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February 2015 ₹100

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Boasting of 135 watts per channel, multiple zone playback, and built-in streaming options, this 9.2 channel THX Select2 Plus -certified network receiver will be the star of your home theatre setup.



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Calling all cinephiles! Here's the 5.1 receiver you've been waiting for. 75 watts per channel, 3D support, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio elevate this from 'excellent' to 'stunningly good'.



Onkyo TX-8020 (B)

This 2-channel AV receiver makes your favourite music come alive with its full-scale, broad-spectrum performance, superb dynamics and accurate timing. Your personal concert, that's what this really is!

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The slim, sleek and powerful solution to your quest for getting the ultimate sound quality from your TV this World Cup season



JBL SB350

They might be compact in size, but when it comes to sound, this soundbar and its wireless subwoofer are nothing short of a nuclear explosion. And the sleek design's the perfect icing for this rather tasty cake.



Philips HTL9100 Fidelio

It's got Dolby Digital and Pro Logic II but the star of this 4.1 channel wireless soundbar's amazing surround performance is the orientation sensor that ensures perfect sound reproduction.



Energy Power Elite

A 3D surround mode, 10in wireless subwoofer, and the ability to pump out some truly remarkable volume levels make this sleek looking soundbar the energy bar for your home theatre system.




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F&D T-280

Bluetooth 4.0 streaming, 90 watts of power, optical and coaxial inputs, 2in drivers with 1in tweeters, twin 4in subwoofers, and space for TVs up to 55in... Good things do come in small packages!



Denon DHT-T100

Anyone picky about balanced sound with exciting dynamics will love this soundbase. Making the deal even sweeter is the virtual surround mode, the aptX Bluetooth streaming, and the custom sound modes.



Onkyo LS-T10

Cinephiles and music fans finally have something to agree on! Solidly built, with a 6-driver array, AuraSphere digital processing, and Bluetooth streaming, the LS-T10 has something for everyone.

DOCKING SPEAKERS

Catch up on all the sports commentary even at the beach or at the gym with these power-packed docking speakers



JBL On Stage IV

The On Stage IV pairs its futuristic looks with some truly impressive specs - A 4-driver design, 110Hz - 20kHz response, USB input, iPhone and iPod docking, and up to 16 hours of playback.



Denon DSD-500 Cocoon

Dock, plug-in or stream with the Cocoon. Complementing the award-winning design are 2-way speakers, FLAC streaming, and a smartphone app for home media server and NAS playback.



JBL OnBeat Rumble

With a lightning connector for your new iPhone, TrueStream wireless technology for sublime sound, and Slipstream port for crisp-yet-deep bass, this compact dock is ready to rumble.



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Apple iPod nano 16GB Slate

With a 2.5in display, Nike+ support, built-in pedometer and a 30-hour playback time, the 16GB Apple iPod Nano packs a punch.



FiiO X1

The X1 should put a smile on any audiophile's face thanks to its support for high-resolution formats.



FiiO X5

Dual microSD slots, headphone, line and digital outputs, a 10-band EQ, and USB DAC capability makes this the cream of the crop.

ON-THE-GO

Late night match and don't want to disturb the kids? snapdeal has the perfect kit for you



JBL Freedom J56BT

The J56BT on-ear headset uses 40mm drivers and PureBass technology to give you balanced sound even when you're on the move.



FiiO E17 USB DAC/soundcard

A heaven-sent gift for the audiophile, the E17 features optical and coaxial inputs, a 1500mAh battery and a 10Hz-500KHz response.



Grado Prestige SR80e

Amazing versatility is yours for the taking with the Prestige SR80e and its signature warm, full-bodied sound with excellent dynamics.

KARAOKE GEAR

Liven up the half-time breaks and post-match celebrations with a lively karaoke session!



Persang Dzire Plus

Wireless freedom, Pitch Control, recording facility, live scoring and a 50 song reserve make this the life of your next party.



LG NK140

LG's ode to Indian music, the NK140 features over 3600 songs in 9 languages, and also has a recording facility.



Kortek KHM-150

On-screen lyrics, image and video backgrounds, and favourite song selection make it the best thing for a rainy day.



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WHAT HI FI? SOUND AND VISION

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This magazine contains 110 pages including both covers.

Hello/02/15



As a fellow audiophile, there are few experiences I cherish than spending quality time with quality hi-fi.

Unless you're the owner of a large retail outlet or part of a review-based publication like ours, I suspect it would be pretty impertinent to step into people's houses for a listening session on demand. But in our own little way,

we are trying to change that scenario. The first edition of the *What Hi-Fi Show* is coming back to Mumbai at the end of this month and at a venue unlike any other. Situated in the heart of the city, upholding the banner of luxury, the Palladium Hotel will be playing host to the biggest show of its kind. If you're even remotely interested in seeing and listening to the best systems in the world, missing this would be the source of much regret. You will find all the details inside, possibly to an event that could change your lifestyle.

It doesn't matter whether you consume your music through a 2-watt portable speaker or a 2000-watt mega system, it's important that it brings a smile to your face. This issue brings together a bunch of **Bluetooth speakers (p42), smartphones (p53), stereo amplifiers (p63), DACs** and **one-box systems** to make a veritable cocktail. Indulge in whatever tickles your fancy, just don't forget to keep it clean, legal and more than 320kbps.

Nishant Padhiar, Editor



Why we're No.1!

Experience and heritage

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

Dedicated test facilities

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

We spot big trends first

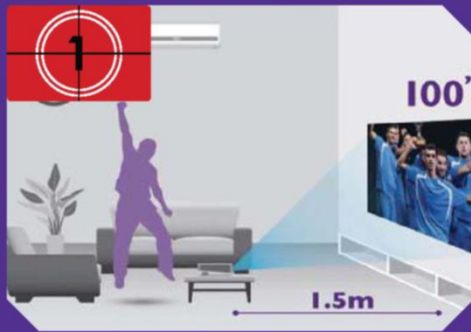
Don't blame us for breaking the best stories, it is a habit that ensures you get to learn about tomorrow, today



BRING HOME THE BIG SCREEN EXPERIENCE

BenQ's got a New Year gift for the sports fan and the cinema buff - The W1080ST+ and W1070+ Home Video Projectors. 300 inches of gorgeous, true-to-life movies and TV shows. Big screen entertainment, big screen gaming, and a ring side view of your favourite sports events, with special features that make them the perfect projectors for your home.

Gather your friends around to watch sports on the big screen



Go ahead, invite all your pals around to catch some World Cup action. Short of space? Never fear! With Short Throw Projection, you can move your projector as close as 1.5m away from the screen and still get a humongous, 100

inch image. BenQ's revolutionary Side Projection and Keystone Correction also let you keep your projector in an unused corner and yet get an accurate, big-screen image! Phew, that should be more than enough space for your cricket-mad friends to jump around. Howzzat?

Rearranged your room? Movie day at a pal's? Easy as pie!



Redecorating your living room or going over to a friend's house for a weekend movie marathon? Don't worry about where you're going to keep your new BenQ projector. Innovative features like Flexible Zoom and Lens Shift

literally open up the room (if you'll pardon the pun) when it comes to placement options. Just adjust the image and push play! Nope, nothing's going to come in the way of a fun-filled weekend of blockbuster movies, not even your Hi-Fi system or that new mini bar!

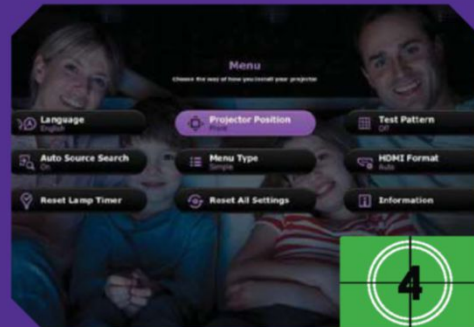
Hook up your HD DTH box to watch the latest TV shows



If your movies are getting the Full HD treatment, should your TV shows be left behind? Nope, that just won't be right. Guess what, BenQ's Full HD DTH support lets you connect your HD satellite set top box directly to your new

projector. Yup, you get all your favourite TV shows, documentaries, sports events, music videos, and movie channels not just in 1080p Full HD, but on a screen far bigger than any television set. Go on, make your favourite reality TV show even more real. We know you want to!

So easy to set up that even your folks can use it

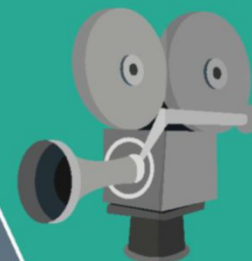


You don't need to be the techy sort to set up the new BenQ twins. An easy set-up wizard will have you watching your fav flicks in no time. In fact, your new BenQ projector is so easy to use, everyone in your family will want

to borrow it. Making things even easier is Auto Source Detection, which automatically highlights any new device, making it a simple plug-and-play affair. Want another reason to make your folks happy? How about the 2-year* warranty? Now that's peace of mind!



*BenQ offers a 2-year onsite warranty on all DLP projectors with a lamp warranty of 6 months or 500 hours, whichever is earlier
 Website: www.BenQ.co.in Customer Care Number: 1800-419-9979 Email: sales.enquiryin@BenQ.com



Show off your holiday snaps and home movies



Hate showing off your holiday snaps on an itchy-bitsy phone screen? How about on a nice, bright, 300 inch screen? Yup, MHL and USB connectivity will make your friends go bright green with envy. All you

gotta do is plug in your phone. But there's more for the gadget guru. How much more? VGA, Composite Video, and multiple audio options.... Yup, hook up your gaming console, laptop, tablet, DVD player, or even that new Hi-Fi system and get set for a weekend of big-screen entertainment.

Gaming's always more fun on the big screen



Ever fantasised about playing the latest shooter, sports title or strategy game on a screen so big it seems real? Of course you have! And you can now make this happen with your new BenQ projector.

Plug in your console or gaming PC and get ready to take on those evil alien monsters or help your team with the World Cup. And what's more, you also get NVIDIA 3D support, letting you play all your favourite games in mindblowing 3D. Now that's what we call immersion.

Blast out those tunes for a big screen concert experience



centre of it all? Well, whether it's F1, the World Cup, a summer blockbuster, or a concert, your BenQ projector's 10W (RMS) resonant chamber speaker gives you an immersive experience with its deeper bass and true to life hi-fidelity sound. Go on, rock your heart out!

Nutty sports buffs, diehard headbangers, and finicky audiophiles, can we have your attention? You want the best sound, don't you? Something that puts you up real close to the action? So close you'd think you were right in the

Atmospheric visuals and bright colours for anything



ISFccc certified projectors give you an optimal brightness of 2200 lumens. Then there's Brilliant Color tech that uses a 6x-speed, 6-segment RGB wheel to give you over a billion colours. But the icing on the cake is the DarkChip3 powered contrast. Perfect!

The dark visuals of a moody French flick? The terrifying shadows of a horror game? The bright colours of a peppy music video? Or the natural tones of a wildlife documentary? It's all possible! For starters, BenQ's



Because it matters

CONTENTS

Off The Shelf
"Bass is tight and plenty, thanks to the twin drivers"



Our products of the month



Sennheiser M2 IEi

First test p14

"One of the best in-ears we've heard in recent months, the M2 IEi sound clear, dynamic and full of detail"



Libratone Zipp BT

Supertest p42

"Like having sheep, but more practical and sounds better"



Sony Xperia Z3

Test p53

"It sounds exciting and engaging, with plenty of punch and attack"



Supertest Wireless speakers
"These five speakers must deliver the very best in design, features and usability to justify a place in our homes"

What's in this issue...

12 First Tests LG's 55EC930T OLED is a stunner, Sennheiser introduces a new face to the Momentum family with the M2 IEi in-ears and Google goes supersized with the Nexus 6.

42 Supertest: Wireless speakers We kick off February with speakers of the wireless kind. Five efforts in the ₹20,000 to ₹40,000 bracket will need to combine sound, design and functionality to prove they have what it takes to be a stellar piece of hi-fi.

53 Smartphones Five of the best flagship phones are here to prove that bigger is better as we scrutinise a handful of 5in+ efforts from Apple, Motorola, LG, Samsung & Sony.

63 Stereo amplifiers Stereo amps are evolving, and from ₹30,000 to ₹65,000, you can find a gem of an amplifier that's a mini-marvel. But which one do we think is best for you?

First Test
"It's almost impossible to pick up the Google Nexus 6 and not comment on its size"



Insider Stars of CES 2015 p20
The International Consumer Electronics Show 2015 has come to an end. We round up the best of the best...

Subscriptions p80
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Top Shelf p108
Sony resurrects our favourite audio companion from the past in a brand new avatar. Here is the new Walkman!



Group Test Stereo amplifiers
"These mighty machines have evolved to reflect the changing ways we listen to music"

Group Test Smartphones
"We've done the hard work for you and rounded up the very best 5in+ smartphones that money can buy"



72 Temptations We always look forward to anything from PMC, and as always, we aren't disappointed with the Twenty 26 floorstanders tempting us this month.

77 Off The Shelf The local test desk has had its hands full this month, thanks to two big packages. The Bose CineMate 120 and the Klipsch Stadium are put through the paces in comprehensive reviews.

82 Playlist We go back into a darkness with the Bluray of *Sin City 2: A Dame To Kill For*, and have a listen to a couple of new albums from Belle & Sebastian and Jon Hassell/Brian Eno.



Temptation
"Some products take a while to get under your skin, but not these."

The Buyer's Guide... comprehensive!

The most trusted hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated p85
With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it 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

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

EXCLUSIVE

Big 6 pushes the boundary

Google Nexus 6 | Smartphone | from ₹44,000

It's almost impossible to pick up the Nexus 6 and not make a comment on its size. Packing a 6in display, it's one of the largest smartphone screens on the market, and not that long ago would have been considered a small tablet rather than a take-everywhere phone.

It doesn't feel quite as ridiculous in the hand as perhaps it once would have, though. Samsung's successful Note range can take a lot of credit for that, while handsets from others have only helped cement the big-screen trend as here to stay.

The Nexus 6 itself is made by Motorola, which puts it in good hands if the most recent Moto X is anything to go by. In fact, it bears more than a passing resemblance to its stablemate, with the same curved back panel and indented M logo that provides the perfect place for your finger to rest in. It's a wholly plastic design, but feels well-built and sturdy, available in blue or white.

It doesn't have the premium design of the iPhone 6 Plus then, but many will find it easier to hold.

Speaking of the iPhone 6 Plus, there's really not much between it and the Nexus 6 in terms of physical size, despite the iPhone's screen being 0.5in smaller. The Nexus 6 is a touch wider, but height-wise there's hardly anything in it.

Controls kept to a minimum

There are very few physical controls on the Nexus 6, save for the ridged power button and volume rocker on the right-hand side. The 3.5mm headphone jack is placed in the middle along the top of the handset, with the nano SIM card slot next to it. There's no microSD card slot here though, which is a shame - you'll need to choose wisely between 32GB and 64GB when you buy it to ensure it sees you through.

Under the hood the Nexus 6 packs one of

the most powerful chipsets currently available, comprising Qualcomm's 2.7GHz Snapdragon 805 quad-core processor, the Adreno 420 GPU and 3GB of RAM.

It certainly seems to do its bit, and the Nexus 6 feels quick and responsive when zipping around menus, multitasking or playing games. Even with really graphic-intensive apps, like Gameloft's *Asphalt 8: Airborne*, we don't suffer from stutters or long load-times at any point.

The power behind the phone

Such a big screen needs a decent-sized battery to power it, and fortunately the Nexus 6 carries a 3220mAh power pack. It includes Qualcomm's QuickCharge 2.0, which gives you up to six hours of charge from a depleted battery in just 15 minutes.

Our battery rundown test, running a 720p video with wi-fi on at half brightness, saw it lasting 10 hours and two minutes, and with everyday use we still managed to get around a full day's usage out of it.

And so to that screen. At 5.96in it's just screaming to be used for watching films, with a Quad HD 1440 x 2560 resolution and 493ppi putting it up there with the best phone screens around, on paper at least.

In use, it can't quite match the Samsung Note 4 or iPhone 6 Plus's video performance, despite its resolution advantage over the latter. But it gives it a good go. Watch a Full HD clip and the screen looks plenty sharp enough with both text and images - it's not until it's compared with Apple's handset that you notice some of the finer details are a little soft. Landscape scenes don't have the same depth to them and textures, aren't quite as well realised.

The Nexus 6's colour palette certainly has a warmer tone to it than the iPhone too, but that's down to personal choice. We'd say the iPhone probably just pips it when it



It's a plastic design but well-built. The combination of flat sides and a gently rounded back make the Nexus 6 easy to hold too

comes to absolute balance, but the richer, more vibrant tone looks punchy and engaging rather than hugely unnatural.

We watch a couple of movies on this phone and it doesn't feel strange to do so - the 6in screen is somewhat of a sweet-spot for movie marathons, and means we don't even feel the need to cast it to our TV.

Aside from its large screen, one of the biggest talking points of the Nexus 6 is its inclusion of Android 5.0 Lollipop out of the box. This is the first time we've seen it on a phone, following its debut on the Nexus 9 tablet, and it's not an insignificant upgrade. Icons are simpler, colours are bolder and the overall appearance of it is flatter, stripped back and fuss-free. There are subtle new animations for opening and closing menus and the three main soft keys for navigation have been given a makeover.

Strengths inherent in the system

Without a doubt, the pure Android experience has always surpassed that of any manufacturer-tweaked offering, and this, alongside the Lollipop update, serves as a big selling point for the Nexus 6.

When it comes to music, Google's all-accepting nature means there's wider file compatibility, with FLAC playback up to 24-bit/96kHz supported.

Even so, its music capabilities fall short of the iPhone 6, lacking the same level of dynamics and timing that we love. There's drive, but the organisation isn't as tight and notes don't deliver the same level of depth or dynamic subtlety.

Listening to a stream of D'Angelo's *Sugah Daddy*, it's also clear that its presentation isn't as precise as the iPhone, with leading

We watch a couple of movies on this phone and it doesn't feel strange to do so - the 6in screen is somewhat of a sweet-spot for great mobile movie marathons, and means we don't feel the need to cast it to our TV once we get home

More handy than before

Yes, you may well find yourself using two hands to text – only the biggest hands will be able comfortably to stretch across the screen, but then that's a given with a device this size.

edges of the notes in the piano into a little soft. Try a movie without headphones and the Nexus 6's front-facing stereo speakers project a fairly solid, full-bodied sound directly at you, which the iPhone's sideways-firing speaker can't compete with. We'd argue the iPhone offers a little more clarity though.

A new focus

The Nexus 6 packs a 13MP camera, which has seen some improvements to the one on the Moto X, with a better sensor, image stabilisation and a wider aperture. However, despite it being a huge improvement on the poor camera of the Nexus 5, its performance still underwhelms. On a bright day it will produce sharp, clean and largely well-balanced shots with plenty of detail, but the autofocus can take some time.

For video, the Nexus 6 includes 4K filming at 30fps alongside its 1080p mode. There are no slo-mo or hyperlapse features, but there are always apps you can download if it's a feature you'll really miss.

Google's Nexus range has always been competitively priced. The 32GB version is available for ₹44,000, with the 64GB costing ₹5000. Compare that to the Samsung Note 4 32GB at ₹57,000, and the Nexus 6 seems a good deal.

Google's Nexus phones have always been a refreshing change from the norm,

Equipped with one of the most powerful processors available in phones, the Nexus 6 is responsive and smooth in operation

and the Nexus 6 undoubtedly continues that trend. Its screen is sure to divide opinion, while its vanilla Android experience remains unbeatable and alone makes a strong case for buying the Nexus 6.

However, with video and audio performance that can't match the iPhone 6 Plus or Samsung Galaxy Note 4, we have to dock it a star from the full five. If you can get to grips with its size, this is a hugely likeable phone where simplicity is king. But when it comes to performance, the Nexus 6 is bigger but unfortunately not better.

In detail



Operating system The fuss-free, visually appealing quality of Android 5.0 Lollipop is a real boon for the Nexus 6



Manufacturer's logo The '6' is made by Motorola and has the good fortune to resemble the impressive Moto X



Charging bonus Qualcomm's QuickCharge 2.0 technology on the Nexus will give you six hours' use from a 15-minute charge

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great screen; fast performance; vanilla Android; front-facing speakers; well priced

AGAINST Video lacks fine detail; camera could be better; music a little soft; no microSD slot

VERDICT Bigger may not be better, but the Nexus 6 is still a compelling smartphone

Also consider Samsung Galaxy Note 4 ★★★★★ ₹57,000

This is a multi-talented marvel, with a superb screen, fast performance, excellent camera and hi-res music



Sennheiser Momentum M2IEi | In-ear headphones | ₹6990

Sennheiser marches on with Momentum

Some headphone ranges are just plain confusing. Mixing multiple designs and model numbers is a recipe for a sore head. Sennheiser's Momentum range has no such issues. First came the launch of the excellent over-ears, followed by a smaller pair of on-ears. Still with us? Now there's a third addition to the family, in the shape of a pair of dedicated in-ears: the M2 IEis.

The Momentum range has a reputation for style and comfort, and these new in-ears continue the trend. They mix a modern look with a classy finish, the earpieces look striking in their deep-red colourway, and they're complemented by a two-tone headphone cable and in-line remote.

Stand out from the in-crowd

Small details like the Sennheiser logos and cable loops on each earpiece make the Momentums stand out from the crowd at this level. Even the in-line mic and remote has been designed to blend in with the rest of the package - the chunky, yet discreet, buttons don't leave you fumbling around

Play a few tracks and the M2IEi show all the signs of quality buds. They promote a smooth and balanced sound, similar to that displayed by the Momentum on-ears and over-ears

and the mic reads you loud and clear. The M2 IEis feature an in-line mic and remote for Apple smartphones, while a variant called the M2 IEG carries the relevant control/mic combination for Android mobiles.

Fit is excellent and comfort levels are very good - you get a choice of four different-sized eartips to help deliver a good seal, which is easy to arrive at.

Play a few tracks and the in-ears show all the signs of quality buds. They promote a smooth and balanced sound similar to that displayed by both their big brothers. There's plenty of drive and a great sense of

musicality: lows are rich and weighty. Play Jay-Z's *Already Home* and the pounding bass notes at the beginning of the track are full-bodied, but they still arrive with purpose and intent. Leading edges are well defined, and the pace of the track is aided by the 'phones' nimbleness and ability to keep a fast-tempo. Highs are precise: the strings looping in the background poke and pulse out of the top of the presentation with impressive dynamism.

Church-going

There's a fine sense of clarity to the sound, too. Play Hozier's *Take Me to Church* and there's an impressive sense of spaciousness around instruments and vocals. Finer elements, such as the echo and reverb around his vocal, are easy to pick out and the tune has a real sermon-like feel to it.

Sennheiser's Momentum range has made a real impact and it's fair to say the latest addition deliver on all fronts. They're a step above most similarly-priced rivals available in the market today, and definitely worth the price. In fact, they're quite easily the best pairs of buds we've heard this year.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Comfy fit; attractive design; clear and detailed sound; tight, full-bodied bass; expressive mids and highs

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT Sennheiser's Momentum range grows and so does our admiration

Also consider

SoundMagic E10S

₹2399 ★★★★★

These Award-winning in-ears though pocket friendly-er, are capable of brilliant all-round sound quality.

The Sennheiser Momentum M2IEi can be tucked away nicely in a tidy travel case



USE IT WITH
Apple iPhone 6

Makes sense, really, given this version of the Momentum has a compatible in-line control and mic



The chunky, yet discreet, control buttons don't leave you fumbling, while the in-line mic reads you loud and clear.



Sony PHA-3AC | Digital-to-analogue converter | ₹74,990

Sony serves up a tidy desktop organiser

For a company with such a rich history in digital audio replay, we're surprised it's taken Sony so long to jump on to the desktop DAC bandwagon. The PHA-3AC is just the second such device we've seen from the company, and it's more left-field than we would have expected.

This DAC is small (imagine something a little taller than a pack of cards) and, at 230g, it's pretty light too. The inclusion of an on-board battery suggests true portability, but this doesn't pan out in use. The battery is there to smooth the power feed to the audio circuits, but can't power the PHA-3AC by itself - disconnect the power input and the unit stops working. We tried to power the unit from our computer. It worked for a while and then shut down, so you'll need the extra grunt of the supplied mains powered USB charger to keep it working.

Three is a magic number

The PHA-3AC has three USBs: a full-size connection for streaming music from iOS devices, a micro alternative to do the same from a computer or Xperia phone, and a second micro just for power (5V DC). You can add optical to the list of inputs, and a 3.5mm jack connection that can act as both input and output for an analogue signal. Look at the front panel and you'll find three 3.5mm headphone outputs. One is a conventional stereo output, while the remaining pair is intended for 'phones with balanced inputs - while Sony make a few compatible units, it's an uncommon configuration. It's also something we would have swapped for a dedicated 6.3mm output - we suspect anyone spending this money on computer audio will have a good pair of headphones. A lot of these still come with the larger jack input. Sure, adapters could be used but it's not ideal.

Sony's stream weaver

The PHA-3AC will cope with music streams up to 32-bit/384kHz, as well as DSD in both 64 and 128 forms. You have to use Sony's 'Hi-Res Audio Player' software if you want to play DSD files. It's

available in both Mac and PC flavours. If you have a PC you'll need driver software too.

This DAC's build is good. It's a nicely finished unit, though lacking the luxury feel we expect at this price. Look inside and it's clear Sony has specified some good-quality parts, including the highly regarded ESS Technology ES9018 DAC chip.

Straight to the source

This Sony produces a pleasing sound - it's fast, detailed and composed. We start with our resident MacBook as source and are pleased with what we hear. A 320kbps-version of alt-J's *Nara* is as layered and organised as we hope for, the DAC doing well rendering the song's growing intensity.

We try the PHA-3AC's DSEE HX feature. It's meant to improve the sound of lower bit-rate recordings and it does that - to a certain extent. The feature adds more high-frequency reach and makes the presentation notably more spacious. The effects are more pronounced the lower the bit-rate, as a listen to a 192kbps-file of Eminem's *Stan* shows. There are small losses in rhythmic drive, though.

Such source material isn't a great test of dynamic ability so we move onto Hans Zimmer's *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* OST. Here the Sony shows lovely cohesion throughout the frequency range. The tonal balance is nicely even. There's plenty of agility too, and pleasing composure as the

This Sony DAC produces a pleasing sound. It's fast, detailed and composed: alt-J's *Nara* is as layered and organised as we hope for

music builds: crescendos hit hard, there's plenty of impact, yet at no point does the DAC tend towards undue aggression. We're happy with detail levels too. Sure, the cheaper (but arguably less well-featured) Audiolab M-DAC edges ahead in outright transparency and renders low-level nuances with more confidence. But listen to this Sony on its own terms and it still pleases. A CD rip of Leonard Cohen's *Slow* shows decent rhythmic integrity, as does Stevie Wonder's *Higher Ground* on DSD.

The PHA-3AC doesn't overtly favour one file type over another. We also tried it with an iPhone 5, as well as a Sony Xperia Z3, with fine results. In both cases the DAC showed greater control and subtlety than the phones' output.

The PHA-3AC is a fine performer, with a pleasing blend of strengths. If you're in the market for a DAC, give this one a listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Articulate presentation; level of insight; file compatibility; smartphone compatibility

AGAINST Lacks the quality feel expected at this price; class leaders offer more transparency

VERDICT A good product, but the PHA-3AC isn't a class-leader

Also consider

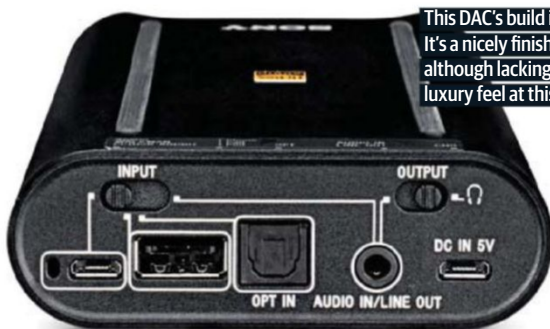
Arcam airDAC ₹54,000

★★★★☆

This Arcam remains a top-class product in this category and range.



