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SOUND AND VISION

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**8 PAGE
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BEAUTIFULLY
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SOUND



I heard Ramona sing And I heard everything

'GIGO' was a thing long before the advent of computers. 'Garbage in, garbage out' has always been a cliché in the hi-fi world, and it's a cliché because it's true. At best, your system should interfere with your music (on vinyl, CD, hard-drive or wherever) as little as possible before it delivers it your ears, and that's why high-res audio is such an intriguing proposition.

We're presenting **an exhaustive guide to the hows and whys of high-resolution audio (p52)** in this issue. I'm a fan of high-res audio - but the GIGO effect is as pronounced with high-res as I've ever heard it. Done properly - a careful recording job in the studio, flawless mastering into a digital file, an uncorrupted download and a system to do the whole process justice - it's the

best sound I've heard. 'Done properly' isn't too much to ask, is it?



Simon

Simon Lucas, editor

My products of the month



Bose QuietComfort 25

Group test p44
Nothing this side of prescription medicine makes a flight pass quicker



Pioneer N-50A

High-res audio feature p59
In the right circumstances (see above) this is £500 extremely well spent

WHAT HI-FI?

Reviews you can trust

Experience & heritage



We've been hard at work helping the world discover the best in hi-fi and home cinema for more than 37 years, and have getting on for 100 years of reviewing

experience under our collective belts - so you can count on our expert opinions.

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

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



We spot big trends first

Mp3 player tests before the iPod even existed? High-def video before it even had a name? That was us. We keep you in touch with big stories and future trends.



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With seven international editions in Africa, Asia and Europe, we reach more than 1.6 million readers every month.

NEXT MONTH

SUPERTEST STEREO SPEAKERS

Why £700 - £1000 is your floorstanding speakers sweet-spot

GROUP TESTS MUSIC STREAMERS

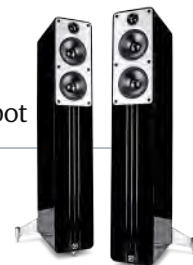
High-res heaven from just £300

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£150 or so buys some extraordinary cans



May 2015 issue on sale 8th April

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Noise-cancelling headphones
"Sometimes we just want to be alone with our thoughts and our music"



Our products of the month



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First test p11
"The 230s are diamonds in more ways than one - they're fantastic, affordable floorstanders"

Andy Madden Reviews editor



B&W 685 S2
Supertest p28
"These terrific speakers continue to dominate, with superb detail, dynamics and punch making them one of our all-time favourites"

Kashfia Kabir Multimedia journalist



UE Megaboom
First test p18
"Great sound. Tough as nails. What more do you need from a portable speaker?"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



Pioneer BDP-LX58
First test p16
"Not feature-laden, but a spectacular performer well worth the handsome asking price"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



Ruark R1 Mk3
First test p15
"With new features, a better design and an improved audio performance, the dinky R1 is a more compelling buy than ever"

Verity Burns Multimedia editor



Aesthetic Janus Signature/Atlas Signature pre/power Temptation p68
"A clever mix of valve and transistor technology wrapped in a thoroughly modern package."

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



Feature High-res audio
"We care about sound quality, and we believe everybody should benefit from better sound"

What's in this issue...

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43 Noise-cancelling headphones Put the mute button on all those around you by investing in a pair of noise-cancelling cans. We have six efforts ranging from £250 to £270 that'll provide a moment of silence.



First Test
"We're astonished at just how much Creative has packed into the Sound Blaster X7's distinctive casework"

Insider 4K content p22

4K is on the rise, but where's the content? We investigate how and where you can watch 4K in 2015

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Special subscription offer!

Buy one year of *What Hi-Fi?* Sound and Vision and get the second year free

That Was Then p146

A glimpse into *What Hi-Fi?* past

Epson's EMP-TW100 projector was an impressive effort back in 2002

Group test Projectors

"For less than £1500 you can get up to 300in of picture from some of the units here"



Feature Televisions

In the market for a new TV? Allow us to guide you through what's coming in 2015



Supertest Stereo speakers

"You'll definitely feel like you're getting your money's-worth here"



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68 Temptations Featuring a standout pre/power amplifier combination from Aesthetix and a deeply impressive pair of floorstanders from ATC.

80 Playlist We rage against the dying of the light with Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, Björk brings her eclectic taste to her latest release *Vulnicura*, and we rev our (hybrid) engines as F1 returns to TV screens.



Temptation
"We're struck by the solidity of the sound first, then by the clean and precise way this amp defines the shape of piano notes"

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

Revamped hi-fi guide! 1500 products rated p79

With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best kit for your cash.



Our ratings explained

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

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

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER

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

Find out...

What to look for: Projectors p89
Setting up your rear speakers p93
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Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



B&O BeoPlay H2

£170 Page 12

The masters of style add real substance with these quality cans



Ruark R1 Mk3

£200 Page 15

A DAB/FM radio that'll soon convince you it's worthy of that pricetag



UE Megaboom

£250 Page 18

The latest in a range of go-anywhere wireless speakers is another hit

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product reviews!



EXCLUSIVE

Onkyo combines two into one for serious dual-function fun

Onkyo C-N7050 | CD player/streamer | £350

Is the Onkyo C-N7050 a CD player that can stream, or is it a hi-res streamer with a CD player built in? No matter which angle you look at it from, this £350 networked CD player aims to give you access to both worlds - for an attractive price.

It's a nice stepping-stone into the world of hi-fi separates, while giving the freedom to experiment with different sources before settling on a specific path - an ideal solution for burgeoning hi-fi aficionados.

The C-N7050's sonic presentation is upbeat and smooth, but edges aren't softened so much that detail is obscured. The Onkyo doesn't make a fuss with file types, either, having a forgiving balance that makes the most of low bit-rate MP3s while still retaining enough transparency to make listening to 24-bit/192kHz FLAC files a worthwhile experience.

Detail is crisply drawn and plentiful. You can hear taut strings being plucked in Public Service Broadcasting's funky

Gagarin, while the layers of harmonics surrounding piano notes in The Unthanks' *Gan To The Kye* are conveyed with passion. Voices are direct and expressive, and it's easy to get caught up in the lovely melody.

It's a neat and tidy presentation, with enough drive and dynamic variation to keep the music enjoyable. There's a pleasing cohesion throughout the frequency range and a nicely judged tonal balance that refuses to emphasise one frequency band above another.

Cool under pressure

There's a good level of composure too, so when the music gets complex the Onkyo has the talent to keep every instrumental strand in place and under control.

Judged against a class-leading dedicated CD player such as the Marantz CD6005 the C-N7050 lacks a little bite, authority and rhythmic drive. Let's not forget, though, that it streams music across a network too.



Onkyo Remote 3 - Apple iPod/iPhone only - £free

The control app is very useful to have at hand - provided you can access it. For now, it's available only for Apple users, is limited to iOS 8 and doesn't have an iPad-optimised version. Once you do gain access to it, the app is simple yet effective, with an interface that lets you scroll through the songs on your network with minimal delay.



USE IT WITH

The Race For Space – Public Service Broadcasting

Re-live the eponymous US/Soviet scramble via this evocative, sample-sprinkled mix of meaty dance beats and alluring soundscapes. Streamed or from disc, the Onkyo's flair with detail will ensure high standards of PSB



Onkyo has managed to tuck itself into an enviable niche - there are very few CD player/streamer combinations on the market, let alone capable and affordable ones

That pleasant sonic character remains constant whether you're listening to CDs or streaming. We did, however, find that *The Imitation Game* soundtrack sounded just a touch more spacious and dynamic when streamed from our server than it did when played via a disc.

Aside from the CD drive, the only other physical inputs are two USB ports. The front USB is Apple-approved, and will play music stored on your iPhone, iPod or iPad, while also charging those devices.

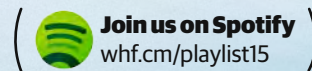
You can listen to other radio or music-streaming apps, as long as it's

A nice stepping-stone into the world of hi-fi separates and an ideal solution for burgeoning hi-fi aficionados

hardwired to the port. There's no Bluetooth or AirPlay to stream through, so third-party apps - such as Spotify, Soundcloud and BBC iPlayer Radio - can be played only through wired means.

The USB port at the back, meanwhile, will play files stored on a stick or flash drive. To plug the C-N7050 to your amplifier, you can choose between optical, coaxial and line-level outputs.

The streamer side of the C-N7050 has plenty of tricks up its sleeve. DLNA support means the Onkyo streamer can play music stored on laptops, smart devices and NAS boxes, as long as they're all connected to the same network. There's no wi-fi, so you'll have to plug the Onkyo to your home network using the ethernet port. It connects instantly, and recognises all devices on the network without a hitch.



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

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



In detail...



1 When it comes to connecting to your amplifier, the Onkyo offers the standard choices of line-level for analogue and coaxial or optical for digital signals.

2 There's no wi-fi capability on the C-N7050, so any connection to your home network will necessarily be via the ethernet port, which, thankfully,

works quickly and has universal device recognition. This is also the route for accessing the world of internet radio, courtesy of the widely connected vTuner service.

You can also tune into hundreds of internet radio stations via the vTuner service.

The Onkyo's file compatibility is extensive. From MP3 and AAC to high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz FLAC and WAV (and 96kHz ALAC), the C-N7050 will play all popular music formats. It supports DSD files, too, but doesn't spin SACD discs.

If you'll be streaming files from a variety of sources, we'd recommend you download Onkyo's Remote 3 app. The simple interface makes it easy to scroll through long lists of songs, while the drop-down menu lets you jump between various sources with ease. We found using the remote handset when changing CD tracks more natural, though.

The app is free to download, but it's currently only available for Apple iPods and iPhones (see panel on p6).

Quality look and feel

The C-N7050 is well made and nicely finished too - in either black or silver. Build quality is decently solid considering the price. The CD loading tray operates smoothly, with no judders or stutters, and the mechanism is pretty quiet.

The fascia is neat and orderly rather than flashy, with only basic controls planted on the brushed-metal front panel. The three main control buttons - one each for CD, USB

and Network - make switching between inputs quick and easy.

The Onkyo responds swiftly to any commands, whether from the unit's buttons and dial, or the ones logically laid out on the remote-control wand. We'd definitely keep the remote in close reach - even if we have the control app at hand - as it's simple yet intuitive to use.

Display details

This is all good news for the C-N7050 - and those looking for an affordable CD player/streamer - but we do have one or two niggles. The player's large display is easy to read from a distance, but its single line of scrolling text looks meagre. It scrolls very slowly, and the cut-off text can be frustrating to read. We'd like a more sophisticated display - two lines, at least - that gives more information in one glance.

But we can see this Onkyo having wide appeal, and rightly so. There aren't many products that can spin CDs and stream files from one box, and not for such an affordable price either. A common starting price for individual CD players and streamers is £350, which makes this two-in-one machine very attractive as a gateway to building your hi-fi system. It's a clever, feature-packed performer we urge you to consider.

We can see this Onkyo having wide appeal, and rightly so. There aren't many products that can spin CDs and stream files from one box, and not for such an affordable price either. This is a clever, feature-packed performer

SYSTEM BUILDER

These three proven performers will make great partners for the Onkyo



Stereo speakers

Wharfedale Diamond 220 £200 ★★★★★

These impressive speakers deliver a finely balanced, articulate, dynamic performance.



Stereo amplifier

Marantz PM6005 £320 ★★★★★

With its snappy timing and crisp detail, this Award-winner will add agility and energy.



Music streaming service

Qobuz £20/month ★★★★★

The catalogue may not be as extensive as Spotify's, but Qobuz offers CD-quality files.

Total build from £890

TECH SPECS

- CD drive** Yes • **Hi-res** Yes, 24-bit/192kHz • **Supported file formats** FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AAC, WMA, MP3, DSD • **Inputs** 2 x USB • **Outputs** Optical, coaxial, line level • **Streaming options** DLNA; vTuner • **Wi-fi** No
- Size (hwd)** 10 x 44 x 30cm • **Weight** 5kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Dynamic, lively sound; crisp detail; low-end weight; feature-packed; price

AGAINST Limited app availability; display could be more sophisticated

VERDICT The dual role is hugely appealing, especially given the price and performance

Also consider

Pioneer N-50A £500 ★★★★★

With superb performance and great features, this is fantastic if you're looking to only stream.



REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE ONKYO C-N7050:

1 Taking the C-N7050 out of the box, we're surprised at how light the unit is - still, it's nicely made. And responsive.

2 Connecting the Onkyo to the internet takes mere seconds. It recognises our reference Naim server immediately, too.

3 There's an app! Simple yet effective, it lets us scroll through our vast music library intuitively. Good job we use Apple...

4 The unit supports DSD files, so it puzzles us that there's no mention of SACD compatibility. It's not a crucial omission, though.

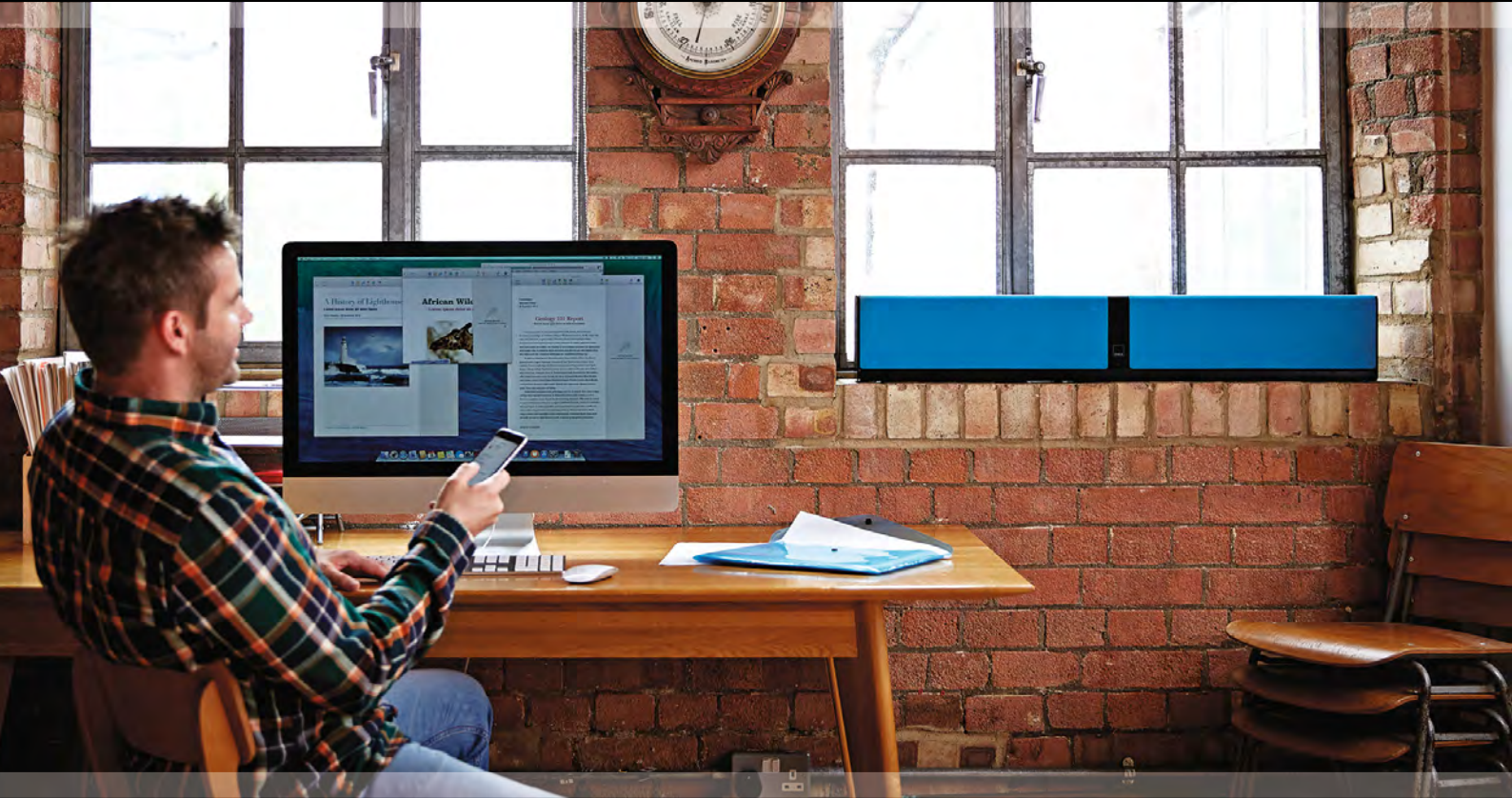
5 The Onkyo's lively, pleasant character is constant, but it sounds more dynamic when streaming than when disc-spinning.



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Wharfedale Diamond 230 | Stereo speakers | £500

Compact floorstanders offer fine value

Our first experience of the Wharfedale Diamond 200 series was encouraging. The 220 standmounters, we decided, are the best-sounding budget speakers around - so much so that we gave them an Award.

No pressure, then, for the Diamond 230s, the compact floorstanders of Wharfedale's entry-level range. Will they be a resounding success like their siblings, or the black sheep of the family? The results are in - and these are great floorstanders for the money.

First things first, you want to give them a good run-in. Fresh from the box, you won't get anything remotely representative of their potential. Give them at least a day. We left them running for a weekend.

At which point, anything more than a cursory listen should lead to the suspicion that these are five-star performers.

The first thing you'll notice is their sense of scale. It's a big sound, easily capable of filling a big living-room. The soundstage is

tall, wide and spacious. Close your eyes and these speakers can give the impression they're bigger than they are.

Of course, size isn't everything. These floorstanders are talented in other areas. The level of clarity is certainly impressive. They deliver a clean sound, helped by precision in timing and definition. That's especially the case in the midrange, which is clearer and more detailed than we'd expect for floorstanders at this price. Vocals are engaging, as is a spot of guitar fiddling. We find ourselves rapt with attention at an unhealthy number of Johnny Cash tracks.

A crisp, punchy sound

Elsewhere, the treble is crisp but not harsh. Move down to the low end, and it's punchy and weighty while maintaining a good sense of agility. It could conceivably do with a bit more texture, but that's not lacking enough to ruin what is otherwise an authoritative, entertaining listen.

The frequency range is well balanced. Nothing distracts, or demands undue attention. We're particularly impressed with the level of integration, the drivers

USE IT WITH

Rega Brio-R

It may be only a half-width chassis, but this amp provides wide-screen sound



performing as a cohesive whole, never giving the impression that a rogue element has other ideas.

Try free-standing and toed-in

Do take care with set-up. Wharfedale recommends placing the Diamond 230s at least 20cm from the back wall and 70cm from the sides, and we'd suggest moving the speakers around to experiment. And consider a bit of toeing-in, which helps to firm up the stereo image while sacrificing just a little of the soundstage width.

We're pleased to see Wharfedale has addressed the finish-related quibbles we levelled at the Diamond 100 series. A new lacquered baffle adds class and, where before there were unsightly bumps beneath vinyl wrap, the surface is now smooth.

This is in part thanks to a new cabinet, made with particleboard sandwiched between MDF. This provides a rigid and well-damped structure, which helps to reduce the amount of cabinet distortion.

Internally, there's a bigger magnet on the bass driver's motor system. This makes it easier to drive and improves responsiveness. There's also an upgraded crossover, which aims to improve the integration of drive units. We think it works.

Unusual bass-tuning technology

Elsewhere, the Diamonds are unchanged. The tweeter is the same, sitting in a deeply dished waveguide which helps efficiency.

Also present is the unusual bass tuning introduced in the Diamond 100 series. Instead of going with the more usual front or rear bass reflex port, Wharfedale is firing downwards into a gap between the cabinet and its plinth. This helps with port efficiency and reduces chuffing noise, and is claimed to make the speaker less fussy when it comes to placement.

We really like the Wharfedale Diamond 230s. They're talented performers, and for the money you're getting a great deal.

A new cabinet structure and a lacquered baffle combine to make the classy finish of the Diamond 230s



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large scale; detailed midrange; good frequency integration

AGAINST Could do with a little more subtlety at low frequencies

VERDICT Wharfedale has made a great pair of budget floorstanders

Also consider

Q Acoustic 2050i
£420 ★★★★★

A multi-Award winner with a smooth, full-bodied sound



Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2 | On-ear headphones | £170

Stylish B&Os also score on sound

Bang & Olufsen is a brand we sometimes struggle with here at *What Hi-Fi?* The Danish company usually produces beautiful products that sound good, but we worry that, on occasion, people are paying a little too much for the style they're buying, rather than the right amount for the sound quality on offer. So the star rating can suffer - after all, we're all about sound per pound.

Quality kit, superior sound

With the Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2, we have no such worries. These are fine headphones that easily compete on sound terms with their price and sector rivals. That they are also a beautiful example of the legendary Bang & Olufsen style and quality is a rather nice added bonus.

That feeling of quality hits us as soon as we open the flap on the box. Inside, there's another box and a ribbon tab with a sign that says "Pull me" in an *Alice In Wonderland* kind of way. Follow that advice and a cardboard cover with teasing holes in strategic places has a "Lift up" instruction. And so it goes, until finally the BeoPlay H2 headphones are revealed, lying in a plush, cloth-covered, contoured tray.

It's an impressive start for these £170 headphones - and that feeling of pride of ownership only grows as we take the H2s in our hands. These are headphones for being out and about in, and they are suitably robust, made from a strong, flexible plastic and partly covered in a durable cloth. There are five colours - the Deep Red here, pink, blue, silver and green.

Built for show

These headphones are light, at 150g, and the earcups fold so, B&O says, when you're not listening, the H2s can be worn around your neck with the earpieces following the shape of your body. Fair enough.

When we first put the H2s on, we're a bit worried that they are going to be too tight - it's a problem the spectacle-wearers among the team have suffered with some other cans. The clever composite material the headband is made from is 'adaptive', however, and while the fit is snug it is reassuringly so, and it never becomes uncomfortable, even during long listening sessions. This impressive comfort may be helped by the beautifully finished lambskin leather-covered earpads.

And we're pleased to report the sound of the H2s meets all the impressive standards the build quality has set. The 40mm driver and bass port in each earcup provide an easily accessible sound, as is appropriate for headphones intended to be worn out. It's warm without being overbearing, and the presentation is even across the frequency range, so no one area stands out as prominent.

The sound of the H2s meets all the impressive standards the build quality has set. It's an easily accessible sound, as is appropriate for headphones intended to be worn out

Treble is clear without being too sharp or bright, and the midrange is a strength, with vocals coming across warm and intimate. The bass is just a touch tubby, but only compared with our current class favourites, the Award-winning Philips M1 MkIIs (indeed the H2s' bass is reminiscent of the original M1s'). It's not overblown, though, and that trait certainly doesn't hurt in a pair of headphones designed to be worn in the open.

Those padded earcups cut out quite a lot of external noise - always a benefit on a crowded train - but they don't prevent you from perceiving what is going on around you, so road safety shouldn't be an issue.

The cable has an inline mic and three-button remote to answer and end calls, and change songs and volume. It works well with an iPhone, but if you're an Android user it may not be as effective (with our Sony Xperia Z3 Compact, for example, it will pause and play but not change tracks). There is no noticeable noise transferred from the plastic-sheathed cable when we're out and about, leaving us able to concentrate on the music.

We like the BeoPlay H2s. They do a fine job of music reproduction and (just as important at this price) they're a top quality product that gives a pride of ownership that some other brands just can't match.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Enjoyable, first-rate sound; superb build; comfortable fit for long listening sessions

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT A stylish pair of headphones that sound terrific and really look the part

Also consider

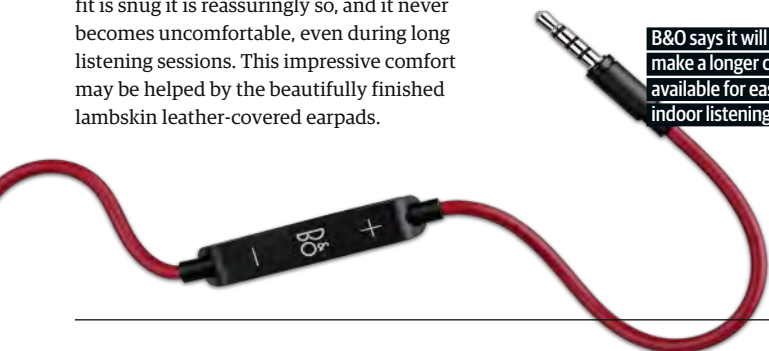
Philips Fidelio M1 MKII £180

★★★★★

Our Award winners provide a sound abundant in detail, with space and great clarity



B&O says it will soon make a longer cable available for easier indoor listening



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MA MONITOR AUDIO

Linsar X24-DVD | Television/Soundbar/DVD player | £300

Flat form produces full-bodied sound

Long wand

The large remote control's well-labelled keys make it generally easy to use, although its length means it's quite a stretch from the top buttons (channel selectors) to the bottom ones (DVD controls etc)

A TV with a built-in soundbar: makes sense, no? Soundbars have been a popular solution for improving a TV's inherently thin sound for years now, so it was only a matter of time before someone put two and two together. Enter the Linsar X24-DVD.

The 'soundbar' consists of a pair of speakers, each driven by a 10W amplifier, and doubles up as the TV's stand. It looks a little tacked on - but its design adds no more height or depth than any typical stand would, so is undoubtedly more space-efficient than even the slimmest of soundbars on the market.

A sound for sore ears

On paper, it works. In practice, it delivers. There's no denying the Linsar's sonic superiority over the hard, thin presentation of TV speakers. Fulfilling its purpose bang-on, its sound is a great deal fuller and richer, the balance much closer to the sound we'd ideally like (but don't often get) from a standard small telly.

The midrange has significantly more body, and it's this more substantial delivery of voices that will be the most noticeable improvement during everyday viewing. It goes room-fillingly loud, and we find ourselves more than satisfied just halfway up the volume bar. Note that near the very limit, distortion creeps in.

The X24-DVD fancies itself a bit of a multimedia mogul: there's a Freeview HD tuner for TV viewing, Bluetooth for music streaming, USB inputs for media playback and recording programmes onto a USB stick or hard drive. As its name suggests, there's a slot-loading DVD player built-in too, though you'll have to invest in a Blu-ray player to play any HD discs.

The stick that's a carrot

The omission of smart services is a little mean, and we feel a bit hard done-by when bigger-screen models with lower price tags include it. Linsar's peace-offering is a free Roku streaming stick for access to a sea of smart apps (including BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Spotify) if you buy (and register) the TV by the end of March 2015, but miss the date and it's not so charitable. You'll have to resort to a Blu-ray player again or a gaming console as your smart supplier.

Starting with Blu-ray performance, we hook up the Sony BDP-S5200 (£95) player to one of the X24-DVD's two HDMI inputs - also onboard are the likes of USB, component and 3.5mm inputs, as well as coaxial and headphone outputs.

First disc off the shelf is endearing space caper *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. No matter how much fine-tuning you do with colour, the Linsar's vivid colour palette struggles to



Those speakers - each powered by a 10W amplifier - make all the difference

find much in the way of balance without sucking the life out of skintones, so is a little on the vibrant side. The bold, somewhat artificial hues make for a punchy, dramatic picture, though we'd like a little more realism and subtlety in shades.

Though fair, contrast could do with a boost for deeper blacks and brighter whites, and there's a hint of motion instability as a space shuttle flies past too.

The Linsar's HD broadcast picture isn't perfect, but there's still a lot to like. It's impressively sharp and clean, with low picture noise, so viewers can sit close to the screen comfortably. Daylight scenes are full of punch and clarity, while darker settings prove coherent too.

Even as we drop resolution to DVD, the image is surprisingly well defined, with

colour punch in spades: in *Lucy*, Scarlett Johansson's red lipstick, leopard-print jacket and golden hair are radiant and lush.

The switch from the Sony to the Linsar's own DVD player sees slightly less sharpness and detail, yet overall holds the overall standard of quality pretty well.

The clean, clear and fairly detailed delivery of standard- and high-def channels is a credit to its tuner.

USE IT WITH

Sony BDP-S5200

Fills the gaps in the Linsar's offering, giving you Blu-ray playback and access to an array of handy smarts

Value judgement

The focus is clear here. The X24-DVD (rightfully) prides itself on good sound, and with the typical cost of a smart-inclusive Full HD TV of this size around £200, asks a premium for it.

Is it too much? Probably, considering the TV's exclusion of smarts. We'd like a more natural-looking picture for a fifth star, too.

But for those craving a fuller, more exciting sound for movies or gaming than you usually get from TVs of this size (or bigger, even) and have the cash to spend, it will make a great telly for a second room. We know a good idea when we see one, and this TV/soundbar combo is exactly that.

The DVD player nestles discreetly behind the screen, which is 10cm deep



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rich, full, detailed sound; goes loud; sharp, punchy picture; decent DVD player

AGAINST Colours can appear overcooked; no built-in smarts; somewhat pricey

VERDICT Not perfect, but it aims to give you a better sound and hits its target

Ruark R1 Mk3 | DAB/FM radio | £200

Ruark buffs R1 with impressive results

For years, Ruark's R1 series radio has been one of those products that just works. Its gorgeous design makes it ready to fit into even the most stylish of homes, while its performance and usability has helped to secure it Award after Award.

However, 2012 was the last time we saw it in our winners' list, so when we heard Ruark was releasing an improved third generation of its desirably dinky radio, we were intrigued to find out what was in store.

Same again, but better

There hasn't been too much change to the design we know and love. It's still a small, single-speaker design, finished in your choice of walnut, black or white (though the last two are now matt instead of shiny), with all controls placed on the top.

It's a premium, no-fuss finish that looks as good as ever, and it's helped by the R1's new OLED display, which looks cleaner and sharper compared with its LCD predecessor.

Out of the box, the R1 Mk3 is a simple affair - screw on the aerial, plug it into the mains and you're halfway there.

The controls are handled by an improved RotoDial system on the top. While it looks like a regular volume knob, it also acts as the main control system for the radio, allowing you to cycle through menus and press down to select.

