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B&W Zeppelin Mini

£ 300 ★★★★★

The Mini is a compact speaker dock with a big future, and top-notch sound quality – we just hope software updates are made available sooner rather than later



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For
Excellent sound quality across the board; smaller design perfect for smaller rooms; easy to use; easy to update software

Against
Struggles to fill large rooms; has some software bugs that need ironing out

The original B&W Zeppelin was and still is a fantastic success story. There aren't many iPod speaker docks that can claim to be in the same league as that sophisticated, sonically gifted system.

However, if you were feeling particularly picky, you could point to the original Zeppelin's wide-boy stance as a potential sticking point for some prospective buyers: not everyone has enough space on their desktop, worktop or bedside table to accommodate a system with a wingspan of more than 60cm.

What would be great is a system that offers performance on a par with the Zeppelin but in a smaller, more manageable package. Step forward the Zeppelin Mini.

From a design point of view, the Mini is just as intriguing as its bigger brother. The curved, fabric-covered chassis is top and tailed by a chrome base and angled, concave, chrome 'bowl.'

Rotating docking arm

In the middle is a new docking arm, capable of rotating ninety degrees. This allows you to watch video content stored on an iPod Touch or iPhone in landscape format and also enables you to use Cover Flow to scroll through your music collection.

The iPod is held securely by one of four supplied cradles that slip onto the docking arm.

The Mini may be half the width of its bigger brother, but don't think this it's any less of a system. In some ways this model is a step up, in fact, especially where features are concerned.

For starters, the Mini allows you to sync your iPod with iTunes whilst in standby – something impossible on the larger model.

You can also play your iTunes music collection through the speaker dock via its USB input, and even control iTunes' through the supplied remote control. Sleek alternative to desktop PC speakers, anyone?

Digital sound processing

But the biggest difference is that unlike its bigger brother, the Mini bypasses the analogue output of your iPod, and extracts music files in their digital form. This allows the speaker dock to do its own conversion and sound processing, which B&W claims gives the best possible sound quality.

Of course, this smaller chassis means that the Mini only has enough room for two drive units (as opposed to the five found inside the big Zeppelin). And unsurprisingly, the Mini can't quite summon the same levels of bass weight or deliver the same sense of scale as its bigger brother.

But what the Mini can do is fill smaller rooms with quality across the frequency range. The two, 18W speakers still kick out a fine amount of bass weight and, more importantly, every note sounds taut, precise and punchy.

Instruments and vocals are allowed to enjoy an open and spacious soundstage that's extremely revealing and detailed for a compact speaker dock.

Syncs automatically with iTunes

It is worth bearing in mind that the Mini isn't compatible with any iPods that predate the Classic, nor will it work with the first generation iPod nano, just in case you were planning to use them.

Also, when in standby and connected to a computer, the Mini currently syncs your iPod with iTunes automatically, so any iPods that don't share the same library could lose their content. However, B&W assures us that a software fix is in the pipeline and will be made available as a download from the company's website in the coming weeks.

To its credit, B&W has managed to take the essence of the Zeppelin and inject it into a smaller unit without making any major sonic sacrifices. It has even managed to throw in a couple of tasty new features too.

For small to medium-sized rooms, the Mini is a superb iPod speaker dock and a great addition to the Zeppelin range.

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