

WHAT HI·FI?
AWARDS 2017

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Hall of fame
KEF LS50 Wireless

WHAT HI·FI?
★★★★★
PRODUCT OF THE DECADE

KEF LS50 Wireless (2016)

KEF

LS50 WIRELESS.
THE SOUND SYSTEM.
REINVENTED.



THE BIGGEST SMALL MUSIC SYSTEM

Spotify Connect | TIDAL | Qplay | Roon | Bluetooth



LINN SERIES 3: THE BEST WIRELESS SPEAKER WE'VE HEARD!

WHAT HI★FI?

STUNNING SPEAKER SHOWDOWN!

• B&W • Dali • Mission
• Monitor Audio • KEF
and more



THE BEST
£500
BOOKSHELF
SPEAKERS



STEREO AMPLIFIERS
Naim, Rega and
Roksan power it out

REVIEWED

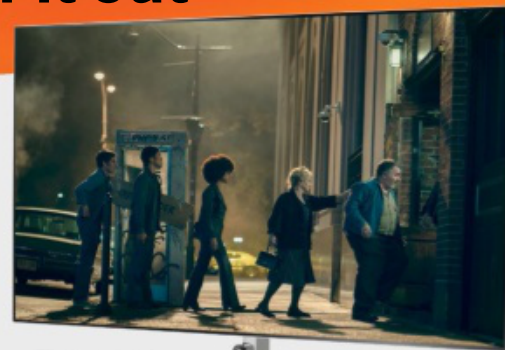


**THE BEST
4K BLU-RAY
PLAYERS
AT EVERY
PRICE**



B&W PI3
wireless
headphones

A new CD player
from Cambridge



Superb
Philips
65in OLED



£1500 SURROUND SPEAKER PACKAGES GROUP TEST

Power. With Control.

Q Acoustics 3030i stereo speakers.

Using the award-winning 3000i range as a baseline, the new 3030i delivers bass punch and presence that's normally beyond a speaker of this type. Add in an effortlessly articulate mid-range, smoothly crisp high frequencies plus class-leading build and finish, and the result is a speaker that looks and sounds much more expensive than it actually is.

Discreet, elegant looks. Powerful, full-scale performance without the premium price. The 3030i is Q Acoustics' latest demonstration of the art of the possible.

3030i is available in the following finishes:



Carbon Black



English Walnut



Graphite Grey



Arctic White



Find out more



qacoustics.co.uk

FREE!
STM Drifter
backpack
worth £89.95
– when you subscribe!
p28



The best bang for your buck

It's a commonly accepted fact, in the world of hi-fi and home entertainment as well as life in general, that more expensive means better. And it holds true for the most part. But it's also true that the higher up that scale you go, the less benefit you get for your extra money. So invest £150 in a pair of speakers to upgrade the supplied boxes that come with a system and you'll notice massive improvements; but move up from, say, a £10,000 pair to a £15,000 pair? Not so much.

The sweet spot for us at *What Hi-Fi?* is around the £500 mark. Which is why we have a round-up of superb **standmount speakers (p34)** between £300 and £650; if you're after the best improvement for your money, this is the area to be looking.

We also have a Group Test of **stereo amplifiers (p44)** and **surround speaker packages (p62)** as well as a round-up of the best **4K Blu-ray players (p54)** at any price. There's a lot to be getting your teeth into, then. What are you waiting for?

Jonathan Evans, editor

MY PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Linn Series 3, p6

It's incredibly expensive for a 'mere' wireless speaker – but of course this is no 'mere' wireless speaker



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HOW WE TEST



EXPERIENCE. HERITAGE.

We've been helping the world discover the best in hi-fi and home entertainment for more than 40 years, and have more than 100 years of reviewing experience under our collective belts – so you can count on our expert opinion.



DEDICATED TEST FACILITIES

We test every product against its peers in our brand-new, bespoke reviewing facilities in London and Bath. We conduct all our tests as a team – our opinions and conclusions are always the result of collaboration.

HOW WE SCORE

All review verdicts are agreed upon by the team as a whole – not an individual reviewer. Each product will be listened to and/or viewed by several members of the test team, who will then discuss the final verdict before it appears in the magazine or on the website. This avoids any individual bias creeping in.

OUR SCORES EXPLAINED

One of the best ★★★★★

A serious contender ★★★★★☆

Worth a look ★★★★★

Disappointing ★★★★★

Awful ★☆☆☆☆

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Look out for this badge to find the best price

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: Phil Barker

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Sublime sonic ability and reasonable pricing makes this a sweet spot for stereo speakers; here are seven of the very best...



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Naim Supernait 3, Roksan Blak and Rega Aethos in a three-way Group Test of one-box integrated amplifiers



RRP
£89.95



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THIS MONTH WE GIVE THE DEFINITIVE WORD ON THESE PRODUCTS

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Five of the best 4K Blu-ray players from Pioneer, Sony and Panasonic



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Bring all the excitement of the cinema to your living room with these four superb speaker packages



70 **TEMPTATIONS**

Mark Levinson's high-end integrated amp – yours for just under £8k



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Eight songs with an unexpected dynamic twist

BUYER'S GUIDE

FIND THE BEST KIT AROUND, FAST!

Every product worth owning. Starting on page 77

2019 AWARDS UPDATE


[View offers](#)

 Wireless speaker | **£2950** | [whf.cm/Series3](https://www.whathifi.com/Series3)

Linn Series 3

Can the most expensive wireless speaker we've tested supply the performance to justify its price tag?

Linn was one of the first hi-fi brands to launch a music streamer back in 2007, so it's surprising the Glasgow-based company has waited this long to launch its first wireless speaker. But here it is, and it's called the Linn Series 3.

While a newcomer in the market often faces an uphill battle to conquer established rivals (in the case of premium wireless speakers, that would be Naim) Linn's entrant arrives exuding a cool confidence thanks to the company's decade-plus experience producing high-end network streamers.

But the Series 3 is the most expensive wireless speaker we have tested. It's more than three times the price of the Bowers & Wilkins Formation Wedge, twice that of the Naim Mu-so 2, and still several hundreds of pounds more than Devialet's Gold Phantom.

Can any standalone wireless speaker, even one with Linn's level of streaming expertise, justify such a price?

New but established

The Series 3 might well mark a new venture for Linn, but anyone acquainted with one of the brand's streaming products doesn't have to go far to find familiarity in the design.

The speaker leverages Linn's established streaming platform, which offers access to networked servers, as

KEY FEATURES

24-bit

24-bit/192kHz



Bluetooth



HDMI ARC

well as music services Tidal and Qobuz, via Linn's Kazoo app.

You can add Spotify Connect to that list, as well as AirPlay, Bluetooth and Roon support, but while Qobuz's hi-res catalogue is fully accessible on the Series 3, subscribers of Tidal's top tier won't be able to play the service's hi-res Masters tracks. Linn has shunned the Masters Quality Authenticated (MQA) technology that these tracks are based on and so none of its hardware supports it.

Multi-room is an option for those with Linn Series 3 speakers in different rooms, while voice control is available here when the speaker is wirelessly paired with an Alexa-compatible device on the same network.

There's also an HDMI ARC socket, that allows you to connect a TV to the Series 3 too, if you could use a 30cm-tall wireless speaker in your telly set-up. If you're feeling particularly flush, you could buy a stereo pair and place one either side of your flatscreen.

Speaking of which, there's an Exakt port that allows serious spenders to wire a chief Series 3 speaker (Series 3-301) to

a slightly modified, £2450 'slave' version (Series 3-302) to form a £5400 stereo pair. Bear in mind though, that there are no analogue or further digital inputs to speak of, so you won't be able to connect a CD player or turntable.

Versatile control plate

Continuing the aesthetic introduced in the company's Selekt DSM, the Series 3's has a glass, touch-control top plate, lit by around 100 LEDs to indicate volume and also featuring six numbered presets offering shortcut access to favourite content, which is easily assignable in the app. You can 'pin' inputs, radio stations and content from streaming services, but the service wasn't extended to our media server.

To minimise the amount of touch controls on the panel, those presets also activate functions when pressed in different sequences: pressing presets three and four simultaneously initiates Bluetooth pairing, while two and five puts the speaker in wi-fi mode.

Once a master and slave are connected via the included Exakt transport cable

"A newcomer often faces an uphill battle, but Linn's entrant arrives exuding a cool confidence thanks to the company's decade-plus experience producing high-end network streamers"

The front grille
hides a silk-dome
tweeter and
long-throw driver

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



Image Source: Linn



An HDMI ARC input allows you to connect a TV to your Series 3(s)



"We are left convinced of its appeal. It proves worthy of even this huge price tag, and those who can afford it won't be disappointed at its mastery"

(Linn's method of transmitting audio data, power triggers and a master timing control to ensure that the audio from all channels are in perfect sync), press-holding presets one and six confirms the pairing.

It's a neat and well integrated control system, but we wish we could slide our finger around the circular ring of LEDs to adjust volume more instinctively, rather than have to tap the volume up and down touch buttons either side.

Elegant design

That top plate is complemented by a ceramic-like stone chassis, which is shaped like the top of a wine glass, but also resembles an oversized egg or rain drop. On the front is a changeable grille, finished in either gold (a Harrods exclusive) or chrome, that hides a silk-dome tweeter and long-throw driver. It's no less gorgeous than you'd expect from Linn - elegant, polished and as close to looking its price as possible for a wireless speaker just shy of £3k.

While it's hard to believe a standalone wireless speaker you can tuck under your arm could look anywhere near such an asking price, it's even harder to believe that the performance could justify it.

But the thing that helps make that happen is Linn's proprietary Exakt

The group of six top-mounted controls are all multi-functional

technology. Linn Exakt aims to reduce phase errors by intentionally delaying higher frequencies so they arrive at your ear at the same time as lower frequencies. It also keeps the music signal's data in the digital domain for as long as possible to avoid any degradation caused by signal processing.

We've heard Exakt do its thing in many a Linn product before, and it again contributes to an absorbing performance. What's immediately striking is the stunning midrange clarity.

Play Mac Miller's *What's The Use?* (over Tidal) and his rap comes through with the clarity and frankness that perfectly captures the delivery's candidness. The Series 3 is a sharp performer, and we don't mean tonally: it's so punctual that his words stop and start precisely.

The Linn's low-end agility ensures the accompanying bassline bobs along with bounce and interest. Where there's quality there's quantity, too. We play Billie Eilish's *Bad Guy*, and the Series 3 thumps the song into the room - just



about able to communicate the bass's seismic quality. We almost feel for the modestly sized woofer having to plumb such depths, but it appears to dig down effortlessly.

Whatever we throw at it, the Series 3 appears at ease - partly down to its balance and clarity but also the seamless integration of its drivers. Its insight sets it apart from its more affordable competitors, too. With Eluvium's *Prelude For Time Feelers*, it reveals itself as a stickler for subtlety, affording each piano key a measured burden and confidently meandering through the subtle dynamic shifts in the compelling sequence. While lesser hi-fi can overlook discrepancies in production, the Linn conveys the warmer cut of Michael Kiwanuka's *Piano Joint (This Kind Of Love)*.

Double the fun

We run a lead between the Series 3 and a slave variant, and discover that it is even more impressive in a stereo configuration. The presentation's tonality, transparency and rhythmic knack remains, but there's a scale, bass volume and, of course, a stereo image to be gained from adding the second.

We play Anthony And The Johnsons' *Aeon* and can appreciate the Linn's value as a wholesome hi-fi system. Anohni's distinctive quiver comes right down the middle of the two Series 3s, the piano familiarly absorbing and the guitar arpeggio delivered with even more dynamic scale.

For the same outlay, you could get a decent system of hi-fi separates, which would topple the Linn in some areas. But for the convenience of having an entire streaming system in two compact speaker boxes, you will still get a hi-fi-mature, best-in-class sound that's surprisingly room-filling.

We should also mention Linn's Space Optimization, which aims to optimise performance according to the shape and

The 3's compact dimensions give great versatility over positioning



You can connect a second 3 for stereo but there are no analogue inputs

size of your room and where the speaker is placed within it. By interpreting your room information against Linn's database of speaker behaviour, the technology aims to make the Series 3s sound as though they're in the ideal position. It's impressive stuff, though we still prefer the tonal balance and overall performance of the Series 3 in our test room with it turned off.

We can hardly describe the Series 3, at nearly £3000, as a bargain, but we

are left convinced of its appeal. It proves worthy of even this huge price tag, and those who can afford it won't be disappointed at its mastery.

The Series 3's omission of Tidal Masters is disappointing, and further connectivity to allow owners to add more non-streaming sources would be top of our wish list - but for a premium wireless speaker it isn't far off. It may not look like it, but make no mistake, this is proper hi-fi.

WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
SOUND	★★★★★	FOR	AGAINST
FEATURES	★★★★★	• Wonderfully articulate	• No analogue inputs
BUILD	★★★★★	• Luxury design	• No Tidal Masters support
		• HDMI ARC for TV connection	VERDICT
			The most expensive wireless speaker we've tested also happens to be the best we've tested

[View offers](#)4K Television | **£4499** | whf.cm/65OLED984

Philips 65OLED984

What happens when you combine Philips' most advanced TV with a super-sophisticated sound system from a giant of the hi-fi world? Here's what...

Few TVs arrive with higher expectations than the 65OLED984 (or OLED+ 984 as it's often called). And for good reason - this is the most advanced TV that Philips produces and it's partnered by B&W's most advanced TV speaker system.

This OLED TV supports both Dolby Vision and HDR10+ and has a Dolby Atmos audio system designed by one of the most well respected hi-fi companies around. It also looks gorgeous and throws Philips' wonderful Ambilight tech into the bargain. What more could you ask for?

But this degree of wishlist fulfilment comes at an eye-watering cost. The Philips 65OLED984 is vastly more expensive than the 65in version of Panasonic's GX2000, which is itself much more expensive than the Award-winning LG C9. This screen needs to be seriously brilliant.

The 65OLED984 looks unlike most TVs. Not in terms of the display itself, which is the usual slab of 16:9 ratio screen framed by fabulously thin bezels, but in the fact that it's a free-standing set, with the OLED panel perched on top of a thin, floor-standing pedestal that also incorporates a soundbar.

KEY FEATURES



OLED

B&W sound



Dolby Vision

It's not super-slim
but it is Philips'
most advanced
OLED TV ever

In fact, soundbar might be the wrong word, at least as far as B&W is concerned. That's because the enclosure below the screen contains only passive speaker drivers and no electronics; processing and amplification is all done within the TV's main chassis.

If you choose to wall-mount, there's a bundled bracket and the part of the stand below the speaker detaches.

Three-channel system

Behind the classy fabric cover of the big, main speaker enclosure are three 10cm mid/bass drivers for the left, right and centre channels. Each of these has its own tweeter; the left and right ones are at either edge of the enclosure, while the central one is just above it, on the stand under the screen. There's a subwoofer output on the rear of the set, too.

It's worth pointing out that the 984 is not wafer-thin like some OLEDs. The drivers used here are much bigger than is normal for a TV, and that means that the speaker enclosure is rather thick. But this television isn't designed to take up as little space as possible - it's designed to make a statement.

While it's easy to focus on B&W's speaker system, the OLED984 is a rather special TV, too. This is the most advanced OLED that Philips has produced, combining the same LG-sourced panel that all manufacturers currently use with Philips' own P5 Pro Perfect Picture Engine.

Like Panasonic, Philips supports both Dolby Vision and HDR10+, as well as standard HDR10 and HLG. You'll find content in both HDR10+ and Dolby Vision on the integrated Amazon Prime Video app, and more Dolby Vision on Netflix. Rakuten and Google Play Movies & TV both offer pay-as-you-go movies in the standard HDR10 format. The rest of the app selection includes the likes of Plex, VLC, Spotify and Tidal, but there's no Apple TV app or Now TV.

There's also some confusion regarding the UK catch-up apps. All four of them (BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4 and My5) are available on our sample. However, Freeview Play was mistakenly added as

part of the most recent software update and could well disappear soon, along with some or all of the catch-up apps. BBC iPlayer should be available, but there are no guarantees on the others.

Android TV is now a pretty good TV operating system, with a decent amount of customisation and value-added features such as Chromecast and Google Assistant, but it is still a fair way short of the bespoke operating systems of Samsung and LG. Press the Home button while watching something and rather than being presented with an overlay of shortcuts to content and settings, it's more like switching inputs. You can't simply go back to what you were watching by pressing the back button or Home again, either: you have to click the source button and select the input again or open the app once more. It's just not as seamless as it should be.

On the subject of inputs, the Philips' four HDMI are 2.0-certified, rather than 2.1. That's not unusual at this point, but it is a shame for such a premium TV, particularly when all of LG's 2019 OLEDs have full HDMI 2.1 sockets.

Once we start watching, we realise that the set's motion processing struggles somewhat. Even on its lowest setting we find ourselves regularly distracted by shimmer and noise around tricky motion. In the first episode of *The Witcher* on Netflix, for example, the hilt of Geralt's sword shimmers as he walks through the halls of Stregobor's palatial paradise. The only solution is to turn the motion processing off entirely, even though this results in a fair amount of judder and blur. In the long run, we find that less distracting.

Areas of brilliance

The good news is that the motion processing is just about the only element of the OLED984's picture performance that isn't utterly brilliant. In terms of detail, sharpness and contrast, there is currently no better TV. The sky at the opening of *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol.2* has never looked better, the clouds beautifully drawn and shaded. There's incredible three-dimensionality on view.



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

We spend the best part of two days watching HDR movies and TV shows, from *Guardians*, *Ad Astra* and *Alien Covenant* on 4K Blu-ray, to streams of *The Witcher*, *Jack Ryan* and *Blade Runner 2049*, and the Philips consistently blows us away with its vibrant, punchy and pin-sharp delivery.

It's similarly impressive with SDR, too. This is a much punchier, more dynamic and three-dimensional performer than even the brilliant Panasonic GZ2000. The colours are probably a little richer than is truly authentic, but that richness is so pleasant, it isn't a negative.

Switching to standard-def from the integrated tuner, a few tweaks to the Vivid mode produce a nice picture. It's easy for a set to dazzle you with the bright colours of the Pointless set, but the Philips is just about spot on. It's a strongly defined and clear picture.

Let's not forget that everything you watch is accompanied by beautiful Ambilight, which extends the light from the screen onto the wall behind it. It draws you into the picture, makes the screen seem bigger and increases perceived contrast.

So, what about the sound that you've paid so much extra for? Sure enough, this is comfortably the most musical audio performance of any TV we've tested. Compared with the Panasonic GZ2000, itself a good-sounding TV, the Philips is



IMAGE SOURCE: Amazon. Hunters is available on Prime Video

The tweeter for the central audio channel is mounted under the screen

vastly more open, spacious and rhythmic, with a genuine soundstage that boasts precisely placed instruments and effects. The delivery is crisp, taut and punchy, with detail and dynamics hitherto unheard from a TV sound system.

Switch to a Dolby Atmos soundtrack and the Philips continues to impress, offering a big, room-filling sound. Some might crave the sofa-shaking low-end of a subwoofer (which can easily be added), but the bass of the integrated drivers is more than deep enough for most people.

The OLED984 is currently around £1500 more expensive than the OLED934, and almost all of that extra cost is for the speaker system. It's a lot to

spend, but it's still broadly good value. Yes, a true hi-fi system will sound more musical, but it won't be as immersive with movies. Meanwhile, a premium soundbar, will make movies sound bigger and more enveloping, but won't be as good with your music.

We were hoping this screen would be special, and so it is. This is a fabulous TV conjoined to one of the best 'soundbars' we've heard. The result is an all-in-one system unlike any other. There are some minor flaws but they don't detract from the broadly overwhelmingly stunning performance. If you have the money and want to make a seriously stylish statement, this is the TV for you.



WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

PICTURE



SOUND



FEATURES



FOR

- Exceptionally crisp, dynamic picture
- Accomplished audio
- Genuinely stunning design

AGAINST

- Motion-processing issues
- Confusion around catch-up apps
- No HDMI 2.1

VERDICT

Incredible images and stunning sound combine to make the OLED984 worthy of its eye-watering price tag

Powered speakers | £749 | whf.cm/TUK

[View offers](#)

Kanto Audio TUK

As a no-fuss, plug-'n'-play option, the TUKs are as versatile as you like

Though hardly a household name in the UK, Canadian speaker firm Kanto Audio makes some very eye-catching speakers. The company's diminutive, wireless YU5 model even graced the White House during Barack Obama's tenure.

The TUK speakers take their name from Tuktoyaktuk, a remote hamlet in the Arctic Circle, where the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, can often be seen. Kanto claims to have emulated this thrilling visual experience in sound with its latest offering.

No amp required

These powered speakers carry many of the features you'd expect of a complete music system, including aptX HD Bluetooth and both digital and analogue inputs. There's even a moving-magnet phono stage. In short, you can connect a range of kit, including your phone, tablet, TV and turntable.

There's also a headphone jack and a dedicated Sub Out RCA connector for integration with a separate subwoofer - Kanto recommends the Kanto sub6 or sub8 - but this isn't essential.

The 28x35mm AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter and minimalist, 13cm aluminium woofer give the speakers a clean look, even though it's a little plastic-heavy. The white finish of our model (also available in matte black) is highly likeable.

There is a bass reflex port on the back of each speaker and, while Kanto says the ideal placement is at least 20cm from a rear wall, we find that placing them a little closer to the wall of our listening room shows them at their best.

Power is claimed to be 65W per channel. And remember, these are powered speakers, not true active, so the amplification - a Class D design - is all housed in the master speaker enclosure, with a cable link between it and its passive partner.

A further cable from the master speaker into a power socket completes

KEY FEATURES



aptX™ HD Bluetooth



USB input

65W

65W per channel



the fuss-free set-up. Kanto has supplied a USB connector for a computer, but we initially press the TUK's volume knob to scroll through input options to Bluetooth, pairing easily with our iPad to run the speakers in.

We cue up Tidal's Retroactive playlist on our iPad and find the youthful choir at the outset of The Rolling Stones' *You Can't Always Get What You Want* clear, spacious and with a healthy dollop of detail. As the guitar and solo horn pipe up through the left speaker, Mick Jagger's voice joins us with a pleasing central placement.

We become aware of the TUK's energetic ability when it comes to delivering a dynamic performance through the midrange frequencies, too. Jagger's vocal is upfront but held within a nicely layered mix, from the sparkling treble to the competent mids.

Textured presentation

We play *Space Oddity* and David Bowie's stirring, sombre lyrics resonate with texture in a refreshing, engaging presentation as the distant countdown to lift-off begins. It's easy to pick out the more meandering musical passages alongside the raucous percussion, too, with each strand given space to shine within the whole.

The weeping electric guitar at the start of Whitesnake's *Now You're Gone* is delivered with zeal and ease through the finessed high frequencies. And when the drums kick in, the TUKs are more than up for the task of keeping the timing secure - but the bass clout is lacking. Checking that all EQ settings are at neutral and that the active crossover (which could send those frequencies to a subwoofer) is disabled, we realise it is a genuine issue.

In search of depth

While the TUKs are presenting a clean and agile listen, it's also thin and overly forward - even adjusting the EQ settings and moving the speakers closer to the rear wall doesn't fully balance things out.

We hook up our laptop with the supplied cable and select Hans Zimmer's Main Theme from *The Dark Knight Rises* - a FLAC file from the hi-res music on our server. Strings are agile and discrete, but the bass registers are reticent and not as stirring as they should be while the midrange lacks projection and solidity.

For those after a set of widely compatible plug-and-play powered speakers, the TUKs present a well-made proposition. All the right ingredients are there, but the sonic balance needs work. It's a forward, insubstantial sound that can become wearing over time.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Clean and expansive treble
- Good attack
- Solid build
- Extensive connectivity

AGAINST

- Thin through the bass
- Sonically a little wearing

VERDICT

Kanto needs to reconfigure the sonic balance here if it wants to trouble the class-leading competition

avforums

**EDITOR'S
CHOICE**

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Speakers Under £1,000

2019



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monitoraudio.com/monitor

MONITOR AUDIO

View offers

Stereo speakers | **£399** | whf.cm/BoreaBR03

Triangle Borea BR03

Triangle’s talented standmounters take the fight to the established class leaders

At this level, the speaker market is a competitive arena and a potentially intimidating place to be for new entrants. Many of the usual suspects, including B&W, KEF and Mission have plenty of five-star speakers to offer, with a select few of them even having a *What Hi-Fi?* Award to their names.

So, it’s going to take a special pair of speakers to stand out from the crowd. A pair of speakers exactly like the Triangle Borea BR03 standmounters.

Preferred location

As with any pair of new speakers, it pays to spend some time getting to know the Triangle Borea BR03s and their preference for placement. Triangle recommends a minimum of 2m between speakers and also between them and your listening position. It also suggests placing them at least 40cm away from a back wall and 50cm from a side wall.

And we have to agree. Even though they’re front-ported, don’t be tempted

KEY FEATURES

90W

Power handling

4.2 ohms

Impedance



Dimensions (hwd)
31 x 21 x 38cm

to put these Triangles right up against a wall. They will certainly do a job, but the overall balance and stereo imaging suffer. However, given some room to breathe and a little toe-in to shore things up, the Borea BR03s are able to perform at their very best.

The Triangle Borea BR03s deliver a huge sense of scale - significantly larger than rivals such as the formidable Bowers & Wilkins 607s. They can also boast impressive separation and precision.

There is detail and insight across the whole frequency range and, given their size, the quantity of bass is perfectly acceptable. There’s plenty of weight to the relatively simple, yet hefty bassline that accompanies Eminem’s *No Regrets*. Some might want a more musclebound delivery, but it’s the detail and quality of bass that gives the Triangles an edge over many rivals at this price.

Texture in spades

There’s texture in spades and the Boreas demonstrate an excellent sense of timing. There’s plenty of precision and no trace of lag as Nina Simone’s *My Baby Just Cares For Me* trots along. The snare drum and piano sound like they’re having fun in each other’s company.

There’s a nice tonal balance to the delivery, which is careful and considerate - sophisticated, even. In the past, we’ve tested some Triangle speakers that have sounded hard and bright in the treble, but that’s not the case here with these Borea BR03s. Bruce Springsteen’s *Terry’s Song* has a raw, demo-like quality to it, so if these Triangles were going to sound bright then this track, whether it’s the



Three finishes are available; black, white or walnut

vocal, guitar or piano could rumble them. But, to their credit, the Boreas take it all in their stride.

Peaky treble

There is a very slight peakiness to the treble, but nothing that would deter us. We would simply recommend you refrain from partnering the Triangles with bright-sounding electronics.

So, what kind of amp would work well with these standmounters? During testing, we partner the speakers with the Cambridge Audio CXA61 (£750) and have a great deal of success. The Boreas sound right at home, their expressive and insightful character combining well with the CXA61’s punchy and



A neat pair of terminals on the rear

"For the money, the Triangle Borea BR03s are savvy musical performers with a great sense of scale and an appetite for presenting music in a transparent and mature manner"

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



IMAGE SOURCE: Borea

dynamic demeanour. Alternatively, a more affordable alternative might be the Marantz PM6006 UK Edition.

The BR03s are the largest of two pairs of standmounters in the Borea range, and feature a 25mm silk dome tweeter above a 16cm mid/bass paper driver.

The twin-pronged diffuser appears at first to be pinching the silk dome, but look a bit closer and it's hovering just above it. It's there to help reduce the directivity and improve the dispersion of high frequencies. Beneath the mid/bass driver sits a pair of bass reflex ports.

Our black review pair looks pretty punchy in the flesh, mainly thanks to the contrasting colour of the mid/bass cone, the silver trim that runs through the driver's surround, plus that eye-catching diffuser. To some, the front of the speakers may look a tad unbalanced, with the ports a little cramped next to

Without magnetic grilles, the BR03s' design is rather eye-catching

the mid/bass driver. However, with the magnetic speaker grilles, there is always the option of covering them up.

These Triangles are single-wired speakers and you'll find a neatly finished pair of terminals for 4mm banana plugs on the rear of each cabinet. The Borea BR03s come in a choice of three finishes. As well as our black review sample, there is also the choice of white or walnut.

It's not often we stumble across a pair of speakers at this price that sound as sophisticated as the Triangle Borea BR03s. For the money, these are savvy musical performers with a great sense of scale and an even greater appetite for presenting music in a transparent and mature manner.

But are they speakers capable of worrying the current class-leaders? On this evidence, they most definitely are.

WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
SOUND ★★★★★	FOR • Sophisticated, detailed sound • High-quality, agile bass • PartyBoost stereo pairing	AGAINST • Aesthetic won't be for everyone	VERDICT At this price, it's rare for speakers to be so sophisticated. These Triangles deliver refinement and detail in spades
COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★			
BUILD ★★★★★			

Phono stage | £990 | whf.cm/Huei

View offers

Chord Huei

We've reached an advanced stage here – but it faces stiff competition



Anyone with even a passing interest in premium hi-fi can't have failed to notice that Chord makes brilliant digital-to-analogue converters. Indeed, the company has truly dominated the quality DAC sector in recent years, producing a string of class-leading products from the portable Mojo (£399) to the high-end DAVE (£8499) that have left the competition floundering.

Amid all that fuss, it's easy to forget that Chord still makes analogue amplification, and has done for the past 30 years.

To help celebrate that significant anniversary, the company has launched the Huei phono stage. The Huei is built into one of Chord's distinctive compact cases – similar to that used on the Qutest, our current DAC Product Of The Year – and it looks very smart too.

Discreetly luxurious

The casework has a luxury feel normally lacking in products of this type and is small enough to be tucked away unobtrusively on a shelf. There's only one finish option: black.

Around the back, there are the usual single-ended RCA connections for input and output as well as a balanced XLR out option. Be careful when using heavy cables though, as the Huei is light enough to be dragged around by their weight.

While the Huei's control layout looks simple, it suffers from Chord's usual use of buttons that turn a different colour to indicate the setting chosen. Some sort of proper display would be more intuitive.

The options for moving magnet and moving coil are simple enough, with the relevant button turning either red or blue respectively, but when it comes to gain there are eight colours, one for each

KEY FEATURES



Moving magnet and moving coil



Balanced output



Variable cartridge loading

step from 21-42dB for moving-magnet cartridges and the same again for moving coils (49-70dB). But that's modest compared with the 12 different shades that are shown by the impedance button to indicate cartridge-loading values.

We're happy that Chord has offered such a wide range of adjustment, but it's hard to manage the settings without the manual. Still, this is something that's usually done once on initial set-up and then only when you change cartridge, so it's something we can live with.

It makes sense to spend this much money on a phono stage only if your record player is suitably talented. We use our reference Technics SL-1000R with Kiseki's Purpleheart moving-coil cartridge for much of this test, then swap to Goldring's still-excellent 2400 to test the Chord's performance with moving magnets. Vertere's extremely talented MG-1 MkII turntable/SG-1 MkII arm/Mystic MC cartridge package is also pressed into service.

Those expecting the Huei to dispense with all-comers in the manner of the company's DACs are in for a disappointment. This phono stage is a useful performer, but it doesn't set new standards for the price in the way the company's digital products do.

Even-handed approach

We start with Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and are pleased to find that the Huei delivers a nicely even sound – nothing sticks out, nothing grabs our attention other than the music. There's a good level of insight here, certainly enough to follow subtle instrumental strands within the complex musical score. There are some savage dynamic swings in this piece and the Huei handles them with composure and

control. It never sounds rushed or fazed when things get demanding and keeps a firm hand on proceedings throughout.

There's plenty to like about the stereo imaging, which is open and stable. Instruments and sounds are confidently placed in the decently sized soundstage and don't wander as the music becomes more demanding. There's a pleasing lack of hardness and edge to the sound, which makes it easy to sit in front of for hours on end.

Seen in context

Yet, compared with class leaders, such as the Vertere Acoustics Phono-1 MkII (£1000) and the more upmarket Cyrus Phono Signature (£1495) there are things lacking. The Chord isn't as dynamically expressive as these fine performers, nor does it sound as open or exciting.

We play Laurie Anderson's *My Right Eye*, but the Huei doesn't capture the track's hard-charging rhythm with as much skill or conviction as the best. It lacks a little punch and definition in bass frequencies, and that leaves it sounding a touch rounded and soft in comparison.

It's not all bad news though. Anderson's voice is clear and nuanced. It's rendered with convincing natural warmth and is nicely textured. The presentation's level of clarity is pleasing, as is the amount of detail the Chord reveals. We also note the phono stage's ability to deal with complex music without confusion and like the way it informs without being clinical.

The Huei is well built, compact and decently equipped. It may not top the class for sonic ability, but it is a solid performer that delivers enough in the way of insight and composure to be taken seriously.



WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR

- Clear and composed sound
- Impressive build
- Neat design

AGAINST

- Could sound more dynamic

VERDICT

The Chord Huei is a capable performer, but it's not as exciting a listen as we'd want at this level

View offers
CD player | £299 | whf.cm/AXC35

Cambridge Audio AXC35

A fine-sounding, slimline, no-frills player that takes a minimalist approach to design



Cambridge Audio's AX series launched last summer; it's a six-strong line-up of hi-fi separates aimed at the more modest end of the market, each one coming in at less than £450.

With an asking price just shy of £300, the AXC35 CD player is actually the pricier of two compact disc spinners in the range. We really like the accompanying AXA35 amplifier, so how will the CD player fare under scrutiny?

Looks familiar

Those familiar with that five-star sibling amplifier will note the AXC35's near-identical dimensions, colour scheme and looks.

This slimline CD player stands just 7.5cm tall, and though we don't recommend stacking your hi-fi components, its stackable dimensions are no bad thing provided you're on board with the understated, purposeful aesthetic that typifies the series.

For the design minimalist, there are refreshingly few flourishes to the AXC35's build, and this carries through to the accompanying remote control.

As with the AXA35, the system remote that comes with the Cambridge Audio AXC35 looks like an entry-level DVD player remote minus some of the buttons. If you run your thumb along it, you can even feel through the top cover where the holes for the missing buttons are. It's perfectly functional but it strays somewhat into corner-cutting territory.

Introducing the panel

Otherwise, there's a central, bright, pleasing dot-matrix display, five circular buttons - for power, eject, play/pause, track-skip and stop - on the right side of the unit, and a power button on the left that has a subtle light in its centre. The display doesn't provide CD text, but at this level, that's hardly an issue.

Around the back, aside from the line outputs and AC power cable, a coaxial

KEY FEATURES



Coaxial digital out



Weight: 4.3kg



Dimensions (hwd):
8 x 43 x 31cm

digital output (for input to a separate DAC or digital recording machine) completes the list of connections. The inclusion of coaxial here is the main difference between the AXC35 and the cheaper AXC25.

There's no optical out and no USB in (for the connection of a USB memory device, for example) as seen in the Award-winning Marantz CD6006 UK Edition player, but at this level, Cambridge Audio has done enough to just about cover the necessary bases.

We begin by listening to Hans Zimmer's *Angels & Demons* soundtrack. The building bass and choral voices in *160 BPM* are quite open and easily distinguishable as instruments alongside textured, human voices.

The driving drum fills and layered, pensive cellos are held in check and relayed with a pleasing musical cohesion as the player proves to be dynamically adept across the frequencies. As the album continues to *God Particle*, we notice that the AXC35 doesn't lose its cool over faster time signatures, delivering a sparkling, percussive rhythm through the treble, underpinned by the foreboding male bass vocals.

A sizeable sound

We load Prince & The NPG's 1991 album *Diamonds And Pearls* into the AXC35 and from the outset of *Thunder* until the final track, *Live 4 Love*, we're presented with a capable performance that isn't afraid to go big.

The Cambridge Audio player's main problem is that it's up against the truly great Marantz CD6006 UK Edition. We cue up Aerosmith's 2005 album, *Rockin' The Joint*, and realise we have gleaned more subtlety in Steven Tyler's moxie-laden vocal and greater dynamic fluidity in Joe Perry's axe from the Marantz. The CD6006 UK times marginally better too, with *Walk This Way* feeling slightly more gripping and exciting, from the classic guitar riff through to Tyler's almost-rapped vocal.

A few years ago, when the Marantz product would have set you back closer to £400, this would hardly be a fair comparison. In 2020, however, the 2019 Award-winner can be bought for the same price as this new Cambridge Audio model, so different rules apply.

Clarity and detail

Cambridge Audio has delivered a slim, fuss-free CD player that fits beautifully within its AX range. It presents enough clarity and detail for a perfectly capable, listenable sound at the price.

However it is up against an exceptional talent in the Marantz CD6006 UK - a product that feels more luxurious, is better equipped, has more sophistication and sounds better across the board.

The Cambridge player is still a worthy proposition. If you want your hi-fi components to assimilate into rather than dominate your decor, the AXC35 remains a solid, budget-friendly solution.

WHAT HI-FI?			RATING ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★	FOR • Good detail resolution • Fits well within AX series • Minimalist design	AGAINST • Can be beaten for sound • Functional build • No optical output	VERDICT If the Cambridge Audio's purposeful, minimalist build works for you, it's a capable contender
FEATURES ★★★★★			
BUILD ★★★★★			

In-ear headphones | **£170** | [whf.cm/PI3](https://www.whathifi.com/PI3)

[View offers](#)

Bowers & Wilkins PI3

These in-ears could easily end up being your best buddies

There's arguably no tougher task in hi-fi than breaking into the headphones market. Where many manufacturers have tried and failed, Bowers & Wilkins has made a fine fist of it. Given the company's heritage in audio and speaker design, it's perhaps not a huge surprise, but success was never a guarantee.

Much of B&W's attention has focused on over- and on-ear models, so its in-ears haven't had quite the same impact - not least because you can count the number of models it has launched on two fingers. Could the Bowers & Wilkins PI3 help make inroads into this market?

Upmarket design

B&W isn't aiming for the budget headphones market here, and this is reflected in the £170 PI3s' design and finish. They use Bowers & Wilkins' Dual Driver technology, where one driver is used for highs and mids, and another for bass, with each driver getting its own separate, dedicated amplifier. This makes for attractive if slightly chunky-looking earpieces.

B&W has opted for a neckband design for the PI3s, rather than going down the true-wireless route. The band is made from coated silicone and rubber that is soft, smooth and quite soothing to the touch. It's flexible too, which makes it easier to fit under jackets and clothing.

The finish is something we'd normally associate with headphones aimed at gym-goers and runners, but while the fit is quite grippy, and the wing tips in the box help, the PI3s aren't IPX rated. B&W claims they are 'resistant to light rain, splash and sweat' though. Besides the Blue finish of our review sample, they're also available in Space Grey or Gold.

The B&Ws come with three different sizes of eartips in the box, which seems a

KEY FEATURES

-  8-hour battery life
-  Bluetooth aptX Adaptive
-  Micro-USB charging

A tactile neck band and nice controls are key plus points



Image Source: Bowers & Wilkins

little mean given the breadth of options offered by some rivals. It also makes it harder to find a perfect seal - and the performance of any in-ears is heavily reliant on the fit being correct.

