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Gear4 BlackBox Mini speakers

Does mini mean poor sound?

by Davey Winder published on 1 February 2008

GEAR4 has, in essence, attempted to make a Mini-Me version of its stunning looking Bluetooth BlackBox stereo speaker system.

In that regard we have to say it has succeeded in pretty much every department from the bling look of the minimalist piano black gloss finish with hidden LEDs that spring to life during use through to the all important wow factor when someone sets eyes upon it for the first time.

Size-wise the Mini almost lives up to the name, it is portable but not really pocketable unless you are happy with people approaching you with "is that an energy drink in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me" comments.

The BlackBox Mini is pretty much the same size as such a can of Red Bull, which is a shame because we like to be able to pocket our portable kit rather than have to use the little case it comes with or carry a bag to carry it around in.

Of course, you cannot expect a portable speaker device to match a standalone in-your-living-room one when it comes down to the real nitty gritty and that's the audio performance.

Despite the clever design with speaker drivers mounted at each end so as to fire sound sideways and the promise of 24W of power, the sound itself was disappointing. Loud, but disappointing.

You need to tweak treble and bass adjustments on the audio device you are connecting, as there are none on the BlackBox Mini itself, which is fine if you are talking MP3 player but probably less so when it comes to most mobile phone music output.

The bass remains poor whatever twiddling you do, although in fairness it was possible to get



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some crisp and balanced mid- and high-range tones eventually.

Connecting via Bluetooth was fairly painless, thanks to a firmware upgrade function that downloads the right profile for your mobile when you connect the BlackBox Mini to your PC. This does assume that you have an A2DP Bluetooth-equipped mobile phone to connect it to though.

The 3.5mm audio input comes into play if you want to hook-up to an MP3 player sans Bluetooth, and iPod fans might baulk at the cost of buying the accompanying GEAR4 Bluetooth adaptor which costs nearly as much as the BlackBox Mini itself!

We did like the ability to opt for either mini-USB driven power or shoving some AA batteries into it, as well as mains power of course: very flexible and sure to satisfy most situations.

We also liked the overall minimalist look of the thing, with touch-sensitive volume and pause controls (no skip or fast forward though), but the LED lights get very annoying, very quickly, especially in the dark.

VERDICT

There are smaller speakers out there, there are better sounding speakers out there, but there are none that look as good as this.

Best suited to those who prefer bling to sing.

At a glance

What is it?

Bluetooth speaker for mobile phone or MP3

Good

Bling looks, ease of use, price

Bad

Size, performance

Verdict

Can the BlackBox live up to the bling looks and deliver the audio goods on the move?

Price £37

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10