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Tech jackpot! 55in curved LG TV has it all



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For a lot of the products we review, there's sort of a universal idea of optimum performance - take our **£1000ish projectors test (p41)**, for example. There's broad agreement on what constitutes a good picture and manufacturers, with varying results, strive towards it.

Sometimes it's a bit more subjective. Our **brilliant floorstanding speakers supertest (p28)** goes to prove just how different one company's idea of 'great sound' is to another's, and that's why it's such a fascinating exercise to get seven expensively and painstakingly researched, developed and marketed speakers into a room together. In isolation, any pair of them might sound pretty impressive. Compare them side-by-side, though, and the differences

can be startling. Got £1000 for new speakers? You *definitely* need a demo.



Simon

Simon Lucas, editor

My products of the month



LG 55EG960V

First test p6
OLED = great. 4K = great.
Thus OLED + 4K = great²



BenQ W1080ST+

Group test p42
Size isn't everything, obviously.
Although in this instance it might be.

WHAT HI-FI?

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NEXT MONTH

SUPERTEST SOUNDBASES

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WHAT HI-FI?

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Our products of the month



Philips M1MKII
Group test p63

"These portable on-ear headphones boast serious music ability"

Andy Madden Reviews editor



Q Acoustics 3020
First test p14

"The new budget speakers from Q Acoustics are better in every way - they're brilliant performers for the money"

Kashfia Kabir Multimedia journalist



Tannoy Revolution XT6F
Group test p35

"You can't escape, at the very least, doing a tiny dance"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



Bluesound Node
Test p51

"Make no mistake, the Node is your best introduction to music streaming on a budget"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 Wireless
First test p16

"There are very few headphones out there that manage to do so much so well"

Verity Burns Multimedia editor



Cyrus CD xt Signature
First test p20

"This excellent CD transport makes perfect sense given the popularity of outboard DACs"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor

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Supertest Floorstanders

"Whether you're starting out or upgrading, the right pair of floorstanders can be a sound investment"



First Test
"The soundstage is wide open and wonderfully expansive. The imaging is stable, focussed, and layered with great care"

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06 First Tests We kick off with an exclusive review of a 4K OLED television from LG, Q Acoustics' Q 3020 standmount speaker hits exactly the right notes, and Sennheiser's Momentum range goes from strength to strength with the 2.0 Wireless over-ears.

28 Supertest: stereo speakers Harder, louder, bigger and taller - we've put seven floorstanding speakers (£1000 and under) through their paces as B&W, Cabasse, Epos, PSB, Q Acoustics, Tannoy and Triangle compete in a battle for hi-fi excellence.

41 Projectors We want our films to look great, not just good. In this test BenQ, InFocus, Philips and Optoma volunteer reasons as to why there's no experience like having your own private cinema.

48 Music streamers The age of streaming is upon us. Whether it's budget or high-end, we have the details on the kit you should place your bets on.

WHAT HI-FI? Team vacancy | Reviewer

We want a talented, passionate, hard-working reviewer to join our team. Working across our digital and print platforms, you'll be testing products, writing reviews

and features, and creating video content. Interested? Send a C.V. and an example of your writing to whathifi@haymarket.com putting 'Reviewer' in the subject line.

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With VR and wearable tech now more than just fiction, we look at how it could affect home cinema and hi-fi

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Free SoundMagic E10S headphones
Subscribe to *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision* and get some fine free in-ears

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We look at the Beats by Dre over-ears that lit up the market back in 2008



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"It's easy to get enthusiastic about their musical talents"

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Test **Music streamers**
"Ready to make your existing hi-fi system streaming savvy?"



Group test **Projectors**
"A projector is the centre-piece of your home cinema"



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

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated **p81**
With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best kit for your cash.



Find out...

How they work: **Turntables p104**
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FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**

EXCLUSIVE



**View Quest Christie
£100 Page 11**
Retro styling, but a modern sound for this stylish radio



**Q Acoustics 3020
£190 Page 14**
Yet another superb pair of speakers from Q Acoustics



**Sennheiser
Momentum 2.0
£380 Page 16**
Stunning premium noise-cancellers

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A glimpse into the future of television with 4K OLED

LG 55EG960V | OLED television | £3800

This is the first 4K OLED screen we've tested, and it's everything we hoped it would be. The LG 55EG960V delivers the combination we've been waiting for - 4K Ultra HD resolution and OLED technology - and it does so with spectacular results.

What makes OLED special?

An OLED panel consists of pixels made up of organic carbon-based film, which light up when a current is put through them. Unlike LCD screens that need a backlight, OLED pixels are self-lighting. So when a pixel turns off, it's pitch black. There's no residual light bleeding into dark areas as with backlit LCDs, meaning we can have proper, inky blacks while retaining brightness, punch and clarity - the holy grail of TV technology.

LG takes its OLED technology further by adding a fourth white pixel alongside the standard RGB (red, green and blue) model for more accurate colours. So does it work? Absolutely. The LG 55EG960V delivers on every promise, from intensely dark black scenes to bright and punchy whites. There are almost 8.3 million pixels on this 4K

Ultra HD screen, and each looks crystal clear, punchy and precise.

We stream *House of Cards* via Netflix, and are blown away by the detail on display. The depth of colours is breathtaking. They aren't just richer, there are simply more precise shades of them on the screen, giving a wonderfully vivid feel to the picture.

Fine textures

The interplay of light and shadow on trees, buildings and on people's faces is fascinating. Unlike early OLED sets, where the strong contrast meant nuances in detail were swallowed up, this set expertly delivers the fine textures of a black suit and the myriad colours within a sun flare.

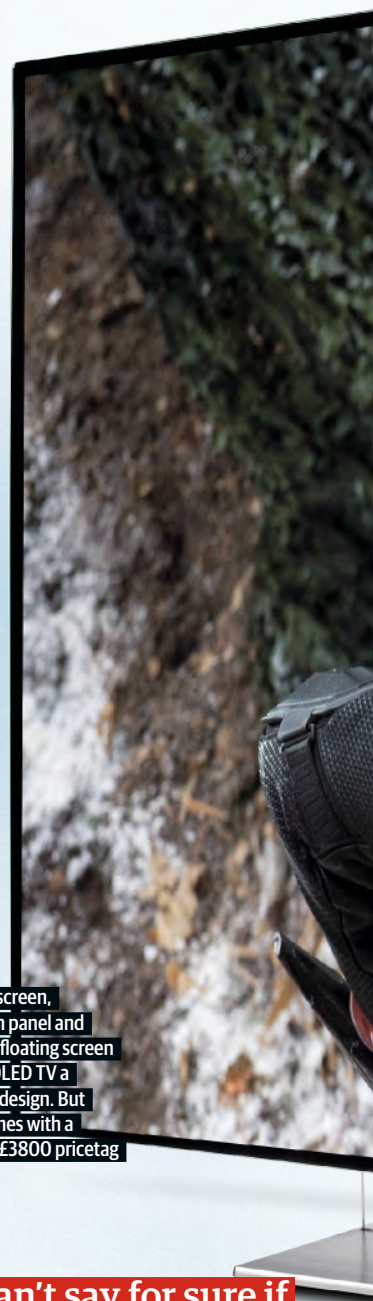
Motion handling is stable, although we turn de-judder and de-blur settings to smooth out the picture more. Those characteristics remain when watching HD channels and Blu-ray films. We play our test favourite *Star Trek* Blu-ray and the spaceships look convincing. The steely structure of the USS Enterprise looks spectacular against the pitch-black backdrop of space.

Bright and punchy

If you've ever had doubts about 3D films, watch *Gravity* on this LG telly. The passive technology means the 3D effect is gentle on your eyes, but the depth offered by OLED is utterly immersive.

The advantages of OLED kick in when you see just how dizzyingly vast and deep the void-like blackness of space looks, while the millions of stars are piercingly bright. You get four lightweight glasses in the box, and we'd urge you to give 3D a go.

But what about standard definition? While it's a shame to watch ropey old standard def on such a talented 4K screen, the LG TV works hard to upscale *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? on DVD. There's the expected fuzzy edges and drop in absolute detail, but the picture is bright and punchy. We do find, though, that our Award-winning Samsung 4K TV (the UE55HU7500) is a touch crisper when it comes to upscaling.



A curved screen, wafer-thin panel and gorgeous floating screen give the OLED TV a premium design. But it also comes with a premium £3800 pricetag

A look around the back of the curved screen reveals there is scope for connectivity, internal speakers and the ability to mount the TV to the wall



We can't say for sure if this is the best we'll see. But if it's anything to go by, the future of TV looks spectacular





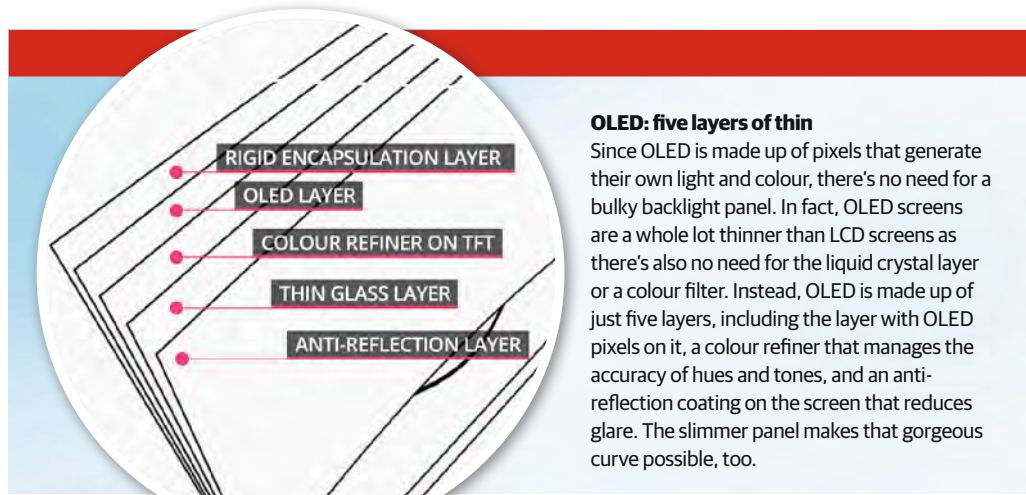
Linked in There are plenty of options to connect all your equipment, including three each of HDMI and USB



Harman Kardon sound The downward-firing HK speakers hide behind this grille in the cabinet



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



OLED: five layers of thin

Since OLED is made up of pixels that generate their own light and colour, there's no need for a bulky backlight panel. In fact, OLED screens are a whole lot thinner than LCD screens as there's also no need for the liquid crystal layer or a colour filter. Instead, OLED is made up of just five layers, including the layer with OLED pixels on it, a colour refiner that manages the accuracy of hues and tones, and an anti-reflection coating on the screen that reduces glare. The slimmer panel makes that gorgeous curve possible, too.

LG has teamed up with Harman Kardon to outfit its 2015 screens with better sound. The 55EG960V has two down-firing speakers at the base of the screen, and they sound smooth and weighty. Voices are clear and expressive, with enough detail to hold your attention. We wish it sounded more open and dynamic, though, as it can sound overly damped even at higher volumes.

Switching from Standard to Cinema sound mode breathes more space and scale into the sound without losing that solid detail. Still, to accompany such a fine screen, you should have a dedicated 5.1 speaker package to get the full cinematic impact.

Gorgeous floating effect

For £3800, you'll want something rather special and the TV itself looks beautiful. The gentle swoop of the curved screen, the wafer-thin panel and that gorgeous floating screen effect - it's an elegant design that looks effortlessly expensive.

The screen is only slightly curved, but you still get a slight distortion if you're sitting off-axis from the centre. Curved LCD screens have so far also given us washed-out colours when viewed from an angle, but here's OLED's party trick: the contrast stays just as strong, the blacks just as deep and whites as bright and punchy as ever even when viewed from extreme angles. There is, incredibly, no fading whatsoever.

Ace up its sleeve

A glance at the back panel shows that the screen isn't super thin all the way, giving scope for connectivity, internal speakers, and the ability to wall-mount the TV.



The LG Magic remote finally has a proper keypad, so can stand as the sole controller

Connections include three HDMI inputs (two of which can handle 4K/60p), three USB ports, an optical output and legacy analogue connections. You can access the internet using wired ethernet or wi-fi, and we experience no dropouts in streaming 4K.

LG has yet another ace up its sleeve: WebOS 2.0. We were pretty effusive in our appreciation of LG's smart interface last year, and the company claims the updated version is 60 per cent faster. The Launcher is intuitive, and moving around the interface is quicker. The animations are fluid and apps launch almost instantly.

The future of TV

LG's updated remote finally gives the Magic Remote a proper keypad, so you don't have to faff about with two remotes. Other updates include clever shortcuts to settings and inputs that don't take up too much of the screen, as well as a 'My Channels' section in the Launcher. The idea is that you can launch BBC One HD or Sky Atlantic HD as instantly as the Netflix or BBC iPlayer shortcuts.

It's fair to say we're impressed with the LG 55EG960V, but it's not without reservations. Price is an issue. £3800 is a hefty amount of money for a 55in screen, but it's worth remembering that you're paying the premium for the new OLED technology and that elegant set design.

However, much like the first Full HD and 4K screens, we expect the price to come down once OLED is more widespread. We can't say for sure if this is the best TV we'll see this year. Nor can we make a judgement on whether OLED is better than LCD. But if this gorgeous LG 55EG960V is anything to go by, the future of TV looks spectacular.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Get these three and you'll be fully prepared to enter the future of television



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

Realistic colour palette and smooth motion - this Blu-ray player is perfect for your films



Speaker package
B&W MT60-D £1950
★★★★★

This Award-winning sub/sat package is dynamic, insightful and beautifully integrated



Home cinema amplifier
Pioneer SC-LX58 £1400
★★★★★

Pioneer's trademark precision, plus bags of deep, rumbling bass in surround sound

Total build £7750

TECH SPECS

Type: OLED • Screen size: 55in • Resolution: 3840 x 2160 • 3D Yes, passive • Tuners Freeview HD, satellite • Smart TV Yes • HDMI in 3 • USB in 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 72 x 123 x 5cm • Weight 15kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous 4K picture quality; rich, subtle colours; elegant design; intuitive interface

AGAINST Sound could be more dynamic and open; pricey

VERDICT The LG is absolutely stunning - it's everything we hoped 4K OLED would be

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- 1 Gosh, this TV is pretty. The transparent glass between the screen and stand gives it an utterly cool floating effect. We're in love!
- 2 OLED's fabled blacks are truly intense - they make everything else look punchier. Even end credit scenes look fantastic
- 3 This set shines with native 4K content. The staggering detail, clarity and depth of colours are absolutely breathtaking
- 4 LG's WebOS 2.0 interface is even more intuitive. Clever shortcuts and lovely remote design make it as smooth as butter
- 5 Tweak the de-judder and de-blur settings to iron out the motion handling hiccups. It helps the passive 3D experience, too



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View Quest Christie | DAB/FM radio | £100

Appealing Christie looks the part

You're not short of choice when it comes to selecting a cute little radio for the kitchen, bedroom or wherever. But while the majority of the 'affordable modern-retro' sales action has lately been vacuumed up by the likes of Pure, Revo and Tivoli, the new Christie by View Quest wants to muscle in on the action.

There's no denying the appeal of the Christie when it's first sprung from its packaging - that fascia is your actual enamel on a pressed-steel plate, and the faux-leather wrap is available in no fewer than 11 colours. It's like a miniature high-tech Aga.

It's a neat little device, finished well. Our only qualitative reservation concerns one of the Christie's authentic USPs: its ability to work in both 'portrait' and 'landscape'.

That 2.4in LCD display (crisp, adjustable for brightness and full of information, if a trifle small and tricky to read from distance) and the bezel it sits in rotate through 90 degrees so the Christie can stand up or lie down. It's a far from smooth action, though, and while we haven't tested the mechanism to destruction we wouldn't be happy constantly sliding it back and forth.

Elsewhere, specification is as it should be for a product of this type and price. There's DAB, DAB+ (for optimists) and FM radio reception, Bluetooth connectivity and NFC pairing. Other sources are catered for by a 3.5mm input on the back panel. That's accompanied by a USB socket (for charging only) and a 3.5mm headphone output. There's also a compartment for the optional

USE IT WITH**Samsung Galaxy Note 4**

A fine-sounding smartphone, its Bluetooth ability suits the Christie perfectly.



battery pack (the battery is part of an 'accessory pack' that includes a faux-leather carry-case. It sells for around £30).

An expansive listen for its size

The Christie proves a tenacious, grippy tuner for both DAB and FM radio, and thanks to its 30-station memory you should never be more than a button-press or two away from entertainment. Considering its diminutive size the Christie's quite an expansive listen, the BBC's 6Music projecting well beyond the confines of the cabinet. With 10 watts of power serving a single 3in driver it's not going to fill a bigger room with sound, but it handles the dynamics of a reasonable-quality Radio 3 broadcast in decent style.

Totally it's a rather more qualified success. It's nicely communicative through the midrange, but with radio broadcasts of any standard it has a rather grainy, spiky approach to the top of the frequency range that all too easily manifests itself as sibilance, while at the bottom it's too tentative.

Bluetooth shines more than radio

The Christie is a better-balanced listen when fed a Bluetooth signal, though, which makes us doubt the absolute fidelity of its radio tuners. Quickly paired via NFC and fed a smartphone-borne file of The Shins' *So Says I* the Christie brings a little more low-frequency body to the tune than it can muster when functioning as a radio, and while treble frequencies are still on a knife-edge they're less inclined to grate. Having said that, a listen to The Upsetters' *Super Ape* confirms the View Quest really isn't inclined to give bass the billing it sometimes requires.

Overall, the Christie is a capable, likeable product that's not balanced enough a listen to warrant the full five stars. If you're seduced by the looks, though (and we imagine plenty of people will be), that may be a trade-off you're willing to make.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great looks, fine build and finish; stands up or lies down; fine scale of sound; good spec

AGAINST Some treble sharpness, some bass deficiency - especially with radio

VERDICT Not absolutely the best-sounding £100 radio around but one of the best-looking

Also consider

Pure Evoke D2
£90 ★★★★★

Our 2014 Award-winner has a more convincing sound than the Christie



Dial and display rotate through 90 degrees, so the Christie can stand up or lie flat



Onkyo LS-T30 | **Soundbase** | £350

Onkyo sizes up its soundbase rivals



We're not surprised to learn Onkyo has designed its latest soundbase for the large ('up to 70in') or heavy ('60kg or less') telly. At a whopping 90cm wide and 40cm deep, you're going to need a bigger TV rack - unless yours is already big enough to accommodate this colossal soundbase.

A few brands have honed in on the 'big TV' trend (Cambridge Audio and JBL to name a couple), pitching soundbases around the £300 mark - so on paper at least, the LS-T30 seems like a sensible addition to the company's inventory.

Adverse effects

Home cinema amplifiers have been Onkyo's craft for years, but the company hasn't been afraid to spread its wings in the AV world. It's had a stab at Blu-ray players and speaker packages before taking a liking to soundbars and bases a year or two ago.

We're yet to be convinced by its TV sound-boosters, though. The last one we listened to, the LS-T10 soundbase, we found rather disappointing. So it's up to its big brother to win us over.

Its jumbo size will invariably limit its fan-base, but the LS-T30 is reassuringly rock-solid and finished to a good standard considering the price. And it doesn't waste space: inside are four 6.5cm full range drivers and a 16cm down-firing subwoofer, all driven by a pair of 25W amps.

Socketry is as you'd expect. It'll hook up to your telly through any of its single optical, coaxial and 3.5mm inputs.

Bluetooth (non-aptX) also allows wireless music playback from a smartphone or tablet. Sadly, though, the USB port is only for service.

The finger-length remote control handset isn't the most luxurious tool either, and we'd recommend taking full advantage of the unit's ability to learn commands from (most) TV remotes.

The Onkyo isn't short of competitors, though none should be particularly worried. Performance-wise, the LS-T30 doesn't come close to our current favourite Cambridge Audio TV5 (£280).

More rumble

Plunge the Onkyo straight into the action-packed Golden Gate Bridge scene in *Godzilla* and it's not quite the intense, high-tension thrill ride we hoped for. Dynamically, the Onkyo struggles to communicate enough build-up in the colossal orchestral score to emphasise the drama and danger on-screen. Instead, the presentation feels a little lifeless and polite.

The LS-T30's bass hardly has us sitting back in our seats either, lacking the power to compete with its rivals. *Godzilla's* growl doesn't go through you in the same way it does through the TV5, and we're left wanting more rumble as he lurches out of the sea.

There's decent weight to car collisions and tankers crunching through rails, but its talented rival has more punch and solidity - plus extra clarity and detail too.

At 90cm wide and 40cm deep, you may need a bigger TV rack for the Onkyo LS-T30

The LS-T30 has all the socketry you'd expect - single optical, coaxial and 3.5mm inputs for the TV, Bluetooth for music. That USB port looks tempting, but it's for service only

Balanced and upbeat

It's not all doom and gloom. If casual TV viewing is more your thing, you may enjoy the Onkyo. Its smooth, refined character has a maturity that makes calmer, less dramatic content easy to listen to, and it delivers enough detail in the all-important midrange. Voices are pleasant: substantial, detailed and lacking the hard edge that's often part and parcel of budget solutions.

As you'd expect, its soundfield is spacious. There's space between objects, and a clear trajectory when they move across the screen. It pumps out the volume and would be at home in a large room.

There are four sound modes ('stereo', 'surround', 'voice' and 'standard'). The mode in use is indicated by a series of lights, but you'll need to refer to the manual to match the different light patterns to its corresponding mode. 'Surround' gets you a more enveloping soundfield, but midrange becomes cloudy, while 'voice' throws midrange forward, coming across as shouty.

We find the default 'standard' the most balanced, though 'stereo' is better for music playback. Play Jack White's *I'm Shakin'* over Bluetooth and the delivery is balanced, relatively detailed and upbeat, the track's distorted vocals and heavy, dense instruments decently clear and coherent.

But despite the LS-T30 strengths, it isn't the complete package we'd expect at this price. Everyone's having a crack at soundbases, but only a few are getting great results. Onkyo just isn't one of them. Not just yet, anyway.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, spacious soundfield; well built; clear stereo performance

AGAINST Lacks dynamics, bass power and punch; poor remote

VERDICT In a highly competitive market, the Onkyo fails to shine

System builder total build £1280

Television

Samsung UE48H6400
£700 ★★★★★

An outstanding picture from this great-value, well-specc'd telly



Blu-ray player Sony BDP-S7200

£230 ★★★★★ The best pound-for-pound disc spinner on the market



Also consider

Cambridge Audio TV5
★★★★★ £280

Punchy, dynamic and detailed, the TV5 is a thrilling listen



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Q Acoustics 3020 | Stereo speakers | £190

These little gems are ahead of the Q

The success of the Q Acoustics brand has been astonishing. The company started back in 2006 and right from the start has produced sensibly priced, class-leading speakers. And guess what? They've only gone and done it again.

The 3020 is part of the new 3000 series. While the multiple Award-winning 2000 range continues for now, it's hard to see demand remaining once word gets out about these new products.

A familiar look

The series includes two standmounters, a floorstander, centre and subwoofer, but the 3020s on test are the larger of the standmounting options. There's a familiar look about these speakers, but otherwise almost everything else is new.

Many of the lessons learned in the design of the premium-priced Concept products have been applied here. This is particularly evident in the cabinet. While the price has taken the sandwich construction used in the Concepts off the menu, Q Acoustics has still produced a surprisingly well-engineered box.

Rigid structure

The 3020's cabinet is mainly made of 15mm MDF panels but with a double-layer 30mm top plate and similarly layered 24mm front baffle. This structure is then extensively braced in specific places to control resonances and help with stiffness. All this work pays off in an enclosure that feels immensely solid and provides a good, rigid foundation for the drive units to work from.

The speaker terminals - hidden under the base panel in the 2000 series - have been moved to a more conventional position on the back. This not only makes the terminals more accessible, but also improves structural rigidity.

A less obvious benefit is that the cabinet depth is significantly reduced from the 2020is, but without losing much internal volume. Height and width stay the same.

The 3020s are single-wire only, losing the biwire arrangement of the 2020is. Though apparently a retrograde step, at this end of the market it's much better to have a single length of decent cable than two sets of inferior alternatives.

Attention to detail

These speakers are available in five finishes. Matt Graphite and American Walnut are standard options, but for an extra £60, you can have either white or black lacquered gloss or an interesting leather option.

Our gloss white review sample is finished beautifully, and made with an attention to detail that few competitors come close to. Q Acoustics' work hasn't stopped there. Both drive units are new too. The 12.5cm mid/bass unit's cone material has changed from a paper/mica mix to one that combines paper and aramid fibre, more commonly known as Kevlar. This strengthens the paper cone and makes its behaviour more predictable, leading to what Q Acoustics describe as a 'more natural tonality'.

The new 25mm tweeter is unusual. It uses a diaphragm that aims to combine the best qualities of ring radiator and dome designs. The aim here is to deliver highs with low distortion and wide dispersion. The tweeter's motor system uses a dual ferrite magnet, and the whole assembly is decoupled from the main cabinet structure by butyl rubber. The idea is to isolate it from the vibrations of the cabinet and produce a purer sound.

These drive units are linked with a revised crossover that features higher grade components than found in the 2000 series, designed with a view to lowering

distortion and minimising any phase issues at the crossover frequency.

These speakers are just as likely to find themselves partnering a little micro system like Denon's evergreen DM39 as they are in a hi-fi separates set-up. They need to be relatively easy to drive and forgiving sonically, and that's exactly what they are.

Over the years, Q Acoustics has developed a specific sonic character, refined and subtle but with enough in the way of dynamic punch and rhythm drive to satisfy. And so it is with the 3020s.

Level of enjoyment

Their innate refinement means that any harshness or edge in the partnering electronics isn't emphasised. They aren't overly fussy about shortcomings in source material either, so anyone with low-bit rate MP3s still has a chance of getting a decent level of enjoyment out of them.

Partner the 3020s with high quality hi-fi separates and good recordings, and they have the transparency to make the most of things. A typical partnering system would be something like the Marantz 6005 CD and amp (about £300 a pop), but such are the 3020's talents that it would be quite happy at the end of an Audiolab 8200CD and Arcam A19 pairing - impressive considering the speaker's pricetag.

Solid stands

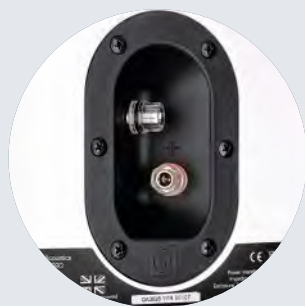
Of course, you'll need to take care in set-up. While these speakers will perform well on wall brackets, we recommend using good, solid stands if you can. Something like Atacama's Moseco 6 (£120) would be good, with Q Acoustics Concept stand (£200) being even better. Either option might seem quite pricey considering the cost of the speakers, but we think the 3020's potential fully justifies that outlay.

Our review sample has a white lacquered gloss finish, which pushes the total cost up to £250

In detail



Tweeter The new tweeter assembly is decoupled from the cabinet to deliver a purer sound



Terminal panel The revised terminal panel is now on the back. In this position, it is easier to use and helps with rigidity



Magnetic grilles The 3020s sound best with the grilles off, but if you have to use them, they're attached magnetically



Reflex port The mid/bass unit is tuned by a rear firing reflex port. The speaker isn't overly fussy about positioning



The 3020s aren't particularly picky about positioning either. We preferred them around 15cm from the back wall, but they sounded pretty balanced tonally even well out into the room. The tweeter's dispersion characteristics mean that exact toe-in angle isn't critical; they just render a wide and cohesive stereo image without much effort.

Play Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and the 3020s deliver a wide, deep sound stage populated by nicely layered and precisely focused instruments. We're impressed by the dynamics on offer, as the 3020s deliver the music's crescendos with confidence, while rendering low-level subtleties with a skill quite outside the scope of most rivals.

We listen to Bruce Springsteen's *Terry's Song* and love the way these speakers handle the genuine emotion in Springsteen's vocals as he mourns the loss of his friend. The tweeter does its job well here, delivering all the bite we expect without overplaying the recording's occasional hard edge.



USE THEM WITH
Marantz
PM6005
£320

This amplifier is as talented as the CD player and a worthy partner to the 3020s. Few rivals can match it for finesse

Beyond expectations

Move up a gear to *Radio Nowhere* and the Qs show they can rock too. They motor along with this track, delivering plenty in the way of drive, dynamics and attack.

We listen to a range of music, starting with the sparsely-produced *Coexist* from The xx and Bjork's energetic *Post*, through to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, and these little gems never fail to please. For their size they deliver a decent dose of low-end punch, and are loud enough for most situations.

Partner them with a bit of care and you'll get a quality of sound that's well beyond the typical expectations of a sub-£300 speaker. Fabulous value? Without a doubt. But are they better than the Wharfedale Diamond 220s, our current budget champions? We wouldn't bet against it.