This DAC's build is good. It's a nicely finished unit, although lacking the luxury feel at this price



USE IT WITH

Beyerdynamic T5i

This is the latest version of Beyerdynamics small on-ears. They're beautifully made and very capable.



Arcam FMJ A39 | Stereo amplifier | ₹1,68,000

Middle child awaiting maturity

Arcam's FMJ family of integrated stereo amplifiers has already tasted success this year, with a 2014 Product of the Year Award for the excellent FMJ A19. Now it's the turn of the range's middle child, the A39, to show us what it can do in the sub-two lakh market.

When it comes to design, it shares a similar look to the rest of the family, with a sturdy black steel and aluminium shell, front-mounted controls and a dimmable display. (A green light will appear above the source you have selected - you simply need to select the corresponding button to choose what you want to hear.)

There are a total of six labelled line-level inputs for hooking up your various bits of kit, alongside a moving-magnet phono stage (which can be bypassed for a further line level in, should you need) and two analogue outs, with both a 3.5mm input and 3.5mm headphone output mounted on the front. There are no digital inputs, but there is an upgrade path offered in the form of a second internal power supply, which can drive products from Arcam's rSeries (including the rDAC, rPAC, rLink and rBlink).

Cool runnings

Inside the A39, Arcam has used a class-G amplifier, which we've previously seen in its home cinema amplifiers. This basically makes the amp capable of big, powerful sound without wasting electricity as heat. The result is not just a more efficient, environmentally friendly amp, but also a much cooler-running one. Even when we pushed it to volume levels unlikely to be used regularly at home, it remained relatively cool to the touch and certainly cooler than its big competitor, the Rega Elicit-R.

It also offers a rather impressive 120w per channel into 8 ohms and 240w into 4ohms too, which should make it capable to drive even the most demanding of price-appropriate speakers.

The power at its disposal is one of the first things you'll notice - the A39 offers an impressively large soundstage and a superb sense of scale to whatever you throw at it. There's real punch here and bass notes are weighty and precise, yet

agile enough to keep the track driving forward with a decent level of precision.

However, while there's plenty of authority in the way it handles tracks, and an eagerness to please with a get-up-and-go attitude, it still can't quite match the Rega Elicit-R for out-and-out rhythmic precision.

Chain reaction

Play Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain* and there's a natural fluidity to the Rega that the Arcam just can't match - the various layers of instruments and vocals don't quite combine and complement one another as seamlessly as they do with its competitor. Switch up the tempo to India Arie's *Ready For Love* and the A39 lacks the Rega's level of insight to deliver every last drop of emotion and nuance in Arie's intimate delivery.

It's not miles off, but at this level it's the small differences that matter, and losing these subtle details makes the Arcam feel a little restrained and impersonal by comparison. The Arcam is very much at home with big-volume, big show-stopper tracks - this is when it

The power at its disposal is one of the first things you will notice about the Arcam A39 - it'll take anything you can throw at it

does its best work dynamically. It's the lower levels of dynamics, the softer, more delicate details that it struggles to show off with quite the same authority, though.

Tonally it's neutral and well balanced, and stereo imaging is stable, keeping a strong soundstage even when tracks get busy. Leading edges aren't always the smoothest, packing impact but without much body, and as such we'd be careful with the quality of tracks you play through the A39: it's not all that forgiving.

Authority figure

However, after saying all this, the Arcam A39 is still a good stereo amplifier with plenty to offer - it just falls down when it's compared to our Award-winner at this price. If scale and authority are high on your must-haves list, then this Arcam is certainly worth an audition. But it needs to take greater consideration of timing and fine detail to earn the full five stars at this price. A worthy effort, nevertheless.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big soundstage; scale and authority; decently detailed; tonally neutral; stable stereo imaging; weighty bass; unfussy speaker pairing

AGAINST The best out there simply betters it

VERDICT A powerful, authoritative stereo amp, but it needs better timing and detail

Also consider

Rega Elicit-R ₹1,80,000*

★★★★★

Our Award-winner, the Rega Elicit-R does a better job with lower-level dynamics.



System builder total build ₹4,58,020

Q Acoustics Concept 40 ₹1,27,000

★★★★★

A wonderfully engaging pair of floorstanding speakers that will complement the Arcam's scale and authority well.



Rega RP6 ₹1,20,000* ★★★★★

This multi-Award winning turntable delivers exceptional performance through clever design and engineering solutions



Shure SRH1540 ₹43,020 ★★★★★

Dynamic and exquisitely detailed, these Shure's offer a balanced presentation with a fast and nimble manner that can handle even the subtlest of rhythmic shifts.



The A39 shares a similar look to the Arcam family, with a sturdy black-and-aluminium shell



JBL CinemaBase | Soundbase | ₹24,990

It's a hit: JBL makes first 'base



Top marks to JBL for consistency. Its debut soundbase, the aptly named Cinema Base, largely mirrors its soundbar equivalent (the SB 350) in the company's new range. We were impressed with the SB350, and now the Base follows suit, possessing a similarly decent sound, rugged build and smart design.

Priced somewhere in the middle of our two Cambridge Audio and Canton Award winners at a rather tempting ₹24,990, it's pretty good value, too, when you consider its strong performance.

Ready for action

Big, dynamic and excellently detailed, its sound is easy to buy into - not least for the action-movie junkies among us.

We unwrap and spin our new *Godzilla* Blu-ray, throwing the JBL straight into the thick of the action. As the chaos gets underway, it's immediately clear that the Base's dual 9cm woofers don't hold back. As the MUTO breaks free from its containment, its stomps bear the heaviness and depth we'd expect from a dedicated subwoofer in a budget speaker package. The bassy sound is floor-rumbling as it reverbs around the room. It can be a little overpowering, mind, so we'd knock it down a few notches to get the best sonic balance.

The Cinema Base is capable of volume

that'll make you sit right back in your seat when *Godzilla* growls, and its big, enveloping soundfield does wonders to draw you into the film's havoc and keep you there - even without JBL's surround-sound mode turned on.

More than just loud

Partner that with headstrong dynamics and a solid delivery and you've got a truly engrossing performance.

Our praise subsides momentarily when it comes to the midrange. It feels a bit restrained. Though the Base trumps the cheaper Cambridge Audio TV2 in some areas (dynamics, for one), mids aren't as clear or well projected as they are through the TV2. Dialogue is weighty and reasonably expressive through the JBL - you can hear the exasperation in Bryan Cranston's voice as he shouts at officials - but in lengthy dialogue-heavy scenes, you wish voices were that bit more defined.

Treble stays duly behind the brightness threshold for the most part, but we'd like more a touch more definition and insight at the higher frequencies.

The JBL is a solid performer with music, its handling of a movie track paralleled in a musical setting. It laps up the meaty bassline in Daft Punk's *Around The World* as we stream it over Bluetooth, and has the

JBL's first soundbase has it, but doesn't flaunt it: fulsome sound, sober design

attack and rhythm to get your foot tapping.

We admire the effort JBL has put into aesthetics, even though the result (shiny edges on a matt-black chassis) is muted. The curved front grille saves this from being 'just another' rectangular box, too.

JBL says the Cinema Base is designed for up to 60in tellies, as long as the TV's stand doesn't exceed the unit's 60 x 40cm size.

The Base has an uncommon trick up its sleeve: a USB charging port (not an input) means you can revive your smartphone or portable while, say, watching a movie.

Also picking up points for practicality is the placement of the optical and 3.5mm inputs and HDMI ARC output, around the back. There's plenty of room around the sockets for owners of chunky cables.

The only blip in design is the feeble credit card-style remote, which is all-too easy to lose down the side of the sofa.

Commendable debut

JBL is one of many brands to channel its soundbar expertise into the burgeoning foray of soundbases of late, and the Cinema Base is a decent first effort by the company.

There's little to fault with design, and plenty to applaud with the sound. It might not be the last word in clarity or detail (up top), but its weighty, dynamic presentation makes it an appealing proposition for anyone looking for a decent upgrade in sound. At this price, it demands a listen.

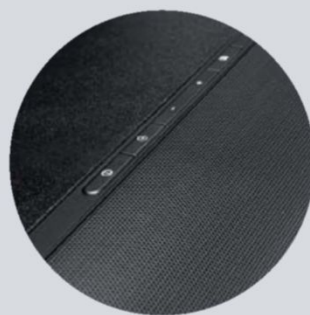
In detail



Remote control The buttons are all there but it's a shame this handset has such a lightweight, flimsy feel



USB port It doesn't function as a standard input but this slot will charge your portable device.



Physical controls In keeping with the overall design, the on-unit controls are neat, discreet and easy to use.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Dynamic and weighty; lashings of bass; smart design; takes most TVs; charging ability

AGAINST Midrange could be clearer; treble needs greater insight; poor remote

VERDICT Delivering a good sound at an appealing price, this JBL is worth a punt

Also consider

Cambridge Audio TV2 ₹22,600

★★★★★ It doesn't have the JBL's big, dynamic sound but there's plenty to like in its rich, balanced delivery and it's cheaper, too.



LG finds a stunning angle on OLED

It is a period of civil war: plasma is dead, and emerging technologies are vying for a foothold in the market. Ultra High Definition (or 4K) is exciting but largely absent, with no indication of when it will stop hugging the horizon. OLED has been hailed as the ultimate weapon for years, but is only now priced sensibly enough for mere mortals.

Essentially, nobody knows how the future of televisions will unfold. Perhaps we will see an influx of UHD content next year, perhaps not. What we do know is this: right now, more than 99 per cent of your content will be in Full HD or standard definition. Right now, at 1080p, we're in love with the LG 55EC930T.

A lot can change in a year. The last time LG brought us an OLED TV, it cost around ten lakhs. So what's the fuss about OLED?

For the uninitiated, OLED stands for Organic Light Emitting Diode. It's a panel of self-lighting pixels, which means none of the backlighting panels found in LCD screens. When a pixel turns off, it goes pitch-black so, in theory, it delivers properly dark black levels that are arguably deeper than anything you'll find on the lamented plasmas, while maintaining the punchy brightness of LCD screens. The perfect balance, then.

LG's take on OLED means the addition of a fourth (white) sub-pixel to the standard RGB (red, green and blue) group, which the company promises will enhance colour range and accuracy.

Stunning picture

In practice, the picture is nothing less than exhilarating. Those promised black levels are not an exaggeration: when the picture is black, it's hard to tell if the TV is even on. It's a genuine absence of light, and we can't ask for more. That's one significant advantage OLED has over LCD screens.

When it comes to bright scenes, the LG is just as happy to oblige. It radiates when fed

anything colourful, such as a Blu-ray of *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. Hues are punchy and vibrant, yet not overdone.

The level of contrast impresses. It's a dynamic picture, capable of juggling light and dark effortlessly. You do need to be careful with OLED light levels, however - make it too bright and you lose out on texture and gradation in light areas. We were very happy with it set at 70 per cent.

There is virtually no picture noise, unlike plasma, which means a wonderfully clear picture. Images are sharply defined. There's plenty of detail, but none of it is over-etched or tiring. This TV also demonstrates remarkable precision. Areas of light on dark (say, yellow words on black) are disciplined, with no halo effects.

Tweak to taste

Motion is fairly well handled too. Out of the box, the 'Trumotion' processing is rather zealous. Even on the more subtle 'Clear' setting there's a hint of the soap-opera effect that turns *The Avengers* into an episode of *Coronation Street*. No processing at all, however, leads to a little judder. It's best to choose the manual option and bump up 'De-blur' and 'De-judder' a notch or two.

If you're a fan of 3D, we have good news for you. This LG puts in a capable performance. The passive set-up is comfortable to watch, with no flickering. Images are vibrant, even with the tinting on the glasses. The picture could be smoother, with a greater sense of depth, but the effect is fast and immersive.

There are four pairs of glasses in the box. Well, two pairs of glasses, and two pairs of shades that you clip onto your own spectacles. That's an excellent move, LG.

We move down to standard definition with a DVD and it's a decent performance too. Inevitably there's a fall in sharpness, but the contrast holds strong. Broadcast pictures look more processed, but the variation on suggests it's more down to

Whether or not you're seduced by the curve, this fine LG screen is a thing of beauty

individual channel quality.

Sound quality is fine, but not as impressive as the picture. We rarely hear a flat screen we really like, and this LG is no exception. The sound isn't particularly smooth or weighty, but it's inoffensive enough for casual viewing. For films, we'd recommend getting speakers or a soundbar.

Straight talking on the curve

Now, let's talk about the curve. This is a curved TV. Why? There is no definitive reason, and only some murmurs about eye ergonomics. Does it work? We're still divided on the matter. Some of us find it natural and immersive. There is more depth to the picture, like a very mild form of 3D without the glasses. Others might see it as a distracting gimmick. The curve is not particularly pronounced, and the effect is not prominent. Viewing from the side feels a little odd, as the picture doesn't taper away uniformly like you'd expect from a flat screen. And if you want the TV mounted on the wall, you can do that too.

The best position for optimal viewing is dead centre, but that doesn't mean an exclusive 'sweet spot'. Feel free to move about on the sofa. It was only when we got past about 35 degrees from centre that the picture started to look warped.

The rest of the design is less fancy, but quite beautiful. There's barely any bezel to speak of, and much of the screen is wafer-thin. Peeking out from below is a simple metal stand. It's an understated affair, much more elegant than the

A grid-like layout for the standard handset, but the smart remote has a curve of its own



Out with the old, in with the OLED

OLED technology isn't totally new. In 2007 we tested an 11in OLED screen, which cost around ₹3,60,000. But the tech soon made its way into some smartphones and, eventually, televisions. It has several advantages over current LCD panels, and the plasmas of old. LCDs have backlighting panels, which often result in uneven lighting and even light bleeding. Plasmas had cells of heated gas: images weren't particularly sharp, power consumption was higher, and the screens were a lot heavier. OLED's self-lighting pixels mean no backlighting or gas - and none of their disadvantages - but they are difficult to make. The manufacturing fail rate for OLED panel production is far higher than for LCD alternatives.



In practice, the picture is nothing less than exhilarating. This LG radiates when fed anything colourful, such as a Blu-ray of *Guardians Of The Galaxy*

wavy sheet of Perspex that supported LG's last effort. A generous selection of ports includes four HDMI 1.4 inputs, three USB 2.0 ports, an optical out, a headphone out, and adapter ports for legacy connections (SCART, composite, component). There's an ethernet socket, but wi-fi is also present.

Two remote controls are included: the standard button-stick and a fancy banana-shaped 'Magic Remote'. This has built-in gyroscopes that sense your movements to control the on-screen cursor.

A super-slick smart platform

Pointing-and-clicking is the best way to navigate this TV. It's all part of LG's WebOS: a super-slick smart platform that lets you juggle live TV with all your inputs and apps. Switching through sources is seamless, like changing channels. It's lovely to use.



USE IT WITH

Dali Zensor 15.1

With a suitable AV amp this package is everything the LG deserves.

The app offering is decent, but not quite comprehensive. All sources appear as pop-up titles in a neat line in the 'Launcher'. Choose one or get rid of them to resume viewing - no faffing with home screens.

The LG 55EC930T can't do 4K. And while it would be tempting to knock it for this reason, we won't. Currently there is very little 4K content and there's no telling when more will come. We're not holding our breath. Meanwhile, this LG's OLED beauty is real, and it's offering to do a wonderful job of your content - right now - for a fair price. If you want to make the most of what you're watching today, it should be taken very seriously indeed.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Genuine blacks; punchy colours; wonderful clarity; that curve

AGAINST Could sound better; that curve

VERDICT OLED enters the realms of affordability - and it looks lovely

Needs to beat

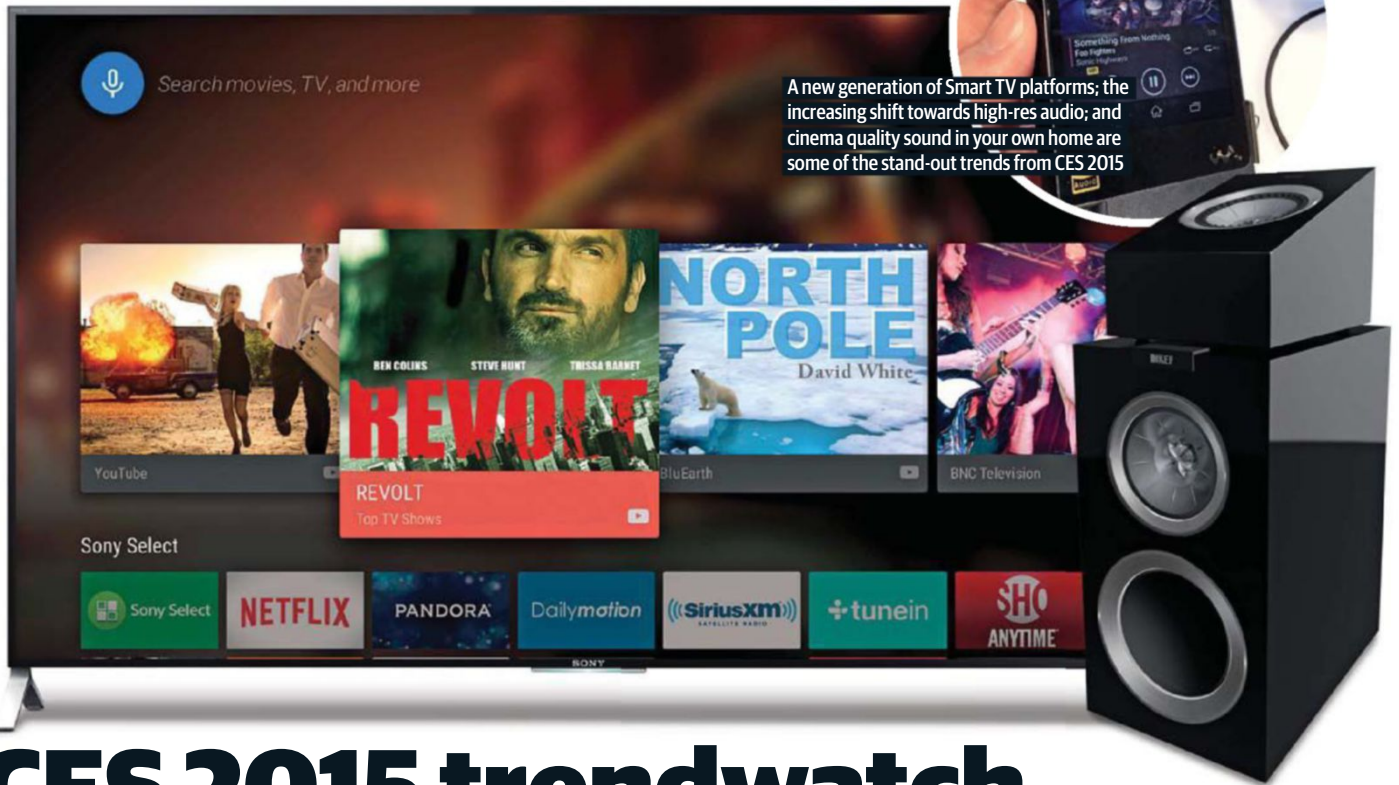
Samsung UA55HU7200

₹2,36,500 ★★★★★

Not OLED, but it is 4K - and costs much less



CES 2015



A new generation of Smart TV platforms; the increasing shift towards high-res audio; and cinema quality sound in your own home are some of the stand-out trends from CES 2015

CES 2015 trendwatch

The tech expected to rule the hi-fi and home cinema roost this year

Each January, the focus of the tech industry is on Las Vegas, as the annual International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) kick-starts the year with a showcase of a slew of new products and technologies.

What Hi-Fi? was on the showfloor all week to figure out what we should be looking out for in 2015, whether it's in the world of TV, home cinema, hi-fi or portables.

Small screens, big deals

TVs often grab the headlines at CES and this year was no exception, with manufacturers aplenty introducing new sets they hope will

create waves in the months ahead.

It was no surprise to find Ultra HD 4K screens even more prevalent, but screen technology has diversified. LG has put its faith in OLED, Panasonic has developed a new Wide Colour Phosphor technology, Samsung unveiled 'SUHD' screens, and there were new TVs featuring Quantum Dot and High Dynamic Range technology, too. From offering better-than-ever pictures to making 4K screens more affordable, there is plenty promised in the TV market in 2015.

It's not just TV hardware that made a real impression at CES 2015. Smart TV platforms will clearly be a key battleground in 2015, with LG's webOS, Samsung's Tizen and Sony's Android operating systems set to shake-up how our television's interfaces look and perform, not least in terms of greater integration with mobile devices.

The new year's resolution

If 4K is the next step forward in TV, in hi-fi circles it's all about high-resolution audio. Sony unveiled its latest high-res, DSD-supporting NWZ-ZX2 Walkman. Neil Young, meanwhile, was extolling the many virtues

of his Kickstarter-funded Pono Player - now on sale in the US.

And again - as TVs proved - it won't all be about the hardware. Meridian Audio used the show as a stage on which to demonstrate the potential of MQA, a new format that aims to package more efficiently studio master quality files for downloading and, potentially, streaming. Tidal, which runs a CD-quality streaming service, confirmed to *What Hi-Fi?* that it is working with Meridian on a high-res streaming service.

A cinema experience... at home

Dolby Atmos has been labelled "the most significant development in cinema audio since surround sound" (by Dolby, admittedly) but it's not alone in wanting to shake up the home cinema market.

DTS:X is an "object-based codec technology" that made its debut at CES, with 90 per cent of major home AV companies set to launch products this year that support the codec. A rival to Atmos? Sounds like it.

There was much more to see at CES 2015, and we'll be on hand to report any new developments in the world of high-end audio and video as they come in.



* Lindy headphone amp

Lindy has introduced its new Mini Headphone Amp and Splitter for your portable device



* Classics Online HD-LL

A new lossless streaming and download service specialising in classical music has arrived



CES 2015 FACTS & FIGURES

2.2 million net square feet of exhibition space

More than 3600 exhibitors and 170,000 attendees

20,000+ products launched at CES 2015

US\$223.2bn - consumer electronics predicted revenues

Took place from Jan 6 - Jan 9, 2015 in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

2015 TV tech explained

Dolby Vision is billed as an end-to-end solution from the creation of content to distribution and playback. Philips, Hisense, Toshiba and TCL have said they will produce Dolby Vision TVs.

High Dynamic Range (HDR) promises more dynamic pictures, with deeper black levels and brighter colours. HDR content will be available to stream via the Dolby Vision platform, while LG, Samsung and Sony have plans for HDR-ready TVs.

Quantum Dot adds a film in front of an LCD backlight to improve the reproduction rate of picture colour and overall brightness. LG, TCL and other brands have announced Quantum Dot TVs.

SUHD is Samsung's marketing term for the company's Quantum Dot TVs. We await LG rapidly devising of a similar rebranding exercise for the company's sets.

Three of the best 2015 TVs



Sony X90C

You'll need to take a good look at the image above to make sure you don't miss this TV. At just 4.9mm at its thinnest point, this new 4K TV from the Japanese tech giant is said to be the thinnest Ultra HD screen hitting shelves in 2015. It's one of six 4K models coming to the market this year from Sony, with 55in and 65in variants of the X90C set to be available. No pricing has been confirmed as yet, but we do know that, like all Sony 2015 TVs, they'll sport a new Android TV platform.

LG EG9600

OLED is the way forward for LG this year, and the EG9600 (below) is among its Ultra HD 4K OLED line-up for 2015. It will be available in 55in and 65in screen sizes and, as you'll have noticed, comes with a curved design. However, LG will also have flat and even flexible OLEDs going on sale this year, with all the new TVs running WebOS 2.0 - the latest version of LG's smart interface that promises to be faster and more customisable.

Samsung SUHD TVs

Samsung is claiming to redefine what TV is capable of in terms of brightness, contrast, detail and colour reproduction with its three-strong range of SUHD TVs. The series ranges from 48in to 88in with the JS9500 (below), JS9000 (below right) and JS8500. One of the innovations involved is the SUHD re-mastering engine that analyses how bright an image is to minimise additional power consumption, without sacrificing contrast levels. The curved design has also been refined by Samsung for 2015.



Stars of CES...

...the most exciting new specialist hi-fi and home cinema products

Stars of
CES 2015

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

STARS OF CES 2015

Hot from the engineers ovens, these are the game changers of the year from the biggest AV gathering in the world...

1 Astell & Kern

Astell & Kern has broken new ground at CES 2015 in Las Vegas with the launch of its first desktop audio product in the form of the AK500N. The AK500N was described as the "ultimate MQS (Mastering Quality Sound) network audio player", with features including one-click CD-ripping, DLNA-based networking capabilities and PCM to DSD conversion. Two speeds - normal and fast - are available for ripping CDs, with files saved in either WAV or FLAC. The dedicated DSD chipset converts high-res 32 bit/384 kHz WAV PCM and 24 bit/352 kHz FLAC PCM files to DSD64 data with no down-sampling. Real time PCM-to-DSD64 playback is available too.



2 Sennheiser

Sennheiser introduced a brand new RS line of digital wireless headphones along with a freshly-designed line of the popular Momentum range. The RS line comes with four designs up for grabs, each using Sennheiser's proprietary wireless link technology for reliable connectivity, with a base unit provided for charging. Sennheiser also unveiled a new range of sports in-ears, which is made up of four different water-resistant designs, with different fits.

3 Chord Hugo

Exactly a year after it introduced the portable Award-winning Hugo DAC/headphone amp, Chord Electronics has now expanded the Hugo range with a better equipped desktop version. The desktop Chord Hugo TT features improved connectivity and performance, a remote control, alphanumeric LED display and an asynchronous USB-B digital input. There's support for up to 32-bit/384kHz audio via coaxial and USB, and 24-bit/192kHz over optical, as well as DSD64 across all inputs and DSD128 via coaxial or USB.





*** Philips NC1L with Lightning port**
Philips' new NC1L noise cancellers are among the first headphones to feature an inbuilt-DAC and plug directly into Apple's lightning port



5 Jeff Rowland

Not one to rush on a new product, American legend, Jeff Rowland wanted to get it just right with the Daemon integrated amplifier. The selector dial which peeks out is actually as large as an LP inside the unit and that was the only way Jeff could achieve the smoothness and feel he wanted. A large touchscreen interface is again a first for this brand and the Daemon adds a PCM/DSD DAC and Bluetooth connectivity to the package. What makes it a headlining product though is the 1500 watts of peak power it's rated at. Weighing in at 50kgs, this is literally a heavy weight.

6 Bang & Olufsen

You can always rely on Bang & Olufsen to do things differently, and that was no more apparent than at the company's CES 2015 press conference. The star of the show was its new BeoSound Moment music system, which was quite unlike anything we've seen before. It's a double-sided wooden/aluminium controller that sits on the top of the unit at a rakish angle. One side houses a touchscreen with a coloured "mood wheel" while the other (wooden) side is designed for one-touch access to "the sound experience that fits your daily rhythm". We can't wait to test this.



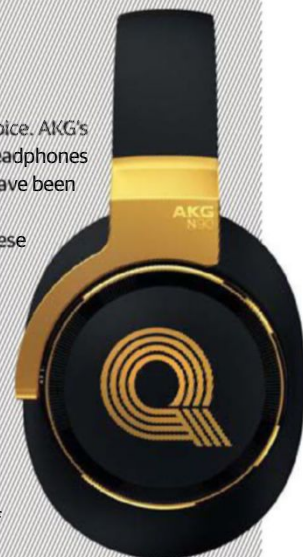
7 Audio-Technica

With Neil Young's Pono player heading the high-res revolution, others soon follow suit. Audio-Technica launched the AT-PHA100 high-resolution portable headphone amp at CES. It can decode high-res files in DSD 32-bit/128kHz, and PCM 32-bit/384kHz. The amp is equipped with a 3.5mm jack and micro USB socket. There is also a high/low gain switch, a machined aluminium volume dial, and a five-stage sampling indicator (for digital input). The battery lasts up to 14 hours with analogue signals, or six hours on digital ones.