It is flanked by a few individual buttons, for power and quick access to core functionality including the R1's dual alarms, radio presets, settings menu and selecting source.

Choose DAB from the source menu and the R1 will automatically set the date and time. We find the menus and controls so intuitive, the manual is far from essential.

As before, the R1 Mk3 features both FM and DAB tuners (futureproofed for DAB+ if and when it arrives on our shores), but a new addition is aptX Bluetooth functionality, allowing you to stream music to the R1 from your portable devices.

Add to this a line-in for hardwiring a device, a headphone output for private listening and a newly added USB port for charging, and this is quite the complete package for a radio that stands just 17cm tall. You can even make it portable, with the optional rechargeable battery "BackPack" for an extra £50.

New chipset and DAC improve sound

Of course, this would all be moot if it didn't sound any good, but luckily the R1 Mk3 sounds as good as ever. There have been several tweaks made to the internal workings of the R1, including a new chipset

In detail

The main control system is the RotoDial in the middle, but Ruark doesn't overburden this so as not to overcomplicate things - there are also buttons around the edge. Use the dial to control menus, then press down to select.



USE IT WITH

Samsung Galaxy Note 4

Take advantage of the R1 Mk3's aptX Bluetooth functionality by streaming playlists from Samsung's fine Galaxy Note 4

with improved DAC and shorter signal paths in the audio circuitry.

The result is a sound that belies its size, and a performance that can top even some larger stereo models. With its rich, full-bodied character, it's sometimes easy to forget there's just a single 3.5cm driver delivering it, with bass that is deep and controlled, and a midrange that ensures everything from instruments to dialogue to vocals are delivered with detail and clarity.

There's a depth and solidity to its performance that many competitors lack, with a clean, open, engaging nature that works as well with talk radio as with music.

A confident performer

Despite its confident performance, there are some obvious limitations due to its size, and the R1 isn't going to have the power required to fill huge rooms.

What it can manage is pretty impressive all the same. It will spread wide and go loud enough for most situations, though the treble can border on thinness at volume with lesser quality broadcasts.

The Bluetooth performance is as musical and well balanced as the rest of the radio's performance, and it's a nice touch the new processor is able to extract Bluetooth track metadata too, so you can see what is playing on the R1's screen.

£200 is not an inconsiderable amount to spend on a radio like the Ruark R1 Mk3, but spend any amount of time with it and we challenge you not to want to take it home.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stylish design; easy functionality; rich, full-bodied sound; clean and clear midrange;

AGAINST Not cheap

VERDICT Small but powerful, the R1 Mk3 balances performance, features and functionality in a compact package

Also consider

Pure Evoke D2 £90 ★★★★★

A great buy at less than half the price, but it can't compete in pure performance terms



With its rich, full-bodied character, it's easy to forget there's just a single 3.5cm driver delivering bass that's deep and controlled

Pioneer BDP-LX58 | Blu-ray player | £600

Going to the pictures is a real treat

Spending £600 on this Pioneer Blu-ray player may seem excessive when you can get a high-performing one with more smart features for a sixth of the price.

But if you are a home cinema enthusiast dedicated to getting exceptional picture quality, we'd say it's well worth it. For the BDP-LX58, the more affordable of Pioneer's two premium models, is first and foremost all about performance - and when it's this good, arguing with that stance is tough.

Nice 'n' edgy

Even our Award-winning Panasonic DMP-BDT700 (£500) can't quite muster the Pioneer's incisiveness when it comes to depicting outlines. The LX58's picture is easily the crispest we've seen at this price, packing a punch to keep your eyes fixed on the screen and involved in the movie at all times.

Play a Coen brothers favourite, *Fargo*, and the snowy landscapes of Minnesota leap off the screen. The deep blackness of tyres, shoes and buried suitcases looks striking against them, and there are good levels of detail at either extreme.

Punchy and well grounded, colours are clean and convincing, while skintones have a natural warmth to them. Colours can appear a little on the vivid side - the redness of bloodied snow, for instance, is intense - but don't ever quite cross the threshold to looking overdone.

Commitment to realism

This player paints with a super-fine brush, too, the woodland trees in the backdrop having greater definition than through the rival Panasonic. Even as night falls on our kidnappers, the Pioneer is still rooting around to dig up detail and deliver clarity.

It puts in the work with DVDs too, making upscaling look easy. Spin *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and outlines hardly lose their cutting edge. Whether it's the red buses, green billboards or the yellow gloves of the rabbit himself, colours remain eye-grabbingly bright and punchy.



Display and control
There's a bright and clear, if not particularly fancy, screen and the remote that operates it is easy to get to grips with - if a little cluttered compared with some.

Elsewhere, picture noise is negligible and the image remains all-but-blur-free as cartoons whiz across the screen.

Sound quality doesn't disappoint, the soundfield nicely focused and balanced as we replay *Fargo*. Gunfire is backed by decent solidity, as is the shattering of windows as the kidnapping gets underway.

Listen to the music

For a Blu-ray player of this price, the Pioneer's music replay is up to scratch, too - particularly good news considering its music-format compatibility is unusually wide (it can play high-res files, SACD and DVD-Audio). You don't get the refinement, organisation or nuance that you would from the best dedicated £600 CD players, but load up Alicia Keys' *If I Ain't Got You* and piano sequences are full of life and body.

Despite being less than half the price of its bigger sibling, the BDP-LX58 still has the lion's share of its features: Ultra HD 4K upscaler (not a given at this price), 3D playback and high-res support for DSD 2.8MHz and PCM files up to 24-bit/192kHz.

You might expect a drop in connectivity from the well-equipped BDP-LX88, but it remains largely the same - save for the absence of balanced analogue outputs. A coaxial and pair of RCA outputs should be satisfactory for most, though. Two HDMI inputs are also sufficient, as are two USB slots (one at the front). Last but not least, a LAN socket gives you access to the built-in YouTube and Picasa smart apps.

Rather than throwing in ubiquitous smart features, Pioneer has put performance first

More comparable to the sturdy construction of an amp than the garden variety of Blu-ray players, the Pioneer's rigid chassis (made from aluminium and steel, and reinforced with an iron plate) is certainly built to last, and both quality and finish feel and look very nice for the price - especially considering it's the spitting image of the doubly-priced BDP-LX88.

The BDP-LX58 is another fine high-end achievement for Pioneer. While it's not the smartest disc-spinner we've come across at this level (in terms of smart functions), we find that easier to forgive when performance is up there with the very best. If you're looking to take the next (perhaps final) step in upgrading your system for a jaw-dropping movie experience, this is a great place to start.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy, bright, sharp image; realistic colour palette; good upscaler; control app; sturdy, smart casework; upscales 4K content

AGAINST Not the best 'smart' offering

VERDICT If performance is your main priority, you can't really go wrong with the BDP-LX58

Also consider

Panasonic DMP-BDT700

£500 ★★★★★ Not such an insightful picture, but the Pana's ample smart features make it more of a jack-of-all-trades



System builder Total build £4200

Television

Samsung UE55HU7500 £2200 ★★★★★



A terrific 4K-equipped 55in set packed with plenty of smarts and delivering a superb picture to boot.

AV receiver

Pioneer SC-LX58 £1400 ★★★★★

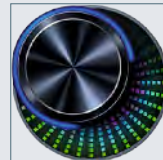
Benefit from Dolby Atmos technology, good connectivity and classy performance.



Control app

Pioneer iControlAV5 (free, Android and iOS)

An intuitive, easy-to-use alternative to the player's supplied remote control.





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Ultimate Ears Megaboom | Wireless speaker | £250

Megaboom? No, it's far better than that

UE (Ultimate Ears) already has a couple of portable wireless speakers in its arsenal: the Mini Boom and Boom. The latter is a firm office favourite and five-star product, but the range has recently spawned a big brother, the UE Megaboom.

To look at it, you'd think it was simply a larger version of the much-loved Boom. And you'd be right. It shares the same cylindrical design and styling, including the natty 'plasma-coated' finish which UE claims is stain resistant and waterproof to an IPX7 rating. So it should survive being dunked in a metre of water for 30 minutes. The speaker is topped and tailed in a rubberised material, which also runs down the middle of the speaker, incorporating a couple of volume control buttons as it goes.

Lie down to recharge

On top of the speaker are power and pairing buttons (you can also pair using NFC on compatible smartphones). On the bottom, there's a 3.5mm auxiliary input and a micro-USB socket for charging.

One thing to point out here is it's tricky listening to the speaker while it's charging. If you want to, you really need to lie it on its side or stand it upside down, neither of which does the sound any favours. On the plus side, once it's charged you should be able to enjoy around 20 hours of uninterrupted playback, unless you need to take a phone call using the built-in mic.

The speaker is designed to stand upright, so using the volume controls means gripping the speaker and giving them a firm press. Press and hold both buttons and the speaker chirps up, telling you the percentage of battery-life left. Of course, you're more likely to alter the volume via your smartphone, which also shows a battery-life indicator for the UE.

Extra features via the app

To do that, you'll need to download UE's app for iOS and Android. This opens up all the speaker's extra features such as the alarm clock function and "Double Up". Double Up allows you to hook two Megabooms together (or one Mega and one normal Boom) to listen in stereo.

The app also gives you access to the UE's sound settings. There are four presets: 'The Standard', 'Bass Jump', 'Cramped Spaces' and 'Voices'. We'd steer clear of the last three. They play around with the sound balance, but in our opinion don't improve sound quality - indeed, in most instances they make it sound worse.

We'd stick with 'The Standard' mode or, if you want to turn the bass down a notch from that, tap the Custom mode and drop the EQ levels to zero.



The volume buttons are on the side, which makes adjusting them somewhat awkward



The Megaboom sounds best upright, but you can't charge and play that way

We start with some classic hip-hop - Grandmaster Flash's *White Lines* does the trick - and the UE's punchy, energetic delivery comes straight to the fore. The track's bassline sounds weighty and taut (but never mega-boomy, ironically) and the speaker never skips a beat. The UE's ability to disperse sound really stands out too, and you're able to enjoy a decent spread of sound from various positions.

A composed, focused sound

Yet even with this great expanse of sound, the UE still manages to keep its composure and focus. There's solidity and precision through the bass, midrange and treble. It's an enthusiastic listen, bristling with life. Music is well-balanced, even if highs aren't the ultimate in refinement.

Playing a spot of classical music proves the Megaboom has a more subtle, delicate side too. Soothe your senses with a bit of *Swan Lake* and the Megaboom is happy to slow the pace, and let its excellent dynamics take over. Strings and woodwind rise and fall freely as the tune flows along.

A top addition to the range

The Megaboom is a great addition to UE's family of wireless speakers - indeed, it's arguably the most polished performer in the range. Battery life and build quality are excellent, and whether you use it indoors or outside, you're in for a musical treat.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, waterproof build; good looks; fires out a punchy, exciting sound; good battery life

AGAINST Difficult to charge and listen at the same time; treble sounds a little unrefined

VERDICT Megaboom in name not nature, this Bluetooth speaker is a talented performer

Even with this expanse of sound, the UE still manages to keep its composure and focus. There's solidity and precision here

Also consider

Bowers & Wilkins T7 £300 ★★★★★

A premium Bluetooth speaker oozing style and substance





Revolution XT

Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

Revolution XT lives up to its name, marking a major leap forward in loudspeaker design and the realisation of some of Tannoy's most radical and forward thinking technologies.

Retaining the classic trapezoid shape from its multi award-winning predecessor, the new Revolution XT cabinets now feature a radical reflex-coupled dual-cavity design. This optimises performance of the all-new Omnimagnet™ Dual Concentric™ driver across extremely low to mid-bass frequencies. The complex internal design is further perfected with an integrated plinth that provides a uniform and predictable low frequency interface to the listening environment, delivering the deepest bass notes with ease.

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Go Deeper

Creative Sound Blaster X7 (with upgrade power supply) | DAC/stereo amplifier | £430

Power pack can't quite shape up

We're astonished at just how much Creative has packed into the Sound Blaster X7's distinctive casework. It's a digital-to-analogue converter and stereo amplifier but, intriguingly, also has Dolby Digital decoding built in. Research the X7 and it's clear that gamers are a priority, the unit's features aiming to make the soundtrack of games more immersive and communication between players easier.

Decoding limits

We're curious about the Dolby Digital decoding. It works, of course, getting us a decent sound from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (on DVD), but for home cinema fans we think Creative has been a little half-hearted here. The X7 won't decode DTS soundtracks, and the high-resolution audio of Blu-ray is off the menu too.

You'll also need external power amplification (or active speakers) for surround sound, and the line-level outputs are an odd mixture of RCAs for the fronts and 3.5mm for the surrounds, centre and sub. If surround sound is a priority we think a stand-alone receiver such as Yamaha's RX-V377 (now down to £180) is a better bet.

We're not wholly convinced by the Sound Blaster's stereo performance either. Our review sample came with Creative's upgrade power supply option. Going for the standard version will save £100 over the price we've quoted, but also results in a notably lower peak power into difficult-to-drive speakers. Oddly, there isn't much power difference between the two power supply options - the standard one is only a couple of watts down on the 22W-per-channel delivery of the upgrade option.

Full featuring

The on-board DAC is 24-bit/192Khz-capable. It can be accessed through a micro USB, if you're using a computer, or optical if you want to connect a games console or DVD player. There's also a full-size USB 2.0 socket to connect Android and iOS devices, and it works without issue as long as you've also downloaded the X7's app. Analogue users are catered for with a single RCA stereo input. Want to go wireless? There's Bluetooth, with NFC to ensure quick pairing.

While we appreciate all that connectivity we can't help wishing the Sound Blaster X7 sounded better. It's not terrible by any means, but it lacks the entertainment value suggested by its name and demanded by the price point. Remember, NAD's excellent D3020 has many of the Creative's features (bar Dolby Digital decoding) and costs less.

We start off using our resident MacBook as source. The sound through a pair of

Design statement

Creative has lived up to its name when it comes to the Sound Blaster's external design, which is sure to turn heads. The finish is plastic though, and it's flimsier than it looks.

We've no quibble with the X7's connections, which are ample, and include micro and full-size USB ports



Sennheiser Momentum headphones is tonally balanced and shows a decent degree of refinement. Detail levels are fair, but the unit is outclassed by something like Audioquest's Dragonfly (£130) when it comes to outright resolution, dynamic expression and rhythmic drive. We also try Grado's more ambitious PS500s (£500) headphones to see how the Sound Blaster copes with something more ambitious, but the Creative doesn't have the talent to make this a worthwhile exercise.

Various artists

We try a range of files from Eminem's *Mockingbird* (192kbps) to Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises* OST (24-bit/192kHz) and find that the X7 isn't particularly fussy about genre. It's listenable, reasonably articulate but not particularly insightful.

USE IT WITH

Apple MacBook laptop

Any laptop will do as long as it hosts good-quality music files

The dedicated app for the X7 (iOS and Android) has an impressive range of settings. Many of the functions improve one aspect of the sound at the cost of another. The 'SBX' switch on the front panel improves clarity and punch but unbalances the sound tonally, adding an unnatural amount of bass to the proceedings.

We try the X7 with speakers from Wharfedale's Diamond 220s and B&W's 685 S2s to ATC's SCM11s, and the find the unit's character unchanged. It's a decent listen, but there isn't much in the way of transparency or insight into the music. Even the upgraded power supply fitted to our unit fails to deliver the drive and dynamics the price deserves.

The Creative's spec sheet promises much, but it doesn't really deliver sonically. Our money would go elsewhere unless we could get one with a very hefty discount.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fully featured; Bluetooth connectivity; agile sound; tonally balanced; distinctive look

AGAINST Price puts it up against some tough competition; low on insight and dynamic thrust

VERDICT A decent performer but one that's easily bettered by the likes of NAD's D3020

Also consider

NAD D3020
£400 ★★★★★

Want a compact amp with high-quality DAC and Bluetooth? Buy this



4K future

4K content: The revolution will be televised, but how?

From 4K Blu-ray to broadcasts and streaming

The lack of 4K content has been a key concern that's checked the rise of Ultra HD TV. Is that about to change?

4K on demand

Netflix launched its Ultra HD streaming service last April. It has been followed by Amazon Prime Instant Video. Provided you've got the necessary kit, what do you get for your money?

Netflix, our favourite video subscription service, is, surprisingly, yet to offer any films in 4K. Its 4K service consists of 80 hours of TV and

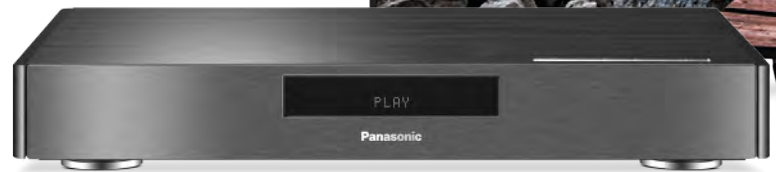
video content, including five series of *Breaking Bad*. Amazon has around 90 hours of 4K content and features 26 films.

YouTube offers some 4K content in the UK, too, but otherwise that's your lot in the streaming world. Ultraflx, currently available in the US, is one to look out for, tipped as it is to bring its 600 hours of Ultra HD content to Samsung and Sony TVs very soon.

Live TV and kicking...

The bottom line is that you can't yet watch live 4K broadcasts on

your TV. The BBC and Sky have carried out successful tests, so they do know what's required to bring 4K to your home. What's more, a recent BBC survey not only made clear the company was investigating 4K broadcasts but also suggested that a



number of households could benefit from 4K based on average screen sizes and viewing distances. Meanwhile, strong rumours suggest BT and Sky will introduce 4K boxes sooner rather than later this year. So plans are definitely afoot.

Getting in a spin

And we will now get 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray discs, with the first titles due to hit the shelves this year.

It's expected that these discs will support High Dynamic Range technologies and sport a wider colour gamut as well. The final specs are due to be confirmed by mid-2015, and we could well see 4K Blu-ray discs on sale in time for Christmas.

All told: the scarcity of 4K content is finally being (slowly) addressed. And by the end of 2015, the option to watch 4K streams, broadcasts and discs could all be a reality...

4K TV

FACTS AND STATS

200,000 - 4K TVs sold in the UK during 2014

£1000 - average cost of an Ultra HD 4K TV (December 2014)

10-15% - 4K's predicted share of 2015 UK TV sales

2-3.5 million - forecast sales figures for 4K TVs in the UK by 2018

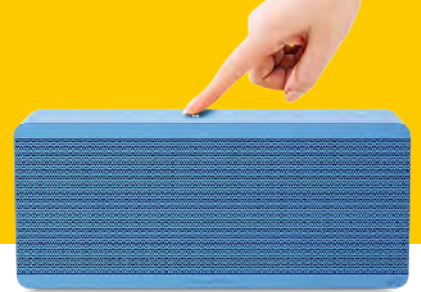
90 per cent - projected share of large screen sales to be Ultra HD by 2017

75 - 4K TV models due for release this year

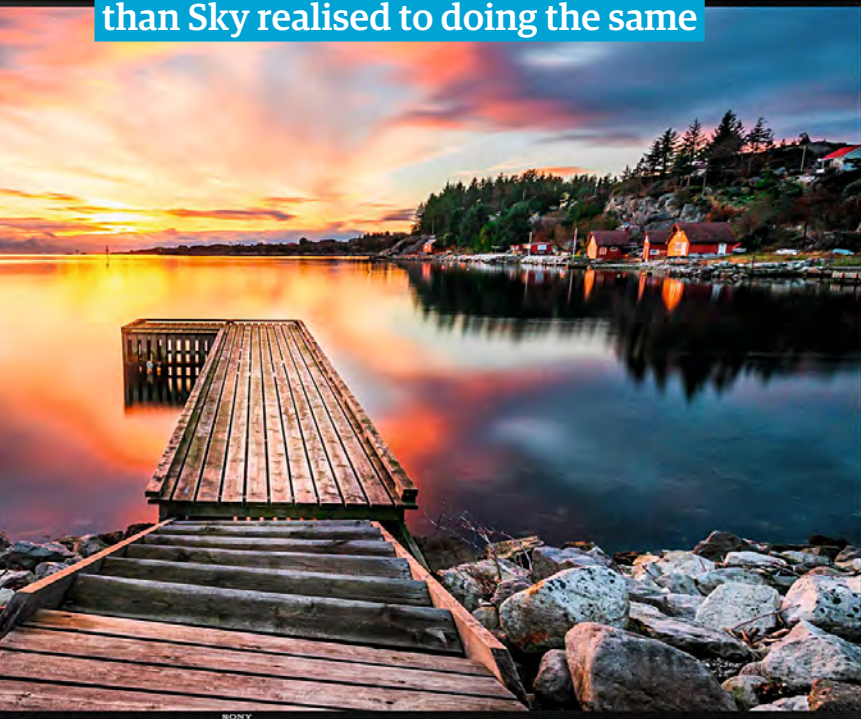
*** ViewSonic projectors**
ViewSonic has launched new LightStream PJD6 projectors
whfcm/LightStreamPJD6



*** Acemile Theatre Box**
The "world's first" portable 3D surround-sound speaker
whfcm/TheatreBox



Strong rumours suggest Sky will introduce a 4K TV box this spring - supposedly because BT are closer than Sky realised to doing the same



Panasonic showcased a prototype 4K Blu-ray player at CES 2015, while companies such as the BBC and Sony have been trialling 4K broadcasting



Analysis

“Are people prepared to adopt a new 4K disc format?”



Content editor Pete Hayman

There are still plenty of people yet to be convinced by the concept of Ultra HD 4K TV. Even for the most committed AV enthusiast, the prospect of splashing out on a new TV might feel somewhat premature given the lack of content. It's hard to argue.

And yes, to an extent we're still being kept waiting, amid reports of trials, breakthroughs and more - but there can be no disputing progress is slowly but surely being made. 2015 is set to be the year it all comes to a head, but which way is the market most likely to go?

Getting a 4K TV is the easy bit. It's evident that prices are starting to tumble, and that's no surprise judging by just how many 4K sets we expect to hit the shelves in the UK this year. It's ever more likely that your next TV will be 4K.



It's clear the content is now coming, too. Netflix and Amazon's 4K services will surely grow only larger over the coming months - and we can't rule out new services. Streaming seems likely to be the easiest route to 4K adoption in the home.

4K broadcasts might be the next most likely option, and also provides relatively few barriers for adoption. Sky and BT will need a new box no doubt, while the Beeb shouldn't be lagging too far behind given its recent trials.

So what about 4K Blu-rays? They're due by the end of the year, but the hurdle is hardware. A sole Panasonic prototype is all we've seen. And how many people are prepared to spend money on a new disc format? The BDA says the discs will offer higher bitrates than online 4K streams, so the hook looks likely to be better quality. And that's something we're always happy to get behind. Interesting times...

TOP 5 New launches



Rega turntable, QAcoustics speakers, Canton soundbase



* Pioneer DJ headphones

The HDJ-2000MK2s feature 50mm drivers and are aimed at wannabe (and real) DJs and lovers of dance music. They are on sale now for £260. Check the news story for more details. <http://whf.cm/PioneerDJMK2>



2 Epson EH-LS10000 £tbc

Another first, this time from Epson. The LS10000 is the company's debut laser projector. It features Ultra HD 4K "enhancement technology" and claims to deliver Epson's widest colour gamut yet. It comes with a long-life light source of up to 30,000 hours, is 3D-ready and can power-up and project an image in just 20 seconds. More details online: <http://whf.cm/Epson4K>

1 Geneva Model Cinema £550

Want a soundbase that benefits from minimalist Scandinavian design? The Model Cinema might be for you. It's Geneva's first TV soundbase and features DSP technology, Bluetooth streaming, and analogue and digital inputs. Geneva has turned out some excellent wireless speakers, so this is one to watch. <http://whf.cm/ModelCinema>



TOP 5 New launches

3 Q Acoustics 3000 Series from £140

The new 3000 Series sits alongside the existing 2000 Series and comprises two standmounters, a floorstanding pair, a subwoofer and a centre channel. Unsurprisingly, Q Acoustics claims the 3000 Series are "the best loudspeakers on the planet for the money". The team claims to have learned from the Concept 20 range, introducing a thicker baffle, an improved cone material and making upgrades to the crossover. The range starts from £140. Full details are online: <http://whf.cm/QAcoustics3000>



4 Rega RP1 Record Store Day Edition £250

To commemorate Record Store Day 2015, Rega has produced 500 special editions of its RP1 turntable, on sale for £250. The deck comes complete with Rega's Carbon cartridge and carries the Record Store Day logo. Other features are the same as the regular RP1: the RB101 tonearm, a "plug-and-play" design and a Phenolic resin flywheel-effect platter. Rega is the main sponsor of Record Store Day 2015, which takes place on April 18th. <http://whf.cm/RegaRP1RSD>

5 Apogee Groove £tbc

The Apogee Groove is a USB DAC/headphone amp for Macs and PCs. Apogee Electronics has 30 years of experience in the digital audio business, working on audio filters and recording technology. The Groove has a Quad Sum DAC, supports 24-bit/192kHz high-res audio and has a USB 2.0 connection. <http://whf.cm/ApogeeGroove>



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If you have a budget hi-fi system, chances are you can improve it significantly just by upgrading the speakers. And there are some stunning options out there...

ON TEST

B&W 685 S2 p28

Cabasse MT32 Antigua p29

Elac BS 73 p30

Epos K1 p31

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Tannoy Revolution XT 6 p33

Triangle Esprit Titus EZ p34



Your first pair of speakers? Or maybe you're looking for an upgrade. Whatever your reason, we think you'll find your next hi-fi purchase in the next few pages. These seven standmount units are really good.

The Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2s are the ones to beat here. Our current Award-winner and office favourite, these talented speakers blew us away when we first heard them a year ago. Do they still have the same effect?

B&W has some serious competition at this price. We have the first set from Tannoy's spruced-up Revolution XT range, and French manufacturer Triangle also dazzled us recently with its elegant speakers - could they sail through to the final reckoning? Joining them are brand new entries from Cabasse, Elac, Epos and Focal, making this one of the most nail-biting tests to grace our listening rooms in a while. We're excited to find out who wins. Join us.



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



B&W 685 S2 £500 ★★★★★

The original 685s were instant stars in their class, but the well-judged improvements brought by the S2s ensure these speakers continue to stand out

“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 recommend the new B&W 685s.” That’s what we said about the S2s when we first tested them and, exactly a year later, we still feel the same.

For a £500 pair of standmounters these speakers are superb. No other speaker in this price category comes close to the sheer power and dynamic punch that they provide. Their layer upon layer of detail unearths nuance and texture that render instruments and vocals startlingly realistic.

Well-toned muscle

Nirvana’s *Smells Like Teen Spirit* hits you like a wall of sound, the 685s packing in so much muscle and depth to the low end that you feel the aggression coursing through the grungy guitars and attacking drums. Basslines plunge deep, rumbling along with control and enthusiasm.

Each note stops and starts with neat precision. The rhythm is fast, punchy and agile - these speakers certainly know how to have fun.

Dynamically, the B&Ws are hugely impressive. They communicate the shifts in tone and the build up of

tension in The Dead Weather’s *60 Feet Tall* with stunning subtlety, while the top end is free to soar in a clear, spacious soundfield. Vocals are nicely expressive, full of emotion in a way that really draws you into each song.

The S2s are revealing enough for you to hear exactly which of your albums are recorded poorly, but instead of making a fuss they simply apply their trademark gusto to deliver the most enjoyable performance possible. Play your old records through these 685s and you’ll feel like you’re hearing them for the very first time - it’s a thrilling performance.

Added protection

The cabinet itself is sturdy, and the chunky speakers come in black or white finishes. Next to the gorgeous Triangle Esprit Titus EZ speakers the S2s feel just a little plain, but they look pretty smart when perched on decent stands.

B&W’s distinctive yellow woven Kevlar mid/bass cone is certainly eye-catching, but what makes us jump with joy is the sight of a metal grille over the previously uncovered tweeter. It aids dispersion and means stray fingers will no longer be able to callously dent the delicate metal.

The S2 version was seven years in the making - plenty of time for B&W to work on the updates to the original 685s. Tweaks include improving the tweeter dome’s rigidity to increase precision, and decoupling the unit from the cabinet to reduce vibration. There’s also a new mushroom-shaped plug at the centre of the mid/bass driver for better damping. The result is a tauter, punchier bass than the original, and a clear treble that integrates smoothly with the rest of the frequencies.

A rare breed

The 685 S2s remain one of the most captivating speakers we’ve heard at this price. The agile, musical Triangle Esprit Titus EZs are the only others in this test able to worry them. We urge you to listen to the B&Ws - we guarantee they’ll leave you with a huge grin on your face.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Powerful, muscular sound; clear, precise and agile; deep, rich bass; stunning detail

AGAINST The Triangle speakers are just a tad more agile, and better finished

VERDICT There’s no stopping B&W - these hugely thrilling 685s remain firm favourites



Cabasse MT32 Antigua £500 ★★★★★

Unassuming in their appearance, the MT32s nevertheless employ a tweeter that's based on a premium design used in Cabasse's flagship speakers

A big, spacious sound that's hugely enjoyable to listen to. If that sounds like your cup of tea, you must have a listen to the Cabasse MT32 Antigua speakers.

Playing with the big boys

Yes, they're rather big for bookshelf speakers, but they do the job expected of their size: delivering a huge, room-filling sound that's wonderfully open and pleasant to listen to. Hans Zimmer compositions sound grand and dynamic, while Nina Simone's soulful voice is enveloping and full of warmth.

They have the kind of smooth detail that's wonderfully easy on the ears without sacrificing too much sonic integrity. Harsh or coarse edges on a recording are ironed out. The top end soars high and open, while voices are projected clearly.

The bass is full-bodied and eager to please, although the Antiguas don't quite deliver the punchy, commanding performance we were expecting from speakers of this size. We'd like a bit more rumble and impact at the low-end. A tauter, more agile presentation - such as that found in the rival B&W 685 S2s and Triangle Esprit Titus EZs - would do wonders for the Cabasse's slightly laid-back performance.

