

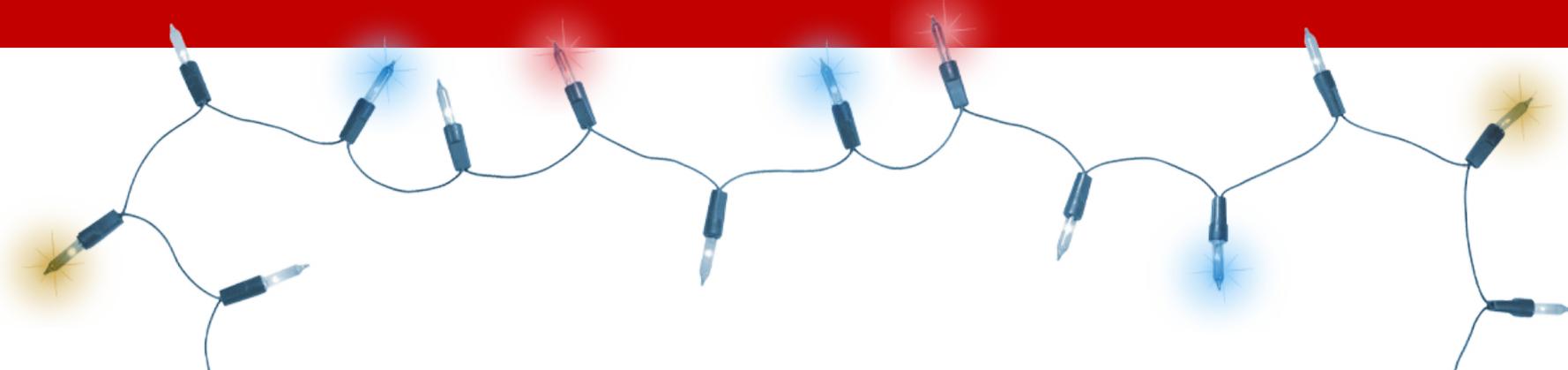
GameOn

GAMEONMAG.COM - GIFT GUIDE 2020

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE







Welcome to The GameOn Christmas Gift Guide! We hope you'll find something to enjoy, whether it's for yourself, a friend, a co-worker, a special someone or a Secret Santa, there are plenty of options.

Having curated some of the hottest peripherals that have crossed our desks, from mice to controllers and beyond, these were rigorously tested and reviewed. Hopefully our reviews will let you get a feel for how these things work in a real-world setting, rather than some kind of lab.

We've put in the recommended retail price (RRP) next to each item to give you a guide on

their pricing. Be sure to shop around to get the best deal for you, as with any purchase, especially with the "sale season" upon us.

Ultimately, we hope this guide goes a little way towards making that hectic festive time of year somewhat more manageable. Whatever you might be celebrating - Happy Holidays!

If you want to make sure you have the latest issue (updated regularly!) you can check at the following address:

<http://www.gameonmag.com/url/g2020v3>

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GIOTECK TX-50

As someone who's been comfortably using in-ear headphones for many years, I've been reluctant to splash out on a proper bulky pair of over-ear headphones, but it's ultimately an accessory you need to invest in if you're into playing with friends online and prefer something more substantial than the basic earphone and mic that get chucked in with a console.

There's all sorts of headsets on the market that can offer a variety of fancy options, whether it's surround sound, noise cancellation, and wireless bluetooth connection - for a high premium price. But if you're after something more straightforward you can just plug in and use, the Gioteck TX-50 headset is a no-nonsense solution that's well-designed and affordably priced at just £29.99.

Plugging into any 3.5mm audio input, the TX-50 works on any console and device, while its black-and-orange colour scheme makes it rather neutral too. But although it's not mentioned on the packaging, it works just as well on the Nintendo Switch when played in handheld, which was one of my unlikely testing cases for the recent Overwatch port.

Like Fortnite, Blizzard have worked voice chat so that it works in-game without using Nintendo's awful mobile app and whatever splitters you'd need to get that working. I had no problems

making myself clear via the flexible metal mic. You'll still need to tweak volume settings in-game to balance out game and chat audio, though that's to be expected. The only control over your chat with the physical headset is an inline switch for muting the mic. Just be aware that if you plan to use the headset as a regular pair of headphones, the mic itself is not detachable, although you can adjust its position to be less conspicuous.

The TX-50 never gets deafeningly loud (even when the Switch and the headset's inline control have volume set to max, it's always just at a comfortable level). It's certainly not as loud as my usual in-ear headphones, while on my laptop, I find myself tweaking the volume setting a





few notches higher than usual. Nonetheless, the audio sounds great and the headset feels comfortable, with Alacantha cushioning that doesn't overheat my ears even after extended use.

If you're a veteran audiophile who's exhausted your current headset, you'd probably want to upgrade to something more sophisticated and detailed. But if you've never owned a headset before and don't want to splash out silly digits on one with features you may not even appreciate, then the TX-50 is an impressive choice to start with.

Suitable for:



Switch



Smartphones



Tablets



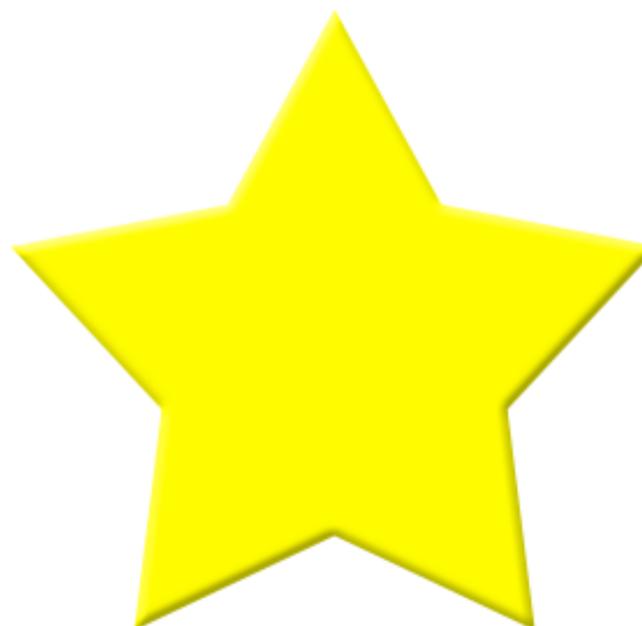
PC



PlayStation



Xbox



**RRP: £29.99
/ \$N/A**





EKSA AIR JOY PRO 7.1

I've managed to get away with not needing to upgrade any of my peripherals in quite a long time. But as lockdown hit us hard and I began using my computer more than ever, my equipment reached its breaking point, including my headphones. So, after batting my eyelashes at my superiors and discovering that we were recently contacted regarding a brand new pair of headphones, I was eager to take a look at them.

EKSA has a long history in developing and manufacturing headphones, so I knew what I was getting was going to be good quality. One of the major selling points of the Eksa Air Joy Pro, and one I was interested in, was its weight. The Air Joy Pro prides itself on the EKSA website as being less than half the weight of most gaming headsets on the market, and that really is no joke. As soon as I took them out of the box, the weight (or lack thereof) was instantly noticeable. When wearing, you can barely feel the Air Joy Pro, ringing true to their claim of comfort even after hours of use. Over gamescom weekend, I had to sit with the headphones on for 7-8 hours straight per day, and even on the final day, I wasn't experiencing any discomfort due to the headphones. The lightweight frame and sleek design make it so you can really keep these on for hours and hours at a time and not even feel it.

USB-C cable, and the box comes with phono and USB adapter cables, which allows you to use the Air Joy Pro with almost any device. Whether having a leisurely stroll and listening to music on your phone, or enjoying an intense gaming session on your computer, the Air Joy Pro has you covered. Its portable and lightweight design makes using it when out and travelling not only a viable option, but a convenient one; a rarity among gaming headphones.

Speaking of sound, how does the Air Joy Pro hold up in that regard? You'll be pleased to know, incredibly well. I was previously using the Hyper X Cloud Revolver S, and while they're definitely good, I've noticed my awareness in games in regards to sound has been a lot better since using the Air Joy Pro. From the sounds of a HAVOC revving up from the other side of the street in Apex Legends, to the sound of people running in the vents above me in Team Fortress 2, the Air Joy Pro has enabled me greater awareness of with what I can only describe as a flawless sound system. Coupled with how well the headset blocks out any sounds going on in the real world, there really is nothing but praise in this department.

There is one issue I do have, however; the microphone leaves much to be desired. Whilst incredibly easy to set up, the microphone is not of the best quality. It feels flimsy, like it could

The headset is connected via a detachable





snap at any given moment. As well as this, my friends reported my voice sounding distant and tinny, a detail I didn't believe until I heard my own voice in recordings I was making of my gameplay. Finally, the microphone is described as 'noise-cancelling', but this didn't ring as true as I was hoping. For the first time in roughly a year and a half, I had to increase my input sensitivity for voice activation on Discord because my microphone was picking up private conversations that were happening in the room; an issue that my previous microphones would not have. This detail isn't necessarily a deal-breaker for me, however, as the microphone can just be removed and I usually use a desk-clamp microphone, but the microphone issues may be enough to put some gamers off.

Overall, the EKSA Air Joy Pro is a solid headset. Its sound quality makes it great for both casual and competitive use. The lightweight design makes it a comfort to wear and carry no matter where you are; whether that be on the couch enjoying Xbox, playing Nintendo Switch on the bus, or watching YouTube videos on your phone in the comfort of your own bed. If you can supply your own microphone, the Air Joy Pro is a great pair of headphones at an affordable price and no skimps in quality.



Suitable for:



PC



**RRP: £39.98
/ \$29.99**





TURTLE BEACH ATLAS THREE

It's been a while since I reviewed a headset, so when the opportunity arose to check out the Atlas Three from Turtle Beach, I jumped at the chance. It's a nice looking headset after all, and it's compatible with the PlayStation 4, Xbox One and Switch as well as the PC.

First off, I'll note that chat functionality on the Switch doesn't work with the headset, but it does work for the other two consoles and the PC. Also worth noting is that you have to charge it to use it for up to 40 hours.

In the box you get the headset, which has a cable ending in a 3.5mm jack. If your Xbox One controller doesn't have a 3.5mm port in it, then you need a Headset Audio Controller. The box also contains a PC splitter cable to plug it into your earphone/speaker and microphone ports. Finally, there's the micro USB charging cable, a quick start guide and a Turtle Beach sticker.

The headset's construction is very solid, though I did notice some creaking in the left earcup when I adjusted it on my head. The headband is adjustable, and is unlikely to shift around on your head as it is nice and stiff. The earcups and headband have a nice, soft cushion covering which is softer where spectacles might be, to make them comfier for glasses wearers.

The right earcup has the volume control for both the earphones and the microphone (which is for you to hear yourself, not the output), as well as the flip-up microphone itself. The sturdy microphone moves to three points, with all the way back muting it. It's quite short, but nice and clear. There are also the power and audio preset buttons.

While the headset isn't uncomfortable to wear for long periods, I have noticed that it's not as comfortable as my previous headset. It's difficult to explain how it feels different, maybe it's because the material is felt instead of leatherette? I've still been able to wear it for hours at a time without discomfort.

One issue I do have, however, is that the headset turns itself off automatically. Of course, this is a power saving measure, but I'm not sure what it looks for before powering down. It's happened after a few minutes of not being used, but it's also happened several times despite there being sound playing. Whether music, the Twitch app or a game, and after different periods of time, it gives a tone and turns off. Even more curious, I had turned the volume dial on the headset only 30 seconds prior to one of the shutdowns.

The headset boasts some audio boosting options, such as being Windows Sonic Surround Sound Ready, and having the aforementioned Audio





Presets. These are audio equalisers, and pressing the button rotates between the three: Turtle Beach Signature Sound, Treble Boost, and Vocal Boost. I'll admit that I'm not much of an audiophile, so the difference in the three wasn't very noticeable. Perhaps if I listened to music at a higher volume?

The Atlas Three had no problems with any audio I threw at it, whether songs, music, videos or games. All were perfectly clear and audible, though after my last headset they do seem quiet. My old headset required the PC to be set to volume two, or risk deafening me. The Atlas Three, even with the volume dial turned all the way up, I could comfortably

listen to things at volume 16 or above. That's not a negative, just an observation.

At £69.99, the Turtle Beach Atlas Three is a decent headset that works well with consoles and PC alike. If you're in the market for a non-USB headset, then you can do worse than this.

RRP: £69.99 / \$79.95

Suitable for:



Switch



Smartphones



Tablets



PC



PlayStation



Xbox





ROCCAT KHAN PRO

Hearing high quality audio is never the same once you experience it with a good headset. It's one of those things that you don't understand how much of a difference it makes until you try it and think "How have I managed without this until now?". It was with the Roccat Khan Pro headset that I experienced one of these moments and knew I could never go back.

The Roccat Khan Pro headset is designed for 'epic moments' and aimed at the esports market with the tagline of 'Raise Your Level'. The notion of wearing them should make you feel in the zone and ready for whatever challenge you might face next and though I didn't see my win rate go up, my enjoyment skyrocketed. From the moment I unboxed them to many hours later I still find myself amazed at how good the headset holds up while its audio output and noise cancellation continues to astound.

The first thing you will notice with the Roccat Khan Pro headset is just how solid and light the headset feels. Coming in at only 230g in weight you might think it is lacking in build quality but thankfully the headset is solid and flexible, complete with hardened hinges and feels as though it can handle a beating or two. I can also confirm that it will survive a number of drops without taking even a dent or scratch which ensures it will withstand even the most heated of rage quits.

This is accompanied by leatherette memory foam earpads ensuring you not only have a solid and light headset but also one that is super comfortable even after hours of use. One benefit to this - though only to those with glasses - is that the design and lightweight nature of the Roccat Khan Pro means you don't feel much pressure on your glasses. Other headsets can put pressure on the wearer's glasses resulting in a need for regular breaks. The Roccat Khan Pro does not suffer from this issue and even after a long period of use is still comfortable to wear and enjoy.

Even right out of the box the sound quality is impressive and a noticeable difference over other headsets and in-ear headphones, include Apple's own earbuds. After testing them with a number of games, films and different genres of music, across multiple devices, it is easy to acknowledge how good the sound quality of this headset is. With dynamic, high resolution audio that allows you to hear even the most subtle of noises, there is a rich range of sounds to enjoy. When playing a game such as Destiny 2 for example, you are able to notice the sounds of the ground under your feet, the tap of metal when reloading and even the rain pattering against the ground and your helmet.

Once more the headset comes complete with an adjustable microphone that features an auto mute function when raised to an upright position.





This small but reliable microphone means that you are able to communicate with your team with crystal clear audio that ensures a natural sound is delivered. Even when used outside of gaming the microphone is a robust stand-in when recording audio for other uses such as podcasts. Not only that but it is compatible with consoles, computers and mobile and is equipped with two 3.5mm jacks (Input and output) with an included adapter to allow for both input and output through one connector.

Whether you are sitting down to play a few hours of your favorite game or listen to some 80's jams as you work, the Roccat Khan Pro is a headset

that is suitable for the job and will deliver above your expectations. With a robust build quality and rich, high resolution audio like you have never heard before, this is a headset definitely worth checking out. The only real downside is that the microphone is not detachable which means it won't replace many out-and-about headphones. Regardless, that is a tiny negative in an otherwise flawless and impressive product. The Roccat Khan Pro is a highly recommend headset.

RRP: £82.05 / \$91.28



Suitable for:



Switch



Smartphones



Tablets



PC



PlayStation



Xbox





ROCCAT KHAN AIMO

Having recently reviewed a Roccat mouse, I was eager to check out more of their products, if only to see what the AIMO lighting system did with multiple peripherals connected. So when I was offered the Khan AIMO headset, I definitely wanted to check it out. It certainly helps that my old headset seems to be on its way out.

The Khan boasts a 7.1 sound card built into the headset, a 275g weight, and easy access earcup controls. One of those is false, which I'll get into in a moment.

In the box you get the headset and some disposal information. The braided USB cable is about two meters long, which doesn't quite give me the range that my old wireless headset did, but is certainly long enough for comfortably plugging into the rear of my PC tower. The microphone is attached to the left earcup, and the right one has the volume wheel, and 7.1 mode toggle button.

Now back to what I was saying a couple of paragraphs ago - the earcup controls are definitely not "easy access". Both the wheel and button are very small and difficult to locate. I've been wearing this headset for upwards of eight hours a day for about two weeks, and I still can't find the button very easily. I suppose it doesn't say they are easy to use, but man...

That said, the sound quality - which is the important bit - is quite good. It's clear and certainly loud - I have to have my system sound turned down as low as it can go, to avoid getting my ears blown off, even with the 7.1 turned off. I already have tinnitus, so I haven't dared to turn them up past half way while wearing them - and even then it was an accident. I'd also like to add that the memory foam around the earcups, and the shape of them, make them comfortable to wear for extended periods.

The 7.1 mode is good for adding bass to music, and depth to games, but it causes voices to be kind of echoey. Also, for reasons I literally cannot explain, toggling it turned my condenser microphone down to 60%, meaning I had to go into the settings and manually correct it. I got sick of it, and ran through Windows Troubleshooting, which fixed whatever was causing it.

The headset microphone is bendable, and moves up and down. When up, it activates the auto mute function, and the box boasts that it has noise cancellation. I didn't really get to test that, but the audio quality from the mic is very clear in recordings, and when talking to people over Discord.

Build quality on the headset is very good. It's solid and none of the moving parts feel loose.





The earcups rotate 95 degrees, and of course expand from the headband in case you've got a big head. I thought the default setting would be too small, but it fits me perfectly.

One final note, the AIMO lighting system. If you've got Roccat Swarm installed, basically it allows the colours to sync between your Roccat devices. This means that the colours roll from greens, to blues, yellows and reds, across both the headset and my mouse. If I had a Roccat keyboard as well, it would also roll across that. Unless you're really into colour coordinating your system, it's not really a selling point.



The Khan is a well constructed headset with a good quality sound, and a decent microphone. If you already have Roccat peripherals, then there's nothing saying that you shouldn't add the Khan to them. If you're just looking for a decent headset, then it certainly fits the bill if it's in your price range.

RRP: £99.99 / \$119.99



Suitable for:



PC



PlayStation



Xbox





STEELSERIES ARCTIS 3 BLUETOOTH

The Arctis 3 Bluetooth headset gives you the easy freedom of choosing between wired, wireless, or both. I'm not one to actually care about driver details, balance of bass, or whether or not its audiophile rating is high. What I do care about is its utility, how well it performs, and if the form factor of the headset is a turn on or off. As a heads up, this was purchased for personal use through the SteelSeries website along with other accessories (shown below) which included in this review.

From go, the Arctis 3 is relatively light and can be used for prolonged sessions. The actual ear cups just hold it in place, the ski band being the main method to keep it sat comfortably on your head. Just don't expect to go running or head bop too energetically with them though, as I've had trouble where leaning too far forward or back can cause them to slide off. Although if you're playing a scary/horror game, the bluetooth function means you don't have to be tethered. And if you are wired into your system, the splitter cable provided is a nice hearty length that it shouldn't be a problem unless your audio jack is far away already.

Going back to the cups, they're relatively easy to remove, although I did have to do some searching on how to do so. The process does require a bit more force than I expected, but that just shows how secure they are. On the

earcups you will find the bluetooth on/off switch on the right, and on the left is the audio dimmer, microphone on/off switch, socket for the Micro USB charging port, proprietary audio connector for the supplied 3.5mm headset cable, and the retractable microphone. Cables from left to right: micro USB, headset splitter, and proprietary 3.5mm connector.

The proprietary connector does take some time to learn to pop in and out, if you're not going to take it off your head to connect. The angle it's inserted in is slightly off kilter to where it's actually inserted. A criticism of the headset is the fact it uses a micro USB to charge, and the lack of a quick charge like system or use of a Type-C port does raise a few eyebrows. Given its reasonable price, I'll let it pass but it's worth mentioning. The velcro that holds the strap is solid and well made, but it's relatively finicky and when adjusting it's kinda hard to make it balanced.

The headset's battery is very capable of lasting an entire week without charging with bluetooth connection. When the headset is plugged in with a bluetooth connection audio is treated as equal for both inputs. However, the microphone will use bluetooth as a priority. So you will have to set your output audio to bluetooth and not stereo. If your mic isn't muted, it's very likely your OS or program isn't using the headset. As for the





microphone, it's good and is about the same as any standard headset microphone. If you do use it on voice channels, the compression isn't terrible going between wired and wireless. A problem I've been having recently is that my wired connection on desktop is worse than using bluetooth or when wire connected to my PlayStation 4.

The packaging is basic, but at least it's easy to open and doesn't require waiting for it to slide out.

The extra accessories that were bought as part of the bundle are nice, the fabric carry bag being

the best part. It only just fits though, so it's not the best if you're in a hurry packing. Personally, I'd have preferred a hard case but it is a simple solution to protect it from scratching or bumps. The leather cups are nice and plush, but aren't as comforting as the fabric ones or as easy to clean. They do act as great substitutes though if you stick the fabric ones into the wash. If you have any comments or questions, fire them below and I'll be happy to answer them.

**RRP: £89.99
/ \$69.99**



Suitable for:



PC





THRUSTMASTER T.RACING SCUDERIA FERRARI EDITION-DTS

The Thrustmaster T.Racing Scuderia Ferrari Edition-DTS headset is rather striking on initial appearance, given it's official "Rosso Corsa" colour scheme, taken straight from Ferrari's branding books. It's an official tie in too, hence the somewhat lengthy name that this headset has been given. Out of the box, you get the headset, the boom microphone, a stub to block the microphone port when not in use, a cable that works both as an extension and a splitter, to allow you to plug into devices that have a split microphone and headphone jack. There's also a brief manual, and a code to give you a year's access to DTS HeadPhone:X, giving you virtualized 3D positional audio in the headset.

