

DOLBY ATMOS EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT HI*FI?

VIDEO SPECIAL!

HOME CINEMA BLOCKBUSTERS

Our pick of the kit for movies and music

INSIDE
TVs, amplifiers, speaker packages, Blu-ray players and more...



+
DENON HITS THE HEIGHTS with its formidable AV amplifier



REVIEWED

Fyne Audio standmounters



Pro-Ject's moving-coil cartridge

Amazon's super smart Echo Show 5



+
B&W'S STUNNING FORMATION WEDGE
Sets the new standard



OUR 300 BEST BUYS BUYING GUIDE

Oscars? Bravo!

Make every night movie night – or, these days, box-set night – with a stunning home cinema system

There hasn't been a better time to enjoy a top-notch home cinema. The advent of 4K content, viewed via a physical disc or the magic of streaming, means the video experience you can enjoy at home really can be on a par with going to the cinema. With that amazing picture, though, it's clear that you really need superb sound to complete the proper cinema experience.

Over the next 14 pages, we suggest a number of ways you could achieve that magical combination of excellent pictures and sound to create a wonderful home cinema to suit you. That may be a full-on £12,000 system with AV amplifier and surround speaker package, or it might be simply a

great TV with a source for some extra content and a soundbar to provide fabulous sound that comes in at just over a grand.

We've got those two systems here, and everything in between, with products from the likes of Sony, Denon, Q Acoustics, LG, Samsung and Sennheiser - among many others - enjoying perfect synergy with their system mates.

Things kick off with three 'traditional' systems using an AV amplifier along with either a very large-screen TV or a projector, and then we move on to the more simple systems using a soundbase, in one case, and soundbars, which mean fewer boxes in your living room and, in most cases, less of an outlay - with the exception, of course, of Sennheiser's remarkable Ambeo Soundbar.

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SEAMLESS SYNERGY AT A KEEN PRICE

When we first tested Sony's mid-range 65in set less than a year ago, it would have set you back £2300. And, at that price, it comfortably won a five-star review and, far more importantly, went on to take a *What Hi-Fi?* Award. That you can now pick up this beast of a television for £1500 is serious cause for, if not celebration perhaps, at least a double take - and with it, consideration.

As we said in our review, this is a television that combines some of the best features of the top end with a price that's affordable to more people. Well, those top-end features are still there, of course, but that affordability is now only more, um, affordable.

What you get for your £1500 is a TV that delivers a picture performance not significantly short of the very best flagship models of last year. There is fantastic detail in both the brightest and darkest picture elements. It's a brilliantly bright, punchy picture with stunning, natural colour reproduction - an exuberant image combined beautifully with genuine subtlety and realism.

After waxing lyrical about this set for a while, we concluded that the only significant thing missing is a way to watch brand-new films (other than Netflix Originals) in 4K and/or HDR. For that, we said, you'll need to add a 4K Blu-ray player.

Happily, that is where the first of the KD-65XF9005's Sony stablemates comes in. The UBP-X700 was pretty much the first of the 'budget' 4K Blu-ray players that we could fully recommend. The 700 has all the features of its 2017 Award-winning sibling, the UBP-X800, with the added benefit of supporting Dolby Vision HDR. This 4K player juggles the multitude of colours in *Thor: Ragnarok*, for example, with an incredibly deft hand. It balances the fantastical colourful elements with more realistic earth hues nicely. Skin tones are natural and action scenes handled with smooth and stable motion. Picture-wise, this is a bargain of a 4K player for its price.

Sonic clarity

But, of course, in a home cinema system, the sound plays just as important a role as the picture. This Sony Blu-ray player comes up trumps here as well. Voices are

- TELEVISION
Sony KD-65XF9005
£1500
- BLU-RAY PLAYER
Sony UBP-X700
£185
- AV AMPLIFIER
Sony STR-DN1080
£397
- SPEAKER PACKAGE
Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1
£790

SYSTEM TOTAL
£2872

View online review
whf.cm/UBP-X700



View online review
whf.cm/3010i51



View online review
whf.cm/STR-DN1080



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 punch when fists and hammer strike humans and Hulks alike.

The X700 remains an engaging listen, and comes well equipped on all fronts. It supports all surround-sound formats, including the latest Dolby Atmos and DTS:X soundtracks. Despite not flashing the hi-res audio badge, it can play up to 24-bit/192kHz files in all popular formats, including WAV and FLAC. DSD is also on the menu.

But only with a suitable AV amplifier, of course. And, as far as a surround-sound power source and processor goes, it makes complete sense to us to stick with Sony for a hat-trick of Award winners. For the STR-DN1080 is a compelling listen - it's our current AV amplifier Product of the Year and an absolute steal at £397.