The staccato rhythm of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's *On We March* needs a stricter sense of timing than the MT32s supply, but the speakers get by with the wide arc of sound they dish out. Voices could have more depth, too, while the easy dynamics that we like so much could be more subtle in the way they shift and soar.

Sure, these Cabasses are not quite as revealing as their aforementioned rivals, but it's impossible not to love that rich, open sound. It's inviting and full of enthusiasm - we could happily spend hours listening to these speakers.

Give them room

Big and boxy, although surprisingly light, these speakers demand quite a lot of space in your listening room. It's not just because they're large bookshelf speakers, it's also because they sound best when given plenty of space. Push them too close to the wall and not only will you exaggerate the quality of the languid bass, you'll also lose a significant amount of that wonderful sense of space.

Available in ebony or walnut finishes, the speakers are well built and finished, even if their plain appearance looks a little severe.

The MT32 Antiguas may look humble, but their heritage can be traced back to Cabasse's high-end speakers. The 'MT' in the name stands for 'midrange tweeter', which is the DOM 37 tweeter - a design derived from the technology used in the flagship La Sphere and L'Ocean speakers (both with six-figure price tags). We wish they had retained some of those speakers' extravagant spherical design, too.

Easy-going nature

The main impression we take away from the MT32 Antiguas is just how easy and enjoyable they are to listen to. They're not quite precise, punchy or revealing enough to worry the best in this class but their spacious sound is unrivalled at this price. If you have the space for them, these Cabasses will do their best to entertain you.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge, spacious sound; smooth detail; full-bodied; easy to listen to; good build

AGAINST Bass can get boomy if near a wall; rivals offer greater insight and precision

VERDICT A huge sense of scale and a smooth presentation give an enjoyable, easy listen



Elac BS 73 £440 ★★★★★

These are beautifully assembled speakers, available in white or black - they certainly feel worth the money

The Elac BS 73s could have been a great pair of speakers. A lack of excitement and dynamic subtlety, however, means that they aren't quite the fully fledged entertainer we hope for when it comes to mid-priced standmounters.

The BS 73s get off to a good start. The jangly-blues guitars on Hot Tuna's *The Terrible Operation* sound solid and detailed, with a good amount of weight to the bottom end. Drums hit with a satisfying thump in Green Day's *Hitchin' A Ride*, although we'd like more punch and vigour to the presentation.

In better company

Listened to on their own, the BS 73s sound perfectly fine. There are no harsh edges, and the drivers integrate smoothly. Set against their rivals, however, you'll notice they're quite dynamically restricted, their treble doesn't shine as sweetly as the competition, and there's a lack of subtlety to the otherwise solid sound.

The Elacs struggle to give the horns and strings in John Williams's *Hymn To The Fallen* the space to soar, and the sweeping music doesn't have the emotional pull to draw you in. The Epos K1s (the Elacs' closest rivals at £400)

may not have the pleasing weight and depth to the bass that the Elacs do, but they're a much livelier and more open performer. Instruments sound more detailed through the Epos speakers, and there's a greater spark of excitement at the top end.

Energy issues

The BS 73s seem to come up short of fully unleashing their potential energy and dynamic range, with the bass sounding ponderous when it should be punchy and agile. As a result, music lacks drive and excitement. We'd like a touch more clarity too - the edges of notes can sound a little blurred.

We'd recommend letting the BS 73s run in for at least a few hours before settling down for serious listening, as they sound quite sluggish when played out of the box. Take care with partnering equipment, too. The agile and full-bodied presentation of the excellent Rega Brio-R amplifier would liven up the BS 73s' sound.

Elac has chosen a minimalist look for the BS 73s, offering just two finishes: white or black. Build quality is great - the speakers feel solid and the smooth finish is pristine. You definitely feel like you're getting your money's worth here.

For anyone concerned with space, these are fairly compact speakers, with a 15cm mid/bass driver that takes up nearly the entire width of the cabinet. They won't look out of place in a small room. Be wary of poking the 25mm soft-dome tweeter - it sticks out, unprotected, and we'd feel more comfortable if there were some sort of cover shielding it from probing fingers.

Fighting with the big boys

The Elac speakers are in formidable company. They do have price on their side (£440 is only a notch up from the budget speaker price range) but then the superb Award-winning B&W 685 S2s are another short jump up at £500. The Elacs are decent speakers, but they need to offer greater clarity and precision, and a punchier rhythm, to compete with the very best.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, weighty sound; decent detail; quality of build and finish; compact; price

AGAINST Lack drive, excitement and subtlety; could be more open and dynamic

VERDICT A decent if unexciting-sounding pair of speakers that just miss the mark



Epos K1 £400 ★★★★★

The Epos K1's fascia is pure, with only a slot port and the drivers to break the line. Optional magnetic snap-on grilles are also available

The Epos K1 bookshelf speakers are ideal if you're on a tight budget, have a small listening area and are looking for decent performance. At £400, these compact speakers are a tempting offer.

There's lots we like about the Epos K1s. They sound solid and lively. Detail definition is decent, with enough energy and dynamics to get you snapping your fingers and tapping your feet in time with the music. It's a smooth, weighty sound that's a pleasant listen.

Complex problems

We like the even tonal balance of the speakers. There are no hard, bright edges to the horns in Quincy Jones's *Blues In The Night*. Nor does the bassline in The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* turn into a woolly, booming monster.

The K1s give a performance to match their capabilities - and price range - and while they may not be as transparent, precise or powerful as class rivals, they deliver an inoffensive sound that's easy to listen to. On the flip side, they can be overwhelmed by complex arrangements. They don't quite have the authority and subtlety to fully convey the dramatic, dynamic upheavals in Hans Zimmer's *The Dark*

Knight soundtrack, and we could do with more nuance and clarity from voices here too.

It's always worth bearing in mind, though, that the K1s cost £400. The Award-winning B&W 685 S2s offer more excitement and insight, but they will cost you a hundred quid more. The Cabasse MT32 Antigua speakers (also £500) offer a bigger, wider soundstage, too, but the K1s have a more focused soundfield that's best suited to smaller rooms - they would be lost in a large listening space.

The Epos K1s are simplicity defined. Our review sample's white finish is startlingly minimal, with no distinct markings or branding on the clear, smooth fascia. The two drivers (a 25mm tweeter and a 15cm mid/bass driver) are similarly plain: all black, with no visible screws or any shiny accents.

Minimal fuss

The minimalist design will appeal to many, while others may find it a touch too stark. Next to the distinctive designs of the Triangle Esprit Titus EZ and B&W 685 S2 speakers, the Epos K1s look rather nondescript. The speakers are nicely made, though: edges are smooth, build quality is sturdy and

there's the option to biwire them. You can also get the K1s in black, while a wood finish will be available later in the year. Magnetic snap-on grilles are also available for £30 per pair.

Active transformation

The K1s do have a neat trick up their sleeve: you can transform them into a pair of active speakers. The removable rear baffle (held on with screws) makes it easy to switch the passive crossover for an active alternative (an upgrade Epos will be releasing later this year).

Sure, if you shell out an extra £100, you get the astounding B&W 685 S2s. This may seem like a reasonable jump, but for some, £400 is the absolute limit. And the Epos K1s make a convincing case for themselves. They may not be the most exciting, but don't overlook them.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, lively sound; decent detail and dynamics; smooth listen; good build; price

AGAINST Rivals sound more exciting, detailed and powerful

VERDICT Not the most captivating or musical, but a pleasing speaker all the same



Focal Aria 905 £600 ★★★★★☆

From solidity of build to fidelity of sound reproduction, the Aria 905s cut an impressive figure. The 13cm cone is made of flax, which is light and well damped

If you want a serious sound for serious money, the Focal Aria 905s are just the ticket. Their ability to deliver each thread of sound with the utmost competency is commendable - even if it comes at the cost of a little bit of fun.

Crisp, clear and precise, the Focal 905s are a hugely accomplished pair of speakers. Detail is abundant, and delivered with unerring control.

The stops and starts of notes are punctual. The staccato, electronic-sounding drum beats in the intro to Radiohead's *15 Step* are organised and hit their mark, while the Aria 905s confidently handle the dynamic shift into the more melodic, soothing guitar strums. The tinkling xylophone in Alt-J's *Ms* sounds sweet but also has a bite to it, while the taut bassline does a great job keeping in time with the nimble rhythm.

Clinical efficiency

The Focals are ruthlessly efficient - they know exactly how each instrument should sound, how to convey a vocal nuance, how far the dynamics are allowed to soar, and how tightly controlled the entire rhythm needs to be. We just wish they would let loose and have some fun.

Next to the unbridled power and gleeful punch of the B&W 685 S2s, the Focals sound a little too controlled and serious. The Award-winning B&W speakers plunge ahead and have fun playing whatever you throw at them; they don't shy away from digging up grungy, crunchy textures around a bassline. The nasal twang in Stevie Nicks' voice on *You Can't Fix This* is politely subdued through the Focals. The B&Ws sound more soulful.

Placing the speakers close to a wall adds some much-needed heft to the sound. The Focals' mature presentation is admirable, but a touch more heart and emotion would make it a truly engaging performance.

Varied material

Wood, glass, leather and metal - there's a lot happening with the Focal speakers' design. The various materials and panels are fitted together expertly, and the solid, sturdy build shows how much work has been put into these £600 speakers. You get the choice of a high-gloss black or walnut finish too.

Some may find the design a bit too hectic, especially when compared with the simpler, more elegant designs of the Triangle Esprit Titus EZs or the

B&W 685 S2s. Focal's signature inverted-dome tweeter adds a distinctive touch, however, while the 13cm flax cone's well damped character ensures the 905s' precise nature.

Unwanted prints

The finish isn't faultless. The leather base of our review sample was easily damaged by Blu-Tack (which we often use to fix speakers to stands), and the glass top is a fingerprint magnet.

The Focals have all the right ingredients, but they lack a touch of spice and zest. Confidence and competence are excellent qualities - and for some, just what they're looking for - but we want speakers that enjoy playing music as much as we enjoy listening to it. These are talented speakers, but it wouldn't hurt the Focals to let their hair down and have more fun.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Precise, crisp and confident sound; plenty of clear detail; taut, agile timing; build quality

AGAINST Need more punch and enjoyment; finish needs more attention; busy design

VERDICT A mature, confident performance that gets nearly everything right



Tannoy Revolution XT 6 £600 ★★★★★☆

This next-generation speaker is definitely worthy of the lauded Revolution name, even if its integrated plinth makes life tricky if you want to use stands

When a hi-fi manufacturer reinvents one of its most successful ranges, we're excited and cautious in equal measure.

Tannoy's new Revolution XT range has the weight of expectation behind it. The original Revolution series spawned many Award-winners, so it's only natural to expect great things from this redesigned range. The XT 6 standmounters are the first to come under our scrutiny. And we've come away excited.

Game played with enthusiasm

Play *The Imitation Game* soundtrack and the XT 6s zing through the fluid piano chords and the soaring strings with alacrity. These are nimble, speedy speakers. Give them a synth-heavy Nine Inch Nails track, or the lilting, exotic vocal quirks of Björk, and the XT 6s will happily deliver each note in a precise, attacking manner.

The Tannoys deliver a wide arc of sound, with plenty of space for individual strands to breathe. Detail is crisp and refined, with the midrange sounding particularly fluid and expressive.

We'd like a bit more weight and muscle to the XT 6s' sound, though. The XT 6s have a lean presentation –

great for agility and timing, but less good for the layers of rich, textured detail needed to fully engage our attention. Rivals offer a punchier, more full-bodied sound that's more satisfying to listen to.

The squelchy bassline in *Wildfire* by Sbrkt never puts a toe out of line, but it's not quite as rumbling and textured as it should be. The grungy, thumping drum beats in Marilyn Manson's *Killing Strangers* lack the muscle needed for a satisfying impact. B&W's 685 S2s (£500) have the appropriate weight and power to show exactly how it's done.

We'd recommend placing the Tannoy speakers close to a wall, as it adds some solidity and punch to the sound. Be wary of partnering the speakers with any bright-sounding equipment, too, as you don't want to exaggerate that lean character.

Elegant and functional

The XT 6s look smart. The trapezoid cabinet (the shape helps reduce internal standing waves) is as sturdy and beautifully made as ever. The 'XT' in the name stands for 'extra technology', reflecting the changes on the new series.

Firstly, Tannoy's signature Dual Concentric driver has been redesigned to improve the integration between the tweeter and mid/bass driver, but the more obvious change is the addition of a fixed plinth. There's a downward-firing port that exits into the gap between the cabinet bottom and plinth, which makes sense when the XT 6s are standing on a table or on a bookshelf. But ideally you want to place them on dedicated stands, and in that context they can look awkward. We'd like a sleeker design.

Compelling sound

These Tannoys are certainly speakers to watch out for. Their fluid, light-footed presentation and crisp detail are pretty compelling – we just wish there were more brawn and richness to the sound they produce.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Crisp, clear, attacking sound; brilliantly agile and precise; refined dynamics; fine build

AGAINST Rivals offer greater detail and more authority; awkward plinth

VERDICT Brilliantly speedy, fluid and refined speakers that look smart and sound exciting



Triangle Esprit Titus EZ £600 ★★★★★

You might not find these speakers as readily available as those from more prominent marques, but their zesty sound is worth tracking down

Look at that shiny tweeter horn. Look at it. Listen to that exciting, captivating sound. Can you blame us for being a little bit in love with the Triangle Esprit Titus EZs?

The Triangle speakers race across Public Broadcasting Service's *Gagarin* with unfettered enthusiasm. The drums hit with precision, while the taut strings are funky and nicely textured. The fanfares blare triumphantly - the surge in dynamics is as subtle as it is rousing. The Triangles capture the upbeat, agile tone of the song perfectly, and their energetic, insightful delivery is riveting.

Fit for action

Looking at their petite dimensions, you wouldn't think the Tituses capable of lashings of deep, cavernous bass. And you'd be right, they aren't. You'll have to go for the B&W 685 S2 speakers if you're after big-scale power and low-end authority, but the zippy nature of the Triangles make even the punchy 685s sound like they need a few miles on the treadmill.

They're admirably precise and transparent. The atonal, mangled tune of Tom Waits' *Bad As Me* has befuddled bigger, pricier speakers than the EZs, but these compact bookshelf units take

it in their stride. The clangorous drums and creeping, blues-tinged melody make perfect sense through the Tituses, which keep a taut hold on each instrumental strand to deliver a thoroughly engaging and cohesive performance.

Waits' intensity is palpable, his voice veering between sinister and cartoonish, and yet the Tituses effortlessly convey each subtle nuance and quirk of his performance.

The only chink in the Triangles' armour is a rather excitable treble. It sounds quite harsh and aggressive when you listen to the speakers from new. Give them a few days to run in, though, and the top end smoothes out considerably, sounding richer, fuller and more integrated with the rest of the frequencies. We'd still avoid partnering the Tituses with any bright or hard-sounding equipment, though.

Premium and no mistake

Compact and beautifully built, the Tituses are hugely desirable speakers. The walnut finish of our review sample feels and looks of a premium quality - it makes all other speakers at this price look underdressed. If the woody look is not your thing, white and black gloss finishes are available for an extra £100.

The star attraction is that titanium tweeter. Some in this office are attracted to shiny things, but the horn-loaded tweeter looks more elegant than bling and the aggressively pointy phase plug gives the design a distinctive touch.

Getting the balance right

The mid/bass driver uses a new cellulose cone that's been engineered to strike the right balance between lightness and rigidity. A listen to the Titus' taut, nimble low end shows the hard work has paid off.

The Triangle Tituses might be difficult to track down compared with some better-known brands, but they're worth the trouble. They're more than just a pretty fascia, too: these gorgeous speakers are talented enough to worry our Award-winning B&W 685 S2s.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Agile, enthusiastic presentation; insight and articulation; impeccable finish; design

AGAINST Needs careful system matching; rivals offer more low-end oomph

VERDICT Impressive in almost every way, these gorgeous speakers are very tempting



INNOVATION



PERFORMANCE



AWARDS



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TEST VERDICT



THE WINNER

B&W 685 S2

£500 ★★★★★

They've had to fight hard against varied and talented opposition, but the dynamic and subtle **B&W 685 S2s** continue to keep their rivals at bay and claim the honours at this price

We have to hand it to them – all seven speakers in this test performed admirably. Each had a distinctive sonic flavour that made us pay attention, and we've come away elated that the mid-priced bookshelf speakers market is saturated with such competitive and entertaining options.

Two peas in a pod

Elac and Epos share many characteristics: compact, minimalist design and a lower price compared with rivals. But it's the Epos KIs that win out here. They may not have the insight and precision of the Triangles, but the KIs are nicely detailed and have a smooth balance. They cost just £400, too.

We wish the same could be said about the Elac BS 73s. While they sound perfectly fine in isolation they lack the energy and drive to really grab our attention.

The Focal Aria 905s, on the other hand, are serious about getting every aspect of their

sonic performance right. The rhythm is spot-on, the bass is taut and the top end soars but never sharpens. They should be a shoo-in for top marks, but they just lack the ability to have fun. More expressive dynamics and extra bass kick would help a lot.

If stark precision and control isn't your cup of tea and you'd prefer to be enveloped in a huge, spacious bubble of sound that's utterly pleasing to listen to, the Cabasse speakers are the ones for you. They're full-bodied and smooth without sacrificing too much detail, and the eager attitude is hugely enjoyable, even if the bass gets a little out of hand. Give these big boxes some space in your room, and you'll marvel at how open and expansive they sound.

Reputation maintained

Tannoy has a reputation to uphold, and we think the company can hold its head up high with the newly designed XT 6 speakers. More muscle and weight to the low end wouldn't go

amiss, but the lean presentation means the speakers can be agile, accurate and attacking. We're in two minds about the look of that integrated plinth, though.

And now we come to the two stars of this test. The entertaining B&W 685 S2s have been firm favourites for over a year, but the new Triangle Esprit Titus EZs have wowed us with their incredible agility and that gorgeous finish. If we could give both of them the win we would, but it's the B&Ws that ultimately get the nod. The Triangles can be fussy with partnering kit, they're £100 pricier, and harder to find – but we'd make the effort as they're such a talented and desirable pair of speakers.

The B&Ws remain unmatched when it comes to dynamics, bass depth and punch, and they have the subtlety and control to support that immensely captivating sound. They're just so much fun to listen to, and that's what makes us keep coming back to them. The 685 S2s are the undeniable champions.



B&W 685 S2
£500 ★★★★★
 Power handling 100W • Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 8 ohms • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 35 x 19 x 32cm • Weight 7kg



Cabasse MT32 Antigua
£500 ★★★★★
 Power handling 75W • Sensitivity 88dB • Impedance 8 ohms • Biwirable No • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 41 x 22 x 30cm • Weight 7.5kg



Elac BS 73
£440 ★★★★★
 Power handling 70W • Sensitivity 87.5dB • Impedance 4 ohms • Biwirable No • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 30 x 18 x 27cm • Weight 5kg



Epos K1
£400 ★★★★★
 Power handling 100W • Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 4 ohms • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 31 x 19 x 25cm • Weight 6kg



Focal Aria 905
£600 ★★★★★
 Power handling 100W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 8 ohms • Biwirable No • Finishes 3 • Dimensions 33 x 21 x 25cm • Weight 6kg



Tannoy Revolution XT 6
£600 ★★★★★
 Power handling 60W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 8 ohms • Biwirable Yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 40 x 22 x 30cm • Weight 7.5kg



Triangle Esprit Titus EZ
£600 ★★★★★
 Power handling 60W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 4 ohms • Biwirable No • Finishes 3 • Dimensions 31 x 17 x 27cm • Weight 6kg



Speaker placement: dos and don'ts
 They may be nicknamed 'bookshelf' speakers, but don't put your brand-new standmounters in between volumes of *Game Of Thrones* if you want the best performance out of them.

We'd recommend placing them on dedicated stands. Not only do products such as the Award-winning Custom Design F104 Signature and Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands offer a stable, stylish support, they also help reduce any unwanted vibrations for a cleaner, punchier performance.

If you think your speaker could sound less bassy, more open, or needs a bit more punch, something as simple as adjusting their placement in the room can work wonders. Only thing is, there are no universal rules about positioning. Some speakers sound fuller and more controlled when placed close to a wall, while others flourish when they're out in the open with plenty of space around them. As ever, experiment for yourself to get the best results.

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Sony



LG



Panasonic



Samsung





The X90C range (left) is just 4.9mm thick, while the X93C TVs (right) incorporate speakers with magnetic fluid tech

Sony

New for 2015: Android TV, YouView, hi-res audio, ultra-thin design

Sony's TVs are coming out fighting in 2015. For starters, all sets will run on the Android TV platform, promising a cleverer user experience, new menu system and smarter integration with mobile devices. We've experienced Android TV first-hand and the initial signs are promising. The voice search function seems a big step up from what we've experienced on rival platforms.

Eyebrows were also raised at Sony's promise to equip certain TV ranges with YouView. Launched in 2012, this catch-up and TV-on-demand service has many admirers, and could be a shrewd move by the Japanese giant. It's a chance to differentiate itself from rivals, at least until Freeview's equivalent, Freeview Play, rolls out. It will be interesting to see how YouView, Android TV and Sony's smart TV set-up mix together.

Key ranges:

X90C (KD-65X9005C, KD-55X9005C) Not that any flatscreen is particularly portly these days, but Sony claims its X90C range boasts the world's thinnest 4K TVs. And, at only 4.9mm thick, they're slimmer than some smartphones. Given that Sony has chosen to put OLED on the back-burner, the X90C looks well-positioned to bring the wow factor back to the brand.

X93C (KD-65X9305C, KD-55X9305C) Sony's wedge design made its debut in 2014 and it's back for 2015. Once again, the speakers use Sony's magnetic

fluid technology but they're presented in a new configuration, where a forward-firing woofer sits below a mid/bass driver and tweeter.

High-res audio is still a huge part of Sony's plans for 2015, and support for high-quality files has now trickled down to its TV sets. This range (together with the step-up X94C series) can handle high-res, and supports 24-bit/96kHz FLAC files played over USB.

S85C (KD-65S8505C, KD-55S8505C) Sony introduced its first curved screens at the end of 2014, and they proved a big hit in our test rooms. We're hoping for more of the same this year at more affordable prices - last year, Sony's 65in curved offering entered the market at just shy of £4000.

LG

New for 2015: Ultra HD 4K OLED, WebOS 2.0, Wide Colour Gamut, Quantum Dot, Harman Kardon sound

We've been waiting for the Holy Grail of Ultra HD 4K and OLED in one set, and LG has promised it in 2015. No fewer than five ranges (curved and flat) boast this killer tech combo. LG managed to drop its OLED TVs into the realm of the affordable in 2014, with the 55in 55EC930V priced at £2000. The addition of 4K will push prices up again, but not by too much (we hope).

LG has solved any flat-panel sound woes with a stand-cum-soundbar. And its 77EG990V goes from flat to curved in 6 sec

Picture quality is high on LG's agenda, with a host of new technologies making their debut in 2015. ColourPrime claims to boost the way its top-of-the-range 4K sets reproduce colour, and is available in two different versions: Quantum Dot and WCG (Wide Colour Gamut).

WCG uses a combination of new backlighting technology and a colour-enhancing filter that LG claims produces more accurate colours. It's available on the UF950V series at 55in and 65in.

Quantum Dots are nano-crystals that range from two to 10 nanometres in size. Each emits a different colour depending on its size. A film of these dots is added to the front of a TV's LED backlight, which affects colour and brightness. This tech isn't exclusive to LG, but will be on LG's UF940V series of 4K televisions.

WebOS 2.0

We were huge fans of LG's WebOS smart platform and 2015 sees the launch of WebOS 2.0, promising quicker loading times and navigation for the user. There will also be greater personalisation, and a new version of LG's Magic Remote with enhanced gesture controls.

Key ranges:

EG9900 (77EG990V) Would Sir care for a curved or flat 4K OLED TV? With this 77in set you can have both. The LG's flexible display goes from flat to curved in six seconds - a serious piece of kit, should you have the space.

We've been waiting for the Holy Grail of Ultra HD 4K and OLED in one set, and LG has promised it in 2015. No fewer than five ranges (curved and flat) boast this killer tech combo



Panasonic

EF980 (65EF980V)

Having a flat 4K OLED TV is all well and good, but super-slim screens like these don't have the best track record when it comes to sound quality. This LG set doesn't attempt to defy the laws of physics; instead, it comes equipped with a TV stand-cum-soundbar, thanks to LG's partnership with Harman Kardon.

Panasonic

New for 2015: 4K Pro, Firefox OS, High Dynamic Range (HDR)

Panasonic's new 4K sets will be powered by a new operating system, Firefox OS. It will incorporate a new, personalised Home Screen 2.0 where you can add your favourite channels, apps and devices to customisable 'decks'.

Panasonic claims its new 4K Pro picture engine and 4K Studio Master Processor will allow full native playback of HDR content. Netflix has promised to start producing and streaming content filmed in 4K HDR in the future. High Dynamic Range claims to deliver improved contrast, colours and brightness, and the technology looks likely to be adopted by all the key players at some point in the not-too-distant future.

Key ranges:

CR850 (TX-55CR852B, TX-65CR852B)

We haven't seen any curved TVs from Panasonic until now. It has three ranges, CR850, CR730 and CR430. The flagship CR850 features a full-array backlight with local dimming

The TX-50CX802 (top) is Panasonic's premium flat-panel offering, while the TX-65CR852 is its first curved set

and uses Panasonic's new 4K Studio Master picture processing technology, designed to bring more accurate colours, contrast and brightness.

CX800 (TX-40CX802B, TX-50CX802B, TX-55CX802B, TX-65CX802B)

If you're looking for Panasonic's premium flat 4K offering, it comes in the shape of the CX800 range. This shares the same backlight technology and picture processing used in the CR850 range above. Both ranges also use panels that feature Panasonic's new Wide Colour Phosphor technology - it claims to use less energy than an equivalent Quantum Dot panel yet still produces a much wider spectrum of colours.

And the rest?

Philips TV announcements are scheduled for the 16th March 2015. Early indications are that virtually all Philips screens will, like Sony, run with the Android TV platform. Philips also promises a revamped user interface and, of course, its Ambilight tech. Expect the usual gamut of Full HD, 4K and curved sets.

There's a cloud of uncertainty hanging over Toshiba. In January, it announced it was ceasing sales operations in North America and licensing its TV business to Taiwan's Compal Electronics, citing a number of factors including a slowdown in the global market and "harsh price competition". At the time of writing there's been no specific news for Europe, although we've been reassured shops will be stocking Toshiba TVs this year.

In the latter part of 2014, Sharp announced it would be entering into a brand licensing agreement with the Slovakian company Universal Media Corporation (UMC). Consequently it's currently undergoing a huge reorganisation in Europe.

At CES, Sharp announced new 4K sets, including THX-certified models and a new SmartCentral 4.0 operating system for the US market. As with Toshiba, we've been assured there will be Sharp TVs in the UK this year, but concrete information is yet to emerge.



Samsung

The JS9500 range will include 4K Ultra HD and SUHD tech. Tizen, left, is Samsung's new Smart platform

Samsung

New for 2015: SUHD re-mastering engine, Tizen smart platform, 'Chamfer' design

Samsung's SUHD remastering engine uses nano-crystal technology, and in many ways is its take on the Quantum Dot technology being used by the likes of its main rival, LG. Samsung claims SUHD will allow for greater performance where colours, contrast and brightness are concerned compared with 2014 models.

Streamlined Smart Hub

2015 will also see Samsung use Tizen, its own open source platform, as the driving force behind its smart TV operating system. This means a new streamlined look for Samsung's Smart Hub, where you'll find recent and recommended content.

You'll be able to pair Samsung devices via Bluetooth and use Quick Connect to beam video content from a smartphone to the TV (and also TV programmes to connected devices) even when the TV's turned off.

Key range JS9500

This flagship series will be curved, 4K Ultra HD and feature SUHD technology. As previously mentioned, the range will be powered by Samsung's Tizen operating system.

All the screens in this new line-up will showcase Samsung's new 'Chamfer' bezel design, which claims to add more depth to the screen.

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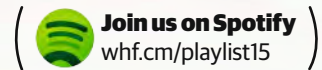
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What's on Test

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PSB M4U2 **p48**

Soul Jet Pro **p48**

Sometimes we just want to be alone with our thoughts and our music – but the world has other ideas. There's the annoying bloke on the train home talking too loudly on his phone, the chorus of babies wailing on a long-haul flight or just the general hubbub of an office that we'd rather do without.

That's where noise-cancelling headphones come into their own. Using internal and external microphones, they judge your surroundings and block outside noises, leaving you to enjoy your music without interruption.

There are brands that have made a name for themselves in this arena, and some promising newcomers here to challenge them. And it's high time to see how they all fare.



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

Beats Studio 2.0 £270 ★★★★★

01

Carrying the tagline "an icon remastered", these are the successors to the classic Beats Studio cans. Perhaps most interesting here is the brand's reconsideration of the 'Beats sound' - a bass-heavy character that gave the original Studio headphones a bad name among audiophiles when they launched.

The Beats Studio 2.0s are now said to be tuned with "balance and accuracy" in mind. We'll see about that...

The design is still very much Beats, if perhaps a little more refined. They're still headphones to be seen in, available in a range of colours, with the now-iconic "B" logo emblazoned on each earcup.

The originals felt somewhat bulky, but these are lighter, and the foldable design makes them an easy portable companion. A case is included, as well as two cables - one with, one without inline controls.

The rechargeable (via microUSB) battery allows for around 20 hours of active noise-cancellation. Less than with some rivals - and there's no passive playback if the battery runs out - but it should cover you for most situations.

It's a relatively comfy fit, with the soft, thick leather earpads preventing any feel of clamping. The headband would

benefit from some better padding in place of its rubberised finish though.

The Beats Studio's efforts at noise-cancelling make an impact on the noises around us, but not to the extent that something like the Bose QC25s can offer.

If you're a fan of classical music, there is another thing to be aware of with Beats - there is a not-insignificant hiss when ANC is on. It's hardly noticeable with livelier tracks, but quieter, more subtle recordings can reveal it.

Hip-hop is still their thing

While there has undoubtedly been a change in the Beats Studio's character, these headphones still lend themselves to the likes of pop, hip-hop and rock music the most - anything lively will bring out the best in these cans.

They're an exciting, upfront listen, and can fill your ears with some serious volume. The bass has been refined so it's better balanced in the frequency range, and never overwhelms the midrange or sounds heavy-handed in the mix.

Let's be clear: anyone looking for a neutral pair of 'phones will find there is still a tad too much bass here, but it's a balance that works better than it did.

The midrange is clear and open, and the treble crisp without ever being hard. Throw them a complex rhythm and there's agility and fluidity on show, and large-scale dynamics are portrayed with confidence and expression.

Vocals could have a touch more body and subtlety to them, and quieter sections of music don't offer the insight or expression found in some rivals.

It's ultimately a presentation that aims to be likeable rather than analytical, with finer detail smoothed off in exchange for a more forgiving character.

We can't argue with that - it's a clever tactic that will serve these headphones well with a lot of people. We would just like to see a touch more refinement and transparency in order to bestow a fifth star upon them.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rich bass; exciting sound; smooth, forgiving character; dynamically confident

AGAINST No passive mode; notable hiss; bass bias will still be too much for some

VERDICT Beats Studios now sound better than ever, but purists may want to look elsewhere.

Bose QuietComfort 25 £270 ★★★★★

02

For years, the Bose QuietComfort 15s were our go-to noise-cancelling headphones, winning our Award for the category four times in a row. For a while we wondered if anything could ever beat them. Then came their successor.

The QuietComfort 25s are an improvement in every way. Whether it's design, aesthetics, performance or noise cancellation, Bose has built on every aspect that we loved in the QC15s and made it even better.

Superb noise-cancelling

When it comes to noise cancellation, you won't get better than this. They are remarkably good at blocking out the consistent sound of an airplane engine, for example, but do a good job at taking the edge off an office environment too.

Switch on the noise cancellation while you're wearing them and you'll feel the ANC kick into action with powerful effect, creating a vacuum-like feeling between your ears and the headphones. You get used to it within a few minutes but it's a strange sensation to begin with.

The ANC runs via a single AAA battery, which should offer around 35 hours' life - and the QC25s do work

passively should you be caught short. They're quieter and lose a significant amount of clarity, detail and balance when used this way though, so try to keep a spare battery with you.

When used as they should be, the QC25s offer a well-balanced presentation, without ever leaning towards any part of the frequency range.

This means the low-end doesn't have the weight of the Beats Studios or PSB M4U 2s, but what it lacks in muscle it makes up for in agility and precision.

It integrates well with the midrange, which is smooth and open with plenty of detail and clarity. We love the insight on show here too - pianos have depth and texture to every note, while percussion sounds believable and never unduly harsh.

Even-handed and mature

Despite the balanced presentation, the QC25s strongest point has to be their sparkling, open treble, which soars all the way up to the highest notes without a hint of hardening at any volume.

With such even handling, the QC25s are at home with any musical genre. They have the insight and maturity to handle subtle classical tracks, but can produce

the drive and attack required to take on faster pace rhythms with confidence.

There's a precision to the way notes start and stop too, and while the QC25s steer just clear of making the sound analytical, it does make them seem a little more restrained when compared to something more up-front and fun, such as the PSB M4U 2s. Which balance works for you will come down to taste.

The QC25s won't win any awards for devastating good looks, but they're light and comfortable to wear for hours at a time, which counts for a lot. There's a lot of plastic here, but it feels solid and durable, and keeps the weight down.

So what do you do if something ain't broke? Well, if you're Bose, you go ahead and tinker with it anyway, producing a new product that's better in every way.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Class-leading noise cancellation; lightweight design; clear, open treble; precise, detailed sound; very easy listening

AGAINST Could be a touch more exciting

VERDICT Not our Award-winner for nothing, these are great noise-cancelling headphones

01 —
The Beats Studio
2.0s are available
in nine different
regular finishes



02 —
Frequent fliers
apply here: the
QC25s are superb
at noise-cancelling

Philips Fidelio NC1 £250 ★★★★★

03

Philips has had a good run of five-star cans of late, so when the Fidelio NC1 noise-cancelling headphones were announced at CES 2015 we couldn't wait to see if the Bose QC25s had a competitor for their noise-cancelling crown.

With a design even smaller and lighter than the QC25s, the NC1s are seriously portable - crucial in this arena - and helped further by their collapsing design.

Perhaps rather strangely for a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, though, is that the NC1s have gone for an on-ear rather than over-ear design. As it turns out, the Philips don't suffer too much from this - at a decent volume, white noise is hard to pick up during music playback. Office environments don't fare quite so well, with conversations and phones creeping in fairly easily.

A design for life

Otherwise, the design works well. The NC1s look more stylish than the Bose QC25s, with a sleeker design made up of aluminium on the cups and a soft-touch material on the headband. The cable is a sturdy woven design, available both with or without inline controls, and there's a carry-case to provide protection.

Being slender and lightweight, the NC1s are very comfy to wear for long periods, the memory-foam and leather earpads doing well not to heat your ears.

The battery for the ANC is rechargeable via microUSB and will last around 30 hours on a full charge. That's pretty impressive, though if you ever are caught short without juice the NC1s are capable of passive playback, and do a surprisingly good job at it too.

We ran the NC1s in for two full charges before we started testing and even then they continued to improve - it will be worth giving them a lengthy bedding-in period if you want the best from them.

When it comes to performance, the NC1s show plenty of bite and attack, but sound noticeably smaller than something like the PSB M4U2s, and don't show the same level of separation and space as the Bose QC25s. The presentation tends to lean towards the upper mids and treble, leaving precious little warmth or body in the low end.

Ellie Goulding's *Burn* is a good example of this, the electronic synth melody ruling the roost while the drum bassline - though taut - takes a backseat, with very little power to be heard.

This dialled-back low-end can leave vocals sounding harsh and vulnerable at certain frequencies without the authority to balance them out, and the leading edges to some notes to sound hard too.

Strangely, turn off ANC and you'll find bass is boosted. You lose some clarity, but add much-needed warmth and body. Detail retrieval is decent and insight is good, though we're not convinced of the NC1s' ability to handle complex rhythms.

These cans are unfortunately not the roaring success that we were hoping for, often finding themselves held back by their size and design. Noise cancellation is surprisingly decent but ultimately the 'phones sound as small as they look. As it is, the Bose QC25s offer a lot of what's attractive about the NC1s in a better thought-out, better-realised package.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent noise cancelling; plenty of bite and attack; good detail levels; portability; battery life

AGAINST Bass is short of punch and depth; complex rhythms can sound disjointed

VERDICT Small and portable, but the sound quality can't compete with the competition

Polk Ultrafocus 8000 £260 ★★★★★

04

Polk Audio may be one of the biggest hi-fi brands in America, but in the UK it's still making a name for itself. The UltraFocus 8000 headphones are the first over-ear cans we've reviewed from the brand, and join the competitive noise-cancelling market at this price.

There's no arguing that the Polks are on the bulky side. Although they come with a carry-case they don't fold down like the PSB M4U2s, making them less than readily portable. Still, despite a largely plastic finish our review sample feels relatively sturdy, with colour options of white and bronze or black.

Instead of placing controls on the cable, which offers a flat, durable design, Polk has put them on the right earcup. It sounds like a good idea, but in practice it is a bit fiddly, plus you hear a plastic click in your ear every time you skip track or change volume. Not ideal.

The fit is snug but not uncomfortable, though we do find our ears get hotter more quickly than with competitors.

A single switch handles noise cancellation, and without it turned on music won't play. Beats Studios also operate like this, but the saving grace in the Polk's favour is that they operate on

two AAA batteries rather than being rechargeable - so just make sure you always have a spare set handy. Depending on your usage, you should get 40-60 hours of playback before you need them.

The noise-cancelling on the Polks is reasonably effective but not infallible, and some outside noise can creep in. We'd say they block out a bit more than the Beats Studio, but don't come close to the levels of quiet offered by the Bose QC25s. But then, not much does.

Upbeat and inclusive

Like the PSBs though, the Polks offer a really big sound. They're not quite as powerful or as spacious, but they're just as confident and display real enthusiasm for most genres of music, with a preference for lively, upbeat material.

The Polks tip the balance in favour of a deep, warm low end. While they stop short of being overpowering or boomy - in fact the bass is quite controlled - feed them a bassy recording such as Jay Z's *F.U.T.W.* and it becomes a touch overemphasised for our taste.

The midrange is never muddled though, and is delivered with focus and clarity. Vocals are direct and full-bodied,

but can lose a touch of intimacy in more delicate recordings.

For the most part, the treble is crisp and controlled, but it does lack a bit of refinement. Play a brighter recording like Of Monsters And Men's *Little Talks* and while you'll hear plenty of detail, there's a hint of coarseness too. The 8000s are never flustered by complicated rhythms or complex instrumentals though, yet can begin to sound congested under those conditions, lacking the more open presentation of the Bose QC25s.

Overall, these are good headphones. There isn't enough for us here in terms of refinement and balance, but they will pump plenty of life into your music. For a more even-handed, refined approach, we'd look elsewhere, but for an engaging, exciting listen, these cans tick both boxes.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big sound; deep, taut bass; exciting; good detail retrieval; clear midrange; well organised

AGAINST Bass is too forward; only so-so noise cancellation

VERDICT Not the last word in balance or refinement, but a fun and exciting listen



03 — Noise-cancelling cans with an on-ear design? Philips has taken that challenge



04 — Just add a pair of AAA batteries for 40-60 hours of exciting listening

PSB M4U2 £250 ★★★★★

05

It's been over two years since we first reviewed the PSB M4U2 headphones. While competitors have been replaced and updated, the M4U2s have stayed the course unaltered. They remain as popular as ever, so we thought it was time to take a second look.

PSB might not be as familiar to you as some of the other brands it shares this test with, but it has been producing speakers for more than 40 years. The M4U2s are one of just two pairs of headphones it produces, the others being a purely passive model.

Big and comfortable

This is a big pair of headphones, though the folding design does help their portability somewhat. Their size also makes them a little on the heavy side when compared with something like the Bose QC25, but the well-padded headband ensures your head never feels the strain, and large soft earpads keep them comfortable over your ears.

The pads are replaceable, with a spare set included in the box, alongside a 1/4in adapter, a second cable without inline remote and a carry case. You'll need two AAA batteries to power them. Most

competitors use only one, but with two you can expect around 55 hours of ANC playback - a clear benefit.

Passive, active, noise-cancelling

As well as the ability to turn noise cancelling on or off (they'll work passively), the M4U2s offer an extra option to activate the amplifier without noise-cancellation for a supposedly cleaner, more powerful sound. This will also help to save the battery life on any portable device, as it won't need to work as hard to drive the headphones.

The noise cancelling on the M4U2s is pretty effective, and with the earpads offering a good amount of isolation you get a convincing feeling of being shut off from the world. The Bose QC25s best them in absolute noise-cancelling terms, but it's not a bad performance.

There's a clear difference between passive, active and noise-cancelling modes. Passively, playback is quieter and the treble has a harsh, thin edge to it. Move to active and you get a better-balanced sound and more volume, but any noise around can be heard.

Switch up to full ANC and you get the best performance of the three, with

noises all but disappearing and the headphones sounding their best.

It's a full-bodied and exciting listen, never holding back in any area. The weighty low-end packs plenty of punch in the bassline of Dr Dre's *The Watcher*, with enough sparkle and control in the top end to counter this.

Change pace to Katie Melua's *Piece By Piece* and the M4Us deliver a clear, open midrange, with the soulful vocal full of confidence and texture body. The guitar has depth and texture to every strum, and detail levels are superb.

Dynamically the PSBs are no slouch either - they'll devour high-tempo tracks with enthusiasm, but can be equally brooding and delicate when asked.

This, then, is a multi-talented pair of headphones indeed.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Exciting, engaging sound; big, powerful sound; flexible listening modes; punchy bass; clean, clear midrange; folding design

AGAINST Slightly bulky for travel

VERDICT Full-bodied, powerful and exciting, these headphones are superb travel companions

Soul Jet Pro £250 ★★★☆☆

06

Following an attempt to take on the likes of Beats by collaborating with rapper Ludacris back in 2011, Soul disappeared from our radar for a while, until we recently bestowed five stars on a pair of its sporty in-ears (February 2015). A perfect time to take a look then at these stylish noise-cancelling cans.

The difference between the original Jets and this 'Pro' version comes down to about £50 and a premium, more stylish finish. There is an aluminium and leather-look headband in place of the plastic on the originals, and a solid construction rather than one that folds down to be more portable.

You'll also get a 99.99% oxygen-free copper-stranded "professional audio cable" alongside the standard inline remote cable (exclusive to the Pro version), a 1/4in adapter and a leather carry-case in the box.

A lightweight, comfortable fit

Internal electronics are the same as on the standard Jets, so we attach the pro cable to get listening.

The design is relatively lightweight and we find the fit comfy enough to wear over extended listening sessions.

The earcups aren't as padded as some and though this doesn't affect the comfort level, it does mean they aren't as good at passive isolation compared with something like the PSB M4U2s.

Dulling, not blocking

Noise cancellation could be better too. Office noise is dulled but not convincingly blocked out, while more constant sound, such as airplane noise, is noticeable, particularly with quieter recordings.

Start playing some music and the news doesn't get much better. The Jet Pros are hollow-sounding, with little body or depth to their presentation, almost as if you are listening to your tunes in a big wooden box.

The bass is boosted and sits forward in the mix, but lacks punch or impact. Listen to Nicki Minaj's *Truffle Butter* and the bassline sounds bloated and soft, with a powerful low rumble but very little detail to go at, making them sound a bit cumbersome and imprecise.

In fact, detail is lacking across the frequencies, with a muddy midrange and vocals that sound like they're being sung behind a window, losing any finer detail or emotion in the process.

Dynamically the Jet Pros are pretty flat too, so you'll lose the impetus of livelier recordings while also sacrificing the intimacy of quieter ones.

Strangely, switch off ANC (powered by a single AAA battery) to listen to them passively and we'd say they sound a touch better - unusual in this category of headphones. There's a slight thinning of the treble but the bass is better balanced and the midrange is cleaner, with better clarity across the board. It's still a sound that's very much below par for this price point, but it is a saving grace of sorts.

For all their good looks, the Soul Jet Pros fail to impress, with sound quality far off the best and noise cancelling that needs improvement too. You can get both much better elsewhere, which makes these difficult to recommend.

Rating ★★★☆☆

FOR Good design; long battery life; interchangeable cable and battery

AGAINST Music lacks clarity; muddy midrange; bloated bass; lack detail and subtlety

VERDICT All looks but no real substance - and simply too hard to justify for the price

05 — The PSBs' bulk is compensated for by the folding mechanism



06 — The metal construction is solid, but these are bulky cans



Yamaha Soundstage

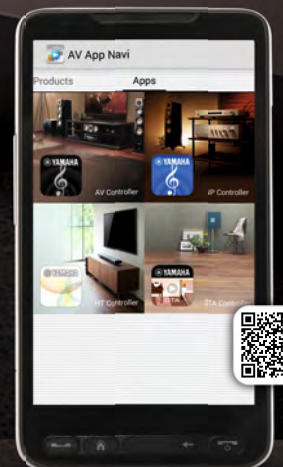
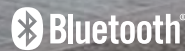
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Powered by music

Yamaha App Navi

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Bose QC25** £270 ★★★★★

Fresh from their success in our 2014 Awards, the **Bose QuietComfort 25s** dispense with their rivals as easily as they do with unwanted noise

If you're in the market for a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, you'll be looking for the right combination of sound quality, noise cancelling prowess and portability. For us, that's exactly what makes the Bose QuietComfort 25s so good. We loved their predecessors and these are better in every way, offering a wonderfully balanced, easy-listening sound and astonishingly good noise cancellation. They make five stars look easy.

Joining them in five-star glory are the PSB M4U2s. Their balance is more upfront than the QC25s, with plenty of low-end punch, and their flexibility with noise cancelling is a nice touch. They are nicely portable, too.

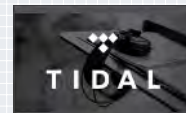
At four stars we have the re-imagined Beats Studio and Polk Audio's UltraFocus 8000. While neither will be for audio purists, the full-on bass of the Beats is now better controlled than it was, and the Polks offer plenty of detail as part of an exciting, upfront sound.

The Philips NCIs were something of a disappointment, their on-ear design leaving them at a disadvantage, while the Soul Jet Pros underwhelmed us with their muddy sound and poor noise cancellation. Unfortunately, they are a prime example of style over substance.

And so to our test winner. A finely balanced sound, excellent portability and the best noise cancellation available seal it for the Bose QC25s.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Hook your Boses up with these three and let your noise-cancelled music really shine

**Streaming service****Tidal** £20/month ★★★★★

CD-quality streaming? We can't get enough of it, and Tidal does it superbly, with an easy-to-use interface and extensive catalogue.

**Laptop****Apple MacBook Pro** £900

The perfect repository for high-resolutions files that the DAC can handle, and a handy means of streaming Tidal as well

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

Stylish and portable, the DragonFly will transform your computer-stored music, uncovering more detail and insight.

Total build from £1320For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com**Facts & figures****Beats Studio 2.0**
£270 ★★★★★☆

Passive listening No
Folding Yes
Rechargeable Yes
Battery life 20 hours
Cable length 1.3m
Weight 260g

**Bose QC25**
£270 ★★★★★★

Passive listening Yes
Folding Yes
Rechargeable No
Battery life 35 hours
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 195g

**Philips Fidelio NC1**
£250 ★★★★★☆

Passive listening Yes
Folding Yes
Rechargeable Yes
Battery life 30 hours
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 150g

**Polk Ultrafocus 8000**
£260 ★★★★★☆

Passive listening No
Folding No
Rechargeable No
Battery life 60 hours
Cable length 1.4m
Weight 340g

**PSB M4U2**
£250 ★★★★★★

Passive listening Yes
Folding Yes
Rechargeable No
Battery life 60 hours
Cable length 1.5m
Weight 362g

**Soul Jet Pro**
£250 ★★★★★☆

Passive listening Yes
Folding No
Rechargeable No
Battery life 35 hours
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 252g

Everything you wanted to know about **high-res audio***



***but didn't even know you were meant to ask**

Nobody ever asked for inferior sound, but they got it anyway. Even worse, they got used to it. The advent of MP3 players saw to that.

These days, for many, convenience is of greater importance than sound quality when it comes to music consumption. An entire generation of casual listeners has never experienced what the artists and engineers intended.

The answer, it appears, lies in high-resolution audio. For years it has been hailed as the next big thing of the audio world. Finally it emerges from the shadows of total nichedom.

We care about sound quality, and we believe everybody should benefit from better sound. And we're making it our

mission to lay it all out. Here's everything you need to know about high-res audio: the facts, the myths, and the other.

The theory

The first rule of high-res audio club is: nobody knows anything. There seem to be no rules. High-res audio has been crudely described as high-def TV for the ears. That's not untrue but, unlike TV, high-res audio has no list of universal criteria to be met. There are merely contradictions bouncing around the 'net.

So what is high-res audio? Ideally, it's the same resolution as the original recording. It's more notion than definition at this point, but that's the closest the industry has come to

JARGON BUSTER

Sampling rate

The number of times a signal is measured every second when music is converted to digital

Bit depth

The accuracy of each measurement. A greater bit depth means more information is taken by each sample

Bandwidth

The range of frequencies in an audio signal



High-res audio promises to bring listeners closer to the sound musicians were working with in the studio. The more you hear, the more you feel. What's the point of music if not to move you?

unanimity. Things got a little more official when some important people got together and hashed it out in June 2014.

An agreement was reached by Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group, in partnership with the Digital Entertainment Group, the Consumer Electronics Association and The Recording Academy.

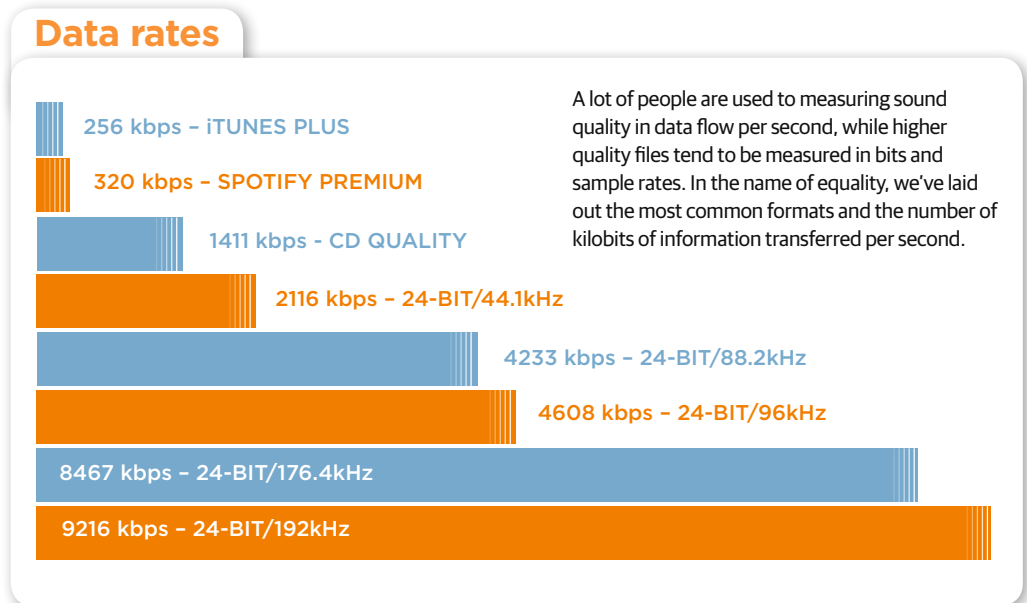
That was far from the final word, but we do at least have something to work with. They define high-res as "lossless audio that is capable of reproducing the full range of sound from recordings that have been mastered from better-than CD-quality music sources."

Better than CD

Quality, in this case, refers to the efficiency of the way music is converted to a digital file. This digital file usually takes the form of Pulse Code Modulation, PCM. The waveform is represented by two parameters: sampling rate and bit depth.

The sampling rate is the number of times the signal is measured per second. Bit depth is best thought of as the accuracy of the measurement. On a standard CD, a sample is taken 44100 times per second, or 44.1 kilohertz (kHz). Each sample is measured to an accuracy of 16 bits (or binary digits).

Put it together and the resolution of a CD is 16-bit/44.1kHz. To be 'better-than CD', a track must have bigger numbers. A higher sampling rate means a higher upper frequency (the maximum frequency that can be reproduced, according to digital theory, is half of the



sampling rate). A greater bit depth means more information is taken by each sample.

With more information to play with, high-res tracks potentially have greater detail and better-developed dynamics. Dynamic range increases with bit depth.

A CD (16-bit) has a dynamic range of 96dB (roughly the sound of a passing train), while 24-bit increases that to 144dB. Away from the theoretical, that impressive figure of 144dB is reduced by the electronic noise inherent in recording and playback equipment.

High-res audio is generally available in 24-bit at 96kHz or 192kHz, but also comes in 88.2kHz and 176.4kHz. Incidentally,

24-bit/96kHz is the resolution the Japan Audio Society takes to be high-res.

Thus high-res audio promises to bring listeners closer to the sound musicians and engineers were working with in the studio. The more you hear, the more you feel. What's the point of music if not to move you?

Fun with formats

Beyond the 'better than CD' yardstick, there are currently no rules governing high-res audio. File formats are a free-for-all, with high-res audio files available in FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF or DSD.

All of these are lossless, so data can be compressed and uncompressed without losing information, unlike MP3. But none of these is a telltale indicator of a high-res file. None of these formats promises to be more than 16-bit/44.1kHz.

That being said, FLAC tends to be the most common form of high-res. It scores points over WAV for better handling of meta-data, which is the information in music files responsible for ensuring your tracks display cover art along with artist and title details.

Tried and failed

The concept of high-res audio is nothing new. The turn of the century saw the introduction of Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio. Both of these offered sound quality that many considered to be above that of the humble CD, but they both failed to hit the mainstream.

This was down to a lack of demand brought about by poor marketing and

How much data?

The more information a file contains, the more space is needed. That's why MP3s took off in the early 2000s: memory was pricey, devices didn't offer much memory space, so files needed to be tiny in order to get enough of them on board.

In the chart on the right, you have the most common file types, laid out to show how much space they each take up. The 24-bit/192kHz line on the outside of the wheel takes up the most space because it contains the most information.

If you're serious about high-res audio, you'll certainly need a big hard drive. Thankfully, memory is a lot more affordable now, so many devices pack plenty of storage - and if they don't, more often than not they provide slots for you to add your own memory cards to increase.



This is an Apple MacBook, but any laptop ought to be able to serve as your high-res audio source

You won't go far wrong with these Philips Award-winners – comfortable, fun-sounding headphones

It's barely bigger than a memory stick, yet the DragonFly does a fine job as a budget DAC that handles high-res files



System 1

Apple MacBook Air 13-inch from £850 AudioQuest DragonFly v1.2 £130 Philips Fidelio M1 MKII £180 TOTAL BUILD £1160

You don't need to fork out exorbitant amounts of money to benefit from high-res audio. There are some perfectly sensible set-ups around, parts of which you may already own. Over the next few pages you'll see our suggested set-ups for various situations: desktop, multi-room, mobile and traditional separates.

We start off with the desktop kit: a computer, a DAC, and a pair of headphones. Here we've used an Apple Macbook Air (which we nabbed off one of our reviewers) but any computer will do as long as it is capable of handling high-res files. (It's worth noting here that iTunes is not able to handle FLAC

files – there is after-market software that can rectify that situation for you.) Your laptop will also need the ability to output audio via USB.

Which leads us to the next part of this simple system, the AudioQuest DragonFly v1.2. This is our favourite affordable DAC, offering astonishing sound-for-pound value in a package the size of a memory stick. It can play files up to 24-bit/96kHz, with higher-resolution files downsampled by the computer. The DragonFly is simple to use, with a single 3.5mm output and compatibility with Apple Mac and PC alike. Just add headphones and you're flying.

The headphones we've chosen are the Philips Fidelio M1 MKII, another of our Award-winners. They're comfortable and portable, but most crucially they offer a fun, refined listen with detail aplenty and impressive precision.

TECH SPECS

Audioquest Dragonfly V1.2

Inputs USB • Outputs 3.5mm headphone • Dimensions (hwd) 1 x 2 x 6cm • Weight 68g

Philips Fidelio M1 MKII

Type On-ear • Dimensions (hwd) 18 x 16 x 4cm • Cable length 1.1m • Weight 166g



The Bluesound combo - Vault left, Powernode right - is our favourite sensibly priced streaming system

The Wharfedale Diamond 220s punch well above their weight - they are superb speakers for the money

System 2

Bluesound Powernode £600 Bluesound Vault £900 Wharfedale Diamond 220 £200 TOTAL BUILD £1700

Multi-room audio has really boomed of late. Sonos's monopoly is no more, with brands old and new throwing multiple hats into the ring.

Our favourite affordable choice is Bluesound, from some of the folks who pioneered hi-fi company NAD back in the '70s. What you get is ease of use and high-resolution audio (up to 24-bit/192kHz) combined in one impressive system.

We begin with the Bluesound Vault, which is an all-in-one music server and CD ripper. It offers 2TB of storage and the ability to rip CDs in FLAC, all without a computer. It happily incorporates other music stored on your network (say, on NAS drives).

The Bluesound Powernode is a standalone, stereo streaming music player with a built-in digital amplifier.

Its job is to take your music from the Vault. It's worth remembering that streaming high-res audio over wifi is pretty bandwidth-intensive, so consider hard-wiring the Powernode with an ethernet cable. Outputs cater for stereo speakers and a subwoofer.

Into the Powernode we would plug a pair of Wharfedale Diamond 220s. These are top-class budget speakers: they sound excellent, delivering meaty bass with far more power than we expect from a boxes only 32cm tall.

TECH SPECS

Bluesound Native sampling rates (kHz) 32, 44.1, 48, 88.2, 96, 176.4, 192 • Bit depths 16, 24 • File formats MP3, AAC, WMA, WMA Lossless, OGG, FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF • Storage (Vault) 2TB • Dimensions (Vault) 21 x 29 x 24cm • Weight (Vault) 3kg • Dimensions (Powernode) 18 x 25 x 20cm • Weight (Powernode) 1.9kg
Wharfedale Diamond 220 Sensitivity 86dB/W/m • Finishes 4 • Impedance 8ohm • Biwirable Yes • Max power handling 100W • Dimensions (hwd) 32 x 17 x 26cm

Where to buy high-res?



HDtracks high-res albums from £12

One of the first sites to offer hi-res downloads, finally available in the UK. There are thousands of tracks, ranging from classical, jazz and remastered Led Zeppelin to newer artists such as St. Vincent, whose latest album costs £18 at 24-bit/96kHz. There are also high-res samples, free to download.



Society of Sound subscription £34/year

Bowers & Wilkins offers a subscription service with a difference. You receive two studio-quality albums each month, as curated by Peter Gabriel and the London Symphony Orchestra.



