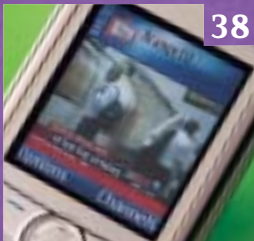


[testing, testing]



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ALL CHANGE

First a Walkman, then a camera – now there's a TV in our phones



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CHILD SAFETY

Keep your kids safe with our Best Buy baby monitors



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SANDWICH MAKERS

Pricey panini presses and more traditional sandwich toasters



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TOASTERS

Including a hopeless £125 Don't Buy and a great £25 Best Buy



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DIGITAL RADIOS

Radios with a pause button – what will they think of next?

DIGITAL RADIOS p52

We do most of our testing behind closed doors, working under carefully controlled conditions. When we test digital radios, for example, we set up a transmitter in a laboratory and broadcast our own little radio station. That way, we can replicate exactly the same conditions for each radio – the only fair way to rate them for sound quality.

But even that's not quite enough to test the latest hand-held models, which offer all those well-publicised digital benefits in a pocket-sized box. One of the few problems with digital radio is that reception is patchy compared with FM, especially if you're moving quickly. So to find the extent to which the radios are prone to this, we cast aside the lab coats and take the radios out in the wild.

We hop on the train from Waterloo to Farnham and start testing. The signal drops out pretty often, and it doesn't make for easy listening. When a digital radio signal breaks up, you don't just get a slightly fuzzy distortion, as with analogue radio – you get an ugly wet crunching sound that's as difficult to listen to as it is to describe. Sometimes the radios don't pick up anything at all.

We've picked two hand-held models that stand out from the rest. Importantly, they both pick up FM broadcasts as well as digital, so you can switch to old-fashioned radio when the digital signal gets too dodgy.



Testing digital reception on the 14:00 to Farnham, July 2005