The headset utilises a set of 50mm drivers, allowing it to pour audio into your ear holes without distortion. There's also a volume control on the left earcup, and an inline control for the microphone portion, allowing you to set the volume of, and muting your microphone without needing to make any changes in software. The microphone is decidedly chunky, and the whole unit comes together to replicate the style of a headset that you'd see on the members of Ferrari's pit crews.

On your head, one of the first things you'll likely notice is that the memory foam earpads are very comfortable, and they stay comfortable on your head for multiple hours - which is great for those longer endurance races, though there doesn't appear to be any weaker memory foam along the top of the ear for those wearing glasses, the foam should mould around the arms of glasses fine, but may push them into your head a little more than you may be comfortable with.

The sound they produce when playing games has great stereo separation, and the virtualisation aspect of DTS Headphone:X works a treat but depending on content can present slightly muddy. This was much more prevalent in listening to music or content with voices such as watching





Netflix, though racing games fair well as it accentuates the tone of the engine more, which fits the demographic of this headset more. If you plan on using this headset for both, I recommend a 3-4db cut at 700Hz, and a small boost of 2-3db on 6000Hz and up, at least when you're not gaming. The microphone also seems similarly nuanced in terms of audio quality, having a slight mid-range punch that left the sound clear enough to be understandable, but it gives it a slightly weird vibe of being broadcast over a radio frequency, despite that not being the case.



Overall, the Thrustmaster T.Racing Scuderia Ferrari Edition-DTS is a very comfortable headset to use for long periods of time, and the DTS positional audio features can certainly heighten the immersion factor when it comes to gaming, it's just a shame that the code in the box is only for one year of access, but this is more DTS' problem than Thrustmaster. It certainly looks the part in its bright red Rosso Corsa colour scheme, but is marred by the overbearing mid-range that they deliver when not gaming, and the quality of the audio from the microphone almost feeling artificially compressed to get that sound of a pit crew headset.

As for their statement of "a major boost to achieve your best race times", at least for me, I've a feeling there's other factors at play keeping me from achieving those...

RRP: £94.75 / \$99.99

Suitable for:



PC

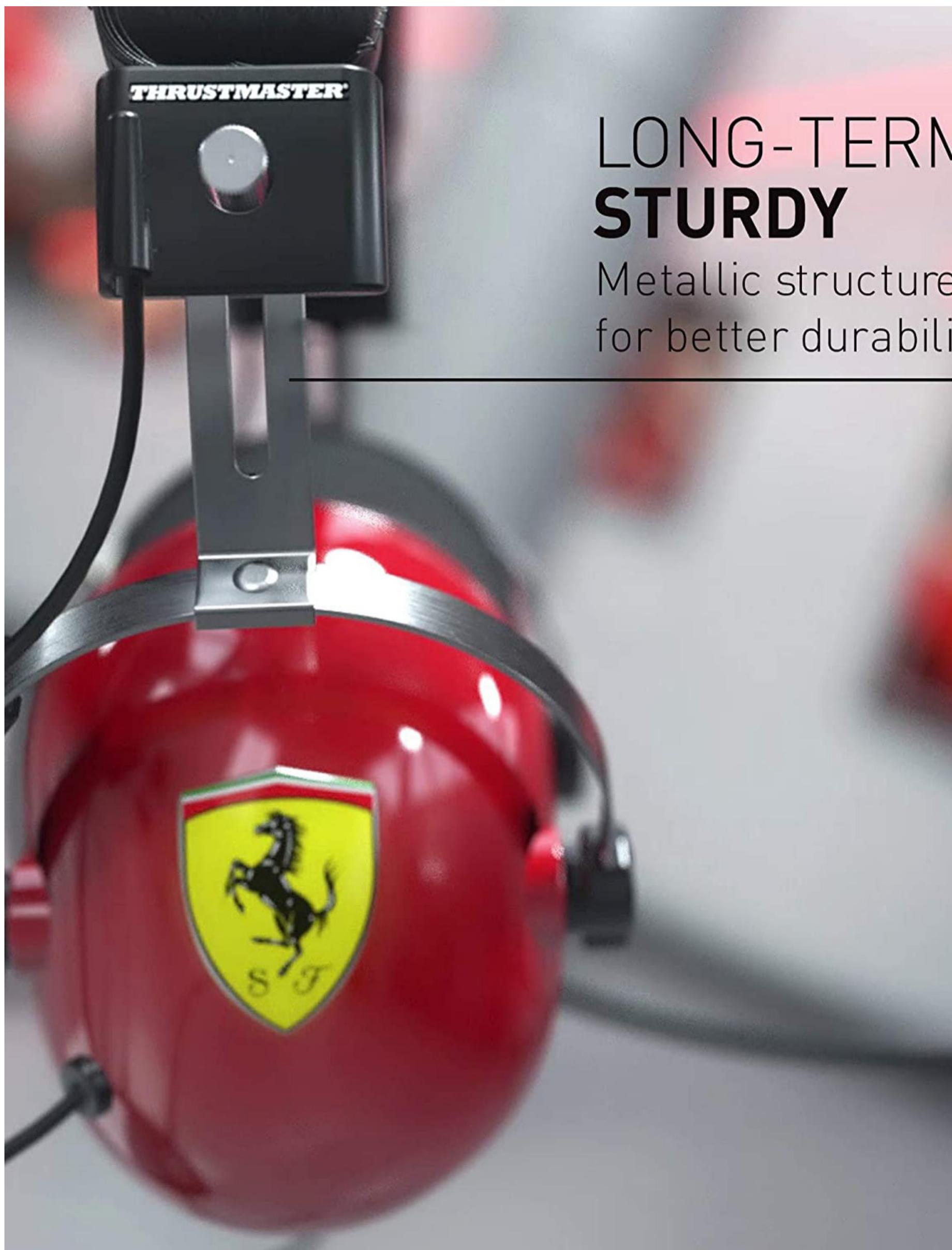


PlayStation



Xbox





LONG-TERM **STURDY**

Metallic structure
for better durability





Inline mic controller included



PITS-STYLE ON EAR
VOLUME KNOB

CLEAR TRANSMISSION
Noise-cancelling, unidirectional mix



CHRISTMAS ALCOHOL PAIRINGS: FIRST PERSON SHOOTERS

It's almost Christmas once again, so what better way to spend it than with a nice drink and your favourite games? But, have you ever thought about marrying the two more than ever before, to choose the ultimate beverage to accompany your playtime? Read on, and in this first article we'll look at drinks to go with this year's most popular first person shooters.

Call of Duty: Black Ops III

Call of Duty: Black Ops III follows every other game in the franchise with fast paced, non-stop action. You don't want a mellow wine or harsh whisky with this; for your CoD playthrough, you need to go for a lager, such as Budweiser Budvar, brewed in the Czech Republic. It's not related to that fizzy piss you might be fond of – and I'm definitely judging you for it – instead, it actually has flavour, and isn't so strong that a couple of bottles is going to have you on your arse.

After all, you need to keep some semblance of alertness to you given the pace in CoD. Budvar sits in at 5% ABV (in the UK, strength may vary in other markets), but if you need something weaker you probably shouldn't bother. Pilsner Urquell comes in at 4.4%, again another Czech production.

If these are too cultural for you, just stick with the Carling and Carlsberg. After all, perhaps that's all CoD deserves.

Battlefield V

Whereas Black Ops III is pretty much non-stop action (exception is the Blackout mode), Battlefield V is much more laid back. Well, as laid back as World War 2 can be. Massive maps lend themselves to a tactical approach, particularly in Conquest. Grand Operations can still get pretty hairy. So you still need to keep your wits about you, but with the amount of diversity on show, you need something with a bit of diversity for your mouth.

What on Earth do I mean by that? Something like an IPA, of course! What did you think I meant? IPA's have been a pretty big rise over the past few years, so it's not just hipsters with tweed jackets supping them in their mansions whilst sons Alfred and Victory are off in boarding school. (Yes, that is an actual name.) Brewdog's Punk IPA is a personal favourite of mine, brewed with six different types of hops with a tropical fruit aroma. Goose Island IPA is another solid choice.

If you want to go even stronger, Belgium has you covered. La Chouffe offers an IPA variant,





with the Dobbelen IPA Tripel a tasty 9% ABV. Might be quite difficult to find in the UK – if you take a trip over to France, or Belgium itself, you'll find it easier to acquire. You won't need many before you start hysterically shooting at houses instead of playing the objective.

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

You could probably take most of what I said earlier for Black Ops III and apply it to CS:GO, but I think that would be wrong. With CS:GO, you should go an extra mile and ditch beer and go for something heavier, but play a game with yourself.

Get onto Demolition, and every time you die, have a shot of vodka / Sambuca / whatever other strong alcohol you've got. If you're really, really shit, you'll soon be too plastered to care. So this will give you some motivation to git gud.

If you don't want to play these kinds of drinking games, then that's okay. Stick to mixing with Coke or lemonade, so you don't even realise you're slowly moving from semi-competent to "oh fuck I've thrown a flash and it's bounced back to me-".

Remember, GameOn only endorses responsible drinking. Be safe, have fun, and look after each other.





SPEEDLINK SICANOS RGB

When it comes to PC gaming it's fair to say that the most important part of your setup is the mouse. Having a mouse that feels good to hold, good to use, and never lets you down is key and it can be a pain finding one that ticks all the boxes. That's why when giving the chance to try out the new SICANOS RGB gaming mouse from Speedlink I was rather excited.

Out of the box the SICANOS is a solid mouse that feels good in your hand. The overall build quality is very high while the weight of the mouse is next to nothing. Coming with four interchangeable side panels, you'll be able to tailor the mouse to best fit your hand and preferred grip method. Want a streamlined design over somewhere to rest your finger? you can do that. Changing the panels is effortless and takes seconds meaning you won't have to worry about any screws or other complex mechanics here.

On the mouse you will find a total of seven ergonomically placed buttons all of which are fully programmable with support for macros. Everything has a robust 'click' to it as well which echoes the build quality once more. Being an RGB mouse you will also find that the scroll wheel, logo, and two side bars all light up and can be customized to match the colour of your gaming setup. Personally, I went for pink with different colours for each DPI preset I had set up.

Speaking of DPI, the SICANOS has support for up to six different DPI settings at the press of a button, allowing for fast switching. Maybe you want a higher DPI for playing first-person shooters but a lower one for general use. Well, you can and setting it up is as easy as using the mouse. Once more you can even adjust the colour of the lighting to change depending on the selected DPI. This can be useful for providing a quick reference point for you, should you not be sure if you switched or not.

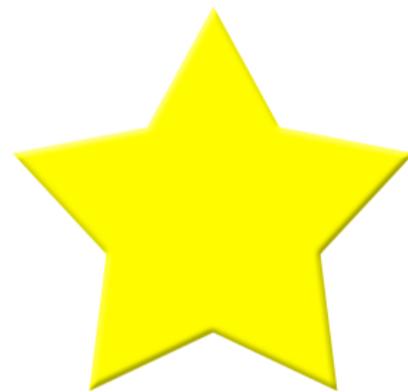
From a different point of view, the SICANOS though not mainly intended to combat wrist fatigue ends up being a comfortable mouse for long session use. Its design and weight means that even those who might already have discomfort can rest assured knowing that it will be easy-going on their wrist. Of course, to completely avoid long term damage and pain a vertical mouse and regular breaks are recommended but for gaming sessions, this is a surprisingly pain free experience.

During my time with the SICANOS I found it to be a highly responsive and reliable gaming mouse that worked in all situations. It kept up during high precision first-person shooter gameplay, provided comfortable use during audio editing, and glided through general use. All while providing a robust and comfortable user experience, complete with pink lighting. It's fair to say then that the SICANO



is one of the best mice you'll find on the market today. With plenty of options to tailor the mouse to fit your needs and a price point that won't break the bank I can't recommend this enough. And yes, the light does other colours than just pink.

RRP: £35.55
/ N/A





MAD CATZ R.A.T. 4

After Mad Catz died, people were worried that the well-known brand was gone forever. Well, it was bought by a Chinese firm and has come back, releasing mice, keyboards and headsets galore. I took a look at the R.A.T. 4, which is the mid-tier priced mouse.

It comes with the quick start guide, sticker sheet and a 1.5 meter cable in the box, so not a lot but you don't need a lot. The mouse honestly feels a little cheap, which was disappointing to find. Due to the design there are a lot of parts that creak when any kind of pressure is exerted upon them. They've gone for a lightweight, "see-through" design, which lets you see the inner workings. Well, a couple of cables, really. It kinda looks like an off-brand Deus Ex Mankind Divided tie-in mouse.



Also, the bit at the back that nestles in your palm can be moved, depending on the size of your hand. It's a pretty neat idea, but the further you move it, the looser it feels.

There are five buttons (apart from the three usual), with one behind the scroll wheel, and three on the thumb rest. Two are the usual "forwards" and "backwards" buttons, but the third by default is a "Fine Aim" button that will slow your cursor down. The one behind the scroll wheel adjusts your DPI, so that your cursor moves faster or slower, by rates selectable in the program you install with the drivers. The final button is to the left of the left mouse button, and it changes which profile you're using. Each one has its own colour, so you don't need to worry about using your League of Legends bindings when you're playing SMITE.

One thing I should point out is that despite the quick start guide telling you where to download the drivers from, it was a dead link. They might change that by the time you've read this, but be prepared to have to find them yourselves on the official website, like I did.

At the time of writing this, I've been using the R.A.T. 4 for a few weeks. I'll admit that it's pretty decent. I'm bummed that the scroll wheel doesn't move to either side, which my last mouse did, but I've been making do.

I know that I've mentioned this, but honestly this





is not an expensive, high quality mouse. After only a day or two of use, a smooth section on the thumb rest unclipped itself, and is raised ever so slightly, so I can feel it whenever I use the mouse. Which, as a keyboard & mouse gamer who does video editing, is often.

I really do like the design and feel of the Mad Catz R.A.T. 4 mouse, just bear in mind that you get what you pay for. I am glad that Mad Catz are back, though, as there should always be peripherals at different price ranges.



**RRP: £59.99
/ N/A**





ROCCAT KONE PURE ULTRA

Efficient simplicity” are the words to describe ROCCAT’s Kone Pure Ultra gaming mouse. Where many hardware manufacturers wave their flags atop the ‘bigger and brighter is better’ mountain, ROCCAT has instead opted for the minimalist approach with an ultra-lightweight mouse that eschews the ‘alien technology’ aesthetic—with all those flashing lights, switches and doodads—for refreshing and stylish simplicity. The Kone Pure Ultra is a mouse that, above all, does a job and does it well with no fuss.

66 grams—about the same weight as a tennis ball—sounds too light for a ‘proper’ mouse. Any piece of equipment that lightweight runs the risk of feeling cheap and hollow: less like a piece of high-end tech, more like bargain bin junk. Fortunately, the Kone Pure Ultra avoids this with a reassuringly high build quality in all aspects other than its airiness. Each input (left/right-click, thumb buttons, sensitivity buttons and scroll wheel) feels sturdy without being stiff; there’s certainly none of the springiness that cheaper mouse buttons suffer from. Its smooth matt finish and perfectly ergonomic design is irresistible too—almost silky to the touch. My only complaint, and this is completely down to preference, comes as a result of the colour-changing LED ‘ROCCAT’ logo that sits about where a user’s palm would be. I feel that the garish light detracts from the effortlessly pure qualities of the mouse, although this is hardly a deal-breaker;

in fact, I’d wager that most people would regard a little flashiness as a positive. Regardless, with some fiddling around in the ‘ROCCAT Swarm’ utility, this light can—mercifully—be switched off.

The Kone Pure Ultra comes packing an “Owl-Eye 16,000dpi optical sensor” with “50G acceleration” and “adjustable lift-off distance”. At least, that’s what it says on the box. I’m not able—or particularly willing—to verify those claims, but I can rattle off a few layman-friendly words on how damn good this mouse feels in action. After several days of regular usage, including one or two lengthy work/play sessions, my hand felt none the worse for wear: no cramping or discomfort at all. In comparison to the cheap and not-so-cheerful mice I was used to, this was like a gift from the heavens; a glimpse at what mice were meant to be. Imagine going your whole life wearing each shoe on the wrong foot, before finally, after decades, getting it right and basking in the comfort that everyone else must have been taking for granted all along. Okay, maybe this is an exaggeration, but don’t let it distract from my point: the Kone Pure Ultra feels good and performs marvellously.

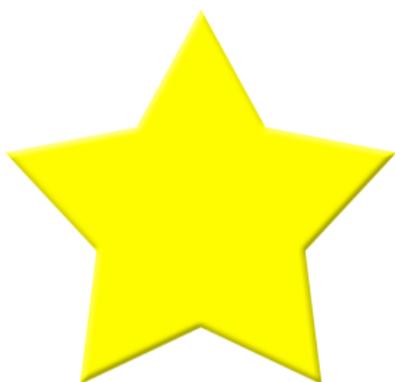
Considering how this is a piece of tech that champions simple functionality over excessive features, it’d be inappropriate to endlessly prattle on about the subtle curves and contours of the Kone Pure Ultra for much longer. ROCCAT has





created a mouse that does a single job incredibly well in a world full of mice that try—and fail—to do several. For that, it gets my approval. If you have £60 to spend on a mouse and, like me,

prefer gaming tech to be relatively discrete, you can't go too far wrong with the Kone Pure Ultra.



**RRP: £59.99
/ \$65.36**





ROCCAT KONE AIMO

I've been using the same mouse for almost two years, so I decided it was time to get something new. The paint where my clicker game addiction random clicking has been wearing away, the pads on the underside are scuffed, and to be honest the glare from the RGB had been bugging me for a while. So when we were offered the Kone Aimo from Roccat, I snapped it up.

It came in a well-designed box, with a few stickers, and a quick start guide. The mouse itself is a bit on the large size, but well constructed. It doesn't feel too big to me, but my wife did reckon it would give her a cramp.

As well as the left and right buttons, and the chunky scroll wheel, there are two additional buttons on the top which control the speed which the mouse moves. Off to the left side of the mouse, and controlled with the right side of your thumb, are the T1 & T2 buttons, which by default go forwards and backwards in the web browser history. Beneath those, controlled with the left side of your thumb is the T3, which is called the Easy-Shift key, because it makes all of the other buttons do something else when held.

By default the alternative modes are basically media keys. The scroll wheel does the volume and track change, etc. However, if you download ROCCAT's Swarm app (either to your phone or computer), you can set them to do other things like open programs, websites, press a button combination, or even

shut down the computer. Since I don't fiddle with the DPI once it's at a speed I like, I just recalibrated the default mode of buttons.

The box - and app - boast that the Aimo has an "intelligent lighting system" designed to "react organically with your gaming behavior". I've had it set to that since I installed Swarm, and it literally just seems to cycle through the colours. I tried several games, but maybe it does something during multiplayer games that I've not seen? For instance, maybe it stays yellow during Counter-Strike, or red for Team Fortress 2 - I've no idea. It could just be something that coordinates when you have a Roccat keyboard and headset, unfortunately I only have the mouse and a Roccat Kanga mousemat.

While I'm talking about it, the Kanga compliments the Aimo well. It's nice and smooth to glide the mouse across, and it's not as thick as my old one, and takes up a little less space on the desk.

I can't think of any negative things to say about the Kone Aimo. It's a good mouse, with a lot of customisation options. The "Titan" scroll wheel is nice and chunky, and unlike other mice I've used it doesn't have those tiny ridges which can cause discomfort if you use the scroll wheel a lot. Instead, it's got well spaced dips around the wheel, and it's lit up with the same RGB as the body of the mouse.





Roccat's Kone Aimo is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the original Kone, and it's certainly a worthy successor. It's worth a look if you want a new mouse.



RRP: £69.99 / \$79.99





ROCCAT KAIN 200 AIMO

By now you'll have read enough of my hardware reviews to know that I stick with something until it's worn out or broken. So, despite my previous mouse only being eight months old, I didn't feel that it needed replacing. Still, I agreed to review the ROCCAT Kain 200 AIMO for a change of pace. And quickly forgot about my old mouse.

The Kain is a wireless mouse with a rechargeable battery boasting up to 50 hours of life. It comes in a box with a quick installation guide, a charging cable, a wireless dongle and a USB-to-micro-USB dongle. I think the idea is to plug the wireless dongle into the USB dongle, then connect it to your computer with the micro-USB cable - and swap the Kain with the USB dongle when your mouse needs a recharge. However, I just plugged in the wireless dongle and kept the rest aside for when I do need to charge it.

The build quality of the Kain is fantastic, with the unit feeling nice and solid in your hand. The buttons are responsive and not too loud - with the usual left, right, and two side buttons. There's also a DPI button behind the scroll wheel, in case you need the mouse to move at a different speed in a snap. The scroll wheel feels a little stiffer than my previous mouse, but it's by no means stiff. I think the old mouse scroll was too loose.

My only issue is where the micro-USB plugs in, underneath the body of the mouse. Since there's no way to cover the hole when not in use, I can imagine it will become full of dust over time, depending on the material of your mouse mat. For reference, I'm using a ROCCAT Kanga mouse pad, so I imagine the exact environment it was designed for - but after a few days I'm already wiping dust off of the area around the micro-USB port.

Also on the underside of the Kain, there is a button to sync the mouse with the wireless dongle - I have not had to use it as yet. There is also a slider to turn the mouse on and off. If you forget to turn it off, the mouse will go into standby mode after a short while. It's 10-15 minutes, I haven't actually timed it, but it's never gone to sleep unless I've left it alone for a period of time.

Being a ROCCAT product, it's compatible with the Swarm app, which keeps it up to date - and lets you control the lights. Obviously, I made it pulse in a "breathing" configuration with two tones of purple, because 3rd Street represent.

