

AMAZON ECHO SHOW **vs** ECHO SPOT

T3

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Top-shelf sounds

The finest all-in-one speaker sets to make your shelves shake and your room rock

Words: Alex Cox



01

ONE FOR BUDGET CRUNCHERS

Q ACOUSTICS BT3
£189, qacoustics.co.uk

Although it's expected that bookshelf speakers hide away and don't make too much visual noise, Q Acoustics' range of high-gloss coloured finishes give them a unique look. Contrarily, there's nothing overly remarkable about their sound, but in a way that's a blessing – they're flat, balanced, neutral, getting well out of the way and letting your audio source do all the hard work. We'd probably have found a way to put the power and source controls somewhere other than the top, but for the price the BT3 pair is absolutely on the mark.

★★★★☆

02

ONE FOR TRADITIONALISTS

DALI ZENSOR 1 AX
£449, dali-speakers.com

Dali's original Zensor 1 loudspeakers have been a reasonably priced hi-fi stalwart for many years. The AX doesn't mess with the formula, jamming all the relevant electronics in the back of the existing hardware. They push out a sound full of clear expression, rich in the treble and mid-range, with slightly more bass on offer if you put the speakers close to a wall. That said, Bluetooth playback adds a slight muddiness that doesn't always jibe, and there's no on-board way to tweak the mix, which is a bit of a shame.

★★★★☆

03

ONE FOR SPOKEN WORD

KITSOUND REUNION
£100, kitsound.co.uk

Clad in a leathery wrap like a guitar amp, and brilliantly small given the volumes they're capable of, Kitsound's Reunion speakers are a package which embodies the word compact: compact in size, compact in price and compact, sadly, in audio capabilities. While you can alter the frequencies to suit your preferences, the combined mix doesn't quite gel, with the beefy low end battering everything else out of the way unless you're careful. For radio or podcasts they're perfect, but musical fidelity isn't the Reunion's forte.

★★★☆☆

Beautifully constructed speakers are a joy to behold, but do your cones and tweeters have to be the focal point of the room you place them in? Arguably, given that audio rarely has a visual element to it, that's the last thing a speaker needs to do.

But moving any old speaker to the edges won't always work –

bookshelf speakers, in particular, are made small, made loud, and made to work with your walls. The six we've picked stay well out of the way, and their integrated amplifiers and Bluetooth mean, for the most part, they're absolutely minimal in terms of wires and extras. Plug them in, hook up your audio source, and you're done.

T3
BEST ON
TEST

T3
★★★★★
PLATINUM
AWARD

T3
★★★★★
PLATINUM
AWARD



04

ONE FOR SURPRISES

RUARK AUDIO MR1-MK2
£329, ruarkaudio.com

Proof that high-end sound doesn't need the complexity of Yamaha's NX-N500 or the heft of the Klipsch Sixes, Ruark's diminutive speakers are an absolute beauty. They look great, with a fashionable milled cloth grille and curves to die for, and crank out exquisitely refined audio, rich in all the right tones. They can be subtle, with an automatic loudness boost at lower volumes to keep everything in focus, but they're carrying more than enough muscle to go all the way to party volumes with aplomb. For the money, you won't find better.

★★★★★

05

ONE FOR EXTRA TECH

YAMAHA NX-N500
£649, uk.yamaha.com

The active NX-N500s remind us more of pro-studio monitors than standard bookshelf speakers. Linked by both a chunky XLR cable and a between-speakers Ethernet cable, and individually powered by a pair of kettle leads, they're far from the most discrete or convenient bookshelf buddies. Then again, they can handle DLNA, Airplay and Spotify Connect, they're stunning to look at, and they carry one of the most crispy and satisfying soundstages around. If you're comfortable routing a few wires, your music is in very good hands.

★★★★☆

06

ONE FOR OLD-SCHOOL TUNES

KLIPSCH THE SIXES
£800, henleyaudio.co.uk

The Klipsch pair embodies a far burlier form than its more compact bookshelf rivals on this list, but the functionality and connectivity is all there, operated through a convenient old-school front panel interface or more modern slimline remote. Gold trim and a classic wood and mesh combo add to the speaker's retro appeal, and there's a phono preamp on board when you're ready to get that vinyl spinning up. Make no mistake, though, the sound of Klipsch's combo is no ancient relic: it's a lively, impeccably engineered mix.

★★★★★