

Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin

Thomas Bartlett



I continue to be astounded by the performance that modern audio system designers are managing to extract out of very compact systems. The latest on this front is the appropriately named Zeppelin from the highly respected British loudspeaker builder, Bowers and Wilkins (B&W).

The Zeppelin is not merely a speaker system. In fact, its primary purpose is as an iPod dock.

Performance

The sound of the devices was simply astonishing. Not because it was the best sound ever – which of course it wasn't – but because it was so good for such a compact unit.

First, it went loud. Not wild raging-party loud, but room filling. At the higher levels it sometimes sounded a bit stressed, but not unduly so.

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Features

The first thing you notice about the Zeppelin is its shape. And then there is the band that circumnavigates it, with the iPod docking port placed right in front of the unit. Most such docks have a reasonably large base with a standard-sized notch in them. These notches are designed to accept the adaptor inserts provided with most iPod models, allowing them to securely support your specific model.

The Zeppelin eschews all that. Instead it has a very narrow, metal-finished base, just a little larger than the plug assembly itself. This is attached to the metal strap around the Zeppelin, hinged slightly so that it can tilt. In that way it accommodates the iPod without any of the normal bulkiness. In fact, it leaves your iPod – especially if your iPod is white – looking like it is simply hovering there in front of the Zeppelin.

The unit also has a combo 3.5mm analog/digital audio input socket so you can use it for non-iPod music devices. Also on the back are composite and S-Video outputs. These are provided to allow photos and video to be displayed from your iPod. They do not support the display of iPod menus, though. The USB port is merely for upgrading the unit's firmware.

To produce the sound the Zeppelin packs five power amplifiers. There are two 25 watt units for the two 25mm metal dome tweeters, two more 25 watt units for the two 90mm midrange drivers, and a 50 watt unit for the single 125mm bass driver. There is also a couple of bass reflex ports on the back.

Second, it delivered decent bass. The bass was not extraordinarily deep – in my room it would not manage the 47 hertz claimed by B&W but it did do a solid 58 hertz, and with the full presence of middle and upper bass it sounded complete.

Third, the tonal balance was good, with a clearly extended high end and everything pretty much at the level at which it should have been. The cymbals had zing, the vocals were clean and recognisable, with no artificial sibilance. Nice! Meanwhile, the percussion section of rock groups punched through.

Finally, it delivered a surprisingly wide stereo image. Even sitting a couple of metres away there was a clear sense of width.

There were two problems, though: the bass was too strong when the unit was placed up against a wall, and especially in a corner, which is where it would best go in many rooms. Second, the remote control was frustrating because of its limitations. You can change input and volume and switch on and off and skip tracks with it. But you cannot navigate the menus, so in the end you will have to walk over to the unit.

Conclusion

Still, this is a fine music player, powerful, offering real sound (not some kind of tinny substitute). If it fits your décor, it is certainly worth a close look – or, rather, listen! ■



Specifications

- Price: \$999.95
- Warranty: one year
- Contact: Conexus Pty Limited
(02) 9975 0900
www.conexus.com.au
- Drivers: 1 x 125mm bass driver, 2 x 90mm bass/midrange drivers, 2 x 25mm metal dome tweeters
- Cabinet Design: bass reflex, stainless steel construction
- Frequency Response: 47 hertz to 22,000 hertz, -6dB
- Power Output: 4 x 25 watts + 1 x 50 watts
- Inputs: iPod dock, 1 x analog stereo audio input/1 x digital audio optical input (shared 3.5mm Input)
- Outputs: 1 x composite video, 1 x S-Video
- Dimensions (WHD): 640 x 173 x 206mm
- Weight: 7.5kg

Pros

- Powerful sound
- Strong and musical bass
- Interesting styling
- Remote control

Cons

- No menu display on video output
- Bass too strong in near-wall locations

Ratings

- Performance: ★★★★★
Features: ★★★★★
Ease of use: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★