8 AKG

Quincy Jones' fans rejoice. AKG's new N90Q over-ear headphones feature auto-calibration and have been designed with the help of the legendary music producer. These over-ears feature AKG's new TruNote technology, which uses proprietary software (and two tiny microphones in each ear cup) to measure their frequency response and auto-calibrate while the headphones are in place. They're designed to optimise the sound for the inner ears of each individual.



Stars of CES 2015

WHAT HI·FI? SOUND AND VISION

4 LG TVs
 Spoilt for choice? We were too. There will be seven new OLED TVs for 2015, comprising curved, flat, and flexible designs, all of which sport Ultra HD 4K resolution screens said LG. The new Art Slim design, which is used on the TVs includes transparent stands that make the screens appear to float. LG also claims that OLED's self-lighting pixels offer deep, literal blacks that aren't possible on LCD screens and WRGB technology adds a white sub pixel to the standard red, green and blue, which aims to improve colours. On the audio front, LG has worked with Harman Kardon, and promises the deep, rich sound that most thin TVs badly need.



* **Star India launches streaming app**
 With around 20,000 hours content spread across seven languages, the Hotstar app lets you stream a wide variety of content on iOS, Android and Nokia Asha



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*** Blaupunkt Cape Town**
The Blaupunkt Cape Town 940 retails at ₹54,990 and features a 6.8in touch display and Android Jelly Bean



9 McIntosh
CES is never complete without a chance to catch the latest from the McIntosh Laboratory. The preamp comes with five digital inputs – two coaxial, two optical and USB – and balanced and unbalanced connections for variable and fixed volume audio outputs. With its USB input, the D150 can support up to 32-bit/384kHz signals and supports DSD64, DSD128, DXD 352.8kHz and DXD 384kHz, while the other inputs support formats up to 24-bit/192kHz.



10 Gibson
Bearing such an iconic logo and wearing such a legendary name can pose pressure. But Gibson engineers and artisans have done a fantastic job with the exterior design of the Les Paul headphones. With a mix of leather, wood and gold, it tries to echo the look and feel of the famous axe that gets pampered by the world's finest musicians. Gibson hasn't revealed much about these but we are on its trail.



11 Technics
The project to resurrect Technics has been overseen by Michiko Ogawa, a former Technics engineer and renowned Japanese jazz pianist. The new portfolio includes speakers, streamers, stereo amplifiers and a single CD player. The company has also released plans for a high-res download store called Technics Tracks. Whether out of nostalgia or retro coolness, there's no denying that this new bit of kit looks stunning.



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BENGALURU : No. 34, Ground Floor, 80 Feet Road, HAL 3rd Stage, Bengaluru 560 075 Tel : +91 85530 50505 / 85530 10804
Email : avi@audiovisionindia.com **WEBSITE** : www.audiovisionindia.com

12 Naim

It is not very often that a few cables make it into the coverage of the biggest tech show of the world. But these are not just any cables. According to Naim, its aim was to design cables that would complement the performance of the Statement (pictured) – a product that earned Naim one of our Stars of CES 2014 awards. The Super Lumina range isn't solely for use with the Statement, but the Naim 500 Series and Classic products too. An advanced version of Naim's patented Air-PLUG technology has been incorporated into the Super Lumina interconnects, with all DIN and XLR connectors coming with an Air-PLUG connector. The full Super Lumina range is in production as you read this.

Silver is used to plate the conductors, all connector pins, the spade and 4mm speaker terminations



13 Cambridge Audio

CES brings its own share of surprises each year. This year, it was Cambridge Audio, or should we say, Cambridge. The company has revealed a new-look logo, which will see the dropping of the 'Audio' part of the name for a simpler 'Cambridge' brand name on some products - including the new CX series that includes six components: a network music player, two stereo amplifiers, a CD transport and two AV receivers. The new range promises to "revolutionise entertainment in the digital age" no less, and sports a fresh design style. The hi-fi and home cinema components offer support for high-res streaming, 4K upscaling, aptX Bluetooth, DSD playback and more.

14 Panasonic

Panasonic's CES 2015 press conference proved to be a low-key affair but revealed a new 4K player. Details of the 4K Blu-ray player remain uncertain, but it will be HDR (High Dynamic Range)-compatible and will sit above two other new Blu-ray models - the Panasonic DMP-BDT270 with 4K upscaling/DLNA/web browser and the DMP-BD93. Both models support Miracast for mirroring the content of a smartphone or tablet directly on to a large TV screen. Panasonic has also confirmed that it has joined the newly-formed UHD Alliance to try and set industry-wide standards for Ultra High Definition.



SONY

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THE SONY HOME CINEMA PROJECTOR VPL-HW55ES



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The first What Hi-Fi Show of 2015 will be hosted at the premium Palladium Hotel in the heart of Mumbai

To get more information on the show, please visit whathifi.in

What Hi Fi Show 2015: Bringing music back to Mumbai's audiophiles

The last time we opened the gates to a hi-fi show, more than 3000 music and movie lovers graced the occasion. The third edition of the *What Hi-Fi Show* promises to be equally exciting!

With little less than a month now left until we open the doors to the 2015 What Hi-Fi Show, it is shaping up to be one of the biggest and best yet, with more than a 100 brands scheduled to show off their latest hi-fi and home cinema kit.

Gaining momentum with every edition of the show, What Hi-Fi is proud to bring its print magazine to life. It's an exclusive event that remains the only place to see all your favourite AV companies and products under one roof.

You'll be able to get hands, eyes and ears on all the products you've been reading about, not to mention a veritable smorgasbord of new kit that'll be competing for place at the show.

While going to print, some of the products that were already confirmed to



Dolby Atmos will be put to the test in various rooms as part of the *What Hi-Fi? Show*

be showcased at the show includes the all-new Definitive Technology Wireless line of products, Monster's 24k gold headphones, Denon's Heos ecosystem of products, the launch of Audio Vector brand of speakers in India and a very exciting music demo promised by British professional monitor maker, PMC.

Dolby Atmos and Auro 3D demos

Big names like JBL Synthesis, NAD, CAT and Wolf Cinema will be putting up full-blown Auro-3D demos using the latest processors. KEI, the Indian distributors for Denon meanwhile will be launching the new flagship AVR-X7200 AV receiver to highlight its state-of-the-art Dolby Atmos processing. Prepare to have a home-theatre experience like never before at the *What Hi-Fi Show*, Mumbai!

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION SHOW 2015

The details

Friday 27th February to Sunday 1st March 2015

11am to 7pm every day

Tickets will be available to purchase at the venue itself

Venue:

Palladium Hotel
Senapati Bapat Marg,
Lower Parel, Mumbai 400013

■ Various major audio and video brands from major dealers and distributors will be on display at the *What Hi-Fi Show* 2015

■ This will be the third edition of the What Hi-Fi Show, after successful shows in 2013 and 2014 at the Hotel Trident (BKC), Mumbai and the Hotel Leela, Gurgaon, respectively.

Exhibitors

Nearly 170 brands are signed up: visit whathifi.in for more...



Budget tablet from Lenovo

The Lenovo Tab 2 A7-10 brings quad-core processing, Android 4.4, a 7in 1024x600 pixel display and Dolby audio at the low price of ₹4999



Stillpoints makes your music sing

The ultra-premium accessories are available now through Surat-based Absolute Sound

Coming from Wisconsin, USA, Stillpoints is the latest high-end hi-fi accessory that promises to change your music for the better. The original Stillpoints "isolation device" has become an icon in the world of hi-fi, with its instantly identifiable shape -- part cone, part cylinder, topped off with that exposed, large-diameter ceramic ball. Its novel approach and stacked ceramic balls set it apart from the crowd and so did its performance, quickly establishing it as the benchmark product against which other cones would be compared.

Current products from the Stillpoints' roster include the highly-rated ESS Rack and Ultra series of accessories, including the Ultra Mini, Ultra SS, Ultra SS Spike, Ultra 5, Ultra Base and Ultra LPI.

Stillpoints is available now through Surat-based Absolute Sound, who will be supplying dealers and end-users in India with a range of Stillpoints products. Absolute Sound also stock a variety of brands, including Bel Canto, MSB, Onkyo, Dune, Tannoy, Velodyne, Joseph Audio, PMC, Inakustic, JVC projectors, Projection Design and many more.



VU GOES 85 INCHES BIG WITH 4K LED

The TV combines smart pictures with UHD resolution and big cinema-style size



Vu Televisions has announced its latest flagship TV set, the 85in 4K Smart LED. The new TV offers buyers a big-screen experience with four times the number of pixels in a standard Full HD set, along with a slew of smart features that promise to make this LED a hit with customers.

The new 85in Vu's Smart features include pre-installed social and browsing widgets. Users can access YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, or browse the web using the remote. Additional widgets are available to download from the widgets store as well. The TV also features 3D, utilising Active 3D technology to ensure the best 3D performance. The TV is also network-enabled, allowing users to share and view content from computers, tablets, and smartphones using Wi-Fi, LAN or DLNA connectivity.

You can also connect a variety of devices to play various media files. The new Vu comes with an in-built media player, to allow wide access to different audio and video file formats that you can play through USB.

The new 85in Smart 3D 4K LED is available now for ₹9,00,000 at offline locations, as well as major online retailers like Snapdeal, Home Shop 18 and eBay.

Epson business projectors

Epson launches a slew of new business and professional projectors, including the EB1400, EB1970, EB1980 and large-scale venue projectors EB-Z9000 and Z11000



Audiocheck.in is the latest online marketplace for high-end audio

With online retail taking off in a big way, a handful of professionals with years of experience in the audio industry have set up Audiocheck.in, a new online marketplace that stocks quality products from Definitive Technology, Wireworld, Mass Fidelity, NAD, Marantz and PSB, with a promise of safe online payment, quick shipping and full warranty support. Log on to audiocheck.in and place your orders now!



Microlab speakers now available in India

Microlab is a US-Chinese joint venture specialising in 2.0 to 2.1 laptop speakers, portable 2.1 Bluetooth speakers (available in both wired and wireless configurations), Bluetooth headphones and entry level 5.1 systems. The entire range of products of Microlab is now available in India through official distributors Splind Electronics.



JBL brings motion-control technology to in-ears

JBL's new Reflect Response BT and Synchros S210 BT in-ears aim to simplify your morning work-outs with the addition of motion sensor control technology. The new in-ears will free your workout from distraction, controlling music, volume and calls by waving your hand. The new in-ears will go on sale this month.



Onkyo on a launch spree with three new products

Japanese consumer electronics giant Onkyo is on a product launch spree, revealing three new product packages, including the CP-1050 turntable, HTS7705 home theatre system and SKS-HT978THX 5.1 home theatre package.

The CP-1050 marks Onkyo's return to its roots (its first ever product back in 1946 was a crystal turntable pickup), and shows that the company is targeting the growing number of audiophiles looking to discover or rediscover the benefits of analog sound.

The new packages include the Onkyo HTS7705 system (pictured), a 5.1 AV receiver and speaker combo package priced at ₹94,000, which is Dolby Atmos enabled and features 4K video support and Wi-Fi/Bluetooth connectivity, as well as the SKS-HT978THX, a traditional 5.1 speaker package priced at ₹75,000.

AudioCrafters open for business

Mumbai-based Rivera International has opened its brand new showroom 'Audio Crafters' in Mumbai. The showroom is a short walk from its office at Lamington Road and will stock the entire range of products from brands like Pioneer, McIntosh, KRK and many more.

The showroom was inaugurated by Mr. Minoru Ogawa, MD of Pioneer India at a ceremony in January. Rivera International has been a key distributor of Pioneer products, specialising in Pioneer DJ equipment, a favoured choice of DJs and music producers the world over. It also recently struck a deal to import and sell McIntosh products in India, known for its range of stereo amplifiers.

The showroom is located at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Road in Opera House, Mumbai. Audiophiles in the area, head on down to Audio Crafters now!





* Gizmobaba gets into the offline retail market

The online portal that deals in wacky gadgets and gizmos recently opened its first offline store at Viviana Mall, Mumbai

* Zebronics gaming headphones

Zebronics' new Metal Head gaming headphones retail at ₹1069 and feature 50mm drivers and a 2m long 3.5mm connector cable



THE LOGICAL SOLUTION

Founded in Mumbai in 2009, Raylogic has since risen up to becoming one of India's leading comprehensive automation systems manufacturer. Along with its sister concern Raytech Designs, Raylogic has been working at building a product offering targeted specifically at lighting control and automation for homes, offices, boardrooms, training facilities, hotels, lounges and spas, among others. The company not only provides products for its users and customers, but also helps customers and automation professionals with support and training. A stated goal of Raylogic is to bring the power of technology to its customers and end users, without burdening their wallets too much.

Focus on R&D

Raylogic's success in such a short spell of time can be attributed to its core R&D team, which spends a considerable amount of time and focus on product design and development. Every design

element, be it PCB layouts, embedded firmware, Windows-based configuration software, iOS and Android apps, product wiring drawings, user manuals and training collateral, is created and developed in-house. Leveraging over a decade of experience in power and digital electronics through their experience with Raytech, the team focuses on designing reliable equipment to be used in the challenging Indian power and climatic conditions.

Raylogic has put considerable investment in licensed design tools and equipment to keep abreast with revolutionary changes in electronics and technology in the industry.

Training Facility, Lighting Controls and Automation

The company runs a training facility in Mumbai, where integrators can get comprehensive hands-on training in the operation and installation of Raylogic equipment. The facility has a set of equipment ranging from a centralized



The TC1 processor is small and easy to program

din-based lighting control system to automation/integration of systems like AV, HVAC, blinds and security.

The TC1 processor by Raylogic is small, stable and easy to program. A freely programmable GUI allows for total customization according to the needs of the end-user. This helps the company build an intelligent automation system that can be programmed to do everything needed at the touch of a button, ensuring that the customer is guaranteed a full-value experience every time.

Cowon in-ears

Cowon's EK2 in-ears feature 10mm dynamic canal units and a flat tangle-free cable, and retail at ₹1100 at cowonindia.in



MOLA MOLA: AUDIO REIMAGINED

Hailing from the Netherlands, Mola Mola is looking to make serious waves in the hi-fi industry. This upstart looks to change the way we listen to music...

Mola Mola, a small, upcoming premium audio brand from Groningen in the Netherlands, functions on the philosophy that once you've removed everything that isn't music, all you're left with is the music. Here, they believe that high-end audio has become all about mixing circuit topologies and parts to make a sonic blend that the designer thinks "sounds about right".

The company's approach to design is meticulous through mathematical analysis of every subcircuit and source of colouration. After every stage has proven performance, the same is done with the whole product, so problem spots get methodically rooted out before they become "audible but not measurable". The resulting amplifiers and converters produce an output signal that cannot be distinguished from the input signal, with natural, true-to-life sound.

Mola Mola's products, including the Makua, Kaluga, DAC and Phono are available now through Surat-based distributors Absolute Sound, with pricing to be announced at the *What Hi Fi Show* in Mumbai from 27th February to 1st March, 2015.



Toshiba unveils new Android-powered TVs

Toshiba has announced the availability of two new TV ranges, the 4K resolution L9450 series and the budget L5400 series, both of which run Android 4.4 and give users access to the entire Google Play market for unlimited access to apps, games and a wide variety of Indian and foreign movies available in Full HD or Ultra HD.

The higher end L9450 series have 4K (UHD) LED panels and are priced at ₹1,99,000 (50in), ₹3,69,900 (65in) and ₹10,49,000 (84in), while the lower end L5400 series aim at bringing smart features to the masses on a budget, with support for Android at just ₹38,990 (32in), ₹58,990 (40in), ₹85,990 (47in) and ₹1,29,990 (56in).

V-Moda comes to India with retail partners headphonezone.in

After making waves the world over with its unique styling cues, and with support from some of the world's best DJs including Hardwell, Avicii, Nervo and Martin Garrix, V-Moda has finally launched in India with the support of headphonezone.in, who are the official distributors and online retail partners for India. The product range starts from ₹12,990 for the Crossfade M-80, going up to ₹24,990 for the flagship Crossfade M-100.

Founded in 2012, Headphone Zone is India's first exclusive headphones and earphones retailer, with seven retail stores all over the country and an exclusive webstore.

The flagship
Crossfade M-100
retails at ₹24,990



Sony goes hi-res

Sony launches the new MDR-Z7 high-resolution headphones with 70mm drivers, at the massive price tag of ₹41,990



The second-gen Jamo Concert line features 10 new passive home theater speakers

Let the show begin! Jamo's new Concert line-up revealed

The flagship series of the Danish loudspeaker specialists returns in a new avatar, with design and performance tweaks galore

Jamo, a Klipsch Group, Inc. brand, has announced the launch of its new Concert Series, the line-up of which includes 10 new passive home theater speakers. The brand's flagship series, now in its second generation, offers high-design forms that house drivers that are designed and acoustically tuned to provide open, transparent playback of movies and music.

Comprised of the premium C 10 line (from ₹2,74,000/pair) and the high performance C 9 line (from ₹82,000/pair), the new Jamo Concert Series includes three floorstanding towers (C 109, C 97 and C 95), three bookshelf models (C

103, C 93 and C 91), two center channels (C 10 CEN and C 9 CEN), and two surrounds (C 10 SUR and C 9 SUR).

Drawing on Jamo's design DNA, the Jamo Concert Series was designed by famed loudspeaker designer Kieron Dunk to combine the brand's typical high-performance audio in conjunction with pleasing exteriors, to help the speakers blend seamlessly into your listening space. Hand-polished high-gloss finishes, satin painted MDF baffles, polished chrome logos, satin aluminum center plugs and stabilizer feet add to the promises of combining elegant looks with quality audio performance. The C 10 line

features a meticulous, 12 step application process for its premium hand-polished high gloss finishes.

The Concert series also features new Evolved Hybrid Composition Conical Cones, Long Displacement Surround, improved Anti-Diffraction WaveGuide technology and redesigned silk tweeter diaphragms.

The new series is available now through official India distributors for Jamo, Bangalore-based Cinebels, which also deals in a variety of other brands, including Klipsch, Marantz, Vivitek and Roksan, with retail showrooms and demo facilities in seven cities all over India.

JBL goes Sporty

JBL's new budget Sport in-ears have been designed for a superior workout listening experience, and are priced from ₹1499



TOP 5 New launches

1 Vertu for Bentley ₹12,50,000 If money really is no concern for you and you want to add luxury to even your smartphone, the Vertu for Bentley is the gizmo for you. Featuring quilted calf leather exteriors, Android 4.4, acoustics tuned by Bang and Olufsen and featuring Dolby Digital Plus virtual surround sound processing, the Vertu also gives users access to the signature concierge service. Now all you need is a Bentley!



2 Classé Sigma from ₹4,75,000 Classé has announced two power amplifiers and a 7.1 channel cinema processor/preamp as part of a new, more affordable (well, that's all relative) Sigma range. The power amplifiers are Class D designs, while the Sigma SSP 7.1 processor supports DLNA streaming and AirPlay.

3 Steinway Lyngdorf P200 ₹TBA When it comes to adding a bit of style to home audio equipment, you can't deny that Steinway Lyngdorf are up there at the head of the field. The new P200 surround sound processor can distribute the signal to multiple speaker sets—each configured for different listening applications. Due to launch shortly worldwide, the P200 will be available here through India distributor Trescent Lifestyles soon.



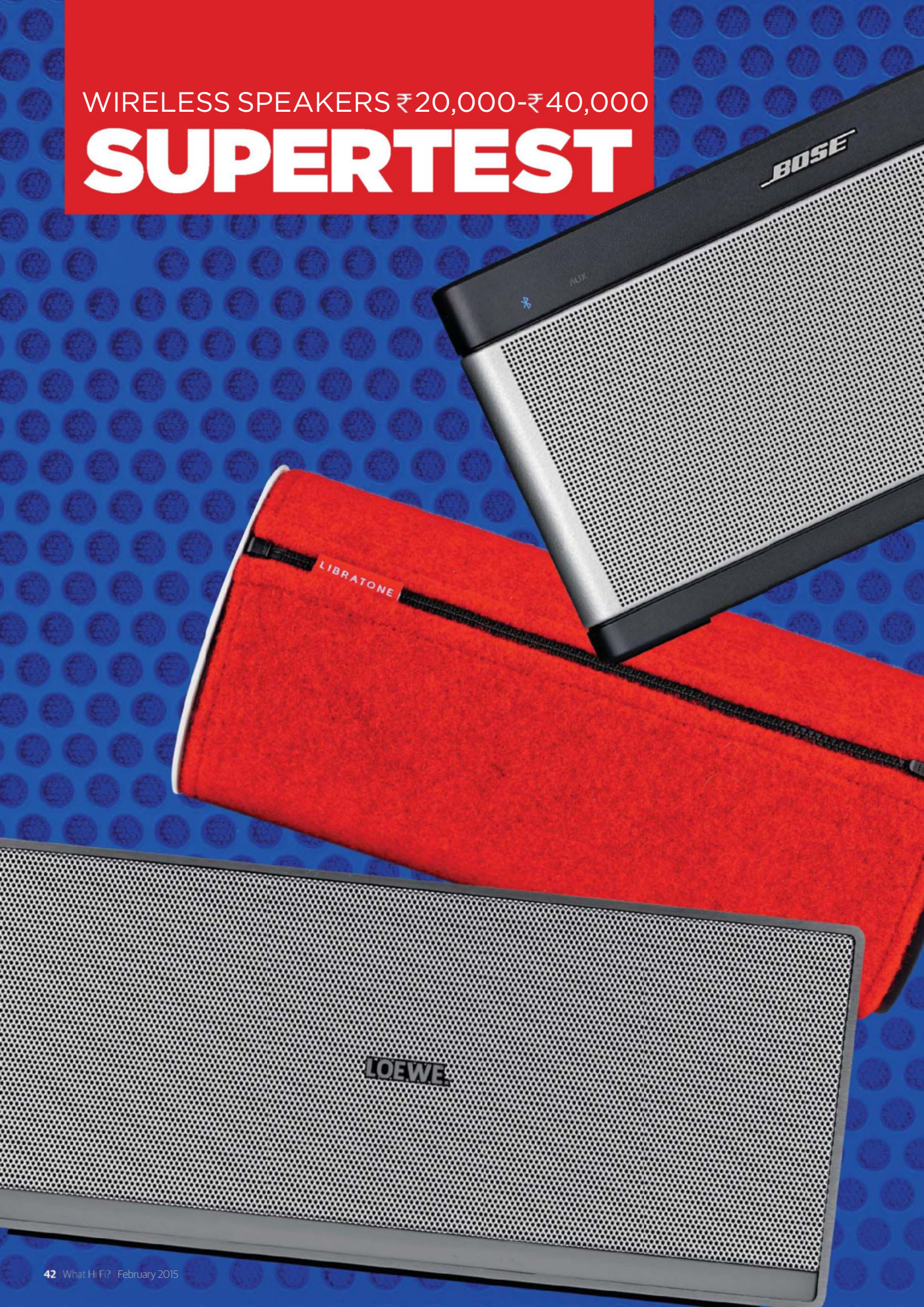
4 Denon AVR-X7200W ₹TBA Denon's latest flagship AV receiver features a plethora of technology - most notably support for Dolby Atmos and Auro-3D sound formats. It can support a full 11-channel Dolby Atmos configuration or any number of other setups. The X7200W also supports wireless streaming over Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, Apple AirPlay and DLNA, as well as streaming support. Internet radio is available and a compatible iOS and Android app allows for easy navigation and control. Its eight HDMI inputs support 4K Ultra HD, while SD and HD content is upscaled.




5 Tata Sky 4K Set-Top Box from ₹5900 Your expensive 4K TV is probably not putting all of those available pixels to use very often, since there's still an appalling lack of 4K content easily available, and the only way to get the little content there is, is to have a very expensive internet connection and stream everything. Tata Sky wants to make it a bit easier for you, with the new 4K-capable Set-Top Box. The DTH service provider plans to showcase some matches of the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup 2015 in 4K, and also intends to launch 4K channels in the near future.

WIRELESS SPEAKERS ₹20,000-₹40,000

SUPERTEST





BLUE NOTES

IT'S TIME TO JAZZ UP YOUR MUSIC ON THE MOVE... TIME TO GO WIRELESS

Stylish. Functional. Portable. Bluetooth speakers are gradually climbing up the ranks in hi-fi society, and these five speakers are a prime example of just how diverse and exciting the market currently is.

From brand-new contenders to established hi-fi stalwarts - everyone wants to woo the wireless speaker audience. With a price range spanning ₹20,000 to ₹40,000, these five speakers must deliver the very best in design, features and usability to justify a place in our homes.

To truly win us over, though, they have to sound fantastic, too. Which speaker will stand out from the rest and claim top spot? Read on to find out...

WHAT'S ON TEST

Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2

Bose SoundLink III

Bowers & Wilkins T7

Libratone Zipp BT

Loewe Speaker 2go

BOSE



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The B&O BeoPlay A2 can be used outdoors and can even take the odd sprinkle of water. Don't leave it out in a downpour, though

Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2 ₹22,990



Bang and Olufsen is known for making specialist, high-end and stylish products. So when it lends its Scandinavian sense of premium-quality minimalist design to a portable Bluetooth speaker (the company's first), you know it'll be special.

The B&O BeoPlay A2 looks luxurious: the curved polymer shell with its high-quality leather strap is a premium lifestyle product. The metal panel, with its beautifully machined buttons, adds elegance. It's well made, and light enough to carry using the sturdy strap.

Plastic not so fantastic

The plastic casing is a touch disappointing (we had hoped for an aluminium grille), as it flexes when picked up. However, the unit is designed to withstand scuffs and scratches. In its all-black finish, the A2 looks a little plain. The green or grey alternatives, with contrasting brown and rose-gold leather handles respectively, look far more appealing.

Fire up the B&O A2 and you'll hear a wonderfully clean and spacious sound. Third Eye Blind's *Semi-Charmed Life* bounds along with precise rhythm, each drum hit and jangling guitar etched out with clear edges. Rapid lyrics are expressive, vocals loud and direct. The big spread of sound is down to B&O's

'True360' sound technology - it uses drivers on both sides of the speaker, meaning you can stand 'behind' the speaker and still hear that clear, open sound. It works admirably, especially compared to the Spaced360's clumsy attempt at omni-directional sound. B&O exploits the wide dispersion in the low frequencies, delivering sound around the edges of the speaker - although you still won't get the full blast of the A2's sound if the slim edge is facing towards you.

The wide soundfield may not be as seamless and dynamic as that offered by fellow omni-directional speaker Libratone Zipp BT, but the A2's diffusive sound does a decent job of conveying soaring dynamics whether you're listening to a Hans Zimmer composition or the warbling tones of Adele.

Edgy character

We want a touch more warmth and richness to the sound, though. Initial thinness gives way to a much fuller sound after a couple of days' running in; we wish we could say the same for the A2's persistent hard edge. Even after a week, there's a hardness to the A2's sound that prevents it from sounding truly relaxing.

You can play smartphone-stored music or custom playlists via the A2's 3.5mm

socket or Bluetooth (with the aptX codec promising higher-quality streams from your smart device). Pairing is quick, and the A2 will remember up to eight connected devices.

Impressive charge account

You can also charge your smart device using the USB port and it won't put too much of a strain on the A2's battery, either. The speaker lasts for 24 hours on a single charge - it's the longest battery life of any portable speaker we've come across.

