



# Digital radios

## NEED TO KNOW

Digital radio, also known as DAB (digital audio broadcasting), offers an increased choice of stations. You get five extra BBC channels, including BBC7 (comedy and drama), and extra pop channels such as 1Xtra. There are more commercial and local stations, too: if you're a head-banger there's Planet Rock, while intellectuals might enjoy the literature-centric One Word.

A small screen on the radio displays information about what you're listening to, such as a description of the type of music the station plays, contact phone numbers to ring the studio, or even track names.

Digital radios are now available as hand-held models, so you can listen digitally when you're out. If you want a table-top model just for use at home, there's a larger selection.

### COVERAGE

Currently 85 per cent of the country can receive digital radio. Visit [www.digitalradionow.com](http://www.digitalradionow.com) and type in your postcode to see whether you can. Some areas have better reception than others, so you may need an external DAB aerial (see 'DAB aerials', opposite). If you opt for a hand-held model, you may wander out of the DAB area, so it's worth buying one with an FM tuner as well. DAB reception can be patchy compared with FM if you're moving quickly, on a train, for example.

## BEST BUYS

Our Best Buys deliver the best sound in a strong reception area. They are easier to use, with better features than the non-Best Buys.

### TABLE-TOP

The **Pure (1)** is the best-sounding digital radio around; it plays all types of music and speech well, with good bass and clarity. You can find it in Argos, Currys, Dixons, John Lewis and Miller Brothers for £130. It remains best on test, despite some stiff competition from the Roberts.

The **Roberts (2)**, £120 from virtually everywhere, lets you pause and rewind live radio (see 'Rewind live radio', opposite). It's uninspiring to look at, falling unsatisfactorily between the 'classic' look of the wood-clad Pure models and the contemporary hi-tech appearance of the Sony models. However, it delivers the goods in other areas, with great sound quality and an easy-to-use design. You can also put batteries in it if you want to take it out and about.

The cheaper **Pure (3)** has ten pre-sets so you can easily switch to the digital stations

you like. Sound quality is good, considering that there's only one speaker. You can buy an extra matching speaker for £30 if you want stereo sound. One drawback is that the sound can distort at louder volumes. This Pure model costs £100 at Argos, Currys and John Lewis.

The **Intempo (4)** has good sound quality, according to our expert panel. The FM reception is particularly good, though there is a slight high-pitched whistling sound in the background during some FM broadcasts. It's around £90 in John Lewis and Miller Brothers.

The **Sony (5)**, £130 from Comet, Currys and Dixons, isn't a bad first-time effort from Sony but it doesn't really have the sound quality or ease of use that the best models can boast. It's easy on the eye (if you like the hi-tech look) and is the only model we've looked at that can receive broadcasts on the DAB 'L' band. This means that it will pick up digital radio stations on the Continent that broadcast in this range. The usefulness of this is questionable, however,

because it doesn't take batteries – so it's not the holiday companion it could be. However, it does have a whopping 40 pre-sets, double anything else we tested.

The cheapest Best Buy **Pure (6)** is based on the earlier Evoke-1. Sound quality is good, though you can't turn it up particularly loud and there's only one speaker. As with the Pure (3), you add stereo sound by buying an extra speaker for £30. There's a choice of either maple or cherry finish, and



3 Pure  
TABLE-TOP

BEST  
BUY





**1 Pure**  
TABLE-TOP

**BEST  
ON  
TEST**

## DAB AERIALS

If you live in an area with poor digital radio reception, you may find that the standard telescopic aerial that comes with table-top digital radios doesn't pick up a good enough signal. If you experience glitches during broadcasts or you can't pick up all the stations you should be able to, a high-gain external aerial on your roof is your best bet. You can buy one of these aerials for about £30, but if you're not confident about doing lots of cabling, or don't

have a head for heights, call in the professionals. The price depends on the logistics of the job, but you can expect to pay about £150 in total. To find an accredited installation specialist, visit [www.cai.org.uk](http://www.cai.org.uk) or ring 020 8902 8998.

If you're in an area of bad reception and think you'll need an external aerial, check our table to see whether the radio you buy can be connected to one. This Pure will take an external aerial.

## REWIND LIVE RADIO

Five of the models we tested, including this Roberts, have built-in memory to record digital radio. This allows you to either pause live radio or skip back through something you've just been listening to.

How much you can record depends on the quality of the broadcast. This is usually

shown in Kbps (128 is normal, 192 is high and 64 is low). The lower the quality, the more that it's possible to record. Some radios can manage to record up to 35 minutes of programming, but expect ten to 20 in most cases.

It's strange to see a 'pause' button on a radio, but it's a definite convenience: you need never again miss those vital goings-on at the Grundys if the doorbell goes during *The Archers*.

If you miss a programme completely, the BBC puts recent radio shows on its website, so you can listen to them over the internet. Go to [www.bbc.co.uk/radio](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio) for more information.



**2 Roberts**  
TABLE-TOP

**BEST  
BUY**



**4 Intempo**  
TABLE-TOP

**BEST  
BUY**



**5 Sony**  
TABLE-TOP

**BEST  
BUY**





WIN

We've got five Sony XDRM1 digital radios to give away See p56



### WHICH? EXTRA

The table shows all the digital radios we've tested that are still on sale. Go to [www.which.co.uk/digitalradios](http://www.which.co.uk/digitalradios) for more information about the features on these radios. Other information you'll find there includes a list of BBC and commercial digital-only stations.

