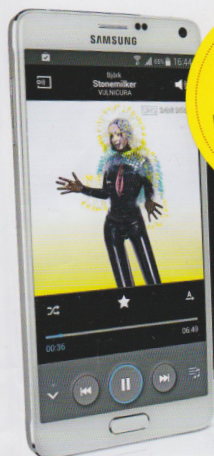


WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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Ruark R1 Mk3 | DAB/FM radio | £200

Ruark buffs R1 with impressive results

For years, Ruark's R1 series radio has been one of those products that just works. Its gorgeous design makes it ready to fit into even the most stylish of homes, while its performance and usability has helped to secure it Award after Award.

However, 2012 was the last time we saw it in our winners' list, so when we heard Ruark was releasing an improved third generation of its desirably dinky radio, we were intrigued to find out what was in store.

Same again, but better

There hasn't been too much change to the design we know and love. It's still a small, single-speaker design, finished in your choice of walnut, black or white (though the last two are now matt instead of shiny), with all controls placed on the top.

It's a premium, no-fuss finish that looks as good as ever, and it's helped by the R1's new OLED display, which looks cleaner and sharper compared with its LCD predecessor.

Out of the box, the R1 Mk3 is a simple affair - screw on the aerial, plug it into the mains and you're halfway there.

The controls are handled by an improved RotoDial system on the top. While it looks like a regular volume knob, it also acts as the main control system for the radio, allowing you to cycle through menus and press down to select.

It is flanked by a few individual buttons, for power and quick access to core functionality including the R1's dual alarms, radio presets, settings menu and selecting source.

Choose DAB from the source menu and the R1 will automatically set the date and time. We find the menus and controls so intuitive, the manual is far from essential.

As before, the R1 Mk3 features both FM and DAB tuners (futureproofed for DAB+ if and when it arrives on our shores), but a new addition is aptX Bluetooth functionality, allowing you to stream music to the R1 from your portable devices.

Add to this a line-in for hardwiring a device, a headphone output for private listening and a newly added USB port for charging, and this is quite the complete package for a radio that stands just 17cm tall. You can even make it portable, with the optional rechargeable battery "BackPack" for an extra £50.

New chipset and DAC improve sound

Of course, this would all be moot if it didn't sound any good, but luckily the R1 Mk3 sounds as good as ever. There have been several tweaks made to the internal workings of the R1, including a new chipset

In detail

The main control system is the RotoDial in the middle, but Ruark doesn't overburden this so as not to overcomplicate things - there are also buttons around the edge. Use the dial to control menus, then press down to select.



**USE IT WITH
Samsung
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Note 4**

Take advantage of the R1 Mk3's aptX Bluetooth functionality by streaming playlists from Samsung's fine Galaxy Note 4

with improved DAC and shorter signal paths in the audio circuitry.

The result is a sound that belies its size, and a performance that can top even some larger stereo models. With its rich, full-bodied character, it's sometimes easy to forget there's just a single 3.5cm driver delivering it, with bass that is deep and controlled, and a midrange that ensures everything from instruments to dialogue to vocals are delivered with detail and clarity.

There's a depth and solidity to its performance that many competitors lack, with a clean, open, engaging nature that works as well with talk radio as with music.

A confident performer

Despite its confident performance, there are some obvious limitations due to its size, and the R1 isn't going to have the power required to fill huge rooms.

What it can manage is pretty impressive all the same. It will spread wide and go loud enough for most situations, though the treble can border on thinness at volume with lesser quality broadcasts.

The Bluetooth performance is as musical and well balanced as the rest of the radio's performance, and it's a nice touch the new processor is able to extract Bluetooth track metadata too, so you can see what is playing on the R1's screen.

£200 is not an inconsiderable amount to spend on a radio like the Ruark R1 Mk3, but spend any amount of time with it and we challenge you not to want to take it home.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stylish design; easy functionality; rich, full-bodied sound; clean and clear midrange;

AGAINST Not cheap

VERDICT Small but powerful, the R1 Mk3 balances performance, features and functionality in a compact package

Also consider

**Pure Evoke D2
£90 ★★★★★**

A great buy at less than half the price, but it can't compete in pure performance terms



With its rich, full-bodied character, it's easy to forget there's just a single 3.5cm driver delivering bass that's deep and controlled