Next to the rich, melodic performances of rivals from B&W and Libratone, the B&O A2 comes off as a touch clinical and soulless. But there's plenty to admire about the A2's detailed, spacious sound and clean presentation. Its stylish design is appealing, as is the lengthy 24-hour battery life. It may not be class leading, but the A2 is worth a place on your list.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clean, open sound; goes loud; plenty of detail; precise timing; stylish; battery life

AGAINST A persistent hard edge; rivals offer a subtler, more fluid sound

VERDICT Not perfect, but the A2's spacious sound, battery life and looks are appealing



The Bose SoundLink III's aluminium chassis is impeccable and its durable build means it should hold up well

Bose SoundLink III ₹22,388

★★★★☆

Rich, warm with an abundance of bass - these are the hallmarks of the Bose SoundLink III's sound. This sturdy, portable Bluetooth speaker may have received four stars when we first tested it, but it has a tough battle on its hand in light of newer, more competitive rivals.

A big, warm sound

The SoundLink III's robust, bass-heavy performance and that big, enveloping sound is appealing, but it's at the cost of clarity and precision. Rich bass rumbles along satisfyingly, with plenty of power. A smooth approach to detail glosses over harsh recordings and low-resolution online streams - it's a comfortable listen. It has no problem filling a room, either.

But there's no escaping just how overpowering that deep bass is. Play Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds' *Red Right Hand* and the fluid bassline that forms the backbone of the song overwhelms other aspects of the tune. There's little bite or shine to the bell chimes, robbing any drama or tension. The low-end oomph, while admirable, could be better defined and pulled in more tautly.

The stop and start of notes aren't as crisp and precise as we'd like. The staccato drumbeat in The White Stripes' *Little Room* needs to hit with more impact and

attack - finer detail, the clash of cymbals and high-hats and soaring dynamics are subdued in the presence of such commanding bass weight. It leaves the Bose sounding uninspired. Voices benefit from a forward presentation and are full of warmth, but they could be crisper and more detailed to fully engage the listener.

Since it already has a tendency to get boomy in the low end, placing the SoundLink III close to a wall or in a corner will only exaggerate this quality. It's best to give the Bose speaker plenty of space.

Impeccable finish

We've admired the Bose's hefty and sturdy build quality before, and the SoundLink III exudes a premium feel befitting its price tag. The aluminium chassis is impeccable, from its steel-grey finish and backlit icons to the soft-touch silicone-rubber control buttons. The speaker is quite heavy, but it's compact enough to carry in a backpack and the battery lasts for a decent 14 hours.

The control buttons are responsive, but they do need a firm push to work. Otherwise the speaker is easy to use and pairing with Bluetooth devices takes only a couple of seconds. A small battery-icon on the front panel indicates how much charge remains. The Bose speaker keeps

connectivity simple, with Bluetooth for wireless streaming from smart devices and a 3.5mm input for hard-wiring other music sources. Unlike rivals, such as the B&W T7 or Loewe Speaker 2go, Bose doesn't offer aptX. The lack of transparency means this probably isn't a big loss; we would have liked a USB charging-port here, though.

Bass is too prominent

Bose really needs to rein in that booming bass to give the other sonic elements a chance. Some rival speakers have a much better handle on their frequencies, delivering punchy highs and lows in equal measure. In comparison, the Bose sounds muddled.

The SoundLink III is a solid design, but it fails to impress when there are more capable and insightful speakers available for the same price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Deep, rich bass; powerful, weighty sound; goes loud comfortably; sturdy construction

AGAINST Booming bass overpowers everything else

VERDICT Solid build and sound, but that bass and lack of clarity has us looking at alternatives



The transparent honeycomb design isn't just for aesthetics: this 'Micro Matrix' effect helps reduce cabinet vibrations

Bowers & Wilkins T7 ₹TBA



Bowers & Wilkins has form when it comes to wireless speakers. The AirPlay-toting Zeppelin Air, A5 and A7 impressed us with their classy designs and five-star sound qualities, and so it's no surprise that B&W has struck gold with its first portable Bluetooth speaker: the T7.

Unchained melody

Punchy, clear, detailed and full of energy, the T7 wants to have fun playing music. It's every bit a B&W speaker in that respect. Crunchy songs from Alice in Chains are delivered with as much precision and verve as Kate Bush's ethereal vocals. There's attack and finesse in equal measure, the T7 impressing with its agile and precise rhythm. Funky blues tunes have their groove intact, and it delivers subtle detail with such ease. Clarity and detail go hand-in-hand, and the amount of information revealed by the T7 is astonishing for a speaker of its kind.

It has a bass emphasis, but doesn't take this too far. Most rivals aren't so controlled throughout the frequency range, letting their excesses dominate, but here basslines rumble and bound along while the top end soars sweetly. While it might not fill the room as generously as the Libratone Zipp BT or Loewe Speaker 2go,

the T7 is accomplished at conveying subtle dynamics and relative positions of instruments within its soundfield. The brooding tone of The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* is relayed with menace: each guitar pluck is taut and tactile, and the raw vocals are etched out with jagged tension and nuanced expressions.

Be wary of cranking up the volume too high, though, as a hard edge starts to creep in. And we'd give the T7 plenty of space, too.

Shine a light

We'd expect nothing less than a solidly built and stylish wireless speaker from B&W. The all-black rubber panels, the pretty honeycomb design that lets background colours shine through like the translucency effect on Apple's OS, and the substantial, yet compact, build - it all speaks quality. Buttons are used sparingly for a minimal look, and do need a firm prod at first. There are a couple of nifty playback features built in: press the play/pause button twice and it'll skip to the next track; press three times and it'll return to the previous track. Bluetooth pairs without a hitch too.

Musical tones greet you when you turn the T7 on (and off, and when Bluetooth is paired - you can turn it off if it gets too

cheery), but our favourite feature is the row of five LEDs on the side that indicate how much battery is left in 20 per cent increments; an elegant solution to a useful feature missing on most speakers.

Connect plus

B&W keeps it simple with Bluetooth and a 3.5mm input for connectivity (Bluetooth is of the aptX variety, meaning you can wirelessly stream higher-quality music from compatible smart devices). The speaker is easy to use, and the T7's battery will last an admirable 18 hours on a single charge. Again, we would have liked a USB port for charging smartphones on-the-go.

If you want a bigger, more open sound, we'd point you to the Libratone Zipp BT, but you'll be missing out on the punch, detail, drive and fun you get from the B&W T7. A fantastic Bluetooth speaker.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clarity and detail; punchy, agile rhythms; superb balance and control across frequencies; excellent build and design

AGAINST Some rivals offer bigger sound

VERDICT The talented T7 is hugely enjoyable to listen to - B&W has struck gold, again



The standard cover is in pepper-black, but you can jazz up the Zipp BT with 10 other colours, at a price of ₹40 each

Libratone Zipp BT ₹36,000 (approx.)

★★★★★

We're big fans of the Libratone Zipp BT, and not just because of the bright woolly covers. The original Zipp wowed us with its extensive steaming features and superb sound quality. And with new Bluetooth powers and an all-new price, the updated Libratone Zipp BT is even more tempting than before.

It sounds gorgeous. The Zipp BT easily fills the room with subtle and refined detail, delivering each note of a song with a lively, agile rhythm. Timing is precise, and the fluid dynamics ensure your attention is drawn to the music. Open and expressive, the Zipp BT is a lesson in how to deliver a big, uniform distribution of sound. Libratone's 'FullRoom' technology (which uses a 10cm-bass driver, a pair of ribbon tweeters and the cylindrical design to spread sound evenly) works admirably.

A forgiving character

There are layers of detail, and voices are nuanced, direct and full of character. Corey Taylor's gravelly tones on *Bother* are subtle, as are the The Unthanks' haunting vocals. Libratone never allows the open top end to sound too bright, and the bass is never out of shape. The smooth presentation makes it easy on the ears – and forgiving of low-res audio files. It's this easy-going, fuss-free character that's

at the centre of the Zipp's appeal. Some rivals add a little more bass authority or a bit more attack, but we're more than happy with the Libratone's nicely balanced nature.

Some woolly thinking

Made of high-quality Italian wool, the zip-up covers add a sense of fun and style. The upright design is classy, it looks like a quality item (bar the slightly plasticky top panel), and you can easily carry it using the sturdy leather handle. It's a shame that, underneath the woolly covers, the Zipp's construction is a touch plain and uninspiring. Still, you do get to have a peek at the driver arrangement and how it disperses the sound in all directions.

It takes a while to learn all the different LED colours on the control panel under the leather handle and on the logo button, but once you get used to it the Zipp BT is a dream to use. We'd recommend the free Libratone app, which helps you with wi-fi/AirPlay set-up, offers EQ settings depending on where the speaker is placed, and has plenty of listening modes to play with.

The Zipp BT has a long list of streaming features: AirPlay, DLNA and Libratone's own 'PlayDirect' option, where you can connect directly to the Zipp's wi-fi

network if you're not near a router. The newest addition to this list is aptX Bluetooth. Pairing is fast and simple. There's also the option of plugging in to a 3.5mm input or USB port (which will also charge your smartphone). Other new features are NFC.

Trips up on wireless

The Zipp BT's battery life is relatively poor: wired connection gives up to eight hours, but wireless is limited to four hours on a single charge. It's a paltry offering, especially next to rival Bowers & Wilkins T7's 18 hours of playback, while Bang & Olufsen's A2 lasts for best part of a day.

Rival speaker B&W T7's crisp and punchy presentation will prove to be its biggest challenge, but there's no denying the Libratone Zipp BT's charm. It's lovely to listen to, and we'd welcome it into our homes with open arms.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Spacious, room-filling sound; clear and open; refined and subtle; agile, musical and engaging; extensive features; stylish

AGAINST Paltry battery life

VERDICT Libratone offers a very likeable product that is well worth investing in



The Loewe Speaker 2go is available in a shiny silver or black finish and its classy build quality has reassuring heft

Loewe Speaker 2go ₹24,000 (approx.)



The Loewe Speaker 2go is sure to catch your attention. It isn't just because of its shiny-metal design, or its powerfully loud and punchy sound. It's because it offers all these qualities for just ₹24,000*. It's an impressively affordable wireless speaker, and warrants an audition thanks to just how much fun it can sound.

Louder than bombs

Boy, does it go loud. For such a compact speaker we can carry with one hand, the Loewe packs a substantial punch: 40 watts of amplification powering two full-range speakers and a subwoofer. Crank the volume up and your neighbours will be calling. We wouldn't push it too far, though, as a hard edge creeps in. Stream David Bowie's *Moonage Daydream* on a more sensible level, and the Loewe delivers a solid, toe-tapping performance.

The Loewe gives a plenty of low-end grunt and aggression to rock songs, with Black Sabbath's *Iron Man* delivered with appropriate weight and crunchy, meaty guitar solos. There's plenty of muscle.

Loewe juggles tonal balance admirably: basslines dig deep enough to rumble while also remaining taut and controlled, and the treble has just the right amount of sparkle without being too bright. It's not quite the perfect all-rounder, however: the

Libratone Zipp BT is a better bet if you're looking for refinement and transparency. Next to the B&W T7, the Loewe could do with an extra dose of clarity. Voices are packed with character, but can sound rather thick and indistinct. The B&W does a better job conveying subtle, dynamic shifts and the layers of harmonies surrounding a note or vocal. Dynamically, the Speaker 2go sounds a little congested.

Props respect due

The Loewe does have a trick up its sleeve to help spread sound further. Press down on the speaker and a discreet rubber-stand pops down, propping up the Speaker 2go by exactly 7.5 degrees. Loewe claims this tilt helps disperse sound around a room - it certainly is more direct and open to our ears. The pop-out strip is a little fiddly - the B&W Audio X3 has a similar, if more elegantly executed, tilted design.

Alongside aptX Bluetooth for wireless streaming and a 3.5mm input for plugging in various music players, the Loewe features a USB charging port. It might not support playback, but being able to charge your smartphone on-the-go is useful. We'd be careful of overusing this, though, as the Loewe's battery lasts only eight hours. Less useful is the Loewe's built-in microphone, as phone calls can sound

rather muffled. There's also a free app, which is little more than an alternative to your smartphone's native music player. The internet radio section is more fruitful, and makes it a worthwhile download.

Push the button

Well-engineered buttons and LED indicators give a sleek look and the speaker is a doddle to use. Pairing with Bluetooth-enabled devices takes seconds, while those with NFC-enabled Android and Windows smartphones can tap on the black circle for instant connection. Build is solid, but we notice the front-grille on our sample isn't flush with the casing all the way around.

It's impressive that the Loewe Speaker 2go has kept its four-stars with new rivals on the scene. There are speakers with greater clarity and insight, but the Loewe's enjoyable sound is well worth a listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Powerfully loud and energetic sound; punchy rhythm; good balance; solid, open sound; nice build; easy to use

AGAINST Rivals offer a more articulate sound

VERDICT Power and enthusiasm: this portable speaker is extremely attractive

TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Bowers & Wilkins T7

₹TBA ★★★★★



The T7 knocks the rest of the competition out of the park with great sound, build, and excellent battery life

In the world of Bluetooth speakers, the competition is so fierce that a small misstep can mean the loss of a star.

It's not only about which speaker has the best sound quality (although that's primary), but it's also about build and design, features, ease of use, and battery life.

This test proves just how high expectations are, considering its price when it'll be launched. It is most definitely a significant sum to spend on a wireless portable speaker.

Spaced out

The Libratone Zipp BT succeeds in showing how to deliver open and omni-directional room-filling sound, yet can be outperformed by some of its rivals.

Bose focuses attention on either end of the sonic range. While the Bose SoundLink III puts too much weight on the bass until the warm, booming sound clouds over detail, others were found to rein in the bass in favour of a lightweight, agile sound that concentrates on the treble and vocals. It's comfortable and easy to listen to, built sturdily and looks smart, but it's not enough to justify the price tag.

Edged out of the running

B&O is no stranger to outlandish, high-end hi-fi products, and the BeoPlay A2 speaker looks every bit the luxury item it intend it to be. That crystal-clear open sound is sure to grab your attention as much as that high-quality leather strap, and it does a decent job of spreading sound around the room. It has an impressive 24-hour battery life, too. But while the initially thin sound can be chased away after a lengthy few days' running in, a hard edge lingers. It stops us from fully enjoying the A2, and ultimately prevents it from gaining that fifth star.

The Loewe Speaker 2go has bags of energy and power. It's punchy, detailed and goes plenty loud enough- much louder than any of the speakers here. Only the fact that the B&W and Libratone are just that little bit subtler and clearer can dampen the Loewe's spirits, but it charges along undeterred and is always hugely fun to listen to.

Standing head and shoulders above the rest are B&W and Libratone. We adore the Libratone Zipp BT, and not just for its colourful zip-up covers. The Zipp is jam-

packed with all the streaming features you can think of, and, although it suffers from a relatively paltry battery life, it remains one of our favourite speakers at this price. The gorgeous open and refined sound, the fluid dynamics and the agile, musical performance are enchanting.

Digging the sounds

The B&W T7, however, knocks everything else out of the park. The T7 shows comprehensively just how much clarity, detail, punch and dynamics the other speakers are missing out on. Its ability to dig out the subtlest detail from such a compact box and pack in so much power and precision is, frankly, astonishing.

The Libratone might sound bigger and more weighty, but the Bowers & Wilkins unit delivers an incredibly mature and evenly balanced performance while still being able to rock out and have a good time. The excellent build and clever honeycomb design, the long battery life, the hugely immersive and captivating performance - the B&W T7 is by far our runaway winner.



Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2
₹22,900 ★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes, aptX • **Portable** Yes
 • **Inputs** 3.5mm • **USB charging** Yes
 • **Battery life** 24 hours • **Power** 60W
 • **Finishes** 3 • **Dimensions (hwd)**
 14 x 26 x 4cm • **Weight:** 1.1kg



Bose SoundLink III
₹22,388 ★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes • **Portable** Yes
 • **Inputs** 3.5mm • **USB charging** No
 • **Battery life** 14 hours • **Power** n/a
 • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)**
 13 x 26 x 5cm • **Weight** 1.4kg



Bowers & Wilkins T7
₹TBA ★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes, aptX • **Portable** Yes
 • **Inputs** 3.5mm • **USB charging** No
 • **Battery life** 18 hours • **Power** 24W
 • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)**
 11 x 21 x 5cm • **Weight** 0.9kg



Libratone Zipp BT
₹36,000* ★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes, aptX • **Portable** Yes
 • **Inputs** AirPlay, DLNA, 3.5mm, USB
 • **USB charging** Yes • **Battery life** 8
 hours • **Power** 60W • **Finishes** 11
 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 26 x 12 x 12cm
 • **Weight:** 1.8kg



Loewe Speaker 2go
₹24,000* ★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes, aptX • **Portable** Yes
 • **Inputs** 3.5mm • **USB charging** Yes
 • **Battery life** 8 hours • **Power** 40W
 • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)**
 10.5 x 24 x 5cm • **Weight** 1.3kg



Things to consider when buying a portable wireless speaker:

Battery life

The longer the better, especially if you're going portable. Eight hours is okay, but 24 hours will last a weekend.

Build quality

Sturdy, yet light and compact enough to carry around comfortably. Don't compromise on a good quality finish if you're worried it'll get easily scratched - a decent speaker should be able to withstand scuffs and scratches.

USB port

A handy, if not necessary, feature to charge your smartphone when on the move. Bonus points if it will play audio, but be aware that it will drain battery.

Auxiliary input

Allows you to connect music players that don't have any wireless streaming powers. Can often sound better, too.

SYSTEM BUILDER



Smartphone
Sony Xperia Z3 ₹45,890
★★★★★

Great battery life and sound. It supports hi-res audio and aptX Bluetooth too.



Music streaming service
Soundcloud ₹ free
★★★★★

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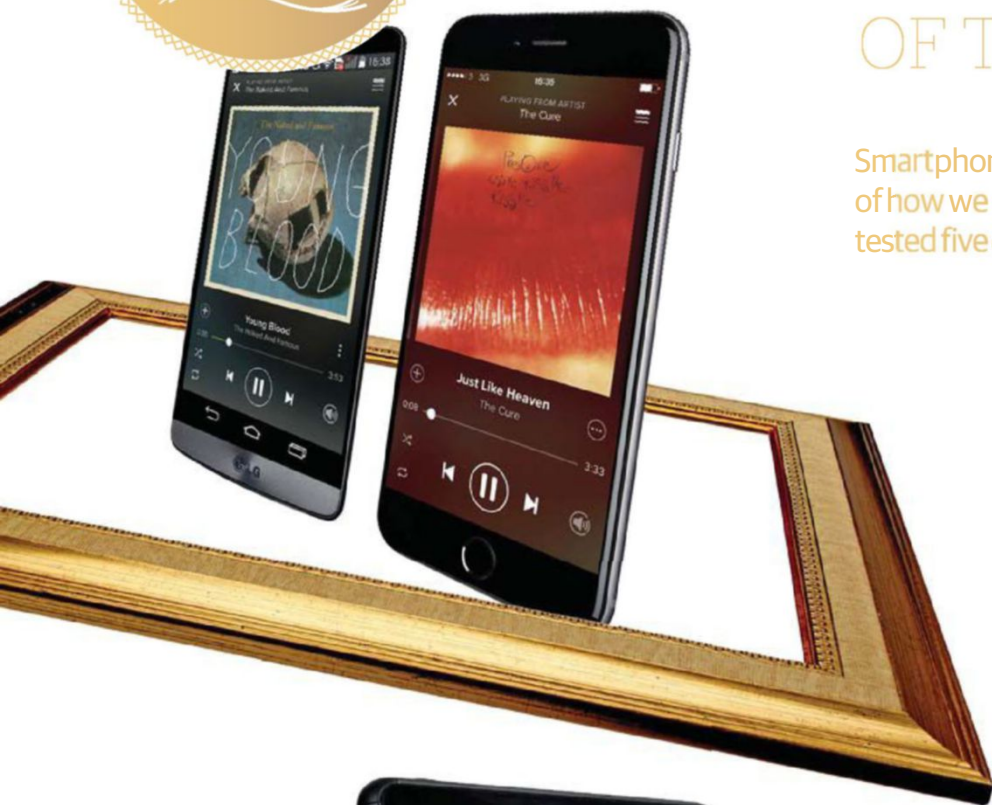


STATE OF THE ART

Smartphone evolution has changed the nature of how we consume audio and video. We have tested five of the very best. Which rules supreme?

The phone you carry in your pocket is probably one of the most important pieces of technology you'll own. It's a home entertainment system in your hand, offering video playback and high-resolution music smarts when you're on the move. Chances are you'll even use it as a second screen at home, too. It can be your personal assistant or personal trainer, and it's an always-ready camera... which phone is the right one for you? Read on to find out...

What's on test
 Apple iPhone 6 Plus
 LG G3
 Motorola Moto X
 Samsung Galaxy Note 4
 Sony Xperia Z3



Apple iPhone 6 Plus from ₹62,500

★★★★☆

Camera, action

You will find a new option for tweaking exposure, a faster HDR mode and a handful of filters on the iPhone 6 Plus.



After years of sticking to its guns over smaller screen sizes, 2014 is the year Apple conceded that the rest of the smartphone world could well be onto something with their bigger displays. Enter the iPhone 6 Plus.

There's no getting away from it - the iPhone 6 Plus is a big phone. With its 5.5in display, it offers the same size screen as the LG G3 but is considerably larger in the hand. In fact, it's even taller than the Samsung Galaxy Note 4 and around the same width, despite the Note 4 offering a bigger screen.

At just 7.1mm thick though, it's seriously slim and, as we've come to expect from Apple, its build quality is second to none. With an aluminium body that curves around to join seamlessly with the screen, it both looks and feels every bit the premium device. We've no 'Bendgate' stories to add here.

First bite at Full HD

With that bigger screen comes more pixels and a better resolution, with the 6 Plus being Apple's first phone with a full HD display. It might not top the LG G3's and Note 4's Quad HD resolution on paper, but in use it still proves itself to be one of the best screens out there.

In video playback, the 6 Plus demonstrates a hugely watchable and detailed picture, with pure, controlled whites and blacks that show good depth and solidity. Colours are beautifully balanced and well judged, with the 6 Plus managing to look both punchy and vibrant without ever appearing overblown or saturated. And while we thought that bigger screen might have a negative impact on battery life, it doesn't seem to be the case. While

far from class-leading, its 2916mAh battery lasted 10 hours 32 minutes during our battery rundown test (wi-fi on, Bluetooth off, looping a 720p video at half brightness).

This easily beats the likes of the LG G3 and just pips the Moto X, but lags some way behind the 13 hours-plus the Xperia Z3 and Note 4 notched up.

With a bigger screen comes more pixels and a better resolution, with the 6 Plus being Apple's first phone with a Full HD display

Sound quality has been a traditional strength for Apple products over the years, but we can't help feel a little disappointed with the 6 Plus.

There's not the same level of fluidity and musicality as we heard in the iPhone 6 and Z3, with the 6 Plus losing its footing when it comes to timing and tempo. There's still solidity and weight, but the 6 Plus just lacks a touch of clarity and dynamic thrust that makes the Xperia Z3 such an engaging listen.

When it comes to camera, there's a new sensor on board the 6 Plus but it's ultimately still the same 8-megapixels we saw in the 5S. Not that this is a bad thing - the iPhone has always been one of our favourites for point-and-shoot

simplicity. Results are impressive, offering sharp, detailed images with quick focusing and excellent colour reproduction. Even low-light snaps fare pretty well, but noise creeps in once light gets sparse.

Sizing up your options

Video remains at 1080p, and thanks to added optical image stabilisation on the 6 Plus it's sharp and steady. There are also slow-mo and time-lapse options too, and an improved front-facing camera, which should make selfies and video calls sharper - and perfectly framed, with the addition of a timer.

The iPhone 6 Plus's biggest selling point (size) is also likely to be its biggest deterrent. It makes the best out of its bigger screen, with added functionality when used horizontally, but it hasn't managed the big-screen-in-a-small-body trick of the G3. Most disappointing, though, is the sound. It's this that sees the 6 Plus drop a star. But if you're an iOS fan with the belief that bigger is better, it's still definitely worth considering.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great build quality; sharp screen; balanced colours; reliable camera

AGAINST Size will divide opinion; sound lacks a bit of drive

VERDICT A desirable big-screen phone that just lacks the levels of sound quality we crave

LG G3 from ₹52,000

★★★★☆

Whippersnapper

LG G3's 13MP-camera is rather stripped back, with barely any manual settings to play with other than HDR mode.



Let's get one thing straight from the off: we love the LG G3. It's been six months since it stormed the market, replacing the excellent G2 and winning well-deserved five star praise for bettering its predecessor in every way.

But like it or not, six months is now a long time in the world of smartphones, and unfortunately for the G3 it's starting to show. LG's Quad HD screen on the G3 was a first for the market and understandably one of the handset's headline features. But while there's still a lot to like here, we find ourselves drawn to its competitors now.

Screening test

With HD resolution of 2560 x 1440 and a whopping 538ppi, its sharpness and ability to dig up fine detail is never in doubt. However, its poor screen brightness now feels more of an issue than ever. Despite a beautifully balanced colour palette that works wonders with any video you throw at it, the screen looks a little dull in comparison to the bright screens on the Galaxy Note 4 and the iPhone 6 Plus. While this might sound like a small thing, in use it can be more of a problem, particularly when watching films on-the-go.

Watch outside or in any well-lit setting and you'll struggle to see the extra detail the G3 is capable of, because it can't push its screen brightness high enough to compensate for the environment.

This affects contrast too, and while whites still pop in dark scenes, they aren't able to shine through as brightly as they do on the Sony Xperia Z3, for

example. We wouldn't mind if this helped its battery serve all those extra pixels, but the LG G3's battery life is now easily beaten by newcomers, despite a recent firmware update to improve it. Our battery rundown test (same as with

the 6 Plus), saw the G3 last a pretty lowly eight hours and 47 minutes, some way off Sony's Xperia Z3 at 14 hours and four mins - even the iPhone 6 Plus with the same-sized (and much brighter) screen lasted 10 hours 32 minutes.

Moderate users should still find it serves them well for a working day but power users with long commutes will want to consider carrying a charger.

We made it clear in our original review that we were disappointed by the G3's audio performance, despite its high-res capabilities. Unfortunately our view hasn't changed, and now it has high-res competitors in the Samsung Galaxy Note 4 and Sony Xperia Z3 that do better. Despite being well balanced and tonally

well judged, its overall sound lacks punch and excitement, giving it a laid-back character that struggles to hold our attention.

So this is what's not so great, but how about what is? Six months hasn't killed the LG G3's outstanding capability to make light work of most tasks, and it's still one of our favourite handsets when it comes to pure usability. Its design is as nice as ever too, with the G3's 5.5in screen fitting in the hand better than the iPhone 6 Plus thanks to thin bezels and a curved back panel. Back-mounted buttons sit just at the right level, too.

Snap happy

The 13MP-camera is largely reliable in most situations, so you're able to point-and-shoot and let the G3 do the rest. Detail and sharpness levels can't quite match the likes of the Samsung Galaxy Note 4 or iPhone 6 Plus, but it will do enough for most situations, including in low light, where it does a good job at keeping noise under control. Autofocus is quick, contrast is well handled, and colour balance is neutral.

To sum up, there are two sides to the LG G3: good and bad. It's still an excellent phone, but there are now better all-rounders out there to consider.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great interface; fast performance; good design; detailed video; superb usability

AGAINST Screen needs to be brighter; audio lacks excitement; battery could be better

VERDICT An excellent phone that is now just bettered by newcomers

Motorola Moto X from ₹29,999



Handy buttons

The only physical buttons are on the side, and easily reached, so the Moto X is perfect for all sizes of hands

One of the unique things about the Moto X is that it comes in an assortment of unique colour options, including our favourites Bamboo White and Black Leather. Compared to the rather plain colour options that a lot of the other phones on test here offer, the Moto X really stands out and is sure to gain the admiration of many a friend and acquaintance.

Worth boosting the storage

It's also now available with a 32GB onboard storage option in place of the standard 16GB - worth considering, since otherwise the Moto X is non-expandable.

