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Best soundbar £300-600

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AV Forums, **Highly Recommended**
- July 2014



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
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Best soundbar £300-600
Q Acoustics Media 4

"Sensibly priced and sounds fantastic...
delivers the action with great gusto"

What Hi-Fi? Awards 2014,
'Product of the Year' - October 2014



Life in all its rich variety - take a little, leave a little...

It's happened almost stealthily, but the 'convergence' we've all been promised is upon us. Not entirely, admittedly - but this issue shows how you can bring all your diverse sources of music together, without any logistical headaches and without spending an arm and a leg.

At opposite end of the modernity scale, we've a test of **four superb turntables (p57)**, which are arguably still as good a source of music as it's possible to buy, and **five brand-new smartphones (p67)** - most of which can handle high-res audio. These two extremes can both be made equally at home by one of **five brilliantly flexible stereo amplifiers (p77)** we've tested - so your hi-fi system is suddenly ready to deal

with many decades' worth of technological advances. Which is what we've been waiting for.



Simon
Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month



Clearaudio Concept

Group test p58

Beautiful engineering, great looks and a sound of such elegance it's quite humbling.



Sony Xperia Z3

Group test p73

A perfectly good and stylish phone, but more importantly a great source of hi-res tunes.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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



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NEXT MONTH

SUPERTEST SOUNDBARS

Premium speakers promise cinema sound without tears



GROUP TESTS SYSTEMS

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TABLETS

The Android and iOS new breed are here

65IN TVs

Which great big screen is for you?

January 2015 issue on sale 17th December

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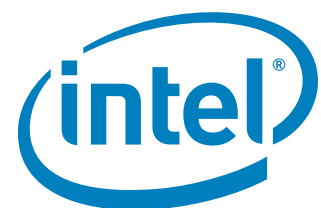
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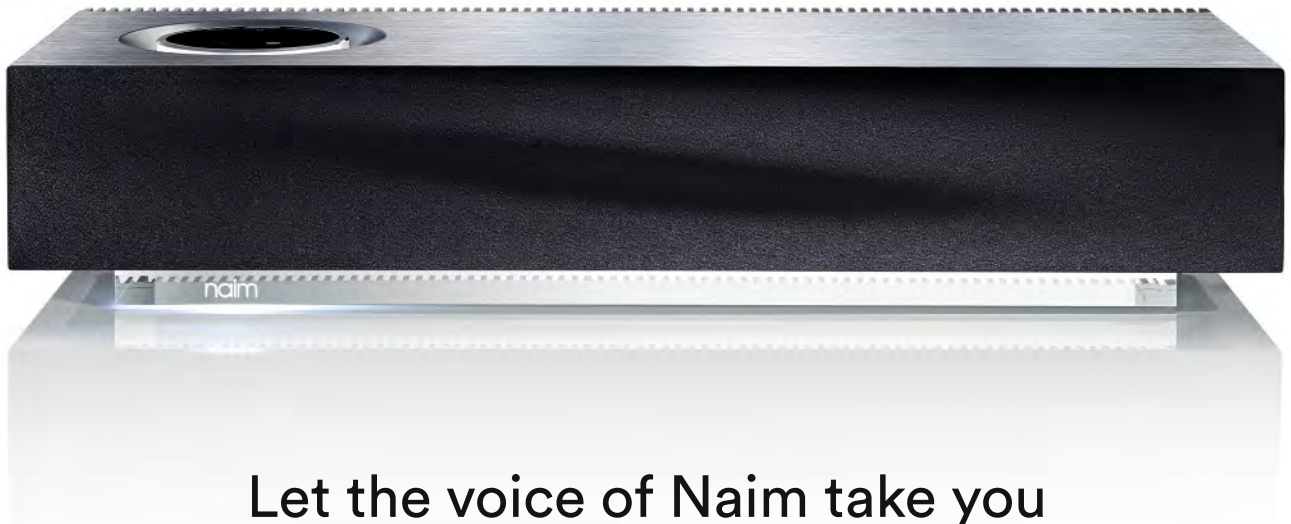


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Go Deeper



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"It's a clash of the smart-
phone titans as to which
comes out on top"



Our products of the month



**Rega RP8/Apheta
Temptation p90**
"We haven't heard a more
detailed or agile-sounding
turntable package at
this price"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



**Apple iPad Air 2
First test p14**
"With an improved screen,
faster performance and
slimmer design, Apple has
made the best tablet in
the world even better"

Verity Burns Multimedia editor



**Sony KD-65S9005B
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"The curved 4K set is a
cut above and sounds
impressive, too."

Andy Madden Reviews editor



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a stylish wireless speaker
that's an absolute treat
to listen to"

Kashfia Kabir Multimedia journalist



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features: a radio fit for kings"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



**Oppo BDP-105D
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spinner that'll play almost
anything. And play it really,
really well."

Becky Roberts Staff writer

Supertest Soundbars

"Despite the arrival of the soundbase, the ever-growing soundbar market seems to have no intention of slowing down"



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First Test
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 Plus save up to 54% on the shop price of *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*

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 The original NAD 3020 is the subject of this month's blast from the past



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

77 Stereo amplifiers Stereo amps are evolving, and for under £500 you can find an amplifier that's a mini-marvel. But which one is best for you?

86 Radios With stylish looks and a bundle of features, radios offer more than they ever had before. Read this round-up to see how far they've come.

90 Temptations Featuring an ambitious turntable from Rega and the immensely likable Darius S1 standmount speakers from Roksan.

98 Playlist Make mine Marvel as *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* returns to TV screens and *Guardians Of The Galaxy* makes its debut on Blu-ray, while singer-songwriter Rumer drops her latest album, *Into Colour*.



Test Turntables
 "The best in this test produce a much more welcoming and finessed sound"



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 ★★★★★☆



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 **p107**
 With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best kit for your cash.



Temptation
 "A wonderfully fluid delivery blending attack, insight and refinement"



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FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**

EXCLUSIVE



AKG Y45BT
£110 **Page 17**
An impressive pair of Bluetooth headphones for the money



Oppo BDP-105D
£1100 **Page 26**
A source that does it all, and in style, for your music and movies



Roth Oli RA1
£100 **Page 28**
Impress with their compact size and confident sound

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Sony gets ahead of the curve with style and substance

Sony KD-65S9005B | 4K Television | £3900

Even if you subscribe to the concept of curved TVs, there's the issue of viewing angle. Sit in just the right spot and it's hard to not be impressed by the extra immersion gained as the screen wraps around you, but sit further back or off to the side and either the effect is lost or the image is distorted.

Panel beater

Sony's cottoned onto this. But also presumably recognises the marketing potential of sexy curves, which is why it's jumped on the bandwagon but with a telly that's far less curvaceous than its rivals (the idea being that the image still draws you in, but there's less of a sacrifice when viewing off-angle or further back).

We're not completely convinced of the benefits. At a fairly normal viewing distance the curve is practically unnoticeable - you may as well be watching a flat telly. We'll admit that viewing angles do seem to be better than most, but it's very hard to tell whether this is thanks to the curve or

simply the result of a good panel. The KD-65S9005B isn't ultra-slim, and it can't match its main rival - the Samsung UE65U8500 - for thin bezels. But it's got a striking look all of its own. The way the gentle curve blends with rounded edges at either side is especially neat, and certainly less divisive than the wedge design of its sister model, the KD-65X9005B.

Those rounded sections at either side of the screen are actually speaker units, and

you'll notice there's no real difference in terms of actual detail. And the Sony has a couple of advantages in terms of contrast and colour. It's a very dynamic picture that combines very dark blacks with pure and punchy whites effectively, and a rich colour palette adds life and vibrancy without ever venturing into the realm of unreality. It makes some rivals look grey and flat in comparison. Once you've run out of 4K content (which will, unfortunately, only

Colours and contrast are the winners here. The Sony KD-65S9005B makes everything seem a little more dramatic and moody, especially the landscapes of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

rather interesting they are too. This is the first Sony TV to process Dolby Digital and DTS signals directly (no downscaling), which it pumps out as virtual surround sound via a built-in 4.2 speaker system. You'll know when you're getting surround sound, because the little horizontal light-strips halfway up each edge glow (unless you've elected to keep them switched off), and also because your soundtrack will sound especially large. You won't quite be fooled into thinking you're surrounded by physical speakers and it's not quite up there with a top Yamaha soundbar, but for a super-neat built-in solution this produces impressively room-filling sound with good weight, punch and nice central focus for dialogue.

Play the ace card

So it sounds very good, but what about the picture? Clearly you're going to go straight to the (unfortunately still small) selection of 4K content on Netflix. Choose *House of Cards* and you're treated to a lovely performance. The level of definition adds an extra degree of three-dimensionality to the image and there's lots of detail.

The Sony looks a touch behind in the sharpness stakes compared to other top 4K TVs we've seen, but pay close attention and

take a few hours) you can switch to the next best source - Blu-ray. As with all 4K TVs, the KD-65S9005B has to upscale even 1080p images to fit its 3840x2160 resolution, and it does so in style. Again the colours and contrast are the real winners here - there might not be quite as much insight into the darkest parts of the picture as you'd get with some rivals, but those darkest parts are extra dark, without any sacrifice in overall punch or vibrancy. It makes everything seem a little more dramatic and moody, especially the landscapes of *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy.

Motion sickness

Sony's motion processing has always been lauded, and it's still strong here. Fast action is clear and controlled, and camera pans are smooth and generally sharp (although there's occasionally just a smidge of blur to tricky horizontal motion).

You can also obviously get your HD fix from the built-in Freeview or satellite tuners, or by connecting a PVR (which the Sony remote can be calibrated to operate), and the performance is excellent here, too. The colourful set of *BBC Breakfast* is punchy enough to knock the sleep out of anyone's eyes. Eventually you'll probably have to drop down to standard definition,



The 'Discover' feature is very good at getting you to content quickly via the standard or mini-remote



Does a fine job of
delivering quality sound
in a portable package

Bowers & Wilkins T7, p31

The rounded sides
at either side of
the screen of the
Sony KD-65S9005B
are actually speaker units



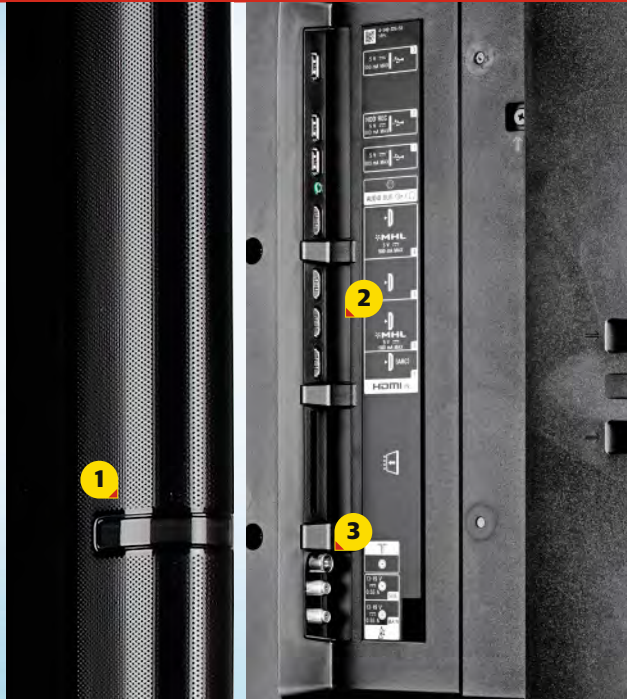
For a full list of specifications and
other useful info visit whathifi.com

In detail...

1 You'll know when you're getting surround sound because the little horizontal light-strips halfway up each edge glow (unless you've elected to keep them switched off, of course).

2 There's a wealth of connections: including four HDMI for high-definition recordings, and the added bonus of USB recordings, too.

3 You can get your HD fix either from the built-in Freeview HD or satellite tuners, or by connecting a PVR (which the Sony's remote control can be calibrated to operate).



which is always a bit of a shame when you've got a 4K TV because it has to do so much scaling to the ropey old signal. Actually the Sony does a decent job here - there's a fair bit of shimmer to thin, straight edges and patterns, but the overall picture is clear and rich. We would still avoid standard-def wherever possible, but it looks good enough when you need it.

Depth charge

The same is true of 3D. We wonder how many people are interested in watching 3D at home, but those who are will be interested to hear that the Sony is a solid 3D performer that on default settings strikes a good balance between the depth of the image and comfort of the eyes.

And as well as the outright performance of the set, Sony has also put some effort into making it more user-friendly than most. The 'Discover' feature is very good at getting you to content quickly: accessed by flicking up on the touchpad of the mini-remote or pressing the dedicated button on the standard zapper, it calls up a row of content up from the bottom of the screen. These might be programs being broadcast right now, on-demand content that's been freshly added to 'Video Unlimited' or BBC iPlayer, or things that

you've recently recorded. The system needs finessing - there aren't enough personal recommendations and it doesn't bring in content from the likes of Netflix (even if you're signed in). But it already gets you to good content quicker than most rivals.

Set for every scenario

Power users like us should also be pleased to hear that the Sony can be set to automatically select the right picture mode ('Scene') for a given source, and that it's pretty intelligent in action.

Watch TV and it will select the 'General' mode, turn on your PS4 and it will switch to 'Game', pop a Blu-ray in (even into the PS4) and it will select 'Cinema'. These modes can be customised, so you've got a system that can be calibrated once for every eventuality and then left to work in the background. Compare that to Samsung, which hides its 'Game' mode in sub-menu after sub-menu (and nowhere near the other picture settings) and you can understand why this might seem a useful feature to many users.

It's thoughtfulness like this and a performance of serious quality that makes the Sony KD-65S9005B a real winner. The curved design is just the pretty packaging it all comes in.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you get the best from the Sony KD-65S9005B



Games console

Sony PlayStation 4 £350 ★★★★★
Plays Blu-ray discs as well as games, so will deliver maximum entertainment.



Set-top box

Sky+HD From £21.50 per month ★★★★★
Standard-def looks okay, but HD movies and sports will look fantastic on the 65in screen.



Streaming Service

Netflix £6 per month ★★★★★
Still the only way to stream 4K video - a must if you're going for a 4K flatscreen.

Total build £4272

TECH SPECS

- Dimensions (hwd, cm) 155 x 90 x 33
- Weight (kg) 42 • HD Ready Yes • Full HD Yes
- Resolution 3840 x 2160 • HDMI 1.3a 4
- Inputs and outputs HDMI In 4 • Component In 1 • RGB Scart In 1 • Composite In 1 • USB In 3 • Phono audio In 1 • Phono audio Out 1 • Digital audio Out 1 • Freesat Yes

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Oodles of detail, brilliant colours and contrast; lovely styling; gets you to content quickly

AGAINST Curve is of debatable value; price

VERDICT Smarter, more stylish and a better performer than the average 4K TV

5(9,(:(5±6 127(6 *(77,1* 72 .12: 7+(621< .' 6 %

1 Out of the box, the Sony is every inch a stunner. Our attention is drawn to the subtly-curved screen and the built-in wrap-around speakers.

2 We're impressed by the Sony's grip on high-def *Champions League* football, and bowled over by *House of Cards* in 4K. Detail and motion are superb.

3 Flatscreens tend to sound pretty average, but the Sony's angled speakers and built-in subs serve up a dynamic, entertaining sound.

4 With our PS4 plugged in and *Destiny* on the go, the Sony proves to be a great set for gaming. The picture's awesome, as is the welcome absence of any lag.

5 The Sony uses active shutter 3D tech to fine effect, but we can't help feeling passive 3D would result in an even smoother, immersive image.

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LG G3



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Now It's All Possible

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Stuff
★★★★★

LG G3, Stuff.tv, 24th June 2014



iPad Air 2 | Tablet | From £400

Thinner Air is most intoxicating

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

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

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

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

A lighter touch

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

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

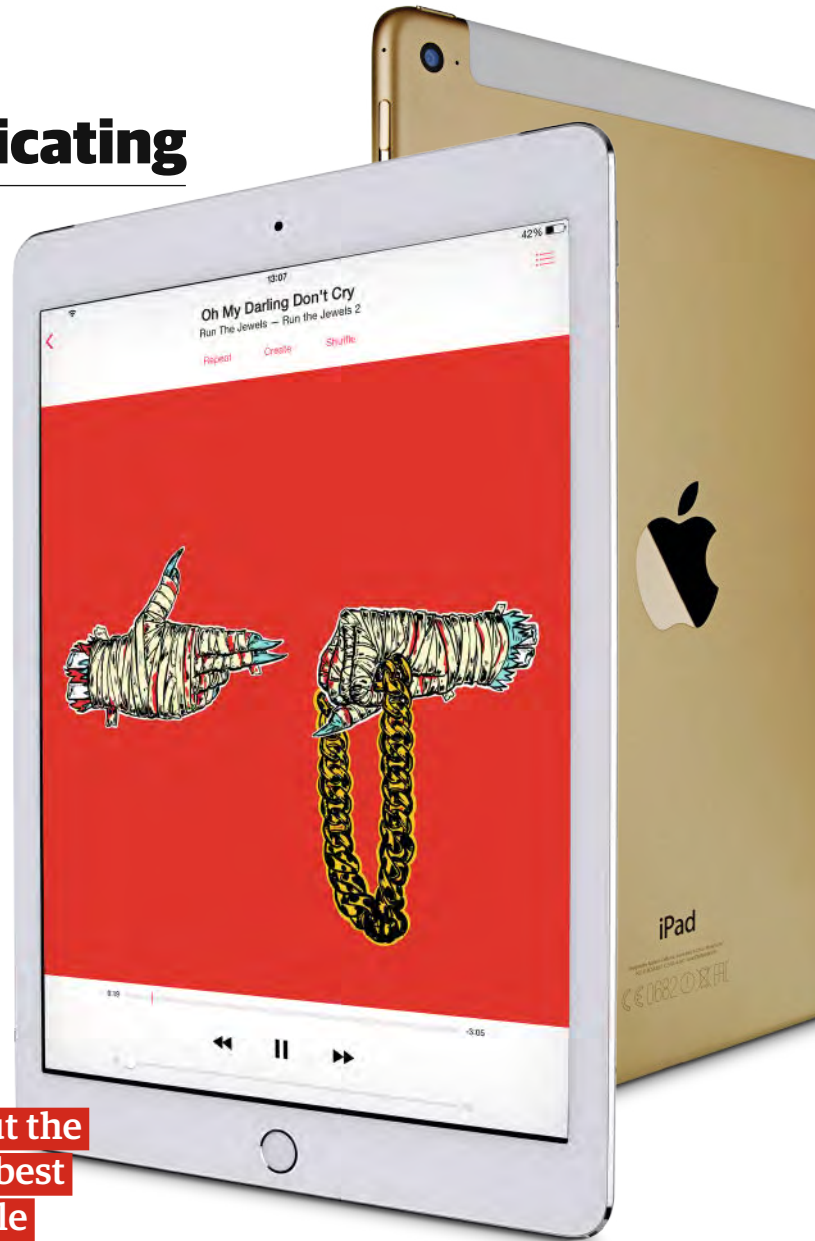
At the heart of the iPad Air 2 is Apple's new A8X processor, which promises to offer 40 per cent faster performance and 2.5x faster graphics. It absolutely delivers. Never

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

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

Sound upgrade

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



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

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

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

New screen construction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



USE IT WITH

Philips Fidelio M1 MKII

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

to expand via microSD, but the 64GB version is now offered for the same price that 32GB was previously. It's something.

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

AGAINST Speaker could be better; unexpandable storage

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

Also consider

iPad Air 1 £320 ★★★★★

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



T7 Bluetooth Speaker with Micro Matrix™ Or in layman's terms, it sounds great.

It has taken Bowers & Wilkins 50 years of acoustic knowhow to make the T7. And thanks to high-resolution streaming via Bluetooth aptX® and an incredible 18 hours battery life you're guaranteed best-in-class performance wherever you are.



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Two-year warranty

Free delivery

Bowers & Wilkins

Bose SoundLink III | Bluetooth speaker | £260

Pay the cost to be the Bose

If you like your music loud and bassy, then the Bose SoundLink III wireless speaker is right for you. This portable Bluetooth speaker marries a premium-quality design with lashings of rich, deep bass.

It's also a far cry from the tinny, weak performance you get from most budget portable speakers, but at this price we'd expect a better quality of wireless speaker anyway.

The Bose features Bluetooth and 14 hours of battery life - a good start. It may not be the most insightful or balanced sound, but there's plenty to like about its weighty performance.

Don't overstate your bass

Play Blackstreet's *No Diggity* and the Bose charges along with energy and muscle. The bass is rich and punchy, it digs deep and there's texture to the rumble. Many will love the Bose's big, warm character - and rightly so. Its smooth presentation means it won't make a fuss over lower-quality Spotify streams, making your Bluetooth streaming sessions a comfortable listen. There are no bright or thin edges, and the sound is satisfyingly large. Make sure you don't place the speaker too close to a wall, though, as it overstates the bass.

There's decent detail: Alice in Chains's distorted guitars have grit and texture, while Beyonce's power ballads fill the room - and with sufficient detail. The Bose goes loud comfortably, too. Voices are direct and clear, although they are at the mercy of the midrange being pushed too far forward.

Fading notes

Admittedly there could be more subtlety and finesse to the Bose's overall performance. The meaty, rich bass is enjoyable, but it can be a bit of overkill at times. Gentle piano notes in particular can sound a little subdued when in the presence of such a brawny, commanding bass. Likewise, the sound could be clearer and have more insight. While Mazzy Star's delicate vocal is prominent in *Fade Into You*, it does sound a little thick through the Bose speaker. Sound can be a bit heavy-



You can connect to the Bose SoundLink III via Bluetooth, or the 3.5mm input

We love the soft feel of the silicone-rubber control buttons on top of the unit

handed at times, too. The drums in SBTRKT's *Wildfire* hit with force, but the impact sounds loose rather than taut. And even as we appreciate the rolled-off treble, we'd like more bite and openness at the top end for songs to truly reach their peak. A touch more breathing space, and the Bose would sound more open and naturally melodic.

As a portable speaker, the Bose keeps it simple: you can connect to the SoundLink III via Bluetooth, or by wiring your music player to the 3.5mm input.

Steel the deal

Pairing with a smartphone is swift and painless, and the speaker responds to volume and track changes, smoothly. The control buttons on the unit itself are also responsive, although they do need a firm push at first. The Bluetooth isn't of the higher-quality aptX variety, but we don't think the Bose speaker has lost anything because of this (a USB port for charging smart devices would've been nice, though).

We've come to expect a certain quality from Bose's wireless speakers, and the SoundLink III doesn't disappoint. There's a premium feel to the steel-grey finish and solid build. We like the heft and sturdiness of the aluminium chassis, the soft feel of

the silicone-rubber control buttons, and the tiny backlit icons that indicate input and battery status - attention to detail that makes it worth its £260 billing.

Despite its sleek appearance, the SoundLink III has a durable design. The speaker is compact enough to slip into a backpack or a large handbag (although it is quite heavy) and it won't scuff easily, making it ideal for portable use. A decent 14 hours of battery life is another plus point (it doesn't take too long to recharge, either).

Coat of many colours

You can accessorise the speaker, while also protecting it from scratches, by slipping on optional soft covers. They come in five different colours, and cost £30 each.

The portable wireless speaker market is very competitive, and the Bose SoundLink III tries to stand out from the crowd. Its substantial, portable build and usability is commendable, as is that rich, bassy sound. It's not quite class-leading but worth an audition for its big and bold performance.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Ample, deep bass; strong vocal performance; weighty sound; goes loud comfortably; excellent build; usability

AGAINST Needs more subtlety and clarity

VERDICT Big, loud bass and excellent build - this energetic Bose is worth a listen

Also consider B&W T7 £300

★★★★★
Clarity, subtle detail and agility: the Bowers & Wilkins T7 (p31) shows how it's done



AKG Y45BT | Bluetooth headphones | £110

Lead off with AKG Bluetooth

Hands up, anyone who has never accidentally tugged at a wire. We look forward to being free of this tethered tyranny, but it seems it's necessary if we want to hold on to our sound quality.

Making a case for the wireless option, though, is AKG and its Y45BT headphones. AKG's Y-series has already shown promise, with the Y50s being named headphone Product of the Year at our 2014 Awards. Will their wireless siblings do as well?

Unassuming on the outside

On the outside, the Y45BTs are fairly unassuming. It's a simple-looking product, which is no bad thing considering the parade of primary colours you see on the street. The understated looks are at odds with the amount of tech packed within.

Much of it is packed onto the right ear-cup alone. There's a smattering of buttons: play/pause, volume up, volume down, and pair/power; near field communication (NFC) speeds up the pairing process too.

There's also a microphone for phone calls, as well as a socket for a cable - you can keep listening even when you're out of power.

Left to charge

Charging takes place on the left ear-cup. Here you'll find a microUSB slot, which lets you charge from any USB source. AKG reckons the battery lasts for eight hours, although, naturally, this will depend on how much you use the headphones.

The headline feature, of course, is Bluetooth. It's a strong, stable connection and we have no complaints about it. Not once did we experience dropouts and the range is good. We wandered approximately 30 metres from our desk without so much as a stutter - so you'll be fine leaving that

smartphone or tablet in your backpack. Furthermore, the Bluetooth is of the aptX variety. Those with compatible sources will benefit from better sound. Speaking of which, the audio performance is very good. We're most impressed by the bass on offer. There's a surprising amount of it,

Bluetooth is a stable connection. The range is good. We wandered approximately 30 metres from our desk, without any dropouts

Build quality is strong. There's a lot of plastic on the Y45BTs, but it's the tough kind

considering the small size (and 40mm drivers) of the headphones. The kick-drum and bassline of Muse's *Panic Station* packs punch.

It's a weighty sound, but never overblown. There's decent tonal balance here, and the Y45BTs never lean too hard on any part of the frequency. The midrange is direct, while the treble is crisp without distortion. We're happy with the level of integration, and there's plenty of detail. Instruments offer enough texture to be distinguished easily. The soundstage is not massive, but it is organised.

Plastic fantastic

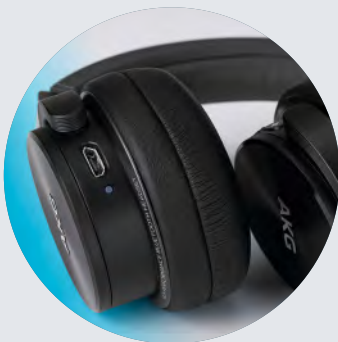
It's not all good news, however. We could do with more subtlety and refinement. The sound is sometimes bright and can make longer listening more taxing than we'd like. Quieter moments reveal a very subtle hiss that's not uncommon among Bluetooth headphones.

In use, the Y45BTs are perfectly pleasant. The buttons are responsive. Pairing is swift. They're comfortable to wear, thanks to soft faux-leather and memory foam in the headband and earcups. They grip without squeezing - we wouldn't recommend headbanging but you could get away with enthusiastic nodding.

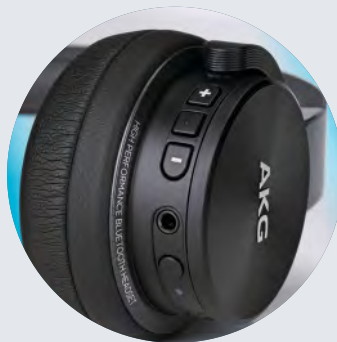
When you're finished listening, they fold up and swivel flat. A small carrying pouch is supplied but they'll happily slip into a pocket. Build quality is strong - there's a lot of plastic but it's the tough, resilient kind that can take a knock or two.

The AKG Y45BTs are not perfect, but they do an impressive job for the money. They're portable, comfortable and well made, and they sound good too. These are well worth investigating.

In detail



Charging takes place on the left ear-cup. Here you'll find a microUSB slot, which allows you charge from any USB source.



All the controls are on the right ear-cup: play/pause, volume up, volume down and pair/power; NFC speeds up pairing, too.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Strong bass for the size; good balance; plenty of features; portable

AGAINST Sound a tad bright

VERDICT Not a stunning pair of Bluetooth headphones, but the AKG Y45BTs are solid-sounding

Also consider Philips Fidelio M2BT £190

★★★★★

A lot more expensive, but a lot better, too



Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2 | Stereo speakers | £450

Cambridge breaks with convention

Instead of tweeters the Aeromax 2s use BMRs to produce a smoother midrange

If you think these are yet another pair of conventional two-way standmounters, think again. There's more going on here than is obvious.

That small driver isn't a tweeter, but a 46mm BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator). BMRs cover a much wider frequency range than conventional alternatives. In the case of the Aeromax 2 that's everything from the highest treble right down to 250Hz. At this point the sound is passed on to what is more a dedicated bass driver rather than a traditional mid/bass unit.

Conventional speakers tend to have the handover between the mid/bass and tweeter between 2-3kHz. This puts the crossover point smack in the middle of where vocals tend to be, and it's exactly the region our hearing is at its most sensitive.

Moving the crossover point

Crossovers invariably introduce all sorts of phase issues and result in a loss of detail. Any way of moving this handover to a frequency where our hearing is less sensitive is a good thing - 250Hz is far



Feed the Aeromax 2s a hard-charging track such as Bruce Springsteen's *Radio Nowhere* and they sound right at home. There's plenty of punch; they pound out the low notes with real authority

preferable to 2.5kHz in this case. A BMR driver makes this possible. The unit used in the Aeromax 2 is a fourth-generation design and is claimed to have a smoother, more even response at higher frequencies than earlier versions. It's mated to a 16.5cm bass driver and linked through a carefully calibrated crossover.

Build quality is good. The cabinet is solid thanks to heavy bracing, and smartly finished with it. Colour options are limited to gloss black or white.

Anywhere's good

These speakers aren't particularly fussy about positioning. We like them best a little into the room, but the combination of taut bass performance and front-firing port means that they sound more comfortable closer to a rear wall than most rivals.

In addition, the excellent dispersion of BMR drivers means that it isn't necessary to play around with toe-in a great deal to get a good stereo image. These speakers are quite happy firing straight ahead, delivering a stable, well defined and precise soundstage while doing so.

Feed the Aeromax 2s a hard-charging track such as Bruce Springsteen's *Radio*

Nowhere and they sound right at home. There's plenty of punch, particularly in the bass, where they pound out the low notes with real authority. They sound confident and composed too; elements stay organised when things get complicated.

There's a wonderful directness with vocals - we've noticed similar traits with other good speakers that have used BMRs. The midrange is well projected and solid. Compare those with more conventional alternatives, and even the best of them - such as B&W's 685 S2s - sound a little indistinct and soft with voices.

You can add a fairly even tonal balance and the ability to play loudly to the list of plus points too. The Aeromax 2s sound far bigger than they are, and deliver a pleasing sense of scale when the music demands.

A question of subtlety

Things aren't perfect though. These Cambridges aren't particularly subtle-sounding. They deliver a decent amount of detail but they never seem to render low-level dynamics with much conviction, so the way a great artist such as Nina Simone uses her voice isn't communicated as well as it could be. Nuances are flattened

and, in the process, some of the emotional engagement is lost.

The way the standmounters latch on to a rhythm track is pretty good, but they could do it with a bit more enthusiasm. Fast-moving tunes such as Michael Jackson's *Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'* sound a little laboured, lacking their usual dose of energy and momentum.

Despite our criticisms we like the Aeromax 2s. Using a single driver across treble and midrange has clear benefits and few rivals sound as confident and large scale. We don't think the 2s are far from challenging the best at this price. They just need just a little more development to help them get there. How about it Cambridge?



USE IT WITH
Marantz PM6005

Our 2014 Awards Best Amplifier up to £400 has the detail and drive to complement the Aeros' authority

Rating ★★★★★

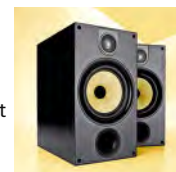
FOR Wonderfully direct and solid through the midrange; bass authority; pleasing scale; build

AGAINST Others communicate low-level dynamics better; could use more rhythmic drive

VERDICT These are fine standmounters but they need honing to challenge the best

Also consider B&W 685 S2 £500 ★★★★★

Our Product of the Year delivers dynamics, insight and rhythm better than any rival we've heard.



