



# Jukebox in your pocket

Not bought a digital music player yet? Discover why you're missing out

## How we test

**Best Buys must have crystal-clear playback of rock, pop and classical music**

To test the digital players' sound quality, we get five expert listeners to listen to music from a spectrum of genres – with tracks ranging from Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall' to Handel's 'Mariagesänge'. They do this using the headphones supplied with the player and a Best Buy set.

### Sound check

The experts listen for any sound flaws, such as distortion or poor stereo, and describe how the music sounds (for example, balanced, shrill, dull or muffled) to give an overall picture of the quality of the sound produced by each player.

We also check for known problems. For instance, because we test so many players we know that some consider each movement of a classical symphony to be a separate track. This means they automatically insert pauses in between the movements and can even mix up the order – not ideal if you are a classical music fan.

Portable music players have come a long way since the original Sony Walkman cassette player, launched in 1979. Now when you want to listen to music on the move, instead of lugging around a selection of tapes, a digital music – or MP3 – player lets you carry around your entire music collection in your pocket. Some even let you watch films and video clips – these are known as MP4 players and you can find out more about them on p44.

You do need some computing know-how, but don't need to be an expert, in order to make the most of a player, as Sue Barber, see p44, found out. You also need a computer and software that is supplied with the player – although many work with software that comes with your computer.

Next, you need something to listen to. You can use media player software (which comes with your computer and sometimes with your player) to copy CDs from your existing music collection on to your computer – you then transfer the copied music to the player. This does breach current UK copyright law but we think it should be legal to copy your own CDs provided it's for your own use. Alternatively, you could buy individual tracks or even whole albums from an online music

website – see 'Where can I buy music?', below, for our recommended sites.

Music isn't the only option for your digital player, as you can also download talking books from websites such as [www.audible.co.uk](http://www.audible.co.uk) or [www.talkingbooks.co.uk](http://www.talkingbooks.co.uk). Prices range from £10 to £30 and titles include Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Before parting with any money, check that your player is compatible with the file formats the sites sell – if you're not sure, see 'Compatible formats' in each Best Buy summary or go to [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) for more.

You could also set up your computer to automatically download regularly updated

audio or video, such as radio programmes and TV clips, from the internet. You can then transfer them to your player – these are called podcasts and many are free.

You can search for podcasts by going to [www.podcast.net](http://www.podcast.net) or [www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com). Between them, these two directories offer access to more than 65,000 free podcasts on subjects as varied as comedy to careers, poetry to pets and relationships to religion.

Now you know how to get audio on to a digital player, your next step is to choose a suitable player from our Best Buys and use our 'How to buy' guide, p42, to help you bag a bargain. You'll soon be enjoying listening to music, audio books and much more when on the move.

## Where can I buy music?

**A round-up of the best download sites on the web**

Music downloads aren't just for pop fans. Launched earlier this year, the [www.classicsandjazz.co.uk](http://www.classicsandjazz.co.uk) website has the largest collection of classical music and jazz online, offering more than 125,000 high-quality tracks, with tracks costing from 79p and albums from £8.

There are plenty of other sites to choose from. Current *Computing Which?* Best Buys (see *Computing Which?*, November 2006, p22) all charge from 79p for individual tracks and from £8 for albums. Sites include Tesco Downloads ([www.tescodownloads.com](http://www.tescodownloads.com)) and Napster ([www.napster.co.uk](http://www.napster.co.uk)).



If you have an iPod, you have less choice about where you can buy your music online – this is because the iPod can't play the WMA audio files that most of the download stores sell. Instead, you can buy music from Best Buys Classical ([www.classical.com](http://www.classical.com)) and iTunes ([www.apple.com/uk/itunes](http://www.apple.com/uk/itunes)) – which also sells video clips for MP4 players; see p44 for more.



## PERFECT YOUR PC SKILLS

**Try two issues for only £3**

*Computing Which?* is the UK's only completely independent computing magazine. Offering impartial, jargon-free advice on everything from the absolute basics through to product reviews and step-by-step guides to help perfect your know-how, it's your essential computing companion. To try two issues for only £3, call 01992 822800 or see [www.which.co.uk/cwtrial](http://www.which.co.uk/cwtrial).



## 1 MP3 PLAYER

**69% iAudio T2**  
£89/99

This small, lightweight player offers decent sound quality and comes with a clear and simple menu that makes it easy to use. Take care when listening at maximum volume for extended periods, though, as it has the potential to damage your hearing.