Not only can it play Dolby Atmos soundtracks up to a 5.1.2 speaker

configuration, but it also supports DTS:X. And all six HDMI inputs at the back are HDCP 2.2 compliant, supporting full playback of 4K HDR content.

It takes only a couple of minutes of listening to the *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* 4K Blu-ray and we're grinning. The STR-DN 1080 sounds fantastic, reaching deep into its reserves to deliver a performance packed with punch, dynamism and authority in a way we haven't heard at this sort of price.

There's an incredible amount of detail, from natural, expressive voices to layers of insight and depth surrounding each sound effect. Dynamically, it's a fun and exciting listen. Quiet moments are as captivating as huge explosions going off in every corner of the big, open soundfield - and the DN1080 handles the changing shifts with masterful control. It's enthralling.

What's more, this amp has a rhythmic quality that lends itself well to music, whether you're listening to a concert Blu-ray or streaming music from Spotify. A home cinema amp at this level isn't a match for dedicated stereo amplifiers such as the Rega Brio, of course, but the Sony handles dynamic shifts and vocals

in a fluid, articulate manner that sounds more musical than most alternatives.

The amp can play up to 24-bit/192kHz files in all popular formats, and will also play native double DSD files across HDMI and USB. In fact, two of the HDMI inputs are optimised for the best audio quality. Sony recommends plugging your favourite sources into these two.

To do this trio of Sony superstars justice, we need to find a speaker package that has excellent sonic chops for a good price. You won't be terribly surprised, no doubt, to hear that we've found one in the form of Q Acoustics' hugely impressive 3010 5.1 Cinema Pack.

If a 5.1 home cinema package comprises four five-star speakers, then it would appear to be well over half way to five-star fame itself; two thirds of the Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1 Cinema Pack is made up of two pairs of the company's five-star 3010i standmounts. And they aren't let down by the accompanying 3090i centre speaker and 3060S subwoofer either.

Effortless musicality

You get a strong sense of these speakers' hi-fi roots, their effortless musicality breezing through the enjoyably eclectic soundtrack of Edgar Wright's *Baby Driver*. Whether it's the rhythmic drum beats in Kashmere Stage Band's *Kashmere*, the jazzy piano in Carla Thomas's *B-A-B-Y* or the bouncy basslines that drive Baby's recorded remixes, the Q Acoustics ensure they're lively and dynamic.

And that musicality is all backed up by decent scale and spaciousness - winning traits for home cinema set-ups, of course - as well as tight integration between the speakers. Placed around our AV testing room, they manage to fill a gapless, busy yet coherent soundfield.

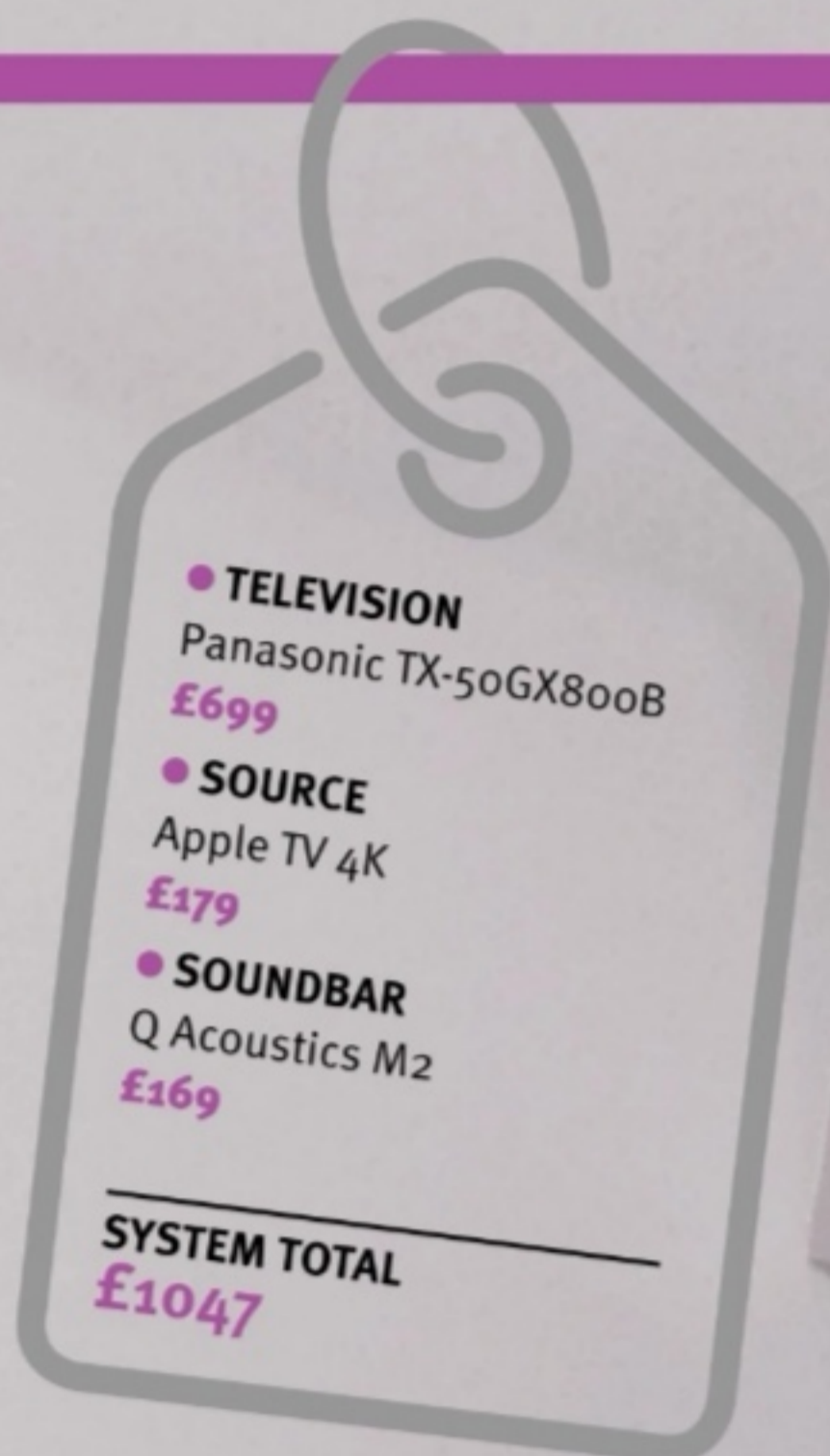
As the smallest standmount in the 3000i range, the 3010i can only bring so much bass in terms of quantity and depth, though - which is where the subwoofer comes in. The sub brings a definite low-end presence to the otherwise bass-limited presentation, and seamlessly takes over from the 3010i for the lower registers.