The neckband has the in-line battery pack and power button on the left side, with the controls and mic on the right. On the battery pack you'll find a micro-USB port for charging and an indicator that tells you the charging status of the headphones.

A degree of ergonomics

The in-line controls are nice to use, with decent-sized buttons including a large textured button for the main play/pause and skip track function.

Battery life is eight hours, which is good for this class. A 15-minute quick charge gets you two hours of playtime.

There's no noise-cancelling tech in the PI3s - this is reserved for B&W's step-up model, the PI4 (£270). Bluetooth AptX Adaptive is supported though.

We fire up Amazon Music HD and select a hip-hop classic in 50 Cent's *In Da*

Club. Through the B&Ws, it's a clean-sounding presentation with a combination of crisp, distinct highs and a solid, punchy bass bringing up the rear.

Weight and detail

There's plenty of weight to low frequencies, but it isn't loose or flabby - it's packaged with purpose and intent. There is also detail and analysis around every corner, the B&Ws able both to pick apart a song and deliver the sum of all its parts with equal skill.

Play Billie Eilish's slow and delicate track *Lovely* and the B&W earbuds draw out plenty of detail and emotion from her vocal. The strings that accompany it flow effortlessly along without sounding unnatural or harsh. It's difficult not to admire the control and poise that these in-ears bring to every music genre.

There are few downsides to the B&W PI3s - they are confident and composed performers. There is some cable noise to contend with, but this isn't uncommon for products of this type. If they fit you well, we'd encourage you to try them.



WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★				
SOUND ★★★★★	FOR - Clean, detailed presentation - Solid, weighty and tight bass - Flexible design and fine build	AGAINST - Not IPX rated - Shortage of eartip options	VERDICT If you don't mind a neckband design, you should definitely consider the Bowers & Wilkins PI3s			
COMFORT ★★★★★						
BUILD ★★★★★						

Tablet | **£349** | whf.cm/iPad7th

[View offers](#)

Apple iPad 7th Generation (2019)

Is Apple's most affordable iPad the performance-per-pound pick of the range?

You might have presumed that the iPad Mini would be the most affordable tablet in Apple's range, but that honour actually goes to the standard iPad, now in its 7th generation. It looks like a lot of tablet for its £349 price tag, but it is missing some tech featured in the Mini. So, the question is whether the standard iPad is still a great device for movies and music.

The 7th-generation iPad is a little taller and wider than its predecessor, but thickness is unchanged at 7.5mm. The weight has increased by only around 15g.

The straight edges and thin bezels of the current iPad Pro models are missing here, this model looking similar design-wise to the rest of the non-Pro iPads. It has curved edges and enough bezel top and bottom (when held in portrait) to house a front-facing camera and 'Home' button. It's hardly a new or surprising look, but there is a timeless classiness to the iPad design.

The three colour options are Silver, Gold and Space Grey, and we're particularly taken with the last of these, which gives the tablet a more mature look. It is a magnet for fingerprints, though, so keep a cloth handy.

Controls and connections

Along the top edge is the power button and a 3.5mm headphone socket (remember that?), and on the bottom there's a Lightning connector and two rows of holes for the stereo speakers. The left edge houses the Smart Connector, which allows the iPad to be switched to landscape and connected to Apple's Smart Keyboard - a big deal for anyone looking for a tablet that can be used for emailing and/or word processing as well as watching movies and listening to music. It can also be used with the 1st generation Apple Pencil.

The big news here is that the 7th-gen's IPS screen has increased in size to 10.2in. That's 0.5in bigger than that of its predecessor, yet resolution has been

KEY FEATURES



LCD



Dolby Atmos



10.2in display

increased to maintain the pixel density of 264 ppi.

This iPad lacks some of the screen tech of the Mini and Air, including the laminate layer, anti-reflective coating and wide colour support. Perhaps most critically for movie-watching, this iPad is also the only one in the current range that doesn't support HDR.

It's also the only model that doesn't have one of Apple's newer processors. Instead, the A10 Fusion chip of the outgoing model has been carried over. Predictably, battery life also remains the same, at about 10 hours of general use.

All current iPads now run iOS 13, this most recent version being focused on improving performance and efficiency. It's not a huge departure from previous versions, and remains a snappy and intuitive platform jam-packed with apps.

Natural colour balance

Apple's own TV app is the best in the business for pay-as-you-go movie streaming (and downloading), so we head here to watch our test favourite *It*. We're immediately impressed by the iPad's performance, which has the supremely natural colour balance for which Apple devices are renowned. The slight saturation of the summer holiday scenes is present, without everything becoming too rich and warm, and skin tones have just the right amount of blush. There's excellent detail and definition, too, and motion is handled exceptionally well.



But while the standard iPad puts in a lovely, authentic performance, the iPad Mini sprinkles a little more fairy dust on proceedings. It can handle the HDR element of the video, and that helps it to produce brighter, punchier highlights and deeper, more dramatic blacks.

Switching to our non-HDR download of *Solo*, the differences in the brightest parts of the picture are less pronounced, both tablets producing similar highlights.

The audio performance is strong. There's weight, solidity and dynamic variation here that other tablets, including the current iPad Mini, can't match. Of course, we'd advise using a wireless speaker if you want to listen out loud. Better still, plug in a decent pair of headphones. Do so and you'll discover a performance with a natural, near-neutral tonal balance and effortless musicality.

This is the most affordable model in Apple's current tablet range, and sacrifices have had to be made to deliver a large screen at a low price. That means it doesn't have quite the same video and audio sparkle of its siblings. But Apple's least impressive tablet is still an impressive one. Make no mistake, this is an excellent portable media machine.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

PICTURE

★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

FOR

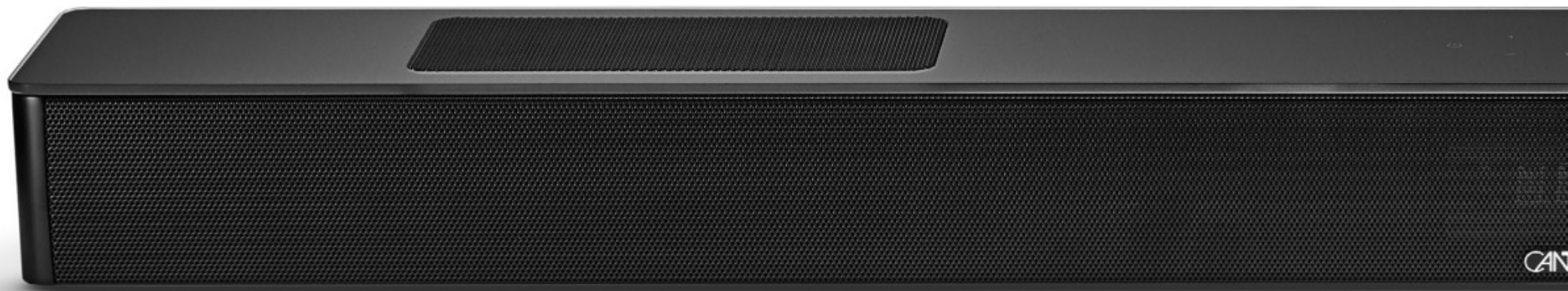
- Brilliantly natural, detailed video
- Bigger screen
- Good value

AGAINST

- No HDR
- Beaten for black depth

VERDICT

Sacrifices have been made in the name of affordability, but the iPad remains an excellent tablet


[View offers](#)
Soundbar | **£899** | whf.cm/SmartSoundbar10

Canton Smart Soundbar 10

It's 10 out of 10 for the tech, which includes Dolby Atmos, but when it comes to scoring the sound, the 10 is more like a six

Dolby Atmos has become a key technology in soundbars, and it's what puts the Canton Smart Soundbar 10 at the top of the company's TV soundbar range.

This technology comes at a price, though. Take a look at our best Dolby Atmos soundbar selection and you'll see that most of the featured units hover around the £1000 mark. The Canton is up there too, but it still needs to offer the basics of clarity and musicality for us to be able to recommend it ahead of cheaper, non-Atmos models.

Fortunately, it has some other tricks up its sleeve to help justify the price, including four HDMI ports, built-in Chromecast, Spotify Connect and the promise of 3D room-filling sound.

Design integration

At just 7cm high and nearly a metre long, the Canton Smart Soundbar 10 is designed to sit underneath a modern TV without getting in the way of either the picture or the IR remote-control sensor.

Finished in a smart lacquer and glass combo, it comes in a choice of either black or silver and has a series of touch-sensitive controls on the top.

You're likely to use the small but sturdy remote control for most of the functionality. This brings direct access to the playback modes, equaliser settings and wireless Bluetooth, as well as media playback, but takes a little getting used to when navigating the on-screen menus. The small display on the front gives

KEY FEATURES



Dolby Atmos



Chromecast built-in



some visual feedback on your selections in the form of blue LED lights.

Inside the soundbar there is an impressive eight-driver array driven by a total of 300W of amplification. There are two 19mm fabric-dome tweeters, two 50mm aluminium midrange cones and four 79mm upward-firing woofers, two of which convert to full-range drivers during Dolby Atmos playback to add a greater sense of height - the result is a 2.1.2 virtual surround sound system.

Of course, not everything comes with an Atmos soundtrack, so there's also decoding for Dolby Digital and DTS Digital Surround formats. At the rear there are plenty of connections, including four 4K-enabled HDMI sockets (three ins and one out). There's also ethernet (as well as wi-fi), optical,

coaxial, analogue inputs and an output for an external subwoofer.

Setting up the Smart Soundbar 10 is a more complicated process than usual for a soundbar. The on-screen menus allow you to choose the listening distance, ceiling height and device height to optimise the soundfield for your viewing position. You can also fine-tune it by adjusting the actual and virtualised channel levels as if it were a 5.1.2 system, although it works well enough out of the box for this not to be strictly necessary.

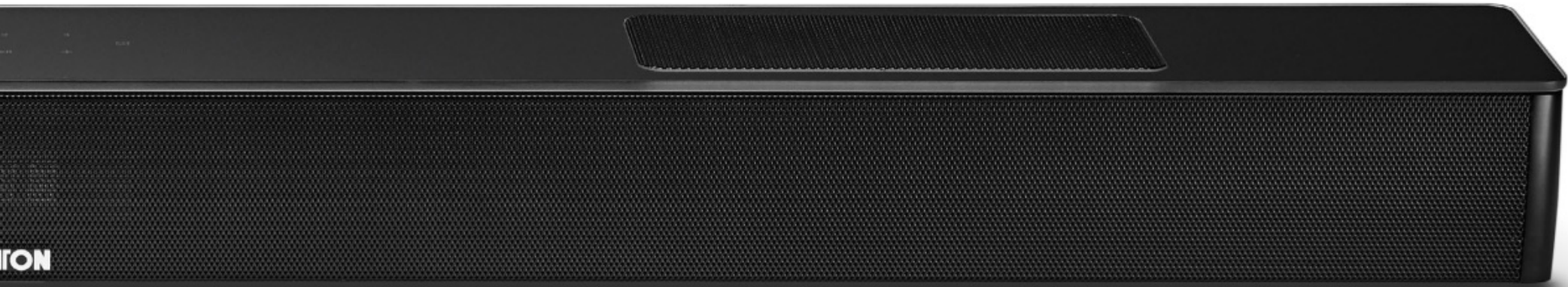
Easy connection and updates

Connecting the 10 to your network is simple enough and, once set up, it automatically updates its firmware whenever available. Chromecast compatibility makes music playback from an Android device simple, and Spotify Connect is also built-in. It all works smoothly enough and with minimal lag. There's no on-board microphone for voice control, though.

You also get hi-res music capabilities - up to 24-bit/192kHz files over HDMI and 24-bit/96kHz over wi-fi - and streaming through the likes of Spotify, Tidal, Google Play Music, Deezer and TuneIn over Bluetooth or Chromecast.

You can also set the Soundbar 10 up in a multi-room system with other Canton Smart Series products, including a subwoofer, AV amp and active speakers.





We put a 4K copy of the Dolby Atmos-encoded *Alien: Covenant* into our player and sit back to enjoy the film.

From the start, it's clear that this soundbar offers plenty of scale for a modestly sized unit. There are deep, forbidding growls as the titles appear, these then give way to an open soundstage that matches the screen as Peter Weyland activates David.

Everything from David's bare footsteps to the sounds of the Steinway concert grand piano come across with an echo from the large, sparsely decorated, white room but the Canton can't quite manage the same level of analysis when we switch to the interior scenes of the spaceship. There's no closed-in feeling to the sound and the scene lacks its usual claustrophobic tension.

Bass-heavy bias

As we reach the busier action sequences, we discover a few bigger flaws too. We get the big, deep noises of the lander craft's thrusters as the remaining crew try to shake-off an alien, and there are some worthy spatial effects as it flies overhead from left to right. However, much of the rest of the audio of the scene is hidden in the chaos.

There's too much of a tonal bias towards the bass sounds and little detail on offer elsewhere. Dialogue and on-screen actions, such as a snarling alien and a cable being winched, are all but consumed by the bigger, hard-hitting sounds. There's not enough insight into anything higher and midrange-pitched - and that impressive range of drivers isn't agile enough to stop the audio from becoming murky.

Dynamically, this soundbar is lacking too. It's clear as we switch to some music with the Live Aid scene at the end of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. There's not enough of a difference between the sound of Freddie Mercury calling out and the 72,000 people responding. As broad and high as the soundstage is, it just doesn't sound like a huge stadium.

When the band kicks in, there's a shortfall in the music's drive. The drums sound distant and the lead guitar



Four HDMI ports are joined by ethernet, optical and coaxial ins

comes across more like a background instrument. Considering the efforts that Canton has gone to with this sensible and practical device, it's a real pity.

Alternative modes

We try out the Stereo and Music modes and things improve a touch. We play *Hunky Dory* by David Bowie and there's enough musicality to enjoy *Changes* and *Oh! You Pretty Things*, but Bowie's voice is still short of definition and feeling. It could quite happily entertain you and your guests as background listening at a party, but for anything more demanding it doesn't quite make the grade.

This Dolby Atmos device certainly delivers on its headline promises. The

Canton Smart Soundbar 10 will open up the breadth and height of your TV's offering and provide body-shaking hits in the process. Its smart capabilities are usable and handy, too.

There are limits to its sonic ability, though. In terms of balance, dynamics and clarity, it feels some way behind other soundbars at this level, and even struggles to match the best of those a fair bit cheaper.

We've enjoyed other Canton home cinema products in the past but, unfortunately, this one doesn't quite meet those standards. It's big and bold enough to create room-filling sound, but we're not convinced that it's a sound worth filling your room with.

WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
SOUND ★★★★★	FOR • Tasteful and practical build • Big, room-filling audio • Impressive Dolby Atmos soundstage	AGAINST • Uneven balance • Lacking insight and dynamics • Could be smarter	VERDICT It's spacious and room-filling, but this Dolby Atmos soundbar is too short on clarity and finesse to shine
FEATURES ★★★★★			
BUILD ★★★★★			

View offers

4K Television | £1299 | whf.cm/65SM9800PLA

LG 65SM9800PLA

Here at *What Hi-Fi?*, a new TV from LG is always eagerly anticipated. This time, however, the hardware took us completely by surprise

The LG name has become synonymous with OLED to such an extent that it's easy to forget the company makes other products – even non-OLED TVs such as the 65SM9800PLA here.

This is, in fact, LG's top non-OLED television. A 65in LCD model with a direct LED backlight for better contrast and so called 'NanoCell' technology for better colours. It all sounds impressive; yet, in action, the most striking thing about this TV is how poor it is.

From a distance, the 'SM9800 is a smart-looking TV with relatively thin bezels and a reasonably elegant boomerang-shaped stand. Without the stand, the TV measures 6.4cm at its thickest point – hardly super-thin but pretty standard for a mid-range LCD TV with a direct LED backlight.

The connections are to the left of the TV screen, with most (four HDMI and two USBs) facing sideways but some (aerial, satellite, ethernet, optical and a third USB) facing backwards and therefore being a bit fiddly to access if you wall-mount the TV.

Fully certified HDMI 2.1 sockets are rare at this price, so their presence here is a bonus. It's unlikely you'll take advantage of all the features, but eARC (Enhanced Audio Return Channel) is useful in that it allows you to send Dolby Atmos to a compatible soundbar or home cinema system. VRR (Variable Refresh Rate), meanwhile, will appeal to hardcore gamers looking for a smoother experience.

Familiar interface

Away from the physical connections, there are plenty of ways to watch things on the SM9800PLA, thanks to it having the same webOS platform as its OLED siblings in LG's 2019 TV range. This isn't the nicest or most app-laden TV operating system around – that accolade belongs to Samsung – but some will love the combination of big, colourful icons and the pointer-like Magic Remote. Certainly, this is a user experience unlike that offered by any of LG's rivals.

The app selection includes all of the obvious big-hitters, such as Netflix (with

KEY FEATURES



4K



LCD with LED backlight

DOLBY VISION
Dolby Vision

Side-facing inputs are neat, but rear ones can be tricky if wall-mounting

Dolby Vision), Amazon Prime Instant Video (HDR10 only, for some reason), BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4 and My5; as well as a few others, such as Google Play Movies & TV (in 4K and HDR) and Now TV. The one big omission on the app front is Apple TV, but LG has announced that this will be coming to TVs such as this via a software update.

It almost goes without saying that this is a 4K set. HDR, meanwhile, is supported in HDR10 and Dolby Vision formats, as well as Advanced HDR by Technicolor. HDR10+ is not supported, but that's no great loss, at least for the time being.

The heart of the TV is the second-generation version of the a7 processor. This is the same CPU as is found in LG's most affordable OLED model, the B9, and it features, among other things, an AI algorithm that's designed to optimise picture and sound on the fly.

Testing the claims

LG makes big claims for its NanoCell technology, particularly regarding colour reproduction and viewing angles. It's surprising, then, that these turn out to be two of the worst aspects of the SM9800's performance.

We begin with the 4K Blu-ray of *Captain Marvel* and initially enjoy the vibrancy of the performance, which brings to life the neon lights of futuristic city Hala. Continued viewing, though, proves the colours to be decidedly exaggerated overall. It's a warm and rich delivery that, while not entirely

unpleasant, is obviously incorrect, and no amount of tweaking fixes the issue. It's a huge problem – the vibrancy of the picture is often quite likeable, but if authenticity is the goal this TV clearly falls short.

The viewing angles, though, are dreadful. Move just a little off axis and black depth and colour vibrancy instantly deteriorate to leave everything grey and hazy. If you're not in the sweet spot, you're going to get a poor performance from this TV.

And even sitting right in the sweet spot, you won't be able to ignore the SM9800's other big flaw: backlight blooming. Every bright object has a patch of light around it that extends a few inches. It would be bad for a cheap, edge-lit TV, let alone a premium model with a direct LED backlight such as this. Hands-down, this is the worst blooming we've seen on any TV for a long while, and it's impossible to ignore.

There is also a general lack of black depth that genuinely ruins some dark scenes (a view of an aurora over some mountains at night in *The Revenant* looks washed out to incomprehension) but also means that brighter scenes lack the contrast they require (views through the forest, for example, that should contrast the bright light in the distance with the dark trunks in the foreground).

Decidedly edgy

Also on our list of picture gripes is the TV's approach to sharpness. Out of the box it has a tendency to over-sharpen and exaggerate edges in a way that looks impressive at first but decidedly unnatural over time. Turning off the Super Resolution feature and reducing Sharpness fixes this, but also results in a soft picture. Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be a middle ground.

After all of these complaints, what's left to be positive about? Motion is reasonable, as long as you avoid the over-processing of the default settings, and this is certainly a bright and punchy performance – much more so than that offered by rivals such as the Samsung QE65Q70R, for example. In bright,





IMAGE SOURCE: Amazon. Vikings is available on Prime Video

colourful scenes, such as those that take place on Ego's planet in *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol.2*, the SM9800 can be dazzling. Even then, though, the brightest parts of the picture can be over-exposed and lacking detail.

The SM9800's issues are exaggerated when watching HDR content; SDR is far more palatable. Playing the standard Blu-ray of *Logan*, the issues are all still there, but are far less in your face. At times, and assuming you're sitting centrally, the viewing experience is perfectly pleasant.

Standard-def broadcasts, whether delivered via the Freeview or Freesat tuners, are decent, too, with the on-board upscaler producing clean and clear images. Colours are a touch overblown again, but not to an extent that looks hugely incorrect.

That sound's more like it

The SM9800's audio is thankfully much better than its video, with the 40W, 2.2ch sound system proving direct, dynamic and detailed. There's good, natural-sounding bass weight, too - still relatively rare from flatscreen TVs,

With its thin bezels and elegant stand, this TV looks good - until you turn it on

particularly those in the price range in which this LG now finds itself.

The Dolby Atmos mode is worth experimenting with. It sacrifices a little of the TV's crispness and punch, but it adds just a bit of width and a reasonable amount of height. While it doesn't suit everything you watch, it works well with a lot of larger-scale movies.

We'd avoid the AI Sound mode, though. It's designed to tailor the sound to your room but, in our tests, it sacrificed width and weight to a disappointing degree.

And, of course, while the 65SM9800PLA sounds good for a TV of its price, it can still be beaten by a relatively inexpensive soundbar.

The 65SM9800PLA is the worst kind of surprise. We're so used to LG TVs being fantastic that the idea of one being unrecommendable seems ridiculous. And yet, here we are.

Astonishingly, until very recently this screen would have set you back £1799 - more than the B9 OLED. Even at this vastly reduced price, this TV has such glaring flaws that a two-star verdict is the best it can get.

No other TV we've reviewed over the past year has had worse blooming or viewing angles, and it's below par in other aspects, too. While it does go bright and is sonically capable, that isn't enough to make up for those issues.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★☆☆☆

PICTURE



SOUND



FEATURES



FOR

- Bright and punchy
- Good OS with lots of apps
- Strong sound

AGAINST

- Awful backlight blooming
- Poor viewing angles
- Exaggerated colours and edges

VERDICT

A strong option on paper, the LG 65SM9800PLA has glaring flaws that make it impossible to recommend

[View offers](#)Portable music player | **£1799** | whf.cm/AultimaSP1000M

Astell & Kern A&ultima SP1000M

The Korean king of the portable player promised a reduction in weight and size and an increase in sound quality. Has it been true to its word?

The **Astell & Kern** SP1000M could be the company's most enticing high-resolution music player yet. After listening to user feedback about its flagship players, the company has come back with a smaller, lighter model that it hopes will be a little more pocket-friendly.

The icing on the cake is that Astell & Kern is promising better sound quality into the bargain – if a seriously expensive portable music player costing almost £1800 can be labelled a bargain.

With its angular lines and edges, a prominent multi-function volume wheel on the side and a shiny, all-aluminium body, the SP1000M is a textbook example of Astell & Kern's design. It looks smart in the shiny finish of our review sample and immediately feels lighter than comparable hi-res music players.

Astell & Kern claims to have reduced the overall volume of the SP1000M by 18 per cent compared with the preceding

KEY FEATURES

32-bit

File support:
32-bit/384kHz,
PCM, DSD256



Battery life: 10 hours



Weight: 203g

Astell & Kern's
attempts to reduce
weight and size
have paid off well

SP1000, while the weight has been reduced by almost half. Weighing 203g, it is heavier than our 2019 Product of the Year, the A&norma SR15 (154g) and indeed the iPod Touch (88g). But this is a more premium affair, which includes a level of heft befitting its hefty price tag.

As well as the jogwheel on the right-hand side for controlling the volume, you'll find three little buttons on the left. These allow you to skip back, stop/start and skip forward.

On the bottom of the unit there's a USB-C connection and microSD slot, while the headphone and balanced outputs are on the top, alongside the power button, which doubles as the screen on/off.

Operational pros and cons

The compact package is certainly pocket-friendly and well made, but we still find ourselves using two hands to perform most functions, most noticeably to reach the screen on/off button. The jogwheel is easy for a right-hander's thumb, even if it does require a fair old scroll to make noticeable volume adjustments. And we do find ourselves knocking it unintentionally from time to time. Perhaps we're just a bit clumsy.

It's lighter, smaller and promises better sound, so what gives? That smaller chassis means a smaller 3300 mAh battery, promising 10 hours of playback rather than 12 hours on the previous SP1000 model. You also get less storage space, with 128GB memory rather than 256GB; but there is always the option of expanding this using a microSD card up to a maximum of 1TB.

The screen is smaller than before too, offering a 4.1in HD display, down from the 5in one of its sibling. It keeps the same resolution and the same, freshly designed user interface, which has been updated with the addition of a new 'virtual back key' – a familiar idea to anyone who's used a smartphone – which helps navigation around the UI.

The UI takes a little getting used to (if you're new to A&K) but is fairly simple, with a sidebar main menu giving access to your folders and music services. There's also a dedicated sub-menu for MQS (Mastering Quality Sound). This is A&K's acronym for lossless and high-resolution audio music. There's a tab within this sub-menu for DSD, too.

Dynamic display

The screen looks great. Sharp, colourful and clear, and a long way removed from the old digital player experience of years past. It's still not a flagship smartphone experience, though; if you're used to expansive screens where you can swipe to your heart's content, this is not that. The keyboard is a little fiddly for our fingers and it's not always instantaneous in its response.

Inside, the CPU and DAC are the same as on the previous model. So that means two AK4497EQ DACs, one for each stereo channel, and an Exynos 7420 octa-core CPU. What is new is an upgraded audio block layout. This aims to shorten the signal path and deliver better sound thanks to reduced noise and improved output level.

Elsewhere, there's support for 32-bit/384kHz high-resolution PCM audio and native playback of DSD audio, up to quad-rate (DSD256), plus wi-fi connectivity, USB DAC functionality, DLNA networking, digital audio output via USB and aptX HD Bluetooth.

App installation

Also new is an open app service, allowing developers to use the A&K application programme interface (API) to enable direct loading of apps on the player. What's the difference? For full functionality – such as offline playback on Tidal – you need to load the apps on rather than have them embedded. Supported apps include Amazon Music, Apple Music, Qobuz, SoundCloud, Spotify, Tidal and Tune-In Radio.



"It's almost effortless, as gentle moments packed full of insight are handled as comfortably as punches of aggression or excitement"

Smaller, lighter and better sound: that's the promise. And the SP1000M doesn't disappoint. The presentation is clean, clear, punchy and detailed, and music sounds as it should. It can make similarly priced machines, let alone more affordable digital audio players, sound dull, muffled or lifeless, thanks to the crisp transparency offered by this Astell & Kern device.

Listening to *Halftime* from Nas's classic *Illmatic* album (in 24-bit, 96kHz FLAC), the bassline is impeccably formed, punchy but tight, delivering just the right amount of depth to ensure weight without impeding the pace of the track. Trumpet and vocal loops sit alongside chugging drums and percussion, each sounding natural and complete, while also fully part of the whole track. Clear but textured vocals complete the perfectly presented picture.

A true connection

We play Tom Waits' *I Hope That I Don't Fall In Love With You* and enjoy that feeling of being truly connected to the artist, something that a great music player and excellent headphones can deliver better than most hi-fi systems. We experiment with the Grado GS1000e, AKG K701 and Sony WH-1000XM3s (through Bluetooth), but through each pair, every guitar pluck and strum seemingly reveals every vibrating string, as well as every inflection in Waits's famously bruised voice.

Tchaikovsky's *Waltz Of The Flowers* from *The Nutcracker Suite*, performed by the Bruckner Orchester Linz, sounds beautifully delicate and light on its feet before the dynamic and expansive strings are released, the stirring conclusion delivering as much pomp as anyone could surely handle.

Jumping from classical to dance music, rock to acoustic, and across hi-res files, Tidal and even Spotify, the SP1000M maintains a solid grip on every element of the audio. This Astell & Kern

Sound quality is first-rate – and a clear display is the icing on the cake

player is almost effortless, as gentle moments packed full of insight are handled as comfortably as punches of aggression or excitement – and with the feeling that it's all in a day's work.

The Astell & Kern A&ultima SP1000M is pretty much faultless when it comes to sound quality. It's not cheap, and we

have minor quibbles with the controls, but when it comes to the business of playing music, it's impossible really to find holes in the performance.

Astell & Kern listened to user feedback in the making of this machine. Now, we're delighted to say, it's our turn to do the listening.



WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
SOUND ★★★★★	FOR • Small and light • Clean, clear sound • Articulate build • aptX HD compatibility • Vast file support	AGAINST • Expensive • Controls are occasionally fiddly	VERDICT A&K's smaller, lighter portable music player could represent a new high in high-performance audio
FEATURES ★★★★★			
BUILD ★★★★★			

In-car hi-fi | £4375 (optional extra)

B&O Advanced 3D Sound System for Lamborghini Urus

V8 power for the car; 1700W for the sound system. And both are very much high-end

Bang & Olufsen has teamed up with many different car manufacturers over the years, providing systems for a range of models across various price points. Aston Martin, Audi, Mercedes-Benz and Ford are just four brands to have benefited from a partnership but, as the saying goes, there's a first time for everything. And this is where the Urus comes in. This super-sports SUV marks the first time that Bang & Olufsen has featured in a Lamborghini.

So, it's no surprise the Danish luxury brand has come out all guns blazing and fitted the Lamborghini Urus with its premium Advanced 3D sound system.

21 today

By premium, we mean ticking the options box will add an extra £4375 to the price of your Lamborghini. For the money, you get 21 speakers, 21 channels and 1700W of Class-D amplification.

The fact it's a premium system means Bang & Olufsen's trademark Acoustic Lens tweeters make a welcome appearance. When not in use, these 19mm lenses are hidden away, one in each corner of the dashboard, with only a small B&O logo on top hinting that something lurks beneath.

Fire up the Urus using the trademark jet-fighter-style engine start button and both lenses rise in unison from the

KEY FEATURES



'Symphoria' 3D surround sound



21 speakers



Touchscreen operation

The Urus is the first Lamborghini to feature B&O audio equipment

dashboard, adding an extra dose of theatre to this already show-stopping car. The Acoustic Lenses aren't just for show, though. They're designed to allow wide, 180-degree dispersion of high frequencies, and they certainly deliver on that front.

The rest of the system is pretty straightforward. In the middle of the dashboard are a 25mm tweeter and 10cm midrange speaker. In each front door there's a 10cm midrange driver and 18cm woofer - the system also includes a 40mm midrange driver in the car's A-pillars to help generate a 3D effect.

Similarly, in the rear, there's a 10cm midrange driver and 16.8cm woofer in each of the doors, partnered with a 25mm tweeter in each B-pillar.

The speakers in the doors are hidden behind precisely crafted aluminium grilles. Each one boasts a smooth matt finish and distinctive Y-shaped holes, in keeping with the design cues throughout the Lamborghini's cabin.

The surround channels are two pairs of 10cm midrange drivers and 25mm tweeters built into the headlining in the rear of the car. And, finishing off the set-up is a 26cm subwoofer hidden in the boot.

Lamborghini is part of the Volkswagen AG (VAG) family, with the relationship having its perks in terms of infotainment

and what the Urus can 'borrow' from other brands under the VAG umbrella. In the Urus, for example, you'll find a virtually identical touchscreen infotainment set-up to that found in the Audi A8. The top screen handles sat-nav and multimedia duties, while the lower display is tasked mainly with the air conditioning system.

It's a good-looking set-up. Both screens are punchy, clear and easy to read. The resolution on offer means icons are crisply and precisely drawn. Album artwork appears clear and pristine too, with solid, bold colours and excellent contrast.

Instead of physical buttons, the digital ones on the touchscreen give you haptic feedback from every press - you feel a click with every command and you can actually alter how powerful it is through the menus.

Smooth operator

The screens are responsive to touch, scrolling is relatively smooth and the system feels like it's working with you as opposed to against you. Some systems we've experienced don't respond quite as predictably.

It's a similar case when it comes to connecting your phone either to one of the USB inputs or via Bluetooth. Disconnecting your phone when parked and reconnecting can be a pain with some systems, but we don't have any such struggles here.

The only slight negative is that those screens are fingerprint magnets, meaning the slightest of touches stands out like a sore thumb, as it were, especially when the system is powered down.

Bring up the system's sound menu and you'll see a number of different settings. You can dabble with treble, bass, subwoofer and balance, and fade the music from front to back. All these are par for the course, but the B&O system also has the ability to shift focus (all, front, rear, movie), surround level and the 3D sound effect, which can be set to high, medium, low or off.





Image Source: Bang & Olufsen



We settle on 'all' for the focus - although 'front' allows more information through to the front speakers, we prefer the general balance and feel of 'all'. We keep 3D sound on low or medium - the system sounds more expansive on the higher setting, but you end up sacrificing cohesion and precision in the soundstage.

It's the same for the system's speed-dependent volume control, which just ends up sounding noisier and messier the higher you set it. If you prefer it turned on, we'd keep it on a low setting.

Powerful presence

The first thing to note is that there's plenty of power on tap. Lows sound purposeful and precise. Leading edges are nicely defined and the system can delve deep too. The bassline to Drake's *Started From The Bottom* is searching and probing. It might not be the most precise but, like the car's 4.0-litre V8 engine, this system isn't afraid of making its presence felt.

Each front door carries a 10cm midrange driver and 18cm woofer

The B&O set-up uses a special Symphoria 3D surround sound algorithm designed by the Fraunhofer Institute to give passengers the impression they're sitting in 'an acoustically enlarged' cabin.

This translates into a wide and open expanse of sound and a thoroughly convincing and cohesive stereo image. Vocals and instruments are all neatly organised, with each various element sounding natural, refined and detailed. There's a degree of sophistication to the sound, especially where mids and highs are concerned, that allows you to sit back and let the music do the talking.

Play The Cure's *A Forest*, and Robert Smith's vocal is forthcoming and expressive. The swagger of the electric and bass guitars helps set a course for the track with a simple kick drum bringing up the rear.

This Bang & Olufsen system skilfully separates everything out but still manages to integrate the different speakers extremely well, effectively disguising their positioning.

There's no trace of hardness or brightness, although the system doesn't smooth over the cracks of poor recordings. It's refined, without sounding completely rolled off. But, the longer we listen, the more we become aware of the restrained dynamics.

We play Royal Bloods' *Figure It Out* and the leading edges of those powerful drum thwacks and guitar notes don't display enough snap or attack. Consequently, the song doesn't sound as engaging or attacking as it should. Other systems we've heard have the edge where timing is concerned too. The B&O set-up lacks a little fluidity to communicate fully with the listener.

That said, this is an extremely capable system, with plenty of power and a good dose of refinement. You won't hear many systems where the imaging is as precise and cohesive as it is here.

It's not the last word in dynamics and timing, but it does treat you to a sound that fits the big, brutish character of the Urus extremely well.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

FOR

- Excellent imaging
- Good sense of refinement
- Intuitive infotainment system

AGAINST

- Lacks dynamic dexterity
- Timing could be better

VERDICT

This big and powerful-sounding system suits the Urus to a tee. It produces some brilliant stereo imaging and integrates a modern user interface to good effect

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KEF museum

KEF has been making speakers for almost 60 years – and its Kent HQ houses a museum packed with classic speakers, from the K1 to the Concept Blades. We took a trip to see a piece of hi-fi history...

Raymond Cooke founded KEF in 1961. He began his career at the BBC, becoming a trained engineer before going on to work for Gilbert Briggs at Wharfedale. After five years there, he decided to branch out on his own, starting up a company from a Nissen hut located on the grounds of the Kent Engineering & Foundry (KEF) metalworks company in Tovil, near Maidstone in Kent.

One of Cooke's prime reasons for going solo was that he wanted to move away from the conventional drive unit materials, such as paper, that Wharfedale was using at the time and embrace the various plastics that were just becoming available. And the rest is history.

We took a trip to the current KEF HQ, just a few metres away from the location of Cooke's original workshop, to revisit some of the company's classic speakers.

K1 monitor

KEF's first speaker was the K1 monitor. It revealed Raymond Cooke's thirst for cutting-edge drive unit technology and his BBC-based engineering background.

The K1 monitor was a three-way speaker, standing just over a metre tall. The bass driver used a flat rectangular diaphragm made of aluminium-skinned polystyrene, as did the elliptical midrange. The tweeter had a Melinex dome, a polyester film known for its high tensile strength and chemical stability.

The K1's hefty 110-litre enclosure was braced and heavily damped to control resonances, and was available in three finishes – American Walnut, Teak or Sapele with a coffee fleck grille.

Back in the 1960s, there was a big market for kit products, so the K1 monitor was available in both ready-built and kit form. There was also a third K1 model in the form of the Slimline, which featured exactly the same drivers but was housed in a cabinet that was just over 12cm deep, compared with the standard version's 35cm.

Celeste

Around that time, KEF produced a number of other models. The original Celeste was a two-way 'bookshelf' model that was a lot smaller than the

K1 monitor and used the now famous B139 'racetrack' bass driver. The Celeste was available in both standard and toughened-up portable form. Curiously, the portable version is physically bigger, than the standard...

Chorale

During the 1970s, KEF continued to develop its range. The move from mono to stereo recordings meant that speakers became smaller to account for the need to have two of them in the room.

While never a KEF product, the legendary BBC LS3/5A monitors used the company's drive units. KEF also built a number of products along similar lines to the BBC monitor, in the form of the Chorale and original Coda.

During this time, the brand continued to make upmarket three-way speakers. Its increased use of measurement and dedication to strict manufacturing tolerances gave rise to the Reference moniker – meaning that every speaker once made, measured closely to the first reference sample. Now, of course, the word is used in an entirely different way.



K1 Slimline

(1961-66)

Dimensions (hwd):
68 x 43 x 17cm

Celeste Portable

(1963-70)

Dimensions (hwd):
51 x 32.4 x 19.7cm



Chorale

(1970-79)

Dimensions (hwd):
47 x 28 x 22cm

104aB

The Model 104aB was the first KEF speaker to carry the Reference tag. KEF also continued to manufacture kit versions of its products and the KEFKIT 1 (1974-1977) was a deconstructed version of its popular Chorale speaker.

Uni-Q

KEF's trademark technology now is its Uni-Q driver array. This is where the tweeter sits in the throat of the midrange or mid/bass driver, giving even dispersion and helping integration. The relatively modest C35 standmounter was the first to use the Uni-Q array. These were released in 1988 and within a few years the technology had worked its way into KEF's Reference products.

While all these products gained good to excellent reviews, it was the range topping 105/3s and (surprisingly) non-Uni-Q 104/2s that really caused a stir. This was also the time where KEF decided to tackle its speakers' in-room balance more actively. It produced a number of passive outboard filter boxes to help even out the sound.

Model 104aB Kit

(1979-81)

Dimensions (hwd):
63 x 33 x 26cm



C35

Development continued on the Reference range over the years and, by the 2000s, it had even gained a super tweeter to take advantage of the wider bandwidth of high-resolution disc formats such as SACD and DVD-Audio. The use of a separate unit in a speaker that preached the unity of Uni-Q seems a bit odd now, but at the time that's what the company felt was needed.

