

Apple's small new 4-gigabyte iPod shuffle can talk

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In this product image released by Apple Inc., a new version of the iPod Shuffle is shown. Apple touts the new \$79 device, which stores 4 gigabytes _ up to about 1,000 songs _ as "significantly" smaller than a double-A battery. (AP Photo/Apple Inc.)

(AP) -- Apple Inc. unveiled a minuscule new iPod Shuffle on Wednesday that takes its "smaller is better" mantra to a whole new level.

The third-generation Shuffle, a slim aluminum rectangle less than 2 inches long, takes up about half as much space as the previous version even as it doubles music storage space to 4 gigabytes. To achieve such a tiny form, Apple had to remove most of the buttons from the body of the \$79 device and build them into the headphone cord instead.

"Smaller has tended to work very well for us," said Greg Joswiak, a marketing vice president at Apple.

The trade-off for a sub-\$100 Shuffle always has been the lack of a screen to visually navigate the music stored on the device. The first-generation Shuffle, which launched in 2005, could hold about 240 songs, arguably not enough to warrant a screen.

Now that the device can carry 1,000 songs, Apple has come up with a way for people to identify the music they're listening to or find songs they want. A new feature called VoiceOver can, at the push of a button, speak the song and artist name or rattle off the list of custom mixes - called playlists - that the owner has loaded onto the device.

Here's how it works: As you synchronize a new Shuffle using an updated version of iTunes, your PC or Mac looks at each track and playlist and creates a small file of a computerized voice speaking the title, artist or playlist name.

When you tap a button on the headphones, the voice speaks the title and artist as the music plays. (If a song is in Spanish, Chinese or any one of 12 other languages, the software figures this out and speaks in the appropriate language.) When you hold down the headphone button, the device reads a list of your playlists, and you can pick one by tapping again.

It's not possible to scroll through all of the songs on the device to jump right to one favorite, unless you know it's at the start of a certain playlist.

The new Shuffle, which comes in silver or black aluminum with a shiny stainless steel clip, is set to go on sale Thursday. Joswiak said Apple's own earphones will be the only option for early buyers, but that other companies plan to make compatible headphones as well as adapters for

regular headphones.

Ross Rubin, an analyst for market researcher NPD Group, said there's no such thing as "too small" for gadget-happy consumers as long as Apple stays focused on ergonomics and provides a way to secure the device and keep it from getting lost.

But people who do buy a new Shuffle will be paying a premium for Apple's design, he added, noting less-expensive mini-models like SanDisk Corp.'s Sansa Clip (\$60 for a 4-gigabyte model) and Creative Technology Ltd.'s Zen Stone (less than \$50 for a 2-gigabyte version on Amazon.com).

Shares of Cupertino, Calif.-based Apple jumped \$4.05, or 4.6 percent, to \$92.68.

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