

BT improves wireless router and adds VoIP phone to bundle

Home Hub upgraded

BT has launched a sleek new version of its Home Hub for Total Broadband customers.

The new router uses 'N-standard' wireless technology, which gives a more reliable broadband connection, with up to twice the range of regular Wi-Fi. This should mean better connectivity all around the house, and the possibility of accessing the internet in the outer reaches of your garden.

However, you'll only benefit from the improved range if your wireless devices, such as laptops, are also wireless-N compatible or are fitted with N adaptors, which can be bought separately.

The new Home Hub also has a power-save mode that turns off the wireless function when it's not in use.

This cuts energy consumption by as much as 20%, according to BT, although we've yet to test this claim.

Security was a concern with previous versions of the Home Hub, which used the WEP standard for protecting your

wireless network from outsiders. This has been addressed in the new model, which comes with a pre-configured Firewall and superior WPA wireless security.

BT has also tweaked parental and access controls so that devices can now be blocked from connecting to the internet at certain times – helpful if you're concerned about your children exceeding download limits.

The new hub comes with a Voip phone for making lower-cost calls over the internet. While BT's rates are not as cheap as some other VoIP service providers, the new phone is convenient and well designed.

VERDICT An advanced wireless broadband and high-spec router with Voip phone. It's free to new customers on some price plans.



A laptop with some extra fizz

The Zoostorm Fizzbook Bang, a new compact laptop, is squarely aimed at the schools market, as the name suggests.

We've taken a look at the version that has a 30GB hard drive and 1GB of Ram, and is available for a lowly £269 – placing it against competitors such as the Asus Eee PC range.

The bold colour means it will look at home on the school bus, while the built-in handle will make it easy for little hands to clasp.

It feels solid and well made – if any of the new breed of mini laptops can survive inside a school bag, it's this one. The surface (including the touchpad) is a reassuringly rugged splash-proof plastic that looks set to withstand plenty of wear, and the hinge to the screen is robust. Like most of these laptops, the keyboard may feel small to adult fingers, but it works well and the keys are clearly labelled.

Switch it on and you're into the familiar environment of Windows XP. This ran a little slowly at times, but, like all of these small, cheap laptops, it's not intended for power-hungry applications.

The Fizzbook Bang comes with a webcam, Wi-Fi, a decent 8.9-inch screen and an SD card reader.

A Fizzbook Lite is available for £199. It has a 4GB solid-state drive and 512MB of Ram.

VERDICT The Fizzbook Bang is a handy laptop that would be useful for anyone, not just school kids.

Straighter hair without straining your arm

Rowenta has released its Supremium for Elite Model Look quick-to-heat hair straighteners. When we tried them out, we found that they're light and you don't have to apply much pressure to close the plates and produce a sleek, straight finish.

The handles are slightly domed, making them comfortable to hold, but a little wobbly when you lay them down on a flat surface, such as a dressing table. The

LCD temperature setting display is small but legible, although screen reflection can make it difficult to read at certain angles.

The buttons are small and easy to press, even if you have long fingernails.

Adjusting the temperature setting is easy, and there's a turbo button if you want a short burst of high heat from the plates – the display turns red when the feature is activated, so it's easy to

see when you're styling in front of a mirror.

During use, you'd be well advised to use the temperature locking feature, as we found that it's easy to accidentally change the setting while you're straightening.

The straighteners come with a pouch and you can lock the plates together for storage, but you should allow them to cool before putting them away.

VERDICT Good for straightening with adjustable temperature and little pressure required to close plates, but unstable on flat surfaces.



160m

the number of Apple iPods sold worldwide up to September 2008

APPLE INC

100,000

the average number of hairs on a human head

MY HAIR FACTS

Apple adds shake-and-go track-changing to updated Nano

Small size, big on features



Apple has released the fourth generation of its diminutive iPod Nano, dropping the square design of the previous model and returning to the original long, thin shape.

The new version is 91mm long by 39mm wide, and, at just 6mm thick, it's the slimmest iPod yet. It has a rounded aluminium case in a rainbow of colour options.

All of the features from the third-generation Nano have migrated to this new model, including music, video and podcast playback. The 51mm (2-inch) screen remains unchanged, as does its scroll-wheel control.

However, Apple has also come up with some new ideas. One development is the Genius function. This lets you create an instant 25-song playlist based around the musical characteristics of a single song.

The new Nano also has the tilt sensor found in the

iPhone and iPod Touch. By shaking the Nano you can shuffle your music tracks.

Visually-impaired users will appreciate the function that reads menu, selection and playback information aloud in a synthesised voice.

The new model comes in 8GB and 16GB versions – it has twice the memory of the third generation – and Apple claims that the battery life is improved, although we'll check this in our tests. We expect that other performance levels, such as ease of use and sound quality, will stay largely the same.