All in all then, this is a home cinema system that truly revels in its synergy. The three Sony products blend together beautifully, perhaps unsurprisingly, and the fine Q Acoustics package does them all justice, and then some.

View online review
whf.cm/KD-65XF9005



REMARKABLE VALUE FOR MONEY



When we first put this system together we had to redo the sums a few times. We couldn't quite believe that a system so accomplished, and so well equipped for the 21st century living room could come in at just over £1000. This set-up is, simply, remarkable value for money.

Let's start with the 50in television. We first reviewed the Panasonic TX-50GX800B in July. And already we are seeing it available to buy at £100 less than the original £799. It is the first TV we've tested that supports both of the two competing dynamic metadata-based HDR formats, Dolby Vision and HDR10+. But is the GX800 all it's cracked up to be? Broadly speaking, it is. You won't mistake its performance for that of a proper premium model, but this is an undeniably great TV for the money.

The GX800 is a 4K LCD set with an edge-LED backlight. Going with edge backlighting, rather than a direct, full-array system has consequences in terms of contrast, but does also allow the set to be pleasingly slim.

On top of Dolby Vision and HDR10+ compatibility, the GX800 supports HDR10 and HLG, giving it the full suite of current HDR formats. Amazon Video and Netflix are on board in 4K and with Dolby Vision, and all of the UK's core catch-up apps (BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4 and My5) are present.

In terms of physical connections, you get three HDMI inputs, two USB sockets, ethernet, component video, optical out and a dedicated headphone output, as well as an aerial socket for live TV.

The GX800 provides a wonderfully natural and balanced picture. Where many sets at this price tend to over-enhance the picture and exaggerate edges in order to make an impact, the Panasonic's smooth subtlety is preferable in the long run.

Poetry in motion

Whites are pure and colours are well judged, with skin tones a particular highlight. Motion is good for a TV at this price. We recommend setting Intelligent Frame Creation to Mid and switching Clear Motion off in order to get fairly crisp, judder-free motion but without soap opera-like over-enhancement or obvious artefacts being added.

Blacks are pretty good, though not as pure as an OLED or top QLED TV. A little light from the main picture leaks into the black bars top and bottom, but it isn't obvious while viewing and is forgivable for a TV using an edge backlight.

The main weakness we highlighted in our review of this set was that its sound isn't up to much - but, of course, here that doesn't matter. Because we've got Q Acoustics' splendid M2 soundbase to deal with everything sonic. This, Q Acoustics' first soundbase, gained its five stars and a *What Hi-Fi?* Award when it was priced at £299 just a year ago. You can pick one up now for around £170, making it highly recommended indeed.

