

## Denon D-M37DAB



£300

**WE LOOKED AT THIS** Denon system in October, just in time for it to scoop our all-in-one-system Product of the Year Award. For an extra £80 you can add a very handy iPod dock accessory; this connects to the back of the unit and gives you full control of your iPod's menus via the remote.

Elsewhere, it's as you were with the D-M37DAB. Available in silver or black, this is a smart-looking system, with

**"The soaring synths fill our room, the Denon boasting serious dynamics and detail"**

Denon having put its mind to a serious internal and external overhaul. Delivering 30W of power per channel, it features an all-new circuit design, including separation of digital and analogue domains, plus UK-tuned electronics and SC-M37 speakers.

There are USB and 3.5mm mini-jack inputs on the front of the unit, and of course that iPod dock attached to the dedicated connection round the back.

**↑ FOR**

Build, design, usability and crucially sound quality are all top class

**↓ AGAINST**

Give the speakers plenty of room to avoid overbearing bass

**→ VERDICT**

The extra outlay for the iPod dock seems fair to us, while everything else about this system remains top drawer

Inside there's a DAB/FM/AM tuner, plus a CD player capable of playing MP3 and WMA discs. There's also a new look, smart and intuitive remote control.

**Performance to please**

Listening to Kanye West's *Robocop*, the Denon delivers a broad soundstage, complete with much bass and power (be careful not to place your speakers too close to the wall or you'll get too much bottom end). The soaring synths do an impressive job of filling our room, the D-M37DAB boasting serious dynamics and detail.

But the Denon can do subtle and delicate, too. Cat Stevens' *Wild World* shows natural, emotive vocals, while the guitar has insight and drive.

The onboard tuners have strong signal reception, providing clear, detailed sound from DAB and FM, the latter especially delivering an authoritative, subtle delivery. Using the remote it's intuitive and easy to navigate, too, meaning a wealth of features and functions, along with top-notch sound mark this as a micro machine of serious quality.

The micro system class tends to be a hot one, so it had to be something special to take our Product of the Year crown, as this Denon did. Adding an iPod dock for £80 seems a fair deal to us, and coupled with class-leading sound and the fact that there are some great online deals on the main unit, means the D-M37DAB looks set to remain the one to beat.



## LG FA163DAB



£200

**HOW MUCH? YES,** LG has delivered a feature-packed micro hi-fi system for just £200. CD player, amplifier and 2.1 speakers? Check. DAB/FM/MW tuner? Check. Integrated iPod dock? Check. Direct recording to a USB memory stick? Check. And all this is packaged in to a smart and luxurious piece of kit thanks to a sleek, gloss black finish.

The speakers are a good size – 24cm high and a slim 13cm wide – and claims an output 80W per channel. A sub driver

**"Press a button and your CD tracks will be recorded to your memory stick"**

in each cabinet means plenty of boom for your buck, too. It's all operated via a flash touchscreen control system, which unfortunately isn't as slick in operation as it looks – stick to the remote control for a more responsive experience.

The iPod dock is integrated into the top of the main unit and again gives full control of your tunes via the remote control. There's also a 3.5mm line input allowing you to connect any portable player straight to the unit.

**↑ FOR**

Loads of features and functions; direct recording to USB; smart looks; rich, even sound; great value

**↓ AGAINST**

Boomy bass; lacks all out detail, dynamics and scale; touchscreen controls are a pain

**→ VERDICT**

If you're on a budget this is a great little versatile system – pay more for a jump in sound quality

This system's unique feature is the direct recording to USB mode. Slot in a USB stick, press a button and your CD tracks will be recorded to your stick in real time or double speed, at anything from 96kps to 256kps MP3 quality.

**Slight trade-off with sound**

Now the standard issue with such a feature-packed, wallet-friendly machine is to expect a trade-off when it comes to sound quality. And, while this LG is far from disgraced, it's not quite in the same sonic league as the machines from the

traditional players in the market. As seems to have been a theme in this test, we're not best pleased with the LG's bass delivery. Playing 2562's bass-heavy album *Aerial*, this system can be a little boomy, with that twin set of subs combining to make a slightly over-bearing bottom end – even after EQ adjustments.

The sound has a rich, refined feel, and in isolation has an even balance that makes it an easy listen, but it can't match the detail and dynamics of the best here. Still, if you want a versatile micro system on a budget, this fits the bill nicely.





