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Sony NW-E205 Bean MP3 player

With so many choices, what makes this one stand out from the crowd?

by Stuart Miles published on 15 November 2005

Sony's Bean, or NW-W205 to give it its proper title, is a 512Mb MP3 player that challenges other flash based models in the market, but with so many choices, what makes this one stand out from the crowd? We take a look and find out.

Shaped like a large magic bean Jack got to grow his beanstalk, the Son EW-205 breaks away from the conventional flat and slim flash player form factors. This makes it perfect for clenching in your fist when you go for a run, but will cause an interesting bulge in a pair of trousers when out and about.

Laid on a desk the top and bottom are void of any buttons, with Sony opting to place them on only one side of the player. We say buttons, but in reality it's really only one button - a d-pad that controls volume, track selection, play, stop as well as the navigation around the menu system.

Track information is displayed on a single OLED display next to the button. Where the Bean differs from other MP3 players is the inclusion within the unit of its USB plug to allow quick connect to a PC or charging and transferring of songs.

Rather than rely on a bit of rubber to protect the USB connector, Sony has spring loaded the plug to hide in the unit when not in use. It makes you realise how small the unit could have been without this and like the iPod Shuffle, it's good to have the connector on board all the time.

Of course it won't help you transfer songs to and from other machines as Sony's DRM and Sonic Stage software requirements step in here although for transferring data it is helpful.

This is where the player's main problem rears its ugly head. The cover that hides the USB stick element also acts as the hold button. Slide it all



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the way closed and the controls are frozen - something that is handy when in your pocket. However to access the controls you've got to slide the cover just enough to get it off the hold marker, but not enough that the cover slides back entirely and reveals that spring loaded plug. Why Sony couldn't have just added a separate hold button is beyond us and the whole experience left us frustrated. The nearest thing we can compare it to is when you want to change the date on an analogue watch - you've normally got to get it just right - too far and the minute hand moves, not enough and nothing happens and it's the same here.

Moving on from the design, the sound quality is very good using the accompanied - white - headphones. The player offers individual base and treble settings to suit all music fans rather than offering you 10 equaliser settings that all sound alike.

Transfer to and from the device is done via Sonic Stage and nothing else - it's the same old argument here - you either love it or hate it.

VERDICT

This is a good player hampered really only by the frustrating hold button which drove us mad. The charge time was very good - 3 minutes amazingly gives you 3 hours playback while on a full charge Sony promises 50 hours.

The sound is good and if you are looking for a MP3 player to use while on a run, the kidney bean shape will certainly be more comfortable to hold in the palm.

At a glance

What is it?

Flash based MP3 Player

Good

Long battery life, USB connector hidden inside, good sound quality

Bad

Hold button is very annoying, slightly on the large side

Verdict

A good player, but the hold switch will drive you mad

Price £80

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10