KEF pushed further upmarket with the high-end Muon (it cost an eye-watering £70,000 in 2009 and is worth double that today).

Eggs

Through the 2000s, the company made a great success of style speaker packages. The 'Eggs', in all versions, proved a success and made a big enough impact to kick start the whole premium lifestyle multichannel subwoofer/satellite category. Below is an example of the company's first Egg, the KHT 2005; the concept has gone through a number of iterations, and is now available in a wireless version.



C35

(1988-91)

Dimensions (hwd):
37.6 x 24.6 x 20.6cm

KHT 2005

(2001)

Dimensions (hwd):
19.8 x 13 x 15cm



Concept Blade

KEF continued to develop its Reference line. The pod-mounted super tweeters gave way as the tweeter in the Uni-Q array continued to be improved. The engineering team continued to push high-end boundaries with the Concept Blade you see below - a stunningly styled speaker that uses a much improved Uni-Q array partnered with a quartet of bass drivers, all housed in a slick carbon fibre cabinet. Clearly the original KEF spirit of cutting edge technology and carefully considered engineering still flows strongly in the brand today.

Concept Blade

(2011)

Dimensions (hwd):
159 x 36.3 x 54cm
(with plinth)



INSIDER TOP FIVE LAUNCHES

Five products to look out for this month



2

Chord 2go and 2yu

£995 and £449

It's been a little over four years since Chord Electronics launched the dedicated Poly streamer for its portable Mojo DAC, and now we have the similar 2go streaming accessory for the Hugo 2. It gifts the Award-winning, higher-end DAC streaming over DLNA and the likes of Tidal and Qobuz, AirPlay and Bluetooth, and sports two 2TB-capable SD card slots for storage and playback. The 2yu, meanwhile, is an additional module that allows the 2go to work with other DACs or digital-input components too.

• whf.cm/2go2yu

4

Samsung Galaxy S20 Ultra

from £1199

Samsung's latest Galaxy S series phones are here, and heading up the trio is the S20 Ultra. Naturally for a flagship, it boasts the most advanced features of the new arrivals, including a quad-camera system that comprises a ludicrous 108MP lens and is capable of 100x zoom; a whopping 5000mAh battery; a 6.9in, 120Hz screen; and a maximum 16GB RAM option. That's an improvement on its predecessor, last year's S10+, in every aspect. Its size won't suit everyone, but its camera looks sure to universally impress.

• whf.cm/S20Ultra



1

Audio Pro A26

£500

Audio Pro's latest offering is a pair of all-in-one, 150W speakers that can stream music wirelessly from a device over aptX Bluetooth or wi-fi, or be hooked up to your TV or audio source via HDMI ARC or 3.5mm inputs. Very much an expansion of the Swedish brand's excellent multi-room range, the A26s can naturally be paired with other speakers in that range. They are joined by the similarly conceived A36 floorstanders, too.

• whf.cm/A26

3

Soundmagic TWS50

£79

Soundmagic's affordable answer to the AirPods, the TWS50s are sporty true-wireless 'buds with an appealing spec sheet – there's Bluetooth 5.0, seven hours' playback from the buds (30 hours in total with the charging case), and an IPX7 rating that means they'll survive a 30-minute dip in the shallow end. The party piece is their 'Dual Listening' mode, too, which allows the left and right earpieces to connect to separate devices.

• whf.cm/TWS50



5

Monitor Audio Bronze

from £260

Monitor Audio's Bronze speakers have picked up many a *What Hi-Fi?* Award and five-star review over the years, and this all-new sixth generation naturally hopes to build on their predecessors' success. Eight-strong, the range benefits from new drivers with Damped Concentric Mode (DCM) technology, as well as a tweeter with a Uniform Dispersion (UD) waveguide. And, although familiar, the new cabinet design features a modern profile and a separate contrasted baffle.

• whf.cm/Bronze

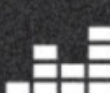




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SKILFUL DRIVERS

A selection of speakers that are talented enough to sound great without forcing you to remortgage

What you're looking at here is pretty much the sweet spot for stereo loudspeakers - a superb combination of sublime sonic ability and more than reasonable pricing. Streets ahead of the entry level efforts you would find within an all-in-one system, and a step up from some admittedly very fine upgrade options at around the £200 mark, the seven pairs of speakers you see here range in price from around £300 up to £650. Which means you have plenty of options when it comes to upgrading your current set-up.

Pick of the bunch is, inevitably, our Product of the Year Award winners, Bowers and Wilkins' mighty 606 offering. But don't just blindly follow the sound of the gong. Every pair you see here has much to offer and entice the listener; and any one of them might be the perfect partner for your hi-fi system.

Keeping those B&Ws company over the following pages you'll find a selection of wonderful offerings from many of the established greats of the loudspeaker world: Dali, Dynaudio, Fyne Audio, KEF, Mission and Monitor Audio.

You can't really go wrong with any of these; it sounds to us as though a lengthy audition process is in order. Lucky you!



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WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/QX-2

Mission QX-2

£299

The affordable speaker market is a tough place to compete - especially as prices continue to slide. As we'll soon see in this Round-up, there's plenty of talented, keenly priced competition for these Missions to respect. But they need not fear it.

The first thing we notice when taking the QX-2s out of their packaging is their unusual proportions. At 32cm high and almost as deep, they're a chunky proposition, needing stands with a decently large top plate.

Mission has made an effort to make the QXs look distinctive, and we think it has succeeded. The company's traditional (and still unusual) tweeter-under-mid/bass arrangement is used here. The advantage of this configuration is that it makes the distance between the acoustic centres of both drive units and the listener more even, so delivering a more coherent sound.

Nice clean plates

We also like the use of aluminium plates on the top and base panels - not only does it look good, but it also helps to solidify the cabinets and dampen resonances within them. The QX-2s are available in four finish options - blackwood, rosewood, walnut or white.

The drive units are unusual too. The 38mm tweeter is a ring-radiator design with a shaped phase plug in the centre. The back pressure from the diaphragm vents into twin rear chambers, which helps to reduce resonance and maintain a wide operating bandwidth.

The 15cm mid/bass uses a smooth pulp/acrylic fibre cone that doesn't have a dust cap. This kind of design tends to have a cleaner response and looks pretty tidy too. There's an extra support behind the cone that lends greater rigidity to the area the voice coil attaches to.

A rear-firing slot reflex port is used to augment the mid/bass's low-frequency output. The port is ribbed in a bid to reduce the noise and distortion caused when dealing with low bass notes played at high volume levels. Its location at the back of the cabinet means that the QX-2s work best if given a little space to breathe, rather than being shoved right up against a back wall.

We end up with the units about 80cm out into our listening room, but we'd suggest starting at 40cm and adjusting from there. It's always a trade-off between bass weight and stereo imaging.

As with any standmounters, the quality of the support makes a big difference to performance. We use the Custom Design FS104 Signatures to good effect. As for partnering electronics, speakers at this price can't afford to be overly fussy. They're likely to be used

with a wide range of electronics from affordable all-in-one systems right up to quality premium separates and will be expected to perform well regardless.

However, the natural amplification partners for these Missions are likely to be something from Marantz's PM6006UK (£330) up to the Rega Brio (£600), with sources to match.

Fun-loving energy

We start with Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's *Can't Hold Us* and the Missions revel in the song's unstoppable momentum. We like these Missions. They are fun and have a lovely energetic character that takes a grip of the listener and refuses to let go.

They charge along with this piece, delivering plenty of agility and insight. There's lots of punch to that thumping bassline along with an impressive amount of grip. Bass notes are delivered with vigour and a surprising amount of weight for a speaker of this size. We like the way the QXs time too. They deliver the song's hard-charging rhythm with plenty of verve, maintaining their prowess regardless of volume.

We change gear to Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31* and the Missions are happy to respond. While the likes of the excellent KEF Q350s sound more tonally even and render a more expansive soundstage, these standmounters still do well by general standards. They counter with expressive dynamics and the ability to tie instruments together into a more cohesive and musical whole.

Partner with care

There's a decent degree of refinement here despite the QX-2s having a treble output that verges on the edge of excess without quite overstepping the mark. We like their high frequency bite but would advise avoiding bright or aggressive partnering equipment.

Overall, the QX-2s are fine speakers. It wasn't long ago that they were selling for £399, and even at that price they were an impressive proposition. Given that they can now be had for £299, they are nothing less than a terrific bargain.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR

- Energetic and insightful sound
- Good rhythmic drive
- Fine build and finish

AGAINST

- Tough competition

VERDICT

These QX-2s are one of the most enjoyable pairs of speakers you can buy for under £300

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



View online review
whf.cm/Oberon1

£349

Dali Oberon 1

As far as we're concerned, Dali is long past having to prove itself when it comes to producing quality budget speakers. Its cluster of *What Hi-Fi?* Awards makes the point clearly enough. And, in quality terms, the Oberon 1s are typical of the brand.

About the size of a shoebox, the 1s adhere strictly to convention on design. They are two way, rear-ported boxes, just like all of the established competition. But look closely and you'll find areas where Dali's engineers have tried to eke out an advantage.

Greater depth

The tweeter uses a 29mm soft dome, which is claimed to be considerably lighter than that used on most rivals. The larger-than-normal size (most tweeter domes tend to be 25mm wide) means that it can delve lower in frequency than alternative designs, aiding integration with the mid/bass driver.

Much care has been taken with the motor system and managing the sound that comes off the back of the dome so that it doesn't distort the forward output.

Moving down in frequency, the 13cm mid/bass unit uses one of the company's trademark wood/fibre cones. Dali has long preferred this material for its low weight, rigidity and fine self-damping properties. The mid/bass and tweeter are integrated with a single-wire crossover.

The lack of biwiring isn't an issue for us. It keeps things simpler, and lets the user concentrate their budget on a single high-quality speaker cable.

The Oberon's MDF cabinet is solid and nicely made. There are four finish options - black ash, white, dark walnut or the light oak of our review sample. At 27cm tall, these speakers are compact enough to fit neatly into most rooms.

Where there's a wall...

Dali has tried to keep this speaker as versatile as possible, even including a rear panel fixing to make wall mounting easier. While these speakers sound notably more balanced than most rivals when used up against a wall, if possible, we suggest pulling them around 30cm into the room to make the most of their stereo imaging and midrange clarity.

As for partnering equipment, while we get good results with the Marantz CD6006 UK Edition CD player and matching amplifier (both £349), these standmounters have more than enough sonic stretch to justify the use of electronics as capable as Cyrus's CDi (£1195) and the Rega Elex-R amplifier (£949). That says a lot for the Oberon's resolution and overall transparency.

Speakers this small are never going to produce loads of bass. Compare these

Dalis with the likes of the bigger Mission QX-2s (see opposite) and you'll find there isn't the same level of sonic authority or power at lower frequencies. That accepted, the laws of physics being what they are, we're left with a wonderfully articulate performer that marries a bold nature with the kind of refinement and insight that's rare at this level.

The '1s are stunning with vocal-based material. We listen to Tracy Chapman's *Telling Stories*, Van Morrison's *Moondance* and Bon Iver's *For Emma, Forever Ago* and marvel at the way these speakers deliver voices in such a solid and expressive way. You'd need to spend closer to four figures to get any better in this respect. There are rivals that dig up as much information, but few deliver it with such a sense of passion.

The art of remaining composed

Tonally, these are nicely judged, having a smooth yet crisp treble and a full-bodied presentation that sounds impressively confident and composed. That controlled attitude remains unchanged, even at higher volume levels where most rivals would start to harden up.

We're impressed by the way these speakers convey the wide-ranging dynamics of Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring*. They manage to render an expansive and sharply focused soundstage that stays stable regardless of the recording's complexity.

Larger rivals will have more scale and sonic authority, but they won't be anywhere near as accommodating as these Dalis when it comes to placement or blending into a room. It's the Oberons' ability to reveal so much information, but also arrange it in a musically cohesive way that really makes them shine against their rivals.

Up with the best

Aside from the limitations of size, they produce a quality of sound only the very best at this level can get close to.

If you're looking for a small, unfussy pair of speakers, we can't think of anything more capable at this kind of price than these Dalis. They are a joy.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND
★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY
★★★★★
BUILD
★★★★★

FOR
• Bold and articulate sound
• Excellent with voices
• Fine build

AGAINST
• Limited bass depth
• They lack a little authority

VERDICT
The Oberon 1s are an excellent choice if you're looking for a small, high-quality speaker with an unfussy nature



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/Q350

KEF Q350

£495

If there's one overriding theme with the KEF Q350s, it's refinement. One of the designers' key aims was to achieve a cleaner, more sophisticated presentation – both sonic and physical – than that of the speakers' predecessors.

These standmounters offer stunning sound and elegant looks at a competitive price – a cocktail of qualities that sees them challenging at the top of their class.

Bang up to date

The first thing you'll notice is the clean, modern design. These speakers look sleek and minimal. Apart from the logo at the top, the fascia is completely devoid of anything to distract you from the main event: KEF's iconic Uni-Q driver.

What looks like a single driver is actually a 25mm vented aluminium dome tweeter sitting in the throat of a 16.5cm aluminium mid/bass driver. This single point-source arrangement is designed to improve integration between the drivers and the way sound is dispersed. The distinctive waveguide on the tweeter helps distribute sound evenly.

The latest evolution of the Uni-Q driver features a damped tweeter-loading tube to soak up unwanted activity from the back of the dome. It's designed to improve the quality of the high frequencies. The Uni-Q driver now sits right in the middle of the cabinet to help reduce internal standing waves and improve clarity.

The port has been moved to the back of the speaker. KEF claims this ensures any midrange leakage of noise is less audible. The port has also been redesigned to

reduce noise and distortion for deeper, cleaner bass performance.

You'll find single-wired speaker terminals at the back, rather than the biwired arrangement of its predecessor. And the wall brackets from the old Q300s have been removed for a neater look.

The cabinets themselves are of impeccable, sturdy build. They come in two satin finishes, black or white, with black or silver Uni-Q drivers to match.

We're going for the B&W 606s (see opposite) as the main comparison here. They're a little more expensive than the KEFs but they're a similar size.

KEF's design brief pays off, as the Q350s display a level of clarity and subtlety that's impressive of at this price. Play *Coward* from the *Interstellar* soundtrack, and we're pleased by the layers of detail exposed in the Hans Zimmer track. The KEFs dig deep and unearth nuances with a great deal of composure and precision; the metronome ticking throughout the piece sounds pristine and precisely edged.

These speakers go surprisingly deep, too. The thumping beat simmering underneath the tune is packed with rumbling, menacing texture.

The Q350s stay clear of sounding too clinical – they're simply articulate in the way they deliver every note. Voices sound clear and characterful, and the integration between midrange and treble is seamless. It's hard to pinpoint where one begins and the other ends. It all serves to make rivals such as the Dynaudio Emit M20s sound a touch rough around the edges.

The scale of sound is huge, too. The extra cabinet volume gives the KEFs the ability to fill a room easily. You can accurately pinpoint instruments on the Q350s' airy and open soundstage too.

The treble performance is detailed and sweet; crisp without ever going too bright. Even aggressive recordings such as Marilyn Manson's *Antichrist Superstar* – where noisy, distorted guitars can easily exacerbate treble flaws in most speakers – sound controlled and cohesive.

A genteel approach

We wish the KEFs had a more explicit sense of drama and drive, though. Where songs such as the The Unthanks' *Gan To The Kye* play to the KEFs' strengths of delicacy and nuanced melody, other songs – such as Amanda Palmer's *Runs In The Family* – need a bit more rhythmic punch to complete the effect – punch that is supplied by the B&Ws. The KEFs are a touch too refined to let go fully. And you really have to crank up the volume to experience their full talent.

The B&Ws might sound more immediate and fun, but the KEF's still provide an impressive level of poise and composure, even if they're no longer the most insightful option in this company.

We'd suggest the superb Rega Brio (£600) stereo amplifier as a good companion piece. It complements the KEF's sound and brings a degree of natural warmth and drive.

While the rear port demands you give the Q350s some space, it's worth putting them close to (but not up against) a wall to add a bit more solidity to the sound.

KEF can hold its head up high: the Q350s continue to compete at this level. This degree of clarity and refinement should not be taken for granted, even if these speakers no longer lead the pack.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Stunning levels of clarity and detail
- Huge scale
- Good timing
- Even balance

AGAINST

- They lack some punch and drive
- Not best at low volumes

VERDICT

The Q350s offer a warm, insightful presentation that keeps them up with the class leaders

RATING ★★★★★



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/606

£549

B&W 606

It took us a while to get our hands on the B&W 606 speakers, but it was well worth the wait. The 600 Series had some serious shoes to fill, and the 606 speakers now face some tough competition at this price point, but these speakers are more than ready for that.

The B&W 606 speakers feature a typically smart design, come in the perfect medium-sized speaker form and ultimately deliver an exciting, engaging and perfectly-poised sound. Building on the all-conquering B&W 685 S2 speakers, the 606s have been worthy successors.

The 600 Series is the most affordable range in B&W's hi-fi family. There are two standmount models, the 606 here, the more compact 607 (£399), plus a pair of floorstanders, the 603s (£1249) and the HTM6 centre (£399).

All of the speakers use B&W's latest Continuum cone technology, as seen on the company's more expensive models, and it's the cheapest range on which the material appears. This cone material replaces the iconic Kevlar of previous generations, with the change being marked by a move to silver from yellow.

Visual flair

With the magnetic grilles removed, the speakers (available in black or white) look great, and while B&W is far from alone in being able to turn out a beautiful-looking pair of stereo standmounters at this price, we do think these speakers look particularly sharp.

The 16.5cm Continuum bass/midrange driver here is joined by a 25mm

decoupled double-dome aluminium tweeter. Decoupling the tweeter from the front panel reduces the degrading effects of the vibrations generated by the mid/bass unit. Gently press the trim around the tweeter and you'll notice the slight movement allowed in the design.

Around the back of the speaker you'll see B&W's Flowport vent and a pair of twin banana plugs for biwiring. At around 3.5kg each and standing 35cm tall, they're a pretty bang-on size for a pair of bookshelf speakers, and only the smallest of rooms would hamper them (and no doubt B&W would point you towards the dinkier 607).

Sonic balance

From Hans Zimmer to house, Nils Frahm to Dr Dre, these B&W speakers simply don't miss a beat. Any concerns about the lively treble being too much for sensitive ears soon fades, with the fully run-in sound settling on a spot-on sonic balance of which Simone Biles would be proud. Instead, the crisp clarity in the treble, and across the spectrum, gives the 606s real energy and drive compared with the KEF Q350s.

Our 606 speakers were supplied with the B&W STAV24 S2 stands, a £99 optional extra, and we set them around 60cm away from the wall. A bit of room to breathe makes sense with a ported design like this, but naturally the distance will depend on the amount of room you have.

Let them entertain you

First impressions, visually and sonically, are good. The B&W 606 speakers deliver an entertaining sound. A lively treble grabs our ear and gives a good pace to the music, while notes stop and start with snappy precision, which only helps keep our toes tapping.

Listening to Loyle Carner's *Ain't Nothing Changed*, there's real body and detail to the rasping saxophone hook, soon joined by pleasantly weighty drums and a smooth, deep bass line. The slightly larger KEF Q350s might deliver a little more depth and weight, but the B&Ws bass sounds tighter and more insightful, ultimately delivering a better-balanced sonic spectrum.

This is brought home by Massive Attack's timeless *Angel*, which sounds every bit as ominous and brooding as it should, while still capable of flapping your trouser legs at high volume. In fact, the 606s are adept at high and low volume, losing little of their dynamic reach and overall detail when played at someone-trying-to-sleep-upstairs volume. The track draws us in from the off, keeping an iron grip on our attention long before the track reaches its crescendo, thanks to faultless timing, excellent insight and stirring dynamics.

We waited a long time to hear the new B&W 600 Series in our test rooms, but after a few days in the company of the B&W 606 speakers, all is forgiven.

A great size and price for anyone with more than a passing interest in music, the 606s will breathe new life into your favourite tracks. They're upbeat and energetic, deliver punchy, solid bass and offer class-leading levels of detail and dynamics. There's speaker talent aplenty elsewhere in this round-up, but don't leave these off your must-audition list.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND
★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY
★★★★★
BUILD
★★★★★

FOR
• Smart, stylish design
• Brilliantly balanced sound
• Dynamic and detailed

AGAINST
• Nothing of note

VERDICT
An upbeat, entertaining, brilliantly balanced sound from a beautifully made pair of speakers

RATING ★★★★★



View online review
whf.cm/f500

Fyne Audio F500



It has been a couple of years since we were first introduced to Fyne Audio, but we remain impressed by this British speaker manufacturer's output. And the F500 standmounters do not let the family down.

In many ways, these standmounters look familiar. In effect, they are truncated versions of the first Fyne Audio speakers we tested, the Award-winning F501 towers. Fyne Audio has relegated the second woofer from those speakers to fit these bookshelf dimensions, but it retains the driver technology it integrated so well for the other.

That technology is the company's IsoFlare configuration, where the tweeter sits in the pool of the mid/bass driver - a 25mm titanium dome compression tweeter inside a 15cm multi-fibre paper cone - sharing a common centre to aid directivity and stereo imaging.

Hidden underneath

A quick glance around the back of the F500s raises the question of whether Fyne Audio has included a reflex port. In fact, it is located in the speakers' undercarriage, thanks to that same BassTrax technology as is present in the F501s - though this is a revised version for standmounters.

A downfiring port, with a cone-shaped BassTrax Tractrix diffuser, it aims for 360-degree dispersion of the soundwaves, as well as increasing versatility when it comes to placement in regards to a back wall.

The result is not only a lengthened spec sheet, but a pair of speakers that look and feel every bit of their mid-range price tag. Based on aesthetic, there's little doubt that these standmounters are from Fyne Audio's premium line.

That's also the case as soon as you plug the F500s into your system. Even more so once they have been given a couple of days to run in.

Getting the low-down

Of all Fyne Audio's technologies present, the first you're likely to notice is the work of its BassTrax design. Without going entirely overboard, the F500s dish out an impressive portion of low end, with sufficient punch to deal heavy kicks and the smoothness to feed bubbling pulses and luscious pedals.

It makes for a warm, welcoming sound that benefits the midrange with its body as well. Whereas many standmount speakers can sound small, the F500s give that middle register real purchase with the support coming from the octaves below. Such profound bass can sometimes feel detached, but this is a cohesive performance.

The treble can really sing as well, that centralised tweeter performing its role admirably. As with the F501s, there is a mild danger of exciting the high frequencies if you're using more rough and ready partnering electronics, but with some careful pairing - and at this price you really should consider how your speakers fit into your system - it is by no means harsh.

Unlike with the F501 floorstanders, however, that careful matching is still necessary when it comes to bass response. We wouldn't call the low end soft or slovenly, but it can easily become muddled if your source or amplifier isn't taut enough to keep it in check.

Musicality trumps analysis

Detail is plentiful, though. It isn't quite what you'd describe as analytical, but there is plenty enough here to validate the price tag, and we are always fond of Fyne Audio's focus on musicality and entertainment over chin-stroking examination. And if that sounds like a backhanded compliment, it really isn't.

Our main gripe with the F500s, though, is that they never quite reach the giddy heights of their floorstanding cousins. Timing and organisation is good, dynamics are expressive and hold our interest, but these speakers don't quite snap in the way we've heard Fyne Audio's towers do before.

That is highlighted when we switch to their main rival, B&W's 606s. They don't possess the same low-end heft as the F500s, but that weight loss contributes to a more sprightly, airy performance. There are marginal gains in detail and space, but the 606s' handling of rhythm and dynamics puts a star between the two. In essence, the B&Ws feel more excited to be playing the music for us, as much as pointing out the sonic sights along the journey.

That said, there is still plenty to love about this pair of Fyne Audio speakers. If you're after a mid-range standmounter with enough bass to shake you, and don't want to miss out on detail or musicality, the F500s are more than worth your time for an audition.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Plenty of bass weight
- Focused midrange
- Well built
- Unfussy with placement

AGAINST

- They lack a little punch and snap
- Strong competition

VERDICT

There are many strengths here, but the F500s don't quite match the prowess of the floorstanding F501s

RATING ★★★★★



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/EmitM20

Dynaudio Emit M20



The Danes can teach us a thing or two about how to live – take ‘hygge’, candles, cosiness and 11am lunches – but they also know how to make awesome speakers. Dynaudio has been cooking with gas with its active Xeo series, the Emit M10 bookshelves and, probably best of all, these Emit M20s.

The speakers sport a satin lacquer (available in either white or black) and a driver-dominated baffle that, thanks to a symmetrical smattering of screws bordering the drivers, looks as though it has been used as target practice. In essence, then, the M20s could be seen as beefy and business-like on the outside, but friendly on the inside.

As is the Dynaudio way, drivers have been designed specifically for each Emit model, with the M20 featuring a 28mm soft-dome tweeter and 17cm magnesium silicate polymer mid/bass driver.

Authority and scale

That pretty sizable mid/bass driver goes a long way to explaining these speakers’ ability when it comes to authority, scale, dynamics and bass depth. That is, after all, what you should expect from a larger standmounter. It’s why the KEF Q350s can make similar claims. More importantly though, that hasn’t come at the expense of musicality and agility along the way.

In Ludovico Einaudi’s *Ancora*, piano sequences bask in nuance and texture, to the point where it sounds not so much as though he’s striking keys, but giving you a personal lesson in advanced piano

playing. The Dynaudios’ scale and openness is laudable and, dynamically, they are always on the move within their generous range, proving as capable with explosive changes as subtle ones. Each piano note is solid, exact and punctual, and it’s that level of insight that separates them from the majority of their direct competition.

The M20s are game for every genre of music too, including the glitchy synths and intensely heady electro-beats in 65daysofstatic’s *Wild Light* album. They whisk through the frenetic electronica with attack and explosiveness, and even in the most complex, cacophonous moments find the discipline and openness to pick out the multiple trails of thought – rhythmic drums, ambient guitar lines, cutting cymbals – without sidelining any element.

They exhibit audacity, but stabilise it with a pleasant smoothness and refinement, and that winning algorithm makes them so listenable and versatile.

Though they aren’t quite as flexible with poorer recordings, the M20s aren’t afraid to lift the lid on the bright and edgy quality of The Cure’s *Kiss Me, Kiss*

Me album, revealing it to be a little constrained. That’s further proof of their transparency, but also a warning that you won’t get the best from them using less-than-talented partnering equipment or poorly recorded music.

Nor will you by shoving them up against a back wall for, when it comes to placement, unlike the Fyne Audio F500s (see opposite), they require a bit of room to hit the right tonal balance. Toeing them in slightly helps with stereo imaging too, so that when we finish our testing with Traffic’s *John Barleycorn Must Die*, tambourines, flutes and guitar plucking are all well mapped on the sonic landscape.

Still in the Premier League

With so many effective weapons in the Dynaudio Emit M20s’ sonic armoury, there’s not much to say against them. Newer rivals, though – not least the B&W 606s – find ways to edge the Emits into the shade when it comes to detail and dynamics. Nevertheless, these remain a keenly insightful and engaging pair of speakers that still excel in this company and are bang on the money.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND
★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY
★★★★★
BUILD
★★★★★

FOR
• Subtle dynamics
• Bags of insight
• Sense of scale
• Energetic yet refined sound
• Good design

AGAINST
• Newer rivals present stiff competition

VERDICT
As meticulous as they are merry, these multitalented speakers are still up with the best at this money

No more hiding



K10

Hogging the spotlight



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Monitor Audio Silver 100

If we review any more products in Monitor Audio's sixth-generation Silver range, we may need a new thesaurus. Having reviewed the Silver 200s and the corresponding surround package, we have already used up quite a few of our superlatives.

These larger of two pairs of standmounters in the Silver series each use a single, 20cm C-CAM (ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium) mid/bass driver. It's the same basic design as the two 13cm units used in the Silver 200 floorstanders, despite being bigger.

A HiVe II port is again a feature. This uses a straight-ripled design to accelerate airflow and reduce turbulence. It moves air in and out more swiftly for a faster, more powerful bass response.

And there's the same 25mm gold-dome tweeter, a Monitor Audio staple fine-tuned for clearer, smoother and distortion-free high frequencies. That intricate pattern around the driver's central dome is designed to improve sound dispersion, but it has the beneficial side effect of also looking rather attractive.

Visual appeal

Our review sample this time is finished in walnut, but other options on offer are the same as throughout the range - black oak, natural oak, rosenut and high-gloss black, as well as the satin white we've seen before.

No matter which finish you go for, you'll be treated to a standard of build and finish that is without peer in this

company. They might be clearly more expensive than any of the other cabinets in this Round-up, but an overall feeling of luxury shows you just where your money has gone.

It comes as little surprise that, with so much in common with other speakers from the talented Silver range, the performance of the 100s is as laudable as it is with their namesakes.

The 100s take a couple of days to properly run in - a little longer than the majority of loudspeakers at this price - but the wait is well worth it.

Energy and intensity

Playing Bicep's eponymous album, for example, the Silver 100s are adept at delivering the energy harnessed within each snapping rhythm. At the same time they leave enough headroom for intensity to build in each track.

The focus is on overall musicality and cohesion with this current Silver range. The temptation to concentrate too intently on analytical insight, and thus leave blind spots where it counts, is skillfully avoided - but the level of detail on display here is still good.

There's texture to instruments, and space within the mix for the reverbs that dictate much of the atmosphere. While nailing a recording's ambience is high on the Silvers' 'to-do' list, at no point do we feel we're sacrificing much in the way of resolution.

Switch to a more vocal-intensive recording in The Twilight Sad's *Fourteen Autumns And Fifteen Winters*, and the emotion in James Graham's voice is penetrating - light is thrown on the inflections in his accent, as well as the intensity of his delivery.

The Silver 100s are given an opportunity to prove their smooth balance, standing on tip-toe to reach those soaring guitar lines, fully charged but without the coarseness that (in lesser hands) can have these arrangements giving the listener's ears a pretty exhausting work-out.

The bass lines that anchor the piece are beefy as well - warmer, perhaps, than with some competitors but not overly soft or distractingly rumbling.

As with the rest of the range, the Silver 100s are versatile with positioning. Putting them right up against a wall will obviously accentuate that bottom end, but without sacrificing too much of the pace or dynamics that are among the range's true fortes.

Swings and roundabouts

The most obvious comparison here is Dynaudio's Emit M20s, which, at £600, are usefully cheaper. Which speakers we'd take home is a conversation that leans towards the M20s, but it's not completely one-sided.

The Dynaudios deliver more in the way of drama, punching harder and rendering rhythms with more purpose. The Silver 100s counter with a superior level of refinement and a more pristine overall presentation.

We can't help thinking the market has been tough on these Monitor Audios. Their balanced presentation and clarity deserve praise but, with so many of their talented rivals becoming ever-more affordable, they now find themselves slipping behind the leading pack.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Clear, organised presentation
- Bold, punchy, well balanced sound
- Impressive timing and dynamics

AGAINST

- The wealth of talented rivals with lower price tags

VERDICT

Monitor Audio has high standards of quality and build but the 100s can't quite match the best of the breed

RATING ★★★★★

IN THE BOX SEAT

With pre- and power amplification in one unit, an integrated amp is a convenient, space-saving option. We test three of the very best...



View online review
whf.cm/Supernait3

Naim Supernait 3
(page 46)



There's a strong argument for suggesting that the class-leading integrated amplifiers around the £3000 mark represent some of the best value on the market. Whether we're talking about our reigning champion, the Naim Supernait 3, Roksan's Blak (our long-running favourite) or the brand new Rega Aethos, each delivers a balance of performance, features and neatness that's hard to better by sonically comparable alternatives.

Still not convinced? Consider that the performance available from our three

contenders can be appreciably bettered only by spending thousands of pounds more, most probably on a premium-priced pre/power combination. But everything is in one unit here, and you won't have to add extra boxes if you listen on headphones or, in two of the cases, to a record player.

The Roksan Blak even has Bluetooth connectivity, so it's easy to use your smartphone, tablet or computer as a source. These are things that rarely feature on purist pre/powers. If you're itching to upgrade to any of our trio, dive right in. You won't be disappointed.



View online review
whf.cm/Blak

Roksan Blak
(page 50)



View online review
whf.cm/Aethos

Rega Aethos
(page 48)



Naim Supernait 3

£3499

We've long had a soft spot for Naim's Supernait. Now in its third generation, this amplifier offers everything we like about the company's pricier pre/power combinations, but in a neater package and at a more affordable price. Of course, an integrated amplifier costing £3500 is still premium, but when it has us questioning the need to spend more, this suddenly seems great value. Take a look around this new amplifier and it feels distinctly familiar. The previous generation of Supernait was launched around six years ago and this

The third generation of this amplifier feels distinctly familiar

new version adds a moving-magnet phono stage and features a simplified and tweaked power amplifier section. At first we are a little underwhelmed to find so little has been done between generations. The arrival of hugely capable new rivals such as Rega's Aethos certainly puts more pressure on. The casework feels suitably hefty with the amp weighing in at almost 14kg. It feels like a quality product, but as is Naim's way, never really exudes a luxury aura. Our only complaint is that if you decide to use the front-panel dials, rather than the generic remote handset, they're

a little too thin and rounded for a comfortable grip. This is about as well equipped as an all-analogue amplifier needs to be. There are four line-level inputs, each offering the choice of conventional RCA or Naim's favoured Din options. We prefer Dins simply because this input tends to sound just that bit better, particularly when using Naim's Din-equipped sources. There's a variable line output available with both socket types, in case you want to add an additional power amplifier or subwoofer. The upgrade potential doesn't end there, with the Supernait 3





able to make use of Naim's Flatcap (£939), Hi-cap DR (£1419) or SuperCap DR (£4599) outboard power supplies.

While we can't see many Supernait owners stretching to the SuperCap DR option, the other two look tempting when the urge to upgrade strikes. This is an area where the Naim has an advantage over its rivals – neither the Rega nor Roksan can be improved so easily.

Some may question the lack of digital inputs. The original Supernait had some, but these were dropped for the sonically superior Mk 2 version. Naim's thinking was that including such inputs not only raises costs, but also has the potential for affecting analogue performance. In our experience, built-in digital modules rarely perform as well as carefully chosen outboard units. Most times, something as humble as a Chord Mojo does the job better.

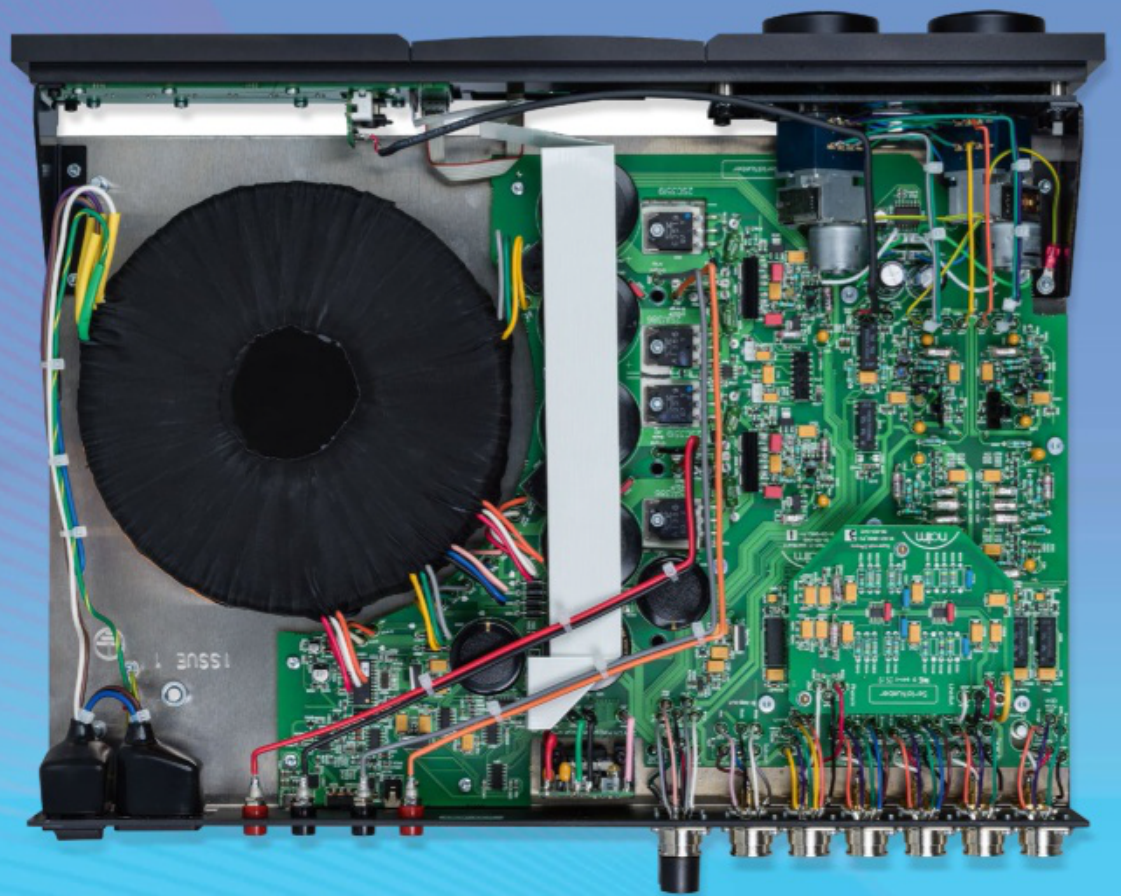
Attention to detail

Take a look inside the amplifier and it's hard not to be impressed by the neatness of the build or the obsessive attention to small details such as the deliberately loose fitting mains socket, which reduces the amount of vibration fed into the casework. There is a hefty mains transformer, and the use of good quality motorised Alps potentiometers for volume and balance controls.

Given a suitable amount of time to settle, this amplifier turns in an assured performance with a source of suitable quality. We used Naim's range-topping ND 555/ 555 PS DR music streamer for much of this test, though the likes of the ND5 XS2 (£2299) or NDX 2 (£4999) are likely to be more usual partners.

The Supernait 3 sounds solid and muscular, as if it can handle whatever you want to throw at it in terms of music and partnering speakers. We try a range of alternatives to our reference ATC SCM 50 monitors and the Naim never sounds as if it has to try hard to make them bend to its will. Such confidence works

It's hard not to be impressed by the neat build or the attention to detail



wonders for the listener. When that subliminal messiness of an amplifier struggling isn't present, it's easier to focus on the music instead. That's what the Supernait, regardless of generation, has always done best.

We start with Four Tet's *There Is Love In You* set and the Naim sounds as happy as a toddler in a sandpit. It has a fast, punchy sound that's backed with real heft at low frequencies. We're impressed by the organisation and the amplifier's ability to track a multitude of musical strands and still tie them together as a cohesive and musical whole.

