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Now that streaming is commonplace, a new type of product has entered the market - the Bluetooth receiver. These little wonders will stream digital tunes into your system to give proper hi-fi sound

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## Arcam miniBlink £90 ★★★★★

**Blink. No, that's not a command, but the suffix Arcam uses for its small range of Bluetooth receivers. First came the rBlink, £150, launched last year; now it has a sibling, the miniBlink.**

The miniBlink is a compact unit shaped like a pebble. The only physical connection is a 3.5mm analogue output, which may seem mean to those expecting digital outs to feed an external DAC. But, even limited to the 3.5mm-to-RCA phono cable, you can hear this is a talented device.

Where some Bluetooth receivers sound zingy and bright, the miniBlink sounds buttery smooth, without sacrificing detail or losing its edge. There's a sense of rhythm and fluidity to music, and the dynamic leaps from quiet moments to grander sections are nicely done.

Michael Bubl 's version of *Cry Me A River* combines his smooth crooning with a dramatic burst of the big band. Wind instruments and percussion explode into life, giving the track real dynamic clout. Switch to a more intimate track such as Bruno Mars' *When I Was Your Man* and the vocal and piano hang beautifully in front of the listener.

This level of quality doesn't come easy to products like this, which makes the miniBlink's abilities all the more special.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Simple design; easy to pair; aptX Bluetooth; refined, natural sound; excellent dynamics and detail; enjoyable presentation

**AGAINST** No digital outputs

**VERDICT** Makes a huge impression - Bluetooth sounds brilliant

It has just the one - analogue - output, which might seem light, but the miniBlink is both a subtle and solid performer



### PAIRING

Bluetooth pairing is a piece of cake: push and hold the button on the top, and your Bluetooth device will find the miniBlink. It's aptX compatible, too.



If NFC isn't a goer, you can connect via Bluetooth in the normal way by holding down the button on the top of the unit

## Bayan Audio Streamport Universal £60 ★★★★★

**This Bayan has price in its favour - it's £30 cheaper than the Arcam - and it features NFC connectivity, so you can hover a compatible smartphone over the top of the unit, pair and stream via Bluetooth (including aptX) without the hassle of having to delve into your smartphone's menus.**

You can connect to an amp through either 3.5mm output or analogue RCA sockets. Both sets of cables are supplied, but if you do want to use the Bayan's analogue outputs we'd invest in some better cables - the difference between the supplied wire and, say, the Wireworld Luna 7 is night and day.

From the off, the Bayan doesn't sound as open, clear or spacious as its close rivals. Despite picking out decent detail, the Bayan sounds more compressed and congested than some.

Vance Joy's sprightly, playful and folksy *Riptide* sounds like it's had some of the sparkle and life sucked out of it. Switch to Kings Of Leon's *Work On Me* and the receiver fails to convey the ebb and flow of that bass guitar.

While we are prepared to forgive products for subtle faults in the sound they provide, the Streamport Universal isn't something we feel we could truly recommend.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** NFC pairing and aptX Bluetooth; decent levels of detail

**AGAINST** Music sounds a touch congested; lacks clarity and dynamics

**VERDICT** The Bayan seems to suck the life out of music and that's never a good thing, whatever the price



**ROUND-UP** BLUETOOTH RECEIVERS

Belkin  
Song Stream BT HD £50 ★★★★★

**Belkin is better** known for its mobile, computer and networking peripherals, but it isn't afraid to dabble in the world of audio electronics.

The Song Stream BT HD is a neat-looking Bluetooth receiver with NFC (near-field communication) built in. Those running Android 4.1 or above can pair with it by resting their handset on the rubber pad on top of the unit.

Those of you running earlier versions will need to download the Belkin BT app from the Google Play store. Those who don't have the luxury of NFC can pair in the normal way.

The Belkin has a 3.5mm analogue output (and a 3.5mm-to-RCA cable) and both optical and coaxial digital outputs (there's a coax cable in the box). We haven't come across another Bluetooth receiver that offers this breadth of connectivity.

There's a confident swagger to Lady GaGa's *Do What U Want*. Bass notes, defined and relatively deep, sound firm and hit with purpose. The Belkin does a decent job of capturing emotion in vocals and following rhythms accurately.

For the money you're getting a very listenable unit - but the best at this price manage to go that extra mile when it comes to ultimate sound quality.