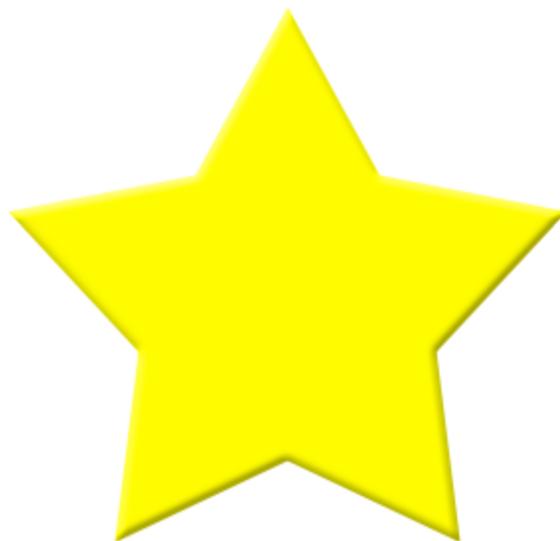
The Kain 200 is a great mouse, feeling very nicely put together and responsive. I would have liked some way of knowing when the battery is getting low so I could plug it in - it just turns off - but other than that and the expected upcoming dust



issue, I recommend it. If you're in the market for a new mouse and it fits your price range, go for it!



**RRP: £89.99
/ \$99.99**





LOGITECH G900 CHAOS SPECTRUM

Truth be told, aside from a controller, I could never see myself using a wireless keyboard or more to the point, a wireless mouse for PC. Wired devices have always been my choice for PC gaming. The reason had always been that I've never trusted them. The battery could die out, the signal could get interfered or drop out, or something similar to that effect.

They are concerns that I need not be left with a headache about. Now, though times have changed. I am now, a believer. Enter the Logitech G900 Chaos Spectrum. Logitech's flagship wireless gaming mouse and man, what a world of difference it has been.

Arriving in Logitech's fanciest packaging, upon removing the outer box and lifting the lid, staring back at me was the G900 mouse itself. Below contained a micro-USB cable, USB extender adaptor and the all important wireless dongle. Also included is additional plates for mouse buttons and covers, but we'll talk more about those shortly.

The G900 is an ambidextrous mouse, so it is incredibly comfortable in its symmetrical design, which is a surprised me being so used to predominantly right-handed mice. It's also lightweight, weighing 107 grams. It

doesn't support or include additional weights -- which I know, is a deal breaker for some. Fortunately, its lightness doesn't make it feel cheap. It has a premium finish, with a smooth top body and subtle grip indentations for your thumb and fingers on either side.

Besides your left and right click, you've got a scroll wheel which can be unlocked for that infinite scroll wheel action and is your middle mouse click, two DPI buttons allowing you toggle back and forth on the fly, and four additional buttons on either side of the mouse.

With the latter, what's interesting about this design is the customisation. Choosing to either utilise the four buttons either side or keep to two. You can then, using the included covers you can keep your device sleek by covering the unused buttons. Not only that, but everything from the buttons, battery life, DPI, and RGB lighting can be customised, monitored, and adjusted within Logitech's gaming software.

The quality really does show through the use. Both the main left and right buttons have a crisp clean click to them, and every click was precise without any delay or lack of responsiveness. I soon discovered that these two buttons contain mechanical pivots,





similarly to mechanical switches on keyboards. Which is not only crazy but impressive. Goes to show, they're not just keyboards anymore.

As for performance, this is what impressed me the most and elevated all my concerns over wireless. With a 2.4Ghz connection, the connection was perfect, with no interference from any of my devices, there is some technical wizardry here from Logitech and it shows. Within the belly of the beast contains the PMW3366 sensor and a built-in and a non-removable 720 mAh battery. The battery life Logitech promises 32-hours of continuous use without the RGB light, or 24-hours with it enabled.

The numbers aren't always exact, but after continuous use, I need not worry about keeping the mouse charged. Even when plugged in, the included micro-USB cable is moulded to fit perfectly to the mouse further streamlining the mouse when wired. The sensor is state-of-art and is regarded as being one of the best on the market, whether it be a wireless or wired mouse, and its reputation holds true. Supporting from 200-

12,000 DPI, you'll be getting an incredibly smooth and accurate experience. And during my time using the mouse encountered no lag, loss of connection and perfect response, regardless if I played wirelessly or wired.

Now for the price: I got lucky on this find, happening to find a seller online offering it for £55. For those interested may not be as lucky, but at a full price of £100, it is pretty steep for a mouse, but personally, you can't go wrong. Choosing the right gaming mouse is tough, but in my honest opinion, the Logitech G900 Chaos Spectrum stands above all others and can be not only considered the best wireless gaming mouse on the market but also the best-wired mouse too.



**RRP: £119.00
/ \$92.89**





LOGITECH G PRO WIRELESS

Across my twenty-or-so years of playing games of various forms I've used a fair few different mice. Ranging from ones with a plethora of extra buttons, to standard simple ones that didn't even have side buttons for going to the previous page in your browser.

However, across that span of history, I only ever had one which was wireless. And that put me off wireless mice for gaming as it introduced a weird delay between the movement of the mouse and the cursor on screen, small enough that it was fine for desktop work, big enough that it was a pain for gaming. Though it did give me an appreciation for heavier mice, as having the batteries added quite some heft, which I liked.

How will the Logitech G PRO Wireless fair then, coming up against a stalwart supporter of wired devices with all of the weights added?

First off, let's talk about what's in the box. There's the mouse itself, with a small wireless dongle. A micro USB cable for charging the mouse, some replacement side-buttons so you can switch between left and right-handed setup and the usage instructions. For all of its portability, like having a removable base plate on the mouse that can be used to store the dongle when it's in transport, the omission of some kind of carry bag for it to ensure it doesn't get scuffed up with

your other bits and bobs in your bag just feels like a bit of a missed opportunity. Especially for a mouse at this price point. But we're not here to talk about what's not in the box.

The Logitech G PRO Wireless, when you first pick it out of the box, almost comes across feeling cheap mostly due to its ultra-light weight. Coming in at only 80 grams, it feels not too dissimilar to the kind of mice you used to be able to pick up for a few quid at the local computer fair. However, when you start taking into account what's inside the mouse - from a technical standpoint - then that 80 gram figure really becomes even more impressive. With their top notch sensor in there, the HERO 16K not only tracks well, but also uses much less power to do so than its predecessors. Because of that, Logitech was able to fit the G PRO Wireless with a Lithium Polymer battery, instead of requiring more weighty rechargeables to further keep the weight down. From a full charge, even with the lighting going I've been able to use it for nearly two weeks of office desktop usage, without even so much as a blip that the battery was getting low.

Charging is a cinch, just pop the supplied micro USB cable in the front of the mouse, and then hook it up to a power supply. When connected via USB to a computer, it uses that for a data connection. So if you're really worried that





the wireless connection might let you down, you have a backup option available. You can also use your own micro USB cable, despite the one in the box looking like it has come from the Bat Cave. The design of the included cable just adds some additional support to the wire so it doesn't move about in use.

And for the wireless aspect, well, for all of my concerns about the technology, the G PRO Wireless might have just assuaged those fears. In multiple rounds of Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, I was just as competitive as if I were using a wired device. It's hard to even tell you're using a wireless mouse at times, as there seems to be no delay at all introduced by the technology. I also partook in some World Of Warcraft where accurate clicking can be the make or break of some of the tougher content, but the G PRO

Wireless held up to that with aplomb. The only real difference for me here is that some of the aspects I'd normally use with additional mouse buttons became difficult to hit, having the additional buttons on the outside of the mouse leading them to need the ring or pinky finger to hit, rather than the index or thumb as I've become accustomed to.

Ultimately, between the difficulty to hit and the amount of accidental actuation I'd racked up on the outside buttons, I reverted back to the setup as it came out of the box. But having those options available means that this is a truly ambidextrous mouse. It's shaped symmetrically, so pop the left hand buttons off and add the right ones, and you've got a mouse that's perfect for southpaws, too.

**RRP: £129.99
/ \$N/A**





LOGITECH G502 LIGHTSPEED WITH POWERPLAY

A few years ago, I would never have even contemplated a wireless mouse. Not because I'm some CS:GO ultra-competitive world champion, but simply because I'm lazy. I don't want to have to think about charging my mouse half way through a game, or deal with irritating wireless disconnections. My first mouse was a Logitech MX518, a mouse which has developed somewhat of a cult following, leading to its re-introduction in 2019. My original developed the dreaded double click issue, which plagued these models until they were discontinued in 2011.

After the distressing time of laying this mouse to rest, I opted for the Logitech G502 Proteus Core, equipped with full RGB lighting, of course. Owning that mouse is the precise reason why I have now upgraded to the G502 Lightspeed, alongside the Logitech G PowerPlay wireless charging mouse pad. A perfect combination. It even weighs less than its wired equivalent, coming in at 114g, unless you opt to add in more weights to the underside for a heavier feel.

Firstly, the mouse itself. The matte black finish, angled shapes and RGB lighting is all of course borrowed from the wired G502. But that's all that is similar between the two; internally, Logitech has completely redesigned the mouse,

upgrading the sensor to the HERO 16K, meaning you can now tune the sensitivity between 100 – 16,000 DPI. As well as this, Logitech claims that there is just 1ms of wireless delay, coupled with a polling rate sitting at 1000 Hz.

That's enough of this stat attack though, because you should already know that this is a high-end mouse, with high-end specs, along with a high-end price. Unfortunately, it's right handed only (unless you're left handed and enjoy being super uncomfortable), and it keeps the same rubberised grips at the edge, as well as the thumb rest from the previous wired iteration. In all, it's a very comfortable mouse, and one that I could easily use for multiple hours without issue. That said, for general office work, I do prefer the larger MX Master mouse. I have pretty large hands, so the taller body makes it more comfortable for me when in use over an entire day. It's definitely not a gaming mouse, though. It lacks RGB LED's, so I wouldn't dream of playing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare with it.

11 programmable buttons make up the exterior, all within easy access down the left side with one below the scroll wheel. You can assign actions to these buttons in the Logitech G Hub software (more on that later), which is perfect for





MMOs. The DPI button closest to the thumb rest makes it easy to take precise aim when you're going for a difficult sniper shot, as an example. The scroll wheel feels tighter than the G502 Proteus Spectrum too, which is a good thing. It also retains the ability to click both left and right, although personally I don't use them. The button directly underneath allows you to easily

switch between notched and smooth scrolling.

Remember when I mentioned earlier about running out of charge when in-game? Well, the great thing about this mouse is that with the addition of the (deep breath) Logitech G PowerPlay wireless charging mat, you'll never need to plug it in again! With the addition of a little wireless





MICE

receiver puck to the underside of the mouse, Logitech's clever mouse pad will automatically charge your mouse wirelessly as you're using it, but not so as it'll keep it perpetually at 100% to ruin the battery. It'll let it discharge to a certain level before charging it up again, to preserve the batteries life. Without this mouse pad, Logitech claims that the battery will last around 60 hours on a single full charge, which is still really good.

The addition of the mouse pad also means that you only need to consume a single USB port. As the mouse doesn't use Bluetooth, rather Logitech's "LIGHTSPEED Wireless" technology, the USB dongle that is packaged with the mouse can be discarded in favour of the receiver built into the mouse mat itself. You can also choose a hard shell mat, or swap it out in favour of soft fabric.

The worst part of the entire experience is definitely the Logitech G Hub software. Myself and many others have found it to be quite buggy, at first on my own PC it would not pick up my mouse at all. After reinstalling, it did, but wouldn't let me change the LED colours. Removed once more, reinstalled, then I could do all I needed to. But even since then there's been occasions where I couldn't go in and look at details without it completely freezing on me. For most though, once you've setup your profiles and your RGB colours as you want, going into the app will likely be an infrequent experience.

I've been exceedingly happy with this combination since I bought them, so I can heartily recommend them to

anyone looking for a new mouse and mouse mat. The PowerPlay wireless mat isn't essential, but it's a great combination if you don't want to worry about charging, ever. If anything is going to put you off, it'll probably be the price, but if you hang tight and look out for offers, the mouse very often drops to the £70-£80 mark.



**RRP: £239.98
/ \$269.98**



CHRISTMAS ALCOHOL PAIRINGS: OPEN WORLD GAMES

It's almost Christmas once again, so what better way to spend it than with a nice drink and your favourite games? But, have you ever thought about marrying the two more than ever before, to choose the ultimate beverage to accompany your playtime? Read on, and in this article we'll look at drinks to go with this year's most popular sprawling open world games.

Red Dead Redemption 2

The sprawling open world of Red Dead Redemption 2 is possibly one of the greatest ever, which I said in my review. It's slow, methodical, and perhaps too realistic in some places, but it's an enjoyable universe to lose yourself in over Christmas.

Leave the beer in the fridge for this one, and join the cowboys with their good old fashioned whiskey. If you have some moonshine brewing in your bath, that could work too, but I'd rather stick to some Kentucky bourbon. There's a few quality choices to choose from that are available in your local supermarket, even Amazon has a decent selection. Buffalo Trace is a personal favourite, but you can't go far wrong with Four Roses either, particularly their small batch and private selection offerings. You have to drink it neat, though. No ice, no watering down. It'll put some hairs on your chest – both men and women.

The whiskey that was actually available in the Wild West was a lot different from what he can buy today, mind. Tobacco juice was a popular ingredient, and in some, gunpowder. I wouldn't recommend trying to produce this concoction at home, though; I don't want to be cited as the reason you've blown your brand new kitchen up.

Marvel's Spider-Man

This is a tough one because Spider-Man tends to refrain from drinking. After all, pissed whilst taking down The Green Goblin isn't going to go well. He's not exactly Deadpool.

After a bit of digging (read: furious Googling), I found that there is actually an issue where Peter Parker gets a bit tipsy. Web of Spider-Man #38, 1988. Peter Parker attends a party and gets drunk on punch, and then runs off to fight the Hobgoblin, almost injuring some innocent civilians in the process. So I'm taking that and running with it.

A decent fruit punch doesn't take a lot of effort to make, and is fairly cheap too. The quick and easy way is to buy a few bottles of fruit juice from the supermarket – orange, pineapple, and other exotic fruits always go well together – along with a few strawberries chucked in and some orange or tangerine slices. As for alcohol, you could lump for vodka, or get some spiced rum to spice





things up a bit. Make sure you're liberal with it too, unless you're letting your kids sample some. But hey, it's Christmas, don't be a scrooge.

Assassin's Creed Odyssey

Do you know what the most popular drink was in ancient Greece? How all those great thinkers got their ideas?

Wine! Yes, glorified grape juice is the source of much of today's intelligence. Mead was also popular, which is slightly different – this is fermented honey, usually with other added flavourings. But for that true old timey feeling, get out a decent bottle of wine and

put away a couple of bottles as you fight in the battle between Athens and Sparta.

I have to be honest though and admit that exactly which wine you should be choosing is lost on me. Don't they all taste the same? Regardless, red wine is definitely what you should be aiming for (I do know that there are different colours, obviously...), and to make it truly in line with our Greek friends, get a period Kylix or Kantharos. Glasses are soooo 14th Century.

Remember, GameOn only endorses responsible drinking. Be safe, have fun, and look after each other.





TRUST GXT 830 RW AVONN GAMING

The Trust brand is well known for producing low cost budget accessories and the Trust GXT 830 RW Avonn Gaming Keyboard (which is a mouthful) is a cheap and cheerful gaming keyboard. As such, it's a relatively straightforward membrane design rather than using mechanical switches. That being said, it does have a nice solid response with a short travel distance that feels nice to type with.

The design has that slightly futuristic angular design popular with gaming peripheral manufacturers and it houses a full-size layout complete with multimedia and extra functions mapped onto the function keys,

which are accessed via an "FN" button that has been fit in next to the right AltGr key.

This key is also used to enable "Gaming Mode" which just means that the Windows key is disabled so you can't accidentally pop yourself out of a fullscreen game or accidentally open the start menu. Pressing "FN" and the Windows key toggles this but there is no LED or other indicator to let you know it's on.

Alongside "Gaming Mode" the main advertised feature is the anti-ghosting support, which allows up to six buttons to be pressed without losing the input. This works as advertised and

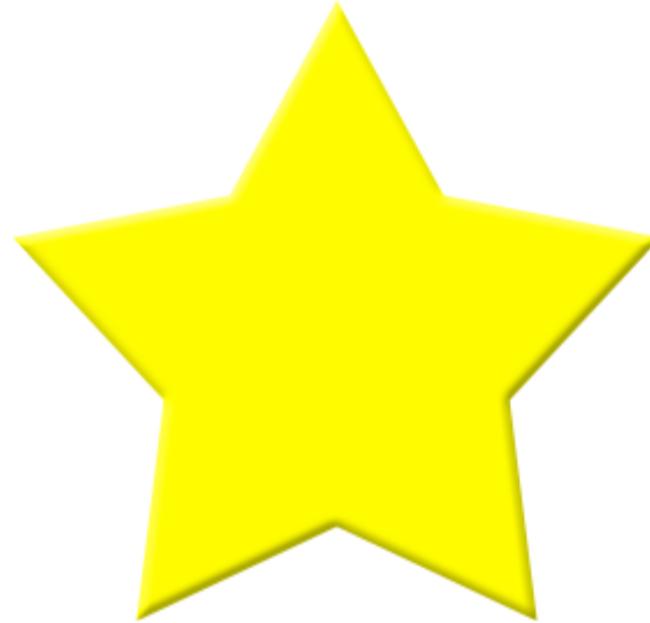




I had no issues combining the important keys around the WASD cluster whilst getting murdered in Fortnite and as I struggled against demonic hordes in DOOM (2016).

All in all the GXT 830 RW Avonn Gaming Keyboard does exactly what you'd expect for a budget gaming keyboard. It won't win any awards but it works as advertised and feels fine to use.

As a budget keyboard it doesn't house USB ports and the plastic doesn't really have a premium feel to it, because of that it is also pretty lightweight, coming in at just shy of 700g. The rainbow illumination is fixed and can't be toggled to a single colour so if you don't like the rainbow effect you are out of luck. It can be set to phase in and out as well as to be toggled off completely and it can also be set to three levels of brightness.



**RRP: £29.99
/ \$N/A**

For what it's worth, the illumination is visible quite clearly around all key edges and does a good job of leaking through the lettering on the keys. It's definitely an effect you either love or hate however.





TRUST GXT 856 TORAC GAMING

Regular readers will likely already know that I'm a sucker for brightly coloured things. Even my unnecessarily oversized mouse mat and desk fan have RGB in them. It's like Christmas all year round in my household, except there's no jolly fat man with a beard. I mean, I am a fat man with a beard but I'm actually quite grumpy. The important takeaway is that I really like RGB, and this keyboard from Trust is a brilliant example of bright shiny lights on a budget.

It used to be that if you wanted a keyboard that was optimised for gaming and also looked nice, you'd pay a premium. With advances in technology and LED lighting getting cheaper all

the time, we're now starting to see some nice designs come to the budget side of the market too, and that is what Trust is going for with the GXT 856 Torac. Retailing at £34.99, it's not the cheapest keyboard money can buy, but it's certainly cheaper than most gaming keyboards.

For your money, you get an anti-ghosting feature that allows for up to eight keypresses, less than you'd get with a more comprehensive piece of hardware, but it's enough for most people. It isn't mechanical, but at this price that is to be expected. The keys have a nice amount of travel to them, although they are a little on the soft side for my liking. This is something that's very much down to



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personal preference of course, so if you prefer a less clicky keyboard then it'll probably be right up your alley. My partner, who prefers her input devices to be quiet, found it to be perfect for her.

The lighting isn't fully customisable, and remains in a graduated rainbow pattern at all times. You can adjust to one of three brightness levels, and also set it to a "breathing" pattern as well. You can also turn them off if required. There are no macro keys and no dedicated multimedia keys, but there's an "Fn" button that you can use to amend the functions of the F1-F12 keys into media and volume controls or open common applications like calculator or your email client. There's also a "gaming mode" button that disables the Windows key so you don't accidentally press it and exit your game.

One thing that is immediately obvious with the GTX 856 is that it's a particularly well-

built piece of hardware. Whilst the base of the keyboard is plastic, there's a sturdy aluminium top plate that, like most gaming keyboards, extends probably a fair bit further out than it needs to in order to look more "gaming-like". It does give a premium feel, although the visible screws on the outside are an odd choice that will probably gain polarising views. I quite liked them as they give a kind of industrial look.

I've been using this as a daily driver for a week now and it's comfortable for both gaming and typing. My usual keyboard is a much more expensive mechanical affair and it's safe to say that I will be returning to that, but to compare the two would be unfair. If you're on a budget, this is a solid choice. There aren't too many bells and whistles, but it feels well built, it's comfortable and (in my opinion at least) it looks very nice.

**RRP: £34.99
/ \$N/A**









ROCCAT HORDE AIMO

With gaming capabilities and requirements constantly evolving and advancing, tech companies are forced to adapt and design better hardware to stay on top of the competition, and German manufacturer ROCCAT have stepped up with the Horde AIMO, sporting everything and more that you could look for in a keyboard.

Starting with the basics, the keyboard itself was very simple to set up - simply plug it in and for the most part, it does everything on its own. The keyboard is very comfortable to use, with a detachable palm rest for extra convenience. The keys just feel right, even if my muscle memory meant that for the first week or so, I would occasionally miss keys when pressed reflexively under pressure.

One of my favourite features of the keyboard is the tuning wheel. Whilst most keyboard wheels are stuck to changing the volume, the wheel on the Horde AIMO offers precise control over multiple functions besides volume, ranging from keyboard brightness, microphone volume, and even a task switcher, that allows you to cycle through all open applications, which is useful when you're working with multiple programs.