Things are equally pleasing when it comes to rhythmic drive and precision. The Supernait 3 conveys the changing momentum of this music well, capturing the various mood changes between tracks with conviction.

Switching to Dvořák's *New World Symphony* shows off the amplifier's fine handling of dynamics. It delivers crescendos with venom, but has the grace to handle low-level shifts of intensity well too.

Detail resolution is good, and it's easy to get insight into the recording and the production methods used. But it never feels as though the Naim makes this a priority. It's simply about getting to the heart of the musical message and feeling the emotion that the artist intended.

This integrated can generate huge scale with recordings such as this and deliver a fine stereo soundstage. While not the most expansive or spacious (the Roksan Blak edges ahead here) the stereo imaging is layered enough to convince.

There's a little more clarity here compared with the previous generation and a slight increase in agility. It's a useful upgrade in performance, but we don't think anyone with a Supernait 2 needs to change to this one.

We fit a Goldring 1042 MM on our reference Technics SL-1000R turntable and the amp delivers fine results. The phono input retains the entertaining character of the line stages and is quiet as far as hiss and unwanted noise are concerned. We can ask no more than that.

The front-panel headphone output is similarly pleasing. It can be a box-ticking exercise for manufacturers, with most sounding compromised compared with the speaker outputs. That's not the case here. We try a range of headphones from the Beyerdynamic T1s to Grado's RS-1s without issue. The Supernait produces an informative and enjoyable sound.

The previous generation of Supernait wasn't broken so Naim didn't need to fix it. But, in adding a good quality MM phono stage and tweaking the power amp section, it has made a great amplifier that bit better

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Impressive dynamic capability
- Authoritative bass
- Fine build
- Upgrade potential

AGAINST

- No moving-coil input

VERDICT

An entertaining yet informative integrated amplifier, the Supernait 3 is a brilliant choice



Rega Aethos

£2999



It's fair to say we're fans of Rega's integrated amplifiers. Between the Brio (£599), Elex-R (£949) and Elicit-R (£1679) the company has picked up more five-star verdicts, Group Test wins and Awards than we care to remember.

But Rega's products are rarely revolutionary, so it comes as no surprise that the Aethos leans heavily on the electronic principles already established in the existing line-up. Think of this integrated as an Elicit-R turned up to 11.

There's a lot of new work under that brooding exterior. The Aethos's power amp section uses two complementary pairs of Sanken Darlington output transistors, giving a solid power output of 125W per channel into 8ohms.

The power amp's circuit is designed to offer the benefits of Class A operation without the usual drawbacks in terms of heat and power consumption. The preamp section prioritises signal integrity and consistent channel balance and features higher-grade parts than used in the company's cheaper products.

The Aethos is based on Rega's established principles

The Aethos falls short of most obvious rivals in terms of features, but if you're happy with line-level analogue connectivity, there's more than enough here. It has five line level inputs, a preamp out, a direct input into the power amp section that bypasses the volume control and that rare thing, a tape loop. Don't forget the front panel mounted 6.3mm headphone output either.

No compromising

Those looking for digital inputs, wireless in the form of Bluetooth connectivity or even a phono stage should look elsewhere, or add extra boxes. Given Rega's record player heritage, the lack of a phono stage is surprising. However the company feels that a phono input would compromise the design, and that, at this level, sensitive circuits are better served by being outboard. It's a fair argument.

The Aethos's build quality is impressive. The chunky styling of the new casework may not be to all tastes but it certainly feels rock solid and inspires confidence. The controls are

simple enough with smooth-acting buttons for choosing the inputs for listening and recording.

There are a few minor issues though. This design forces the user to toggle through inputs rather than select them directly. This is a pain when changing sources, with any changes taking multiple button presses rather than just one. It doesn't help that the lighting used to indicate the source selected is too dim to see in a bright room. The volume control is also rather enthusiastic when responding to commands from the remote, so it's hard to make subtle volume adjustments. However, these things are minor irritations at most.

A more practical consideration is that this amplifier still runs pretty warm despite the claims made for the power amplification circuitry's efficiency. Make sure you leave enough space around the Aethos to ensure adequate ventilation.

Our initial impressions of the Aethos's sound are disappointing. Despite being given days to stabilise, it isn't as dynamically expressive as we expect and



doesn't convey rhythms with enough verve. Something isn't right. So we ask for a second Aethos sample, and this proves a notable improvement in both respects. It turns out that the cables for one of the channels had been disturbed on our original sample model (possibly during transit) with the result that distortion had increased on that channel. The second sample we receive has no such issue, and this is very much Rega on top form. It retains the verve of the company's affordable integrations, but adds a dose of extra clarity, precision and muscle to the recipe.

Authoritative delivery

Dvořák's *New World Symphony* is a stirring piece of music and this Rega delivers it with all the authority we would expect. The Aethos sounds unstressed, even when pushed to high levels, and uncovers an impressive amount of detail.

All that information is tightly knit in a cohesive and convincing way, so that all our attention is focused on the music, rather than the mechanics of hi-fi reproduction. The presentation is impressively clean and forthright.

There are no digital inputs or wireless connectivity here

Underneath that exterior, there has been a lot of new work done

Tonally, this integrated veers slightly towards the lean side of neutral, but in no way sounds thin or undernourished. We suggest it's best to avoid systems that edge towards brightness or aggression. It is a revealing amplifier that doesn't go out of its way to hide the shortcomings of its partnering source or speakers. Match with care - let's face it, this is something you should do at this level - and there won't be any issues.

The stereo imaging is precise and nicely layered, though there are rivals such as Roksan's Blak that sound a little more expansive. Either way, there remains little to complain about when it comes to image stability or scale.

We play Laurie Anderson's *My Right Eye* and the Rega's enthusiasm and punch come to the fore. Following the song's complex rhythmic patterns is a pleasure through the Aethos, as it makes easy work of communicating the song's claustrophobic intensity. Anderson's voice comes through with clarity and nuance and there's no doubt about her intent or what she wants you to feel.

We try the Rega's headphone output and are pleased with what we hear. The

results are consistent whether we use our Beyerdynamic T1s or Grado's RS1s and retain the clarity and punch we enjoy through the speaker outputs. This headphone circuit certainly doesn't sound like an afterthought as some do.

Along with the Roksan Blak, the obvious rival is Naim's Supernait 3 - our current favourite at this level and a formidable performer. Though it costs around £500 more, the Naim includes a quality moving-magnet phono stage. There's little to separate the two amps when it comes to build, each feeling impressively solid and nicely finished.

There are differences when it comes to sound, though. The Naim is more muscular and has a slightly fuller tonal balance, which probably makes it less fussy to partner. The Rega counters with greater clarity, and dynamic fluidity. It delivers rhythms and dynamics with even more skill - some feat considering the Supernait 3's abilities in these areas.

We'd recommend listening to both. The choice is likely to come down to system matching and taste, though that £500 saving helps the Rega's case. Either way, the Aethos is a terrific proposition.



WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Good resolution, agility and punch
- Expressive dynamics
- Solid build

AGAINST

- Runs warm
- Some minor ergonomic issues

VERDICT

The Aethos delivers a combination of insight, dynamics and rhythmic precision for a class-leading sound



Roksan Blak

£2799



It's a testament to the quality of Roksan's Blak integrated amplifier that our biggest issue with it is the deliberately misspelled name. Blak. Really? Aside from that, the Blak is a superbly rounded product that's well made, sensibly featured and capable of very fine sound.

Roksan has decided against the minimalist approach with this design. If you want just a premium line-level analogue integrated, we would point you towards either the Naim or the Rega, despite their higher price tags. But if you need a fully equipped unit that can connect to your computer, smartphone, turntable and headphones, the Blak makes a mighty strong case for itself.

Particularly when you consider its impressive muscularity - it's rated at 150W per channel into an 8ohm load, rising to 230W as impedance halves. As a comparison, the Supernait 3 outputs just over half that while the Aethos still falls short at 125W per channel into 8ohms. Of course, it's best to remember

The Blak is well built, solid, nicely finished and a pleasure to use

that on-paper specifications don't always translate into real world performance.

This Roksan is a hefty amplifier in every respect. It weighs in at 14kg - and runs a little warm too, so make sure there's enough space around it to ensure good ventilation.

Fisher Price vibe

The Blak feels well built - it's solid, nicely finished and a pleasure to use. There's a bit of a Fisher Price vibe to the large display, though at least you can read it from a distance, even in bright sunlight.

There are a few oddities that need to be accommodated, though. The main power switch is hidden on the left-hand lower edge, while plugging a pair of headphones in - there's a 6.3mm output on the front panel - doesn't automatically switch the sound away from the speakers. This leaves you having to select the headphone output through another switch under the front panel. And finally, the volume level works in steps of two rather than one, which is a little odd.

Get past these eccentricities and you'll find the Blak accommodating of both partnering equipment and musical genres. There's plenty of connectivity. Traditionalists will be kept happy with balanced XLRs, three single-ended line-level inputs and a moving-magnet phono stage. Those into digital get a USB Type B that will cope with 24-bit/192kHz PCM as well as DSD music files.

Unlike either of its rivals, the Blak has embraced aptX Bluetooth connectivity too - so listening to music from phones, tablets as well as computers is easy. Outputs are limited to the headphone socket on the front panel and a single set of high quality WBT speaker terminals.

It takes a few days of running before the Blak really comes on song, but even in the first few minutes of listening the signs are good. Our initial impression of an enthusiastic, big-boned presentation remains unchanged throughout the test.

We start off with Holst's *Mars* and are greeted by a large-scale sound that's packed with authority and power. It's good enough to rival the muscular Naim

in this respect. The music is packed with dense, textured low frequencies and the Roksan Blak responds with glee, delivering them with all the punch and presence they deserve. There's a lovely sense of ease, even when the music becomes demanding and volume levels rise. That impressive claimed power output rings true.

Staying composed

The music's wide-ranging dynamics are delivered with plenty of drive. There's little sense of the amplifier holding back as crescendos come through with tangible impact. The Roksan stays composed throughout.

This amplifier renders a lovely soundstage, painting instruments with a steady brush and positioning them with skill on an expansive canvas. It's a stable presentation, the instruments staying locked in place even as complexity rises.

We switch to Nina Simone's *Ain't Got No, I Got Life* and the track charges along, packed with energy. Simone's characterful vocals are delivered with verve, yet there's enough in the way of nuance and texture to keep purists satisfied. But listen to either of its two competitors in this test and you'll find there's even more in the way of outright resolution and insight available.

Despite a slightly rich overall tonal balance, the top-end still has enough in the way of bite. We sit back and admire



The Blak has a neat and functional remote

the amplifier's refinement and the way it copes with less than perfect sources and recordings. Roksan has gone for listenability over outright analysis with this amplifier and that's a fair trade.

We try out the moving-magnet phonostage and are pleased with what we hear. It's a lively sounding circuit, reflecting the insight and transparency delivered through the line inputs. Noise levels are low and, unless you have a premium deck costing, say, £1500 and upwards, we can't see a reason to use anything else.

We're equally positive about the on-board DAC. It's a good module, offering roughly the performance level of a good £400-ish stand-alone unit. Regardless of whether we play Nick Cave's moody *Push The Sky Away* or Kanye West's frenzied *Yeezus*, the DAC takes it all in stride, serving up a detailed and entertaining sound.

It's a shame the company hasn't seen fit to offer coaxial or optical inputs

options. The Bluetooth performance isn't quite as pleasing, sounding thinner and notably less expressive, but that's as much the limitations of the transmission method as it is a character of the Roksan module. The most important thing is that the amplifier is open to a range of sources and connects swiftly.

Punchy and detailed

We try the headphone output, and once we find the hidden switch to put these into circuit, we're impressed. Often headphone circuits are box-ticking exercises for manufacturers, but not this one. It sounds punchy and detailed, delivering a similar character of sound to that we hear through the speaker outputs.

The Blak amplifier is nicely judged. It has a powerful and energetic sound, with enough in the way of insight, subtlety and refinement to keep us happy. It's also well equipped, and capable of sounding right at home in a wide range of systems. Recommended? You bet.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR

• Big, powerful and enjoyable sound

• Insight and refinement

• Feature list

• Solid build

AGAINST

• Some eccentricities in use

• No coaxial or optical inputs

VERDICT

A well-equipped all-rounder that works superbly with a wide range of systems and across all musical genres





GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOM

1969 - TOM AGE 7



At FYNE AUDIO we don't build time machines - but we do make loudspeakers so detailed and natural that memories will come flooding back. Just like it did for Tom, listening to his favourite track.

Experience Fyne Audio and let us take you right back.



FYNE AUDIO products are designed and engineered in the UK.



[FYNEAUDIO.COM/TAKEMERIGHTBACK](https://fyneaudio.com/takemerightback)

**TEST
WINNER**



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

Rega Aethos

£2999

It should be clear by now that there is no loser here in this Group Test. Each of our three contenders is a great purchase and would keep you happy for many years. That doesn't mean that they're all the same though.

Roksan's Blak is a long-time favourite and listening to it again just reminds us why we rated it so highly in the first place. It's well built and, apart from a couple of ergonomic quirks, easy to use. The Blak is also the best equipped of our trio, having not only a good moving-magnet phono stage, but Bluetooth connectivity too.

This amplifier's refined yet powerful sonic delivery is a major plus point. It will drive any price compatible speakers to high levels with ease, but still has enough in the way of finesse and musical

Our test winner just pips the others for musical communication

cohesion to keep us satisfied over the long term. In absolute terms it doesn't offer quite the insight, dynamic dexterity or rhythmic cohesion of either of its rivals here, but that's balanced out by its price advantage. Overall this powerhouse remains fully worthy of five star rating.

Muscular delivery

Next up is our current Best Buy in this sector, the Naim Supernait 3. We love this amplifier and its muscular yet musical delivery. If ever you needed proof that on-paper power figures don't tell the whole story this is it, with the Supernait sounding at least as commanding as the Roksan, despite having a claimed power output of only just over half as much. This is the kind of amplifier where we forget about fussing and just enjoy the sound.

At the time it was launched we wondered whether Naim's minimal revisions for this third generation - just the addition of a moving-magnet phono stage and slight tweak to the power amplifier section - would be enough to ward off fresh rivals. In the end, it turns out it wasn't.

Rega's Aethos is the least well-equipped contender here. It doesn't have digital inputs or a phono stage, but it has enough connectivity for most line-level analogue needs. Rather than concentrate on features Rega has focused on the performance, delivering an integrated amplifier that renders dynamic shifts and rhythmic precision to a degree that even shades the Naim. When it comes to communicating the music's message, the Aethos does it best of this trio, and that's why it takes the win.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTION

Streaming may be more convenient, but for the ultimate 4K experience, you can't beat the quality of an actual Blu-ray disc

We've come a long way since the days of VHS. In the time it used to take to wrestle a new tape from its shrinkwrap, you can now fire up Netflix and be bingeing on all manner of 4K content. But for the best 4K experience, there's no substitute for a proper physical format, in the shape of a 4K Blu-ray disc.

Ultra HD resolution, High Dynamic Range (HDR) and high-quality audio formats, such as Dolby TrueHD, Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and DTS-HD Master Audio, can all exist on a single disc. In our experience, picture and sound quality both tend to be better than the equivalent 4K stream - and you won't have any potential bandwidth or buffering problems to contend with.

Of course, you'll need a 4K Blu-ray player for your disc collection, so in this round-up we have options

for every budget, from an entry-level Panasonic deck under £200 to a high-end movie maestro from Pioneer which costs the best part of £1000.

Entry-level machines deliver plenty of performance for your money, whether you're plugging it straight into a soundbar or using it to steer an entry-level surround sound system. However, if you're planning on using the player in a more expensive home cinema set-up with a pricey surround sound speaker package and a big-screen 4K television or projector it's well worth considering a more premium machine.

The bells and whistles tend to be kept to a minimum with more pricey units, but you get great picture and sound quality. So sit back, grab a bag of popcorn and let us take you on a guided tour of the best 4K Blu-ray players out there right now.

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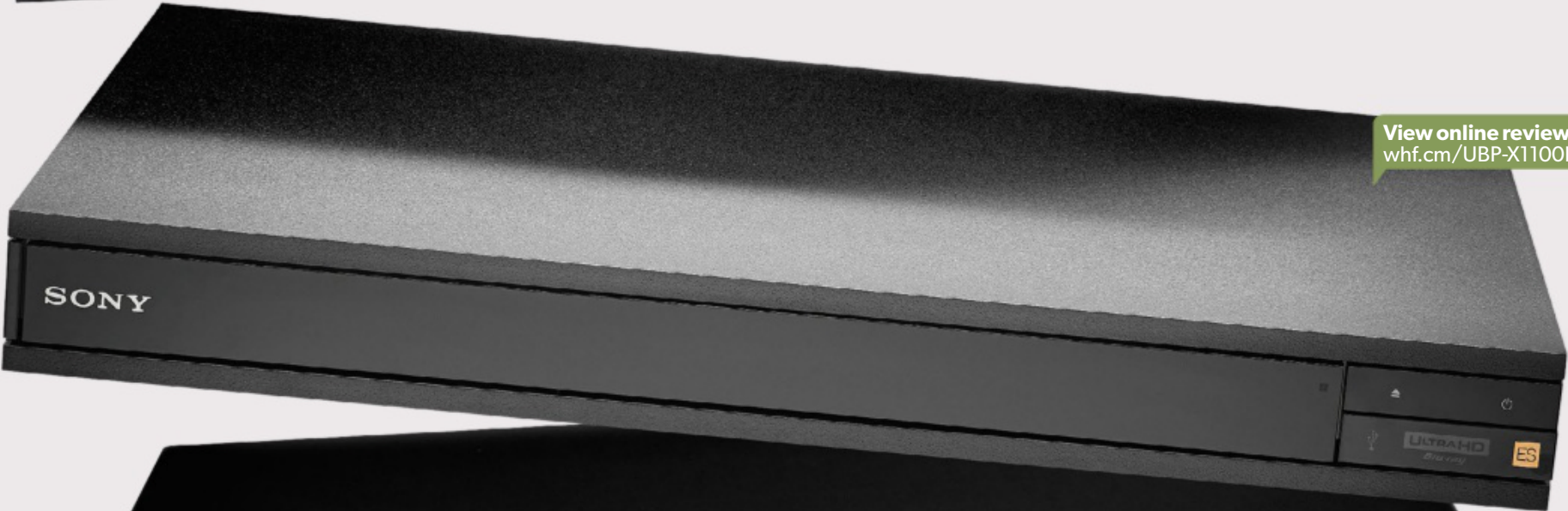
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whf.cm/UDP-LX500

PANASONIC DP-UB150EB



With streaming services still on the rise, why would anyone invest in a 4K Blu-ray machine – plus a collection of discs at £20 a pop – when they can get an access-all-areas subscription to Netflix, or another streaming service, for a whole lot less? Well the Panasonic DP-UB150EB 4K Blu-ray occupies a golden niche for the category – it’s a player costing less than £150, the limit many will be prepared to spend on an entry-level disc spinner. Even a budget 4K Blu-ray player is under pressure to deliver, of course, so Panasonic has taken a no-frills approach to keep the price down.

Missing features

So if it’s features you’re looking for, look elsewhere. This is a boxy and pleasantly compact player at just 32cm wide and weighing 1.2kg. There are few buttons, just on/off and eject within easy reach on the top. There’s also a humble but predictably useful remote control with buttons just big enough to fit the bill. The USB 2.0 port is easily accessible on the front for playback from a hard drive or memory stick. The back is pretty bare, with just three holes – for the power cable, an HDMI out and an ethernet socket for software updates. There are no apps or smart features – but at this price we wouldn’t really expect them. Even without wi-fi, apps or an LCD display, this player manages to fulfil its core responsibilities. It plays optical discs of most kinds. It can upscale DVDs and Blu-rays up to 4K approximations as well as spin 4K native discs. There’s no SACD compatibility, but it handles standard regulation music CDs. It also plays lossless audio files, including FLAC, WAV, AIFF, ALAC and DSD as well as MP3s and AACs via that USB 2.0 port. We pop season one of *Game Of Thrones* on 4K HDR into the DP-UB150EB and head back to the beginning

of the saga with the opening scene of three ‘redshirts’ who find themselves missing their heads. It takes a little longer than some players to get from the tray closing and to the action itself (about a minute) but at this price, it’s not out of the ordinary.

Dramatic reproduction

There’s a big sound from the DP-UB150EB as the drawbridge raises on Castle Black and the three members of the Night’s Watch head through the tunnel. The gate opens with a boom that rumbles on against the tinkling of the portcullis’s chains. It’s a dramatic beginning to the show and reproduced really well by this player. There’s some decent detail throughout the tonal range: nice, low wind-rippled flames of the torches in the tunnel, a higher-pitched echo of the horses’ hooves and the whispers of a gentle snowfall all clear and adding to the fantastic sense of atmosphere. At this price, it’s a strong performance, but go to the next level up and you could enjoy the better dynamics of the Sony UBP-X700. We feel the difference in the quiet as the members of the Night’s Watch walk through the snows of the forest. With the Sony, that silence forms a blanket of eerie still as the backdrop for everything else – the distant cries of a wolf and the flutter of birds. However, the Panasonic’s audio offering is more than fair for the money.

There’s little difference between the Panasonic DP-UB150EB and the slightly more expensive Panasonic DP-UB450EB. Arguably the most significant disparity is that the cheaper model supports only HDR10+ and HLG, whereas the UB450EB covers all bases by adding Dolby Vision. Dark details are strong as we see the three Watchmen head into the tunnel. Their torchlight gives way to the sunless gloom, but it’s still possible to see the rafters and rocks of the tunnel’s sides in the foreground. The texture of the furs of the Watchmen’s black outfits gets a little lost. But while a player at the next level up may deliver more dark detail, there’s little wanting in the depth of the blacks. Once back out into the daylight, detail on the whole is good, with HDR contrast handled well. There’s plenty of differentiation in the ice and the snow, and the bark of the trees is lifelike. The Panasonic DP-UB150EB is keen to impress and we’ve no problem with that, as it also does the basics of keeping the detail as fine as possible. It might lack the nuance and sophistication of more premium 4K Blu-ray players, but it’s certainly a step up from streaming and will reward those prepared to make the effort and stick with physical media. Ultimately, we’d recommend stretching to the Sony UBP-X700 if you can afford it, but if you’re looking for a punchy picture and solid sound on a tight budget, then this is the 4K Blu-ray player for you.

WHAT HI-FI?

PICTURE

★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

FOR

• Punchy picture

• Big, impactful sound

• Excellent value for money

AGAINST

• No Dolby Vision support

RATING

★★★★★

VERDICT

This is a highly competent player at an impressively low price

SONY UBP-X700

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



There aren't many budget 4K Blu-ray players that have wowed us with their 4K and HDR picture quality. But the Sony UBP-X700 fits into that camp, delivering a five-star performance where rivals fail.

We start with the 4K Blu-ray of *Thor: Ragnarok* - a kaleidoscope of vivid colours, from the multi-hued, gaudy garbage planet to the gilded halls of Asgard. The Sony player juggles all these colours with an incredibly deft hand. Every blade of grass is etched cleanly, Thor's red cape has depths of gradations within its folds, and sparks of lightning split the screen with startling brightness. It's a fun, involving performance with stacks of detail.

In our review of the 4K Blu-ray, we note how the film "strikes an impressively naturalistic look for a fantasy film" - and it's this quality that comes to the fore with the Sony X700.

We've always lauded Sony for its disc-players' talents for a natural-looking image, and the X700 continues the trend, displaying a wonderfully subtle picture that's impeccably judged while being hugely entertaining.

Lifelike qualities

It balances the colourful, fantastical elements - the rainbow bridge, a scintillating Jeff Goldblum - with the more realistic hues of our Earth world. Skin-tones are natural, action scenes are handled with smooth and stable motion, and there's a lifelike quality to the picture that just draws you in.

Play the Blu-ray of *Looper* and this quality is most noticeable through skin tones and landscapes - the green grass looks natural, while purples, oranges and sparkling blues are prevented from clashing with each other, while still being allowed to wave their respective flags.

You'll want a comparable quality of sound to accompany that superb picture,

and the Sony doesn't disappoint. Voices are front and centre, and blissfully clear.

So much of *Thor: Ragnarok* hinges on humour, and the Sony player relays every joyous quip, sarcastic rejoinder and laugh-out-loud line with punctual timing. It's full of character.

Special effects are flung about with agility and precision, and there's a good amount of attack and punch when fists and hammers smack into humans and Hulks alike. The X700 prefers a lean sonic balance but never suffers any wince-inducing brightness in an engaging listen. It is well-equipped on all fronts, supporting all surround-sound formats, including the latest Dolby Atmos and DTS:X soundtracks.

Despite not flashing the hi-res audio badge, the X700 can play up to 24-bit/192kHz files in all popular formats, including WAV, FLAC and DSD.

Zippy, dynamic character

That zippy, dynamic character comes through with stereo music, with each instrument and voice ringing through loud and clear on The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* on CD. If you want to hear all the intricacies of the brooding composition, however, you'll need a dedicated hi-fi machine for the job.

The X700 supports 4K 60p pictures and can play all types of discs, including SACDs and 3D Blu-rays (even if your new 4K TV doesn't support 3D). Dolby Vision HDR is supported, but not HDR10+.

If you stream 4K, you'll be glad to know the Sony player supports 4K HDR streams on Netflix and Amazon Prime. Other apps found on the player's home page include BBC iPlayer, BBC Sport, Demand 5, Spotify, Rakuten TV, YouTube and more. Connecting to your home network using wi-fi or ethernet is a painless process and the X700's 4K stream of *Jessica Jones* holds up nicely without any drop outs during testing.

For connections, you get twin HDMI outputs - handy if you want to separate the video and audio feeds in your home cinema set-up - a coaxial digital output, and a USB port for playing content stored on media drives or USB sticks.

Being an affordable model, the X700 boasts a small, lightweight chassis - but it's not an all-plastic affair. The thin metal panels around the X700's angled body stop it feeling cheap, and though the power and eject buttons are plastic, they are prompt and work without fail.

The remote control is small, plastic and lightweight. The buttons are functional and easy to use, though, even in a dark room. Button-prodding leads to instant responses, the disc loads quietly and, overall, the X700 is a breeze to use the second you hook it up to your TV.

The X700 is a fantastic player that makes watching 4K discs an affordable reality. It delivers a subtle, lifelike 4K picture and an entertaining audio performance on a tight budget. For the money, it's hard to beat.

WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
PICTURE ★★★★★	FOR • Crisp, natural-looking picture • Excellent detail and colours • Great value	AGAINST • Sound could be punchier and grander • no HDR10+ support	VERDICT Sony delivers a stunningly natural 4K picture for an affordable price - it's sure to be a crowd-pleaser
SOUND ★★★★★			
FEATURES ★★★★★			

PANASONIC DP-UB820EB



On paper, the Panasonic DP-UB820EB looks like quite the prospect. This 4K Blu-ray player borrows much of the picture-processing technology from the company's flagship 4K machine, the DP-UB9000, but costs less than half the price. If the UB820 can produce a picture of a similar standard and nail the sound part of the equation, we could be looking at a home cinema bargain.

The Panasonic DP-UB820EB is a chunky rectangle of a deck. It's a lot wider and taller than proper budget Blu-ray players, and the beefier dimensions give it a more substantial look. The bevel-cut finish around its edges looks attractive enough, as does the brushed effect on the top panel. But up close, the player looks and feels a little cheap and plasticky.

You get a matching chunky remote that fits in the palm of your hand. The buttons are a good size and it's easy for your thumb to find its way around the wand, even if it doesn't have a backlight.

Minimalist design

The design is pretty minimalist, with just two buttons on the top panel for power and opening/closing the drawer. The front panel drops down as the drawer extends out, revealing the player's display and one of its two USB inputs. This particular one allows you to play content from a portable hard drive.

There aren't many surprises on the back of the Panasonic, but it does tick all of the boxes you'd probably expect at this price. There's ethernet for a wired internet connection while twin HDMI outputs give added flexibility for owners who prefer to split the picture and sound for their display and amp.

The provision of a set of 7.1-channel analogue outputs isn't vital given the specifications of modern AV receivers, but it's nice to have the added flexibility.

The Panasonic will handle the full gamut of surround sound codecs on modern 4K Blu-rays and streaming services, including Dolby Atmos and DTS:X. It also covers all the necessary bases for HDR formats. There's HDR10 and Dolby Vision support out of the box, and HDR10+ support too.

A press of the 'HDR Setting' button on the remote gives you the option of tweaking the HDR intensity to compensate for different lighting conditions. The brighter your room, for example, the harder it can be for the extra punch of HDR to make a mark. The player can even downconvert HDR to SDR, which is useful if you're running a 4K projector that doesn't support HDR.

All the key catch-up and on-demand video streaming services are at your disposal, including BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Vibrant and immersive picture

We fire up the player with *Blue Planet II* in 4K and HDR10 and head to the Galapagos Islands, where we're greeted by a detailed and sharply drawn volcanic landscape. The picture is as vibrant and immersive above sea level as it is below. As marine iguanas nibble away at vegetation on the sea floor, the Panasonic picks up an impressive level of detail on their claws, face and even the fine lines that separate their teeth.

They convene on a sun-kissed clifftop, where the DP-UB820 paints an eye-

catching and immersive picture. There's a burst of vibrant colour as a crab appears to feed on dead skin from the iguana's back. The crab's reds, oranges and bluey-whites appear punchy, contrasting with the darker skin of their hosts.

The DP-UB820 is a decent upscaler too. The original *Transformers* movie on Blu-ray is a stern test - there's plenty of noise and the colour balance has a warmish tint - but the Panasonic does a good job of working the picture into something watchable.

The Panasonic complements its exciting picture with a sound to match. The DP-UB820 delivers a weighty and powerful performance that's capable of delivering explosions with plenty of gusto, but also in a controlled manner.

We spin the Dolby Atmos soundtrack to *Spiderman Homecoming* on 4K Blu-ray and as the Vulture's high-tech weapon rips through the Staten Island Ferry's metal structure, the laser pulses with weight and purpose. The Panasonic delivers each blow with plenty of force before one final huge pulse. It's an exciting performer that doesn't struggle to hold your attention.

If you've bought into the 4K Blu-ray format and have a suitable home cinema set-up, you need a dedicated player that can deliver on multiple fronts. The Panasonic DP-UB820 delivers a hugely immersive and impactful picture, backed up by a strong audio performance. At this price, it's a great buy.

WHAT HI-FI?		RATING ★★★★★	
PICTURE ★★★★★	FOR • Vibrant, immersive HDR picture • Punchy, believable colour balance • Powerful and weighty sound	AGAINST • No SACD or DVD-A support	VERDICT This 4K Blu-ray player promises plenty on paper and backs that up with a hugely entertaining picture and sound
SOUND ★★★★★			
FEATURES ★★★★★			

Depth. Definition. Dexterity.

Introducing the Q B12 subwoofer by Q Acoustics.

The first Q Acoustics subwoofer to feature a 12in driver brings all of the depth and drive your home cinema system craves, along with all the detail and subtlety your music needs. Iron-fist punch meets velvet-glove control in Q B12 - it's the subwoofer your audio set-up deserves.



WHAT HI-FI?



"The QB12 smashes through the action like a steam train, hitting you right in the stomach and taking your whole body along with it. it's precise, detailed and really rather dynamic."

What Hi-Fi, October 2019

Designed to complement the Q Acoustics' Concept and 3000i range of stereo and centre speakers and available in matching finishes. Create the ultimate home cinema system with the Q B12.

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SONY UBP-X1100ES



Upon first sight of the Sony UBP-X1100ES, we are left feeling a little disappointed. Unboxed, the player certainly feels substantial and weighty, but place it on your rack, and it doesn't look like almost £750 worth of player. The plastic drop-down front panel is something we'd normally see on a budget Blu-ray player, while the textured plastic top cover feels cheap and scratchy to the touch. Next to a rival, such as the Panasonic DP-UB9000, the Sony loses out on quality.

But when it comes to features, there are plenty on the Sony's menu. The UBP-X1100ES is a proper universal disc player, so its compatibility extends all the way to SACD and DVD-Audio discs, plus 3D and 4K Blu-rays and DVDs.

There's no set of multi-channel analogue outputs for owners of legacy AV receivers that lack HDMI inputs, but it's no problem if you're using the Sony with a relatively modern amp. The Sony has a couple of HDMI outputs which is normal for players at this sort of money.

Quiet time

The Sony handles all manner of hi-res audio files and formats, with the built-in DAC capable of allowing native playback of DSD files and PCM signals at 192kHz. Dolby Atmos and DTS:X soundtracks are both supported too. There is built-in Bluetooth connectivity, so if you want to watch a film in the early hours you can beam the soundtrack to a pair of Bluetooth headphones. We use the feature with a pair of Sony WF-1000XM3 in-ear headphones, and find no lip-sync issues nor any problems with range.

The UBP-X1100ES comes with the three major video streaming services built in too: YouTube, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. 4K HDR streaming is supported, although the Sony doesn't support Dolby Atmos over Netflix or Dolby Vision via Amazon Prime Video.

One slightly irksome point is that the Sony doesn't support HDR10+. It also has an odd way of implementing Dolby Vision, in which you have to enable it in the menu system every time you watch a supported disc - and switch it off for non-Dolby Vision titles. It is unable to switch automatically, which is a little disappointing from a player at this level.

The Sony's remote is lightweight, small and more akin to something you'd get with a budget player. But we like its minimalist design and clear layout and it is quick to respond to commands.

This Sony produces a simply brilliant image with 4K Blu-rays. We play *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol.2*, and during the scene in which the intrepid band of intergalactic misfits visits The Sovereign to return their precious batteries, the Sony captures the matt gold texture of Ayesha's skin perfectly.

The level and lustre of gold intensifies as the camera scans over her gilded throne and the deep blues of the palace are equally rich and bold without looking overcooked. The picture boasts loads of detail, from the intricacies of the markings on Drax's body to the textures and stitching on Quill's leather jacket.

When the group evades the chasing Sovereign ships and crash-lands on Berhert, there's impressive depth and realism to the image. The greens and browns of the forest look natural as the Sony digs up lots of detail from the dirt floor. We drop down to the Blu-ray of *The*

Amazing Spiderman 2 and the Sony does a fine job rendering Spidey as he swings between rooftops, capturing the texture of his suit as it ripples in the breeze.

DVD pushes the Sony to its limits and it struggles with the transfer of *Star Trek Into Darkness*. It's watchable, but if you have a player at this price, you should feed it content that will do it justice.

Sensational thrust

The Sony combines its excellent picture quality with equally impressive audio. The way it builds the tension during Spiderman and Electro's confrontation in Times Square is superb. It delivers sensational dynamic thrust, switching from a quietened hush in the seconds after the blackout to an explosive surge, as Electro emerges from the hoardings.

Bolts of electricity rain down, striking with power and precision, but don't sound uncomfortably hard or bright. They crackle and pop in the background, while dialogue remains clear and evenly balanced. Some rivals might give greater weight and solidity to explosions and lower frequencies, but the Sony manages the subtle shifts with greater finesse.

Although the Sony UBP-X1100ES might lack HDR10+ support and have a few quirks in the way it operates, there's no doubting its ability as a universal 4K Blu-ray player. Picture quality is excellent and it backs this up with an entertaining and musical sound that is up there with the best at the money.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

PICTURE



SOUND



FEATURES



FOR

- Crisp, clean 4K picture
- Dynamic, immersive sound
- SACD and DVD-Audio support

AGAINST

- No HDR10+
- Strange Dolby Vision implementation
- Doesn't look or feel premium

VERDICT

The job of picking a premium 4K Blu-ray player just became a bit tougher - the Sony UBP-X1100ES is a fine proposition

PIONEER UDP-LX500



Spending nearly £1000 on a 4K Blu-ray player such as the Pioneer UDP-LX500 is difficult to justify when you can buy a decent entry-level deck for less than £200. But if any AV brand can convince you to set your sights a little higher, it's Pioneer.

The UDP-LX500 is solid, stable and sturdy, and has been designed to help reduce unwanted vibrations and outside interference. Pioneer uses a double-layer chassis that is reinforced with a 3mm steel plate for extra rigidity and to give the player a low centre of gravity. The disc tray is suspended and acoustically damped to reduce vibration in the chassis, and it uses a mechanism that makes it a lot quieter in operation than its rival, the Panasonic DP-UB9000.

The UDP-LX500 comes with a streamlined rectangular remote. The presence of a backlight is a bonus in darkened rooms and there are quick buttons to all relevant features such as picture and audio settings.

Setting parameters

The menu system is simpler than Panasonic's, with two menus you should investigate - Audio Parameters and Video Parameters. The latter allows you to assign preferred video settings to one of three presets. Within each you can change brightness, contrast, sharpness and noise reduction.

Audio Parameters allows you to access the digital filters for the player's internal DAC. You can choose between Sharp (a solid sound), Slow (a softer sound) and Short (a smoother sound). We prefer Sharp, but the differences are subtle.

The LX500 is a universal disc player, so besides Full HD, 3D and 4K Blu-rays, it can also handle DVD-Audio and SACD discs which will please some prospective buyers. It supports the usual HDR formats, such as HDR10 and Dolby Vision. An HDR10+ software update was

promised for Spring 2019, but at the time of writing we're well into 2020 and there's still no sign of it being released.

Pioneer designed this player to be just as accomplished with audio as it is with video, and it shows. We start with the 4K Blu-ray of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, and as Poppy's missile strike takes out the Kingsman headquarters, explosions sound dynamic and suitably bombastic.

There's weight and power, but the Pioneer also keeps a tight grip, drawing crisply defined lines around rumblings as they ripple out around your head. In the aftermath, Eggsy confronts Merlin and the Pioneer does a great job of extracting the emotion, distress and the slight hint of comedy in Eggsy's voice.

Effortless delivery

Switch to CD playback and the Pioneer sounds equally natural and effortless in its delivery. It has a fine grasp of timing and delivers a solid and robust drum beat to accompany Eminem's *White America*. Hit the Direct button, which turns off all digital video and audio processing, and it adds some extra clarity to the sound. Music sounds purer, with detail and dynamics easier to extract.

Compared with its closest rival, the Panasonic DP-UB9000, the Pioneer organises the different elements better and delivers audio with greater focus and precision. The UB9000 opts for a fuller, richer sound that is appealing, even if it isn't quite as convincing.

The high praise doesn't stop with the player's sound quality. The Pioneer UDP-LX500 delivers a fantastic picture too. It's close to that of the Panasonic DP-UB9000, but just about edges it in terms of outright detail and clarity.

As Poppy's missiles strike their targets in *Kingsman*, the Pioneer delivers the explosions with vim and vigour. Bursts of yellow don't so much pierce the night sky as smash right through it. They don't overwhelm the overall image, though, and there's still plenty of detail in the darker areas of the scene as the UDP-LX500 picks out plenty of detail from the rubble and splintered wood.

