

## Sony NZW-A826 Walkman MP3 player

Does this Bluetooth Walkman impress?

by Paul Lester published on 27 May 2008

Sony likes to adopt a bit of an elitist approach to the MP3 player market, refusing to bother itself with fancy extras like games, voice recorders and FM radios, but focusing instead on audio quality and getting the most from your music. It's kind of refreshing, in a way, that it hasn't followed the rest of the market down this road, but you do start to wonder how long it can keep targeting its players solely at the audiophiles.

The A820 series has undergone a bit of a redesign following a swathe of recent models that have followed the same format. Admittedly this is only from a cosmetic point of view; the new player is a fraction slimmer but quite a bit wider than previous players in the range, but this does allow room for a 2.4in (240 x 320) display which would suggest that it's getting more serious about video. However its restriction towards MP4 format means that it isn't any easier to get your favourite clips copied across without re-encoding, though if you are happy to do this you'll be very impressed with the high-quality crystal clear display.

Of course with Sony it's all about the music, and the new 820 series follows its rather belated adoption of drag and drop to make it easy to copy collections straight onto the player. There are an extensive range of audio effects, equalisers and environments to apply to your tunes and though this hasn't changed much over the last year or so it still culminates in one of the most refreshing and rewarding ways to listen to your tunes on the move. The interface is also the same, so you can still browse music using a time machine shuffle to pick songs from a specific year and there are strong search, shuffle and playlist functions here to make it easy to find new ways to randomise your collection.

The headline feature of the new series though is the inclusion of built-in Bluetooth, and Sony



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makes itself heard by supplying you with a pair of its DR-BT21G wireless Bluetooth headphones in the box for the reviewed NZW-A826 model.

These over-ear models retail for around £70 by themselves, which goes some way to justifying the price tag. Connecting is as simple as hitting the dedicated Bluetooth button. The player, which after pairing for the first time, will automatically switch audio output to the headphones. This works very well and though the cans supplied aren't nearly as immersive as in-ear buds there's an obvious advantage here in wireless operation. An array of controls around the right earpiece makes it easy to skip tracks, adjust volume and play and pause, so if you're in the market for this sort of convenience you'll be well pleased.

Those who are happy enough with a decent pair of moulded wired buds will also be very pleased with the set supplied, which back-up Sony's audio stance by being some of the best earphones available that are supplied by default with an MP3 player.

## VERDICT

Though the A820 series is rather more expensive than most rivals in this market, the inclusion of the Bluetooth earphones does make it a worthwhile investment provided you'll use them. If you're looking at the device in terms of an upgrade though there's not a lot else on offer that hasn't already been covered by previous models in the range, and in this light you can knock a point of the final score below.

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## At a glance

### What is it?

Bluetooth-oriented player

### Good

Unparalleled audio quality, effective Bluetooth support, excellent degree of control over your music

### Bad

Still no extras of note, expensive if you won't use the Bluetooth headphones

### Verdict

Sony continues to set the standard in audio quality but may begin to regret not expanding its players in other areas

**Price** £139.99

**Our score**

8/10

**Your score**

?/10