

# TEST VERDICT

## THE WINNERS

**Pioneer N50**  
£500 ★★★★★

The Marantz manages to hold on to its five-star verdict, but it's the **Pioneer** newcomer that takes the laurels with its superb blend of premium feel and top-notch performance. A product to be proud of...



**This test proved** quite a tussle, but Pioneer must take the plaudits for making the N50 a fabulous all-rounder. You could say it's the things streams are made of...

We weren't expecting Pioneer to turn up and throw its weight around in such spectacular fashion. Not only has it waltzed in to this test and beaten all before it, but the N50 has also set a high benchmark, not just for products of this type at this price. More expensive streamers should also be wary of the sheer value the Pioneer represents.

The N50 looks like a quality item and has the feature set and performance to back those looks up. File support is extensive and no other streamer here satisfies in quite the same way. It brings to life heavily compressed tracks and allows CD-quality files and better to shine. Music is taken from a hard drive or from the internet with seriously musical results. This is a product any owner should be proud to have in their system. The perfectionist in us would like a slicker control app, and a larger screen; but you can't grumble too much.

### A second five-star machine

The fact the Marantz NA7004 has managed to maintain its five-star rating is testament to its abilities too. Having said that, it did start out life as a £700 machine so one really ought to expect that it can make the grade. The unit can't quite match the sonic prowess of the Pioneer, but it comes close enough to make it a viable alternative - especially if you already own a host of other Marantz components.

It's really the Cambridge Audio NP30 that falls foul of the Pioneer. In just the few months since we last featured the unit, rivals (the Pioneer chief among them) have come along and have raised the bar. Yes it's £100 cheaper than the Pioneer, offers wifi connectivity, and the StreamMagic app is more intuitive, but there are more holes in its spec sheet and it doesn't feel like such an all-round device. The Cambridge doesn't have the musical qualities to compete either. The NP30 is still a good machine, but expectations have been raised thanks to that Pioneer.

The Pro-ject's problem is twofold - price and the level of performance.

**We weren't expecting Pioneer to throw its weight around in such spectacular fashion. Pricier streamers should also be wary**

The harsh truth is that the StreamBox DS would still struggle to compete even if it was around the same price as the Pioneer and Marantz in this test.

There's just no reason we can see why you'd buy it or even consider it over the rival machines here. There are elements of a decent piece of kit, namely the splendid remote control and the speed of the unit's response, but features and performance are severely lacking when compared with the two front-runners here. Pro-ject's turntables have had great success, but it should really be a case of back to the drawing board with the StreamBox DS.

The fine Pioneer is finished beautifully, and performs in a similar manner

## Jargon buster

### AirPlay

Apple's proprietary wireless technology, which allows you to stream from one of its portable devices or any computer with the company's iTunes software onboard to an AirPlay enabled device

### Bluetooth

A wireless technology designed to transfer files over short distances. Common on mobile devices. Broadly the same level of performance as AirPlay

### aptX

A Bluetooth audio compression codec used in products to allow higher quality, more efficient music streams

### DAC (Digital-to-Analogue Converter)

A DAC takes a digital stream and turns it into analogue. They tend to have optical and coaxial inputs with Type B USB inputs becoming increasingly common

### Sample rate

The number of times an audio signal is read every second. The higher the rate, the more accurate the sound. CD uses a sampling rate of 44.1kHz, while the most common high-resolution files can go up to 192kHz and even higher rates are not far away

### UPnP

'Universal Plug and Play' is a set of protocols that allows products on the same network to see each other

### AAC (Advanced Audio Coding)

An alternative compression technology to MP3. It's claimed to be more efficient and offers identical bitrates

For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

## Facts & figures



**Cambridge Audio NP30**  
£400 ★★★★★

**Inputs** Ethernet, USB x2 • **Outputs** Coaxial, optical, stereo RCA • **Asynchronous USB** No • **Format support** MPE, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, FLAC, AIFF, WAV • **24-bit file support** Up to 96kHz • **Gapless playback** No • **Services** Internet radio, Aupeo, MP3 Tunes • **Digital iPod connection** No • **AirPlay** No • **Wifi** Yes • **Tuner** No • **Finishes** Silver, black • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 27 x 29cm • **Weight** 2.1kg

Performance	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★



**Marantz NA7004**  
£430 ★★★★★

**Inputs** Ethernet, USB x2, coaxial, optical, stereo RCA • **Outputs** Coaxial, optical, stereo RCA, headphone • **Asynchronous USB** No • **Format support** MP3, AAC, WMA, FLAC, WAV • **24-bit file support** Up to 96kHz • **Gapless playback** No • **Services** Internet radio, Last.fm, Napster • **Digital iPod connection** Yes • **AirPlay** Yes • **Wifi** No • **Tuner** DAB+, FM, AM • **Finishes** Black, silver • **Dimensions (hwd)** 11 x 44 x 35cm • **Weight** 6.5kg

Performance	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★



**Pioneer N50**  
£500 ★★★★★

**Inputs** Ethernet, USB x2, coaxial, optical • **Outputs** Coaxial, optical • **Asynchronous USB** Yes • **Format support** MP3, AAC, WMA, FLAC, WAV • **24-bit file support** up to 102kHz • **Gapless playback** No • **Services** Internet radio • **Digital iPod connection** Yes • **AirPlay** Yes • **Wifi** Optional dongle AS-WL300 (£70) • **Tuner** No • **Finishes** Black, silver • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 44 x 33cm • **Weight** 7.3kg

Performance	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★



**Pro-ject StreamBox DS**  
£700 ★★★★★

**Inputs** Ethernet, USB x2 • **Outputs** Coaxial, stereo RCA • **Asynchronous USB** No • **Format support** MP3, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, WMA, WAV, FLAC • **24-bit file support** up to 192kHz • **Gapless playback** Yes • **Services** Internet radio • **Digital iPod connection** Yes • **AirPlay** No • **Wifi** Yes • **Tuner** No • **Finishes** Silver, black • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 21 x 19cm • **Weight** 2.6kg

Performance	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★

## SYSTEM BUILDER



**AMPLIFIER**  
**Cyrus 6a**  
£700 ★★★★★

If you haven't already done so, you can read the full review of Cyrus' brand new integrated amplifier back on page 11. Suffice to say it's a cracker, combining precision, clarity and detail to produce a wonderfully entertaining sound.

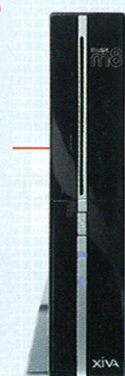


**SPEAKERS**  
**Tannoy Revolution DC6T**  
£800 ★★★★★

Some of Tannoy's most impressive floorstanders to date, the DC6Ts are two (large) sticks of audio dynamite and perfect partners for the Cyrus amplifier. They're an exciting listen and create a very broad and open soundstage for you to enjoy.

**NETWORK ATTACHED STORAGE**  
**XiVa musicm8**  
£800 ★★★★★

The musicm8 allows you to kill two birds with one stone: you can rip all your CDs onto the built-in 1TB hard drive, in the file format of your choosing, after which you can use it as a NAS to feed music to the Pioneer streamer.



**MP3 PLAYER**  
**Apple iPod Touch**  
£250 ★★★★★

You can hook the iPod up to the Pioneer for charging or stream tunes straight off the device. Of course there's always the wireless route - all you have to do is tap the AirPlay logo, select the N50 and away you go. It's that simple.