Q tips

Q Acoustics has a habit of making class-leading speakers at a reasonable price, and the 3020s are no exception. With the right partners, you'll get a quality of sound well above what you'd expect at this price

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Exceptional combination of refinement, insight and dynamics; terrific build and finish

AGAINST Absolutely nothing at this price

VERDICT Yet another top class budget standmounter from Q Acoustics. It delivers a fabulous sound for the money

Needs to beat

Wharfedale
Diamond 220
£200 ★★★★★

Our current budget speaker champion is a terrific all-rounder



Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 Wireless | **Headphones** | £380

Sweet music, with no strings

When Sennheiser launched the first range of Momentum headphones in 2013, it showed a fashion-conscious popular headphone market that style and substance didn't have to be mutually exclusive.

With these 'phones now in their second generation, that message is stronger than ever. Not only has the range been tweaked and improved, it's also expanded with the addition of these wireless, noise-cancelling cans. And what an addition they are.

From a pure design perspective, the Momentum 2.0 Wireless are as desirable as ever. At first glance, they appear similar to the first generation, sporting an all-leather headband and elegantly sculpted earcups on adjustable stainless-steel rails.

Spot the difference

Look closer though, and you'll notice there have been some tweaks. The frame is now collapsible, allowing them to fold down for better portability, while the earcups are bigger to ensure a better over-ear fit.

The soft leather earpads are thicker too, making them even comfier than before. We have worn them for hours at a time without feeling the need to remove or adjust them, and our ears have never become overly warm during use.

Despite the strong bass response, it's in the midrange that we think the Momentums really shine. From vocals to guitars, there's a level of subtlety here that uncovers stacks of fine detail

Obviously the headline features of this model over the standard Momentum 2.0 are aptX Bluetooth and active noise cancellation, both of which make their debut here with excellent results.

You'll get around 22 hours of stable wireless music playback with noise cancellation activated (more at a modest volume level), and should you drain that you can attach the included cable and continue listening passively (passive mode is available when wired only). We do wish the power light stayed on constantly when they're powered up though - without it it's easy to forget to turn the Momentums off and waste battery life in the process.

Controls to hand

You'll find all the controls for power and music control on the right earcup. The power button doubles as the pairing button, with the ability to remember up to eight different devices, or you can use NFC pairing if your device is compatible.

There's a multi-function button that shifts up and down for volume adjustments,

and can also be depressed to perform varying functions. Once you remember which combination of presses does what, it's a handy option.

The noise-cancelling on board is Sennheiser's proprietary NoiseGuard technology, and it does a really good job of dulling down the noises of the world around you.

You don't get the almost eerie levels of silence provided by Bose's QC25s, but you also don't get that odd feeling of pressure on your ears when noise cancellation is activated.

Office noise is all but gone and airplane noise is drastically reduced to a negligible hum - it's up there as one of the most effective noise-cancelling experiences we've had, and one of the most natural too.

Fire them up for a listen and we're greeted with the Momentum sound signature we know and love, which hasn't lost any of its verve or excitement in shedding wires. In fact, we're really impressed at how close the wired and wireless performances are. Things are a little tighter with the wire attached, but you certainly won't feel like you're missing out when you go wireless.

It's a rich, full-bodied performance with a level of composure and refinement that we aren't always used to hearing from Bluetooth headphones.

The low end is weighty but detailed, giving the pulsing bassline of Jay-Z and Kanye West's *No Church In The Wild* plenty of punch without ever sounding boomy or drowning out the rest of the frequency range.

In fact, despite its strong bass response, it's in the midrange that we think the Momentums really shine. From vocals to guitars, there's a level of subtlety here that uncovers stacks of fine detail, with plenty of clarity to boot.

In Rihanna's *FourFiveSeconds*, vocals are expressive and focused, while Paul McCartney's guitar strums have real depth and texture to them. Dynamically the Momentums don't miss a beat either, timing superbly and delivering a wonderfully enthusiastic, up-front presentation that keeps you hooked on the music track after track.

The high end is as well judged as the rest of the frequency range, possessing an open,



Now collapsible, the soft leather earcups are also larger than before - and more comfortable

articulate treble that shows no hint of harshness, even with lesser-quality recordings. The Momentums have always been forgiving and that quality has continued in the second generation.

They also offer an impressively spacious presentation for a pair of closed-back headphones, giving instruments and performers plenty of room to breathe, even in the busiest of recordings.

Separate microphone

Take a call while wearing the headphones and, thanks to a separate microphone dedicated to voice calls built into the earcups, you don't need a mic on the audio cable to be heard. We find calls to be clear and stable, with callers always able to hear us without issue.

The only hitch in all of this is the price. £380 is a not inconsiderable amount to spend on a pair of headphones, but if you have it to spend you won't be disappointed.

In the Momentum 2.0 Wireless, Sennheiser has delivered an endlessly listenable, hugely likeable pair of headphones with new features and design tweaks that make them better than ever. If you can find £380, you'll be well rewarded.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Design; great dynamics; clear, detailed midrange; rich bass; good noise cancellation

AGAINST A little pricey

VERDICT The Momentum range just got even better - these headphones look stylish, offer great functionality and sound superb



A friendly voice
As well as the multi-function button on the right earcup, the Momentums also offer voice prompts to let you know when you're connected to a device, in pairing mode, or powering on or off.

There's little to choose between the wired and wireless performance; it's superb in each case

System builder Total build £1080

Smartphone
Samsung Galaxy Note 4 £550
★★★★★

Samsung's excellent Galaxy Note 4 is able to take full advantage of the Momentums aptX Bluetooth function, and with NFC on board as well, pairing the two together is quick and easy.



DAC
Audioquest Dragonfly v1.2 £130
★★★★★

A dinky DAC that offers an outstanding performance for a great price, Audioquest's Dragonfly is a simple way to bring greater transparency and detail to your computer's audio.



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

CD-quality streaming might come at a price, but it really is worth it. Tidal is the most together service of its type we've seen, with sound quality that blows competitors away.



Crystal Acoustics Cuby 7 | Wireless speaker | £270

Clever Cuby loses direction

The Crystal Acoustics Cuby 7 may look like a subwoofer, but it's actually a fancy Bluetooth speaker. More than that, it's a fancy Bluetooth speaker with WiSound technology.

What does WiSound do? Basically, it promises that you'll hear the same sound wherever you are in the room. Goodbye to your traditional stereo speakers and their 'sweet spot', the theory goes. Crystal Acoustics argues that fewer people listen that way nowadays, instead going for single-box wireless speakers placed on shelves and tables.

Sound is all around you

WiSound works by blasting sound upwards, forwards and sideways from drivers of varying sizes. This aims to create a balance between direct sound (straight from the speaker) and sound reflected from your walls and ceiling. As the product name suggests, there are seven drivers: four on top, two on the side, and one at the front.

It works. Crystal Acoustics claims you'll get the same sonic performance and tonal balance wherever you are in the room, and we find this to be true. We set the speaker up in a medium-sized room (not far from walls) and walk around the speaker as it

What does WiSound do? Basically, it promises that you'll hear the same sound wherever you are in the room. Goodbye to traditional stereo speakers and their 'sweet spot', the theory goes. And it works

plays. The sonic characteristics do not change noticeably. There is not more detail over here and less bass over there. The performance is not a narrow beam of sound, but rather a spacious and enveloping dome.

There is something rather pleasing about the freedom to uncouple yourself from the sofa and walk around while listening. As far as the company's claims are concerned, it's mission accomplished.

A lack of sonic cohesion

Unfortunately, that does not take into account what those sonic characteristics are. We hear the same sound wherever we are in the room, but we find that sound a little disappointing.

There is a lack of organisation. Whatever we play, we struggle to single out and follow all the individual strands of music. Instruments jostle for your attention, rather than performing as a cohesive whole.

Then we have the matter of definition, the Cuby 7's other significant weakness. Leading edges feel a bit blurry. The bass is a bit soft. It is difficult to identify the

instruments in play, particularly when they're scrabbling for your attention.

Tonal balance is fine. There's a good amount of everything from bass upwards through to midrange and treble. But the quality of the anything above the upper-midrange is harsh - and that's despite many days of running in.

These are not issues we've experienced with similarly priced rivals such as the Monitor Audio Airstream S200 or Geneva Model M Wireless. Neither of those speakers can replicate the Cuby 7's positional flexibility, but both offer far greater clarity and definition, not to mention punchier dynamics.

Sub-standard looks?

We're also not especially keen on the design of the Cuby 7. Even considering the changeable top plate (also available in red or white), we can't escape the fact that it has the look and size of a small subwoofer.

It is well made, however. The remote may be disappointingly plasticky, but the main unit feels nice. There is a reassuring



The top plate is also available in white or red - but this is still a functional-looking box

weight and solidity to the Cuby 7. It also has a decent collection of physical inputs (RCA, 3.5mm and digital optical).

Of course, if you really want to make the most of your freedom to roam, you'll be best off using the aptX Bluetooth connection. And that is solid, with pairing proving swift and the connection reassuringly stable.

The Crystal Acoustics Cuby 7 succeeds in its goal of giving you the same sound wherever you are in the room. Unfortunately, that sound is a touch underwhelming. It's a good idea, but the overall package needs a bit of work.



The impressively built main unit is let down a bit by the plasticky remote control

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Same sonic character wherever you are in the room; solid build

AGAINST Unclear, poorly organised sound; could do with greater dynamics; poor remote

VERDICT The Cuby 7 is a good idea, but that sound needs to be better

Also consider Monitor Audio Airstream S200 £200 ★★★★★

Delivers clearer, better organised sound



Audio Analogue Fortissimo AirTech | Stereo amplifier | £1750

Fortissimo has strength and subtlety

If you're looking for a well-equipped premium integrated amplifier, this Audio Analogue is worth investigating. The Fortissimo AirTech packs a lot into its large chassis, including digital-to-analogue conversion, a headphones output and moving coil/moving magnet phono stage.

Don't let the 'AirTech' name fool you; there isn't the wireless functionality here that the tag suggests. It simply indicates that this is the revised version of the Fortissimo amplifier we tested back in late 2013. The changes include a new thicker chassis and front panel, upgraded internal cabling and improved capacitors in the power supply and audio circuits. The company has revoiced the Fortissimo too, aiming for improved smoothness, transparency and spaciousness in its presentation.

Plenty of inputs

First impressions are positive. As is Audio Analogue's way, the unit feels solid and is nicely finished. It's available in two colours, black and silver.

A single, large rotary control dominates the front panel, handling volume and source selection duties. There are a lot of connections to work through as the amplifier has five line-level inputs (including one balanced and a 3.5mm input on the front panel), three digital options (USB, coax and optical) as well as a phono stage. The remote makes things easier, though you'll have to learn the specific number associated with each input to get direct access.



I get around

The large rotary control on the front panel handles volume and source selection duties. It can only cycle in one direction, so if you miss the one of your choice, you'll have to work your way around the dial again.

The remote handset may not have the clearest layout we've seen, but it is nicer to use than most rival offerings.

USB sampling rate is a let down

We're a little thrown by the DAC. It can accept data streams of up to 24-bit/176.4kHz sampling rate through its optical and coax inputs, but just 16-bit/48Khz through via USB. We'd expect the USB and coax inputs to cope with 24-bit/192Khz signals at least.

Through the analogue inputs this amplifier puts in a strong performance. It sounds big and powerful, as its 100 watt per channel power output suggests, but combines these traits with an impressive degree of subtlety when required.

We start with Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and the Fortissimo AirTech delivers the piece's large-scale dynamic swings with composure, keeping the complex arrangements organised. There's a good degree of insight and fine handling of the interplay between instruments.

Tonally it's mostly even, with just a touch of extra sweetness at the top end. We like this balance; the amplifier retains a good degree of transparency without

USE IT WITH Roksan Caspian M2 CD player

An excellent CD player that delivers a dramatic and engaging sound, yet lacks nothing in refinement



turning nasty if fed with poor quality source material or partnered with aggressive-sounding kit.

Moving to an old favourite in PJ Harvey's *White Chalk*, the Audio Analogue sounds right at home. It has a lovely midrange; articulate, agile and subtle. Harvey's voice is delivered with all the passion intact, and the sparse instrumental backing is rendered with care. There's power when needed, but the amplifier's finesse impresses us most. By the highest standards at this price there are small, but noticeable, shortfalls in terms of dynamic punch and rhythmic precision, but it's not enough to spoil things.

Pleasing, but perhaps not exciting

The on-board DAC is a decent one, but doesn't have the all-round talent of Arcam's irDAC. Listening to Kanye West's *Yeezus* shows off the Fortissimo's refinement and composure, but also reveals a slight lack of dynamic expression. The amplifier remains a pleasing listen, but falls a little short in the excitement stakes. The headphone output is disappointing though, and it loses a notable amount of insight and finesse this way.

Overall, the Fortissimo AirTech is a capable amplifier, packed full of useful features and with a pleasant and subtle presentation. Worth a listen? We'd say so.

In detail

1 New chassis

While the Fortissimo looks the same as the model we reviewed back in 2013, the front panel and chassis are both thicker and more rigid than before.

2 XLR connection

The Fortissimo has a good range of analogue inputs and includes a balanced XLR connection. This amplifier will happily accommodate most stereo set-ups.

3 Built-in DAC

One of the big selling points of the Fortissimo AirTech amplifier is the built-in DAC module. Although it's a decent unit, it is still bettered by the likes of Arcam's irDAC.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Subtle and articulate midrange; refined presentation; good build and finish

AGAINST Lacks a little attack and rhythmic drive; headphone output could be better

VERDICT A good amplifier which is at its best with music that requires finesse above all else

Also consider

Rega Elicit-R £1600 ★★★★★

A top-class amplifier that delivers excellent dynamics and precise rhythmic drive



Cyrus CD Xt Signature | CD transport | £1750

A quality Signature tune

The CD Xt Signature is the latest in a long line of Cyrus CD transports. While it looks just like the last one - the CD Xt SE2 - the company claims improvements in the servo control software, power supply and electrical noise levels.

Obsessives will notice the removal of the PSX-R socket. The PSX-R is an add-on outboard power supply, and the standard recommendation to upgrade Cyrus products. It made huge improvements to earlier transports, but the Signature's internal power supply has been refined to the extent that the company no longer feels the outboard unit adds significant benefits.

Fewer disc-reading errors

The Signature is built neatly, mirroring the construction of other Cyrus products. It doesn't give off a premium aura, though, which is what we'd hope for at this price. Things get worse when we load a disc - it feels agricultural rather than beautifully engineered, and is noisy with it. But once the disc is spinning, the CD Xt Signature is quieter than most of its rivals.

Cyrus is very proud of its transport mechanism, particularly the software that controls it, and has invested a great deal in developing this CD engine. It is designed to deliver high performance in a home hi-fi environment - the Cyrus claims an impressive 20 per cent fewer errors in disc reading than the best OEM alternative.

But there's a downside. This transport is fussy about disc quality. If they're not in top condition, or formatted to the precise Red Book CD spec, it may struggle to read them.

Clean, crisp and dynamic

For this review, we use a Chord Hugo digital-to-analogue converter to do the number crunching. The signal then feeds into our reference Bryston BP26/4B SST2 pre/power and ATC SCM50 speakers.

We're impressed by its wide-ranging dynamics, seismic bass and nuanced rendering of piano and strings. It's the kind of performance we'd find hard to better, even at double the money



Quick response
The CD Xt Signature is an easy-to-use, responsive unit that snaps to commands quickly. It's fussy about disc quality, but you'll be hard pressed to find better, even at twice the price.

The last generation of Cyrus transport was the best-sounding vaguely realistically priced unit we've heard. The Signature sounds cleaner, crisper and more dynamic, even compared to its predecessor partnering a PSX-R.

Exceptional skill and clarity

We start with the *Broadchurch OST* (from Ólafur Arnalds) and the Signature (with the Hugo) delivers astonishing detail. Each instrumental strand is crisply drawn, notes stop and start with precision, and subtleties, such as the dense texture of the growling low frequencies and the space around the sparse instrumental backdrops, are easy to hear.

The soundstage is open and wonderfully expansive. The imaging is stable, focused, and layered with great care. We're also impressed by the combination's wide-ranging dynamics; the way the soundtrack's

The CD Xt Signature is neat and well-built, but lacks the premium aura you might hope for at this price

seismic bass hits hard but also the nuanced rendering of the piano and string notes. It's the kind of performance we'd find hard to better even at double the money.

With Gil Scott Heron's *I'm New Here*, we are pleased by the sound's precision and drive. The complex percussion at the opening of *New York Is Killing Me* is delivered with exceptional skill and clarity.

If you want to hear how good your CDs can sound - and are happy with a separate DAC - the Cyrus CD Xt Signature is a terrific buy.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Class-leading sound when partnered with a suitable DAC; superb dynamics

AGAINST Agricultural-sounding loading mechanism; fussy about disc quality

VERDICT Looking for a top class CD transport? Buy this one

Also consider

Roksan Caspian M2 CD player
£1900 ★★★★★

Not as insightful as the far pricier Cyrus/Chord combination, but nice all the same



System builder Total build £7970

Portable DAC

Chord Hugo DAC £1400
★★★★★

This Award-winning DAC makes an excellent partner for the Cyrus Signature transport.



Stereo amplifier

Naim SuperNait2 £2850 ★★★★★

A powerful, punchy integrated amplifier with the insight and dynamics to shine in this company.



Stereo speakers

PMC Twenty 22 £1970
★★★★★

These premium standmounters make the most of such a talented source and amplification.



Pioneer X-HM72-K | Microsystem | £350

Pioneer's features lost in sonic gloom

The Pioneer X-HM72-K micro system appears quite the overachiever. The sheer number of features it offers - from Bluetooth streaming to high-resolution support - is astounding at this price, but operational and sound quality issues beg the question has it bitten off more than it can chew?

Nifty little system

Let's start with the positives. The Pioneer micro system has a 50W amplifier to power the pair of speakers included, but it's the features under the hood that



Outstanding features, extensive file support and a budget price are all considerable plus points. Unfortunately, the Pioneer X-HM72-K is let down by its ordinary sonic performance

appear the most. Whether your music consists of CDs, high-res files stored on your laptop or streamed songs from your smartphone, this Pioneer will play it. It also offers extensive file support. From bog-standard MP3s to high-resolution files of up to 24-bit/192kHz in WAV, FLAC or AIFF formats, this nifty little system can handle it all. It even plays DSD files - quite an accomplishment for such a product.

You can also play high-res files by plugging them into the USB port on the front panel. If you're an Apple user you can play songs stored on your smartphone or tablet through the same USB port, which also charges while playing. Other physical connections include 3.5mm and two line level inputs, and a digital optical input.

Swift and seamless

Bluetooth, AirPlay and DLNA are the highlights of the Pioneer's streaming talents, although they're less reliable when it comes to playing music wirelessly. During testing we experience an alarming rate of dropout with both Apple and Android devices. Bluetooth is the most convenient streaming feature, but frustrating to use.

Connecting to the network via the system's built-in wi-fi can also be fussy. It often takes a couple of tries, so we opt for the more stable and quicker wired ethernet route in the end. On the plus side, the vTuner Internet radio service plays songs swiftly and seamlessly.

USE IT WITH
Spotify Premium
£10/month Upgrade to Premium and you'll have access to a vast catalogue of uninterrupted music, and can take advantage of the Pioneer's Spotify Connect feature

We find the CD drive to be the simplest and most stable way of playing music. CDs also deliver a more solid, organised and detailed performance than streaming.

The disappointing thing is this: the Pioneer just doesn't sound that good. Play Stevie Nicks and Dave Grohl's *You Can't Fix This* and while the little system can go pretty loud and is fairly well balanced tonally, it doesn't sound very solid or subtly detailed. The nuances in Nicks' vocals - her nasal twang and the emotion breaking through as the song reaches its peak - aren't as clearly defined as we'd like.

Timing isn't precise enough either, resulting in a sound that lacks agility and liveliness. The funky beats of *Gagarin* by Public Service Broadcasting sound vague and laboured when they should be fun and jaunty.

There is some good news though. This Pioneer avoids the harsh, thin presentation of many similarly priced alternatives.

Smart, uncluttered fascia

Overall, the micro system is compact and solidly built, and looks smart thanks to the main unit's uncluttered aluminium fascia. The disc-loading tray is fairly quiet and it operates smoothly, as does the volume dial.

The main unit comes in either silver or black but, strangely, the small speakers - nicely made, but a little plain looking - are available in black only.

The main unit's display is large and clear enough to be easily read from a distance, but one big niggle is that the CD track number is hidden away at the bottom corner, which means you can't see the track you're skipping to.

The remote control makes more sense and is nice to use, with a sensible layout and responsive buttons that make it easy to hop between sources. There is a free iOS/Android control app, but we prefer the straightforwardness of the trusty remote.

Plethora of features

It's one thing to offer a plethora of features at a budget price, but that generosity is lost if the system doesn't sound entertaining.

If features rate higher than outright sonic performance, then buy the Pioneer. However, in order to fully enjoy your music collection, we'd urge you to look elsewhere.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Extensive file compatibility; well built and compact design; budget price

AGAINST Disorganised sound; lacks detail, cohesion and punch; streaming is frustrating

VERDICT Superb features on a budget price, but performance isn't inspiring

Also consider

Denon D-M39DAB
£300 ★★★★★



No streaming, but this detailed, dynamic and punchy Denon system is delightful to listen to

Wearable technology

Time for a giant leap into virtual reality

Wearable technology is set to revolutionise the way we enjoy our music and movies

Could the next generation of AV products see the biggest advances in technology yet? From Dolby taking its latest cinema sound to virtual reality to Apple's latest 'iPod' being on your wrist, wearable technology could be about to change the way we're enjoying music and movies in the not-too-distant future.

Once strictly the preserve of Hollywood, this futuristic technology is setting the wider tech agenda in 2015. As with any new tech development, the latest wearable kit is sure to have a knock-on effect on the wider world of hi-fi and home cinema.

Show time

Last month's Mobile World Congress saw the traditional slew of new smartphones and tablets, but the real trend of the show was wearable technology, and specifically virtual reality.

HTC sprang the biggest surprise of the show by teaming up with gaming company Steam to reveal its Vive VR headset. Delivering a 1200 x 1080p pixel-per-eye picture, the Vive VR aims to deliver games, video and more with an unrivalled level of immersion. Gaming may be the hook for early adopters, but HTC is already talking about live sports and concerts.

Choose your angle

Would you like to watch a live music concert from the stage? Or follow a football match from a camera by the dugout? With such events already using a huge number of cameras, VR could allow you to do just that. The HTC Vive VR is due on sale by the end of the year, so this is more than just a pipe dream.

So it's no wonder home cinema companies should have VR tech on their radar. Cinema



companies don't get much bigger than Dolby and, aside from the first Atmos-enabled smartphone, and new Atmos tablets (above), the company revealed it has been working on its own VR solution, which it sees as a natural fit for its new Atmos surround-sound format.

Cinema giant Dolby has thrown its hat into the virtual-reality ring by collaborating with VR company Jaunt to produce its own immersive technology, complete with Atmos surround sound



Working with virtual reality company Jaunt, Dolby is bringing live concerts and videos, complete with Dolby Atmos soundtracks, to VR, allowing anyone with an affordable Google Cardboard headset to experience virtual reality and surround sound.

Once strictly the preserve of Hollywood, this futuristic technology is setting the wider tech agenda in 2015. The latest wearable kit is sure to have an effect on home cinema

HTC's Vive VR headset, on sale later this year, delivers a highly immersive Full HD image aimed at game-play, live sports viewing and concerts



Live performance

While TV and films could gain an extra dimension, the real advantage could be live concerts and sport, where the user is free to roam their environment. Even a 4K OLED picture might struggle to compete with that... (You can read our first impressions of the experience opposite. Spoiler: we loved it.)

With the Facebook-owned Oculus Rift being the original flag-bearer for virtual reality and Sony recently revealing its Morpheus VR headset prototype, there's plenty of energy focused in this area. But VR isn't the only wearable tech to look out for...

* Speaker plus phone app

Not just a £130 Bluetooth speaker, the Harman Kardon One also has HTC Connect for easy connection to HTC phones: whfcm/HKspeaker



* New Meridian buds

Meridian has collaborated on the limited-edition Sir George Martin Signature Custom headphones, with DAC: whfcm/MeridianSGM



Analysis

“Atmos with virtual reality takes cinema to a new level”



Multimedia editor Verity Burns

Dolby thinks Atmos is the perfect all-encompassing audio experience to complement the visual experience you get with virtual reality, and will “transform the way we tell stories”. To demonstrate its enthusiasm, the company was showcasing two new platforms for Atmos at Mobile World Congress: Atmos sound on mobile, and as part of a virtual-reality experience.

First I tried Atmos on mobile using headphones. Overhead noises are convincingly recreated, and there is a decent sense of width and space that pushes the surround-sound effect even further than traditional surround-sound processing in headphones.

But coupling Atmos sound with the virtual reality headset takes the experience to another level, giving you the audio



Combine Atmos sound with the VR headset and the effect is convincing

cues you need to move yourself around a virtual environment. The on-screen visuals certainly work alongside the audio to help ‘place’ sounds in certain areas. Close your eyes and you can more easily pick up on the trickery Dolby is using to create the multi-directional effect, but then that’s not really part of the fun.

Effects are less pronounced and the experience is, overall, less immersive than being in the cinema, but it’s worth remembering this is working with just two speakers and some clever processing. Dolby tells us it’s not trying to match the cinema experience, it’s trying to complement it and improve the mobile audio experience we already have.

The only catch is content. Aside from the demo clips we saw, there is currently no native Atmos content available for mobile. This means it will be working mostly with non-Atmos-mixed audio and upscaling it to create the effect.

But it’s early days. With Dolby adamant that virtual reality will be crucial in the future, we look forward to seeing how the technology develops.

Apple Watch



Wearable technology is about much more than virtual reality. The elephant in any tech room is Apple, and the Cupertino company has confirmed more details on its first play in the market – the Apple Watch.

As shown by the stellar success of the iPhone and then the iPad, underestimating any Apple product’s impact on the wider consumer electronics industry tends to be a mistake.

The idea of a mobile phone being a hi-fi product was laughable 10 years ago. Now the smartphone is one of the most popular devices in the world for listening to music, let alone streaming, buying and ultimately controlling your tunes and your wider AV system.

Could the Watch make a similar impact? Well, it’s also an iPod (it can play music without a phone connected), and is set to launch with “thousands of apps”. Who’d bet against Apple moving our collective eyes to our wrist?



TOP 5 New launches

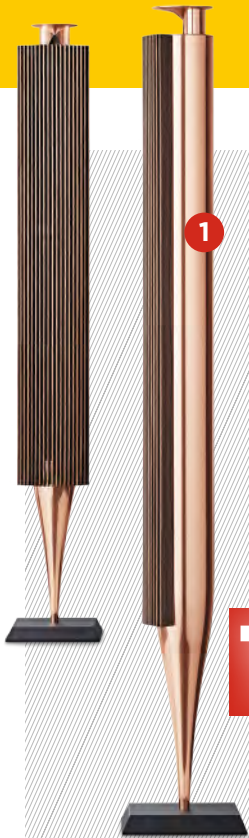
Dynaudio Excite speakers, Sony tablet, Panasonic multi-room range

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



* Nvidia Shield console

The Nvidia Shield is not just a games console – it also runs Android TV, can support 4K video playback and high-resolution audio. European availability and pricing has yet to be announced. <http://whfcm/NvidiaShield4K>



1 B&O Love Affair collection from £235

To celebrate 90 years in the AV business, Bang & Olufsen has released six of its current products in a new rose-gold finish. The products featured are the BeoVision Avant 85 TV, BeoRemote One, BeoVision 11-46, BeoLab 18 speakers (pictured), BeoPlay H6 headphones and the BeoPlay A9 music system. We're reliably informed the rose-gold colour represents the "love and attention to detail" B&O has put into its products over the years. More here: <http://whfcm/BandORoseGold>



2 Sony Xperia Z4 Tablet £tbc

Sony's new tablet features a 10.1in display and is claimed to be the "brightest 2K screen on the market". It also supports high-res audio and offers DSEE HX technology to upscale lower quality tracks. Elsewhere there's the latest Snapdragon processor and a 17 hour battery life. Want to know more? <http://whfcm/SonyZ4Tablet>

TOP 5 New launches

3 Dynaudio Excite X14A £1350

The Excite X14A is a new, active version of Dynaudio's passive Excite X14 speakers. The electronics have been tailored with the drive units to create "the ultimate compact audio system". A 50W digital amplifier powers the bass/midrange driver while a separate 50W digital amp powers the tweeter. Three equalizer switches let users adjust the sound depending on where the speakers are placed in your room. Two analogue connections are available too – one RCA and one XLR. Full details are online <http://whfcm/ExciteX14A>



4 Panasonic Multi-room range £tbc

Panasonic has made additions to its All Connected multi-room range of products in the form of the SC-ALL2 and SC-ALLCD (pictured) speaker systems, the SC-PMX100 micro hi-fi system, SC-ALL70T soundbar and SC-ALL30T 'speaker board'. All will feature wi-fi, DLNA and Bluetooth streaming, with the SC-ALLCD claiming to be the first multi-room product with a CD player. Panasonic has also launched new micro-systems and headphones. For all the details, head online <http://whfcm/PanasonicMultiroom>

5 Samsung Galaxy S6/S6 Edge £tbc

Samsung's two new Galaxy smartphones have similar specs, but with one big difference. Both use a 5.1in Super AMOLED 2K screen, but the S6 Edge's 5.1in screen curves off at both sides on the front and back. This design brings with it some clever features. For more info on the Galaxy S6, head to <http://whfcm/GalaxyS6Phone>. For the S6 Edge, go to <http://whfcm/GalaxyS6EdgePhone>



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DANISH DESIGN UNIVERSAL SOUND

Style? Or substance? Something's got to give, surely? Not if DALI's engineers are involved. And not when they're producing the KUBIK ONE wireless speaker...

