

[product news]

One-off reviews of recent launches

Roundup

VIDEO IPOD

Apple releases new iPods faster than we can buy them, let alone test them. The previously top-of-the-range colour iPod Photo has now been superseded by a thinner, sleeker, video-playing version that boasts an even brighter, sharper screen. Our sister magazine, *Computing Which?*, is currently putting it through its paces in the lab and will bring you full results in January. In the meantime, we've had a chance to play with it and the quality of the display is certainly excellent. The iTunes software has been improved to cope with video and you can now buy



The display is excellent on Apple's video iPod

music videos for £1.89 from the iTunes online store. The 30GB iPod is £220, while the porkier 60GB version is £299. It's a pretty safe bet that it will be a Best Buy.

MP3 player in a cube

The Best Buy iPod Shuffle isn't the only small and cute MP3 player around. The Q-Be is shaped like a cube, available in different colours, and has an FM radio built in. It comes in 512MB (125 songs) or 1GB (about 250 songs) versions. Dixons predicts it will be one of its top ten best-selling gadgets this Christmas. However, we're not convinced.

Sound quality is flat and dull compared with our Best Buys (see table, below). Adding a set of Best Buy headphones such as the Sony MDR-ED238 improves it a little. Be careful on the train with the supplied headphones, though, as a lot of sound escapes. Battery life is decent enough, with around 11 and a half hours of music on a single charge.

The Q-Be is approximately 2.5cm square and weighs just 19 grams – so it's very portable. However,

the drawback of its compact size is that its controls are tricky to use. Buttons are located on opposite sides of the cube and, if you press one on one side, it's easy to press one on the other side accidentally. The screen is reflective and the text is small so it can be difficult to read on the move or outdoors.

A major downside is that the Q-Be doesn't allow you to play songs downloaded from the big music sites such as HMV and Napster. However, you can still copy music on to it from your CD collection, via your computer. Transferring songs from your computer to the Q-Be is quite easy as you don't

MP3 players

1GB OR LESS

	Price (£)	Size hxxxd (cm)	Weight (g)	Memory	Mac	Ease of use	Battery (hours)	Supplied headphones	Score (%)
1 iPod Shuffle	69/100	8.5x2.5x0.9	34	512MB/1GB	✓	☆	17	☆	70
2 Sony NW-E507	150	8.5x2.9x1.7	51	1GB		☆	24	☆	67
3 Q-Be	85/110	2.4x2.4x2.5	19	512MB/1GB	✓	○	11.5	○	58

Roadstar multimedia player

The number of multimedia devices on sale has boomed recently, but the Roadstar TVD5004 stands out as the first one we've tested that combines a DVD, CD and MP3 player with a TV and radio in a 'boom-box' style unit. Unfortunately, it's a bit of a letdown.

Sound quality through the speakers is

poor in all modes. The picture on the five-inch TV screen is fuzzy and lacks resolution; you won't see much if you're sitting more than two metres away. Worse still, the TV switches itself on and off when you adjust the radio volume.

In DVD mode, the player was noisy, though it functioned well enough. However,

removing CD/DVD discs is quite awkward.

The control system is confusing, perhaps as a result of cramming all this functionality into one box. For instance, adjusting the picture settings is fearsomely complicated, and the buttons on the remote control are fiddly. We were disappointed to discover that the 'Fun' button on the remote

control was actually the 'function' or source button. And if you want to use it as a portable unit, it requires ten D-size batteries, which makes it very heavy.

For a plastic unit that scratches easily, the asking price is steep – £212.99 from www.kayslifestyle.co.uk.

Verdict Jack of all trades, master of none. Not recommended.



need any software (although you do need Windows XP). You just link the two with the supplied cable and transfer away. Even if your computer has a fast USB 2.0 connection, transfer will still be slow, as the Q-Be has only the slower USB 1.1. An album will take more than 90 seconds to transfer, compared with around 10 seconds with the Shuffle.

The Q-Be costs £110 (1GB) or £85 (512MB) and is available from Dixons.

Verdict Although the Q-Be is a looker, sound quality and ease of use are only average compared with our Best Buys.

USING THE TABLE

Specification

Memory 1GB stores around 17 hours of music; 512MB stores about eight hours. **Mac** Works with Apple computers; all the players work with Windows computers.

SCORE

This ignores price and is based on:

Sound quality	40%
Ease of use	20%
Features	20%
Technical tests	20%

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ●
Best —————> Worst
■ Best Buy



The Roadstar packs too many functions into one unit

The writing is off the wall

As cleaning tasks go, getting rid of graffiti is one of the toughest. So we were interested to hear about two new graffiti removers – Nitromors Graffiti Buster (£8.50 for 500ml) and Briwax Graffiti Wipe (£7.70 for 500ml) from DIY and hardware shops. We tested how well they removed typical aerosol gloss from a range of surfaces compared with white spirit, methylated spirit and cellulose thinners. Both did better than the conventional alternatives, which were all messier to apply.

With both products, you spray them on, leave, and wipe off. Graffiti Buster is faster – ten minutes, compared with 20 for Graffiti Wipe. Neither had any problems cleaning graffiti off a painted car panel, bare aluminium sheet or glass. Both also worked quite well on

concrete, though they left marks where the graffiti had been. For brick, the Graffiti Buster performed slightly better – Graffiti Wipe left some staining.

The results weren't so good on bare wood because the paint soaked into it and wasn't fully removed. On plaster, both cleaners

either damaged or completely removed the emulsion paint. For wood and plaster, it may be better to paint over the graffiti.

Verdict Both products are easier to use and more effective than conventional cleaners. There may be times when repainting is the best answer, though.



the gadgeteer

Gadgeteer #15

Stainless steel chocolate fountain

Christmas is a bit naff with all its fairy lights, glitter and tinsel: as Santa comes down the chimney, style goes out the window. It's also a time for massive consumption of fattening foodstuffs: yule logs, brandy butter, mince pies, roasted chestnuts – all washed down with gallons of booze. In the light of all this, what better Christmas gift could there be than one that combines the naff (fondue) with the calorific (chocolate)? The chocolate fountain heats up chocolate in its base and then pumps it upwards, resulting in a chocolatey eruption which glides down the sides to start the process again. In this last respect, it gets double naffness points for being similar to a lava lamp. The chocolate fountain costs £90 at www.gadgets.co.uk.