Keyboards are either membrane or mechanical. Membrane keyboards are those cheap ones with the rubber that get all sorts of crap inside them and stop working. Mechanical keyboards are all the rage nowadays, especially in the gaming community. The annoying loud clicking they generate is made up for in the amazing responsiveness of the keys, and the tears of





everyone that you ever go on voice-activated comms with. But for some, the obnoxious sound is enough to put them off ever getting one, which is where ROCCAT have come in to save the day.

Coining the term 'Membranical', the Horde AIMO manages to combine the technology to give you the soft, quiet touch of a membrane keyboard, with the responsiveness and longevity of a mechanical. Sporting what is being described by many as the best membrane-based keyboard on the market, ROCCAT have certainly outdone themselves with the creation. ROCCAT have kept many details regarding the membranical design close to their chest, but have stated the keys have a 'fast midway travel actuation point', achieving an actuation speed of 7.8ms, when compared to the standard membrane keyboard of 9.0ms actuation speed.

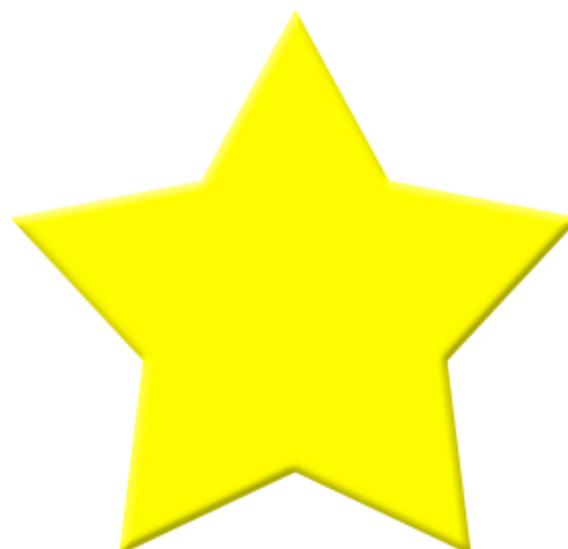
As with any gaming keyboard, macros are generally included as a must-have feature.

The keyboard has five programmable macro keys. The keys can be easily assigned by use of the ROCCAT Swarm software, which can also be used to further customise things like key bindings and illumination. I was a bit worried

about how responsive they'd be due to being membrane and macros often being needed on the moment they're pressed, but ROCCAT tackled this worry in an amusing yet practical manner: by sinking the macro keys deeper into the keyboard so they have less distance to go before registering as a press. To test the macro keys themselves, I made one for the 'struggle' function for when you're on the hook in Dead By Daylight that repeatedly 'pressed' the spacebar with a delay of 0.05 seconds and continued for as long as it was held down. The longest amount of time you can 'struggle' for before dying is 44 seconds, and the macro managed to hit this almost every time (with the almost being down to human error of pressing too early/late).

Overall, ROCCAT's latest keyboard is definitely one that any gamer is going to want to get their hands on. With a current pricing of £89.99 on their website at time of writing, it's certainly worth the investment if you put a lot of time into gaming, whether casual or competitive. Simple to set up, easy to use and effective at what it sets out to do, there's not much that could be done to improve the Horde AIMO.

**RRP: £58.74
/ \$149.99**





SPEEDLINK ULTOR MECHANICAL

Speedlink have been around for sometime: they're big on making console and PC peripherals from headsets, controllers and keyboards. So it comes to no surprise that they would continue their foray into the market and create something much more premium for all the PC gamers out there. That's why Speedlink have developed not one but two mechanical keyboards, and I've had the pleasure of using their top-model: the Ultor.

As you do with the arrival of any keyboard I took it out of the box. The Ultor's packaging isn't anything special, It isn't sleek or minimalistic coming in a black box with red lining across covered in logos showing its features as well as a very handy logo signifying it being a British layout keyboard. Once the Ultor was out of the box all that was left were quickstart and info papers. But we're not here to talk about the included booklets, it's all about the keyboard.

Popular among other manufacturers and of course gamers, the Ultor uses Red mechanical switches. The ones used here are not Cherry MX but instead are Kaihua Kailh, which aren't as favoured as the Cherry's, but are still of a high quality and offer excellent feedback.

Now for the keyboard itself. The Ultor is a compact keyboard, that's not to say it's got smaller keys absolutely not, it means it lacks a numpad. I'm personally not a fan of this as I prefer a numpad, but as I will explain, there is good intention for why Speedlink decided not to have one. For you see the Ultor's body is designed for portability with very little compromise. It's a keyboard for the gamer and many other manufacturers do the same as a player would rarely use the numpad in normal gaming. As for the design, the Ultor is very nice, with a frameless design and an entirely red aluminium top. When I first saw the press images I was rather put off by the entirely red frame, but as soon as I plugged it in and the glow the blue backlight of the keys came on I was surprised how pleasing it looked. And while it may not feature of any fancy RGB colours as seen on other keyboards, the blue glow was pleasant enough.

Using the keyboard took some getting used to, I love mechanical keyboards, but I'm used to a





fully sized keyboard including a numpad. So this certainly took some time for my hands to adjust, but surprisingly after a short while and getting my hands positioned the typing experiencing was very comfortable and the feedback from mechanical keys was very responsive and smooth - this backed by the anti-ghosting and up to 1,000hz poll rate.

All the keys glow blue, except for W,A,S,D, the arrow keys and the dedicated Game (Print Screen) key, which glow white. Beside these, there are a number of function keys included. With the right Windows key replaced, you can use this to access a number of media controllers including: volume, next/previous track and mute. One real nice feature is the inclusion of macros - although you'll first need to install the Speedlink drivers to use. Once installed, you'll be able to create up to six macros as well

as five profiles (switchable using the F keys) for said macros. It wasn't something I took an advantage of, but certainly for someone who enjoy their MMO's will be able to make full use.

I was very surprised how much I've enjoyed using this keyboard and I will continue to do so. Although during my time, it didn't make me want to ditch my other mechanical keyboard, which is full-sized and has dedicated media controls. What I will say is the Speedlink Ultor is a perfect travel / LAN gaming keyboard. Due to it's compact size, macro support and durable build it will make an excellent complement to anyone's portable rig. Even if that's not your thing and you're someone looking for a unique keyboard for their gaming rig at home and your favourite colour is red, then definitely check this one out.



**RRP: £94.99
/ \$59.99**





ROCCAT VULCAN 121 AIMO

The ROCCAT VULCAN 121 AIMO keyboard is a pretty number, when I was shown the picture I just had to have it. As my last one was the HyperX keyboard that I reviewed three years ago, I thought it was time to get something new.

Inside the box it had the keyboard with the cable attached, palm rest, the quick-installation guide, disposal information and some stickers. As I unplugged my HyperX I took the ROCCAT VULCAN 121 AIMO keyboard out of the box and I sized them up against each other. The VULCAN is slightly bigger than my previous one, so I thought it might take up more room on my small desk, turns out it fit nicely once it was plugged in.

I loaded up my PC and went straight to the ROCCAT site to download a program called ROCCAT Swarm, that lets you customise the keyboard. As this was the first time I ever came across the program, I checked it out. At the bottom there are Gamer Profiles, so I went to Micro Manager and it has profiles already added for games like Borderlands 2, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege, Fortnite and many others. Although I don't use a keyboard for playing games as my hands are too

small to do many things on it, so I use a controller, so I didn't use any of the profiles.

As I was looking through the program and learning to understand it, I looked through all the options under Key Illumination and noticed you can change the patterns from Wave, Snake, Ripple FX and a few more. Choosing Snake, Ripple FX or any other pattern you can change the colours to your desire, but on Wave it is rainbow colours only. Once you have chosen your pattern you can choose how fast or slow you would like the colours to run through your keys as well as how bright you would like it. I decided to go for Wave as it lit up my keyboard in rainbow colours, and I turned the brightness up all the way.

Since the palm rest is magnetic, it really helps to





clear up some space. I like to do crafty bits now and then, so it's a really handy feature, as it means I can just take it off whenever I want, instead of taking the entire keyboard off of my desk.

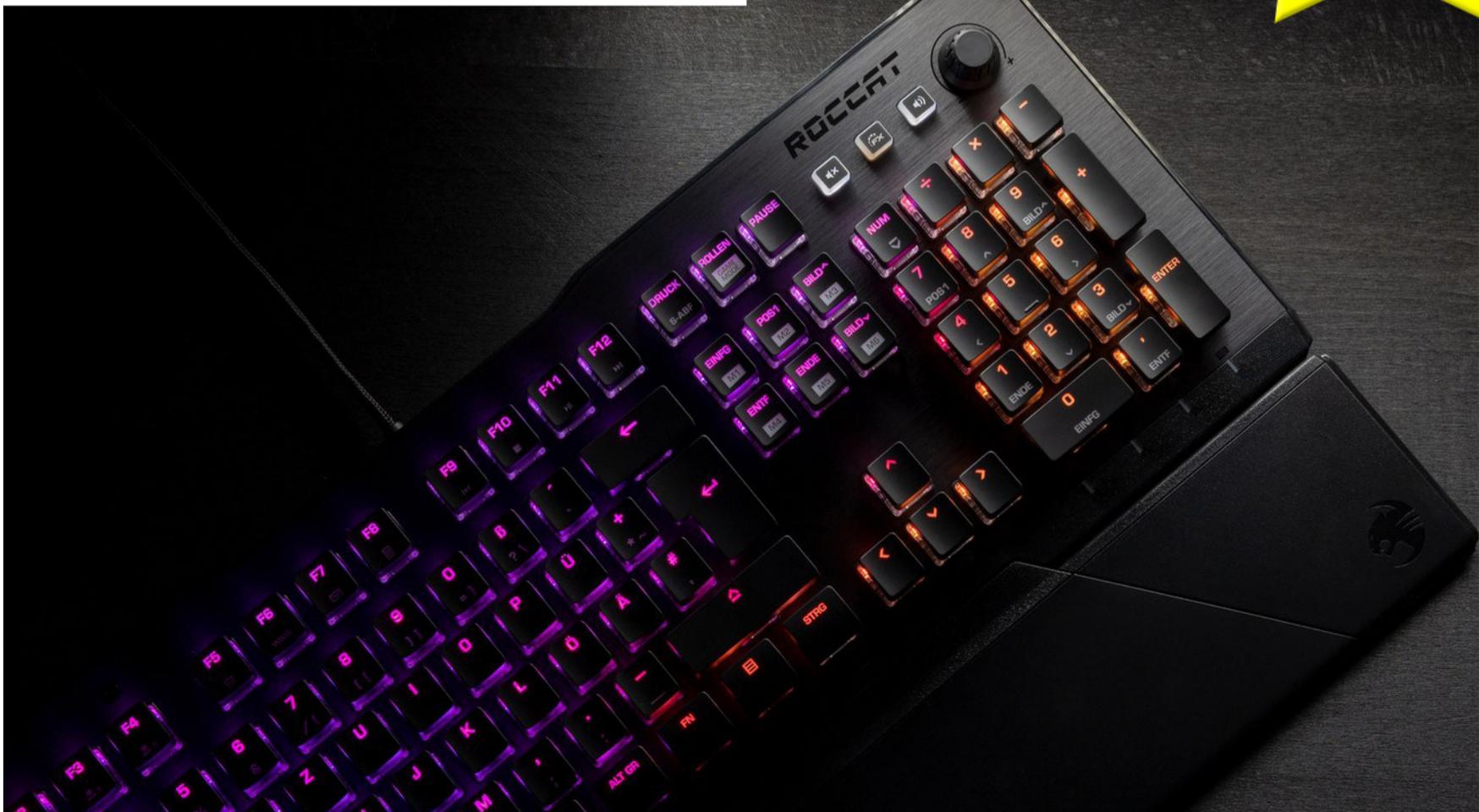
When it started to get dark, my two youngest children pointed out that my keyboard made a rainbow pattern on the ceiling and wall nearby. I found that even with the brightness down you can still see the pattern, so if you like to light up your room without an actual light, this keyboard is a must-have.

When playing games I like to have easy access to the volume, I do have a thing that

can turn the volume up and down on my headset, but I do like that the VULCAN has a little dial to turn the volume up and down. I have used this a lot since having the keyboard and rarely touch the one on my headset.

My VULCAN doesn't seem to be a UK keyboard so some of the symbols are not the same as a UK keyboard. I have lost myself many times in trying to work out what the symbols are and how to get them to show up in Google Docs. Your mileage may vary, though.

RRP: £174.64 / \$159.99



CHRISTMAS ALCOHOL PAIRINGS: PLATFORMERS

It's almost Christmas once again, so what better way to spend it than with a nice drink and your favourite games? But, have you ever thought about marrying the two more than ever before, to choose the ultimate beverage to accompany your playtime? Read on, and in this article we'll look at drinks to enjoy responsibly with this year's most popular platform games.

Tanglewood

Tanglewood is an old-school game, so it deserves a real old-school drink. None of these new-fangled micro brewery gubbins or fizzy pop masquerading as cider. No, a game needs something warm and brown with little twigs floating in it. To wit: it needs a real ale.

There are a few options here, and one that springs to mind immediately is Tanglewood Branch IPA. This didn't make the cut however due to the aforementioned ruling out of microbreweries, and also the fact that it ceased production a few years ago. The similarly named Tangle Foot brewery do a few lovely ales that are worth considering too, including Fursty Ferret, a nice malty number, and The Legendary Tangle Foot, which is a lovely refreshing golden ale.

game, is Fuller's Red Fox. This deep ruby ale is a deep and mellow sipping ale which works well with the more considered approach to platforming that Tanglewood provides.

Unravel 2

This cute-as-a-button sequel from EA adds multiplayer into the mix. With a game that is best played with a friend, it seemed like a good idea to find a drink best enjoyed with a friend. And what better drink to enjoy with someone else than a cocktail.

As much as I try to make out that I'm a manly man, I'm really not, so from time to time I do like to sip something with a lurid colour and more sugar than Kim Tate and Jeremy Lyle put together. The perfect cocktail to go with this title would have to incorporate the colours of our two woolen heroes. If you remember back to primary school you'll know that red and blue combine into purple, so what better than a purple people eater. This Grenadine-based cocktail incorporates Blue Curacao and Cranberry juice for a sweet but dry hit. If that's not your jam though, perhaps a Purple Haze; a classic mix of Vodka, Chambord and Sprite.



The winner for me though, with its fruity autumnal notes that complement the aesthetics of the



Sonic Mania Plus

Sonic Mania's success was a surprise to literally nobody except Sega. Fans of the series had been crying out for a classic 2D game like the 16-bit days and finally, thanks to a collaboration with Christian Whitehead, it came in 2017. Off the back of that, 2018 saw the breakout hit get a physical release with a bunch of new bells and whistles in the form of Sonic Mania Plus.

It would be easy to just say that Blue Curacao or WKD would be the way to go here, but we've already used colour for our inspiration earlier. Instead I'm taking my cue from the blistering speed that is Sonic's other trademark.

The obvious choice for drinks that people who gotta go fast love to consume is the classic Jägerbomb, made by dropping a shot of Jägermeister into a glass of energy drink (usually Red Bull). This gets you drunk quickly, and gives you energy, because everyone likes an energetic drunk.

There's an ever more potent alternative though which is less famous. Buckfast Tonic Wine, known to Glaswegian clubbers in need of a vitality boost as "Buckies", is an even more lethal mix. Made by the monks of Buckfast Abbey in Devonshire, you'd think this would be a pretty posh drink. It turns out though that this caffeine-fortified wine is just as popular amongst the riff-raff. In 2010, an investigation by the BBC found that the drink had been mentioned by name in an average of 3 crime reports a day in the Strathclyde area alone between 2006 and 2009. If you decide to engage in a tippie of this speedy intoxicant, do so in moderation and please don't break any laws. Except those of physics as you zoom through Sonic Mania Plus's loops, ramps and rolling hills.

**Remember, GameOn only endorses responsible drinking.
Be safe, have fun, and look after each other.**





VENOM PRO GAMER CASE FOR SWITCH LITE

Since I bought a Switch Lite I knew it would need some sort of protection from my four children. So when I got offered to review a Venom Pro Gamer Case I jumped at the chance. In the box you get the Pro Gamer Case and a screen protector. There were no instructions but it was easy to work out how to attach the case to the Switch Lite.

The Pro Gamer Case is a soft rubber on the outside and a hard plastic in the middle which has a compartment for you to store your Game Cards. At first I found it hard to slot them in, before I worked out you have to put the left side of the Game Card in first then it will fit easier. However, taking the Game Cards out I find to be hard.

My six year old daughter found it easy to open the compartment and take a Game Card out and put it back in. However, my 14 year old autistic son found it hard to open and insert a Game Card, though he found it much easier to take one out.

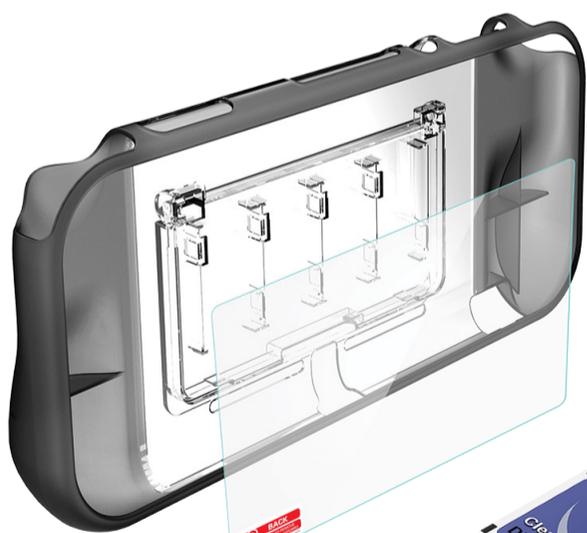
After only having the case a few days and hardly opening the back to retrieve a Game Card the flap has now on one side started to get loose. Also the lid/flap is scratched from putting it in my handbag so it is easy to scratch, because I don't even have keys in there.

The Game Card slot on the Switch Lite itself is hard to get to if you don't have nails while the Pro Gamer Case is attached. You have to lift up the rubber to access it, but if you need to get to the micro-SD card slot it has a little notch to make it easier.

I've found that the Case is more for making the Switch Lite easier to hold, rather than to protect your Switch Lite, as it doesn't protect the sticks/buttons. As I mentioned it comes with a screen protector, but the Case does leave a lot uncovered. However, it does help you grip a lot better than just the plain Switch Lite.

**RRP: £9.00
/ \$N/A**







MARVEL BATTLEWORLD: MYSTERY OF THE THANOSTONES

Funko, best known for the beloved POP! Vinyl models, has branched out into other areas in recent years, notably board games with Funkoverse. Well, the follow-up to that is a board game with a gacha mechanic - buy a pack of Thanostones and open them to discover which characters you now have!

Titled Marvel Battleworld: Mystery of the Thanostones, the gist is that Thanos has kidnapped everyone, sealed them in Thanostones and plonked them on Battleworld. Your task is to defeat the other players and hopefully Thanos himself!

The Mega Pack that I was sent came with 13 Battle Cards, an Attack Die, 13 Danger Tokens, a Danger Coin, four Heroes (plus cards) and two Thanostones. This is enough for two players, as for more players you'll need to buy some Battle Balls for additional Battle Cards and Heroes.

I'll try and explain the rules for Mystery of the Thanostones as best I can, but I read the instruction sheet five times and only think I get it. You start with two Heroes and seven Battle Cards. You roll the Attack Die and add that total to your Hero's power - if it's equal to or higher than the Battle Card, you hit. Otherwise, you miss.

Hitting means that the character advances on the card. Depending on which Battle Card you made them attack, it could take one, two or three hits to defeat it. Once defeated, flip it over.

Missing, however, means that you have to place a Danger Token on the card. If you miss three times, advancing the token each time, you flip the card over and put the token on top of it. Lose three cards like this and it's game over. It can be very easy to lose, actually, since after each turn you need to flip the Danger Coin - if it has the same symbol as the Battle Card you have to advance





the Danger Token again. Similarly, the dice has a Thanos symbol on, which is an automatic miss, though the star symbol is an automatic hit.

To win you have to defeat five Battle Cards, and Thanos is defeated. That's the game - defeat Zombie Boomerang, Hulk Eater Plant, Quack City Kingpin, Dark Elves and Maestro's Warship. Or five other Battle Cards, anyway.

So where do the titular Thanostones come into play? Why do you have these jagged orange cardboard things and cards in black pouches? There's a chance you may never find out.

I'm serious; if your seven random card pulls never pull a Thanostone Battle Card, you'll never get to crack open one of them. However, if you do win against a Thanostone Battle Card you can crack open a Thanostone! Just break it open and add the hero to your roster, and play with three instead of two. If you don't have any more Thanostones, you can just grab another random hero from your collection.

Which is where the game shows its Funko. There are 30 heroes in Series 1, and 60 Battle Cards, so this is clearly more of a collectible than a game. Especially since the game is designed to be easily played by a single player.

The Mystery of the Thanostones Heroes look pretty good, to say they are miniatures they're better detailed than some POP! Vinyls I've seen. The Mega Pack comes with stands that hold the Heroes and their Hero Cards, so you can display them. I just wish the cards felt a bit

more stable in the slots, as I fear a stiff wind might blow them off of my shelf. Also, given the size of the cards they take up quite a bit of shelf space to say the figures are only 4cm tall, so there's no real way to display them apart from in a line beside one another. Unless you have something for a line behind to stand on that's going to clear 8cm worth of pentagonal card.

If you're up for another collectible card game, but with figures, then you can't go wrong with Marvel Battleworld: Mystery of the Thanostones. What's more, there's a mini-series cartoon that ties into it - or the game ties into the cartoon? Maybe it's symbiotic, so if the game does well the cartoon will continue and visa-versa. It's Marvel, there has to be a symbiote somewhere.