### Table-top digital radios

MODEL	Specification			Features					Performance		Score (%)
	Price (£)	Weight (g)	Size wxhxd (cm)	Batteries	FM	Pre-sets	Pause/rewind	Aerial	Ease of use	Sound	
1 Pure Evoke-2	130	2,466	29x22x12	✓	✓	12		✓	☆	☆	71
2 Roberts Gemini RD7	120	1,889	28x17x9	✓	✓	10	✓	✓	☆	☆	69
3 Pure Tempus-1	100	1,492	21x18x12			10		✓	☆	○	67
4 Intempo PG-01	90	1,650	25x20x12		✓	8		✓	☆	○	64
5 Sony XDRS1	130	2,420	32x15x16		✓	40			○	○	60
6 Pure Evoke-1XT	90	1,454	21x17x11			6		✓	○	○	59
7 Roberts Gemini RD11	120	3,300	30x20x11	✓	✓	10	✓	✓	☆	○	59
8 Acoustic Solutions Portal 2	70	1,458	25x20x12	✓	✓	6		✓	☆	●	55
9 Perstel DR-601	120	1,874	29x14x16	✓	✓	10		✓	○	○	55
10 Roberts Gemini RD-3	140	1,336	28x16x9	✓	✓	20		✓	☆	●	53
11 Roberts Gemini RD-10	149	1,590	26x15x12	✓	✓	0		✓	☆	●	53
12 Pure Sonus-1XT	120	1,490	21x18x12			10		✓	○	●	52
13 Panasonic RF-D1	85	1,124	26x17x9	✓	✓	10		✓	☆	●	51
14 Acoustic Solutions Portal 3	100	1,920	26x20x10	✓	✓	12	✓	✓	○	●	48
15 BT Aviator 10M	100	2,481	24x21x12	✓	✓	10	✓	✓	○	●	48
16 Bush TR2003DAB	60	1,828	32x18x10	✓	✓	10			☆	●	48
17 Goodmans GSR80DAB	60	1,800	30x18x10	✓	✓	10		✓	○	●	48
18 Roberts Gemini RD-1	200	1,608	21x26x12	✓	✓	6		✓	○	●	48
19 Roberts Gemini RD-15	70	995	24x14x6	✓		5			☆	●	48
20 Sharp FV-DBIE(S)	80	1,692	32x13x10	✓	✓	20			○	●	48
21 Pure Elan	70	2,960	28x19x9	✓	✓	16			☆	●	45
22 Alba TRDAB2821	50	1,815	29x15x11	✓	✓	8		✓	○	●	43
23 Morphy Richards MR27016	115	2,344	30x23x10	✓	✓	14	✓	✓	○	●	43
24 Crown CDR240	70	1,708	31x20x12	✓	✓	16			○	●	41

## KEY



## SCORE

## Hand-held

## Ignores price and is based on:

Sound quality	60%
Ease of use	20%
Features	20%

## SCORE

## Table-top

## Ignores price and is based on:

Sound quality	40%
Ease of use	30%
Features	25%
Battery life	5%

## TABLE NOTES

We tested popular digital radios from leading brands.

## Specification

**Price** The lowest price we found on the high street.

## Features

**Batteries** For table-top models, this indicates whether the radio can run on batteries. For hand-held models, it's whether rechargeables are included. **FM** Indicates whether the radio has a back-up FM tuner. **Pre-sets** How many stations you can put in memory. **Aerial** Shows an external aerial can be added.

## Performance

**Sound** The quality of the sound. For the hand-held radios, this is with their supplied headphones.

it's available for £90 at Argos, Comet, Currys, Dixons and John Lewis.

The old-fashioned leathery appearance of the **Roberts (7)**, £120 from John Lewis, belies its hi-tech innards. You can pause and rewind radio using the PausePlus feature, and close inspection reveals a brightly lit modern-day LCD screen to give your station and signal information. You can use batteries to roam freely, but at 3.3kg it's the heaviest radio on test and not that portable. The two

speakers deliver stereo sound but the quality isn't as good as with the best models.

## HAND-HELD

If you like your gadgets small, dark and handsome, the **Sony (25)** (shown below, actual size), £150 from Comet, Currys, Dixons and John Lewis, fits the bill. It packs an FM tuner as well as a digital one inside its diminutive frame so you can always tune in, and it delivers great sound. Battery life was also impressive at 11 hours (digital radios are harder

on batteries than analogue ones and usually last about half as long). Our only gripes were that it is fiddly to use, which is admittedly difficult to avoid given its small size, and it has a very dim display which was difficult to read in sunlight.

The **Philips (26)**, £100 from John Lewis, delivers decent sound with the supplied headphones, but it's not as good as the Sony. Sound quality improves considerably if you get some better headphones.

On the plus side, the Philips comes with rechargeable batteries, although they last only seven hours. Still, if you get caught without a mains plug, you can put in some standard AAs. Like the Sony, this Philips comes with an FM tuner as back-up.



## Hand-held digital radios

## MODEL

	Specification			Features		Performance			Score
	Price (£)	Size wxhxd (cm)	Weight (g)	Batteries	FM	Battery life (hr)	Ease of use	Sound	(%)
25 Sony XDRM1	150	7x9x3	107		✓	11	○	★	66
26 Philips DA 1000	100	6x11x2	142	✓	✓	7	○	☆	61
27 Perstel DR-301	170	8x7x3	157		✓	6	●	☆	51
28 Ministry of Sound DR-011b	60	7x10x3	144			10	☆	○	46