Its softly curved back panel nuzzles nicely into the palm of your hand, making it comfortable to hold, while its textured power button and volume rocker - the sole buttons on the handset - lie on the right-hand side at the perfect height for quick access. Smaller hands should be able to negotiate the handset without worry.

A sharp, punchy display

That screen has gone Full HD this year too, and while there are a handful of 2K screens doing the rounds this year the Moto X looks in no way left in the dust, with its 424ppi display looking sharp and punchy, and blacks as inky deep as only AMOLED screens can get.

Compared to the iPhone or Sony Xperia Z3, the colour palette is on the warmer side of neutral, but colours are still believable and don't look overdone.

There's plenty of fine detail too, which helps to give a great sense of depth to scenes. Contrast is strong, offering plenty of detail in the shadows.

Viewing angles are good, with colours not dropping in vibrancy and blacks staying deep when viewed off-axis. Screen brightness levels are high enough that viewing video outdoors is possible too.

The rest of the Moto X specs are pretty competitive. There's a quad-core 2.5GHz Snapdragon 801 processor and 2GB RAM under the hood, which keeps

There's never a hint of harshness from the treble, and though it's undeniably full-bodied in the bass, it's not overpowering

things moving along without a stutter, there's NFC connectivity on board for one-touch pairing with compatible kit, and a new 13MP camera and flash (up from 10MP on its predecessor).

Pictures taken on the Moto X will work fine as quick snaps and for social sharing, producing clear, decently detailed images in good light with a largely accurate colour balance. The camera's Achilles' heel is really with low-light photos. Images look soft and undefined, and picture noise is more of an issue here too.

When it comes to audio, the Moto X lacks a little detail and sounds a touch tubby in the bass, but it makes up for that with a lively, exciting presentation.

There's never any hint of harshness from the treble, even when dropping down from our CD rips to streaming Spotify, and though it is undeniably full-bodied in the bass, it's not overpowering or boomy.

Battery life is respectable for its size, offering up to 10 hours 21 minutes in our battery rundown test, beating the G3 by some way and coming very close to the iPhone 6 Plus.

Nothing bloated here

What's arguably nicest about the Moto X though, is the way Motorola has handled the software side of things. You'll find no bloatware here - and next to no brand-specific apps either, with Motorola leaving things such as video and music players in Google's capable hands rather than doubling up with its own efforts.

The new Moto X launched without any of the fanfare or fuss we've come to expect from a flagship smartphone. Still, it manages to be one of the best handsets we've see 2014.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good user experience; fine screen; enthusiastic sound; relatively cheap

AGAINST Non-expandable storage; camera could be better

VERDICT Motorola has produced a phone that feels like it works for you

Samsung Galaxy Note 4 ₹57,000

★★★★★

**Inside access**

The ability to remove the back cover to boost the Note 4's 32GB storage and hot-swap a battery is a useful feature

Bigger is getting better, it seems, and Samsung is most certainly leading the way - basking in the success of its Note range by launching its fourth iteration, the Galaxy Note 4.

As ever, Samsung hasn't done things by halves, and this has to be one of the highest-specced phones we've ever seen. The design hasn't changed drastically, but it's been refined. It has near-on the same size body, give or take a few millimetres, Samsung instead working on improving the look and feel of the device as well as what goes inside it.

It's been largely successful. The edges of the Note 4 are now metal, and the back panel from the Note 3 has been tweaked to make it feel a little more grown up. We're not totally sold on the textured finish, but it does help to make the Note 4 easier to grip, with none of the slippiness of the iPhone 6 Plus.

Same size, greater resolution

Samsung has put its ever-growing screen on hold for now, offering the same-sized display as its predecessor at 5.7in. What has changed, though, is the resolution, jumping from Full HD to a Quad HD Super AMOLED screen at 2560 x 1440 resolution and matching the LG G3.

It looks stunning and incredibly sharp, with Samsung's vibrant colour palette and rich contrast immediately evident.

This continues in video playback. The screen is seriously bright, so you'll probably want to keep it down at around 50% unless in direct sunlight (which it's great for), or use the Adaptive Display setting that automatically tweaks the screen to suit your environment.

Samsung's colour palette has cooled recently but it's still on the warm side of the scale, with colours full of punch, if a little over-saturated alongside something like the iPhone 6 Plus.

Viewing angles are superb, and motion is well handled too. Purists will prefer the iPhone's balance of things, but there's no doubt the Note 4 offers one of

Viewing angles are superb, and motion is well handled too. The Note 4 offers one of the best ways to watch video on the go

the best ways to watch video on the go.

This is supported by a surprisingly good battery life. Though it has a larger battery than the LG G3 at 3220mAh, it also has a larger, brighter screen to power, but manages to better the G3's performance by nearly 5 hours.

The audio performance on Samsung devices has been a bit hit and miss for us in recent years, but with the Note 4 it seems to be improving.

Playback is enthusiastic, with an admirable level of rhythm and drive, and high-resolution music is also supported, offering further insight and detail with tracks all the way up to 16-bit/192kHz. Dynamically it can't quite match the likes of the Xperia Z3, but it's well

balanced and plenty detailed enough.

The smartphone market spent years trying to rid itself of styluses, but the Note range has always championed them, and in the Note 4 the S-Pen is twice as sensitive as previous iterations.

As far as the user experience goes, Samsung's inimitable Touchwiz is built over the now second-from-top Android Kitkat 4.4.4, and the interface comes with added tweaks. The most useful of these are the enhanced multi-window options. They give you the ability to shrink apps to smaller windows for easier multitasking.

Camera boost

The camera on the Note 4 has had a slight boost here from its predecessor, up from 13MP to 16MP, and packs Samsung's new Smart Optical Image Stabilisation. The results are superb, and place the Galaxy Note 4 among the best smartphone cameras around.

When it comes to big-screen phones,

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Improved design; great screen; powerful performance; high-res music support

AGAINST Fingerprint scanner is hit and miss; Touchwiz is still a little heavy-handed

VERDICT Big on specs and on performance, the Note 4 is the best big-screen phone yet



CES 2015: WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT AURO-3D® ?

Instead of telling you how great Auro-3D® is, we thought we would let others do it for a change! So here are a few highlights of the reactions to Auro-3D® at the International CES 2015 in Las Vegas earlier this month.

Auro-3D Height Surround Demo Blows Minds – Sound & Vision

“Without a doubt the most mind-blowing surround demo at CES combined Auro-3D height-enhanced surround technology with gear from CAT, ATI, and Theta”

“...thrillingly, deliciously airy”

“This is a demo we won’t soon forget.”



CES 2015 Wrap Up – Scott Wilkinson, Home Theater Geeks

“So emotionally involving, it almost brought a tear to my eye. That’s what immersive sound is all about!”

“That was the emotional impact that I’m looking for – and it was really astonishing, the best sound at the show”



CES 2015 – Residential Systems

“audio with incredibly lifelike ambience”

“audio that had the air and realism of the real world, able to accurately convey the space and dimensionality of large concert venues or large exterior spaces”



Dolby Atmos vs Auro-3D – RSL Home Theater Newsletter

“The experience [of Auro-3D] was exhilarating... the closest simulation of reality that we’ve ever experienced... It was so convincing it was almost scary...”

“At this point, if sound were the only desire, we would recommend Auro-3D”

2015

CES®

Sony Xperia Z3 ₹45,890

★★★★★



Full HD is enough
The screen eschews a 2k resolution in favour of extending the Z3's battery life – a move of which we approve

After bagging an

Award at the *What Hi-Fi?* Awards 2014 just last month, the Sony Xperia Z3 is already having to defend its position against a flurry of newcomers, and it's certainly not backing down without a fight.

It looks better than ever. Dropping the angular edges that divided opinions over its predecessors, the Z3's look and feel finally match its performance.

Far from just a pretty face though, the Z3 is as tough as we've come to expect from a Sony phone, offering both dustproofing and the highest level of waterproofing available in a smartphone, making it safe for depths of up to 1.5m for a maximum of 30 minutes.

The Z3's 5.2in screen is Full HD, with Sony actively opting against a 2K display, citing the sacrifice it would mean in battery life as one of the main reasons. We're not upset by that. The Z2 was a great screen, and the Z3 is even better. Colours are certainly punchy, sitting somewhere between the cooler, neutral tones of the LG G3 and iPhone 6 Plus, and the warmer colours of the Moto X and Samsung Galaxy Note 4.

Detailed and natural-looking

This vibrancy is never pushed into looking overdone or unnatural though, and there's stacks of detail, with the screen holding its own against the likes of the 2K-packing Note 4.

When it comes to battery life, we haven't seen a smartphone last as long as the Z3 on one charge for some time, managing a whopping 14 hours and 3 minutes on our test.

This year, Sony has added high-res music support to the Z3, and it's a much better performance than high-res on the LG G3, sounding exciting and engaging with plenty of punch and attack.

We listen to a high-res master of Michael Jackson and Justin Timberlake's

This year, Sony has added high-resolution music support. It sounds exciting and engaging with plenty of punch and attack

Love Never Felt So Good and there's a wonderful sense of space with a tight, warm bassline, and a precise, detailed character. Switch it up to Muse's *Supremacy* and the Z3 shows its agility, rhythmic prowess and superb dynamics.

Standard resolution tracks offer a similar character, with a lively performance that's precise and immersive, if on the lean side compared with the Moto X and iPhone 6 Plus.

Camera performance is handled by the same 20.7MP camera as its predecessor, though there have been some improvements, such as a wider 25mm lens, improved image stabilisation and a boosted low-light mode. To get the best from it, you'll want

to have a play around with the extensive options in the camera app, but once you've got to grips with it you'll be rewarded with beautifully balanced, seriously detailed shots, and low-light pictures that remain crisp and do a good job of keeping noise at bay.

In day-to-day use, the Z3 zips around without a second thought thanks to a 2.5GHz quad-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 processor and 3GB RAM.

Heavy but useable

Sony's skin for Kit Kat is a little heavy handed for our taste – we prefer the purer experience offered by the Moto X – but it's easy enough to navigate and you can delete much of the bloatware.

The microSD card slot will allow for expansion up to a maximum of 128GB, which should provide plenty of room for your movies and high-res music files.

The Sony Z3 is every bit the flagship handset that Sony wants it to be, with next to no compromises, and very little in the way of gimmicks. Instead, everything has been well considered and well realised, creating a handset well and truly worthy of the tagline of 'multimedia powerhouse'. The Xperia Z3 won our Award for good reason – competitors will have a big job on their hands if they want to top it.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great design; outstanding battery life; strong multimedia performance; waterproof

AGAINST Audio could go louder; camera auto mode is hit and miss; too much bloatware

VERDICT A multimedia powerhouse that offers the best of Sony in an easy-to-use format

WINNER: BEST ACTIVE HOME SPEAKERS

The SRP 202s clearly bring out the experience Sonodyne has in the world of studio monitors and we think its a brilliant result. Sonodyne SRP 202 is well worthy of an award ~ WHAT HI-FI?, DECEMBER 2014

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TEST VERDICT



THE WINNER

Sony Xperia Z3

₹45,890 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

The smartphone field is getting more competitive at the top end of the market, and this test just proves it. With three five-star products and two fours, there's not a bad handset among them.

The LG G3 is the oldest phone in the test at just six months, but even in that short time it's no longer the powerhouse it was. If video and music performance are important to you, it's behind the competition, and its battery can be bettered too. Despite all this, it's still one of our favourite phones to use day-to-day, but that can't save it from dropping a star down to four.

Joining it is the Apple iPhone 6 Plus, a big handset trying to find its way. It'll win over iOS fans looking for a larger screen,

but we felt the design could've been a little better. The audio lacks the rhythmic performance we've always loved on the iPhone, too.

The first of our five-star winners is the 6 Plus's big competition, and we mean big. With a 5.7in-screen, the Samsung Galaxy Note 4 is a larger device, but also one of the best-specified phones we've ever seen. The good news is that it shines in performance too. The new Moto X also gets five stars, and is an excellent handset for those who want simplicity, speed and a near-on pure Android experience.

The Sony Xperia Z3 wins out, though. Protecting its Award-winning status with a multimedia performance that's hard to fault and a truly excellent battery life - two things that rarely go hand-in-hand. How long can it retain its crown?

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners to bring the best out of the Sony Xperia Z3



Headphones

Sennheiser momentum ₹9600 ★★★★★

These Award-winning portable cans are agile, punchy and endlessly entertaining.



Streaming service

Soundcloud free ★★★★★

With a vast catalogue and great sound, this is a wonderfully complete streaming service.



Bluetooth speakers

Logitech Ultimate Ears BOOM ₹21,990

★★★★★

Logitech's portable speaker doesn't disappoint with room-filling sound and rhythmic display.

Total build ₹74,870

Facts & figures



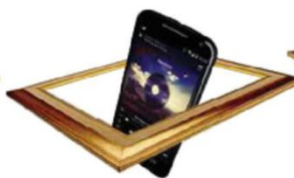
Apple iPhone 6 Plus
from ₹62,500 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.5in • Resolution/ppi 1920 x 1080/401 • Processor Dual-core A8 • RAM 1GB • Camera 8MP/1.2MP • Battery 2916mAh • Capacity 16/64/128GB • Expandable No • Dimensions (hwd) 158 x 78 x 7mm • Weight: 172g



LG G3
from ₹52,000 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.5in • Resolution/ppi 1440 x 2560 pixels/534 • Processor 2.5GHz quad-core • RAM 2GB • Camera 13MP/2.1MP • Battery 3000Ah • Capacity 16GB • Expandable Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 146 x 75 x 9mm • Weight 149g



Moto X
from ₹29,999 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.2in • Resolution/ppi 1920 x 1080/424 • Processor 2.5GHz quad-core • RAM 2GB • Camera 13MP/2MP • Battery 2300mAh • Capacity 16/32GB • Expandable No • Dimensions (hwd) 141 x 72 x 10mm • Weight 144g



Samsung Galaxy Note 4
₹57,000 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.7in • Resolution/ppi 1440 x 2560/515 • Processor 2.7GHz quad-core • RAM 3GB • Camera 16MP/3.7MP • Battery 3220mAh • Capacity 32GB • Expandable Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 153.5 x 79 x 8.5mm • Weight 179g



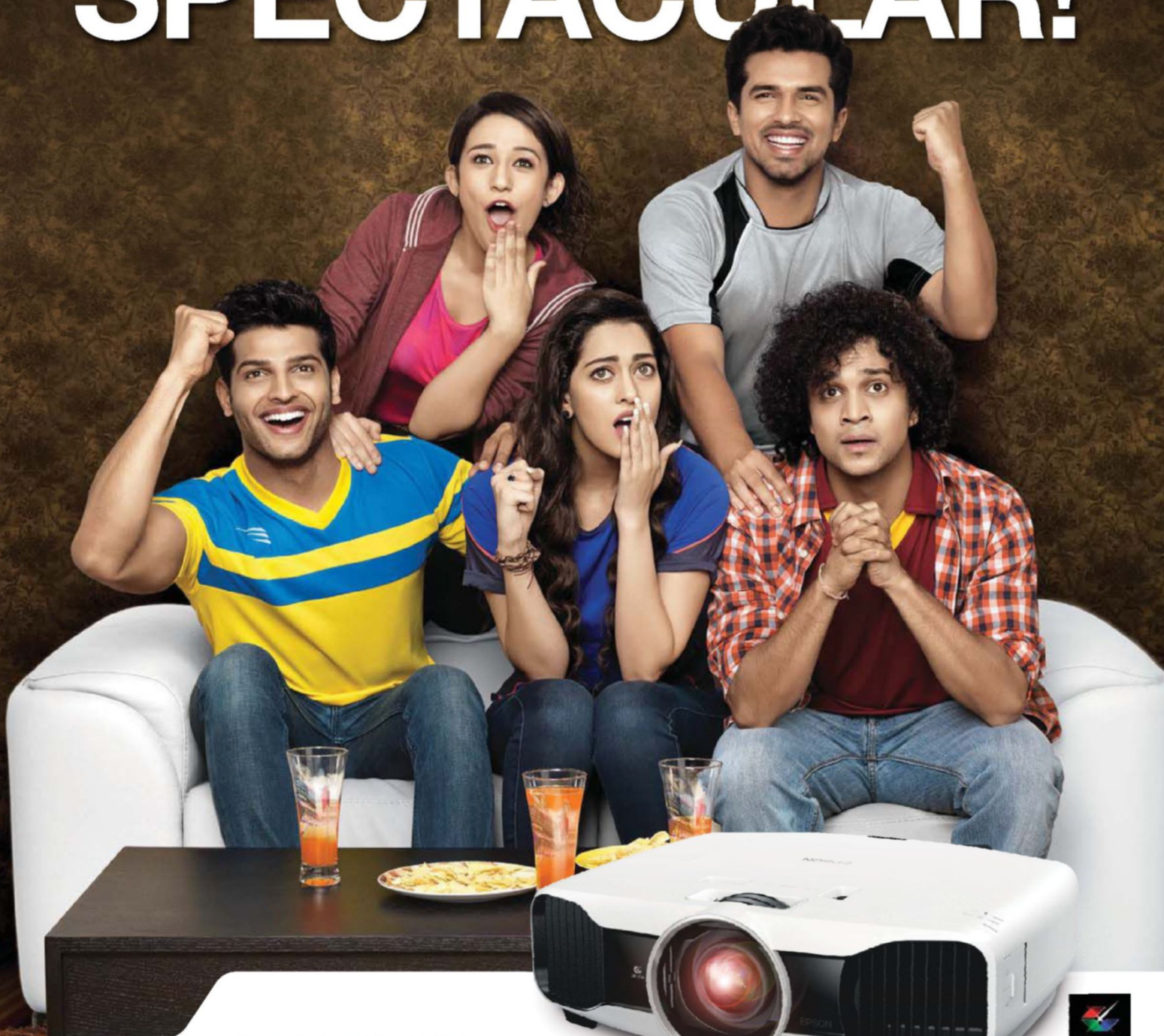
Sony Xperia Z3
₹45,890 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.2in • Resolution/ppi 1920 x 1080/424 • Processor 2.5GHz quad-core • RAM 3GB • Camera: 20.7MP/2.2MP • Battery: 3100mAh • Capacity: 16GB • Expandable Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 146 x 72 x 7mm • Weight 152g

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What's on test

Micromega MyAmp
 Monitor Audio Airstream A100
 NADD3020
 Pro-Ject MaiA
 TEAC AI-301DA

Ever since the NAD D 3020 showed us a glimpse of the future of the stereo amplifier, these mighty machines - the beating heart of any hi-fi system - have evolved to reflect the changing trends in how we listen to music. We stream. We play music on our smartphones, on our laptops. We use streaming services and we demand high-quality downloads.

The five amplifiers on test here all meet the required criteria: they're compact and flexible; they have a built-in DAC for hi-res digital formats; they have Bluetooth (or another form of streaming). And all but one cost under ₹50,000. It's going to be a tough contest.





THE PAIRING PROCESS

Bluetooth is of the higher-quality aptX kind. You'll need a toothpick or pen tip to press the pairing button when connecting to your device, but otherwise the process is fairly painless.

Micromega MyAmp ₹45,000 ★★★★★

Compact, feature-packed, and with a ruthless, attacking rhythm. These key points aptly describe the Micromega MyAmp. With a hi-res DAC and aptX Bluetooth streaming (that can remember up to eight paired devices) on its list of features, the MyAmp seems to assemble a formidable armoury of qualities.

Unorthodox appearance

Inside this curious-looking unit lies a class A/B amplifier. On the outside, heat sinks help to keep the unit cool.

This is unlike any other integrated amplifier we've seen, even in the light of forward-looking models such as the NAD D 3020. The Micromega's compact dimensions mean it can be easy to place in the home, but we're not too keen on its build quality. Given the price of the MyAmp, the plastic finish (which comes in black or white colour options) looks and feels rather cheap.

We're not entirely enamoured of the tiny 'credit-card' remote control either, but at least it has all the options and is responsive. We much prefer using the remote to having to push the unit's flimsy buttons.

Once you get past the lacklustre build quality, you'll be pleased to see that the Micromega MyAmp features a decent range of connectivity. Thanks to its built-in DAC it has single optical and coaxial digital inputs that support full-fat hi-res 24-bit/192kHz files, while the Type B USB input can handle up to 24-bit/96kHz.

When it comes to sound, the Micromega MyAmp is an energetic, attacking beast. It rips through *The Social Network* soundtrack's electronic and synth-based textures with a crisp and driven nature. Timing is snappy, there's grit and bite to the crunchy notes, and a decent helping of detail.

A love of speed

Feed it tracks that rely on a fast-paced rhythm, (such as from Eminem, Sbrkt or The White Stripes, regardless of source or file quality), and the MyAmp gleefully dishes out excitement and speed. It's organised, controlled and punchy. But this attacking sound can veer towards the aggressive, which is sometimes jarring. Drums and cymbals can sound a bit edgy, guitar twangs are taut yet

dispassionate. We wouldn't call it brash, but there's a hardness to the MyAmp's sound that won't suit all genres.

It's not quite as full-bodied and rich as its rivals, such as the NAD D 3020, and we'd like more subtlety and refinement to pick out the nuances in vocals - Birdy's breathy tone in *Shelter* isn't quite as expressive as we know it to be.

We admire the control and energy of the Micromega MyAmp. The sheer driving force will entertain many listeners, and it doesn't discriminate when it comes to low-resolution Soundcloud streams, either. That versatile list of connections is also impressive, but its questionable build quality and less-than-subtle sound isn't quite everything we hoped ₹45,000 would buy.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Energetic, attacking rhythm; organised sound; decent detail; excellent connections

AGAINST Voices sound thin; could be subtler and more refined; cheap build and finish; price

VERDICT We're not keen on the plastic finish, but this amp's attack has caught our attention

**WIRELESS WARS**

When the A100 was designed, Apple didn't allow AirPlay and Bluetooth to coexist in the same machine. They've relaxed that rule now, and we're sure the A100 Mk II will feature Bluetooth.

Monitor Audio Airstream A100 ₹34,500 ★★★★★

Ever since we first tested the Airstream A100, we've been itching to pit this hi-res, AirPlay-streaming, integrated amplifier against its peers. We're taken by its stylish design and composed, insightful sound. But how will its performance fare against class rival and Award-winner, the NAD D 3020?

A fine spread

Straight off the bat, we know there's something special about the Airstream A100. The first impression is one of scale. We play test favourite *Shelter* by Birdy and the spread of sound is wonderfully open and wide - far wider than with any rival. And in that spacious soundfield the music is crisp and clear.

The level of detail is stunning, and it conveys a tune - be it a John Williams theme or the latest alt-J track - with a great deal of composure and refinement.

Stream alt-J's *Breezblocks* and the delicate vocals are subtle, with each nuance laid bare. Guitar plucks are taut and tactile, drums hit with impact, and there's a good grip on basslines.

While we tend to prefer Bluetooth for streaming, the A100 is talented enough

to take off that hard edge that can creep in when playing songs via AirPlay. The sound is solid and organised across DLNA and wired USB connections too.

It's a captivating listen, but it's not perfect. The Monitor Audio is so intent on delivering the most revealing, refined sound it can that it forgets to have a little fun. We'd like a bit more punch to the rhythm and a touch more fluidity. It's here that the NAD's bite and free-flowing dynamics are a whole lot more fun.

We have to take our hats off to Monitor Audio for the A100's bold design. The build quality is solid and sturdy, while either black or white finish options make it look like a premium product. You can place the A100 horizontally, but it looks more at home propped upright on its stand next to your TV or computer.

As with its design, Monitor Audio has been brave with its connections. The main focus is on streaming with AirPlay, Airstream Direct and DLNA. The front panel USB port can charge up and play from your iPod, iPhone or iPad. You can also transfer your Apple smart device's wi-fi settings using the USB.

Monitor Audio's own Airstream Direct is a convenient option - it creates its own wireless network so you can stream songs when you aren't near a router.

Unlike its rivals, the A100 doesn't go much for wired connections. There's a pair of RCA line level inputs, a digital optical input (limited to 24-bit/96kHz files), and a subwoofer output.

Sleek and insightful

The A100's smart, sleek design is gorgeous, and its spacious, insightful sound will garner many fans. The lack of Bluetooth might not sit well with some, and on pure enjoyment terms we think the NAD just about edges it out. But for this price, you can't compete with that amount of refined detail.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Subtle, refined detail; huge, spacious sound; wide soundstage; stylish design

AGAINST Sound delivery could be a bit punchier and more upbeat; no Bluetooth

VERDICT With its incredible sense of space and stunning subtlety, this stylish amp is a treat

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**LIGHT AND FLEXIBLE**

The D 3020 is not a heavy unit and therefore fairly versatile when it comes to placement. Just make sure your cables aren't too heavy, as they will drag on the amp's lightweight build.

NAD D 3020 ₹42,500 ★★★★★

It's no exaggeration to say the D 3020's bold, compact design and Bluetooth streaming powers paved the way for a new breed of integrated stereo amplifier. And even alongside newer rivals, this exciting little amp continues to impress and entertain us.

What we love about the NAD is just how much fun it is to listen to. Whether it's our favourite Soundcloud playlist or songs stored on our laptop, we could spend hours listening to this amp.

Key to the NAD's performance is its punchy sense of rhythm. Play Redbone's *Come And Get Your Love* and you'll be snapping your fingers along to the funky, lively beat and taut, agile guitar plucks. Drum beats are punctual and hit with impact, while the bass cheerfully rumbles along. It's immensely enjoyable.

Rising to the challenge

Switch to something more demanding (such as The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall*), and the D 3020's remarkable control and authority keeps all the discordant instruments working cohesively, while also building up the brooding tension in the song. It's a confident performance.

There's plenty of rich, smooth detail on board too, along with ample rhythmic drive. The electronic instruments in alt-J's *Fitzpleasure* have texture, the layered harmonics are laid bare and the dynamic melody is handled with subtlety. While it may not have the Monitor Audio Airstream A100's level of clarity, insight and refinement, the NAD is more expressive in its delivery.

Its smooth presentation works well across a variety of genres and file types. This makes it a very unfussy amplifier - as content playing hi-res 24-bit/96kHz files as it is streaming songs over Bluetooth, even if a wired connection admittedly sounds punchier.

Like the Airstream A100, it can be placed on its side, but it makes more sense upright. The touchscreen power button on the top is often sluggish, but switching between inputs is simple.

The supplied remote control is compact and has a smooth, weighty build. It's responsive, too.

NAD's headline feature is aptX Bluetooth, allowing users to stream music stored on smartphones, tablets and laptops to the amp. Pairing is swift

and easy, and the connection is stable. Digital connections feature prominently, with two optical inputs alongside a coaxial and a type B USB input.

It's worth noting that the NAD's built-in DAC is capable of playing files up to 24-bit/96kHz. You can still play full-fat 192kHz files, but they'll be downsampled.

Staying power

The NAD D 3020 remains a fantastic piece of hi-fi kit. The compact design and breadth of connections aside, it's the punchy, exciting, nuanced performance that truly engages us. Its biggest threat comes from the stylish and detailed Monitor Audio A100, but the NAD may just have the edge here with its warm, lively character and offer of Bluetooth.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy and dynamic; bags of detail; exciting performance; compact design

AGAINST Touch controls are a little fiddly

VERDICT The NAD continues to impress and entertain with a punchy, lively sound that's immense fun to listen to



INTRODUCING THE PANEL

A nicely weighted volume dial takes centre stage on the fascia, while two small buttons let you scroll through the nine (yes, nine) inputs. A tiny blue LED indicates which input is selected.

Pro-Ject MaiA ₹48,000 (approx.) ★★★★★

A small integrated stereo amplifier that's chock full of connections, the ₹48,000* Pro-Ject MaiA looks like a tempting piece of kit.

But the MaiA (a stylised acronym that stands for 'My Audiophile Integrated Amplifier', which we can all agree is a bit of a mouthful) isn't quite the small wonder we were hoping for. This amp may boast a built-in hi-res DAC and Bluetooth streaming, yet it can't quite compete with its rivals when it comes to performance.