Skin textures and facial stubble are treated in the same confident way. It's colourful, but there's subtlety and neutrality too. The Panasonic DP-UB9000, on the other hand, prefers a slightly richer colour balance.

The UDP-LX500 is also a confident upscaler. Played through an LG OLED65C9PLA TV, the Blu-ray of *Transformers: Dark Of The Moon* isn't completely devoid of noise, but has a firmer grasp on the picture than the TV's built-in upscaler with fewer artefacts present. The source material will always determine how good the picture looks, but this machine still proves its worth.

The UDP-LX500 might be one of the most expensive 4K machines we've reviewed so far, but if your home cinema system can make the most of its abilities, every night should be movie night.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

PICTURE



SOUND



FEATURES



FOR

- Crisp, insightful picture
- Dynamic, expressive sound
- Impressive timing

AGAINST

- Few smart features

VERDICT

Pioneer's premium 4K player delivers a superb picture and awesome sound quality. Buy with confidence

The leaders of the pack

Can't go out to the cinema? Then bring all the excitement of the big screen to your home with these four superb speaker packages



View online review
whf.cm/3050i51

**Q Acoustics 3050i5.1
Cinema Pack** (page 64)



View online review
whf.cm/Oberon551SP

**Dali Oberon 55.1 Speaker
Package** (page 67)

Spend a few hundred pounds on a speaker package and your choices are limited. But drop a grand or more and you're into a home cinema sweet spot of real quality and serious options.

It's not that duff speaker packages don't exist in the £1000-2000 bracket - they do, of course - but they're a lot fewer and further between. For the past few years, we've enjoyed an embarrassment of riches at this price point, leaving only the problem of finding the right one for your home and your tastes.

Their prices have fluctuated quite significantly over the past six months, with as much as £750 between the ones on test here but, at the time of writing that spread has narrowed to just over £250, making that buying decision, on paper, seem even harder.

The most affordable of the four is the Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack with its rocket-like front pair and brief-case sized subwoofer from 2018. The launch

of a matching, meatier bass channel option last year brings it right up to date, though.

In the middle, at £1499, come two very different propositions. The Mission QX-2 home cinema package is the only package in the group not to feature a floorstanding speaker but, while its front pairing may be more diminutive, they certainly make up for the lack of size with a monster 23kg subwoofer.

The Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 Home Theatre System is the other package at the same price. Its speakers may look rather boxy in a traditional way, and have just the one, dark grey finish, but it is available with Dolby Atmos add-ons if you want to expand your sound further down the line.

Then there's the Dali Oberon 5 5.1 Speaker Package, the most expensive (£1699) and most recent of the gang. Danish by design and devilishly handsome, they will win hearts and minds before you even plug them in. Let's dim the lighting and get some big films on.

View online review
whf.cm/QX-2HCP

Mission QX-2 Home Cinema Package (page 66)



View online review
whf.cm/Debut251HTS

Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 Home Theatre System (page 65)

Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack

You have only to take a look at the divorce statistics to know there's no guarantee that any coupling will go to plan, no matter how well intentioned. So even though we adored both Q Acoustics' 3050i floorstanders and its 3010i 5.1 Cinema Pack, we are still taken aback by how exceptionally they complement one another in practice.

The 3050i 5.1 speaker system is essentially the same as the 3010i, only with a pair of Q Acoustics' brilliant floorstanders swapped in for the front channels. Those speakers haven't undergone a massive change since the 3050s from five years ago - outwardly the only noticeable difference is the addition of a fourth colour finish (now grey, walnut, white or black) and a chrome bezel around each driver.

The changes involved more than just a cosmetic revamp though. As with the 3010i and 3020i, cabinet rigidity was improved - point-to-point (P2P) cabinet

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Snappy, detailed and infectiously musical
- Plenty of power and insight to bass frequencies
- Versatile with positioning and pairing

AGAINST

- Nothing at this price

VERDICT

This Q Acoustics package is a talented and enjoyable set of speakers

bracing added extra support to the parts that required stiffening to make them quieter; a thicker baffle now gives better support to the tweeter and mid/bass driver; and traditional terminal panel cut-outs made way for embedded sockets within the cabinet.

To isolate it from any vibrations emanating from the two sandwiching 16.5cm woofers, the 3050is' 20mm soft-dome tweeter is decoupled from the baffle via a suspension system.

Show of strength

Unique to the 3050is in the range, however, is Q Acoustics' use of Helmholtz Pressure Equalizer (HPE) technology, which the company introduced in its high-end Concept 500 speakers and has since trickled down to this lower price point. Essentially, it's a tube filled with damping material inside the cabinet, which aims to absorb unwanted energy and reduce resonance.

While the 3010is, which make up the surround channels, are 25 per cent larger by volume than their predecessors, they are still a fair amount smaller than the 3050is. This means that their mid/bass driver measures 10cm, compared with the 3050is' 16.5cm driver.

We would defy anybody not to enjoy an evening spent with this Q Acoustics speaker package. Their energy and exuberance is infectious, without being fatiguing, and those qualities are complemented by a great deal of maturity and insight too.

The power and bass weight offered by the 3050i caters for greater intensity, without forgoing the snappy timing of their more diminutive partners. That fluidity and fleet footedness is one of the most impressive aspects of this package, avoiding rigidity for a fast but natural sounding performance.

Centre of the action

Any home cinema package lives or dies by its centre speaker, as this is where so much of the dialogue is delivered. Paired with the 3050i, the same speaker seems to perform even better in this set. Here, it appears to be even more dynamic and engaging than when partnered with the 3010i fronts, and knits seamlessly with its new surroundings.

The sub's output is augmented by the 3050is taking on part responsibility for bass power, which means plenty of extra low-end detail. Insight generally is better too, especially with soundtracks, where the 3050is pick out extra strands and organise them with the same precision we heard when testing them as a stereo pair.

Their general musicality doesn't go unnoticed in that regard either, with subtle and large-scale dynamics delivered with confidence and deft understanding.

All the same, the Q Acoustics 3060S sub is very much the smallest of those on test, in both stature and sound. If you're looking to stow away a subwoofer somewhere unseen, then it's a big advantage. Otherwise, it might be worth considering an upgrade to the Q Acoustics QB12 instead. That will set you back £499 (\$599) if you're buying it separately, but it's also possible to find it bundled as part of the more expensive 3050i 5.1 PLUS package.

For most rooms, the 3060S should suffice, but the QB12 takes things to another level with its detailed, gut-rumbling bass, that is expertly integrated and impossible to ignore, though the basic package still edges it for value.

It is worth stressing just how talented the standard 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack is. It's an instant hit, and easily identifiable as such within moments of being switched on. If you're looking for a floorstanding speaker package that will elevate your home cinema for less than two grand, you should consider this Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack.



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★



Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 Home Theatre System

Outstanding performers don't always combine to best effect. Take the star-studded England midfield of the mid-2000s, for example; world-class individuals whose achievements amounted to far less than the sum of their parts. In hi-fi terms, it's especially true of home cinema packages, where the individual speaker elements may be impressive in their own right, but might not gel together.

The Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 Home Theatre System has at least six such elements - the Elac Debut 2.0 F5.2 floorstanding front speakers and the Elac Debut 2.0 B5.2 standmounter surrounds are both five-star rated, but with a centre and a sub too, does the whole package come together in a class-leading performance?

The Elac Debut 2.0 speakers have been redesigned from the original Debut range of 2016. The internals of the MDF cabinets and the drivers have changed, but what hasn't is their understated class.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Highly immersive soundstage
- Silky tonal balance
- Clean, clear dynamic sound

AGAINST

- Nothing at this price

VERDICT

A deliciously mature and sensible speaker set for the money

The build is more solid thanks to the internal MDF bracing, which adds stiffness and strength, and reduces unwanted vibrations. The drivers are a step on too. The new silk-dome tweeters have a wide-roll surround that lifts the frequency response up to 35kHz for more realistic reproduction at the top of the range. The woofer cones are made from a woven aramid-fibre; Elac's choice of compromise between the clarity of stiffness and the damping needed to stop unwanted resonance.

Works a treat

These treats come housed in the Elac Debut 2.0 F5.2 floorstanding fronts, two Elac B5.2 standmounters and the C5.2 centre speaker. The floorstanders are fitted with four drivers apiece - a 25mm silk dome tweeter and three 13cm woofers, plus there are three rear-firing reflex ports for a deeper push.

The bookshelf surrounds come with a tweeter and single woofer with the reflex port at the front to make positioning less crucial. The Elac C5.2 centre speaker also has front-facing ports; two within its cabinet, one at either end alongside the single tweeter and dual-woofer combo.

There are also Elac Debut 2.0 A4.2 Dolby Atmos modules, available at an extra £250 per pair. These fit on both the front and surround speakers and turn your 5.1 set-up into a 5.2.1 system with overhead sound for any height effects in Dolby Atmos-compatible films.

Lastly, the Elac SUB3010 subwoofer is a 36cm tall box, weighing 14.5kg, with

a 25cm long-throw driver. There are no volume controls, instead use the Elac SUB Control smartphone app to alter the volume by Bluetooth or let it use your mobile's microphone to determine the best EQ settings for the sub.

We sit down with Martin Scorsese's classic boxing opera *Raging Bull* and right from the off, this package is a knockout. As *Intermezzo* from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* pours through the front speakers, the orchestral strings soar through the room and the hairs on the back of our necks stand up.

The audio is a touch bright and grainy, but we sit agog as Jake LaMotta ducks and weaves on the canvas. What we hear is more refined than either the Missions or the Qs. Punches thump on contact or swing and miss with threatening weight. The calls from the baying crowd come from all around as the boxers turn - and we're standing in the ring amongst it all.

Delightfully balanced image

What's astonishing is the realism of the soundscape. These aren't effects picked and placed in one of six carefully positioned speakers as you get with the more raw Q Acoustics; instead, it's a delightfully balanced audio image - not as forward or aggressive as some of the other packages here. The Elacs are subtle and balanced with no part of the frequency range dominant, but still snappy and crisp. It's easy and transparent, but capable of warmth too.

We try out the Dolby Atmos speakers on the front floorstanders with *The Predator*, and there's an excellent sense of height as the growls and echoed taunts of the titular alien dance over our heads. The roof of the audio dome is still very much at the front end of our space, and it's obvious that a set of four of these would be well worth the extra outlay - adding a subtlety to your home cinema experience that's impossible not to like.

Their silky sound production creates the kind of wonderfully open and detailed soundstage that true cinema sound is about. They put you in the heart of the action so succinctly that you almost forget about the speakers.

This Elac package is a real match-winner, whether for the two-channel or full surround. Just a pity they weren't around for the World Cup in 2006.



Mission QX-2 Home Cinema Package

Even before we've set it up, the Mission QX-2 home cinema pack is two-thirds of the way to a five-star review – of the six speakers in this 5.1 bundle, four have received full marks as stereo pairs. All we need is a decent subwoofer and centre speaker and all should be fine. But centres and subs are a different proposition.

Read our Mission QX-2 speaker review and you'll see many words of praise. These affordable standmount speakers are a beauty and there are four of them in this home cinema package to act as the front and surround pairs. Don't be fooled by their modest front facade – there is a healthy amount of cabinet space here.

Mission has stuck with its Inverted Driver Geometry (IDG) driver format, which positions the tweeters below the mid/bass drivers. The intention is to equalise the distance between the acoustic centres of both drive units and the listener's position to give a more focused and better integrated sound.

Seamless construction

The drivers themselves aren't exactly run of the mill either. The 15cm soft pulp and acrylic fibre mid/bass cones are given extra support from the rear thanks to a larger point of contact with the voice coil. From the outside, you'll notice that there are no dust caps and that the cone surface is also seam-free. The idea is to better maintain clarity in the midrange. Underneath that unit sits the 38mm ring dome tweeter. Its woven textile material is arranged in a double ring structure to reduce distortion. The back pressure from the diaphragm is vented back into a damped rear chamber.

The QX-C centre speaker comes off a lot less chunky with its elongated design. In the middle is that same 38mm tweeter, with two 13.5cm versions of the mid/bass drivers, one on either side.

As for the sub, the QX-12SUB is a good sized box for a package at this price. It's fitted with a single, 30cm, long-throw drive unit, a 300W internal amp and a set of rubber feet to keep this 23kg beast in good contact with the floor.

Anyone looking for a package with a low profile might want to take a look at the dimension specs of these speakers before they splash out. The two pairs of standmounters are certainly not small.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Immersive effects handling
- Mostly musical sound
- Imposing bass

AGAINST

- Mediocre centre speaker

VERDICT

A great package for home cinema immersion let down by a mismatch at the centre channel

Fortunately, the QX-2s take well to sitting close to the wall so they won't have to encroach too far into your room. Those and the QX-C centre are rear-ported to augment the low-frequency output. The edges of the ports are ribbed to avoid distortion at higher volumes. At roughly 40cm cubed, the sub is huge and not something you can hide behind a sofa or fit under a coffee table.

And all that jazz

We start our listening with Martin Scorsese's classic, *Taxi Driver*. Bernard Herrmann's score comes through just beautifully on these Missions. There's scale and dynamism to the sound as the film opens. The meandering New York jazz saunters through the speakers and across the soundstage. Underpinned by big, open pulls on the double bass, it's light and breezy until threatening crescendos of snares and cymbals remind us of the danger that lies beneath Travis Bickle's harmless looking exterior.

But as Bickle interviews for his job at the taxi depot, it's clear that the QX-C centre speaker is not the best match here. It sounds more closed-in than the QX-2s, making the dialogue a little muffled, so it's harder to hear the character in the voices. We don't get the sense of what's behind Bickle's interview-friendly answers, even when his mask slips. The centre doesn't give us that vocal texture. It's not in the same league as the others in this group.

We reach for alien invasion movie *Independence Day* to test the dynamic ability of the Mission QX-2 package. The film may be 20 years old, but these speakers bring it right into the present.

The balance of the soundfield on this package is quite incredible. Missiles zip across our space in the final dogfight above Area 51 with their weight and movement in the audio inch-perfect. Everything from the high-pitched rattle of the machine gun bullets to the alien laser blasts sound fantastic, and it's all matched by a very decent sub.

The Mission QX-12SUB delivers hits worthy of what a nuclear missile might sound like when exploded at the core of an alien mothership. The output of this unit is huge compared with the others on test. It's agile enough for some tight rumbles, but has a slight softness at the edges that Elacs, Dalis and Qs don't suffer from. However, it's perfectly acceptable at the price point, given the added oomph.

There's an easy balance between the soundtrack and the effects too. The brass fanfares in the music, when Russell Casse rises to his moment of redemption, are pitch-perfect. We feel our heart racing at the finale – this is pure movie melodrama, delivered with mastery by these Missions, and not even the mediocre centre can spoil the moment.

Four stars is a tough wrap for what is generally a very good home cinema speaker package. Five out of the six speakers involved are excellent, but the centre doesn't maintain the same open and dynamic character as the rest of the family. It's easy to feel the shortfall when the other units are so good.

The Mission QX-2 speaker package will provide your home cinema with all the music and surround effects your viewing has to offer, but when watching a quieter drama, it may leave you wanting more.



Dali Oberon 5 5.1 Speaker Package

Home cinema speakers are about lifting your home entertainment onto a higher plane. It's all there on your content just waiting to be unlocked: a beautiful soundtrack, clean dialogue, big-hitting bass and surround-sound effects - all you need is a package to unlock it. Could that be the Dali Oberon 5 5.1 Speaker Package?

Up front are the 2018 Award-winning Dali Oberon 5 floorstanders. The surrounds are either the five-star Dali Oberon 1 standmounters (package price, £1699), which is what we're testing, or the compact Dali On-Wall speakers (£1799).

At just 83cm tall, the two-way front pair is as unobtrusive a set of floorstanders as you'll find. They're significantly smaller in every dimension than all of the rivals here, aside from the Missions which have standmount speakers at the head - and that's well worth considering if you have limited space in which to house your 5.1 system.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR

- Stylish good looks;
- Full, warm sound
- Seamless sonic integration
- Expressive dynamics

AGAINST

- Nothing at this price

VERDICT

Full, honest and warm - these clever performers will make the best out of any home cinema soundtrack

The Oberon 5s have a fairly large and lightweight 29mm soft-dome tweeter, and that allows it to dip into lower frequencies to help integrate itself with the sound coming from the woofers. Those two 13cm mid/bass drivers are made from Dali's wood fibre/fine grain paper pulp choice of cone material, which it believes gives the best balance between rigidity and low resonance.

Dali has made its standmounter Oberon 1 surround speakers as versatile as possible by adding a wall-mounting attachment. They sound better than most hung like this, but we'd recommend setting them around 30cm into the room.

Centre stage

One of the make-or-break battlegrounds of a speaker package is the centre, and the Oberon Vokal is tasked with that job here. It has the same selection of drivers as the floorstanders, with the tweeter in the middle and the front-facing bass port just underneath. That arrangement has been chosen to help achieve a wider dispersion pattern and make positioning less fussy.

The subwoofer is a small cube, the Dali Sub E9-F. An aluminium-coned, 23cm woofer sits inside the MDF enclosure which stands 3cm off the floor, with its rubber legs creating enough space for the downward-firing bass vent to work.

It is powered by a 170W RMS Class D amplifier and has a heavy magnet motor system with a four-layered, long-stroke voice coil designed to keep the cone up to speed with the amp's signal. There are

controls around the back for fine-tuning the speaker to your room, with dials for gain and crossover.

We fire up the projector and head to *Deadpool* on 4K Blu-ray. The film opens up with the kind of scene that puts home cinema sound through its paces. It's chaotic - with explosions, dialogue, cars zooming left and right, and plenty of thumps and amusing details as henchmen meet their grisly ends. The Dali Oberons perform the job admirably.

There's a beautiful rasping quality to a motorcycle as it zips across the picture. As it shifts across the soundstage, we're never aware of the sound passing from speaker to speaker, but more through the space around us, which is exactly how home cinema should be.

Huge hits

There's surprising authority and power to this relatively diminutive package; not as much as the crowd-pleasing Q Acoustics 3050is or the Missions, but the Dalis hold their own. The hits are huge as airborne vehicles slam into the road, but details of twisting metal and the splattering of blood aren't lost amid the thuds either.

Switching to dialogue scenes with Wade Wilson and we're blown away by the way the Dalis convey the character in his voice. The dynamics and detail from the centre speaker give a fabulous sense of the roughness of his timbre - a quality which none of its rivals can quite match.

There are incidental moments where the detail is not quite as fine and singular as with the more delicate Elac Debut 2.0s - a glass placed upon a table, the safety click of a gun, for instance - they're all present, but not so beautifully three-dimensional. Instead, what we have with the Dalis is the best of both worlds, and a definite overall step-up in sonic terms.

While the sub can create a rumble with the gain turned up high, it's best to dial it down for a more subtle response. If you need serious weight, you can upgrade to the Dali E-12F with its 30cm driver.

Attractive, interesting and unfussy: these words describe both the aesthetics and acoustics of these clever performers. The Dali Oberon 5 5.1 system has an honesty and warmth that brings the best out of any soundtrack. They're transparent but fun, powerful but subtle; we'd have them round to ours any day.



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TEST
WINNER

Dali Oberon 5 5.1 Speaker Package


WHAT HI-FI?
 ★★★★★

It's no accident that the Dali Oberon 5 5.1 Speaker Package was named Product of the Year at the 2019 *What Hi-Fi?* Awards. There are one or two different types of home cinema brilliance on test here, and the Dalis manage to capture something of the best of each of them. Their presentation is open enough to capture the sweetness of an epic film score but still with enough raw firepower to send your hair flying back when there's big action on-screen. Combined with a brilliantly nuanced centre speaker, it's a proper triple threat.

Their convenience as a product you can live with can also not be overstated. A 5.1 set-up is a big commitment for your home space and not everyone shares their lives with a person who is quite as dedicated to quality cinema sound. The standmounter-based Mission pack aside, the Dalis are not only the smallest of the speakers of the bunch, but their wide choice of finishes and contemporary styling is an easy match for most homes. They might be the most expensive but

they're worth every penny of that extra outlay. Should you ever decide they need more beef, there's always the bigger sub.

There are others here which may be better suited to your tastes, though. The Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack is at an unfortunate price peak at the time of writing (between Black Friday and the post-Christmas sales, it was available for less than £1000). Should you see them dip down there again, then you will be able to grab yourself some tremendous bang for buck.

If you can splurge that saving on the upgraded Q Acoustics QB12 subwoofer or, better still, get a deal on the Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 PLUS package which already includes it, then you'll have yourself a real hotrod of a system – one that action film-lovers may indeed prefer with more focus on big effects at the cost of more gentle care with the soundtrack and a slightly less joined up experience.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Elacs are still heartbreakers in their own right. Their ease with movie music will

be a big hit with fans of the classics with big sweeps from big directors brought to life with every note. They have a sense of sophistication that only the Dalis here can capture and, no matter which other package we chose for ourselves, it would be hard to keep these from our thoughts.

It's only the Mission QX-2s which we have to highlight as a definite step down in performance here – and that's because of its off-the-mark centre channel. Its combo of huge hits and fantastic imaging make for something of a sound effects masterclass. With a good discount, it's still worth considering.

And that just about wraps it up. Any of these speaker packages would work ably with a quality AV amplifier such as the Denon AVR-X3600H or the slightly cheaper Sony STR-DN1080.

And if you've got this far, then maybe you're willing to go all the way? How about a five-star home cinema projector and 4K Blu-ray player to fit into your new system? Come back in a month or two and we'll see what we can do.



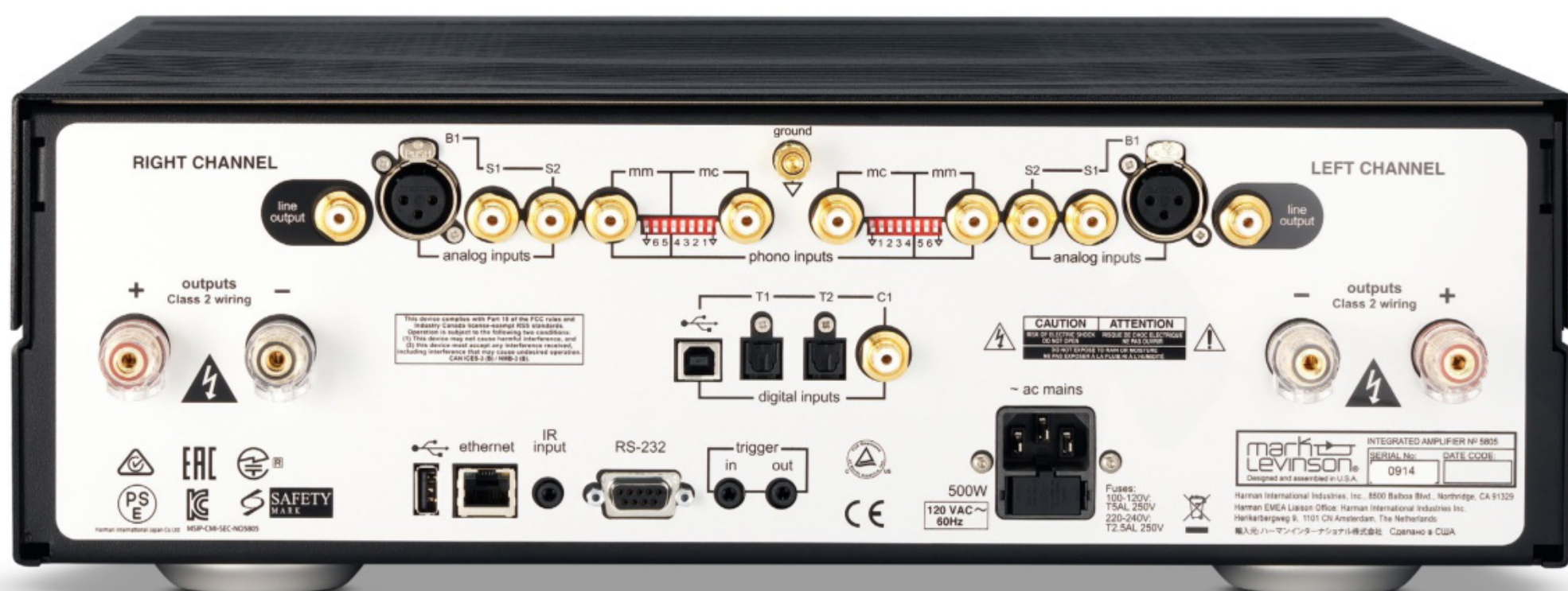
TEMPTATIONS

EXPENSIVE, YES. BUT YOU
KNOW YOU WANT THEM

Mark Levinson 5805

- Integrated amplifier
- £7995
- ★★★★★





"Its finish is as good as we would expect at this level, and the controls – particularly the dials that control inputs and volume – spin with precision"

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Crisp, refined and articulate sound
- Well specified
- apt X HD Bluetooth
- Pleasing build

AGAINST

- Up against some tough competition

VERDICT

The 5805 is a good introduction to the Mark Levinson amplifier range, delivering fine sound with a well judged features set

When it comes to high-end amplification, few brands are as prestigious as Mark Levinson. The company helped establish the idea of high-end hi-fi in the 1970s and, despite going through a few fallow periods, remains one of its leading lights.

The 5805 has quite some legacy to live up to. It may not be obvious from that hefty price tag, but this integrated is pretty much the entry point into the company's amplifier range. Its sister model, the 5802 (£6999), is built into the same chassis but offers only digital inputs. So, if you require analogue line ins or a phono stage, you'll need to buy the one we've got on test here.

COPIOUS CONNECTIVITY

It's a pretty well equipped unit with three analogue line-level inputs, including a balanced XLR, alongside a quartet of physical digital connections. There's a choice of USB, coaxial and a pair of opticals and a nod to wireless modernity in the form of aptX HD Bluetooth.

Fans of vinyl haven't been ignored either. The 5805 has a built-in phono stage that will cope with both moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridges. The cartridge loading is adjustable via a series of dipswitches on the back panel. Such adjustments are important to get the optimal sound from any cartridge you connect.

There's also an ethernet socket on the back panel. Don't get too excited – the port is used only for control purposes and there's no network-streaming module. Indeed, you can use this connection to manage the unit's set-up configuration from a computer or tablet. That's more convenient than relying on the remote and panel controls, though the graphical interface can be described as basic at best.

The amplifier's set-up menus are pretty wide-ranging, providing various digital filter and upsampling options, adjustment for gain levels and the facility for giving custom names to those inputs.

There are no fewer than seven digital filter choices from 'Brickwall' through 'Apodizing' and 'Linear Phase'. While there are obvious technical differences, there's no wrong answer here – your choice will depend on your system and the recording, as well as taste. We settle for 'Minimum Phase', as it offers the most pleasing presentation in our system.

The 5805's build is reassuringly solid. Its finish is as good as we would expect at this level, and the controls – particularly the dials that control inputs and volume – spin with precision. This unit is certainly up to the standards set by direct price rivals such as Krell's K-300i.

NEAT AND TIDY

Take a look inside and it's hard not to be impressed by the tidiness of construction. The preamp circuit is a direct-coupled, dual-mono design, in a bid to optimise stereo imaging and sonic precision. There are large heatsinks running down both sides, a generously sized toroidal mains transformer (rated at over 500 VA) and circuit boards that seem to have been configured by a neatness obsessive.

This integrated is rated at a healthy 125W per channel into 8 ohms. That figure just about doubles as the load impedance halves, which is impressive. That means the 5805 will drive even the most difficult speakers without issue, and to pretty high levels. Only those with the largest rooms or particularly inefficient speakers are likely to need more.

While the amplifier's casework gets hot during use, we never get to the point where the heat feels excessive, even when we push it really hard. We would still recommend ensuring that there's plenty of ventilation around it to avoid over-heating though. Also, make sure you have a sturdy support – this integrated weighs in at just under 28kg.



5805: IN DETAIL...

The generously sized, 'ultra-low noise' toroidal mains transformer is specified at over 500 VA

In keeping with the rest of the internal layout, the circuit board is a model of neatness

Despite the heat produced, the 5805's designers have succeeded in keeping the heatsinks inside the casing

"We can't fault its ability to float an expansive soundstage and populate it with carefully layered instrumentation"

Bluetooth, even of the aptX HD variety, may not seem an obvious place to start when testing an amplifier at this level, but we're keen to see just how well the technology has been implemented. We use an iPhone X loaded with the Qobuz streaming service, and it connects quickly without fuss.

We listen to Nitin Sawhney's *Fragile Wind* and like what we hear. The ML sounds clean and precise, rendering each sound with obvious care. It's a coherent presentation, one that does well when it comes to communicating the momentum of the piece. Vocals come through with clarity and are nicely separated from the instrumental backdrop, while dynamic shifts are conveyed with fluidity.

Bluetooth can take us only so far and we're itching to dig deeper into the 5805's abilities. We switch to our reference Naim ND 555/555 PS DR music streamer. This makes as big a jump in performance as we hoped, highlighting the amplifier's innate transparency.

We listen to a range of music, from the sultry, rhythmically delicate *Mira* by Melody Gardot to Holst's *Jupiter* and Kanye West's *Yeezus*. The 5805 handles this diverse collection of music with ease. It has the resolution and dynamic expression to render Gardot's lovely voice with the body and finesse it deserves.

This is a lively, entertaining performance that's as detailed as they come, but also fun to listen to. The ML isn't the kind of amplifier that makes everything sound large and impressive. It can do that, but only if that's the way the recording is.

A large-scale symphony sound, such as on *Jupiter*, requires an amplifier to have different skills. This piece needs power, authority and scale, things that the 5805 is happy to provide.

Krell's K-300i sounds even bigger and more bombastic with this recording, making the ML sound a little lightweight in comparison. But the ML counters with the ability to paint sounds with precision and with a more delicate brush.

High-level dynamic swings are punched out with confidence, the amplifier sounding impressively composed even when pushed hard. We can't fault its organisation or its ability to float an expansive soundstage and populate it with solidly focused and carefully layered instrumentation.

Tonally, things are pretty even. It's a refined presentation. One that's got enough in the way of smoothness to avoid making a meal of poor recordings or sources but transparent enough to allow good quality music feeds to shine.

We move from the analogue line stages to the coaxial digital input and this amp continues to please. We lose some of the solidity of the ND 555's internal DAC, but the digital module in the 5805 delivers enough expression and rhythmic coherence to leave us impressed. It's a clean and crisp sound that balances smoothness with bite.

The story is almost as positive with the USB input, which can accommodate up to 32-bit/384 kHz PCM music streams or DSD 11.2. This input just lacks a little of the verve of the coaxial, but remains good enough to entertain.

INSIGHTFUL WITH VINYL

We connect our reference Technics SL-1000R package to the phono stage and take advantage of the amplifier's variable cartridge loading to optimise the sound. It doesn't take long before our Kiseki Purpleheart MC (£2450) is singing and delivering a sweeping sound brimming with insight. We miss a little dynamic punch and the sense of transparency the line stages have, but it's still a fine performance.

The 6.3mm headphone output is a good one. It retains the pleasing character of the speaker outputs and manages to drive our Beyerdynamics T1 to high levels with ease. The sound is spacious, informative and entertaining.

The 5805's sound doesn't grab the attention as firmly as some rivals, but over time its many charms become obvious. Its presentation is clean, detailed and articulate, while the features set is admirably broad. If you're in the market for a premium integrated amplifier then this is one to consider.

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Astell & Kern A&Ultima SP2000

- Personal music player
- £3399
- ★★★★★



"This is the best A&K player we've heard. Actually, it could be the best portable music player we've heard"

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Best-sounding music player we've heard
- Streaming features
- Intuitive interface
- Distinctive aesthetic looks
- expensive

AGAINST

- Might expect better battery life
- Chunky build

VERDICT

Not very portable or kindly priced, but it sounds like no other PMP we've heard

A few thousand pounds may not be considered a flagship price for a lot of kit we test, but for a portable music player it's pretty unorthodox. Yet Astell & Kern's flagship A&ultima SP2000 comes in at over £3k - around three times the cost of most of the top smartphones or other music-playing devices you carry around in your pocket.

It's unlikely, however, that this 'portable' player will spend much time in your pocket - the SP2000 is about twice the thickness of a phone and weighs more than 400g. Holding it in one hand, we feel a sudden empathy towards early adopters of the first portable phones.

That heft is at least reassuring of its excellent build quality. The SP2000's sandblasted aluminium chassis is a lavish statement for Astell & Kern's design creativity. A solid block carved with the geometrical interest of an ornate stained-glass window, perfectly complemented by the choice of shimmering stainless steel and copper finishes, it's hard not to be impressed by it. If a portable music player can ever come close to looking like it's worth thousands of pounds, it's this one.

Despite its proportions, it's intuitive to hold, the small play/pause/skip buttons (on the left) and the trademark volume wheel (on the right) lining up perfectly to where your thumb and index finger naturally sit. A pleasantly minimal socket and button layout - including a USB-C charging socket, microSD slot, 3.5mm unbalanced and 2.5mm balanced jacks - is helped by the fact the volume wheel doubles as a power control.

But as with previous Astell & Kern products, the edges and corners of the SP2000's jewel-like construction are a little cutting. We'd slip on the protective, emerald leather case (included) for the sake of both your palms and the player - even if it does hide the SP2000's beauty.

LADEN WITH TECH

Astell & Kern would argue that the considerable size is necessary to achieve its technical ambition, and the SP2000 is densely packed with high-end engineering and features. It shares many features with its siblings: MQA file support; dual-band wi-fi and Bluetooth; built-in access to Spotify, Tidal, Qobuz, Amazon Music, Apple Music and Deezer apps (some come pre-loaded, some require installation); and the neat AK Connect, which turns the player into a DLNA server or renderer, with control via the AK Connect app (iOS, Android) on a smartphone or tablet.

The interface is consistent across the range, a minimalist white-on-grey affair that complements the player's physical sophistication. Playback screens are album-art heavy with info clearly displayed on the bright 5in HD touchscreen.

Naturally, though, the SP2000 justifies its flagship supremacy with exclusive advantages. It's the first of the

company's players to use separate, independent audio channels between the Unbalanced and Balanced outputs, delivering more output as a result. It also boasts more advanced DACs in its dual configuration.

Native playback is extended to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512 so the SP2000 should be able to play anything you throw at it. It should be able to store just about everything you want too, thanks to its 512GB of internal storage. That's enough for around 2000 albums, based on CD-quality FLACs. And you can expand storage further by simply popping in a microSD card up to 1TB.

From the 3700mAh battery, A&K promises eight hours of continuous playback - a figure based on CD-quality FLACs playing at around half the peak volume.

Considering the SP2000 shares a line-up with two 2019 *What Hi-Fi?*-Award-winning players, the A&futura SE100 and A&norma SR15, we aren't surprised by its performance - even if it is staggeringly good. It may be double and four times the cost of those siblings respectively, but it sounds it too.

A NEW LEVEL

The SP2000 is familiar for all the right reasons - big, transparent and refined. But there's a new level to each of those qualities that makes this unmistakably the best Astell & Kern player we've heard. Actually, it could be the best portable music player we've heard full stop. We are particularly taken with the player's openness and level of clarity and detail, which combine to make music both easy and interesting to listen to.

Play Kamasi Washington's *Askim* and the player's generous soundstage, plus the subtlety that fills it, laps up the density and intricacies of the jazz ensemble's recording. Similarly, the busy opening of Radiohead's *Reckoner* can all too easily sound like a jarring racket, but through the SP2000 there's rhythm to each of the shakers, drums and cymbals - and a wonderfully logical pattern.

We find the Focal Stellia closed-back headphones and Grado GS1000e open-backs are both matches made in heaven, despite their differing balances. But the SP2000's character should sit right with any decent pair of high-end cans, particularly those that prioritise openness and insight.

Of course, while headphones may be the predominant pairing for a music player, the SP2000 is also a system source in its own right. We hook up the SP2000 to our reference system - Burmester 088/911 Mk III amplifier and ATC SCM50 speakers - via a 3.5mm-to-RCA cable, playing songs stored on the player and from streaming services, and it holds its own. While you shouldn't expect the level of performance of a class-leading dedicated music streamer at this price, it's more than capable - its authoritative, refined nature coming to the fore.

OUT ON ITS OWN

This is a one-of-a-kind player, which is as impractically portable as it is inaccessibly priced. But as a high-end music player - both as a straight-up PMP in a desirable headphones set-up, as well as a streaming-capable source for your speaker-led hi-fi - the A&ultima SP2000 is the sort of musical and multi-talented device that's otherwise hard to come by. Forgive its weight and average battery life, and you won't be sorry you chose this fantastic-sounding device.



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BUYER'S GUIDE

The definitive guide to the best home-entertainment kit you can buy

From 65in 4K TVs to turntables, and from portable Bluetooth speakers to Dolby Atmos surround sound packages, here's where you'll find the perfect hi-fi and AV product, fast.

NEW ENTRIES THIS MONTH

This month we've got a little bit of something for everyone. There's the very best wireless speaker we've heard (somewhat inevitably, it's also one of the most expensive), ProAc's simply wonderful Response D2R standmount speakers, and another rather splendid OLED TV from Philips.



Linn Series 3 , p103
Quite simply the best wireless speaker we've ever heard

ProAc Response D2R, p96
As insightful and entertaining as any speakers we've heard at this sort of money



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8K TV: JUST AROUND THE CORNER?
There's always something new on the horizon - now it's 8K TV's turn. We give you the lowdown on the new high, high-res format on p110.

AMAZON PRIME TIPS
Amazon Prime is one of the big hitters of the video-streaming world - and getting bigger day by day. It's worth picking up some navigational tips and tricks, so we enlighten you on p118.



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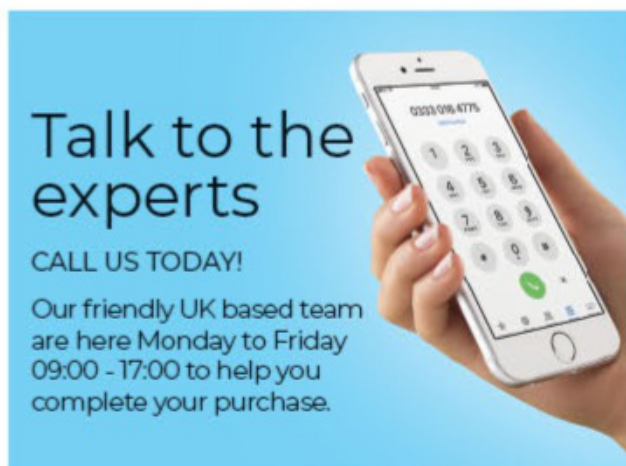
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NEW

ARCAM AVR20 • £2999

AV Receiver

The AVR20 is a high-performance audio/visual receiver that delivers stunning realism for the ultimate home cinema experience. With an impressive 7-channel surround solution and featuring all the latest CODECs from Dolby, DTS and IMAX Enhanced, the AVR20 exemplifies sound quality and engineering excellence. The design of the HDA range draws upon all of Arcam's experience and is designed and built to give you years of listening enjoyment.