**WE FOUND** Small keys on either side of the player mean that those with large fingers could accidentally press the wrong button.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Available Online** Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 1GB and 2GB Compatible formats MP3, WMA, Ogg and Wav Uploading 100MB 38 seconds Radio Yes Photos No Batteries Rechargeable Running time 12 hours Charging 1 hour

## 2 MP3 PLAYER

**68% Apple iPod Nano**  
£99/129/169

The newest version of the Nano comes with up to 8GB of storage space, enough for 136 hours of music (that's about 2,000 songs).

Unlike its predecessor, which played for only 11 hours, this Nano gives you a rather more generous 26 hours of play time per charge.

**WORTH KNOWING** For each special edition Red Nano sold, Apple donates \$10 (about £5) to help battle HIV and Aids in Africa.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Cheapest store** Argos, Comet, Currys, John Lewis Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 2GB, 4GB and 8GB Compatible formats MP3, AAC, M4A, Apple lossless, Wav and Audible Uploading 100MB 26 seconds Radio No Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 26 hours Charging 2 hours

## 3 MP3 PLAYER

**67% Creative Zen V**  
£50/70/80

This Creative comes with a small joystick as well as

big, easy-to-use buttons. You can use its decent screen to view photos, and it supports lots of different types of image files (including Jpeg).

**WE FOUND** This is the slowest Best Buy on test to transfer music to – taking 1 minute 44 seconds for 100MB, about 22 songs.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Cheapest store** Comet and Currys Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 1GB, 2GB and 4GB Compatible formats MP3, WMA, Wav and Audible Uploading 100MB 1 minute 44 seconds Radio No Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 18 hours Charging 5 hours

## 4 MP3 PLAYER

**65% Philips SA9100/SA9200**  
£90/110

An easy-to-use player that comes with good instructions and a clear, straightforward menu.

It's not great for viewing photos, though, as the low-resolution screen means images lack detail.

**WE LIKE** Charging this model takes only one hour.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Cheapest store** Argos Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 1GB and 2GB Compatible formats MP3, WMA and Wav Uploading 100MB 64 seconds Radio No Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 16hr Charging 1 hour

## 5 MP3 PLAYER

**64% Archos 104**  
£109

Available in three colours (black, grey and pink), this Archos player is compatible with both

Macs and PCs. It is easy to view photos on its decent screen and the Archos 104 is compatible with the common Jpeg image format – used by many digital cameras. It doesn't come with a radio.

**WE FOUND** The supplied software is poor. If you have a PC, you can use Windows Media Player – which comes with your computer – instead.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Cheapest store** John Lewis Memory type Hard disk Memory sizes 4GB Compatible formats MP3, WMA and Wav Uploading 100MB 56 seconds Radio No Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 13hr Charging 3hr

## 6 MP3 PLAYER

**64% Samsung YP-K5**  
£75/90/140

This sleek black player flips open to reveal a large built-in speaker, which offers a good enough

sound quality for its size. It has an excellent 37-hour battery life and comes with a radio – which you can't record from – a clock and an alarm.

**WE FOUND** You can't put together lists of your favourite tracks – known as 'playlists' – with this Samsung.

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Cheapest store** Argos and Comet Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 1GB, 2GB and 4GB Compatible formats MP3 and WMA Uploading 100MB 32 seconds Radio Yes Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 37 hours Charging 4 hours

## 7 MP3 PLAYER

**64% SanDisk Sansa C240/C250**  
£40/62

The only difference between the

C240 and the C250 is their storage capacity of 1GB (the equivalent of 225 songs) and 2GB respectively. You can buy FM and non-FM versions of both models and they have a decent battery life of 18 hours.

**WORTH KNOWING** You can increase the storage capacity by 256MB by slotting in a micro SD memory card (about £25).

WHICH?  
**BEST BUY**

**Available Online** Memory type Solid state Memory sizes 1GB and 2GB Compatible formats MP3 and WMA Uploading 100MB 23 seconds Radio Yes Photos Yes Batteries Rechargeable Running time 18 hours Charging 2 hours

**Don't buy**

**Cheap but not cheerful – why you should avoid this Ministry of Sound player**

WHICH?  
**DON'T BUY**

The Ministry of Sound MOSMP097X2 Sport Clip (20), £20, is not easy to use and has poor sound quality. The supplied software is also poor, making it slow to transfer music, and its battery life is just five hours per two-hour charge.