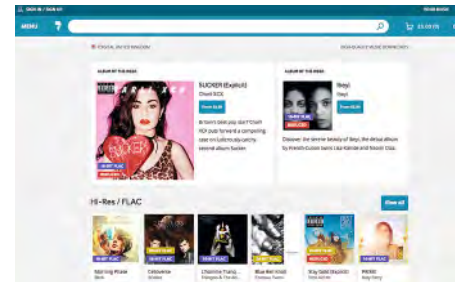
Qobuz high-res album downloads from £10

A French site offering both a music-streaming service as well as downloads. The streaming maxes out at CD-quality, but downloads go up to 24-bit/192kHz. The collection isn't huge (and there is a lot of classical), but there are bargains to be had. Björk's *Vulnicura* costs £9.59 at 24-bit/96kHz.



Linn high-res album downloads from £18

Linn offers what it calls 'Studio Master' downloads, which come in ALAC and FLAC and go up to 24-bit/192kHz. A Studio Master album costs £18, or it's £10 for CD-quality.



7Digital high-res album downloads from £8

A gigantic provider of digital music, boasting over 30 million tracks. Only a few handfuls of those are high-res, but prices are keen. The Foo Fighters' *Sonic Highway* costs £7.92 at 24-bit/44.1kHz. Meanwhile D'Angelo and The Vanguard's *Black Messiah* is £12.99 at 24-bit/96kHz.



Naim high-res album downloads from £17

Hi-fi brand Naim has a nifty sideline in high-res music. Naim Jazz and Naim Classical are joined by Naim Edge, which offers contemporary and 'artistic freedom'.

the confusion caused by the format war. And there was a frustrating trickle of content, which tended to prioritise such audiophile staples as jazz and classical.

Storage has long been an issue: it was very expensive. Portable MP3 players thrived by squashing all your music into low-quality files. With high-res, all the extra information means much bigger file sizes. A 192kbps MP3 takes up 1.44MB per minute, compared to 34.56MB per minute with a 24-bit/96kHz file. That's 24 times the space.

Once more unto the breach

This time, it's different. High-res audio has built up momentum like never before, thanks to a decided and fairly coordinated drive in hardware and software.

There are now entire ranges of high-res audio products, from streamers and DACs to one-box player systems. Brands big and small are having a crack at it, including Astell & Kern, Naim, Chord, Cambridge Audio, Samsung and Sony.

Portable players have also seen a push in high-res, thanks in part to the falling price of memory. This is important, as most non-audiophiles do their listening when out and about. Since 2013, a great many flagship smartphones have shipped with high-res capability.

That's not including the standalone portable music players - Sony has used high-res to rejuvenate its Walkmans.

Meanwhile, rock legend Neil Young has Pono, his own brand of portable player (as well as a music service).

So what is there to play?

Which leads us to software. Record labels are finally getting their act together. There's a healthy number of sites selling high-res downloads, and it's not limited to Brahms or The Eagles.

There is new content from current artists, available at the same time as (sometimes even before) general release. Take Björk's *Vulnicura* (review p75): a 24-bit/96kHz download was available a full month earlier than the CD release.

Increased public reach is helping this high-res drive, according to research by the Consumer Electronics Association. Its latest study found that 40 per cent of US consumers were aware of hi-res audio, while 37 per cent are actively interested.

This is far from the entire picture, but it's a sign that high-res may not be quite as niche as before. Things are looking good for high-res audio. It's all there, waiting for you, and if you care about high-quality sound, this is an excellent time to hop on.

But should you?

The reality

The goal of high-res audio is simple enough: get better sound. Who can argue against better sound? Before you dive in, though, there are practicalities to consider.

It's very easy to get caught up in numbers. After all, 'bigger numbers, better sound' is an easy concept to grasp - not to mention highly tempting to the marketing folk. So a 24-bit/192kHz recording sounds better than 16-bit/44.1kHz one, right? Not always.

The argument against

A popular argument is that high-res audio is overkill, and that CD-quality is good enough. The sampling rate of 44.1kHz was chosen for CD because it allowed an upper frequency limit of just over 20kHz - the upper limit of what humans can hear.

The way digital works means there has to be a very strong filter just above this upper frequency, which prevents phantom signals from adding distortion. This filtering unfortunately brings its own distortions, which end up affecting the audible range.

Raising the sampling rate, therefore, is a means of taking unwanted filter effects much further from audible frequencies. Numbers are great to throw about, but there are more significant factors that affect the worth of a high-res file.

The bigger picture

High-res files are not all created equal. There are recordings touted as high-res that are merely CD rips, up-sampled to the correct resolution. These are not high-res in any meaningful sense. To

A high-quality original recording is, of course, a must. If music is engineered poorly, it doesn't matter how high your numbers go because it won't make the sound any better

combat this practise, some companies label their records as 'studio master' where it applies.

A high-quality original recording is, of course, a must. If music is engineered poorly, it doesn't matter how high your numbers go because it won't make the sound any better. You'll just get a more accurate rendition of a poor original signal.

Then there is the issue of care. High-res files and CD-quality alternatives aren't necessarily treated the same. A studio is likely to take more care when engineering high-res files, as they are intended for more discerning users.

A high-res studio master downsampled for CD release, meanwhile, will often be degraded, and there are losses involved in stepping down the resolution. It may also be engineered for less discriminating uses, such as in-car or for commercial broadcast. Many CDs are compressed in a way that sacrifices dynamics and quality in the quest for loudness.

Death Magnetic - a cautionary tale

Let's rewind to 2008, when Metallica released *Death Magnetic*. This album is one of the best examples of poor production, attracting a huge number of complaints about over-compression and distortion.

There was even an online petition demanding the album be remixed or remastered, which attracted over 22,000 signatures. Meanwhile, frustrated fans took to ripping songs from the album

What's all the FLAC about?

flac

F.L.A.C
Free Lossless
Audio Codec

A widely supported lossless audio codec. It's not proprietary, which means it is not encumbered by patents and rights. A popular format for CD ripping, and now for high-res audio.



A.L.A.C
Apple Lossless
Audio Codec

A lossless audio codec developed by Apple, and designed to work on Mac and iOS devices with iTunes. But that does mean iTunes is picky, and will not accept FLAC.



Waveform Audio File Format is the full name. It's a format by Microsoft and IBM. Compatibility is wide, but certain applications cannot see metadata (track and artist info).



Audio Interchange File Format. An older format by Apple. Comparable with WAV in that compatibility is wide, and works fine with both PC and Apple Mac.



Direct Stream Digital. Conceived for SACDs. Bit-depth is low, but sampling rates go up to 5.6Mhz. Originally developed for archiving analogue master tapes.

that were featured on the *Guitar Hero 3* videogame, which sounded better, having been sourced from different master material.

Then there's the issue of hardware. What are you using to listen to your high-res music? If your equipment isn't transparent enough to reveal the differences, you have no chance of hearing them.

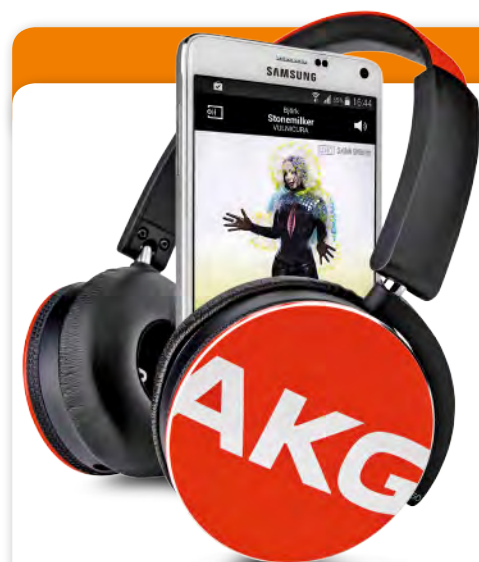
You don't need to spend a year's salary on high-end systems, but freebie earbuds just won't do. Check out our example set-ups dotted around this feature.

Hear ye, hear ye

Should you go high-res? That's a question only you can answer. You may

find yourself stepping into a larger world of higher quality and increased dynamics. You may be entirely ambivalent, or unable to hear a difference, in which case you stand to save yourself money and effort.

We've heard it all. We've streamed from Spotify, spun CDs and downloaded full-fat, studio master quality 24-bit/192kHz FLACs - and we've heard differences. If the stars align - if the initial recording and mastering process is up to scratch, if the subsequent download contains all the information in the master, and if your high-res system is worthy of the name - you've never had a better chance to hear the sound the musicians intended.



System 3

Samsung Galaxy Note 4 from £450 (SIM-free) AKG Y50 £80 TOTAL BUILD £530

Yes, you can go high-res on the go. While there are a quite a few standalone portable high-res players, they aren't always the most affordable.

Most flagship smartphones these days are capable of handling high-res. If you're getting a smartphone anyway, you might as well get one of these, and avoid having to carry another device.

Take the Samsung Galaxy Note 4. It's a pocket multimedia monster, and a great portable media centre. Besides its massive screen, it also offers support for FLAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz. Its sound is enthusiastic, with admirable rhythm and drive. It's balanced and detailed.

Pair this with the AKG Y50s: well-built cans with insight, good timing, impressive clarity and punchy dynamics. Their design may be a little flash, but you also have a choice of blue, yellow, or black.

TECH SPECS

SAMSUNG GALAXY NOTE 4 • Memory 32GB • Expandable memory microSD up to 128GB • Battery 3220mAh • Screen size 5.7in • Screen resolution 1440x2560 • Dimensions (hwd) 1154 x 79 x 8.5mm • Weight 179g
AKG Y50 Type On-ear • Dimensions (hwd) 16 x 10 x 8cm • Cable length 1.2m • Weight 190g



Pioneer's network audio player is a remarkable box of tricks that ticks most boxes and sounds great

Bowers & Wilkins stunning 685 S2s will do justice to this powerful and superb-sounding high-res system

Our Product of the Year integrated amp for 2014, the Arcam FMJ A19 is a real sonic powerhouse

System 4

Pioneer N-50A £500 Arcam FMJ A19 £650 B&W 685 S2 £500 TOTAL BUILD £1650

There are good arguments for desktop, multi-room or portable listening, but for us nothing beats a good sit-down with a traditional separates system. What we've assembled here arguably provides the best sound you can get for £1650.

Your source here is the Pioneer N-50A. It's a new network audio player, with many tricks up its ample sleeves. It can take virtually any file format you can throw at it. Connections are varied, offering local and web-based streaming goodness, as well as physical inputs (optical, coaxial, USB). All that, and it sounds fantastic too. If you're after network streaming, this ticks many, many boxes.

We'd connect that to the Arcam FMJ A19, the brilliant integrated stereo amp that took home a Product of the Year gong at our 2014 Awards. Its build and connections are impressive, but not as much as the big, room-filling sound. You get bags of subtle, revealing detail, as well as strong dynamics and remarkable composure.

Top it off with the B&W 685 S2s. Not only are they also Award-winners, they've proven themselves again by winning our latest Supertest (see p26). They really are a superlative pair of standmounters, with an authoritative, thrilling sound and remarkable agility.

TECH SPECS

Pioneer N-50A Inputs optical, coaxial • Outputs optical, coaxial • USB Yes • Ethernet Yes • Wi-fi via adaptor • Bluetooth via adaptor • Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 44 x 33cm • Weight 7.5kg
Arcam FMJ A19 Power 50W per channel • Line level in 6 • Headphone out Yes • MM phono in Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 8.5 x 43 x 27.5cm • Weight 8.5kg
B&W 685 S2 Power 100W • Impedance 8ohm • Sensitivity 87dB • Dimensions (hwd) 34.5 x 19 x 32cm



So Pure. So Stylish. Solo.

Arcam's world-class reputation for state-of-the-art home cinema and high performance Hi-Fi systems has now been applied to a soundbar.

The new Solo bar and sub have been designed to make Arcam's legendary sound quality accessible to a wider audience, setting a new standard for music and movie reproduction from a soundbar.

For more information on these landmark products or to find your nearest stockist visit www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM
Bringing music and movies to life

Size matters when seeking your home entertainment thrills,
so allow us to light the path to your ideal projector...

HUGE ACTION

With flagship tellies peaking at around 75-or-so inches, the ultimate big-screen cinematic experience still comes from having a quality projector at home.

For less than £1500 you can get up to 300in of picture from some of the units here - each of them new to our test rooms.

Projectors remain the pinnacle for the cinema aficionado, with all the pleasures of sitting in a darkened room with your favourite film or box set running on a large screen. Today's projector has plenty more to offer though: 3D playback seems to be standard now at this price, as are built-in speakers, multiple HDMI inputs and USB slots for media playback. We're also seeing wireless connectivity and DLNA functionality on board.

Read on to discover which of these big-screen behemoths is best for you.

ON TEST

Acer H9505BD, p62

BenQ W1500, p63

Epson EH-TW6600, p64

InFocus IN5312a, p65



Acer H9505BD £1300



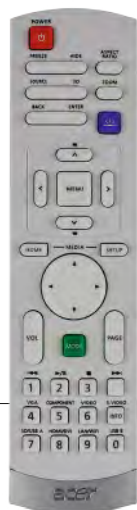
After starting out in the PC market, Acer decided to spread its wings, becoming a respected brand in the world of smartphones and tablets. Most recently it has made a brave foray into wearable technology. Along with all that, the company is known to produce projectors as well - and here we have the flagship model in its new 'home' range.

Three is a magic number

Most rivals have one or two HDMI inputs, but the Acer has three - handy if you're bypassing a home cinema amp and connecting sources directly into your projector. There's a host of analogue connections too (such as VGA inputs for laptops), and the potential for wireless playback by means of an optional wireless adapter (not included) that plugs into one of two USB sockets. The spare USB allows for playback of media files stored on a stick, while DLNA functionality allows you access files over your network via the projector's LAN input. The 'media' hub interface is nothing flashy, but it is easy to follow.

It takes a few minutes longer than usual to get up and running. This is partly

The remote is a bugbear: it fits well in hand, but is a pain to use due to its illogical layout (the 'enter' button is in a strange position, to say the least)



We're pleased to report that the Acer H9505BD performs consistently with Blu-ray, DVD and 3D content. It's capable of a clear, bright (thanks to its 3000 lumens) picture, where edges are crisp

due to the lack of adjustable feet, which can make positioning a little tricky (especially when the projector is placed in a position lower than the screen).

Versatile performer

We're pleased to report the H9505BD performs consistently with Blu-ray, DVD and 3D content. It's capable of a clear, bright (thanks to its 3000 lumens) picture - edges are crisp, if not quite as sharp as the best. We play *TT3D: Closer to the Edge* on Blu-ray and the Acer shows respectable contrast: white details on bikes, and the black biker-jackets are convincing. Motion is mostly smooth - you have to put the Acer through fast-paced scenes to notice it's a little rougher round the edges than the Epson EH-TW6600 or BenQ W1500 in this test. The Acer's colour rendition is far from washed-out, but colours don't have that 'pop' factor or enough subtlety to convince. The same flaw applies with detail. The H9505BD's efforts are decent, but more subtlety is needed for it to compete with the very best.

Play the same film in 3D and, again, the picture becomes a little messy when motion is involved. It's not so bad as to hinder our enjoyment, but it is noticeable.

With only a six-watt output from the built-in speakers, it's little wonder the Acer's sound is restricted and unable to reach the same volume of rivals, but then again you won't have to worry about fan noise - it's a polite purr (though you will have to sit close by to hear movies clearly).

The Acer has its qualities: connections are decent and picture quality wins points for good clarity and brightness. Unfortunately, rivals best the H9505BD on performance at almost every other turn.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR A bright, clear image; balanced, clean colours; plenty of connection options

AGAINST Has a few motion issues in 2D and 3D; rivals have more insight

VERDICT A decent performer, but outclassed by rivals. We expect more from a flagship model

BenQ W1500 £1400



The **W1500** is the next model up from the current Award-winning W1400 in BenQ's 'W' series, so it comes with plenty of expectation. And it copes with the burden admirably. Although not quite a class-leader like its smaller sibling (as the four stars awarded here shows), the W1500 maintains high standards.

Initially, it's hard to tell the W1400 and W1500 apart. They look identical and are fairly evenly matched for specification: both DLP projectors are Full HD (1920 x 1080), support 3D and have the same contrast ratios (10,000:1), brightness levels (2200 lumens), zoom (1.6) and throw ratio (1.07-1.71).

Down to the wireless

However, the W1500's wireless ability helps justify the extra spend. With the supplied transmitter plugged into the HDMI socket of a compatible source (a Blu-ray player or gaming console, say) the projector can beam its picture to a screen without a direct connection. It's easy to set up, too. If you do prefer a physical connection, there are plenty: twin HDMI inputs (helpfully located on the left-hand side for easy access), a

The BenQ's remote control keys for picture adjustment are nifty shortcuts during set-up, although we would like bigger function menus



The W1500's wireless ability helps justify the extra spend. With the supplied transmitter plugged into an HDMI socket of a compatible source, the projector can beam its picture to a screen without wires

mini-USB, PC, component, RCA inputs, and a 3.5mm input and output.

This short-throw projector gives you a screen size of up to 84in at a distance of two metres, so it is ideal for small rooms where the projector and screen need to be close to one another (of course the zoom offers leeway here).

All the right moves

The W1500 has all the right performance assets at this price: it's bright and controlled, with good insight and solid colours. It's not as eye-catching as the Epson, yet we find the BenQ convincing. Skintones are impressive, while true blacks and vivid whites make for exemplary contrast.

Load *Harry Potter* on Blu-ray and, as the battle on the broomsticks takes off, the BenQ doesn't miss a beat. Even in low-light scenes it shows a good eye for detail, although it's not quite as perceptive as the fine Epson EH-TW6600. When it comes to 3D, the W1500 is clear, stable and has depth, making it an enjoyable watch.

We turn to *The Grand Budapest Hotel* on DVD and the W1500 maintains its standards, losing only the insight you'd expect with the resolution drop. With striking aesthetics and vivid colours, this film is a good test. The BenQ complies happily: colours are deep and rich. Detail is decent too.

For sound the BenQ is clear, goes reasonably loud (fan noise being no more than a gentle whirr) and, surprisingly, has a decent amount of body. For TV viewing or gaming it will do the job.

The W1500 can't quite muster enough punch or subtlety to gain the full five stars, but there's no doubting its appeal. A very decent all-round performer.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clear picture; realistic colours; decent contrast; can connect wirelessly; compact, portable build; logical remote; easy to set up

AGAINST Lacks a touch of punch; competition

VERDICT A well-featured product that's worth considering if wireless connectivity is a must

Epson EH-TW6600 £1400



The EH-TW6600 is, like many an Epson to have come before it, a seriously competent projector. Its picture is rich, punchy and insightful, and the complete package when it comes to build and ease-of-use. Epson has consistently been winning five stars of late (and an Award), so we've come to expect quality from the projector giant - and this EH-TW6600 doesn't let the side down.

Compare and contrast

The specification sheet here looks standard at this price point: Full HD, 3D playback (as well as 2D-to-3D conversion) and a decent number of connections. Then you discover the 70,000:1 contrast ratio - seven times higher than most rivals. The proof is certainly in the picture. Deep, oily blacks and punchy whites (even without the 'Super White' mode on) appear from the very first frame of our THX Optimizer disc.

Colours are bold and punchy, opting for outright richness over the slightly more natural, refined palette of the BenQ W1500. The Epson's crispness and insight gives it the upper hand on its rivals though: *Guardians Of The Galaxy*

The remote is tall, chunky and not one you will lose down the back of the sofa. It's well laid out, despite a set of buttons applicable only to the 'W' model



Colours are bold and punchy, opting for outright richness over the slightly more natural, refined palette of the BenQ W1500. The Epson's crispness and insight give it the upper hand on rivals though

on Blu-ray is a picture full of detail and subtlety - every whisker on Rocket the racoon is perceptible, and the tree-like Groot is precisely outlined. The EH-TW6600 sets the standard for sharpness at this price, edging the BenQ W1500 by a pencil shaving or two. It doesn't trip up with motion either. Fight sequences take place without a hitch.

Gravity has depth

3D performance is impressive: it's just as stable, detailed and clear as 2D, and communicates a good sense of depth as we look through the space shuttle in *Gravity*. Contrast remains the best in class, while our only grumble remains the richness of some colours. There's a pair of active glasses in the box (a three-minute charge gives three hours use; 50 minutes for 40 hours), although you may need to budget for a second pair.

Even when dropping down to DVD quality the Epson still manages to deliver big-screen thrills. It's hard to tell the difference in resolution as we play sci-fi thriller *Lucy*. You have to move up to the

pricier EH-TW6600W for wireless connections (hence the 'W' suffix), but the EH-TW6600 is still well equipped. Easily accessible around the back are the usual component, composite and RCA inputs beside two HDMI inputs. A single USB for photo playback is a nice bonus, too. The mini-USB is only for service.

The Epson's 20-watt speakers are rear-firing, so are ideal if you're sat behind the projector. But if that's not practical, don't worry: they can belt out sound louder and clearer than most.

Overall, it's another resounding success for Epson. If you don't care much for wireless features or portability, you can't really go wrong for the money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy, crisp picture; stable, smooth delivery; well-equipped; simple set-up; built-in speakers go loudish

AGAINST Remote control is big

VERDICT Performance-wise, it delivers pretty much everything. Another success for Epson

InFocus IN5312a £1450



Since the arrival of 4K in the world of home cinema, Full HD has increasingly become a 'standard' spec. So it's surprising to still see products being made with lower resolutions, especially those with four-figure price tags.

The IN5312a has only a 1024 x 768 resolution, which means it not only has to upscale to play DVDs (like its Full HD rivals), but downscale Blu-rays, too. (The more expensive model of InFocus's two-strong IN5300a range has a 1920 x 1080 resolution).

Lighten up

Resolution may put the InFocus a step behind rivals on paper, but it does deliver 6000 lumens - double the measure of brightness of most at this price - so it could be ideal for rooms with a lot of ambient light. The result? An impressively bright picture that gives films a glowing presence. Beam *Killer Joe* on Blu-ray, and daylight scenes in the Texas trailer park are coherent (though colours aren't as rich or punchy as we'd like). Lots of brightness is often a trade-off for contrast, and although the InFocus's contrast ratio is only 2000:1

The InFocus remote control is nicely designed, with bright back-lit buttons and a ridge on the back for a more ergonomic effect



The InFocus delivers 6000 lumens - double the measure of most at this price - so it could be ideal for rooms with a lot of ambient light. It's an impressively bright picture that gives films a glowing presence

(the norm is four or five times higher) whites are clean and blacks have reasonable depth. A fair amount of detail helps make for a watchable picture too, although under closer scrutiny it's clear some subtlety is lost here.

Struggles with dark matter

Clarity suffers in low-light conditions and dark detail is too easily lost: in a low-lit caravan, furniture in the background is hard to make out, and Matthew McConaughey's black gloves and cowboy hat lack texture. There's a hint of motion blur as the camera moves around the caravan, but motion is really only an issue in faster, action-packed scenes.

3D glasses are not included here, but if you're willing to spend the extra £50 per pair it won't go to waste. Though not particularly detailed, the 3D picture is coherent enough - clear, bright and holding up well with depth and motion.

The menus are helpfully blown up on-screen, though a little problematic in layout. The InFocus's single HDMI port is outnumbered by most rivals, but isn't

disastrous when sources are, typically, plugged into a home cinema amp. Elsewhere there's a generous smattering of connections: composite, component, 3.5mm and RCA inputs. A USB and mini-USB port are present, but they're solely for power and service respectively.

Ideally you will want a dedicated sound system, but the projector's two built-in 3W-speakers are adequate. If you sit close by, it goes loud enough for films to be heard above the fairly loud fan.

InFocus has been off form recently, and the IN5312a is not a turning point. The sub-£1500 projector field is hugely competitive, and this projector struggles against more talented and cheaper rivals.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Clear, bright picture; decent colour palette

AGAINST Not Full HD: lacks sharpness, detail and subtlety of rivals; some motion instability; no 3D glasses supplied; size won't suit everyone

VERDICT A watchable performance that falls down on crispness and subtlety

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Epson EH-TW6600** £1400 ★★★★★

From beam to screen, the **Epson EH-TW6600** is our top pick for superb colour, contrast and detail



Products with four-figure price tags rarely fall into the 'budget' end of their respective category. It's the case with projectors, though.

When you factor in the cost of a source (a Blu-ray player, say) and a screen as a minimum package, (and costlier again, a home cinema amp and 5.1 speaker package) you're talking serious cash. So you need to make the right choice.

There are two projectors in this test that will make part of a great set-up - but the Epson EH-TW6600 is unquestionably our top pick. Like its sibling, the EH-TW5200, it wins on performance, with an eye-catching colour palette, gorgeous contrast and, even more importantly, an eye for detail. And if you're a fan of 3D movies then its clear, bright performance gives you all the more reason to invest.

Anyone with particularly inflexible set-ups or a small room (or both) might favour the impressive BenQ for its wireless ability and compact build. And judging its performance, purchasing the BenQ

wouldn't be a bad move - the W1500 isn't quite as insightful or punchy as the Epson, but its clean, realistic picture earns it a hearty recommendation from us.

Speaker of sorts

Both the Epson and BenQ have decent, loud built-in speakers too, which will tide you over for TV viewing until a better solution (ideally a surround speaker package of sorts) comes along.

The Acer H9505BD and InFocus IN5312a are harder to vouch for - not least because they cannot match the Epson and BenQ for punch, colour depth or subtlety. The InFocus's lower resolution also proves problematic for sharpness, although its vast connectivity will no doubt please those looking to hook up a number of sources.

Acer's new flagship arrived with much expectation attached, and initially it looked good. But performance issues and a poor remote control handset cost it in the end.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you see the Epson EH-TW6600 at its best

**Home cinema amp****Sony STR-DN1050** £500 ★★★★★

Incredible value, this home cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you need.

**Speaker package****Dali Zensor 15.1** £980 ★★★★★

This Award-winning package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering plenty of punch and drama. Superb.

**Blu-ray player****Sony BDP-S7200** £220 ★★★★★

Apart from a stunning picture, this Sony will give you smarts, and high-res music support too.

Total build from £3100**Facts & figures****Acer H9505BD**
£1300 ★★★★★

Type DLP • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Max image size 300in • Throw ratio 1.5-2.28 • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • Rated brightness 3000lm • Fan noise 42dB • HDMI in 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 13x40x31cm • Weight 7kg

**BenQ W1500**
£1400 ★★★★★

Type DLP • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Max image size 300in • Throw ratio 1.07-1.71 • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • Rated brightness 2200lm • Fan noise 43dB • HDMI in 2 • Dimensions 12x34x28cm • Weight 3.9kg

**Epson EH-TW6600**
£1400 ★★★★★

Type LCD • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Max image size 300in • Throw ratio 1.32-2.15 • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • Rated brightness 2500lm • Fan noise 44dB • HDMI in 2 • Dimensions 16x41x30cm • Weight 6.7kg

**InFocus IN5312a**
£1450 ★★★★★

Type DLP • Aspect ratio 4:3 • Max image size 217in • Throw ratio 1.6-2s • Resolution 1024 x 768 • Rated brightness 6000lm • Fan noise 49dB • HDMI in 1 • Dimensions 18x43x34cm • Weight 8.6kg

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TEMPTATIONS

“Finesse and top-quality resolution in abundance”

■ **Aesthetix Janus Signature/Atlas Stereo Signature**

Preamp/power amp combination

■ **£10,000/£10,000 ★★★★★**

It may surprise many readers to know there's no shortage of pre/power combinations that cost £20,000. They come in all shapes and sizes, with power outputs that vary from single digits to kilowatts. We've heard many of them over the years and, in our view, this Aesthetix pre/power combo is one of the very best.

We're reviewing the Signature version of each product. These retrofittable upgrades add £3300 to the standard Janus preamp's price and attract a £2000 premium for the Atlas stereo power amplifier. That additional money buys a host of improved components and results in a notably more transparent and detailed sound. The standard pre- and power are great but, if you can stretch to them, the Signatures versions are worth the extra in the right system.

It says much for the talent of this Janus/Atlas pairing that our biggest complaint has to do with the remote. While functional, it just isn't classy enough for a product of this price, and would look far more at home partnering some budget Bluetooth speaker.

Old-school but new-wave

Take a look at the spec sheet and the Janus Signature preamp seems old school: it uses a valve-based circuit and includes a serious phonostage where most rivals have long since gone line-level only. But Aesthetix's execution of this design is cutting edge.

We can't fault the remote's functionality but it looks and feels cheap alongside the classy main units



It's the flexibility of the phono stage that grabs our attention. The circuit's gain can be adjusted from 40dB to 75dB, which means it accommodates moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridges.

If you don't have a record player, Aesthetix makes a line-level version of the Janus called the Calypso - the Signature version of that product retails for £6800. Beyond the Janus's phono stage there's an ample supply of line-level inputs and outputs of both the single-ended and balanced variety.

Care over construction

Take the lid off the preamp - an easy thing to do because it's held on (securely) by strips of Velcro - and you'll find an immaculately constructed product. The valve-powered circuit is dual mono and fully balanced, to maximise consistency between channels and keep noise levels low.

Other interesting design touches include zero overall feedback in the circuit and the use of discrete resistor ladder volume control rather than a more conventional potentiometer design. It's all done to improve dynamics and optimise resolution.

The Atlas Signature power amp is something of a beast. It's a relatively compact box by price standards but weighs a hefty 32kg. Impressively, its 200W-per-channel power output doubles as impedance halves to 4 ohms

- that's enough to drive any speaker to decent levels, even in a large room.

Inside you'll find the same care found in the preamp. Everything is neatly assembled and the circuits carefully organised to reduce interference. The Atlas is a hybrid design that couples a valve input stage to a transistor-based output section. As with the preamp, Aesthetix has designed a fully balanced circuit with zero global feedback.

There are more front panel controls here than would be expected on a stereo power amp, and there's an input that connects to a built-in crossover. The working range of the filter is 40-200Hz, and it's intended for use in stereo systems where there's a subwoofer or speakers that have a powered bass section. It's an unusual but neat touch.