We all know where the soundbar goes: under the TV. And it's long, black and unobtrusive... and maybe a little dull. Chances are it's also the best speaker in your living room. But it's tied to the TV, destined for a life of the news and (if it's lucky) televised gigs. DALI's **KUBIK ONE** wireless speaker changes all that. It's a soundbar (if you want it to be) – and it can sit under the TV (if that's the best place). But it's also a complete sound-system in its own right.

The KUBIK ONE uses the same knowledge, materials and techniques that make DALI's hi-fi speakers so well

regarded then combines that heritage with cutting-edge tech and design. The result is a system that's just at home on the wall or hi-fi rack as it is under the TV.

It uses Bluetooth to connect with any compatible device, has two optical inputs for connections to a TV and sound source, a USB input and analogue and subwoofer connections for even more options. Whether you're listening to a high-res symphony played from the computer (it handles files up to 24-bit/96kHz) or want a blockbuster movie to blow you away, the KUBIK is the ONE.



KUBIK ONE CONSTRUCTION

The KUBIK ONE uses the materials DALI uses in its high-end hi-fi speakers. The 13cm wood-fibre drivers are designed specifically for this system; the 25mm soft-dome tweeters use damping techniques for even greater detail. It's all housed in a single piece of extruded aluminium that keeps things rigid for punchy bass – but also compact. And there's no separate power box – compact switch mode power supplies the 100W class-D amplifier.

KUBIK ONE TECHNOLOGY

The speaker owes its quality to traditional hi-fi techniques but its tech is thoroughly modern. Want to start using? Hit play: the speaker detects and turns on the input automatically; Bluetooth 3.0 with Apt-X tech means great sound; there's a bass-level control to connect to any active subwoofer, the DSP ensures optimum sound quality; wide sound dispersion maximises the sonic sweet-spot for everyone in the room.

KUBIK ONE DESIGN

Danish design is famous for simplicity and elegance. The KUBIK ONE is sleek, compact, stylish and customisable. Blend in with the black cover or make a statement using any one of eight interchangeable coloured covers (samples featured below).



STEREO SPEAKERS £750-£1000

SUPERTEST

EXPLICIT

Floorshow

Less is more? Not always. Sometimes, you just want your music to sound bigger. Go louder. Beat harder. You need floorstanders. And when you're spending the best part of £1000, you're entitled to expect some frankly revealing speakers that will lay your music bare.

That's not to say you should throw all thoughts of practicality out of the window. There are good reasons to choose floorstanders over standmounters. For starters, you don't need to invest in stands, leaving more cash to spend on your speakers. Then there's space: floorstanders don't always take up a lot of room. Whether you're starting out or upgrading, the right pair of floorstanders can be a sound investment.

To help you decide, we've put together a seven-way death match. Our trusty Q Acoustic Concept 40s are joined by newcomers from Bowers & Wilkins, Cabasse, Epos, PSB, Tannoy and Triangle. All of them have been working hard to shout louder and better than the others. It's been deafening at times, but it's also been a lot of fun.



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



ON TEST

B&W 684 S2 p30

Cabasse Jersey MT32 p31

Epos K2 p32

PSB Imagine X1T p33

Q Acoustics Concept 40 p34

Tannoy Revolution XT6F p35

Triangle Antal 902 p36



BOWERS & WILKINS 684 S2 £800



Bowers & Wilkins has done very well of late. Much of that success is down to the 600 S2 series. We're big fans of the 683 S2 floorstanders, and even bigger fans of the 685 S2 standmounters. Both picked up Awards in their respective price class.

So our expectations were naturally high when we received the 684 S2s. Alas, we're not quite as blown away as we were with their bigger and smaller siblings. We're a little disappointed, yes, but that's not to say these speakers deserve to be overlooked: there's plenty of enjoyment to be had here.

Deceptively powerful

Things begin very well indeed. We're struck by the size of the sound we hear, which is entirely at odds with the size of the cabinets.

That's not to say these speakers are diminutive by any means, but close your eyes and you could believe that far larger boxes are responsible for that clamour.

The soundstage is admirably wide, and on it you'll find firmly placed instruments and vocals.

Ah, the vocals. The 684 S2s can boast an excellent midrange. It's direct, articulate and very expressive. These speakers' rendition of Johnny Cash's *Hurt* might well make you quiver.

The treble, meanwhile, sparkles. There's plenty of detail at the top end, but it's delicate. Even the thrashest hi-hat stops short of sounding harsh.

But what about the bass? There's a good deal of it, but the 684 S2s aren't capable of trouser-flapping or other such clichés. You need their big brothers, the 683 S2s, for that.

The art of articulation

The real issue here isn't the amount of bass, but the character of it. It goes deep enough, but we find it a little restrained and not as articulate as we'd like.

As a result, the performance doesn't gel with the cohesion we're looking for. That's despite the dynamics on hand, which are decently strong and wide.

It's a shame, because in other areas the 684 S2s are more-than capable. On the physical side, these speakers are sturdily built. They may appear a little plain next to the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs or the Q Acoustics Concept 40s, but they look smart on their own terms.

The centre of gravity is quite high, so it wouldn't take much to tip these speakers over - worth thinking about if you have children or a dog. B&W provides a stabilising plinth, but performance does suffer a little with it attached.

Those Kevlar cones are a familiar sight on a pair of B&Ws, as are metal dome tweeters

B&W's yellow Kevlar cones are certainly distinctive whether you choose the black or white finish. The S2 series speakers all benefit from a new tweeter, which is covered with a metal grille. This aids dispersion and fends off wandering fingers. The tweeter has also been decoupled from the rest of the cabinet to reduce unwanted vibrations.

There's a new plug at the centre of the Kevlar drivers. It's a mushroom-shaped cap, which replaces the old bullet-shaped plug, and promises better damping.

A note on positioning: these speakers are designed to work well in tighter spaces, but we still wouldn't put them right up against a back wall. Give them a little space to breathe.

The B&W 684 S2s don't quite blow us away, but there's plenty here to admire. If you're tight on space, these compact floorstanders are worth an audition.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Expressive midrange; delicate treble; good build; fairly flexible about positioning

AGAINST Bass is a bit restrained; some rivals offer better all-round performance

VERDICT A more-than competent compact floorstander but not B&W's finest offering

CABASSE JERSEY MT32 £900

This is the second time in as many months that we've tested a pair of Cabasse MT32 speakers. Last time it was the Antigua bookshelf model, which we liked despite a few shortcomings. Will the Jersey floorstanders be as appealing?

For the money, you're getting a lot of speaker. While some rivals have gone for the 'compact' approach, we'd struggle to apply that label to the Jersey MT32s.

Incidentally, the 'MT' part stands for 'midrange tweeter' - that's the DOM 37 tweeter, a design derived from the flagship La Sphere and L'Ocean speakers, which have six-figure price tags.

These entry-level floorstanders don't have the same level of fit and finish as their more expensive siblings, sadly. They're well built, and available in ebony or walnut finishes, but there's no denying they look a bit austere. That's not necessarily a bad thing - just don't expect them to add a luxury feel to your living room.

Out in the open

Now, you're going to need a fair bit of space. Not only are these fairly big and boxy - they aren't too keen on walls. Put these speakers into a corner and you won't get the good tonal balance that they otherwise enjoy.

Give them space, and you'll get space right back. They have an expansive sound that has no trouble filling a larger room. They can comfortably pump up the volume, too. If you're after something to shake the house a bit, these fit the bill nicely.

A musical mix

As for the presentation itself, it's a mixed bag. There's a fair amount of detail across the frequency range, but the Q Acoustics Concept 40s demonstrate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of texture.

Timing is another area where the Cabasses fall short of standards set by rivals: the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs' level of precision makes the Jersey MT32s seem a little sloppy.

What we do like is how well the frequencies integrate. The drivers demonstrate a consistency of character. The sound is smooth and full-bodied, just like the Jerseys' standmounted siblings, the Antigua MT32s.

But unlike those speakers, there's no real sense of enthusiasm. Where the standmounters had a sense of life, these floorstanders feel a touch ponderous.

Play something inherently bouncy - Taylor Swift's *Shake It Off*, for example

Time for austerity: the Jerseys have a pared-down, business-like look but are well built

- and the performance feels a bit by the numbers, lacking any sense of energy. There's plenty of power on hand (as demonstrated by a quick blast of any Hans Zimmer), the Jersey MT32s seem rather ambivalent about exercising it.

The result is a performance that feels unexciting. Rarely were we rapt with attention or animated, as we often are while listening. In fact, we occasionally found our attention wandering.

And that's a shame, because the Cabasse Jersey MT32s do quite a few things right. We appreciate the smooth presentation. We're impressed by the sense of scale. And then there's that appealing consistency across the frequency range.

But we can't get past that unexciting sound. We want to be entertained, and similarly priced rivals prove themselves to be significantly more capable.

**Rating ★★★★★**

FOR Large sound; consistency of character; smooth presentation

AGAINST Rivals are more precise, detailed and nuanced; unexciting performance

VERDICT A huge sense of scale but a rather forgettable listening experience

EPOS K2 £1000



If your space is tight and you're looking for a pair of compact floorstanders, these Epos K2s fit the bill nicely.

We tested their standmounted siblings, the K1s, last month and were impressed by their solid sound and lively performance. The K2s are a very similar offering. There's just more of them to go round.

Full-bodied sound

Like the K1s, these also sound solid and lively. There's enough energy to get your feet moving. They punch hard, and keep time well. They have no problem grabbing your attention and holding it for the duration of your listen.

They deliver a smooth, full-bodied sound, which makes for an easy listen without tiring your ears. We have a good crack at Dave Brubeck's repertoire and didn't find any hardness in the drumming (of which there is plenty).

That's partly to do with the bass on offer, which is rich and weighty without getting overblown. It never overpoweres the rest of the frequency range, which includes a lovely, sweet treble.

However, the K2s can't be described as the most revealing performers we've come across. Up against the similarly priced Q Acoustics Concept 40s and

Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, we find ourselves wishing for a greater level of transparency.

More than once the K2s find themselves slightly overwhelmed by more intricate compositions from Mogwai. They're also not entirely at ease with great dynamic shifts, as found on Muse's *Exogenesis*, and here the Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2s definitely have the edge. It doesn't help matters that the K2s' bass is a little tubby.

But what these speakers lack in bass definition they make up for in tonal balance. No part of the frequency range sticks out to distract, which makes for a more engaging, natural listen.

There is also a consistency of character over the whole frequency range, and the sound is smooth and solid across the board.

Minimalist vibe

The K2s also impress with their sense of scale. It's a big sound from these small speakers, although we wouldn't necessarily put them in a larger room.

On the aesthetic front, the K2s win points for simplicity. If you're after a minimalist vibe, look no further. There are no markings or brandings. There are no screws or holes on the front panel to

A smooth sound and minimalist design make the K2s ideal for a small space

complicate matters. It's just a smooth matt coat, available in black or white. The only elements present are the drivers (a 25mm tweeter and two 15cm cones) and a slot-shaped reflex port, designed to minimise audible distortion.

The build quality is excellent. These speakers feel sturdy. And, at the back, there's even a neat party trick - the back panel can be unscrewed and removed. This is to let you switch the passive crossover for an active one, using Epos's own Active-K modules. That's right, you'll be able to turn these passive speakers into actives when Active-K modules are released later in the year.

There's a lot going for the Epos K2s. We like the smooth sound and the minimalist design. The bass and transparency could do with more work, but if you have a small listening room these are worth investigating.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth, weighty sound; energetic presentation; an engaging listen

AGAINST Slightly tubby bass; could do with greater transparency

VERDICT If space is tight, check out these talented little floorstanders

PSB IMAGINE X1T £750

Products from Canadian brand PSB, the lesser-known sister of NAD Electronics, don't often appear at *What Hi-Fi?* Towers. In fact, the last time we played with their speakers was about a year ago. It's a shame, because we've rarely been disappointed by them. And we're not disappointed here, either.

Short, chunky - and punchy

What we have here are the PSB Imagine X1Ts. They are the smallest floorstanders in the Imagine range, but appearances can be deceptive. They are short at 87cm and thin at 21cm, but a depth of 40cm means they're still reasonably chunky.

The good news is that they're fairly flexible about positioning. You can stick them within a 30cm of a wall without noticeably affecting the performance.

Set-up is simple: plug them in and toe them a little towards the listening position to firm up the stereo image.

You can always benefit from some running-in time, but our review sample didn't exhibit much change even after an extended, solid blasting.

Our experience with PSB has led us to expect an energetic, surprisingly punchy sound. And that's what we get. The company clearly knows exactly what its customers want, and that's a fun listen.

There's certainly a lot of energy here. These are agile, caffeinated performers, and they're eager to charge along to anything you care to throw at them.

Play Muse's *Uprising* and the pounding call-to-arms intro has a rousing momentum to it. That's helped no end by the bass, which the X1Ts dole out in spades.

It's a deep, solid sort of bass. The PSBs keep it on a firm leash, but there's no getting past the fact that there's an awful lot of it. The balance is definitely tipped towards the low end.

Not that the treble and midrange feel the need to protest. They're allowed, where pertinent, to register their say.

Verisimilitude

It's a fun listen. There's a real sense of life to the performance. Dynamic shifts are confident and deliberate and there's a surprising amount of punch, given the size of the speakers. The depth of the cabinet suddenly makes a lot of sense.

Reservations? We don't have many. By this point we've accepted they're not the most neutral performers, prioritising thrills over verisimilitude.

But we would like a bit more subtlety when it comes to instrumental and vocal textures. The beating of drums is plenty

A little more refinement needed from our infrequent Canadian visitors

of fun, but it's occasionally hard to identify the individual components. It doesn't help that the sound isn't the clearest we've heard. We wouldn't go so far as to call it cloudy, but neither is it particularly insightful.

Build quality is strong. They feel solid, and they're surprisingly heavy too. The design will probably split opinions. On one hand they're minimalist and smart, but we're not sure how we feel about the creamy, slightly-off yellow of the cones.

Overall, we've rather enjoyed our time with the PSB Imagine X1Ts. They're capable, entertaining performers, and they're aggressively priced.

That said, we would like more refinement, as offered by the Q Acoustics Concept 40s. And we'd like more precision, as shown by the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs. Not a class leader, then, but highly commended.

**Rating ★★★★★**

FOR Lively presentation; deep bass; good energy levels

AGAINST Could do with more subtlety; sound isn't the clearest

VERDICT A pair of floorstanders that have plenty of energy

Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 40 £1000



Over the last few years, our feelings towards Q Acoustics have evolved from a pleasant surprise to a deep respect. Despite being a young brand (less than ten years old) it has gone toe-to-toe with long-established heavyweights, and we've lost count of the number of Awards we've given to it.

Despite its success, Q Acoustics never gets complacent. The Concept 40s (and their standmounted siblings the Concept 20s) are a determined move upmarket, bringing a relatively exotic cabinet construction to their price points.

Bags of detail

What you get here is an unusual box-within-a-box structure. Two layers of MDF are separated by an elastic compound called Gelcore, which turns vibrations in the inner cabinet into heat.

The idea is that those vibrations don't radiate to the outside world to distort the sound produced by the drive units.

It works. The level of insight is very impressive. Not only are we treated to bags of detail, it's also an extraordinarily clear sound. Then there's the consistency to the way the Concept 40s handle all parts of the frequency range.

Tonally, it's the same Q Acoustics sound we know and love. That means a

smooth, highly refined presentation that trades outright excitement for an easy listening experience.

The Concept 40s could never beat the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs when it comes to sheer excitement or finger-snapping glee. Then again, they don't want to. Q Acoustics instead aims to give you a sound that you can happily listen to for hours on end.

It would be easy to dismiss these speakers as overly polite, but that would be a mistake. Unlike the Cabasse Jersey MT32s, these are not too laidback.

There are strong dynamics, as well as a pleasing degree of agility. They have no problem making sense of Étienne de Crécy's dance-happy *Smile* - certainly not when there's the kind of hefty low-end that could cause your neighbours considerable grief.

Futuristic design

There's certainly a good deal of attack when the occasion calls for it. Orchestral crescendos are delivered with enthusiasm, and there's plenty of scale and authority to boot.

We're also taken by the Concept 40s' aesthetics. The design is minimalist and futuristic, and build quality is top-notch. The cabinet is heavy and solidly put

The machined aluminium faceplate gives the Concept 40s a modern feel

together, and finished in high-quality black or white gloss. That machined aluminium faceplate is also a nice touch, giving these speakers a distinctive and modern feel.

Positioning is a straightforward affair. Just give them a bit of space (there's a large reflex port at the back) and toe them in slightly towards the listening position to firm up that stereo image.

These speakers aren't particularly fussy about partnering equipment, although we'd suggest avoiding a system that sounds too laid-back.

No doubt about it: these are five-star speakers. Sure, they lack the precision and high-octane entertainment offered by the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, but they counter with a very high level of refinement. If you want a talented set of speakers with an easy-going, welcoming sound, these must be considered.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Refined balance; surprising sonic agility and composure; impressive build

AGAINST Slightly polite sonic balance may be a little too smooth for some

VERDICT Build on the brand's strengths to deliver a wonderfully inviting sound

TANNOY REVOLUTION XT6F £1000



Vive la révolution. Tannoy has historically done well in this arena, but at the moment it gets to strut around proudly like very loud peacock.

We don't deal readily in hyperbole, but we feel compelled right about now. The Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs are incredible speakers for the money and you must seek them out for an audition.

Their aptitude is obvious. They waste no time in setting out their stall: what you get is an entertaining listen. There's a tremendous immediacy to the Tannoys' delivery that has no problem attracting your undivided attention.

Well endowed

We put on a bit of Prince and party like it's 1999. Your feet will tap. Your fingers will snap. So infectious is the level of energy that you can't escape, at the very least, doing a tiny dance in your chair.

That said, these Tannoys are more than just a joyride. These are versatile speakers, and while they're happy to bop along with Pharrell Williams they are just as content chilling to Portishead.

Timing and dynamics are the key here, and these Tannoys are well endowed in both departments. Whatever you throw at them will be handled with precision and agility, while

the wide dynamic range offers enough zest to ensure the performance never veers into the clinical.

Spacious and airy

Despite their lively demeanour, the sound is nice and balanced. No part of the frequency demands your attention.

The midrange is lovely. It's direct without being demanding. Vocals stand out without feeling isolated. There's a good deal of bass, but it's agile and nicely controlled. We move up to the treble and find it could be a little sweeter and more delicate, but now we're just nitpicking.

We're impressed by the level of integration. The various elements cooperate to perform as a unified whole. There's also plenty of detail throughout the frequency range. The various textures are entirely convincing.

It also helps that it's a big sound, tall and wide as you like. The presentation is spacious and airy. There's room enough whether you want to occupy that soundstage with brass bands or full orchestras. Whichever you choose will be organised and fully ready to rock.

A stunning performance, then, and it's entirely down to the engineering. We're always nervous when a manufacturer decides it's time to shake up a winning

The Revolution XT6Fs will get your feet tapping and your fingers snapping



formula, but the Revolution has definitely been improved - at least where the XT6Fs are concerned.

Attention to detail

'XT', by the way, stands for 'extra technology'. The most obvious change here is the angled base of cabinet and an integrated plinth and down-firing reflex port for better dispersion of low frequencies. Tannoy's signature Dual Concentric driver has also been tweaked to improve integration between the tweeter and mid/bass cone.

The trapezoid shape of the cabinet, as always, helps to reduce internal standing waves. And as always, fit and finish is superb. We're particularly keen on the attention to detail: look closely enough and you'll see 'TANNOY' written on the in the bolts at the front. This is very pleasing. We are very pleased.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Timing and integration; upbeat, lively demeanour; good balance; fine build

AGAINST Treble could be a little more delicate, but that's just nitpicking

VERDICT Talented, hugely entertaining floorstanders. These will be hard to beat

TRIANGLE ANTAL 902 £900



Imagine, if you will, a monster truck. It's not particularly practical. Nor will it offer the refined driving experience. But take one look at those house-sized wheels and you know you're in for a lot of fun. And that just about sums up our experience with the Triangle Antal 902s: it's a bit like driving a monster truck.

Chunky old beasts

Let us explain, starting with the bit about being impractical. These are massive speakers, at least when compared with others in this group.

While many rivals at this price want to tempt you by fitting nicely into your sitting room, these Triangles couldn't care less. They're heavy, chunky old beasts and that's that.

Not only do they take up a fair bit of space, they also need room to breathe. Keep them a couple of feet from the back wall, or they'll get a bit boomy. That's no joke with speakers this size.

It won't come as a surprise when we say these speakers pump out a massive sound, but it's true. Not only will they fill your living room with ease, they'll happily occupy the adjacent rooms too. They're certainly loud enough.

We'll get this bit out of the way: it's not the most subtle sound we've ever

encountered. What you get are the broad strokes. These Triangles leave the finer brushwork to their smaller, more sensible rivals. When it comes to conveying finer textures and nuances, these don't even come close to what the Q Acoustics Concept 40s offer.

So why should you buy them? We've clearly gone out of our way to paint a ridiculous picture, after all. Because they're fun. Better than that: they're fun and actually quite competent.

Sharing the spotlight

There is a lot of bass. Enough to upset the bookshelf you thought was sturdy. Enough to crack a smile across your face.

But it's not just about the quantity of bass - it's the taut, controlled type of low-end heft that we like. While the presentation is tonally unbalanced, the bass never threatens to drown out the rest of the frequency range. The treble and midrange have no problem getting their fair share of the spotlight.

There's a surprising amount of control. Notes start and stop when they're meant to, even if leading edges could benefit from better definition. Another surprise is how revealing they are. The sound is nice and clear, which makes for an insightful listen.

The Triangle Antal 902s are chunky old beasts, but they're also a truckload of fun

Dynamics are strong and far-reaching, and combine with that good feeling of rhythm for a real sense of life. Overall, what you get is a hugely entertaining sound that's as exuberant as it is forceful.

As for the cabinet itself? We've already established that they're enormous, but they're also very well built. We'd suggest giving them a bit of time to run in when you first get them. Fresh out of the box, they're not as coherent as they can be.

We're sticking with that monster truck analogy - at least until we drive home the point. Sure, the Q Acoustics Concept 40s offer more refinement, and the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs offer greater precision. But still, rarely do we encounter something with the power to make us grin uncontrollably, and that has to count for something. We highly recommend a test drive at the very least.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Tremendous fun; lively presentation; power on tap; impressive agility

AGAINST Not the most refined or subtle listening experience

VERDICT Who needs refinement when you can have this much fun?

Our SuperUniti all-in-one player will unleash your digital music, from high-resolution audio files to Spotify playlists. Its analogue heart is an integrated amplifier backed by over 40 years of engineering knowledge to offer countless years of musical enjoyment. Just add speakers.



Next-generation music systems,
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Go Deeper

TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Tannoy Revolution XT6F

£1000 ★★★★★



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

The seven pairs of floorstanding speakers we tested have something to suit every need. But there was one clear winner – step forward **Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs**, the floor is all yours

This was fun. There's a lot of talent among these seven pairs of speakers, and pitting them against one another has been fascinating. At times we struggled to establish a hierarchy, but when it came to picking the winner, there was only one clear choice: the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs.

We were won over by their astonishing precision. Their remarkable timing and strong dynamics make for an entertaining and engaging listen. And yet there's enough detail and subtlety for those with more refined tastes. Tannoy has traditionally been great at making floorstanders at this price – so practice does make perfect indeed.

A bit more bite

Don't be too downheartened, Q Acoustics! The Concept 40s are also formidable speakers, and thoroughly deserving of their five-star rating. Their level of refinement is second-to-none in this group. We only wished they packed a bit

more bite, which would make them a more rounded, versatile performer.

Power and vivacity

But don't write off our four-star rated speakers just yet. They are all worth your consideration, even if a flaw here and there stands between them and full marks.

In third place we've put the Triangle Antal 902s. They may not be the subtlest of performers, but they make up for it with sheer power and vivacity. They are a force to be reckoned with, and we find them thoroughly invigorating. Try them and prepare to smile.

Next up are the Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2s. We were impressed by their scale, their strong dynamics and expressive midrange. Sadly they lose out in the bass department, which could have been less restrained and more articulate.

Then there are the PSB Imagine XITs. Like the Triangles, these place fun and outright energy ahead of subtlety. But they're not quite

as adept as the Triangles, because they suffer from a relative lack of transparency.

The Epos K2s are interesting, largely because they will be able to be converted to run actively later this year. However, until then we can only judge them on their passive skills. And while we are impressed by their smooth, solid sound, we find our attention drawn to their bass, which needs better definition. Transparency could also be improved.

Precision and nuance

Bringing up the rear are the Cabasse Jersey MT32s. Like their standmounted siblings they offer a large, well-integrated sound, which makes up for a weaker performance in terms of precision and nuance. Sadly, their performance fails to get us excited. It's decent, but your money can get you further.

Seven pairs of floorstanders: we've picked our favourite, but there's plenty here to suit every need. Go out and try them.



Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2
£800 ★★★★★
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2
 • Dimensions 92 x 16 x 23cm



Cabasse Jersey MT32
£900 ★★★★★
 Power handling 100W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Biwirable no • Finishes 2
 • Dimensions 100 x 22 x 32cm



Epos K2
£1000 ★★★★★
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 89dB • Impedance 4 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2
 • Dimensions 86 x 19 x 25cm



PSB Imagine X1T
£750 ★★★★★
 Power handling 200W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 1
 • Dimensions 87 x 21 x 40cm



Q Acoustics Concept 40
£1000 ★★★★★
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 6 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2
 • Dimensions 97 x 17 x 29cm



WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER

Tannoy Revolution XT6F
£1000 ★★★★★
 Power handling 150W • Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 2
 • Dimensions 10 x 27 x 32 cm



Triangle Antal 902
£900 ★★★★★
 Power handling 120W • Sensitivity 91dB • Impedance 4.5 ohms
 • Biwirable yes • Finishes 1
 • Dimensions 110 x 26 x 31cm



Location, location, location
 It's very important to consider where you put your floorstanders. Here are a few thoughts that will hopefully help you with positioning, but also with choosing speakers.

The size of the room matters as much as the position. If you have a large space, you'll never fill them with small floorstanders. Likewise, don't get large speakers for a small room, because things will get very boomy indeed.

Now, let's talk about walls. There are no universal rules about positioning. Some speakers sound fuller and more controlled when placed close to a wall. Others prefer a bit of breathing space, out in the open.

Don't be fooled by front-firing reflex ports, either. They don't guarantee that a pair of speakers will like being put near a wall.

Only by moving speakers about will you find their optimum positions. The best thing you can do is play around.

SYSTEM BUILDER



Turntable
Rega RP6/Exact £1000
 ★★★★★

This articulate and engaging Award-winning turntable is the perfect partner to the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs.



CD player
Naim CD5si £1000 ★★★★★

A truly terrific player with a winningly enthusiastic approach to music.

Total build £3900



Stereo amplifier
Rega Elex-R £900
 ★★★★★

One of the most talented sub-£1000 amplifiers we've heard.

