



rod easdown

A close listen speaks volumes

When it comes to choosing a quality hi-fi system, louder doesn't always mean better.

STEREO music systems are so chock-full of features these days, it's easy for buyers to lose sight of the objective — beautiful music. We listened to lots of stereos priced about \$500 for this comparison and acceptable sound quality is hard to find. Some have so much bass response that the high-end notes, carrying much of the musical message, are drowned out.

A Sony system we listened to came with a separate subwoofer and even with that turned off, the bass was way overstated.

Many people like lots of bass. The trouble is that when it dominates the music, it becomes wearing on the ears and can even cause headaches. And lightweight, plastic-clad speakers are apt to distort low-range sound, especially when played loud. It all goes fuzzy and sounds like a coagulating mess.

So, the most important thing when buying a system is to listen. Take some favourite CDs with you or, even easier, pull out your iPod or iPhone and play music you know well.

You're listening for precise

definition, clarity and depth. When you close your eyes, you should be able to see the musicians on the stage and know where they're located. You'll be amazed by the differences you hear between systems.

The most important point is to get the system that sounds best to you. Only you have your ears and your taste in music and what sounds good to a salesperson or your friends may not be your cup of tea.

Take some CDs or pull out your iPod and play music you know well.

Think about the space you have to fill. If it is a large, open-plan room, systems like this don't have the horsepower to fill it properly. You'll need something with more power and bigger speakers. But if it's a bedroom or office, these work nicely.

If you like your music loud, some of these systems won't be powerful enough for you and lots of them distort badly when the volume is right up.

music systems under \$500



Yamaha MCR-040
\$499 ★★ ★★ yamahamusic.com.au
A NICE compact unit that looks good, is available in a range of 10 colours and pumps out a lot of sound for its size. It has good definition but it can sound a little hollow at times. The bass is surprisingly powerful and the soundstage is impressively wide. It gets both digital and FM radio, there's a USB for MP3 or WMA music as well as a CD player and an iPod dock on top. Each speaker houses a 10-centimetre full-range driver that's magnetically shielded. The centre control unit is 180mm wide x 120mm high x 309mm deep and each speaker is 122mm wide x 118mm high x 287mm deep. Don't lose the remote; some functions won't operate without it.



Sony CMTMX750NI
\$449 ★★ ★★ sony.com.au
A NEAT-looking unit with an iPod dock that folds down from the fascia. The sound from the two-way speakers can get a bit delicate but bass is certainly all there and the definition is good. The sound across all ranges is probably best described as accurate. It has a digital radio tuner along with FM, internet radio capacity through a home Wi-Fi network, a USB port and the iPod dock and CD player. Two generous speakers each have separate woofers and tweeters and there's a sleep timer and an equaliser. It's compatible with MP3, AAC and WMA. The control unit is 309mm wide x 122mm high x 247mm deep and the speakers are each 150mm wide x 240mm high x 220mm deep.



LG FB164DAB
\$499 ★★ ★★ lge.com.au
THIS is designed to appeal to younger people and the good thing about bigger speakers is better sound quality. This sounds impressive, with excellent definition, great bass and a wide soundstage. The cabinet doesn't feel terribly robust — the whole top flexes as you open the iPod dock — but the speakers are big enough to each fit a couple of mid/bass drivers and a tweeter, with a passive radiator at each side. There's digital radio as well as FM, a sleep timer and a USB that allows recording to, as well as playing from, a USB driver. The control unit is 175mm wide x 264mm high x 285mm deep and each speaker is 132mm wide x 322mm high x 290mm deep.

Looking for that special companion

The iPad blazed the way for tablets but now the competition is hotting up.

THE tablet concept had been around for years with mixed success until Apple's iPad struck a chord with consumers due to its balance of price, portability and functionality. Apple has upped the ante with the release of the iPad 2 but faces stiff competition.

Think of a tablet as a notebook computer but with a touchscreen display and the keyboard ripped off. They are great for doing things you usually



adam turner

would with your computer: browsing web pages, reading books and magazines, watching movies, listening to music, emailing and using services such as Facebook and Twitter. A tablet

is a far more natural and intuitive way to handle many of these tasks. Where a tablet falls short is in content creation.

Virtual onscreen keyboards are fine for bashing out an email or a Facebook status update but anything more is a slog. You wouldn't want to write a school assignment or the great Australian novel on an iPad 2. That is why most people view a tablet as a companion to their computer, rather than a replacement.

