



One is fun

Ruark's latest all-in-one adds more network smarts to its stylish platform, **Ed Selley** finds out how it stacks up.

Ruark's transition from speaker manufacturer to purveyor of sleek all-in-ones ranks as one of the more surprising, but it has been extremely successful. The R3 is its latest and boasts CD, DAB, FM and a choice of analogue and digital inputs joined by network audio functionality and aptX Bluetooth

It supports a comprehensive spread of streaming services and has a decent internet radio installation too. 24-bit/96kHz playback is possible but only via AAC. Other formats are only supported up to 48kHz while AIFF isn't at all. The control app is stable but devotes a significant amount of space to showing art, compressing the search and browse options into a small area of the screen.

The more traditional functions are better, though. The CD mechanism is silent and quick, the radio is logical to setup and use, and operation is simple thanks to the remote and physical controls on the top of the unit. Unlike a few designs at this price, it's possible to operate the R3 for many functions without recourse to the app.

The Ruark manages to balance some traditional design elements and colours with enough modern flourishes to not feel overtly retro. In the walnut finish it's a very good looking device. Of particular note is the display. It's clear, easy to read at a distance and can show a reasonable

amount of information about what it's doing. The build quality is extremely good and the R3 goes a long way to feeling it's worth the asking price.

Sound Quality

The performance is dominated by some of the software options available. It ships with both the loudness and the '3D Audio' functions activated and, in contrast to my usual thoughts in this direction, they are worth leaving on. The 3D Audio in particular is genuinely impressive in use. The Ruark does a better job of creating the illusion of a truly stereo image than almost any other one-box speaker I've tested. Without any overt sense of processing, it does a fine job of pushing audio out to the left and right without creating a gap in the middle. Peter Gabriel's Athens concert on the remastered version of *So* feels convincing as a reproduction of a genuinely live event as a result.

The loudness function is more overt in its effect, but helps to fill out the low end without it sounding bloated or overblown. A spirited rendition of Stereo MC's *Deep Down And Dirty* has bass that is palpable and weighty, but it integrates well with the upper frequencies and doesn't affect the speed and drive of the music as a whole. This is a consistently engaging performer with a decent grasp on timing and flow across a wide selection of time signatures. The

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Ruark R3
- ORIGIN**
UK/China
- TYPE**
Wireless speaker with CD, DAB/FM, UPnP and Bluetooth
- WEIGHT**
5.3kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
420 x 167 x 220mm
- FEATURES**
• 30W amplifier
• 2x 75mm drivers
• Supports sample rates up to: 24-bit/96kHz
• AptX Bluetooth
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Ruark Audio
- WEBSITE**
ruarkaudio.com

use of Class AB amplification and a single 75mm full-range driver each side results in a speaker that feels extremely cohesive in use.

It is also a fantastic radio. Spoken word material on the high-quality stream of Radio 4 is a model of clarity. Even at fairly low levels, the R3 ensures that presenters are clear and easy to follow and it's extremely easy to listen to for long periods. This ties into a generally forgiving presentation with compressed material, while the most satisfying means of listening to music is Spotify because it avoids the somewhat compromised experience offered by Ruark's own app.

Conclusion

The app is something of a blot on an otherwise rather impressive device. The R3 manages to take a compact and elegant chassis, pack some impressive functionality into it and then go on to deliver some of the best sound I've heard from a sub-£1,000 one-box offering. If you are adding it to a house of devices that make heavy use of streaming, it might feel a little limited. If you intend to use the network functionality as a boost to its excellent core functionality, the R3 is well worth seeking out ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Spacious, lively and detailed sound; features; design
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Clunky app; limited format and sample rate support
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A capable speaker that could benefit from some refinements to the streaming platform
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL

