



MUSIC SERVER
HERMSTEDT
HIFIDELIO PRO



£ 800

FOR

Large 160GB hard disk; great (for a server) sound; ease of use; talks to iTunes and iPods; wireless ability; high-quality recording format options

AGAINST

Hi-fi purists will prefer the sound of a standalone CD player

VERDICT

A cracking music server, and an impressive debut for Hermstedt

Music server is a tasty treat

ISN'T IT GREAT when technology works? And we don't mean the hollow victory we all experience when a VCR timer programming produces a vaguely accurate recording. We mean the satisfaction you feel when kit simply delivers on its promises. Hail, then, Hermstedt's Hifidelio 160GB music server, which fully delivers the goods, and makes you feel, well, great...

Plug in the German-built unit, add an amp and a pair of speakers, shove in a CD, and the Hifidelio displays the disc's track details (you can update the track recognition database via the internet), before

"The 160GB hard drive means plenty of space for quality recordings"

swiftly asking if you would like to record, or 'rip', the music to its internal hard disk. You can choose to rip all or some of the tracks, plus you can select from various recording formats and bit-rates.

Different formats take up varying amounts of space on the hard disk, but this 'Pro' unit's vast 160GB memory – the £599 non-Pro version sacrifices 80GB of memory, the 320 kbps MP3 recording option and the internet radio – means you can afford to choose a higher quality rate, such as Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC), meaning better-quality sound.

On the subject of sound, many sub-£1000 servers sound fairly pedestrian, but match this unit with a capable £250-ish stereo amplifier, and it does a fine job. Sure, it lacks the dynamics, pace and punch to equal the Award-winning Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2, but pitched into a Group

Test of £250-and-below CD players, the Hifidelio would be looking a three- or maybe four-star review.

But let's not forget this server's extra capabilities. Add a 'client', such as Roku's Soundbridge – Hermstedt has its own design on the way – and it will 'stream' music, either wirelessly or via Ethernet, throughout your house.

Fluent in iPod and iTunes

This clever chap can also 'talk' to your PC or Apple Mac. Again, wirelessly or via Ethernet, the Hifidelio can access your iTunes library, and conversely you can open and edit the Hifidelio library via your PC.

And get this: hook up your iPod to one of the server's USB ports, and the machine recognises your portable, allowing you to play tunes from your iPod. You can transfer tracks from the Hifidelio library to the iPod library, but due to copyright issues, you can't transfer directly from your iPod to the Hifidelio.

The above paragraph features this review's first use of the word 'can't' – this Hifidelio is definitely a 'can do' sort of machine, and the world of hi-fi could do with more of that approach. Nice one, Hermstedt.



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640H



£600 March 2005

The Azur range's 160GB music server addition delivers a fine performance, but it doesn't speak to your Apple iPod

YAMAHA CDR-HD1500



£600 May 2005

No wireless capability, but Yamaha's simple-to-use 160GB recorder works well

MP3 PLAYER
SONY
NWA1000



£ 160

FOR

Rocking good sound; great timing for a portable; curvaceous design; above average in-ears; good battery life

AGAINST

Lacks the Nano's ultra-svelte body; software not as slick as we'd like; PC only

VERDICT

We like... the player. We don't like... the software

Walkman still lags a step behind

SINCE APPLE'S IPOD grabbed the portable music player baton, Sony has been playing catch-up. This shiny NWA1000 is the latest 'Walkman' to briefly sniff the lead, only for Apple to find another gear. Up against the tiny 4GB Flash-memory based Nano, this 6GB hard disk Sony, though splendidly curvy, looks a bit plump. Even its 1.5in screen, up against its colourful rivals, looks somewhat off the pace.

Sony still sounds superb

Nevertheless, the player sounds excellent, delivering tunes with a sonic snarl. Treble stays sweet, and punchy bass leaps along with verve. Timing also does well. Even the Sony buds are good, though a set of Sennheiser MX500s trumps them.

Elsewhere, the 109g unit delivers a healthy 20 hours battery life, and it can download in ATRAC or MP3. Here's the rub, though: Sony's 'new and improved' bundled software is still no match for Apple's iTunes. For that reason, this Sony gets close to the baton, but can't quite take it.



Sony's latest Walkman looks elegant, but the supplied software is clumsy