The M2 is sturdy enough to sit comfortably underneath a fairly big screen TV. It can supposedly handle weight up to 25kg, which is a few kilos more than most 65in LCD TVs, so the 50in Panasonic we have here is no problem at all.

View online review
whf.cm/M2



View online review
whf.cm/TV4K



As we fire up a Full HD transfer of *Neon Demon*, the M2 doesn't waste a moment before revealing its talents. The opening credits are not only a window into Cliff Martinez's fantastically eerily, eclectic score, but they also show off Q Acoustics' pleasing tonality and potential elsewhere.

Delivering sparkly chimes

The downward-firing subwoofer digs deep to punch through the bassline, while the twin Balanced Mode Radiator speakers fight just as hard for the credit by delivering clear, sparkly chimes and energetic synth-driven electronica, with the Q Acoustics affording body to beats and dynamism to the melodies.

That clear, lively and musical character is recognisably in-line with the company's soundbars, so credit to Q Acoustics for its consistency.

Detailed, musical, punchy: all faculties that bode well for the M2's music playback, for those inclined to use a soundbase in that way as well. We Bluetooth a Tidal stream of The Cure's *Six Different Ways* to the M2 and that adeptness is confirmed, with textured

woodwinds and a jaunty piano line appearing confidently between Robert Smith's chipper vocal.

The new Apple TV 4K marries nicely into the abilities of both the Panasonic TV and the Q Acoustics soundbase in this system. The device detects if your TV supports 4K resolution and adjusts its output accordingly. It also tests for HDR support, sending an HDR signal to the TV. If you can receive it, everything the Apple TV 4K sends to your TV from this point will be in 4K.

Big improvements

Following a post-launch software update, the device no longer upconverts standard dynamic range to HDR and it will now match the native frame-rate of your content. Both are big improvements and well worth activating in the settings.

There's just 32GB storage in the standard model (£179), and 64GB in the version we test here, priced £199. That storage sounds paltry, particularly as it can't be expanded by the addition of an external hard drive - but as the Apple TV 4K doesn't download movies, TV shows or music, but exclusively streams them,

the only storage it needs is for the apps themselves. The apps tend to be pretty small - Netflix is just 41.6MB, for example - and though games files tend to be significantly bigger (*Hitman GO* is 1.21GB), the 32GB model should be sufficient for most people.

The UK catch-up services hole has just about been plugged, with BBC iPlayer having been joined by ITV Player and My5. All 4 is missing, which is a shame, but it's a fairly small gap in an otherwise substantial suite of streaming services.

But hands-down, the new Apple TV 4K's biggest selling point is its library of 4K HDR movies. The catalogue is expanding at an impressive rate and currently includes well over 200 films, including recent blockbusters such as *Mission Impossible: Fallout*, *Deadpool 2* and *A Quiet Place*. The only other way to watch these films in 4K HDR is by buying the 4K Blu-rays.

Sky Q has a similar quantity of 4K films, with TV shows and sport added into the mix, but HDR isn't featured at all, and you obviously need a Sky dish and subscription.

Free pixels

Apple TV's simple pay-as-you-go model will be more appealing to many, particularly as the extra pixels don't cost any extra money - most films can be bought for between £10-12 or rented for £5.50, the same price as the Full HD versions and loads cheaper than buying the 4K Blu-rays.

4K movies streamed via iTunes look lovely in their own right. Compared with a Full HD stream, there's a clear step up in sharpness and definition, giving the image much more solidity and depth.

But the addition of HDR is undoubtedly an even bigger upgrade, as it makes movies pop from the screen. Whites are pure and bright, colours are more vibrant and vivid, and blacks deeper and more solid. It's simply a more exciting and enticing picture.

The only rival that gets close to mounting a serious challenge to the Apple TV 4K is the new Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K, which is undeniably awesome for the money. But between the superior performance and unrivalled selection of 4K HDR movies, Apple's streamer more than justifies the extra outlay.

And, for this (amazingly) £1000 system, it's just the thing.

View online review
whf.cm/TX-50GX800B



WE HAVE YOU SURROUNDED

You'll hear the action as if you were there with one of these sterling surround sound packages

You can spend all the money you like on a flash TV or eye-wateringly expensive projector, but without great sound, your movie night is still going to fall flat.

It's the ground shaking with an explosion, the tremor in an actor's voice and the gushing strings of an effusive score that really bring our films to life; and it takes a truly talented speaker package to sit you right in the middle of that on-screen action.

Thankfully, you don't necessarily need to remortgage your house to kit it out with a truly immersive home cinema, as these eight

surround sound speaker packages - all costing less than £1500 - are here to attest.

Our round-up begins with Wharfedale's small but mighty DX-2 package, a *What Hi-Fi?* Award winner at only £399, and takes in a number of the industry's biggest names as we edge towards a recent favourite in the Elac Debut 2.0 5.1 home cinema speaker package.