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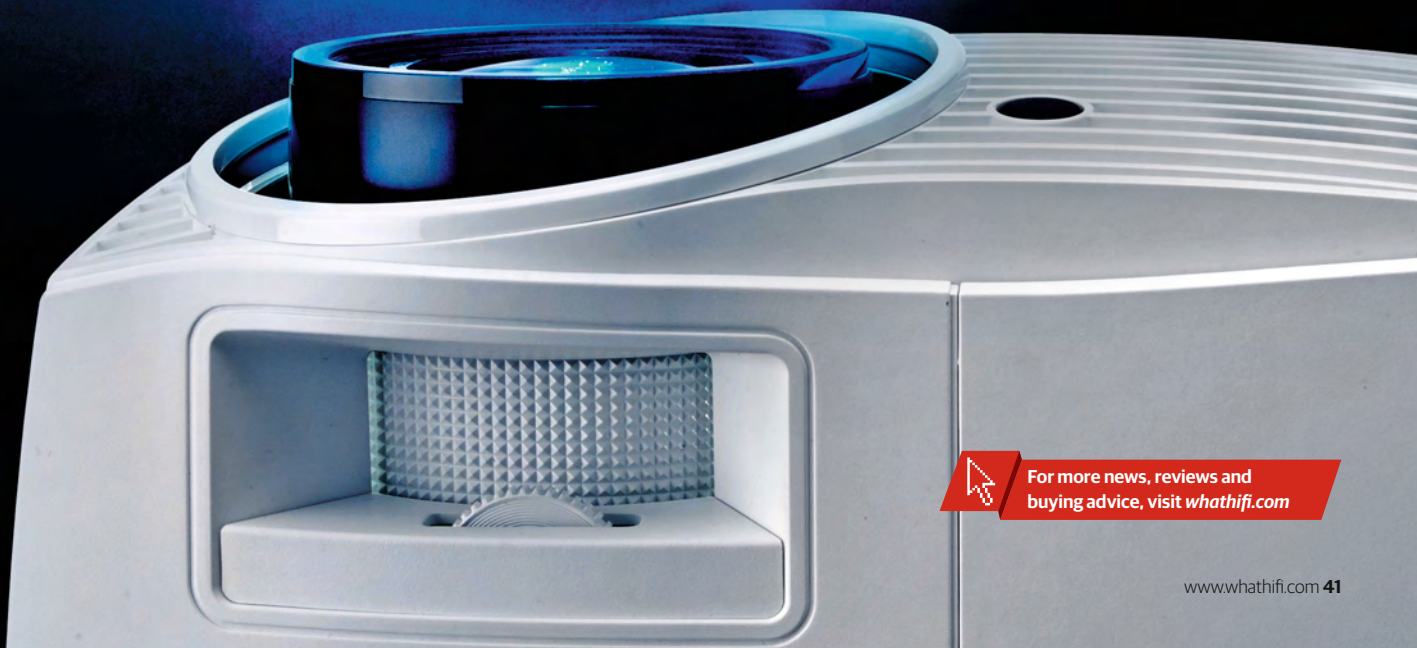
200IN PIC: £1000

AN IMAGE TWICE THE SIZE FOR ONE HUNDREDTH OF THE PRICE

Lights, camera, action! Who doesn't want to bring the magic of the movies into their home? Picture it: the darkened room, the big screen, and being utterly captivated by a cinematic experience like no other - all in the comfort of your own living room.

You don't have to spend a fortune either, as all four projectors on test here cost a grand or less. The feature-packed Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV is the established presence in this market, but it now has to do battle with a trio of newcomers: BenQ's W1080ST+, the keenly priced InFocus IN3138HDa and the HD50 from Optoma.

Let's see which one steals the spotlight...



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

BENQ W1080ST+

£1000 ★★★★★

When BenQ gave us a £1000 projector to test last year (the W1400), it ended up winning an Award. Will the new BenQ W1080ST+ follow in its footsteps? It's certainly possible - as this may just be the best big-screen picture we've seen at £1000 so far this year.

Natural skin tones

The picture is bright, crisp and clear, but it's the subtlety with which colours are delivered that really impresses. BenQ claims there are 1.07 billion colours on display, and we're inclined to believe them. Colours are rich and punchy, but they don't cross the line into overblown.

Even the green skin of our CGI heroes in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are shaded, mottled and textured enough to look realistic. Human skin tones are nicely balanced and look natural, too. Whites and highlights are clean and shine bright, while blacks go inky deep without swallowing finer detail.

For fans of 3D films, the BenQ's 3D glasses are comfortable to wear, and the picture is just as smooth, bright and dynamic as in 2D.



The BenQ remote is intuitive and also handy backlight for use in a dark room

Motion is smooth and flicker-free too, and the W1080ST+ is decent at upscaling DVDs, albeit with some fuzziness and drop in colour subtlety. But watching *The Grand Budapest Hotel* on DVD never feels frustrating - it's still enjoyable.

There's a 10W speaker inside the projector, and it sounds pretty good. Voices are loud and clear, explosions and engines rumble pleasingly, and there's a vague sense of space and width. There's satisfying weight we usually don't hear from projector speakers at this price, but really you'll need a 5.1 speaker package to fully appreciate a movie soundtrack.

Flexible positioning

The projector is compact and light enough to be moved around. It has a short throw, so you can place it closer to the screen than most of its rivals. There's plenty of adjustment to allow you flexibility with positioning.

One tiny niggle is that the entire projector wobbles when you adjust the focus. Other than that, the W1080ST+ is easy to use. The menus are basic but they operate smoothly, and the remote

control is intuitive to use in a dark room thanks to responsive backlit buttons.

You can plug your Blu-ray player or AV receiver into either of the projector's two HDMI inputs. There's support for MHL, too, so you can watch HD videos from compatible Android devices. It has a PC input for streaming movies and TV shows, and a separate wireless module is available to minimise cable use.

An ideal entry into cinema

The BenQ W1080ST+ is excellent value for money and great to use, it delivers an entertaining picture and even sounds rather good. If you are looking to set up your first home cinema room, you can't really go wrong with this BenQ.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Bright, punchy and crisp picture; balanced and nuanced colour palette; smooth motion; good sound quality; easy to use

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT BenQ is on to another winner with this hugely entertaining compact projector

INFOCUS IN3138HDA

£800 ★★★★★

Can a classroom projector double up as a home cinema projector? InFocus has wowed us before, its bright, sharp screens making movie-watching more exciting than you'd expect from a projector designed for PowerPoint presentations. But while the IN3138HDA makes a decent case for itself, it doesn't punch quite as hard as class rivals.

Stark and crisp

Play *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* on Blu-ray and the IN3138HDA delivers a bright, clean picture. There aren't any obvious noise or motion issues to deter our enjoyment, with the brilliantly choreographed fight scenes unfolding on screen smoothly.

The InFocus performs well with sunny daylight scenes. The steely glint of metal and the sunlight flaring on Cap's shield are stark and crisp. We'd like more punch and depth to the picture, though. In darker scenes, the IN3138HDA doesn't differentiate well between various blacks and greys. Colours and their subtle gradations in shading are similarly subdued. We like how InFocus hasn't given us over-saturated and



The fiddly remote doesn't add to the overall experience of the IN3138HDA

exuberant colours, but characters and backgrounds could 'pop' a bit more.

3D films are pleasantly smooth and comfortable to watch. The overall stable, clean image has a decent impression of depth. The active 3D glasses (sold separately for £50 a pair) may be big and bulky, but they're not uncomfortable.

The 10W speaker inside sounds like the wispy, tinny sort found in flatscreen TVs about two years ago. You'll be able to hear dialogue just fine, but there's little body or weight. Explosions and other sound effects are faint and lack impact. You'll want a budget surround speaker package to accompany the action.

Fiddly and unintuitive

The build is sturdy, but compact and light enough to move around without breaking into a sweat. Manual focus and zoom adjustments operate smoothly, and as with all these projectors we'd recommend the use of a THX Optimizer disc to fine-tune the picture.

The flimsy credit card-style remote is horrible. We can live without a backlight, but the shallow, slippery buttons are fiddly and unintuitive.

The IN3138HDA is kitted out with plenty of connections, including two HDMI inputs and two PC inputs, catering to those who play games and watch movies or TV shows on a computer.

Analogue connections as well

Analogue connections aren't forgotten, with S-video, composite and line level inputs thrown in. Don't get too excited about that ethernet port, though, it's strictly for remote technical support.

The IN3138HDA is a fair deal at £800 and, at £200 cheaper than its nearest rivals such as BenQ W1080ST+ and Optoma HD50 (both at £1000), looks inviting. However, we'd wait a little longer and save up for a more exciting, more detailed and punchier picture.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clean, bright picture; decent colour balance; compact build; affordable

AGAINST Could do with sharper detail; lack of deep blacks and punchy colours; flimsy remote

VERDICT Clean picture and attractive price, but there are more able projectors in this test

COLOUR RANGE

The BenQ W1080ST+ may be the best big screen picture of the year. BenQ says it displays 1.07bn colours, and who are we to argue?



FIFTY SHADES

The IN3138HDa needs more depth to the picture. In darker scenes, it is hard to differentiate between blacks and greys



OPTOMA HD50

£1000 ★★★★★☆

Big, bold and bright - the Optoma HD50 projector's picture is certainly attention-grabbing.

A punchy, colourful Blu-ray such as *Guardians Of The Galaxy* looks crisp and exciting through the HD50's lens, but it's the vibrant colour palette that really shines through. The yellow jumpsuits, green alien skin and purple-hued explosions are rich and inviting.

That vivid approach can look overblown at times, especially when watching a more natural-toned film such as *The Imitation Game*. Turning the Brilliant Colour setting off calms it down a touch, but we'd be wary of taking away too much of the HD50's exuberance.

Turning to the dark side

Skintones are textured and imbued with warmth, but we think the HD50 could be a little more nuanced in the way it unearths detail in darker scenes. Blacks could go deeper to add more punch.

The issues with black levels and subtlety come across more obviously with upscaled DVDs. There's also the inevitable softening of edges and loss of



The backlit remote control is easy to use but there are delay and sensitivity issues

detail, while the colours are just as extravagant and warm.

In-depth analysis

If you're keen on 3D films, you might want to try a different projector. While the colours remain vibrant and dynamic, there are instances of juddering. There's an exciting sense of depth in *TT: Closer To The Edge* as the bikes zoom across the island, but we wish the HD50 delivered a smoother experience throughout.

You'll need both the small RF transmitter and the active-shutter glasses (£80 per pair) for 3D.

The HD50 is compact and nicely made, with a manual focus ring surrounding the lens that's easy to use.

Optoma's PureEngine settings are worth a twiddle, but stay far, far away from PureMotion - it makes the picture look too smooth and artificial.

The remote has a useful, if blindingly bright backlight, but the relationship between the buttons and on-screen menu is not always smooth.

The HD50 keeps connections simple with two HDMI inputs for your digital

sources, plus composite, component and PC connections, so those with analogue sources aren't left behind.

You don't get any built-in speakers with the HD50, so you can't just plug in and play without having all the home cinema trappings. It's not too much of a problem, as we would always suggest you invest in a 5.1 surround speaker package anyway (see roundel).

The Optoma HD50 isn't perfect, but what it does offer is a richness that keeps you drawn to the picture. You'll have to expand your budget for more components if you want to build a home cinema based on this projector, but it's worth a look if you want to upgrade from a TV screen to a bigger, brighter screen.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Punchy, bright picture; vibrant colour palette; good, crisp detail; compact build

AGAINST Rivals are more subtle; remote has lag issues; 3D flickers; no built-in speakers

VERDICT It's not perfect, but there's plenty to like about the Optoma's rich, colourful approach

PHILIPS SCRENEO HDP1590TV

£1000 ★★★★★☆

The Screneo HDP1590TV is an unusual projector. It has network capabilities, an extremely short throw, it sounds surprisingly good and it even has a digital TV tuner. We were impressed by its range of features a year ago, and since it's had a price cut from £1500 to £1000 we felt it deserved a second look.

The downs and ups

Let's tackle the elephant in the room first: this projector is not Full HD. Its native 1280 x 800 resolution means it has to downscale Blu-rays as well as upscale standard-definition content. It seems odd not to offer Full HD at this price in the present day, and it will be a deal-breaker for some.

Once you get over this, however, the Screneo has plenty going on. Firstly, you can place it as close as 10cm to a wall for a 50in screen. Take it back 44cm, and you'll get a 100in screen. That's great for those with a small room, a blank wall and the desire for a big screen.

Play *Guardians Of The Galaxy* on Blu-ray and the Philips springs to life with a vibrant, punchy, smooth-motion picture that impresses on many levels.



Lots of buttons, but the remote is intuitive to use with the logical on-screen menus

Admittedly it doesn't deliver the subtlety and sharpness you'd get from a Full HD rival such as the BenQ W1080ST+, but the Philips tries to make up for it with a luscious colour palette and a strong contrast that adds no small measure of drama and excitement.

It's particularly adept at delivering deep blacks against brilliantly punchy whites. Skin tones, blue skies and even the metallic sheen of spaceships look vivid and bright in *Star Trek*, but the rich colour balance never goes so far as to look unnatural. It's a likeable approach, and one that's present across DVDs, TV and 3D films, with motion remaining admirably stable in the last instance.

Would we watch films with just the Philips' built-in speakers? Yes, we would, especially as they sound fairly weighty, dynamic and detailed. They're impressive for projector speakers, which usually sound thin and harsh.

You wouldn't be buying the Screneo just for its big-picture credentials. This projector has built-in wi-fi and an ethernet port, and once it's connected to your home network you can stream photos, videos and music from your

smartphone or tablet using Bluetooth or DLNA, as well as access media content stored on your NAS box or laptop.

The unit itself is hefty and well built, while the remote control, though lacking a backlight, is intuitive to use. There's plenty of scope to tailor the sound and picture to your room's environment, too.

The big picture

This projector is aimed at those that simply want to watch films on a big scale with minimum fuss. In that context it delivers an entertaining experience - and adds some attractive bells and whistles. But our reservation with picture quality remains. If only it were capable of delivering a Full HD picture, this Philips would be hard to beat.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Punchy, appealing picture; good contrast; rich colours; weighty sound; excellent features

AGAINST Not Full HD; picture could be crisper and more subtle

VERDICT This one has much to offer, but the lack of Full HD at this price is a stumbling block

SOUND INVESTMENT

A budget 5.1 system such as the Tannoy HTS-101 will go nicely with Yamaha's RX-V377 amplifier, and all for less than £600.



HANDY HOOK-UP

Built-in wi-fi and an ethernet port are stand-out features, but there are ample physical connections too: three USBs, three HDMI and an SD card slot.



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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****BenQ W1080ST+ £1000 ★★★★★**

All-round ability is as important in a projector as in any other device, and the **BenQ W1080ST+**, has that box ticked - we simply couldn't fault it

A projector is the centrepiece of your home cinema, so when you decide to spend £1000 on a new one, you want to make sure you've picked the best.

That distinction goes to the BenQ W1080ST+, the gorgeous picture of which is captivating to watch. It sounds decent, but it's the punchy yet natural colour balance, the precise detail and the deep blacks that stand out here.

Less subtle, but almost as exciting, is the Optoma HD50. The eye-catching picture is bold and vibrant, but we'd like a more natural colour balance and smoother motion handling.

If you're a fan of 3D films, you'll like the smooth, easy-going approach of the

InFocus IN3138HDA. The less-than-dark blacks, however, leave us a little underwhelmed, and it doesn't reveal detail as proficiently as its rivals. The fact that it's £200 cheaper than the others makes it tempting, but not enough to win us over.

The Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV makes an attractive proposition. On one hand, it offers a myriad features - network streaming, a digital tuner, good sound, flexible positioning - but it's not a Full HD projector. The extra precision, clarity and subtlety you get from a Full HD picture is lost on the Philips, no matter how punchy and rich its colour balance is. It's a good product, but the BenQ is a better projector.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Just hook these three up with your BenQ to create a killer home cinema set-up

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

Crisp and colourful picture, smooth motion, and feature-filled - this Sony is the ideal source for spinning your Blu-ray and DVD collection.

**AV receiver****Yamaha RX-V377 £200 ★★★★★**

This entry-level amplifier brings bags of power, fun and huge scale to your home cinema's sound.

**Speaker package****Q Acoustics 2000i5.1 £625 ★★★★★**

This long-standing Award-winner remains one of the best-sounding and best-looking speaker packages for sensible money.

Total build from £2045

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

Facts & figures**WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER****BenQ W1080ST+ £1000 ★★★★★**

Type DLP • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • 3D Active • Claimed contrast ratio 10,000:1 • Brightness 2200 lumens • Fan noise 31dB • Inputs 2 x HDMI, PC, composite, component, RCA, 3.5mm • Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 31 x 24cm

**InFocus IN3138HDA £800 ★★★★★**

Type DLP • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • 3D Active • Claimed contrast ratio 8000:1 • Brightness 4000 lumens • Fan noise 37dB • Inputs 2 x HDMI, 2 x PC, composite, S-Video, RCA, 3.5mm • Dimensions (hwd) 12 x 26 x 29cm

**Optoma HD50 £1000 ★★★★★**

Type DLP • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • 3D Active • Claimed contrast ratio 50,000:1 • Brightness 2200 lumens • Fan noise 31dB • Inputs 2 x HDMI, composite, component, PC • Dimensions (hwd) 12 x 29 x 27cm

**Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV £1000 ★★★★★**

Type DLP • Resolution 1280 x 800 • 3D Active • Claimed contrast ratio 100,000:1 • Brightness 500 lumens • Fan noise 25dB • Inputs 3 x HDMI, 3 x USB, composite, PC, Bluetooth, DLNA • Dimensions (hwd) 15 x 34 x 29cm

UP TO £500

Bluesound Node
Cabasse Stream Source



£1000-£1500

Cyrus Stream Xa
Pioneer N-70A



£500-£1000

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2
Pioneer N-50A

KILLER

BYTES

Freeing you from the constraints of your CD collection, music streamers open up a whole new world of listening

Gone are the days when your music consumption was limited to physical formats, such as vinyl or the CD, or at the mercy of tedious download times - and good riddance too. For some time now, music streaming (where you playback online in real time without having to

download or store a single file) has steered our listening habits.

Everyone's doing it these days: rather than downloading songs from iTunes or Amazon, people are getting their digital fix by streaming thousands of songs (sometimes for free) at the touch of a button.

And today, it's more influential than ever: streaming data now influences the UK's official chart rankings, and the imminent, long-anticipated arrival of Apple's streaming service is stealing the headlines.

Multi-room potential

Ready to make your existing hi-fi system streaming-savvy? Good for you. All you need is a stable home network, connected to an all-important music streamer (via an ethernet cable, ideally), and a source: a NAS (network-attached storage) device loaded with music, or a subscription to the streaming service juggernaut Spotify (or one of its many equivalents).

No matter what the cost - budget or high-end - music streamers let you stream high-res music and control your library with a smartphone or tablet via a dedicated app. Many have multi-room potential, while others have offline streaming powers via Bluetooth or AirPlay. Most allow access to their DAC, so streaming files from a computer or USB drive is also feasible. Some streamers are amplified 'just add speakers' solutions, but this test's participants will need hooking up to an amplifier.

Let battle commence

Here, we have pitted our Award winners, ranging in price from £400 to £1250, against newcomers in three intense head-to-head challenges. First Cabasse takes on the Bluesound Node for the prized title of best first step into streaming. Then the familiar Cambridge Audio jostles with a five-star Pioneer for pole position in the mid-market. And finally, at the top end of the range, Pioneer makes its second appearance, this time with its flagship unit making a stand against one of Cyrus's many esteemed streamers.

And to that end, let the battles commence...



Bluesound Node

Bluesound has recently expanded its already-exhaustive offering of Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Quobuz and TuneIn Radio by adding Tidal, WiMP, and HDtracks



Cabasse Stream Source

Energetic and entertaining, it barely comes up for air in The Cure's *Just Like Heaven*, throwing its all into the stew of electric riffs and taut bass guitar

UP TO £500

BLUESOUND NODE vs CABASSE STREAM SOURCE

Bluesound Node

£400 ★★★★★

If anyone (including us) thought the five-star amplified Powernode streamer from new-kid-on-the-block Bluesound was a fluke when we reviewed it last September, they (and we) couldn't have been more wrong. In less than a year, Bluesound's high-resolution 'ecosystem' has taken the streaming sphere by storm, making formidable inroads into the multi-room market at the same time.

The Node is the unamplified, entry-level part of the system and, although specs play a big part in its success, it's performance that grants it top honours. Its rich, balanced presentation has an entertaining temperament that's wonderfully detailed and spacious.

Wish fulfilment

Play Wyclef Jean's *Wish You Were Here* cover and its acoustic intro is full of subtlety and texture, so you can hear every strain on the strings as they hum into being. The muffled radio in the background sounds rightfully tinny in comparison - through the Cabasse it sounds over-amplified.

The presentation isn't the very last word in brio, though energy levels are far from drained as the Node launches into the familiar melody. There's body to guitars and impressive insight into Jean's voice.

There's space and organisation aplenty too - enough to whip even The Smith's dense *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* into shape. The heavy piece has a lot going on but, unlike through the Cabasse, instruments have room to work and there's a clear sense of layering to the presentation. The weighty disposition gives electric guitars a solid backing, yet the high-energy Node never struggles to keep up with its breakneck pace.

Its knack for clarity, detail and openness pays off when you drop down to a 320kbps stream from Spotify, too. The piano sequence in The Unthanks' *Madam* is full of information, while the fragile, folkly vocals are clearly projected and bathed in subtlety.

Impressive app

The slick, hassle-free Bluesound app (free for iOS and Android) is the heart and soul of the Node experience, and once the streamer is connected to a home network and hooked up to an amp, it detects the Node instantly. If for some reason it doesn't, the app's manual set-up process is straightforward.

The app is the portal to the music stored on your network (the Node gets one over on the

Cabasse by supporting FLAC and WAV files up to the full 24bit/192kHz), and the gateway to its myriad streaming services.

Bluesound has recently expanded its already-exhaustive offering of Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Quobuz and TuneIn Radio by adding Tidal, WiMP, HDtracks and Slacker Radio among others. The intuitive app's sidebar is where you can access the music and services.

It's hard to feel hard done-by on compatibility, and there is also a USB input for connecting a USB stick or an optional Bluetooth adapter.

Bluesound didn't work so hard on function that it forgot about form. The Node is a glossy (black or white) cubed design, small enough to pick up with one hand and tuck away on a shelf. It's a beautiful modern design, and a lovely finishing touch to what is an outstanding all-round budget streamer.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rich, insightful sound; balanced, precise and spacious soundstage; huge list of streaming services; easy set-up; intuitive app

AGAINST Nothing

VERDICT An all-round beauty, from sound to features to design. And it won't break the bank

Cabasse Stream Source

£300 ★★★★★☆

If you're looking to start out in music streaming, the Cabasse Stream Source is an appealing option - and not just because of its funky elliptical shape. It's the most affordable offering in Cabasse's streaming bloodline, boasts multiroom functionality and high-res support, and sounds pretty decent too.

Previous tests have complained that a "frustratingly glitchy" and "counter-intuitive" app has blighted other Cabasse streamers, so we're glad to see a markedly better one here: the new StreamCONTROL app (see roundel). If your device is out of arm's reach, a small remote - a mirror image of the unit, but palm-size - can control input and volume, and skip tracks.

The Stream Source will hook up to an amplifier via its analogue or optical outputs. As

CABASSE TAKES CONTROL

Cabasse's control app StreamCONTROL (free on iOS and Android) is a marked improvement over its predecessor (Stream Audio Control). You'll find your stored music in a neat sidebar, along with Spotify and Deezer, and can link Cabasse streaming products in a multi-room capacity. It's mostly intuitive to use, too.

well as playing files on your home network, there's also Bluetooth with NFC connectivity. And the Stream Source has another trick up its sleeve: a USB key can be plugged into the unit's rear socket.

As well as playing popular formats such as WMA, AAC and MP3, the Stream Source supports high-res WAV and FLAC files up to 24-bit/96kHz - sadly, it doesn't go the whole-hog to 192kHz like the Bluesound.

The Cabasse's sound is an enjoyable one: balanced, full-bodied and more than happy rustling up detail and organisation whether it's a 24-bit/96kHz WAV or low-res Spotify file.

Energetic (if anything, too forward) and entertaining, it barely comes up for air in The Cure's *Just Like Heaven*, throwing its all into the stew of electric riffs, energetic keyboards and taut-sounding bass guitar. The Bluesound kicks slightly harder as the drums penetrate the soundfield, yet the Cabasse's controlled treble is a godsend when the cymbals start thrashing.

On the quiet

Slip into a more soothing Norah Jones piece and her distinct vocals are clear and focused, the Cabasse drawing out enough nuance to be convincing. On the flipside, dense material - such as Johann Strauss II's *Voices Of Spring* - requires space and instrument separation, and this is where the Cabasse could take tips from its more open-sounding Bluesound peer.

Minor snags aside, we're now satisfied with the new app software, so the Source's barrier to a fifth star is quite simply the standard of the competition. The Bluesound has a more dynamic, subtle and spacious performance, one-upping the Cabasse on its number of streaming services and high-res compatibility. Would we part with more pennies for it? Sure.

That said, the Stream Source has an entertaining sound, ample features, and affordability on its side. It's easily good enough to get you off the blocks into music streaming.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Enthusiastic delivery; balanced, detailed sound; improved, intuitive app; USB input is a bonus

AGAINST Bluesound has better dynamics, subtlety and space; no support for 24-bit/192kHz

VERDICT A decent streamer at a tempting price, but sound needs to be a little better to worry the Node

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

The punchy, dynamic character and unyielding rhythmic drive makes its presentation both informative and exciting. This is a born entertainer



Pioneer N-50A

The minimalist look of its solidly-built casework and brushed aluminium faceplate grants it an aesthetic quality most hi-fi enthusiasts would welcome

£500-£1000

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO STREAM MAGIC 6 V2 vs PIONEER N-50A

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

£700 ★★★★★☆

Despite appearances, spending a few hundred quid extra over the previous two streamers doesn't just get you more traditional casing and a display screen. It also brings a substantial leg-up in quality - if you choose the right machine for the job.

Here we have the Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2 - our 2014 Product of the Year, fresh off the back of the update to the Award-winning original. This second version is a more versatile, better-sounding streamer, and confirms its credentials with impressive compatibility.

Alternative sources

Once connected to your home network - wirelessly or directly via an ethernet cable - the Stream Magic 6 V2 can stream popular formats (MP3, WMA, AAC), and FLAC, WAV and ALAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz.

And if you wish to use alternative sources such as a computer or USB hard drive, the internal DAC offers the same file support through the machine's coaxial, asynchronous type-B USB, and front and rear type-A USB inputs. Through the optical input, playback is limited to 24-bit/96kHz.

Additionally, if you get your hands on the company's BT100 receiver (£70), local files from a smartphone or tablet can be streamed over Bluetooth. Whatever the source or file type, the Stream Magic 6 V2 automatically upsamples songs to 24-bit/384kHz using its proprietary upsampling technology.

A somewhat dated display

The Cambridge isn't always the seamless operator you'd like it to be. Its bright blue-on-black text display is crystal-clear when looking at it head-on, but less so from height or an angle. Compared to the Pioneer N-50A's high-contrast LCD, it looks a little dated too.

The real bugbear is the app. Apple device owners can download the 'Stream Magic' app, but Android users have the 'Stream Magic Lite' app, which looks more polished but is buggy. The remote control at least oozes quality, its nicely spaced buttons geared towards browsing folders, and the large, responsive control dial making easy work of manual operation.

Once you're good to go you're in for a treat, for the Cambridge is a born entertainer. Its punchy, dynamic character and unyielding rhythmic drive, coupled with its rich character makes its presentation both informative and exciting.

During our first track, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's *Same Love*, the piano is delivered with dynamic subtlety while the vocal delivery is nothing short of vivid. The Cambridge rises to the challenge of the duo's denser songs - littered with agile beats, explosive synths and cutting cymbals - offering a listen that's both balanced and precise.

Test its DAC capability through a USB key and its assets in a streaming capacity are consistent: a 24-bit/96kHz recording of Bob Marley's *No Woman, No Cry* is insightful, with texture to the instruments.

Great care has been taken to reduce jitter and produce a 'noise-free' sound. Even with a low-res MP3 file, we're pleased with how small the compromises are when it comes to clarity and detail. This Cambridge remains a fine product, but it's up against some very talented, more affordable rivals.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Rich, insightful, balanced; good rhythmic drive; clear, spacious soundfield; convincing dynamics

AGAINST Screen not clearly readable from certain angles; Android app needs improving; price

VERDICT An unquestionably impressive streamer, but one now ousted by a cheaper box

Pioneer N-50A

£500 ★★★★★★

Our first impression of the Pioneer N-50A was that, for £500, it's an exceptional streamer. So has the Cambridge Audio met its match?

We can't help but adore the minimalist look of its solidly built casework (available in black or silver). Its brushed-aluminium faceplate grants it an aesthetic quality most hi-fi enthusiasts would welcome, but the talking point is the 3.5in LCD screen, bright and crisp for easy readability, and displaying everything from sampling rate to album artwork.

A decent ControlApp

The handheld remote is suitably arranged for navigating your music collection. ControlApp (free on iOS and Android) is also pleasing, with user experience clearly a priority. Both methods are easier to use than the Cambridge alternatives. Pioneer hasn't pulled back the reins when it

VERDICT

With performance differences largely tit-for-tat, initial comparisons had us sitting on the fence. As it turns out, the Cambridge gets its toe ahead with a bigger soundstage and richer bass. Ultimately, though, the Pioneer wins our vote. Not only does it sound pretty much as good, we prefer its app and appealing design - not to mention its price

comes to compatibility, either. Getting one over on the Cambridge Audio, the N-50A can stream PCM files up to 32-bit/192kHz and DSD files up to 5.6MHz, or play them from a computer connected to its asynchronous Type-B USB input. Users can also plug hard drives or iDevices into the USB - these support FLAC and WAV files up to 24-bit/192kHz - or make use of its coaxial and optical inputs.

DLNA, AirPlay, Spotify and more

DLNA functionality means you can connect to NAS drives and smartphones. AirPlay lets you stream from an iPhone or iPad, while Spotify and internet radio are also at your fingertips.

Optional extras like a Bluetooth AS-BT200 adapter (£50), and an AS-WL300 dongle (£50) for wirelessly connecting the N-50A to your network hub, build on this impressive list.