Speaker output terminals aren't something we talk about often, but the rhodium-plated ones on the Atlas are a little different. They clamp down on the speaker cable, making them ideal for use with spade connectors or bare wire rather than the banana plugs we normally use. They make for a really firm connection.

Comfortably bedded in

Our review samples of the Janus and Atlas are well-run demo units, so it only takes an hour or so before they start to sing. 'Comfortable' is the word that we keep coming back to in our notes. The Aesthetix sound is smooth, and as refined as you like. There are no hard edges here, no tendency to harshness, even with less-than-perfect recordings. Yet these components - the pre- and power share the same sonic character

The Aesthetix sound is smooth and as refined as you like; no hard edges here, no tendency to harshness. Yet these components partner this civility with sledgehammer muscle

Everything inside is neatly assembled and the circuits carefully organised to reduce interference

See overleaf for more detail...



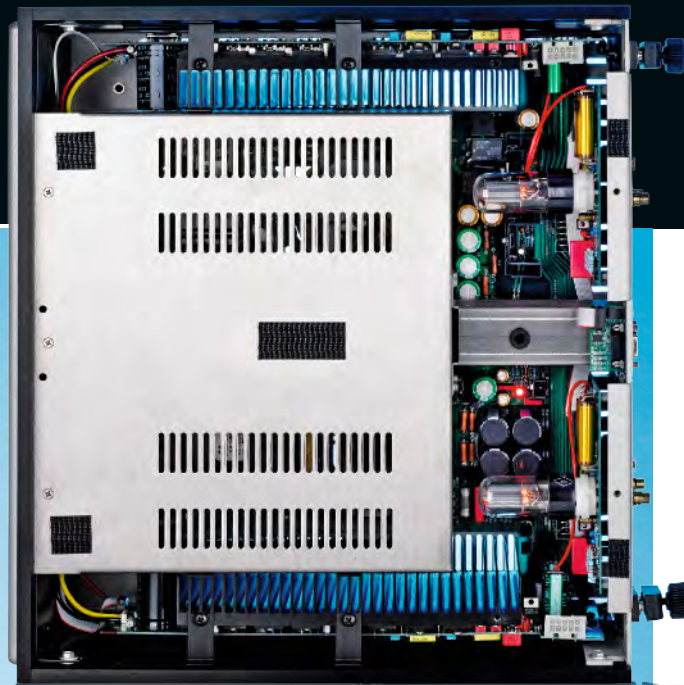
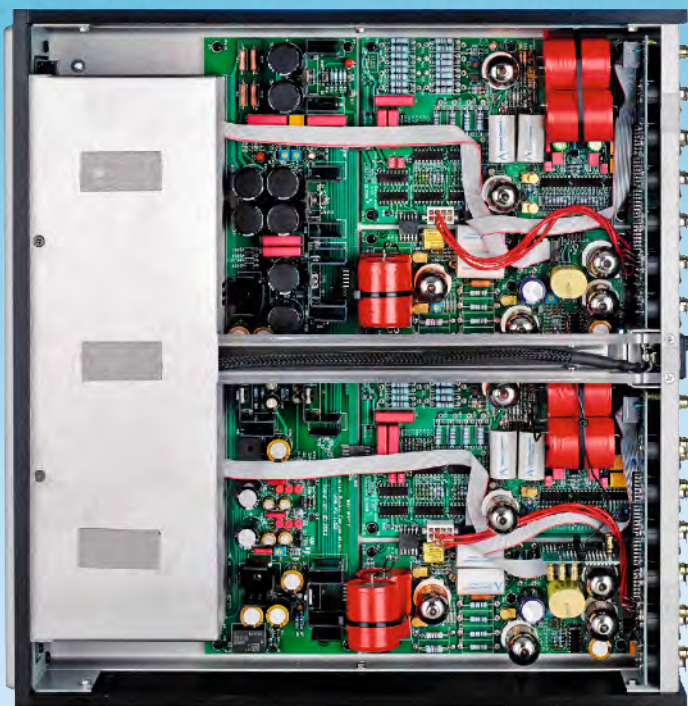
You won't run short of connections with this pair: the Janus presents myriad single-ended and balanced possibilities. Note also the Atlas power amplifier's second set of inputs. These are filtered for use with a subwoofer



TEMPTATIONS

Aesthetix Janus Signature/Atlas Stereo Signature

In detail



Aesthetix has taken great care with the circuit layout on these products. Both the Janus (left) and Atlas (above) feature shielding over their power-supply sections. That's the silver metal cover you can see in the photos. This reduces the adverse effect of any electromagnetic radiation generated by the supply affecting the delicate low-level signals in the audio circuits. The result should be a purer sound.

You'll also notice the symmetrical circuit layouts, more obvious in the preamp, to maximise stereo imaging and the use of valves in both products. We reckon the better-quality components of these Signature editions are worthwhile provided your system is talented enough.

TECH SPECS

JANUS SIGNATURE

Type Preamp

Inputs 5 x line level, MM/MC phono in, tape loop

Outputs RCA, XLR

Dimensions (hwd)

11 x 45 x 46cm

ATLAS SIGNATURE

Type Power amp

Power 2 x 200W

Inputs 2 x RCA, 2 x XLR

Bridgeable no

Weight 32kg

Dimensions (hwd)

22 x 46 x 48cm

- partner this civility with sledgehammer muscle when required. That combination of abilities is rare, even among the priciest of products.

We start off with something small-scale, playing Debussy's *Clair De Lune* from our Naim NDS555PS streamer. This piece of music thrives when fed through a system that has finesse and top-quality resolution - qualities this pre/power has in abundance.

We're struck by the solidity of the sound first, then by the clean and precise way this amplifier defines the shape of the piano notes. There's just so much detail on offer, with the Aesthetix delivering a full dose of the instrument's harmonic richness.

Knight packs a punch

We follow up with Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises* OST and are taken with the Aesthetix's scale and authority. There's an impressive amount of low-end punch in evidence and we're pleased with the pairing's ability to deliver large-scale dynamic swings with real venom. Stereo imaging is impressive

too, with the soundstage nicely layered and precisely populated.

Tonally, this pre/power combination isn't the most neutral we've heard: there's a hint of sweetness at high frequencies and an element of extra warmth and richness through midrange and bass frequencies. None of this goes too far however, and the payback is a sonic balance that keeps the worst of recordings listenable while allowing the very best to shine.

Good news for vinyl

What of that phono stage? It's terrific, giving little away to the line-level inputs in terms of outright clarity - some feat considering the extra circuit complexity, equalisation and gain required.

We feed our reference Clearaudio Innovation Wood turntable a range of music from Michael Jackson's *Bad* and REM's *Automatic For The People* to Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, and love what we hear. There's hard-charging rhythmic drive when the music demands, plenty of punch and a class-leading degree of organisation.

Vocals are delivered with fluidity and a convincing sense of presence.

We're really impressed by this pre/power combination. Rarely has high-end amplification been so easy-going while still retaining the transparency the price point demands. Aesthetix has produced a standout performer at this price.

Consider if You want an insightful and punchy yet easy-going pre/power combo
Highlight The Aesthetix's combination of refinement and resolution is terrific

Rating ★★★★★

Janus Signature preamplifier

FOR Excellent phonostage; impressive refinement coupled to class-leading resolution; strong dynamics and rhythmic ability; fine build

AGAINST Poor remote

VERDICT We can't think of a better high-end preamp with a built-in phonostage

Rating ★★★★★

Atlas Signature power amplifier

FOR Powerful; authoritative; impressive resolution; composure and refinement

AGAINST For a product of this type, nothing

VERDICT One of the finest power amps we've heard; couples refinement to insight superbly

We're struck by the solidity of the sound first, then by the clean and precise way this amplifier defines the shape of the piano notes. There's just so much detail on offer



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TEMPTATIONS

ATC SCM40A

Each tower houses
three amplifiers - one
for each driver - and
an active crossover.
All three drivers are
designed and made
in-house by ATC



Standards of build
and finish are
generally exceptional,
but we're not sure
about the supplied
metal grilles, which
look less than classy



Red stops (which feature top and bottom) help protect the heat sinks and connectors; one XLR and the power input



“Low-end authority only really capable big speakers manage”

■ **ATC SCM40A** Active stereo speakers

■ **£6280** ★★★★★

Two things strike us when we first unpack ATC's brand-new SCM40A floorstanders. The first is the sheer weight of the things. They pile in at 36kg each, meaning a strong, helpful friend is handy come unpacking time. It'll avoid damage to them, and your back.

Once we've wrestled them out of their boxes it occurs to us these may well be the best-value speakers the company makes. If the idea of a six-grand floorstander being called good value bothers you, consider that there's no cheaper way of getting a full dose of ATC's heavy-duty engineering and studio-proven technology.

What makes ATCs different? It comes down to drive units, mostly. There are few speaker companies outside the industry giants making their own drive units. Most small manufacturers - ATC is tiny by most standards - tend to buy in units from OEM suppliers.

In-house and independent

With the introduction of a tweeter designed and manufactured in house, ATC now makes all its drivers. The SCM40A features a version of this new 25mm tweeter as well as being home to the company's trademark 75mm soft-dome midrange (introduced way back in 1976) and 16.5cm bass driver.

The SCM40A has three power amps (and an active crossover) in each enclosure. There's a 150W module for the bass driver, 60W driving the midrange and a 25W amplifier for the tweeter. It all comes wrapped in a solidly made, curved cabinet, finished in cherry or black ash. Our only aesthetic concern has to do with the supplied metal grilles - they're not particularly class.

Once up and running these are deeply impressive speakers. Though magnificently detailed, they sound notably less clinical than some ATC actives we've heard in the past, yet no less insightful. That's a great thing.

An unbiased account

We listen to a range of recordings from Keith Jarrett's *Paris/London: Testament* and Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* all the way to Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall*, and these speakers take it all in their stride. They show no bias towards any genre.

The way they reproduce dynamics is excellent. They have the reach to convince with the large-scale dynamic swings of *Swan Lake*, punching out crescendos with enthusiasm. There's an impressive dose of muscle here, and the kind of low-end authority only really capable big speakers truly manage. Yet

TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander
Amplification 235W;
(tweeter 25W,
midrange 60W,
bass 150W)
Finishes 2
Dimensions (hwd)
98 x 37 x 34cm

these ATCs are more than happy to turn their hand to subtlety when required. Jarrett's piano playing simply sparkles, the SCM40s rendering the shape and harmonics of each note beautifully.

Insightful and cohesive

If you want to analyse a recording, we can think of few alternatives as good. Every subtlety is sharply defined with the speakers keeping organised and controlled, yet fluid, even when the music becomes complex. Most hi-fi - even true high-end kit - has problems making sense of Radiohead's *15 Step*. Not these ATCs. They take all in their stride, revealing a lovely cohesion throughout the frequency range. Resolution, timing and dynamics are all spot-on.

Initially, a price of more than six grand looks steep for a pair of conventional-looking floorstanders. But factor in the built-in amplification, exotically engineered in-house drive units and the resultant exceptional sound quality, and the SCM40As emerge as something of a high-end bargain. Consider us smitten.



ATC has long been in the business of producing its own bass and midrange drivers, but the new tweeter is a first for the company. It's an impressive unit

Consider if You place sonic honesty above all else and are happy to go active
Highlight There are many. If pushed, we would have to say their clarity

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Terrific detail resolution; exceptional dynamics and control; composure; integration

AGAINST Performance loses a little too much sparkle at low volume

VERDICT Terrific. The most affordable way to a full dose of ATC's technology and engineering

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system



Out this month...

Interstellar
Blu-ray
Out 30 March

★★★★☆

Bonus content

- The Science of Interstellar
- Plotting an Interstellar Journey
- Life on Cooper's Farm
- The Dust
- TARS and CASE
- Cosmic Sounds
- The Space Suits
- The Endurance
- Shooting in Iceland: Miller's Planet/Mann's Planet
- The Endurance
- The Ranger and the Lander
- Miniatures in Space
- The Simulation of Zero-G
- Celestial Landmarks
- Across All Dimensions and Time
- Final Thoughts
- Theatrical Trailers
- Celestial Landmarks

Duration 169m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 5.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p

Picture	██████████
Sound	██████████
Extras	██████████



Valiant overreach for the stars

Shoot for the moon, the saying goes. Miss and you'll still land among stars. The logic: stars are a fine consolation prize. That's the deal with Chris Nolan's latest, most audacious project yet: *Interstellar* is almost a masterpiece.

It is the near future. The planet is dying, and astronauts look to outer space for solutions. Leading them is Matthew McConaughey, who must abandon his family to potentially save mankind.

Interstellar isn't really about space. Its concern is the human condition. Fear, love, and hope take the spotlight as much as rockets and black holes.

But it proves just too much to handle. The ingredients are not quite done, even with a generous baking time of 169 minutes.

Not that there's anything wrong with a slow build, of course. The first hour or so admirably ensures you give a damn.

Interstellar really hits its stride once we get to the final frontier. This is Nolan at his best, serving up hypnotic beauty and mind-bending physics supposedly backed up by Real Science.

Ever wanted to see a black hole? This is about as close as you'll get. It looks gorgeous at a crisp 1080p.

A nod to the master

For Kubrick fans, the shadow of *2001: A Space Odyssey* is hard to miss. *Interstellar* navigates its cosmic playground with panache.

Claustrophobic interior scenes are juxtaposed with sweeping vistas of planets. There are even a couple of mildly creepy robots.

And yet Nolan avoids being eclipsed. His is a separate vibe. The majesty of Johann Strauss has no place on the soundtrack, which opts for the turbulent Hans Zimmer instead. Sadly, the sound effects often overpower dialogue.

Crucially, while Kubrick went headlong into the void, Nolan keeps an eye on Earth - with mixed results.

After two hours of restraint, the final act veers into the realm of ridiculous convenience. Scientific concepts are thrown about, and Anne Hathaway tries hard not to cringe as she delivers a soliloquy about the importance of love (and its similarity to gravity).

The bold, mature journey ends on a contrived, tedious note - and about 40 minutes too late.

Should you watch this? Oh yes, very much so. Despite some gaping flaws, this is still a journey well worth taking.

Its scale and ambition are deeply impressive, it is impossible to fault the production values, and the spectacle on offer is like nothing we've seen this year. *Interstellar* may be hard to love, but it is easy to admire.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist15](https://whf.cm/playlist15)



Henry Thomas: Bull Doze Blues Recordings from the late '20s are short on fidelity, but *Bull Doze Blues* is an evocative listen. You already know some of it.

Michael Jackson: Off The Wall An exquisite Quincy Jones production job, allied to possibly the most joyful and abandoned vocal Jackson ever delivered. Irresistible.

Steve Lawler: House Record Straight outta Birmingham, Steve Lawler (or King of Space to you) never strays far from his template. So you know what you're getting here.

Joey Bada\$\$: Paper Trail\$ After three acclaimed mixtapes, Joey Bada\$\$ released his debut album on 20th January 2015, which was also his 20th birthday. Sickening, really.

Music



Hi-res download, CD, vinyl



beautifully arranged and recorded strings, glitchy electronics and percussion, and eloquent use of silence. And while Björk's vocals are as idiosyncratic as ever, lyrically there is an unprecedented level of candour here. There's a proud tradition of break-up albums in popular music, and songs like *Lionsong* and *Notget* put *Vulnicura* right up there.

Top production values

And in the right circumstances (and on the right system), *Vulnicura* can sound stunning. It's obviously been painstakingly recorded, and as a result it's a spacious, punchy, headily dynamic listen. This is particularly true of the hi-res download (which would appear to tick all of our criteria boxes laid out on p52's hi-res audio feature). It's simply alive with detail, possessing the sort of harmonic richness and differentiation that makes the copious string arrangements spring to life. So it's a spirited, challenging recording on every level.

Specifications

Duration 58m 37s
Standout track *Lionsong* Like a celestial choir singing the blunter sections of a self-help manual.

BJÖRK VULNICURA
Out now
 ★★★★★☆

Say what you like about Björk (people always have and always will), there's no denying the strength of her commitment or her credentials as an artist. The clarity of her artistic vision, on the other hand, has sometimes been easier to question.

Vulnicura, though, might be Björk's most unified and coherent album since 1995's *Post*. With the sole exception of *History Of Touches* (the sort of dislocated electronics and knowable-only-to-herself vocal melody that constituted almost all of 2011's *Biophilia*), *Vulnicura* combines

Download, CD, vinyl



Fourth album *The Scene Between* (2011's *Rolling Blackouts* was rumoured to be a swan-song but you know how these things can be) is more of the same. Wafer-thin biscuit-tin drum sounds, über-girly vocal lines, and an impenetrably thick, congested and gleefully overdriven production that makes following individual instrumental strands nigh-on impossible.

Rough and ready charm

Despite its relative lack of hi-fi worthiness, though, *The Scene Between* is still good, harmless, scuzzy fun. *What D'You Say?*, *Her Last Wave* and the title track in particular build a tinny, unstable bridge between pre-Beatles Brit-pop and old-skool hip-hop you may not have even known you needed. In fact, the majority of the charm of *The Scene Between* is derived despite, rather than because of, its hi-fi credentials or lack thereof. So don't let its ramshackle sound put you off.

THE GO! TEAM THE SCENE BETWEEN
Out March 23rd
 ★★★★★☆

For 10 years now Brighton's The Go! Team (or, more accurately but less excitingly, Brighton's Ian Parton) have been making a rattlingly joyful Bacharach-meets-Avalanches-on-a-date-with-the-BBC-Radiophonic-Workshop kind of sound. Strong on nursery-rhyme melodies, big on poppy hooks but rather too often sounding like corking intros in search of songs. The Go! Team are, like eating a whole big bag of Haribo in one sitting, initially quite compelling but possibly likely to prove too sugary and chewy.

Specifications

Duration 35m 19s
Standout track *Her Last Wave* Pudding-sweet and an absolute pea-souper of a listen.

Listen to it this way

The system
Pioneer N-50A £500 ★★★★★
 Outstanding value for money, and a streamer well up to making the most of *Vulnicura*

Arcam A19 £650 ★★★★★
 A prodigious combination of dynamism and delicacy, the Arcam covers all bases

Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2 £500 ★★★★★
 Not the first time they're been mentioned in glowing terms in this issue

This lot'll ensure none of Björk's idiosyncrasies are lost in translation

Listen to it this way

The system
Marantz CD6005 £280 ★★★★★
 Looks, feels and, crucially, sounds considerably more expensive than that price would suggest

Rega Brio-R £500 ★★★★★
 Half the width but all the performance, the Brio-R is an agile, surefooted listen

Wharfedale Diamond 220 £200 ★★★★★
 Frankly unlikely value for money, and more than capable of matching up to the Rega amp

Let The Go! Team's chaotic sound ring true - play them through this fine system



Movie shorts

Silicon Valley (Season 1)

It was only a matter of time before sitcoms tackled the likes of Apple and Google. It is amusing enough, and supposedly not far from the truth.

The Imitation Game

Benedict Cumberbatch plays a socially awkward genius again, only this time he's up against the Nazis in a codebreaking extravaganza.

Nightcrawler

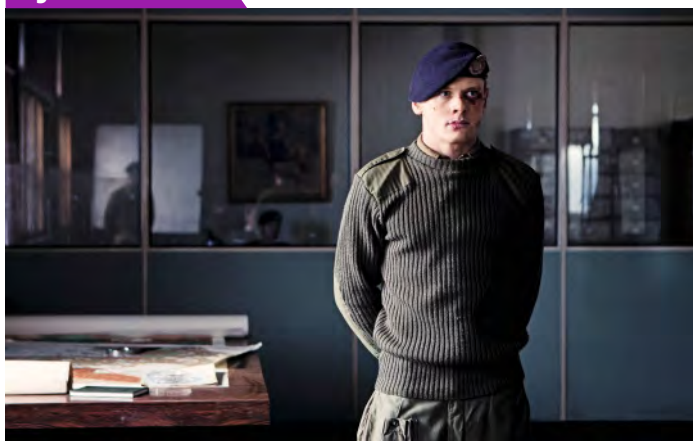
Creepy, greasy Jake Gyllenhaal's drive for success has him filming accident and murder scenes for bloodthirsty TV news in this unsettling thriller.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay (Part 1)

This time, teenagers are not killed for laughs. Jennifer Lawrence continues to inspire a revolution, and her sad face is used for propaganda.

On-screen

System tester



'71 Blu-ray Out now

★★★★☆

Belfast, 1971 - the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. A British soldier (Jack O'Connell) is left behind following a riot, upsetting the already delicate balance in a place of extreme paranoia and violence.

Some people desperately want him dead. Others provide random acts of kindness, but not without consequences. It's properly nasty business, and nobody is unscathed.

'71 succeeds by not preaching at you. The politics are left fairly ambiguous, with admirable and abhorrent behaviour on both sides.

The film refrains from passing judgments, instead focusing on our protagonist's plight as he navigates disorientating, hostile territory.

Despite the historical setting, '71 is chiefly an action thriller - and a memorable one at that. With fine acting and tight direction, what you get is a short, sharp and utterly gripping tale of survival.

An excellent choice if you're after something a little more mature.



Watch it this way

The system

Sony BDP-S5200

£85 ★★★★★

Astonishing value for money

Sky+ HD 2TB £250 ★★★★★

Great storage, great performance

Philips HTL5140

£270 ★★★★★

Amazing performance-per-pound ratio

Sony KDL-40W605

£450 ★★★★★

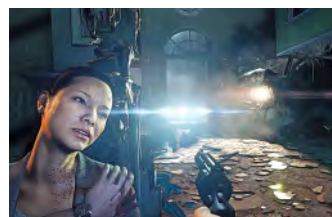
A brilliant all-rounder at the price

Games

Battlefield Hardline

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★★



What sounded like an overly gimmicky version of *Battlefield* has turned out to be the best game in the series for ages. The cops 'n' robbers theme makes for some interesting game modes and - along with better balancing and the usual battles - makes this a standout multiplayer first-person shooter.

Resident Evil: Revelations 2

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★☆

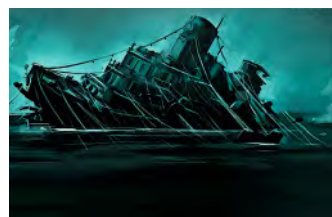


The original *Revelations* was a surprise hit for a survival-horror series that had seemingly badly lost its way. Hence this sequel. Split into five episodes, each with different characters, what's really interesting about *Revelations* is its return to old-school Resi action and scares. Something of a return to form.

Sunless Sea

PC, Out now

★★★★☆



This is not for everyone, but if you like your games with narrative, decision-making and exploration, this little indie title is an utter delight. You're a denizen of the Unterzee, a London split into islands, and it's up to you to explore, uncovering new boroughs and nasty creatures using a ship.

The Order: 1886

PS4 Out now

★★★★☆



A story of knights battling werewolves in a slightly steampunk but lush and believable alternative version of Victorian London sounds amazing, and in a lot of ways it is. But *The Order: 1886* is a bit too linear, its third-person cover-combat too prescribed. It's very short, too.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Blu-ray) Get On Up (30th March) This year's flood of biopics continues, and now it's time for Chad Boseman to do James Brown. Things are about to get funky.

Movies (Cinema) John Wick (10th April) Somebody kills Keanu Reeves' dog. Keanu goes from sad to angry, and proceeds to shoot ALL the faces in the name of retribution. Looks fun.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Courtney Barnett - Sometimes I Sit And Think, And Sometimes I Just Sit (23rd March) Not long to go - we're on the edge of our seats here.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Sufjan Stevens - Carrie & Lowell (30th March) Three years is, frankly, longer than we should be made to wait for a new Sufjan Stevens album.

March in Hi-Def

The best on the box



Kevin Bacon and James Purefoy continue their cat-and-mouse game. Full of brutal murders balanced with a tight script, this series is one fans won't want to miss

2015 Formula 1 Championship Sky Sports F1 HD & BBC One HD - 15th & 29th March

Nine teams, 18 drivers and 20 races. Formula 1 is back, and there are plenty of changes to look forward to this year. The biggest news is that four-time champion Sebastian Vettel has left Red Bull Racing to join Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari - that's quite a formidable team. McLaren, however, have the most experienced team on the grid, with Fernando Alonso and Jenson Button racking up 500 races between them. Returning champions Mercedes will be looking to retain their crown, and fans can expect the rivalry

between Hamilton and Rosberg to rekindle. We start the season down under in Australia at Melbourne's street circuit, before heading to the spectacular night race of the Malaysian Grand Prix.

Bloodline Netflix - 20th March

Set in the tropical landscape of the Florida Keys, *Bloodline* follows the Rayburn family - who may or may not have an ancient curse haunting them. Detective John Rayburn (*Friday Night Lights*' Kyle Chandler) is confronted with his family's dark past when the black sheep of the family returns and threatens to spill secrets. With

spooky happenings, ghostly encounters and evil forces permeating the family members and their lives throughout 13 episodes, this original Netflix series may just end up on your must-watch list.

Powers PlayStation Network - 10th March

Sony is carving out its own slice of Netflix pie with its first scripted series to be released on the PlayStation Network. *Powers* (an adaptation of a comic-book series of the same name) is part superhero fantasy, part crime *noir*, and part police procedural - and it looks rather cool. It follows the lives of two Chicago homicide detectives assigned to a special division that deals only with cases involving superheroes and supervillains. It turns out that superpowers are normal in this version of Chicago. Detectives

Christian Walker (played by *District 9*'s Sharlto Copley) and Deena Pilgrim (Susan Heyward) head a rather impressive cast that includes Michelle Forbes, Eddie Izzard and Noah Taylor. Slick, sexy and swearsy, *Powers* has plenty of potential to live up to Netflix's Marvel counterparts.

The Following Sky Atlantic HD - Saturdays, 9pm

Kevin Bacon and James Purefoy continue their cat-and-mouse game well into the crime thriller's third series. After faking his death, serial killer and cult leader Joe Carroll is now back behind bars. FBI agent Ryan Hardy thinks he can now rest in peace and get on with his life, but one of Carroll's followers is continuing his gruesome work. Full of brutal, gory murders balanced with a tight, tense script, this series is one that fans won't want to miss.

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Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Pioneer N-50A

"It's not easy to surpass a double Award-winner, but that's what Pioneer has done here," **p122**



Triangle Esprit Titus EZ

"In a suitably talented system, these classy standmounters will excel," **p105**

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DISPLAYS



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★★★★★

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TOTAL £1420

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★

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AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
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SPEAKERS



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★★★★★

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PANASONIC DMP-BDT700
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PIONEER SC-LX58
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NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



£499 OR LESS

£699 OR LESS

NAD • C 546BEE / C 356BEE DAC 2.0 • CD / AMP / DAC

Enjoy music from your computer without musical compromise via the DAC or listen to music from CD with the MP3 / WMA compatible CD player.

AUDIOQUEST • DRAGONFLY v1.2 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

An affordable and easy-to-use device that delivers far superior sound by bypassing the poor quality sound card that is built into your computer. DragonFly is a sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC, turning any computer into a true high-fidelity music source.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£129 OR LESS



ESSAV .COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

ESSAV .COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.



£1040

£950

NAIM • CD5si / NAIT 5si • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

Enjoy outstanding performance from your CDs with this highly acclaimed Naim CD/Amplifier combination. Available from selected stores. Visit www.ssav.com for details



£399 OR LESS

NAD • D 1050 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

The best way to add Computer Audio and HD Digital to your hi-fi system. In fact, all digital sources will get a boost when the D 1050 takes over for the inferior digital circuitry found in everything from Blu-ray, DVD and CD players, to music streamers and set-top boxes.



NEW £1249 OR LESS

NEW £1249 OR LESS

ROKSAN • K3 • CD / AMPLIFIER

New integrated amplifier with aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five additional line inputs for other sources. The K3 CD player is the perfect match for the K3 amplifier. Three finish options available.



£599 OR LESS

£499 OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.

B&W • P5 S2 HEADPHONES



NEW

£249 OR LESS

GRADO • SR325e HEADPHONES



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

NEW

£299 OR LESS



£100 GIFT VOUCHER FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC DOWNLOADS FROM QOBUZ. MUSIC IS BACK.

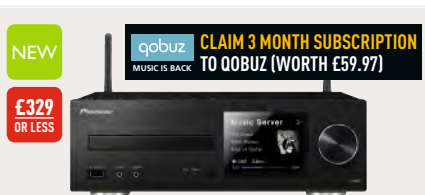
Hi-Res AUDIO

£699 OR LESS

aptX Bluetooth

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



NEW

£329 OR LESS

CLAIM 3 MONTH SUBSCRIPTION TO QOBUZ (WORTH £59.97)

PIONEER • XC-HM82 • CD/NETWORK SYSTEM

The XC-HM82 is an absolute power house, equipped with a Class D amplifier to boost your sound. Its compact size and stylish aluminium design make it suitable for any interior style.

NAD • VISO HP50 HEADPHONES



£229 OR LESS

SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES



NEW

£379.95 OR LESS



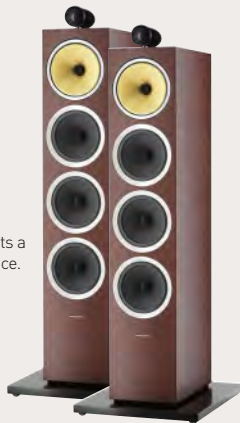
BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

NEW

£499
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best speaker
Best compact speaker
Best speaker under £500
Bowers & Wilkins S2

Price excludes stands



**BOWERS & WILKINS
CM10 S2**

The flagship floorstanding speaker of the CM Series sets a new standard for performance. It combines technologies taken from across B&W's ranges. The result simply sounds and looks beautiful.

NEW

£2999
OR LESS



**PSB
IMAGINE XB**

An attractive compact two-way speaker featuring a 5 1/4" woofer and one inch titanium dome tweeter. The XB is ideal for smaller rooms or in concert with a powered subwoofer for a compact full-range system.

