



Temptations

THE WORLD'S MOST DESIRABLE KIT

IPOD SPEAKER SYSTEM
B&W
ZEPPELIN
★★★★★
£ 400

FOR
Extraordinary sonic ability for a one-body system; real scale and weight to its sound; lavish build; stunning styling

AGAINST
Remote ought to offer more functionality for a system this costly

VERDICT
One of the most impressive products we've seen in an age: not cheap, but great to listen to, live with and look at

B&W's remarkable new iPod system is a head-turner in every sense, from its styling to its ambitious price – but the amazing **Zeppelin** has the ability to match its looks

WE SEE a lot of kit in this office, and a significant proportion of it nowadays is iPod-related ('i-tat' as we sometimes refer to the worst of it). Yet few products have attracted as much attention in recent months as B&W's new Zeppelin. We spent a frustratingly short time with one back in our December issue, but even on the brief listen we had then, we knew B&W was on to something special.

The Zeppelin combines delicious form with serious function. Its sultry, sensuous curves exist not merely because they look nice, but because they also make a real contribution to the sound of the product. Its distinctive elongated shape doesn't just place each drive unit in sensible places for decent stereo sound: it also helps to minimise the cabinet around each drive unit, an approach that improves dispersion.

That's important, because in both quality and quantity of drive units and amplification, this is no ordinary iPod speaker system. If you were able to take a peek under its cloth grille and inspect its drive units, you'd find the Zeppelin is laid out rather like a subwoofer/satellite speaker system. At its heart, it boasts a dedicated 13cm Kevlar-reinforced bass driver, fed by its own 50w digital power amp. The 9cm midrange drivers (each with 25w of power) are positioned flanking the bass driver, while right at each extreme end of the chassis, there's a single 25mm metal-dome tweeter (again, with 25w per drive unit), as is commonly used in many of B&W's loudspeakers.

By making the chassis ultra-stiff and very heavy – it's a composite mix of polymer and

stainless steel, and weighs in at 7kg – this complex arrangement of drive units has a rigid platform to operate from, too. Of course, all that mass adds to the product's upmarket feel, too.

And then there's the stunning control interface, which is – wait for it – your iPod. There's a basic remote, but one of the many touches of genius surrounding the Zeppelin is the tactile, intuitive and alarmingly enjoyable way you use it. All the key controls – including, so long as you're running the latest version of iTunes, access to bass adjustments to suit different positions within the room – are accessed from your iPod.

Just slot it into the beautifully ergonomic arm protruding from the front of the Zeppelin's chassis (the B&W supports iPods back to 3G, though it works best with the latest designs), and you're away.

Sound exceeds all our expectations

And whatever you're playing, you'll be amazed at the Zeppelin's pace, scale, weight, rhythmic ability and timing. Its sense of attack and energy is thrilling, too: you're treated to just the right amount of edge and invective in The Gossip's *Standing In The Way of Control*, and the B&W remains well in control of the track's driving beat.

Weaknesses? It doesn't image as well as rivals with widely spaced speakers, and the remote ought to offer more at this price. But we're still smitten: in every sense, from style through to build quality and including, most crucially, sound, this is an outstanding achievement.



TECH SPECS
MAX POWER 50w (bass), 2x 25w (mid), 2x 25w (treble)
DRIVE UNITS 1x 13cm (bass), 2x 9cm (midrange), 2x 25mm (treble)
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 47Hz-50kHz (-6dB)
DIMENSIONS (HWD) 17x 64x 21cm
WEIGHT 7kg
INPUTS iPod, 3.5mm, USB 2.0
OUTPUTS S-Video, composite video