You'll find Q Acoustics, Fyne Audio, Dali, Monitor Audio and Jamo all represented over the following four pages, with even more Award winners and plenty of other five-star products being celebrated.

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Wharfedale DX-2



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/DX-2

It's easy to baulk at the thought of introducing a full 5.1 surround sound package in your home when you have limited space - but, here, Wharfedale has just the solution.

A follow up to the excellent DX-1HCP and DX-1SE speaker packages, the Wharfedale DX-2 is a tiny and extremely capable 5.1 surround speaker package.

Standing just 19cm tall - they're roughly the same dimensions as the Sonos One - the four satellite speakers are small enough to fit almost anywhere.

Big sound for their size

Speakers this size shouldn't be able to handle Hans Zimmer's epic score for *Inception*, but this package delivers a respectable scale of sound - far larger and with more heft than its diminutive stature would suggest. It sounds punchy, detailed and surprisingly expansive.

It may be designed for smaller rooms, but it copes admirably even in our large AV test room. Naturally, larger speakers will fill a room more easily but, as the dream collapses in the final act of *Inception*, the Wharfedale speakers deliver deep, resonant notes and thunderous crashes with utter composure.

The DX-2 speakers are well-integrated too. Surround effects

ping around the room, engulfing you in an articulate cocoon of sound. The package does a grand job of going quiet, too, and the edges of notes are precise and clean, allowing the Wharfedale to keep a snappy, agile sense of timing. It's a hugely listenable speaker package.

Dialogue cuts through the busy special effects clutter, although we would prefer more texture and depth to voices. More subtlety in the lower frequencies would help overall, but that shouldn't take away from the rumble to punches, explosions and soundtrack crescendos. It's a satisfying amount of grunt and weight - especially at this price - that keeps us hooked to the action.

Push the volume up too high and the package starts to struggle. The DX-2 holds our attention at lower volumes, though - a sure sign of subtlety and expressive dynamics.

Go up the price scale and you'll find speaker packages, such as the Q Acoustics offering to the right, that are more articulate, more precise and bigger-sounding, but they cost double what this does.

The entertaining performance, the compact yet stylish build and appealing price tag - it's impressive how much Wharfedale has bundled into the petite DX-2 package.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR Well-integrated • Plenty of detail, dynamics and punch • Impressive heft and scale • Compact design • Great price

AGAINST Speaker terminals are a tight fit

VERDICT Wharfedale proves you can get movie magic on a small scale with the delightful DX-2

Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/3010i51

The majority of Q Acoustics' 3010i 5.1 Cinema Pack is made up of two pairs of the company's five-star 3010i standmounts. The centre speaker features the same 10cm mid/bass driver as the 3010i, while the unit in the 150W active subwoofer - the slimmest sub the company has made - is larger at 20cm.

If you can extend your budget, the front 3010i pair could be swapped out for two 3050i floorstanders, bringing the cost to £1345. For those wanting Dolby Atmos and DTS:X set-ups, you could buy Q Acoustics' matching installation speakers (£159 each, plus installation costs) - though this option isn't reviewed here.

A huge amount of fun

With the five speakers and the sub, the package provides a convincing surround sound presentation that, like its predecessor, is bags of fun to listen to. You get a strong sense of the speakers' hi-fi roots, their effortless musicality breezing through the eclectic soundtrack of Edgar Wright's *Baby Driver*.

In the opening scene, Baby's finger taps, the windscreen wipers and gentle revving car come through with insight and clarity, and the 3010is keeps one hand on guitar rhythms in The Jon Spencer

Blues Explosion's *Bellbottoms* underneath the cacophony of the car chase.

It's all backed up by decent scale and spaciousness - winning traits for home cinema set-ups, of course - as well as tight integration between the speakers.

We play *Alien: Covenant*, and the sub brings a definite low-end presence to the otherwise bass-limited presentation, that seamlessly takes over from the 3010is. It provides both atmospheric rumble and more devastating bass during thunder and explosions.

During the opening dialogue, the centre speaker reveals its penchant for detail and tonal synchronicity with the 3010is. The speakers pick up details such as computer sounds, dripping water and rustling leaves, but importantly they also communicate them with subtlety.

With the speakers' new silver trim rings building on what was already a neat and stylish package, it's hard to find fault with the Q Acoustics 3000i 5.1 Cinema Pack.