NEW

DENON HOME 250 • £449

Wireless Speaker

The Denon Home 250 Wireless Speaker combines clean, modern industrial design with the latest technology and connectivity with support for gapless playback of high-resolution files including 192kHz/24-bit FLAC, WAV, ALAC and DSD 2.8/5.6MHz via Network or rear USB port. Setup is simple via the free HEOS app, which also allows for stereo pairing when you group two Denon Home products as the left and right channel of a stereo pair.



NEW

NAD Masters M33 • £3999

BluOS Streaming Amplifier

This 200W streaming amplifier features Purifi's Ultra-Quiet Amplification Technology, BluOS multi-room streaming, a 32-bit DAC, full MQA decoding and Dirac room correction. External connectivity includes six digital and two analogue inputs along with a MM or MC phono stage. Two MDC expansion slots allow for future upgrades while Dirac's Room Correction is available to optimise loudspeaker performance in any listening room.



Dirac BluOS

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£329

£449

ROTEL • CD11 / A11 • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

50-watt amplifier supporting aptX and AAC for CD quality wireless audio streaming and MM phono input. The CD11 brings musical details to life with ability beyond its modest price-point.



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MARANTZ • CD/PM6006 UK EDITION • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the highly acclaimed CD and PM6006. Enhancements have been made in sound-critical areas, giving these exclusive UK Edition models even better performance.



NEW

£1999

ARCAM • SA30 • AMPLIFIER/DAC

Arcam's SA30 is packed with features, including AirPlay 2 compatibility and state-of-the-art room correction technology.



NEW

£2199

NAIM • NAIT XS 3 • AMPLIFIER

Offers much of the performance of Naim's reference quality SUPERNAIT 3 in a simpler, slimmer package combining a 70W power amplifier with five analogue inputs plus a phono stage.

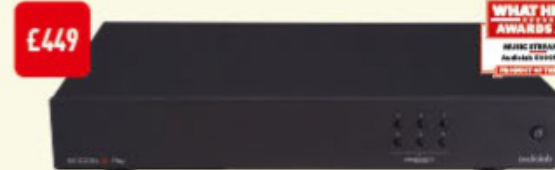


NEW

£3499

NAIM • SUPERNAIT 3 • AMPLIFIER

With significant performance upgrades, the SUPERNAIT 3 is a perfect partner for any music source including vinyl.



£449

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
WINNER
Audiolab 6000N Play
BEST STREAMER

AUDIOLAB • 6000N PLAY • STREAMER

Audiolab's 6000N Play is the ideal way to add high-performance wireless streaming to any home audio system.



£1499

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
WINNER
NAD C 658
BEST STREAMER/DAC

NAD • C 658 • STREAMER/DAC/PRE AMPLIFIER

Features Dirac Live room correction, MQA decoding and a Qualcomm aptX HD Bluetooth transmitter for wireless headphones.



£2399

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
WINNER
Naim ND5 XS 2
BEST STREAMER

NAIM • ND5 XS 2 • STREAMER

Uses Naim's innovative streaming platform with an expanded feature set including Roon compatibility and multiroom streaming.



£2199

EDITOR'S CHOICE
NAD M10
BEST ALL-IN-ONE
STREAMING SYSTEM

NAD • M10 • BLUOS STREAMING SYSTEM

The new NAD Masters M10 combines hi-res music streaming with state-of-the-art amplification to make it an all-in-one solution that will transport you to your favourite musical destination.



£2249

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
WINNER
Naim Uniti Atom
BEST ALL-IN-ONE
STREAMING SYSTEM

NAIM • UNITI ATOM • ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM

Uniti Atom is a beautiful, compact multi-source music player that is perfect as a high-end main system or for use in the kitchen or study, where space is at a premium.



ESSAV.COM

MARANTZ • MELODY X • CD/DAB/STREAMING SYSTEM

This elegant network CD receiver supports near limitless streaming platforms through AirPlay 2, Bluetooth and HEOS WiFi connectivity. (Model M-CR612)



NEW

£899

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
WINNER
Technics SL-1500C
BEST TURNTABLE

TECHNICS • SL-1500C • TURNTABLE

Direct drive turntable with integrated MM phono amp for easy connectivity. Highly acclaimed Ortofon 2M Red cartridge fitted.



£699

NAD • C 588 • TURNTABLE

Two speed belt driven turntable featuring a Carbon Fibre tonearm. Supplied with an Ortofon 2M Red cartridge pre-installed.



NEW

£699

PRO-JECT • X1 • TURNTABLE

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B&W • PX7 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

NEW

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SONY • WF-1000XM3 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

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Sony WF-1000XM3
BEST WIRELESS HEADPHONE

SONY • WH-1000XM3 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

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BOWERS & WILKINS • 702 S2
This floorstander features a wealth of state-of-the-art technologies, including a solid body Carbon Dome tweeter housing. The 702 S2 brings goose-bump-inducing clarity and detail to your home audio set-up.

£3399

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD 200

The Gold 200 is the most compact floorstander in the series combining the driver technology of the Platinum II flagship speakers and beautiful cabinetry to stunning effect.

£2899



PSB • ALPHA P3

Bookshelf speaker featuring a custom 4.5" woofer and a black anodized aluminium dome tweeter. An acoustic Butterworth low-pass filter is designed to get a perfect blend between the drivers and keep distortion at its lowest even at high volumes.

NEW £199



PMC • TWENTY5.23

Arguably the most elegant model in the range, the twenty5.23 takes the speed, transparency and sophistication of the twenty5.21 and adds greater bass extension and power. And yet its slim-line form doesn't mean it can't move you.

£3295

BOWERS & WILKINS • 805 D3

Features B&W's Diamond dome tweeter, isolated in its own solid-body tweeter assembly for precise imaging and clarity. Voices and instruments are delivered with purity and precision, thanks to the smooth, accurate Continuum™ cone mid/bass driver.

NEW £4750

Price excludes speaker stands



FOCAL ARIA 906

This 2-way loudspeaker features Focal's exclusive Flax cone, characterised by its low coloration and natural sound, coupled with Focal's inverted dome TNF tweeter. Aria is available in Black high gloss and real wood walnut veneer finishes.

£899



BOWERS & WILKINS • 606
New 600 series 2-way standmount/bookshelf speaker combining Decoupled Double Dome tweeter technology with a 6.5-inch Continuum cone mid/bass driver. Matt black or white finish.

£549

Price excludes speaker stands



KEF • R3

A true three-way speaker, the 165mm bass driver pushes bass performance to new extremes. The 125mm midrange driver and 25mm aluminium dome tweeter creates a Uni-Q array that defies the expectations from the most compact main speaker in the range.

£1299

Price excludes speaker stands



Q ACOUSTICS 3020i

These substantial speakers, with 125mm and 22mm precision drivers, can be shelf-mounted on pre-fitted rubber feet, stand or wall-mounted on optional, dedicated stands and brackets.

£249

NEW

Bowers & Wilkins FORMATION

Formation is the perfect combination of outstanding Bowers & Wilkins sound quality, ease of use and flexibility. It's the first wireless audio system that lives up to the exacting standards of Bowers & Wilkins. Exclusive Formation® Wireless Technology combines perfect speaker synchronization, a proprietary mesh network, and industry-leading 24/96 high-resolution sound. That means an immersive, seamless, wired hi-fidelity soundstage, wirelessly.



PRICES FROM £399

SONOS The Home Sound System

6 YEAR WARRANTY INCLUDED

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with warm, full-bodied sound that's crystal clear at any volume. Sonos can fill your home with music by combining HiFi sound and rock-solid wireless in a smart system that is easy to set-up, control and expand.

PRICES FROM £179



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019

Multi-room systems
Best premium multi-room system
Sonos

BLUESOUND 2i

Bluesound Generation 2i builds on the strengths and success of the Gen 2 platform and boasts several technological updates.

NODE 2i £499
Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer

POWERNODE 2i (HDMI) £799 NEW
Hi-Res Music Streamer / Amplifier

VAULT 2i £1099
Hi-Res Music Server / CD Ripper



£999



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Speakers
Best wireless speakers
KEF LSX

KEF • LSX WIRELESS • HI-RES WIRELESS SPEAKERS
From streaming to gaming, from TV to multi-room music, LSX is designed for all your home entertainment needs. Compact, elegant and incredibly versatile, LSX looks great and fits comfortably into any setting.

NEW

£749



NAIM • MU-SO Qb (2ND GEN) • HI-RES WIRELESS SPEAKER
Mu-so Qb 2nd Generation features a totally new streaming platform, as seen in Naim's flagship network-connected products, to deliver the latest music streaming technology plus true hi-fi performance.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Wireless speakers
Best hi-fi wireless speaker over £200
Naim Mu-so Qb 2nd Generation

NEW

£399



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Multi-room systems
Best premium multi-room system
Sonos

6 YEAR WARRANTY INCLUDED

SONOS MOVE • PORTABLE WIRELESS SPEAKER
Get brilliant sound anywhere with the weatherproof and drop-resistant Move. Control with your voice, the Sonos app, and Apple AirPlay 2 at home, and stream via Bluetooth outside.

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NEW

£4999

ARCAM • AVR30 • AV RECEIVER

Dolby Atmos 9.1.6 capable AV receiver that is equally at home with high resolution surround sound or two-channel music.

Also Available: ARCAM AVR20



NEW

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HEOS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019

DENON • AVR-X3600H • AV RECEIVER

9.2-channel receiver supporting Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and DTS Virtual:X. 8 HDMI inputs and 2 outputs with HDCP 2.2.

Also Available: DENON AVR-X2600H



ESSAV.COM

HEOS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019

DENON • AVC-X6500H • AV AMPLIFIER

Enjoy the most complete surround sound experience with latest audio formats Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D built-in.

Also Available: DENON AVC-X8500H



NEW

£2499

BluOS ENABLED

NAD • T 778 • AV RECEIVER

Dolby Atmos and BluOS enabled AV receiver with Hi-Res audio playback and 4K Ultra HD full support.

Also Available: NAD T 758 V3



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Chromecast built-in

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019

SONY • STR-DN1080 • AV RECEIVER

With flexible speaker solutions, DTS:X and Dolby Atmos support, the STR-DN1080 delivers mighty, cinematic surround sound.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A680



ESSAV.COM

MusicCast

YAMAHA • RX-A3080 • AV RECEIVER

9.2-channel receiver MusicCast, Dolby Atmos and DTS:X support, along with Spotify, Bluetooth, AirPlay.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1080

BLUESOUND • PULSE 2i SOUNDBAR

Not only does the PULSE 2i SOUNDBAR not require a subwoofer to get full natural sound, but it also includes BluOS, Bluesound's powerful wireless multi-room streaming music app, it's also an all-in-one music system that rivals many high-end audio systems.



£799

White Finish £899

MQA, Hi-Res Audio, Qualcomm aptX HD, Bluetooth

B&W • FORMATION BAR • SOUNDBAR

With over 50 years of performance acoustic technology built into Formation Bar experience high fidelity sound like no other wireless system. Includes 9 optimized drive units, Double Dome Tweeter and 96kHz/24-bit Audio Resolution.



NEW

£999

Hi-Res Audio, Bluetooth

SENNHEISER • AMBEO • SOUNDBAR

Sennheiser AMBEO Soundbar delivers an unparalleled sonic experience creating an 'as if there' 3D spatial experience in immersive 5.1.4 sound. DSP technology allows just two front speakers to reproduce full, cinematic sound from all around you, including from above.



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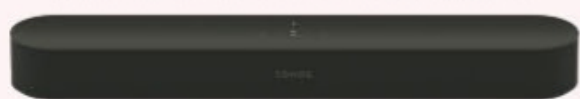
NEW

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SONOS • BEAM

SOUNDBAR WITH AMAZON ALEXA VOICE CONTROL

Experience incredible sound while streaming music, watching TV and movies, enjoying podcasts and audiobooks, or playing video games. With easyvoice control, five far-field microphones detect your voice from any direction, anywhere in the room.



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works with the Google Assistant

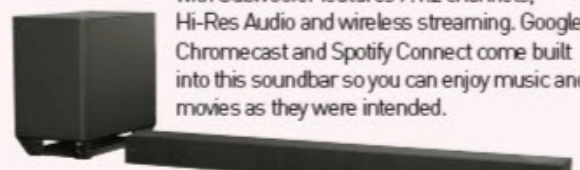
6 YEAR WARRANTY INCLUDED

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019

SONY • HT-ST5000

SOUNDBAR/SUB

The Sony HT-ST5000 Dolby Atmos Soundbar with Subwoofer features 7.1.2 channels, Hi-Res Audio and wireless streaming. Google Chromecast and Spotify Connect come built into this soundbar so you can enjoy music and movies as they were intended.



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Chromecast built-in

DOLBY ATMOS

YAMAHA • YSP-5600 • DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

3D sound reproduction equivalent to 7.1.2 channels realised using Yamaha's unique Digital Sound Projector technology to let you enjoy movies and music with thrilling 3D surround sound.



£999

SAVE £700

MusicCast

DOLBY ATMOS



CX-A5200
AV PROCESSOR
£2649

MX-A5200
11-CHANNEL POWER AMPLIFIER
£2849

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Purchase the CX-A5200 and MX-A5200 together and Save £1000 when you trade-in your old AV amplifier

OFFER AVAILABLE IN-STORE ONLY



Experience the future of home cinema with the 11.2-channel CX-A5200 AVENTAGE AV Processor and MX-A5200 Power Amplifier. Features include Yamaha's renowned CINEMA DSP HD3 combined with Dolby Atmos and DTS:X to deliver an exhilarating home cinema experience.



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B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PV1D subwoofer. Matt black or white.



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Q ACOUSTICS • 3010i CINEMA PACK

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Relax with a TV that adapts to give you the very best 4K picture, targeted sound and personalised TV recommendations. Experience a smarter way to watch and enjoy TV. Save time searching with intuitive voice assistance and control your compatible smart devices and home appliances from the comfort of your sofa.

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FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K HDR

Also Available

55 77

SONY

KD-49XG9005 • 49" 4K UHD LED TV



FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K HDR

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
TV
Best 55-59in TV under £1000
Sony KD-49XG9005

LG OLED TV AI ThinQ

OLED55C9PLA • 55" OLED 4K UHD TV

Step into the wonder of LG OLED. LG C9 combines a cinema screen design with AI brilliance for a TV like no other. Experience films in a new level of immersion using the power of AI to automatically enhance the stunning 4K HDR picture and DOLBY ATMOS audio. And with the ability to control Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant from your TV, you can truly set the scene at home for your favourite show with a single command.

Also Available

65 77 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
TV
Best 55-59in TV over £1000
LG OLED55C9PLA

Panasonic

TX-58GX800 • 58" 4K UHD LED TV

The GX800 features much of Panasonic's best picture tech at a great price. With Panasonic's HXC picture processor, this slim-line design 4K LED TV features HDR Bright Panel Plus to make sure the picture reveals every detail of 4K resolution. Dolby Vision and HDR10+ Dynamic Metadata means you get the best from UHD Blu-ray discs and 4K video streaming services. Dolby Atmos sound transports you into the story - add a compatible soundbar for best results.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

HDR

Also Available

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
TV
Best 55-59in TV under £1000
Panasonic TX-58GX800

ULTRAHD
Blu-ray

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PANASONIC • DP-UB9000 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER
4K UHD Blu-ray player supporting HDR10+, Dolby Vision HDR, Alexa and Google Assistant voice control (via a future software update), and 7.1 channel audio.

ULTRAHD
Blu-ray

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Best 4K UHD Blu-ray player under £1000
Panasonic DP-UB9000

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PANASONIC • DP-UB820 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER
The DP-UB820 faithfully reproduces the director's intended images. Unique chroma processing technology maximises the beauty of 4K HDR content.

ULTRAHD
Blu-ray

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Best 4K UHD Blu-ray player under £1000
Pioneer UDP-LX500

£999



PIONEER • UDP-LX500 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER
Designed to satisfy videophiles and audiophiles alike, the UDP-LX500 offers state of the art playback of both Ultra HD Blu-rays and SACDs.

ULTRAHD
Blu-ray

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2019
Best 4K UHD Blu-ray player under £1000
Sony UBP-X700

£199



SONY • UBP-X700 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER
Find yourself at the heart of every movie and series. 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray shows everything in finer detail than ever before, so you feel like you're seeing the real thing.

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PROJECTORS
Sony VPL-VW270ES



£4999

SONY • VPL-VW270ES • 4K SXRD PROJECTOR
A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.



£1399

OPTOMA • UHD51 • 4K DLP PROJECTOR
The UHD51 delivers the ultimate in home entertainment with impressive 4K cinema quality images. Enjoy excellent colour depth, crystal clear detail, and high contrast for a stunningly immersive experience.

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73b North Street, GU1 4AW

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Reading 01189 477093
Caversham House, 15 Church Road, RG4 7AA

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Swiss Cottage 020 7722 9560
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THE BEATING HEART OF YOUR HI-FI SYSTEM

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Onkyo A-9010 £229

Best stereo amplifier under £300, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

Our favourite budget amplifier, this is arguably the most entertaining affordable amp around. It is agile and has a wicked sense of rhythm.

Power 44W **Inputs** Line-in x5, MM **Outputs** Headphone



Marantz PM6006 UK Edition £369

Best stereo amplifier under £400, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

An already class-leading amplifier gets a few small, but telling, improvements that make it an even more compelling proposition.

Power 45W **Inputs** Line-in x4, MM, coaxial, optical x2 **Outputs** Headphone



NAD D 3020 V2 £399

September 2018 ★★★★★

A very likeable effort that features a full-bodied sonic performance with fine timing and dynamics and lots of useful features.

Power 30W **Inputs** Line-in, MM, optical, coaxial, BT **Outputs** Headphone



Audiolab 6000A £599

December 2018 ★★★★★

An extremely well-featured amplifier – it even has Bluetooth – that impresses with superb clarity, refinement, and a big, airy soundstage.

Power 50W **Inputs** Line-in x3, MM, optical, coaxial **Outputs** Headphone



Cambridge Audio CXA61 £750

Best stereo amplifier £400-£750, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Justifies the price premium over the Audiolab 6000A and the Rega Brio by delivering a superior combination of sonic ability features and build quality

Power 60W **Inputs** Line-in x4 **Outputs** Preamp, speaker x2, headphone



Rega Brio £599

Best stereo amplifier £400-£700, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

An upgrade on the Brio-R, this incredibly talented stereo amplifier offers a sound that's subtle, precise and engaging.

Power 50W **Inputs** Line-in x4, MM **Outputs** 6.3mm headphone, record



Musical Fidelity M2si £799

September 2019 ★★★★★

It doesn't have the feature list of many of its rivals, but the M2si counters with an impressively refined and entertaining performance

Power 76W **Inputs** Line-in x5 **Outputs** Preamp, tape loop



Rega Elex-R £949

Best stereo amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Arguably the best-value amp Rega makes, with insight and a precise handling of rhythms that's hard to better even at double the price.

Power 72W **Inputs** Line-in x4, MM **Outputs** Preamp



Stereo amps up to £500

£500 to £1000

£1000 to £2000

Naim Nait 5si £1099

January 2015 ★★★★★

Naim's starter amp is an exceptionally polished performer which combines drama with the insight and subtlety to match the very best.

Power 60W **Inputs** Line-in x3 **Outputs** Headphone



Cambridge Audio CXA81 £999

Best stereo amplifier £750-£1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Class leaders are constantly being replaced in hi-fi – but rarely is it done so soundly as by Cambridge Audio's CXA81 integrated amplifier

Power 80W **Inputs** Line-in x4, XLR, USB **Outputs** Pre, sub, headphone

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



Moon 240i £1990

Best stereo amplifier £1500-£2500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A gorgeous piece of kit that puts in a stunningly revealing and dynamic performance. The Moon 240i is in a class of its own.

Power 50W **Inputs** Line-in x2, MM, optical x2, coaxial x2 **Outputs** 3.5mm



£2000 to £5000

Naim Nait XS 3 £2199

Best stereo amplifier £1500-£2500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A fit and forget product in the best sense, the Nait XS 3 slots into your system and does just what you want – delivers music with emotional impact intact.

Power 70W **Inputs** Line-in x4 **Outputs** Preamp, headphone

AWARD WINNER



Roksan Caspian M2 £2000

October 2013 ★★★★★

A supremely rounded product with solid build, classy aesthetics and a brilliant all-round sound that works well with all types of music.

Power 85W **Inputs** Line-in x5 **Outputs** Preamp



Roksan Blak £2799

Best stereo amplifier £2500+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A well equipped all-rounder with a powerful and energetic sound.

It's happy to work with a wide range of systems and musical genres too.

Power 150W **Inputs** Balanced XLR, line-in x3, MM, USB, aptX Bluetooth



Naim Supernait 3 £3499

Best stereo amplifier over £2500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

In adding a good-quality MM phono stage and tweaking the power amp section, Naim has made a great amplifier even better

Power 80W **Inputs** Line-in x5, MM, XLR **Outputs** Subwoofer, headphone

AWARD WINNER



£5000 and above

Leema Tucana II Anniversary Edition £4995

March 2017 ★★★★★

It looks no different to its 2010 incarnation, but this remains a top-class amp that works across a wide range of systems and music.

Power 150W **Inputs** Line-in x7 **Outputs** Preamp



Luxman L-509X £8500

June 2018 ★★★★★

Much more than an expensive retro throwback; its blend of build, features and performance is hard to better at this price.

Power 120W **Inputs** Line-in x6 **Outputs** Headphone, preamp



Audio Research GSi75 £14,998

April 2017 ★★★★★

This can stand toe-to-toe with the finest pre/power combos at this price; it's a well equipped one-box solution for high-end purists.

Power 75W **Inputs** Line-in x3, MM, MC, USB **Outputs** Headphone



Aesthetix Janus Signature/Atlas Signature £20,000

January 2015 ★★★★★

It costs a lot, but this Atlas combo is exquisite, with class-leading resolution, refinement and composure. Great phono stage, too.

Power output 200W **Mono/Stereo** **Stereo Inputs** Phono, XLR x6

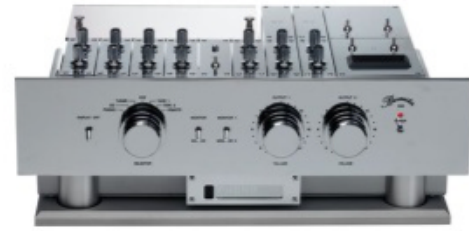


Burmester 808 MK5 £28,000

February 2013 ★★★★★

Burmester's masterpiece may be decades old but a string of upgrades have kept it relevant. Sound quality remains exceptional.

Inputs Line-in, MM, MC (optional) **Outputs** Balanced, single-ended



Nagra Classic Pre/Power amp £29,000

August 2018 ★★★★★

Rivals have more muscle, but once in full flow the Nagra lets the music take centre stage. One of the finest pre/powers money can buy.

Power 100W **Inputs** Line-in x5, phono, XLR



Preamp and power amps

CD PLAYERS & TRANSPORTS

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Cambridge CXC £299

Awards 2015 ★★★★★

If you already have a DAC (the CXC is useless without one) we wouldn't hesitate in recommending this transport over a standalone CD player.

Type CD transport **Outputs** Coaxial, optical



Marantz CD6006 UK Edition £349

Best CD player under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The king of the budget market. The CD6006UK shows plenty of skill with detail, dynamics and clarity. A great player for the money.

Type CD player **Outputs** Line-out, coaxial, optical, headphone, USB

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR



Cyrus CD t £895

Awards 2015 ★★★★★

An exceptionally talented transport, the CD t offers a level of insight, transparency and clarity you'd struggle to find elsewhere at this price.

Type CD transport **Outputs** Coaxial, optical



Naim CD5si £1149

October 2014 ★★★★★

The CD5si boasts a full-bodied, winningly enthusiastic approach to music. The absence of digital outputs means there's no upgrade path.

Type CD player **Outputs** Line-out, DIN



Cyrus CDi £1195

Best CD player £500+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Cyrus says this player is its best-sounding yet, and after listening to how confident and entertaining it sounds, it's hard to disagree.

Type CD player **Outputs** Line-out, coaxial, optical

AWARD
WINNER



Cyrus CD Xt Signature £1895

May 2015 ★★★★★

A top-class CD transport (you'll need to add an external DAC), this Cyrus has layers of dynamics, precise timing, and an expansive soundstage.

Type CD transport **Outputs** Coaxial, optical



Up to £1000

£1000 to £2000

£2000 and above

Roksan Caspian M2 CD £1999**Awards 2010 ★★★★★**

The Caspian M2 CD has been around the block and is showing few signs of its age but it still combines skill with timing, dynamics and authority.

Type CD player **Outputs** Line-out, coaxial, optical, USB, XLR

**Marantz SA-10 £5999****April 2018 ★★★★★**

One of the best digital source components around. Its unfussy disposition allows it to sound at home across a wide range of systems.

Type CD player **Outputs** Coaxial, optical

**Chord Blu MkII £7995****January 2018 ★★★★★**

The most informative and enjoyable sound we've heard from the CD format. Partner it with the DAVE and we doubt you can do better.

Type CD transport **Outputs** Coaxial x2 **Inputs** Coaxial, USB

**DACs**

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Up to £200

Cyrus soundKey £99**Best DAC under £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

An affordable, compact DAC that turns mobile listening into an authentic high-fidelity experience. iOS users may find connectivity a little inelegant.

Size 2 x 5 x 1cm **Resolution** 24-bit/96kHz

**AWARD
WINNER****Audiolab M-DAC nano £149****Best DAC £100-£200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

If you've got a good pair of wired headphones and want to improve your sound on the move, the Audiolab M-DAC nano makes a mighty strong case.

Inputs Bluetooth 4.2 **Size** 44 x 44 x 14mm **Res** 32-bit/384kHz

**AWARD
WINNER****AudioQuest DragonFly Cobalt £269****Best DAC £200-£300, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

If you loved the DragonFly Red and you're looking to make the next step up without compromising on size or form, this is something of a no-brainer

Size 6 x 2 x 1cm **Resolution** 24-bit/96kHz

**AWARD
WINNER**

£200 to £1000

Chord Mojo £399**Best DAC under £300-£500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

The majority of the Hugo's performance for a fraction of the price. An enthusiastic performer that stays refined and superbly balanced.

Inputs Coaxial, optical, USB **Size** 2 x 6 x 8cm **Res** 32-bit/768kHz, DSD 512

**AWARD
WINNER****Audiolab M-DAC+ £695****August 2016 ★★★★★**

Audiolab's follow up to the M-DAC gets a great deal right with a sound that's neat, tidy and expansive. The M-DAC+ demands your attention.

Inputs Coaxial x2, optical x2 **Size** 11 x 25 x 29cm **Res** 32-bit/384kHz

£1000 to
£3000**Chord Qutest £1195****Best DAC £500-£1200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

As with the 2Qute, the Qutest is a superior DAC which sets a new benchmark at this price with its clear and precise performance.

Inputs Coax x2, opt, USB **Size** 4 x 16 x 7cm **Res** 32-bit/768kHz PCM, DSD512

**PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR**

Chord Hugo 2 £1799**Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

The Hugo 2 has a hefty price tag but, at this level, there isn't another DAC near that can communicate so unambiguously or so effortlessly.

Inputs Coax, opt, USB, BT **Size** 2 x 10 x 13cm **Res** 32-bit/768kHz

**Copland DAC 215 £2098****January 2017 ★★★★★**

A versatile DAC that can be used as a preamp. This understated effort is hugely talented and has an open, clean and precise presentation.

Inputs Line-in, coaxial, opt, USB **Size** 12 x 20 x 28cm **Res** 32-bit/384kHz

**Chord DAVE £7995****Awards 2016 ★★★★★**

The uniquely-named DAVE costs a lot, but we'd argue it's the best DAC money can buy. Build quality is excellent and the sound is very special.

Inputs Coaxial x2, opt x2, XLR **Size** 6 x 34 x 15cm **Res** 32-bit/768kHz

**dCS Rossini DAC/Rossini Master Clock £22,608****July 2018 ★★★★★**

An expensive DAC/clock combination that justifies its price tag with a performance of exceptional detail, organisation and fine dynamics.

Inputs Coaxial x2, opt x2, USB x2 **Res** 24-bit/384kHz

**Nagra HD DAC/MPS £23,600****September 2018 ★★★★★**

An effort that boasts a natural, fluid and informative sound. If you're in the market for the ultimate DAC, this would certainly be a frontrunner.

Inputs Coax x2, opt, AES/EBU x2, USB **Res** 24-bit/384kHz



£1000 to £3000

£3000 and above

How to digitize your vinyl collection

Read more at...
www.whathifi.com/features



Turntables might not be cutting-edge tech, but for their look and feel – not to mention thrillingly articulate analogue sound – you can't beat them. The only thing your record collection lacks is portability, but there is a way to take those LPs with you wherever you go...

What do you need?

The basic building blocks are: a turntable, a phono stage, an analogue-to-digital converter with USB output, and a computer with suitable recording software. There are turntables that come with a phono stage, analogue-to-digital converter and USB output built in. However, most are at the budget end and focus on getting the job done rather than doing it particularly well.

Your recordings won't necessarily reflect the quality of sound possible from your records, though Audio Technica's AT-LP5 and Sony PS-HX500 vinyl-ripping decks do their best to buck that trend. If you already have a turntable, the best option is to buy a decent USB phono stage. We like the £90 Rega Fono Mini A2D and Pro-Ject also produce decent affordable alternatives.

Recording software

Channel D's Pure Vinyl offers a great deal of flexibility. It features built-in phono equalisation, so you can feed the turntable's output straight into the computer without needing a phono stage in the signal path. There are also powerful editing functions that aid optimisation. The downside is a price of around £250 once the trial period is over.

A more affordable alternative is VinylStudio. This includes many of the features of Pure Vinyl, and costs around £20. Another option is Audacity. It's free and does a good enough job. While the interface looks complicated and some of the editing functions take a while to figure out, spend some time with it and it will become familiar enough.

Patience is a virtue

Before you start, make sure your deck is working optimally as that will aid a better recording. Is the cartridge tip free from fluff? Are the tracking force and bias adjusted correctly? Simple checks like these can help. Vinyl can be recorded only in real time. If a song lasts five minutes, that's how long it will take. Make sure the player isn't jostled during the recording, and keep the playback volume low to reduce any degradation of sound caused by

feedback from the speakers. Make sure your records are spotless. Any hisses, clicks and pops will be recorded. You can buy software to edit such sounds but it's time-consuming and processing could spoil the recording.

It's all in the details

Storage is affordable, so we'd be tempted to go down the high-resolution route: 24-bit/96kHz is the norm for many studios and seems a good compromise between quality and memory space. It doesn't really matter whether it's WAV, AIFF or FLAC files as long as it's compatible with what you normally use. Records don't have metadata built in such as album art and track information, so that data has to be manually entered. The process is fairly tedious, but it makes it easy to locate tracks. Your computer won't recognise individual tracks, so you'll have to stop recording when you've finished ripping each one and mark tracks that flow into each other.



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£100

Google Chromecast Audio £30

Best music streamer under £100, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

Google turns its expertise to audio streaming to bring music from any Cast-compatible app to your amps and speakers for a super-low price.

Inputs Line-in, 3.5mm, optical



£100 to £500

Audiolab 6000N Play £449

Best music streamer under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A great, affordable way to implement streaming into your system without compromising sonic quality. The best budget solution we've seen...

Outputs Line-in, coaxial, optical, subwoofer

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR



Bluesound Node 2i £499

Best music streamer under £500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Even better than before, this large-scaled, well timed Bluesound has sensational streaming skills and features for the money.

Outputs Line-in, coaxial, optical, subwoofer



£500 to
£1000

Cambridge CXN V2 £799

Best music streamer £500-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

All the success of the classy CXN streamer, with added Google Chromecast. Great design, features set and performance.

Inputs Coaxial, optical, USB x2

AWARD
WINNER



Cambridge Audio Azur 851N £1399

Best music streamer £1000-£1500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A sterling streamer that boasts excellent file support, plenty of connections and a sound that's both expressive and dynamic.

Inputs Coaxial x2, optical x2, USB x3



NAD C 658 £1499

Best music streamer £1000-£1500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

One of the most fully furnished, future-proofed and intuitive streamers we've come across – and one of the most convincing performers at this price.

Inputs Coaxial, optical, USB, phono, RCA

AWARD
WINNER



£1000 to £5000

Moon Neo MiND £1799

Best music streamer £1500+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

An elegant performer that delivers the kind of musical finesse we rarely hear at this price. You'll need to factor in the cost of a DAC.

Outputs Coaxial, optical, AES/EBU



Naim ND5 XS 2 £2299

Best music streamer over £1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Naim's 'entry-level' network streamer? Fear not; if this is the best your system ever sounds, you'll be doing your ears mighty proud

Inputs USB, ethernet **Outputs** Line-out, DIN, coaxial, optical

AWARD
WINNER



Technics SL-G700 £2350

February 2020 ★★★★★

A high quality digital source that covers all the bases – including CD and SACD to go along with its terrific streaming smarts.

Inputs Coaxial, optical **Outputs** Line-out, balanced, coaxial, optical



Cambridge Audio Edge NQ £3500

March 2019 ★★★★★

A truly fantastic streaming preamp that has a clear, bold and spacious presentation across all its many inputs. And it looks good, too.

Inputs Line-in x2, balanced XLR, coaxial, optical x2, HDMI, USB x2, BT

£1000
to £5000**Moon 390 £4750**

February 2019 ★★★★★

A well connected streaming preamp that's uncluttered in design and use, and sounds terrifically dynamic, refined and engaging.

Inputs Line-in, MM/MC, balanced XLR, coaxial, optical, AES/EBU, HDMI x4

**Linn Selekt DSM £5250**

Reviewed online, 2019 ★★★★★

If you're looking for a top-end one-box electronics solution, this is a good place to start. Its modular approach to high quality sound is admirable.

Inputs Line-in, MM, MC, coaxial x2, optical x2, HDMI, USB, AirPlay



£5000 and above

Burmester Musiccenter 151 £14,500

August 2015 ★★★★★

This multi-talented machine is a streamer, server, CD player and ripper, all wrapped in one superbly made chrome-laden box.

Inputs USB x5 **Outputs** Line-out, balanced XLR, coaxial, optical

**Linn Klimax DS3 £15,800**

February 2017 ★★★★★

If you want the finest-sounding music streamer on the market and aren't afraid of the heavyweight price, then invest your money here.

Outputs Balanced and single-ended XLR

**RADIOS**

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whf.cm/BBInternetRadiosView offers
whf.cm/BBDABRadios**Pure Evoke H2 £89**

Best radio under £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Pure's latest radio is similar to its previous incarnation, but more refined. The H2 improves on the D2's already sophisticated sound.

Battery Optional **Size (hwd)** 18 x 12 x 12cm **Inputs** 3.5mm

AWARD
WINNER

"There's no doubt the Pure Evoke H2 is an upgrade over the D2"

Roberts Stream 94i £189

Best radio over £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Sets the bar even higher than its predecessor, adding Bluetooth without compromising its sound and offering plenty of features.

Battery Optional **Size (hwd)** 26 x 17 x 13cm **Inputs** 3.5mm, USB, BT, wi-fi

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR

"The Stream 94i is the complete package, making it the best radio at this price"

Roberts Revival iStream 3 £200

Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★

A lengthy features list – DAB/FM/internet radio, Bluetooth, Spotify, Tidal – under that vintage design makes for an appealing radio for the price.

Battery Yes **Size (hwd)** 16 x 26 x 11cm **Inputs** 3.5mm, USB, BT, wi-fi



"It has a warm, welcoming character, with focus on a rich midrange that celebrates vocals"

Revo SuperConnect £300

Best radio £200+, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

Not just a radio, this feature-packed Revo is a streaming music player that will play just about anything from nearly any source.

Battery No **Size (hwd)** 18 x 27 x 12cm **Inputs** 3.5mm, Bluetooth, wi-fi



"Design, ease of use, and sound quality – the Revo has it all"

Up to £200

£200 and above



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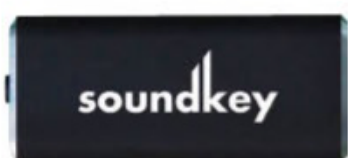
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WHAT HI-FI?
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AWARDS 2019

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Richer Sounds exclusive

Cambridge Audio network streamer
CXN V2 (lunar grey)

£799

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AWARDS 2019

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Choice

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**VIP
EXCLUSIVE**

£200 OFF speakers over
£600 with this amp. Available
in-store or via Telesales.

Richer Sounds exclusive

Cambridge Audio amplifier
CXA81 (lunar grey)

£999

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2019

Trusted
Reviews

6 Year Supercare Guarantee £99.90



VIP EXCLUSIVE PRICE

Cyrus streaming system / CD player
THREE (Stealth)

£1199

SAVE
£300

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customer rating

RRP £1499 | Non-VIP price £1299
6 Year Supercare Guarantee 10% of purchase price



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AWARDS 2019**

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Standmounts up to £200

Dali Spektor 1 £159

March 2018 ★★★★★

A small speaker that inherits all the Spektor 2's good traits, pumping out an energetic and entertaining sound for an affordable price.

Size (hwd) 24 x 14 x 20cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2



"If you're looking for really small budget speakers, buy these"

Dali Spektor 2 £199

Best standmount speaker under £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The 2s combine Dali's traditional strengths with a generous dose of entertainment that even Mission and Q Acoustics struggle to match.

Size (hwd) 17 x 28 x 28cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2



"The way these speakers handle dynamics is impressive"

Q Acoustics 3010i £199

July 2018 ★★★★★

The revamped bookshelf speaker has gained sonic maturity – greater detail, more energy, and good balance even if they're not the biggest-sounding pair.

Size (hwd) 25 x 15 x 25cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4



"This measured yet fun approach is enough to inspire fervent foot-tapping"

Elac Debut B5.2 £250

Best standmount speaker £200-£400, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

ELAC's latest budget standmounter is talented enough to worry the established competition.

Size (hwd) 34 x 18 x 23cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 1



"These new Debuts should be considered one of the company's finest efforts"

Monitor Audio Bronze 2 £250

Best standmount speaker £200-£400, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

For their size, these Monitor Audio Bronze 2s dig unusually deep in the bass. They're tonally balanced and impressively detailed too.

Size (hwd) 35 x 19 x 26cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 4



"Hugely talented performers, but it takes a little while to appreciate how good they are"

Dali Oberon 1 £349

February 2019 ★★★★★

About the size of a shoe, these articulate and bold-sounding speakers have a wonderfully unfussy nature and are a joy to listen to.