A Ministry of Sound spokesman told us this player is a basic entry-level product and the five-hour battery life we managed is more than the four and a half hours it claims. We think that some products are just too cheap for their own good.

## How to buy

**Buying your digital music player online is the best way to pick up a bargain**

### ■ SAVE MONEY

Our research has found that buying your digital player online often works out cheaper than buying on the high street. As we went to press, the 8GB Apple iPod Nano was £29 less online at [www.rankhour.com](http://www.rankhour.com) than the best high-street price.

### ■ BEST PRICE

The quickest way to compare prices on the internet is to use a price-comparison website such as Froogle ([froogle.google.com](http://froogle.google.com)) and Pricerunner ([www.pricerunner.co.uk](http://www.pricerunner.co.uk)). Simply type the name of the Best Buy you want into the search panel and then wait for the site to reveal the

cheapest shops. If you are not confident about shopping online, it is worth asking friends and family to recommend a tried-and-trusted website for you.

### ■ YOUR RIGHTS

When buying online, don't forget you have additional rights under the Distance Selling Regulations 2000. If you change your mind about the goods you have ordered, provided you let the store know within seven working days (beginning the day after you receive the goods), you can return them without any questions asked. However, depending on the shop's returns policy, you may have to pay for postage.

## Facts & scores

**Handy extra information from our testing team**

### Hold on a minute

This iAudio and the SanDisk C240/C250 are the only two Best Buy MP3 players on test that don't have a hold function

### Music to your ears

In this test, only the SanDisk and Creative players are compatible with the Best Buy Napster online music service (see 'Where to buy music', p40)

### Story time

This Apple iPod Shuffle, the iPod Nano and the Creative Zen V are all compatible with the online talking books website [www.audible.co.uk](http://www.audible.co.uk)

MODEL	SPECIFI
	PRICE (£)
1 <b>iAUDIO T2</b>	<b>89/99</b>
2 <b>APPLE iPod Nano</b>	<b>99/129/169</b>
3 <b>CREATIVE Zen V</b>	<b>50/70/80</b>
4 <b>PHILIPS SA9100/SA9200</b>	<b>90/110</b>
5 <b>ARCHOS 104</b>	<b>109</b>
6 <b>SAMSUNG YP-K5</b>	<b>75/90/140</b>
7 <b>SANDISK Sansa C240/C250</b>	<b>40/62</b>
8 <b>iRIVER S10</b>	<b>69/89</b>
9 <b>SONY NW-S703F/NW-S705F/NW-S706F</b>	<b>80/100/130</b>
10 <b>SONY NW-A1200</b>	<b>149</b>
11 <b>AIGO A215</b>	<b>30/40</b>
12 <b>SONY NW-S202F/NW-S203F/NW-S205F</b>	<b>50/70/90</b>
13 <b>APPLE iPod Shuffle</b>	<b>55</b>
14 <b>MAXFIELD Max Sin Touch</b>	<b>60</b>
15 <b>MOBIBLU Cube</b>	<b>30/40/50/60</b>
16 <b>JVC XA-F107</b>	<b>105</b>
17 <b>McCODY M20</b>	<b>67/83</b>
18 <b>PACKARD BELL Pulse FM</b>	<b>35/50</b>
19 <b>ALBA MP3128D6SIL</b>	<b>12</b>
20 <b>MINISTRY OF SOUND MOSMP097X2 Sport Clip</b>	<b>20</b>

a Best Buy MP3 players with the best-quality supplied headphones are Apple iPod Nano (2)

## Which should you choose?



### Easy to use

**PHILIPS SA9100/SA9200, £90/110** As you move through the menus on this Philips (4), only the keys you can use are lit. This makes it easier for you to know which controls to press.

### Best for sports

**APPLE IPOD SHUFFLE, £55** This tiny, lightweight player (13) clips firmly to your clothes, so it won't fall off when you're working out. Unlike players that store your music on to a hard disk, the technology used in the Shuffle (solid state) doesn't have any moving parts so it stands up to active use.

### Best for long journeys

**SONY NW-S703F/NW-S705F/NW-S706F, £80/100/130** With 47 hours of play per two-hour charge, this Sony (9) gets through an impressive amount of your music collection before needing its battery recharged.

### USING THE TABLES

We tested as many new MP3 and MP4 players (see p44) as possible. The more stars the better.

### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide. If models are available only online, prices are in *italics*.