First, the good stuff. The MaiA's diminutive size is a welcome sight to anyone who doesn't want to clutter their house with large boxes of hi-fi. Slim as it is, the Pro-Ject still packs some weight. It stands just 4cm tall, but weighs 2kg and its aluminium chassis exudes a sense of quality. The fascia is fairly neat and classy-looking, too.

Slight but effective

A slim 'credit-card' remote control is included and, while we wish it were a bit more substantial, it does its job with speed and no fuss. The MaiA is available in black or silver.

Given Pro-Ject's heritage and expertise with turntables, it makes perfect sense that the company has included a moving-magnet phono stage. If you don't own a turntable, you can connect your CD player, streamer or laptop to any of the two line-level, two optical, coaxial or Type B USB inputs. The built-in DAC is capable of playing 24-bit/192kHz hi-res files through the USB inputs; it's restricted to 24-bit/96kHz over optical.

Aerial for streaming

AptX Bluetooth is also on the MaiA's features list, but you'll need to screw in the supplied Bluetooth antenna before streaming songs from your smart device.

It's impressive how much Pro-Ject has managed to fit inside such a small chassis. It's just a shame its performance isn't nearly as impressive. While it sounds solid, weighty and has a good deal of detail definition, there's a lack of enthusiasm. The MaiA's rhythm trudges along, sounding laboured and weary - which brings down the mood. The bassline in Prince's *Let's Work* (24-bit/192kHz) sounds loose and lumpy where it should be taut, punchy and agile.

Dynamically, it sounds a little squashed, so there's no breathing space for the songs to soar and flow.

On the plus side, the MaiA sounds clear and detailed, although the top end could do with a touch more sparkle.

It's with the phono input that the MaiA sounds its best. Plug in a budget turntable such as the Award-winning Pro-Ject Essential II or the Debut Carbon, and the amp has a bit more freedom to stretch its sonic wings.

We wish we could say that the MaiA is the ideal stepping-stone for someone with a record collection who now wants to experiment with smartphone-streaming. If only it had a touch more liveliness to its delivery, we'd be giving it a hearty four-star recommendation.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, weighty sound; decent detail; plenty of useful connections; fine build quality

AGAINST Rhythmically challenged; could be livelier and more dynamic

VERDICT Despite its smart design, this little amp isn't quite up to the standard at this price

**THE BODY BEAUTIFUL**

The solid, half-width chassis is of excellent quality. The metal build is sturdy, each panel is machined perfectly and the aluminium faceplate looks classy in black or silver.

TEAC AI-301DA ₹61,999 ★★★★★

With modern trappings bundled inside a traditional-looking, half-width hi-fi exterior, the TEAC AI-301DA integrated amplifier will appeal to enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

The combination of aptX Bluetooth, hi-res audio and DSD playback makes it stand out from the fiercely competitive small stereo amplifier crowd. But can it beat the class leaders?

Easy listening

There's plenty to like about the AI-301's smooth, full-bodied performance. The rounded quality smoothes off any rough edges a song may have. Admittedly, this means the TEAC isn't the most transparent or revealing of amplifiers, but it does make it easy to listen to.

There's warmth and weight to alt-J's *Fitzpleasure*, and the abrupt dynamic shifts are relayed with an easy-going attitude. While it can't match the scale and openness of the Monitor Audio Airstream A100's sound, the TEAC does a good job of creating a wide soundstage.

Detail definition is decent. The TEAC's sonic characteristics remain consistent when switching between sources, and

from a CD-ripped WAV file to a hi-res FLAC file. It's only when you switch to Bluetooth does the TEAC falter. It sounds less solid, and less lively.

Play *I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow* (FLAC, 24-bit/96kHz) from a streamer, and the folksy-bluesy tune jauntily jangles along with rich guitar strums and clear, direct vocals. While we like the detail and clarity of the expressive voices, the TEAC does have a tendency to push the midrange, and thereby voices, a bit too far forward. We prefer that to a lacklustre delivery though, and it bodes well for vocal-heavy songs.

While there's plenty to keep you listening for hours, the TEAC's sense of rhythm isn't quite as confident or precise. It struggles to control all the elements in the complex arrangement of *The Dead Weather's 60 Feet Tall*. The NAD D 3020 easily delivers the punchy and taut music with all cohesion and tension intact.

Fit for the modern age

That exterior is certainly traditional, but underneath it's a different story. The AI-301DA has a Class D amplifier

outputting a claimed 60W per channel, a hi-res Burr-Brown DAC, and an asynchronous USB input. But that's just the start. The single coaxial and Type B USB inputs support hi-res files of up to 24-bit/192kHz, while the optical input is limited to 24-bit/96kHz. There are also two pairs of RCA line-level inputs on the back panel, while a subwoofer output is available if you want more oomph.

The TEAC amp faces stiff competition from the likes of NAD and Monitor Audio. But despite its unadventurous presentation, it's still a warm, smooth sound that's really easy to listen to. Let's not forget its sturdy chassis and extensive file compatibility. Give the AI-301DA a whirl – you may just find it pleasant company.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth, full-bodied presentation; fine dynamics; good file support; classy build quality

AGAINST Could do with more insight, rhythm and precision; forward midrange

VERDICT It's not perfect, but the TEAC's warm, smooth presentation is enjoyable



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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****NAD D 3020**

₹42,500 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

NAD's done it again. The D 3020's bold, hybrid design marked the beginning of a new era of digital integrated amplifiers, and despite the surge of new rivals fiercely vying for top spot, this talented amplifier firmly holds on to its crown.

We applaud the Pro-ject MaiA for attempting to throw in every single option for the modern music-lover, but features only tell half the story. Despite a winningly slim design and a solid, detailed sound, the MaiA's lack of enthusiasm and punch failed to entertain us.

The TEAC AI-301DA and Micromega MyAmp share four-star status, but for completely different reasons. The

TEAC sounds smooth and easy-going; the MyAmp is aggressive and snappy. Each offers a different flavour of presentation, but neither can reach the Monitor Audio's depth of subtle detail, nor the NAD's punchy rhythm.

And so it came down to a head-to-head battle between the Monitor Audio Airstream A100 and the NAD D 3020. Neither is truly perfect, and in the end it came down to which amplifier we have the most fun listening to - the one we could imagine living with and never getting bored of. Unequivocally, that honour went to the D 3020. We admire the A100, but the NAD's ability to communicate the essence of a song kept us coming back to it. It's a winner.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Hook the NAD in with these three to create a formidable file-based music system

**Stereo speakers****Dali Zensor 3** ₹33,000 ★★★★★

A stonkingly good pair of speakers whose airy presentation and punchy dynamics are immensely fun to listen to

**Tablet****Apple iPad Air 2** From ₹35,900 ★★★★★

Powerful interface, gorgeous design and crisply detailed sound quality - the latest version of Apple's premium tablet is a stunner.

**Streaming service****Soundcloud** ★★★★★

Our favourite music streaming service is among the best, thanks to its huge catalogue, ease of use and versatile listening options

Total build ₹1,11,400**Facts & figures****Micromega MyAmp**
₹45,000 ★★★★★

Rated power 30W • **Inputs** 3 x line level, coaxial, opt, USB • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 14 x 14cm • **Weight** 1kg

**Monitor Audio Airstream A100**
₹34,500 ★★★★★

Rated power 50W • **Inputs** Line level, optical, USB, AirPlay • **Bluetooth** No • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 37 x 21cm • **Weight** 2kg

**NAD D 3020**
₹42,500 ★★★★★

Rated power 30W • **Inputs** Line level, 3.5mm, coaxial, 2 x optical, USB • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 19 x 6 x 22cm • **Weight** 1kg

**Pro-ject MaiA**
₹48,000* ★★★★★

Rated power 25W • **Inputs** 2 x line level, phono, 3.5mm, coax, 2 x opt, USB • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 21 x 20cm • **Weight** 2kg

**TEAC AI-301DA**
₹61,999 ★★★★★

Rated power 30W • **Inputs** 2 x line level, coaxial, opt, USB • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 6 x 22 x 25cm • **Weight** 2kg

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“Few have delivered music in such a likeable way”

■ PMC Twenty 26 Floorstanders

■ ₹7,00,000 ★★★★★

We're big fans of PMC's Twenty range. The two middle models in the series, the 22 standmounter (₹2,20,000) and 23 floorstander (₹3,25,000) have been regular Award-winners in recent years and are in with a decent shout of repeating the feat yet again this time round.

The newly introduced 26 sits well above those two in price and, we're glad to report, in performance too. Like the rest of the range these floorstanders look a little odd when you first see them due to that sloping cabinet. The slope isn't just there to grab your attention either, it's claimed to make the cabinet more rigid and reduce the build-up of internal standing waves.

This is the first three-way Twenty model. A standard Twenty series tweeter handles the highs - it's a drive unit co-engineered with the highly respected OEM manufacturer SEAS. It uses a 27mm soft dome made of a fabric called Sonolex. The tweeter's grille doesn't just protect the driver from prying fingers, it also helps sound dispersion giving a wider, smoother off-axis response.

Star driver

The dome midrange driver is the star here. It's a 5cm coated linen design that builds on the units PMC has long used in its more upmarket offerings. This dome covers a wide frequency range, from 3.8kHz right the way down to 380Hz, meaning the all-important midrange area - where our hearing is at its most sensitive - is covered by just one driver. This approach moves the phase issues and other shortcomings innate in any crossover network to frequencies where such flaws are less critical.

The dome midrange driver is the star here. It's a 5cm coated, linen design. Building on the units PMC has long used in its more upmarket offerings, it covers a wide frequency range

A hefty 18cm driver - designed specifically for this speaker - delivers bass frequencies. It uses a stiff, damped natural fibre (otherwise known as treated paper) cone with rigid cast alloy chassis and a vented magnet assembly. Together these things help with detail, dynamics and power handling.

The output from this bass driver is augmented by PMC's trademark transmission line system (see panel). The company has been honing this kind of bass tuning system for years and gained considerable success, delivering deep, clean low frequencies from smaller cabinets than you might expect.

Three-way harmony

A three-way design has innate advantages. Each drive unit can be optimized for the frequency band it works in, which should lead to a more revealing sound. Power handling is improved over two-way alternatives too, but the addition of an extra crossover - between midrange and bass - makes it harder to achieve a truly seamless balance throughout the frequency range. Rhythmic precision tends to suffer too. Still, with PMC's experience you'd hope these difficulties would be overcome.

Build quality is as good as we'd hope for. The 26's cabinet is solid and smartly finished. There's a choice of four finishes - the Amarone of our review sample

along with oak, walnut or diamond black. The finish is smart regardless of option chosen.

A sizeable plinth has to be attached to the base of the cabinet with some sturdy-looking Allen bolts. Unusually the plinth is separated from the main cabinet with hybrid cork/rubber spacers, which provide a degree of decoupling. The company claims improved bass definition and greater high frequency focus compared to the conventional solid approach, which rings true in use. Be careful not to do up the plinth bolts too tightly otherwise the decoupling effect is reduced - aim for fairly tight rather than lock-down rigid.

Sing from the source

Any speaker at this kind of level needs great electronics to sing, and the Twenty 26 is no different. We used our reference system of Clearaudio Innovation Wood-based record playing package, Naim NDS/555PS streamer and Bryston BP26/4B SST2 pre/power amplification. In this system the Twenty 26s shine.

Some products take a while to get under your skin, but not these. We like them straight away. They're beautifully balanced, from a tonality that's as even as you like to a combination of attack and refinement that's class leading.

Play a piece of music like Lorde's *Royals* and it's hard not to be impressed

TECH SPECS

Sensitivity (db/w/m) 86
Impedance (ohms) 8
Max power handling (watts) 300
Biwireable Yes
Finishes 4
Dimensions (hwd cm) 109 x 19 x 44



**'Any speaker at this type of level
needs great electronics to truly sing,
and the Twenty 26 is no different'**
See overleaf for more detail...

ENTRY PASS

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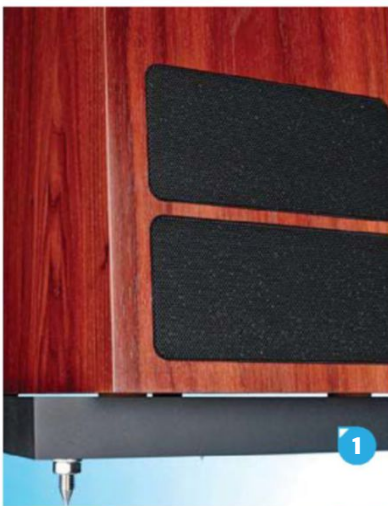


with the 26s' low-end power and precision. There's a fine sense of weight here, yet these speakers have no trouble defining the texture and reverb of the bass notes too.

Lorde's vocals are rendered superbly. There's a massive amount of detail through the midrange and a lovely display of low-level dynamics that help make the most of her distinctive, engaging vocal delivery.

Move onto something more dramatic, such as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, and these PMCs continue to impress. Here their dynamic reach stands out, as does the way they maintain composure when the piece becomes complicated.

Some products take a while to get under your skin, but not the PMC Twenty 26. They're beautifully balanced speakers



In detail

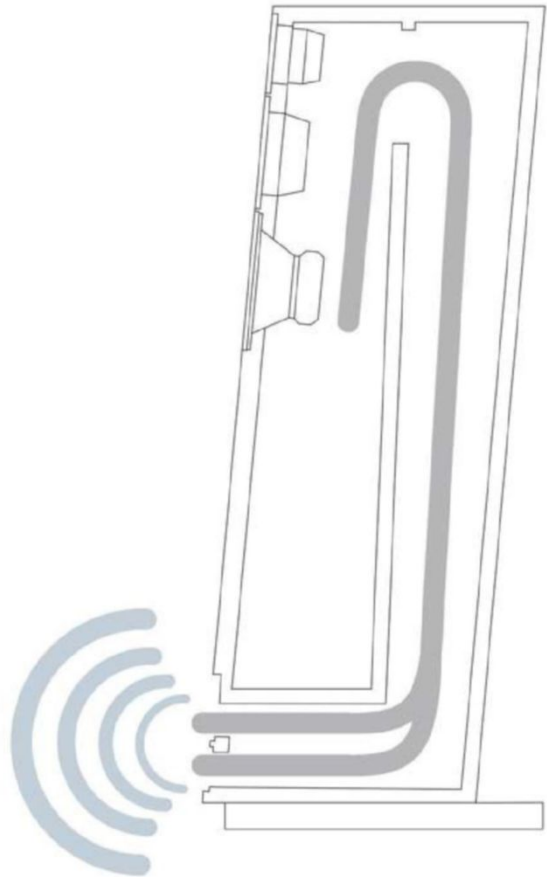
Peter Thomas – owner and chief designer



We think that transmission line bass loading technology is the best way of achieving high

levels of musicality; a natural sound with deep, clear bass and from a far more compact cabinet than other designs allow. The transmission line is a difficult design to get right and it is far more costly to produce – but the payback is the sound quality.

Transmission lines work in a very different way to sealed or bass reflex designs. In our Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) the bass driver is placed at one end of a long tunnel, which is heavily damped with up to five different formulas and profiles of acoustically absorbent foams, to absorb all the upper bass inside the cabinet. The result is extremely low-distortion bass with no unwanted harmonics. The lowest frequencies emerge from the vent at the end of the line, which effectively acts as a second driver, giving deeper bass. The bass output of the ATL is consistent regardless of listening level, meaning it's perfectly clear, even at the lowest level. Great for late night listening!



1 The exit of the transmission line is at the base of the front panel

2 The speakers can be tri-wired and it is worth experimenting to get the best out of them

The 26s' even tonality helps instruments sound convincing and the floorstander's carefully honed dispersion characteristics mean wide, expansive stereo imaging without too much effort. The stereo image is well projected and far more detached from the speaker enclosures than it normally would be for such sizable cabinets. That quality points to a well-behaved cabinet structure that doesn't impart too much of itself onto the music.

Time to shine

Perhaps most impressive of all is the way PMC has managed to engineer such a seamless sound from the three-way design. The drive units really seem to work as one, delivering a consistent character from the lowest bass notes upwards. We're happy with the agility of these floorstanders too. Despite delivering a sound of pleasing weight and authority they never sound slow or unresponsive. These are lively, entertaining speakers that are refined

enough to allow you to enjoy poor recordings yet transparent enough to allow the best material to shine.

We come back to that word balance. While we've heard even more revealing high-end floorstanders (including those from PMCs more upmarket Fact range), very few have delivered music in such a likeable way. This is an all-round package that's very hard to pick holes in.

Consider if – You want an informative but unfussy high-end floorstander
Highlight – We love the Twenty 26's sonic balance. Few rivals can match it

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Insightful yet refined balance; unfussy, musical nature; strong dynamics and impressive detail resolution; build and finish

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT Yet another top-class speaker from the Twenty range. PMC has done it again

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Why you should read?

Off-the-shelf is a collection of the hottest and newest products in Indian stores this month and selected from a variety of locations so regardless of where you live in India, you will never be far away from a dealer who can fix you up with one of these systems. If it's out there, it's in here!

Expert opinion

What Hi Fi? (India) has some of the finest ears in the country, enabling a product review of superior credibility and authenticity. Our expert reviewers have more than 20 years of collective experience and this helps them make accurate judgments of every kind of hi-fi equipment thrown at them.

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Like all product reviews in WHF, Off-the-shelf will also rely on the price to performance ratio to derive its verdict. While we are audiophiles at heart, we also sometimes listen to our minds. Not just to keep matters interesting but also for mere survival! If a product sounds like God but costs as much as His blessings, we'd rather put our money on the underdog and have enough savings for a decent set of interconnects!

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Listening Room

The *What Hi Fi?* Team has been hard at work reviewing kit fresh from the AV oven and putting it through the paces in our dedicated listening rooms. With a state-of-the-art space to accommodate even bigger equipment and better acoustics, you can rely on our reviews for the most accurate impression of a new product. Helping us achieve this level of AV perfection are brands like: APPLE MAC MINI • PROJECTION DESIGN • NAD • MONSTER CABLE • DENON • TOTEM • SPYDER TV • DA-LITE • SOUL NOTE



NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You are low on space, yet want to enjoy a room filling aural experience

YOU'LL NEED

To buy the SoundTouch wireless adaptor to stream audio from other sources

MAKE SURE

You place the bundled rubber shoes for the Acoustimass module before turning it on

AVOID

Placing the sub inside a wooden cabinet or away from the walls

HIGHLIGHT?

The immensely loud, distortion-free and room-filling sound

Bose CineMate 120

₹96,638

If you are tight on living room space, need big sound and are looking for a product to go well with your room decor, the Bose CineMate 120 is one such soundbar-based surround speaker system that will pretty much fulfill all of those needs.

The package consists of the soundbar which is extremely compact that features five precisely positioned (two on either ends and three front-facing) drivers on the inside that are helped by Bose's TrueSpace technology, aimed at creating a room filling soundstage from just a single speaker. Also included is the wireless subwoofer (called the Acoustimass Module), control unit and a meaty, well laid out universal remote controller. For some reason there are a total of 10 power cords packed in, just in case.

Setup is an extremely simple affair, as Bose makes sure that guesswork is thrown out of the window even for a novice attempting to set this system up for the very first time. Place the soundbar under your TV, connect the speaker wire to the control unit and position the subwoofer at a spot of your

choice (closer to a wall or a corner). You will then need to put on the ADAPTiQ headset and let the system configure the best acoustic settings for your room layout. You will hear many beeps and a voiceover will keep updating you about the proceedings after asking you to sit at five different spots of choice in your living room. Minutes later, you are set to enjoy some gut pounding sonics.

If you had any doubts about how loud this tiny system could sound, they will vanish the moment you spin your favourite disc. We fired up *The Dark*

The sub does well to kick in at the right time and is capable enough to bring down your chinaware

Knight Rises on Blu-ray and boy, did we feel the bat hover right inside our living room. The CineMate does enough to pull you in to the action, with the soundbar spraying the room with sound in multiple virtual locations. It will take you some time getting used to the fact that something so small can conjure such immensely loud, distortion-free sound. The wireless sub does well to kick in at the right time and is capable enough to bring down your chinaware. However it doesn't sound cohesive with the soundbar,

considering that you can pin-point the sub hidden away in the corner. Ignore that bit and what we have is a system which impresses overall. We had even more fun playing games, as gunshots and engine notes are rendered with enough thump to have you grin ear to ear. Switch to music and the Cinemate punches out deep bass as we played *California Love* by 2Pac feat Dr Dre. Definition in the midrange is lacking and tends to get muddled up in the overpowering bass. Not an audiophiles' choice but it does make it convenient via the optional Bluetooth adaptor. Future upgrades won't be painful with support for 4K and the fact that it features four HDMI slots to connect other devices. You can even add in the optional SoundTouch wireless adapter, and stream internet radio or music from your PC or media server via Wi-Fi. If you want ease of use, this is hard to beat.

Rating

FOR Sound output, wireless subwoofer, simple setup, connectivity, 4K ready

AGAINST Incoherent bass, midrange lacks definition, hard-edged sound

VERDICT On the whole, it's a VFM soundbar

TECH SPECS

Drivers (5x soundbar, 2x sub) **Inputs** 4x HDMI (1x output), 1x Coaxial, 1x optical, 1x 3.5mm, 1 x R-L audio

**NEED TO KNOW****CONSIDER IF**

If you want to start a house party at the press of a button

YOU'LL NEED

A distance of at least 6ft from the speaker for best performance

MAKE SURE

You leave the grilles off for better transparency of sound and clean delivery

AVOID

Sitting too close as this constricts the stereo imaging and soundstage

HIGHLIGHT?

Bass is full bodied and can generate insane SPLs for filling out the biggest room

Klipsch Stadium

₹1,98,000

It wasn't the first one on the block, but when Klipsch decided to make a "reference" class tabletop system, they clearly didn't hold back. The Stadium was years in the making and finally it's out, here in India and on our very sturdy desktop. With its almost 13kg weight, the die-cast aluminum chassis and proper high-end components make their heft felt the moment you unpack the sizeable unit. If there's one thing people know about Klipsch is that they're purveyors of the horn technology and they didn't want to sacrifice that philosophy in their single-box system. The large magnetic grilles come off to reveal a bunch of traditional Klipsch technologies and some new-generation tricks. A bonafide 3-way system, there is no dearth of drivers in this design. A pair of 1in Tractrix horn-loaded tweeters ensure wide dispersion and typical Klipsch efficiency. 3.5 midrange drivers remain invisible to the eye but instead fire through a different slot while the 5.25in woofers are positioned facing each other so it cancels most of the vibration causing reverse energy. Placing the woofers on the insides also gives the engineers more internal volume to play with and the in-built 400-watt amplifier

really squeezes out every bit of juice from these drive units.

Connectivity is comprehensive too, with something for every kind of user. AirPlay, Bluetooth and DLNA takes care of wireless audio and analog, optical and USB allows for hard wired connections to your sources. The remote controller is unique too with a replica finish but falls short of

Move back a few feet and the horn-loaded drivers and the meaty bass section start to sound cohesive

the quality exhibited by the main unit. It does however, have a convenient resting place for your smartphone.

Initial impressions were mixed. We started with Sade's *By Your Side* from the Lovers Rock album and the amalgamation of electronics and live instruments didn't really make us smile with aural nirvana. Sounding a bit harsh and forward, we realised the problem here was the seating position that was just too close to the Stadium. Move back a few feet and the horn-loaded drivers and the meaty bass section suddenly start to sound cohesive and authoritative. We settled at a safe pitch of 6ft. from the system and our large 450 sq.ft. room was filled with punchy sound that was entertaining, if not the last word in refinement. Shifting gears to Gary

Clark Jr., the blues guitar was delivered with a nice and crunchy bite with an effortless reserve of power by the amp section. Bass is tight and plenty, thanks to the twin drivers but there could be more definition. What's really noteworthy is how all the drivers come together without calling attention to individual units, even though they're all placed in silos inside the cabinet. It makes for a compelling listen although fans of stereo imaging will be left wanting since the physical distance between the two tweeters here is less than 10in, restricting the soundstage depth.

Bold and a heavy-hitter, this is the most unapologetic single-box system we have heard. Don't look for logic considering its price and just appreciate its attitude.

Rating

FOR Ease of use, loud and punchy sound, great all-round connectivity

AGAINST Remote feels flimsy, lack of stereo imaging and depth

VERDICT If you want a party speaker that cannot be crushed, this is it

TECH SPECS

Design 3-way active, **Drivers** 2 x 5.25in woofers, 2 x 3.5in mids, 2 x 1in horn-loaded tweeters, **Amp power** 400watts **Max SPL** 112dB **Frequency Response** 26Hz-24kHz **Dimensions (WHD)** 21 x 8.25 x 8.5in

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PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system



**Sin City2:
A Dame To Kill For**
Blu-ray
Out now

★★★★★



Bonus content

- Behind the Sin
- Character profiles: Eva Green is the Dame to Kill For/Jessica Alba is Nancy /Josh Brolin is Dwight / Joseph Gordon-Levitt is Johnny
- Makeup Effects of Sin City
- Stunts of Sin City

Duration 102m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 5.1



Darkness on the edge of town

Bullets, booze and broads: that's what you'll find in Sin City, where it's always midnight and everyone has a hand in something dirty.

It's been nearly 10 years, but this place doesn't change. If you liked it the first time, welcome back. You didn't? Well, better get out before you're spat out like a bad aftertaste.

For the uninitiated, *Sin City* is a series of graphic novels, now twice adapted into motion pictures that play heavy on pounding basslines and moaning saxophones.

This is a nasty world of crooks and dames, presented with Frank Miller's signature hyper-stylised, ultraviolent panache.

It's an over-the-top noir homage and a sight like no other. Nearly everything is starkly black and white, broken by splashes of bright colour. The novelty factor isn't as strong as it was in 2005, but it will still challenge your TV's contrast.

Witch-green eyes, ruby-red lips – but blood is often white. It's probably a good thing considering how much of it is spilled. There is a lot of violence. Throats are slit and there's a particularly nasty bit involving somebody's fingers.

But it's not just the violence that's gratuitous. There's also a silly amount of nudity. Eva Green almost never puts clothes on, and the girls of 'Old Town' offer a parade of flesh and fishnets. And yet, it never truly feels offensive. Despite the relentlessly grim tone, *Sin City* is never entirely serious.

Noir with a light side

There's more than a degree of camp to everything. The narration is a string of clichés from the dustiest of detective novels, read by subterranean voices. The cast is superb, and clearly having a great time hamming it up with mouthfuls of absolute drivel.

As with the original, *Sin City 2* serves up a handful of slightly intersecting storylines. The opening segment has a thug terrorising a bunch of obnoxious students. Elsewhere, a cocky gambler messes with the wrong people. A *femme fatale* torments her ex-lover. A stripper tries to take down a politician.

Most of these tales are hugely entertaining. Well, not the bits with Jessica Alba, who still has no presence. But that's fine, because Mickey Rourke is great fun and Eva Green is utterly captivating.

What's confusing (read: a narrative mess) is that this serves as both sequel and prequel, and some re-casts feel out of place.

Sin City 2: A Dame To Kill For is much like its predecessor. Either it's a guilty pleasure or it's entirely abhorrent, and only you can decide. If nothing else, it's one stylish peculiarity.

Music highlights

Fela Kuti: Colonial Mentality

An absolutely fulminating piece of jazz- inflected intensity and a hair-raising way to spend 13 minutes 42 seconds.

Pink Floyd: Louder Than Words

Fundamentally changed (though not diminished) by time, this is as fitting a way for Pink Floyd to leave the stage as they could have hoped for.

Lorde: Flicker 'Reworked' by Kanye West

(in this instance 'reworked' means 'turned into a pitch-black drone-a-thon of portentousness' - but in a good way).

Childhood: Blue Velvet It's not every band that contrives to leave a two-year gap between their debut single and debut album, but then Childhood are not every band.