Size (hwd) 27 x 16 x 23cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4



"Tonally, these are nicely judged and have a smooth treble that still has plenty of bite"

B&W 607 £399

April 2019 ★★★★★

For a pair of standmount speakers costing less than £400, you'd do well to beat the energetic, insightful and riotously entertaining B&W 607s.

Size (hwd) 30 x 17 x 23cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 2



"Their energy and enthusiasm is ceaseless, their aim only to make us happy, as long as we keep feeding them"

Mission QX-2 £399

Best standmount speaker £350-£500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

These chunky speakers are hugely enjoyable. Fantastic rhythmic drive and terrific insight (and great finish) make them the best you can buy under £500.

Size (hwd) 32 x 22 x 31cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4



"These boxes are fun, with a lovely energetic character that takes a grip of the listener and refuses to let go"

KEF Q350 £499

Best standmount speaker £500-£750, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

KEF has delivered a speaker that's a cut above the rest, with a sophisticated, insightful presentation that belies its modest price.

Size (hwd) 36 x 21 x 31cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2



"The Q350s display a level of clarity and subtlety unheard of at this price"

£200 to £500

B&W 606 £549**Best standmount speaker £400-£750, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

An upbeat, entertaining, brilliantly balanced sound from a beautifully made pair of speakers. These B&Ws are the ones to beat at this price.

Size (hwd) 35 x 19 x 34cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2**PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR**

"Notes stop and start with snappy precision, which only helps keep our toes tapping"

Dynaudio Emit M20 £599**Awards 2016 ★★★★★**

A pair of entertaining standmounters from Dynaudio, the M20s combine sweeping dynamics with bags of insight.

Size (hwd) 36 x 22 x 27cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2

"Unlike some speakers that favour certain music genres, the Emit 20s are game for everything"

Revel Concerta2 M16 £999**Best standmount speaker £750-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

One of the best speakers we've ever heard below the £1000 mark. Make sure to partner carefully to get the best out of them.

Size (hwd) 37 x 22 x 27cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2**AWARD
WINNER**

"They pound out crescendos with relish, refusing to harden or compress, even at high volume"

Acoustic Energy AE1 Active £1000**June 2018 ★★★★★**

Active speakers that deliver punch, drive and rhythmic ability. They outperform plenty of more expensive hi-fi components.

Size (hwd) 30 x 19 x 25cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 3 **Active** Yes

"Simply put, these AE1s do everything they do with a flourish"

KEF R3 £1299**Best standmount speaker £1000-£2000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

These KEFs are exceptional. Knocking out the ATCs (below) to take home an Award, these are the most complete speakers at this price. Stunning.

Size (hwd) 42 x 20 x 34cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 3**AWARD
WINNER**

"The KEFs capture the natural acoustic of the recording superbly"

ATC SCM11 (2013) £1300**Best standmount speaker £1200-£2000, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

One of the most talented standmounters we've ever heard, the transparency of their sound compares to far more expensive rivals.

Size (hwd) 38 x 21 x 25cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 2

"When it comes to speakers, there are few better ways to spend your money"

Dynaudio Xeo 10 £1300**March 2019 ★★★★★**

Pricy, but these versatile active speakers offer fantastic sound that isn't compromised by convenience.

Size (hwd) 26 x 17 x 15cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2 **Active** Yes

"For small speakers, they sure belt out a large and spacious soundstage."

Totem Sky £1799**August 2017 ★★★★★**

A hugely enjoyable listen, delivering one of the most musically convincing presentations we've heard anywhere near this price.

Size (hwd) 31 x 16 x 23cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 3

"These Totems excel at communicating the changing momentum of a song"

ATC SCM19 £2150**Awards 2016 ★★★★★**

It's quite a trick for a speaker to be highly analytical with music, yet never sound clinical or passionless. But that's the case with the SCM19s.

Size (hwd) 44 x 27 x 30cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2

"We like the SCM19s' ability to render a large soundstage and populate it with well focused instruments"

Dynaudio Special Forty £2500**Best standmount speaker £2000+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

When paired with talented electronics, these standmounters will shine, offering a confident, muscular and subtle sound. Lots of fun.

Size (hwd) 36 x 20 x 32cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2**AWARD
WINNER**

"They sound far bigger and more authoritative than a 36cm-high speaker has any right to"

£500 to £1000

£1000 to £2000

£2000 and above

£2000 and above

ProAc Response D2R £3295**February 2020 ★★★★★**

Wonderfully transparent, yet never overly analytical, these ProAc's excel at giving the music the limelight. We can't ask for any more than that.

Size (hwd) 43 x 21 x 26cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 6



"The Response D2Rs are wonderfully expressive speakers, even at low volumes"

Spendor Classic 2/3 £3295**August 2018 ★★★★★**

They have their predecessor's easy-going nature, as well as the punch and rhythmic precision to work well with a wide range of music.

Size (hwd) 54 x 27 x 34cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 2



"We can't think of a better all-round alternative at this price level"

KEF Reference 1 £4999**July 2018 ★★★★★**

These are superb all-rounders that work well across a wide range of music, systems and rooms. The dedicated stands are pricey though.

Size (hwd) 44 x 21 x 43cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 3



"Rather than excel in a few specific areas, they perform well across the board"

Desktop speakers

Ruark Audio MR1 Mk2 £329**Best desktop speaker, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Gorgeous retro design and superb sound make the Mk2s an update that manages to be even more appealing than its predecessor.

Size (hwd) 17 x 13 x 14cm **Powered** Yes **Finishes** 1



"Quite simply, these are superb speakers of their type"

Fyne Audio F302 £399**Best floorstander under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

The superlative F302s' full-bodied presentation and low-end presence make this another easy recommendation for this brand.

Size (hwd) 93 x 19 x 27cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 3



"A speaker that belies its reasonable price tag at every turn"

Floorstanders up to £800

Elac Debut 2.0 F5.2 £599**September 2019 ★★★★★**

A mature, honest presentation, neither sucking the life out of a piece, nor exaggerating it. Elac is one of the few companies to do this with such aplomb

Size (hwd) 100 x 18 x 23cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 1



"These Elacs can go low, but there is a bass clarity beyond the grasp of most floorstanders at this price"

Q Acoustics 3050i £649**Best floorstander £400-£800, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

These punchy and entertaining floorstanders are an improvement on their predecessors. They're well built and flexible about positioning, too.

Size (hwd) 102 x 31 x 31cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4



"The Q Acoustics have the subtlety to pick out textures and discern dynamics without combing over intricacies"

Dali Oberon 5 £699**Best floorstander £500-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

A great option for floorstanders under £1000, these Dalis are fun-sounding speakers, with a great dose of transparency that's impressive for the price.

Size (hwd) 83 x 16 x 28cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4



"The Dali's sound simply flows in an organic and convincing manner"

£800 to £1000

Acoustic Energy AE309 £999**August 2019 ★★★★★**

These are simply a fun, well-rounded pair of floorstanders that are as likeable as anything we've heard for less than a grand.

Size (hwd) 90 x 17.5 x 28cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 3



"It's in the way everything hangs together; each piece of music is effortlessly whole"

Monitor Audio Silver 200 £999**Best floorstander £800-£1200, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

The latest generation of Silver speakers bring a sense of fun that was lacking in previous efforts. They are great all-round performers.

Size (hwd) 88 x 16 x 24cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 6



"A very mature performance, marked by rhythmic and instrumental organisation as well as balance."

Fyne Audio F501 £1199

Best floorstander £1000-£1500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Another thrillingly accomplished effort from Fyne. Partner them well and they'll deliver a detailed, revealing and confident sound.

Size (hwd) 98 x 20 x 32cm Bi-wire Yes Finishes 2



"The F501s are an extremely confident calling-card"

Wharfedale Evo 4.4 £1199

Best floorstanding speaker £1000-£1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The Evo 4.4s are entertaining and detailed, with enough in the way of refinement to make them an excellent long-term choice.

Size (hwd) 106 x 25 x 35cm Bi-wire Yes Finishes 3



"Tying everything together is a fine sense of timing that results in surefooted rhythms"

B&W 603 £1249

June 2019 ★★★★★

The B&W 603s are floorstanding speakers that are up there with the best at this price. You should give them a whirl...

Size (hwd) 98.5 x 19 x 34cm Bi-wire Yes Finishes 2



"They are blessed with a wow factor that other speakers at this price can only dream of, especially with voices"

Neat Iota Alpha £1470

Best floorstander £1200-£2000, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

If you want fuss-free floorstanders that don't dominate the room, there are few better alternatives than this entertaining effort from Neat.

Size (hwd) 45 x 20 x 16cm Bi-wire No Finishes 4



"A surprisingly spacious presentation that wouldn't be out of place in rivals twice the height"

Revel Concerta2 F35 £1899

May 2019 ★★★★★

There aren't many speakers at this price that make listening to music as enjoyable as the Revel Concerta2 F35s

Size (hwd) 102 x 21 x 31cm Bi-wire No Finishes 2



"It's impressive how effortless the Revels sound. They dispatch any genre you throw their way with minimal fuss"

ProAc Response DT8 £1999

Best floorstander £1500-£2000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The DT8s deliver such an entertaining sound, we can't help but recommend them. Take a bit of care with system-matching and they will impress.

Size (hwd) 98 x 20 x 23cm Bi-wire Yes Finishes 5 (plus 2 specials)



"The DT8s paint on an expansive sonic canvas, and locate instruments with precision and stability"

Spendor A7 £3200

Best floorstanders £2000+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

The A7s continue Spendor's knack for combining precision, clarity and subtlety with hugely enjoyable dynamics and rhythm.

Size (hwd) 94 x 18 x 31cm Bi-wire No Finishes 4



"The sound is terrifically clean and organised. The A7s also pack in bags of punch to keep things sounding lively"

Floorstanders £1000 - £2000

£2000 to £5000

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PMC Twenty5.23 £3295**Awards 2016 ★★★★★**

PMC has created a terrific pair of floorstanding speakers. Match them with a suitably talented system and they will sing.

Size (hwd) 91 x 16 x 33cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4

"If you're looking for top-class floorstanders, we can't think of a better alternative"

Neat Iota Xplorer £3495**September 2018 ★★★★★**

The Xplorers are another odd-looking pair of speakers from Neat, but they have a way of delivering music that's truly spellbinding.

Size (hwd) 74 x 30 x 22cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 4

"If it's all about the music for you, as opposed to absolute sonic transparency, give these Neats a serious listen"

Q Acoustics Concept 500 £3999**January 2018 ★★★★★**

One of the most impressive high-end speakers we've heard in recent years, these offer insight, great bass and wide-ranging dynamics.

Size (hwd) 115 x 40 x 35cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 2

"Capable of a performance that strongly challenges alternatives up to twice the price"

Sonus Faber Venere S £4998**March 2017 ★★★★★**

There are more analytical alternatives available, but few deliver music in such an appealing manner. Impressively musical.

Size (hwd) 124 x 39 x 48cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 3

"There are few speakers that manage to deliver music in such an appealing manner"

Audiovector SR3 Avantgarde £6320**January 2019 ★★★★★**

These floorstanders match their impressive price with impressive sound. They demonstrate a good deal of organisation, stunning clarity and real punch.

Size (hwd) 103 x 19 x 33cm **Bi-wire** Tri-wire **Finishes** 8

"Importantly, they're subtle, conveying nuances with skill"

ATC SCM40A £6800**April 2014 ★★★★★**

The price looks steep but factor in built-in amplification and exceptional sound, and the SCM40As emerge as something of a high-end bargain.

Size (hwd) 98 x 37 x 34cm **Bi-wire** No **Finishes** 2 **Active** Yes

"Once up and running, these ATCs are deeply impressive speakers"

JBL K2 S9900 £44,000**Best Temptation, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

A fantastic pair of speakers that deliver a spellbinding mix of dynamics, insight and finesse. Among the best speakers money can buy.

Size (hwd) 120 x 56 x 35cm **Bi-wire** Yes **Finishes** 2

"They charm and thrill. They make us happy or sad as the music demands. We can't get enough of them"

SYSTEMS

CONVENIENCE DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN LOWER QUALITY

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Pro-Ject Juke Box E £369**Best turntable system, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

An impressive all-in-one system with a level of functionality that's difficult to replicate in individual separates for a similar price.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Inputs** Line-in, BT **Outputs** Line-out**Denon D-M41DAB £329****Best microsystem, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Denon hasn't rested on its laurels. It's managed to better the M40, delivering improved sound and functionality. The best just got better.

Inputs CD, line-in, optical x2, BT, DAB/FM **Outputs** Subwoofer

KEF LSX £999**Best all-in-one system, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

KEF has shrunk its excellent LS50 Wirelesses to create a wonderfully insightful and flexible pair of speakers with a neat, colourful design.

Inputs 3.5mm, optical, BT, AirPlay 2, wi-fi **Outputs** Subwoofer**PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR**

£500 to £1000

Marantz PM7000N £999**Best system under £1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

A practical, well-furnished just-add-speakers streaming system that impresses with its entertaining performance

Inputs USB, coaxial, optical, analogue, wi-fi **Outputs** Sub, headphone**AWARD
WINNER****Naim Uniti Atom £1999****Best hi-fi system £1000+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

Rarely does a product look and sound this good. A triumph of design, the Atom boasts class-leading levels of insight and clarity.

Inputs Line-in, coaxial, opt x2, USB, BT, wi-fi **Outputs** Line-out, headphone**AWARD
WINNER**

£1000 to £2000

KEF LS50 Wireless £1999**Best all-in-one system, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

More than active versions of the LS50s, the LS50 Wirelesses deliver the performance of traditional hi-fi system in a neat and brilliant package.

Inputs Line-in, optical, USB, BT, wi-fi **Outputs** Subwoofer**Naim Uniti Star £3499****November 2018 ★★★★★**

The Uniti Star is a great addition to Naim's streaming system range – and if you need CD replay, it's the obvious choice.

Inputs Line-in x2, DIN, coax x3, opt x2, USB, BT, wi-fi **Outputs** Line-out, DIN

£2000 and above

Naim Uniti Nova £4199**January 2018 ★★★★★**

It's a lot of money to pay for a system, but the Nova is as complete and convincing an argument for one-box convenience you're likely to hear.

Inputs CD, DIN, coaxial x2, optical x2, HDMI, BT, wi-fi **Outputs** Line-out**Audio Pro System from £650****Best multi-room system under £1000, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

Audio Pro's multi-room system is not the most advanced, but no other system makes more sound-per-pound sense than this one.

Res 16-bit/44.1kHz **App** iOS, Android **Formats** MP3, FLAC, WMA

Multi-room

Sonos System from £1047**Best multi-room system £1000+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

If you don't need hi-res, Sonos is an obvious choice for multi-room. A great user experience alongside a full-bodied, insightful sound.

Res 16-bit/44.1kHz **App** iOS, Android **Formats** MP3, FLAC, WMA**TURNTABLES**

DECKS TO KEEP THE VINYL REVIVAL THRIVING

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whf.cm/BBTurntables](http://whf.cm/BBTurntables)**Pro-Ject Primary E £159****Best turntable under £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Pro-Ject has revised a budget deck to nail the under £150 market – and has succeeded on every front.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 11 x 42 x 33cm**AWARD
WINNER**£150 to
£300

£150 to £300

Audio Technica AT-LP3 £199

Best turntable under £200, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

A fully automatic turntable that doesn't scrimp on performance, this is the ideal entry-level deck for those looking to dip their 'vinyl toes' in.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 13 x 44 x 35cm



Sony PS-LX310BT £200

August 2019 ★★★★★

A no-nonsense, fully automatic turntable with built-in phono stage and Bluetooth, offering a surprisingly musical sound.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 11 x 43 x 37cm



Rega Planar 1 £249

Best turntable £200-£500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

This revamped entry-level deck from Rega doesn't sound anything like an entry-level deck. Pleasingly solid, accurate and agile – it's a lovely listen.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 12 x 45 x 36cm



Sony PS-HX500 £249

Best USB turntable, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A turntable with the ability to rip vinyl into hi-res files, but it's also an entertaining deck with a big, open sound.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 11 x 43 x 36cm



Pro-Ject Essential III £259

October 2017 ★★★★★

Another excellent turntable from Pro-Ject. The Essential III is easy to set up and offers a detailed and musical performance.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 11 x 42 x 33cm



Audio Technica AT-LP5 £299

Awards 2016 ★★★★★

A pleasure to use and listen to, the LP5 boasts both ease of use and the added bonus of a USB output. At this price there's none better.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 16 x 45 x 35cm



£300 to £500

Pro-Ject Debut III S Audiophile £325

June 2018 ★★★★★

Its solid design, smart finish and natural treble reinforce the Debut range's knack for delivering great, affordable sound.

Speed 33⅓ & 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 12 x 42 x 32cm



Rega Planar 1 Plus £329

July 2018 ★★★★★

All the sonic talents of the Planar 1 with an equally talented phono stage built in. The Plus is a winning combination of convenience and excellent quality.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 12 x 45 x 36cm



£500 to £1000

Rega Planar 3/Elys 2 £649

Best turntable £500-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Rega builds on the 3's predecessor by adding extra servings of clarity, precision and insight. The result is the best RP3 yet.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm **Size (hwd)** 12 x 45 x 36cm



Technics SL-1500C £899

Best turntable £750-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

With a really good built-in phono stage and an auto-lift function, this Technics is a beautifully made, fuss-free record player that sounds great

Speed 33⅓, 45, 78rpm **Size (hwd)** 23 x 16 x 12cm



Clearaudio Concept £1195

Best turntable £800-£1200+, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

A thoroughly sorted, easy-to-own package with tremendous sound, combining punch, extension and tonal variation in equal measure.

Speed 33⅓, 45, 78rpm Size (hwd) 14 x 42 x 35cm



EAT B-Sharp Super Pack £1368

July 2018 ★★★★★

EAT's entry-level deck is a fine one that can count among its talents a sense of control, sure composure and a well judged sonic balance.

Speed 33⅓, 45, 78rpm Size (hwd) 14 x 46 x 35cm



Rega Planar 6/Ania £1469

Best turntable £1000+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A refined, articulate and precise turntable that's lovely to listen to. It requires good system-matching to get the best out of it though.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm Size (hwd) 12 x 45 x 37cm



Rega Planar 8/Apheta 2 £2439

Best turntable over £1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Clever engineering and sky-high standards make this Rega's most ambitious and boundary-pushing turntable yet. It's gorgeous in sound and design.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm Size (hwd) 13 x 42 x 32cm



VPI Prime £4200

Awards 2015 ★★★★★

A confident-sounding package that can organise with the best and maintain composure even when faced with the most challenging music.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm Size (hwd) 18 x 54 x 40cm



VPI Prime Signature £6000

February 2018 ★★★★★

This upgraded version of the standard Prime builds on that model's strengths, with more insight, stronger dynamics and a lovely stability.

Speed 33⅓, 45rpm Size (hwd) 18 x 54 x 40cm



Clearaudio Innovation Wood/DaVinci V2 £15,900

2010 ★★★★★

This gorgeous, mind-blowingly expensive turntable is so good, we've been using it as our reference deck for years now. Extravagant, but it's worth it.

Speed 33⅓, 45, 78rpm Size (hwd) 14 x 45 x 36cm



Linn Klimax LP12 £18,670

July 2017 ★★★★★

A mightily expensive deck that has the unmistakable feel of real quality. It's startlingly better than previous LP12 turntables.

Speed 33⅓, 45, 78rpm Size (hwd) 14 x 45 x 36cm



£1000 to £2000

£2000 to £10,000

£10,000 and above

WIRELESS SPEAKERS

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Ultimate Ears Roll 2 £60

Best wireless speaker under £100, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

The Roll 2 has a sound that's more open, more dynamic and goes louder than that of its predecessor. The drop in price makes this a bargain.

Size (hw) 4 x 14cm Battery 9 hours



"The same sense of fun as the previous model, but there's a touch of maturity with the Roll 2"

Up to £100

Up to £100

Ultimate Ears Wonderboom 2 £90

Best portable wireless speaker under £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

If you want a travelling companion you can rely on, this portable, rugged and durable speaker is a great-sounding option.

Size (hwd) 10.5 x 9.5cm **Battery** 13 hours



"The Wonderboom 2 delivers a sound as cohesive and detailed as we could hope for at the price"

JBL Flip 5 £120

March 2020 ★★★★★

A simple, portable Bluetooth speaker that sounds as good as £120 can buy. An impressively weighty performance, and overall solid sonic chops.

Size (hwd) 7.4 x 18 x 7cm **Battery** 12 hours



"JBL's latest offering sounds great and is an excellent proposition for the money"

Sonos One SL £149

March 2020 ★★★★★

A Sonos One without the smarts, the SL (unlike the Play:1) will pair with a One to make a stereo pair – but it sounds great as a standalone as well.

Size (hwd) 16 x 12 x 12cm **Battery** No



"The sonic performance, streaming options and app support are among the best we've tested at this level"

Ultimate Ears Megaboom 3 £170

Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★

The rugged, weather-proof Megaboom 3's sleek design and improved sound are worth your time, especially at under £200.

Size (hwd) 23 x 9 x 9cm **Battery** 20 hours



"An enthusiastic sound that favours excitement while still keeping an eye on balance"

Audio Pro Addon T5 £179

Best wireless speaker under £200, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

An impressive stationary wireless speaker that offers great dynamism, a clear and transparent sound and a good sense of timing.

Size (hwd) 13 x 25 x 15cm **Battery** No



"You'll be hard pressed to get much better without dipping a lot deeper into your piggy bank"

Audio Pro A10 £180

February 2019 ★★★★★

A brand-new cylindrical design, but underneath that trendy outfit is the hugely enjoyable sonic character that we love from Audio Pro.

Size (hwd) 19 x 14 x 14cm **Battery** No



"It snaps along with that same intensity and intelligent organisation we've come to expect"

Tivoli Andiamo £189

November 2018 ★★★★★

A stylish portable product whose performance lives up to its looks, with a musical sound hard to better at the money.

Size (hwd) 5.5 x 13.5 x 13.5cm **Battery** 20 hours



"It's a level of performance and articulation that's hard to find for this money"

Audio Pro Addon C3 £249

Best wireless speaker £100-£250, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A smaller version of the talented and similarly-featured C5, this petite Audio Pro sets itself apart by being battery-powered and portable.

Size (hwd) 12 x 22 x 14cm **Battery** 15 hours



"By multi-room speaker standards, this is a remarkably refined performance"

Audio Pro Addon C10 £269

Best wireless speaker £250-£500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

The big daddy of the Audio Pro multi-room system, this has a rich, powerful performance, great timing and a more spacious presentation than any rival.

Size (hwd) 16 x 32 x 18cm **Battery** No



"The scale of the sound is impressive, digging down into the low frequencies with warmth and punch"

Dali Katch £329

Best portable wireless speaker £250+, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

The Katch has significantly raised the bar among portable wireless speakers. Its powerful, versatile sound is just one of many highlights.

Size (hwd) 14 x 27 x 5cm **Battery** 24 hours



"The size of the sound is quite simply incredible for something of the Katch's stature"

£100 to £200

£200 to £500

Audio Pro Drumfire £649**Best wireless speaker £500+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

Audio Pro's biggest and loudest speaker features a performance that combines tight bass, a clear midrange and a good sense of space.

Size (hwd) 65 x 52 x 19cm **Battery** No

"As an all-in-one system which connects to a multitude of sources, the Drumfire is a great choice"

B&O BeoPlay A6 £729**February 2016 ★★★★★**

Oozing style and substance, the A6 effortlessly combines the simplicity and convenience of a one-box system. It's a job fully well done.

Size (hwd) 30 x 54 x 16cm **Battery** No**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

"The A6 will stream pretty much anything from anywhere and in any way you like"

Naim Mu-so Qb 2nd Generation £749**Best home wireless speaker over £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

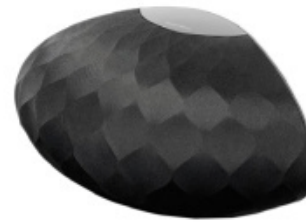
The greatest value here is not found in the features or design, but in a sonic performance that will effortlessly dispense of any one-box rival near this price.

Size (hd) 17 x 14cm **Battery** No **Voice assistant** Siri

"The overall presentation is muscular but lean; there's plenty of bass weight, but balance is never skewed"

Bowers & Wilkins Formation Wedge £899**November 2019 ★★★★★**

The B&W Formation Wedge offers the kind of detailed, balanced, cohesive sound that cannot be ignored – making it a class-leader in its category.

Size (hwd) 26 x 28 x 26cm **Battery** No

"The Wedge isn't afraid to let you hear the truth. Vocals are clear, textured and emotive"

Naim Mu-So 2 £1299**September 2019 ★★★★★**

We're surprised just how much sonic progression the Naim Mu-so 2 brings over the original – Naim says that 95 per cent of the Mu-so 2 is new.

Size (hwd) 12 x 63 x 26cm **Battery** No

"Musicality is still at the heart of the Mu-so 2's performance as a soundbar"

Linn Series 3 £2950**April 2020 ★★★★★**

The most expensive wireless speaker we've ever tested also happens to be the best. It's hardly a bargain, but we are left convinced of its appeal.

Size (hwd) 30 x 25 x 21cm **Battery** No

"The Series 3 may not look like it, but make no mistake, this is proper hi-fi"

Amazon Echo Plus (2018) £140**January 2019 ★★★★★**

The 2nd-gen Plus is Amazon's flagship smart speaker, and it finally has the sonic talents to match its smarts – especially at this price.

Size (hwd) 15 x 10 x 10cm **Battery** No **Voice assistant** Alexa

"Its sonic performance makes it worthy in isolation"

Sonos One £199**Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

Essentially a Play:1 with Alexa. The odd software niggles at launch, but one of the best wireless speakers around just got smarter.

Size (hwd) 16 x 12 x 12cm **Battery** No **Voice assistant** Alexa

"The soundstage is spacious and impressively organised, with vocals given plenty of breathing room"

Ultimate Ears Megablast £270**February 2018 ★★★★★**

Featuring Amazon's Alexa voice assistant in a portable speaker, the Megablast is Ultimate Ears' most energetic and controlled speaker yet.

Size (hwd) 24 x 9 x 9cm **Battery** 16 hours **Voice assistant** Alexa

"The Megablast has no problem filling up our medium-sized listening room with a sound that demands your attention."

Apple HomePod £319**April 2018 ★★★★★**

It works best if you're in the Apple ecosystem, but nevertheless it's the best-sounding, most music-orientated smart speaker available.

Size (hd) 17 x 14cm **Battery** No **Voice assistant** Siri

"It's capable of going loud, and remains composed, clear and unflustered, even at maximum volume"

£500 and above

Smart speakers



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Up to £500

Panasonic DP-UB150EB £129

March 2020 ★★★★★

A highly competent machine at an impressively low price, this 4K Blu-ray player represents a big step up from streaming your UHD content.

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, CD **HDMI out 1**



Sony UBP-X700 £199

Best 4K Blu-ray player under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

This 4K player delivers a stunningly natural picture for an affordable price. It'll be tough to knock this Sony off its perch.

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, SACD, CD **HDMI out 2**



Panasonic DP-UB820EB £290

Best 4K Blu-ray player £350-£500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Delivers on multiple fronts, supporting all major HDR formats, delivering a hugely immersive and impactful picture, and all backed up by strong audio.

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, CD **HDMI out 2**



£500 and above

Sony UBP-X1100ES £749

November 2019 ★★★★★

Picture quality is excellent and it backs this up with an entertaining and musical sound that is up there with the best at the money.

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, SACD, CD **HDMI out 2**



Panasonic DP-UB9000 £849

Best Blu-ray player £500+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A razor-sharp picture with fine detail and an excellent colour balance all help to deliver a picture that has a rare realism.

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, CD **HDMI out 2**



Pioneer UDP-LX500 £999

Best 4K Blu-ray player over £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Pioneer's premium 4K player delivers a double whammy of superb picture and awesome sound quality. If your system warrants it, buy with confidence

Compatibility 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray, DVD, CD **HDMI out 2**



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Up to £500

Sony STR-DN1080 £429

Best home cinema amplifier under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Sony's latest AV amp is a return to form, with cutting-edge features (inc. Dolby Atmos) and a compelling sound. It ticks all the right boxes.

Power 7 x 100W **Dolby Atmos** Yes **HDMI in/out** 6/2



Denon AVR-X2600H £599

October 2019 ★★★★★

Denon has done it again. If you have the budget and desire for a serious home cinema, this receiver demands your attention.

Power 7 x 150W **Dolby Atmos** Yes **HDMI in/out** 8/2



£500 to £1000

Denon AVR-X3600H £999

Best home cinema amplifier £500-£1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Denon has nudged its 3000 series home cinema amplifiers much closer to the next level with this stunningly powerful performer.

Power 7 x 180W **Dolby Atmos** Yes **HDMI in/out** 8/3

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

**Denon AVC-X6500H £2300**

Best home cinema amplifier over £1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A terrifically composed, articulate and powerful AV amplifier that delivers a captivating home cinema performance for its top-end price.

Power 11 x 140W **Dolby Atmos** Yes **HDMI in/out** 8/3

AWARD WINNER



£1000 and above

PROJECTORS

BECAUSE A MASSIVE PICTURE IS HOME CINEMA

View offers
whf.cm/BBProjectors**Optoma UHD40 £1199**

Best projector under £1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A '4K' projector that brings top-tier technology to a budget price point, this device boasts punchy colours and insightful detail.

Throw ratio 1.21:1-1.59:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2, VGA, 3.5mm **Speakers** Yes

AWARD WINNER



Up to £2000

LG CineBeam HU80KSW £1967

December 2019 ★★★★★

An all-in-one, do-it-all 4K portable projector that does its thing with aplomb. You can have the CineBeam up and running in a matter of minutes.

Throw ratio 1.3:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2 **Speakers** Yes

**Optoma UHD65 £2999**

Best projector £1500+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

It may not have the bells and whistles of a high-end 4K projector, but it puts in a sophisticated performance, is future-proof and well priced.

Throw ratio 1.39-2.22:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2, PC x2, Phono **Speakers** No

**Epson EH-TW9400 £2549**

Best projector £1500-£3000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The perfect compromise if you want a super-sized faux-4K picture on a budget. The picture vibrancy and sense of depth are impressive.

Throw ratio 1.35-2.84:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2, USBx2 **Speakers** No

AWARD WINNER



£2000 to £10,000

Sony VPL-VW270ES £5000

Best projector over £3000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Sony is one of the few brands making native 4K projectors and its latest is a stunning showcase of class-leading sharpness and subtlety. Gorgeous.

Throw ratio 1.37-2.83:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2 **Speakers** No

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

**JVC DLA-Z1 £35,000**

August 2017 ★★★★★

Produces the finest image we've seen in our test rooms. It showcases 4K in all its glory – but that performance comes with a huge price tag.

Throw ratio 1.29-2.61:1 **Inputs** HDMI x2 **Speakers** No



£10,000 and above

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PVRs

Humax FVP-5000T from £199

Best PVR, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

If you need a Full HD box to give your older TV some more sparkle, Humax's digital box should absolutely be something to consider.

Tuners 3 Storage 500GB Ultra HD No

AWARD
WINNER



Subscription
boxes

Sky Q 2TB from £199

Best subscription box, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Sky has overhauled its TV package with Q and made it more enticing and versatile thanks to 4K support, but it comes with a high price tag.

Tuners 4 Storage 2TB Ultra HD Yes

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR



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Up to £500

Yamaha YAS-207 £249

Best soundbar under £300, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The latest in a series of fine Yamaha soundbars, this is a compelling, class-leading performer in a practical, easy-to-use package.

Size (hwd) 6 x 93 x 11cm Inputs Opt, HDMI, 3.5mm, BT Sub Yes

AWARD
WINNER



Sonos Beam £399

Best soundbar £300-£500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A compact soundbar that pumps out an exceptional sound for its size and price. It could potentially transform your listening experience.

Size (hwd) 7 x 65 x 10cm Inputs Optical, HDMI ARC, AirPlay Sub No

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR



Sonos Playbar £699

August 2017 ★★★★★

It's not perfect, but it still has the sonic heft and all-round quality to edge out its Sonos Playbase stablemate.

Size 9 x 90 x 14cm Inputs Optical, ethernet Sub No



£500 to £1000

Yamaha YSP-2700 £699

February 2017 ★★★★★

With a spacious, involving sound the YSP-2700 is the most convincing surround experience you'll get outside of a full 5.1 surround system.

Size (hwd) 5 x 94 x 15cm Inputs HDMI x3, opt, coax Sub Yes



Dali Kubik One £799

Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A gorgeous and complete package, Dali's debut soundbar impresses with its hugely engaging sound and smart, well equipped exterior.

Size (hwd) 15 x 98 x 10cm Inputs Line-in x2, optical Sub No



Dali Katch One £649

Best soundbar £500-£1000, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Great for music, even better for films, this tidy soundbar delivers all the sound your living room is likely to need.

Size 7 x 86 x 17cm Inputs HDMI, Optical, 3.5mm Sub No

AWARD
WINNER



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Kingston Park, NE3 2FP

E: sales@petertyson.co.uk
Mon - Sat: 9am - 5:30pm

0191 285 7179

£1000
and above**Sony HT-ST5000 £1199****Best soundbar £1000-£1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Delivers an accomplished Atmos performance we'd have no hesitation in recommending. It is a superb-sounding effort for the price.

Size (hwd) 8 x 118 x 15cm **Inputs** HDMI x3, opt, USB, 3.5mm **Sub** YesAWARD
WINNER**Sennheiser Ambeo Soundbar £2199****Best soundbar over £1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

This is the best soundbar we've tested, and the best way to get surround sound into your room without filling it with loads of individual speakers.

Size (hwd) 14 x 127 x 17cm **Inputs** HDMI x4, opt, RCA line in **Sub** NoAWARD
WINNER

Soundbases

Q Acoustics M2 £169**Best soundbase, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Q Acoustics can now add 'soundbase' to its list of successes. The M2 is an expressive, easy-to-use and fuss-free way of boosting your TV sound.

Size (hwd) 9 x 55 x 34cm **Inputs** Line-in, HDMI, 3.5mm, BTAWARD
WINNER

SPEAKER PACKAGES

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Up to £1000

Wharfedale DX-2 £399**Best speaker package under £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Wharfedale delivers movie magic on a small scale with this enjoyable, well integrated package that's perfect for smaller rooms and budgets.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 12 x 31 x 12cm **Finishes** 2AWARD
WINNER

"It has all the detail, attack and deftness to deliver exhilaration in spades"

Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1 Cinema Pack £895**Best speaker package £500-£1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

The subwoofer needs a bit more kick, but this fantastic sub-£1000 5.1 package delivers a clear, well-balanced and expressive performance.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 15 x 43 x 22 cm **Finishes** 4AWARD
WINNER

"This compact set really hits the spot with its great clarity, integration, expression and ample bass weight"

B&W MT-50 £1100**Awards 2015 ★★★★★**

These speakers sound crisp, clear and insightful, and the sub and satellites integrate so well. Value and versatility combined.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 25 x 11 x 16cm **Finishes** 2

"It has all the detail, attack and deftness to deliver exhilaration in spades"

£1000 to £3000

Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack £1345**Best speaker package £1000-£1500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Add in floorstanders to the above, and this speaker package hits the sweet spot with an infectious musical and powerful performance.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 15 x 43 x 22 cm **Finishes** 4AWARD
WINNER

"It's worth stressing just how talented the 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack is. It's an instant hit"

Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV £1489**Best speaker package £1000-£2000, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

This classy speaker package from Monitor Audio is beautifully designed, has ample punch, creates a spacious soundfield and is very musical.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 17 x 46 x 19cm **Finishes** 4

"This may be the easiest £1500 you'll ever spend"

Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 Home Theatre System £1499**October 2019 ★★★★★**

This Elac package is a real match-winner, whether for your two-channel or the full surround. You'll be hard pushed to find better at this price.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 18 x 54 x 22cm **Finishes** 1

"What's astonishing is the realism of the soundscape – a delightfully balanced audio image that lets the equipment melt away"

Dali Oberon5 5.1 £1795**Best speaker package £1500-£2000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

These are clever performers: lean, attractive, interesting and unfussy. And those words stand for both the aesthetics and the acoustics.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 16 x 44 x 30cm **Finishes** 4**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

"There's surprising authority and power to this relatively diminutive package as well..."

KEF Q350 AV 5.1 £2100**January 2018 ★★★★★**

It takes up a fair bit of space, but the Q350 package puts in a powerful and precise performance. You'll struggle to do better for the money.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 21 x 63 x 30cm **Finishes** 2

"If you have the space, then you should consider opening your home to this outstanding KEF package"

Monitor Audio Silver 200 AV12 £2865**Best speaker package £2000-£5000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

A little patience may be required, but once it hits its stride the Silver 200 AV12 is an expressive, fun and talented speaker package.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 16 x 45 x 20cm **Finishes** 6**AWARD WINNER**

"Rarely are we so fully behind a speaker package for its work both in stereo and in surround sound"

ATC C1 5.1 £3595**Awards 2016 ★★★★★**

We'd like a bit more authority in the bass, but we're delighted by the detailed, agile sound, focused surround steering and power on offer.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 16 x 41 x 28cm **Finishes** 2

"For small to medium-sized rooms, we can think of no better alternative"

PMC Twenty5.23 5.1 £10,290**Best speaker package over £5000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Analytical and fun in equal measure, this gorgeous PMC system – also our current reference speaker package – is entirely worth the high asking price.

Size (hwd) Centre speaker 17 x 55 x 31cm **Finishes** 4**AWARD WINNER**

"The greater insight and texture make this one of the most lifelike reproductions of the human voice at this price"

£1000 to £3000

£3000 and above

VIDEO STREAMERS

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Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K £50**Best video streamer under £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Despite some caveats, this 4K device supports all HDR formats and delivers excellent picture quality for a very affordable price.

Resolution 2160p, 1080p, 720p **Storage** 8GB **4K** Yes**AWARD WINNER**

Up to £100

Apple TV 4K £179**Best video streamer over £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

It has a fantastic UI and design, a huge library of 4K HDR content, and the best picture and sound performance at any price. Siri is useful, too.

Resolution 2160p, 1080p, 720p **Storage** 8GB **4K** Yes**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

£100 and above

Sony PS4 Pro £350**February 2017 ★★★★★☆**

The Pro offers a solid, relatively affordable upgrade over the base PS4, but still needs work to be an all-in-one 4K streamer and player.

Resolution 2160p, 1080p, 1080i, 720p **Storage** 1TB **4K** Yes

Games consoles

Microsoft Xbox One X £410**January 2018 ★★★★★☆**

A capable, all-consuming box of 4K tricks. The interface has never been better and the jump in picture quality and audio abilities is welcome.

Resolution 2160p, 1080p, 1080i, 720p **Storage** 1TB **4K** Yes

TELEVISIONS

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Up to
43in

Samsung UE43RU7470 £399

Best 40-43in TV, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

For a size of TV that is all too often overlooked, we're delighted to see that Samsung has served up a stunning 4K TV for the average household.