RRP: from £10.94
/ from \$9.84





SNAKEBYTE GAMES:TOWER 5

Let's be honest, there are a large portion of gamers who are careless with their gadgets. Controllers casually tossed aside; under sofas, beds, in the path of desk chairs. Discs scattered about the room, some in cases, some in the wrong case, others stacked on top of the console with faint scratch marks appearing across the surface. Will they still play? Who knows, there's a copy of FIFA 15 there. Not played it for four years now. Don't want to move it.

If that rings any bells, snakebyte has produced a potential solution for you – so long as you are disciplined enough to actually use it – the GAMES:TOWER 5. This nifty plastic accessory allows four controllers to be placed upon hooks, of which there are two on each side. They don't only hold DualSense controllers, but I've tried with a DualShock 4 and the Series X | S controllers, which all fit perfectly.

The tower itself has space for 10 games to fit no matter the platform, with a drawer at the bottom which the promotional material shows the PS5 media remote residing in. In reality, you could put cables in there or anything like that. It's not that big though so you won't fit anything more substantial than that.

In fact, the whole tower isn't terribly large. It comes in at 20.5cm tall, and 30cm wide.

You could take the hooks off the side if you have no intent on using them, shaving off 5cm either side for a 20cm width instead.

Construction is easy enough with the basic steps listed on the side of the box. Though you do need to make sure that you take note of the little left and right letters marked on the plastic, or you'll end up putting it up back to front like I did, wondering why the games were going in backwards...at any rate, once that was corrected, everything just worked like it was supposed to.

The only thing I can criticise is the quality of the plastic is not great, but it holds everything that it's supposed to and doesn't topple over when you only put controllers on one side of the tower. In truth, once it has been constructed, you're never likely to notice that again. I'm also thankful that the logo



NEW PAGES



is kept in black at the top rather than some loud overly gamer aesthetic you often get with this kind of product. There's also a curious rectangular ridge at the top, perhaps there was going to be something to stand headphones on? I'm not sure.

bedrooms or perhaps even living rooms that would benefit from the organisation that the snakebyte GAMES:TOWER brings.

Could I recommend it? Yes, certainly, if you want something to quickly dump your controllers onto and stack your games nice and neatly. I'm sure there are plenty of messy

RRP: £19.99
/ N/A





SNAKEBYTE TWIN:CHARGE 5

The dawn of a new generation of consoles usually brings about a sudden realisation when you open the boxes to your new peripherals – oh, damn, that cable or charging unit I’ve been using for the past seven years doesn’t work anymore! Whatever will I do...

For PlayStation 5 owners out there with Sony’s brand spanking new DualSense controllers, snakebyte has the solution: the TWIN:CHARGE 5, allowing two controllers to sit atop its PS5-esque design, complete with fins matching the console itself. It comes with these side panels in white or black, so to match the console as closely as possible I would recommend the white. However, the black will probably blend into an entertainment unit a little more easily.

In the box is the unit itself along with a 1 metre USB type-C cable. It is a USB type-A end though, so you can use one of the rear type-A ports on the PS5 to keep the cabling a little more discreet. On the front of the unit there are two lights to indicate the charging progress of each controller – more on that later though. The rubber grip on the bottom of the charging block is also excellent at keeping it in place on flat surfaces; I tried shoving it and without quite a bit of force, it did not move. Simply placing and taking the controllers off won’t move it around annoyingly.

Which is a good thing, because one of the things I noticed instantly is the controllers can be a little finicky to get in. There are grooves for the controllers to sit on so they can charge through the COM-port at the bottom next to the headphone jack, however, to get the connection absolutely perfect can take a bit of jiggling. I just hope I don’t mark the plastic on the controllers in the process.

If you are charging two controllers simultaneously, charging time will obviously be longer than plugging each one singularly into the console, or simply sticking one on the unit. Sony says each controller takes roughly three hours for a complete charge, so when you have two attached, you will be looking at around six hours for both to complete – providing the source is 5V 1.5A anyway. I tried with a 5V 1A Apple USB iPhone charger, which does still work, but only appears to charge one controller at a time.

To be honest, I’m not sure why this charging station really needs the LEDs on the front at all. I left both controllers attached overnight to charge, and when leaving, I noticed one LED was blue and the other was orange, but both DualSense controllers were lighting up yellow to indicate they were filling up. And that’s the thing; the controllers already have a way of letting you know that they are charging, so these buggy LEDs should just go.



NEW PAGES

In all though, if you just want a neat and tidy charging station to match your brand new PS5, the snakebyte TWIN:CHARGE 5 will do the job admirably. There are some shortcomings there, but to be honest they are nit-picks; they go in, they charge, you play. Done.



**RRP: £19.99
/ \$N/A**





GIOTECK WX-4 WIRELESS SWITCH CONTROLLER

I've personally been pretty happy with my Switch Pro Controller, but at an RRP of £59, it's also a pricey gamepad, especially when compared to the PS4 and Xbox One. This is of course an opportunity for third party manufacturers to swoop in with cheaper alternatives, and in this case, Gioteck has kindly provided me with one of its latest controllers to try out.

The WX-4 controller is available in both wired and wireless ranges, with the former costing less but also with fewer features. For the purposes of this review, I was supplied with the wireless one, which is priced around £24.99. Note that this is compatible with not only Switch but also PC and PS3, though this is based purely on my experience with the Switch.

The WX-4 certainly looks the part with matte surfaces (except for the grips) and a traditional layout with regard to face buttons and non-symmetrical analogue sticks, much like the style of both the Xbox controller and the official Switch Pro Controller. The colour of the letters of the face buttons might make the WX-4 look a bit too much like an Xbox controller. Fortunately, the AB and XY buttons are still in the reverse order that Nintendo has always used. You'll also find the home and capture buttons

placed in the centre, which seem convenient. Compared to the Switch Pro Controller, where I often forget where those buttons are.

It's when you pick up the WX-4 that you notice that it feels a bit too light. While we generally prefer our electronics to feel lighter, a good controller also needs to feel weighty otherwise it just feels cheaply made. This extends to the feel of the buttons, specifically the sticks and d-pad. They make very audible clickity-clack noises, which again accentuates that cheap feel. Not quite a premium product then. That said, everything still works like it should, including the built-in rumble and motion/gyro controls. I also had to test the d-pad out with Tetris 99, and am happy to say it passed the test of not accidentally making me hard-drop any blocks.

Also of note are the triggers, which appear to be analogue even though the Switch by default doesn't use analogue triggers, though it should be useable on PS3 and PC, which do support that function. Nonetheless, as a controller intended for the Switch, it is a little annoying that the shoulder buttons are named L1/L2 and R1/R2, which are actually the naming conventions for the PlayStation's DualShock, rather than the Switch's L/ZL and R/ZR.





As for pairing the controller to your Switch, connection is made with a USB to micro-USB cable, which is included. Once paired, a blue light is displayed on the front of the controller, the number of lights indicating whether it's player 1-4. The downside is that you have to manually pair it with a cable each time, meaning you can't use it to turn on your docked Switch. Leave it idle for a few minutes and the controller also switches itself off so you'll need to reconnect it again. Nonetheless, if you're planning to go for an intense gaming session, you should be able to manage with a fully charged controller for up to 10 hours.

I don't see the WX-4 replacing my official Pro Controller anytime soon, but despite my niggles with it, it's a perfectly functional controller at a lower price, which still beats making someone play with the Joy-Cons in a grip.



**RRP: £24.99
/ \$N/A**





GULIKIT DETACHABLE BACK MOUNT POWER BANK 5000MAH FOR SWITCH LITE

As it was the school holidays here in the UK, as is our family tradition we planned a jaunt out to the beach. I decided that I needed to look into getting a power bank for my Switch Lite, as my daughter has one and I guessed she would be taking it with us so I purchased the Gulikit Detachable Back Mount Power Bank.

The back of the box shows how to attach the power bank to your Switch Lite. The box contained: a Power Bank, Back Mount Clip, Padding Plate and USB-C cable. Once I charged the power bank and attached the back mount clip I picked up my Switch Lite, and I ran it down to 26%.

The short USB-C cable is already attached to the power bank, and is the ideal length to keep plugged in while you play. With the power bank attached to the back of the Switch Lite, it does make it slightly heavier, but not too heavy. After 45 minutes my console was charged to 63% and just over two hours it was fully charged.

On the box it does say that the charge can last 4-8 hours. As it charged to 100% within two hours, then the charge of the power bank would probably last for a good two or three more times. On one side of the power bank

there are four little dots that show you how much life is left in the power bank itself.

What I did notice after using it is that the short cable doesn't sit flat against the power block the way it was when it first came out of the box. After time and use this could get a little worrying, because it will stick out if you keep it attached to the back of your Switch Lite and if you keep it in a bag you might catch the cable and pull it. However, at the moment it does sit somewhat close to the power bank as it should be.

If you are looking to keep your Switch Lite charged on the go, then the Gulikit Detachable Back Mount Power Bank is an ideal item to buy, just remember to keep it charged up after use.

**RRP: £27.99
/ \$N/A**







SNAKEBYTE DUAL CHARGE:BASE S

As it was the school holidays here in the UK, as is our family tradition we planned a jaunt out to the beach. I decided that I needed to look into getting a power bank for my Switch Lite, as my daughter has one and I guessed she would be taking it with us so I purchased the Gulikit Detachable Back Mount Power Bank.

The back of the box shows how to attach the power bank to your Switch Lite. The box contained: a Power Bank, Back Mount Clip, Padding Plate and USB-C cable. Once I charged the power bank and attached the back mount clip I picked up my Switch Lite, and I ran it down to 26%.

The short USB-C cable is already attached to the power bank, and is the ideal length to keep plugged in while you play. With the power bank attached to the back of the Switch Lite, it does make it slightly heavier, but not too heavy. After 45 minutes my console was charged to 63% and just over two hours it was fully charged.

On the box it does say that the charge can last 4-8 hours. As it charged to 100% within two hours, then the charge of the power bank would probably last for a good two or three more times. On one side of the power bank there are four little dots that show you how much life is left in the power bank itself.

What I did notice after using it is that the short cable doesn't sit flat against the power block the way it was when it first came out of the box. After time and use this could get a little worrying, because it will stick out if you keep it attached to the back of your Switch Lite and if you keep it in a bag you might catch the cable and pull it. However, at the moment it does sit somewhat close to the power bank as it should be.

If you are looking to keep your Switch Lite charged on the go, then the Gulikit Detachable Back Mount Power Bank is an ideal item to buy, just remember to keep it charged up after use.



NEW PAGES



Charging function for
Nintendo Pro Controller



Charging function for
two joy controllers

RRP: £29.99
/\$N/A



All-in-One
Organiser



1.2m type C cable &
type C adapter included





SNAKEBYTE TWIN:CHARGE SX

A charging station is a must-have piece of kit for any console. snakebyte has, of course, made one for the Xbox Series X|S. You know that, you're reading this review. Do note, the battery compartment on the new controllers is very slightly different, so previous battery packs & chargers will not work with them!

The TWIN:CHARGE SX comes in a box with a 2m long USB-C cable and two battery packs (also available separately). In an effort to cut down on plastic waste, the box has very little of it inside. Weirdly, however, the box is about 5cm too long, with a cardboard insert keeping the TWIN:CHARGE from touching the bottom. I wouldn't point it out, if not for how curious it is to have so much wasted space in a box labeled with text about reducing waste.

The design of the unit is made to look like the top of the Xbox Series X|S, with a pitted texture on parts of it. The two controller cradles have connectors for the battery packs to connect to charge. The cable is long enough so that you can pretty much plug it in anywhere, though I just rest it next to the Xbox Series X, plugged into the USB on the front.

Placing the controllers down can be a bit touchy, occasionally needing a bit of a jiggle to get them to sit properly. The light on the

front of the unit is also quite small and dull, so it's not always obvious if you're successful.

One worry I had is that the controller once got quite warm after charging. However, I've put that down to having the controller turned on the whole time it was on the TWIN:CHARGE SX, so that it could be used for scrolling menus & Netflix.

The battery packs last for a good few gaming sessions before needing to be charged, and charging doesn't take very long. Admittedly, I haven't timed it because I usually charge the controller overnight, but when I've popped it on for a quick boost it's certainly helped it last much longer.

The snakebyte TWIN:CHARGE SX is a decent piece of kit, though I do wish it was easier to ensure the controller was sitting correctly. It's well made, and since it comes with two battery packs it's perfect for if you have a second controller - or just want to ensure you always have a full battery ready.

**RRP: £29.99
/ \$N/A**





**2 batteries with
800 mAh each included**





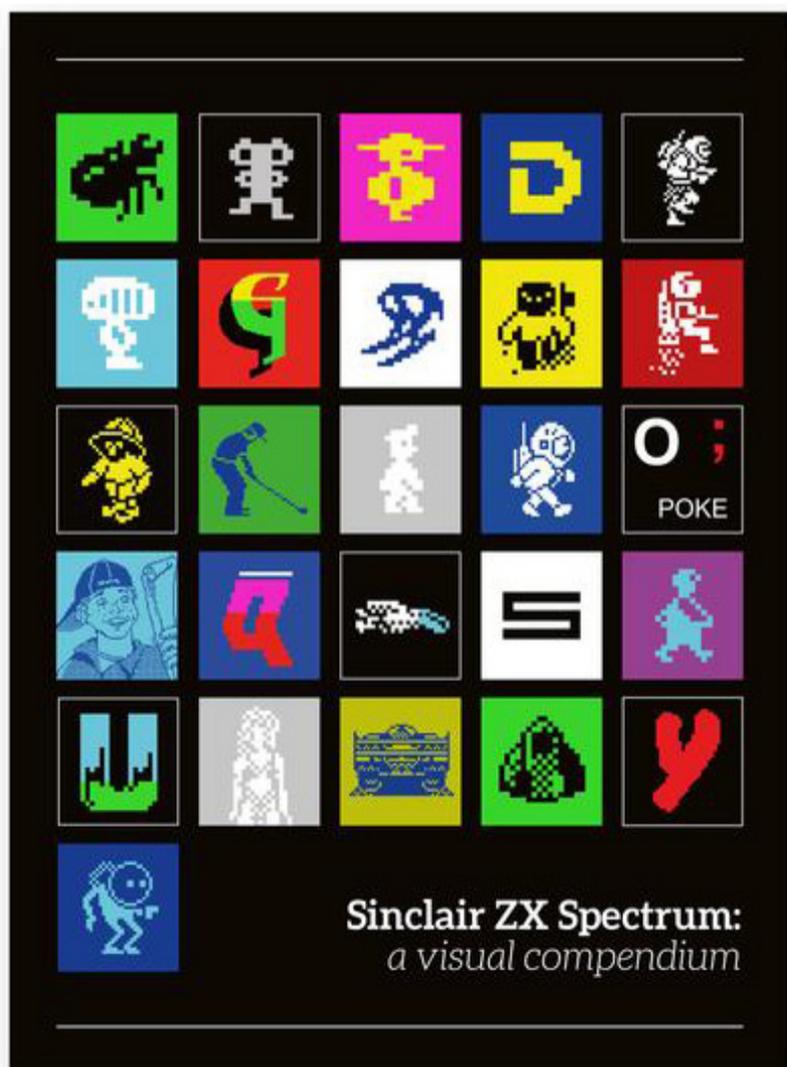
SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM: A VISUAL COMPENDIUM

The early 1980s were a unique time for computers and gaming and the ZX Spectrum had a massive hand in forming the fledgeling industry in its early years, at least in the UK and Europe. Bitmap Books' Sinclair ZX Spectrum: A Visual Compendium takes us back to those exciting days of colour clash in a celebration of the little black box.

The book takes you on a historical jaunt through the iconic systems life with full-page screenshots for each game covered along with a brief paragraph or two from a variety of people ranging from industry veterans, developers and artists who worked on or are connected to the game in some way.

It gives you insight into the significance and importance of a variety of titles ranging from Sandy White's isometric marvel, Ant Attack, through to Rare's heritage with Ultimate Play The Game's Jet Pac and Sabre Wulf. Each and every game in the book has a story to tell and there were a number of games I hadn't thought about in years that came flooding back to me as soon as I saw their art.

The bold, chunky art that the Spectrum is known for looks fantastic when blown up to fill the page and the garish colours help the whole thing pop, which makes for an inviting and engaging coffee table book. For those with nostalgia for the black box with rubber keys it's a lovely trip down memory lane, but it's also quite informative with sections devoted to Durell, Beyond and Vortex, to name a few. It even finds room to briefly touch on the Russian scene, that kept the humble "Speccy" alive well into the 90s.



Sinclair ZX Spectrum:
a visual compendium



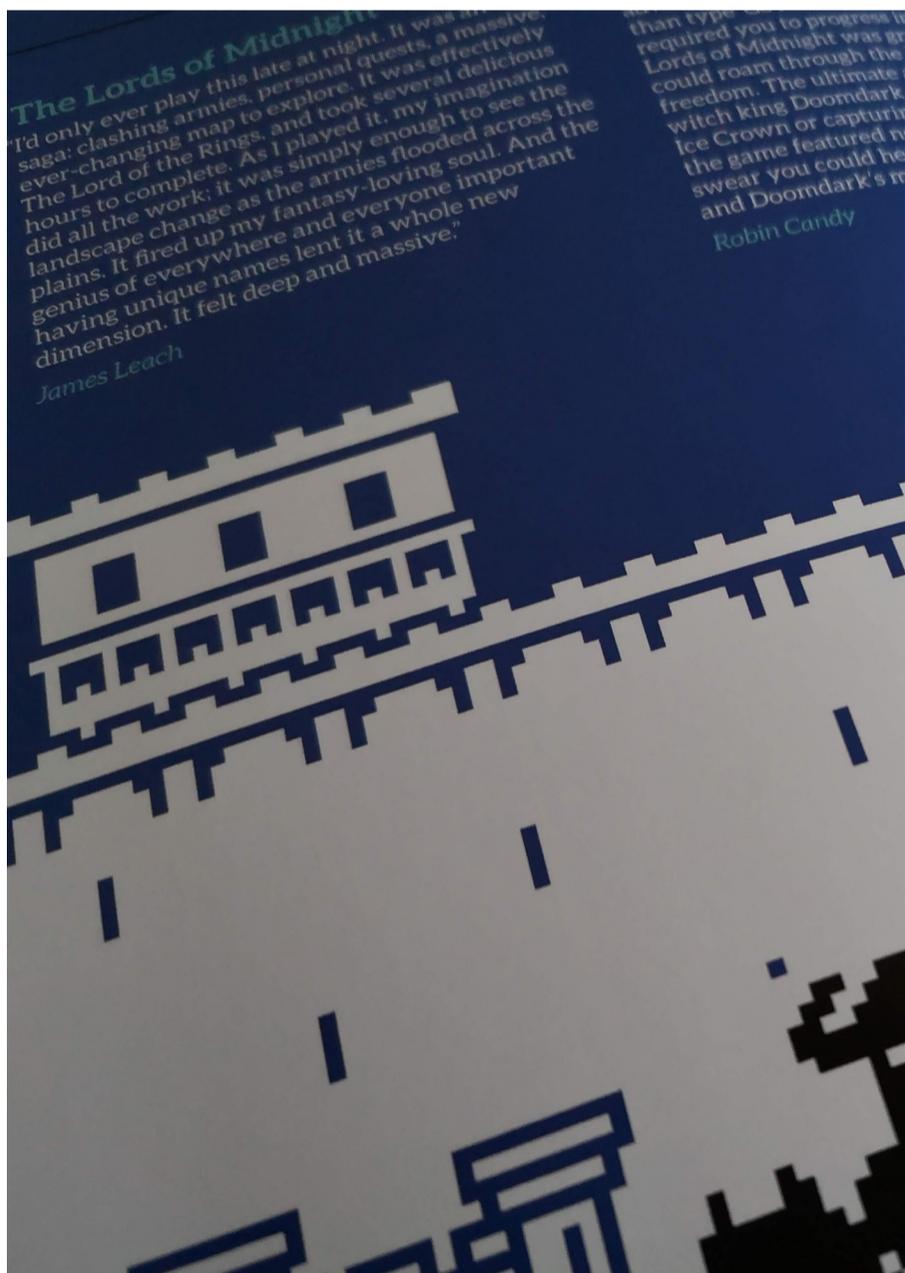


The book is clearly made with love and there is a reverence to the machine and the games that graced it that shines from every page. The Spectrum is an important cornerstone in the industry, a machine that despite all odds became a gaming heavyweight, especially in Europe. This compendium manages to visually condense that into a lovely volume that anyone can pick up and get enjoyment from.

Bitmap Books have created a quality book that feels premium, looks wonderful and filled my old, haggard body with nostalgia for my younger years where I'd spend hours typing in code listings from magazines and looking forward to spending my pocket money on the next Dizzy game.

If you have an interest in the Spectrum at all or just want an interesting, enticing coffee table book, you can do a lot worse than the Sinclair ZX Spectrum: A Visual Compendium. Oh, it also has Spectrum coloured fabric bookmarks too, so there is that in its favour!

**RRP: £29.99
/ \$38.28**





SNAKEBYTE MULTI:PLAYCON SWITCH CONTROLLER

With the amount of multiplayer games available on Switch, it's not always economical to get Joy-Cons. Luckily, snakebyte has a solution in their MULTI:PLAYCON controllers. You might wonder why I said controllers, when everyone knows that two halves make one Joy-Con - that's because two PLAYCONs make two controllers.

In the box you get the manual, a micro-USB cable and the two controllers. They're available in orange & blue-grey or black & white. They're well put together, and the design of them looks like a smile, with the Mode button (used to connect them to the Switch) as the nose. Since it's October, of course it's quite reminiscent of a pumpkin. Admittedly, the very stylised look of the letters on the face buttons is very weird and chunky, but it works. The micro-USB is used to charge, as well as update, the controllers.