At the time of going to press, we were testing this new model – our extensive results will be online in mid-October. We expect that it will perform similarly to its Best Buy predecessor.

VERDICT Larger memory, fun Genius playlists and shake-to-shuffle features are worthy additions to this tiny MP3 player.



Free iTunes update

The latest free update to Apple's iTunes music and video player and integrated online store is now available to download. Version 8 is evolutionary rather than revolutionary – it'll feel familiar to existing users, but it has some interesting new features.

There's a new grid view for browsing album covers, for instance, while the Genius function looks at your music collection and then suggest tracks you don't yet have. The suggestions are drawn from the preferences of all iTunes users, so should improve over time.

Of course, for this to work, you'll have to let Apple know the contents of your music collection, though Apple promises that it will store this information in an anonymous form.

VERDICT Familiar interface with a couple of new tweaks for this free audio software.



Scales of intelligence

If you have a keen interest in tracking your weight loss or fitness, then Salter's £60 MiBody scales may be something for your Christmas wishlist.

The scales can track your weight, body fat, body water, muscle mass, body mass index (BMI) and basal metabolic rate (BMR) reading. They come with USB stick and computer program, which lets you transfer the data to your PC and analyse it.

The instructions are fairly clear and simple, and it takes only a few minutes to install the software onto your PC. As a precautionary measure, this product is not recommended for people fitted with a pacemaker.

VERDICT Interesting stats, tables and charts help you to track progress, but the BMR reading does not take your activity level into account.



Just out

Breville Hot Cup

£59.99

Breville is to launch the Hot Cup, a device that dispenses boiling water at the touch of a button. The Hot Cup allows you to pour 250ml of water at a time, so you boil only what you need. Available at Argos from November.



Prestige Deco range kettle and toaster

£45 (kettle); £40 (toaster)

Prestige is extending its Deco kettle and toaster range with the launch of two new colours. The 1.5-litre jug kettle will be available in red and slate blue, as will the two- and four-slot toasters. Find them in department stores and at Amazon.co.uk and meyergroup.co.uk.



Typhoon GreenPan

From £16

Typhoon has launched its new GreenPan cookware collection. The non-stick coating is said to produce fewer greenhouse gasses during production. Pans are heat resistant up to 450°C and come in recycled packaging. Available now from department stores and cook shops.



Samsung i900 Omnia

From £0 with contract

Samsung has just launched its new flagship handset: the i900 Omnia. It allows you to access Microsoft documents, and has a touchscreen and a 5Mp camera. Widely available in 8GB and 16GB versions.



Red is no longer the colour for M&S raspberries

Golden raspberry award

Consumer demand for unusual fruit varieties has prompted Marks & Spencer to offer Limited Edition Golden Raspberries in its food stores.

A natural variation of the conventional red berry, the yellow-coloured fruit are priced £1.99 for 150g.

As well as the novel colouring, M&S claims that the raspberries deliver a slight honey-like overtone and leave fewer stains on the clothing of messy eaters.

We challenged 12 people to blind taste Marks & Spencer Limited Edition Golden Raspberries and conventional red Tasty British Raspberries, and choose their favourite based on taste and appearance.

We also squashed six raspberries of each type on white t-shirts and washed them using a Best Buy



detergent to see if golden raspberries really do mean fewer stains.

You get more raspberries for your money with conventional red varieties. Marks & Spencer Limited Edition Golden Raspberries cost £1.99 for 150g, while standard M&S Tasty British Raspberries on the day of testing cost £1.99 for 220g. That's 48% more for the limited edition – but is it worth it?

Our research found that if you're looking for the tastiest raspberries it may not be worth paying extra.

In our blind taste test, neither red nor golden raspberries were more likely to be voted tastier.

And the raspberries remained neck and neck in our stain test. When we squashed six red and six golden raspberries on plain white t-shirts, both sets of stains washed out completely when washed according to care instructions with a Best Buy detergent.

But the golden raspberries left significantly less mess and odour before washing.

When it came to appearance, our tasters were more emphatic. More than 80% of tasters preferred the look of traditional red raspberries when asked to rate the varieties for appetising appearance.

VERDICT Our research suggests golden raspberries don't offer any advantages over traditional varieties.



Nokia deal for music lovers

Nokia's much-anticipated Comes with Music deal bundles unlimited access to music downloads with the price of a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) handset.

Anyone who buys the Nokia 5310 XpressMusic handset (which just missed out on a Best Buy award) will get a year's unlimited access to the Nokia Music Store and can download as many songs as they like. The deal will be available from the Carphone Warehouse for £129.95. It will be extended to more Nokia phones in future.

Once you've registered your Comes with Music phone with Nokia, you can play downloaded songs on your mobile and a single computer registered to your account. This is a heavy restriction, especially for those used to the relative freedom of iTunes.

The free music offer also has a time limit of one year, and the only way of extending access is to buy a new handset when the first year is up. On the plus side, you get to keep all your downloaded tracks indefinitely.