Whether as a pair of 3010i or 3020i standmounters or 3050i floorstanders, or as the full surround sound package, for anyone after an affordable and entertaining home cinema speaker set-up, we can highly recommend the 3000i series.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR Clear, musical presentation • Well-integrated, tonally well-balanced soundfield • Expressive, clear centre speaker • Subwoofer provides healthy low-end rumble; fills a big room

AGAINST Subwoofer not the most impactful

VERDICT As effective in surround sound as stereo, the 3010is' form the basis of an all-round excellent package

Dali Zensor 15.1



View online review
whf.cm/Zensor151

The Dali Zensor 15.1 package is our reigning champion. Not only has it won Awards in the £700-£1500 arena, it has also been our speaker package Product of the Year for two years in a row.

This package has two pairs of Award-winning Dali Zensor 1 standmount speakers. With them are the Zensor Vokal centre and the E-9F subwoofer. And this is arguably the most stunningly entertaining sound this money can buy.

Excitement – and calm

It's a fluid, dynamic performance that soars with excitement before easily dropping right down for a bit of hush-hush. We put on a Blu-ray of *Whiplash* to watch JK Simmons torment a drumming Miles Teller.

The Dalis have no problem shifting up from Teller's tearful sniffing to Simmons' seething barks. It's 0-60 in less time than you can say 'oooh'. There is plenty of pop, to the extent that 'lively' really doesn't quite cut it.

It's not all about the excitement. The Dalis are as articulate as they are expressive, with great attention to detail. Dialogue is delivered with insight and there is as much subtle texture as you like, from the rustling of sheet music to the leading edges of a full orchestra.

Combine this level of nuance with the strong, far-reaching dynamics and you have yourself a thoroughly invigorating listen. This is good, sophisticated fun.

And the whole package is beautifully integrated. Sound effects that travel across the room maintain a consistency of character - and that includes the subwoofer, which is authoritative yet articulate; it's fast, precise and a seamless part of the ensemble.

This is an attractive and well-built package. The speakers all use the same 25mm soft-dome tweeter and 13cm wood-fibre mid/bass driver - the centre doubles up on this for extra authority and better dispersion.

Placement is simple. Dali designs its products to have wide sound dispersion, and they tend to work best when firing straight ahead, though it pays to experiment.

They work best on stands, fairly close to a wall. Wall-mounting works too, which lends the package a degree of flexibility not enjoyed by many rivals.

We have tremendous respect for the Dali Zensor 15.1 package. That it's lasted this long is impressive; it's doubly admirable that it's still at the top of its game. If you're after a speaker package for less than £1000 you must seek the Zensors out.

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR Punchy dynamics • Bags of detail • Articulate and expressive • Impressive integration

AGAINST Nothing at this money

VERDICT Still arguably the best-sounding package available for the money

Fyne Audio F302 AV



View online review
whf.cm/F_302

As a package, the F302 AV is made more enticing by being so easily accommodated - but don't assume that has come at the price of sound quality. While this package doesn't quite manage to get the full five stars, that's more to do with the strength of its opposition than anything else. This is still an engaging listen for the money.

When we first heard the 302s, we praised a presentation that avoids the pitfalls of many entry-level floorstanders, which sacrifice texture, spaciousness and timing for a bass-heavy performance - and it's pleasing to hear Fyne's attention again being paid to sophistication ahead of sensationalism.

A fleet-footed sound

As a whole, the package is as swift and agile as its illustrious front channels, wrapping us in a tonally balanced and fleet-footed sound. The F3-8 subwoofer supplements the soundfield with a sturdy floor of bass weight, while maintaining that pace and level of detail.

Fyne Audio suggests that those wanting to double down on low-end presence from this package might be best served adding another F3-8 sub, rather than upgrading to one of the company's larger models. Given the

F3-12 is double the price, for those who could accommodate a second sub it appears to be sound logic.

Our only minor qualm with the package is the level of expression offered by the F300C and, to a lesser extent, the F300s. If they were any less than good this package would not have received a four-star review, but they just don't match the excitement of their Award-winning cousins.

The centre speaker is where much of the action happens, of course, and while vocals are still interesting and given depth of character, their presentation isn't quite at the same level as Q Acoustics's Award-winning rival.

It is a shame, given Fyne's prowess in creating entertaining speakers, but producing class-leading products across the board may be expecting too much from such a youthful company.

It just means taking a little care with system matching. With a sprightly enough home cinema amplifier you'll not be lacking for enthusiasm; just don't pair the F302 AV with anything subdued.

If you've an extra £350 sitting in your bank account, Q Acoustics' 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack is our choice; for a floorstanding speaker package costing less than a grand, though, you can't go far wrong here.