Music

Download, CD, vinyl



BELLE AND SEBASTIAN GIRLS IN PEACETIME WANT TO DANCE Out January 19th

★★★★★

We all get a bit more accommodating as we get older, a bit more pragmatic and less headstrong. And while Belle and Sebastian may have been inching rather than striding along that path of least resistance, their ninth studio album of a career that's never been less than intriguing finds them at their most open and acquiescent.

Parts of *Girls In Peacetime Want To Dance* sound like they'd do anything to be a Big Hit Single. *The Party Line* and *Enter Sylvia Plath* (perhaps the best title for a song Morrissey never

wrote) are startlingly radio-friendly, sounding exactly like music produced by Animal Collective and Gnarl Barkley collaborator Ben H Allen III ought to: beaty, bouncy and ready for the floor.

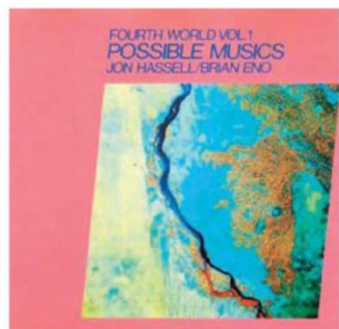
The midrange matters

Elsewhere it's recognisably business as usual, albeit with the glossier, friendlier sound the band has been developing ever since appointing Trevor Horn to produce 2003's *Dear Catastrophe Waitress*. Your system must deal with the dynamic pile-up of *Nobody's Empire*, the spaciousness of *The Cat With The Cream* and the delicate fragility of *Ever Had A Little Faith?* with equal dexterity, but as is usual with Belle and Sebastian recordings it's the midrange that demands the real care and attention. There's a wealth of detail, nuance and expression waiting to be revealed. With it, this is an engaging collection of songs. Without, the entire album becomes a little spurious.

Specifications

Duration 61m 16s
Standout track *Ever Had A Little Faith?* "Something good'll happen, wait and see..."

Download, CD, vinyl



JON HASSELL/BRIAN ENO FOURTH WORLD VOL 1 POSSIBLE MUSICS Out now

★★★★★

Brian Eno has always had multiple fingers in numerous pies, and when he was approached to collaborate with Jon Hassell he envisaged a producer's role. Hassell, though, was keenly aware of the commercial traction Eno's name might generate (although a trumpeter of some renown in avant-garde circles, Hassell was unsurprisingly low of profile) and the album was released with a double-billing. Not long after its release, Hassell complained Eno's approach was too 'commercial' and

indicated he was unhappy with the record. This was in 1980. Now, for the first time since 1992, *Possible Musics* is in shops and in download stores.

Mood and texture

Emphatically less about 'songs' and altogether more concerned with mood, texture and literal ambience, *Possible Musics* is a breathy, earthy collection of pieces with a very progressive eye on the idea of 'world' music. It also has an absolute determination to make a trumpet sound like anything but a trumpet. There's more than a gesture towards rhythm and groove in the likes of *Delta Rain Dream* and *Ba-benzele*, but overall the feel is outdoors-y, equatorial and, particularly in the case of the 21-odd minutes of *Charm (Over 'Burundi Cloud')*, abstractly pretty. A system with wide tonal variation, significant powers of detail retrieval, and the ability to express the silences as completely as the sounds is the minimum requirement.

Specifications

Duration 45m 05s
Standout track *Delta Rain Dream* Concise, accessible and (by prevailing standards) strong of structure.

Listen to it this way

The system
Pro-ject Essential II ₹24,000 ★★★★★
Pretty much an all-round perfect budget record player

Marantz PM6005 ₹41,900 ★★★★★
Better specified, better made and better sounding than the price even hints at

Q Acoustics Concept 20 ₹43,000 ★★★★★
Talented enough to survive multiple upgrades elsewhere in your system



That crucial midrange will come across in all its glory with this system

Listen to it this way

The system
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact ₹TBA ★★★★★
The best-sounding little tablet around

NAD D 3020 ₹42,500 ★★★★★
In terms of specification and performance it's everything an integrated amp should be

Dali Zensor 3 ₹33,000 ★★★★★
All the scale and energy you need, and more than capable of communicating the NAD's punch



A great set-up for delivering the atmospheric feel of the Hassell/Eno collaboration

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Ali Pardiwala
Editor, Buyer's Guide

Inside

Home cinema

AV RECEIVERS AND AMPLIFIERS 86

SURROUND SPEAKERS 87

Hi-Fi

CD PLAYERS 88

DACS 89

HI-FI SPEAKERS 90

STEREO AMPLIFIERS 93

PREAMPS 94

POWER AMPS 94

IPOD DOCKS 95

WIRELESS SPEAKERS 95

Headphones

96

All-in-one-systems

STEREO SYSTEMS 99

Network systems

MEDIA STREAMERS 99

Smartphones and Tablets

TABLETS 100

SMARTPHONES 101

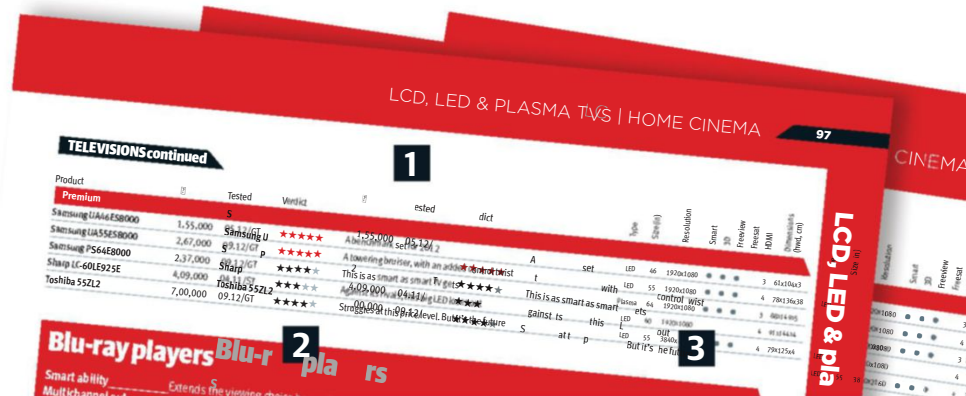
Accessories

HDMI CABLES 102

DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS 102

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS 103

SPEAKER CABLES 103



AV receivers & amplifiers

Budget	Well-equipped and deliver convincing surround sound
Mid	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
Premium	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

Product	₹	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hw, cm)
Pioneer VSX-522	NA	★★★★★	An agreeable entry-level amp	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer VSX-922	NA	★★★★★	A highly specified all-round performer that excels at its new price point	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V373	28,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2012	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V375	30,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Denon AVR-1912	45,900	★★★★★	A fine amp bettered by close rivals	7x90	5	1	●	17x44x38
Onkyo TX-NR525	46,000	Not rated	Not rated	5x160	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-2113	49,900	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Harman Kardon AVR171	59,990	★★★★★	Could be subtler but still delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Pioneer VSX-923	55,190	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a compelling and confident amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	63,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x175	6	2	●	17x44x33
Onkyo TX-NR727	72,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x185	8	2	●	17x44x38
Denon AVR-X4000	1,34,900	★★★★★	A decent enough AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Yamaha RX-V673	56,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget-mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer SC-LX57	1,10,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid), Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature laden powerhouse	9x170	7	2	●	17x43x41
Onkyo TX-NR1009	1,30,000*	★★★★★	An incredibly talented amplifier	9x180	8	2	●	20x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3030	1,61,000	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Onkyo TX-NR828	95,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x215	8	2	●	20x44x40
Pioneer SC-LX56	NA	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid-premium), Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR750	4,50,000	★★★★★	It isn't flawless, but it is very good indeed	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1010	89,990	★★★★★	A receiver with huge but fluid delivery	7x170	8	2	●	18x44x43
Yamaha RX-A1020	89,990	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Onkyo TX-NR1010	1,60,000	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	1,60,000*	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	1,90,000	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR5010	2,20,000	Not rated	Not rated	9x280	9	2	●	20x44x66
Pioneer SC-LX86	NA	★★★★★	Best Home Cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2012	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3020	1,34,990	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-V377	34,990	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-A1030	1,04,000	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, but this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with the feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR450	2,55,000	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42

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Surround speakers

Full size Traditional cabinet design that are big but can deliver a great sound
Style Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Front speaker (h/wd, cm)	Center speaker (h/wd, cm)	Rear speaker (h/wd, cm)	Subwoofer (h/wd, cm)	Finishes	
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	33,099	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 125 MX	39,375*	★★★★★	A choice compact speaker package	12x9x10	9x20x10	12x9x10	43x24x42	3
Canton Movie 130	75,000	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	45,000	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	58,500	★★★★★	Lots to admire here from very little	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22	1
SKS HT-528	25,000	Not rated	Not rated	18x10x12	10x27x11	18x10x12	43x23x41	
KEF KHT3005 HD2	1,08,000	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1
Monitor Audio MASS	80,000*	★★★★★	Best style package (mid), Awards 2012	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Monitor Audio Vector AV10	59,000	★★★★★	For those who like big sound, not big boxes	24x15x17	15x35x17	24x15x17	37x32x32	3
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	87,750	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to (mid), Awards 2012	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000	95,250	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Tannoy HTS-101	60,200	★★★★★	Best style package (budget-mid), Awards 2012	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
B&W MT-50	1,91,250	★★★★★	Best style package (mid-premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	3,28,500	★★★★★	Best style package (premium), Awards 2012	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 2	88,000	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound meets decorative looks	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x36	2
DALI Zensor 1 5.1	1,12,000	★★★★★	Best style package (mid-premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
DALI Zensor 5 5.1	1,55,400	★★★★★	Best traditional package (mid-premium), Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1,05,000	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a on detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	2,17,000	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEF KHT3005SE	1,08,000	★★★★★	Still a valid product and test winner	25x12x15	13x30x18	25x12x15	39x44x19	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1,26,000	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	89,900	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1,60,000	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	2,75,000	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1,40,000*	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	7,99,875	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2012	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	2,01,65,625	★★★★★	Expensive but it's the best we've heard	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
DALI Ikon 5 Mk2 5.1	3,21,900	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Cerwin Vega SL Series 5.1	2,36,000	Not rated	Not rated	84x36x38	17x28x18	91x42x50	45x13x16	1
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1,57,000	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2013	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
KEFR100 5.1	2,47,000	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2012	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
Monitor Audio Apex	1,68,100	★★★★★	Best style speaker package (Premium), Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Energy Veritas RC Micro 5.1	47,100	Not rated	Not rated	12x9x9	9x9x15	12x9x9	32x31x27	1
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	14,10,000	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2,93,400	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2,50,800	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	5,27,200	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Mordaunt-S. Performance 5.1	13,14,000	★★★★★	Deeply impressive, they will leave you breathless	121x24x37	60x21x22	121x24x37	50x50x50	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	5,00,000*	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution Signature	1,64,500*	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

CD Players

Integrated Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Marantz CD6005

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Naim CD5si

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Mid)



AWARD WINNER

Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	30,800	★★★★★ A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	46,600	★★★★★ A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Denon DCD-710AE	27,400	★★★★★ Enjoyable enough, but holds itself back	●	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x28
Marantz CD6004	39,900	★★★★★ Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
NAD C546BEE	41,000	★★★★★ Excellent all-rounder that entertains like no other at this price point	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x44x29
Audiolab 8200CD	80,000*	★★★★★ Best CD player (Mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Cyrus CD T Transport	1,15,000	★★★★★ An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	1,25,000	★★★★★ Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	1,25,000	★★★★★ A stripped down affair, but it's as musical as they come	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Roksan Kandy K2	68,500	★★★★★ Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Burmester 069	45,00,000*	★★★★★ Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Audio Research CD5	6,18,750	★★★★★ Audio Research strikes gold again. The CD5 is a terrific player	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1,23,000	★★★★★ Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1,82,000	★★★★★ Best CD player (mid-premium), Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	9,50,000	★★★★★ With the master clock it's an amazing combo	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
Parasound Halo CD1	3,00,000	★★★★★ Great player for classical, jazz and sultry female vocals	●	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	11x44x34
Naim CD5 XS	2,50,000	★★★★★ It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555	14,00,000	★★★★★ The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	4,50,000	★★★★★ The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Primare CD32	1,63,000	★★★★★ It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1,98,000	★★★★★ Best CD player (Premium) Awards 2013	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
Marantz CD6005	41,900	★★★★★ Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2013	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Esoteric K-05	8,50,000	★★★★★ A great place to start... If you're looking for your final disc player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36

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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from its source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turn it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

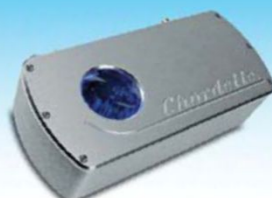
The shortlist



HRT microStreamer

Has beaten our 2012 Award-winner

“Truly captivated us with a stunningly agile-paced performance that reveals layers of subtlety hitherto unheard with just a pair of headphones and a laptop.”



Chord Chordette QuteHD

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Mid)

“It’s simple, looks great – and above all, sounds absolutely fantastic. You’ll have to spend twice as much to get something significantly better.”



NAD M51

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Premium)

“The M51 sounds sensational. In fact, we’d go further than that by saying it’s one of the best NAD separates we’ve heard in recent memory.”

Product	₹	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Audioengine D1	11,789	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	18,900	★★★★★	Best DAC (Budget), Awards 2012. Now beaten by the HRT microStreamer	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x2x6
Arcam rDAC Wireless	36,000*	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam rPAC	19,800	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	18,800	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	38,500	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
HRT microStreamer	20,000*	★★★★★	HRT has struck gold again. The microStreamer is an excellent buy	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
Meridian Explorer DAC	31,000	★★★★★	The Explorer’s design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	32,000	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC’s for you	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity M1 DAC	40,500	★★★★★	Best DAC (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	10x22x30
NAD DAC2	25,500	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x14x7
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1,03,000	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it isn’t the best in delivering outright entertainment	1	4	3	1	0	0	1	0	12x43x36
Chord Electronics QuteHD	1,00,000*	★★★★★	Best DAC (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Meridian Director	65,000	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger present in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Audio Research DAC8	5,30,000*	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJD33	2,34,000	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Burmester 113	4,00,000*	★★★★★	Want excitement and insight above all else? The 113 could be for you	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Rotel RDD-1580	80,000	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x43x32
NAD D1050	42,500	★★★★★	If you’re looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
NAD M51	1,27,000	★★★★★	Best DAC (Premium), Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2,50,000	★★★★★	Best premium DAC, Awards 2010. Gives digital sources a big boost	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30

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Hi-Fi speakers

Standmounters	Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders	Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered	Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker (Budget)



AWARD WINNER
KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hw/d,cm)
Audioengine P4	18,000	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●		3	23x14x17
PSB Alpha T1	37,000	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated		●	3	91x18x31
PSB Alpha LR1	13,000	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated		●	3	18x12x16
Waterfall Serio	15,000	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			3	5x5x3
Q Acoustics 2010i	19,200	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●		4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	25,900	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers (Budget), Awards 2013	●		4	26x17x28
Tannoy Mercury V1i	19,800	★★★★★	An excellent entry-level all-rounder	●		2	30x17x26
Wharfedale Diamond 10.0	11,500	★★★★★	An ideal choice for the easily startled, but a little straitlaced for our liking	●		7	24x15x17
Audioengine A5+	27,980	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●		3	27x18x20
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	39,990	★★★★★	There are few other products as versatile and easy to like at this price	●	●	4	31x19x24
Boston Acoustics A-26	24,600	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●		2	33x21x27
B&W 685 S2	65,000	★★★★★	A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●		2	35x19x32
B&W MM-1	40,000	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available		●	1	17x10x10
Waterfall Hurricane Evo	31,200	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			3	11x7x3
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	28,013	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●		2	12x7x12
DALI Lektor 2	37,500	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2	31x18x22
DALI Zensor 3	33,000	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3	35x21x29
DALI Zensor 1	23,700	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●		2	27x16x22
Epos Epic 1	32,950	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	49,999	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●		3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	29,999	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop.		●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	33,000	★★★★★	Product of the year - Stereo speakers, Awards 2011	●		3	36x21x30
Totem Dreamcatcher	33,250	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			4	11x5x7
Totem Mite	44,750	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			6	11x6x8
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	32,000	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	43,900	★★★★★	Form and function in perfect harmony, these speakers will sit pretty in any home	●		6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1	18,000	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●		1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	23,000	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●		3	32x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 2	37,800	★★★★★	For speakers so small, you get surprisingly full bass	●		2	35x22x28
Q Acoustics 2050i	66,400	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2012		●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	38,000	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4	31x19x24
Tannoy Mercury V4i	48,200	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2011		●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	42,700	★★★★★	They may be small of stature but these Tannoys have a huge sonic heart	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	70,300	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Mid), Awards 2012	●		1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	49,400	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●		3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 10.1	18,500	★★★★★	Fresh competition now offers more for the money	●		4	30x19x28
Wharfedale Diamond 121	20,000	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival.	●		7	32x17x23
Audio Pro LV2e	86,625	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	TBA	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with		●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	TBA	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed		●	5	98x14x24

SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/6	59,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers at this price. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	66,000	★★★★★ A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
ATCSCM 11	93,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	38x21x25
B&WXT2	1,12,500	★★★★★ Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	●		2	31x15x20
DALI Ikon 6 MK2	1,26,000	★★★★★ Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●		3	100x19x36
DALI Ikon 1 Mk2	60,000	★★★★★ Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●		3	33x15x26
DALI Mentor Menuet	84,000	★★★★★ These Menuets are something of a gem	●		2	25x15x23
DALI Zensor 5	54,900	★★★★★ Compact and affordable floorstanders	●		2	84x16x27
Energy Speakers CF70	78,400	Not yet rated	●		1	103x21x40
Energy Speakers CF50	67,200	Not yet rated	●		1	98x18x37
PSB Image T5	67,000	Not yet rated	●		2	94x21x32
PSB Imagine T	1,39,000	Not yet rated	●		5	94x21x35
Elac BS142	60,000	★★★★★ An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elipson Planet L	60,000	★★★★★ Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	66,425	★★★★★ Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●		2	92x21x32
KEFLS50	1,10,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		1	30x20x28
KEFR100	73,000	★★★★★ These are extremely talented stand-mounters	●		4	28x18x29
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	55,000	★★★★★ Easiest floorstanders to live with we've heard in a good while	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	65,300	★★★★★ A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●		6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	83,250	★★★★★ A sensational product from Monitor Audio – detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1,09,000	★★★★★ If you're addicted to bass, these floorstanders will suit you	●		6	96x28x39
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	41,500	★★★★★ A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●		3	95x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	52,000	★★★★★ Great speakers for sure, but too controlled	●		3	95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	75,600	★★★★★ Possibly the best in their class	●		2	100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1,09,000	★★★★★ Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable	●		2	107x22x31
PMCD B1i	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●		4	29x16x23
Quad 12L Classic	52,000	★★★★★ There's plenty to admire here	●		4	34x21x28
Spendor S3/SR2	84,500	★★★★★ A little less than the sum of their parts	●		4	31x17x18
Spendor SA1	1,35,800	★★★★★ Small, top-class standmounts	●		3	31x17x19
Tannoy Precision 6.1	96,300	★★★★★ Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Precision 8D	60,000*	★★★★★ Solid active speakers that sound good	●		1	44x27x37
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	1,03,700	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1,10,000*	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	40,000*	★★★★★ DC4s are still appealing across the board	●		2	27x17x18
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC6T	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Expensive but fully justify the price tag – expertly balanced performance	●		2	14x9x9
Totem Rainmaker	59,500	★★★★★ Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	77,000	★★★★★ A brilliant desktop speaker package	●		3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	1,24,000	★★★★★ Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	85,920	★★★★★ Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	52,000	★★★★★ Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●		1	32x20x31
Neat Iota	85,000	★★★★★ Attractive, but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Elac FS249	2,40,000	Not yet rated	●			115x26x36
JBL Project Everest DD66000	16,16,999	Not yet rated	●		2	44x38x18
JBL Synthesis 4700	7,04,599	Not yet rated	●		1	43x20x15
Neat Motive SX1	2,20,000	★★★★★ Charming, unique speakers - they lean backwards	●		4	93x16x20
PSB Synchrony One	3,47,000	Not yet rated	●		3	109x23x33
PSB Synchrony One B	1,49,000	Not yet rated	●		3	99x19x28
ATCSCM 100A	10,99,000	★★★★★ Massively talented and proportioned	●		4	107x40x56

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
ATSCM40	2,20,000	★★★★★ Among the best at this price level, but is your system good enough?	●		1	97x23x32
Harbeth P3ES-R	1,74,027	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	30x19x20
Harbeth Compact 7ES-3	2,46,089	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	52x27x32
Harbeth Super HL5	3,00,181	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	64x32x30
B&W 800 Diamond	26,71,875	★★★★★ An exceptional performer, and a fine showcase for B&W's range of technology	●		3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	5,34,375	★★★★★ Good, but easier to admire than really love	●		3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	2,79,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	5,60,000	★★★★★ Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●		3	39x22x28
Neat Motive SX2	1,75,000	★★★★★ Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●		3	39x21x37
DALI Fazon F5	2,49,000	★★★★★ Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●		3	92x28x32
DALI Mentor 6	2,55,000	★★★★★ Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●		1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Excite X32	1,94,000	★★★★★ These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●		4	92x17x27
Dynaudio DM 3/7	1,48,000	★★★★★ Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●		2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Focus 160	1,88,000	★★★★★ Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●		6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Excite X12	80,000	★★★★★ They get enough right to warrant the full five stars	●		4	29x17x26
Focal Diablo Utopia	8,99,999	★★★★★ When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●		Any	43x26x43
Jamo R907	4,98,000	★★★★★ The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●		1	119x44x19
KEF Reference 207/2	12,50,000	★★★★★ Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●		4	123x40x69
Linn Akurate 242	6,74,860	★★★★★ Very impressive speakers, and ideal in a Linn set-up	●		2	100x21x38
Monitor Audio PL100	2,13,000	★★★★★ For those who want sonic delivery and insight	●		3	37x23x29
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	4,78,000	★★★★★ Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●		3	111x41x47
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 2	1,56,000	★★★★★ Not all-rounders, but exceptional in some areas	●		3	49x24x36
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 6	2,68,000	★★★★★ Among the most realistic-sounding speakers ever	●		2	121x24x37
Neat Petite SX	1,75,000	★★★★★ Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●		6	31x20x18
Neat Ultimatum XLS	6,20,000	★★★★★ An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●		9	38x22x37
PMC DB15-All	2,20,000*	★★★★★ They may not look it, but these PMCs sound like every penny's worth	●		1	29x16x28
PMC Fact 3	4,20,000*	★★★★★ Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●		4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	5,00,000*	★★★★★ These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●		4	103x15x38
PMCFB1i	2,50,000*	★★★★★ Great all-rounders. They have real long-term appeal	●		4	100x20x30
PSB Imagine Mini	49,000	★★★★★ Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a small room	●		5	23x14x21
PMCPB1i	6,50,000*	★★★★★ Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●		1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	2,20,000*	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2012	●		4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	3,25,000*	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2012	●		4	92x15x33
ProAc Response D18	1,49,625	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2011	●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1,16,275	★★★★★ An entertaining and dynamic performer	●		4	104x19x28
Quad ESL 2805	5,40,000	★★★★★ Exceptional electrostatic speakers	●		1	104x70x39
Quad ESL 2812	on request	★★★★★ Still a terrific electrostatic speaker, in certain respects it remains unmatched	●		1	107x69x38
Spendor A6R	2,25,000	★★★★★ An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●		5	88x19x28
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	4,83,750	★★★★★ One of the best standmounts money can buy	●		2	35x20x37
Spendor A5	1,63,000	★★★★★ The most accomplished speakers for this money	●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A6	2,06,000	★★★★★ Brilliant speakers for the money - a class-leading combination of insight and naturalness	●		4	88x19x28
Spendor A9	4,06,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers (Premium), Awards 2010. Stunningly capable	●		4	103x21x35
Spendor D7	3,18,000	★★★★★ The finest Spendors in years	●		6	95x20x32
Spendor SP100R2	6,28,500	★★★★★ Can still compete with the best at this price level	●		2	70x37x43
Spendor SP2/3R2	2,24,500	★★★★★ They're wonderfully natural with a seamless presentation	●		1	55x28x33
Tannoy Definition DC8	2,81,500	★★★★★ Capable of seriously controlled sound	●		3	47x27x26
Totem Mani-2 Signature	2,49,900	★★★★★ When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●		44x21x31	
Triangle Quartet	2,48,400	★★★★★ Hugely entertaining premium floorstanders	●		2	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1,52,000	★★★★★ Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●		3	106x25x40

WHAT HI FI?

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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
NAD D 3020



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Arcam FMJ A19



AWARD WINNER
Naim Nait 5i

Product	₹	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Head phone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam FMJ A19	72,000	★★★★★	Picky about partners but wonderfully talented	50	6	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	1	●	1	9x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	TBA	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	2	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	43,000	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	1	1	12x43x35
Cyrus 6a	1,24,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amp (Mid), Awards 2012	40	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-710	29,700	★★★★★	The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	12x43x21
Denon PMA-720AE	34,900	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	2	12x43x31
Marantz PM6005	41,900	★★★★★	A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM6004	39,900	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM8003	56,700	★★★★★	Built like a battleship and delivers most of the goods	70	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	12x44x36
NAD C326BEE	38,000	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	1	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	57,000	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	1	13x44x34
Naim Nait 5i	1,00,000	★★★★★	The Nait 5i gets all the basics right and more	50	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	1	7x44x31
Onkyo A-9030	25,000	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	35,000	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	2	14x44x33
Roksan Kandy K2BT	1,30,000	★★★★★	Full of power and punch, but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	2	11x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2	82,600	★★★★★	Best stereo amp (Budget-Mid), Awards 2011	125	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	3	3	10x43x38
Rotel RA-04SE	45,000	★★★★★	A startling upgrade to an already strong performer	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	7x44x34
Rotel RA-06SE	91,125	★★★★★	A forceful, articulate listen. Could do with more detail	70	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	1	1	9x44x34
Rotel RA-10	55,125	★★★★★	Best Stereo Amp (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	27x43x34
Rotel RA-1520	1,05,750	★★★★★	It's got good looks, a good spec, and a great sound	60	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	9x43x269
Cyrus 8a	1,82,000	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	2,19,000	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	2	2	7x22x364
Denon PMA-2010AE	1,39,900	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	1	18x43x449
Naim Nait XS	1,75,000	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	1	1	7x43x30
Quad II Classic Integrated	3,80,000	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	1	20x31x38
Roksan Caspian M2	1,80,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Premium) Awards 2012	85	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	2	8x43x332
Unison Research Preludio	2,40,000	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	1	20x40x38
Unison Research S6	2,90,000	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33	5	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	2	2	21x35x49
Unison Research S9	6,45,000	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	1	1	25x41x57
Unison Research Simply Italy	1,50,000	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	2	2	26x19x35
NAD D3020	42,500	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Budget) Awards 2013	30	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	●	2	2	19x6x22
Naim Nait 5si	1,25,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Mid) Awards 2013	60	3	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	2	2	7x44x331
Cyrus DACXP Signature	TBA	★★★★★	With the signature update, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	2	7x22x36

Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Product	₹	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
ATCCA-2	1,43,000	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4,18,600	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	75,000	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152XS	1,25,000	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	79,000	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Rotel RC-1580	1,59,750	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Audio Research LS27	7,31,250*	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Burmester 808 MK5	25,00,000*	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	20,50,000	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Naim NAC252	6,50,000	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31

Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
ATCP1	2,16,000	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo 150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Cyrus Mono X300	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo 235	1	1	7x22x36	73
Linn Akurate 2200	3,33,795	★★★★★	A fine product with a distinctive sonic signature	Stereo 111	1	1	9x38x38	6.5
NAD C275BEE	99,000	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo 150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1,50,000	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo 60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3,75,000	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo 80	0	0	9x43x32	165
Quad QSP	95,000	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo 140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1,80,000	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo 200	1	0	14x43x41	33
Audio Research Reference 75	9,00,000*	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo 75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	35,00,000*	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo 535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	19,75,000	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono 700	1	1	31x48x69	75

Instant expert... hi-fi separates

1. Why matching pairs are a winning combination

We advocate separates over all-in-one systems. Sound-wise, separates tend to perform better, but when buying we still suggest you demo the same maker's matching amp and CD player. The kit usually shares the same design team and will sonically complement each other: if you like the sound of the amp, you'll probably enjoy the CD player, too.

