

Review: Wireless speakers great fit for phone use

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This Wednesday, June 13, 2012 photo, shows The Beacon Audio Phoenix, a wireless speaker that connects to smartphones via Bluetooth, in Decatur, Ga. Diminutive wireless speakers are increasingly filling the shelves at electronics retailers as they quickly prove to be the perfect accessory for people who listen to the bulk of their music on mobile phones. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

(AP) -- Diminutive wireless speakers are filling the shelves at electronics stores. They're proving to be the ideal accessory for people who listen to the bulk of their music on mobile phones.

Because the smartphone is now such a ubiquitous entertainment device, there's no reason it can't also be a solid stereo around the house and on the road when paired with the right speakers.

All of the speakers I tested connect to your device wirelessly through

Bluetooth. They also have a traditional stereo input jack, so you can plug in iPods and other music players without Bluetooth capability.

I looked at some of the latest wireless offerings that provide the most boom for your buck. I used a Motorola Droid X2, running Google's [Android operating software](#). These options work with Apple's [iPhone](#) and iPad, too.

- Mini Boombox, by Logitech (\$99.99)

This speaker isn't much bigger than a balled-up fist, but it packs a similar punch when you press play. It holds a [battery charge](#) that I couldn't kill, even with a full day of house cleaning.

For such a small unit, the Mini Boombox delivered a full range of fidelity across various music genres, from the crunch heavy metal to the thumping beat of electronica.

The Mini Boombox was easy to set up once my phone scanned for available [Bluetooth devices](#). The speaker kept the connection nicely throughout the first floor of a two-story house.

It also sports backlit, touch-sensitive controls on top of the unit, allowing me to easily toggle back and forth through my [music files](#) and adjust the volume. Of course, everything can be controlled from the phone as well.

Pound for pound, the Mini Boombox is a serious performer and my favorite of the bunch. It has the best balance of sound quality, touch-sensitive controls and a price point that won't gouge the wallet too deeply.

- Braven 650, by Braven (\$189.99)

The Braven 650 has a streamlined, utilitarian design. Underneath the silver shell are stereo subwoofers pumping out a decent six watts of sound, similar to the output of the Mini Boombox. It can easily fill a large room with tunes, though it sounded thin when placed too far out in the open. I liked the resonance better when the Braven was about a foot in front of a wall.

Like the other units, the range for the Bluetooth connection remains steady at about 30 to 35 feet. One bonus: It sports a USB port, so I can charge my phone while continuing to play music through it via Bluetooth.

The Braven's built-in rechargeable battery claims a playback time of 20 hours, double the battery time boasted by the Mini Boombox. I don't have enough good music to put that to the test, but it never went dead on me after days of intermittent (and loud) use.

Big Jambox, by Jawbone (\$299.99)

You'll have to pay more for this speaker, but you'll get monstrously huge sound. This is the only unit that will blow you out of one room and into another. The Big Jambox sounds like a stereo speaker four times its size.

The fidelity here is impeccable, the setup easy and the physical controls on the top surface are nicely rubberized, which gives them a good feel and makes them fingerprint-proof. An oversized "minus" sign takes the volume down while a "plus" sign cranks it up.

The unit is sturdy, with a strong metal mesh for its external skin. You'll want to be careful not to snag it on soft cotton fibers, lest they get stuck in the futuristic-styled housing.

The Big Jambox goes one step beyond the others reviewed by allowing you to sync it to exclusive content and apps through its "MyTalk" interface online. That requires a wired USB connection, which takes away from the goal of a wireless experience.

Moreover, the Pandora, SHOUTcast and other music feeds that this wired connection enables work fine wirelessly through a smartphone without needing MyTalk. This feature comes across as redundant.

Phoenix, by Beacon Audio (\$99)

The Phoenix is small, light and well designed, but at the low-end of the sound spectrum, the bass isn't as bass-y as I'd like. Still, it delivers decent volume for its weight and size.

Of the four tested, the Phoenix is the only one to lack a built-in speakerphone, so you can't pause your music and answer phone calls wirelessly. Instead, you must answer the calls on the phone itself.

The Phoenix is the most portable of the bunch. The small cube comes in three colors, plus a nice case to tote it around in. If you're looking for something to lug into a small office every day without weighing yourself down, the Phoenix is a decent choice.

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