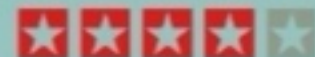
WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★☆

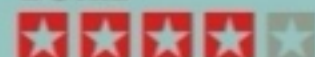
SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR Plenty of detail and pleasant balance • Snappy timing • Attractive design and slender footprint

AGAINST Centre and rear channels lack some of the F302 floorstanders' expression

VERDICT Fyne Audio was keen to create a floorstanding package costing less than a grand; they've designed one well worthy of being on your shortlist

Jamo S 807 HCS 7.1



View online review
whf.cm/S807HCS

Pocketing change from a score over £1100 for a full 7.1 Atmos speaker package seems almost too good to be true. Consider that the cost includes a sizeable pair of floorstanders, and you can write it off as quality sacrificed for quantity, right?

However, throw in the name Jamo, and we're all ears.

The S 807 floorstanders, an upgrade on the fine budget S 805s, act as this package's front channels and sandwich the centre speaker. Though at first glance they add just a second 12.5cm woofer below the same 25mm soft dome tweeter, the S 807s also offer a neat solution to Atmos integration. They're bi-wireable; slot the feet of a pair of S 8 ATM speakers into the holes on the top of the cabinet, however, and, in a home cinema set-up, that top pair of inputs connects directly to the height channels on your AV receiver, leaving the Atmos speakers clean of terminals.

Sleek sub still has rumble

For a subwoofer the S 808 is easier than most to miss. With a 20cm driver powered by a Class D amplifier, it's a wonder how Jamo has fitted so much rumble into a cabinet so slim. At only 176mm in depth, it sticks out no further into the room than your front channels.

If we were forming a soft spot for Jamo following the stereo performance of its S 805s, we've grown only fonder after a couple of days with this S 807 HCS package.

Those floorstanders are the stars. There is a minor coarseness across the board, so you'll need to give a little thought to system matching, but the S 807s stand out with their full body and confident dynamics.

It does affect integration a little: the centre and surround speakers, as much as being smaller scale, can't quite match the expression dealt by their floorstanding siblings.

A lot of the bass is handled by the S 807s as well, those front-firing reflex ports earning their keep, but the heft of the S 808 sub helps it to delve even deeper.

It's fair to say Jamo has built a speaker package very much in the image of what we heard from the S 805 stereo pair. It's a family sound, the kind you'd hope from any range of speakers, instilling trust that what you hear from one you'll get from the rest, but one that isn't as common as you might expect.

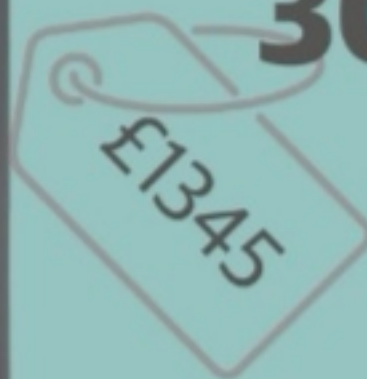
The S 807 HCS isn't a great package due to its cost, nor its practicality; it's simply a really good cinema system. Improvements could be made, edges smoothed, but we'd be more than happy going to the movies with Jamo any time.



Q Acoustics 3050i 5.1



View online review
whf.cm/3050i51



WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

This package is essentially the same as the 3010i, only with a pair of Q Acoustics' brilliant floorstanders swapped in for the front channels.

The centre speaker features the same 20mm soft-dome tweeter 10cm mid/bass driver as the 3010i, while the unit in the 150W active subwoofer - the slimmest sub the company has made - is, unsurprisingly, the largest of the set at 20cm. The sub can be tucked away on the floor, ideally close to the front speakers for optimum integration.

Q Acoustics also offers matching Dolby Atmos and DTS:X installation speakers (£159 each, plus installation costs) - though this option isn't reviewed here.

Energy and exuberance

We'd defy anybody not to enjoy an evening spent with this 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 snappy but natural performance.

Any home cinema package lives or dies by its centre speaker, where so much of the dialogue is delivered. Here, it seems even more dynamic and engaging than when partnered with the 3010i fronts, and knits seamlessly.

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

To put this package's brilliance into context, we believe you'd have to spend twice the amount to experience an immediately noticeable upgrade in performance.

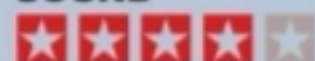
It is worth stressing just how talented the 3050i 5.1 Cinema Pack is. It's an instant hit, easily identifiable within moments of it being switched on.

