

Cambridge Audio

Minx Air 200 wireless speaker

STANDALONE SPEAKERS

PROVIDE a fashionable way to enjoy music stored on portable devices (as well as desktop computers) without the apparently unacceptable clutter of a separate amp and speakers. When it comes to connections, some speakers use Apple's proprietary physical dock for mooring an iPod or other iDevice, but others such as the Minx Air 200 prefer the wireless route (albeit with analogue inputs as well).

And like the more affordable Minx Air 100 (reviewed issue 371), the Minx Air 200 is unusual in offering both AirPlay and Bluetooth, which includes the fledgling 16-bit, 44.1kHz apt-X Bluetooth transmission standard comparable with CD quality. To date, the number of phones and tablets with apt-X is relatively small, but gradually growing (HTC, Sharp, Motorola and Samsung already support it). Although iMacs are compatible with apt-X, owners of portable iDevices can use AirPlay, which also supports lossless 44.1kHz sampling, or resort to the inferior standard version of Bluetooth in the absence of a wireless network.

Internet radio also features on the Minx Air 200, with five preset stations on the body of the unit and a further five selectable via the iOS or Android app.

Delivering the goods

Available in black or white, the Minx Air 200 is hefty compared with most other wireless speakers, but it is elegantly designed, if somewhat unexciting. Technologically robust, the Minx Air 100 is limited in terms of its performance because of its size, use of a passive sub and lack of power. The Minx Air 200 looks much better equipped to deliver the sonic goods, thanks to the use of a more meaty 200W digital amplifier along with a 6.5in active subwoofer and twin 2.25in BMR drivers.

The rear panel sports a bass gain control, while Ethernet and service ports are complemented by a generic MP3 line-in and analogue



stereo phonos. The latter could see the unit used as a soundbar connected to an AV source such as a TV. In the absence of a streamed source the unit reverts to its analogue input, or can be forced to do so by pushing a button marked X on the top panel or remote. This is also the mute button for analogue sources.

While the Minx Air 100 can be an excellent performer it is rather fussy, much preferring hard-wired analogue over streamed digital sources. Not so, the Minx Air 200, which is much better equipped to extract the best out of compressed audio delivered by AirPlay or Bluetooth. The difference between the analogue line in and digital stream is negligible. Where the cheaper model struggled with Tina Turner's vocal range in *Private Dancer* the Minx Air 200 has a much more balanced tonal range, so that Tina's higher pitch screams are neither shrill, thin nor seemingly on the bright side. The active bass blends brilliantly too, so that the overall effect is meaty and emotional, yet deftly articulated, with excellent clarity across all frequencies.

The Killer's *Losing Touch* streamed over AirPlay is full of energy and requires the Lounge EQ setting to rein in an over-enthusiastic bass response. Generally, all sources benefit from choosing the most suitable of the app's various EQ modes.

The Minx Air 100 did a pretty commendable job with a FLAC of Britten's *Young Persons' Guide To The Orchestra*, but its lower registers felt under powered. The Minx Air 200 by contrast is much more satisfying, plugging the gaps so that the only criticism is the narrowness of the soundstage, an inherent flaw of single unit 2.1 systems.

Stream dream

Also pleasing is how well the Minx Air 200 does with an MP3 rip of the same piece when streamed over AirPlay. The percussion retains its clarity, while the strings are as open and warm as the CD version. As the brass section kicks in and the strings carry the recording to a *forte crescendo* the piece remains a comfortable listen, requiring no volume adjustment to compensate for over emphasis on any particular part of the register.

The internet radio feature is well executed, but choosing higher bit-rate stations is recommended. Classic FM at 128kbps for example has an obvious lack of dynamic range compared with the 320kbps BBC Radio 3.

Overall, the Minx Air 200 is a beautifully refined wireless speaker, which consistently delivers regardless of whatever source you care to throw at it. **AJ**

DETAILS

PRICE
£430
WEBSITE
cambridgeaudio.com

OUR VERDICT