You can buy a 5310 XpressMusic without Comes with Music for £80, so the deal may be attractive if you download a large amount of music a year (£50 worth or more).

And the music transfer limitations may not be a problem – many people use the same media player every day without wanting to transfer songs more widely.

VERDICT If you're a music fan looking for a PAYG mobile, this may be a good choice.



Tough Tefal pans take some beating

Tefal Preference is a new range of pots and pans with a super-tough non-stick coating – Tefal claims that you can use metal utensils when cooking without damaging it.

The tough surface is supposedly easy to clean – the claim is that burnt milk comes off with minimal fuss – so we put it to the test.

We tried a frying pan and saucepan, cooking a range of meals while being deliberately heavy-handed with a range of metallic spatulas, knives, forks and spoons.

An inspection for damage afterwards showed that they were unharmed, backing up Tefal's claim that the new tough surface is safe to use with metal utensils.

Next, a pan of milk was allowed to boil over, and we fried some milk in the frying pan.



We found that the resulting mess did wipe off fairly easily with a washing-up sponge – no excessive scraping was required.

The pans are dishwasher-safe. They also come with a lifetime guarantee and Tefal's 'Thermo-Spot' system, which lets you know when they've reached the right temperature.

The range includes several different sizes of saucepans and frying pans, as well as a stew pot and crepe and grill pans. Prices start from around £15.

VERDICT This range lives up to Tefal's claims. It's tough and would suit enthusiastic chefs who aren't overly careful with their cookware.

Get a pizza the action

Giles & Posner is well known for its chocolate fountains, but it's now trying its hand at a gadget that makes a savoury treat – stonebaked pizza. We gave the mains-powered Stonebake Grill a first look hands-on test and found that it works well.

To make your pizza, preheat the grill for 10 minutes

using the timer, then place the pizza on the stone plate. Two grill elements, one below the stone and one above, do the cooking.

You can control these separately – for a fresh-dough pizza, you cook with both elements for eight minutes, then with just the bottom one for a further two. We found that increasing the bottom element cooking time made the pizza a bit more crispy.

The stone base rotates to ensure even cooking, and there is a window at the top of the device so you can see how your pizza is doing. The metal casing does get hot, but there are small plastic handles for opening the grill.

We made several fresh dough and pre-baked base pizzas – they were a bit better than those made in a conventional gas oven.

Instructions are easy to follow, and there's also a deep pan for making omelettes. The Stonebake Grill is available from Amazon.co.uk, priced £49.95.

VERDICT Better results than using a conventional gas oven, though the casing can get hot.



Espresso on the go

The £80 Handpresso Wild makes excellent espresso – if you're willing to put the effort in. You pump the Handpresso to create pressure, then pour hot water into a bulb at the tip of the pump. Place a coffee pod on the bulb, then screw the unit

together. Simply press a button and the gadget releases a great espresso.

VERDICT Pumping takes practice, and you have to be careful to ensure that you don't accidentally pinch your skin when pumping.



CREDIT CRUNCH COMPARISON

We pit a First look against a previous Best Buy model to see how it fares



£499.99

Canon Powershot G10

Canon's latest Powershot compact camera is the 14.7Mp G10. It has a wide-angle lens, a 3-inch LCD monitor and a DIGIC 4 processor for clearer pictures. The G10 has an optical image stabiliser to reduce the effects of camera shake, and 'i-contrast', which should bring out the detail in dark areas of photos without bleaching lighter areas.

VS



£300

Canon Powershot G9

You could save £200 by opting for the 12Mp Canon Powershot G9 – a current Best Buy. It's easy to use – it has an image stabiliser, an optical viewfinder and an LCD display. The G9 struggles slightly in low light conditions but overall image quality is great, particularly with outdoor shots.



Sony PlayTV

Sony's new PlayTV device turns your Playstation 3 (PS3) games console into a personal video recorder (PVR). You connect it to your PS3 via a USB cable, then connect it to your aerial with a lead to receive Freeview digital TV channels, which can then be recorded to the PS3's hard drive.

At £69.99, PlayTV is much cheaper than most other PVRs on the market (although the games console costs around £299).

Setting it up is straightforward. You simply insert the installation CD into the PS3 and follow the step-by-step instructions.

PlayTV includes an electronic programming guide that displays TV programmes seven days in advance. We thought that menus looked razor sharp, and live TV pictures looked crisp.

Controlling menus using the games control pad is frustrating, however. An official Sony Playstation Bluetooth remote control (bought separately) makes life easier.

There are some niggles. PlayTV doesn't let you record a series, and it's limited to Freeview. However, if you own a PS3 and are considering a PVR for recording digital TV, PlayTV is a cost-effective choice.

VERDICT Cheaper than most PVRs, and makes the PS3 an all-in-one entertainment system, but an additional remote control is essential.