NEW

£379
OR LESS



PMC • TWENTY-22
An astonishingly natural balance and high dynamic capability are the hallmarks of this speaker. It creates a precise sound stage and profound bass performance from its compact cabinet.

£1970
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best speaker
Best compact speaker
PMC Twenty 22

Price excludes stands



**MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER 6**

2.5 way speaker system combining excellent dynamics with a naturally rhythmic sonic character and tight, controlled bass. The Silver 6 is an outstanding communicator of music and film audio.

£999
OR LESS



**WHARFEDALE
DIAMOND 220**

The award-winning Wharfedale Diamond 220 is a 2-way, bass reflex bookshelf speaker offering everything you need from an advanced speaker design that doesn't cost the earth.

£199
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Hi-Fi room systems
Best Hi-Fi room system under £500
Diamond



KEF • R500

The smallest of the floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions and sleek contemporary looks make it perfectly suited for any interior.

£1499
OR LESS



**Q ACOUSTICS
3020**

Replacing the award-winning 2020i speakers, the 3020 incorporates numerous improvements including a revised cabinet with wool fibre damping plus new bespoke drive units.

NEW

£189.95
OR LESS

Standard finishes
Premium finishes
£249.95



WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM MUSIC SYSTEM

HEOS by Denon is a Wireless Multi-Room Sound System comprising a family of great-sounding music players for your whole home. There is a free app to control them from your iOS or Android phone or tablet. You can enjoy your favourite streaming music services, internet radio or your own music collection and set-up is a breeze.

PRICES FROM £249



tunein DEEZER

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ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS



SONOS

THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. **PRICES FROM £169**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Hi-Fi room systems
Best Hi-Fi room system under £500
Sonos

Wireless Extender Boost **NEW**
£79

BLUESOUND
HiFi for a wireless generation

HIGH RES AUDIO

"There's a new leader in the wireless multi-room music market - Bluesound combines high-res audio and ease of use in one impressive system."

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2015

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Hi-Fi room systems
Best Hi-Fi room system under £500
Bluesound

Stream your digital music collection, internet radio and cloud music services. Bluesound is simple to setup and easily expandable and supports 24-bit/192kHz studio master recordings in lossless FLAC format for crystal clear audiophile-grade sound to any room in your home. **PRICES FROM £399**



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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

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SOUND & VISION



£2199 OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality. Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



ESSAV.COM



ONKYO • TX-NR838 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver supporting Dolby Atmos® upgradability, multidimensional sound plus Ultra HD streaming. Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR636 & TX-NR3030



NEW

ESSAV.COM



PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: PIONEER VSX-924 & SC-LX88



ESSAV.COM



SONY • STR-DN1050 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device. Also Available: DENON AVR-X2100W & AVR-X3100W



NEW

ESSAV.COM



DENON • AVR-X4100W • AV RECEIVER

Enjoy Dolby Atmos for immaculate audio, Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth and DSD streaming. Also Available: DENON AVR-X5200W



NEW

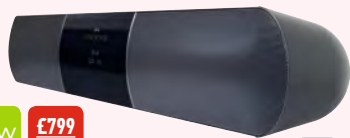
£1999 OR LESS



YAMAHA • RX-A3040 • AV RECEIVER

New AV receiver with built-in Wi-Fi, 11.2 channel expandability, highest grade construction and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A2040

ARCAM • SOLO BAR • SOUNDBAR
Not only an ideal solution to improve on the mediocre sound quality of modern TVs, Arcam's superb engineering means it can also be used as a high quality stereo system all over the house. Optional subwoofer also available.



NEW

£799 OR LESS



CANTON • DM 50 (BLACK GLASS) • SOUNDBASE
The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£399 OR LESS

NEW BLACK GLASS FINISH



DENON • DHT-T110 • SOUNDBASE
The Denon DHT-T110 is an under TV Soundbase that dramatically improves your TV watching experience. Simply connect the all-in-one system to your television and enjoy powerful, dynamic audio from your favourite TV shows, movies, games and music.



NEW

£199 OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR
The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



£399 OR LESS



£599 OR LESS

SONOS • PLAYBAR SOUNDBAR & WIRELESS SPEAKER

This plug-and-play unit incorporates 9 integrated amplified speakers. Simply connect it to your TV with the supplied optical cable to deliver an epic home cinema sound in your own living room. PLAYBAR can also expand your existing Sonos system.

YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR
Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



NEW

ESSAV.COM



£899 OR LESS

KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



£1499 OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO • RADIUS R90HT1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Award-winning speaker package comprising four Radius 90 satellites, Radius 200 centre speaker and Radius 390 subwoofer.



NEW

£599 OR LESS

KEF • R50 • DOLBY ATMOS ENABLED SPEAKERS

Designed to sit above freestanding or wall-mounted speakers allowing you to enjoy Dolby Atmos at home.



£1939 OR LESS

B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PVID subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.

REL • S2 SUBWOOFER
Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.



NEW

£999 OR LESS



£2799 OR LESS

SONY • VPL-HW55ES • SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.

Samsung UHDTV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



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SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

NEW

SONY

4K

X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

The new Sony X8 series 4K UHD LED TV boasts four times more detail than Full HD, 4K gives stunningly natural images, not pixels. Dramatically higher image quality means that you can sit closer to the screen, filling more of your field of view until the screen disappears and you are enjoying an at-the-movies experience.

49 55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available
SONY X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K 65 75



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SONY • W7 SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 42 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

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NEW

VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

PANASONIC • AX902 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

WHAT HIFI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HIFI? AWARDS 2014



NEW £1199 OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



NEW £599 OR LESS

PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



WHAT HIFI? AWARDS 2014

ESSAV.COM

SONY • BDP-S7200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The new Sony BDP-S7200 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features - it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S5200 & BDP-S6200

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Epsom • 01372 720720
Exeter • 01392 218895

Guildford 01483 536666
Holborn • 020 7837 7540
Kingston • 020 8547 0717
Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886
Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

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SOUND & VISION



LCD, LED & OLED TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
OLED	An ultra-thin screen that's commonly used in curved TVs

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony KDL-32W706B

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV

"With an attentive, punchy picture, decently detailed sound and a smattering of features, the KDL-32W706B is the full works with all the trimmings of a well-designed telly."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Samsung UE48H6400

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV

"Sharp, clear and full of subtle detail that's impressive at this mid-range price, the Samsung '6400's picture hooked us in from the minute we turned it on."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung UE55HU7500

Awards 2014: Best 52-60in TV

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

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Free/ew	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500													
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	43x73x6
Kogan KULED22XXXA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x54x17
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	43x72x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x2
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A surprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	55x93x9
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x96x9
£500-£2000													
Finlux 42FME242S-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	56x96x6
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x4
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwxd, cm)
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An engrossing TV with plenty of smarts and a cracking picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
£2000 and above													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED enters the realms of affordability, and it's a thing of beauty	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	84x114x34
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Stunning with Ultra High Def, but ordinary elsewhere	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A 4K TV worth investigating	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A gorgeous screen but that price is a sticking point	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A feature-laden TV, this is an impressive, attractive and entertaining TV	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	85x145x11
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KD-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Thoughtful design married with seriously good picture quality	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	155x90x33
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscaled content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x172x10

System killers: Games



DriveClub
PlayStation 4

After a problematic launch, *DriveClub* has now evolved into a confident racer with some astonishingly realistic graphics.



Forza Horizon 2
Xbox One

Looks great. Sounds great. Turn the music down, bump the sound effects up and rev. A sequel that's bigger and better.



Mario Kart 8
Wii U

There's nothing particularly new here, but the tweaks made help freshen and rejuvenate the latest in the *Mario Kart* franchise.



Sunset Overdrive
Xbox One

A heady mix of combat and traversal gameplay, *Overdrive* is a terrific visual showcase for what the Xbox One is capable of.



The Last of Us Remastered
PlayStation 4

The finest game on the PS3 is now one of the finest on the PS4. Extra content (*Left Behind* DLC) makes this an essential purchase.



Blu-ray players

Smart ability _____ Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
Multichannel out _____ Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
Twin HDMI outputs _____ These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



AWARD WINNER

Panasonic DMP-BDT700

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £300+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)	
Up to £500									
LG BP645	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine Blu-ray player replete with a strong feature list	1	1	0	No	5x43x21
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Much improved, but needs to better its sound and video performance to match the best	1	1	0	No	4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	80	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An impressive Blu-ray spinner that's even more value for money after its price drop	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Lacks in the smart app area but performance elsewhere is terrific	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Talented with sound as it is with picture, this is a Blu-ray player to be reckoned with	2	1	0	No	4x42x18
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Mightily impressive, this Blu-ray spinner is a multimedia beast	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A very good performer that lacks some smart features	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung-BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Samsung-BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Another solid, competitive effort from Samsung	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5200	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £150, Awards 2014	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of smart features, sharp images and well-rendered 3D. A talented disc spinner	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Super slim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential	1	1	0	No	8x33x27
£500 and above									
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	If you want a Blu-ray player that does everything, then this is it	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Pioneer BDP-LX88	1300	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Great with movies, lacks the same quality in its stereo performance	2	1	1	No	13x44x34

System builder

The perfect partners to bring the best out of Panasonic's DMP-BDT260



Television

Sony KDL-40W605B £450 - ★★★★★

A stunning looking set with rich, superbly judged colours and terrific smart features



AV receiver

Yamaha RX-V377 £250 - ★★★★★

Weighty and authoritative, the RX-V377 offers superb surround sound on a budget



Surround speakers

Q Acoustics Q7000i £900 - ★★★★★

Toeing the line between smoothness and balance, the Q7000i is a small package with a wide-open sound



Projectors

Screens _____ Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise _____ Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life _____ Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

BenQ W1400

Awards 2014: Best projector up to £1500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Epson EH-TW7200

Awards 2014: Best projector £1500-£2000



AWARD WINNER

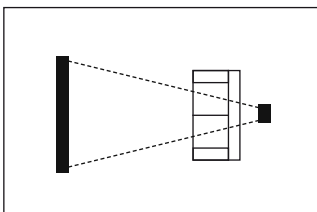
Sony VPL-HW55ES

Awards 2014: Projector £2000+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI In	DVI In	PC In	Component In	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)	
Up to £1000														
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25	3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000														
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above														
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14

What to look for: Projectors



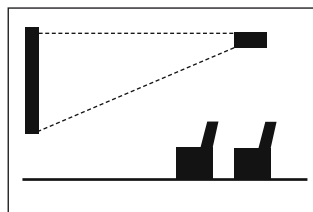
Room for a view?

Projectors take up less room real-estate than a big TV, but they need a certain distance, or 'throw', to work. Those specs and ratios are always quoted, but you still need to do the calculations to figure out exactly how much is required.



Dark matters

While it's possible to watch a projected image in daylight, most projectors work best in darkened rooms. Thick curtains or blackout blinds are worthy investments if you're looking for that immersive cinema feel.



Put it in its place

Ideally a 'fixed' projector installation using a dedicated shelf or ceiling bracket works best. The same applies to your screen - a fixed install is always ready to go. A white wall simply won't do, so invest in a purpose-built electric or manual model.



Lamp boast

If you want a particularly big screen, a Full HD 1920 x 1080 projector has its benefits. However, the quality of its lamp and its optics are every bit as important as its resolution so bear that in mind when you're on the hunt for a projector.



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500 Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000 There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+ Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha RX-V377

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350
 “The RX-V377 isn’t revolutionary, yet Yamaha doesn’t rest upon its laurels – this is a hugely capable budget receiver.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony STR-DN1050

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700
 “Following the success of the STR-DN1040 was never going to be an easy task, but Sony has undoubtedly managed it.”



AWARD WINNER

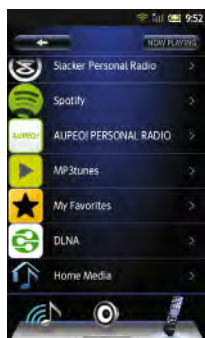
Pioneer SC-LX58

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500
 “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.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300										
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014	5x70	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
£300-£500										
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtler but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	●	12x44x30
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	●	16x43x33
£500-£1000										
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you’re looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	●	17x44x39
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013.	7x100	8	2	●	●	16x43x32
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	7x165	6	3	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that’s not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x43x36

Killer Apps: Remote apps



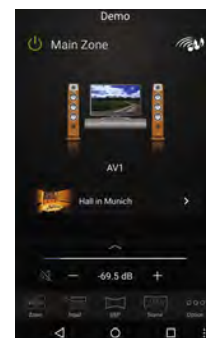
Onkyo Remote

Compatible with Onkyo releases between 2010 and 2014, this app gives the user a clean, navigable interface, with easy streaming from online services and connected devices.



Pioneer iControlAV5

Updated for 2015, iControlAV5 has features such as a searchable music list, remote control and EQ settings. It’s also backwards compatible with amps dating back to 2012.



Yamaha AV controller

Yamaha’s app has a stark, unfussy interface but offers options for tweaking levels, selecting sound modes and changing inputs. Decent, simple remote, too.

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000-£2000									
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	16x44x37
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, piped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	34x59x55
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	18x44x43
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX88	2200	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A staggeringly powerful amp with a captivating sound	9x250	8	3	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speakers	Line outputs	Speaker outputs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																		
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	4	31x31x38
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20	●	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	32x28x28
RELAcoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20	●	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30	●	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●	●	Downward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																		
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	34x34x41
RELAcoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Playspeakers	n/a	n/a	●	●	Inward	0	0	●	●	●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25	●	●	Downward	4	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	45x41x41
£1000 and above																		
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38	●	●	Forward	n/a	0	●	●	●	●	●	1	56x59x50
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	3	34x33x34

"Monitor Audio's VW-8 is a capable little subwoofer and will make a good addition to a bass-light, entry-level, sub/sat or stereo system"

April 2010



Surround speakers

Full size _____ Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound
 Style _____ Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
 Bipole/Dipole _____ Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack up to £700
 "We simply can't find a rival (trust us, we've looked) that even comes close to the Q Acoustics' performance-per-pound offering."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack £700-£1500
 "Whether it's with music or movies, the Zensor 1 5.1 produces a stunning sound. That's £1000 well spent, we say."



AWARD WINNER

Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1

Awards 2014: Best Style package £1400-£1800
 "You have a package that blends nicely. With price, performance and practicality on its side, the Radius ticks all the boxes."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a 3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2
£500-£1000								
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44 2
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission M ³	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27 1
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33 4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38 1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31 7
£1000-£2000								
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33 2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36 2



Sound Fantastic

Olsons *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthline choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

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- 13A Sockets
- 10A Panel Mount Fuse
- RFI 10A Mains Filter & Surge Suppressor
- External Earth Stud
- 2m x 1.5mm Screened Cable
- UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- Colour Black
- Specials to order

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HF 4	4	446mm
HF 6	6	557mm
HF 8	8	670mm

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SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Cabasse Eole 3	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A likable, big-sounding system that lacks a little authority	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x35	2
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1650	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2014	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
Dali Fazon 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27	2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12	2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28	3
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-lite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2014	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51	2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47	3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1

Setting up your... rear speakers

Getting the most from your home cinema surround sound set-up

Dali Zensor 1
£200

Do I need rear speakers?

What do rear speakers do, exactly? Well, with the advent of discrete 5.1 surround sound in 1992, sound designers gained the ability to place specific effects into either the left or right rear speaker. Unlike older systems that relied on a mono rear channel of sound, such as Dolby Surround, the rear channels are given more to do instead of the same signal being shared between multiple surround speakers. Sound steering was better as the sound matched what was on screen more precisely.

Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D
£1950

Should I use hi-fi speakers?

Positioning can be a bit awkward if you have a large rear speaker. Place it too close and a headache may ensue. Hide it in a corner and performance will be diminished. Hi-fi speakers are designed to create an audio image that places sonic elements within a focused soundstage. This direct pattern of sound reproduction is what sound engineers avoid with most rear speaker effects. It's why, to avoid sound localisation, cinemas use multiple pairs of rear speakers along the sides and behind you.

Monitor Audio BFXF speakers
£250

Dealing with localisation

Negating the effect of localisation can be done in two ways: mounting a hi-fi style bookshelf or style speaker high on the wall, or buying a specialist rear speaker that's either bipolar or dipolar in design. A bipolar design will use an opposing-driver arrangement which run in phase (unison). This gives good bass and helps fill the room. A dipolar design is similar, using opposing sets of drive units radiating into directions, one running out of phase with the other. This creates an out-of-box sound that's hard to localise.

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1
£625

How loud should they be?

Whatever your speakers, watch the volume levels. It's tempting to crank it up to make the rear speakers more audible but all that does is defeat their purpose: they're not meant to draw attention to themselves. Too much rear-focused sound is unrealistic and, over long periods can become wearing for the listener, so don't be tempted to select an artificially heavy rear bias. Even in 5.1 channel mixing, it's common to use a mono effect at times.

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TANNOY MERCURY V1 DARK WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Balanced, detailed, hugely enjoyable sound; flexible with regards to positioning and system matching." – What Hi-Fi.

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Packs great sound and connectivity into its slender dimensions.
5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

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MONITOR AUDIO A100 STEREO AMPLIFIER

"It delivers large-scale dynamics with a surprising degree of composure. We're impressed by its refinement too." – What Hi-Fi.

TSP £399

5 year Supercare only £19.90

Also available in white.

£199



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PROJECT ESSENTIAL 2 TURNTABLE

"Exceptionally well made and refined sound." – What Hi-Fi.

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Available in a range of colours.

£209

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MARANTZ PM6005, CD6005 & Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 20 AMPLIFIER, CD PLAYER & GLOSS BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Superb sound quality on a budget for your analogue and digital music," commented What Hi-Fi of the PM6005, while they said of the CD6005, "A fantastic player and immense value for money."

TSP £889.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase prices

Q Acoustics Concept 20 also available in white.

Amp and CD player also available in silver.

£749.95

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ARCAM FMJ A19 AMPLIFIER

"It's clear that its strength lies in its competence. Each musical element is delivered with a remarkable amount of composure and stability." – What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £64.90

£649

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED



MUSICAL FIDELITY M3s1 & M3SCD AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER

Experience the incredible M3s1 that offers deep and dynamic sound quality. A powerful option for hi-fidelity fanatics. The M3SCD boasts class-leading components throughout including an impressive built-in DAC so you can enjoy great sounding digital music as well as CDs.

5 year Supercare only £109.90 each

At selected stores

£1099 each

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED



CAMBRIDGE STREAM MAGIC 6 V2 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER

"The Stream Magic 6 V2 is as captivating as ever." – What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £69.95

£699.95



Demonstration Rooms

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DENON DM39 & WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 121 MINI SYSTEM & WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Back, and better than ever." said What Hi-Fi of the Denon DM39 mini system.

The Denon DM39 comes from a long line of award-winning mini systems, and what better way to make the most of its charming and dynamic sound than with the Diamond 121s, which What Hi-Fi described as "brilliant performers".

System TSP £338.95 | 5yr Supercare 10% of DM39 price DM39 also available in black



£249.95

SAVE £200

FREE 5 YEAR SPEAKER GUARANTEE

MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BX2 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi of the MCR610, while of the BX2s they said, "Stupendously good and give their price rivals much to worry about."

TSP £699.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase price Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 also available in oak and walnut.



£499.95

SAVE £200

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION WHATHIFI.COM

TEAC NPH750/CDH750 MINI SYSTEM

Featuring a separate CD player and a host of connections, including a connection for a turntable, this TEAC is the mini system with the maximum spec.

TSP £499.95
5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price
Also available in silver

REGULAR PRICE **£349.95**
VIP CLUB PRICE £299.95

SAVE £200

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION WHATHIFI.COM

CAMBRIDGE MINX XI STREAMING MINI SYSTEM

"It's easy to use, well built and sounds great." - What Hi-Fi.

Usually £599.95
5 year Supercare only £39.95
Also available in white.



£399.95

SAVE £1000

FREE 5 YEAR GUARANTEE

TANNOY PRECISION 6.4 SATIN WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Hugely listenable speakers, with a stereo image to die for." - What Hi-Fi.

TSP £2199.95

REGULAR PRICE **£1499.95**

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Roksan's brand new K3 components are sure to please even the most discerning audiophile listener. Fully equipped with Bluetooth for easy music streaming the K3 range offers crisp and expansive sound quality, these stunning separates deserve an audition.

5 year Supercare only £125 each

£1250 each

SAVE £1100

FREE Chord Cadenza Interconnect worth £249.95 (VIP exclusive offer)

FREE 5 YEAR SPEAKER GUARANTEE

EXCLUSIVE!

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION WHATHIFI.COM

Choice

CAMBRIDGE 851A, 851C & TANNOY 6.2 AMPLIFIER, CD PLAYER & SATIN WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This refined and revealing pairing delivers a dynamic, clean and engaging result with pretty much anything you care to play." - Hi-Fi Choice magazine (851A & 851C).

TSP £4098.90 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of amp & CD player purchase prices

Amplifier & CD player also available in silver.

Speakers also available in gloss walnut

Call for individual unit prices

£2999.95

ARCAM audiolab **audioquest**

Cambridge Audio **CYRUS**

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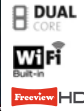
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- trustedreviews.com.

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"Big-screen entertainment for a great price." - What Hi-Fi.

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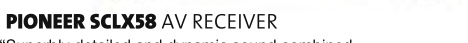
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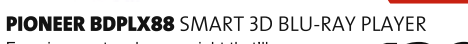
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"Serves up a classy picture and stunning sound." - What Hi-Fi.
5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

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PANASONIC DMPBDT700
SMART 4K 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"A premium Blu-ray player for a premium home cinema system." - What Hi-Fi.
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5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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5 year Supercare only £89.95

£899



CANTON DM 50
SOUND BASE

"The Canton DM 50 is a lesson in what a sound base should sound and look like." - What Hi-Fi.

TSP £399

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DALI KUBIK ONE
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Bournemouth 0333 900 0058	Eton 0333 900 0087	Leeds 0333 900 0025	London Chiswick 0333 900 0055	London West End 0333 900 0028	Nottingham 0333 900 0035	Romford 0333 900 0041	Weybridge 0333 900 0083
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CD players

Integrated _____ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport _____ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cyrus CDi

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	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 (hwd, cm)	
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28	
£500-£1000																
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38	
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44	
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39	
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31	
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x35	
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33	
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44

"There's no denying that the Primare CD32 is a polished performer, particularly with CDs. If an information-over-entertainment balance appeals, give it a listen"

April 2011

Peter Tyson Audio Visual Experts

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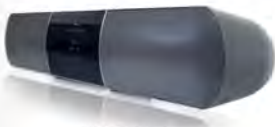
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Newcastle, NE3 2FP

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Mon – Sat: 10am – 6pm



DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from their source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turns it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES/EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014, Accessories Product of the Year	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3x18x14
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSD	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30

DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	ALS EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
Oppo HA-1	1200	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition but needs to deliver more energy to compete with the best	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	8x25x33
T+A DAC8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable _____ The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm _____ The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge _____ Turns the information in the record groove into sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		33.33 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000															
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	16x45x35
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A terrific package for the price and worth serious consideration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13x42x34
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An eye-catching turntable with a robust sound. A very fine effort	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13x46x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x36
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It's been a few years but the Carbon is still a tempting proposition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12x45x36
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A blindingly good turntable for the price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	10x45x36
£1000 and above															
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x42x35
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x42x35
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13x42x33
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	28x56x36
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x40x30
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x45x36
Michell Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Packs a sublime punch – it makes listening a pleasure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	19x41x53
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	26x64x53
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x45x38
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-Ject can compete at all price levels	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	25x55x45
Rega RP8/Apheta	2200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A spectacular turntable from Rega	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12x45x36
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Deceptively simple looking, this Rega is one of the very best at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	15x45x37
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	One of the best at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	It's got its quirks, but it's great value for the money	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	15x40x34


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Radios

DAB _____ Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
Internet _____ Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100										
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A neat, lightweight radio that's fine for listening on the go	●	●			●	10x6x2
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Classy and natural - another joy from Pure	●	●			●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great performer in the right circumstances	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for on-the-go casual listening, but not as your main home radio	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An upgrade of an established favourite	●	●			●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio up to £100, Awards 2014	●	●			●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	No-frills wi-fi radio that sounds great for its size	●	●		●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	User friendly and sleek - with great sound	●	●			●	15x25x8.3
£100 and above										
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2013	●	●			●	17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Terrific sound and features makes this radio an appealing buy	●	●				25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent radio that doesn't sound as good as some of its stablemates	●	●				18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Internet and DAB-capable radio that's a delight to use and listen to	●	●		●		18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-15 Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A quirky and appealing style classic			●			17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio up to £150, Awards 2012	●	●		●		15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to offer: add to your shortlist of portable internet radios	●	●		●		17x28x18
Revo AXIS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio £150+, Awards 2012	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Great radio and a nice little streamer	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A decent rather than ground-breaking effort from Revo. Worth an audition	●	●				13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2014	●	●		●		18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A retro radio with great looks and sound	●	●		●	●	16x26x13
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Good in most areas, but the 83i needs a more balanced sound	●	●		●		21x25x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	●	●		●		21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best DAB/FM radio, Awards 2012	●	●				18x13x14
Tivoli Alberg+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	On the expensive side, but a neat unit nonetheless	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A good table-top offering at an affordable price	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat, talented portable radio that deserves an audition	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters _____ Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders _____ Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered _____ Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200									
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish looks meet grown-up performance	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Good scale and authority make for a competitive pair of speakers	●			2	37x20x31
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Full of zip and gusto, the SX-50s are excellent value for money	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £150, Awards 2010. A real return to form from Mission	●			4	28x17x26
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	A very good attempt at a budget hi-fi speaker	●			2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	They're not perfect but these budget speakers are a pleasant surprise	●			2	28x18x23
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●			4	26x17x28
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●			2	23x15x15
SoundScience Frankenspiel FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best Budget desktop speakers, Awards 2011	●			1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●			1	8.5x8.5x8.5

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d,cm)
£200-£500							
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Real ability in most areas but they don't quite gel	●	2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money, definitely worthy of consideration	●	2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●	3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget	●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer Music Monitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●	2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●	2	33x21x27
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●	4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available	●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●	2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●	2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●	2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●	2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	These Dali's are still entertaining all-rounders, but they've finally been outclassed	●	2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●	3	35x21x29
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●	3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop	●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals	●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●	3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●	4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●	6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●	1	28x18x27
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●	4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders	●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●	1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014	●	2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●	4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014	●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●	4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014	●	3	17x13x14
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●	3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014	●	4	50x32x41

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What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

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stereophile

CLASS A RECOMMENDED
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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best floorstander £300+
Sendor D7

SPENDOR

www.sendoraudio.com

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish		3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11 (2013)	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014	●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014	●	2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	2	35x19x32
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas	●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●	2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●	1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●	2	29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●	2	28x17x26
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●	3	29x18x27
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●	5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●	1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis	●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●	3	40x42x43
Eclipse Planet LW Bridge System	1400	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A commendable effort; decent sound and stylish looks to go with it	● ●	3	29 diameter
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●	3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●	3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●	2	30x30x28
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●	1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●	4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●	1	28x18x24
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●	2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s produce an authoritative sound at a fine price	●	5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●	4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●	5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●	6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●	6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers		2	54x39x9
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●	3	95x21x30
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Physically and sonically impressive	●	4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Almost mission accomplished. Hugely capable but not as entertaining as the class leaders	●	5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Attractive but with a hefty sound too	●	5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●	4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections	●	4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	● ●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25

"In true Italian fashion, the Mezzas look super-smart and are dressed to impress. Sonically, they're steady as opposed to stunning, but there's still plenty to admire"

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**HOW IT
WORKS**

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
£500-£1500							
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●	2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●	1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6TSE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package		3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	03.15/FT	★★★★★	A classy pair of articulate and expressive standmounters	●	3	30x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●	1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●	2	108x32x34
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab 5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good speakers but they lack the freedom of expression that we'd expect	●	3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●	4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Another pair of fine speakers from Dali – fast, agile and authoritative	●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	The Xeo 4s serve great-quality, convenient, versatile wireless sound	● ●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Spellbinding performance with the right kind of music	●	1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Superb timing, detail and imaging	●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	They have a few compromises but their strengths can't be matched at any price	●	4	99x35x43
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●	Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Intended for professional use, the SM9s work brilliantly as home speakers	●	1	32x49x39
Focal Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT MinenT M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention		1	59x48x10
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●	2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
PMC Twenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●	4	41x18x37
PMC Twenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMC Twenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range	●	4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi		2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●	6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●	6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●	1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●	1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●	5	87.5x19x28

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★			6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★		●	3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●		3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	●		2	36x11x25
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	●		2	114x42x37
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	●		3	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●		3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	●		16	47x27x31
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		7	105x35x48