If you already have a smartphone, you might struggle to justify buying a tablet that performs the same tricks. Tablets trade portability for usability but the bigger screen makes them better for browsing the web and reading books, newspapers and magazines.

However, these devices need not be mutually exclusive.

You might find that a notebook is best for your desk and a smartphone slips nicely in your

pocket but a tablet fills the space in between.

Despite its popularity, Apple's iPad lacks a physical keyboard, optical drive, USB port, memory card slot and the ability to play Flash content such as video clips and online games. Apple also rules the iPad and online App Store with an iron fist.

If Apple's walled garden leaves you feeling claustrophobic, you might want to look to other tablets that offer more freedom.

android tablets

Samsung Galaxy Tab
\$999 ★★ ★★ samsung.com/au
THE seven-inch touchscreen display isn't as sharp as the iPad's. It runs Android 2.2 Frodo with built-in Adobe Flash 10.1, plus a range of pre-installed apps. At 385 grams, it's much easier to carry than an iPad. It features a microSD slot and USB connectivity. Along with Wi-Fi, you can connect to mobile broadband, as well as make phone calls and send text messages. There's a three-megapixel rear camera and 1.3-megapixel front camera. It can be sluggish, particularly with complex web pages. The Galaxy Tab 10.1v, which runs Android 3.0 on a faster dual-core processor with a 10.1-inch display, is available exclusively from Vodafone for \$729.



Telstra T-Touch Tab
\$279 ★★ telstra.com.au
THIS budget tablet running Android 2.1 Eclair looks impressive, weighing 500 grams and with front and rear cameras, as well as micro-USB and microSD card slots (with a 2GB card thrown in). It connects to the internet via Wi-Fi or the Telstra mobile network and you can make and receive calls and text messages. Unfortunately, its seven-inch display isn't nearly as sharp as the iPad 2 or Galaxy Tab and it is far less responsive due to the resistive touchscreen panel. You can't use a two-fingered pinch to manipulate images and web pages and the home screen is stuck in landscape mode. It also lacks Flash compatibility, which should be one of the key selling points for Android.



Viewsonic ViewPad 7
\$499 ★★ ★★ viewsonic.com.au
RUNNING Android 2.2 Frodo with a seven-inch display weighing 375 grams, this rivals the Galaxy Tab in terms of portability. It features mini-USB and a microSD slot along with built-in Wi-Fi and you can connect to mobile broadband, as well as make phone calls and send text messages. There's a three-megapixel rear camera but the front video camera is only VGA (0.3 megapixels). It won't run Flash 10.1, which negates one of Android's key strengths, and has a mediocre 800 x 480 display. It comes with an elegant protective case. There's also a business-focused \$699 ViewPad 10 and a consumer-focused \$599 ViewPad 10s.



sight&sound

On with the Slideshow

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rainfall icons familiar from newspaper weather pages or TV weather bulletins.

He says ARN tests its Slideshow output with new radios as they come to market. "We had a Grundig radio in here recently because our slides weren't showing properly," he says. "So we tweaked our output to make it work."

He says the problem was there was no standard size of screen from the radio manufacturers.

"If we've got a radio with a screen, we want to make it look as good as possible for the listeners," Condon says.

SBS was one of the first to use Slideshow to advertise its products, such as compilation audio CDs. Now it is devoting a

lot of data throughput to Slideshow, especially for its digital-only channels SBS Chill and SBS Pop Asia.

Trevor Long, business affairs manager for SBS audio and language content, says Slideshow is a moveable feast and different amounts of the data stream are allocated as required.

He declined to divulge precise allocations but he gave an example that on a stream of 80 kilobits a second, 64kbps could be allocated to audio and 16kbps to data, which meant the Slideshow pictures would arrive at the radio quickly so the pictures were viewed when a particular track was playing or when a news item was being read.

"The speed is crucial," Long says. "We want the images to reflect the on-air content — and with a combination of now-

playing data, news data and sales information, the time for download is crucial.

"You could have as little as 2kbps for it. However, we feel a more generous allocation is required for the best user experience."

The broadcasters are putting out some good Slideshow content.

CARL ROBERTSON, *Bush Australia*

Electronics distributor Bush Australia, which owns the Grundig brand in Australia, has designed its own DAB+ radios specifically for the Australian market and one full-colour Slideshow model, the Grundig Trio Touch, was released three months ago.

Bush Australia product development manager Carl Robertson says the company had some help from a British design house.

Bush Australia's parent company, Harvard, is based in Britain, where the DAB radio format, the forerunner to DAB+, has been on air for more than a decade. "We saw there was a gap in the market for something that embraced the Slideshow in Australia," Robertson says.

