WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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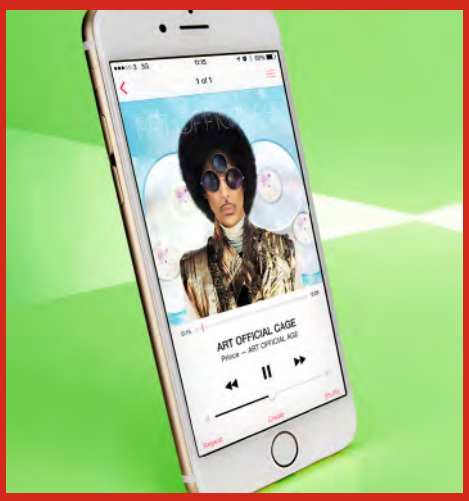
It's the one night of the year *What Hi-Fi?* (as a brand) scrubs up, dresses up and invites the electronics and home entertainment industries out for a drink to explain exactly what it's been up to for the past 12 months. In all honestly, the past year has been much like all the others: we've been testing, comparing, evaluating and judging the most popular, most interesting and most exciting consumer electronics around. Over the next 80 pages we reveal the 99 products we think are the best you can currently buy – and you, lucky reader, don't even have to put on your best clothes to find out what they are.



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For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit *whathifi.com*

Best stereo speakers up to £200

Wharfedale Diamond 220 £200

Looking for the most talented budget speakers on the market? Look no further. Wharfedale's Diamond 220s have managed to dislodge the excellent Q Acoustics 2020is in the process, which is no mean feat.

Wharfedale's engineers have used composite cabinet walls made with two thin MDF layers sandwiching a chipboard filling. It works really well, producing a sturdy cabinet that's controlled in terms of resonance. This means you'll hear far more of what the drive units are doing rather than the cabinet. And what does that mean for you, the listener? A clearer, more detailed sound.

Diamond designing

Changes from the last generation of Diamond standmounter include a bigger magnet on the 13cm woven-Kevlar mid/bass driver in an attempt to make the speakers a little easier to drive and improve responsiveness. The unusual slot-loaded port arrangement first seen on the 100 series makes a reappearance here too, and it has been tweaked to reduce distortion. It's claimed to be more efficient than a conventional port but, as always, the proof is in the listening.

The tweeter remains unchanged. It still sits in a deeply dished waveguide, which helps efficiency, particularly through the crossover region.

When it comes to sound quality, the Diamond 220s are excellent. These speakers deliver a meaty bass with more power and punch than we expect from boxes that stand just 50cm high. Lows are also articulate, able to track fast-moving basslines with ease. Move up the frequency range and the good news continues. Midrange quality is terrific, pointing to quality drive units and a well-designed crossover network. Listen to Adele's *21* set and it's hard not to be taken in by the emotion in her delivery.

*The **Wharfedale Diamond 220s** sound excellent. They deliver a surprisingly meaty bass with far more power than we expect from a 50cm box*

Switching to Holst's *Jupiter,* we're impressed by the balanced tonality and the 220s' ability to deliver large-scale dynamic shifts with enthusiasm. Stereo imaging is good too.

Put it all together and you have a top-class pair of budget speakers. Well done Wharfedale.