If you're looking for a floorstanding speaker package to elevate your home cinema for less than two grand, you should consider this set of Q Acoustics. Even if you're not in the market, you owe it to yourself to visit your local dealership and enjoy their talents at least for an afternoon.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★☆

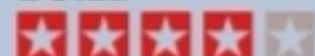
SOUND



COMPATIBILITY



BUILD



FOR Energetic, dynamic and well detailed • S 807s stand out and could easily be used as stereo pair • Attractive and practical design

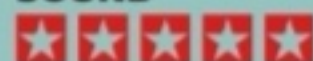
AGAINST Slight coarseness to treble • Could be better integrated with centre and surrounds • Bass a little soft

VERDICT For a 7.1 Atmos package on a budget, this Jamo is really fine value

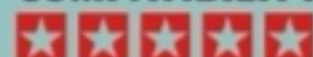
WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★★

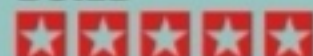
SOUND



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 Despite not making wholesale changes to its 3000 range, this Q Acoustics package is a talented and enjoyable set of speakers

Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV



£1489

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/Bronze2

The B5 AV system comprises the Bronze Centre, two Bronze FX surround speakers, Bronze W10 subwoofer and a pair of Bronze 5 floorstanding speakers for front channels.

The technology upgrade centres on new C-CAM drivers (made of Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium, a material originally developed for jet engine components).

For the midrange and bass drivers, the stiffness and damping quality of that dished cone aids control and reduction in break-up. The drivers are also an inch smaller in diameter than previous models, helping reduce the speaker's overall footprint.

Superbly organised sound

We play *Taxi Driver* on Blu-ray and are immediately struck by the film's jazz accompaniment. Instruments are brilliantly organised and offered a generous amount of space in which to breathe, but most of all they are expressive and terrifically rhythmic. This is a reasonably priced package, but that doesn't restrict it from exploring the nuances of a dejected, lonely film.

Changing tack with *ParaNorman*, the Bronze B5 AV is equally comfortable with the scale and

intensity of the modern-day family-focused animation. Those same characteristics of rhythm, detail and organisation are present as the zombies chase Norman and co through the woods, only now with a healthy injection of power.

The surround sound field is cohesive, and there's great tonal matching between the channels. They feel comfortably in control, without being restrained.

The results are much the same in stereo. We play LCD Soundsystem's *Sound Of Silver* album and, though still using an AV receiver and not a stereo amplifier, remain impressed by the balance, dynamics and expressiveness that keep us hooked. If you're using these speakers for music as much as cinema, this may be where the depth and organisation of the Bronze 5 speakers trumps the Bronze 2-based alternative package most considerably.

You don't have to be Miss Marple to read the clues - we like this speaker package a lot. MA's decision to hand down premium driver tech to its Bronze range has raised the standard. This package delivers a sound that is bold and capable of great subtlety and dynamics.

Spend a couple of hours with the Bronze B5 AV and this may be the easiest £1500 you'll ever spend.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR Great dynamics and musicality • Good space and organisation • Enough punch for adventurous soundtracks • Slimmer than previous model

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT Monitor Audio has taken a previous Award-winning package and raised the bar for its rivals

Elac Debut 2.05.1



£1499

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

View online review
whf.cm/Debut2F52

We sit down with Martin Scorsese's boxing opera *Raging Bull*. From the off, this package feels like a knockout. *Intermezzo* from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* pours through the front speakers. The orchestral strings soar through the room, making the hairs on the backs of our necks stand up. Remastered or not, this is not an easy score to do well - but this package gets it right.

As the action switches to LaMotta's fight with Jimmy Reeves, the full suite of speakers kicks in. Punches thump on contact or swing and miss with threatening weight. The soundstage of the front three is polished and flawlessly joined up. The calls from the crowd come from all around as the boxers turn. There's no doubt we're standing in the ring amongst it all, on the shoulder of our protagonist.

An astonishing soundscape

What's astonishing is the realism of the soundscape. These aren't just effects picked and placed in one of six carefully positioned speakers, but a delightfully balanced audio image that bathes the viewer in the cinematic experience.

We move onto the more modern cinematic action of *Baby Driver*. From the off we're in the getaway

car with *Bellbottoms* by The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion blasting through Baby's Apple earbuds. It's a complicated mix of sounds with tyres screeching left and right, sirens blaring front and back, and all set on top of the music track; the Elacs organise it all with aplomb.

It's not a forward or aggressive sound that some speakers might push to make the owner feel they have really bought something. It's subtle and balanced with no part of the frequency range dominant but still snappy and crisp.

Even when we try out the Dolby Atmos speakers on just the front floorstanders, there's an excellent sense of height. A set of four of these would be well worth the extra outlay.

We'd happily spend more time watching our favourite soundtracks and scenes just for the treat of seeing what this speaker package can do. Their subtle, sensible and silky sound production creates the kind of open, 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 your two-channel or the full surround. You'll be hard pushed to find better at this price.

WHAT HI-FI?

RATING ★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★

COMPATIBILITY

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FOR Highly immersive soundstage • Silky tonal balance • Clean, clear dialogue reproduction • Dynamic soundtrack performance

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT A deliciously mature and sensible speaker set; the best movie watching audio at this price