Performance doesn't let this fine product down. Precise, energetic and dynamically adept, its sound is one of the most engaging we've heard in the sub-£1000 streamer market.

A sweet, controlled treble

Start with Alexandre Desplat's *Mission* (from *The Imitation Game* soundtrack) and the Pioneer captures its gradual dynamic build-up, happily swinging between its quieter, calmer moments and the attacking instrumental passages.

Tonally, the presentation is never less than balanced: the treble is sweet and controlled, while bass response is solid and tight. The N-50A isn't afraid to put pedal to metal, either, its fanatical rendition of Michael Jackson's *P.Y.T (Pretty Young Thing)* full of attack as the beat hits hard underneath the poppy vocals.

Turn to its internal DAC and the Pioneer remains a talented performer. The default 'Direct' mode is our preferred setting, though we wouldn't discourage experimentation. 'Auto Sound Retriever' is for optimising low-quality files, though it sounds a little recessed. Overall, this is an impressive piece of kit and crucially, costs significantly less than some of its rivals.

Rating ★★★★★★

FOR Dynamic, detailed and precise; plethora of digital inputs; impressive compatibility; bright, crisp screen; nice build and finish; competitive price

AGAINST Wireless connectivity not built-in

VERDICT Excellent sound, vast compatibility and slick design in one great-value package

Cyrus Stream Xa

Its honest delivery of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No 1* is awash with perfectly placed instruments loaded with texture and subtlety



Pioneer N-70A

The soundstage is wonderfully coherent and nicely tight-knit as Bowie's echoed vocals on *Moonage Daydream* bounce between the speakers

£1000-£1500

CYRUS STREAM Xa vs PIONEER N-70A

Cyrus Stream Xa

£1250 ★★★★★

Cyrus has long pitched itself as the brand to beat when it comes to high-end streaming. Ever since music streamers became a *What Hi-Fi?* Awards category in 2011, a Cyrus product has always featured there - not wholly surprising considering the decade's-worth of streaming development the company has under its belt.

The Stream Xa, which sits between the preamp-packed Stream XP2 and DAC-less Stream X Signature, is one of Cyrus' latest entries and, unsurprisingly, the brand's representative in our 2014 Awards issue.

It's a Cyrus product through and through, not just because of its half-width aluminium casing and agricultural black-on-green display, but in its sound too: precise, controlled and agile, with an effortless musicality that can bring any genre of music to life.

Inticing character

Engaging and transparent, the Stream Xa has a rare knack for drawing you into a song and keeping you there. Its honest delivery of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No 1* is awash with perfectly placed instruments loaded with texture and subtlety. The Cyrus's dynamic know-how makes the most of the varying orchestration, capturing the intensity of the explosive start before picking out the subtle variations in the leading strings.

Its presentation may be close to clinical, but precision and organisation aren't trade-offs for energy and liveliness. Feed it Supertramp's *Breakfast In America* and the song's giddy rhythms brim with pep and pizzazz. The streamer bites into the intro's catchy keyboard, each crisp note exact and punctual.

Open and expansive, the Stream Xa's soundstage has good spatial awareness, so the jumble of piano, trombones and brass that make up the anarchic chorus never feel cramped together.

Getting the tone right

Tonally, the Cyrus takes the middle path: the midrange is lucid and detailed between a sparkly treble that's clear and controlled, and a tuneful, agile bass. Sounds have more body and warmth through the richer Pioneer N-70A, but the neutral-sounding Cyrus has more solidity.

Vocals are clear and detailed, the streamer really getting under the layers of the vocals.

Away from sound and, as the rest goes, the Stream Xa is an easy machine to figure out. Just as it should be. It can stream files up to

24-bit/192kHz over a wi-fi network, though we'd always go down the more stable wired route.

Access to TuneIn Radio puts 100,000 internet radio stations on the map, while digital connections (three coaxial, two optical, one USB) and an internal 24-bit DAC expand compatibility to computers, USB drives and portable devices.

The unit's small, three-line display is less than ideal for browsing folders manually, so we're glad the streamer has two decent alternatives: the Cadence app and 'n-remote' (see roundel).

The Stream Xa's compact design won't be everyone's cup of tea. But its truly entrancing sound undoubtedly will. At the end of last year it proved the best-performing streamer at this price, bagging a well-deserved Award. Here we are months later, dying to know: is it still the front-runner? Well, that's in the hands of its newest rival, the Pioneer N-70A.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Precise, organised, agile sound; transparently musical delivery; controlled bass; clear, sparkly treble; expressive; seamless app and handy 'n-remote'

AGAINST Design won't be for everyone

VERDICT A fantastic performer that sets the benchmark for sound quality in streaming

Pioneer N-70A

£1000 ★★★★★☆

Think the Pioneer N-50A, but bigger and (as you'd hope for twice the price) better. That's the N-70A, the company's brand-new flagship streamer. It comes into a rather static market knowing full well the mammoth task at hand: compete with the likes of Cyrus.

As well as a 6.3mm headphone output (with dedicated amp), the N-70A gains 2cm in height over its sibling (to 12cm) and looks like a machine that will last a lifetime. Our sample is black, but a silver finish is also available.

The N-70A can stream and upsample LPCM files up to 32-bit/384kHz (and play DSD 5.6MHz) over a wired connection to your home network. DLNA support is included, and an extra £50 buys the adapter for wireless pairing.

To complement web-based streaming - Spotify Connect and vTuner internet radio - there's AirPlay for streaming from iDevices.

CONTROLLING THE CYRUS

Logical and intuitive, the Cyrus's Cadence app has a neat layout with helpful shortcuts. For those who prefer a more tactile feel, the 'n-remote' is a thoughtfully designed, do-it-all tool with a small screen providing visual aid for navigating servers. The button layout is easy to get along with, and browsing is surprisingly speedy.

All your music is controllable with Pioneer's intuitive, responsive ControlApp (free, Android and iOS) or the familiar lanky, well-featured remote. As with some of Pioneer's other flagship products, the unit's interior is divided into chambers to isolate the components. This is to reduce signal interference.

The N-70A has a very similar character to the N-50A: clean, big-boned and tonally balanced, with decent dynamic insight and rhythmic drive.

But here the sound is bigger and more powerful, more authoritative and detailed. And thrilling.

Play David Bowie's *Moonage Daydream* and the Pioneer is as muscular as it looks. It drives the song's rhythms with pleasing punch and dynamism, steamrolling through the guitar melodies and applying control where necessary.

The soundstage is coherent and nicely tight-knit as his echoed vocals bounce between the speakers. It could do with more space, though - the Cyrus Stream Xa's open and airy presentation has more room for instruments to work in, and better communicates depth and dimension.

A shudder down the spine

That said, the Pioneer has little problem projecting Johnny Cash's distinctly deep, quivering vocals with enough clarity, focus and insight to send a shudder down your spine.

It's a confident, dynamic delivery on the whole, and that doesn't change as we play our computer's music through the asynchronous USB. The headphone amp pulls its weight, too, so listening through cans is just as satisfying.

The N-70A is a worthy flagship, but the Cyrus Stream Xa sets the bar just outside the Pioneer's reach, with more precision, subtlety and drive.

If you've made the decision to spend serious bucks on a streamer, we'd imagine you'd want the very best sound quality. The N-70A might seem like a good mid-point between the N-50A and Stream Xa but, logically and practically, the direct jump to the Cyrus makes more sense.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Big, powerful sound; authoritative; detailed; feature-packed; solid build; crisp, bright display; good app software; sensibly priced

AGAINST Competition proves too good

VERDICT The Pioneer is a serious contender, but sound-wise it's no Cyrus Stream Xa



INNOVATION



PERFORMANCE



AWARDS



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TEST VERDICT**WINNER up to £500**
Bluesound Node

★★★★★

WINNER £500-£1000
Pioneer N-50A

★★★★★

WINNER £1000-£1500**Cyrus Stream Xa**

★★★★★



Spending more doesn't guarantee extra features, so our test winners – **Bluesound Node**, **Pioneer N-50A** and **Cyrus Stream Xa** – stand out for their sound and usability

Essentially, sound quality will determine whether you spend £300 or £1250 on a music streamer. Whatever the price, most are similarly matched for connections and file support, and features are often tit-for-tat – spending an additional £200, say, won't necessarily get you an extra USB input or improved compatibility. In fact, the best-sounding streamer here is probably one of the more sparsely featured.

General usability (mostly through an app) is important too – there is nothing more frustrating than having a music collection that's a burden to access.

If our first head-to-head tells us anything it's that decent sound doesn't have to cost an

arm and a leg. The funky-looking Cabasse and Bluesound are both decent-sounding and easy to use, and either would sit well with first-time buyers. Extra levels of dynamics and subtlety steer the comparison in the Bluesound's favour, seeing it sail past yet another competitor.

While the Bluesound hangs onto its credentials, the Cambridge Audio proves less fortunate, courtesy of its new Pioneer adversary. It's not only outshone, but loses a whole star. Even if the Cambridge is a fraction more dynamic and open, there's no question that the cheaper Pioneer offers more bang for your buck. Its seamless operation puts the less-than-perfect design of the Cambridge in

perspective, too. At an enticing £500, the Pioneer is probably the star of this test.

Sometimes, though, it's not about taking baby steps. With the market as it is, your next leap should be to the Cyrus Stream Xa. Here Pioneer is less fortunate. Its flagship is out to ruffle Cyrus feathers, but fails to change the pecking order. Both deliver the goods, but are a star apart performance-wise. More dynamic and spacious, the Cyrus continues to set the standard at this price (and until you reach its bigger brother, the £2010 Stream XP2-Qx).

Only three streamers will get you the very best for your budget, but there's no bad box here – we'd be happy letting any of the six loose with our (or Spotify's) music library.

**£300-£500****Bluesound Node**
£400 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 0 • Optical in 0 • Coaxial in 0 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 15 x 21 x 17cm • Weight 1kg

Cabasse Stream Source
£300 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 0 • Optical in 0 • Coaxial in 0 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/96kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 4 x 23 x 13cm • Weight 0.5kg

£500-£1000**Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2**
£700 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 9 x 43 x 31cm • Weight 4kg

Pioneer N-50A
£500 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless no (optional) • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 43 x 33cm • Weight 7.5kg

£1000-£1500**Cyrus Stream Xa**
£1250 ★★★★★

Optical out 0 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 2 • Coaxial in 3 • USB in 1 • Wireless yes • Resolution 24-bit/192kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 7 x 22 x 36cm • Weight 4.2kg

Pioneer N-70A
£1000 ★★★★★

Optical out 1 • Coaxial out 1 • Optical in 1 • Coaxial in 1 • USB in 3 • Wireless no (optional) • Resolution 32-bit/384kHz • Dimensions (hwd) 12 x 43 x 34cm • Weight 11.5kg

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February 2015



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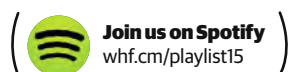


HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE

Make the most of your smartphone's improved sound and picture quality by investing in a decent pair of headphones. Try these six cans for size...

Headphones aren't just an extension of your personality, they're an extension of your smartphone too - allowing you to answer calls and listen to music without your handset seeing the light of day.


We know it isn't difficult to improve on the headphones that come with your phone, but our job is to tell you the models that sound the best. Read on to find out which of these six on-ear headphones are ideal for life on the move.



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!



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



The MSR7's penchant for a leaner take on music means low frequencies come up short. You don't get a sense of power behind a pounding beat

Audio Technica ATH-MSR7 £200

★★★★☆

Don't be fooled... hi-res headphones don't automatically mean you get a better quality of sound

The Audio Technica ATH-MSR7s are one of the first pairs of so-called 'hi-res' headphones to hit our test rooms. The hi-res logo on the box highlights the fact they claim to cover a wider frequency range than 'normal' headphones (5Hz to 40kHz in the case of the MSR7). But don't be bamboozled by the figures, this doesn't mean you'll automatically get a better quality of sound.

Breathing room

That's the case with the MSR7s. In terms of resolution and detail, they don't fare too badly. Play Florence & The Machine's *What Kind of Man* and they pick out more than the odd morsel from Florence's distinctive vocal at the start of the track. And the headphones cast their detail-gathering net out further as more and more elements are introduced. Their preference for a clear and spacious sound works well, giving Flo and her Machine plenty of breathing room.

Timing is okay, and the Audio Technicas sketch out basic outlines of

music without too many issues, but complex arrangements, like alt-J's *Breezeblocks* sound less convincing.

The MSR7s' penchant for a leaner take on music means low frequencies come up short in terms of weight and solidity. Play Macklemore & Ryan Lewis's *Bombom* and you don't really get the sense of power behind the pounding drumbeat - it's more like a weak pulse.

Higher up the frequency range there's also a coarse tinge to the upper mid-range. Highs aren't especially harsh, but there are more rounded, better balanced headphones out there.

Good looking, nicely finished

It's disappointing, because out of the box the signs are promising. This particular gun-metal finish and brown leather combo works together well - showy enough without being in your face. The materials look and feel nice, although the inner edges of cut-out sections of headband feel sharp to the touch.

Safe and sound

You've two choices of headphone cable: one with a one-button control and mic, the other a plain cable which is more suited to listening to hi-fi kit at home. You also get the obligatory carry pouch to keep them safe and sound.

The fit is firm, but fair. There's a decent amount of pressure fixed on the your ears, but overheating isn't a problem. They remain in place despite our best attempts to dislodge them with some enthusiastic head movements.

The MSR7s are okay, but there's no shortage of quality alternatives at this price. Which puts them at a disadvantage.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clear, open sound; decent detail; comfortable fit

AGAINST Bass lacks weight, music lacks drive; coarseness further up the frequency range

VERDICT Lack of quality combined with a relatively high price leaves them struggling

The sound quality is pretty respectable too - warm, but without sounding too rich or woolly - and there's nice balance to the sound



Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2 £170



B&O's BeoPlay H2 on-ear headphones have plenty of style, but don't think for a minute that you're paying for that at the expense of substance. Take them on a sound-per-pound basis and they're up there with the best at the money.

The feeling of quality hits you as soon as you open the flap on the box. Inside there's another box and a ribbon tag that says 'Pull me' in an Alice in Wonderland kind of way.

Follow that advice and a cardboard cover with teasing holes in strategic places has a 'Lift up' instruction. And so it goes, until you finally unveil the H2s.

Stylish, but robust

It's an impressive start for the B&Os and the feeling of pride of ownerships grows as you get to grips with them. As well as being stylish, they're robust too. The plastic is strong, flexible, and partly covered in a durable cloth material. There are five colours available - the deep red pictured here, along with pink, blue, silver or green.

The fit is snug, more so than the Philips M1MKIIs, but they're by no means uncomfortable and arguably more secure. The lambskin leather-covered earpads help out here.

Warm and intimate

So the build quality isn't in question, but what about the sound quality? Thankfully, that's pretty impressive too - warm, but without sounding too rich or woolly, and there's a nice balance to the sound. No one area stands out for unwelcome attention.

Play Foo Fighters' *I Am A River* and the top notes of the electric guitar sound pristine. The midrange is the B&Os' particular strength, with David Grohl's vocals coming across as particularly warm and intimate.

However, play something with more of a hefty, lingering bassline such as SBTRKT's *Higher* and you begin to notice the H2s do sound a touch tubby compared with the all-conquering Philips M1MKIIs, but the bass isn't overblown. In fact, it's a

character trait that certainly doesn't hurt in a pair of headphones designed for the great outdoors.

The detachable cable provided has an inline mic and three-button remote that has the usual powers when it comes to iPhones, but with Android you only get basic functionality.

Sense of pride

We like the BeoPlay H2s. They do a fine job of getting to the heart of the music whilst also managing to convey a sense of pride in ownership. Maybe that's always B&O's style, but it's also something that few brands in this group can match.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb build; stable, comfortable fit; detailed, enjoyable sound; even tonal balance

AGAINST The bass sounds a tiny bit tubby

VERDICT Not just for dedicated followers of fashion, the H2s have more than enough substance to stand up to scrutiny

The H2s combine style with substance. On a sound-per-pound basis, they're up there with the best



There's excitement in the music, but the Beats force an attacking upbeat sound on every track, which doesn't lend itself to subtle numbers

Beats Solo 2 £170

★★★★☆

Beats' sound quality is again hit and miss. They do the job, but many rivals do it better for similar cash

A headphone test without a pair of Beats would be like a Full English without baked beans. Love 'em or hate 'em, if it wasn't for the Beats brand, many of these rivals wouldn't exist.

So here we have the Beats Solo 2s. This particular version is actually part of the 'Royal Edition' which adds more colourful finishes to the current line-up. The striking Sapphire Blue paint job isn't subtle, but if you want to stand out from the crowd, it ticks that box (though more sedate options are also available).

Cheap and plasticky

As you'd expect from portable headphones, the Beats are a lightweight design and they're hinged, which means you can stow them away in tight spots. They come with a neoprene storage pouch which can double as a decent camera case if you'd rather keep your headphones on display.

Compared to some of their rivals, the Beats feel quite cheap and plasticky. The hinges give off a loud click, and the click

varies between earcups, with one slightly higher pitched than the other. The fit, though, is decent and the pressure on your ears reasonably judged.

Slam and attack

The RemoteTalk cable plugs into the left earcup through a 3.5mm jack, and it's finished in matching Sapphire Blue rubber. The matt finish extends to the in-line mic and three-button remote (for iOS), which is tactile and easy to use.

As always, only certain elements of the controls work with Android and other smartphone brands. It's one of the nicer remotes to use and you aren't left fumbling around when it's time to skip track or change the volume.

In our experience, Beats sound quality has been a bit hit and miss - and the Solo 2s continue the trend. Play Sam Smith's *I'm Not The Only One*, and there's a fine sense of slam and attack where the drum kicks are concerned. The hand-claps sound crisp and precise, and the vocals are both rich and warm.

Even though there's plenty of excitement in the music, there's no unpleasant hardness to speak of. Still, the Beats force an upbeat, attacking sound on every track, which doesn't lend itself well to slower, more subtle numbers. Shifts from high to low-level dynamics aren't driven home with enough conviction.

The top picks at this money, such as the B&O H2s and Philips M1MK1Is sound clearer, more exciting and deliver rhythms with more care and greater finesse. The Solo 2s do the job - the problem is rival cans do it better for similar money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, hefty bass; no hardness or brightness to the sound

AGAINST Lack of subtlety and dynamics; struggle to adapt to changes in pace

VERDICT Comfortable and portable, but lack the killer sound quality needed at this level

Play a handful of tracks and we're impressed by the abundance of detail. Music is delivered with unerring precision and clarity



Philips Fidelio M1MKII £180

★★★★★

The M1MKIIs are a constant thorn in the side of rival headphones. Launched last year, they instantly struck a chord with our review team, so much so that they earned a 2014 *What Hi-Fi?* Award. This means if any headphones are to stand a chance in this test, they're going to have to take the fight to Philips.

Good commuting buddies

Free the Fidelios from their carry pouch and you immediately warm to their design. They're a good size, not too big or small, and they feel lightweight in-hand and on your head. The faux-leather material surrounding the earpads and headband is soft and comfy. The metal frame for the earpieces is robust and sturdy.

There's just enough grip from the earpads, so they're not ear-crushingly tight and don't make your ears overly warm - they make for good commuting buddies. The pads can twist and rotate, so you're pretty much guaranteed an even spread of pressure. They go flat for

storage in the carry pouch, but there's no folding action here.

The in-line remote runs out of the left earpad. It's a one-button affair, so you can't alter volume during playback, but the flipside is that it works across multiple devices from iOS, Android, Windows and Blackberry. There's a fabric coating on the cable, designed to fight tangles, and it works well.

Play a handful of tracks and we're impressed by the abundance of detail on offer. Music is delivered with unerring precision, clarity and a fine sense of spaciousness.

Plenty of punch

We'd stop short of calling the sound attacking, but there's plenty of punch to the Philips' sound. Dynamics are strong and timing is out of this world. Play New Order's *True Faith 94* and our feet tap away enthusiastically, as they do with any track flung at them.

There's solidity and weight behind every drum hit and there's excellent

definition too. The track entertains, but it's still careful and considerate enough not to be tiring.

First port of call

Play David Guetta's *What I Did For Love* and Emeli Sandé's guest vocal is full of richness and warmth. It's given plenty of room to breathe, as is the accompanying piano play. The top end sounds natural and refined, never hard or brash, even when the track bursts into life.

If you've got a budget knocking on £200 for a pair of on-ear headphones, then the Philips M1MKIIs have to be your first port of call.


Lightweight and dynamic, the Philips M1MKIIs struck an instant chord with our review team last year

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fantastic timing; excellent detail and definition; great with vocals

AGAINST Can't be folded... but that's about it

VERDICT You have to feel sorry for the competition. At this price, it takes a different calibre of headphone to stand up to the M1MKIIs



The blurb on the back of the box promises 'massive bass and clear treble'. And we can't really argue. There's plenty of grunt in evidence here

Sennheiser Urbanite XL £200

★★★★☆

If you like a relaxed, full-bodied sound and value durability, pop these on for a listen

Although dubbed the Urbanite XLs, Sennheiser isn't about to start sizing its headphones as if they were T-shirts. It just highlights that these are the larger of two models in the Urbanite range. The standard Urbanite is a smaller, on-ear model, while the XLs boast bigger drive units and bigger earpads, better suited to enveloping your lugholes and relegating the outside world to background noise.

Wearing it lightly

Despite looking bulky and seeming - on paper, at least - relatively heavy, the XLs don't feel it. Build is solid, the chunky hinges and slick slider mechanisms giving the impression of quality and suggesting an ability to withstand bumps and bruises.

The 'denim' finish on our review pair won't appeal to all tastes, but other colours are available. A flat cable helps to fight tangles while the angled jack at the smartphone end keeps things discreet. The same can't be said for the three-button remote, which seems unnecessarily large and cumbersome.

Thanks to the smart sliding mechanism on the headband, it's easy enough to get the headphones in the right place, and the bigger pads are a good fit both in terms of comfort and noise isolation. Glasses wearers in the office often complain that some designs can crush ears against arms, but the Urbanites give stability without this side-effect. We do find our ears start to heat up more quickly than with some other models, though - great for cold winter commutes, but not so much for hot summer days.

The blurb on the back of the box promises 'massive bass and clear treble'. And we can't really argue. Play James Bay's *Hold Back The River* and there's plenty of grunt in evidence. There's an impressive sense of solidity and power behind each drum hit.

Clarity and neutrality

The Urbanites favour a more neutral approach than the rich balance of the Philips MIMKIIIs. This means they're

very clear and open-sounding in comparison, and do a fine job of extracting information and detail from the music. What they don't quite manage to do is capture the natural rhythm of a track. There isn't as much differentiation between the slower and quicker parts - they're happy to sit back and relax for the duration of *Hold Back The River* instead of springing into life when the track shifts tempo. Class leaders show greater dexterity.

But this doesn't stop the Sennheisers from being a good option. They're talented enough and built well enough to warrant a second listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Robust build; decent noise isolation; powerful bass

AGAINST Relaxed delivery doesn't get the best out of music; not the final word in timing

VERDICT The XLs look like big brutes, but they sound relaxed and unfussy. A good option

Exciting and engaging, the MDR-1As can shift from speedy, attacking beats to slower, more measured and moody rhymes without any hesitation



Sony MDR-1A £170



Sony's been one of the main driving forces behind hi-res audio, so you won't be surprised to find the MDR-1As sporting the hi-res logo. They trump the Audio Technica MSR7s on paper by claiming to cover a wider frequency range (3Hz to 100kHz). But don't get bogged down by the numbers game - trust your ears.

The MDR-1As are stylish and unassuming, similar in looks to their MDR-1R predecessors. This new version gets an extended frequency range, the hi-res logo, a new 40mm, aluminium-covered driver and redesigned earpads.

Comfortably done

Placed against the Audio Technica MSR7s, the Sonys look similar in size, but they weigh 70g less. They also win out in the comfort stakes. The elongated pads sit over the bulk of your ear and feel soft - almost slipper-like. For long periods of listening these Sonys make a lot of sense.

The in-line remote and mic is only one-button and favours Apple devices. That said, you can download Sony's Smart Key app from the Google Play store - it should offer personalisation of the in-line remote for Android devices.

There's also an additional headphone cable without control and mic. We'd use this when listening at home through a proper hi-fi system - music sounds a little more assured and solid.

Dynamically, the Sonys really stand up to scrutiny. They sound exciting and engaging, more so than many in this test, including the MSR7s and Urbanite XLs. The MDR-1As can shift from the speedy, attacking beat of Jessie J's *Bang Bang* to the slower, more measured and moody rhymes of The Weeknd's *Wicked Games* without any hesitation. Add clarity and an uncluttered top end, and it's easy to get enthusiastic about their musical talents.

That openness allows you to extract a lot of fine detail from the music, but it also draws your attention to a slight

shortcoming with the midrange - vocals lack natural warmth and sound less substantial than when heard through the likes of the Philips M1MKIIs.

On the loose

Another little niggle is that these headphones sound tubby in the lower frequencies. Play Lorde's *Royals* and it soon becomes clear those booming bass notes need to sound tighter and better defined.

We're only talking a couple of small issues here, but those little niggles are enough to hold the MDR-1As back from achieving full five-star status.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stylish appearance; soft, comfortable earpads; musical delivery; excellent dynamics

AGAINST Lack low-end control; vocals sound insubstantial

VERDICT Comfortable headphones that are an enjoyable listen - they have a lot going for them

They might not be perfect, but these Sonys are versatile performers. And comfortable with it

VIRTUOSO



A lifetime of electronics design expertise has led to Arcam's finest ever amplifier, the new A49 integrated amplifier. Its ultra-refined class G topology* represents the pinnacle of Arcam's engineering heritage and sets new standards of performance. An audition will confirm that power is nothing without control.

ARCAM

www.arcam.co.uk



Arcam's G class amplification provides the perfect balance of ultra low distortion and enormous power. You can read all about this world class technology by visiting our website.

BRINGING MUSIC AND MOVIES TO LIFE

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Philips Fidelio M1MKII**

£180 ★★★★★

The amazing **Philips Fidelio M1MKII**s have won the day – again

It's a tough choice, but the musicality of the superb Philips Fidelio M1MKII wins the day – they are amazing all-rounders.

The Fidelios have been giving rival headphones a tough time over the past few months. We originally reviewed them at £180, but a quick search on a certain online retailer will reveal they're available at a frankly ridiculous discount, making them even harder to argue against.

However, the B&Os pushed them remarkably close. B&O will always have admirers in the style stakes, but the H2s back this up with a confident, beautifully balanced performance.

The Urbanite XLs are a robust proposition and kick out powerful bass. But they don't capture the full emotion of music as well as the best.

Sony's MDR-1As fall just short of a five-star review too. Excitement and feeling isn't an issue for these comfy cans, but vocals sound insubstantial. Like the Sennheisers they're good, but can't be placed in the top bracket.

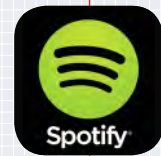
Audio Technica and Beats bring up the rear. The Solo 2s will undoubtedly sell on image alone, but you're never sure what level of quality you're going to get. The MSR7s look the part, but the overall quality doesn't match the pricetag. A lack of refinement leaves us wanting a more natural sound.

**SYSTEM BUILDER**

These three extras will help you get the most out of your Philips Fidelio M1MKII

**Smartphone****Sony Xperia Z3** from free ★★★★★

Sony has stepped up to the plate with the Z3. Excellent picture and sound quality make it the ideal partner for the Philips on-ears.

**Music streaming service****Spotify** from free ★★★★★

Spotify's a great way to access all-you-can-eat music – it's a gateway to millions of tracks and the mobile app takes some beating.

**DAC****Audioquest DragonFly v1.2** £130 ★★★★★

There's no harm plugging the Philips into a laptop or desktop computer. Do it via this USB DAC and your tunes will sound sensational.

Total build from £310

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

Facts & figures

Audio Technica ATH-MSR7
£200 ★★★★★

Remote One-button
Folding No
Cable length(s) 1.2 - 3.0m
Weight 290g



Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2
£170 ★★★★★

Remote Three-button
Folding No
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 155g



Beats Solo 2
£170 ★★★★★

Remote Three-button
Folding Yes
Cable length 1.3m
Weight 205g

**WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER**

Philips Fidelio M1MKII
£180 ★★★★★

Remote One-button
Folding No
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 166g



Sennheiser Urbanite XL
£200 ★★★★★

Remote Three-button
Folding Yes
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 313g



Sony MDR-1A
£170 ★★★★★

Remote One-button
Folding No
Cable length 1.2m
Weight 225g

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“A full dose of Pathos's distinctive DNA”

■ Pathos ClassicRemix HiDAC

Integrated amplifier

■ £2850 ★★★★★

Pathos has a habit of turning out imaginatively styled and fine-sounding amplifiers, and we're pleased to report that the ClassicRemix is yet another one. This well equipped compact integrated is one of the Italian company's more affordable models. But don't worry, it still delivers a full dose of the brand's distinctive DNA.