Panasonic

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Yamaha RX-A1040 | Home cinema amplifier | £1000

Net gains, Avenge Yamaha

Yamaha's Avenge range of AV amplifiers have thrilled us in recent years with their powerful and immersive surround sound.

The brand new Yamaha RX-A1040 fits into this brawny, muscular mould, but the £1000 seven-channel amplifier isn't quite the resounding success we've come to expect from Yamaha.

Yamaha plays to its strengths: the RX-A1040 is powerful, punchy and energetic. Play *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* on Blu-ray, and the RX-A1040 relishes the chance to flex its muscles. The 7.1 DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack sounds solid and weighty, with special effects whizzing across the room with a great deal of gusto. Explosions are big, loud and pack quite a meaty punch, while gunshots are taut and piercing.

Voice of reason

It's not lacking in detail either, with the zing and clank of metallic objects having plenty of bite. Voices are clear and direct, and the sparkly dialogue doesn't get lost amid frantic action scenes. Switch to a music Blu-ray, and Beyonce's vocals are smooth in her *I Am Yours* live performance, while rhythmically it's snappy and enthusiastic enough to keep us hooked. It might not have the outright finesse and precise cohesion needed for music, but the Yamaha does make it exciting.

What surprises us is just how aggressive the RX-A1040 sounds. Crashes and bangs are delivered with more force than expected - there's a slightly hard edge that makes us wince when the action gets explosive. The piercing top end has a spiky edge, too.

Scale it back

While we've always enjoyed the brawny character of Yamaha receivers, there's always been a great deal of subtlety, a grand sense of scale, and stunningly precise surround steering to go with all that power. It's disappointing, then, that the RX-A1040 isn't quite as immersive, or as open as we hoped.

Special effects jump out at you from all directions, but we can't feel the movement of objects as they travel across the soundfield. Likewise, there's no sense of

wide, expansive openness as the scene moves from a crowded street up to the roof of a skyscraper - it doesn't have the subtlety to reflect the change in scale.

Insightful character

Compare it with the Pioneer SC-LX58 (one of the RX-A1040's direct rivals in this price range), and you will immediately hear how the Yamaha is missing that last ounce of insight that would allow for a more rounded and expressive performance. The Pioneer amplifier is admittedly more expensive at £1400, but its performance is just that much more refined, engaging and flat-out thrilling.

The RX-A1040 unit itself is a solid, sturdy chassis, and the finish (available in either black or titanium) is impeccable. The aluminium fascia is neat and sleek, with control buttons and various inputs hidden away under a panel. The display is crisp and easy to read from a distance.

The auto-calibration system is crucial for setting up the RX-A1040 and optimising its sound according to your speaker package and room acoustics. It's quick and fairly accurate, although we'd encourage you to dive into the manual settings and check the speaker settings to make sure they're correct. If you have a sound level meter at hand to fine-tune the levels, then even better.

Set menu options

The menus are informative and easy to navigate with the included remote. It's responsive and best for changing input, volume and trying out Yamaha's various sound programs, although anyone wanting to use their tablet or smartphone for controls can download Yamaha's AV Controller app. Free for iOS and Android devices, it's a nicely designed interface, with colour icons and graphics to guide your way through all of the RX-A1040's features. It makes streaming from various devices and services much slicker too, although using the physical remote for adjusting volume seems more natural.

The RX-A1040, as expected, is kitted out with an exhaustive list of features. There are a generous eight HDMI inputs and two



The RX-A1040's aluminium fascia is neat and sleek, with control buttons and inputs hidden under a panel.

HDMI outputs, all of which conform to the latest HDMI 2.0 specification to support 4K Ultra HD upscaling as well as 3D films.

Socket to you

Don't worry if you haven't upgraded your AV system to include HDMI yet, as Yamaha offers a full complement of analogue sockets, including five composite and three component inputs.

An MHL input lets you play HD content from Android devices, while Apple users can play music using the front panel USB port (it will charge the device too). You can also play hi-resolution files (24-bit/192kHz) stored on a USB stick or flash drive. No amplifier is complete

System builder total build £5445

Projector

BenQ W1400 £1000 ★★★★★

You will need big-screen entertainment to go with that brawny amp, and this Award-winning projector delivers an immersive experience.



Blu-ray player

Panasonic DMP-BDT700 £500 ★★★★★

Award-winning premium player that delivers a natural, crisply-detailed and punchy picture with all Blu-ray films. Smart features, too.



Speaker package

KEF R100 5.1 £2850 ★★★★★

A stunning speaker package that looks gorgeous and sounds even more enthralling - the powerful dynamics and subtle details are jaw-dropping.





We'd always recommend a dedicated stereo amp for music, but the Yamaha's warm, solid sound is well suited to streaming lower-quality songs from a smartphone or laptop

without streaming features, and the inclusion of Spotify Connect, Napster and vTuner internet radio ensures you will have hours of new music to discover. DLNA-certification means you can play music libraries stored on a laptop or NAS box over your home network - while iOS users can stream their tunes wirelessly using AirPlay.

The cost of convenience

We'd always recommend a dedicated stereo amp if you're playing music, but the Yamaha's warm, solid sound is well suited to streaming songs (especially of lower quality) from a smartphone or laptop.

If you want the convenience of Bluetooth, however, you will have to plug in a separate YBA-11 receiver (which costs around £50). You can connect to your home network using the built-in wi-fi or wired ethernet - both proved stable - while there's

another way to connect to your network: simply plug your Apple device into the USB port and transfer its wi-fi settings to the Yamaha amplifier. It's neat and fast, and means you don't have to faff about with the set-up menu.

Falls down on surround

The RX-A1040 is great in every other respect - features, design, use - so it's annoying that the one thing it is supposed to excel in, surround sound, is what holds it back from five stars.

There's no need for that jarring, aggressive tone, and we miss the gleefully grand scale that's usually apparent in Yamaha receivers regardless of their price or position in the Aventure range.

However, we don't want to end on a downbeat note, as the amount of power, punch and boundless energy behind the RX-A1040's sound is commendable. But it's

not the class-leading performance you'd expect at this price. It might be a more affordable option than its main rival, the Pioneer SC-LX58, but we'd probably kick ourselves for not handing over the extra cash for the SC-LX58, for it offers a more thrilling and satisfying cinematic performance. Give the Yamaha RX-A1040 an audition, though. Its beefiness of sound and numerous features means it's still a good, if not great, AV receiver.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Loud and punchy performance; muscle and attack; full of detail; excellent features

AGAINST Could do with more subtlety and refinement; not immersive enough

VERDICT A well-featured receiver full of power, but not quite the thrill we hoped for

Also consider

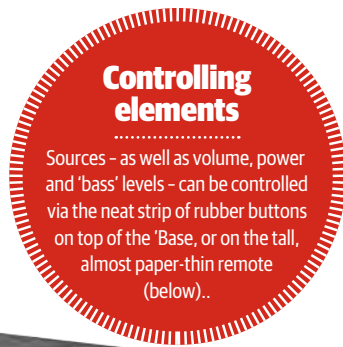
Pioneer SC-LX58
£1400 ★★★★★

Its powerful steering of surround effects and beautifully balanced and subtle sound is unbeatable in this class.



Otone SoundBase | **Soundbase** | £130

Boost your TV's sound on a budget



Controlling elements

Sources - as well as volume, power and 'bass' levels - can be controlled via the neat strip of rubber buttons on top of the 'Base, or on the tall, almost paper-thin remote (below)..



If it's not the Otone SoundBase's cheap price that catches your eye first, it'll be its strikingly snazzy image. Soundbases aren't particularly exotic-looking products, but the Otone's sparkly, pyramid-studded front garners some interest. Comparable to an emo's belt, it somehow invites you to run your fingers along it, and would jazz up most home cinema set-ups, no mistake.

Two and one

Tilt the box towards the light and you can just about make out two 5cm drivers hidden behind that grille. Flip it upside down and you'll see that bass is taken care of by a single 7cm woofer.

Analogue- and digital-friendly, it houses a pair of RCA plugs and an optical input for hooking up to a telly, while the Bluetooth spec comes in handy for wirelessly playing music from a smartphone. That's the 'Base' part - now onto the 'Sound'.

Even a modestly priced soundbar should produce a noticeable improvement over a TV speaker, and the Otone duly obliges. Its presentation is significantly weightier than the aforementioned Sony TV's - more solid-sounding and open too.

We play *Percy Jackson: Sea Of Monsters* through both, but only the soundbase lets

Otone has managed to give its SoundBase a certain visual appeal, but it suffers in other areas



In detail

The Otone's rubber-ended feet allow space for a 7cm woofer, fitted underneath the unit, to fire the lowest frequencies downwards

If getting more volume from your movies is a factor in investing in a soundbase, know that the Otone goes substantially loud, yet you don't need to hit the high numbers to hear dialogue

The chassis' smooth, wood-effect finish looks beyond its price tag, but build quality leaves much to be desired - the cabinet's a little rough around the edges, and the vinyl wrap actually started peeling away during our time with it. Upon closer scrutiny, we realised its slightly raised rubber-ended feet weren't all fixed on straight. We don't expect a luxurious build from a budget soundbase, but the Otone aches for more care.

Any size you like

Our reference 40in Sony TV is a perfect fit for the Base, though any model with a stand less than 65cm wide and 32cm deep will be suitable. Otone claims it can take up to 80kg, so you shouldn't have to worry about mounting a large TV on it.

the film's bassy elements manifest. A 'Bass' mode emphasizes lower-end frequencies, but makes the whole presentation a little boomy. We'd leave it off.

Loud and clear

If getting more volume from your movies is a factor in investing in a soundbase, know that the Otone goes substantially loud, yet you don't need to hit the high numbers to hear dialogue. Voices are well-projected, even if they do carry hints of sibilance.

The Otone's real issue lies with dynamics and detail. Skip to the boat fight with arch-enemy Luke, and the orchestral score's brisk, yo-yoing dynamics come across as rather dull and lifeless. Inconsistent with the lively on-screen action, its overly safe

delivery simply fails to add anything to the scene's tense atmosphere.

The Otone SoundBase starts out well with a fresh and striking design, but ends up being rather average. While expectations are fairly low at this price bracket (it's by far the cheapest soundbase we've seen to date), the Otone doesn't rustle up the detail or dynamic know-how to meet them. Whether it's a soundbase or a soundbar, there are better options out there vying for your investment.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent volume levels; an improvement on most TVs' sound; low price

AGAINST Shabby build; sound lacks detail; flat dynamics; midrange has slight sibilant edge

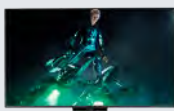
VERDICT A neat design, but more thought needs to go into sound and build, even at £130

System builder Total build £580

Television

Polaroid 5-42-LED-14 £370
★★★★☆

A competitively-priced 42in TV with a sharp, vivid screen and decent smart features.



Blu-ray player

Philips BDP3380 £80
★★★★☆

A punchy, detailed picture and user-friendly interface. The Polaroid will make up for the lack of features.



Also consider

Cambridge Audio TV2 £200

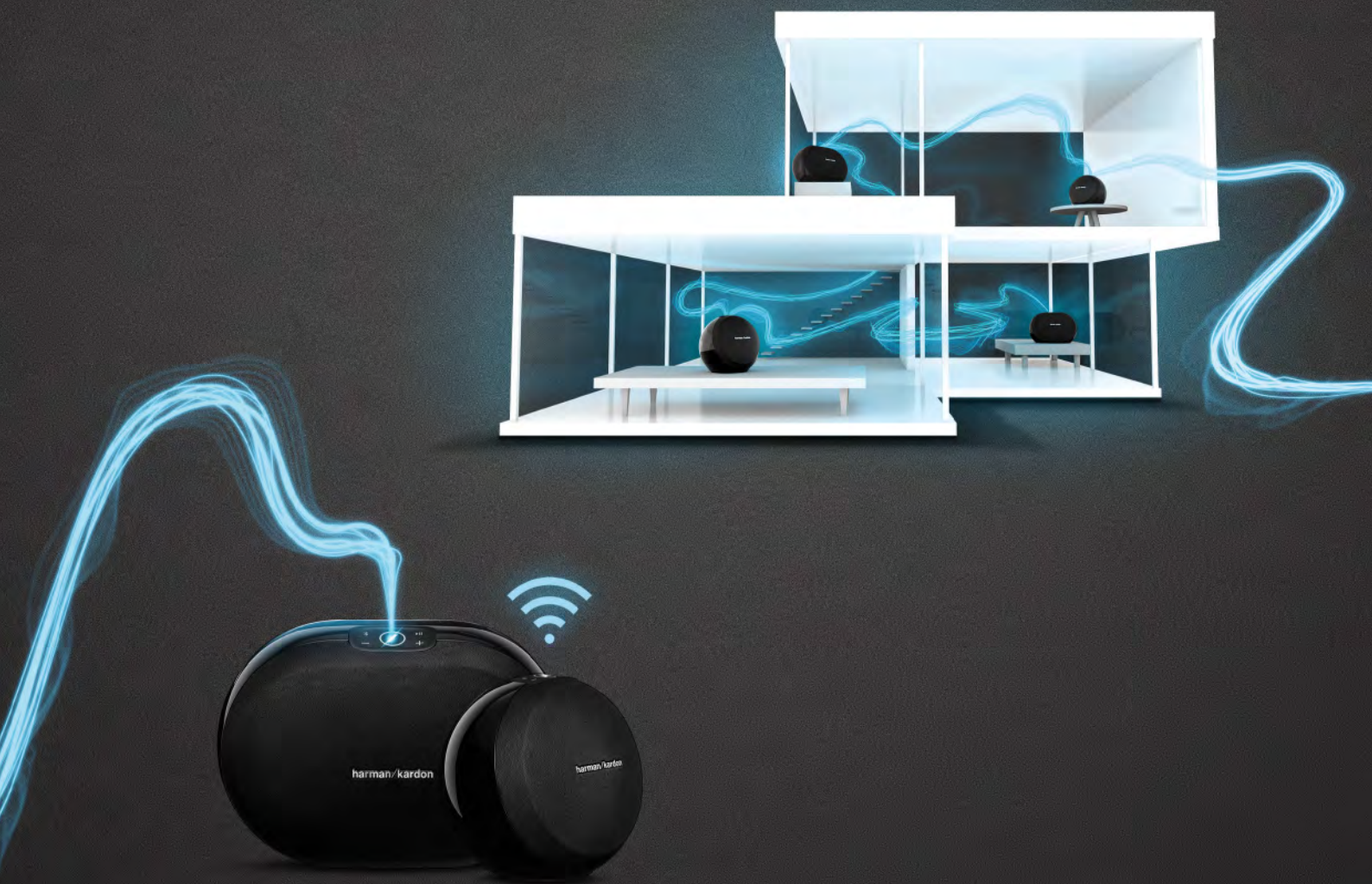
★★★★★

Rich, dynamic and balanced - a near-perfect option for boosting your TV's sound

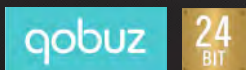


All your music in all your rooms, wirelessly.

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and wireless play with the touch of a button.



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Wireless HD Audio System

Sony NWZ-A15 | Portable music player | £170

Low-cost, high-res music has arrived

High resolution is the audio fledgling that hasn't quite found its momentum yet. One of its obstacles is the prohibitive price of music and equipment, so we're pleased to see Sony bring its latest Walkman out at the lower end of the market.

The NWZ-A15 is an entry-level music player, offering high-res goodness for £170. While it cannot match premium rivals on performance and build, it's a good place to start your resolution revolution.

For the money we wouldn't expect many bells and whistles, and the NWZ-A15 is a suitably dedicated device. That means no wi-fi, and no apps. Fancy some Spotify streaming or Miracast/DLNA action? You're in the wrong neighbourhood.

NFC (Near Field Communication), FM radio and aptX Bluetooth is about as fancy as the feature list gets. The screen - 2.2 inches, 320 x 240 pixels - only functions as a display and offers no touch capability.

On the button

You control the Walkman using physical buttons - remember those? A diamond-shaped directional pad adorns the front, with enter/play/pause at its centre.

The design is a matter of function over form. That textured aluminium face makes a good first impression, but the matte finish on the back and sides looks and feels a little cheap. We find ourselves missing the luxury of the flagship Sony NWZ-ZX1, even though it costs £380 more.

At least it's tiny. Sony currently claims the A15 is the world's smallest and lightest high-resolution music player, which isn't hard to believe. Measuring 109 x 44 x 9mm and weighing only 66g, this thing will disappear into your pocket without issue.

Loading music onto the Walkman is a matter of dragging and dropping files from your computer. The internal 16GB fills up



You won't find many features adorning the NWZ-A15, but it scores where it matters

quickly, but you can just insert a microSD card. File compatibility includes MP3, WAV, AIFF, WMA, AAC, HE-AAC, FLAC and ALAC. The NWZ-A15 does not decode DSD files.

Finding your content from the main menu is easy enough, although the 'Back' key provides an easy escape if you do take a wrong turn. It feels a little archaic, and not entirely intuitive - especially after being spoiled by lovely touchscreens.

Customise the sound

In the music playback screen, the options menu gives you many ways to mess with the sound as well as some bizarre offerings limited to non-high-res tracks. We'd recommend tinkering with the various EQ settings and sound modes, but we're essentially happy with the default sound.

We're impressed by the agile, energetic audio performance of this diminutive device. We start jamming with Bob Marley's *Could You Be Loved* and it's an insightful listen. The Walkman shows off all manner of texture, from the obvious drumming and guitar picking to the subtle cuíca, played by rubbing a wet cloth on a stick.

Tonal balance is good, with no undue emphasis on any part of the frequency range. It's a lean sound, which helps with agility, but it never oversteps into thinness.

Timing and dynamics

Our recent experience with Sony portables has led us to expect regimented precision, but the A15 doesn't quite tick that box. Instruments are well organised and clearly positioned within an accurate soundstage, but timing isn't as taut as we'd like. There's also the issue of dynamics, which we'd like to be more expressive.

Ultimately it comes down to this: if you want the very best in sound quality and features, the A15 isn't what you're looking for. But if you're not after flashy features and merely want to dip your toe into the high-resolution water of portable music, this is a good place to start.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lots of detail; small size; expandable memory; excellent build and finish; easy to use

AGAINST Could do with better timing and greater dynamics; uninspiring design

VERDICT This pared-down player is a good way to get into high-resolution music

Also consider Sony Xperia Z3

★★★★★

Now supporting high-res music, this smartphone sounds warm, punchy, detailed and wonderfully spacious



In detail



Make the connection There's a standard data/charging port and 3.5mm headphone port on the base



Card accepted Sony gives the NWZ-A15 16GB of internal storage, but you can add a microSD card for more



Physical controls The play/pause button sits centrally inside a diamond-shape pad on the front

A2

24h



360° sound

MADE TO MOVE

Powerful, portable and Bluetooth-enabled, BeoPlay A2 is the social speaker designed to travel with you. It's True360 omni-directional sound, the whole day long.

See the full collection at [BEOPLAY.COM/A2](https://beoplay.com/A2) | **B&O PLAY** by **BANG & OLUFSEN**



Oppo BDP-105D | Blu-ray player | £1100

A price that's well worth paying

In today's market spending £1100 on a Blu-ray player seems awfully steep. After all, you can buy a truly accomplished machine like our newly crowned Product of the Year, the Sony BDP-S7200, for just over £200. Can this high-end Oppo justify the additional expense? On initial acquaintance we weren't so sure, but after having spent some time with the BDP-105D our opinion has changed markedly.

First of all, it would be wrong to call this just a Blu-ray player. Unlike some upmarket machines, it matches the wide-ranging feature-set of most mainstream players, but takes the opportunity to add a couple of extras for hardcore audio and video fans.

Playing the standards

Alongside the standard disc trio of Blu-ray, DVD and CD, the BDP-105D will also play SACDs and DVD-Audio discs. While the likes of SACD and DVD-Audio are hardly mainstream formats, they are good ways of getting a high-resolution music signal into your system, and that can't be a bad thing.

As has become common, the Oppo has smart functionality: it'll deliver Netflix, YouTube and BBC iPlayer among others and can stream high-resolution music files (up to 24-bit/192kHz) across a home network.

We're impressed with the BDP-105D's connectivity. It feels as if Oppo has tried to cover all bases. There's an ample supply of type A USBs (three), HDMI (MHL-compatible inputs along with a pair of outputs) as well as the usual digital audio of optical, co-ax and (type B) USB. The optical and coax are limited to 96kHz sampling rates, while the USB accepts 192kHz.

DAC's a good one

Digital inputs on a product such as this are only really useful if the on-board DAC is a good one - and it is. The design uses high-quality ESS Sabre DAC chips, as found on Audiolab's hugely-talented £600 M-DAC as well as pricier digital products.

There's no shortage of analogue outputs, either. Alongside single-ended and (the better sounding) balanced XLR stereo connections, you'll find increasingly rare multi-channel audio outputs designed for use with older receivers that don't have

HDMI inputs, or can't cope with SACD or DVD-Audio signals through them.

This Oppo impresses straight out of the box. It's a big, solid unit that, while not pretty, gives off a bold, purposeful aura. It feels like a luxury piece of kit, making cheaper alternatives seem insubstantial. The front-panel controls are nicely responsive, even if the display isn't quite as informative as we'd like. Want to know the sampling rate of the piece of music you're streaming? Good luck with that.

The remote is a similarly substantial unit. It's chunky, positive in use and backlit. We wish more manufacturers would add backlighting to their remotes. It makes a big difference in a darkened room. We like this handset, even if its layout is a touch busy.

Blu sky thinking

Blu-ray performance seems as good a place to start as any, and here the BDP-105D excels. We love its picture performance. Oppo has added a DARBEE processing function with a view to letting the user fine-tune the image to taste. We played with it for a while and decided we liked the picture better without the additional processing, so left it alone.

The Oppo's picture doesn't need much help in any case. Watch the likes of *Pacific Rim* and it's hard not to be impressed by the crisp detailing and richly textured colours. Every edge is precisely drawn, but not so much that it looks unnaturally sharp. The dimly lit fight scenes show off the player's impressive insight into blacks and strong contrast performance. There's plenty of punch to brights, but this stops short of glare and exhibits a pleasing degree of subtlety when required. Every aspect of



In detail

1 Home work

Get connected to your home network and stream high-resolution music files through the Oppo's wired ethernet connection.

2 Two of a kind

Twin HDMI outs gives you the option of feeding your amp and display separately, for optimum performance.

3 Back to the future

Alongside single-ended and

balanced XLR stereo connections, you'll find multi-channel audio outputs for use with older receivers that don't have HDMI inputs, or can't cope with SACD or DVD-Audio signals.

4 Take a sample

For owners of high-resolution audio files, both the optical and coaxial digital inputs are limited to 96kHz sampling rates, so if you're using 192kHz files, you will need to use the USB input.



System builder total build £8150

Projector

Sony VPL-HW55ES £2800 ★★★★★

Top-quality projector from Sony. Delivers loads of detail, natural colours and strong contrast. Smart menus make it a pleasure to use.



Amplifier

Pioneer SC-LX58 £1400 ★★★★★

A terrific performer: an agile and insightful sound that lacks nothing in punch, dynamics or drive. There's finesse here, too.



Speaker package

KEF R100 5.1 £2850 ★★★★★

A speaker package that has been the class leader for a number of years now. No rival we've heard betters its cohesion, integration or insight.



Roth Oli RA1 | Stereo speakers | £100

Olé all the way for RA1

A matt-black finish and the curves that wrap around the cabinet give a smart appearance

Calling speakers 'bookshelf' is fine and dandy until it comes to actually finding them a home. Some are only fit for shelves that are as deep and tall as an old-school 36in CRT TV.

But the Roth Oli RA1s are the real deal. At only a millimetre over 23cm tall, 15cm wide and 15cm deep, you will be doing well to find a bookshelf these little beauties can't sit on, or a desk space they can't squeeze into.

Given the asking price, they're nicely enough designed. Okay, so the RA1s don't feel particularly solid, but the matt-black finish (white is also available) looks smart, so too do the curves that wrap around the top and bottom edges of each cabinet. It's nice to get our hands on something at this level that doesn't look cobbled together with a few pieces of chipboard and a couple of tacks.



Bouncing off the walls

The Roths are a two-way design: each speaker features a one-inch silk dome tweeter and rather petite, four-inch fibreglass hybrid mid/bass driver. The two run-of-the-mill speaker terminals on the back of each speaker are joined by a small bass port and wall mount. Each speaker slots onto a screw-in bracket supplied in the box.

Just as you'd want from a speaker at this price and size, the Oli RA1s aren't too fussed when you place them against a rear wall. If anything, the compact cabinets thrive on

Terminals on the back of the speaker are joined by a small bass port and wall mount, with a bracket supplied



Play Drake's *Take Care* and the Roths jump into action - the opening exchanges are rhythmic and tightly controlled

the proximity - the inclusion of a rear bass port helps to reinforce low frequencies and give them a greater sense of impact compared to when they're placed out in the open.

Comes out fighting

Play Drake's *Take Care* and the Roths jump into action - the opening exchanges are rhythmic and tightly controlled. As Drake's vocal and the percussion kick in, there's an impressive sense of weight and drive to the track - the powerful bassline acts as a solid foundation and the Roths produce just enough low-frequency heft for the listener to feast on.

Faced with the Foo Fighters' *My Hero*, the RA1s rock out with impressive detail and dynamics. Drum kicks and guitar riffs are tight and attacking, with plenty of expression and emotion coming across from Dave Grohl's vocal. The Roths also possess enough dexterity to cope with a shift in pace to tracks that demand a more delicate, gentle approach.

You just need to take a little bit of care when cranking up the volume - the Roths harden and brighten up ever-so slightly when they're stressed, but this only creeps



USE IT WITH Denon D-M39 DAB

You can buy this micro-system with, or without speakers. Add the RA1s instead and you've a great set-up.

in when the volume moves towards anti-social. Otherwise they conjure up a decent sense of scale and show impressive weight and authority, all the more impressive given their small dimensions.

Skills to pay the bills

If both space and budget are tight, or if you're looking to upgrade the speakers supplied with an ageing micro-system, then the Oli RA1s have the size and sonic skills to fit the bill.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Compact size makes them versatile; decent looks; dynamic and rhythmic sound

AGAINST Mids and highs harden when pushed

VERDICT For the money, you can't really grumble - the Roth Oli RA1s impress with their compact size and confident sound quality

Also consider

Q Acoustics 2010i
£130 ★★★★★

A high-quality pair of budget speakers, capable of great finesse, detail and dynamics.



BLUESOUND

HIGH-RES MUSIC MULTI-ROOM WIRELESS

NODE
/ Wireless
/ Multi-room
/ Streaming
/ Music Player



VAULT
/ Network
/ Multi-room
/ Streaming
/ Music Player
/ FLAC CD Ripper
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AWARDS 2014

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system £500+
Bluesound

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Libratone DIVA is a 225W complete TV soundbar and wireless music system with built-in subwoofer in one sleek, integrated solution that will enhance your Christmas Day viewing & listening pleasure.

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Bowers & Wilkins T7 | Wireless speaker | £300

Class-leading portable carries the day

It's almost a surprise that a speaker company as renowned and as popular as Bowers & Wilkins doesn't already have a Bluetooth speaker in its increasingly broad range of products. Well, now it does, in the shape of the B&W T7, its first portable Bluetooth wireless speaker.

B&W's Zeppelin Air, A5 and A7 wireless AirPlay speakers led the way in their respective price categories for Apple users wanting wireless music. Now the T7 wants to do the same for portable Bluetooth speakers, opening B&W up to an audience of Android and other device users (and, of course, Apple).

Thoughtful design

The T7 speaker looks like a B&W product. There's a premium look, and an obvious design flourish which helps set the speaker apart. This is mainly thanks to the Micro Matrix design, which makes for a transparent frame around the main bulk of the speaker, creating a neat honeycomb effect. It's designed to improve the sound by making a solid, resonance-free structure. It also looks smart, twinkling when it catches the light.

At 950g it's light enough to be portable and fit in a bag, yet still feels more solid and robust than you might think when you first pick it up (although it will wobble on its 4cm-deep base given too strong a prod).

On the top edge you'll find four control buttons which let you pair, play/pause and adjust the volume, and there's a blue LED to one side, which shows when you're paired.

Around the back there's a power socket and aux input for non-Bluetooth devices. There's no USB connection for charging your device as you find on some rivals, but we think that's very much a bonus rather than a necessity.

B&W told us the aptX codec was a must to ensure the T7 could achieve the Bluetooth sound quality the company wanted, so that's present and correct.

Quick hook-up, long playing time

We connect a variety of Apple and Android devices without problem, as well as a MacBook Pro. B&W claims 18 hours of playback (75 per cent volume, rock music) - but suggests you should get much longer, anything up to 40 hours, at lower volume and/or with speech radio. We comfortably get more than 24 hours music playback.

The specs are solid, the features more than sufficient. But what really matters is the sound quality. And at £300 it needs to be good. Thankfully, we're impressed. The B&W T7 sound is an easy, pleasurable listen that does a fine job of delivering high-quality sound in a portable package.



The specs are solid, the features more than sufficient. But what really matters is the sound - at £300 it needs to be good. Thankfully, the T7 does a fine job of delivering high-quality audio

Streaming lossless FLAC files from our aptX-enabled Sony Xperia Z3, music is detailed, nicely balanced and musical. *It Ain't Hard To Tell* from Nas' remastered *Illmatic XX* album has a solid, punchy bass that gets your head nodding, plus clear vocals to help deliver an open, relatively spacious sound from a small speaker.

Realism and rhythm

Instruments sound natural and realistic, with impressive dynamics ensuring notes stop and start punctually, helping to give the sound plenty of attack and rhythm.

Play Bob Marley's *Waiting in Vain* and though some rivals might deliver more bass, it won't sound as tight as it does on the T7. There's no flappiness, no loss of composure at loud volume - instead the T7 doles out bass weight when it's required. And it does go pretty loud. The Loewe Speaker 2Go goes louder and sounds a bit bigger but is never as organised or musical.

USE IT WITH

Sony Xperia Z3

A great big-screen smartphone that also offers aptX Bluetooth.



The T7's honeycomb Micro Matrix design aims to create a solid, resonance-free unit



Play something a little brighter and edgier, such as Metallica's *Until It Sleeps*, and the T7 faithfully delivers the recording's raw flavour. You can, though, push the speaker closer to a wall to take the edge off a little and fill out that bottom end.

The B&W T7 is at the upper limit of what we'd expect most people would be prepared to pay for a compact portable wireless speaker, and beyond it for some. But if you value sound quality, as of course we do, and you've got the budget for it, this really is money well spent.

The T7 looks the part, does everything you'd expect a Bluetooth speaker to do, and sounds comfortably better than any such product we've heard at the price. Bowers & Wilkins has entered the market in style.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Looks good; impressive battery life; easy to use; detailed, musical sound

AGAINST No USB charging facility

VERDICT B&W's first Bluetooth effort looks good and sounds great - a genuinely portable speaker that justifies its premium price

Also consider

Loewe Speaker 2go £230 ★★★★★

Big, powerful sound and charges your phone, too - but lacks the clarity and subtlety of the T7.

CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE BEST

The 2014 What Hi-Fi? Awards was the biggest yet. This year's Oscars of the hi-fi industry, held at the London Hilton on Park Lane, presented 99 Best Buy winners over an unprecedented 24 categories.

Every winner is a class-leader - and the 24 Products of the Year represent the pinnacle of their category. That's a lot of pinnacles - which is even better for you, because it means there's a ton of great kit out there for you to fill your house with...



Headphones

Best portable on-ears up to £100

AKG Y50 £80

What is it?

It's a pair of portable cans that put design and sound quality on an equal footing - and they're all the better for it. Don't be fooled by the looks (something of a departure for AKG, it has to be said) - these pack both style and substance. They are premium from start to finish, with aluminium ear-cups (which house hefty 40mm drivers), comfy leather ear-pads and a neat folding mechanism.

Why did it win?

The fact that they outperform many pricier competitors while still only costing £80 doesn't hurt. And neither does the level of that performance: the Y50s combine balance, insight and space with the kind of punch, rhythmic ability and downright listenability that almost forces toes to start tapping.

To find out more:

Visit uk.akg.com

Call 01707 278 113

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But that's not to say that they can't do subtle, too. The Y50s handle orchestral music with the poise of a top conductor - revealing startling amounts of detail and openness. They're a top pair of headphones.

What the team say

"The Y50s don't put a foot wrong. Don't be fooled by the design: it's just a smokescreen for what is another pair of great-sounding AKG headphones"

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 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"

Stereo speakers

Best floorstanders £1200+ Spendor A6R £2500

What are they?

Revamping an already successful product is always a risk - but for Spendor, this update of the Award-winning A6 speakers has paid off big-time. Visually there isn't a lot of difference - but the innards have been overhauled, and include a new 18cm mid/bass driver and re-engineered crossover.

Why did they win?

Because their performance is exceptional. They're surprisingly deep and punchy for their size, and that provides a solid foundation for the expressive midrange and refined, detailed treble. It all sits together into a really coherent whole, too - there are no sharp edges, and no unbalanced honks or booms.

And if dynamic clout floats your aural boat, then you're in for a treat. The original A6s were no slouches

in this department, but the A6Rs take that ability to a whole new level - doing a great job of contrasting bombastic choruses with nuanced, detailed verses.

Best of all, they're completely unflusterable, whether they're fed full-on classical pieces or weird, on-beat/off-beat fusion.

The A6Rs are a splendid pair of speakers that manage to do a heck of a lot exactly right. Give them an audition and you'll be left in no doubt as to where your money will be going...




What the team say

"The A6Rs show another level of dynamic attack. They keep a strong grip on bouncing basslines, with a low end that's both punchy and agile..."

To find out more:

Visit spendoraudio.com

Call 01323 843 474

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Future tech

2014: The year in tech

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

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

Multi-room mania

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

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

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

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

Upping the resolution ante

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

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

A GOOD YEAR FOR...

Multi-room systems, lossless audio and vinyl



A BAD YEAR FOR...

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





* Marantz's new HD-DAC1

The company has introduced its first high-end headphone amp – complete with integrated DAC. It's now available for £680. <http://whfcm/MarantzHD-DAC1>

Audio-Technica's MSR7

After new over-ear headphones that get the best out of high-res audio? Audio-Technica claims its £200 MSR7 cans will do just that. <http://whfcm/ATH-MSR7>



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

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

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

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

Small screen, big definition

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

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

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

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

The spinner takes it all

Not new, but an honourable mention nevertheless to the

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

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

But it's not all good news...

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

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

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

Back to the future

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



TOP 5 New launches

Amazon Fire TV, B&O wireless speaker, Pure radio, Dynaudio, and Google Nexus

Timeline

2014 review: Tech year in headlines

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

January

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

February

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

March

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

April

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

May

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

June

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

July

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

August

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

September

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

October

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



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



*** Denon DA-10**

The DA-10 headphone amplifier supports high-res and DSD files and can upscale low-res files too. Its rechargeable battery means it's portable too. It's yours for £280. <http://whfcm/DenonDA10>



1 Amazon Fire TV £80

The Amazon Fire TV is finally available in the UK. If you want a set-top box for apps and services, but don't want to partake in Apple or Sky's offerings, it could be the one for you. It provides access to services such as BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Spotify, as well as Amazon Instant Video. It's also said to have three times the processing grunt of the Apple TV and can be controlled via voice too. 1080p video playback and Advanced Streaming and Prediction (ASAP) technology also feature. For more information, head to <http://whfcm/AmazonFireBox>.

1

TOP 5 New launches



2

2 B&O BeoPlay A2 £300 Just as B&W has released its first portable wireless speaker, B&O has done the same with the BeoPlay A2. It supports aptX Bluetooth for wireless streaming and also features 180W of power with True360 omni-directional dispersion, plus a claimed 24-hour battery life. Want to know more? <http://whfcm/BandOA2>



3

3 Pure Evoke D6 £180

The Evoke D6 features Bluetooth connectivity as well as FM, DAB and DAB+ tuners. Two forward-firing speakers can be found on the front of the oak veneer casing. A 20W amplifier powers the Evoke D6 and it also comes with an auxiliary

input, two alarms and a touch sensitive SnoozeHandle. For more information: <http://whfcm/EvokeD6>

4 Dynaudio Focus XD from £4500

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



4

5 Google Nexus 6 and Nexus 9 £tbc

Google is the last major smartphone and tablet producer to unveil its latest wares. Along with the latest edition of the Android OS, the Motorola-made Nexus 6 features a 6in Quad HD screen, 2.7GHz processor and 13MP camera. The HTC-made Nexus 9 features a 9in screen, 64-bit processor and a 6700mAh battery. <http://whfcm/Nexus2014>

5



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Streamline



Stream Xa

A NEW LEGEND HAS BEGUN

Decades'-worth of audio and video expertise combine in the Pioneer BDP-LX88 Blu-ray player – bringing the ultimate movie experience directly to your living room

Reference. In the world of all things audio/visual, it's an important word. It describes the conditions created by the people who actually make the content you love. The volumes they use to mix the sound; the settings they use on their video equipment when they edit. It's the gold-standard for ultimate quality.

Pioneer takes that level of accuracy extremely seriously. That's why it's applied over 30 years of expertise to the

new flagship BDP-LX88 Blu-ray player – a fully fledged reference product in its own right.

The BDP-LX88 uses advanced reading technology to reproduce material in a more revealing way than ever. What does that mean for you? Simply that you'll see and hear your favourite content as never before, in a way nothing else can deliver – not to mention that you'll be safe in the knowledge that you own the ultimate playback machine.

ADVANCED DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Great performance starts with great design. Pioneer's designers know this – which is why they've used a raft of advanced techniques to form this Blu-ray player's internal structure.

It's separated into three chambers for a start – one each for the power supply, digital processing and analogue audio circuits. It's all shielded, greatly reducing the possibility of unwanted electronic interference.

Crucially, it's also extremely rigid. The double-layered chassis, highly rigid centre frames, aluminium side-panels, steel-plate top panel and quiet, rigid Blu-ray drive all help reduce vibrations. Less vibration means more stability for the high-precision disc drive. And that in turn means better audio and video quality for you.





VIDEO LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

The BDP-LX88's disc transport is a masterclass in precision. That in itself spells fantastic news for video quality – but there's more. The player also benefits from full-spec 4K/60p/4:4:4/24-bit upscaling thanks to the Precise Pixel Driver with HD Detail Enhancer and Triple HD Noise Reduction for high-quality video processing; 4K Reference Converter for accurate and natural 4K upscaling; and, of course, the combined experience of Pioneer's video-tuning experts.



Content data

Precise
Pixel
Driver

HD (1080/24p, 60p)

HD processing

4K
Reference
Converter

4K upscaling

4K (2160/24p, 60p)

A REAL TREAT FOR YOUR EARS

Great audio is a staple of any quality home cinema experience and the BDP-LX88 is perfectly equipped to deliver. A large-capacity power supply ensures plenty of brawn, while the ESS SABRE³² Reference DAC (ES9018) handles the subtleties. Dual HDMI outputs allow separate transmission of audio and video, while PQLS bitstreaming all but eliminates jitter from the audio when it's sent to a compatible Pioneer AV receiver. What does that all mean? Awesome movie sound and stunning music reproduction.



SOUNDBARS £190-£350

SUPERTEST



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

Your TV looks great. Now for the sound...

All that flatscreen brilliance deserves some quality audio to complete the picture. And these discreet, modestly priced devices can provide it

We all long for something to boost our TV's innately tinny sound, but not everyone wants to pay through the nose to do so. That's where budget soundbars come in. Despite the arrival of the soundbase, the ever-growing soundbar market seems to have no intention of slowing down. But quantity doesn't always mean quality, as this test demonstrates.

The king and the pretenders

Here we have our newly hailed Award-winner, the Philips HTL5140, facing new rivals from Humax, JBL, LG, Samsung, Polk and Toshiba. A four-star Pioneer we reviewed earlier in the year also joins the scrum following a considerable price drop.

These hopefuls range in price from £190-£350, with some boasting aptX Bluetooth capability, the convenience of HDMI connections, and ultra-thin designs. One is billed as the "world's slimmest soundbar". Another can wirelessly connect to your telly. But which deserves that pride of place in front of your TV? The next few pages will give you the answer.

ON TEST

Humax **STA-1200BSW**

JBL **SB350**

LG **NB4540**

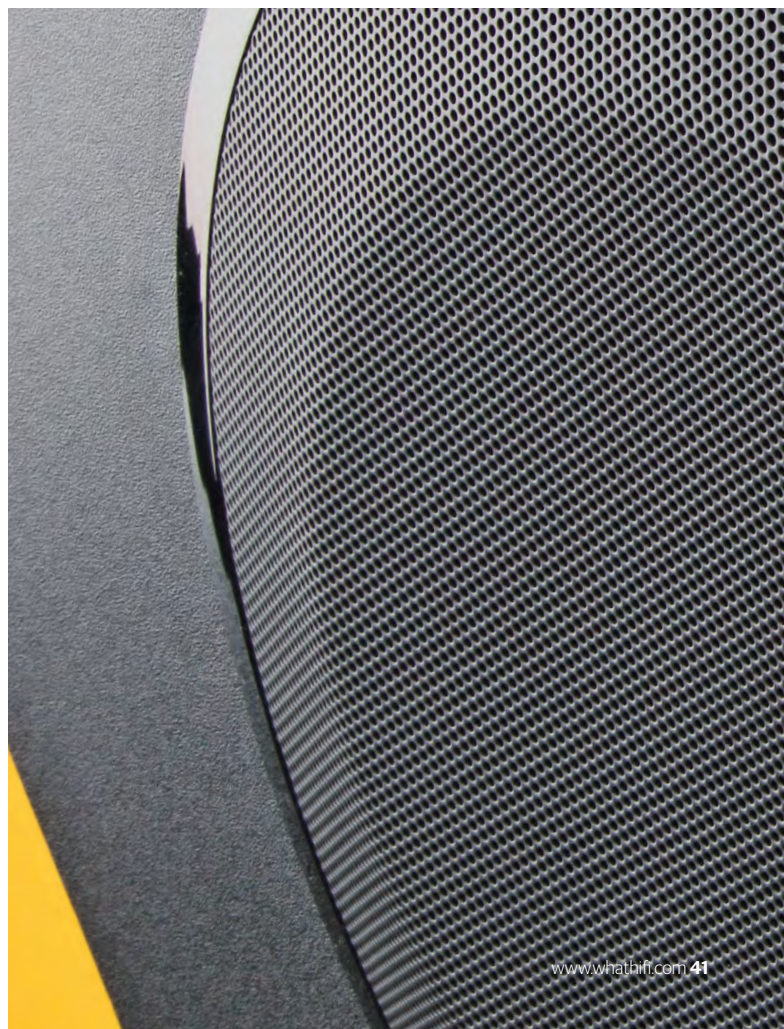
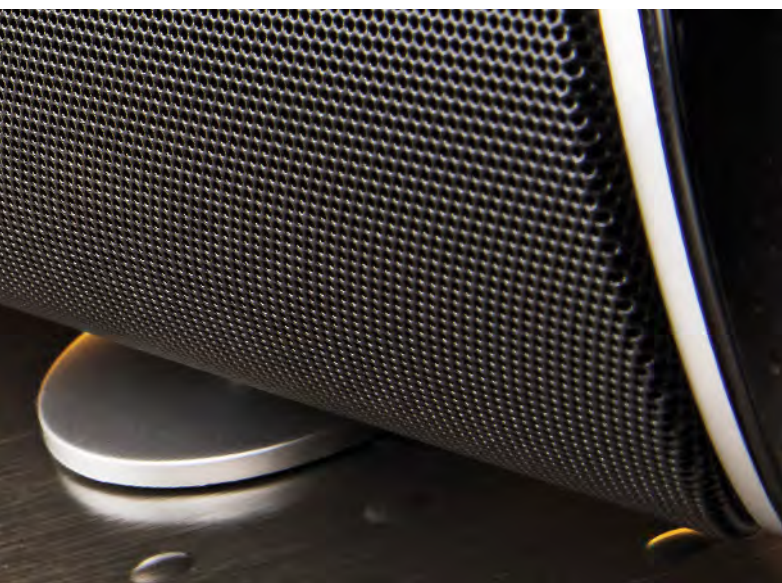
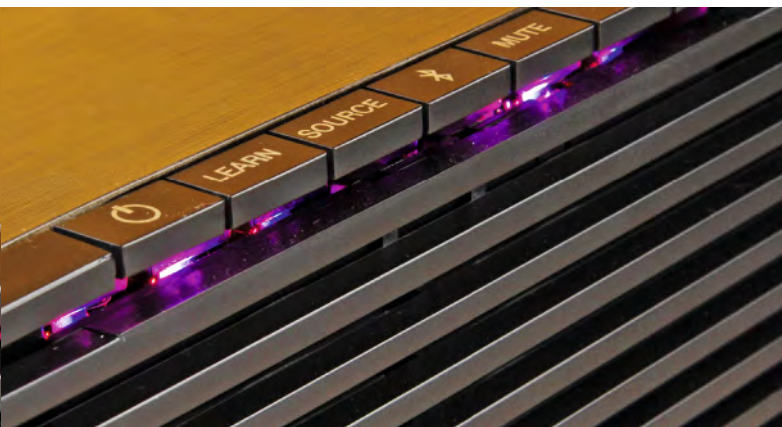
Philips **HTL5140**

Pioneer **SBX-N700**

Polk **N1**

Samsung **HW-H550**

Toshiba **SB3950M1**



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www.lg.com/uk/discoveroled



The Humax is less than 4cm tall, so it's safe to say it will sit in front of your telly without blocking any part of the screen. Its broad 120cm frame makes up for its slenderness elsewhere

A tight spot

The choice of only optical and 3.5mm inputs will suit most set-ups, although the inward-facing sockets are a little hard to access and have very little room around them. Owners of chunky cables (or ones with large plugs) beware!

Humax STA-1200BSW £200 ★★★★★

The "world's slimmest soundbar" - that's how Humax bills this unit. Indeed, measuring just 2cm deep, it's as thin as a Mars bar (we checked).

Humax is best known for its set-top boxes and PVRs, so it deserves kudos for entering the crowded budget-soundbar market. And we're quite taken with the Korean company's nickname for the bar, too: 'The Blade'.

The STA-1200BSW is less than 4cm tall, too, so it's safe to say it will sit in front of your telly without blocking any part of the screen. Its broad 120cm frame makes up for its slenderness elsewhere - it spreads approximately the width of an average 55in telly. It does, though, sit on a small plastic stand and can topple fairly easily if it's nudged.

Internal workings

It's hard to believe there's room inside this bar for any workings, but the grey strip that runs across the matt-black body hides four drivers. A separate subwoofer boosts its efforts.

The space-efficient sub is easy to house, too. While most soundbars come

toting a wireless sub, the Humax's passive woofer needs to be wired to the bar (on the plus side, it doesn't require power from the mains).

Balancing act

Of course, extreme slimmness isn't everything - how does it sound? A skinny build on a soundbar often means thinness and imbalance with the sound, but the STA-1200BSW's balance is largely fine. Put on motorbike racing documentary *TT3D: Closer to the Edge* and it does well to avoid making screeching brakes sound brittle and hard. The sub delivers controlled bass, while interviews with bikers come through with fair clarity and substance.

Its physical proportions help it to produce a relatively wide soundfield. Bikes tear across the screen with a significantly more full-bodied sound than you'd get from most TVs - but they don't exactly roar through, and detail is fair rather than impressive. The price-matching Polk N1 is much more of a powerhouse, and outmuscles the Humax with relative ease.



We can't pretend the Humax's remote control is among the best of its kind. Prone to scratches and finger marks, its glossy black body looks and feels cheap

The Humax's lack of dynamic punch is its undoing. It's all a bit of a flat tyre really as the riders cane it around the dangerous road circuit.

We spin a CD of *Happy* by Pharrell Williams and the delivery is certainly listenable. Its presentation is spacious enough to give a sense of staging, even if it does fail to get us foot-tapping as we usually do with this tune.

Unfortunately, the Humax's strengths start and end with its super-thin frame. Its performance is an improvement on the sound of most TVs, but it falls short of the detail and dynamics of some rivals. When it comes to soundbars, size matters - but sound matters more. We'd take our money elsewhere.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Slim, unobtrusive design; balanced delivery; fairly wide soundfield

AGAINST Lacks the muscle, detail and dynamics of rivals; stability; poor remote

VERDICT The Humax claims some fame with design, but its lacklustre sound disappoints

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The soundfield throws you right into the action - it's immersive and crammed with detail. There's precision here: you can track every shard of glass as it splinters in slow-mo

On the inside

Underneath the JBL's curvaceous metal-mesh front sit left and right speaker modules, each with two 5.5cm full-range drivers and a 3cm dome tweeter. There's no text display, but buttons light up to indicate changing volume and inputs.

JBL SB 350 £350 ★★★★★

JBL has given us some gorgeous soundbars in the SB 200 and SB 400 - and the SB 350 is yet another knockout. It might be just another long black bar, but its tasteful silver trimmings and stylish semi-cylindrical body make a stylish change. It oozes quality, and would easily pocket the full five stars if it were about looks alone.

With two circular feet hoisting the bar to a height of 8cm, the SB 350 just about manages to sit beneath our TV screen. Its slim body doesn't require much space in front of the telly, though the bar can be wall-mounted, too (there's a switch on the back to optimise performance for placement on a table or wall).

Ample connections

Also found at the rear are an optical input, 3.5mm mini-jack and HDMI ARC output, for a passable connections list. Don't get too excited about the USB socket though - it's for firmware updates only. The JBL does double as a wireless music speaker though, thanks to built-in Bluetooth.

The partnering subwoofer is relatively nondescript, although it racks up points

for its practical, compact build. It's a downward-firing design using a 16cm woofer to shift the air.

A big draw

One of the SB 350's biggest draws in performance is its large-scale dynamics - ideal for blockbusters like *G.I. Joe: Retaliation*. As we once again root for the Joes facing their arch enemy Cobra, the soundfield throws you right into the action. Fight scenes fill the room with sound, and it's immersive and crammed with detail. There's precision here - you can track every shard of glass as it splinters in slow-mo.

The lengthy ninja battle-scene is a challenge, as treble-tastic metal-on-metal effects burst onto the soundfield, but the SB 350 remains cool, calm and collected, showing not even the slightest hint of a hard edge. Clashing swords have bite, but they are never piercing.

The sub delivers too, with generous bass (although we'd turn it down a bit to even things out tonally). Meanwhile, expressive dynamics make the fast-paced movie score all the more exhilarating.



Given the JBL's £350 price tag, we think the credit-card remote is a poor effort. Its buttons are neatly arranged but it feels cheap and insubstantial

The SB 350's midrange is clear - it becomes indistinct only if you turn on 'Virtual Surround' mode. Voices aren't as insightful or well projected as on the Philips HTL5140 (£270), while you can pay another £50 for our Product of the Year, the Q Acoustics Media 4 (£400) and get more midrange solidity and expression. Still, the SB 350's performance has a lot going for it with movies and music alike.

Ultimately, stiff competition prevents the SB 350 winning a fifth star, but the SB 350's showstopping design is exactly what you'd want in front of your telly. And with a decent sound that's big, dynamic and detailed, it grants movies the thrilling and immersive quality they (and you) deserve.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, dynamic sound; lashings of detail; precise soundfield; elegant and practical design

AGAINST Midrange lacks the insight and clarity of some rivals

VERDICT An exciting and dynamic sound, if not quite revealing enough to be a class-leader

The sound on the LG NB4540 is relatively detailed, but the problem is balance. The soundbar's midrange and treble feel undernourished, lacking weight and solidity



LG NB4540 £290 ★★★★★

Easy elegance

The LG NB4540 is an elegant soundbar: sleek, modern and unobtrusive, it's exactly the sort of soundbar we want in front of our TV. The downward-sloping bar is just 35mm tall at its highest point and occupies the width of a 40in telly.

This time last year we were cooing over an LG soundbar in the budget market. Of course, we're referring to the 2013 Award-winning NB4530A. Its smaller sibling - the NB3530A - was pretty good too. Since then, LG has experienced a dip in form. Earlier this year, the NB5540 won points with its stylish, ultra-slim design but couldn't deliver the goods in the sound department. Here is its little brother, the LG NB4540, and it's much the same.

Confounded not surrounded

In addition to the common stereo-plus-subwoofer configuration, the NB4540 has two extra drivers dedicated to feeding out the 'surround' information of a film soundtrack, which is designed to create an enveloping sound.

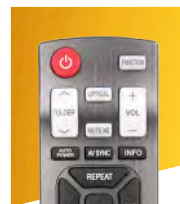
Put on the *Ender's Game* Blu-ray and it's not the most immersive soundfield, though, as drones circulate in the space simulation - it's certainly not as big or open as with the Polk N1 or JBL SB350. Nevertheless, there's a good sense of depth to the sound, and the shuttle movements are easily traceable as they

cross the screen. It goes fairly loud, too. The sound on the NB4540 is relatively detailed, but the problem is balance. The soundbar's midrange and treble feel undernourished, lacking the weight and solidity of its rivals. As Ender shouts commands to his crew, it's reasonably clear and communicative, but severely lacks body and substance.

Bass dominates the presentation. Jump to Ender's final simulation and there's deep rumble when fire engulfs the planet. It's a little overbearing, so we turn the bass down a notch on the remote. But even then, presentation is far from neutral, and gaps between the low and mid frequencies are noticeable.

Bypass the bass

We find 'standard' and 'bypass' to be the best-balanced sound modes. Use the NB4540 for music (over non-aptX Bluetooth), and its reasonably detailed and musical character is hampered by that tonal imbalance. Play *Save Me (Underdog)* by Turin Brakes and the opening acoustic riff is too thin and lightweight.



The remote has a brushed-silver finish to match the soundbar. It's a decent unit, too

The slim body is mainly plastic, but its brushed-metal effect has aesthetic appeal (see above). The wireless sub has a similarly modern and shiny finish, and pumps out 160W through its side-firing woofer, hidden beneath a mesh grille.

Connections are another plus point: HDMI inputs aren't a given at this price, but the NB4540 has an HDMI input and ARC-compatible HDMI output. There are also USB, optical and 3.5mm inputs on board, as well as the Bluetooth spec.

Suffering the same three-star fate as its big brother, the NB4540 simply can't compete with the top performers. It falls short when it comes to balance, dynamics and integration- and not even a smart appearance can make up for that.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sleek, practical design; ample connections; clear, relatively detailed sound

AGAINST Thin midrange; rivals have more solidity and balance

VERDICT Has its strengths, but sound isn't one. Outclassed by similarly priced rivals

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Know your place

For best results, the 105cm-wide bar should be laid flat on your equipment rack, while the wireless sub (which houses a side-firing 20cm driver) should sit on the floor as close to the bar as is practically possible, for optimal integration.



It's a treat to use. A clear and bright text display is helpful when changing inputs, and the remote is responsive. You will be surprised at the calibre of sound from such a slim unit, too

Philips HTL5140 £270 ★★★★★

This smart-looking soundbar fought off a number of rivals to secure a place on the 2014 *What Hi-Fi?* Awards podium. But the newly crowned champion can't rest on its laurels yet; just a month on and it's under the spotlight again as it faces the next batch of contenders.

So does the HTL5140 meet its match this time round? In a word, no. If anything, a second spin only confirms its class-leading position.

Although we prefer the ultra-flat design of the LG NB4540, the HTL5140's build is far from distracting - the 5cm tall bar won't block your viewing, that's for sure. It doesn't draw attention to itself, and keeps a low profile in front of your telly.

Assemble in a line

Once the bar's three parts are slotted and screwed together - the speaker ends hide four drivers and two tweeters, and fit into either side of the centre module - the HTL5140 spreads roughly the width of a 42in telly.

It's a treat to use. A clear and bright text display is helpful when changing

inputs or the unit's seven sound modes, while the remote is responsive.

The HTL5140's wealth of connections includes HDMI, optical, 3.5mm and USB inputs. There's aptX Bluetooth - with one-touch NFC pairing - for wireless music streaming too. Completing the lot is a useful HDMI ARC output, which lets home cinema sources be plugged directly into the bar so only the one HDMI cable runs out to your TV's input.

Rich pickings

You will be surprised at the calibre of sound from such a slim unit. Rich, dynamic and detailed, the HTL5140 is a joy to listen to. It produces plenty of energy and detail to make even the frankly dire samurai movie *47 Ronin* mildly enjoyable.

As the samurai battle, the clash of their swords is clear, never once teetering into hardness. At the other end, there's decent bass punch. The subwoofer and bar work hand in hand towards a consistent soundfield. It might not break boundaries for spaciousness, but that's not a problem - it will fill an average



Largely a clone of the standard remote Philips supplies with its TVs, the curved handset has rubber buttons, feels good in the hand and is generally easy to use

living space and goes louder than you'd probably need it to. Midrange carries weight and transparency in equal measure, so voices are neither too thin nor muddy.

The final showdown between the Kira and the Ronin is full of sound effects, but the HTL5140 has no problem unpicking the details in the action scene.

The HTL5140 finishes on a high with music performance. Play Eminem's *Rap God* over Bluetooth and it has a firm hand on the song's jaunty rhythms.

The HTL5140 remains the best budget soundbar around, impressing yet again with its super-slim design and insightful, balanced sound. Have you been good this year? Then put this at the top of your Christmas list.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Insightful, balanced delivery; far-flung dynamics; well-integrated presentation; smart, compact design; clear text display

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT A brilliant performance and good design in one great-value package

The sub's tall and narrow profile makes it ideal to place on the floor alongside your TV. It can be left to its own devices, thanks to automatic wireless connection with the bar. Handy

The Equaliser

We would ignore the soundbar's 'Surround' mode. The midrange becomes less distinct, and the soundfield is roomy enough as it is. 'Gaming', 'Movie' and 'Music' EQs offer customisation, too, but we found the last best for most content.

Pioneer SBX-N700 £250 ★★★★★

While some brands are entering double-digit territory on the number of their soundbar models, Pioneer remains content with its three-strong debut range. Its flagship model, the SBX-N700 (which earned four stars earlier in the year) has had £100 knocked off the price, and returns to our test rooms once again.

The Pioneer is facing different competition this time - and our lowest-priced Award-winner, the Philips HTL5140 (£270). It doesn't beat the Philips, but it gives it a run for its money.

A fact not beyond recall

Rich, balanced and with plenty of detail, the Pioneer's performance is a solid one.

It takes some tweaking to get the right delivery, though: play *Total Recall* on Blu-ray and the midrange sounds a little distant. But the 'Dialogue' button on the remote gives much clearer character, and, in turn, more subtle detail. Voices are insightful and well projected. We recommend using the remote to reduce out-of-the-box bass levels for better balance - if you do, explosions still have depth and power, but more subtlety and

definition, too. Although we criticised the bass for being a touch soft in our first review, the N700 can happily match rivals at this new, lower price point. Treble has bite and the N700's dynamic handling of the score has lots of tension.

Bar with a musical character

Changing EQs (see roundel above) is possible only through the on-screen menu, accessible via an HDMI connection between the TV and soundbar, so changing it mid-movie is a no-go.

We wouldn't hesitate to use the N700 for music playback: we play Lorde's *Team* over Bluetooth and its handclaps and beats have punch and precision, and good timing too. Vocal delivery has nuance, and space between the two voices gives the soundfield imagery.

The Pioneer impresses on features: you can stream music using Wi-Fi Direct, and access files on your home network thanks to DLNA compatibility. Its Miracast feature also lets you beam your smartphone's picture to the TV.

Physical connections are decent, too: two optical inputs, a LAN for a wired



We imagine most people will use the supplied remote for day-to-day use, due to its logical layout. Pioneer also offers a decent 'Control App', which is free, and iOS and Android compatible.

internet connection and an HDMI output for a single-cable connection to your TV. The absence of an HDMI input will no doubt be inconvenient for some, though we like the inclusion of 3.5mm and USB inputs.

The N700 has one of the sturdiest builds in the budget market. It's quite deep for a soundbar - 12cm - so check your tabletop has enough space.

The sub's tall and narrow profile makes it ideal to place on the floor alongside your TV. It can be left to its own devices, thanks to automatic wireless connection with the bar. Handy.

It's not always a given that a price drop earns a product another star, but here the Pioneer proves itself worthy.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Hugely detailed; confident dynamics; deep, punchy bass; sturdy build; features

AGAINST Not as dynamically agile as Philips' HTL5140; build might be impractical for some

VERDICT The N700 gives the Award-winning Philips HTL5140 a run for its money

Play *Gravity* on Blu-ray and the boundlessness of space is well conveyed. Crashes are room-filling, and the soundfield has breadth. There's nice clarity and weight to vocals, too



Solid as a rock
 Available in black, or a white and wood finish, the N1 is a burly unit. Sitting on two feet, the trapezoidal bar measures 10cm tall and 99cm wide. It's not the most discreet bar to put in front of your TV (or on a wall) but the plus side is its sturdiness.

Polk N1 £200 ★★★★★

The Polk N1 may have been designed as a 'gaming' soundbar - it's been engineered alongside game designers, is designed in-line with Microsoft's Xbox consoles and has specific gaming EQs onboard - but don't let that put you off if you're a cinema fan.

The N1 is a one-box soundbar (or 'SurroundBar' as Polk calls it) that will cover all your entertainment needs: movies, music and, indeed, gaming. Any source that can be hooked up to the well-equipped bar's optical, coaxial and 3.5mm inputs, or has Bluetooth compatibility, will work with the N1. And work well. The N1 is the first Polk soundbar we've heard - and we hope it's not the last.

Learn as you go

The design (see roundel above) isn't at all distracting. Its plastic shutter-like grill is relatively low-key, as are the springy keys up top that indicate commands through LED lights underneath. The 'Learn' button complements power, volume and source keys and can be used to set-up the N1 to respond to your TV

remote in a few simple steps. It might be a good idea to do that (see panel, right).

The down-facing sockets are easy to slot cables into, though be mindful that their position near the bottom of the unit means cables with large plugs might get a bit squashed against your TV stand.

Drowned in sound

As its size suggests, the N1 produces a big sound: open, spacious and with the potential to go loud. It's easy to be swallowed up in the movie you're watching - even without any of its four 'immersion' modes ('Forza Racer', 'Halo FPS', 'Cinema' and 'Music') turned on. We fire up sci-fi game *Destiny* through the Sony PS4, and are engrossed in its post-apocalyptic world and momentous orchestral soundtrack.

Play *Gravity* on Blu-ray and the boundlessness of space is well conveyed. Crashes are room-filling, and the soundfield has breadth. There's nice clarity and weight to vocals too, and a good degree of detail on offer. The midrange can feel a little 'shouty' though, so a little more refinement



The supplied credit-card style remote isn't much to shout about. Even though it's nicely responsive, it feels cheap and gimmicky.

wouldn't go amiss. Dynamically, the N1 shows good range, though we'd welcome more subtlety. Despite the lack of an external subwoofer, there's good heft to the sound as George Clooney pounds on the space station; bass levels prove decent during big explosions, too.

There's not the depth or definition to the lower frequencies that separate subs can give (that's the beauty of them, of course), but the N1 does have a sub output, so the option to add a woofer is there if you have the extra funds.

The Polk N1 entered the market at a rather steep £350, but a price drop makes it a very talented soundbar. If it fits in your set-up size-wise, the N1 is certainly one to consider.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, dynamic sound; high volumes; decent detail levels; good dynamic range; price

AGAINST Size won't be practical for all; midrange lacks refinement

VERDICT Bar size won't appeal to all, but the sound will. The Polk will put pep into your films

Subtle detail permeates the presentation, from the echo of footsteps to the sliding sound of our hero writhing on the floor, while the bass is deep-seated and well integrated



Get connected

As long as your Samsung TV fits the right criteria, the company's 'SoundConnect' feature will not only send sound wirelessly to the HW-H550, it will also let you control both telly and soundbar simultaneously with the same remote.