It's a weird decision that snakebyte put the Home and Snapshot buttons on separate controllers, but this was likely because the Joy-Con has them like that. Still, since each PLAYCON is intended to be used separately, it's weird. They also lack motion control, an NFC chip for amiibos and HD rumble, so will feel different to a Joy-Con in more ways than just the outside would suggest.

Once the MULTI:PLAYCON is connected to your Switch or Switch Lite, they work as you might expect. If they disconnect from inactivity (it's quite a short window), it's simple enough to reconnect them.

Playing with the PLAYCON feels better than a Joy-Con, because it's a bit bigger, and contoured to fit your hand. Again, each one is for use separately, which is a good thing as they would be a bit difficult to hold sideways, and have no way to connect onto the sides of the Switch.

The only thing you might notice is that the lights on the front of each PLAYCON can be bright if you're playing in the dark. But in a pitched race of Mario Kart 8 Deluxe you won't notice them.

There's not really much else that I can say about snakebyte's MULTI:PLAYCON. It's aiming to replace both sides of the Joy-Con, but not

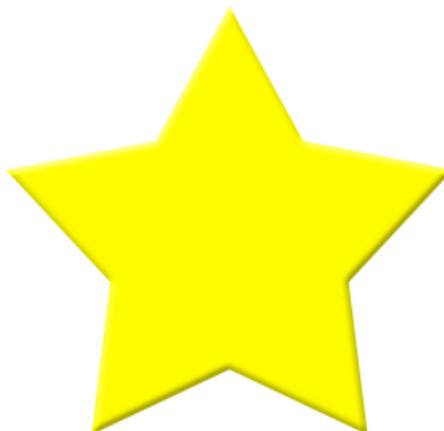




the Joy-Con itself. After all, one box contains enough controllers for two players, but not a single-player controller. If you need a new Joy-Con, then this isn't it. However, if you need some controllers for Player 2, Player 3 and more, then they're definitely worth checking out.



**RRP: £199.99
/ \$199.99**





HORI SWITCH SPLIT PAD PRO - DAEMON X MACHINA EDITION

There's a sizeable group of large-handed people who, despite loving their Switches, struggle with the relatively diddy Joy-Cons that come packaged in with the console. Hardware manufacturer HORI has worked to appease these folks with the Split Pad Pro, an officially licensed pair of Joy-Con controllers that feel more substantial to hold than a pair of Tic Tacs with analog sticks. While my hands aren't actually large enough to have difficulty with the traditional Joy-Con offering, I was interested in trying something different with some nice extra features at an appealingly lower price. After pretty much exclusively using these controllers for the past month or so, I'm ready to make a judgement, and it's a good one: the Split Pad Pro is a superb alternative to regular Joy-Con controllers... for the right person.

Let's start off with the kicker, it's a big one after all: the Split Pad Pro has no wireless functionality, which means that these controllers are for handheld use only. I mention this so hastily because, for some players, this is an absolute deal-breaker—understandably so. Thankfully, my circumstances mean that this issue was irrelevant: I have an official Pro Controller for docked usage that I'd have continued using regardless of whether this Joy-Con pair was an

option or not. At any rate, there's no denying that it's a significant flaw in the controllers' design and likely a cost-saving measure above all else.

On the topic of cost-saving, it's also worth pointing out that these controllers have also been stripped of the regular Joy-Con 'bells and whistles': no motion control, rumble, infrared or Amiibo support. Admittedly, lack of motion control could present an issue in some games, but I can't bring myself to care about the exclusion of the other features. If anything, I find the rumble a little too loud for handheld mode and usually leave it turned off anyway.

It might seem as if I'm painting something of a bleak picture for Split Pad Pro, but for every negative listed earlier there's a positive that I'm just waiting to gush about! Even before picking them up, the sleek 'black with red accents' colour scheme is striking: the controllers have been designed in association with Daemon X Machina (a fast-paced mech game) and I assume the choice of black and red—as well as the stylised 'X' button—reflects this. A textured finish to parts of the back also helps the product feel—for lack of a better term—premium. While only a small touch, it's a factor that many companies producing third-party peripherals overlook.





Upon attaching the controllers and picking the Switch up, things go from good to better. They feel chunky in the best possible way; the analog sticks are less dainty and—hopefully—not prone to the dreaded stick drifting issue; on top of that, there's an actual D-pad! Not four buttons that represent each direction: a real, honest to god D-pad! For a mammoth-fisted individual, these would be a godsend; even for myself they're an absolute joy to use. I haven't felt the urge to use a real Joy-Con since pulling these out of their box. It's such a relief to use a Switch controller that doesn't feel like it's going to irreparably break upon being dropped more than about eight inches.

There's a couple of bonuses too: programmable back paddles and turbo mode functionality.

These, compounded with the inclusion of 'proper' analog sticks and the tie-in with Daemon X Machina should clue you in on the intended use for these controllers: shooters and action games. Regardless of your genre of choice though, these controllers still feel seriously good to use and come in at a damn sight cheaper than regular Joy-Cons: £45 RRP, but can be found without much difficulty at £35.



**RRP: £45.00
/ \$N/A**





STORAGE BASICS

In this guide I aim to give a brief rundown of what's currently available on the market, good use cases for each technology, and help make things a little clearer for potential buyers.

I'll be looking at internal drives in this article specifically in the consumer space.

Mechanical / Magnetic Drives

When talking about hard drives, most people think of the traditional drive that's been around since 1956. Offering the highest capacities in the consumer space at a reasonably low cost, this type of drive stores data on rotating platters (also known in the industry as "spinning rust").

Solid State Drives

Solid State Drives or SSD's have been around for awhile now but have really caught in in recent times due to the increases in capacities.

Where as a traditional hard drive uses metal platters with magnetic coatings to store the information, SSD's use non-volatile flash memory instead which can offer a number of benefits. performance is the main gain but also they can use less power, put out less heat and are silent. SSD's are available in a wider variety of form factors which I will detail further later in this article.

Hybrid Drives

Hybrid drives are a hybrid of the standard tried and tested hard drive with the relatively newer SSD.

The integrated Solid State Drive is generally of a small capacity around 16—32GB and

is used as a cache. Frequently read data is kept on the SSD portion of the disk for faster access, while the rest of the disk stores the brunt of the information. Whilst you won't get the performance of a full SSD with a hybrid drive, you will generally notice performance gain over a standard hard drive. These drives are commonly known as Hybrid or SSHD.

You can purchase a hybrid drive which combines the SSD and hard drive in one package, which is the most straightforward way, or you can also add a separate small SSD to your system in combination with an existing hard drive. The SSD will then work as a cache for your existing drive though this is a little more complicated as it requires a specific combination of hardware and software.

Form Factors

2.5"

This is the standard model that most of you will be familiar with. It looks like a standard hard drive and connects to your motherboard via SATA, Delivering good performance and generally offering the best capacity for an SSD.

M.2

The M.2 form factor replaces the old mSATA standard and comes in varying lengths of 30, 42, 60, 80 and 110 mm. mSATA plugged into mini-PCIexpress slots on older Laptops.





Supported busses for M.2 are PCI-E, SATA and USB 3.0. Check your motherboard when purchasing whilst most will take all three standards some boards will only accept one of them (PCI-E M.2 drives, for example).

I am a big fan of M.2 due to the form factor, these drives are very small and fit into a socket on the motherboard, which means no data / power cables and an overall tidier look inside the computer.

On the PCI-E side of things, the legacy Advanced Host Controller Interface (AHCI) is supported for older SATA drives, as well as the newer NVM Express (NVMe) for newer PCI-E drives.

U.2

This is a bit of an odd one, as currently only a single SSD vendor supports the standard, Intel. However, I can see it catching on — the drives are your standard 2.5" form factor and will fit nicely in many current cases out there, the differences being the interface and the cabling. Essentially, the drives use the same PCI-E 3.0 4x interface that the M.2 drives use, but with a more familiar cable and socket on the motherboard for connectivity. Performance-wise, the drives are on par with the M.2 variants.

In theory, with the right setup you should be able to have more of these hooked up to a single system, but as with the M.2, there is only so much space on the motherboard to put the connectors.





PCI-E

I have already mentioned PCI-E in both the M.2 section and the U2 section, but this is a third type which installs directly into a PCI-E slot just like your GPU does. This is the more familiar PCI-E device. Again expect performance in the same ball park as the M.2 drive and the U.2 drives.

SATA Vs PCI-E

So you're looking for a new drive which one do you choose: SATA or PCI-E? Well, the main benefit of PCI-E over SATA is its performance. Both drives can be a lot faster but will you really notice it in the real world? That depends on the workloads. Windows will load faster and feel snappier on a PCI-E drive, however, with gaming you probably won't notice a huge difference.

SATA also costs a lot less, which may also be a consideration — most people I know who have SATA-based SSD's are very happy with its performance.

Personally, I use both. I have a small PCI-E based M.2 SSD for Windows and a larger SATA based 2.5" drive for my ever growing Steam collection, and I find this a great balance.

Terms used in this article

Essentially, NVMe is a logical device interface specification that was designed from the ground up for PCI-E SSDs. The

specification improves over AHCI in a number of ways in order to make the most of the low latency and parallelisation of PCI-E SSD's.

PCI-E - 'Peripheral Component Interconnect Express'

A high-speed serial computer expansion bus standard, designed to replace older less performant standards.

SSD - 'Solid State Drive'

A hard drive that has no moving parts, allowing data to be accessed much faster than a standard hard drive.

NVMe - 'Non-Volatile Memory Express'

A logical device interface specification that was designed from the ground up for PCI-E SSDs. It utilises the low latency and parallelisation of PCI-E SSDs to perform better than AHCI





STAR WARS BOOK SETS

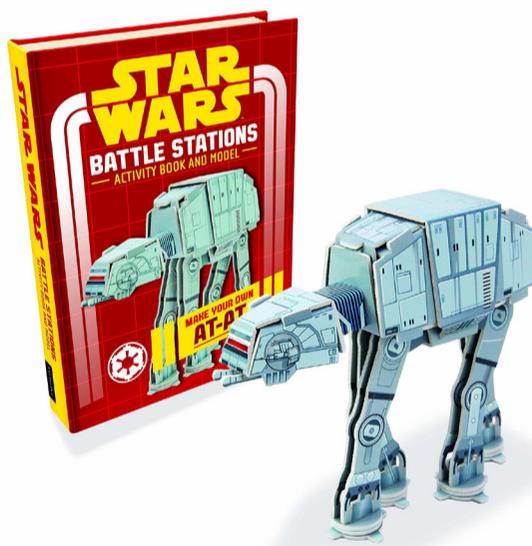
Star Wars Rogue One Book and Model: Make Your Own U-wing



RRP: £9.00
/ \$12.00

Star Wars: Battle Stations: Activity Book and Model

RRP: £9.00
/ \$12.00



Star Wars: Smuggler's Starship: Activity Book and Model



RRP: £9.00
/ \$12.00



TOP FIVE GAMES YOU SHOULD GET FOR SWITCH

The Nintendo Switch has been around for a while, and a great many games have come to the system, with even more on the way. It should only be natural that a console that can shift between three forms has a wide array of games to go with it, so here's five games that, if you have the Switch or plan on getting it, should definitely find room on your shelf.

5. *Minecraft*

Minecraft is on pretty much every system, and for good reason. The addictive wide-open sandbox shines even better on Switch, since you no longer have to wait until you get home to work on the building idea you have in your

head: you can make it happen anywhere. With constant updates and plenty of add-ons, DLC, and hundreds upon hundreds of items to craft, the only limit in Minecraft is your own imagination.

4. *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*

Don't let the name fool you: it has no direct connection to the previous game, but it definitely shares its charm, style, intricacies, and gorgeous landscaping. With an excellent story, a memorable cast of characters, and action-RPG elements that'll keep you on your toes in the heat of battle, it's definitely one to pick up and play. Just keep in mind you'll be playing for quite a while.





3. Mario Kart 8 Deluxe

Even if you're not a fan of the racing genre, Mario Kart 8 Deluxe is sure to make you one. With simple to learn and easy to master controls, and stunning graphics you can lose yourself in, what the game lacks in story it more than makes up for in the hours of fun you'll have blazing through tracks old and new. With plenty of characters and parts to choose from, you can pick out your ultimate ride and aim for that winner's circle in style, and portability.

2. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

GOTY isn't an award given lightly, and Breath of Wild earned it and then some. Travel across a ruined yet breathtaking Hyrule to battle, forage, explore, and uncover the mystery of Link's century-long slumber as you fight the Calamity and win the war that started so long ago. Breath of the Wild shines in its storytelling, and can leave an impression long after the Switch has been shut off.

1. Super Smash Bros. Ultimate

Surprising no one, Super Smash Bros. Ultimate makes the list. Whether you're a die-hard veteran anxious to take your skills to the next level, a casual fan happy to see the new characters, or even the most neophyte of neophytes, if you love tossing around your friends and family with your favorite video game characters, look no further than the latest iteration of the party fighter that's taken the world by storm. The title's not for show, with plenty of third-party characters joining the fray. There's faces old and new, and with everyone from the previous games making their way in, it truly is Ultimate.



TOP FIVE GAMES YOU SHOULD GET FOR XBOX

The Xbox One is in a weird place right now because it just doesn't have anything to offer during the end of its lifecycle that is blowing many peoples skirts up like PlayStation 4 at the moment, but it used to, just many people don't know or remember. It used to be the opposite in the earlier years of these two consoles; PlayStation 4 wasn't pumping out hits like they are now and Xbox One was, but, since PlayStation was dominating the market in console sales, many people don't know about most of Xbox One's best games. So, without further ado, here is a list of the best games on Xbox One!

5. Forza Horizon 4

When it comes to racing games there is only one franchise that continues to pump out hits what seems like every year and that's Forza. I'm more of a Need for Speed player myself, which is why I prefer the Horizon series to the Motorsport games because they feels more arcade-like, but they are both equally good in quality. I loved the crazy missions that the Horizon series brought like epic races against helicopters or boats and every Horizon game just seems to keep getting better, plus, every Forza game is just stunning to look at.

4. Sunset Overdrive

I feel like not many people have played Sunset Overdrive due to it coming out early in Xbox One's

lifecycle and many people not owning an Xbox One in the early years, but I think it's a mistake people should correct immediately. I loved everything about Sunset Overdrive; the bizarre story, the iconically crazy Insomniac weapons, the fast movement, everything just worked together so well and is a huge reason I knew that Insomniac Games were the perfect developers for Marvel's Spider-Man. My only worry is if it holds up nowadays because the comedy might be dated.

3. Halo: The Master Chief Collection

Of course, it wouldn't be a top Xbox games list without Halo, but this is more than a Halo game, this is the ultimate Halo experience. Despite being probably one of the rockiest launches we have ever seen for a game, Halo: The Master Chief Collection (Halo: MCC) is a must-own for any Halo or Xbox fan now that it's all up and running. Those Blur Studio cutscenes for Halo 2 Anniversary are excellent and the ability to swap graphics/music with a press of a button is very impressive, but the Halo multiplayer for each game should be reason enough. It's going to be very exciting when PC players finally get a chance to experience Halo: MCC later this year!

2. Ori and the Blind Forest

Ori and the Blind Forest is definitely one of my favourite metroidvania games that has come out





in a long time. It's such a beautiful game in terms of story, visuals, and music plus the gameplay and level design are excellent while challenging. I can't wait for the sequel – Ori and the Will of the Wisps – to finally release February 2020 after being teased for years and I hope it's equally as good, if not better than its predecessor.

thing Quantum Break does is having an episode of their own TV show after every chapter with scenes that are impacted by your decisions from the game, which I personally loved. Unfortunately, Quantum Break suffered the same fate as Sunset Overdrive, even though it was critically acclaimed as well, so play it if you haven't!

1. Quantum Break

Remedy Games' Quantum Break is definitely my favourite Xbox One game and one of my favourite games this generation. I'm just a huge fan of Remedy Games and almost everything they have done in the past and this game just speaks to me. I love well-done stories about time travel, feeling like a badass, great characters and when developers try something new and Quantum Break has all of this. The most unique



TOP FIVE GAMES YOU SHOULD GET FOR PLAYSTATION

No one can argue that the PlayStation 4 is the undeniable “winner” this generation as it continues to move up the list of best-selling consoles of all time. In the earlier years, the PS4 didn’t have many system sellers like it does today, it was mostly selling so well because of how awful the Xbox team handled the marketing for the Xbox One. Now, at the end of the console’s life, there are some truly incredible experiences to be had on the PS4 and I’m here to tell you all about them.

5. *The Last of Us Remastered*

This kind of feels like cheating but since this Naughty Dog masterpiece came out so late in the PlayStation 3’s life, I thought there might be many people who haven’t had a chance to play this incredible game. The Last of Us is a game that many people – like myself – might say is one of the greatest games of all time because of its masterful story-telling and stellar characters/performances. It coming to PS4 makes it the definitive edition bringing 4K support for the PlayStation 4 Pro along with a 60FPS for the base console. Now would be the perfect time to play as well since The Last of Us Part II will be out next year, and from what we’ve seen, it’s bound to be another hit from Naughty Dog.

4. *Horizon: Zero Dawn*

Horizon: Zero Dawn shocked many people because who would have thought that the next game from the people that worked on the Killzone series was an action RPG and an amazing one at that. Horizon is still one of the best looking PS4 games to date and it’s great combat system, superb story and fascinating world are all reason enough to check this game out. I’ve heard great things about its DLC, The Frozen Wilds, as well and I hope they are working on a sequel for the PlayStation 5 which seems likely based on the game’s success.

3. *Marvel’s Spider-Man*

I’ve been a huge Spider-Man fan for as long as I can remember, but it’s been years since we’ve got a great Spider-Man game. Then, unexpectedly at Sony’s E3 2016 conference, they announced Marvel’s Spider-Man being developed by Insomniac Games, which I immediately knew was the right developer for the job thinking back to Sunset Overdrive. Marvel’s Spider-Man is everything I could have wanted from a Spider-Man game; the swinging felt perfect, the story was epic and emotional, and the performances were fantastic. There are a few very minor hiccups when it comes to side content, but none of them takes away from what makes this an amazing Spider-Man game.





2. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*

It's no surprise that Naughty Dog would be on the list twice since they are some of the best developers in the business right now. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* is the first time we got to see the developer taking advantage of the new hardware from the ground up and the results are, unsurprisingly, incredible. With *Uncharted 4* being the end of Nathan Drake's journey, it's only natural that Naughty Dog would want this to be his biggest and best adventure yet and it absolutely is. The gameplay in *Uncharted 4* is a massive improvement over its predecessors and its set pieces are some of the best in the series. It's a perfect end to one of PlayStation's best exclusives and a must-play for everyone, but if you're not familiar with the series, *The Nathan Drake Collection* is available on PS4 as well.

1. *God of War (2018)*

God of War (2018) is reason enough to own a PS4. It's one of those games you immediately want to talk to everyone about because it's just that damn

good. As someone who wasn't really a huge fan of the previous *God of War* games, I was completely blown away by how much I loved this game. *God of War (2018)* is a generation-defining game that sets a new precedent for all videogames in terms of cinematic visuals, attention to detail, characters, story-pacing, and gameplay. I'll never forget how amazing it felt to throw and catch the Leviathan axe as the DualShock 4 rumbles when it returns to your hand. *God of War (2018)* is definitely up there for game of the generation, if not one of the greatest games of all time.



TOP FIVE GAMES YOU SHOULD GET FOR VR

While a number of fantastic VR games that are available today released a couple of years ago, I've put together our top five VR games of to raise awareness of the awesome experiences you may have missed.

5. Astro Bot Rescue Mission

Astro Bot Rescue Mission is a PSVR game, and probably one of the best VR games available on the system. Developed by Japan Studio, the game is one of the few to give the player a presence in the world, in addition to needing to control the main character, Captain Astro. Levels can span 360 degrees, requiring players to look and move around in order to complete them, while others have physical barriers that players need to headbutt so that Captain Astro can move forward.

4. No Man's Sky Beyond

In August 2019 Hello Games launched their biggest update to No Man's Sky yet, Beyond. Among a plethora of other features, the update added VR for players on a number of different platforms. Everyone should understand the game's premise by now, a space exploration game within a procedurally generated universe. Players are free to follow the story and missions, or just fly off and create a home for themselves on an alien world. VR is an eye-opener for No Man's Sky, and it's undeniably the best way to play it. VR makes you feel closer to the action, whether

you're mining for resources, bartering on a space station, or creating something spectacular with friends thanks to the addition of multiplayer.

3. Borderlands 2 VR

The Borderlands games are some of the best shooters available. The tight gunplay, combined with fun multiplayer and the ultimate loot system, make them great for gaming sessions of any length. Borderlands 2 VR takes that shooter experience to the next level. Nothing has been cut for the sake of VR, and that's what makes this game so great. You can earn all of the wacky guns that you can in the non-VR version, and they're just as fun to use. Shaky hands can sometimes cost you a sniper shot, but that's nothing compared to the feeling of being inside a Borderlands game, a hectic shooter that makes you feel like a real life action hero.

2. Ghost Giant

While Ghost Giant isn't a very challenging VR game, it's definitely one of the most-charming. Players take on the role of a giant ghost, hence the game's name. The story plays out in front of you, and it's bursting with heartwarming moments and incredibly well-written characters. The only caveat is that the controls can be a bit difficult, making for a bit of a frustrating experience at times.