Stereo amplifiers

Integrated _____ These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output _____ A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs _____ Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000																	
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	60		6	0	0		3	●	1	●	●	●	2	7.5x45x34
Arcam FMJ A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	50		6	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	9x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	45	●	6	0	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	75	●	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	85		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	1	11x43x34
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	55		5	0	0		0	1	●	●	●	●	2	6x43x8
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	40		6	0	0		0	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	30		3	0	0		0	1					1	22x32x31
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	●	●	2	7.5x14x14
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	50	●	1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30		2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	1	19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	50		4	0	0		1	1					1	7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	60		3	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	30		3	0	0		0	●	1				1	9x21x36
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	65		4	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	40		1	0	0	●	1	●	1				1	13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	40		2	0	0		0	1					2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	4	10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	50		4	1	0		1	1					2	8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	72		4	1	0		1	●	1			●	1	8x43x32
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	125		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	140		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	2	6x21.5x25
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1					1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	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)
£1000 and above																	
Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120	6	1	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	1	10x43x43	
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50	5	0	0	1	1	●	1	●	1	33x45x41		
ATCSIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150	4	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	1	14x44x35		
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60	4	0	0	1	1	●	2	●	2	5x43x28		
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120	8	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	12x43x39		
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	7x22x36		
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8XPd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70	5	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70	6	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36		
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36		
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	1	18x43x44		
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0	1	●	1	4x38x38		
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240	2	1	1	1	●	1	●	●	3	4x40x40		
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50	5	0	0	1	1	●	1	1	14x42x14			
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35	5	1	0	0	●	1	●	2	9x22x36			
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180	4	0	0	1	1	●	1	●	2	9x50x34		
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	8.5x43x35			
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148	7	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	10x43x36		
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	1	●	2	9x22x28		
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150	1	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	1	13x43x39		
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	●	1	●	1	7x43x30			
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	1	7x43x30		
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	1	9x43x31		
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100	7	0	0	●	0	1	●	1	15x43x49			
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10	1	0	0	0	●	1	●	2	18x33x29			
Pathos Logos Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0	●	1	●	1	17x42x43			
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x31x38			
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	12x44x35			
Rega Elicit-R	1600	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2014	105	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	8x43x34			
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	2	8x43x33			
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	3	10x43x38			
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80	5	1	1	0	1	●	●	1	13x43x42			
T+A PA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300	6	0	0	0	1	●	●	1	17x46x46			
Unison Research Preludio	2295	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	20x40x38			
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	25x41x57			
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	26x19x35			
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	5	0	0	Opt	1	1	1	1	20x30x45			



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	1	1	7x22x36
Cyrus PreXP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	1	1	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●	1	1	1	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●	1	1	1	9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0	●	●	1	1	8x44x29

PREAMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	9x30x22
Townshend Allegrì	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	5x13x31

£5000 and above

Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
GamuTD3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	11x43x42
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31
Plinius Tauroro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XB in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)	
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	3
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33

£5000 and above

Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x44x69	75
GamuTD200i	9300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard	Stereo	220	1	1	16x43x47	34
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

"Heed Audio's Obelisk ps is involving and exciting in a way few rivals can match, and that's why it deserves a high place on any shortlist"

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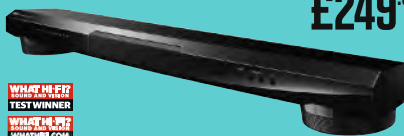
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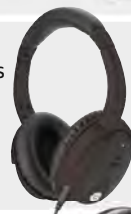
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
BEST OVER-EAR HEADPHONES
★★★★★
OCTOBER 2012



Noise Cancelling Portable Headphones
Goldring NS1000 Expedition

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★★★★★
OCTOBER 2012

RRP: £139.95
SAVE: £70.00
£69.95



Mobile HiFi Headphones
B&W P5 S2

OUR PRICE:
£249.00



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2015
BEST MOBILE HI-FI HEADPHONES
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2015

Stainless Steel In Ear Headphones
RHA T10i

OUR PRICE:
£149.95



Wireless Speakers

Wireless Speaker with Airplay and Bluetooth
Libratone Zipp BT

OUR PRICE:
£299.00

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
MARCH 2015



Portable Wireless HiFi Speaker
B&W T7

OUR PRICE:
£299.00

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
DECEMBER 2014



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† Terms and conditions apply, see website for further details. †† On orders over £75.



iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Docktype	Aux	Power(w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz AktiMate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Monitor Audio Airstream S200

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £150-£300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



AWARD WINNER

Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	5x18x6
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●		118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●		18x35x12

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Overcooked bass aside, this is one of most powerful sounding portable speakers we've heard	●	●	●	●	●	14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	●	●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	●	●	●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	●	●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	●	●	●	●	●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A chunky, fun unit that's starting to sound a little unrefined against more recent competition	●	●	●	●	●	17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Lots of power to go with its enthusiasm, but gives up a little clarity and insight to its rivals	●	●	●	●	●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this	●	●	●	●	●	16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users	●	●	●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It only supports iOS devices but this speaker sounds fantastic	●	●	●	●	●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with	●	●	●	●	●	13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable wireless speaker with excellent sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x4
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An attractive design is marred by some uncontrolled bass	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Fine sound and a well-designed package make this a good travel companion	●	●	●	●	●	8x19x2.5
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	●	●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	●	●	●	●	●	14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●	●	●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	●	●	●	●	●	19x25x9
£300 and above										
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Not perfect, but its spacious sound, battery life and stylish design are worthy of a look	●	●	●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●	●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●	●	●	●	●	22x36x16
B&W T7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success	●	●	●	●	●	11x21x5
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●	●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●	●	●	45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●	●	●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice	●	●	●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£500, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	A wireless speaker that's lovely to listen to	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●	●	●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●	●	●	●	●	24x13x24
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £750+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Nocs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Versatile and fun desktop speakers	●	●	●	●	●	16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them	●	●	●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●	●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass	●	●	●	●	●	23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5



Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

AKG Y50

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears up to £100
 “Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a promising start for AKG’s latest range.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Philips M1MKII

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £100-£200
 “If you have just under £200 to spend on a pair of portable on-ear headphones, this is a most worthy candidate.”



AWARD WINNER

Beyerdynamic T51

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £200-£300
 “They’re easily some of the best portable on-ear headphones we’ve heard at this price.”


Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★			Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★			Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★			Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p	60	03.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★			Closed			11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★			Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★			Closed			14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★			Closed			8
JVC HA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			6.6
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★			Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			13.5
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			47
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★			Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★			Closed			174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★			Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★			Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★			Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★			Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★			Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★			Closed			12
Sennheiser PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★			Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★			Closed			13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★			Closed			71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			13.4
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★			Closed			11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★			Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★			Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★			Closed			8
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★			Closed			9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★			Closed			18

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above							
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Open		390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	150
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		340
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9IS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		165
Beyerdynamic DTX102IE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		11
Beyerdynamic DX160 IE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	●	Open	● ●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		290
Beyerdynamic MMX 101IE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		330
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	198
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	153
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		195
B&W P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		365



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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight(g)
£70 and above							
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed	26
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●	Closed	310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed	225
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Need a bit more clarity and sparkle to go with its lovely, balanced sound	●	Closed	180
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●	Closed	220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●	Closed	183
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stunningly insightful and expressive	●	Closed	9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●	Open	9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●	Open	312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●	Open	500
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Open, spacious and sturdy. Great performance for the money	●	Open	363
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	Open	330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●	Open	330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Hugely accomplished and built to last too	●	Closed	125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones up to £150, Awards 2013	●	Open	200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●	Closed	12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●	Closed	195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Chunky and enjoyable buds	●	Closed	11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★	These quiet Jamos aren't without charm	●	Closed	13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●	Closed	12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●	Closed	208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●	Closed	138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●	Closed	16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best in-ears £140+, Awards 2011	●	Closed	320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●	Closed	356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge	●	Closed	12
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	If you are serious about portables then these in-ears need to be on your shortlist	●	Closed	10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy	●	Closed	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●	Closed	225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●	Closed	13
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●	Closed	299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●	Open	453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Timing could be tighter but these in-ears are an easy listen	●	Closed	n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●	Closed	12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A pleasant listen, laid-back and amiable	●	Closed	240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●	Open	395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Nice enough sound but average noise cancelling	●	Closed	79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●	Closed	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●	Closed	14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●	Closed	140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easygoing and comfortable	●	Closed	272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	Closed	166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2014	●	Closed	166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●	Closed	14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●	Open	430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●	Closed	340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★	PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!	●	Closed	362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	●	Closed	11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●	Closed	220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders	●	Closed	140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●	Open	260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●	Open	270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●	Closed	18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●	Closed	5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2014	●	Closed	8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●	Closed	105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●	Closed	13

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight(g)
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed			190
Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi	90	02.15/FT	★★★★★		●	Closed			16
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed			160
Sennheiser PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed	●		115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed		●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★		●	Open		●	204
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★		●	Open			260
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★		●	Closed			280
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●		Closed			32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	●		Closed			36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	●		Closed			286
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	Open			268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed			240
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★		●	Closed			6
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★		●	Closed			228
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★		●	Closed			10
Ultrason HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed			285
Ultrason HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★		●	Open			285
V-modi Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★		●	Closed			200
V-modi Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★		●	Closed			17



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Up to £500											
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●			●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha R-N500	350	03.15/FT	★★★★★	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
£500 and above											
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●				●	●	●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●			●	●	●
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●				●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★							●	
Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik	17500	03.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●			●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●			●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
McIntosh MXA70	5995	02.15/FT	★★★★★						●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

"If you're after a do-it-all system that won't tax your ears (or bank account), then the Sony CMT-G2BNiP should definitely be on your list"

April 2012



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500											
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●		1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●		●		2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV					1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
£500-£1000											
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●		2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●		●		1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£1000 and above											
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●		0	3	2.1



Soundbars/Soundbases

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Philips HTL5140

Awards 2014: Best soundbar up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Q Acoustics Media 4

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £300 to £600



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha YSP-2500

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £600+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000												
Arcam Solo bar	800	03.15/FT	★★★★★	An ambitious soundbar that doesn't quite match the audio performance of its peers				4	1	1		13x100x11
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original		●		3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price				0	1	0		8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014				0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	280	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Bigger than – and just as good as – its smaller brother				0	1	0	●	10x73x34
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price				0	1	1		6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 75	450	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014				0	1	1	●	7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement		●		0	2	2		15x90x30
Dali Kubik One	800	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Dali's first soundbar is another resounding success				0	2	0	●	15x98x10
Focal Dimension	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular				1	1	0		12x116x12
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A good alternative to a full-on home cinema system		●		0	1	1	●	10x116x8
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Delivers a good sound at an appealing price				0	1	0		10x60x40

SOUNDBARS/SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Klipsch R-20B	700	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A good soundbar with a powerful sound. Rivals edge it out on balance and detail, though	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	10x102x7
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound		0	1	0				12x99x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Stiff competition prevents this immersive sounding soundbar from getting five stars	●	1	1	0				8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●	3	1	0				10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Impressive quality and authority for a soundbar	●	0	2	0				8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●	0	2	0				71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0				8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Connection issues aside, this is a strong one-box system with streaming options aplenty	●	0	1	0				16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features					3	1	1	8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Still great but new competition takes its toll	●	3	1	1	●	●	●	101x119x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●	0	1	0				9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250					2	1	0	15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0				5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	2	1	1				7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set. And now with a price cut	●	●	0	2	0			9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A sizeable soundbar with an appealing sound			0	1	1			10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £300-£600, Awards 2014, Product of the Year			0	1	0	●	●	11x114x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●	1	1	0				6x94x6
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●	2	1	0				11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●	0	1	0				9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but rivals are more insightful			3	1	0			7x72x31
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound					1	0	●	12x64x36
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Nails the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	9x90x6
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●	3	2	1				14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget			0	1	1	●	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar, Awards 2012	●	3	2	1				9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●	1	2	1	●	●	●	7x94x14



Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000															
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3		24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3		16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2		24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1		24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	●	24/96	



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Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Bluesound Node

Awards 2014: Best streamer up to £600



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

Awards 2014: Best streamer £600-£1000



AWARD WINNER

Naim UnitiQute 2

Awards 2014: Best music system £800-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/krz)	Video
Up to £500													
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Apple TV	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2 XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku 3	100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but good features and speedy operation make this a winner	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	40	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the smoothest streaming stick around, but Roku's effort is a great try	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
£500-£1000													
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50A	500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	The excellent N-50 again, this time better than ever	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●
£1000 and above													
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	24/192	●
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	24/192	●
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	32/192	●
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	24/192	●
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



Set-top boxes

Freeview	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart	
Up to £500														
Equinix Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★☆	Wi-fi Freeview for your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch	●					1	n/a	0		
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014	●				●	2	500	1	●	
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013					●	2	500	1		
Humax HD-FOX T2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD receiver, Awards 2011	●					1	n/a	1		
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013		●				2	500	1		
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★☆	Loads of storage, but could do with more features	●					2	2TB	1		
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders	●					2	500	1	●	
Sky+ HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Set-top boxes, Awards 2012			●			2	1TB	1		
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			●			2	1TB	1		
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★☆	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd	●					2	1TB	1		
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011				●		3	1TB	1	●	



Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000									
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★☆	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32		79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★☆	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★☆	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a		114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★☆	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8		10x64x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★☆	A good place to start if you're looking to get into hi-res	2.2	320x240	16		109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★☆	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	●	123x61x16

Top tips: Hi-fi hints

Use your ears for cable management

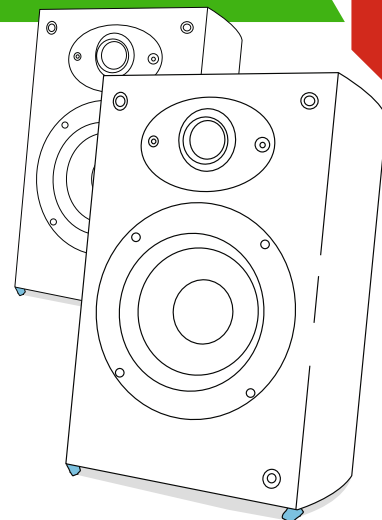
Fed up with hearing your footsteps and the rustle of your clothes through your earbuds? Try running the cable over the top of your ear before putting the earphone in. Some models won't fit like this, but most will and many, such as the Shure SE425s, are designed specifically to do so. That way you'll significantly reduce the amount of noise carried up the cable.

Don't dismiss four-star kit

In this buying guide we only include kit rated four stars or higher, but that doesn't mean you should always go for the highest-rated option. Your specific needs, whether it's the scale and dynamism required for classical music or the low-end control that DJs demand, might be better met by a four-star amp than a five-star rival. Remember, settle on what your priorities are, and audition equipment whenever you can.

Blu-Tack - very handy

When conducting our preliminary Dolby Atmos tests, we used Blu-Tack to keep our speakers in place and at the right angle. For small speakers they're particularly useful, so while such speakers might seem perfect for shelf-mounting as they are, they rarely sound at their best that way. You can make big improvements by mounting them rigidly with a blob of Blu-Tack under each corner.





Tablets

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Apple iPad Air 2

“Apple has done it again. This is the iPad to beat all iPads, and is still the best tablet on the market.”



Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact

“The Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact is an excellent addition to the Z3 family, offering a great video experience, a superb way with music and a startlingly good battery life.”



Apple iPad mini 3

“The iPad mini 3 is as strong in video and audio as ever, and packs a level of design and performance you can’t argue with.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600										
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer but the Kindle Fire still feels a little restrictive	Android	●	8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad mini 3	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of updates, but it's still the 8in tablet to be reckoned with	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet with an unrivalled user experience	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
BlackBerry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty on offer here, but lacks apps	QNX	●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2014	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	The best tablet we've tested from Samsung so far	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb tablet that's terrific with music and video	Android	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT	★★★★★	There's little to grumble about at this price, a nifty budget tablet	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9

Things to consider: Smartphones

How much will your phone cost you?

When it comes to smartphones, we don't quote prices in the Buyers Guide because the sheer number of service providers and packages means they vary hugely. Even so, phones such as the Oppo N1 and Nexus 5 will be significantly cheaper than any of the others, whether you're on pay-as-you-go, contract or buying outright.

Which operating system is right for you?

Your use of apps is key here. Apple's iOS has always led the way to date because of the sheer number of apps available, but the choice and variety on Android is now almost as good. Windows is still playing catch-up in this respect but Windows 10 could change things.



You can buy the Oppo N1 for £289 sim-free. Phones such as Apple's iPhone 6 will cost a lot more



Smartphones

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 6

Awards 2014: Best phone up to 5in
 "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, its performance is one that's hard to fault."



AWARD WINNER

Sony Xperia Z3

Awards 2014: Best phone 5in+
 "It takes everything we loved from the Z2 and makes it better, while refining the bits we didn't like so much in the process. The Xperia Z3 is the Sony smartphone we've been waiting for."



Samsung Galaxy Note 4

12.14 Group Test ★★★★★
 "Yes it's big, but if you're interested in it, you already know that. What you need to know is that it's worth every single inch of your pocket space."

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	12.14/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Google Nexus 6	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.96	1440x2560	32/64	160x83x10
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 4	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
Samsung Galaxy S II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7

Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history.

Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than



a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“ ... there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm. ”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
 40 High Street.
 t: 01233 624441
 www.soundcrafthifi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 216 Moulsham Street.
 t: 01245 265245
 www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
 9 High Street,
 Hampton Wick.
 t: 020 8943 3530
 www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead
AUDIO VENUE
 36 Queen Street.
 t: 01628 633995
 www.audiovenue.com

Norwich
MARTINS HI-FI
 85-91 Ber Street.
 t: 01603 627134
 www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 44a High Street.
 t: 01268 779762
 www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 132/4 London Road.
 t: 01702 435255
 www.rayleighhifi.com

LONDON

Ealing
AUDIO VENUE
 27 Bond Street.
 t: 020 8567 8703
 www.audiovenue.com

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI
 190a New North Road.
 t: 020 7226 5500
 www.grahams.co.uk

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
 61/63 Webbs Road.
 t: 020 7924 2040
 www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST
Bath
AUDIENCE
 14 Broad Street.
 t: 01225 333310
 www.audience.org.uk

Exeter
GULLIFORD HI-FI
 97 Sidwell Street.
 t: 01392 491194
 www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS
Banbury
OVERTURE
 3 Church Lane.
 t: 01295 272158
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 www.acoustica.co.uk

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 t: 0191 477 4167
 www.lintone.co.uk

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THE AUDIO ROOM
 Savile Street, Hull
 t: 01482 891375
 www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York

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 2 Gillygate.
 t: 01904 627108
 www.soundorg.co.uk

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 VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer - chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3

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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best speaker cable
QED XT40



QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best analogue interconnect
Atlas Element Integra



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

DACs
Best DAC up to £100
AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST DIGITAL AUDIO CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE



QED Performance Digital Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST USB CABLE
SUPRA USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★ Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★ A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★ This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★ With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5	1.3
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★ An assured, but expensive, performer	5	1.3a
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★ Not just pretty but it delivers impressive performance over eight metres	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★ Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★ One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★ It's pricey, but has good performance	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★ It's an enjoyable watch, although there's some reservation	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★ Flexible cable that delivers pictures as good as any HDMI cable at this price	7	1.0



Digital interconnects

- USB** An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
- Optical** Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
- Coaxial** Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★ Got a budget laptop and a budget DAC? This cable is ideal for connecting them	USB	1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★ Fine, substantial, budget cable choice	Optical	1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★ Simple upgrade to the iPod/iPhone-to-USB cable - music sounds cleaner and clearer	USB	2

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Chord Active V2 HDMI Cable



QED Reference Optical Quartz



Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable



QED Reference Audio 40 Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon USB to Lightning Cable



Atlas Hyper Integra Audio Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable



Tellurium Q Ultra Blue Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
June 2014

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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Best digital interconnect, Awards 2010. Excellent optical lead	Optical 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	This is another fine cable from the Copper-line stable. It's well worth a listen	Co-axial 1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	The sheer brilliance of this cable makes it stand out	Co-axial 0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made, but not quite as thrilling as we'd like	Co-axial 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB 2



Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



QED Reference Audio 40

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RC/Aphono 3.5mm-t-to-RCA XLR (blanaced)	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2014	● 1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	● 1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	● 1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	● 1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	● 0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA-phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	● 1
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	● ● 0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	● 1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	● 1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1.5
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● 1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100				
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-LAlpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
£100 and above				
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a

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Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

The shortlist



Talk Electronics Talk 3
£4/m



Wireworld Luna 7
£6.50/m



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

QED XT40
Awards 2014: Best speaker cable

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
Cl. Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch

Biwire

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BEST SPEAKER CABLE
QED XT40



QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Van Den Hul The Clearwater

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
WHATIFI.COM
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
RECOMMENDED
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2011
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST SPEAKER CABLE
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN



Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT

FutureShop
Recommended



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SPEAKERS CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Biwire
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics	
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable	
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own	
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade	
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition	
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7	

£10/m and above

Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed	
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance	●
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit	
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement	
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound	
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display	●
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	



Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2014	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	●	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5	Variable 60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	● 3	Variable 60x40	3

AV & HI-FI RACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	● 4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	● 1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	● 4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	● 3	42x77x40	4
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	● 3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	● 3	Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	4	Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	4	Variablex59x39.5	8
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	3	32x95x40	4
£500-£1000						
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	● 3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/FT	★★★★★	● 3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	● 2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x47	6
£1000 and more						
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	● 3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	● 3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	6	VariablexVariablex53	16

Accessories

Best equipment support

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 £450

What is it?

It's a thing of beauty, that's what it is. Kit racks don't generally get an appreciative "ooh" out of the team, but this one did - and that's all down to its ultra high-quality build and materials.

The shelves are made from solid bamboo, and come in three shades - light, medium and a sultry dark, and are set off by the glossy black legs (available in a variety of lengths to suit your kit) and shiny steel cone caps and spikes. Even better, it's modular, too: you can add extra shelves for £150 each - so it can grow as your system does.

Why did it win?

It saw our Cyrus CDi/Roksan Caspian M2 reference system deliver a confident, insightful and hugely enjoyable sound - with punchy bass, nuanced midrange and clear, open top-end.

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Best equipment rack
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

What the team say

"It's pricier than some rivals, but we think it's well worth it for that stellar build quality and materials, not to mention the way it works with our kit"



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in Outputs	
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●		1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x4x3x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9



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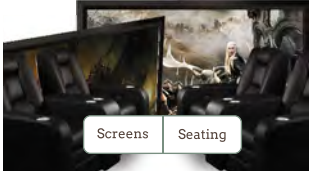
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14th May 2010
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★ "Very nearly the match of the all-powerful Chord Supershield"

QUOTE ME
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uPlay Puck Bluetooth Audio Receiver

QED



The QED uPlay bluetooth system allows you to play your music through your home stereo via Bluetooth technology.

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QED



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11th June 2008
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QED



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Performance Graphite Digital Optical Cable

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<p>NR1605 Slimline Network AV Receiver marantz</p> <p>Marantz are the experts when it comes into cramming in pure AV performance into one compact case.</p> <p>BEST PRICE</p> <p>✓ Wi-Fi and Bluetooth built in ✓ HDMI scaling 1080p, 4k 30Hz</p> <p>QUOTE ME 11376</p>	<p>RX-A3040 11.2 Channel AV Receiver YAMAHA</p> <p>The Yamaha RX-A3040 contains 9 channels of high-grade amplification which is expandable to up to 11.</p> <p>✓ Dolby Atmos ✓ "Best High-End AV Receiver"</p> <p>QUOTE ME 10872</p>	<p>VSX-S510 Slimline 6.2 Channel Receiver Pioneer</p> <p>Measuring just 85 mm high and 317 mm deep, the VSX-S510 slim receiver is still packed with tons of features.</p> <p>✓ Stream with ease ✓ 4K Ultra HD Ready</p> <p>QUOTE ME 14701</p>	<p>RX-A2030 Aventure AV Receiver YAMAHA</p> <p>Network AVENTAGE AV Receiver that ensures audiophile performance and features Advanced HDMI Zone Switching.</p> <p>47% OFF</p> <p>✓ 4K Upscaling ✓ Apple Airplay</p> <p>QUOTE ME 8046</p>
<p>TX-NR636 Black 7.2 Channel AV Receiver ONKYO</p> <p>It's one of the only A/V receivers to support future Ultra HD movie streaming as well as 4K gaming at 60 fps.</p> <p>BEST PRICE</p> <p>✓ 3D Ready ✓ Wi-Fi</p> <p>QUOTE ME 8298</p>	<p>SR6009 Black 7.2 Network AV Receiver marantz</p> <p>Fulfills some serious Hi-Fi demands with the integration of most current streaming technologies.</p> <p>✓ Apple Airplay ✓ Bluetooth</p> <p>QUOTE ME 11446</p>	<p>TX-NR3030 11.2 Channel AV Receiver ONKYO</p> <p>The TX-NR3030 serves up revolutionary Dolby Atmos surround-sound complete with liquid 4K video at 60 frames per second.</p> <p>✓ Dolby Atmos Sound ✓ Latest HDMI for 4K/60 Hz Video</p> <p>QUOTE ME 11915</p>	<p>AVR-X5200W 9.2 Channel Receiver DENON</p> <p>The AVR-X5200W is a powerful 9 channel amplifier with 11.2 channel processing and 13.2 preout.</p> <p>✓ Dolby Atmos Sound ✓ Easy to setup</p> <p>QUOTE ME 12405</p>

<p>2050i Floorstanding Speakers</p> <p>Constructed from superior long grain copper, each conductor is coated with silver for improved conductivity.</p> <p>ACOUSTICS</p> <p><i>"They're well built, with integral steel plinths and internal bracing that keep them sturdy."</i></p> <p>20th July 2010 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 5063</p>	<p>2010i Bookshelf Speaker Pair</p> <p>The Q Acoustics 2010i are the best that money can buy.</p> <p>10% OFF</p> <p>17th January 2012 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 4788</p>	<p>7000i Black 5.1 Speaker Package</p> <p>Unique shapes and sturdy aluminium cabinets sport a sleek matt finish.</p> <p>0% FINANCE</p> <p>8th October 2013 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 8100</p>	<p>Zensor 1 Bookshelf Speakers DALI</p> <p>DALI Zensor 1 offers a stunningly realistic soundstage for their price point.</p> <p>20th June 2011 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 6982</p>	<p>Zensor 5 Floorstanding Speakers</p> <p>The distinctive look of DALI's wood fibre cones complete the package blending sound and style effortlessly.</p> <p>DALI</p> <p><i>"The top of the frequency range is clean and detailed, and integration is smoothly achieved."</i></p> <p>6th October 2011 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 5429</p>
	<p>2020i Bookshelf Speaker Pair</p> <p>Great lines and superb performance, a great set of bookshelf speakers.</p> <p>10% OFF</p> <p>19th October 2011 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>QUOTE ME 4988</p>	<p>CX-S Satellite Speakers AUDICA</p> <p>Get the minimalist look. These will compliment any modern home.</p> <p>✓ Stylish ✓ Compact</p> <p>QUOTE ME 12174</p>	<p>Zensor 3 Bookshelf Speakers DALI</p> <p>Just one listen is all it takes to be completely seduced by their performance.</p> <p>AUDIOVISUAL ONLINE EXPERT PICK</p> <p>QUOTE ME 7443</p>	

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THAT WAS THEN

Epson EMP-TW100 LCD's giant leap

Epson LCD projector is best of breed

Epson EMP-TW100
LCD projector £6729
★★★★★

TOR
The best LCD projector we've seen for sensible money; runs quietly

AGAINST
Not quite as film-like as some rival DLPs – but it comes close

VERDICT
An excellent effort from Epson – easy to use, quiet-running and highly capable

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a bigger picture in your living room then a plasma TV is one option, but with a 42in display typically costing around £4000 you'll get many more inches – up to 100, in fact – from a similarly priced projector.

However, most affordable projectors use a liquid crystal display (LCD) panel, to generate images – and this can lead to problems. When blown up over a large screen, the LCD panel normally leaves a tell-tale 'chicken-wire' mesh (effectively, the LCD-panel structure blown up to large scale) over images. LCD projectors also tend to suffer both limited contrast and poor depth of field.

However, the Epson EMP-TW100 is different. Optimised for home cinema, although LCD-based, the Epson is far better than is typical of the breed. The key is an integral Faroudja DCDi de-interlacer. The company's DCDi chipset delivers 'directional correlational deinterlacing' – a sophisticated system of video processing that allows the projector to deliver progressive-scan imagery whatever the signal source. With most non-DCDi projectors you only get the benefit of progressive scan with your DVD player; with DCDi, you get it with your VHS, your laserdisc player and whatever else you want to feed into the projector.

The Epson has other virtues – it runs quietly, it's well equipped with inputs,

including component video for DVD players, S-Video and composite video for lesser signals, and connections for computer use. Also, it's easy to use and the performance is spot on: with a good DVD image like *Harry Potter* you'll be delighted with the quality, the depth of the blacks and the smoothness of motion. Colours are vivid and the 'chicken-wire' effect is minimised.

The Epson offers a strong all-round package for the money. It's one of the best LCD projectors we've seen.

Epson has overcome LCD's limitations

LEADING RIVAL
DreamVision CinexOne E3100
★★★★★ (June 2001)
High-quality DLP performance in a very compact case; highly competent

Sanyo PLV-30 £1995
★★★★★ (Awards 2001)
One of our long-standing LCD projection favourites – a bargain



Sony MD deck makes home recording a breeze

Sony MDS-JE480
MiniDisc recorder
£130

HOME RECORDING HAS undergone a quiet revolution in the last few years. The impact of digital formats has raised recording stan-



Back in 2002, LCD technology was still considered too compromised for serious home cinema use. We remember testing many a projector in which the limitations of clarity and lack of black depth were painfully apparent. It was products such as Epson's excellent EMP-TW100 that changed people's minds.

By the standards of the time, it delivered crisp detail and deep blacks the likes of which many believed LCD-display devices would never be capable. This was when DVD was booming, well before the days of Full HD, so the resolution of 1280 x 720 was more than adequate. Analogue connections ruled; there was component for the best-quality DVD replay alongside S-Video and composite for other, lesser sources.

The right perspective

Paying more than four grand today will buy you a very decent high-end projector. Back then, we considered the £4230 Epson a bargain, with serious high-end offerings starting at three times that price. Remember, this was a time when spending £8k on a top-end 50in Pioneer plasma was considered acceptable.

Fast forward to today's £1400 EH-TW6600 and it's amazing how much more we get for so much less. The TW6600 delivers Full HD, of course, and is vastly better than its predecessor when it comes to all aspects of picture performance. It does 3D and even packs in a set of speakers.

We're impressed by Epson. Back in 2002 it proved LCD projectors could be taken seriously. Ever since then it has worked hard to deliver better performance at increasingly lower price points. Judging by the EH-TW6600's showing in this month's group test, it's succeeding.

It delivered crisp detail and the kind of deep blacks many believed LCD devices would never be capable of

Today's EH-TW6600 emphasises just how far technology has advanced over the last decade



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