Samsung HW-H550 £310 ★★★★★

The last Samsung soundbar we tested didn't quite set our hearts racing - performance flaws spoiled the HW-F750's nice, slim profile. So can the cheaper, newer HW-H550 make amends?

It will certainly take pride of place in front of your telly without being obtrusive. The long, slim bar is almost completely wrapped in a black, metal-mesh grille (it's available in silver, too).

Now you see it, now you don't

Turn on the bar, and the bold text display in the centre of the grille makes operation simple. Helpfully, it fades out after a few seconds so it's not distracting during movies.

Samsung partners a skinny bar with a beefy wireless subwoofer, although the sub shouldn't be too difficult to house and wins points for an attractive matt-black casing with a glossy top.

The wireless convenience doesn't end with the subwoofer: the bar can receive sound from a TV over a Bluetooth connection, eliminating wires from the equation altogether. The catch? The TV must be a Samsung model compatible

with the company's 'SoundConnect' feature (see roundel above).

Connections are as good as you'd expect at this price: HDMI, optical and 3.5mm inputs, as well as a USB socket for music playback from a storage device or hard drive, and an ARC-compatible HDMI output for a one-wire hook-up to the TV.

Unlike the HW-F750, the HW-H550 doesn't lose face when it comes to the all-important sound quality. Crisp, detailed and as balanced as any rival, the HW-H550 has a likeably confident sound as we spin psychedelic revenge thriller *Only God Forgives*.

As Julian's violent fight with Lieutenant Chang takes place, each blow penetrates the soundfield with brute force and clarity. Subtle detail permeates the presentation too, from the echo of footsteps to the sliding sound of our hero writhing on the floor, and the Samsung affords the film's synth-driven score decent pace and detail.

The sub justifies its bulky size as the bass is deep-seated and well integrated, while the higher frequencies prove equally disciplined.



As you'd expect from Samsung, the remote is attractive and well made. It's a good size and shape too, although rather over-packed with smallish buttons

Dynamically, things could be more exciting though, and a bigger, more open presentation would give the viewer a more enveloping experience.

Loud and clear

On broadcast TV, there's decent weight to voices, although outright transparency is hampered by a slightly muffled element.

The HW-H550 might not have the dynamics or expression to mix it with the big boys, but it has a confident sound and well thought-out design. Price is a little steep when you consider the more talented, more expressive Philips HTL5140 costs £40 less, but this Samsung is certainly worth adding to your shortlist.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detail; balanced, weighty presentation; decent bass; well-integrated sub; design

AGAINST Rivals are better dynamically; not the most open sound

VERDICT A soundbar that marries decent, attractive design with good performance

With action thriller *Hanna* the Tosh gets right into the thick of it. Punches are full-bodied, iron doors have weight, and there's sufficient heft to trucks as they race over uneven ground



Toshiba SB3950M1 £190 ★★★★★

Sound modes

'Music', 'Movie' and 'Game' EQ modes are available on the SB3950M1 - we prefer 'Music' for its even-handed delivery. 'DTS TruSurround' widens the soundfield for 'a more immersive' experience, and 'DTS TruVolume' flattens dynamics for quieter viewing.

This Toshiba is just the ticket for those looking to take the first step in boosting their TV's audio. It offers decent sound, good connectivity and a smart design - all for a price that's easy on the pocket.

The bar has a cloth front hiding four 6cm drivers, with a plastic, oblong display. We're fans of the bold green-on-black text - it's clearly legible even in bright conditions and from a distance, and the spelling out of commands makes the bar easy to use. The display also eliminates guesswork by displaying 'paired' when the Bluetooth connection is complete too.

Height and depth

Our only qualm is with the bar's size. Its slim body (just 6cm deep) is practical for those without much space in front of their TV, but its 9cm height can block the bottom of screens. The wireless sub has a downward-firing 18cm woofer, and is also on the chunky side.

There are generous connections: two HDMI inputs join the standard 3.5mm and optical sockets, while a Bluetooth connection is achieved by a mere tap of

a device on the bar thanks to near-field communication (NFC). There's also the bonus of an HDMI output, which means sources can be plugged straight into the bar's inputs with only one cable running out to the TV.

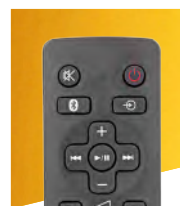
Weighty delivery

So far so good, but the cornerstone of the SB3950M1 is its performance. It can go loud, and the sound is solid. With action thriller *Hanna* the Tosh gets right into the thick of it. Punches are full-bodied, swinging iron doors have weight, and there's sufficient heft to trucks as they race over uneven ground.

The sub is well integrated too, working hand in hand with the bar to bring some serious weight and force to car crashes. You get a lot of bang for your buck.

Voices are projected with clarity and focus - far better than through our reference 40in Sony TV - and the same goes for presenters on daytime TV.

On the negative side, the SB3950M1 sounds a bit hard in the treble when pushed - rubble that flies up under the car sticks out a little, and it doesn't have



It's good to see such a solidly built, well thought-out remote handset at such a relatively modest price. It's a simple design with a logical button layout

the punch or crispness in the midrange of some of its rivals. Gunfire feels a bit restrained compared with the Polk N1 (£200) and Philips HTL5140 (£270).

When it comes to music, the SB3950M1 is up to standard for budget soundbars. Stream songs over Bluetooth and there's detail, balance and drive, if not the dynamics or rhythmic skill to set your heart on fire exactly.

All soundbars pledge to be a step up from your TV's sound, but not all deliver - especially at this price. This Toshiba does, nailing the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness. We'd like a little more punch and refinement at the top end, but ultimately this Toshiba gets a whole lot right, for little cost.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Price; decent clarity and detail; good integration; dynamic delivery; connectivity

AGAINST Treble could do with some refinement; height might block your TV screen

VERDICT A good sound at a decent price: that's the Toshiba's promise, and it's fulfilled



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October 2014

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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Philips HTL5140

£270 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER



Another soundbar test, another mishmash of quality. It's hard to find a standout model that nails sound, design and great value - which is why we are so thrilled to have the Philips HTL5140 in our midst. We've written a great deal about this unit in recent months and we've almost run out of compliments. Almost. It's the best-sounding product here - punchy, dynamic and expressive - and a likely fit in anyone's set-up. For now, the Philips remains the one to beat.

Its closest rival is a familiar face. Sometimes price makes or breaks a product and in the Pioneer's case, a favourable price cut since we first tested it has made a whole star's difference. Now recipient of the full set of stars, it's one of the most feature-packed soundbars we've seen for less than £300 and one of the most insightful and dynamic performers in the budget market.

Move down to four-star territory and JBL graces another soundbar test with yet another elegant looker. Not only will the SB 350 draw compliments (we can't say that for many soundbars) but it also has a big, thrilling sound that will keep you engrossed in any blockbuster movie. Its slightly steep price, along with the Philips' and Pioneer's greater levels of insight, deny the JBL top honours.

No need to bring on the sub

The one-box Polk scores well too. It proves you don't need an external subwoofer to get plenty of bass, and reaches out to both gamers and movie fans alike thanks to its 'gaming' sound modes. Like the JBL, the Polk's large profile has the spaciousness and solidity to have you reaching for your favourite movies (and games) time and time again.

The cheapest-of-the-lot Toshiba might not be such a powerhouse as the Polk or the JBL, but it nails the basics in sound without compromising elsewhere. You can only expect so much from a sub-£200 soundbar, yet this Tosh is surprisingly good in a number of respects and a shining beacon for our performance-per-pound ethos.

Our last four-star rating goes to the Samsung. It may be less dynamically expressive and cost £40 more than the Philips, but it has a lot going for it: weight, insight, balance and functional design to name a few.

Playing catch-up

Which brings us to this test's also-rans: the three-star LG and Humax. While they both make a 'look at me' statement with their super-slim designs (in the Humax's case, record-breakingly so), it's all downhill from there - both models fall short of their rivals' solidity, insight and dynamic expression for us to vouch for them.

Still, there are more than a few soundbars here worthy of a place on your Christmas list, but we all know exactly which one deserves the top line.

We've almost run out of compliments for the Philips HTL5140. Almost. It's the best-sounding product here - punchy, dynamic and expressive - and a likely fit in anyone's set-up. For now, it remains the one to beat



Humax STA-1200BSW
£200 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack • **Outputs** None • **Subwoofer** wired • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 4 x 120 x 2cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 27 x 20 x 27cm



JBL SB 350
£350 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 8 x 100 x 6cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 32 x 5 x 24cm



LG NB4540
£290 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack, USB, HDMI • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 4 x 84 x 8cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 35 x 22 x 28cm



Philips HTL5140
£270 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack, USB, HDMI • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 5 x 105 x 7cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 30 x 20 x 40cm



Pioneer SBX-N700
£250 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital x2, 3.5mm stereo jack, USB, LAN • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 9 x 90 x 12cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 42 x 20 x 27cm



Polk N1
£200 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, coaxial digital, 3.5mm stereo jack • **Outputs** None • **Subwoofer** no • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 10 x 99 x 11cm; **Dimensions (subwoofer, hwd)** n/a



Samsung HW-H550
£310 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack, USB, HDMI • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 6 x 94 x 6cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 37 x 30 x 29cm



Toshiba SB3950M1
£190 ★★★★★
Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm stereo jack, HDMI x2 • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) • **Subwoofer** wireless • **Dimensions (soundbar, hwd)** 9 x 90 x 6cm; **(subwoofer, hwd)** 30 x 33 x 22cm



SYSTEM BUILDER



TV
Sony KDL-40W605B £450
★★★★★

A great-value telly with stunning picture quality plus good design and smarts



Blu-ray player
Sony BDP-S5200 £95
★★★★★

Punchy and detailed, this disc-spinner is a natural match for the Philips



Set-top box
Sky+HD 2TB £250
★★★★★

Combines excellent performance with huge storage and a user-friendly interface

Total build £1065

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meet the new
Y50

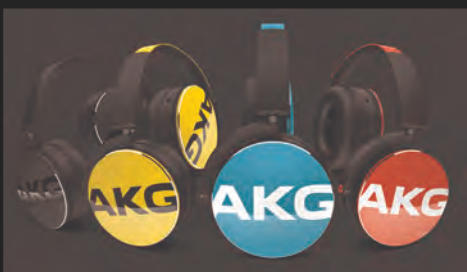
WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

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The great **ROCK 'N' ROLL** spindle

The revolution continues. Demand for high-quality turntables remains on an upward curve. We've got a fab four on test, but only one can be the king...

- 1 Clearaudio Concept
- 2 Pro-Ject 2-Xperience 2-Pack
- 3 Rega RP6/Exact
- 4 Thorens TD 206



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

1 Clearaudio Concept

£1000 ★★★★★

When we're talking top-quality turntables, Clearaudio's Concept is never far from our thoughts. It's picked up the odd Award in recent years and its price has fluctuated, but it now stands before us with a cheaper price tag (down from £1190) and a brand new tonearm.

Pick up and play

Unlike some rival designs, which require patience, a steady hand and a passable grasp of mathematics to get them working, the Concept is a 'plug-and-play' product with no nasty surprises.

The company's own 'MM Concept' cartridge is fitted to the 'Verify Direct Wire Plus' tonearm. The end of the arm tube without the cartridge floats, as if by magic, thanks to a magnetic bearing inside the plinth. Clearaudio sets everything, up to and including cartridge weight and bias, before the turntable leaves the factory. Your involvement is placing the platter and fitting the drive belt. Before setting a

record to play, though, it's worth admiring the Concept's clean design and chunky, substantial finish. Speed (33½, 45 and 78rpm) is controlled by a hefty rotary dial and the whole thing operates with the sort of solidity that gives you supreme confidence in a product.

And, with a copy of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in place, the Clearaudio is little short of thrilling. It weaves a musical path through each and every one of Jacko's timeless tunes, pounding and punching its way through *Beat It* at a fair rate; poise and agility in equal measure.

Pause to reflect

There's a real sense of snap as Jacko whips through the verses, each line punctuated by a very brief, yet perfectly timed pause - the silence hangs just long enough before the track powers on.

If you think vinyl reproduction has a tendency to sound warm and wallowing, think again. The Concept's finessed sound invites you in for a closer listen, but it's the engaging dynamics and superb rhythmic ability that really seal the deal.

Set the needle to Jamie T's *Love Is Only A Heartbeat Away* and the Concept changes pace, taking you on a delicate, emotive journey. Strings sway in the background, allowing the delicate vocal and guitar to take centre stage. There's an effortlessness to the way this deck delivers any type of musical genre. Whatever your taste, the Concept bursts with musical flavour.

All hands on this deck

Some might think the idea of a high-end plug-and-play turntable could take something away from the vinyl experience, but the Concept is so beautifully executed that it simply allows you more time to enjoy the music. A stunning deck.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Easy to set up; great build; excellent all-round performance

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT A thoroughly thought-out, easy-to-own package with tremendous sound. We're completely sold

2 Pro-Ject 2-Xperience 2-Pack

£900 ★★★★★☆

It's surprising what a slab of clear acrylic and a dash of carbon fibre can do. Take the 2-Xperience 2-Pack - it looks flashy and exciting straight out of the box (at least once you've put all the various pieces together).

We've already had some, er, experience of the Xperience in previous years, but never this combination of tonearm and cartridge. Pro-Ject's striking 9cc Evolution arm features a conical, carbon fibre tube fitted with Ortofon's 2M Blue moving-magnet cartridge.

On a firm footing

Instead of sitting underneath the platter, the motor is decoupled and sits suspended to help ward off the effects of unwanted vibrations. In a similar vein, each of the three feet has a Sorbothane inlay to give more pliant isolation for the deck.

Assembly includes positioning and ensuring the drive belt sits level along

the middle of the platter - you will also notice the absence of any switch to change speed. This requires a spot of manual labour - moving the belt from one motor pulley to the next, depending on the required speed. It isn't as convenient as being able to flick a switch, but vinyl junkies will love the chance to get hands-on.

You're gonna carry that weight

The Pro-Ject is the only model here to come with its own record weight - the hefty disc-like device screws onto the spindle and sandwiches the record between itself and the vinyl-topped MDF platter. Pro-Ject claims this gives the 'perfect playback platform'. Experiment for yourself and see if you can hear a difference.

In our opinion, having the weight in place allows music to sound a touch clearer and more solid. And in general, these are areas where the 2-Xperience 2-Pack scores highly. Playing Michael Jackson's *Smooth Criminal* there's a real

sense of solidity to the pounding heartbeat at the beginning of the track. It's soon substituted for the track's bruising bassline and snappy percussion hits. It's an exciting sound for sure.

The only area where we'd ask for more is when it comes down to uncovering the subtle nuances of the track. Sometimes, more delicate moments feel as though they're being washed over and ever so slightly steamrollered by the Pro-Ject. Timing suffers, and the turntable doesn't communicate as fluently and deliver the same dose of sonic charm as its closest rivals.

Still, this is a very fine effort, from a fine-looking deck.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Striking looks; solid, powerful sound; good levels of detail

AGAINST Not as subtle or rhythmic as the best

VERDICT It's an eye-catching, robust-sounding ensemble from Pro-Ject, which just misses out on the full five-star treatment

1



Clearaudio's own 'MM Concept' cartridge is fitted to the 'Verify Direct Wire Plus' tonearm

2



Each of the three feet on the Pro-Ject 2-Xperience 2-Pack has a Sorbothane inlay to give more pliant isolation

3 Rega RP6/Exact

£1000 ★★★★★

Take a peek inside Rega's trophy cabinet and you will find a couple of *What Hi-Fi?* Awards confirming our hearty admiration for Rega's RP6/Exact combo. It's been our go-to package in recent years, but how does it fare against some of the new, and improved, competition out there?

You can buy an RP6 turntable without the Exact moving-magnet cartridge, although we wouldn't recommend it. The pair work so well together, there's little to be gained by going through the potential trials and tribulations of mixing and matching.

Twist to the turn

Rega tends to add its own twist on turntable design and this is evident in the RP6/Exact. The turntable uses a layered glass platter, which is thicker and heavier on the outside of the disc. This increases inertia and helps to promote greater speed stability, without adding too much weight to the plinth

and main bearing. Rega's engineers have long felt too much mass spoils the sound.

This school of thought also helps explain the lightweight plinth. Rega ensures extra rigidity by using a special resin coating - and it also adds extra bracing between the tonearm and main bearing.

Isolationism stance

The deck's lack of isolation (apart from three rubber feet, that is) means careful positioning is a must. A level, rigid surface away from speakers (they give off their own vibration and air movement) should be your starting point before spinning any vinyl.

Unlike the other three turntables in this test, the Rega has an external power supply, which also doubles as the speed control. It's not the neatest solution and gives off a homemade feel, but this doesn't detract from performance.

The RP6 shines. It's an enthusiastic listen, with bags of detail. The deck rumbles through Jamie T's *Limits Lie* with a great sense of scale and deep solid

drum kicks. His vocal sounds expressive and direct, especially as the track builds up to its final crescendo. Tracks come at you from a regimented and well-organised soundstage.

Dynamic and expressive

Holst's *The Planets* demands greater insight, control and dynamic flux, but it's dispatched with relative ease. The RP6/Exact pairing delivers the quieter lows and crashing highs with real vigour. This turntable is one of the most expressive and enthusiastic you can buy at the money.

So far so good for the Rega. But as you've already seen, Clearaudio and Pro-Ject have put in decent showings, and we've still Thorens to come...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Engaging, detailed sound; well-matched own-brand cartridge; fine build

AGAINST Not quite plug-and-play

VERDICT Relatively simple styling, but don't let this fool you - the Rega is one of the top performers at the money

4 Thorens TD 206

£1000 ★★★★★

'Level your turntable' is one of the first rules of vinyl club. But it's surprising how some manufacturers have managed to turn a straightforward task into one of the trickiest to master. Handling a turntable with only three feet, unsighted and from underneath, requires juggling skills usually reserved for the Moscow State Circus.

Thankfully, Swiss turntable manufacturer Thorens has been in the game long enough - more than 80 years - to address this issue. The feet on the TD 206 can be adjusted from above, so you can keep an eye on your spirit level.

Classical conditioning

The TD 206 opts for a classic turntable look with an rectangular MDF plinth available in red, black or white high-gloss lacquer. Compared with the more smartly dressed Clearaudio Concept and Pro-Ject 2-Xperience 2-Pack, the Thorens appears functional

and it doesn't really pull off the £1000 price tag. It's nice to see electronic speed-change included, but the switch doesn't feel solid or terribly nice to use.

To the right of the belt-driven platter sits Thorens' own T90 tone arm. It uses a rolled aluminium tube, which has been damped in an effort to prevent vibrations travelling up and disrupting the needle when it's in the groove.

Cartridge in case

As standard, the deck comes fitted with the company's AT95E cartridge, but our sample came equipped with a Grado Platinum Reference 1. For the price you still get the AT95E included as a spare - useful for any slight technical hiccups...

Listen to the TD 206 for a while and you discover the deck does the basics fairly well. It doesn't have any serious issues locking onto and following the rhythm of The xx's *Heart Skipped A Beat*. There's a decent level of detail, but the Thorens struggles to express itself fully. Highs don't quite sparkle and pop, and

the overall soundstage sounds flat and a tad subdued. It feels as if the Thorens is conveying only part of the story, whereas rival decks don't seem to have a problem expressing the vibrancy and playful character of the track.

Lows sound weighty and meaty but they also sound over-egged. Play SBTRKT's *Higher* and, as the bass notes rise and fall with varying weight, the Thorens overplays the heaviest, upsetting the balance and diverting your attention from the mids and highs.

There's nothing especially offensive about the Thorens' sound, but it does give the impression that it's out of its depth in this company. At this level, you can find much more impressive decks.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Simple to use; relatively rhythmic and rounded sound

AGAINST Average build; sound lacks detail and dynamics; flat soundstage; overly rich bass

VERDICT A so-so deck which never really gets out of first gear

3



Unlike the other turntables in this test, the Rega has an external power supply, which doubles as the speed control

4



The feet on the Thorens TD 206 can be adjusted from above, so you can keep an eye on your spirit level

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TEST VERDICT



THE WINNER

Clearaudio Concept

£1000 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

This test had the potential to put our heads in a spin, but we're sold on the amazing sound quality and plug-and-play brilliance of the Clearaudio Concept.

At the top, it's really a two-way battle between the five-star Clearaudio and Rega RP6/Exact. On pedigree and past performances, we thought it would be a closely fought contest and, true to form, neither turntable took a backward step.

The RP6/Exact impresses with its muscular, powerful sound, while the Concept has subtlety and dynamics to die for. The Clearaudio is the complete package straight out of the box - no faff, no tears and no tantrums. Plug, play, and enjoy your vinyl collection like you've never enjoyed it before. But to be fair, whether you plump for the Clearaudio or the Rega, we know you won't be disappointed. Pro-ject's

2-Xperience 2-Pack puts in a good showing. It's a glamorous-looking deck with real presence, and demonstrates plenty of drive and authority as part of the deal. Rival decks just happen to display a greater sense of rhythm and communicate subtleties more explicitly.

Last, and somewhat least

Which leaves the Thorens propping up the test table in fourth position. For the money it's a decent enough deck, but doesn't really sell itself, whether you're talking looks-wise or the audio quality. It's not an offensive sound, but there is a lack of detail and dynamics compared to the better decks, and the overly-rich bass doesn't make it the most inviting long-term listen. The best in this test produce a much more welcoming, and finessed, sound.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the Clearaudio Concept turntable



Stereo amplifier
Rega Elex-R

£900 ★★★★★

One of the most talented sub-£1000 stereo amps we've heard. Features its own built-in phono stage: ideal for the Concept.



Phono stage
Rega Fono MM MK2

£200 ★★★★★

You'll get even better results if you opt for this stand-alone phono stage from Rega - it delivers real sonic excitement.



Stereospeakers
Dali Rubicon 2

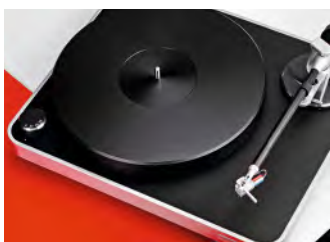
£1600 ★★★★★

These standmounters are beautifully finished and produce a sound blessed with breathtaking speed and agility.

Total build £3700

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Facts & figures



Clearaudio Concept
£1000 ★★★★★

Speeds (rpm) 33⅓, 45, 78 • Electric speed change Yes • Belt/Direct drive Belt • Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 13 x 42 x 35cm



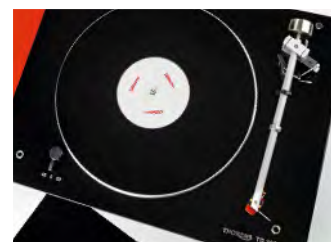
Pro-ject 2-Xperience 2-Pack £900 ★★★★★

Speeds (rpm) 33⅓, 45 • Electric speed change No • Belt/Direct drive Belt • Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 13 x 46 x 36cm



Rega RP6/Exact
£1000 ★★★★★

Speeds (rpm) 33⅓, 45 • Electric speed change Yes • Belt/Direct drive Belt • Finishes 4 • Dimensions (hwd) 12 x 45 x 36cm



Thorens TD 206
£1000 ★★★★★

Speeds (rpm) 33⅓, 45 • Electric speed change Yes • Belt/Direct drive Belt • Finishes 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 13 x 47 x 43cm

Ear me now

We've got a round-up of six of the coolest pairs of over-ears that will have you grinning from ear-to-ear as you take your movies or music on the move



Audio Technica ATH-M50x £130

1

Occasionally, you just want something that gets the job done. That's the case with the Audio Technica ATH-M50xs: no-fuss, portable over-ear headphones, with very good sound.

Beyond the most basic flourish (silver ring and a logo), there's very little song and dance about them. We think of them more as a tool than a fashion accessory, which is just fine.

There's a lot of plastic, but it's the good kind, and it feels strong enough to withstand a lot of punishment. Earcups swivel 180 degrees and can fold inwards too. Now, if only the cable had an inline remote/mic unit...

These headphones offer an enjoyable listen. Vocals and instruments are afforded texture, and are nicely separated on an organised soundstage. It's an immersive experience.

It's not quite perfect, however. We could do with more dynamic punch, and more clarity would help treble sparkle. But if you're looking for a portable pair of over-ears and you like your sound a little warm, for the money the Audio Technica ATH-M50xs are worth checking out.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent detail; good separation; good sense of life

AGAINST Need greater clarity and dynamic punch

VERDICT A great effort from Audio Technica: these are a good pair of portable over-ears

Philips Fidelio M1MKII £180

4

As the name implies, these are a second take on the Philips Fidelio M1s. You might not know it, because they look virtually identical, but that's no bad thing, because the M1s were lovely.

The MKIIs have a light yet sturdy body of mostly metal and leather. The earpads of memory foam sit snugly, providing a good deal of passive noise isolation. Internally, the new design boasts a lighter voice coil, extended high frequencies and more accurately tuned bass. It certainly works: while the looks have barely changed, the sound is a clear step up.

There is an abundance of detail, only now it is accompanied by a larger sense of space, with more precision and greater clarity. It's a fun listen. There's plenty of punch, with tight timing and strong dynamics. The bass is weighty as ever, but now it's tauter and better defined.

The high end is natural and sweet, and vocals have room to breathe. If you're looking for great portables under £200, you've found them.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth delivery; weighty bass; comfy; nice design

AGAINST Nothing really at this price

VERDICT A superb pair of portables for under £200 – the MKIIs are everything we could hope for

Focal Spirit One S £225

2

Take a look through the Focal Spirit One S webpage and you'll find a load of stuff about 'digital nomadism'. Don't worry, Focal isn't raising an army of audiophile travellers – it's an erroneously translated statement of intent from the company, about excellent sound on the go.

So, nomadism: these Focals are certainly light enough to be lugged about. And despite the lightweight materials (which don't feel very luxurious), these Focals are solid. Their limited folding and swivelling skills mean they're not as compact as we'd like, but at least you get a cloth bag and chunky, hard case for stowing them.

As for the sound, these are a lovely, easy listen. It's a balanced sound, never leaning too hard on any particular part of the frequency range. Punch and accuracy of timing are good enough to convey a strong sense of energy.

We'd like a bit more clarity and sparkle, though, particularly around the treble, which feels a little closed-in. The Focals also lack some thrust. We like the smooth sound, but feel the Spirit One S's character is at times too laid-back.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth sound; decent detail and timing

AGAINST Need more oomph; materials lack luxury

VERDICT Another fine pair of headphones from Focal, but they are not the punchiest

Samsung Level-On £170

5

Samsung is not the first name that springs to mind when we think of headphones. The company is trying to change that. The Level-Ons didn't set our world alight – so will the Level-Ons? Sadly, no. It's not near the level of sound quality we expect for £170. It's not that they do anything particularly badly – it's just, for the money, we expect something special.

Instruments are not as distinctive as they are on similarly-priced rivals. The Level-Ons are not very agile either. We'd also like a greater sense of space and definition. Drumbeats, for example, could be tighter. To make matters worse, these are designed with Samsung Galaxy devices in mind – controls don't work with other devices.

They're well made and comfortable to wear and fold up for stowing away, with a nice zip-up hard case. But our second encounter with the Samsung Level range is a disappointment. They don't do any one thing wrong, but for the money, we expect them to get more things right.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Sturdy construction; comfortable

AGAINST Not engaging; not that dynamic or clear; price; remote only works with Samsung Galaxy devices

VERDICT Disappointing and overpriced

Grado SR125e £150

3

When it comes to Grado, some things just don't change. You have to take them for what they are. Many of our comments about the Grado SR125es will have been said before, and will be again. You won't buy them for their design, which is unashamedly idiosyncratic. They look like a headset for a 1950s shortwave radio.

The SR125es are sturdier than they appear, with swivelling ear cups and detachable foam-pads attached to a thin band of faux-leather, courtesy of some short metal rods.

You won't buy the SR125es for their noise isolation. Indeed, Grado seem to design their headphones with the very opposite in mind. These are about as open as can be. Don't wear these on a bus – the Grados are supposed to be experienced at home, on your lonesome. They're awesomely detailed, with impressive texture. The open back affords them plenty of space, and so the soundstage is very wide.

These Grados pound along with pace and energy: overall, you have great performance for the money, with detail, precision and musicality.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Spacious, detailed, well-timed sound; comfortable

AGAINST Distinctive looks and leaky sound

VERDICT Another talented performer from Grado – just keep them at home

Sennheiser Urbanite £150

6

Headphones have become more flamboyant in recent years. Hence the Urbanites, which promise "urban style on the move".

What you get is a chunky metal headband, part of which is covered in fabric and rubbery plastic. The rest of it has a metallic paint job, which extends to the plastic earcups. These fold inwards, while a flat cable fights tangles. Build quality is strong, overall.

Audio-wise, these Sennheisers have a punchy sound, which is mainly due to the bass, which is somewhat exaggerated. There's an undeniable emphasis on the low end. It's well defined: listen to Lorde and the sparse basslines are taut. This definition means the sound is clear, and there's a decent amount of detail on hand, but we wouldn't go so far as to call it natural. The midrange isn't as expressive as we'd like. Vocals are less detailed, less subtle and less direct.

The Urbanites are a good pair of 'phones by Sennheiser, but not the best around.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Strong, well-defined bass; solid build; stylish

AGAINST Midrange could be more open and expressive; need more subtlety and rhythmic precision

VERDICT Loud in style, sound, but not well-rounded

oppo

EUROPEAN HI-FI HEADPHONE
OF THE YEAR 2014-2015



PM-1

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What's on test

Apple iPhone 6 Plus p68

LG G3 p69

Motorola Moto X p70

Samsung Galaxy Note 4 p72

Sony Xperia Z3 p73

STATE
OF THE ART

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

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

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

Apple iPhone 6 Plus £619

★★★★☆

Camera, action

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

For more details on the Apple iPhone 6 Plus and LG G3 visit whathifi.com

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

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

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

First bite at Full HD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sizing up your options

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

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

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

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

LG G3 £395



Whippersnapper

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



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

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

Screening test

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Snap happy

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

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

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

VERDICT An excellent phone that is now just bettered by newcomers

Motorola Moto X £420

★★★★★



Handy buttons

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

One of the unique things about the Moto X is that you're able to custom-build your handset using Motorola's online Moto Maker service. This allows you to decide between a black or white fascia, pick an accent colour for the speaker grilles and choose from a selection of colours and materials for the back panel, including leather and FSC-certified wood for an added cost.

Worth boosting the storage

It's also through this service that you can request a boost to 32GB of onboard storage in place of the standard 16GB - worth considering, since otherwise the Moto X is non-expandable.

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

A sharp, punchy display

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nothing bloated here

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

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

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Customisable; good user experience; fine screen; enthusiastic sound; relatively cheap

AGAINST Non-expandable storage; camera could be better

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

So **slim**,
you'll need a
closer look



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Samsung Galaxy Note 4 £630

★★★★★

For more details on the Samsung Galaxy and Sony Xperia Z3, visit whathifi.com



Inside access

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

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

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

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

Same size, greater resolution

Samsung has put its ever-growing screen on hold for now, offering the same-sized display as its predecessor at 5.7in. What has changed, though, is the resolution, jumping from Full HD to a Quad HD Super AMOLED screen at 2560 x 1440 resolution and matching the LG G3. It looks stunning and incredibly sharp, with Samsung's vibrant colour palette and rich contrast immediately evident.

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

Samsung's colour palette has cooled recently but it's still on the warm side of

the scale, with colours full of punch, if a little over-saturated alongside something like the iPhone 6 Plus.

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

This is supported by a surprisingly good battery life. Though it has a larger

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

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

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

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

The smartphone market spent years trying to rid itself of styluses, but the

Note range has always championed them, and in the Note 4 the S-Pen is twice as sensitive as previous iterations.

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

Camera boost

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

When it comes to big-screen phones, Samsung knows what works. It's been doing it for years, and that shows in the Galaxy Note 4. Yes it's big, but it's worth every single inch of your pocket space.