The core gameplay requires you to interact with the scenery of each level, with what look like hand-crafted paper structures that make up the buildings and trees. Interacting with the roof of a house can lead you to a secret room within the attic, or a note on a table in a closet. While these are puzzles in the loosest sense of the word, they're really rewarding when just the right discovery is made to advance the story. It's the story that you should play Ghost Giant for. A lot of love has gone into creating these characters and the stories that unfold right before your eyes. It might only be four or five hours long, but they'll be four or five hours you won't forget quickly.

about the layout of the missions and the gameplay comes together really well to provide that gangster shooter experience that everyone wishes they could have after watching a good gangster film. In *Blood & Truth* you'll find a great cast of characters, a small selection of great weapons, and superb shooting. Some levels have multiple paths, and there are a few great sections with pillars and walls to hide behind and peek out from as you mow down the group of enemies in front of you. The game isn't all shooting though, with a few levels that see you do crazy things like climb up the side of buildings, taking enemies down from open windows as you go.

1. Blood & Truth

Blood & Truth was one of the crowning jewels of VR games in 2019. The game is made up of 19 shooter missions, all wrapped up in what feels like a heist movie. The overwhelming feeling that the game leaves you with is 'cool'. Everything



Image reformatted for non-VR display





LOOT CRATE

If you've been around the internet, you've at least seen an advert for Loot Crate. If not, then you're one of the few people left who hasn't been tempted by stuff! That's the draw of Loot Crate - you get stuff sent to your house every single month, and you don't know what it will be. A magnetic Katamari? A statuette of Sonic the Hedgehog? a Borderlands 2 mousepad? Fallout-themed notebooks? Who knows?! Previous Gaming Crates, for instance, have included Five Nights at Freddy's wearable bunny ears, a PAC-MAN bottle opener, a Street Fighter vinyl figure, a Big Daddy plushy and much, much more!

You'll get a t-shirt in every crate, but if you subscribe to one crate, you will get stuff like that every four weeks. Heck, you could subscribe to multiple crates if you wanted to. Loot Crate gives you multiple tiers, and there are multiple types of crates to suit anyone's mood.

Maybe the Gaming Crate isn't for you, and you're after something more niche than the regular Loot Crate. There's a ton of themed crates to choose from: anime, sci-fi - heck, there's even the Apparel Crate if you're just after a t-shirt or pair of socks once a month. If you're interested in checking out the swag, or setting up a subscription, tap on the big image and it will take you straight to them.

You can pick a crate, choose between one and 12 crates, and set it up, with delivery starting from the next crate available.





RRP: from £20.00
/ from \$24.99





THRUSTMASTER T.FLIGHT HOTAS X JOYSTICK

I haven't used a massive amount of joysticks in the past and at times have struggled using them, so when STAR WARS: Squadrons was announced I thought it was about time I invested in picking up a joystick. Not wanting to spend a fortune on a joystick, I had a look around to see what was on the marketplace, I was trying to budget around the £70/\$70 range, but the truth is I had no idea what I was looking for.

When looking around, I could see that having a larger throttle would be beneficial and my attention got drawn toward the Thrustmaster T.Flight HOTAS range. So when Thrustmaster got in touch and offered the one of the T.Flight HOTAS models, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to try it out. Another thing which really appealed to me was that you could separate the throttle from the joystick (there is still a wire between the two) and I liked the idea of having these either side of the keyboard. With some games requiring you to use a keyboard as well as the joystick a fair amount, I felt this would definitely be beneficial for me.

Just to clear up a small detail and to make sure you have the correct model that you require for your type of device - T.Flight HOTAS is available as one of three different models:

T.Flight HOTAS X - (For PlayStation 3 or PC)

T.Flight HOTAS 4 - (For PlayStation 4 or PC)

T.Flight HOTAS One - (For Xbox One or PC)

These are all compatible with the PC, and since I didn't need it for any console use, I picked the T.Flight X as it would have suited the budget I was looking at in the first place. There is a little switch on the back of the joystick which allows you to select which platform you are using. Make sure you remember to switch it to the right platform beforehand!

Upon opening the Thrustmaster T.Flight HOTAS X I was pleasantly surprised with the quality and weight of the product, especially with its price range being what I'd consider as a budget





joystick. It really feels like you are getting much more value than you are paying for.

There were some of the assumptions I made which were incorrect. The first being when I separated the joystick and throttle, I was a little disappointed with the length of the cable, initially thinking it didn't reach either side of the keyboard. However, after a couple of games I investigated this further to find the cable was wrapped around the underside of the base. Once I undid the cable, the length was more than enough for what I required.

My second wrong assumption was with the stability of clipping the joystick and throttle together. To begin with, I found it very unstable and wobbly, however, after remembering my first mistake, I took a look underneath the base to find

there was an Allen key/hex key attached to the bottom of the base. Removing this allowed me to tighten and lock the joystick and throttle together, stopping all of the wobbling I was getting.

Lesson learnt from this point onwards: always read the manual.

When using the T.Flight HOTAS X on Windows 10, it required no drivers or installation - I just got it out the box and it worked! It is worth checking the calibration within Windows itself, nevertheless, but this is very easy to do.

In my previous experiences with using a joystick, they always felt very unstable on the desk. I encountered issues with previous joysticks sliding and slightly tipping over when you pull backwards too hard on the joystick itself,





but I have not had this happen to me with the T.Flight HOTAS X at all, which in return I have felt has helped improve my gameplay.

Just to test my theory I have swapped multiple times to keyboard and mouse in Star Wars: Squadrons and found that my gameplay was as bad as I expected. Whilst keyboard and mouse can be used for a lot of flight games, I found the T.Flight HOTAS X made the maneuverability of any ship a lot smoother for me.

On the underside of the base there is an adjustable tension control for the joystick itself which I found very handy during set up to mess around with this control dial. There is a very convenient button on the top of the base for switching between the four or five axis control, and the button lights up red or green to let you know which one you are using.

The joystick has a total of 12 buttons and it has a nice feature which allows you to remap the buttons to your liking. Whilst I did not have a use for this, the instructions for remapping are in the manual (see, I am learning).

My gameplay has changed for the better using the Thrustmaster T.Flight HOTAS X. Even down to simple things like using the rocker button for adjusting shields from front to rear really quickly mid-battle was very useful.

As a disclaimer, I am by no means an experienced or decent player in flying contraptions, so when I say has made me better, this does not

make me an elite god while gaming. It just means I can fly without crashing every two seconds... My future plans are also to use this in games such as Elite Dangerous and War Thunder. I mean, it's not like my gameplay could get any worse in these types of games.



RRP: £59.99 / \$64.99



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The Founder's Edition also came with a Chromecast Ultra HD, a small device that you can plug into your television and stream games on Stadia through. Chromecast Ultra HD requires power to work, and comes with a plug as well. Having heard the horror stories about the device overheating, I took the measure to only plug it in when I know I'm going to use it in the same day, otherwise it remains firmly unplugged. As far as I can tell the overheating issue hasn't been fixed, but this measure does a stellar job of not setting my television on fire so I would recommend it. The setup was relatively painless, although it did require two apps to get working properly. Once up and running however, the service is really easy to use.

The Stadia store is made up of games with Pro, and the standard offerings. Games with Pro are free to Pro subscribers, and the list of games

has grown by two games every month since the service launched. You can access these games as long as you claim them in the Stadia Store. If your subscription lapses then you'll lose access, but if you start your subscription up again you'll still have access to all of the games that you've claimed or paid for. If this trend continues that I can easily say that Stadia Pro is worth the monthly cost of \$9.99.

I started out with Stadia by playing a game I'm extremely familiar with, *Destiny 2*. Like all games on Stadia, it loads quickly, much faster than any other platform I've played it on. Even once you're in the game it continues to be quick. Transitions between areas are minimized to the point that there's just not enough time to check your loadout as you fly between the Tower and another planet.





All of the controls for Destiny 2, and every other game that is also on console, transition perfectly to the new controller. Even the most experienced of Destiny 2 players will find it easy to best opponents in the Crucible after just a few minutes with the game to orient themselves on Stadia.

I've tried out a couple of other games on Stadia since I got it, like the Tomb Raider reboot, and can safely say that single player games are all superb. If Stadia was designed only to stream single player games, or the solo experiences of MMOs at a push as well, then it would be perfect.

However, there are some caveats to Stadia that are impossible to ignore, especially when moving from a console to the service. Firstly, the visuals are noticeably worse on Stadia than they are anywhere else. This is of course a side effect of games being streamed from somewhere else, instead of being played directly on a device in the same room. Visuals aren't everything though, and this aspect can be mostly overlooked.

The second issue I experienced with Stadia is a delay between the actions occurring in-game, and the sounds for those actions. In Destiny 2 there were points where the delay was as bad as two or three seconds between a shot and the noise it should make. This may be an issue with my internet connection, and could be improved upon with faster speeds or a better PC. However, as it is, this issue makes some games unplayable with the sound on.

My final point on Stadia isn't necessarily a bad one. Right now the service is only available with

a Stadia Pro subscription, but a free version is coming soon. What seems slightly strange is that in addition to this premium service cost, which is similar to the cost of a Netflix subscription, users still need to pay for almost every game they want to play. Yes, there are discounts on most games for Pro subscribers, but the fact remains that all users have to purchase a game if they want to play it on Stadia.

Comparing Stadia to other subscription services, such as Netflix and Xbox Game Pass Ultimate, it seems to overcharge the subscriber. While with other subscriptions the user pays a monthly fee for access to all the content the service has to offer, with Stadia it seems as though users are paying a premium just to access Google's streaming service.

As long as Google continues to grow the offering of free games for Stadia Pro subscribers, the service will be worth the monthly cost. On the other hand, if Google stops growing the free games, instead focusing on charging users more to play modern games, then I don't see why anyone would continue to pay for it.





**RRP: £89.99
/ \$89.99**





BLUE MICROPHONES YETI NANO

A while ago, I had a cheap condenser microphone running off of a phantom power block. It was a mess of cables, but it sounded great. Unfortunately, the operative word there is 'cheap', so it lasted about 18 months, then stopped working for no apparent reason. So, I defaulted to the microphone on my headset. It sounded fine, so I was in no rush to get a new standalone microphone.

Until Blue Microphones got in touch, and offered me a Yeti Nano. Of course, I had heard of the company, and over the years had read that their microphones were the go-to for people doing voice acting as a hobby. So, of course, I jumped at the chance to try it out.

The Yeti Nano from Blue Microphones comes with: the microphone, a desk stand, a micro-USB cable, a stand adapter, a quick start guide in seven languages, a registration reminder and a card which tells you where to download the Sherpa software. On the microphone itself, there are two buttons, the micro USB socket and an earphone socket so that you can listen to yourself in real time.

The button on the front (where the Blue logo is) mutes and unmutes, as well as controls the earphone volume if you've got something plugged into it. The button on the rear toggles between

cardioid and omnidirectional modes - the first one is for a single speaker, the second is for a group. It's pretty cool that it can switch between the two modes with just a push of a button, in case you get into a surprise podcast, or need to let someone in the room join you in a Discord call.

However, even in cardioid mode the microphone is sensitive enough to pick up other things that are happening in the room. It's even sensitive enough to pick up things that you cannot hear yourself. When I was first setting the Yeti Nano up, I was listening to the audio to check levels and such. I then realised that, despite the house being silent apart from my PC fans, I could hear two people having a conversation. I couldn't make out the words, and when I took off my headset I couldn't hear anything. I had a window open, so I can only assume that it was picking up one of the neighbours, judging by the clattering during the conversation, in their kitchen. Not counting the unoccupied house next door, there wasn't a kitchen within 100 metres of the microphone.

So yes, it's sensitive, but how does it sound? The answer, of course, is pretty great. I haven't had the opportunity to try it out with multiple people, but streaming and recording podcasts sound good. I haven't tried any voice acting yet, but certainly intend to.





Honestly, I didn't use it very much with the stand, as I found that it would attach to the boom arm that I used for my old microphone. It has a thread in the bottom, and will easily screw onto a standard mount. Of course, they recommend the Blue Microphones-created boom and mount, but it's up to you.

If you're looking for a new microphone, then definitely consider the Yeti Nano. It's 21.1cm tall (in the stand) and weighs 0.63kg, so is quite portable. Being powered by USB means that it's suitable for use on the fly, without having to plug in loads of other things first. It's a great little microphone that's really sensitive and very clear.



**RRP: £99.99
/ \$99.99**





PC ENGINE COREGRAFX MINI

First released in 1987 in Japan, the PC Engine was a bridge between the 8-bit and 16-bit era, as a system that could display 16-bit graphics but operated on a modified 8-bit CPU. Despite flopping in Western markets (where in the US it was known as the TurboGrafx-16), it nonetheless proved to be a success in Japan, outselling the Famicom, and that alone seems incentive enough for Konami - who acquired PC Engine designer and software developer Hudson Soft - to jump on the mini retro console bandwagon now.

One thing to note is that the PC Engine CoreGrafx Mini isn't actually much smaller from the original model. That's because the Japanese PC Engine is already the smallest home console ever

made. Nonetheless, like other mini consoles, this is a simple plug-and-play system powered by USB cable and connects to modern TVs via HDMI with little fuss. You have the usual display options like 4:3, pixel perfect or horrendously stretched widescreen, as well as a CRT filter (personally, I felt it unnecessary, which also resulted in making the colourful visuals too muddy). You can even apply a filter that mimics the handheld TurboExpress, though the novelty wears thin as the display really hurts the eyes.

It's also one of the most expensive retro consoles, with an RRP of £99. That said, it does boast the largest library of preinstalled games, totalling 57. But then compared to the SNES and Mega Drive Minis, you only get one wired controller out of the



©Konami Digital Entertainment





box. This controller also shows its age, looking like a variation of the NES controller in both its uncomfortable angular design and limited to two buttons on the right, although they do include adjustable turbo settings. It does at least benefit from having a generously lengthy cable, so you can comfortably play from your couch. By pressing Select and Run together you'll also bring up the menu, meaning there's no need to keep reaching for the console when you want to change games.



The number of games is, however, a bit skewed, as these include both English releases, categorised as TurboGrafx-16 titles, and Japanese releases, meaning a few overlap with one another. Still, it's nice to be able to compare the differences, in particular the box art, the Japanese being vastly superior in aesthetics. In either case, the emulation work is terrific from retro masters M2, also responsible for the software on the Mega Drive Mini. There's also a wonderful touch that as each game starts up you get a little pixel art animation of the system's proprietary HuCard slotting in (seeing as the mini mould is devoid of such detail).

This also helps distinguish the games released on the CD expansion, which did make me wish SEGA had done the same and included some Mega CD (or even 32X) titles for their mini console. While you can't really see much of a graphical upgrade, CD-based storage allowed for better audio, most apparent with games utilising voice over and music that goes beyond chiptune. The standout is probably scrolling shoot-em-up Lords of Thunder, which has a soundtrack as metal as the title suggests.

But let's get down to the actual games. The problem of being obscure hardware means there's a lack of proper household names like Mario, Sonic or Streets of Rage (strangely enough, there are titles from competitor SEGA by way of Fantasy Zone and Space Harrier). Naturally, Hudson Soft has the lion's share of representation, the Bomberman games the most recognisable entries - including the best one Bomberman '94 (also known as Mega Bomberman) which let you ride kangaroo creatures while dropping bombs. The good news is that you can also experience Bomberman's hectic multiplayer as intended, though you'll need to shell out for both the multitap and extra controllers being supplied by third party manufacturer Hori.

Other recognisable highlights include Castlevania: Rondo of Blood, Splatter House and Nihon Falcom's RPG Ys Book I&II. But there's also underwhelming fare like the horrid looking platformer J.J. and Jeff (sadly the Japanese version Kato-chan & Ken-chan and its ridiculous toilet humour is absent), Gauntlet clone Dungeon Explorer, and Zelda clone Neptunia and its sequel. More than anything else, there are scrolling





shoot-em-ups, from staples like Gradius, R-Type and Super Darius to some more offbeat ones. But they all involve flying around a set path shooting lots of things. And they're all merciless.

It encapsulates an era of Japanese arcade game design that was just punishing to play, where sometimes one life is all you get before a Game Over throws you right back to the beginning. You can of course alleviate that if you know some cheat codes (the PR was generous enough to supply me with some during my testing), while there's also the option to save progress at any time and load up again, though there's sadly no option to rewind progress.

Those with a keen interest in Japanese gaming history will lap up the selection of Japanese games as a lost treasure trove. There's bizarre gems like Monopoly-style board game Super Momotarō Dentetsu II and Appare! Gateball, a croquet sim with a bunch of pensioners in the

cast (no, really). But here's the rub: these games are only in Japanese, since these are strictly emulations, not localisations. It's no big deal when it's just an arcade shooter or platformer, but when that includes Hideo Kojima's text-based cyberpunk adventure game Snatcher, you really wish Konami and M2 could've bent the rules and thrown in the localised Mega CD version. As the Japanese would say, 'Shoganai'.

The PC Engine CoreGrafx isn't going to be for everyone, much like when it was first released. It's nonetheless a faithful and well-emulated mini console that stands as a fresh counterpoint to both obvious nostalgia bait and the safe iteration of next-gen hardware still to come in 2020.

RRP: £99.99 / \$99.99





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ROXIO GAMECAP HD PRO

The Roxio Gamecap HD Pro is an external video capture device intended for recording gameplay from games consoles in an easy to use combination of hardware and software as well as provide an easy way to stream to Twitch and YouTube. So how does it fare?

First of all, the Roxio Gamecap HD Pro can capture multiple resolutions from 480i up to 1080p, this means you can capture from last generation consoles (Wii, PS3, Xbox 360, WiiU) easily as well as from both Xbox One and PlayStation 4. It can record at up to 60fps except at 1080p where it is limited to 30fps.

The Gamecap HD Pro fits in between your TV and your console and has both HDMI and Component inputs and outputs. You simply connect your console to the inputs then connect the preferred output to your TV (most likely using the HDMI option), finally you connect the box to your PC via the included USB cable.

It should be noted that you cannot connect a PS3 using HDMI as Sony enforce HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) sadly and the Gamecap HD Pro doesn't act as a HDCP stripper so you'll need to use a Component connection for PS3.

PC and supplying power, an installation DVD and a Quick Start Guide that explains how to set up a PS3/Xbox 360. No HDMI or Component cables are included however so that's something to factor in.

After installation of the newest software from Roxio's site (rather than the outdated DVD), it's simply a case of launching the included software where you'll then see your console's output in the preview window and some settings related to capturing.

From here you can configure whether you are using the HDMI or Component input source, the location to save files to and length of videos (if required). You can also choose from one of two video containers, M2TS or the more widely used MP4. Capturing video is then as hitting the green Capture button.

Jumping into the options lets you customise the bitrate for your videos as well as link your Twitch and Youtube accounts. Once you've done that, streaming to those services is as simple as hitting the Live Stream button. This all works really well and is great for a beginner but it's very barebones, there is no support for adding an overlay of any sort (camera or image) or any sort of scene transitions. As long as you only want your game image with voice over the top the included software does the job with a minimum of fuss.

In the box you get the device itself, which is extremely light, a USB cable for connecting to your



If you want to go the extra mile all is not lost however as you can use the Gamecap HD Pro in both OBS Studio (Open Broadcaster Software) and XSplit streaming programs. Using these more advanced programs you can create overlays, show video from webcams, as well as other more advanced features. Support in other programs however is a little hit and miss, even though the Gamecap HD Pro shows up as a video device in other programs, it often won't work as you'd expect.

This isn't generally a problem as you'll most likely be using OBS or XSplit (or indeed its own software) to stream/record video but it does bear mentioning. The software also includes a surprisingly competent video editing package called Roxio Videowave, it's no replacement for Sony Vegas Pro or Adobe Premiere Pro but for the budding YouTuber it's an exceptionally fully-featured piece of software allowing you to trim and piece together a video with a wide variety of transitions and effects. The product does have some negatives though, it's really light and the plastic casing doesn't

feel sturdy at all, the lack of an HDMI cable in the box is a shame as that's something extra you need and the hit and miss compatibility with other software could be something that requires more investigation if you have specific needs.

The Gamecap HD Pro does what it says it will and in combination with its own software is straightforward to get setup and working quickly. If you solely intend to record videos from newer consoles for use on YouTube or to stream to Twitch in a plug and play manner then it performs those tasks admirably.



RRP: £101.07 / \$N/A

Suitable for:



PC



Switch



PlayStation



Xbox





COUCHMASTER CYBOT

There are a few options when it comes to “things that hold a laptop”, whether it’s a table, the floor or your own lap.

Luckily, there’s also the Couchmaster line of lapboards, which sit above your lap.

In the case of the Couchmaster CYBOT, the bamboo board sits on top of two rectangular cushions covered in Kevlar. The idea is that you put the cushions on either side of your person whilst sitting on the couch or sofa - whichever word you prefer to call it - and place the laptop or netbook on it the board which straddles it.

The board has a ventilation grille on the left which you (hopefully) place your laptop fans over, and it’s quite large so distributes a lot of the heat nicely. On the right is a large mouse mat and a slot to stand your tablet or phone. The tablet slot even has a hole in it, so you can plug it in if the tablet charges from beneath.

The CYBOT also has two pouches for the laptop power supply or accessories, and a

detachable mouse pocket. I honestly haven’t gotten much use out of them, but that’s due to how I store the lapboard when not in use - not with items in the pockets.

Using the board is painless, and it assembles easily. It doesn’t clip onto the cushions, so you’re free to balance it however you like, though when it’s balanced properly it feels nice and sturdy. Of course, as it is three large parts it is cumbersome to get up if you have to answer the door in a hurry...

Where the board meets the cushions (ideally) it slopes up into two wrist rests. As a result I was always comfortable while using the CYBOT for work or gaming. I’ve never had much use for the tablet slot, but your mileage will vary depending on how often you use your tablet. I mainly use mine for the occasional game and for reading, so it’s not really required for an extended work or game session.

The mouse mat was loose in the box, and had an adhesive underneath, so it’s stuck on there





very well. The material that the top is covered in is easy on the mouse, it glides smoothly and has enough room to give you lots of motion.