We can't think of another high-end electronics manufacturer that mixes the demands of aesthetics and performance as successfully as Pathos. One look at the ClassicRemix confirms it looks like little else on the market bar its pricier stablemate, the excellent InpolRemix.

There are two versions of this amplifier. The HiDAC, on test here, has a

full-size connections (for use with memory sticks or hard drives) and aren't active yet. Neither is the ethernet socket. These are included to accommodate a forthcoming digital board, the arrival of which we have no firm date for.

Headphones taken seriously

Most high-end amps tend to be stripped-down affairs, but along with the DAC module this Pathos also has a headphone output. It's a carefully designed amplifier circuit with a dedicated power supply, and the ability to deliver good amounts of current to drive a wide range of headphones.

Build quality is up to the usual high Pathos standard. The amplifier is a solid,

This is refinement with enthusiasm: the ClassicRemix offers the kind of presentation that has us concentrating on the music rather than the specifics of hi-fi reproduction

built-in digital-to-analogue converter module - the 'basic' ClassicRemix doesn't. Going for the non-DAC version saves you £355 on the price we're quoting, but you'll also be missing out on a fine-sounding circuit.

Don't let the minimalist appearance fool you - the ClassicRemix isn't short of features. Alongside a good range of balanced and unbalanced analogue inputs you have digital feeds, including coax, optical and multiple USBs.

Don't get too excited about the three USBs and ethernet connection. Of these, only the Type B USB on the back actually works. The remaining USBs - one on the front, the other on the back panel - are

neatly finished package put together with the kind of care we would hope for considering the price. If you don't like the low-key black finish of our review sample, the amp is also available (for an extra £100) in a number of more luxurious options such as Zebrano wood, red, white or black lacquer.

We're pleased by the effort the company has put in to make things look good. Where most manufacturers are happy with basic fins for heatsinks, for example, Pathos has had them shaped to spell the company name. This may not be the most efficient shape for carrying heat away from the circuitry, but that's not a problem because the 'sinks don't

Don't be fooled by the minimalist look. It's not short of features

See overleaf for more detail...

get too hot in use and, let's face it, look far more interesting in the process.

We like the remote too. It's a nicely sized, basic affair with just six control buttons. Interestingly, none of these are labelled, which feels a little awkward to begin with, but we think users will learn their functions soon enough.

Reliable formula

As is Pathos's way, the ClassicRemix uses a hybrid electronic circuit that mixes valves in the preamp stage with a 70W-per-channel Class A/B power amplifier. While that's not a huge amount of power, it is enough to get decent volume from most price-compatible speakers in anything but the largest of rooms. We got good results from Triangle's terrific Esprit Titus EZs, Audio Note Type Js and our reference ATC SCM50s.

There's a small digital display on a lower front-panel lip but, if viewed from



From far left: aesthetic considerations are never far from the Pathos designers' minds, as witnessed by the stylish heatsinks, fashioned to spell the company's

name; the twin valves sit in an elegant metal housing; the display is on the small side and partially hidden by the overhanging body. Front USB port is currently inactive



TEMPTATIONS

Pathos ClassicRemix HiDAC

In detail



1 Over the years Pathos has become known for its skill in combining valves with transistors, thereby getting best of both worlds – sweetness and refinement but with a firm grip on the sound.

2 This is the HiDAC version of the ClassicRemix, and the DAC included therein is a surprisingly good one that gives admirable results from most digital sources. It's well worth the extra £355.

3 Only one of the two rear USB ports is active. The other one is intended for use with a digital board that has yet to be incorporated into the amp. The same goes for the Ethernet connection.

TECH SPECS

Type Integrated
Power output 70W
Inputs 5 x line level,
USB Outputs
Preamp, speaker,
headphone **Remote control** yes
Finishes 5
Dimensions (hwd)
17 x 37 x 28cm

It might be modestly sized (and powered) but the ClassicRemix is not short of heft

above, it's hidden from view by the bulk of the top section.

Such practicalities are quickly forgotten once we start listening. We use a range of sources: digital is taken care of by the USB and optical outputs of a MacBook (loaded with Pure Music software) and the coaxial feed from our reference Naim NDS/555PS streamer. We also use our Clearaudio Innovation Wood turntable running through a Graham Slee ERA Gold/EXP phonostage.

The ClassicRemix is one of the most likeable amplifiers we've come across. It has refinement aplenty, but also a sense of enthusiasm that makes listening fun. It's the kind of presentation that has us concentrating on the music rather than the specifics of hi-fi reproduction.

We start with Bob Marley's *Exodus* on vinyl and are impressed with what we hear. The Pathos has a slightly sweet, rounded tone and plenty of body through the midrange, making the passion in Marley's vocals easy to hear. The amplifier's midrange is lovely; subtle, articulate and well projected.

Controlled force

Rhythmic drive is good too, the amp delivering the title track in a forceful and controlled manner. There's enough punch to satisfy and a good amount of attack to the leading edge of notes.

We try out the DAC next, playing a range of music from CD rips of Björk's *The Dull Flame Of Desire* and Dvořák's *New World Symphony* to a 24-bit/192kHz file of Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises* soundtrack. We continue to be impressed.

The ClassicRemix works well across all types of music, having the punch to work well with Zimmer's bold approach and the subtlety to allow Björk's more low-key material to shine. There's plenty of insight here, and a nicely layered soundstage. A rival such as Naim's terrific SuperNait 2 has more grip at the lowest frequencies, but less fluidity through the midrange.

We give more compressed music a go and find that the Pathos is forgiving for so revealing an amp. Eminem's *Mockingbird* (192kbps) usually sounds harsh but through the Pathos the rough edges are rounded off neatly.

Listening through headphones is equally rewarding. The appealing character the Pathos reveals through speakers stays intact via both the Grado PS500s and BeyerDynamic T1s.

The ClassicRemix is a fine amplifier, and a great choice for someone who doesn't want their hi-fi dominating their room but still wants a top-class sound. It's usefully featured and is good enough to form the heart of plenty of top-class systems. We like this one a lot.

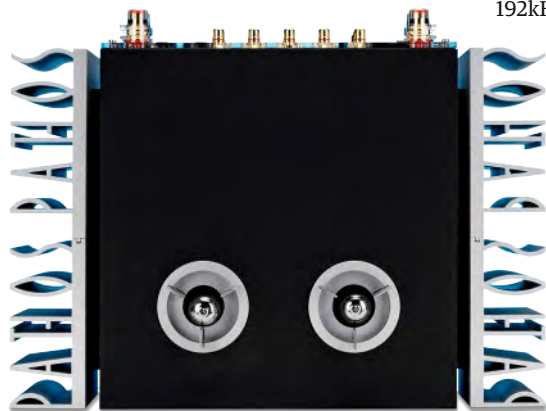
Consider if you want a built-in DAC and headphone output in a compact amp
Highlight The performance is excellent, but we also love the distinctive aesthetics

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Refined, yet entertaining sound; detail; timing; expressive dynamics; styling; build

AGAINST Some rivals deliver more low-end authority and scale

VERDICT A well built, fine-sounding amplifier for those who value style





NIGHTHAWK

AROUND-THE-EAR SEMI-OPEN HEADPHONES



audioquest®

“We can't help but fall in love with the DA1000's sound”

■ **TAD DA1000** Digital-to-analogue converter

■ **£11,995** ★★★★★

To say we're impressed by TAD's DA1000 is something of an understatement. We're no strangers to fine-sounding high-end digital kit in Temptations but, even among all the glitter, this digital-to-analogue converter is gold.

TAD is pretty low-key when it comes to marketing, so we wouldn't be surprised if the brand is an unknown entity to many readers. It's owned by Pioneer, the name stands for Technical Audio Devices and the company originally manufactured high-performance speakers for studio use.

The DA1000 is a heavy set, chunky-looking unit that weighs in at a sizable 16.5kg. Much of that heft is down to the unit's slab-like casework. It feels immensely solid and well damped. Build and finish are immaculate - as we would expect at this price - with every part of the casing precisely machined and beautifully aligned.

That front panel display is small, though. While it's clear, even from a distance, there's not a lot of information on offer. The thick metalwork hides part of the screen when viewed from above, which is likely to be the usual angle.

Under the skin

Get inside the case, carefully, and you'll find a generous power supply arrangement, neat circuit designs and great care taken to lower noise levels.

The TAD's connectivity is good. There's an ample supply of digital inputs - USB, AES/EBU, optical and a pair of coaxes. The USB will cope with sampling rates up to 384kHz, while optical input is limited to 96kHz. The two remaining input options split the difference, coping

with all rates up to 192kHz. As is usual at this level, balanced and single-ended analogue outputs are available - the unit sounding good with both options. At the front you'll find a 6.3mm headphone output with a dedicated volume control.

For once, we don't have to moan about the poor quality of remote-control handset supplied with a high-end piece of kit. The one with this DAC is nice to hold and easy to use.

Once things are up and running we can't help but fall in love with the DA1000's sound. The unit spends most of its time in our main reference system of Naim NDS/555PS streamer, MacBook (running Pure Music media software), Bryston BP26/4B SST2 pre/power combination and ATC SCM50 speakers.

Straight to the amp

It doesn't take long for us to dump the Bryston preamp and use the DA1000 straight into the power amplifier. The gains in transparency and resolution are significant, with little of the usual losses in terms of body, dynamics or drive.

We start off with a CD rip of Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain*, and love what we hear. There's just so much detail here, with the TAD digging out subtle instrumental strands like its life depended on it. Everything is crisply defined without ever sounding hard or overly etched. It was the DAC's tonal sweetness that caught us off guard - for all its resolution and analysis, the TAD never errs towards the clinical. It will reveal a poor recording for what it is, yet never makes a meal of things.

The longer we listen, the more we come to appreciate the DA1000's ability to preserve the acoustic space around

TECH SPECS

Inputs 2 x coaxial, optical digital, XLR, RCA, USB **Outputs** Coaxial digital, RCA, headphone **Remote control** yes **Finishes** 1 **Dimensions (hwd)** 15 x 44 x 41cm

instruments and its fluid way with low-level dynamics. Don't get the wrong impression though. Switching to The Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter* (24-bit/88.2kHz) shows this converter has plenty of kick when the music demands.

Giving the TAD's headphone output a go, we're really happy with what we hear. We try a range of music from Kanye West's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (16-bit/44.1kHz) through to Berlioz's *Les Nuits D'Ete* (24-bit/192kHz) and it never fails to shine. Our headphones alternate from Grado's PS500s to BeyerDynamics' T1s and the TAD has no difficulty getting a great performance from either. The sound mirrors that from the line-level outputs.

The DA1000 is one of the most capable digital-to-analogue converters we've come across. Its digs up as much detail as we've ever heard in our digital files, yet the delivery has real verve and drive. It's huge fun to listen to, and that's not always true of its rivals. Want the last word in DACs? The TAD will give anything else we've heard a run for its money.

Consider if you want an exceptional DAC and value an excellent headphone output
Highlight The DA-1000's mixture of sonic clarity, precision and refinement

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Astonishing detail resolution; precision; clarity; dynamics; rhythmic drive; build and finish

AGAINST Small, limited display

VERDICT The TAD DA-1000 is one of the best DACs money can buy. If you have the budget you won't be disappointed



Connectivity is generous on this beautifully built unit, which – unlike many premium devices – has a remote control of equivalent quality



We start off with a CD rip of Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain*, and love what we hear. The TAD digs out subtle instrumental strands like its life depended on it

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

Out this month



The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies

Blu-ray
Out 20 April



Bonus content

- Recruiting the five armies
- Completing Middle Earth
- Part 1 - A Six Part Saga
- Part 2 - A Seventeen year journey
- The Last Goodbye
- Part 1 - Behind the Scenes
- Part 2 - Music Video
- New Zealand: Home of Middle-earth, Part 3

Duration 144m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 7.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p



There and back again and again

It's finally over. We went there and back again, and then *there* and back again. And now we're safe.

It only took 14 years and six films to get here. The journey of a thousand minutes - 1223 if you count the extended editions - has come to an end. A bitter end.

The entire Hobbit trilogy has been a bloated mess until now, but part three marks its lowest point. That's because it's essentially a load of fights and references. This is what happens when you pad out a concise children's book with footnotes and appendices.

A lot happens in *The Battle of the Five Armies*. There is a dragon fight. There is a wizard fight. Dwarves have a turf war with elves, humans, orcs, bats and Orlando Bloom.

Hordes of CGI characters beat seven bells out of another horde of CGI characters, and then big eagles save the day. Again.

It's not epic or magical. It's convoluted and longwinded. Numbness is inevitable after seeing the hundredth bloodless casualty, and all those shots of New Zealand's mountainous landscape don't do much to stave off boredom.

Off the pace

It really doesn't help that the pacing is all over the place. Most situations are resolved abruptly, with little sense of threat.

The opening segment is entirely at odds with what follows, and really should have been attached to the end of the last film.

And then there are the multiple endings, where everyone either says goodbyes or makes references to *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy.

At its worst, one of the elves even tells Orlando Bloom to go hang out with Viggo Mortensen (from *The Fellowship Of The Ring*).

If there is a saving grace, it's this: like the rest of the saga before it, *The Battle Of The Five Armies* is an audiovisual treat.

It must have taken an inordinate amount of time and technical effort to make a film look and sound this good. You need look no further than the opening segment, where a very angry dragon trashes a village.

Fire and gold serve up some lovely colours, which contrast nicely with the dull greys of armour and roof tiles. Boats crash, wood splinters, and arrows land with satisfying *thunks*. There are few better uses for surround sound.

But technical achievements aside, this was not an adventure. This was a delayed and sloppily executed conclusion to something that should not have been divided into three films in the first place. No, it was not worth the wait.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist15](https://whf.cm/playlist15)



The Knack: My Sharona
Thumpingly angular white-boy power-pop from the last great era of the skinny tie, and a guaranteed crowd-pleaser.

Lake People: Drifting Red Clean, streamlined and entirely aerodynamic tune from the excellent *Purposely Uncertain Field* album. The authentic sound of Dresden.

Nicky Thomas: Love of the Common People When Trojan Records hit the bullseye, they turned out recordings for the ages. This is as warm and as inclusive as it gets.

Kanye West: All Day We're a decorous crowd here, so this is the radio-friendly (and consequently borderline-incoherent) version. There is a potty-mouthed version too.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p76



Download, CD, vinyl



THE PRODIGY THE DAY IS MY ENEMY

Out now

★★★★☆

Six months or six years, it's all the same to The Prodigy. It's been over half a decade since *Invaders Must Die* but if you know anything about The Prodigy, you know what you're getting with *The Day Is My Enemy*. They may be a one-trick pony, but if you want the sort of queasy thrill that comes with being a passenger in a speeding car, and a pretty-much constant sense of danger, few are the bands who can flood you with adrenaline like The Prodigy can.

There's an anger and attack to much of *The Day Is My Enemy* that

might be difficult to take seriously (given the age and status of the protagonists) but it's delivered with such implacable conviction it's hard to doubt its sincerity. The title track, first single *Nasty and Rok-Weiler* in particular sink their teeth in and don't let go.

A short, sharp shock

For all its bug-eyed attention-grabbing, though, *The Day Is My Enemy* is knowingly disposable and unlikely to live all that long in the memory after album closer *Wall Of Death* has barked its last. Similarly, while it will stretch your system in terms of timing, low-end clout and grip as well as out and out attack, it's not a state-of-the-art production. Dynamically it's pretty limited – inevitable as everything starts at '11' on the volume control – and there's little in the way of soundstaging or stereo focus to get worked up about. If you just fancy getting a sweat on, though, jump right in.

Specifications

Duration 56m 20s

Standout track *The Day Is My Enemy*
Start as you mean to go on: this is the whole album in microcosm.

Download, CD, vinyl



SUFJAN STEVENS CARRIE & LOWELL

Out now

★★★★☆

Given how very prolific Sufjan Stevens has been since his debut album *A Sun Came* was released in 2000, it's a medium-sized wonder his prodigious gifts for melody and harmony show no signs of waning. For *Carrie & Lowell* Stevens has moved away from the angular electronic edge of 2010's *Age Of Adz* in favour of a (slight) return to the lo-fi folk-inflected intimacies of his most celebrated recordings.

Stevens has always been a direct, emotionally unflinching lyricist, and the death of his mother Carrie in 2012

informs almost every one of these 11 songs in one way or another. But as is often the way with Sufjan Stevens, there is hope amid despair, redemption where all might at first seem lost. *Death With Dignity*, *All Of Me Wants All Of You* and *The Only Thing* might be among the bravest and most direct 'pop' songs ever recorded.

Rigorous test of detail retrieval

There's not much going on in terms of dynamism or tonal variation here, but in certain respects this is as big a test as your set-up will get all year. Stevens' self-recording, home-recording methodology, plus the album's emphasis on tremendously close-mic'd vocals and picked steel-or-nylon strings, mean it's as rigorous a test of detail retrieval, tonal variation and midrange expressiveness as you'll hear. Plus it's human, and heartfelt, and there's no system inferior enough to stop that shining through.

Specifications

Duration 43m 40s

Standout track *The Only Thing* "In a veil of great surprises, I wonder did you love me at all?"

Listen to it this way

Turntable

Pro-Ject Essential II £200 ★★★★★
Musical and detailed beyond its price, but happy to rough it too

Amplifier

Rega Brio-R £480 ★★★★★
Half the size, all the performance... and all the punch the album demands

Speakers

Wharfedale Diamond 230 £500 ★★★★★
Scale and control from an elegant cabinet at the right price



Listen to it this way

Turntable

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Speakers

Spendor AGR £2500 ★★★★★
Surefooted, poised, balanced – and other words to describe a truly sorted speaker





Movie shorts

Horrible Bosses 2

Three incompetent and hugely unlikeable people make a poor attempt at a kidnapping. Hilarity does not ensue, but Chris Pine is fun.

Veep (Series 3)

It's not *The Thick Of It*, but Armando Iannucci's lightweight political comedy drama does hit all the right notes about political ineptitude.

Get On Up

Chadwick Boseman shines in this James Brown biopic, which dares to be a bit offbeat and nowhere near as glossy as on-the-face-of-it similar fare.

The Breakfast Club

The original teen drama is 30 years old. And to celebrate there's a remastered Blu-ray rerelease, along with some new extras.

On-screen

System tester



Black Sea Blu-ray Out 13th April

★★★★☆

What would you do for money? Well, Jude Law would hunt for sunken gold in a submarine with a bunch of people he doesn't know or trust.

It's a recipe for disaster, all right. Especially when you factor in language barriers, racial tensions, and the cliché of subterranean madness.

You don't need to have seen *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre* to know this isn't going to end well.

The narrative may be a bit predictable, but Jude Law gives a magnetic performance. It's not a particularly nice character, but he's desperate and unpredictable, which makes him rather watchable.

The real star, however, is the submarine. Dark, dank and claustrophobic, it's a great atmosphere for watching the men fall out and act like animals.

It's also perfect for use with a surround sound system. With those echoes and creaks all around you, you'll be all tensed up and a bit mad in no time.

This is a high-class set-up - but it's well-worth the investment



Watch it this way

Blu-ray player

Panasonic DMP-BDT700 £500

★★★★☆

The Panasonic's a wonderful Blu-ray player that will upscale to 4K as well

AV Amplifier

Pioneer SC-LX58 £1400

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Powerful and refined in equal measure, the Pioneer also supports Dolby Atmos

Speaker package

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Projector

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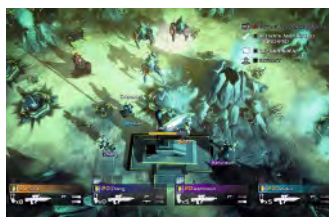
Our Best projector: £2000+ Award winner delivers simply stunning picture quality

Games

Helldivers

PS4, PS3, Vita, Out now

★★★★☆



Helldivers has the power to destroy friendships - it revolves around four-player co-op, but with friendly fire turned on. With bullets spraying it's all too easy to send one into your mate rather than the horde of aliens. But that's all part of the fun, and the frantic, explosive action is a riot.

Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number

PS4, PS3, Vita, PC, Mac, Out now

★★★★☆

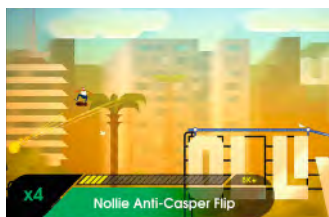


As with the first game in the series, *Hotline Miami 2* is a fiendish, gore-encrusted, top-down shooter with a real sense of retro. It's as much a puzzler as an actioner, as you learn the precise order and timing required to take out a building full of baddies while achieving the maximum score.

OlliOlli2: Welcome to Olliwood

PS4, Vita Out now

★★★★☆

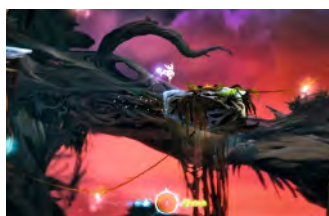


The mechanics of the first *OlliOlli* are practically unchanged for this sequel. The movie studio setting allows for more varied levels, but the joy is still in the effortlessly elegant control system and feel of the thing. It may not look like an advanced skateboarding simulator, but that's sort of what it is.

Ori and the Blind Forest

Xbox One, PC Out now

★★★★☆



Ori and the Blind Forest is a game of true beauty. This is a side-scrolling platformer at heart, with the jumping and puzzling you'd expect, presented in such a lush, inviting way that the simplicity of the gameplay is more than acceptable. There's real charm here, and that's a rare and wonderful thing.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Blu-ray) Exodus (23rd April) Ridley Scott takes on the Bible, with Christian Bale playing Moses. Less cheesy and more angry than when Charlton Heston did it.

Movies (Cinema) Avengers: Age of Ultron (24th April) It's the ultimate superhero movie as well as a fascinating evil AI/end of the world yarn. What's not to like?

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Muse - Drones (8th June) Divisive in the extreme here in the office, but we anticipate a painstaking, high-quality production at the very least..

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Hot Chip - Why Make Sense? (18th May) We'll level with you - we've heard this already. And it's good. Really really good..

April in Hi-Def

The best on the box



It looks as if Daenerys might finally get around to setting foot in King's Landing to take the Iron Throne - but the Houses of Westeros won't give up without a fight

Daredevil Netflix - 10th April

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is expanding, and it's kicking off its Netflix-based sub-universe with a new, non-Ben Affleck version of *Daredevil*. Charlie Cox plays Matt Murdock, our blind lawyer-turned-vigilante superhero, who wants to deliver justice where the city's legal system failed. Think Batman, but with less money and no gadgets. Running alongside *Daredevil*'s origin story is that of his arch-nemesis: businessman and feared crime mogul Kingpin. While firmly taking place in the same New York City that's had aliens, Norse gods and metal suits flying all over the place, the Hell's Kitchen setting aims for a grittier, more violent and character-driven tone than we've seen from Marvel. If they're digging deep into the comic's neo-noir roots, consider us very happy. All 13 episodes will be released at once, so binge away!

Game of Thrones Sky Atlantic HD - Mon, 9pm

Where do we start with *Game Of Thrones* series five? Do we talk about the dragons, the army at the Wall, the Lannisters' diminishing power, the introduction of the Sand Sisters? Or about how it looks as if Daenerys might finally get around to crossing continents and setting foot in King's Landing to take the Iron Throne? The Houses of Westeros won't give up their claims without a fight, but how will they fare against three fire-breathing dragons? And that's before we get to fan favourites Arya and Tyrion, the secrets revealed by Cersei's flashbacks to a childhood prophecy, and the eternal plotting of Petyr Baelish. We can't wait.

Inside No 9 BBC Two HD - Thurs, 10pm

From the dark and twisted minds of *ex-League of Gentlemen* writers Reece Shearsmith and Steve

Pemberton come six more short stories filled with strange happenings, odd characters, and pitch black comedy. *Inside No 9* is unlike anything else on TV. Each half-hour episode is a self-contained plot with its own cast, tone and genre, with all stories taking place behind doors marked number '9'. The show's razor-sharp writing and unique blend of horror and comedy make for unexpected twists and turns that are as refreshing as they are shocking. Delightfully gruesome stuff.

Mad Men Sky Atlantic HD - Thurs, 10pm

"This is not a spaceship, it's a time machine. It goes backwards and forwards, and it takes us to a place where we ache to go again." And so ends our trip to the amber-tinted world of 1960s Madison Avenue, where everyone is sharply dressed and sharp-tongued, and a glass of whiskey at

a 10am meeting is perfectly acceptable. It's the end of an era, not just for the outstanding series, but also for the golden age of advertising that the men and women of *Mad Men* inhabit. It will be a bittersweet end.

Penny Dreadful Sky Atlantic HD - Tues, 9pm

What fresh hell is in store for our mismatched troupe of attempted heroes? The Devil himself, according to Vanessa Ives' prophetic tarot cards. The sumptuous gothic horror *Penny Dreadful* returns for a second series, where fictional Victorian literary characters (Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, Mina Murray from *Dracula*, Dorian Grey) mingle with supernatural staples of the era (werewolves, vampires, psychic mediums). The core characters have a new battle on their hands, but will their inner demons be too much to handle?

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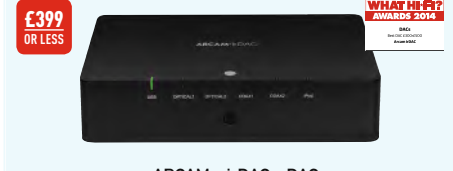


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The combination of sound quality and features make the NAD C 390DD a highly capable and versatile amplifier. Featuring NAD's MDC, the C 390DD comes with 8 inputs which can be expanded to 14 with the optional MDC modules.



AUDIOQUEST • DRAGONFLY v1.2 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

DragonFly is a sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC, turning any computer into a true high-fidelity music source.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£129 OR LESS



NEW

£199 OR LESS

MQA MQA READY

MERIDIAN • EXPLORER² • USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

Successor to the popular and widely acclaimed Explorer pocket USB DAC with up to 24-bit resolution and 192kHz sampling. Includes Meridian's unique MQA - Master Quality Authenticated.



NEW £1249 OR LESS

NEW £1249 OR LESS

ROKSAN • K3 • CD / AMPLIFIER

New integrated amplifier with aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five additional line inputs for other sources. The K3 CD player is the perfect match for the K3 amplifier. Three finish options available.



£599 OR LESS

£499 OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.



£899 OR LESS

SAVE £600

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012

NAD • M51 • DAC / PREAMP - SILVER FINISH

This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.



NEW £499 OR LESS

PIONEER • N-50A • MUSIC STREAMER

Developed for the digital age, the N-50A Network Audio Player connects to many different sources and features Internet Radio and Music Streaming from compatible devices, a high quality DAC and Airplay and DLNA compatibility.



NEW £399 OR LESS

SAVE £100

MARANTZ • NA6005 • MUSIC STREAMER

If you prefer direct wireless access to your digital media then look no further. With in-built WiFi, Bluetooth and USB-A capabilities, this player also connects to everything: to your computer, external hard disc, smartphone, and tablet.



B&W • P5 S2 HEADPHONES

NEW

£249 OR LESS



GRADO • SR325e HEADPHONES

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

NEW

£299 OR LESS



£100 GIFT VOUCHER FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC DOWNLOADS FROM QOBUZ

qobuz MUSIC IS BACK

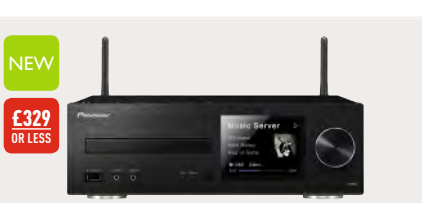
Hi-Res AUDIO

aptX Bluetooth

£699 OR LESS

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.

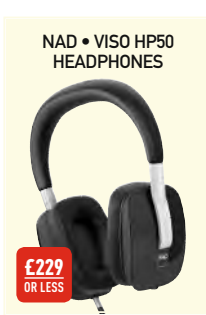


NEW

£329 OR LESS

PIONEER • XC-HM82 • CD/NETWORK SYSTEM

The XC-HM82 is an absolute power house, equipped with a Class D amplifier to boost your sound. Its compact size and stylish aluminium design make it suitable for any interior style.



NAD • VISO HP50 HEADPHONES

£229 OR LESS



SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

NEW

£379.95 OR LESS



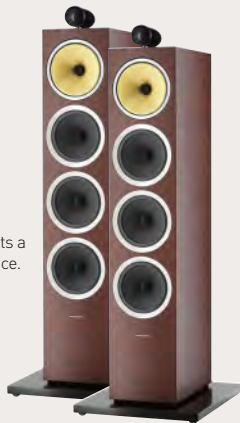
BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

NEW

£499
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best speaker
Best compact speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker

Price excludes stands



BOWERS & WILKINS CM10 S2

The flagship floorstanding speaker of the CM Series sets a new standard for performance. It combines technologies taken from across B&W's ranges. The result simply sounds and looks beautiful.

NEW

£2999
OR LESS

PSB IMAGINE XB

An attractive compact two-way speaker featuring a 5 1/4" woofer and one inch titanium dome tweeter. The XB is ideal for smaller rooms or in concert with a powered subwoofer for a compact full-range system.

