

Bowers & Wilkins

T7 Bluetooth loudspeaker

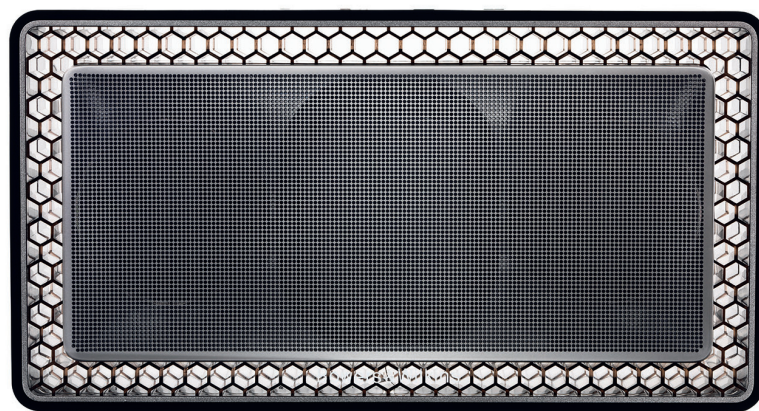


UP UNTIL RECENTLY B&W's speakers for portable media players have been aimed exclusively at owners of Apple's products. Meaning that the vast swathes of the population that don't use an iPhone or iPod have had to look elsewhere to find a way to get music off of their phone or music player. But then aptX came along and changed the hi-fi landscape, making Bluetooth a viable way to transmit music without cables. The new T7 represents the company's first foray into the world of Bluetooth, meaning that Android users can finally join in the fun.

Given that the loudspeaker specialist is well-regarded for its seriously impressive range of hi-fi and home cinema speakers, you'd never expect the T7 to be like the cheap and cheerful Bluetooth speakers that are ten a penny, and sure enough it looks a little different to the norm. The cabinet design is a bit boxy but feels pleasingly robust, weighing in at 950g. There's a matte black rubber trim around the outside – the sort that looks like it will be a magnet to dust and greasy fingerprints, but thankfully isn't – into which the controls are recessed. They aren't particularly easy to see and I find that they need to be given quite a substantial prod to work, although this might become easier with familiarisation over time.

Hexagon in 60 seconds

The gun-metal grille appears to float inside the chassis, thanks to a clear plastic hexagonal surround derived from the Matrix internal bracing used in B&W's reference 800 Series Diamond speakers. Originally designed for use in a concept car for Jaguar that didn't make it to market, it provides substantial stiffening to keep resonance to a minimum. The honeycomb structure is an interesting design feature that is best described as an acquired taste. I like the way that it lets light through, stopping it from being just another black box, but you'll really need to see it in the flesh to decide for yourself.



Under the hood there's a pair of full-range 50mm drivers, driven by two Class D amplifiers, while a high-output bass radiator is placed around the back. The T7 utilises the same DAC and DSP as B&W's Z2 Apple wireless speakers.

Socketry is limited to a 3.5mm headphone out, an input for charging (it takes four hours to fully top up and lasts 18 hours) and a service port, but no USB for charging additional devices.

Pairing is ridiculously simple. Hold down the standby button on the side, turn the Bluetooth on your portable device on, and then wait for the two to discover one another. It all happens in a matter of seconds and is the sort of process that even Luddites will struggle to get wrong. The T7 can remember up to eight devices and produces an electronic chirp to let you know that it's worked. Interestingly, B&W commissioned electronica artiste Mira Calix to 'write' the audio cues the T7 produces. In truth, I can't help wondering if it was worth the effort and just how much time Calix put into composing them, but it's a nice touch nonetheless. I manage to pair my MacBook Pro, iPod and Samsung Galaxy Ace Plus with the minimum of fuss.

Left nonplussed by Mira Calix's audio cues, I opt instead to give the

T7 a workout by streaming a lossless FLAC file of *Sparrow*, a rather sparse electronic piece from her album *One On One*. The first thing that strikes me is the impressive depth of the bass. Positioned about 30cm away from the wall the T7 has the sort of tight, meaty lower frequencies that are missing from most rival Bluetooth speakers, with very little sense of overhang. The sharp, crunchy midband is also impressive, starting and stopping with precision and alacrity, while giving the track a powerful pulsating feel.

It might get loud

Switching to something a bit more upbeat, The Heavy's *How You Like Me Now* has a full sound that even when cranked up loud doesn't distort like so many portable rivals can, while that hexagon bracing appears to be doing the business as there's no sign of resonance. The sound fires out into the room coherently painting big, bold three-dimensional images that are comfortably among the best I've heard from a wireless portable.

Sure, it isn't cheap, but if you're serious about a way to enjoy music from your phone or media player without wires, the T7 has to be near the very top of your list. **JDW**

DETAILS

PRICE
£300

TELEPHONE
0800 2321513

WEBSITE
bowers-wilkins.co.uk

OUR VERDICT