Rating ★★★★★

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

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

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

Sony Xperia Z3 £550

★★★★★



Full HD is enough

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

After bagging a

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

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

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

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

Detailed and natural-looking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heavy but useable

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

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

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

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

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

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Sony Xperia Z3****£550 ★★★★★****WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER**

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

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

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

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

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

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

SYSTEM BUILDER

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

**Headphones****AKG Y50 £80 ★★★★★**

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

**Streaming service****Spotify from free ★★★★★**

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

**Bluetooth speakers****Bowers & Wilkins T7 £300 ★★★★★**

B&W's first portable speaker doesn't disappoint with a refined and rhythmic display.

Total build £930

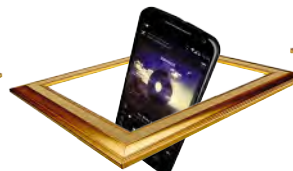
For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whatifhi.com

Facts & figures**Apple iPhone 6 Plus**
£619 ★★★★★

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

**LG G3****£395 ★★★★★**

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

**Moto X****£420 ★★★★★**

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

**Samsung Galaxy Note 4**
£630 ★★★★★

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

**Sony Xperia Z3**
£550 ★★★★★

Screen size 5.2in • **Resolution/ppi** 1920 x 1080/424 • **Processor** 2.5GHz quad-core • **RAM** 3GB • **Camera:** 20.7MP/2.2MP • **Battery:** 3100mAh • **Capacity:** 16/32GB • **Expandable** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 146 x 72 x 7mm • **Weight** 152g



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October 2013



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Streaming, digital, stereo, style. Meet the new amplifiers for the 21st century

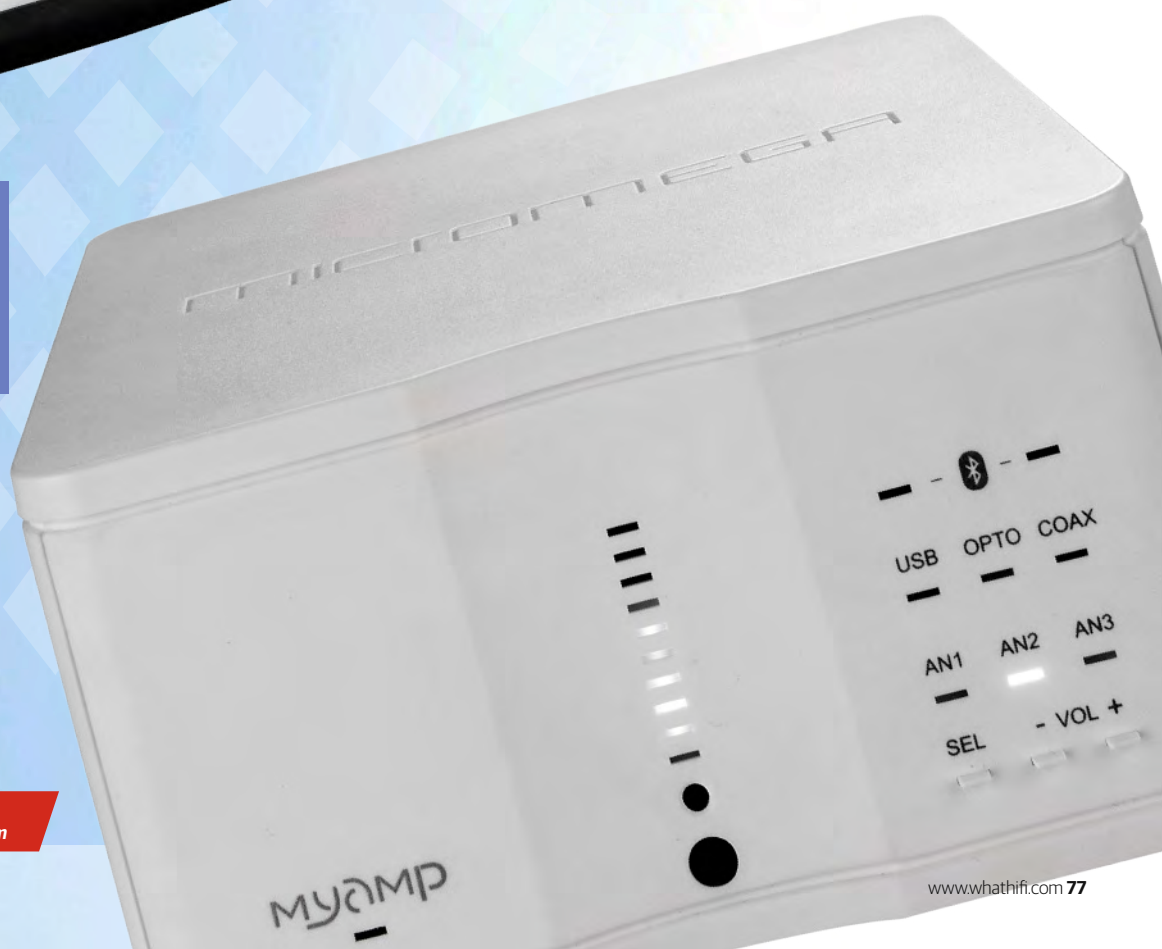


What's on test

Micromega MyAmp, p78
 Monitor Audio Airstream A100, p79
 NADD 3020, p80
 Pro-Ject MaiA, p82
 TEAC AI-301DA, p83

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

The five amplifiers on test here all meet the required criteria: they're compact and flexible; they have a built-in DAC for hi-res digital formats; they have Bluetooth (or another form of streaming). And all but one costs a sensible £400. It's going to be a tough contest.



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THE PAIRING PROCESS

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

Micromega MyAmp £480 ★★★★★☆

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

Unorthodox appearance

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

This is unlike any other integrated amplifier we've seen, even in the light of forward-looking models such as the NAD D 3020. The Micromega's compact dimensions mean it can be easy to place in the home, but we're not too keen on its build quality. Given that the MyAmp costs £80 more than its rivals, the plastic finish (which comes in black or white) looks and feels rather cheap.

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

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

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

A love of speed

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

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

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

We admire the control and energy of the Micromega MyAmp. The sheer driving force will entertain many listeners, and it doesn't discriminate when it comes to low-resolution Spotify streams, either. That versatile list of connections is also impressive, but its questionable build quality and less-than-subtle sound isn't quite everything we hoped £480 would buy.

Rating ★★★★★☆

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

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

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

**WIRELESS WARS**

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

Monitor Audio Airstream A100 £400 ★★★★★

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

A fine spread

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sleek and insightful

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

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

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



LIGHT AND FLEXIBLE

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

NAD D 3020 £400 ★★★★★

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

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

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

Rising to the challenge

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Staying power

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

AGAINST Touch controls are a little fiddly

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

The Special One

Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE



Enhanced Dual Concentric™ drive unit with additional magnet providing improved sensitivity, crisper response, wider dynamic range and even faster transient attack than the standard DC6T. Now that really is special!

Special Edition graphic clearly indicating that the DC6T SE owner is a person of demanding and exclusive taste.

Improved bass driver with a twin-magnet motor system, providing exceptional low frequency control and accuracy.

Crossover especially re-engineered and optimised to the improved driver complement.

A very special and substantial plinth to improve stability, stereo focus and sound-staging.

Top-adjustable spikes and large locking wheel making set up especially easy.

btw ...the speaker is priced at £999 making it a bit of a special bargain.

Tannoy logo, indicating built by Tannoy and incorporating 85 years of loudspeaker engineering expertise. So clearly very special indeed.

Recognition for special performance -2012 & 2013 What Hi-Fi Award for Best floorstanding speaker.



STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £700-£1500



STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £800-£1500





INTRODUCING THE PANEL

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

Pro-Ject MaiA £400 ★★★★★

A small integrated stereo amplifier that's chock full of connections, the £400 Pro-Ject MaiA looks like a tempting piece of kit.

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

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

Slight but effective

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

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

Aerial for streaming

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

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

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

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

It's with the phono input that the MaiA sounds its best. Plug in a budget turntable such as the Award-winning Pro-Ject Essential II (£200) or the Debut Carbon (£325), and the amp has a bit more freedom to stretch its sonic wings.

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

Rating ★★★★★

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

AGAINST Rhythmically challenged; could be livelier and more dynamic

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

**THE BODY BEAUTIFUL**

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

TEAC AI-301DA £400 ★★★★★☆

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

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

Easy listening

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fit for the modern age

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

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

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

Rating ★★★★★☆

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

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

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

MUSIC STREAMING MADE SIMPLE

'An excellent sounding system'

What Hi-fi? Sound and Vision,
November 2014

'Outstanding – amongst the best'

Hi-Fi World, October 2014

'Rich and engaging sound'

Hi-Fi Choice, July 2014



The Simple Audio Roomplayer+ is a high resolution music streamer. It transforms the way you listen to your own music at home with its unique multi-library, multi-user and multi-room features. Add music discovery into the mix and you'll love how simple it is to stream great sounding music from your favourite devices.

simpleaudio.com

Available from Audio-T, Music Matters and all good specialist dealers:
simpleaudio.com/where-to-buy



TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****NAD D 3020****£400 ★★★★★****WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER**

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

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

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

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

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

SYSTEM BUILDER

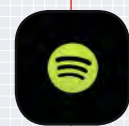
Hook the NAD in with these three to create a formidable file-based music system

**Stereo speakers****Dali Zensor 3 £300 ★★★★★**

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

**Tablet****Apple iPad Air 2 From £400 ★★★★★**

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

**Streaming service****Spotify £10/month ★★★★★**

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

Total build £1100

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

Facts & figures**Micromega MyAmp
£480 ★★★★★☆**

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

**Monitor Audio Airstream
A100 £400 ★★★★★**

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

**NAD D 3020
£400 ★★★★★**

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

**Pro-ject MaiA
£400 ★★★★★☆**

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

**TEAC AI-301DA
£400 ★★★★★☆**

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

With internet, DAB and Bluetooth capabilities, the right radio can now easily transport you around the globe



Pure Pop Midi with Bluetooth

£80 ★★★★★

1 Pure has a proven track record of making good radios: the company took gongs in our 2013 and 2014 Awards. Next up is a trio of digital radios, called the Pop Mini, Midi and Maxi, and what we have here is the middle-sized unit. Why is it called Pop? Because it's the most noticeable feature of the radio. Press the comically large power button at the top and it will pop up, doubling as a volume knob.

The front has a small screen and a single driver, while the cloth-grille wrap is deceptive: sound only comes out the front. Power is from a microUSB connection, as opposed to a bulky power brick. The bottom of the device opens up to take four 'AA' batteries, or Pure's rechargeable ChargePAK D1 battery pack (£35, sold separately).

The Pop is lovely to use and a tidy device, with friendly dimensions (17x9x10cm). The sound, however, could be better. You get a decent amount of detail and weight, but there's no escaping the small size of the audio. There's a hard edge to everything, too, that can get tiring. It's a decent device for the price. Just don't expect excellence.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Looks good; nicely made; neat 'Pop' button

AGAINST Sounds a bit small, cluttered and hard; small screen

VERDICT A neat bedside radio, but we have certainly heard better



Roberts Revival iStream 2

£200 ★★★★★

2 There's no getting around this: the Roberts Revival iStream 2 is a lovely thing. As 'Revival' suggests, this is one of Roberts' retro models, with a large grille and black, cream or Duck Egg leather-like material all over.

On one side, you'll find a metal clasp. Undo this and you can open the full-width back panel. This is where you can insert four 'D' batteries (if you're not near the mains) while marvelling at the radio's innards. Look to the top of the unit and you'll find this radio isn't the relic it could be. It can handle DAB, DAB+ and internet radio as well as FM.

You can play your own content with a USB stick or via the 3.5mm input, but the real surprise is Spotify Connect compatibility.

The LCD screen is small and monochrome, but it is clear and easily read. You'll have no problems scrolling through menus and channels. As for the sound, it's clear but full-bodied and not tinny. Tonally, the sound is well balanced. It could do with a little more bass weight, but it's perfectly convincing. Detail levels are good too. Yes, we really like the Roberts Revival iStream 2.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Balanced, full-bodied sound; good looks; strong build

AGAINST Could do with a bit more bass

VERDICT Great looks, great sound - it's got a royal warrant, and sure enough, this radio is fit for kings



Roth DBT-003 £80 ★★★★★

3 We like a good price drop. Take this Roth DBT-003, for instance. It was launched two years ago at around £150, but now it can be bought for £80. Sounds like a good time to review it.

The DBT-003 is a desktop digital radio. Its dimensions (12x30x15cm) and weight (1.71kg) suggest it should be left at home. Its features include DAB, DAB+ and FM, as well as inputs via 3.5mm auxiliary and Bluetooth. At the back of the unit you'll find a USB port, but this is for charging only. It's a handsome device - available in glossy black or white, or walnut. The front has two drivers and clickable buttons between two dials.

It's weightier and more spacious than the relatively tinny sound of the equally priced Pure Pop Midi with Bluetooth. There's a decent amount of detail. Sadly this is outweighed by the lack of balance. It's a boomy sound, with thick bass hogging your attention. Songs thump along without any sense of refinement, and it's hard to pick out much nuance.

The price drop helps of course, but still, the Roth DBT-003 could sound better.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good looks and build; remote control

AGAINST Boomy, thumpy sound; awkward volume controls

VERDICT A nicely-specified radio that looks better than it sounds, or operates



Join us on Spotify
whf.cm/playlist2014
Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

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

Tivoli Audio Music System Three+ £250 ★★★★★

4 We're never sure what to expect from Tivoli these days. Our recent experience has ranged from very good to not-so-good. What of the Audio Music System Three+? Well, we think it's a decent, if pricey, offering.

Its dimensions (12x29x13cm) and weight (1.89kg) means you won't stick this in a handbag, but a cavity built into the back acts as a handle (this doubles as a storage space for the credit card-type remote control).

It also has a built-in battery which frees you from the mains. It lasts up to 20 hours. A full charge takes 12 hours, but Tivoli says it can reach 75 per cent in three.

The Three+ is capable of DAB/DAB+ and FM, while there's also Bluetooth, an auxiliary 3.5mm input and a headphone output. The sound via the two three-inch drivers is passable, fairly spacious for a portable device, with decent power. But it's boomy, and not very clear. The treble is thin and fuzzy, the midrange is hollow and recessed, and the bass lacks definition.

The Music System 3+ is not a terrible purchase, but it is an expensive one.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid build; portable; built-in battery

AGAINST Poor sound quality

VERDICT A decent portable device, but the price tag does not reflect the sound - it should be a lot better



View Quest Hepburn £150 ★★★★★

5 This is the Hepburn, named after the iconic actress. It's not hard to see why. We think it's very stylish:

there are 11 colour schemes to choose from. But it's not long before we suspect the Hepburn is just a pretty face. We're not keen on build quality. The antenna bends with little persuasion, as does the leatherette at the front. It also takes very little to scratch the grille. For £150 we'd expect better.

We'd also hope for better sound. It's not a pleasant listen. The bass is over-egged and muffled. Elsewhere, it's a harsh, hard sound, and it doesn't take much volume before distortion sets in. It does fine on the features front: DAB/DAB+ as well as FM. You can play your own content wirelessly via Bluetooth, or plug in with the 3.5mm auxiliary input. There's a USB port too, but for charging only.

The Hepburn comes with a mains adaptor, but you'll find a flap for four 'D' batteries on the radio's underside. It's nice to use, and while there's no remote, you can download the 'View Quest' app. But all in all, we find it hard to recommend the View Quest Hepburn. Take your money elsewhere.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good looks; remote app

AGAINST Poor sound; build quality is disappointing; no remote control

VERDICT The Hepburn looks enticing, but it's a case of style over substance

SOUND UNWIRED

We love surround sound. We'd love it more if we didn't have to hide cables all over the place. Step forward, LG MUSICflow...

Nothing adds realism to the experience of watching a blockbuster on an amazing television like having sounds pop out at you from all directions.

The problem is clutter: the bigger your room, the more wiring you need, and hiding all that cabling is tiresome.

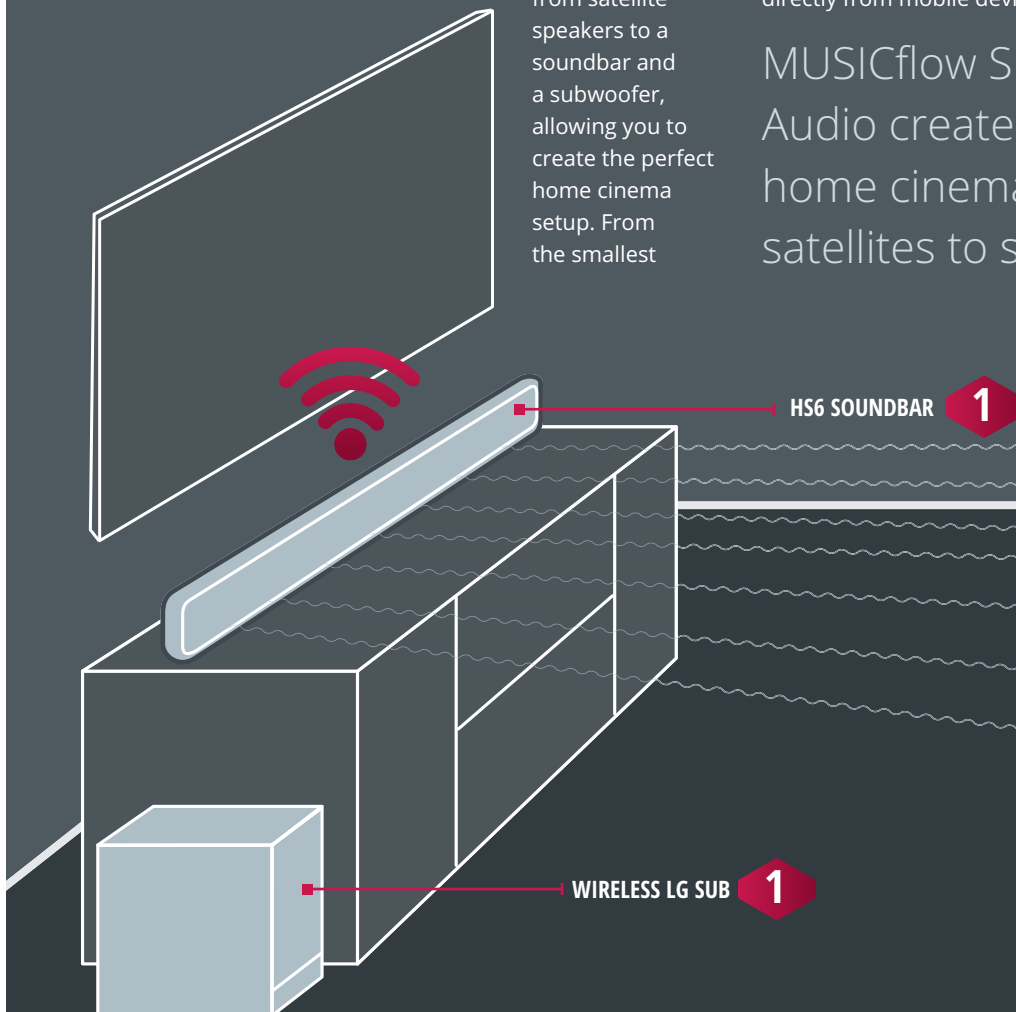
LG's solution is ingenious: the MUSICflow Smart Hi-Fi Audio system comprises a big range of different audio components,

from satellite speakers to a soundbar and a subwoofer, allowing you to create the perfect home cinema setup. From the smallest

MUSICflow H3 to the 70-watt H7 and the HS6 soundbar/subwoofer combo, MUSICflow is all about freeing your home cinema.

And, of course, you can be more flexible with your music: play a song on all your speakers at once, or play different tracks in different rooms. Alternatively, you can group speakers into a wireless multi-channel system, and stream music from services such as Spotify, Napster and TuneIn, as well as playing directly from mobile devices.

MUSICflow Smart Hi-Fi Audio creates the perfect home cinema setup, from satellites to subwoofer





1 MUSICflow Smart Hi-Fi Audio HS6 wireless soundbar and subwoofer

The HS6 packs an amazing punch: 160W of sound from the four-channel soundbar plus another 160W from the wireless subwoofer will revolutionise how your TV sounds.

This wunderbar wonder-bar integrates with the rest of LG's MUSICflow hardware, so when it's not performing cinematic duties it can form part of a next-generation hi-fi system.

Like the rest of MUSICflow, it's compatible with high-res FLAC files for truly top quality.

SPECS: 4x 160-watt speakers, 160-watt sub-woofer; 24-bit FLAC compatible; wireless mesh network; Bluetooth-compatible

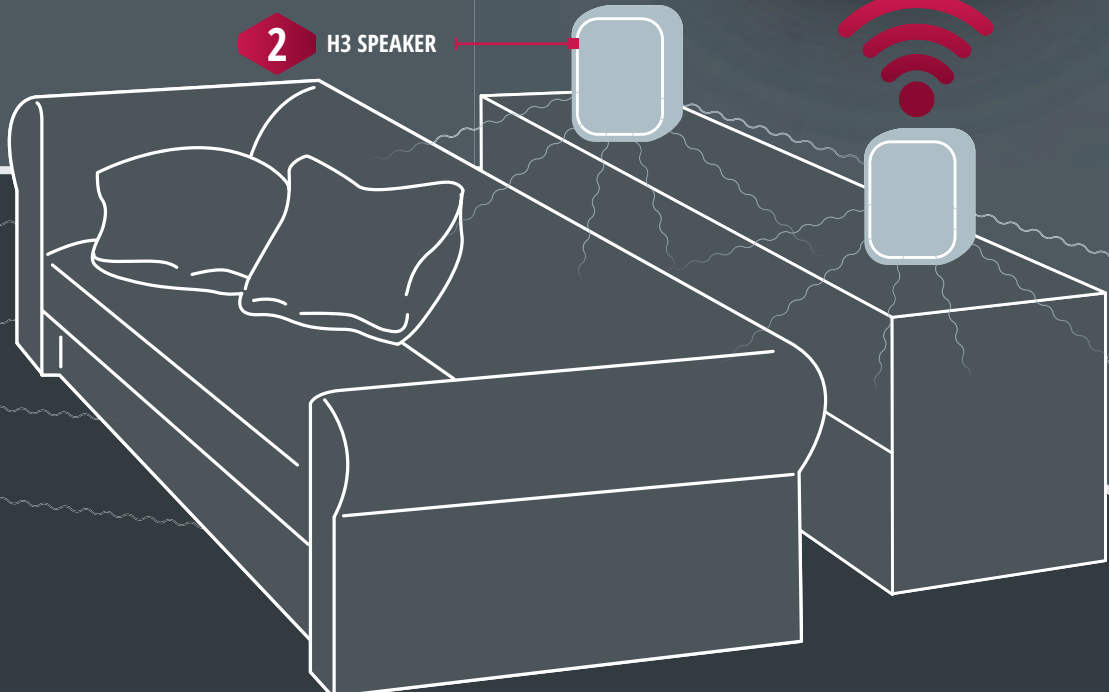
2 MUSICflow Smart Hi-Fi Audio H3 wireless speaker

At just 12.5cm wide, the H3 is LG's smallest MUSICflow device, but that doesn't mean it doesn't rock with the best of them. The single 30W speaker inside the sleek casing packs plenty of punch, while HD audio compatibility, the ability to fold the H3 into a multi-room system or play on its own, plus NFC and Bluetooth compatibility, make it a pint-sized powerhouse.

SPECS: 1x 30-watt speaker, 24-bit FLAC compatible, wireless mesh network, Bluetooth and NFC compatible



2 H3 SPEAKER



The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“This deck delivers a sound full of energy and sparkle”

■ Rega RP8/Apheta Turntable

■ £2200 ★★★★★

The RP8 is the most ambitious Rega turntable we've ever tested. Initially, it's possible to mistake it for one of the company's more modest offerings, but a closer look reveals there's far more going on here than first impressions suggest. And we're not talking about the glossy finish, either.

Rega has long believed in making its turntable plinths as light and rigid as possible. If the material is light it doesn't store unwanted vibration energy as long, which is a good thing as far as turntable sound quality is concerned.

Over the years Rega has used plinths made of either MDF or chipboard covered with phenolic resin to deliver low weight with rigidity, but with the RP8 the company has gone much further.

A very bearable lightness of being

The central core of this deck's plinth is made of light, closed-cell polyolefin foam. This material took three years to develop to match Rega's needs. As with the earlier designs, phenolic resin skins are added to both top and bottom surfaces to deliver higher rigidity and an element of damping. The result is a plinth - available in gloss-black only - that is a seventh the weight of the original Planer 3 plinth.

To improve the plinth structure even further, the company has added two braces where it thinks rigidity needs to be at its highest - between the arm base and main bearing. Two different materials are used for the bracing: the upper layer is made of magnesium and the lower is phenolic. Each material damps the natural resonances in the other resulting in an immensely light, stiff and well-behaved structure.



It goes further than just materials. The RP8's plinth is a skeletal design intended to be as small as practical. The smaller it is, the lighter and more rigid it will be - notice a theme here?

There is a slight issue when using the RP8's skeletal form, caused by the foam core. The material's edges aren't smooth, and to many it looks unfinished. That's just the way the material is, and Rega no doubt feels the advantages in terms of performance far outweigh the apparent aesthetic shortcomings.

In addition, there's a practical issue with skeletal decks and that's how to incorporate a dust cover. While some hardcore purists may not care for such practicalities, for many people it matters. Rega's answer is to build a surround for the skeletal structure resulting in what looks like a conventionally rectangular plinth; that way an entirely conventional lid can be used. Neat.

The space between

But look carefully and you'll see that there's an even gap between the plinth and the surround, and the connection between the two is limited to thin rubber bands at each of the deck's three feet. These bands make sure the spacing between the two parts stays even.

It's a simple but very clever arrangement. The lack of a rigid connection between the plinth and surround means that any vibration picked up by the lid - a significant issue

that degrades sound quality by feeding mechanical energy into the player's structure - is minimised, if not avoided altogether.

Weight on the outside

The only place Rega likes more mass is on its platters, or more accurately at the rim of its platters. Mass at this point helps to maintain rotational speed and irons out slight speed fluctuations - though go too far and you create problems with the main bearing design. As with everything in hi-fi, it's all about finding the best compromise.

The hefty platter of the RP8 is a complex affair. It comprises three layers of laminated glass. The top layer is where the record sits; the subsequent layers are rings to focus the mass on the outer edge. The idea is to maximise the flywheel effect but keep the weight at the centre low.

This glass platter sits on an aluminium sub-platter, rather than the plastic versions used in the more affordable models. We try to spot some play in the main bearing, but can't - it's as precisely machined as we'd hope for at this price. A 24V AC motor spins the sub-platter though a twin-belt arrangement. It's controlled by Rega's TT-PSU outboard power supply, which provides a clean, high-quality power feed. The power supply is fine-tuned to the specific

1 Three rubber feet help with isolation, but make sure the RP8 sits on a solid platform 2 A metal sub-platter, driven by twin belts, supports the main platter 3 Counterweight (right) and spring-loaded downforce control regulate the cartridge



TECH SPECS
Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45
Electric speed change Yes
Manual Yes
Tone arm Yes
Cartridge Yes
Drive type Belt
Finishes Black
Dimensions (hwd)
12 x 45 x 36cm

'Rega's answer is to build a surround for the skeletal structure resulting in a conventional plinth. Neat'



TEMPTATIONS

Rega RP8/Apheta

motor by hand to maximise smoothness. The TT-PSU also has speed control on it so you can swap from albums to singles (33 $\frac{1}{3}$ to 45rpm) at the press of a button rather than having to take the platter off and move the drive belt manually as with some rivals.

Compared with the plinth, other parts of the Rega may look more conventional – but that doesn't make them any less interesting. The arm is an RB808. It's handmade, with great care taken over the fit and tolerance of the bearings. Each bearing is individually selected to find the closest match to the relevant spindle. The bearing assembly is an all-new design too, majoring on – you've guessed it – low mass and high rigidity.

Strong arm tactics

Even the arm tube is different from those used by Rega's lesser arms. It's been designed to redistribute mass and reduce resonances, and rigidity is also improved over earlier designs. Lastly, the RB808 uses high-quality cabling with fewer joins in the signal path than before and better quality plugs.

The final part of the package is the Apheta moving-coil cartridge (see panel). It's the only moving-coil cartridge the company makes, and is the natural partner for the RP8. While it may be tempting to save the £600 it costs and go for a cheaper alternative, we think it fits the turntable's character really well and is worth the expense.

As with all turntables, the RP8 benefits from careful placement. There isn't much in the way of suspension, so performance will suffer if the deck is placed too close to the speakers or on a surface that resonates strongly. Take care

It's brilliant at latching on to that infectious rhythm track and thumps out the dense, undulating bass with considerable skill

The cartridge

The Apheta is Rega's first moving-coil cartridge. The company looked at the conventional way of designing such a cartridge and decided that the workings could be simplified with modern materials and technology.

The result is a fast, agile and highly detailed performer but one which errs on the bright and lean side of neutral. Careful system matching will stop the tonal character from being an issue. Each sample is supplied with a specific tracking weight, rather than the general value given by most manufacturers.



with respect to these points and this Rega will reward you richly.

How does the package sound? In a word, detailed. We've heard many turntables at this level but can't think of one that digs up as much information as this one.

Play *Mars* from Holst's *The Planets* and the RP8 excels. There's power coupled to wide-ranging dynamics and the ability to keep a tight grip on instrumental strands. Nothing gets confused as the piece builds to its crescendo.

Tonally, things aren't quite neutral. The presentation is always just a touch lean and bright. Bass, while wonderfully taut and tuneful, doesn't quite have a full dose of weight to it. This lack of neutrality doesn't go too far though, and certainly won't be a problem unless other components in your system have harsh or aggressive tendencies.

Energy and agility

The pay-off for that tonal balance is speed and plenty of it. This is a magnificently responsive-sounding deck and it delivers a sound full of energy and sparkle. If you want excitement, drama and the ability to just lose yourself in your music, we haven't heard a better alternative for the job. The soundstage is good too. It's stable, focused and nicely layered.

Switch to Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean* and the Rega is right at home. It's brilliant at latching on to that infectious rhythm track and thumps out the dense, undulating bassline with considerable skill. Jackson's distinctive vocals are delivered with

passion and superb clarity, and are in no way submerged by the packed instrumental backdrop.

Takes all sorts

We scan our record collection, taking in the likes of R.E.M.'s *Automatic For The People*, Miles Davis's *Kind Of Blue* and Bob Marley's *Exodus*, and the Rega takes it all in its stride, delivering a class-leading combination of attack and subtlety.

This is a hugely accomplished package that lifts a massive amount of information off the groove and organises it in a musically engaging way. It's the kind of record player that has us listening well into the night, just wanting to see how good it makes the next record sound.

Rega is quite rightly recognised for the quality of its more affordable decks. The likes of the RP3 particularly have dominated their sectors, and our Awards, for longer than we care to remember. But when the company really goes for it, shooting for the stars rather than trying to meet a price point, the results are spectacular. If you have the budget for the RP8/Apheta combination, jump right in. You won't be disappointed.

Consider if You want an articulate and massively detailed-sounding turntable
Highlight Resolution – this is as detailed a deck as we've heard at this level

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A massively detailed sound; class-leading agility; strong dynamics and precision; build

AGAINST Sympathetic placement a must; needs careful system matching

VERDICT The RP8/Apheta combination sets sky-high standards at the price

The TT-PSU power supply has a button for switching easily from 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ to 45rpm



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TEMPTATIONS

Roksan Darius S1



Neat design touches abound throughout, including the smart label disc machined into the top panel



“We’re caught up in the drama of the melody”

■ Roksan Darius S1 Stereo speakers

■ £5000 (inc £750 stands) ★★★★★

Those with long memories may remember the original Roksan Darius. Introduced in the '80s, they were the company's first speakers; odd-looking high-end standmounters with a suspended tweeter and, in their earliest incarnations, an intriguing exoskeleton stand.

They could perform really well, if pampered, having a direct and dynamic delivery. Fans of the originals might be surprised to learn that the new S1s share little engineering DNA with that classic design, but we have to say they're none the worse for that.