## Onkyo CS-525UKD



£320

**IF YOU DON'T** like spoilers, you might want to skip this introduction... then again, regular readers will be aware of what has previously come to pass: Onkyo and Denon both brought out brand new micro systems within a few days of each other and, sadly for Onkyo, it was the Denon that comfortably took the spoils and, a month later, the Product of the Year crown.

**"Playing Guns N' Roses, it reveals plenty of detail as it delivers an spacious sound"**

In terms of form and function, the CS-525UKD has a similar style to its predecessor, the '515, but added a USB input on the front of the unit. There's still a headphone output alongside stereo inputs and outputs, and a 3.5mm minijack output. There's also a dedicated iPod dock connection on the rear of the unit (the DS-A2X costs £60) and the speakers have had a glossy redesign.

Navigating the machine has been made easier thanks to the removal of the twisting control knob for skipping

**↑ FOR**

Another smart package; plenty of features; open, substantial sound; decent detail

**↓ AGAINST**

Soft bass; uneven tonal balance

**→ VERDICT**

Another system that has plenty to offer but has simply been pipped at the post by a superior sounding rival

tracks in favour of individual 'forward' and 'back' keys. The chunky remote does a job but, as with the Yamaha, doesn't fit in with the style of the rest of the system.

**Digs deep for the detail**

Listening to the hotly anticipated and predictably underwhelming *Chinese Democracy* album from Guns N' Roses, the Onkyo reveals plenty of detail as it delivers an open, spacious sound. Kanye West's *Robocop* shows this system is capable of hitting high frequencies as well as it can reach impressively low bass notes.

A very promising start, but prolonged listening turns up a few small issues that start to bug us. Listening to A Tribe Called

Quest's *Buggin' Out*, the track doesn't quite have the flow we're used to, with the lazy rolling bassline lacking pace and punch, sounding a little soft. More pertinently there's a lack of balance to higher frequencies, with vocals at times sounding a touch muffled while other treble sounds display some brightness.

Switch to the tuners and the Onkyo is strong and reliable, picking up the necessary stations and demonstrating clarity and stability with DAB and FM. While undoubtedly an enticing product, sonically this Onkyo doesn't quite match either its admittedly brilliant predecessor or the new kid on the block from Denon – which can only mean four stars.



## Yamaha M-430



£350

**IT'S BEEN A** while since we've seen a micro system from Yamaha, so it's perhaps no surprise to see the company storm back on to the scene with a product that's packed with features and boasts a competitive price tag – in fact, this M-430 will be on sale for a special price of £300 for a limited time after launch (we'll stick with the £350 price tag for the long-term).

**"The midrange delivers a warm sound meaning it has a pleasant way with voices"**

As a micro system, the M-430 is in a product category that more than most has quickly demanded a host of extra functionality as standard. So while you can of course play your favourite CDs, you can also listen to DAB radio, as well as FM/AM, and take advantage of the integrated iPod dock.

This dock is a real eye-catcher. Sat atop the main unit it gives you full iPod functionality – charging your iPod and allowing you fully to browse the iPod's menus on the Yamaha's display using the remote control.

**↑ FOR**

Integrated, fully functional iPod dock; smart design; smooth midrange; big sound.

**↓ AGAINST**

Lacks detail and cohesion of best systems; bass is a little flabby

**→ VERDICT**

This system doesn't quite scale the sonic heights of rivals, but find it at a knockdown price and it's quite a tempting proposition

Strangely, the remote is in two colours – white and silver – which sits slightly at odds with the black design of the micro system. The rest of the system, including the gloss black speakers, is neatly finished, complete with an aluminium front panel.

The system claims 25W of power per channel, can playback MP3 and WMA CDs and has a headphone output on the front. Round the back you'll find a phono output and an input, plus subwoofer and digital optical outputs.

**Silky sounds in the midrange**

Listening to Cat Stevens' *Wild World*, the Yamaha system has a pleasant way with voices, the midrange delivering a smooth, warm sound. We'd like a little more detail

on display, and it doesn't quite have the rhythm and swagger of the best micros we've heard, but it remains a pleasant, balanced listen.

We switch to Kanye West's *Heartless*, and it's clear the system has plenty about it, too, with a decent amount of bass, albeit a touch on the flabby side and lacking absolute articulation, helping to deliver a sound with scale and substance. Flick to the system's solid, reliable tuners and its warm texture makes for detailed, authoritative dialogue, though music is still a little flabby.

