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Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Mini

 By [Ty Pendlebury](#) on 15 December 2009

A Trojan horse in a field full of cardboard cutouts, the new Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Mini delivers fine sound in an affordable package.

Editor's rating:

8.3

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Bowers & Wilkins almost single-handedly invented the "premium" iPod dock with the release of its [Zeppelin speaker system](#), but as good as it sounds it's a little out of reach for those who just want to share the sound of their iPods. B&W put on their pointy thinking hats and came up with the Mini, a dock that's perhaps even better than the first.

Design

The design is a little less ostentatious than the previous model, and features a concave fascia rather than the convex, football shape. It features a reinforced plastic chassis, and a distinctive mirrored top designed to complement [the Panorama soundbar](#). The front of the speaker is covered by a dark grey mesh which hides the dock's twin 3-inch drivers. While the Zeppelin Mini lacks the company's famous Nautilus tube-loaded tweeter it does feature a Flowport — a bass port with golf-ball-like dimples designed to reduce a chuffing effect called "port noise".

The bundled pebble remote is similar to the ones the company has used for the Panorama and the Zeppelin, and is functional and shiny. If you lose the remote there isn't too much to worry about as B&W has supplied volume buttons on the side of the unit.



The pebble remote controls most of the Mini's functions (*Credit: Ty Pendlebury*)

Features

The new Mini tops the original Zeppelin in several key areas: firstly, the arm attaching your iPod to the unit now swivels by 90 degrees enabling you to use Cover Flow or watch movies on an iPhone or iPod Touch. Apple reportedly had some issues with the original Panorama because the metal connector arm conducted GSM signals and so — on the sly — B&W's engineers changed the design to plastic. This design carries over to the Mini. The arm also provides users with the ability to grip the iPod in their hand so that the experience more closely resembles usage "on the go".



The connecting arm rotates 90 degrees enabling Cover Flow mode (*Credit: Ty Pendlebury*)

The Mini now features an on-board digital amplifier and a D/A converter designed to improve the sound of the iPod. The Mini now incorporates a USB connector which means the dock itself can decode or "stream" the sound of your PC which could be a useful upgrade to your existing speakers. The USB port also allows you to sync your iPod and receive regular Zeppelin firmware updates.

The speaker is rated as having a frequency response of 38Hz to 20kHz (-6dB) which is impressive for a dock of this size. The twin drivers are powered by two 18W amplifiers.

As the dock can now stream your PC content as well as your iPod it makes sense to include a 3.5mm headphone jack at the back. Rounding up the connectivity list is an Aux port which enables you to plug in any other device of your choice.

The list of supported iPods includes the iPhone, [iPod Classic](#) (80GB and above), iPod Nano (2G, 3G and 4G) and the iPod Touch. If you use an iPod other than these you may be restricted to the 3.5mm input.

Performance

The Zeppelin was one of the best sounding iPod docks we had high hopes for the performance of the Mini. Ever since Bowers & Wilkins jettisoned its "3" series of loudspeakers it's been lacking a presence at the budget end of the scale, and the new Mini could fill that gap nicely.

We loaded up an iPod Touch (3rd gen) with a variety of different music and plugged it into the Mini. What we were greeted with was a very expansive sound that was less "stroke your chin and sip port wine" and more "bopping to your favourite song while doing the dishes".

For 36W of total power the Mini can go quite loud, and on the right song it can do so without distortion. The sound was well-balanced with surprisingly full bass for a unit its size, with an expansive soundfield that filled the room. Rock music sounds best, and the crunching metal of Mastodon is as bracing as it should be.

Listening to it critically, we found there was only a slight lack of intimacy or presence in Islands' *Vapours*. As we said, this isn't an audiophile's speaker which reveals every nuance but something that sounds good when listened to from somewhere in the room. More complex tracks, such as Battles' confounding *Atlas* sounded quite confused at full bore but better at a medium volume.

Hooking the Zeppelin up to a PC also worked well — our desktop recognised the Zeppelin as an external sound device and started straight away — and if you haven't got a decent sound system already this could be one of the easiest ways to get high quality music off your PC and into your ears.

Conclusion

Though we've heard more "hifi" docks at this price — namely the old [Monitor Audio i-Deck](#) — the Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Mini is nonetheless a great-sounding and fully-featured iPod dock that puts the Boses of this world to shame. It may even open people's eyes to the joys of "true" hifi. Who knows?