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Philips GoGear Spark SA2940 MP3 player

Will this ignite your music?

by Chris Hall published on 12 March 2009

Philips seem to have taken note of some of the criticisms levelled at the previous range of diddy GoGear players. We now find the range refreshed and given a name: Spark. But will these new players light up your music collection?

Staying in the same form as previously, the GoGear Spark MP3 player is a compact square box (41 x 41 x 15mm) which will slip into any pocket or bag. It still features the clickable screen cover as previous models did, but there have been a number of refinements to make this a much more appealing device.

First of all the design overall is slicker. It is still all plastic, so lacks the premium feel that you'd get from an iPod nano, but at the same time you don't have to pay the Apple premium. But the compact device is now black all around the back, with the screen outlined in silver on the front.

There are controls on three of the four sides: on the left you'll find a power slider that doubles as a lock as well as the USB connector; the top gives you an "Options" button and 3.5mm headphone jack; the right features the volume control and a small mic for the voice recording feature.

Power on and you are presented with the 1.46-inch 128 x 128 pixel OLED display. This uses a similar icon-based interface to previous iterations, but benefits from colour, so it will show off photos or cover art if you wish. Most of the menu navigation is carried out by clicking the screen cover, and it feels more positive and is more intuitive than previous versions of the GoGear player.

The screen is still a little small with a border, so you might feel some screen real estate has been wasted here, but there is enough here to navigate



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your music without problems. (If you are after a larger screen you might be more interested in the Opus or Ariaz models.) The screen cover is relatively clear, not as "oily" as previous versions, but still suffers the problem of being a little too reflective so suffers in bright light, but a definite improvement over previous editions.

The menu is divided into music, pictures, recordings and various settings and customisation options. Most of your time will be spent in the music section that will allow you navigation via the normal genre, album, artist and so on, although you do need to pay attention to how you manage your music as you can just drag and drop music in a random fashion. We found that some albums had their track listing reversed, although on checking, the files were all in the right order on the player.

You'll also find that Philips' Player Manager software is included on the player itself, so simply plugging in will give you the option of installation. It isn't strictly necessary unless you experience a problem, but it does update the firmware on the device for you.

Control consists of using a forward and back click, or up and down to browse through your music. Clicking forward leads you through the cascading menus to the point of play, and it is all very simple. The option button on the top doesn't always function, but when listening to music, for example, gives you quick access to repeat/shuffle modes, as well as changing the sound options.

The player supports for MP3, WAV and WMA formats, which some might find lacking, but will cover many general audio choices.

In terms of sounds quality, things are greatly improved by discarding the bundled headphones in the box, which are the hard plastic type. Overall the sound quality isn't too bad, with bass being well represented, which will appeal to most listeners across all strands of popular music. The

At a glance

What is it?

MP3 player

Good

Compact, easy to use, reasonable sound quality, price

Bad

Screen not the best, poor bundled headphones

Verdict

Ok so there is still the update delay when you turn it on and the screen, although better, isn't great, but at this price, you get a compact and interesting player, which doesn't sound too bad

Price £49.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

6/10

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equaliser does make quite a difference, but we found that our preference was to keep it turned off, as was the case with FullSound, once we started using better headphones.

Charging is carried out through the mentioned USB connection when you hook it up for syncing. Unfortunately you can't charge and listen to music at the same time. The battery will give you more than a day on continuous play, so it performs pretty well.

We do like the fact that you can lock the main controls but still change the volume via the buttons on the side - the lock is pretty essential, as we found that in a trouser pocket we would change tracks whilst walking because the clickable area is pretty large.

VERDICT

We weren't so keen on the smaller GoGear players in the past, but we are pleased to say that things have improved overall in these players whilst the price is still under control. The GoGear Spark comes in three capacities, 2GB, 4GB and 8GB, with the option of a radio, which will add £5 to the price.

Ok so there is still the update delay when you turn it on and the screen, although better, isn't fantastic. But at an appealing price you get a compact and interesting player which doesn't sound too bad.