All told this is a decent stab from Yamaha, and if you're after an iPod dock and find this system at £300, we'd do nothing to dissuade you, but on pure sonic terms the Denon remains a step ahead.



**TEST RESULT**

There are some good systems here, but it's **Denon's** Award-winner that hangs on to the top honours

**Denon D-M37DAB**



£300



**WE HAVE TO** hand it to Denon. After a while without a winning micro system, the company struck gold with the D-M37DAB, delivering a product that combines form and functionality with a superb sonic performance for the money.

Whether you're listening to the on-board tuners, CD playback or using the attached iPod dock the Denon delivers a detailed, rhythmical sound, with bags of energy and pace. Timing is the key and this system times better than anything else on test here making for a pacy, foot-tapping listen. Solid styling, build and usability is the icing on the cake.

**Strong competition just falls short**

Elsewhere there's some strong competition here – three four-star products says it all. None, however, can quite match the Denon for all-round appeal. LG delivers a mass of features at a knockdown price alongside surprisingly good sound quality for the money, while Onkyo's system has an open, detailed sound. The new entry from Yamaha is a welcome addition, combining an integrated dock with premium sound quality. But it's the Denon system that remains on top of the pile.

**“Denon delivers a product that combines form with superb sonic performance”**



PORTABLE MUSIC PLAYER  
APPLE IPOD CLASSIC 120GB



£179

Awards 2008

This fifth-generation sounds even better and still has bags of room for all your tunes. Apple still rules the roost in the MP3 market and we're happy to report that its iPods get better with every update.



SPEAKER STAND  
SOUNDSTYLE Z2



£70

Awards 2008

These stands have been Award-winners for some time now, and have recently received an upgrade for even better build and sonic results. If you're on a budget, looking for something to get the best from your micro's speakers, look no further

**NOW ADD THESE**



SPEAKER CABLE  
CHORD CARNIVAL  
SILVERSCREEN



£6/m

Awards 2008

Chord Company knocked QED off its Award-winning perch with this massive step forward for its own cable range. Ditch your freebie cables to enjoy a real step-up in quality.

**TOTAL SYSTEM £609**

**FACTS AND FIGURES**

PRICE RANGE	DENON D-M37DAB	LG FA163DAB	ONKYO CS-525UKD	YAMAHA M-430
£200-£350				
<b>SPECIFICATION</b>				
PRICE	£ 300	£ 200	£ 320	£ 350
PLAYS	CD MP3	CD MP3	CD MP3	CD MP3
TUNER	DAB, FM, MW, LW	DAB, FM, MW	DAB, FM, MW, LW	DAB, FM, MW
AMPLIFICATION	2x 30W	2x 40W	2x 26W	2x 25W
INPUTS	Analogue Audio 2	Analogue Audio, USB	Analogue Audio 2	Analogue Audio
OUTPUTS	Analogue, sub, headphones	Analogue, sub, headphones	Analogue, sub, headphones	Analogue, optical, sub, headphones
FEATURES	Additional iPod dock available for £80	Integrated iPod dock, direct USB Recording	Additional iPod dock available for £60	Integrated iPod dock
DIMENSIONS	12 x 21 x 31cm	26 x 17 x 23cm	12 x 21 x 37cm	11 x 21 x 36cm
WEIGHT	4.3kg	3.2kg	4kg	4.4kg
<b>HOW THEY RATED</b>				
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

**DAB** Stands for Digital Audio Broadcasting: digital radio on the BBC and independent stations. Can provide a better, hiss-free sound.

**DOCK** Can be simply a socket for connecting your MP3 player to a hi-fi, or can be part of a radio, micro or speaker system

**USB** A type of data connection originally used only on computers, but now commonly used with MP3 players and other hi-fi and home cinema products. USB 2.0 has replaced the slower 1.1.

**MP3** Audio compression for music files that can reduce file sizes up to a factor of 10 compared with CD. Smaller files can reduce quality.

**MIDRANGE** The frequency range where most of the instruments and voices are heard. It must be of high quality if singers, guitars, trumpets and so on are to sound natural.

**TRANSIENTS** The short and sudden events in music such as a cymbal crash or the crack of a stick on a snare drum. Difficult for hi-fi to reproduce.

**WATT** More Watts can equal more power, but loudness depends on speaker sensitivity and room size.

**SENSITIVITY** The higher the sensitivity, the easier the speaker is to drive.