3. Position before you listen - and don't stack it, rack it

You've bought your shiny new system. But you're not going to stack your new amp, CD spinner and turntable on that rickety table, are you? And don't even think of putting the kit on the floor. To sound it's best, hi-fi kit needs a dust-free, level and secure base. Invest pounds in a dedicated rack, and the sonic (and visual) rewards justify the outlay.

2. Listen to your favourite music, not the dealer's

Hi-fi dealers should have a decent CD and vinyl collection for demo purposes, but we suggest you take your own. Take tunes you know so you can concentrate on how the kit is performing, rather than on the new music. And don't just take your 'good'-sounding CDs. If you listen to lots of compressed pop, take it and hear exactly how it sounds.

4. Give your amplifier room to breathe

Well done for buying that nice equipment rack, but before you undo all your good work, make sure you give your stereo amplifier room to breathe. These machines get hot, and the chassis vents shouldn't be covered up. The top shelf of your rack is ideal, but if you also own a top-loading CD player and/or turntable you'll need clearance for all.

5. Keep on running, keep on improving

Hi-fi units are also (sort of) like Spanish footballers. No, not constantly feigning a blown fuse, but happiest playing in the heat. New kit can take weeks to reach optimum levels. Once run-in - unless you have an environmental conscience - we suggest you leave your kit on. Otherwise, give it around half-an-hour to warm up before you hit play.

iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod; usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

The shortlist



Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	AUX	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam rCube	42,300*	★★★★★ Best iPod dock (Mid), Awards 2011			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	14,513	★★★★★ A talented dock that can fill an average-sized room			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
Epoz Aktimate Micro	27,500	★★★★★ Best desktop speaker, Awards 2012			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	19,900	★★★★★ AirPlay and iPad support, with good sound too	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
GenevaSound Model S	24,990	★★★★★ Discreet looks combine with authentically competitive performance			iOS	●	30	14x24x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	15,990	★★★★★ The VenueLT is a versatile, talented and enthusiastic dock		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Logitech S715i	9995	★★★★★ Best speaker dock (Budget), Awards 2012			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	TBA	★★★★★ Best speaker dock (Mid), Awards 2012		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Monitor Audio i-deck 100	20,000	★★★★★ A dock that's full of style and substance			iOS	●	90	25x32x21
Monitor Audio i-deck 200	TBA	★★★★★ No frills but very high quality sound			iOS	●	140	25x55x21
Revo K2	30,000*	★★★★★ Lots to like - but it's not perfect			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
B&O BeoSound 8	92,000	★★★★★ Relishes big volumes, the performance justifies the cost			iOS		n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	48,263	★★★★★ This nifty Bose moves up a star		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	48,000	★★★★★ A massive step up from the original		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Epoz Aktimate Maxi	56,450	★★★★★ True hi-fi sound in the form of a speaker dock			iOS	●	60	32x21x265
Geneva Lab Model L	1,10,000	★★★★★ More musical than your usual dock'n'speakers combo			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	54,990	★★★★★ Still capable but rivals have caught it up			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	2,00,000	★★★★★ If you've lots of money and space, this is a must try			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
JBL OnBeat Xtreme	24,990	★★★★★ Product of the Year - Speaker Docks, Awards 2012		●	iOS	●	120	23x44x24
Loewe AirSpeaker	TBA	★★★★★ Stylish, subtle and great-sounding. It's a serious must-try		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x244
Marantz Consolette	75000*	★★★★★ Not an allrounder, but a unique device with lovely sound		●	iOS		150	26x54x21

Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's proprietary wireless system; works over your home network

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	AUX	Charging Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
B&O Beolit 12	66,600	★★★★★ A great design with amazing build quality	●	●	●	●	19x23x13
B&W A5	38,000	★★★★★ At this price there are few better AirPlay devices	●	●			18x30x20
B&W A7	62,750	★★★★★ If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●	●			22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	23,513	★★★★★ Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●	●			17x31x10
Bose Soundlink W'less Mobile	20,138	★★★★★ A flexible, and user friendly wireless speaker		●	●	●	13x24x5
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	36,100	★★★★★ A worthy option, but it can't match the best when it comes to sound	●	●	●		18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	12,500	★★★★★ Best wireless speaker (budget), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR		●	●	●	23x24x6
JBL Charge	9990	★★★★★ A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble		●	●	●	18x7x7
Bose SoundLink Mini	16,200	★★★★★ A no-frills approach reaps dividends in the SoundLink's performance		●	●	●	5x18x6

Headphones

Ear tips Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with sizes to get the best fit.
In-line remote Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are growing. Handy.

The shortlist

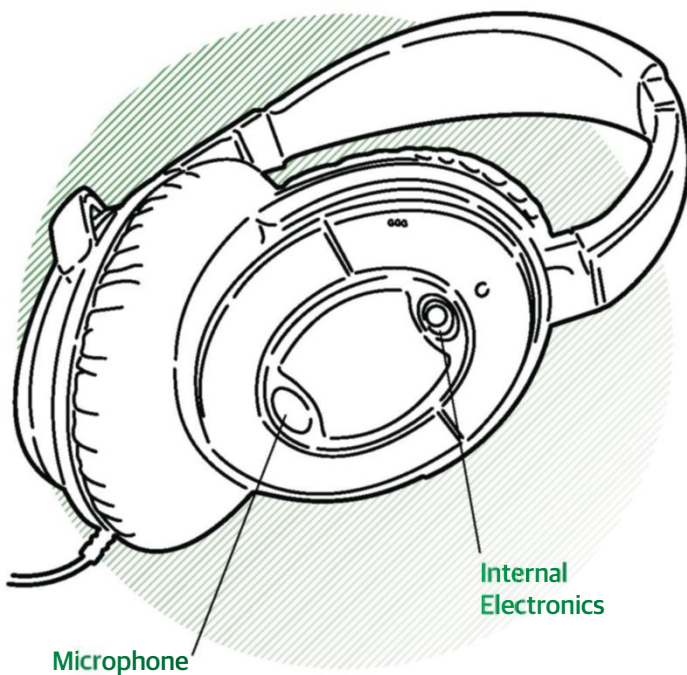


Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CK555i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			260
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	6795	★★★★★	●		Closed			11
Nokia BH-504	6500	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	108
Panasonic RP-HJE170	799	★★★★★	●		Closed			3
Panasonic RP-HTX7	3999	★★★★★	●		Closed			153
Sennheiser CX 300-II	3490	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	2790	★★★★★	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser HD 202	2290	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Sennheiser MM 70i	7490	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	12
Sennheiser MM50	4990	★★★★★	●		Closed			7
Sennheiser PX100-II	3990	★★★★★	●		Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	3559	★★★★★	●		Closed			13
Skullcandy Icon 3	1949	★★★★★	●		Closed			45
SoundMagic E10	2500*	★★★★★	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	1486	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	2730	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	2990	★★★★★	●		Closed			110
B&W P7	33,990	★★★★★	●		Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	100
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			165
AKG K3003i	1,00,000*	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
AKG K370	8000	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
AKG K451	5000	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
AKG Q701	19,990	★★★★★	●		Open			236
AKG Q460	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DT880	22,399	★★★★★	●		Open	●	●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	4999	★★★★★	●		Closed			12

HEADPHONES continued

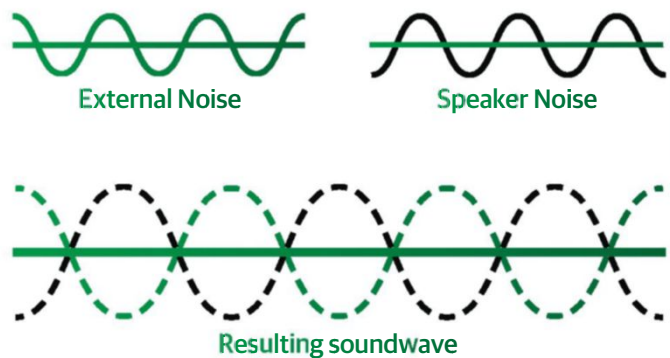
Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	4750	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Mid), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	1,00,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Premium), Awards 2010.		●	Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	11,800	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		174
Bose Around-ear 2	8663	★★★★★ Packed with clever technology and work well		●	Closed			142
Bose MIE2i	7650	★★★★★ A perfect headphone meets microphone solution		●	Closed			19
Bose Mobile in-ear headset 2	8213	★★★★★ Unobtrusive in place, but lacking in excitement		●	Closed			18
Bose QuietComfort 15	17,550	★★★★★ Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		227
B&W P3	16,500	★★★★★ Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones		●	Closed			130
B&W P5	23,500	★★★★★ Aesthetically beautiful and aurally accomplished too		●	Closed			195
Focal Spirit One	19,999	★★★★★ Refined enough, but not the most exciting		●	Closed			225
Grado SR80i	12,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012.	●		Open			200
Harman/Kardon CL	9990	★★★★★ An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon		●	Closed			195
Klipsch Image One	6600	★★★★★ Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass		●	Closed			138
Klipsch Image X5	9750	★★★★★ Still a great buy, with a very balanced sound		●	Closed			11
Klipsch Image X10i	12,000	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Premium), Awards 2011		●	Closed			320
Klipsch S4i	4490	★★★★★ These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge		●	Closed			12
Logitech UE 9000	31,995	★★★★★ Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed	●	●	378
Martin Logan Mikros 70	TBA	★★★★★ If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job		●	Closed			13
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	15,000	★★★★★ For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace		●	Closed			n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	38,000	★★★★★ Brilliant at what they do well		●	Closed			299
Oppo PM-1	79,999	★★★★★ Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success		●	Open			395
Philips Fidelio M1	16,000*	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		166
PSB M4U2	28,000	★★★★★ PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!		●	Closed	●		362

How Does Noise Cancelling Work?



This kind of design is usually battery-powered and will reduce background noise. They contain microphones that pick up external noise, and then invert its waveform electronically before outputting it to your ears. This inverse wave works against the original, and greatly reduces the amount you hear.

It works best on continuous low-frequency sounds such as plane engines and Brian Blessed humming. It's not unusual for such designs to tweak tonal balance to improve things, although some add a degree of hiss in the process.



Try these

Bose QuietComfort 15 ★★★★★ ₹19,013
"The noise-cancelling is so effective it can feel like silence is being pushed into your head. Mid-tune, it's almost as if the outside world disappears completely."

Logitech UE9000 ★★★★★ ₹35,000
"They could do better in terms of refinement - but if it's energy and entertainment you're after (as well as Bluetooth), they're pretty much spot-on."

PSB M4U2 ★★★★★ ₹28,000
"If you want to turn your office, flight or train journey into a private listening experience of exceptional quality, these are the headphones to get."

HEADPHONES continued

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	9990	★★★★★ Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●	Closed		220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	3990	★★★★★ Stylishly excellent all-rounders	●	Closed		140
Sennheiser HD 800	84,990	★★★★★ They offer much, but close rivals pip them to the post	●	Open		350
Sennheiser IE 8i	24,990	★★★★★ Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●	Closed		18
Sennheiser IE80	27,990	★★★★★ Expensive, but a truly quality option	●	Closed		5
Sennheiser MM 400-X	17,990	★★★★★ Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●	Closed	●	105
Sennheiser Momentum	24,990	★★★★★ Smooth, punchy, refined all-rounders	●	Closed		190
Sennheiser PXC 450	27,990	★★★★★ Excellent fit and great performance, but now beaten by newer rivals	●	Closed		240
Sennheiser RS 160	13,490	★★★★★ An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●	Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	21,990	★★★★★ These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●	Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	29,990	★★★★★ A very neat wireless solution with great sound quality	●	Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	7990	★★★★★ The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●	Closed		280
Shure SE115	8200	★★★★★ These Shures aren't only a colourful upgrade but a sound investment	●	Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	21,000	★★★★★ Detail and clarity is first class	●	Closed		7
Shure SE420	29,000	★★★★★ Once in your ears they offer a dynamic sound	●	Closed	●	29
Shure SE535	31,000	★★★★★ Still good but no longer the best	●	Closed	●	272
Shure SRH1840	49,778	★★★★★ Not cheap, but worth every rupee	●	Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	TBA	★★★★★ Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●	Closed		240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	19,990	★★★★★ Impressive sounding cans - with good flexibility	●	Closed		270
Sony XBA-3iP	7990	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Premium), Awards 2012	●	Closed	●	7
SoundMagic HP100	15,000*	★★★★★ Sparkling detail, spacious character	●	Closed		228

Spectrum Tab-Tension Series

MaxWhite 1.1 Gain
IR remote included
Integrated 5-12 volt trigger port
Tab-tension system provides a uniform
screen flatness

The Only
International
Projection Screen
Brand available in
India from the
manufacturer with
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MaxWhite FG 1.1 Gain
IR, RF remotes included
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Tab-tension design helps maintain a
flat projection surface

Saker Tab-Tension Series



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Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Denon D-M39DAB

Awards 2012: Best Micro System



Ruark R4i

Awards 2012: Best All-In-One Music System



Onkyo CR-N755

Awards 2012: Best Networked Micro System

Product	₹	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analog inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Denon CEOL Piccolo	39,900	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style			●	●	●	●	●
Denon D-M39	44,900	★★★★★	Best micro system, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR502	31,758	★★★★★	Exceptional precision and timing, and better value			●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	32,000*	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	54,900	★★★★★	Best music system (premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR			●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Mini	87,000	★★★★★	Best CD system (Mid), Awards 2010			●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Neo	1,38,000	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy			●	●	●	●	●
Denon CEOL (RCD-N7)	39,900	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, with great features			●	●	●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	3,85,000	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use			●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR603	39,900	★★★★★	Best microsystem (Premium) Awards 2011			●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player (Premium)			●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1,25,000	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year			●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	60,000*	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012			●	●	●	●	●

Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Product	₹	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Apple TV	8900	★★★★★	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	8595	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	0	3		20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	38,400	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/96	
Denon DNP-720AE	29,990	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0	1		●	24/192	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	69,700	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Cyrus Lyric 09	4,40,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	2	2	3	●		24/192	
Pioneer N50	NA	★★★★★	0	1	0	0	1	0	1		24/192	
Rotel RT-09	NA	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	55,500	★★★★★	0	0	0	1	1	1			24/96	
Cyrus Stream X2	1,45,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline2	1,75,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-QX	3,08,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	3,20,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	3,50,000	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	2,00,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	

Tablets

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Apple iPad Air



Apple iPad Mini Retina



Google Nexus 7

Product	₹	Verdict	OS	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (h/w/d, mm)
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	14,590	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	137x110
Apple iPad 2 16GB Wi-Fi	24,500	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	1024x768	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	33,900	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 32GB Wi-Fi	37,900	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	49,999	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Trans Prime	42,999	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Google Nexus 7	9999	★★★★★ Best tablet (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	99x120x11
Google Nexus 10	34,413	★★★★★	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	25,000*	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	28,900	★★★★★	iOS 7	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	31,900*	★★★★★ Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	35,900	★★★★★	iOS 7	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	20,999	★★★★★ Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	49,470	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	46,990	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	72x266x69

Things to consider: tablets



Camera

Most tablet cameras are decent, but they won't be able to beat a dedicated camera in terms of picture quality. Think long and hard if you're looking to capture footage as quality can be inconsistent.

Apps

iOS is the king of apps, but Android is hard on its heels and Windows is catching up. If apps are your thing then your choice may come down to which ones are available on each platform, rather than quantity.

Keypad

Want to increase productivity? On-screen keypads are a mixed bag, but some have optional (and expensive) physical keyboards. Keep that in mind if you're looking to do some work on the go.

Ecosystem

iOS, Android and Windows 8. Each one is better (or worse) than the other, in some way. Apple has the apps, while Android is customisable and Windows offers a lot in terms of functionality.

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Smartphones

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Product	Verdict	OS	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)	
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★	A powerhouse of a smartphone in every respect	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Apple iPhone 5	★★★★★	Faster, lighter and better: iPhone gets its annual facelift	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android	●	4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
HTC One Max	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its big screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One X+	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	
LG G-Flex	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2 and more, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 1520	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint, but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Opportunity N1	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	★★★★★	The original phablet. Updated and still among the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	16/32	151x80x8
LG G2	★★★★★	Unbridled power and thoughtful design. A fantastic phone	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
HTC One M8	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
Sony Xperia Z1	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it. A speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
HTC One	★★★★★	A true marvel in terms of smartphone tech	Android	●	4.7	1920x1080	16	
Apple iPhone 5S	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★	A powerhouse of a phone in every respect	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Nokia Lumia 925	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8

Consider these

Wired cans sound better, but wireless is catching up. Here are the best on offer



Logitech UE 9000

Solid build and effective noise-cancelling features make the UE 9000 a fine proposition. The wireless connection is a tad unrefined but the energy produced is excellent. Good for six hours' use.



Parrot Zik

Stylish and advanced, the Zik features the 2.1 A2DP variant of Bluetooth which doesn't quite match aptX. Still, with NFC on board and a detailed sound to boot, the Zik should be on your list.



Philips Fidelio M1BT

Our 2013 Award-winners boast aptX compatibility and easy-to-use controls. It's in the sound where they really shine, showing off an excellent turn of pace with bags of detail. Good for 10 hours' use.



Sennheiser MM 400-X

A compact, portable design and low(ish) price make these cans quite enticing. Vocals have plenty of detail and directness, and with aptX along for the ride too, these are some capable headphones.

HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Product	₹	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Audioquest Pearl	2100	★★★★★ Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1	1.4
Chord Company Supershield	5000	★★★★★ Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1	1.3
Kimber Kable HD-09	6500	★★★★★ Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2	1.3
Profigold SKY HDMI Ethernet	2999	Not rated Not rated	2	1.4
QED Performance HDMI-e	7410	★★★★★ Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	7	1.4
QED Profile HDMI	2225	★★★★★ Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 6	1589	★★★★★ Best HDMI cable, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1	1.4
Audioquest Cinnamon	6600	★★★★★ A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	9300	★★★★★ A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield and again	5	1.4
Bridge Connect BPE105	3399	Not rated Not rated	1	1.4b
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	9500	★★★★★ An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	9000	★★★★★ A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5	1.3a
QED Reference	7740	★★★★★ An assured, but expensive, performer	5	1.3ab
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	10700	★★★★★ One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	13000	★★★★★ It's pricey, but has good performance	1	1.3

Digital interconnects

- USB** An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
- Optical** Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
- Coaxial** Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

The shortlist



QED Performance Graphite
Awards 2012: Best Optical Digital Cable

"The sound through this cable is incredibly detailed and startlingly clear. There's a good grasp of dynamics, too."



QED Performance
Awards 2012: Best Coaxial Digital Cable

"The QED is good at conveying subtleties. There's a good sense of energy too, with plenty of attack."



Supra USB 2.0
Awards 2012: Best USB Cable

"It helps deliver impeccable timing and plenty of energy, both of which translate into a tangible sense of fun."

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Profigold SKY Optical	2299	Not rated Not rated	Optical	2
QED Performance Digital	4135	★★★★★ Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	2760	★★★★★ Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical	1
Supra AnCo (coaxial)	4700	★★★★★ Ideal if you like it meaty and beaty - it revels in low-end stuff	Co-axial	1
Wireworld Nova 6	1059	★★★★★ Like and up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet USB	1324	★★★★★ Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB	1
Chord Company Optichord	3300	★★★★★ Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical	1
Bridge Connect BEA562	2599	Not rated Not rated	Optical	2

Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2012: Best Analogue Interconnect

“Improves on many of the things that the former champ did right. The Element Integra is highly recommended.”



Furutech Alpha-Line 1

“If your current soundstage sounds a little loose and disorganised, this can help to snap everything back into place. Best for owners of midrange systems.”



Chord Company Chameleon Plus

“Give your kit a serious shot in the arm – an overly dull system would certainly benefit from its ability and verve. One of our long-time favourites for high-end set-ups.”

Product	₹	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Wireworld Luna 6	979	★★★★★	●	1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	649	★★★★☆		1.8
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	2800	★★★★★	●	1
Profigold PROI3301	899	★★★★★		1
QED Performance Audio 2	4770	★★★★☆	●	1
QED Profile	1855	★★★★★	●	● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	2914	★★★★★	●	● 1
QED Profile J2P	1590	★★★★★	●	1.5
QED Reference Audio J2P	3290	★★★★★	●	3
van den Hul The Name	8000	★★★★☆	●	0.8
Bridge Connect BEA423	2499	Not rated	● ●	3
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	8300	★★★★★	●	1
QED Signature Audio S	23,535	★★★★★	●	1
van den Hul The Wave	15,900	★★★★★	●	1

Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

Product	₹	Verdict	Biwire
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	750/m	★★★★★	
SCP 16/20FC-HD-WT	174/m	Not rated	
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	380/m	★★★★☆	
Chord Company Leyline	160/m	★★★★☆	
QED Silver Anniversary XT	668/m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	2119/2m	★★★★☆	
Wireworld The Orbit	4239/2m	★★★★☆	●
QED Revelation	1908/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	1336/m	★★★★★	●
van den Hul CS122	2050/m	★★★★☆	●

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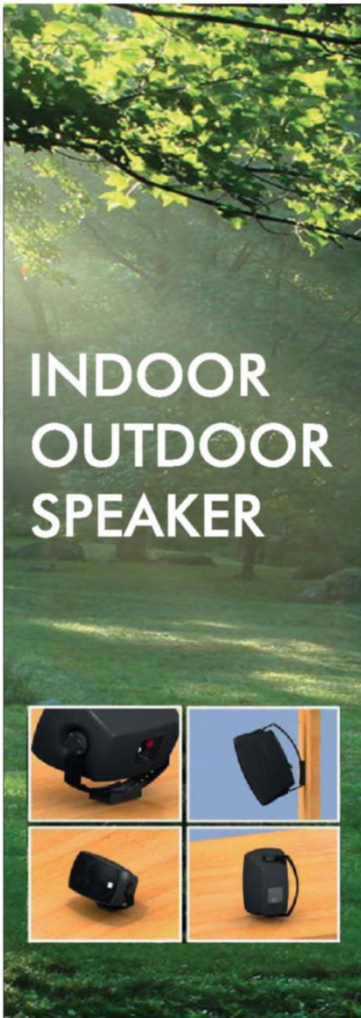
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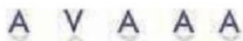
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SONY WALKMAN ZX2

Walking the talk, all over again!



The original Walkman still has that special place in our hearts. Some of us have it tucked away in our cupboards, safely. So when Sony unveiled their new Walkman last month at CES, we sure were excited. The new Walkman - NW-ZX2 is a solid block of audiophile candy, wrapped in a grippy leather exterior on the rear, a sturdy aluminium frame on the inside and flanked by circular volume buttons on the side, the Walkman looks the part. It's buttons on the side remind us of the original Walkman cassette player that we would clip on to our denims and play/pause/rewind/foward tracks without even looking at the player. The same can be done with the ZX2.

What we really love about the new Walkman is that it is a true audiophile grade player. The copper chassis on the inside is gold-plated to enhance stiffness and reduce overall contact resistance and electrical impedance. Add the S-Master HX digital amplifier's magic and you have a player that sends pristine audio signals to your speaker/ headphone as closely as the music producer would have intended.

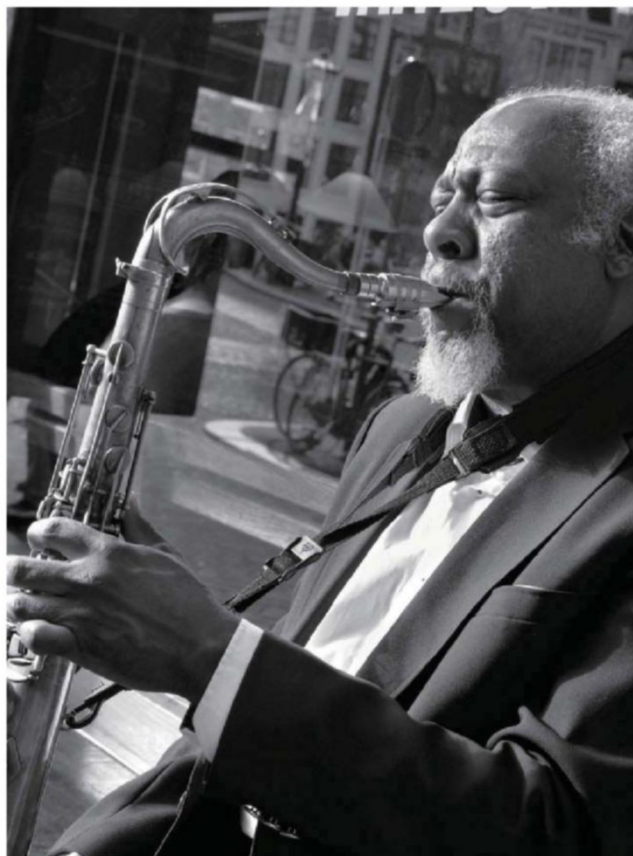
High-resolution audio is a format that stores audio at above CD quality and this player supports all the major types (FLAC, WAV, Apple Lossless), all the way up to 192 kHz/24 bit. Do not lose heart if you plan to listen to the more common file formats such as MP3, WMA, and more, because the built-in DSEE HX tech, upscales 128kbps tracks to high-res.

That should help when there is 128GB of storage space on the inside, which can be upgraded to 256GB via the MicroSD slot. Sony promises a total playback time of 33 hours on a single charge for high-resolution files and 60 hours for regular tracks (roughly 1700 high-res songs), which should be enough for your entire day commute or an adventure trip out on the hills. You can even stream audio wirelessly via Bluetooth and thanks to NFC support, pairing the Walkman to a speaker system with NFC would be a breeze. At roughly \$1200 the new Walkman is priced on the higher side. But it is meant for the audiophile, looking for the absolute high-end portable media device. We are hoping to get our hands on one soon for an in-depth review!



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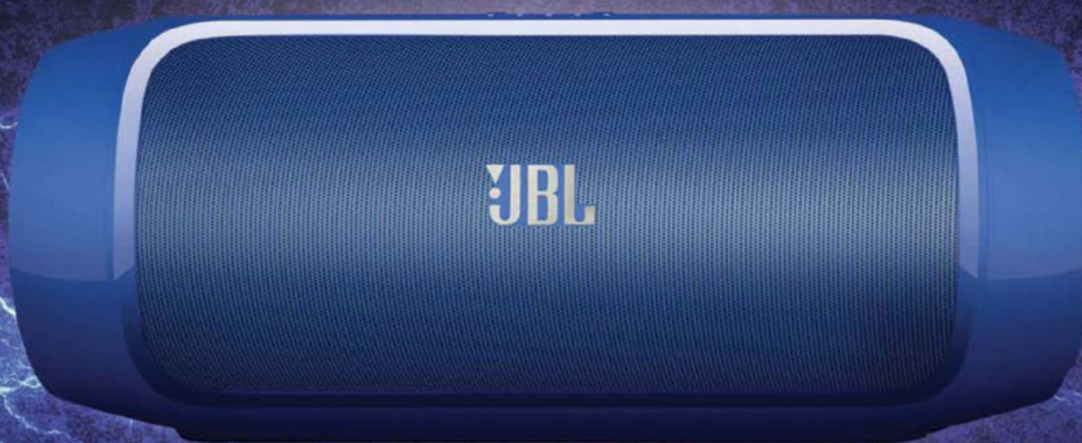
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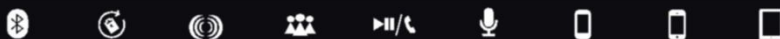
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