The S1 remains a two-way design. It mates a high-quality aluminium ribbon tweeter (an Aurum Cantus G2N) with a custom-made 13cm mid/bass driver. That fearsome-looking grille in front of the mid/bass is only there to prevent unwanted poking and prodding.

Care on the crossover

Roksan has taken a great deal of care with the crossover design, trying to integrate the two drivers as seamlessly as possible. Take a look at the quality of the components used and it's clear the company hasn't tried to save the pennies. The crossover components for treble and mid/bass are also positioned on separate boards to prevent unwanted interaction, and good-quality internal cabling is claimed throughout.

That smart, internally braced MDF cabinet is immaculately made and finished. We like the attention to detail, right down to the curved cabinet edges and dimples machined into the side panel. It makes the speakers look so much more interesting than would otherwise be the case. The enclosure

The dedicated stands suit the S1s perfectly, but bear in mind the combo could be easily toppled if bumped



is relatively slim in proportion, but deep enough to gain a decent amount of internal volume. Look around the back and you'll find a pair of determined-looking reflex ports and a biwire set of rather swish WBT terminals.

Made for the job

While the Darius will work on third-party stands we would suggest sticking to the dedicated supports. These aren't cheap at £750, but look good and suit the speakers both in appearance and performance. There's also a tidy cable management arrangement. The combination is available in two gloss finishes, white and black - both options look smart.

A word of caution though. If you have young children running around it's worth knowing that the speaker/

Roksan has taken a great deal of care with the crossover. Look at the quality of the components used and it's clear the company hasn't tried to save the pennies

stand combination is fairly easy to topple if it's bumped, thanks to a pretty high centre of gravity and a relatively small stand footprint.

Any speakers at this level need top-class electronics to shine and these Roksans are no different. Their quoted sensitivity is relatively good at 89dB/W/m but the nominal impedance is 4 ohms, which suggests a relatively beefy amplifier is required. We get good results with our reference system of Naim NDS/555PS streamer, Clearaudio

TEMPTATIONS

Roksan Darius S1

Innovation Wood turntable package and Bryston BP26/4B SST2 amplifier. Given this kind of system the Darius S1s soar.

We like them best positioned well out into our test room. It pays to take a bit of time getting the toe-in and the distance between the channels just so. Get it right and these standmounters produce a lovely, well-focussed soundstage that extends well beyond the physical placement of the cabinets. The imaging is wide, deep and beautifully layered with impressive precision.

The Darius S1s are immensely likeable speakers. They have a wonderfully fluid delivery that blends attack, insight and refinement well. Most high-end speakers tend to be mostly about analysis; with the better ones you'll be able to unravel a recording and spot any errors in production or the musicianship. That's

While they reveal plenty of detail, it's the way they organise it that impresses us. These speakers are rhythmic and dynamic, yet have finesse when the music demands

great as far as it goes, but we want more. We want to feel the energy of Stevie Wonder at his best on *Higher Ground*, and get caught up in the hard-charging momentum of the song. This is the area many fall short on, delivering lots of detail without communicating the energy of the music properly. Not the Darius, which get straight to the core of the track with ease.

Attention to detail

Equally, play an intricate piece like Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* and we want to get caught up in the drama of the melody and swept away by the ever-building tension of piece. The Darius S1s manage all this and more.

While they reveal plenty of detail, it's the way they organise it that impresses us most. These speakers are rhythmic and dynamic, and yet have finesse when the music demands too.

They're pretty small, standing just 38cm high, so truly deep bass isn't on the menu. Roksan itself quotes 47Hz (-3dB) as the low-end limit, so you'll certainly find alternatives that will dig deeper.

TECH SPECS

Type Standmounter **Sensitivity** 89dB/W/m
Impedance 4 ohms **Max power** 200W
Birirable Yes **Finishes** black or white gloss
Dimensions (hwd) 38 x 20 x 38cm



1 The dedicated stands have slots top and bottom to facilitate neat cable management **2** Despite the significant bass ports, the S1s don't suffer too much from being placed close to a wall. Biwire terminals are high quality **3** Neatly machined side dimples look attractive **4** The ribbon tweeters work especially well in the S1s, but are fragile

But don't dismiss these speakers on that account. Importantly, the Darius produce enough low-end weight and authority to ensure a lack of bass reach never gets to be an issue in our test room. We never feel like we're missing out on the lowest octaves. The solidity at low frequencies is pleasing, as is these speakers' ability to render texture to their bass delivery. The leading and trailing edges of notes are defined neatly.

Seamless flow

This solid foundation is mated to a quite lovely, flowing midrange. We're impressed by the naturalness on vocals and the utterly seamless way they track sounds from the lowest notes upwards. It's all topped off with a clear, crisp and subtle treble performance that sparkles with cymbals but has the required bite when needed. Tonally, things are nicely balanced and without emphasis on any part of the frequency range.

While Roksan has always made speakers, they have never grabbed the limelight in the way the company's amplifiers, CD players and even turntables have. These new Darius S1s are good enough to change that.

Consider if You want great sound from well built, compact standmounters
Highlight Sonic balance is exceptional; fluid, refined yet still exciting to listen to

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fluid, well balanced sound; convincing midrange; solid, agile bass; strong dynamics; fine rhythmic ability; impressive build

AGAINST Dedicated stands are pricey

VERDICT The Darius S1s are excellent performers and one of the most enjoyable standmounters we've heard in years



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Guardians of the Galaxy

Blu-ray

Out 24th November

★★★★★



Bonus content

- Audio commentary
- Deleted scenes
- Gag reel
- Making-of featurettes
- Sneak peek of *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*

Duration 121m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 7.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p

Picture	■■■■■
Sound	■■■■■
Extras	■■■■■

Space opera at its very best

Ten films in, and things look uncertain for Marvel. Its last three films were sequels, and now one of its lesser-known properties gets adapted. Is the studio out of ideas? Not even close - *Guardians of the Galaxy* is a delight.

Suffering from superhero fatigue? Then this is the remedy. In place of *The Avengers* is a band of misfits: a dancing thief, a couple of vengeful killers, a humanoid tree and a gun-toting raccoon.

This is Marvel's most far-fetched picture yet, but it's also the most endearing. It wholeheartedly embraces the silly side of comic books and never takes itself too seriously. This is the antithesis of the dark, sulky nonsense that weighed down *Man of Steel*.

That's not to say this is less epic or heroic - it's just a departure in style and tone. Bad Guys still get vanquished, but capes and powers give way to camaraderie.

An interstellar setting also helps. It makes for a grander, more flamboyant affair than just beating up New York again.

The result: a space opera more likeable, more magical, and altogether more *Star Wars* than anything in all of Episodes I-III.

The script is sharp. The banter is snappy and subversive. Main characters have room to develop - proof that it doesn't take multiple films to set up a good ensemble.

There's still plenty of action

Action occupies a secondary role, but when the time comes, it's thrusters on full. From prison breaks to aerial dogfights, there's plenty of variety.

The sheer number of colours employed makes for a seriously attractive picture. The cinematography is sensible enough to make the most of this, with no attention-deficit editing.

Music plays a far bigger role here than other Marvel flicks. There's a suitably caffeinated score, punctuated with '70s hits on a cassette tape.

It's an inspired playlist, crucial in anchoring the proceedings to a vibe of irreverence and camp.

If there is a flaw, it's with the plot. With so much attention on the Guardians themselves, there's little time for much else.

It's basically a trek through space for A Dangerous Thing. It's also never really justified why the main (and entirely forgettable) villain wants to hit things and conquer a bunch of planets.

Still, these are minor bumps. In nearly every other way, this is a thoroughly satisfying journey.

Guardians of the Galaxy is a rare beast indeed. Bold, adventurous and plenty of fun, this is space opera at its best. JJ Abrams should be very concerned.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist2014](http://whf.cm/playlist2014)



The Donnas: It's On The Rocks The best band in the world with a singer called Brett Anderson is The Donnas. Hear them at their rockiest.

Etienne de Crécy: Fast Track French house music may no longer be de rigueur, but *Fast Track* is a good-natured dancefloor monster nevertheless. Formidable.

Amii Stewart: Knock On Wood A stone disco classic, obviously, but more pertinently one of the most out-and-out strange-sounding recordings you'll ever hear.

Sir Frog & The Toads: Mustang You're not short of throw-away surf-pop instrumentals, but this is among the more giddily exciting examples. All the whammy-bar, all the time.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p100



Download, CD, vinyl



RUMER INTO COLOUR

Out now

★★★★☆

When the app to build your perfect album finally arrives, it will have limitless options. Go to 'Instruments' and select 'electric piano', 'muted wah-wah guitar', 'mellow string sections', 'sensitively brushed drums' and 'eloquent singer/songwriter piano'. In 'Arrangements' select 'lush', 'langorous' and 'risquely mid-tempo'. Go to town on 'Singer' by choosing 'effortless', 'smooth', 'emotive', 'honeyed' and 'eerily like Karen Carpenter'. Then check 'personal' and 'direct' in the 'Lyrics' column. You've put everything in place to turn out a

superior selection of adult-orientated and accessible pop songs.

The problem with *Into Colour* is the 'Songs' option has been ignored, and it's apparently defaulted to 'bland' and 'anonymous'. Everything that's right about *Into Colour* – production, musicianship and so on – is undermined by a magnolia selection of songs Dido might have rejected as being a bit on the safe side.

Still, it's a system stretcher

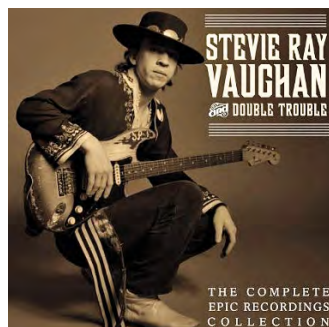
As a collection of songs to give your system a stretch, though, *Into Colour* is the real deal. There's not a lot of dynamic variation on show, but in every other respect this is an album to separate a really great set-up from the rest. Every instrument is alive with timbre and nuance, Rumer's voice remains a humbling experience, and the sound is spacious. As a top-to-bottom showcase of a system, then, you could do a lot worse. As entertainment, though, not so much.

Specifications

Duration 41m 39s

Standout track *Baby Come Back To Bed* Absolutely saturated in essence of Burt Bacharach and Hal David

Download, CD, vinyl



STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE COMPLETE EPIC RECORDINGS

Out now

★★★★☆

One valid argument says Stevie Ray Vaughan was a virtuoso guitarist with nuance of tone and touch few can come close to, a talent taken before his time (at age 35) just as his career was entering an intriguing second act.

A second argument, similarly easy to defend, holds Stevie Ray Vaughan to be a one-paced, generic (if accomplished) blues player whose best songs were covers, who had an anonymous singing voice and who gave work to the whitest backing band ever to play.

Either way, the entire SRV&DT cannon – four studio albums and a plodding, shamelessly overdubbed live double set – has been parlayed into the 12 (count 'em!) discs that comprise *The Complete Epic Recordings Collection*. If, at the end of this marathon, you feel the need to hear any more clean, overdriven, impeccably played and deeply felt blues guitar in the next, oh let's say decade, well, you have a blues affinity almost as strong as Stevie's.

The guitar's the star

And just the first few hours of the recordings here will tell you all you need to know about your system. The guitar is front-and-centre, of course, and there's no denying how much SRV's playing demands of your set-up's tonality, speed, detail retrieval and dynamism. The rest is a mid-'80s nightmare of enormous drums, flabby bass and approximate vocals, though, and barely exercises your system at all.

Specifications

Duration 626m 17s

Standout track *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)* No fewer than four times, each show-offier than the last.

Listen to it this way

The system

Pro-ject Essential II £210 ★★★★★

Pretty much an all-round perfect budget record player

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

Better specified, better made and better sounding than the price even hints at

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £200 ★★★★★

Talented enough to survive multiple upgrades elsewhere in your system



Into Colour is a great recording to show off this fine system

Listen to it this way

The system

Cyrus CDI £1050 ★★★★★

A redefinition of what a CD player at this sort of price can be capable

Rega Elicit-R £1600 ★★★★★

Assertive and surefooted, the Elicit-R wears a velvet glove over its iron fist

PMC Twenty22 £1970 ★★★★★

Unassuming until the moment you hear them, these PMCs are alive with detail



A superb system that will see you through 10 and a half hours of Stevie Ray



Movie shorts

Transformers: Age of Extinction
New characters, same old problems. This time it's Hong Kong that gets blown to bits in the name of saving mankind and selling merchandise.

20,000 Days on Earth
A truthful fiction, a dissembled biography, a study of good suits and bad beards... this is as wilful and half-hidden as Nick Cave himself.

Godzilla
A long-awaited and thoroughly redeeming return for the King of Monsters, but this needs to be seen in a good, stomping home cinema.

X-Men: Days of Future Past
X-Men old and new are bashed together in a convoluted time-travelling story that holds together really, surprisingly well..

On-screen

System tester



Mad Men (Series 7) Blu-ray Out now

★★★★★

That wailing and rending of garments you can hear is for the end of *Mad Men*. This year sees the conclusion of the series, and the first half of season seven is now out on disc. The second half is being broadcast early next year.

We pick up the story at the start of 1969. One of the USA's truly pivotal decades is fast approaching its end, and in a matter of months an agog

nation will watch an American man walk on the moon.

As was ever thus with *Mad Men*, it's all about the women - the men represent America, and all of its complexities and stupidities, while the women are The Women, trying to navigate uncharted waters.

Like every series of *Mad Men*, season seven is a visual and audio treat. Production values, of course, are sky-high, and every one of these seven episodes is a vivid, high-definition demonstration of what TV can be given the cast, the writing and the artistic resources.



Watch it this way

The system

Samsung UE48H6400

£700 ★★★★★

The best pound-for-pound TV around

Sony BDP-S7200

£220 ★★★★★

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Sony STR-DN1050

£500 ★★★★★

Sony's bossing of this sector continues

Dali Zensor 15.1

£980 ★★★★★

A beautiful match for the Sony amp

Games

Middle Earth: Shadow of Mordor

PS3, PS4, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC Out now

★★★★☆



Combine the hand-to-hand combat of the *Arkham* series with the stealthy killing of *Assassin's Creed*, wrap it all up in the *Lord of the Rings* license and you've got *Shadow of Mordor*. There's some clever invention in the Nemesis System, but it's a bit too po-faced and bombards you with tutorials early on.

Shadow Warrior

PS4, Xbox One, PC Out now

★★★★☆



We didn't realise how much we were craving an old-school first-person shooter until this remake of *Shadow Warrior* came along. Forget sneaking, hiding behind cover and conserving ammo - this is fast, frenetic and at times very funny. It also looks surprisingly lovely in this new next-gen skin.

Sunset Overdrive

Xbox One Out now

★★★★☆

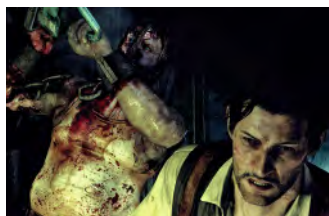


Sunset Overdrive is like *Crackdown* overdosing on Red Bull - little surprise considering the premise is that a fizzy drink has turned most of the population into mutants. To combat them you've got the nuttiest arsenal since *Dead Rising 3* and the ability to grind, climb and swing from almost any object.

The Evil Within

PS4, PS3, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC Out now

★★★★☆



To some this will feel like (*Resident Evil*'s) Shinji Mikami's greatest hits. To others it will feel like a step backwards for the survival horror genre, full of hokey dialogue and cliched locations and enemies. Still, it's got plenty of scares and it looks lovely on next-gen consoles.

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What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, May 2014

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What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) What We Do In The Shadows (21st November)
Mock-documentary on vampires and modern issues such as house-sharing and socialising. It's really quite droll.

Movies (Blu-ray) Sin City 2 (15th December) Eva Green continues to smoulder in this second adaptation of Frank Miller's shallow but fascinatingly stylised graphic novel.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Pixies - Doolittle 25 (1st December) Bad: *Doolittle* is 25 years old. Good: you get to listen to *Doolittle* again, this time with loads of out-takes too.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Smashing Pumpkins - Monuments To An Elegy (8th December) Will contain strong songs. Will also be overwhelmingly pleased with itself.

November in Hi-Def

The best on the box



With S.H.I.E.L.D.'s reputation in tatters, it's up to Phil Coulson to rebuild the agency

Elementary

Sky Living HD - Tuesdays, 9pm

When we last saw them, Holmes and Watson had gone their separate ways: Sherlock to work for MI6, Joan becoming NYPD's go-to private investigator. When Sherlock returns, having been fired by MI6, his relationship with Joan is on even rockier ground: he's brought a new apprentice with him. Joan is not amused.

Detective Lestrade won't let Holmes back into the good graces of the NYPD without Watson's approval, and so begins Holmes's ill-judged but well-intentioned (and funny) attempts at reconciliation. All the while solving puzzling murders, of course.

Gotham

Channel 5 HD - Mondays, 9pm

A Batman show without Batman. As far as premises go, we rather like the idea of DC's *Gotham*. Instead of following the Caped

Crusader's crime-fighting exploits, the show puts its spotlight on the early days of Gotham City.

A young Bruce Wayne mourns in his mansion, trying to make sense of his parents' murder with the help of Sean Pertwee's Alfred. But it's Ben McKenzie's Jim Gordon who's the main hero, as he battles thugs and corrupt officials while trying to do the right thing.

With its gothic background, *Gotham* has always been a rich, twisted backdrop for its colourful villains, and the show's tone is more hardboiled and pulp than a shiny, superhero spectacular.

The Wayne murders kick-start a chain of events, which includes a power struggle between rival mob bosses, the redevelopment of Arkham Asylum, and a new take on the origin stories for many of *Gotham*'s supervillains.

Robin Lord Taylor, as Oswald "Penguin" Cobblepot, in particular, steals the show.

Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Channel 4 HD - Fridays, 8pm

Marvel's TV show became the slick, fast-paced action and espionage vehicle it was meant to be only in the closing episodes of its debut series. All thanks to Hydra emerging in all its evil glory.

With S.H.I.E.L.D.'s reputation in tatters, it's up to Director Phil Coulson to rebuild the fallen agency. With new recruits on board - Mack, Lance Hunter and Mockingbird are our favourites - and others are still reeling from Ward's betrayal and Fitz's near-death experience, the team dynamics are interesting.

The second series focuses on retrieving powerful artefacts stolen from S.H.I.E.L.D.'s vaults, alongside Skye's origins (she might be an alien) and Coulson's compulsion for drawing geometric patterns (which might also be alien). Keep your eyes peeled for Avengers cameos, too.

Ripper Street

Amazon Prime Instant Video - from 14th November

Thanks to fan outcry and Amazon, *Ripper Street* survived permanent cancellation and is now back for a third series. Set in Victorian London, the show plunges us back into the grimy, foggy, crime-filled streets of east London's Whitechapel, with new sensational murders to entertain us.

We're reunited with Detectives Reid, Drake and Jackson (respectively: Matthew Macfadyen, Jerome Flynn and Adam Rothenberg) four years after the events of series two, while Sherlock's Louise Brealey joins the cast as one of the first female doctors of the period.

The double-bill premiere will be available on demand from 14th November, with subsequent episodes released weekly on Friday nights.

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THE ONLY THING TO EXPECT IS EXCELLENCE



Featured: HD 800 headphones (main)
and HDVD 800 headphone amplifier (below)



Sound can't be sold to you in a catalogue, or explained in a sentence – it's something you have to experience. Which is why you'll only be able to find our most exclusive headphones at Club Orpheus retailers.

And the specialists you'll find there are as obsessed with quality as you are; their knowledge, experience, first-class service and the exclusive products they give you access to have all been designed for one reason – to find you the sound you've been searching for.

We promise an experience you won't forget.



To find out more about Club Orpheus, please visit:
sennheiser.co.uk/cluborpheus

facebook.com/sennheiseruk
@Sennheiser_UK

SENNHEISER
The Pursuit of Perfect Sound

Oh ... I Wasn't Supposed To Eat Them For Lunch?



Meaner, smoother, more dynamic, and not hungry ... at least for a little while.

DragonFly v1.2 €129

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

- What Hi Fi? Sound & Vision, February 2014

DRAGONFLY

USB DAC + Preamp + Headphone Amp

Replaces your computer's existing audio output, feeding much more beautiful sound to your:

- Headphones and Earbuds
- Desktop Powered Speakers
- AV Receiver, Preamp or Power Amp



audioquest

The No.1 source of clear, expert and independent advice

BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

How do you want to hold off the hubbub? The difference between **noise-cancelling** and **noise-isolating** headphones explained

Streaming tunes to a **wireless speaker** is a convenient, fun way of listening to your music. We tell you what to look out for



QR (quick response) codes

For full reviews, get a barcode scanner app on your smartphone. Scan these little squares and they'll take you to the relevant section on whatifit.com

All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



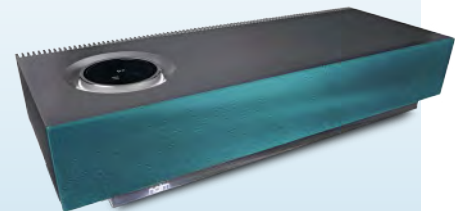
Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Wharfedale Diamond 220

"These are the speakers we wanted Wharfedale to make all along - some of the best budget speakers around" p133



Naim Mu-so

"The Naim Mu-so is a seriously attractive product. Everything promised is delivered" p145

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Your essential system set-ups

BEST BUYS

GET THE
BEST KIT
FOR YOUR
BUDGET

Home Cinema Systems

Hi-Fi Systems

BLU-RAY PLAYERS



SONY BDP-S4100
★★★★★

£95

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...

RECEIVERS



YAMAHA RX-V377
★★★★★

£260

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i5.1 PACK
★★★★★

£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.

DISPLAYS



SONY KDL-40W605
★★★★★

£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.

TOTAL
£1430

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★

£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★

£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.

SPEAKERS



DALI ZENSOR 3
★★★★★

£300

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with lots of detail, punch and tonal balance.

TOTAL
£950



SONY BDP-S7200
★★★★★

£250

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



SONY STR-DN1050
★★★★★

£500

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



DALI ZENSOR 15.1
★★★★★

£980

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



SAMSUNG UE48H64800
★★★★★

£700

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.

TOTAL
£2430



CYRUS CDI
★★★★★

£1050

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



REGA ELEX-R
★★★★★

£900

One of the most talented sub-£1k amplifiers we know. Delivers a fast, agile sound with superb dynamic shifts.



B&W 683 S2
★★★★★

£1150

The sense of scale these floorstanders produce is massive, but they do delicacy and subtlety too. Superb speakers.

TOTAL
£3100



PANASONIC DMP-BDT700
★★★★★

£500

A superb Blu-ray player with 4K/60fps capability and 4K Chroma upscaling. A star.



PIONEER SL-LX58
★★★★★

£1400

Mature, powerful, refined - this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.



KEF R100 5.1
★★★★★

£2850

Best Buy for 2013 and 2014, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - great in stereo too.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★

£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.

TOTAL
£7550



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★

£1800

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.



REGA ELICIT-R
★★★★★

£1600

The best-value premium stereo amp we know: surefooted, with superb timing, it's very revealing too.



SPENDORA 6R
★★★★★

£2500

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

TOTAL
£5900

Complete your home cinema system

SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB

£250

Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)

£220

Humax DTR-T1010

£230

PROJECTORS

BenQ W1400

£1000

Epson EH-TW7200

£1900

Sony VPL-HW55ES

£2800

COMPACT SPKRS

Tannoy HTS101

£400

Q Acoustics Q7000i

£900

B&W MT60D

£1950

SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW610

£400

B&W ASW610XP

£700

Velodyne SPL-1000

Ultra £1400

STYLE SPEAKERS

Tannoy HTS-101

£350

Q Acoustics Q7000i

£900

B&W MT-60D

£1950

SOUNDBARS

Philips HTL5140

£270

Q Acoustics Media 4

£400

Yamaha YSP-2500

£800

SUPPORTS

Target CL430

£190

Atacama Evoque

Eco 60-40 £460

Atacama Moseco 6

£200

REMOTE CONTROLS

One For All Zapper

£170

Logitech Harmony

One £125

Logitech Harmony

1000 £280

Grow your hi-fi system

TURNTABLES

Pro-Ject Essential II

£200

Rega RP3/Elys2

£550

Clearaudio Concept

£1000

TABLETS

iPad Mini

£200 (16GB)

Google Nexus 10

£390 (32GB)

Apple iPad Air

£480 (32GB)

RADIOS

Roberts Stream 93i

£150

Revo SuperConnect

£250

Arcam T32

£480

HEADPHONES

Sony MDR-EX650AP

£60

AKG Y50

£80

Philips Fidelio

M1MKII £180

MICRO SYSTEMS

Cambridge Minx Xi

£60

Denon D-M39DAB

£310

Naim UnitiQute 2

£1150

AUDIO CABLES

QED XT40

£10/m

Atlas Elements

Integra £45

Supra USB 2.0

£30

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Multi-room systems
 Best multi-room system £500+
Bluesound

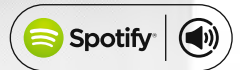
"There's a new leader in the wireless multi-room music market - Bluesound combines high-res audio and ease of use in one impressive system."

HIGH RES AUDIO



BLUESOUND

HiFi for a wireless generation




BLUESOUND IS A 24-BIT NATIVE, PURE DIGITAL WIRELESS STREAMING MUSIC SYSTEM.

Even 16-bit CDs have only about half of the audio spectrum that the master recording holds and that's a whole lot more than MP3s have left in them. With more than a decade of compressed audio piping through earbud headphones and cheap dock players, the time has come. The portable players we all love have created a new way of listening to music, but there hasn't really been much there to hear. Until now. Enter true 24-bit HD digital audio.

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

NEW
£299 OR LESS



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
 Wireless speaker
 Best Hi-Fi speaker
 £500+
NEW
£895



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.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
 Best Hi-Fi speaker
 £500+
£299 OR LESS



RUARK AUDIO • MR1 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM
 Standing just 17cm tall, the MR1 speakers feature 20W of Class A-B amplification, a 75mm mid/bass unit and 20mm tweeter in each enclosure. The handcrafted cabinets are finished in a choice of rich walnut veneer, soft white or soft black lacquer.

SSAV.COM



PIONEER • N-50 • MUSIC STREAMER
 Award-winning audiophile Network player supporting AirPlay® and DLNA wireless technologies, allowing you to stream music wirelessly from your iTunes libraries or iOS devices. When connected to your home network, you can also enjoy a wide variety of online music services remotely.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
 Wireless speaker
 Best Hi-Fi speaker
 £500+
NEW
£199 OR LESS



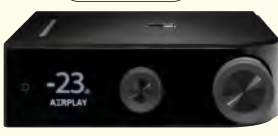
MONITOR AUDIO AIRSTREAM S200 WIRELESS SPEAKER
 The award-winning Airstream S200 Wi-Fi speaker concentrates state-of-the-art functionality, advanced digital processing and powerful amplification within a smaller than the average one-box system.

£90 OR LESS




ARCAM • miniBlink • BLUETOOTH DAC
 Arcam miniBlink: Hi-Resolution Bluetooth Streaming DAC in new micro-format. Incredible value and peerless sound quality from Bluetooth. The full suite of Arcam Analogue and Digital Hi-Fi technologies in one tiny new wave product.

£799 OR LESS



NAD • D 7050 • NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC
 Combines NAD's most advanced digital platform, Direct Digital technology with Apple AirPlay® Wi-Fi streaming to create the ultimate plug 'n play solution for wireless music.

£799 OR LESS



SONY • HAP-S1 HI-RES AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM
 Take your music enjoyment to new heights with Sony's new HAP-S1 500GB Hi-Res audio system with 2x40W analogue amplifier, easy music file transfer and smartphone browsing.

£1195



NAIM • UNITIQUTE 2 ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM
 All-in-one system featuring a 30W amplifier, FM/DAB/Internet radio and wired and wireless connections to play network digital audio. UnitiQute 2 can play USB-stored music files of up to 32bit/192kHz resolution.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 17/12/2014. E&OE

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SEVENOAKS
 SOUND & VISION



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£209 OR LESS

PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.

£249 OR LESS



NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.

NEW

£575 OR LESS

PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon sets new standards in its price range.



£649 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

ARCAM • FMJ A19 • AMPLIFIER

Arcam's award-winning A19 integrated amplifier delivers 50W per channel and includes seven analogue inputs along with a MM phono input.

£399 OR LESS

aptX Bluetooth



NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.

£399 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

Designed to be the heart of a digital system. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



NEW £799 OR LESS

NEW £1499 OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ CDS27 / FMJ A39 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Introducing Arcam's audiophile Class G integrated amplifier and SACD/CD player with Network streaming up to 192/24 for class leading sound quality.

£249 OR LESS



NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER

Received an outstanding product award from Hi-Fi News magazine who described the C 316BEE is an "absolute barn-stormer of an amplifier". The C 516BEE is the perfect partner.

£599 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

AUDIOLAB • M-DAC • DAC / PREAMP

Award-winning DAC featuring a USB input with asynchronous data processing along with two coaxial and optical digital inputs. High-res 24-bit/192kHz music files can be played via its coaxial input.



ESSAV .COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

ESSAV .COM

MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.

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.

£399 OR LESS



NAD • D 1050 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

The best way to add Computer Audio and HD Digital to your hi-fi system. In fact, all digital sources will get a boost when the D 1050 takes over for the inferior digital circuitry found in everything from Blu-ray, DVD and CD players, to music streamers and set-top boxes.



AUDIOQUEST • DRAGONFLY v1.2 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

An affordable and easy-to-use device that delivers far superior sound by bypassing the poor quality sound card that is built into your computer. DragonFly is a sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC, turning any computer into a true high-fidelity music source.

£129 OR LESS



£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.

£1899 OR LESS



ROKSAN • CASPIAN M2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

The M2 amp boasts 85wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.

£1499 OR LESS



NAD • M51 • DAC

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 BLACK FINISH



£100 GIFT VOUCHER FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC DOWNLOADS FROM QOBUZ

qobuz MUSIC IS BACK

Hi-Res AUDIO

£699 OR LESS

aptX Bluetooth

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.

ESSAV .COM



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

DENON • D-M39DAB • CD / DAB SYSTEM

This micro component system gives you clean dramatic sound, and more life to iPod and iPhone music libraries via its digital USB input. Includes DAB/DAB+/FM tuner.

ESSAV .COM



MARANTZ • M-CR610 • CD / DAB / NETWORK SYSTEM

Enjoy great sounding music from diverse sources, including Internet radio, music-streaming services, mobile devices, TV and other digital audio sources.

click & collect NOW AVAILABLE

www.SSAV.com



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 speakers
Best compact speaker
Best Hi-Fi speaker

Price excludes stands



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 bass cabinet.

£1970
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014
Best speakers
Best compact speaker
Best Hi-Fi speaker

CLAIM FREE
PMC TWENTY
SPEAKER STANDS
WORTH £295

**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



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.

£349.95
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014
Best speakers
Best compact speaker
Best Hi-Fi speaker

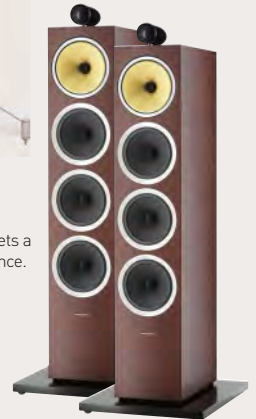
Price excludes stands

**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



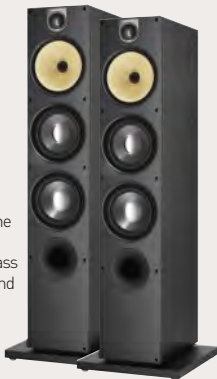
**BOWERS & WILKINS
683 S2**

The versatile 683 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre use. Its performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter along with new bass driver construction techniques and an FST Kevlar midrange driver.

NEW

£1149
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014
Best speakers
Best compact speaker
Best Hi-Fi speaker



KEF • LS50

An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

£799
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014
Best compact speaker
Best Hi-Fi speaker



**PSB IMAGINE MINI
(WALNUT OR CHERRY)**

Meet the newest and smallest member of the ultra-stylish Imagine Series. The deceptively small Imagine Mini makes a big impact on an already impressive range of award-winning speakers.