NEW

£379
OR LESS



PMC • TWENTY-22
An astonishingly natural balance and high dynamic capability are the hallmarks of this speaker. It creates a precise sound stage and profound bass performance from its compact cabinet.

£1970
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best speaker
Best compact speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker

Price excludes stands

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 6

2.5 way speaker system combining excellent dynamics with a naturally rhythmic sonic character and tight, controlled bass. The Silver 6 is an outstanding communicator of music and film audio.

£999
OR LESS



WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220

The award-winning Wharfedale Diamond 220 is a 2-way, bass reflex bookshelf speaker offering everything you need from an advanced speaker design that doesn't cost the earth.

£199
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system
Best multi-room system



Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 20
A truly remarkable award-winning speaker which delivers a level of sonic performance previously only available to audiophiles able to invest in high-end models.

£349
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best speaker
Best compact speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker
Best 2-way speaker

Price excludes stands

KEF • R500

The smallest of the floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions and sleek contemporary looks make it perfectly suited for any interior.

£1499
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS 3020

Replacing the award-winning 2020i speakers, the 3020 incorporates numerous improvements including a revised cabinet with wool fibre damping plus new bespoke drive units.

NEW

£189.95
OR LESS

Standard finishes £249.95
Premium finishes



NEW

£299
OR LESS



Bluetooth

BT
CSF

B&W • T7 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM

Introducing the pick-up-and-play hi-fi speaker. Perfectly sized for bedrooms, kitchens and gardens, T7 is B&W's most portable, versatile wireless system yet.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system
Best multi-room system



NEW

£895

BT
CSF

Bluetooth

AirPlay

NAIM • MU-SO • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-so is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.



SONOS

THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless Hi-Fi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. **PRICES FROM £169**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system
Best multi-room system

Wireless Extender Boost **NEW**
£79

BLUESOUND
HiFi for a wireless generation

HIGH RES AUDIO

"There's a new leader in the wireless multi-room music market - Bluesound combines high-res audio and ease of use in one impressive system."

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2015

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system
Best multi-room system

Stream your digital music collection, internet radio and cloud music services. Bluesound is simple to setup and easily expandable and supports 24-bit/192kHz studio master recordings in lossless FLAC format for crystal clear audiophile-grade sound to any room in your home. **PRICES FROM £399**



FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

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SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



£2199 OR LESS

BUY FOR £1749
SAVE £450 WHEN YOU TRADE-IN ANY HOME THEATRE PRODUCT
OFFER ENDS 30/04/2016 - ASK FOR DETAILS

ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality.
Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



£999 OR LESS

NAD • T 758 • AV RECEIVER

AV receiver featuring NAD's Modular Design Construction for future upgrades along with exceptional sound quality.
Also Available: NAD T 748V2 & T 787



NEW

ESSAV.COM



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability.
Also Available: PIONEER VSX-924 & SC-LX88



ESSAV.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

SONY • STR-DN1050 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device.
Also Available: DENON AVR-X2100W & AVR-X3100W



NEW

ESSAV.COM



DENON • AVR-X4100W • AV RECEIVER

Enjoy Dolby Atmos for immaculate audio, Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth and DSD streaming.
Also Available: DENON AVR-X5200W

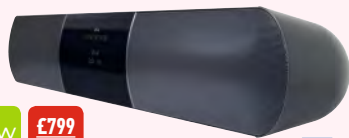


ESSAV.COM

YAMAHA • RX-V677 • AV RECEIVER

Highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with AirPlay and Spotify Connect.
Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A3040

ARCAM • SOLO BAR • SOUNDBAR
Not only an ideal solution to improve on the mediocre sound quality of modern TVs, Arcam's superb engineering means it can also be used as a high quality stereo system all over the house. Optional subwoofer also available.



NEW

£799 OR LESS



CANTON • DM 50 (BLACK GLASS) • SOUNDBASE
The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£399 OR LESS

NEW BLACK GLASS FINISH



PSB • VS21 • SOUNDBASE
PSB has been creating award-winning home theatre speaker systems for decades, and the VS21 brings this extraordinary experience to the sound bar category.



NEW

£499 OR LESS

NEW

£499 OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR
The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



£399 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£599 OR LESS

SONOS • PLAYBAR SOUNDBAR & WIRELESS SPEAKER

This plug-and-play unit incorporates 9 integrated amplified speakers. Simply connect it to your TV with the supplied optical cable to deliver an epic home cinema sound in your own living room. PLAYBAR can also expand your existing Sonos system.



YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



NEW

ESSAV.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



£899 OR LESS

KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£1499 OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO • RADIUS R90HT1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Award-winning speaker package comprising four Radius 90 satellites, Radius 200 centre speaker and Radius 390 subwoofer.



NEW

£599 OR LESS

KEF • R50 • DOLBY ATMOS ENABLED SPEAKERS

Designed to sit above freestanding or wall-mounted speakers allowing you to enjoy Dolby Atmos at home.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£1939 OR LESS

B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PVID subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.



REL • S2 SUBWOOFER

Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.

NEW

£999 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£2799 OR LESS

SONY • VPL-HW55ES • SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.



SAMSUNG
SUHD TV^{4K}

JS9000 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar, it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

NEW

48 55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES



SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K

65 75

SONY 4K

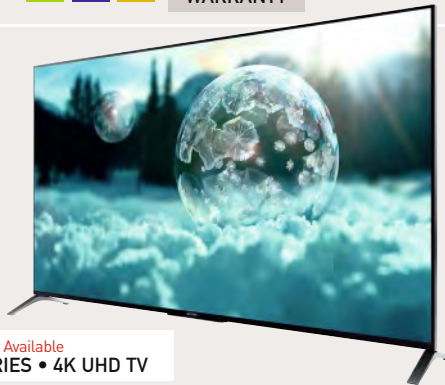
X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

The new Sony X8 series 4K UHD LED TV boasts four times more detail than Full HD, 4K gives stunningly natural images, not pixels. Dramatically higher image quality means that you can sit closer to the screen, filling more of your field of view until the screen disappears and you are enjoying an at-the-movies experience.

49 55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available
SONY X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



SONY • W7 SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 42

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

WHAT HIFI? AWARDS 2014



PANASONIC • AX902 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



SAMSUNG • JU7000 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

40 48 55 65 75 85

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

NEW



NEW

£1199 OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



NEW

£599 OR LESS

PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



£599 OR LESS

WHAT HIFI? AWARDS 2014

SONY • BDP-S7200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The new Sony BDP-S7200 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features - it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S5200 & BDP-S6200

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Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886
Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
Southampton • 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
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LCD, LED & OLED TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
OLED	An ultra-thin screen that's commonly used in curved TVs

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony KDL-32W706B

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV

"With an attentive, punchy picture, decently detailed sound and a smattering of features, the KDL-32W706B is the full works with all the trimmings of a well-designed telly."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Samsung UE48H6400

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV

"Sharp, clear and full of subtle detail that's impressive at this mid-range price, the Samsung '6400's picture hooked us in from the minute we turned it on."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung UE55HU7500

Awards 2014: Best 52-60in TV

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

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Free/ew	Free/sat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500													
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	43x73x6
Kogan KULED22XXXA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x54x17
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x8
Linsar X24-DVD	300	04.15/FT	★★★★★	ATV with a built-in soundbar that's a credible option for a second room	LED	24	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x56x11
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	43x72x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x2
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A surprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Astunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	55x93x9
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x96x9
£500-£2000													
Finlux 42FME2425-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	56x96x6
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x4
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwxd, cm)
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9

£2000 and above

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6

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AWARDS 2014

Stereo amplifiers
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AWARDS 2014

CD players
(see www.whathifi.com/2014)
Marantz CD6005



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PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES.

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TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (wxd,cm)
£2000 and above													
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A feature-laden TV, this is an impressive, attractive and entertaining TV	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	85x145x11
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Thoughtful design married with seriously good picture quality	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	155x90x33
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscaled content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x172x10



Blu-ray players

- Smart ability** _____ Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
- Multichannel out** _____ Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
- Twin HDMI outputs** _____ These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



AWARD WINNER
Panasonic DMP-BDT700

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £300+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (wxd,cm)	
Up to £500									
LG BP645	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine Blu-ray player replete with a strong feature list	1	1	0	No	5x43x21
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Much improved, but needs to better its sound and video performance to match the best	1	1	0	No	4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	80	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An impressive Blu-ray spinner that's even more value for money after its price drop	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Lacks in the smart app area but performance elsewhere is terrific	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Talented with sound as it is with picture, this is a Blu-ray player to be reckoned with	2	1	0	No	4x42x18
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Mightily impressive, this Blu-ray spinner is a multimedia beast	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A very good performer that lacks some smart features	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung-BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Samsung-BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Another solid, competitive effort from Samsung	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5200	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £150, Awards 2014	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of smart features, sharp images and well-rendered 3D. A talented disc spinner	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Super slim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential	1	1	0	No	8x33x27

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500 and above								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Pioneer BDP-LX58	600	04.15/FT	★★★★★	2	0	1	No	12x43x39
Pioneer BDP-LX88	1300	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	13x44x34



Projectors

Screens Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

BenQ W1400

Awards 2014: Best projector up to £1500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Epson EH-TW7200

Awards 2014: Best projector £1500-£2000



AWARD WINNER

Sony VPL-HW55ES

Awards 2014: Projector £2000+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000													
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25	3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000													
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
BenQ W1500	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	3.9
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW6600	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	1	16x41x30	6.7
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	SKRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above													
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	SKRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14

"We think the Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV is a clever product. Its portable nature and unfussy set-up have real appeal"

May 2014



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500 Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000 There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+ Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha RX-V377

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony STR-DN1050

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



AWARD WINNER

Pioneer SC-LX58

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300										
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014	5x70	4	1	●	●	15x44x32
£300-£500										
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtler but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	●	12x44x30
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	●	16x43x33
£500-£1000										
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	●	17x44x39
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013.	7x100	8	2	●	●	16x43x32
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	7x165	6	3	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x43x36
£1000-£2000										
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	●	16x44x37
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	●	34x59x55
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	●	18x44x43
£2000 and above										
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX88	2200	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A staggeringly powerful amp with a captivating sound	9x250	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	●	34x61x60

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																			
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●			Forward	1	1			●	●	4	31x31x38	
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20		●		Forward	2	0			●			2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25		●		Forward	1	0			●			3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20		●		Forward	2	2			●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30		●		Forward	2	1			●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5		●		Forward	2	2			●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25		●		Downward	1	1			●			8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																			
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25		●		Forward	2	1			●	●	4	32x32x37	
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5		●		Forward	1	0			●			2	34x34x41
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a		●		Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5		●		Forward	1	0			●			2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5		●		Forward	1	2			●	●	●	1	45x42x46
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25		●		Downward	4	2			●			2	45x41x41
£1000 and above																			
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20		●		Forward	1	0			●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38		●		Forward	n/a	0			●			1	56x59x50
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25		●		Forward	1	1			●	●	●	3	34x33x34



Surround speakers

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500									
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a	3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
£500-£1000									
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44	2
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Agutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31	7
KEFE305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27	2
Mission M ³	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27	1

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Center speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Rear speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Subwoofer (h/w/d, cm)	Finishes
£500-£1000									
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33	4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20	2
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31	7
£1000-£2000									
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 3	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A likable, big-sounding system that lacks a little authority	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x35	2
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1650	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2014	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
Dali Fazon 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27	2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12	2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28	3
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-ite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEFR100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2014	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51	2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47	3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMCD1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1

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CD players

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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cyrus CDi

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Onkyo C-N7050	350	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Is it a CD player or a high-res streamer? Regardless, it's hugely appealing	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x44x30	
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000																
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44

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Also available in black.

£199.95



SAVE
£200

FREE
5 YEAR
SPEAKER
GUARANTEE

MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BX2 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi of the MCR610, while of the BX2s they said, "Stupendously good and give their price rivals much to worry about."

TSP £699.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase price

Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 also available in oak and walnut.

MCR610 also available in white.



£499.95



SAVE
£200

EXCLUSIVE!

FREE
5 YEAR
SPEAKER
GUARANTEE

CAMBRIDGE MINX XI & MINX XL STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & SPEAKERS

"Easy to use, well built and sounds great" - What Hi-Fi on the Minx Xi.

Usually £599.90

5 year Supercare 10% of Minx Xi purchase price

Also available in white.

£399.95



SAVE
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5 YEAR
GUARANTEE

TANNOY PRECISION 6.2 SATIN WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Hugely listenable speakers, with a stereo image to die for." - What Hi-Fi.

TSP £1699.95

£999.95

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NEW!

ROKSAN K3 & K3

CD PLAYER & AMPLIFIER

Roksan's brand new K3 components are sure to please even the most discerning audiophile listener. Fully equipped with Bluetooth for easy music streaming the K3 range offers crisp and expansive sound quality, these stunning separates deserve an audition.

5 year Supercare only £125 each



£1250 each



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FREE
5 YEAR
SPEAKER
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EXCLUSIVE!

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Chord Cadenza Interconnect
worth £249.95
(VIP exclusive offer)

CAMBRIDGE 851A, 851C & TANNOY 6.4 AMPLIFIER, CD PLAYER & SATIN WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This refined and revealing pairing delivers a dynamic, clean and engaging result with pretty much anything you care to play." - Hi-Fi Choice magazine (851A & 851C).

TSP £4599.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of amp & CD player purchase prices

Amplifier & CD player also available in silver.

Speakers also available in gloss walnut and gloss black.

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- What Hi-Fi.

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Wireless speaker
Best wireless speaker 2014
(under £200)

£119.95

MONITOR AUDIO AIRSTREAM S200 WIRELESS MUSIC SPEAKER

"Great price and streaming features galore... a very desirable wireless speaker."
- What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £19.95
Also available in white.

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Wireless speaker
Best wireless speaker 2014
(under £200)

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"Naim's first entry into the wireless speaker market, and it's an absolute better... you won't be disappointed."
- What Hi-Fi.

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Wireless speaker
Best wireless speaker 2014
(under £1000)

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A small selection from our headphone range

SONY MDR-EX650 HEADPHONES

"From sound to fit, the EX650s are everything a pair of in-ears should be."
- What Hi-Fi.

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
In-ear headphones
Best in-ear headphones 2014

£59.95

AKG Y50 HEADPHONES

"Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a cracking introduction to AKG's latest range."
- What Hi-Fi.

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Over-ear headphones
Best over-ear headphones 2014
(under £100)

CALL OR SEE WEB

SENNHEISER MOMENTUM M2 HEADPHONES

"Easily one of the best pairs of buds we've heard this year."
- What Hi-Fi.

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Over-ear headphones
Best over-ear headphones 2014
(under £100)

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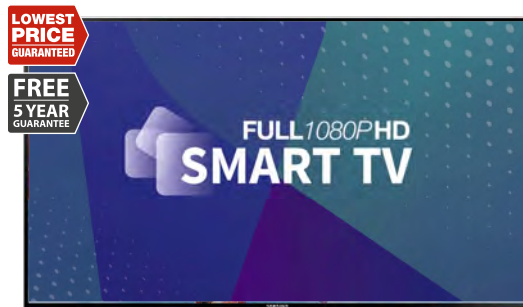


PANASONIC VIERA TX47A5650B
47" SMART 3D LED TV

Full smart functionality with effortless control and a brilliant picture performance.

TSP £599 | Also available 42", 50" & 55"

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SAMSUNG UE48H6400
48" SMART 3D LED TV

"Punchy, subtle and exciting, this Samsung Smart TV is fantastic at the price making it one of the outstanding deals of the year." – What Hi-Fi.

Also available 32", 40" & 55"

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Superior picture performance for games and movies in stunning 3D.

TSP £1199 | Also available 60"

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VIP CLUB PRICE

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SAMSUNG UE55JU7500
55" CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

As expected from Samsung, this TV is packed to the brim with the latest Smart tech that will transform your TV viewing, while the 4K resolution adds amazing detail. Not only does the attractively curved screen give great depth and realism to the picture, but it looks the business too!

Also available 48", 65" & 78"

£2099



SONY BRAVIA KD49X8305C
49" 4K ULTRA HD SMART LED TV

Android TV has arrived with this fantastic Smart Sony. You'll enjoy more choice than ever with this new 4K stunner.

Also available 43"

£1299



PANASONIC TX55AX902B
55" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

"No other LED television comes closer to emulating plasma's alluring image quality." – hdtvtest.co.uk.

TSP £2499 | Also available 65" & 85"

£1999



LG 55UF950V
55" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

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Chris, Deputy Manager, Leeds store, 10th year of service



BENQ W1070 3D PROJECTOR

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VIP CLUB PRICE

£469



BENQ W1400 3D PROJECTOR

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TSP £1099.95

£899.95



EPSON EHTW7200
3D PROJECTOR

"Exciting, immersive and effortless." – What Hi-Fi.

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SONY VPLHW55
SXRD 3D PROJECTOR

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SONY VPLVW300ES
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Home Cinema Amplifier

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YAMAHA RXV377
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"Superb surround sound on a budget."
- What Hi-Fi.

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HT RECEIVER PIONEER VSX-924
HOME CINEMA BEST BUY

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING **AirPlay** **Bluetooth** **Internet RADIO**

PIONEER VSX924
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"Packed with features, and great value for money." - Hi-Fi Choice magazine.

TSP £399.95
5 year Supercare only £24.90

£249



LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2014

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING **AirPlay** **WiFi** **Internet RADIO**

YAMAHA RXV677
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

"An endlessly entertaining receiver that's full of character."
- What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

CALL OR SEE WEB



SAVE £300

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING **AirPlay** **WiFi** **Bluetooth**

PIONEER SC2024
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

With the perfect blend of power, control and features, this is a masterful AV receiver.

TSP £799 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

REGULAR PRICE £599 **VIP CLUB PRICE £499**



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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Speaker package

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING **AirPlay**

Bluetooth

SONY STRDN1050 & TANNOY HTS101
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER & 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"A dynamic, spacious and above all effortless listen." - What Hi-Fi on the HTS101.

"A seriously good amp that balances muscle and subtlety with stacks of features."
- What Hi-Fi on the STRDN1050.

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PIONEER SCLX58 AV RECEIVER

"Superbly detailed and dynamic sound combined with all the features you need make this a natural winner." - What Hi-Fi

TSP £1399 | 5 year Supercare only £119.90

£1199



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TRUSTED RECOMMENDED

CAMBRIDGE 752BD 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"Its picture and sound quality are superb, making it the perfect player for cinephiles and audiophiles alike." - trustedreviews.com

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£599.95



SAVE £400

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Bring blockbuster sound to your home with this incredible package. "A deeply satisfying experience."
- avforums.com on the RXA3040.

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Panasonic's latest 4K upscaling Blu-ray player adds jaw-dropping realism to any movie.

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4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING Wi-Fi

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SONY BDP57200 SMART 4K 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"Serves up a classy picture and stunning sound."

5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING DUAL CORE Wi-Fi

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SAVE £50



PANASONIC DMPBDT700 SMART 4K 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"A premium Blu-ray player for a premium home cinema system."

TSP £449 | 5 year Supercare only £39.90

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING Wi-Fi

£399

SAVE £150

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

LAST FEW

CAMBRIDGE S215 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"Colossal cinema sound from surprisingly small speakers."

- What Hi-Fi.

TSP £499.95

5 year Supercare only £34.95

Also available in white.



£349.95

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CAMBRIDGE TV 2 SOUND BASE

"The TV2 is an affordable product that ticks all the criteria of a good TV sound-booster: a full-bodied, detailed sound, smart style, and practical build."

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£199.95

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



YAMAHA YSP2500 SOUNDBAR

"This is an amazingly talented soundbar delivering captivating sound."

- What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

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Bluetooth

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"The Q7000i is a stunning package at this price."

- What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £89.90

Also available in white.

£899

SAVE £100



CANTON DM 50 SOUND BASE

"The Canton DM 50 is a lesson in what a sound base should sound and look like."

TSP £399

5 year Supercare only £29.90

£299

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



DALI KUBIK ONE SOUNDBAR

"Design and features impress us, and we love how it sounds."

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Bluetooth

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DACs

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014. Accessories Product of the Year	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3x18x14
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSD	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30

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DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above													
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
Oppo HA-1	1200	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition but needs to deliver more energy to compete with the best	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8x25x33
T+A DAC8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable _____ The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm _____ The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge _____ Turns the information in the record groove into sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Up to £1000															
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35	
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	9x43x30	
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	14x46x36	
Pro-Ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A terrific package for the price and worth serious consideration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	13x42x34	
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An eye-catching turntable with a robust sound. A very fine effort	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	13x46x36	
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience Basic+	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x36	
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It's been a few years but the Carbon is still a tempting proposition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	7	12x42x32	
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	12x45x36	
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A blindingly good turntable for the price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	12x45x36	
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	10x45x36	
£1000 and above															
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x42x35	
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	14x42x35	
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	13x42x33	
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	28x56x36	
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x40x30	
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	5	14x45x36	
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	26x64x53	
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x45x38	
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x39	
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-Ject can compete at all price levels	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	25x55x45	
Rega RP8/Apheta	2200	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A spectacular turntable from Rega	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	12x45x36	
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Deceptively simple looking, this Rega is one of the very best at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8	12x45x36	
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8	15x45x37	
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	One of the best at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	18x43x34	
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	13x47x43	
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	It's got its quirks, but it's great value for the money	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	15x40x34	

How they work: Turntables

1. Motor - Drives the platter either directly or through a rubber belt. Both methods have merit. Belt drive isolates the platter from the motor's vibration while direct drive promises greater speed stability.

2. Platter - This is where your vinyl record goes. It can spin at 33.3, 45 or 78 rpm depending on how the record was mastered, but the first two speeds are most common.

3. Plinth - The plinth is the turntable's base and can come in a variety of materials (MDF, metal, acrylic). Vibration picked up by the plinth will affect sound quality.

4. Cartridge - There are two choices available here: a moving-magnet (MM) or a moving-coil (MC) cartridge. MM tends to produce a higher output while MC (usually found on more expensive designs) can dig up more detail.

5. Tone-arm - Holds the cartridge and allows it to move across the record.

"Most budget turntables come pre-assembled. These come with arm and cartridge attached"





Radios

DAB _____ Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
Internet _____ Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100										
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A neat, lightweight radio that's fine for listening on the go	●	●			●	10x6x2
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Classy and natural - another joy from Pure	●	●			●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great performer in the right circumstances	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for on-the-go casual listening, but not as your main home radio	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An upgrade of an established favourite	●	●			●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio up to £100, Awards 2014	●	●			●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	No-frills wi-fi radio that sounds great for its size	●	●		●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	User friendly and sleek - with great sound	●	●			●	15x25x83
£100 and above										
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2013	●	●			●	17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Terrific sound and features makes this radio an appealing buy	●	●				25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent radio that doesn't sound as good as some of its stablemates	●	●			●	18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Internet and DAB-capable radio that's a delight to use and listen to	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-1S Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A quirky and appealing style classic			●		●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio up to £150, Awards 2012	●	●		●		15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to offer: add to your shortlist of portable internet radios	●	●		●		17 x 28 x 18
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio £150+, Awards 2012	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Great radio and a nice little streamer	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A decent rather than ground-breaking effort from Revo. Worth an audition	●	●				13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2014	●	●		●	●	18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A retro radio with great looks and sound	●	●		●	●	16x26x13
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Good in most areas, but the 83i needs a more balanced sound	●	●		●		21x25x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●		●	●	21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 Mk3	200	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Ruark doesn't rest on its laurels, as this improved version of the MkII shows	●	●		●	●	17x13x13.5
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	On the expensive side, but a neat unit nonetheless	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A good table-top offering at an affordable price	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat, talented portable radio that deserves an audition	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200									
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish looks meet grown-up performance	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Good scale and authority make for a competitive pair of speakers	●			2	37x20x31
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Full of zip and gusto, the SX-50s are excellent value for money	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £150, Awards 2010. A real return to form from Mission	●			4	28x17x26
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	A very good attempt at a budget hi-fi speaker	●			2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	They're not perfect but these budget speakers are a pleasant surprise	●			2	28x18x23
QAcoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
QAcoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●			4	26x17x28
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●			2	23x15x15
SoundScience Frankenspiel FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best Budget desktop speakers, Awards 2011	●			1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●			1	85x85x85

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (wxd,cm)
£200-£500							
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Real ability in most areas but they don't quite gel	●	2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money, definitely worthy of consideration	●	2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●	3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget	●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer Music Monitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●	2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●	2	33x21x27
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●	4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available	●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●	2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●	2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●	2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●	2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	These Dali's are still entertaining all-rounders, but they've finally been outclassed	●	2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●	3	35x21x29
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●	2	31x19x25
Epos K1	400	04.15/ST	★★★★★	For £400 the K1s put in a decent performance. Rivals have the edge in terms of excitement, though	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●	3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop	●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals	●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●	3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze BX1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●	4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●	6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●	1	28x18x27
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●	4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders	●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●	1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014	●	2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●	4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014	●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●	4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014	●	3	17x13x14
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●	3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014	●	4	50x32x41
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish	●	3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11 (2013)	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014	●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014	●	2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	2	35x19x32
Cabasse MT32 Antigua	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Wonderfully easy on the ears, the MT32s are a smooth listen	●	2	41x22x30
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas	●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●	2	29x17x24

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander		●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●			29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●		5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis		●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Eclipse Planet LW Bridge System	1400	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A commendable effort; decent sound and stylish looks to go with it	●	●	3	29 diameter
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●		3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●		3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 905	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A hugely accomplished pair of standmounters, although the finish could be better	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●		3	33x21x25
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●		1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●		4	28x18x29
KEFX300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●		1	28x18x24
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●		2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s product an authoritative sound at a fine price	●		5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●		5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●		6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●		6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers	●		2	54x39x9
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●		3	95x21x30
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Physically and sonically impressive	●		4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Almost mission accomplished. Hugely capable but not as entertaining as the class leaders	●		5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Attractive but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●		4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections	●		4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●		6	31x20x18
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●		4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●		5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●		3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●		2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●		4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●		3	80x22x25
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●		1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6TSE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●		1	100x31x28



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
£500-£1500							
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Tannoy Revolution XT 6	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Tannoy's new range is an exciting step forward, although a little more detail wouldn't go amiss	●	2	40x22x30
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package		3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A classy pair of articulate and expressive standmounters	●	3	31x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 230	500	04.15/FT	★★★★★	A compact pair of floorstanders with big sound and terrific detail	●	4	94x20x33
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●	1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●	2	108x32x34
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
ATC SCM40A	6280	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Favours an analytical reproduction of music, these ATCs offer exceptional sound performance	●	2	98x37x34
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good speakers but they lack the freedom of expression that we'd expect	●	3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●	4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Another pair of fine speakers from Dali – fast, agile and authoritative	●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	The Xeo 4s serve great-quality, convenient, versatile wireless sound	● ●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Spellbinding performance with the right kind of music	●	1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Superb timing, detail and imaging	●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	They have a few compromises but their strengths can't be matched at any price	●	4	99x35x43
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●	Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Intended for professional use, the SM9s work brilliantly as home speakers	●	1	32x49x39
Focal Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inenT M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention		1	59x48x10
Linn Akurik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●	2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
PMC Twenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●	4	41x18x37
PMC Twenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMC Twenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range	●	4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi		2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●	6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●	6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●	1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●	1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
SPAcoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●	5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●	6	95x20x32

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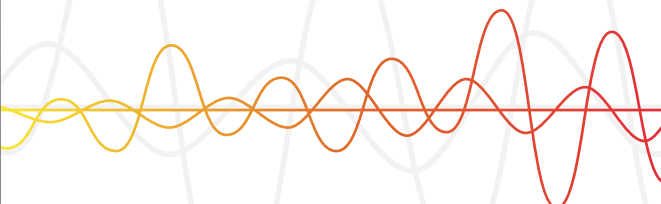
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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwxd, cm)
£1500 and above							
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●	3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●	3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●	3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●	3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●	2	36x11x25
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A speaker dedicated to actually enjoying music	●	2	114x42x37
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●	3	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●	3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	It needs a capable amp and source but when Duette II gets going it sounds breathtaking	●	16	47x27x31
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●	7	105x35x48



Stereo amplifiers

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwxd, cm)
Up to £1000																	
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60	6	0	0	3	●	1	●	●	●	2	7.5x45x34	
Arcam FMJ A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	50	6	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	1	9x43x28	
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A budget amp with a decent grasp of timing	45	●	6	0	0	1	2	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	1	12x43x35	
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	1	11x43x34		
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	An entertaining amp that holds its own against established rivals	55	5	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	2	6x42x38		
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Still precise and insightful but now lacks rivals' energy	40	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31	
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30	3	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	1	22x32x31	
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with attack and verve, although the finish could be better	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	2	7.5x14x14	
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	2	5x37x21	
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40	5	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29	
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29	
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34	
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34	
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and lively sound that's great fun to listen to	30	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	●	1	19x6x22	
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	1	24x7x27	
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50	4	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x44x31	
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60	3	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x31	
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30	3	0	0	0	●	1	●	●	●	1	9x21x36	
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x33		
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a digital based set-up	40	1	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	1	13x38x29	
Pro-ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40	2	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	2	4x10x10		
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90	3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	2	14x44x36	
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	An interesting proposition but it's left wanting in terms of finesse	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	4	10x31x30	
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50	4	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x22x31	
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2014	72	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	1	8x43x32	
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125	5	1	0	1	1	●	1	●	●	3	10x43x38	
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	11x43x38		
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	7x43x34		
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	14x44x36	
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with an unadventurous, but pleasant presentation	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	2	6x21.5x25	
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	1	7x20x20	
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60	6	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	2	15x44x39		
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	A capable amplifier that's packed with features	60	6	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	2	15x44x39		

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
£1000 and above																		
Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120	6	1	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	1	1	10x43x43	
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50	5	0	0	1	1	●	1	●	1	33x45x41			
ATCSIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150	4	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	1	14x44x35			
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60	4	0	0	1	1	●	●	2	5x43x28				
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120	8	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	12x43x39			
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2	●	2	7x22x36		
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	7x22x36			
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	2	7x22x36		
Cyrus 8 Xpd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70	5	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36		
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70	6	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36			
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36			
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	1	18x43x44			
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0	1	●	1	4x38x38			
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240	2	1	1	1	●	1	●	●	3	4x40x40			
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50	5	0	0	1	1	●	1	1	14x42x14				
Heed Audio Obeliski	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35	5	1	0	0	●	1	●	2	9x22x36				
Karan Acoustics KA I180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180	4	0	0	1	1	●	2	9x50x34					
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	1	8.5x43x35				
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148	7	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	10x43x36			
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1	●	2	9x22x28		
NAD C390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150	1	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	1	13x43x39			
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	●	1	●	1	7x43x30				
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	7x43x30				
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	1	9x43x31				
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100	7	0	0	●	0	1	●	1	15x43x49				
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10	1	0	0	0	●	1	●	2	18x33x29				
Pathos Logos Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	1	17x42x43		
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x31x38				
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162	6	0	0	1	1	1	●	1	12x44x35				
Rega Elicit-R	1600	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2014	105	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	1	8x43x34				
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	2	8x43x33				
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	3	10x43x38				
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80	5	1	1	0	1	●	●	1	13x43x42				
T+A PA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300	6	0	0	0	1	●	●	1	17x46x46				
Unison Research Preludio	2295	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	20x40x38				
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0	0	1	●	1	1	25x41x57				
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	26x19x35				
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	5	0	0	Opt	1	1	1	1	20x30x45				



Preamps

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
ATCCA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x22x36
Cyrus Pre XP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0	●	●	●	1	8x44x29

PREAMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Naim NAC152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●		●		7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●		●	●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Aesthetix Janus Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many high-end preamps better than this one	5	1	1	1	●	●		●	11x45x46
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●		●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●		●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
GamuTD3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x43x42
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●		●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●			●	9x43x31
Plinius Tautoro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)	
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
Atlas Stereo Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amps we've heard. An absolute beast	Stereo	200	2	2	22x46x48	32
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
GamuTD200i	9300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard	Stereo	220	1	1	16x43x47	34
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

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iPod docks

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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Docktype	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9



Wireless speakers

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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Monitor Audio Airstream S200

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £150-£300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



AWARD WINNER

Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●			9x18x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●			5x18x6
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●			118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●			18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x12x6

Superfi

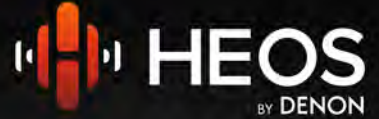
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HiFi Separates

Networked Music Server
Pioneer N50A



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Networked Audio Player
Marantz NA6005



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from Marantz
CD Player CD6005
& Amplifier PM6005

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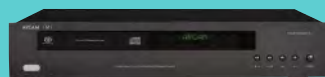
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Wharfedale
Diamond 220



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Arcam CDS27



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Marantz Melody
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Micro System
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Home Cinema

Blu-ray Player
Sony BDPS5500

NEW!