**Rating** ★★★★★

**FOR** Weighty bass, smooth treble; twin digital outputs; NFC functionality

**AGAINST** Some rivals sound more exciting and engaging; no aptX

**VERDICT** A solid performer for the money, the Belkin is a good option if you want to go down the wireless route



The Belkin stands out as the only receiver here to offer both optical and coax digital outputs, as well as an analogue 3.5mm out



The two plugs mean you can connect directly to an amp without extra interconnects. Fitting could be an issue, though

Focal  
Universal Wireless Receiver £85

★★★★☆

**This Focal DAC** is both convenient and inconvenient. It's compatible with aptX Bluetooth, a bonus for those toting compatible smartphones and tablets. Even better, its analogue output uses actual plugs so you can connect directly to the back of your amplifier - no need to add stereo interconnects.

The downside is that connectivity options are restricted - there are no digital outputs should you want to use an external DAC. And, depending on the distance between the sockets on the back of your amp, the Focal might not be a perfect fit.

We stream some music and are greeted by a clean and clear sound. There's a fantastic sense of spaciousness and atmosphere during the intro to Feeder's *Moonshine*. Drums and guitar caress the peaceful and fluid intro, but when the chorus kicks in the Focal shows plenty of attack and bite. It dishes out loads of detail too, arguably as much as the miniBlink.

Play Adele's *Someone Like You* and the Focal shows a fine grasp of the emotion in the vocal, but it lacks that extra layer of refinement and sophistication the miniBlink delivers. The Arcam creates a stronger connection with the listener, for which we'd willingly pay the extra, but the Focal makes a very fine fist of music streamed over Bluetooth.

**Rating** ★★★★★

**FOR** Loads of detail; open soundstage; convenient design (for some)

**AGAINST** No digital outputs; lacks an ounce or two of refinement

**VERDICT** This simplified take on a Bluetooth receiver isn't without its quirks, but the Focal is a very talented performer.



## Crystal Acoustics BluDAC £60 ★★★★★

**What the BluDAC** lacks in size and weight, it makes up for in body art. Just in case you don't read the packaging, you can see what it has to offer via its NFC, Bluetooth and aptX tattoos.

The BluDAC's ready to be connected from the moment you plug in the mains lead. If you're using NFC, hold your device against the unit's top panel and you'll get a quick handshake - with the LED in the middle beaming a steady shade of blue.

When you're pairing over normal Bluetooth, the receiver comes up as 'Music Receiver' on your smartphone or tablet - the majority of rivals tend to show their actual model name to help save any confusion.

Right away we're impressed with the BluDAC's powerful, dynamic approach to music. Play Haim's *Running If You Call My Name* and the track has vigour and verve. There's a solid soundstage in front of the listener, with plenty of headroom to allow for those punchy drum kicks, and expressive vocals. The BluDAC picks out plenty of detail, including the subtle sparkle of the piano strings that follow in the background of the track.

Music doesn't have the same level of finesse as when heard through the Arcam, but then the Crystal Acoustics is almost half the price. And that's what makes the BluDAC a bargain.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** An open, clear sound; exciting, engaging delivery; NFC (near-field communication)

**AGAINST** Nothing at this money

**VERDICT** Great budget choice with good connectivity - a real entertainer



The touch-sensitive button on the top triggers the pairing process. The LED flashes red and blue until you get a solid link



## QED uPlay Plus £100 ★★★★★

**Compared with other** Bluetooth DACs on the market, the uPlay Plus is relatively big - so it will be a bit harder to conceal among your kit than some.

The raised lip on the right glows blue or red depending on its status. Once you're streaming to the uPlay Plus, you can either go out through the dedicated analogue outputs and into an amp, or out of the optical digital socket and into an amp or a completely separate DAC. You'll need to have the relevant cables though - you don't get any included in the box.

The first thing you notice about QED's sound is the odd balance. Play EMA's *Satellites* and the female vocals sit quite deep in the soundstage. They're so recessed that highs and lows take greater prominence and as a result overpower what's happening with voices.

There's a similar imbalance with Tom Odell's *Can't Pretend*. The piano playing, vocal and drums don't knit together as convincingly as when heard through the best DACs at this money. And even with a decent level of detail to fall back on, there's a lack of solidity and conviction in the sound.

Other receivers sound clearer and more articulate - for less money. The uPlay Plus just doesn't do enough to argue its case.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Decent level of detail; digital and analogue outputs

**AGAINST** Unbalanced sound; recessed mid-range; ill-defined lows

**VERDICT** The uPlay Plus sounds disappointing overall and doesn't offer great value for money