

# GROUP TEST

Putting products through their paces



**AirPlay included**  
Apple's AirPlay is the patented wireless streaming standard that allows Apple products to stream media to compatible devices. This feature was missing from the RCD-N8's predecessor but Denon has rectified this in the new CEOL.

**Super-crisp audio**  
The Sneaky's DAC supports a high sampling rate. The actual difference between 192KHz and lower-quality audio is for the academics to argue about. Regardless, the audio reproduced by Sneaky's DAC is exceptionally detailed.

**Analogue to digital**  
Converting from old vinyl records to digital music is handled by a DAC chip. This 'samples' the music in blocks, effectively turning peaks and troughs in the signal into a series of zeros and ones.

**USB-B**  
By using the USB-B connection of the NA-11S1, music can completely bypass the sound card and mixer on your PC for unmodified audio.

HOW IT WORKS  
**EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD**  
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# Network audio players

Sync all your audio needs with a home network using these cutting-edge machines built to amp up your media

## 1 Denon CEOL RCD-N8

**Price:** £399.95/\$TBA  
**Get it from:** [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)  
The new lightweight, pearl-finished CEOL box is about as plug-and-play as they come. In only a few steps, you've connected to either your wired or wireless network, ready to stream music from your home network, via internet radio or online services. The CEOL supports a wide range of music formats and packs 65W of power into its amp for a well-rounded punch of sound when paired with a quality pair of speakers. It's fully furnished with a suite of audio input options, including CD, but stops at Bluetooth - a shame given how complete this package is otherwise. Speakers are extra, of course, though the two that are paired with this system don't do it justice.  
**Verdict:** \*\*\*\*

## 2 Linn Sneaky DSM

**Price:** £1,750/\$N/A  
**Get it from:** [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk)  
Scottish audio specialist Linn offers a comprehensive solution in its aptly named 'Sneaky' DSM. The software suite was also developed in-house and it even has its own online music store - [www.linnrecords.com](http://www.linnrecords.com) - where you can buy the high bit-rate songs the Sneaky is capable of pumping out. It's an intriguing-looking thing, but the £1,750 question is: how does it sound? Setup is quite easy - just follow the wizard and you can't go wrong. The Sneaky plugs in to your router and after setting up, a media server will allow you to stream audio from a number of sources - and there's no two ways about it, it sounds incredible. The Sneaky's main drawback is that it has no wireless input as Linn feels Wi-Fi doesn't support high-quality audio.  
**Verdict:** \*\*\*\*

## 3 Cocktail Audio X30

**Price:** from £879/\$N/A  
**Get it from:** [www.cocktailaudio.co.uk](http://www.cocktailaudio.co.uk)  
Cocktail's 'Big Brother' to its older X10 strikes the balance between price and features of this HIW lineup. This hi-tech piece of kit is both an HD music server and network streamer, with integrated CD-ripping and a power amplifier with 50W per channel - more or less all your music-playing needs contained in a single box. To compete at this price level, the X30 supports high-resolution, 24-bit music files and gapless playback. Its capacity as music server is its standout feature though. It supports hard-disk drives up to 4TB or 500GB of solid-state drive, allowing you to record audio from older media - vinyl or cassette, for example, which means you can archive your music. It costs more than your average streamer but for the quality, ease of use and features, the X30 offers the most value for money in our opinion.  
**Verdict:** \*\*\*\*

## 4 Marantz NA-11S1

**Price:** £3,499/\$3,499  
**Get it from:** [www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)  
Leading the pack on both quality and price here is one of the market leaders, Marantz, with this high-end offering. Finished in classic brushed aluminium, it features support for a huge range of audio formats, streaming from Spotify, AirPlay and several other online services, plus all the audio inputs and outputs you could possibly want. So what does over £3,000 of network music streamer get you over something a third of the cost - or even less? For starters, it's incredibly robust, both in terms of what the NA-11S1 can do and how solidly it's been manufactured. One of the major factors in the price of a piece of audio technology like this is the high quality of the digital-to-analogue converter (DAC), but the complete sound it delivers is where you'll hear your money hard at work. It's beyond the budget of pretty much anyone other than a committed audiophile, but their music system will be the envy of the street.  
**Verdict:** \*\*\*\*

# ON THE HORIZON

Four other cool gadgets we're keen to get our hands on...  
**SteelSeries Stratus**  
With the increasing power of mobile devices and trend towards gaming on smartphones and tablets, it was only a matter of time before someone brought out a controller compatible with Apple's portable range. Bluetooth-powered and with ten hours of juice, SteelSeries Stratus could be a godsend for Apple gamers.



## Google Glass prescription

Apparently, the much-hyped augmented reality specs are being made available on prescription. It will come to an optician near you sometime this year.



## Sony Ultra Short Throw Projector

Short-throw projectors are the ultimate alternative to a giant flatscreen TV or conventional projector. It shoots the image directly up against the wall rather than across the room. Sony's version is a monster that projects a 4K image at up to 373cm (147in)! It will set you back around £25,000 (\$40,000) though.



## ChefJet

The days of a *Star Trek*-style replicator can't be too far away now, what with the launch of ChefJet, a 3D printer that produces edible items. At the moment, this device can print decorations in chocolate, vanilla, mint and other flavours for the cake and pastry industry.