£399
OR LESS

SAVE £200

LIMITED STOCK

CLAIM FREE
PSB PFS-27
SPEAKER STANDS
WORTH £199



**Q ACOUSTICS
2020i**

This award-winning bookshelf speaker exudes quality, delivering extended bass, an open mid-range, astonishing transient response and exceptional high frequency clarity.

£169.95
OR LESS

STANDARD FINISHES.
GLOSS FINISHES: £219.95

**SONOS
THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM**

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound.

One year of music included.
Buy any Sonos player and claim 365 days of Deezer Premium+ worth over £100



£550
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014
Best Hi-Fi system

**B&W • P7
HEADPHONES**

£329
OR LESS



**GRADO • SR325e
HEADPHONES**

£299
OR LESS



**DENON • HEOS
WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM
MUSIC SYSTEM**

HEOS by Denon is a Wireless Multi-Room Sound System comprising a family of great-sounding music players for your whole home. There is a free app to control them from your iOS or Android phone or tablet. You can enjoy your favourite streaming music services, internet radio or your own music collection and set-up is a breeze.



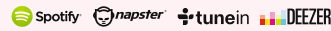
90 DAYS TO BE AMAZED

- 90 Days Risk Free Trial
- 20% Off For Your Second Heos Purchase
- Try Spotify Premium - 60 Day Free Trial



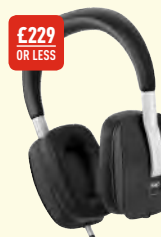
NEW

£550
OR LESS



**NAD • VISO HP50
HEADPHONES**

£229
OR LESS



**SENNHEISER
MOMENTUM HEADPHONES**

£199.95
OR LESS



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 2014. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 17/12/2014. E&OE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



£2199 OR LESS

BUY FOR £1749
SAVE £450 WHEN YOU TRADE-IN ANY HOME THEATRE PRODUCT
OFFER ENDS 31/12/2014 - 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



NEW

£999 OR LESS



ONKYO • TX-NR838 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver supporting Dolby Atmos® upgradability, multidimensional sound plus Ultra HD streaming. Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR636 & TX-NR3030



NEW

£1399 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema and Hi-Fi
Best Receiver

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



NEW

£499 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema and Hi-Fi
Best Receiver

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-X4100W



NEW

£550 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema and Hi-Fi
Best Receiver

YAMAHA • RX-V377 • AV RECEIVER

The new Yamaha RX-V377 offers 4K Ultra HD pass-through and is sure to provide great sounding home cinema. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V677



NEW

£1999 OR LESS



YAMAHA • RX-A3040 • AV RECEIVER

New AV receiver with built-in Wi-Fi, 11.2 channel expandability, highest grade construction and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A2040



CANTON • DM 75 • SOUNDBASE

The Canton DM 75 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 75 creates a convincing, room filling sound.

NEW

£449 OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Soundbars & Soundbases
Best Soundbar



DENON • DHT-T110 • SOUNDBASE

The Denon DHT-T110 is an under TV Soundbase that dramatically improves your TV watching experience. Simply connect the all-in-one system to your television and enjoy powerful, dynamic audio from your favourite TV shows, movies, games and music.

NEW

£199 OR LESS



NEW

£499 OR LESS



YAMAHA • SRT-1000 • SOUNDBASE

Enjoy richly realistic and powerful sound just by placing it under your TV! Surround sound system featuring Digital Sound Projector technology. Supports Bluetooth® and a dedicated app for smartphone control.



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
Soundbars & Soundbases
Best Soundbar



NEW

£399 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.

£599 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Hi-Fi systems
Best Soundbar



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

£799 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema and Hi-Fi
Best Soundbar



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Speaker packages
Best 5.1 Package

£899.95 OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • Q7000i • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Stylish 5.1 package that delivers dynamic sound for movies, but with the ability to play music. Classic black or white matt finishes.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Speaker packages
Best 5.1 Package

£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.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Speaker packages
Best 5.1 Package

£2849 OR LESS

KEF • R100 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Comprises four R100 speakers, an R200C centre speaker and R400B active subwoofer. Great for both home cinema and music.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Speaker packages
Best 5.1 Package

£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
Projectors
Best Home Cinema Projector

£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 UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K

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HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



NEW

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CLAIM
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ASK IN STORE FOR DETAILS
Offer Ends 23/12/2014

FREE
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WORTH £249
Offer Ends 07/12/2014

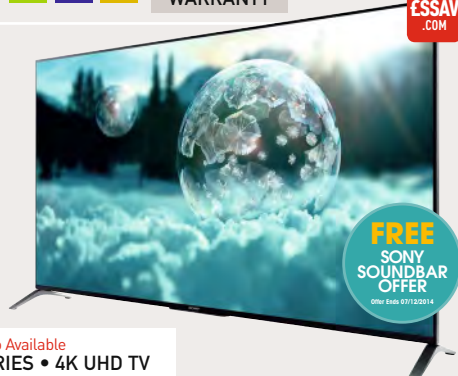
SONY 4K

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



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FREE
SONY SOUND BAR
OFFER
Offer Ends 30/12/2014

SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K 65 75



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WHAT H.I.P. AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema
Best TV

SONY • W7 SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 42 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



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PANASONIC • AX802 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

50 58 65 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



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UHD TVS

WHAT H.I.P. AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema
Best TV

SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



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



WHAT H.I.P. AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema
Best Blu-ray Player

NEW **ESSAV.COM**

PANASONIC • DMP-BDT700 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

New top of the range model boasting up to 4K 60p output, HDMI 2.0 support, 7.1-channel analogue audio output, along with ground-breaking 4K Direct Chroma up-scaling. Also Available: PANASONIC DMP-BDT260 & DMP-BDT460



NEW **ESSAV.COM**

WHAT H.I.P. AWARDS 2014
Home Cinema
Best Blu-ray Player

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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SOUND & VISION



LCD, LED & plasma TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
Plasma	The rival to LCD, now usually only seen on larger screens

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony KDL-32W706B

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV

"It may not be quite the most accomplished picture out there, but a tempting price puts it right at the top of our wishlist."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Samsung UE48H6400

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV

"It's a subtler, more controlled and balanced picture, and we think that the TV giant has got its approach just right this year."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung UE55HU7500

Awards 2014: Best 52-60in TV

"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	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Alba AMKDVD22W	130	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set but there are better options for broadcast TV	LED	22	1920x1080					1	38x52x17	
Celcus LCD40S913FHD	250	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Big screen on a budget: a real supermarket special	LED	40	1920x1080					3	97x22x66	
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●				3	43x73x6	
Finlux 40F8073-T	330	03.14/GT	★★★★★	ATV with a sharp, exciting picture at a terrific price	LED	40	1920x1080	●				3	55x93x4	
Kogan LULED24DVDYA	134	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This versatile little set is fine value for money	LED	24	1920x1080					2	38x58x5	
Kogan KULED22XXXYA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080					2	39x54x17	
Linsar 22LED906T	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A great 22in set with a DVD player and Freeview HD	LED	22	1920x1080					2	38x53x4	
LG 32LS5600	299	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This budget TV gets the basics right	LED	32	1920x1080					3	46x75x36	
LG 50PA650T	499	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture and price, but we'd like more detail	Plasma	50	1920x1080					3	70x117x5	
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●				3	45x74x8	
Panasonic TX-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	
Panasonic TX-P50X50B	453	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Hard to beat on performance per pound	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8	
Panasonic TX-P50X60B	430	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Compromised, but this Plasma is an admirable effort nonetheless	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8	
Philips 22PFL3517T/12	270	12.12/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set with Freeview HD and YouTube	LED	22	1920x1080	●				3	32x51x5	
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080	●				3	45x74x2	
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. Pricy, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●			4	43x73x6	
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●			4	54x93x5	
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●				2	41x64x6	
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●				2	44x73x7	
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●				4	43x73x6	
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●				4	55x93x9	
Technika 22-212i	168	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great value, with plenty of features	LED	22	1366x768	●				2	37x54x1	
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080	●				4	44x76x7	
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●				4	54x92x27	
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	
Finlux 47S9100-T	800	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture, decent 3D and a low price. Worth a look	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●			4	67x112x4	
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-L32ET5B	530	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Price drop pushes this firmly into five-star territory	LED	32	1920x1080	●				4	47x76x5	

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwxd, cm)
Panasonic TX-L42ET50B	900	10.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080		●				4	60x99x4
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080		●				3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-P42GT50B	1200	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Plasma	42	1920x1080		●				4	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080		●				3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47ET50B	1300	08.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080		●				4	66x110x4
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080		●				3	63x107x4
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	LCD	50	1920x1080		●				3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	LCD	50	1920x1080		●				3	71x112x27
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	42	1920x1080		●				4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080		●				5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080		●				3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080		●				4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080		●				4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	LED	48	1920x1080		●				4	62x108x6
Samsung PS51E550	850	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Plasma	51	1920x1080		●				3	72x120x6
Samsung PS51E8000	1700	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Plasma	51	1920x1080		●				3	71x119x5
Samsung PS51F5500	680	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●			3	71x112x27
Samsung PS51F8500	1900	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Plasma	51	1920x1080		●				3	74x119x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	LED	40	1920x1080		●				3	67x92x33
Samsung UE32F6400	500	09.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	32	1920x1080		●				4	44x74x5
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	40	1920x1080		●				3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40F7000	1200	08.13/ST	★★★★★	LED	40	1920x1080		●				4	90x58x24
Samsung UE46F7000	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080		●				4	59x104x3
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



Bowers & Wilkins

685 S2 | £499

Combining audio performance, power and price, the 685 S2 blends technology from high-end Bowers & Wilkins speakers with engineering solutions unique to the range, to bring the best in audio to everyone.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Stereo speakers

Best standmounter £400-£800

Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2

“A superb pair of speakers that are hugely thrilling. These are the speakers we’d put on to get our friends into hi-fi.”

WHAT HI-FI? ‘PRODUCT OF THE YEAR’ AWARDS 2014

Other brands available include: ARCAM **marantz** ROTEL

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TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£500-£2000													
Sony KDL-40HX853	1000	10.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	57x94x4
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
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
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-P60ZT65B	3850	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Plasma	60	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	83x140x5
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	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



Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



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 (hwd, cm)
Up to £500								
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT230	160	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	4x43x18

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	120	07.14/FT	★★★★★	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	2	1	0	No	4x42x18
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-S5200	95	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony BDP-S790	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	4x43x19
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	8x33x27

£500 and above								
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	10x43x31

Take your music enjoyment to new heights with High Resolution Audio



SONY

MAP-S1 MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM £699

It's all right here - the compact MAP-S1 has a powerful 100W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in a sleek, elegant unit that fits neatly on a shelf or bookcase. Just add speakers and you're ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience. Sony's S-Master HX Audio Amplifier reduces distortion and noise, while DSEE HX upscales your existing music collection - including compressed files and CDs - to better than CD quality.

Stream music over your home network from a PC or Internet services like Spotify and Music Unlimited. Connect a USB thumb drive, or hook up your smartphone via cable, Bluetooth or Apple AirPlay. Just one touch instantly makes a wireless connection with your NFC-enabled Xperia phone or tablet for effortless listening.



£100 GIFT VOUCHER*
FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC
DOWNLOADS FROM QOBUZ
*By redemption from Sony. Offer ends 30/06/2015

qobuz
MUSIC IS BACK

SILVER



£100 GIFT VOUCHER*
FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC
DOWNLOADS FROM QOBUZ
*By redemption from Sony. Offer ends 30/06/2015

qobuz
MUSIC IS BACK

HAP-S1 HI-RES AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM £799

- Take your listening beyond CD quality playing High-Resolution Audio files
- With DSEE you can enjoy compressed music at high resolution
- Copy music files to the hard drive over Wi-Fi. New music files added to your PC will get copied automatically
- Easily browse your music using the front-panel LCD or use the dedicated smartphone app as a remote control
- The HAP-S1 has a huge 500GB hard drive, so you can store a large amount of hi-res and compressed music files
- Play Hi-Res Audio from a variety of compressed and non-compressed formats including FLAC, WAV, AIFF, DSD (DFF) and DSD (DSF)

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Other brands available include: Bowers & Wilkins (M) MONITOR AUDIO ○○○ PMC

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Projectors

Screens _____ Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise _____ Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life _____ Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	ThrowRatio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)				
Up to £1000																	
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector				DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment				DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles				DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25	3
Epson EH-TW5910	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1000, Awards 2013				LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2100	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector				DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it				DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector				DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000																	
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014				DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013				LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year				LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced, with a solid performance				DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	1	19x49x37	8.4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly				DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014				SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above																	
Epson EH-TW9000W	3200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	If you need wireless HDMI, buy this Epson				LCD	1.34-2.87	1920x1080	2400	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8.5
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected				LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures				D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013				LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3XLumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen				DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money				SXRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x41x46	10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten				SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless				SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around				SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14



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
Sony STR-DH820	230	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable, if not faultless, option for those looking for a sub-£250 7.1 channel amp				7x115	4	1	●	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013				5x100	4	1	●	●	15x44x32

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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
Onkyo TX-NR515	450	11.12/GT	★★★★★	The amplifier to beat in 2012, now beaten	7x130	8	2	●	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-923	450	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a confident and compelling amp	7x150	8	2	●	●	17x44x36
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
Sony STR-DN1030	470	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Gives the best (at this price) a run for their money	7x120	5	1	●	●	17x43x33
£500-£1000										
Denon AVR-2113	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-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-V673	500	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2012	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x44x36
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, piped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	●	34x59x55
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX56	1300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-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
£2000 and above										
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3020	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

- Sealed cabinet** _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

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
Klipsch SW-450	330	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Weighty and tight, but loses its way at times	200	25.4	●	●	Downward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	43x36x50
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20	●	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	32x28x28

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SUBWOOFERS continued

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																		
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-10	295	07.09/GT	★★★★★	This sizeable subwoofer needs to be more controlled	150	25	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	35x32x37
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●	Downward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																		
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	34x34x41
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
Paradigm Seismic 110	1250	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A subwoofer that's deeply impressive in every sense	850	25	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	34x30x32
Sunfire Subr. SRA2700EQ	2350	03.12/FT	★★★★★	It's not cheap, but it is impressive	2700	25x2	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	36x113x9
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	34x33x34
Wilson Benesch Torus	3000	02.07/GT	★★★★★	The most musical and insightful deep bass ever	200	36	●	Upward	4	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	45x90x30



Surround speakers

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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack up to £700



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack £700-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1

Awards 2014: Best Style package £1400-£1800

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes	
Up to £500									
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Harman-Kardon HKTS20	450	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Neat, but a conservative listen	22x11x9	11x26x9	22x11x9	36x27x27	1
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a	3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
£500-£1000									
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44	2
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31	7
KEF KHT3005 HD2	900	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27	2
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33	4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
QAcoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
QAcoustics Q7000	800	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
QAcoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20	2
Teufel Theater 200	799	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Big-screen soundtracks don't come bigger than this	44x20x29	25x44x27	23x16x12	60x38x49	1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31	7
£1000-£2000									
Acoustic Energy Neo V2 5.1	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Plenty to enjoy if you have a large room	91x20x24	18x48x20	36x18x23	41x36x33	2
B&W 685 Theatre	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1000-£1500, Awards 2010	23x16x12	34x20x33	27x17x33	26x26x33	6
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 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
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	1700	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Klipsch Synergy B20/SW450	1050	09.11/FT	★★★★★	A vibrant and exciting 5.1 package	32x18x20	15x41x13	14x30x12	43x36x50	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-lite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1300	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
Acoustic Energy Active Pro 5.1	3035	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A stunning listen that's great value too	22x15x18	22x15x18	22x15x18	35x35x33	1
Acoustic Energy Radiance 5.1	3000	05.09/FT	★★★★★	This 5.1 package has plenty of appeal	92x23x30	19x45x30	32x19x25	41x36x33	2
B&W 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	110x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	67950	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive but it's the best we've heard	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
Cabasse MT-30 5.1	2100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Looks more assertive than it is, but still likeable	x11x21	16x48x37	41x23x20	42x31x43	2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Dali Ikon 6 Mk2 5.1	2900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with big listening areas to fill	103x19x35	15x57x25	38x27x15	48x41x46	3
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 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
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2200	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2000	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMCD B1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SE AV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1
Tannoy Revolution Signature	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

"Dali's Zensor 5 5.1 is a brilliantly realised set-up - and cracking value, too"

Awards 2011

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"Superb sound quality on a budget for your analogue and digital music," commented What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine of the PM6005, while they said of the CD6005, "A fantastic player and immense value for money." The Q Acoustics 2020is were What Hi-Fi? award winners in 2013.

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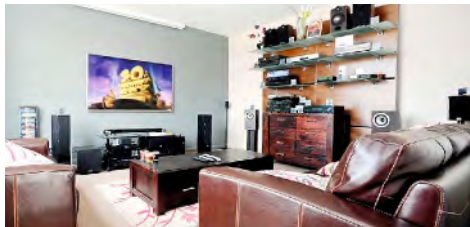


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★★★★★
SEPTEMBER 2014

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SAMSUNG UE55HU7500
55" 4K ULTRA HD 3D SMART LED TV

"Top marks for another outstanding all-rounder from Samsung... The picture has plenty of detail and a real sense of depth. Its picture looks great across all resolutions and it has plenty of good features. If you're looking to get a 4K TV right now, look no further."
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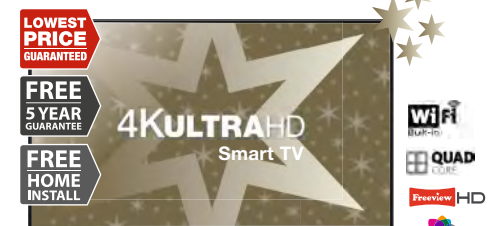
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★★★★★
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QUAD CORE
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freesat HD

PANASONIC VIERA TX55AX902
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Cutting edge technology that delivers incredible image quality.
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4K ULTRA HD SMART TV

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EPSON EHTW7200 3D PROJECTOR

"Exciting, immersive and effortless" - What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

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"Detailed, dynamic & confident." - What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine.
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SONY VPLHW55 3D SXRD PROJECTOR

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PIONEER VSX329 AV RECEIVER
 All the features you need, plus Pioneer's legendary sound quality.
 TSP £249.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of purchase price

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
 Home cinema amplifiers
 Best home cinema amplifier (under £200)
 November 2014

YAMAHA RXV377 AV RECEIVER
 "Superb surround sound on a budget."
 - What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision mag.
 TSP £260 | 5 year Supercare £22.50

£225

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Bluetooth **4K ULTRAHIGH UPSCALING** **WiFi BUILT-IN** **Internet Radio**

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION WHATHIFI.COM
 ★★★★★ SEPTEMBER 2014

YAMAHA RXV677 AV RECEIVER
 "An endlessly entertaining receiver that's full of character." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
 5 year Supercare £55.90

£559

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
 Speaker packages
 Best home cinema speaker system (under £1000)
 January 2015

SONY STRDN1050 AV RECEIVER & TANNOY HTS101 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
 "This is a seriously good midrange amp that balances muscle and subtlety with stacks of features at a good price" and "this Tannoy package is perfectly formed with an open sound and good integration" - What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine of these award-winning products.
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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION WHATHIFI.COM
 ★★★★★ NOVEMBER 2014

PIONEER BDPLX58 BLU-RAY PLAYER & SCLX58 AV RECEIVER & CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
 Movies sound incredible when played through a phenomenal surround sound set-up from two manufacturers at the top of their game. Now with a great saving, too!
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SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER
"It's a top quality, entry-level Blu-ray player."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare £9.99
Also with multi-region DVD Playback £94

£84



SONY BDPS7200
SMART 4K 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER
"Serves up a classy picture and stunning sound."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare £19.99
Also with multi-region DVD Playback £209

£199



PANASONIC DMPBD700
SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER
"A premium Blu-ray player for a premium home cinema system."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare £44.90

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Q ACOUSTICS M4 SOUNDBAR
"Sensibly priced and sounds fantastic."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare only £39.90

£399



CANTON DM75 SOUNDBASE
"Clearer, bigger and more powerful sounding... the DM75 is a worthy alternative for larger TVs."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare only £49.90

£449



YAMAHA YSP2500 SOUNDBAR
"Looks amazing, and features wireless subwoofer and Bluetooth connectivity."
- customer review on richersounds.com.
5 year Supercare £79.90

£799



Q ACOUSTICS Q2000i
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
"A must-hear... works as well with music as it does with home cinema."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare £64.95

£649.95



DALI ZENSOR 15.1
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
"Still the finest-sounding surround sound package available for this money."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 year Supercare £97.90

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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
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Brighton 0333 900 0039	Edinburgh 0333 900 0026	Leicester 0333 900 0043	London City 0333 900 0045	Manchester 0333 900 0086	Oxford 0333 900 0052	Sheffield 0333 900 0034	York 0333 900 0084
Bristol 0333 900 0024	Exeter 0333 900 0061	Lichfield 0333 900 0089	London Croydon 0333 900 0033	Maidstone 0333 900 0062	Plymouth 0333 900 0047	Solihull 0333 900 0090	Customer Service 0333 900 0095
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CD players

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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Marantz CD6005

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Cyrus CDi

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



AWARD WINNER

Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28	
£500-£1000																
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Basic on features, but capable enough	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29	
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	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	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	9x44x31	
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	8x22x36	
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	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	2	13x44x33	
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32	
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38	
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44	
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39	
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31	
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	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	1	11x43x31	
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x35	
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33	
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	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

"The Musical Fidelity M6CD is a fine player. It may not be a complete sonic all-rounder but there's enough here to appeal to a wide range of people"

August 2013



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

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Audioquest DragonFly v1.2

Awards 2014: Best DAC up to £300



AWARD WINNER

Arcam irDAC

Awards 2014: Best DAC £300-£500



AWARD WINNER

Chord Hugo

Awards 2014: Best DAC £1000+

Also consider

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	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	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	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	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	1	1	0	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	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	1	0	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	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	1	0	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	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	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	1	1	0	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011. Product of the Year	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	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	0	n/a
HRT Headstreamer	145	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat headphone amp and DAC combination	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3x6x7
HRT microStream	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	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	2	0	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	1	0	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	1	0	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	1	0	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD DAC 1	295	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4x14x7
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	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	1	0	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	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	0	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	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	0	5.5x43x32
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	7x23x26
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	13x48x25

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													
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	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	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSB	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable _____ The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm _____ The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge _____ Turns the information in the record groove into sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Pro-Ject Essential II

Awards 2014: Best Turntable up to £400



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Rega RP3/Elys2

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £400-£800



AWARD WINNER

Clearaudio Concept

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £800+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33/33 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Up to £1000															
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35	
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A tempting alternative to the class-leaders at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	12x45x36	
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	9x43x30	
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	14x46x36	
Pro-Ject 2-Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x36	
Pro-Ject 2Xperience Classic	750	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine deck that's worth auditioning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	16x46x36	
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	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	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x42x35	
Clearaudio Emotion SE	2110	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For the money, this is an excellent performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	8x40x32	
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	14x42x35	
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	13x42x33	
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	28x56x36	
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x40x30	
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	5	14x45x36	
Michell Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Packs a sublime punch – it makes listening a pleasure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	19x41x53	
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	26x46x53	

TURNTABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x45x38
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	25x55x45
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8	15x45x37
Roksan Xerxes 20 Plus (Pack)	6275	10.08/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	12x45x37
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	15x40x34



Radios

DAB Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
Internet Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

The shortlist



Pure Evoke D2
Awards 2014: Best Radio up to £100



Roberts Stream 93i
Awards 2014: Best Radio £100-£200



Revo Superconnect
Awards 2014: Best Radio £200+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x6x2
iLuv Vibro Classic II	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	7x23x8
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x25x83
View Quest WiFi200	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	73x125x23
£100 and above									
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-1S Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Oasis Flow	170	09.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x16x14
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x28x18
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	12.5x22x15
Revo Domino D3	170	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	14x22x13
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x26x10
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x27x12
Roberts Revival Cath Kidston	200	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x16x12

RADIOS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£100 and above									
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●			21x25x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●		21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●				18x13x14
Tivoli Alberg+o	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

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

The shortlist



Wharfedale Diamond 220

Awards 2014: Best Stereo Speaker up to £200
 “If you’re looking for the finest budget speaker around the Diamond 220s are a great place to start.”



B&W 685 S2

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter £400-£800
 “They’re the speakers we’d put on to get our friends into hi-fi, and we can’t think of a better reason to recommend the new B&W 685s.”



ATC SCM 11

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter up to £1200+
 “The new SCM11s are a drastic improvement over an already talented performance, and they have the good looks to match.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●			4	28x17x26
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	170	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●			4	26x17x28
SoundScience Frankenspiel FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	●			1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●			1	85x85x85
£200-£500								
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●			2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●			2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●			3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●	●		2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★			●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer Music Monitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●			2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-25	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●			3	27x18x23
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●			2	33x21x27
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●			4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★			●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio SLA-25	200	05.12/GT	★★★★★			●	8	22x15x18
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●			2	34x20x27
Castle Knight 2	400	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●			8	38x20x34
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	●			2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	●			2	31x18x22
Dali Lektor 3	450	08.09/GT	★★★★★	●			2	39x20x26
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●			2	27x16x22

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	35x21x29
EB Acoustics EB1	470	08.09/GT	★★★★★	●		2	31x17x27
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★		●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	36x21x30
Leema Xero	495	07.08/GT	★★★★★	●		5	25x25x16
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●		1	28x18x27
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●		4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	●		4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●		1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●		4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	●		4	100x32x27
Quad 111 Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	●		4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●		3	17x13x14
Tangent Evo 5	200	05.09/FT	★★★★★	●		2	23x15x20
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●		2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●		1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●		4	50x32x41

£500-£1500

Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	●		2	30x18x26
Acoustic Energy AE22 Active	899	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	25x35x30
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★		●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★		●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●		2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●		2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●		2	35x19x32
B&W CM8	1250	08.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	96x25x30
Cabasse Minorca MC40	720	02.11/FT	★★★★★	●		2	40x23x28
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	●		2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	33x15x26



Sendor A6R

Setting the Standard

The A6Rs truly are a stunning achievement
What Hi-Fi Awards 2014

An outstanding pair of speakers that deliver detail and dynamic punch in spades
What Hi-Fi Feb 2014

One of the very best mid-price floorstanders around
Hi-Fi Choice Feb 2014

Let the technology work - Hear the music

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best floorstander £1200+
Sendor A6R

Hi-Fi Choice
★★★★★

SPENDOR

www.sendoraudio.com

2014's What HiFi Award Winners

Check online at www.superfi.co.uk or contact your nearest store for even more great offers.

Award Winning Televisions

55" & 65" 4K Ultra HD 3D LED Smart Televisions
Samsung UE55HU7500 & UE65HU7500

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Televisions
Best 52-60in TV
Samsung UE55HU7500

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Televisions
Best 60in+ TV
Samsung UE65HU7500

55" UE55HU7500
RRP: £2299.99
SAVE: £300.00
£1999.99

65" UE65HU7500
£3599.99



"Beautiful 4K; no sacrifice at lower resolutions; dynamic, natural pictures"
What HiFi? October 2014
FREE FIVE-YEAR GUARANTEE

Home Cinema Separates

Product of the year:
Best Home Cinema Amplifier £350 - £700
Sony STR-DN1050

OUR PRICE: £499.00

"A thoroughly engaging and exciting listen"
What HiFi? September 2014

Best Home Cinema Amplifier up to £350
Yamaha RX-V377

RRP: £259.95
SAVE: £34.95
£225.00

Best Home Cinema Amplifier £700+
Pioneer SC-LX58

OUR PRICE: £1399.95

Projector

Product of the Year:
Best Projector £1500 - £2500
Epson EHTW7200

OUR PRICE: £1899.00

Soundbars

Product of the year:
Best Soundbar £300 - £600
Q Acoustics Media 4

OUR PRICE: £399.95

Best Soundbar £600+
Yamaha YSP-2500

OUR PRICE: £799.00

Best Soundbase £300+
Canton DM 75

OUR PRICE: £449.00

Blu-ray Players

Product of the year:
Best Blu-ray Player £150 - £300
Sony BDP57200

RRP: £249.95
SAVE: £50.95
£199.00

Best Blu-ray Player up to £150
Sony BDP55200

RRP: £109.95
SAVE: £25.95
£84.00

Best Blu-ray Player £300+
Panasonic DMPBDT700

RRP: £499.00
SAVE: £50.00
£449.00

Speaker Packages

Product of the year:
Best Traditional Package
£700 - £1500
Dali Zensor 15.1

OUR PRICE: **£979.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Style Package
£1000 - £1400
B&W MT-50

OUR PRICE: **£1094.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Style Package
£700 - £1000
Q Acoustics Q7000i

OUR PRICE: **£899.95**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Traditional Package £2500+
KEF R100 5.1

OUR PRICE: **£2850.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

HiFi Separates

Product of the year:
Best Stereo Amplifier £500 - £800
Arcam FMJ A19

OUR PRICE: **£650.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Product of the year:
Best CD Player £500 - £1500
Cyrus CDi

OUR PRICE: **£1050.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best CD Player up to £500
Marantz CD6005

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE FOR LATEST PRICE

Best Stereo Amplifier up to £500
Marantz PM6005

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE FOR LATEST PRICE

Product of the year:
Best Standmounter £400 - £800
B&W 685 S2

OUR PRICE: **£499.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Desktop Speaker
Ruark MR1

OUR PRICE: **£299.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Floorstander up to £600 - £1200
B&W 683 S2

OUR PRICE: **£1149.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Music System up to £400
Denon D-M39DAB

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE FOR LATEST PRICE

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Radios

Product of the year:
Best Radio £100 - £200
Roberts Stream 93i

OUR PRICE: **£249.95**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Radio £200+
Revo SuperConnect

OUR PRICE: **£249.95**

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*Open Sundays **Terms and conditions apply, see website for further details. †On orders over £75

Headphones / Earphones

Product of the year:
Best In-ear Headphones £50 - £150
Sony MDR-EX650AP

OUR PRICE: **£59.95**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Product of the year:
Best Portable On-ear Headphones up to £100
AKG Y50

OUR PRICE: **£79.99**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Home On-ear Headphones up to £150
AKG K550

RRP: £249.95
SAVE: £140.00
OUR PRICE: **£109.95**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Home On-ear Headphones £150 - £300
Grado SR325e

OUR PRICE: **£299.95**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Readers' Award

Product of the year:
KEF L550 Speakers

OUR PRICE: **£799.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Turntable

Best Turntable up to £400
Project Essential II

FROM: **£209.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Accessories

Product of the year:
Best Bluetooth Receiver
Arcam MiniBlink

OUR PRICE: **£90.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Best Speaker Cable
QED XT40

PRICE PER METRE: **£10.00**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (WxHxD,cm)
£500-£1500							
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 6	750	12.08/FT	★★★★★	Only the bass stops these good speakers becoming great	●	3	26x16x14
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●	2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●	1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●		29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●	2	28x17x26
EB Acoustics EB2	669	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Remarkable performers that should worry the competition	●	2	45x23x30
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●	3	29x18x27
Edwards Audio SP1	550	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable performers but up against top-quality competition at this price level	●	4	31x17x25
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●	5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●	1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis	●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●	3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	750	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●	2	92x21x32
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●	3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●	3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●	2	30x30x28
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●	1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	1	30x20x28
KEFR100	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
Kudos X2	1450	03.11/GT	★★★★★	These floorstanders have much to recommend them	●	6	78x17x21
Leema Xone	995	10.09/FT	★★★★★	In certain areas nothing else comes close at this pricepoint	●	6	85x14x21
MAD 1920	1350	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive and powerful. although not as precise as its peers	●	5	28x19x23
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●	2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s product an authoritative sound at a fine price	●	5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●	4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●	5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●	6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●	6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	630	10.12/GT	★★★★★	A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●	6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1050	06.10/FT	★★★★★	If you're addicted to bass, these floostanders will suit you	●	6	96x28x39
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers		2	54x39x9
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●	3	95x21x30
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
PMCD B1i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●	4	29x16x23
PMCTwenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold looks disguise an easy-going character	●	4	39x21x28
Revolver Music5	1300	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Fine all-rounders with the power to fill larger rooms	●	4	93x25x32
Ruark Acoustics Sabre III	899	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Communicate music so well they demand to be auditioned	●	2	34x20x27
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Stunning speakers that deserve to be labelled as contenders for class-leading status	●	1	37x19x28
Spendor S3/5R2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	●	4	31x17x18
Tangent Evo E45	650	12.09/GT	★★★★★	For those who like an exciting and exuberant listen	●	2	100x15x26