The Grundig Trio Touch took less than six months to bring to market.

"The broadcasters are really putting out some really good Slideshow content," he says.

Bush Australia has introduced some other innovative products for DAB+ buyers in Australia, including a TV set-top box with DAB+ tuner.

Another recent product is a

DAB+ radio with an electronic program guide (EPG), deployed initially by SBS and the ABC, so listeners can tune into a particular show at a preset time.

Another radio is a tri-band digital and analog radio, with AM, FM and DAB+ tuners. This will help city listeners who want to listen to the community stations on AM that have yet to make the move to digital or listeners on the metropolitan digital fringe who are not within the official digital-radio broadcast range but may have coverage.

The other two commercially available tri-band radios in Australia are car radios: an after-market radio from Kenwood and a car radio being offered as a factory option by BMW Australia for its 5- and 7-Series vehicles and the 6-Series when it becomes available this year.

sound advice

Pure Sensia

Designed: Britain
Distributor: Pioneer
RRP \$749

THIS unit looks like something the Jetsons would aspire to own. It is shaped like a football and sits inside the slot of a small, flat cradle, allowing it to be swivelled so the 14.5-centimetre capacitive touchscreen (with 640 x 480 pixels) can be tilted up or down for better viewing. There are four body colours — white, black, red or yellow. It has a sturdy, telescopic aerial.

The elegant colour touchscreen features an easy-to-understand menu. Tap on the top right to enlarge the screen so the Slideshow can run full-size. Swipe the screen to the right or left to move through the different apps that can be deployed, such as FlowSongs or the Lounge, if the radio has been hooked up to a Wi-Fi network. The Lounge is a service that contains Pure's index of many thousands of internet radio stations.

The software on the device, or the firmware, can be updated as Pure adds new functions.

After a bit of futzing, it is easy to work out how to operate. The remote is a small hand-held device, a half-egg-shaped pod. Further instructions are available on the Sensia website.

The two speakers face forward on the curved edges of the radio as if they were ears.

Although it is unlikely to be used as a portable radio, there is a woven mesh pouch with a foam protective layer with a drawing that can be used to carry the unit around.

Pure's parent company is Imagination Technologies, a British electronics and software house, listed on the London Stock Exchange. Two of Imagination's three largest shareholders are Intel and Apple.

pure.com/au



Grundig Trio Touch

Designed: Australia/Britain
Distributor: Bush Australia
RRP \$549

THE 8.9-centimetre resistive touchscreen has a resolution of 320 x 240 pixels. There is a small circular knob on the right of the screen for precise volume or tuning control.

The Trio is an iPod- and iPhone-compatible device that, from the rear, looks like an imposing piece of hi-fi kit, with its multiple RCA connectors and other slots, although the speakers are not comparable with hi-fi quality. There is a Wi-Fi chip to connect to a wireless network and an ethernet slot for a cable to connect directly to a computer.

Speakers are mounted each side of the central control unit but can be unfastened and positioned around the room by using longer cables.

The shorter cables have to be screwed in to feed sound to the speakers when they are clipped in the home position but this is not mentioned in the instructions.

There is a remote-control unit. The colourful screen is easy to read in daylight and the menu is easy to operate.

It has a strong, telescopic aerial to ensure good reception indoors.

grundig.net.au

radios with pictures

iriver S100

Designed: South Korea/China
Distributor: C.R. Kennedy
RRP \$166

THIS is a hand-held MP3 multimedia player with a DAB/DMB function. It receives DAB+ radio signals in Australia and if you travel to South Korea you can tune into the mobile TV signals on the DMB channels.

The screen is an impressive colour LCD 7.2 centimetres from corner to corner. But it is not a touchscreen.

The menu is navigated with a series of five buttons for cursor control, including a central raised "OK" button.

The battery is charged through a USB cable from a computer or power adaptor.

The reception on this unit is much stronger than the predecessor model, the iriver B30, which had a small, metal, telescopic antenna that could be swivelled around in search of a radio signal. However, unlike the B30, the S100 has no external speaker. The headphones you choose to connect to the unit will act as the antenna.

The on-off button on the edge of the unit also doubles as a lock, so a listener does not change channels or accidentally record audio on the internal storage.

The iriver plus4 utility software that helps transfer AVI, MP3 or MP4 files or information to the MP3 player is written for Windows 7.

The device can store up to 8GB of data and the firmware is upgradeable. The storage capacity can be expanded by adding microSD memory cards.

It weighs about 77 grams.

iriver.com.au



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