Type LCD/LED **HDMI** 3 **Resolution** 3840 x 2160 **Tuner** Freesat HD, TV Plus



"There's a proper sense of depth to the image, with excellent shading in both bright and dark areas"

49in to 50in

Samsung UE49RU8000 £749

Best 49-50in TV under £800, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

This is a brilliant buy, offering most of what makes the Q70R great at a reduced price. It's a great all-rounder with exciting HDR performance.

Type LCD/LED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freeview HD/YouView



"It's a brilliantly detailed image with sharp, clearly defined edges that render scenes with excellent depth"

55in
to 60in

LG OLED55C9PLA £1399

Best 55in TV, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Colours are insanely good, contrast levels are cracking. It's super sharp and detailed. We'd have it at home in a heartbeat

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freeview/Freesat HD



"We switch to *Blue Planet II*, and while the colours really zing, it's the detail that grabs us from the off."

8K TV – everything you need to know

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As ever in consumer electronics, there is always something new on the horizon and that new thing is 8K. So here's what we know about the latest format to trouble the TV market.

What is 8K?

8K refers to resolution – the number of horizontal and vertical pixels in an image. Pixels equals information, so more pixels should, in theory, make for a better quality image. 8K, has a horizontal resolution of 7680 pixels and a vertical resolution of 4320 pixels. 4K has half the number of horizontal and vertical lines (3840 x 2160) and Full HD is 1920 x 1080. Count the pixels up and 8K has four times as many as 4K and 16 times more than Full HD.

Who is making 8K content?

Filmmakers use cameras with sensors that range from 4K to 8K, though films will be finished at either 2K or 4K. The Japanese

Broadcasting Corporation, NHK, ran a series of 8K trials in 2015 and in 2016 announced it had successfully demoed a broadcast in 8K. The Korean Broadcasting Corporation (KBS) is researching 8K broadcasts too, working with LG on content, possible broadcasts and displays, with 4K and 8K broadcasts mooted for the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Streaming site Vimeo is one of the first to offer 8K HDR support.

What about 8K TVs?

LG and Samsung revealed 8K prototypes at CES 2015, while Sharp went a step further with an 85in 8K TV on sale in Japan that year. LG ignored that and claimed the title of the world's first production 8K TV in 2016, with Sharp returning the favour a year later by saying its LC-70X500 TV was the first consumer-ready 8K effort. LG volleyed back at the start of 2018 with the announcement of an 88in OLED 8K TV, that's not just the largest OLED screen ever made, but the first in 8K. SiTune became the first brand to release an 8K TV tuner module, which will support the 8K Super Hi-Vision plans of Japan's NHK broadcaster, which aims to be in place by the 2020 Olympics.

When will we be watching 8K?

If you're in the UK, Europe or US, it's unlikely you'll be viewing proper 8K content any time soon, and we don't think an 8K TV should affect your buying decisions now or in the near future. Plus, content needs to be created, the infrastructure for distribution realised and the equipment to watch it, so, for now, 8K is not a guarantee, but never say never...



Panasonic TX-58GX800 £739**Best 55-58in TV under £1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Panasonic has packed this set with fancy features, and priced it incredibly aggressively. This is a superb-value large-screen television.

Type LCD/LED **HDMI** 3 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/F'view HD**AWARD
WINNER**

"Colours are brilliantly judged, proving tonally natural and nuanced in their gradients"

Panasonic TX-55GZ950B £1799**November 2019 ★★★★★**

The Panasonic GZ950 is a fine TV that will be particularly appealing to those who would rather not buy a separate sound system.

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/F'view HD

"It may not be flashy, but the Panasonic TX-55GZ950B is a real contender"

Philips 55OLED803 £1799**February 2018 ★★★★★**

A real return to form for Philips with one of the finest TVs around. It puts in a stunning HDR image and is aided by terrific Ambilight performance.

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freeview HD

"It's been a long time since the brand properly floored us with a TV, but this OLED has done just that"

Samsung QE55Q9FN £1799**July 2018 ★★★★★**

Recent massive price drop has made Samsung's 55Q9F's a brilliant buy. You won't find a punchier or crisper image for the money.

Type QLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freeview HD/Sat

"It combines that startling punch and vibrancy with serious subtlety."

Samsung QE65Q70R £1299**Best 65in TV under £2000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

The Q70R makes the dream of a healthy chunk of flagship performance without spending flagship money a reality.

Type QLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/Freeview HD**AWARD
WINNER**

"Detail and definition are exceptional. Edges are razor-sharp without looking artificially enhanced"

Sony KD-65XF9005 £1749**Best 65in TV under £2500, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

A mid-range TV that punches above its weight, delivering fantastic detail and an image that's brilliantly bright and punchy.

Type LCD/LED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/F'view HD

"Delivers a picture performance not significantly short of the very best flagship models of 2017"

LG OLED65C9PLA £3299**Best 65in TV over £2000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

LG has squeezed yet more performance from its OLED panel.

The C9 is natural, dynamic and rich – and it sounds good, too.

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freesat/Freeview HD**AWARD
WINNER**

"Each year, LG squeezes more performance from its panels, making a picture that defies expectations"

Panasonic TX-55GZ2000 £2999**February 2020 ★★★★★**

Dolby Atmos sound is the headline-grabber, but the picture is just as important – a huge achievement by Panasonic, beating LG at its own game

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** Freesat/Freeview HD

"Those picture upgrades are so special that this is the best OLED TV we've tested"

Sony KD-65AF9 £3999**December 2018 ★★★★★**

The Sony AF9 is a stunner in so many ways, not to mention one of the best-sounding tellies we've tested.

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/F'view HD

"Exceptional motion processing, superb detail, awesome 1080p delivery, and excellent sound"

Philips 65OLED984 £4499**April 2020 ★★★★★**

This is a fabulous TV conjoined to one of the best 'soundbars' we've heard, and the result is an all-in-one system unlike any other.

Type OLED **HDMI** 4 **Resolution** 4K **Tuner** YouView/F'view HD

"This Philips set consistently blows us away with its vibrant, punchy and pin-sharp delivery"

50in to 60in

65in and above



HM Revenue
& Customs

P45 Part 2 Details of employee leaving work Copy for new employer

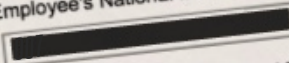
1 Employer PAYE reference

Office number Reference number



007

2 Employee's National Insurance number



3 Title - enter MR, MRS, MISS, MS or other title

MR

Surname or family name

BOND

First name(s)

JAMES

4 Leaving date DD MM YYYY

02

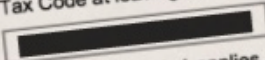
04

2020

5 Student Loan deductions

☐ Student Loan deductions to continue

6 Tax Code at leaving date



If week 1 or month 1 applies, enter 'X' in the box below.

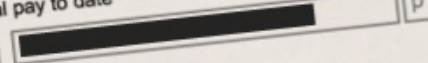
Week 1/Month 1 ☒

7 Last entries on Payroll record/Deductions Working Sheet.
Complete only if Tax Code is cumulative. If there is an 'X' at box 6 there will be no entries here.

Week number Month number

Total pay to date

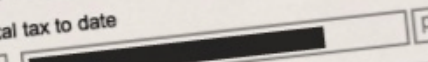
£



P

Total tax to date

£



P

To the employee

This form is important to you. Take good care of it and keep it safe. Copies are not available. Please keep Parts 2 and 3 of the form together and do not alter them in any way.

Going to a new job

Give Parts 2 and 3 of this form to your new employer, or you will have tax deducted using the emergency code and may pay too much tax. If you do not want your new employer to know the details on this form, send it to your HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) office immediately with a letter saying so and giving the name and address of your new employer. HMRC can make special arrangements, but you may pay too much tax for a while as a result of this.

Going abroad

If you are going abroad or returning to a country outside the UK ask for form P85, *Leaving the United Kingdom*, go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/income-tax-leaving-the-uk-getting-your-tax-right-p85

Becoming self-employed

You must register with HMRC within 3 months of becoming self-employed or you could incur a penalty. To register as newly self-employed go to www.gov.uk/topic/business-tax/self-employed

Claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Take this form to your Jobcentre Plus office. They will pay you any tax refund you may be entitled to when your claim ends, or at 5 April if this is earlier.

Not working and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

If you have paid tax and wish to claim a refund fill in for P50. Claiming tax back when you have stopped working, go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/income-tax-claiming-tax-back-when-you-have-stopped-working-p50

Help

If you need more help, go to www.gov.uk/topic/personal-tax

To the new employer

Check this form, record the start date and report it to HMRC in the first Full Payment Submission for your employee. Prepare a Payroll record/Deductions Working Sheet. Follow the instructions at www.gov.uk/payroll-software

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PORTABLE HEADPHONES

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Beyerdynamic Byron £39

Best in-ears under £50, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

A spectacular return to the budget earphone arena for Beyerdynamic, the Byron sets the standard at this price with a peerless performance.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.2m



SoundMagic E11C £50

Best in-ear headphones under £50, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The latest version of Soundmagic's budget in-ears continues to impress with a full-bodied, energetic and informative sound.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.2m



Beyerdynamic Soul Byrd £69

April 2019 ★★★★★

You'll struggle to find a better pair of in-ear headphones costing less than £70 than these Beyerdynamics.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.2m



Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi £70

Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

You wouldn't think anything so small could sound quite so good – not for just £70. But they are wonderfully smooth, expressive and balanced.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.3m



Klipsch T5M Wired £70

Best in-ear headphones £50-£100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Not only do they have some of the most comfortable tips around, but these T5M Wireds also show a maturity that's rare at this price.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.3m



Klipsch R6i II £89

Awards 2018 ★★★★★

2018's Product of the Year in-ear headphones are as natural and transparent as they come at this price. Few can match their insight.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.2m



Bose SoundSport Pulse £179

February 2017 ★★★★★

The best-sounding pair of wireless in-ears we've heard so far. The modest battery life is a downside, but the sound is fun and enjoyable.

In-line controls Yes Cable length n/a



Shure SE425 £185

Best in-ears over £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

If you're serious about the quality of your in-ear headphones, we'd point you here. The energetic, immersive performance is irresistible.

In-line controls Yes Cable length 1.6m



In-ears up to £100

£100 to £200

£200 to £500

Sony WI-1000X £206

February 2018 ★★★★★

The best of both worlds thanks to great sound and fine noise-cancelling capabilities. Absolutely worth your time and money.

In-line controls Yes **Cable length** 1m

**AKG N40 £249**

Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

These sound great, but you'll need a decent portable DAC and hi-res tracks to make the most of them, so they're not for the casual user.

In-line controls No **Cable length** 1.2m



£500 and above

Shure KSE1500 £2549

November 2016 ★★★★★

At this price they won't be for everyone, but they are the finest in-ears we've heard and arguably one of the best headphones money can buy.

In-line controls Yes **Cable length** 1.3m



On-ears up to £100

AKG Y50 £69

Best portable on-ear headphones, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Our Product of the Year cans for 2019 are portable on-ears, and deliver a rhythmic, clear, detailed, dynamic sound. At this price they're amazing.

Type Closed **Connection** 3.5mm **Weight** 190g

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

**Grado SR80e £99**

Best home on-ears under £100, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

These Grados aren't the most relaxing listen, but the excellent treble and midrange make for an exceptional performer.

Type Open **Connection** 3.5/6.3mm **Weight** 210g

AWARD WINNER



£100 to £500

Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 £199

Awards 2018 ★★★★★

We love the design, but it's more than just pretty – these Momentums are comfortable on your ears and fold away neatly when not in use.

Type Closed **Connection** 3.5mm **Weight** 240g

**Grado SR325e £350**

Best home on-ears £100-£400, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

If you don't mind the amount of sound leaking from them, you're free to enjoy the fluid dynamics and wonderfully musical presentation.

Type Open **Connection** 3.5mm/6.5mm **Weight** 330g



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Beyerdynamic Amiron £520**Best home on-ears over £400, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

Beyerdynamic has produced a pair of headphones that sound as good as they feel. Be careful though; their open-backed nature leaks sound.

Type Open **Connection** 3.5mm/6.3mm **Weight** 340g**Audio Technica ATH-W1000Z £530****March 2017 ★★★★★**

The 11th version of the W1000z opts for evolution over revolution and with a spacious sound that packs power and punch, it's a good choice.

Type Closed **Connection** 6.3mm **Weight** 320g**B&W P9 Signature £699****December 2016 ★★★★★**

They're not cheap but there's no doubt these are talented cans. A retro look, stunning sound and a comfy fit make these worth their price.

Type Closed **Connection** 6.3mm/Lightning in 2017 **Weight** 413g**Sony MDR-Z1R £1650****April 2017 ★★★★★**

The finest closed-back headphones we have heard. Feed them with quality electronics and there is no doubt the Z1Rs will shine.

Type Closed **Connection** 3.5mm/6.3mm **Weight** 385g**Sennheiser HD820 £1999****October 2018 ★★★★★**

Probably the best-sounding closed-back headphones we've heard. They have lots of detail, plenty of punch and a strong bass performance.

Type Closed **Connection** 4.4mm/6.3mm/XLR4 **Weight** 360g**Focal Utopia £3499****June 2017 ★★★★★**

With these cans Focal has aimed for the moon and reached it, delivering one of the finest pairs of headphones we've heard.

Type Open **Connection** 6.3mm **Weight** 490g**Beyerdynamic Byron BT £59****Best wireless in-ears under £100, Awards 2018 ★★★★★**

These affordable Bluetooth in-ears retain much of the sonic charm and detail of their Award-winning wired siblings.

Controls Yes **Battery** 7.5 hours**Cambridge Audio Melomania 1 £120****Best wireless in-ears under £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

These budget-conscious in-ears offer a cohesive, expansive and rhythmically driven sound, and an intuitive, playful soundstage that few match at this price.

Controls Yes **Battery** 9 hours**AKG Y500 Wireless £129****Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★**

This second-generation wireless on-ear is robustly made and nicely finished. Sonically, they're nicely balanced and as refined as they come.

Folding Yes **Battery** 33 hours

£500 to £1000

£1000 and above

Wireless
up to £200FOR A FULL LIST OF SPECIFICATIONS AND
IN-DEPTH REVIEWS VISIT **WHATHIFI.COM**

JBL Reflect Flow £130

February 2020 ★★★★★

Solid performers sonically and with a nicely secure fit, the JBL Reflect Flow are about as good as it gets for a truly sporting pair of true-wireless buds

Controls Yes **Battery** 10 hours (plus another two full charges from the case)

**Grado GW100 £169**

December 2019 ★★★★★

Grado's first pair of wireless headphones are truly excellent.

They won't be for everyone, but for sound there's not much to beat them.

Controls No **Battery** 15 hours

**Jaybird Vista £195**

December 2019 ★★★★★

Ideal for runners, the fit is the best we've yet tested. These are a front-runner in the niche, true wireless sport category.

Controls Yes **Battery** 16 hours

**Sennheiser Momentum M2 IE Free £170**

Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★

These wireless in-ears continue the Momentum range's fine reputation by delivering a comfortable sound packed with insight.

Controls Yes **Battery** 6 hours

**AKG N60 NC Wireless £195**

Best wireless headphones under £300, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

They've lost the cable, but the N60s retain the superb character of their wired equivalents. These are a great pair of portable noise-cancellers.

Folding Yes **Battery** 15 hours **Noise-cancelling** Yes

**Sony WF-1000XM3 £220**

Best wireless in-ears over £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A new benchmark for true wireless earbuds, the WF-1000XM3s combine effective active noise-cancelling with a real sense of musicality.

Controls Yes **Battery** 6 hours

**Bose QuietComfort 35 II £329**

January 2017 ★★★★★

The second-gen QuietComforts benefit from being truly wireless and also from a switch to rechargeable batteries.

Folding Yes **Battery** 20 hours **Noise-cancelling** Yes

**Sony WH-1000XM3 £330**

Best wireless headphones over £300, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

You can't get better than these Sonys when it comes to combining noise cancelling, sound quality and comfort. Our favourite headphones this year.

Folding Yes **Battery** 30 hours **Noise-cancelling** Yes

**B&W PX £330**

Best wireless headphones £300+, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

The PXs are a fantastic package, boasting excellent sound quality, successful noise-cancelling and a smart design.

Folding Yes **Battery** 22 hours **Noise-cancelling** Yes



FOR A FULL LIST OF SPECIFICATIONS AND
IN-DEPTH REVIEWS VISIT **WHATHIFI.COM**

PORTABLE MUSIC PLAYERS

TREAT YOUR TUNES TO A DEDICATED MUSIC PLAYER

View offers
whf.cm/BBPortableMusicPlayers

Sony NW-A45 £180

Best portable music player under £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Sony has designed, marketed and priced the NW-A45 to act as a companion to your smart phone, handling your desire for hi-res music. It does this well.

Hi-res 24-bit/192kHz, DSD Weight 98g Storage 16GB



"There's good bass depth, musical cohesion and space around the various instruments"

Cowon Plenue D2 £259

Best portable music player £200-£500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The PD2 manages to justify the premium over its predecessor.

We haven't heard a better-sounding budget portable music player.

Hi-res 24-bit/192kHz, DSD 128 Storage 64GB



"Cowon justifies the price hike with a performance that takes transparency and entertainment to the next level"

Astell & Kern A&norma SR15 £549

Best portable music player £500-£1000, Awards 2018 ★★★★★

Our favourite music player combines fine build, ease of use and class-leading sound better than any rival we've tested.

Hi-res 32-bit/384kHz, DSD128 Weight 154g Storage 64GB



"The A&norma has as much sonic aspiration as design ambition"

Astell & Kern Kann £899

Awards 2018 ★★★★★

The Kann is expensive but, despite the chunky aesthetics, the sound quality is impressive, with lashings of depth, detail and dynamism.

Hi-res 32-bit/384kHz, DSD256 Weight 279g Storage 832GB



"When it comes to performance per pound, there's no mistaking the Kann's sonic chops"

Astell & Kern A&futura SE100 £1499

Best portable music player over £1000, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

For those with grand portable ambitions, decent high-end headphones and, crucially, the budget, this sonic-savvy source is both a luxury and logical buy.

Hi-res 32-bit/184kHz, DSD 11.2MHz Weight 240g Storage 128GB



"Playing a range of music genres and file resolutions, the SE100 comes out on top at every turn"

Up to
£300

£300
to £700

£700
and above

Headphone jargon busted

Read more at...
www.whathifi.com/advice



What's the difference between the various on-ear headphones?
Our jargon buster explains the various types, and why you might want to choose one particular model over another



1. First, the most popular headphone design: the **over-the-ear** model, also called circumaural. These cup your ears completely, usually with semi-air-tight earcups that help minimise both sound leakage from your headphones into the outside world and the intrusive effects of ambient noise.

2. Supra-aural or **on-ear** designs tend to be smaller and lighter than circumaural models and, as the name suggests, they sit on your ears rather than over them. Some listeners find them lighter and easier to wear for extended listening, but they do tend to allow in more sound from outside.

3. Available in both circumaural and supra-aural types, **closed-back** headphones are the optimum choice for cutting out external sounds altogether. They'll also deliver more bass weight than other headphone types, because the closed earcups prevent bass leakage.

4. **Open-back** headphones are vented designs that allow sound out through apertures in each earcup, reducing internal sound reflections and helping to create a more natural listening experience. More sound will leak out into the surrounding environment, and you'll also suffer more ambient noise intrusion.

5. **Semi-open** headphones, as the name implies, combine the characteristics of both closed and open-back designs. When done well, they can be a 'best of both worlds' solution, but equally, they can often fall between two stools.



SMARTPHONES

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iOS

Apple iPhone 11

Best smartphone, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Ignore the 11 over the Pro and Pro Max, and you're missing out on a more affordable smartphone that ticks many of the same boxes, for less cash.

OS iOS **Size (hwd)** 151 x 76 x 8mm **Storage** 64GB, 128GB, 256GB

PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR



"We've come to expect musicality and rhythm with Apple, and the iPhone 11 doesn't disappoint"

Android

Samsung Galaxy S9

Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★

A polished successor to the S8 that, due to a number of carefully considered tweaks, is one of the best Android phones available.

OS Android **Size (hwd)** 148 x 69 x 9mm **Storage** 64GB/microSD



"Samsung's careful refinements make the S9 a pretty impressive package"

Samsung Galaxy S9+

May 2018 ★★★★★

It's more evolution than revolution, but that's enough to make the S9+ the best big Android phone you can currently buy.

OS Android **Size (hwd)** 160 x 74 x 9mm **Storage** 128GB/microSD



"The S9+ is as polished and refined as Android phones currently get"

Samsung Galaxy Note 9

December 2018 ★★★★★

This is another terrific effort from Samsung combining crisp images and good sound with a lag-free, large-screen user experience. And we love the S-Pen.

OS Android **Size (hwd)** 162 x 77 x 9mm **Storage** 128GB, 512GB/microSD



"The Note 9 is silky smooth in use, with every swipe and button-press reacting instantly."

Amazon Prime Video tips, tricks and features

Read more at...
www.whathifi.com/advice



Whether you're a Prime professional or just thinking of signing up, you'll want to get the most out of the service. Here are a few tips and tricks on how to do exactly that.

Setting up a 'Household' account

Amazon Prime Video will recommend content based on your viewing history - but what if you're really into crime thrillers, your other half loves romantic comedies and the kids love cartoons? The answer is by linking together two Amazon accounts that will both have access to Prime Video. Go to Your Account > Shopping Programmes > Amazon Household. There you can add another adult or profiles for children, and then click 'Create Household'.

Parental Controls

You can set up a four-digit PIN on the web by going into the 'Settings' of the Prime Video section and also in the mobile app's settings.

Streaming Ultra HD video

On Amazon's TV app there's a category populated with Ultra HD content. You can also search for '4K' or 'Ultra HD' in the search bar. However, the results might not be complete -

you can tell for sure if a TV show or movie is 4K only by clicking on it. Unfortunately, if you're on a mobile device, this doesn't show up at all.

Streaming HDR video

HDR video - and Dolby Vision on compatible televisions - is more difficult to spot than 4K. Amazon's search function is also incomplete - when typing in 'HDR' it recommends *The Man In The High Castle*, but leaves out other HDR shows. Much like finding 4K content, it's a bit trial and error - clicking on shows to see if they come up with the HDR or Dolby Vision symbol seems the best way to find out.

Downloading shows

For those using tablets or smartphones, you can download content to your device for offline viewing. On select films and TV shows, you can tap the download arrow to save it to your device. Your offline titles can be found in the 'Download' tab in the menu at the bottom of the mobile app.

Changing resolution

If you want to save on space, try changing the quality of the download. Go to the app's settings and click on 'Download Quality'. There, you can switch between three tiers:

Good, Better or Best. And if you want to ensure content is downloaded only over wi-fi (saving you from using up your precious mobile data), there's a toggle for that too.

X-ray vision

X-Ray grants access to actor biographies, trivia and other information overlaid on your show. Tap anywhere on the screen on iOS, Android or Fire devices to bring it up.

De-registering devices

Rather than allowing someone else access to your streaming service if you sell or give away your device, go into the app's settings on another device and click 'Registered devices'. There, you can remove any unwanted devices from your account.



STREAMING APPS & SERVICES

THE BEST WAY TO GET YOUR STREAMING FIX

Spotify **from free**

December 2016 ★★★★★

Its accessibility, ease of use, huge catalogue and more mature music discovery are reasons why Spotify remains at the top of the pile.

Sound quality Up to 320kbps Ogg Vorbis **Offline playback** Yes



Music apps

Tidal **from £10/month**

Best music streaming service, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

One of the few streaming services to offer lossless audio, Tidal's exclusive content and curated playlists make it stand out.

Sound quality Up to 1411kbps lossless **Offline playback** Yes



BBC iPlayer **Free**

Awards 2015 ★★★★★

Quality content, a great interface and free (for catch-up TV), BBC's iPlayer is one of, if not the best, video on-demand platforms out there.

Resolution Up to 1080p **Offline playback** Yes



Video apps

Amazon Prime Instant Video **from £5.99/month**

Best video streaming service, Awards 2017 ★★★★★

Cheaper than Netflix and with an extensive catalogue geared towards new releases as well as 4K and HDR content, this is a great service.

Resolution Up to Ultra HD **Offline playback** Yes



Netflix **from £5.99/month**

Best video streaming service, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Without doubt one of the most satisfying streaming services, with excellent new and original content, it runs on practically every platform available.

Resolution Up to Ultra HD **Offline Playback** Yes



TABLETS

VIDEO, GAMES AND MUSIC ON A PORTABLE SCREEN

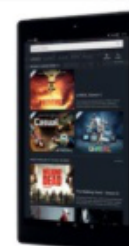
[View offers
whf.cm/BBPortableMusicPlayers](http://whf.cm/BBPortableMusicPlayers)

Amazon Fire HD 10 **£150**

Best tablet under £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★☆

A cheap and cheerful tablet that's good for the money and has a lot of the functionality you'd find in more expensive efforts.

OS Android **Size (hwd)** 114 x 190 x 10mm **Storage** 8GB



Up to
£200

Apple iPad (2018) **from £319**

Awards 2018 ★★★★★

The latest iPad receives a muted update, but it still continues to give you that elegant and intuitive experience we expect from Apple.

OS iOS **Size (hwd)** 240 x 170 x 8mm **Storage** 32, 128GB



£200
and above

Apple iPad Mini (2019) **£399**

Best tablet over £200, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

The looks haven't changed, but under the skin improvements make the latest iPad Mini even better than before

OS iOS **Size (hwd)** 204 x 135 x 6mm **Storage** 64, 256GB





ACCESSORIES

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS

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Up to £50

Chord Company C-Line £40/m

Best analogue interconnect under £50, Awards 2019 ★★★★★
Few entry-level interconnects at the price come close to offering the sonic enjoyment that Chord has produced with this cable.
Balanced/Single-ended Single



QED Performance Audio 40 £40/m

Best analogue interconnect under £50, Awards 2017 ★★★★★
Few rival interconnects are as good as this QED when it comes to detail resolution and precision. It's nicely made too.
Balanced/Single-ended Single



£50 and above

Chord Clearway Analogue RCA £90/m

Best analogue interconnect £50+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★
If you're spending cash on hi-fi components and you want cabling that doesn't inhibit performance, the Clearway may be the ideal pick.
Balanced/Single-ended Single



AV & HI-FI RACKS

HI-FI KIT CAN ONLY SOUND ITS BEST WITH THE PROPER SUPPORT

[View offers whf.cm/BBAVHiFiRacks](http://whf.cm/BBAVHiFiRacks)

Up to £500

Atacama Apollo Storm 6 £390

February 2018 ★★★★★
Another class-leading support from Atacama that's cheaper than its Award-winning sibling. It lets your kit perform at its best.
Width 590mm **Modular** Yes **Cable management** No



"Want to give your system adequate support for a decent price? Atacama has you covered"

Hi-Fi Racks Omnium8 £478

Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★
Hi-Fi Racks has made the Omnium8 about as flexible as possible. You can specify everything from finish to shelf spacing and upright shape.
Width 57cm **Modular** Yes **Cable management** Yes



"As configurable an equipment rack as we've come across"

£500 and above

Atacama Elite Eco 12.0 £598

March 2013 ★★★★★
Those looking for a strong support for AV and hi-fi that enables a fluid, authoritative presentation will like the performance this rack can offer.
Width 1157mm **Modular** Yes **Cable management** Yes



"We were impressed by how our system performed when using this rack"

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 SE £600

Best equipment rack, Awards 2019 ★★★★★
The SE stands for Special Edition, while significant improvements in the Eco 60-40's design and dampening mean it works better than ever.
Width 600mm **Modular** Yes **Cable management** No



"If you're of the opinion all hi-fi racks are created more or less equal, think again"

CARTRIDGES

YOU CAN'T HEAR YOUR RECORDS WITHOUT 'EM

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whf.cm/BBCartridges

Goldring E3 £90

Best cartridge under £150, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

This is a wonderfully balanced and entertaining moving magnet cartridge that will work well with a wide range of record players.
Type MM **Tracking weight** 2.0g



"The sound it delivers is clear, informative and fun. We can't ask much more than that"

Ortofon Quintet Blue £349

Best cartridge over £150, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Given a suitably capable system we have no doubt the Ortofon Quintet Blue will impress. It's a well-balanced design with no obvious weaknesses.
Type MC **Tracking weight** 2.3g



"There's plenty of attack here as basslines are punched out with glee and no shortage of passion"

Cartridges

HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS

HOW TO GET THE VERY BEST FROM YOUR CANS

View offers
whf.cm/BBPhonoAmps

Pathos Aurium £895

August 2013 ★★★★★

A top-class choice for amplification, but you'll need a source and a pair of headphones of similar quality if you want the best from it.
Inputs Line-in x3, XLR **Outputs** Line-out, XLR, 6.3mm headphone



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Tacima CS947 £35

September 2015 ★★★★★

Great value, the highlight being how well it allows for greater detail, attack and dynamics. For the price, it's a brilliant entry-level purchase.
Type Block **Mains filter** Yes **No. of plugs** 6



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Olson Sound Fantastic HF6 £180

September 2015 ★★★★★

Grants a system far greater freedom of expression without sacrificing control or authority. If you can afford to, buy it without reservations.

Type Block **Mains filter** Yes **No. of plugs** 6



Russ Andrews X6 £381

September 2015 ★★★★★

No matter what the source material, the X6 helps unearth a revealing well-integrated listen, allowing your kit to be as explicit as it can be.

Type Block **Mains filter** Yes **No. of plugs** 6



PHONO STAGES

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Edwards Audio Apprentice MM £90

Awards 2017 ★★★★★

A fine entry-level phono stage that will deliver a crisp and exciting sound from any good price-compatible moving magnet cartridge.

Type MM **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 16 x 11cm



Graham Slee Gram Amp 2 Communicator £180

July 2018 ★★★★★

A gem of a phono amplifier that has stood the test of time. It offers class-leading levels of detail, brilliant timing and a sweet sound.

Type MM **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 12 x 19cm



Rega Fono MM MK3 £199

Best phono stage under £250, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

Rega has managed to take a near-perfect product and squeeze more improvements from it. It's a class-leading performer.

Type MM **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 18 x 14cm



Musical Fidelity LX2-LPS £199

April 2018 ★★★★★

Though it's not as versatile as the Rega Mk3, the LX2 delivers a more engaging performance thanks to its open, full-bodied sound.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 17 x 19cm



Cambridge Audio Duo MC/MM £249

July 2018 ★★★★★

This is a well-equipped MM/MC phono stage that even has a headphone output. Its sound quality is right up there in the leading pack.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 22 x 16cm



Arcam rPhono £399

Best phono stage £250+, Awards 2019 ★★★★★

A hugely accomplished box from Arcam. It sounds great and has a combination of insight and entertainment that few rivals can match.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 19 x 12cm



Lindemann Limetree Phono £595

February 2019 ★★★★★

It may look ordinary, but this little box is an enjoyable and insightful performer with premium turntables, and sets a high standard at this price.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 12 x 12cm



Musical Fidelity MX-VYNL £699**Best phono stage over £500, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

A superbly made unit, that's nice to use and, most importantly, sounds lovely. As good a phono stage as we've heard at this price.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 5 x 22 x 22cm

£500 to £1000

Vertere Acoustics Phono-1 MkII £1000**March 2020 ★★★★★**

If you're looking for a top-class phono stage at this level, this should be at the top of your shopping list; it never trades musical enjoyment for analysis.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 5.5 x 21 x 23.5cm**Pathos In The Groove £1299****February 2017 ★★★★★**

Provided you have a suitably talented turntable, this is a fine and flexible phono stage that beautifully combines refinement with insight.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 20 x 26cm**Cyrus Phono Signature/PSX-R2 £2290****May 2016 ★★★★★**

Partnered with the PSX-R2 power supply and a suitably talented turntable, the Signature sounds great. It's a top-class phono stage.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 22 x 36cm

£1001 and above

Burmester 100 Phono £8840**March 2018 ★★★★★**

One of the finest phono stages available, the 100 is an understated, but brilliant performer that has a fluid and dynamic presentation.

Type MM, MC **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 48 x 35cm

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Chord Company C-Screen £5/m**June 2018 ★★★★★**

The C-Screen possesses the fantastic ability to mirror a system's punch and drive. What it does, it does better than anything else at the price.

Single or Bi-wire Single**QED XT25 £6/m****May 2018 ★★★★★**

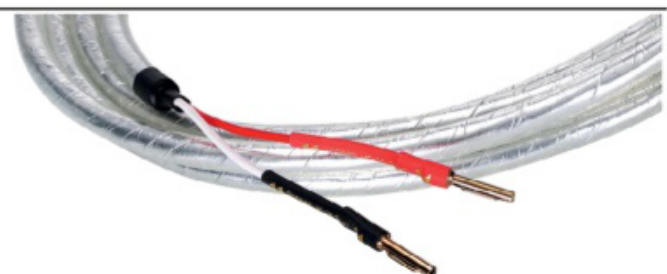
Features the same characteristics as the more expensive XT40, displaying the kind of transparency that's difficult for its rivals to match.

Single or Bi-wire Single**Atlas Equator 2.0 (2018) £7.25/m****Reviewed online, 2018 ★★★★★**

A nicely built speaker cable that promotes a wonderfully clean and detailed delivery – it's an affordable and easy way to spruce up your system.

Single or Bi-wire Single**Chord Company Clearway £10/m****Best speaker cable, Awards 2017 ★★★★★**

Not the flashiest cable, its strength is aiding dynamics and musicality, as well as knitting instruments together for an enjoyable experience.

Single or Bi-wire Single

Up to £10/m

£10/m
and above

QED XT40 £10/m**Awards 2014 ★★★★★**

Facilitates a detailed, balanced and authoritative sound with a full-bodied presentation that leaves competitors sounding lean.

Single or Bi-wire Single**AWARD
WINNER****AudioQuest Rocket 11 £12.50/m****Best speaker cable under £15/m, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

If you're looking for a flexible and transparent speaker cable, this is a great option for the price. It works well with a wide range of systems, too.

Single or Bi-wire Both**PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR****Chord Company RumourX £18/m****Best speaker cable over £15/m, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

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Single or Bi-wire Single**AWARD
WINNER**

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whf.cm/BBSpeakerStands](http://whf.cm/BBSpeakerStands)**Atacama Moseco 6 £120****Best speaker stand, Awards 2019 ★★★★★**

A speaker stand that impresses with how weighty and dynamic it allows systems to sound. Considering the price, it's something of a steal.

Height 60cm Fillable Yes Finishes 4 (pole), 3 (base panel)**AWARD
WINNER**

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Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands £200**September 2014 ★★★★★**

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Height 66.5cm Fillable No Finishes 2

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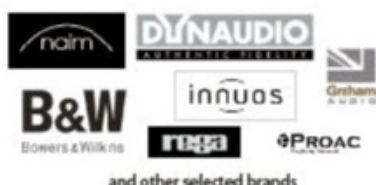
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SONGS TO CATCH YOU OUT ON APRIL FOOL'S DAY

April Fool's Day is something that sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom: we've actually set aside half a day every year solely for the purpose of lying to each other. You can lie about anything you want, as many times as you like, and nobody can be angry with you as long as you start telling the truth again at noon.

But it isn't only humans that lie, of course. Sometimes the things we create have a knack of tricking us as well, and music is no exception. We all love a good plot twist, but what about a track that lulls you into believing it is one thing, only to catch you out by darting in the opposite direction?

In this list, we've avoided those schizophrenic arrangements that change tack every 30 seconds and gone instead for those with a definite style change, unforeseen rhythmic adjustment or sudden dynamic shift. They're all great for testing your system, too, so pop one on in company and watch to see how many ears prick up when you get to that bit.

SIT DOWN, STAND UP (SNAKES AND LADDERS) RADIOHEAD

There is obviously a build throughout the introductory section of this track, subtle as it is, but if you were asked to guess what it led to before your first listen then the odds of success would be slim. After three minutes of eerily sparse piano and repeated vocal lines, a few jabs of a synthesizer are all the warning you get of the oncoming cacophony of jungle-style polyrhythm that is swiftly joined by Colin Greenwood's sprinting bass guitar line. It's enough to trip up many a hi-fi system, at very least.

GLITTER AND TRAUMA BIFFY CLYRO

On *Infinity Land*, the album before Biffy Clyro made the switch to chart-topping anthemic rock, Simon Neil admitted to willfully toying with his audience. *Glitter And Trauma* offers an electronic intro designed to trick listeners into thinking they have bought the wrong CD, before it explodes into life with Biffy's then-trademark angular riffs and discordant harmony.

SHAKE A FIST HOT CHIP

"Before we go any further, I'd like to show you all a little game I made up," says the voice interrupting this belter from Hot Chip's *Made In The Dark*. "This game is called 'Sounds of the Studio'." The section starts off a bit like when you used to press the demo sounds on the keyboard during a music lesson, jarring against

the body of the track that precedes and follows it, but nonetheless it works when taken in context of the rather eccentric band who decided to include it.

MOGWAI FEAR SATAN MOGWAI

Mogwai's extended instrumentals are hugely dependent on dynamics, and few shifts sting as much as the one in this track that closes their debut album – especially when heard on the band's *Special Moves* live album. The secret is not to turn your amplifier up too loud as the music dulls to near silence, lest you blow your speakers.

M.A.A.D CITY KENDRICK LAMAR

Much of the beauty in Kendrick Lamar's music is his refusal to be shackled by one style or genre, even within a single track. The change in *m.A.A.d city* is a seemingly simple shift of impetus, but it is one of those that will make you do that face; you know the one. Best of all, it still hits even after repeated listens.

HAJNAL VENETIAN SNARES

This track by Aaron Funk, otherwise known as Venetian Snares, doesn't constitute much of a twist if you're listening to his album *Rossz Csillag Alatt Született* in full, but heard in isolation it's enough to make your gran spit out her teeth. It samples various classical composers, including Bartók, Mahler and Stravinsky, adopting a jazz-like, brushed-kit rhythm before careering into Funk's trademark breakbeats.

SAFE PASSAGE 65DAYSOFSTATIC

Another album closer with a sudden change in dynamics, *Safe Passage*, from the album *Wild Light*, twinkles into being for its first minute or so before flooding the speakers with a tidal wave of warm synths. It is a euphoric ending to an atmospheric eight-song suite, like a dying star that celebrates its passing with an intense beam of light.

SKATE JANEK SCHAEFER

Don't bother scouring the internet for a stream of this one: it is a vinyl-only experience. Award-winning English composer Janek Schaefer's 2003 release *Skate* was designed as a random-playing LP, with several lengths of groove marooned by blank vinyl, meaning the stylus would skate and skip between grooves free from the physical shackles of pre-determination. In short, it will catch you out by not sounding the same twice, however many times you play it.

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Printed by William Gibbons

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU **www.marketforce.co.uk**
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