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	●		1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		2	27x17x18
Totem Rainmaker	1095	06.10/FT	★★★★★	●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★			3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	950	12.10/FT	★★★★★	●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	1000	10.10/FT	★★★★★	●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	●		1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	●		7	94x20x31

£1500 and above

Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	●		1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	●		2	108x32x34
Audiovector S1 Avantgarde	2950	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●		5	37x19x28
Aurousal VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	●		1	168x61x6
ATCSM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	●		98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	●		4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	●		1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	●		3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	●		3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	92x28x32
Dali Helicon 300 Mk2	2100	02.08/FT	★★★★★	●		2	44x21x40
Dali Mentor 6	2200	02.07/FT	★★★★★	●		1	40x8x15
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●		4	35x20x34
Dynaudio Confidence C1	5325	08.08/FT	★★★★★	●		4	45x20x43
Dynaudio Excite X32	1765	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●		4	92x17x27
Dynaudio Focus 110A	1700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	●		6	31x17x32
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●		6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Focus 220 Mk II	2630	10.09/FT	★★★★★	●		4	98x21x30
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	●		1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	●		3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		4	99x35x43
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	●		Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		1	32x49x39
Focal Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●		2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inenT M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	●		10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★			1	59x48x10
Jamo R907	5500	04.09/FT	★★★★★	●		1	119x44x19
JBL Studio 580	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		2	107x25x35
KEF Reference 207/2	12000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	●		4	123x40x69
Kudos Cardea C30	5650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	●		7	112x20x27
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●		200+	105x35x45
Monopulse 42A	2000	07.09/GT	★★★★★	●		10	108x23x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●		2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	●		3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●		9	38x22x37
Opera Callas	2375	01.09/FT	★★★★★	●		3	37x23x34
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	●		4	103x15x38

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1500 and above							
PMC PB1i	5850	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●	1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●	4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMCTwenty 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 D28	3250	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Another excellent pair of floorstanders from ProAc	●	6	108x20x29
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
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	2690	06.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●	2	35x20x37
Sonus F. Liuto Monitor Wood	1649	01.10/FT	★★★★★	These are classy and natural standmounters	●	2	35x19x34
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●	5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●	6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●	3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●	3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●	3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●	3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●	2	36x11x25
Totem Mani-2 Signature	4600	12.10/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●	4	42x21x31
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A speaker dedicated to actually enjoying music	●	2	114x42x37
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●	3	123x37x39
Vivid Audio V1.5	5250	11.09/FT	★★★★★	They might look odd, but these are a must hear	●	5	113x26x24
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●	3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best pairs of speakers we've ever heard	●	Any	47x23x35
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●	7	105x35x48
Wilson Benesch A.C.T	8800	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Good looking, solid and superb sounding floorstanders	●	1	108x23x37
Wilson Benesch Trinity	4700	03.08/FT	★★★★★	An awful lot of technology and ability for the money	●	4	108x24x30



Stereo amplifiers

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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz PM6005

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Arcam FMJ A19

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £500-£800



AWARD WINNER
Rega Elex-R

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £800-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000																	
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60	6	0	0	3	●	1	●	●	●	2	7.5x45x34	
Arcam FMJ A18	500	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Comfortable, with impressive detail and agility	50	6	1	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	1	8.5x43x33	
Arcam FMJ A19	650	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	

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85	●	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	11x43x34
Cyrus 6a	800	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £600-£1000, Awards 2012	40	●	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-710	350	07.10/GT	★★★★★	The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50	●	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x21
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	●	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30	●	3	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	22x32x31
Marantz PM-KI Pearl Lite	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Decent performance at an affordable price	70	●	3	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	13x44x38
Marantz PM6004	310	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011. Product of the Year	45	●	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45	●	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0	0	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40	●	5	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	●	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	●	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2013	30	●	2	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	0	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50	●	4	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	10.14/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	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	1	13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40	●	2	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-A6	350	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Among the most fluent amps under £500	45	●	3	1	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	10x42x36
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90	●	3	1	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50	●	4	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	11.14/FT	★★★★★	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	●	●	●	●	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	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60	●	6	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60	●	6	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39

£1000 and above

Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50	●	5	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	33x45x41
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
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100	●	2	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	6x34x15
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120	●	5	1	0	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	1	9x43x34
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	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	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
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200	●	7	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	17x44x34
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	●	4	1	1	2	●	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	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35	●	5	1	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180	●	4	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30	●	4	0	0	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
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80	●	6	1	1	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150	●	1	0	0	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

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power(w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above																	
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	
Plinius Hautonga	4455	07.11/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of an integrated amplifier	200	5	1	1		2	●	1	●	●	2	12x45x50	
Plinius Hiato	6759	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you're after a top class amplifier the Hiato is for you	300	5	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	2	17x45x45	
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1		1	1				1	20x31x38	
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162	6	0	0		1	1		●	●	1	12x44x35	
Rega Elicit-R	1600	10.13/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	
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	
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40	5	0	0		1	1		●	●	4	16x32x22	
T+A PA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300	6	0	0		0	1		●	●	1	17x46x46	
Unison Research Preudio	2295	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0		1	1				1	20x40x38	
Unison Research S6	2995	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33	5	0	0		1	1		●	●	2	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0		0	1		●	●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0		1	1		●	●	2	26x19x35	
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	5	0	0	Opt	1	1		●	●	1	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	●	●	●	●	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Cyrus PreXP 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	●			●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●				9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0	●	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●			●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●			●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Rotel RC-1580	995	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
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
Audionet Amp 1 V2	4850	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for this kind of money	Stereo	200	1	1	18x43x32	28
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x61	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Croft Polestar 1	800	06.07/FT	★★★★★	Great buy if you want sound quality not quantity	Stereo	25	1	0	11x22x33	6
Cyrus 8 Power	850	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Performs with panache, we'd spend our cash here	Stereo	60	3	0	7x22x36	5
Cyrus Mono X300	2500	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo	235	1	1	7x22x36	7
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisks	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Plinius P10	3390	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Makes a terrific amp when partnered with the Plinius M8 preamp	Stereo	200	2	1	12x45x40	14
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
Aesthetix Atlas	7600	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Sophisticated brute - pair with the Aesthetix Calypso	Stereo	200	2	2	19x45x46	33
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Audio Research VS115	5395	02.09/FT	★★★★★	Ignore the looks and enjoy the sound	Stereo	120	1	1	20x45x21	29
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

"Whichever way you run it, the Cyrus Pre XP d makes a perfect partner for the 8 Power amp"

February 2012

What does a speaker crossover do?

It's one of the inescapable laws of physics - and of hi-fi design - that a loudspeaker containing only one drive unit won't be able to reproduce the entire frequency spectrum as deftly as one with multiple drivers.

Tweeters and mid/bass drivers are designed to handle different parts of the frequency range with the minimum of distortion and the maximum finesse.

However, sending the full frequency range to both of these drivers will stop them working at their best or even cause damage, so a crossover circuit is used to split the incoming signal into frequency bands optimised for the different drivers.

There are two crossover types: passive and active. Passive ones, used in most domestic speakers, are unpowered and deal with speaker-level signals that amps deliver from their speaker outputs. Because the current they have to deal with is so high, they use robust (and so, less precise) components. This can lead to a loss of detail and transparency.

Active designs are powered, and route a low-voltage line-level signal to the drivers' individual power amps. There's less power loss, although they can add noise. But the smaller power-handling needs let them use more precise parts, which gives more control over the sound.



Q Acoustics 2050i, £460

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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
Arcam rCube	350	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	250	09.10/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz AktiMate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	60	15x42x28
Logitech 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									
Bose SoundDock 10	699	08.11/GT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model L	1000	08.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	1500	10.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
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
Samsung DA-E750	600	10.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	iOS/Android	●	100	15x45x24

What to look for... wireless speakers



Ultimate Ears Boom, £170

Battery life

The longer the better, especially if you're going portable. Seven hours is okay, but current speakers (like the Ultimate Ears Boom) can go for 10+. Bonus points if your speaker has a USB port to charge your smartphone.



Audio Pro Allroom One, £400

Build quality

A portable speaker needs to be compact and light, but still sturdy and well-finished. Check it doesn't feel flimsy or cheap, that it won't get too scuffed or dirty if it's used outdoors, and that the controls are responsive and easy to operate.



Cambridge Audio Go, £120

Auxiliary input

Bluetooth is most convenient (aptX especially, which we'll come to next), but a wired connection can often sound better than a wireless one. Make sure your speaker has a 3.5mm input if you choose this path.



Dali Kubik Free, £645

AptX

We wouldn't get hung up on aptX as some speakers aren't transparent enough to reveal the format's benefits. Nevertheless, if you can find a speaker that can take advantage of it, your music will sound superb.



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



AWARD WINNER
Dali Kubik Free
 Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Naim Mu-so
 Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Up to £1000										
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●	●	●			20x31x19
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A nice-looking portable speaker with some clever design touches		●	●			9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A no-frills approach reaps dividends in the SoundLink's sonic performance		●	●			5x18x6
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year				●	●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●					18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●					22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●					17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down		●	●	●		14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A bold, engaging performance from a speaker that lacks a little clarity		●	●			118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A worthy option but it can't match the best when it comes to sound	●	●	●			18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●			45x22x17
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2014				●	●	24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013		●	●	●		23x24x6
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014				●	●	31x15x15
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Overcooked bass aside, this is one of most powerful sounding portable speakers we've heard				●	●	14x26x5
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●			●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice		●	●	●		22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£500, Awards 2014				●	●	15x14x18
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	●	●	●	●		24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	●	●	●			9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	●			●		0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	●	●	●	●		18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	●			●		0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	●			●		6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A chunky, fun unit that's starting to sound a little unrefined against more recent competition	●	●	●			17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●			●		26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●			●		33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●			●		24x13x24
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this		●	●	●		16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users		●	●	●		6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2014		●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It only supports iOS devices but this speaker sounds fantastic	●			●		15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with				●		13x12x12
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £750+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year				●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●		26x48x30
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though		●	●	●		10x20x3
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them		●	●			30.5x16x16
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Hard to find fault with this Bluetooth speaker		●	●	●		12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●			●		21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem		●	●			13x13x14
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance		●	●			13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character		●	●			n/a

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	AUX	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000									
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have an edge in terms of sound	●	●	●		27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	●	●			14x34x17
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless	●	●			14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless	●	●			n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●	●			n/a
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●		16x12x12
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●		n/a
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●	●	●		18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●	●		7x19x7
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●		13x43x13
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	●	●	●		19x25x9
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass	●	●	●		23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●	●		16x6.5x6.5



Headphones

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

The shortlist



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-CK550	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Smooth and weighty with lashings of detail	●	Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CK555i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	Closed			11
dBLogic EP-100	25	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A dramatic, enjoyable musical performance	●	Closed			117
Digital Silence DS-321D	60	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Admirable noise-cancelling buds	●	Closed	●		11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●	Closed	●		17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed			14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed			8
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed			13.5
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed	●		174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed	●		48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed			16

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy		●	Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best		●	Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●		Closed	●		12
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans		●	Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★	An extremely likeable pair of in-ear 'phones	●		Closed			13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws		●	Closed	●		71
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £50, Awards 2014	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●		Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	30	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, all-round, on-ear headphones		●	Closed			110
Sony MDR-AS40EX	24	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Sporty headphones that sound weighty and clear	●		Closed			6
Sony MDR-EX500LP	45	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Display good solidity and weight – well worth an audition	●		Closed			7
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●		Closed			9
Vivanco Airc. Studio Monitors	50	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable - but should be approached with caution	●		Closed			n/a

£70 and above										
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●		Closed			10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Impressive for the money	●		Closed			4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Headphones, Awards 2011. Products of the Year		●	Closed			120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability		●	Closed			280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears up to £150, Awards 2014	●		Closed			305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing		●	Closed			305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	It needs a top-class system to shine but these cans sound heavenly. Highly recommended		●	Open			390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen		●	Closed	●		292
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans. Comfy, too		●	Open			235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete		●	Closed			120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●		Closed			190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price		●	Open			548
Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're after closed-back cans, give these a try		●	Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound		●	Open			265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Remarkably clear and spacious sounding pair of headphones		●	Open			340
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Their portability and noise-cancelling makes them a viable buy		●	Closed	●		100
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great		●	Closed			10
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	90	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ear headphone up to £100, Awards 2010		●	Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like here		●	Closed			160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans		●	Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	159	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Featherlight phones are awesomely detailed		●	Closed			33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort		●	Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	650	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Expensive, but offer magnificent hi-fi sound		●	Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010		●	Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner		●	Closed			165

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight(g)
£70 and above									
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	There's little to fault with a pair of in-ears that demand to be listened to	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DX160iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer from Beyerdynamic with a smooth, weighty sound	●	Closed			32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	●	Closed			290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	●	Open	●	●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Impressive, if a little lacking in dynamics	●	Open			290
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones £50-£100, Awards 2010	●	Closed			12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	●	Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2014	●	Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed			330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Good noise-cancellers, but sonically slack	●	Open	●		180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Impressive, capable and clear-sounding	●	Closed	●		180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	A great set of noise-cancellers, with a good sound to boot	●	Closed	●		25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●		150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	●	Closed			19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●		227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	●		198
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed			130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed			195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed			290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed			365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed	●		26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Serious hi-fi quality in a stylish little package	●	Closed	●		11
Focal Spirit 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
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 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 by Dre iBeats	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace	●	Closed			n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●	Closed			299
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

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
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						140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easygoing and comfortable			Closed			272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013			Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	Aw.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	250	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014			Closed	●		190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●		Closed			14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips			Open			430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar			Closed			340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★	PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!			Closed	●		362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	●		Closed			11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up			Closed			220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders			Closed			140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound			Open			260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes			Open			270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance			Closed			18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●		Closed			5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2014			Closed	●		8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012			Closed	●		105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●		Closed			13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-300, Awards 2013			Closed			190
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range			Closed			160
Sennheiser PXC 310 BT	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth headphones, Awards 2011			Closed	●	●	105
Sennheiser PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a walk on the mild side			Closed	●		115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods			Closed		●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price			Open		●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	350	10.12/ST	★★★★★	A very neat wireless solution with great sound quality			Open		●	329
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far			Closed			280
Shure SE215	100	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordably opulent buds	●		Closed	●		30
Shure SE310	120	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Detail and clarity is first class	●		Closed			7
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014			Closed	●		32
Shure SE535	450	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Still good but no longer the best	●		Closed	●		272
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●		Closed			36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2014			Closed	●		286
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	●		Open			268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick			Closed			240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	385	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Impressive sounding cans - with good flexibility			Closed			270
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●		Closed			6
Sony XBA-3iP	225	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		7
Sony XBA-4iP	275	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Sony headphones we've heard in years	●		Closed	●		8
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character			Closed			228
TDK ST700	150	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Tonally balanced and solidly musical			Closed			205
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●		Closed			10
Ultrasone HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration			Closed			285
Ultrasone HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades			Open			285
V-moda Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good-looking and great fun, with lots of bass			Closed			200
V-moda Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable sounding buds	●		Closed			17

Noise isolation v noise cancellation

Noise isolation is not the same as cancellation. They're two different ideas that go about reducing external noise in different ways. What isolation does is stop external noise from coming in (isolation is something of

a misnomer in this case). Cancellation on the other hand, deals with the noise once it's in, with several mics on your device capable of recording outside sounds and play them in reverse phase (opposite), 'cancelling' external sounds.

All headphones are able to isolate sounds to some degree. Some are better than others, but in truth it's not something that's easily quantifiable.

Not all sounds will be cancelled (constant hums, yes, sharp noises, probably not), you'd need batteries to keep them going and the

effectiveness of the cancellation will depend on how tight a seal your headphones can create. However, if you enjoy your music without (much) interruption, noise-cancellation is the way to go.





Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Up to £500											
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style	●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●		●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●		●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-SMC5-K	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent jack of all trades	●	●			●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-555	380	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Vastly improved over the original	●		●	●	●	●	●
£500 and above											
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system	●	●			●	●	●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●		●	●	●
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●			●	●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic						●	
Lyngdorf Digital 2.2 System	12350	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but a system worth a look	●	●			●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●		●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player £1500+, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems, Awards 2010. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●	●		2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	330	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV				1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£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

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Few soundbars include a Blu-ray player as standard.

The shortlist



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/Directive Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (fwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
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
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
Focal Dimension	890	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular			1	1	0		12x116x12
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A good alternative to a full-on home cinema system	●	0	1	1		●	10x116x8
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound			0	1	0		12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●	3	1	0			10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Impressive quality and authority for a soundbar	●	0	2	0			8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●	0	2	0			71x950x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0			8x104x4
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features			3	1	1		8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £800+, Awards 2013	●	3	1	1		●	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●	0	1	0			9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250			2	1	0		154x1010x81
Philips HTL5140	270	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0			5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	2	1	1			7x103x16
Pioneer SBXN700	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set	●	0	0	2	0		9x90x12
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £300-£600, Awards 2014, Product of the Year			0	1	0	●	11x14x100
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●	2	1	0			113x900x48
Sonos Playbar	600	05.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●	0	1	0			9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but rivals are more insightful			3	1	0		7x72x31
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound				1	0	●	12x64x36
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●	3	2	1			14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget			0	1	1	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar, Awards 2012	●	3	2	1			9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●	1	2	1	●		7x94x14

Consider this: soundbars

Spatial awareness

You'll need the subwoofer as close as possible to the soundbar, otherwise sound integration may be a problem and they'll come across as two distinct entities.

Table topper?

Some soundbars are flat and slim, but others aren't, and may block off your TV's infrared receiver. Consider a shelf under the telly, or invest in a power drill.

Always look

Check the connections. Some bars need you to plug everything into your TV, then connect that to your soundbar. But you may prefer to use the soundbar directly.

For best results, Yamaha's YSP-2500 needs to be placed directly below your TV



The end for MP3?

If you own a half decent hi-fi system, using 'FLAC' instead of 'MP3' files could be music to everyone's ears

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

Listening to music has many benefits

Hi-Fi is, of course, a means to an end – the reproduction of music. Many studies over the years have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. Making music is intrinsic to all cultures and music is often used for various therapeutic purposes because it involves using the whole brain. It is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history

along with 78 rpm records and the 8-track cartridge. Unfortunately, such is the current market penetration of MP3 and AAC formats that many people today are listening to a considerably lower quality of music reproduction than their peers back in the 1970's.

Bach - my favourite!



Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to

you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“ ... there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm. ”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
t: 01233 624441
www.soundcraftifi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighifi.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.rayleighifi.com

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighifi.com

LONDON

Ealing

AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street.
t: 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road.
t: 020 7924 2043
www.oandlhiifi.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.gullifordhiifi.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
6 Hotel Street.
t: 0116 262 3754
www.cymbiosis.com

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
t: 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.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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SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/192	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/192	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Olive O3HD	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A great music server that's nearly excellent	500GB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video	
Up to £500														
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	110	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A flexible streamer improved by a hard disk	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	●	20/48	●
Bluesound Powermode	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	●
Bluesound Node	400	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Still worthy, but there's better around	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/96	●
Marantz NA7004	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Unique, flexible and packed with dynamics	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	●	24/96	●
Netgear NeoTV 550	150	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Decent enough if you know what you're doing	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Now TV	10	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Oodles of free and premium content makes this a great upgrade for a 'dumb' TV	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Popcorn PopBox 3D	140	10.11/FT	★★★★★	A Swiss Army Knife of streaming	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	●	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/196	●
Roku 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	50	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Performs a very specific task and does it brilliantly	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/44.1	●
Sony NSZ-GS7	180	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Good first Google TV device but needs more apps	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	●	24/48	●
Sony SMP-N100	120	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine mixture of paid-for and catch-up content	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	●
Sony SMP-N200	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A competent and easy to use device	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●

Wake up to streaming!

THE SOUND GALLERY

The New World of Audio
The Sound Gallery has the finest range of British music streamers, designed to produce beautiful sound in your home!

01494 531682

www.soundgallery.co.uk
65 Castle Street, High Wycombe, Bucks.

STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
£500-£1000														
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	
Olive O2M	700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordable, but a bit too refined for our tastes	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013	0	1	0	0	1	0	1		24/192	
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
£1000 and above														
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3		24/192	
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	●	24/192	
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems, Awards 2010. Product of the Year	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192	
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2		24/192	
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	
T+AMP 1260R	2700	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing – this is proper high-end hi-fi	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	



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	Turners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart	
Up to £500														
Equinix Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Wi-fi Freeview for your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch	●					1	n/a	0		
Humax DTR-T1000	230	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Digital HD recorder, Awards 2012						●	2	500	1	
Humax DTR-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 Foxsat HDR	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking to try Freesat, this is the way we'd do it			●			2	320	1		
Humax HD-FOX T2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD receiver, Awards 2011		●				1	n/a	1		
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013			●			2	500	1		
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Loads of storage, but could do with more features						2	2TB	1		
Panasonic DMR-PWT500	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	PVR box meets Blu-ray player						2	320	1	●	
Philips DTR-5520	150	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Fine in its own right, but there's better out there						2	n/a	1		
Philips HDT8520	270	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Excellent Freeview HD+ box						2	500	1		
Sagem DTR94250S	250	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A capable if unspectacular buy			●			2	250	1	●	
Samsung BD-D8500	450	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Freeview meets Blu-ray in this handily sized box						2	500	1	●	
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders						2	500	1	●	
Sky+ HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Product of the year, Set-top boxes, Awards 2012				●		2	1TB	1		
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 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		
TechniSat HDF5	180	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A superb solution for its price						1	n/a	1		
TVonics DTR-HD500	280	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A clever and well-presented PVR						2	500	1		
Virgin Media Samsung V+	99	07.09/FT	★★★★★	An alternative to Sky HD, but still less high-def content						3	320	1	●	
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011						3	1TB	1	●	



Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32	79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16	77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2	30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	123x59x6
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	A genuine rival to the monopoly of Apple	4.3	480x272	120	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a	114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8	60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8	10x64x17
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This multimedia Walkman is a fine choice	3.5	800x400	16	115x57x9
Sony NWZ-F886	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An intuitive interface, good sound and battery make for a well-realised music player	4	854x480	32	116x59x8
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	123x61x16



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	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
BlackBerry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty on offer here, but lacks apps	QNX	●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but an appealing alternative to the usual suspects	Windows RT	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2014	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not for music buffs but a great budget option nonetheless	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Tab S	320	10.14/GT	★★★★★	The best tablet we've tested from Samsung so far	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64
Tesco Hudl	120	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but this is a superb budget tablet from Tesco	Android	●	7	1440x900	16	192x129x10

"There really is a lot to like about the LG G Pad, with its great screen, expandable memory and impressive design and build"

January 2014



Smartphones

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 6

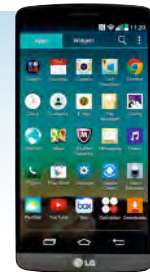
“It’s fair to say we’re quite taken with the iPhone 6. While it might not break any new ground when it comes to specification, its performance is one that’s hard to fault.”



AWARD WINNER

Sony Xperia Z3

“Sony’s expertise when it comes to camera, screen, gaming and audio technology shines through to make the Xperia Z3 a true multimedia powerhouse.”



LG G3

“There’s no denying its high-res capabilities, mixed in with a stunning video performance, great design and superb user experience make the LG G3 a very tempting choice.”

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 4S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Former reigning smartphone, now replaced but still good	iOS			3.5	960x640	16/32/64	115x59x9
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●		4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best phone up to 5in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●●		4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Former reigning smartphone, now replaced but still good	iOS			3.5	960x640	16/32/64	115x59x9
Google Nexus 4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android			4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android	●		4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●		4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●●		5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●●		5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android			4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●		4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●		4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android			4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android			4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●●		5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Has everything we liked about the G2 and then some	Android	●●		5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●●		6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia’s flagship	Windows	●		4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●		4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	We’d like more apps but this is (again) the best Windows effort we’ve seen	Windows	●●		5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●●		6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●●		5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Nexus	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Great in many ways but pipped by rivals for audio	Android			4.65	1280x720	16/32	136x68x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android			5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android			5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●●		5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy S II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great but upped by the new kids on the block	Android			4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android			4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●●		5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●●		5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S	01.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent addition to the market	Android			4.2	854x480	1	125x63x9
Sony Xperia S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A real rival to the iPhone	Android			4.3	1280x720	32	128x64x11
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android			4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●●		5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●●		5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●●		5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●●		5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7



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	Lengths tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Chord Company Supershield	50	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1 1.3
Clearer Aud C-line HDMI (2m)	60	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Will improve even 1080p pictures, helping stability. Well worth the money	1 2
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor Flat HDMI	40	10.09/GT	★★★★★	A gutsy, well built HDMI cable.	1 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Performance HDMI-e	35	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	1 1.4
QED Perf. HDMI-e S/speed	60	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Communicates a superb and natural colour balance and virtually noise-free images	2 1.4
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
£80 and above					
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Prowire	45	10.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that's worth seeking out	1.5 1.3

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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

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
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 Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Highly competent, although lacking in low-frequency heft	1 1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable £50+, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1 1.4
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
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-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This stylish cable offers a solid, cohesive image with good sound	3 1.3
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
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	Worthy of serious consideration - pictures are highly detailed, colours convincing	4 1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5 1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1 1.4
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 Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Stunning value, offering a cracking picture, and great for budget set ups	7 1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	An assured, but expensive, performer	5 1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	It's competent and classy, and looks good too	1 1.3
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

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013

ACCESSORIES
BEST ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT
ATLAS ELEMENT INTEGRA



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical Cable

NEW

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2010

CABLES
BEST USB CABLE
AUDIOQUEST DRAGONFLY



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLIP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLIP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL 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

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Digital interconnects

USB	An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
Optical	Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
Coaxial	Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	2
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Bluetooth	10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	USB	2



Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Wireworld Luna 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	●	1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	● ●	1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	●	1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA/phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★ A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	1
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★ Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II can struggle to gel sounds	0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★ A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★ Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable	1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★ Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★ Clean sounding and packed with detail	1.5
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★ QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch	1
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★ For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★ Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★ The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★ An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★ A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100				
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★ A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★ Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★ Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★ For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★ Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★ Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★ An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★ Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	6
£100 and above				
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★ A lively and precise cable that does much right	n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★ Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★ Capable of truly astonishing improvements	n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★ A pricy but worthwhile addition to your set-up	n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★ If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★ Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets	2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★ It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound	6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★ Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	n/a
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★ One of the best mains cables for this money	n/a

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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 Lluna 7
£6.50/m



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

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SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED Silver Anniversary XT	5	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Our budget cable Best Buy for three years on the trot
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
QED XT Evolution	6	10.09/FT	★★★★★	QED is now a twin threat in the sub-£10/m speaker cable market
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

Biwire

£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 of 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 T5 IV	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with forward sounding speakers	50x24x30		2
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
Partington Heavi	399	03.07/FT	★★★★★	If you demand the best, buy these	60x30x21		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Alphason ST560/3	260	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A well isolated modular design that does much right	● 4	65x56x59	2
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
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	● 4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	● 1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Icon Sig.	330	10.06/FT	★★★★★	A great rack for an upgrade to tame unruly systems	4	42x75x66	11
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	● 4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	● 3	42x77x40	4
Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4	430	08.11/GT	★★★★★	A lightweight rack with immense potential	● 4	64x58x40	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	● 3	62x60x40	1
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
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Classy looks and features	2	82x95x44	6
Target CL470	299	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For pure performance, this is a winner at this price	4	82x50x55	2
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3	32x95x40	4
£500-£1000							
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks 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



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Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in Outputs	
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	2	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	6	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	1	7	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	2	5	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	6	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9




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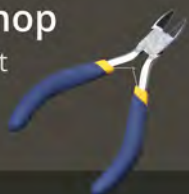


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- Cohesion of sound
 - MC input
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- DISLIKES**
- Fiddly speaker connections



NAD 3020A
The addition of the A suffix to NAD's phenomenally successful 3020 amplifier signifies the addition of a moving coil input, plus the removal of the audio muting button in favour of a mono switch.
Internally there is a small redesign in the preamplifier which has resulted in the disposal of a pair of transistors. Perhaps you thought, like me, that the 3020 did not need a moving coil stage and, if they did fit one, it probably would not be very good anyway as those generally fitted to budget amplifiers seem fairly poor.
But we would both be wrong because the addition of the mc stage has meant that low price, low output moving coil cartridges can be adequately catered for as the new input works really very well for such a low priced device. I am a little sorry to see the muting switch go though, much as I like the inclusion of a mono switch. I think that a more satisfactory solution would have been to replace it with a mono button and retain the muting switch. Hows that?
In all other respects the 3020 is the same. The speaker connections are as bad as ever and it remains one of the only amplifiers at the price to offer two different types of input from the separable preamplifier section

into the power amp. Rear inputs are via phono plugs, which is fine, but there is only switching for one tape deck and one pair of speakers.
Despite the fact that the 3020 has been around for so long it still shows clear performance advantages over the majority of amplifiers in this class. Like the Quantum it lacks the immediate impressiveness of the Japanese designs but somehow, like the IA 100, it lends an extra cohesion and togetherness to music that is always present.
It may not have the most dynamic sound but it can reproduce the smack of a pedal beetle on a bass drum with commendable accuracy and recovery, so that music retains its excitement. Add to this a surprisingly subtle tonality that can easily differentiate between low and high end textures while revealing small but important instrumental clues, this is what sets the 3020 apart from the majority.
I think that this latest NAD sounded cleaner than the previous one I had been using for the past several months, not a huge difference, but a definite sharper high end cut and a mile more definition and articulation on vocals.
It is a little warmer sounding than the Quantum which never sounds quite as cosy as the NAD, and holds music together in a slightly nicer way than the Rotel which was also very good indeed when it came to achieving a real sense of control, subtlety and overall definition. There's very little to criticise about the NAD 3020A.

Onkyo A25
Not a name that springs readily to mind when matters hi-fi are being discussed, Onkyo are however building more and more competitive products pitched right in where competition is at its fiercest. This new small amplifier proves that Onkyo are trying hard to reach the market so expertly cultivated by NAD over the past few years with their excellent 3030.
At £120 recommended retail

the Onkyo A-25 is the most expensive amplifier under scrutiny here, though it is hard to see how the extra cost can be justified when it is held in comparison to a product like the 3020A. It is specified at 40 watts per channel output and appears no better made than its competitors, indeed the feel of the switches is actually quite poorer for a far eastern product.
Facilities are on a par with the best of the rest. Two sets of speakers, two tape decks and full dubbing are included. In addition a rather conservative looking pair of power level meters that are virtually illegible from anything more than a few feet, and all the better for it, are sited on the fascia. Tone controls, cartridge switching and an awful loudness button are all located underneath a small flap on the front of the machine.
Quite attractive from a cosmetic point of view it makes these controls difficult to use and there should really be indentations on the small and hard to get tone and balance controls. I also fail to see the point of a circuit diagram of Onkyo's own Dual Super Servo Circuit in miniature under the flap.
It means nothing and merely shows the kind of high-tech approach that Onkyo feel seem to feel a product like this needs. The truth is of course that this is the last thing the A-25 needs as, underneath all the flash casing, is a decent little amplifier trying to get out.
In use the Onkyo was never up there with the best of 'em, so to speak, but in truth it was not that



Although it reflects modern trends, the D3020 is true to its ancestor in one sense - it sounds great

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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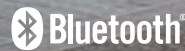
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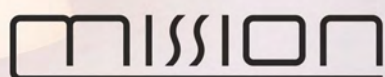


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