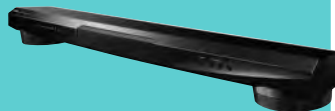
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£199.95

SAVE £130



Wireless Speakers

Wireless Speaker
with Airplay
Monitor Audio
Airstream S200

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

OUR PRICE:
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Wireless Speaker
with Airplay
Audio Pro Allroom
Air One

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013

RRP: £499.00
SAVE: £220.00

£279.00



Portable Wireless
HiFi Speaker
B&W T7

OUR PRICE:
£299.00



Headphones/Earphones

Portable On-ear Headphones
AKG Y50

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE
FOR LATEST PRICE



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
★★★★★
SEPTEMBER 2014

Headphones
AKG K451

WAS: £129.95

SAVE: £80.00

£49.95

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
OCTOBER 2012

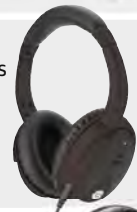


Noise Cancelling
Portable Headphones
Goldring NS1000
Expedition

RRP: £139.95
SAVE: £70.00

£69.95

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
★★★★★
OCTOBER 2012



Mobile HiFi Headphones
B&W P5 S2

OUR PRICE:
£249.00

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2015
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2015



Earphones
Sony MDR-EX650APT

OUR PRICE:

£59.95

WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
★★★★★
NOVEMBER 2014



Superfi Audio

Speaker Cable
Superfi XT by QED

- Our price: £4.95 per metre
- Plugs not included



Superfi Audio
by QED

- Our price:
- 0.6m: £39.95
 - 1m: £44.95
 - 2m: £59.95
 - 3m: £74.95



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*Terms and conditions apply, see website for further details. **On orders over £75.

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Changing Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300								
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★			●		13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	10x20x4
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	8x19x2.5
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	19x25x9
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5
Ultimate Ears Megaboom	250	04.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	n/a
£300 and above								
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★				●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	22x36x16
B&W T7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	11x21x5
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	24x13x24
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	26x48x30
Nocs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★				●	n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	23x60x32



Headphones

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

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

AKG Y50

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears up to £100
 "Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a promising start for AKG's latest range."



AWARD WINNER

Philips M1MKII

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £100-£200
 "If you have just under £200 to spend on a pair of portable on-ear headphones, this is a most worthy candidate."



AWARD WINNER

Beyerdynamic T51i

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £200-£300
 "They're easily some of the best portable on-ear headphones we've heard at this price."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●	Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013	●	Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p	60	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A superb performance that's let down by an indifferent build quality	●	Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	Closed			11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●	Closed	●		17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed			14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed			8
JVCHA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable in-ear that nails both comfort and sound	●	Closed			6.6
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed			13.5
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Stylish, sporty-looking buds with a fine sound	●	Closed			47
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed			174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●	Closed			4

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"I immediately noticed how reduced the distortion was over the entire soundstage... the price of the fuse, which initially might have triggered howls of derision seemed, after the test, to be rather low. Low, that is, considering the improvements in sound quality."

Paul Rigby, theaudiophileman.com

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			12
Sennheiser PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★			● Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed	●		71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			13.4
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			8
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			18
£70 and above									
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★			● Open			390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		292
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		150
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★			● Open			235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★			● Open			548
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★			● Open			265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★			● Open			340
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			10
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			165
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2	170	04.15/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			150
Beats Studio 2.0	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		260
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DX160 iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★			● Open	● ●		340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★			● Open			290
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			330
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		195
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●		153
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			195
B&W P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			290

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●		Closed			365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●		Closed			26
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●		Closed			310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●		Closed			225
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Need a bit more clarity and sparkle to go with its lovely, balanced sound	●		Closed			180
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●		Closed			220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●		Closed	●		183
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stunningly insightful and expressive	●		Closed			9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●		Open			9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●		Open			312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●		Open			500
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Open, spacious and sturdy. Great performance for the money	●		Open			363
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●		Open			330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●		Open			330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Hugely accomplished and built to last too	●		Closed			125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones up to £150, Awards 2013	●		Open			200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●		Closed			12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●		Closed			195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Chunky and enjoyable buds	●		Closed			11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★	These quiet Jamos aren't without charm	●		Closed			13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●		Closed			12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●		Closed			208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●		Closed			138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●		Closed			16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best in-ears £140+, Awards 2011	●		Closed			320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●		Closed	●		356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge	●		Closed			12
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	If you are serious about portables then these in-ears need to be on your shortlist	●		Closed			10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed	● ●		378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●		Closed			225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●		Closed			13
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●		Closed			299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●		Open			453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Timing could be tighter but these in-ears are an easy listen	●		Closed			n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●		Closed			12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A pleasant listen, laid-back and amiable	●		Closed			240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●		Open			395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Nice enough sound but average noise cancelling	●		Closed	●		79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●		Closed	● ●		352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●		Closed	●		14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●		Closed			140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	●		Closed			272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●		Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2014	●		Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●		Closed	●		500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014	●		Closed	●		190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●		Closed			14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●		Open			430
Polk Ultrafocus 8000	260	04.15/GT	★★★★★	An exciting listen, but one that's a little short on refinement and balance	●		Closed	●		340
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●		Closed			340
PSB M4U2	250	04.15/GT	★★★★★	PSB's first pair of headphones make a superb travel companion. Highly recommended	●		Closed	●		362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	●		Closed			11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●		Closed			220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders	●		Closed			140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●		Open			260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●		Open			270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●		Closed			18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●		Closed			5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2014	●		Closed			8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●		Closed			13

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight(g)
£70 and above							
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEI	90	02.15/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		16
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		160
Sennheiser PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Open	●	204
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open		260
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		280
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		286
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		240
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		6
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		228
Thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		10
Ultrasone HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		285
Ultrasone HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		285
V-modà Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		200
V-modà Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		17



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming Internet/Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs Digital inputs Headphone out
Up to £500								
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●			● ● ● ●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		● ● ● ●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Yamaha R-N500	350	03.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
£500 and above								
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●			● ● ● ●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		● ● ● ●
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			● ● ● ●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★					●
Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik	17500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●			● ● ● ●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		● ● ● ●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
McIntosh MXA70	5995	02.15/FT	★★★★★					● ● ● ●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●
TEACCR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	● ● ● ●

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Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500											
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●			1 0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●			1 2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●		●			2 2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV						1 0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●			1 2	5.1
£500-£1000											
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●			2 3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●			1 2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●		●			1 2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●			1 2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●			1 2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●		1 2	5.1
£1000 and above											
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●			0 3	2.1



Soundbars | Soundbases

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Philips HTL5140

Awards 2014: Best soundbar up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Q Acoustics Media 4

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £300 to £600



AWARD WINNER
Yamaha YSP-2500

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £600+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000												
Arcam Solo bar	800	03.15/FT	★★★★★	An ambitious soundbar that doesn't quite match the audio performance of its peers				4	1	1		13x100x11
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●			3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price				0	1	0		8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014				0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	280	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Bigger than – and just as good as – its smaller brother				0	1	0	●	10x73x34
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price				0	1	1		6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 75	450	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014				0	1	1	●	7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement	●			0	2	2		15x90x30
Dali Kubik One	800	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Dali's first soundbar is another resounding success				0	2	0	●	15x98x10
Focal Dimension	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular				1	1	0		12x116x12
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Delivers a good sound at an appealing price				0	1	0		10x60x40
Klipsch R-20B	700	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A good soundbar with a powerful sound. Rivals edge it out on balance and detail, though	●			0	1	0	●	10x102x7

SOUNDBARS | SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc/Direct	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)			
Up to £2000														
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★						0	1	0	12x90x10		
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★						●	1	1	0	8x100x6	
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★						●	3	1	0	10x110x6	
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★						●	0	2	0	8x100x5	
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★						●	0	2	0	71x95x50	
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★						●	1	1	0	8x104x4	
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★		●				0	0	1	0	16x99x10	
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★						3	1	1		8x94x39	
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★		●				3	1	1	●	101x19x17	
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★						●	0	1	0	9x30x10	
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★						2	1	0		15x101x8	
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★						●	1	1	0	5x105x7	
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						●	2	1	1	7x103x16	
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★		●				0	2	0		9x90x12	
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★						0	1	1		10x99x11	
QAcoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★						0	1	0	●	11x14x100	
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★						●	1	1	0	6x94x6	
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★						●	2	1	0	11x90x5	
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★						●	0	1	0	9x90x14	
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★						3	1	0		7x72x31	
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★						1	0	●		12x64x36	
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★						●	2	1	0	●	9x90x6
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★						●	3	2	1	14x43x35	
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★						0	1	1	●	10x100x13	
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★						●	3	2	1	●	9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★						●	1	2	1	●	7x94x14

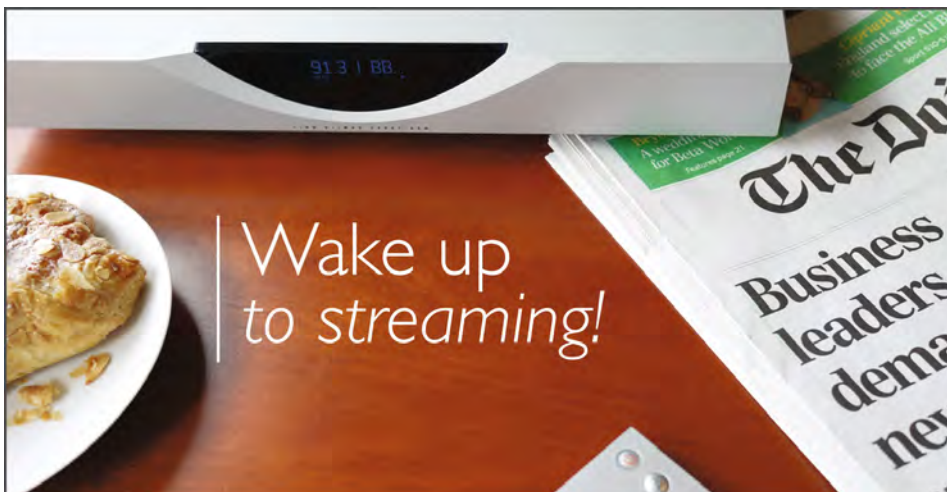


Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Cinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3		24/192	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	●	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/192	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	●	24/96	



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Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMIout	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMIin	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500														
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Apple TV	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Pure Jongo T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku 3	100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but good features and speedy operation make this a winner	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	40	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the smoothest streaming stick around, but Roku's effort is a great try	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
£500-£1000														
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50A	500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	The excellent N-50 again, this time better than ever	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	●
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	●
£1000 and above														
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	●
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	●	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDS XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192	●
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/192	●
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●

Streaming system set-up



NETWORK ATTACHED STORAGE (NAS)

All your music goes in here. It's an intelligent hard drive that can be accessed by other components within your network.

MUSIC STREAMER

Deals with the music stored in the NAS and turns it into an electronic signal your amplifier can work with.

ETHERNET SWITCH

Not essential, but a good way of isolating your network from outside interference.

WIRELESS ROUTER

The control centre of your network. This manages the communication flow. You can connect to it via wired ethernet or wi-fi.

TABLET/SMARTPHONE

The best way to navigate around your music is with a dedicated app. A phone will do, but a tablet is better.



Set-top boxes

Freeview	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart	
Up to £500													
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014				●	●	2	500	1	●
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013					●	2	500	1	
Humax HD-FOXT2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD receiver, Awards 2011				●		1	n/a	1	
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013					●	2	500	1	
Icencrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Loads of storage, but could do with more features				●		2	2TB	1	
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders				●		2	500	1	●
Sky+ HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Set-top boxes, Awards 2012					●	2	1TB	1	
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year					●	2	1TB	1	
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd				●		2	1TB	1	
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011					●	3	1TB	1	●



Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	2.5	320x240	32		79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
fiIO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	2.4	400x360	n/a		114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	2.4	320x240	8		10x6x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	2.2	320x240	16		109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	4	854x480	128	●	123x61x16



Tablets

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600										
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●		7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Android	●		8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows 8	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	iOS	●		7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad mini 3	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●		9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8

TABLETS continued

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT ★★★★★	iOS	●	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST ★★★★★	Android	●	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x6.9
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x6.4
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT ★★★★★	Android	●	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9



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

Our recommendations

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	12.14/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Google Nexus 6	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.96	1440x2560	32/64	160x83x10
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Windows	●	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 4	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7

Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history.

Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than



a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

What is the future of recorded music?

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“ ... there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm. ”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
 40 High Street.
 t: 01233 624441
 www.soundcrafthifi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 216 Moulsham Street.
 t: 01245 265245
 www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
 9 High Street,
 Hampton Wick.
 t: 020 8943 3530
 www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead
AUDIO VENUE
 36 Queen Street.
 t: 01628 633995
 www.audiovenue.com

Norwich
MARTINS HI-FI
 85-91 Ber Street.
 t: 01603 627134
 www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 44a High Street.
 t: 01268 779762
 www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 132/4 London Road.
 t: 01702 435255
 www.rayleighhifi.com

LONDON

Ealing
AUDIO VENUE
 27 Bond Street.
 t: 020 8567 8703
 www.audiovenue.com

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI
 190a New North Road.
 t: 020 7226 5500
 www.grahams.co.uk

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
 61/63 Webbs Road.
 t: 020 7924 2040
 www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST
Bath
AUDIENCE
 14 Broad Street.
 t: 01225 333310
 www.audience.org.uk

Exeter
GULLIFORD HI-FI
 97 Sidwell Street.
 t: 01392 491194
 www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS
Banbury
OVERTURE
 3 Church Lane.
 t: 01295 272158
 www.overture.co.uk

Coventry
FRANK HARVEY
 163 Spon Street.
 t: 024 7652 5200
 www.frankharvey.co.uk

Leicester

CYMBIOSIS
 8 Brook Park,
 Gaddesby Lane.
 t: 0333 200 4475
 www.cymbiosis.com

NORTH

Chester
ACOUSTICA
 17 Hoole Road.
 t: 01244 344227
 www.acoustica.co.uk

Gateshead

LINTONE AUDIO
 7-11 Park Lane.
 t: 0191 477 4167
 www.lintone.co.uk

Hull

THE AUDIO ROOM
 Savile Street, Hull
 t: 01482 891375
 www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York

SOUND ORGANISATION
 2 Gillygate.
 t: 01904 627108
 www.soundorg.co.uk

WALES

Monmouth
CERITECH AUDIO
 5 Monnow Bridge.
 t: 01600 716362
 www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

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STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer - chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3

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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best speaker cable
QED XT40



QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best speaker interconnect
Atlas Element Integra



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best DAC up to £500
AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST GENERAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE



QED Performance Digital Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST USB CABLE
SUPRA USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2010

CABLES
BEST MAINS CABLE
MERLIN TARANTULA MK6



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

Hi-Fi Cable & Home Cinema Cable Specialists

Bring your hi-fi to life with our high performance award winning cables

www.futureshop.co.uk - call 0208 905 1555

FutureShop.co.uk, Unit 5 MODA Centre, Stirling Way, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 2BW, England, UK

HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★ Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★ A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★ This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★ With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5	1.3
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★ An assured, but expensive, performer	5	1.3a
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★ Not just pretty but it delivers impressive performance over eight metres	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★ Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★ One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★ It's pricey, but has good performance	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★ It's an enjoyable watch, although there's some reservation	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★ Flexible cable that delivers pictures as good as any HDMI cable at this price	7	1.0



Digital interconnects

- USB** An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
- Optical** Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
- Coaxial** Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★ Got a budget laptop and a budget DAC? This cable is ideal for connecting them	USB	1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★ Fine, substantial, budget cable choice	Optical	1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★ Simple upgrade to the iPod/iPhone-to-USB cable - music sounds cleaner and clearer	USB	2

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Chord Active V2 HDMI Cable



QED Reference Optical Quartz



Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable



QED Reference Audio 40 Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon USB to Lightning Cable



Atlas Hyper Integra Audio Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable



Tellurium Q Ultra Blue Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
June 2014

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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Best digital interconnect, Awards 2010. Excellent optical lead	Optical 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	This is another fine cable from the Copper-line stable. It's well worth a listen	Co-axial 1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	The sheer brilliance of this cable makes it stand out	Co-axial 0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made, but not quite as thrilling as we'd like	Co-axial 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB 2



Analogue interconnects

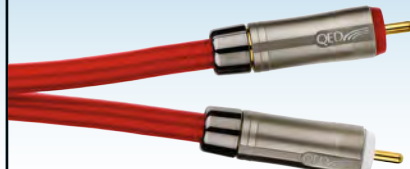
These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



QED Reference Audio 40

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



AWARD WINNER
Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RC/Aphono 3.5mm-t-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2014	● 1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	● 1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	● 1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	● 1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	● 0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA/phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	● 1
Ecosse The Baton MK II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	● ● 0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	● 1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	● 1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1.5
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● 1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100				
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
£100 and above				
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	● ● ● 6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	● ● ● n/a

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Tacima™ CS947 New Mains Conditioner for 2015

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- Screened Mains Lead
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- Status Button to test for degradation by Lightning etc.



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Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

The shortlist



Talk Electronics Talk 3
£4/m



Wireworld Luna 7
£6.50/m



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
QED XT40
Awards 2014: Best speaker cable

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict
Up to £10/m			
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★ Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★ Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★ A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★ Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
CL Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★ A decent cable that needs a touch more punch

Biwire

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Best speaker cable
QED XT40

NEW

QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014

Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014

Van Den Hul The Clearwater

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008

Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
WHATIFI.COM
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4

AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2011
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
RECOMMENDED
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN

Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008

QED Silver Anniversary XT

FutureShop Recommended

Tellurium Q Black Speaker Cable

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SPEAKERS CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Biwire
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics	
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable	
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own	
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade	
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition	
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7	

£10/m and above

Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed	
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance	●
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit	
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement	
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound	
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display	●
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	



Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound.

The shortlist



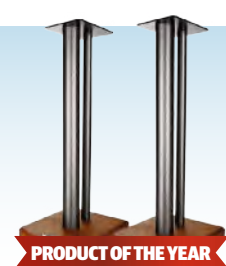
Custom Design FS104 Signature

£200



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands

£200



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Atacama Moseco 6

Awards 2014: Best speaker stands

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2014	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	●	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2

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AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

The shortlist



Hi-Fi Racks Podium

“You get an enjoyable sound that isn’t going to wear on you any time soon, and a product where quality control has taken centre stage”



Atacama Eris Eco 5.0

“Add fine build and easy construction to the list of plus points and there’s much to admire here”



Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

“It might not initially sound quite as immediate as some rivals, but longer listening reveals plenty of attack”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5	Variablex60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	● 3	Variablex60x40	3

Before you buy: Equipment racks

Choosing an equipment rack can be tricky. Here are a few things to consider...

1) Equipment supports have a difficult job to do. Ideally they should isolate your system from external vibrations so that it can perform optimally, but also act as a ‘sink’ for any internally generated vibrations – say, the effects of a spinning disc or the low-level buzz of a mains transformer. Make sure there’s enough air space around your kit to avoid overheating.

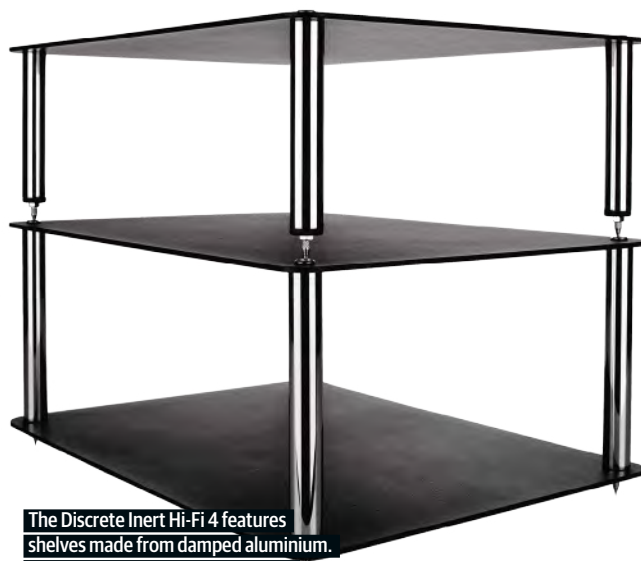
2) Do you need a full-width bench-style rack? Racks come in different sizes and lengths. If you have lots of hi-fi equipment – and the space for it – then a wider rack will suit you better. For those with only a CD player or amplifier there are rack companies who sell half-width versions.

3) Planning for the future? Going for a rack with a modular design is a good halfway house if you have one eye on later system expansion. Assembly may be something to consider in this instance, too – a fussy design could bring frustration – but while another shelf won’t come cheap, it’ll most likely be cheaper than investing in a new rack altogether.

“Racks don’t actively add anything to the sound. They can only allow your system to perform better by controlling resonance and reducing vibrations”



Dedicated AV racks such as Alphason Finewoods FW1350 are not expandable, but they’re big enough to house everything you need



The Discrete Inert Hi-Fi 4 features shelves made from damped aluminium. Custom Design claims this helps to absorb unwanted resonance and increase “noise vibration absorption”

AV & HI-FIRACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	● 4 70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratibase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	● 1 0.4x4.3x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3 60x101x40	4
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	● 4 59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	● 3 42x77x40	4
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	● 3 62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	● 3 Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4 Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4 Variablex59x39.5	8
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3 32x95x40	4
£500-£1000						
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	● 5 Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3 54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	● 3 45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics	3 57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	● 4 Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	● 3 50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	● 2 Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	● 4 Variablex59x47	6
£1000 and more						
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	● 3 65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	● 3 53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2 31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6 VariablexVariablex53	16

Accessories

Best equipment support

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 £450

What is it?

It's a thing of beauty, that's what it is. Kit racks don't generally get an appreciative "ooh" out of the team, but this one did - and that's all down to its ultra high-quality build and materials.

The shelves are made from solid bamboo, and come in three shades - light, medium and a sultry dark, and are set off by the glossy black legs (available in a variety of lengths to suit your kit) and shiny steel cone caps and spikes. Even better, it's modular, too: you can add extra shelves for £150 each - so it can grow as your system does.

Why did it win?

It saw our Cyrus CDi/Roksan Caspian M2 reference system deliver a confident, insightful and hugely enjoyable sound - with punchy bass, nuanced midrange and clear, open top-end.

To find out more:

Visit www.atacama-audio.co.uk

Call 01455 283 251



WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best equipment rack
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

What the team say

"It's pricier than some rivals, but we think it's well worth it for that stellar build quality and materials, not to mention the way it works with our kit"



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level In Outputs
Up to £1500				
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★ Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★ A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★ Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★ Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★ One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★ Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★ Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★ A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★ Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★ This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★ A phono stage that belies its budget price	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★ Decent phono amplifier for a relaxed listen	●	●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr-Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★ Low on frills, high on quality	●		1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★ Best phono stage, Awards 2011	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★ Clarity and punchiness make this a great amp	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★ Just needs a little more excitement to trouble its rivals	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★ For an affordable phono stage, the V-LPS II produces admirable results	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★ Best phono stage, Awards 2012	●		1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★ Best phono stage, Awards 2014	●	●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) _____ These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) _____ Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★ It punches well above its weight - with great results	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★ A Group Test winner with its full bodied and detailed sound	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★ Smooth and balanced, but can be awkward to fit	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★ A great first upgrade cartridge that does much right	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★ Power and dynamics are on tap from this Ortofon	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★ If you want a neutral and analytical cartridge this fits the bill	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★ An easy to fit and fine sounding cartridge	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★ This Rega is a fun listen that does much right	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★ Better then ever - but heftily priced to match	MM	1.9




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The Beats – developed by Monster with the aid of NWA's most famous graduate – are hardly cheap. But these Apple-Store-exclusive headphones are also excellent: they're beautifully finished and very comfortable. Their noise-cancellation circuitry is formidably effective, although they do allow more sound out to the outside world than some rivals. Most crucially, though, they sound absolutely thrilling, with a punchy, deep sound, ample attack and plenty of detail.

VERDICT

There's no marketing gimmickry at work here. These are serious cans – seriously good, that is



With their full-bodied sound, fine build and premium image, the original Beats blazed a new trail in the market

It's coming up to seven years since we first reviewed a pair of Beats headphones. They were called Beats By Dre back then and, despite a five-star rating, we would never have guessed at the seismic impact they would have on the headphone industry.

The combination of excellent marketing, Dre's image and good product set the premium headphone market on fire. Before Beats, the idea of spending almost £300 would have been unheard of for the mass market. Now it's nothing unusual.

Shifting emphasis

Beats also changed the way headphones sound. Their bass-heavy balance has become the norm in every category below the true high-end. But they did many other things as well.

That first model was superbly made and had a premium feel most rivals lacked. They were comfortable too. Add that to a sound that, while it overplayed low frequencies, was still detailed enough to satisfy the purists, and you have a firm foundation for success. How much success? When a company like Apple pays \$3 billion to buy out Beats, it's fair to say a lot.

Unsurprisingly, the brand-new Beats Solo 2s, tested in this issue, don't mess with the original's recipe too much. They remain nicely finished, comfortable and impressive when it comes to bass power and out-and-out attack. The brand's rivals haven't stood still though, matching the Solo 2's quality feel and sonic excitement while delivering superior insight.

It will be interesting to see how the Beats brand develops from here. Headphones will remain core, but we know it is set to branch out to other products such as streaming services. And we can't wait to see how it fares.

Beats' newest pair, the Solo 2s, follow a similar path to that of the originals. See p62 for a full review



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