**Weight** Includes batteries.

**Mac** A ✓ means model works with Apple computers (all work with PCs).

### Memory

**Type** HD = hard disk; SS = solid state. Hard-disk

players use a hard disk for storage, like a computer. Solid state ones have no moving parts.

### Features

**Viewing photos** A ✓ means photo viewing is possible. All MP4 players (see p44) are photo viewers.

### Battery

**Type** R = rechargeable; S = standard. **Running time** Battery life with supplied batteries. For MP4 players that score less than ★★ for watching video (see p44), we don't test video running time because these models are not great portable digital video players.



CATION			MEMORY		FEATURES			BATTERY			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE				SCORE %
WEIGHT (g)	SIZE hxxwxd (cm)	MAC	TYPE	MEMORY AVAILABLE	FM RADIO	MICROPHONE	VIEWING PHOTOS	TYPE	RUNNING TIME MUSIC (hr)	CHARGING TIME (hr)	SOUND WITH BEST BUY HEADPHONES <sup>a</sup>	EASE OF USING THE PLAYER	EASE OF USING THE SOFTWARE	VIEWING PHOTOS	
22	3x5x1	✓	SS	1GB/2GB	✓	✓		R	12	1	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★		69
40	9x4x6	✓	SS	2GB/4GB/8GB			✓	R	26	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★	68
42	7x4x1		SS	1GB/2GB/4GB		✓	✓	R	18	5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	67
46	9x5x1		SS	1GB/2GB			✓	R	16	1	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	65
74	9x4x1	✓	HD	4GB			✓	R	13	3	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★	64
104	10x5x2		SS	1GB/2GB/4GB	✓		✓	R	37	4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	64
41	4x8x2		SS	1GB/2GB	✓ <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓	R	18	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★	64
16	4x3x1		SS	1GB/2GB	✓	✓	✓	R	7	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	63
47	3x9x2		SS	1GB/2GB/4GB	✓			R	47	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★		63
109	9x5x2		HD	8GB				R	15	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★		63
51	3x10x3		SS	1GB/2GB		✓		S	39		★★★★★	★★★★★	★		61
24	2x9x2		SS	512MB/1GB/2GB	✓			R	16	1	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★		61
15	3x4x1	✓	SS	1GB				R	17	5	★★★★★	★★	★		58
25	8x3x1	✓	SS	1GB		✓		R	10	1	★★★★★	★★★★★	★		58
16	3x3x3	✓	SS	256MB/512MB/1GB/2GB	✓	✓		R	8	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★		58
36	4x7x2		SS	1GB				R	12	2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★		57
25	8x3x1		SS	1GB/2GB	✓	✓		R	9	3	★★★★★	★★★★★	★		56
34	3x8x2		SS	512MB/1GB	✓	✓		R <sup>c</sup>	16		★★★★★	★★	★		52
40	5x7x2		SS	128MB				S	7		★★★★★	★★	★★★★★		46
15	5x3x2		SS	256MB				R	5	2	★★	★	★		32

and Samsung YP-K5 (6) <sup>b</sup> FM and non FM versions available <sup>c</sup> Batteries are removable; charging time not tested

### Test performance

#### Sound with Best Buy headphones

The best sound quality possible if you upgrade the headphones.

**Watching video** MP4 players only – see p44. Considers compatible formats, quality of the display, viewing the screen indoors and out, ease of use and battery life.

#### Score for both tables (table for MP4 players is on p44)

Ignores price and is based on:

Convenience	30%
Sound quality	30%
Battery	15%
Features	10%
Use on the move	10%
Durability	5%

### BEST BUY COMPETITION – FIVE TO WIN

## Win a Best Buy Apple iPod Nano digital music player

Become the envy of your friends with our Best Buy MP3 player, the 8GB Apple iPod Nano, worth £169

#### TO ENTER, SIMPLY ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

How many hours of music is the 8GB Apple iPod Nano capable of storing?

(a) 10 (b) 72 (c) 136

To enter our Best Buy competition, go to [www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition](http://www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition) or send your entry on a postcard to 'Best Buy May 07', Which?, PO Box 44, Hertford X, SG14 1SH. Include

your name, address and postcode, daytime phone number and Which? membership number (found on your Which? membership card as your user name). Entries received by 31 May 2007 will

be entered. Our competition is open only to current Which? members. Usual rules apply. See [www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition](http://www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition) for a full set of rules or Which?, December 2006, p79.