Before the lapboard I was just using my lap for the laptop, which obviously made gaming tricky as I'd have to angle things away from the hot areas. The Couchmaster CYBOT means a cool lap and a laptop with better heat distribution. Just mind out for the colour, as the Kevlar is "military sports" camouflage and you might misplace it.

RRP: €174.00 / \$169.00

Suitable for:




Switch PC




PlayStation Xbox





COUCHMASTER CYCON

For quite some time, the main gripe I've had when playing games from the comfort of my sofa is that, for FPS games at least, I haven't been afforded the accuracy that comes with using a mouse and keyboard for input. Nerdytec have, however, come up with an elegant solution to that problem.

Enter the Couchmaster. The model we have here is the Cycon, which is their all-singing, all-dancing version that comes with all of the gadgetry you'll need for comfortable couch based gaming. Out of the box, you'll get the two armrest pieces, the support case (which houses the USB3 hub), a 5 meter active USB3 extension cable, mousemat and a pocket

for your mouse to go in when not in use. The two armrest pieces are fairly simple, comprising of a foam inner and faux leather outer (other fabrics are available) that are fairly sturdy, but still allow your arms to rest on them without causing discomfort. Before use, I had worried that the armrests may have ended up pushing my shoulders up, however, in use it became apparent that this wasn't the case.

The real meat of the Cycon is in the support case. In order to set this up, you need to remove two panels from the back of the case, and wire in your mouse and keyboard to the internal USB3 hub. Take note, that you'll also need to connect the USB3 hub extension wire that allows it to be





connected to the longer 5m extension at this point. Something I'd forgotten to do and had to re-open the back of the support case to solve...

Once the keyboard and mouse is in place, you can hook up the Cycon's USB3 hub to your PC using the supplied 5m cable, and then get yourself comfortable for some gaming. Sitting at the Couchmaster feels a little weird at first, as you adapt to the more outward placement of your arms and hands. Initially, it's a little difficult moving your hands to the keyboard to type, but this is likely caused by years worth of muscle conditioning from sitting at a desk. It becomes second nature quickly enough, and you'll be using your mouse and keyboard as naturally as if you were at a more standard setting of a desk. Getting in and out of a seated position is relatively easy too, as you can slide the support case over one of the arm rests to facilitate movement. Since the pieces are separate, you could also use the support case on it's own over a chair that has armrests already. Nerdytec do sell the support case solo - should

you already have a single-seater chair that means the armrest pieces would go unused.

A major plus point is that the unit can be used for more than just a keyboard and mouse combo, with the addition of a USB port on the top of the support case, you could quite easily connect a joystick or gamepad to your PC such that you could control games like Elite: Dangerous whilst retaining the full command set afforded to you by having a keyboard at hand. Alternatively, you can pop your laptop on top of the support case and use it from the comfort of your sofa too. Though, if you've wired in a keyboard and mouse, you'll need to find somewhere to "hang" them whilst using a laptop - or unwire them from the base completely.

I've since spent a couple of our Theme Nights here at GameOn using the Couchmaster Cycon, playing games such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, interspersed with time spent playing single player outings. Sitting in front of a home-theatre system and large screen had me wanting to relive some

of the experiences of games gone by, to see them in a new light. So with that, I fired up Half-Life 2 and got to work saving City 17 (again). Sat on the sofa, with the Couchmaster in place, watching Gordon Freeman





get ported to the other side of the office on a large TV with full surround sound brought new life to the game, instead of being hunched over a small 22 inch screen with only a stereo headset for audio, and that's part of what makes the Couchmaster Cycon such a great addition to the gamers set piece. I also figured that a good test of the stability of the Cycon would be to play some strategy games, like an old favourite Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2, constant mouse shifting and keyboard presses meant nothing to the Cycon, which sat there and ate them up like it was a fully fledged desk. To wind down from all that, I moved onto some Factorio and well, 5 hours later I was still sat as comfy as ever laying waste to hordes of biters and placing transport belts, which speaks volumes for the comfort and usability of the Cycon.

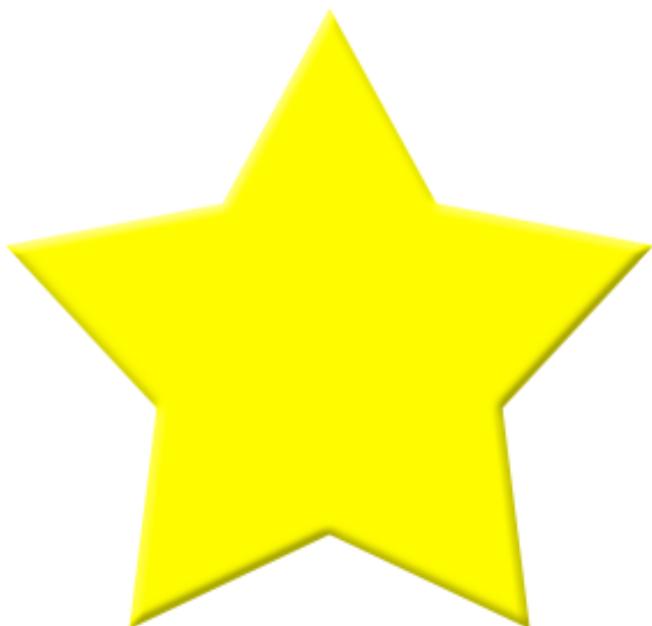
Lastly, there's some additional gadgets available for the Couchmaster; an ash-tray, phone holder and a tablet holder round out the selection of what's available as optional extras. I quite like the idea of mounting a tablet to the Cycon, for those times you need to look up crafting recipes in Minecraft or where that last damn flag is in Assassin's Creed.

**RRP: €174.00
/ \$169.00**



nerdytec





Suitable for:



Switch



PC



PlayStation



Xbox





TACTICAL ASSAULT COMMANDER PRO (TYPE M2)

There comes a time in every gamer's life when they realise their joints are getting a little older, and they realise control pads SUCK for precision aiming. Hori has also realised this and the solution it has come up with for the PC and PlayStation peeps out there is the Tactical Assault Commander PRO M2.

This wonderful little gadget is a gaming mouse and keypad for use on PC, PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4. Connected either by USB or Bluetooth and set up using an optional iPhone or Android App, you can bind differing inputs to the bank of 20 backlit mechanically switched keys or just leave it on the FPS centric default.

Added to this is a thumbstick that will be familiar to users of a console controller, a touchpad that duplicates the one on a DualShock 4, DPI adjustment, headset input, buttons for "snipe" and "walk" and even a button to switch the thumbstick to D-pad input momentarily for quick switching of items and the like. It's found a lot of use in World of Warships: Legends allowing me to quickly drop a smoke-screen and leg it away from angry Yamatos and the like.

Different profiles can be set for each game or console and switched on the fly using the device manager app. A profile notifier LED

makes it easy to check whether you're trying to play World of Warcraft using your PlayStation profile you set for Dead to Rights: Retribution.

After spending a couple of months with one of these my wife now refuses to go back to keyboard and mouse because it's eased the pain in her wrists, and I was so impressed I bought one for myself.

It's not cheap, and there are better mice out there (I've gone back to my Roccat Kova), but the added utility of the gamepad more than makes up for it and it's always handy to have a spare lying about for when a pet chews a cable.

The lack of a lightbar or motion-sensing SixAxis wizardry could be an issue for some games, I can think of a couple of PlayStation 3 titles that will mess up royally without it, but it's not a massive problem as this is an additional control method and not a replacement to the traditional controllers. I wouldn't want to play a beat-em-up on a gamepad over a controller.

On PC such things are moot. In VR I can see this being useful in games like Elite: Dangerous and once the keybinds are set the way you want almost every game will allow you to change the controls to your preference. Muscle memory will



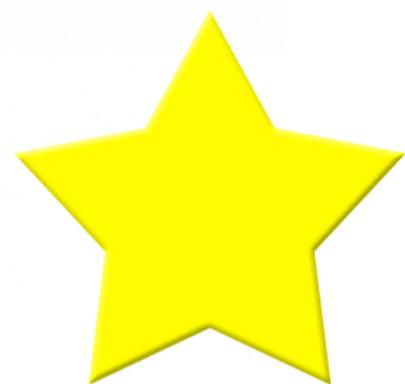


have you wondering why you bothered with the old keyboard and mouse combo in the first place.

pounds is worth the money. It gets a thumbs up from me, with the caveat that the mouse is merely average rather than it being top end kit.

If you're looking for something that's multiplatform, or you're like me and your wrists and fingers are showing their age, then the ergonomics of the Tactical Assault Commander PRO M2 will be a veritable Godsend in most applications, and even at just over a hundred

RRP: £142.61 / \$149.99



Suitable for:



PC





NINTENDO SWITCH LITE

When the Nintendo Switch Lite was first announced I wanted to pre-order it right away. Yes, I did, and got it on launch day.

In the box was the Switch Lite, charging plug and instructions, which covers both the original and Lite consoles. Not a lot, but since you can only play games in handheld mode, there's not a lot that they could put in.

The flaps to insert the Game Card and micro-SD card are stiff and hard to open, but in time I'm sure they will loosen up. The buttons/sticks are easy to press and the sticks are easy to move with no stiffness. I have to say it was the best feeling as the Joy-Cons on our original Switch have started to drift, and it was getting very irritating. The buttons are just like having the Nintendo Switch but it's slightly smaller and you can't feel the sides like on the Switch itself where the Joy-Cons connect. Because it doesn't actually have Joy-Cons, it's all fixed together.

The first game I tried out was Pokémon Let's go Pikachu. The screen is perfect for that game, and the quality is just like the original Switch itself. It is a little bit brighter though, even at lower settings.

The Switch Lite is easy to hold and not too heavy. While playing it doesn't get hot in the hands. It does get slightly warm, but

that is normal for the original Switch too. It all depends on the game you play.

I decided to test the battery, especially since the Switch Lite is designed to be played away from a plug socket. After one hour with low brightness and a full battery, it dropped down to 79%. With the brightness all the way up, the battery went down to 73%. It also got warmer, which is worth noting.

As an update to the original, the Switch Lite is quite good. As a handheld console it's fantastic. I really like being able to play Dead By Daylight wherever I am, and recommend the Switch Lite to anyone wanting to break free from their TV.





Nintendo Switch Lite

Zecian & Zamazenta Edition



**RRP: £199.99
/\$199.99**





SNAKEBYTE GAMING:SEAT

Having gone through many different gaming hardware in my time, something I've never considered is the more practical stuff, such as chairs. Having happily spent my gaming history sat in >£70 office chairs, when I woke up to find the £250 chair on my doorstep, it's needless to say that I didn't really know what to expect. It took two of us to actually get it through the door, and then I was left with this behemoth of a box that resided in my living room.

After unboxing all of the components and leaving them strewn across the living room, I was fairly daunted by the amount of pieces I would have to put together. When I braved up to looking at the instructions, I was initially overwhelmed, with only pictures being used with very little being diagramed and, as I found out later, certain steps that just were skipped by the manual. Whilst these steps were fairly self-explanatory, as someone who likes to (and has to) follow instructions to the letter, the exclusion of certain steps was overly difficult for me to get around.

Instructions aside, the construction of the chair itself was surprisingly easy. Many components simply slotted and clipped together, and any screws needed were already provided and screwed into the appropriate holes, avoiding all the awkward shuffling of screws that usually occurs when constructing any form of

furniture. Once I'd gotten my head around the instructions, to actually build the chair only took around 15 minutes or so. The only issue I did encounter was the plate which attaches the height & recline levers to the chair is shown screwed in facing a different direction in the instructions to how you actually can with the real chair. The version depicted in the instructions made more sense as the actual way it screwed in meant I had to adjust how I'd screwed in the arm rests, as they were overlapping.

Once those complications were put aside, it came to actually using the chair. Sporting a headrest, lower back pillow, retractable leg rest & adjustable armrests, it was a lot of choice and comfort that I was not used to. Being a digital magazine designer, nightly livestreamer, small-time writer and long-time procrastinator of real, important tasks, it's not wrong to say I spend 8-10+ hours sat in my computer chair on an average day. As of writing, it's currently 2:45pm GMT and I'm at five hours already as an example. I was happy enough with my basic chairs, but Snakebyte have changed that. The Snakebyte 'Gaming:Seat' remains perfectly comfortable to sit in, and the customisation you're given in the chair's design makes it easy to comfortably switch up sitting positions to avoid your entire body from sticking to the chair, especially in this heat.





One thing I feel is important to bring up is that I suffer from both Scoliosis, a spinal condition which causes the spine to curve into a C or S shape, affecting only 3% of the population, and Scheuermann's Disease, where the vertebrae grows disproportionately, causing the spine to bend outwards/inwards. These combined cause me irritation and pain whilst doing pretty much anything, especially for long periods of time, and sitting down is one of them. Being unable to consciously correct my posture, I found I could only sit in the office chairs for about an hour until pain started. With the Gaming:Seat, the use of the back pillow and headrest allowed me to sit comfortably in the chair for up to 2+ solid hours without discomfort occurring. As mentioned earlier, I livestream almost every night for two hours, and towards the end of many streams it would be commented I would grow visibly restless and fidgety. Since using the Gaming:Seat however, I have been able to happily sit through the two hour session without growing abnormally discomforted. I'm not saying it's cured my issues, and long gaming or work sessions still cause pain and high irritation, but this experience would not be typical of most users and if anyone reading this suffers from problems like this when seated, the Gaming:Seat is definitely worth your interest.

The leg rest was a feature that I was interested in seeing how it worked, and if it was practical to do so. Whilst it looked relaxing, I couldn't imagine it's use when PC gaming, and this showed from my experiences. From trying to play Rocket League, if I had the leg rest up I generally found it more uncomfortable as I would naturally lean

forward when playing. For watching videos, the leg rest managed to find its love in me, as well as when I was playing games that required an Xbox controller such as Human: Fall Flat. The versatility the chair gives you offers an extraordinary variety of ways to enjoy yourself.

Overall, the snakebyte Gaming:Seat showed me what I've truly been missing all these years. Amazing quality, great customisation, a bit of a confusing construction but it can be easily overlooked when you get the final product. With a current cost of £230 at the time of writing, the price may put many off, but for anyone who spends a large amount of time at a PC, whether it's watching videos, doing work, playing videogames or just relaxing, it's definitely a great value for the money, especially when compared to other gaming chairs on the market.

**RRP: £159.99
/ N/A**





BRAZEN SERPENT GAMING CHAIR

When I was first asked to review the BraZen Serpent Gaming Chair, I was initially skeptical. Being a PC gamer basically all my life, I've never had much thought for pedestal-style gaming chairs, with their smaller, stationary design being more suited for console gameplay. In spite of this, I decided that the new experience would give me a way to entertain myself over the Christmas period, and I took in the Serpent with little to no expectations for it outside of 'a small comfy chair'.

When I first obtained the chair, the first thing I noticed was its weight. Whilst it was quite heavy and I had a hard time maneuvering the box through the house, the BraZen Serpent is notably lighter when compared to other gaming chairs on the market, clocking in at approximately 20kg or 44lbs. Despite its low weight, the chair itself still offers ample support, being able to support a (recommended) max weight of 125-150kg, or 20-24st.

Upon unpacking the chair, it came in six pieces, plus a set of screws with an Allen key and instructions. Considering I can be a bit non-technical when it comes to constructing just about anything, I was able to fully construct the chair with no difficulty from the instructions. Parts are clearly labelled in the diagram, and the given steps are logical and easy to follow.

Getting the chair powered on and hooked up to various devices also showed to be light work, and I was able to hook the chair up to my phone, TV and laptop. Through this time I was able to watch TV shows, listen to music, and play videogames, all from the comfort of the BraZen Serpent. The audio quality was astoundingly good, the option to boost the bass and volume were easily accessible, and the surround sound worked very effectively when sat in the chair.

Most importantly for a gaming chair, it was comfortable to sit in for extended periods of time. I was sat in the BraZen Serpent for the better part of roughly three hours without any discomfort. The chair can rotate a full 360 degrees and can recline into a comfortable leaning back





position with ease. The arms at the side can also be folded up out of the way if one so wishes. My only gripe with the chair was the inability to adjust the height, which wasn't a personal problem for me, but someone who is shorter/taller than me (roughly 180cm/5'11") may find the chair uncomfortable for long periods of time.

**RRP: £249.95
/ \$N/A**

The BraZen Serpent has been on the market for over a year now and still sits as one of the more expensive chairs available, but given its high-quality comfort and sound, it's more than worth the price tag. With the only downside really being difficulty in adjusting the chair, this would make a fantastic choice for those looking for high-quality comfort as they game.





E-WIN CHAMPION SERIES ERGONOMIC COMPUTER GAMING OFFICE CHAIR

It's easy to say that I'm not one to splurge. I've looked at several gamer chairs and tried out quite a few in stores, but it's hard to commit when you're a penny pincher. Finding the right style, the right fit, and for the right price is a challenge.

When E-WIN reached out regarding their gaming chairs, I was most definitely interested. I recently moved and when I did so, I left almost all of my furniture behind. Up until recently, I had been using a dining chair until I finally purchased a very basic office chair. It was comfortable enough, but as a person who has broken their tailbone in the past, comfort is occasionally a challenge. Note to readers, don't break your tailbone.

I have wanted a gaming chair for a while, and to get the opportunity to try out one of E-WIN's quality was a chance I couldn't pass up. After getting my measurements, they were happy to send over a chair from their E-WIN Champion Series. It was wonderful to find one that even fit my aesthetic, one with a bloody handprint on the front and back and with the word "bloody" printed on the pillow. I do love horror games after all, why not play them in a horror-ish gamer chair!

new arrival, I set into putting the chair together. It was amazingly easy and actually faster than putting together the cheap office chair I had bought only two weeks prior. Finally all set up, I was looking forward to giving it a try, and try I did.

Seeing as I had work to do, I set the chair at my desk and went to work. After adjusting to the pillow at the base of my back, I realized it was incredibly comfortable. Where my other chair had made me feel a bit stiff after sitting in it for a while, I didn't feel fatigued at all with this new chair. For computer gaming chairs, this one was incredible, especially considering how it allowed me to sit. I'm one who tends to sit crossed-legged in my chairs, curled up while I type, do research, or play games. This chair fits not just the normal style of sitting, but definitely fits me sitting like the curled up odd person.

Over the next few days I worked through the adjustments, changing the angle of the reclining back as well as adjusting the arms. I was pleased to see the arms adjusted three different ways: sliding in toward the chair and away from it, sliding forward and backward, and lastly up and down. This has made it so that I can find the exact height and angle I want the arms at so that my elbows can rest comfortably while I work or play. The buttons are easy to press and figure out,



The delivery arrived quickly and was in a rather large box. After letting my dogs sniff around the



and for the first day or so I felt like I kept finding a new armchair button feature! The headrest pillow was also a wonderful surprise, especially on nights where my head started to bother me. I've never had a more comfortable chair and I'm extremely happy to have this one now.

As a slightly vertically challenged person, I worried about the lowest height setting on the chair. Granted, my feet aren't on the ground the vast majority of the time, but I do have to sit a little closer to the edge for my feet to hit the ground on the lowest setting. That's not all that bad, though, as the comfort of the chair is more than enough to make up for that occasional issue. As a former orchestra student in school, one gets used to sitting on the edge of the chair and old habits die hard.

All in all, the E-WIN Champion Series may be my first in the world of computer gaming chairs, but I already feel I will turn to them whenever

I need another. I have had my friend's mother and father even try them due to looking for a chair that will be comfortable and it hugs just like a glove. E-WIN puts a lot of work into their chairs and it shows with not just the design and craftsmanship, but also the feel. If you're in the market for a gaming chair, definitely give E-WIN a look, as they are worth it.



RRP: from £276.00
/ from \$349.00





XBOX SERIES X

There are some consoles that go for a flashy exterior but that can't be said about the Xbox Series X, which actually looks like a black box. That's not a bad thing, as when it's in use I usually forget it's there, unlike my white Xbox One S - but this is to talk about the new, not the old.

The size of the cardboard box belies how heavy the Series X is, as it's quite a hefty beast. You get the power cable, HDMI cable and one controller, as well as a leaflet that tells you how to set up your new device; which basically amounts to "Download the Xbox app and follow the instructions".

I won't go into the technical stuff for two reasons. Firstly, there are plenty of places that have been going over that kind of thing since before the consoles came out. Secondly, I just don't understand a lot of it - teraflop? Utter nonsense.

I thought that it was a nice touch that the Xbox Series X will download updates while you're setting things up using your mobile device. It means you're not sitting twiddling your thumbs, depending on the speed of your connection, and are ready to go quicker. Another great touch was being able to transfer games

from your Xbox One to the Series X, rather than download them completely. Some games will require a patch, if they're designed to look better on Xbox Series X, but it's still hours saved.

Loading up the console is noticeably faster than the Xbox One. When you get into the menu screens, they will look familiar if you had a previous-gen console. In fact, it will look exactly the same, because it's supposed to. You can even import the settings from your old console, if you like.

Loading games is nice and quick, with Watch_Dogs 2 and Dauntless being two games where I noticed the loading times being much faster. I keep fast travelling in San Francisco and





reaching for my phone, forgetting that I'll barely have time to pick it up, let alone tap on Twitter.

Unfortunately, installing doesn't seem to be any faster than the Xbox One. Sure, the Xbox Series X can't do anything about my download speed, but installing from the disc should have been faster than the previous generation, surely.

I've previously explained why I was planning on buying this rather than the competitor, and a part of that was Xbox Game Pass. It's kind of annoying that Microsoft didn't push a bunch more titles onto the service to celebrate the new launch. Yes, there are a

load of games there already, and I've not played them all, but it would have been nicer to have some new stuff, rather than mostly games I could have played a week earlier.

However, those are really the only negative things I can think to say about the console, and one of

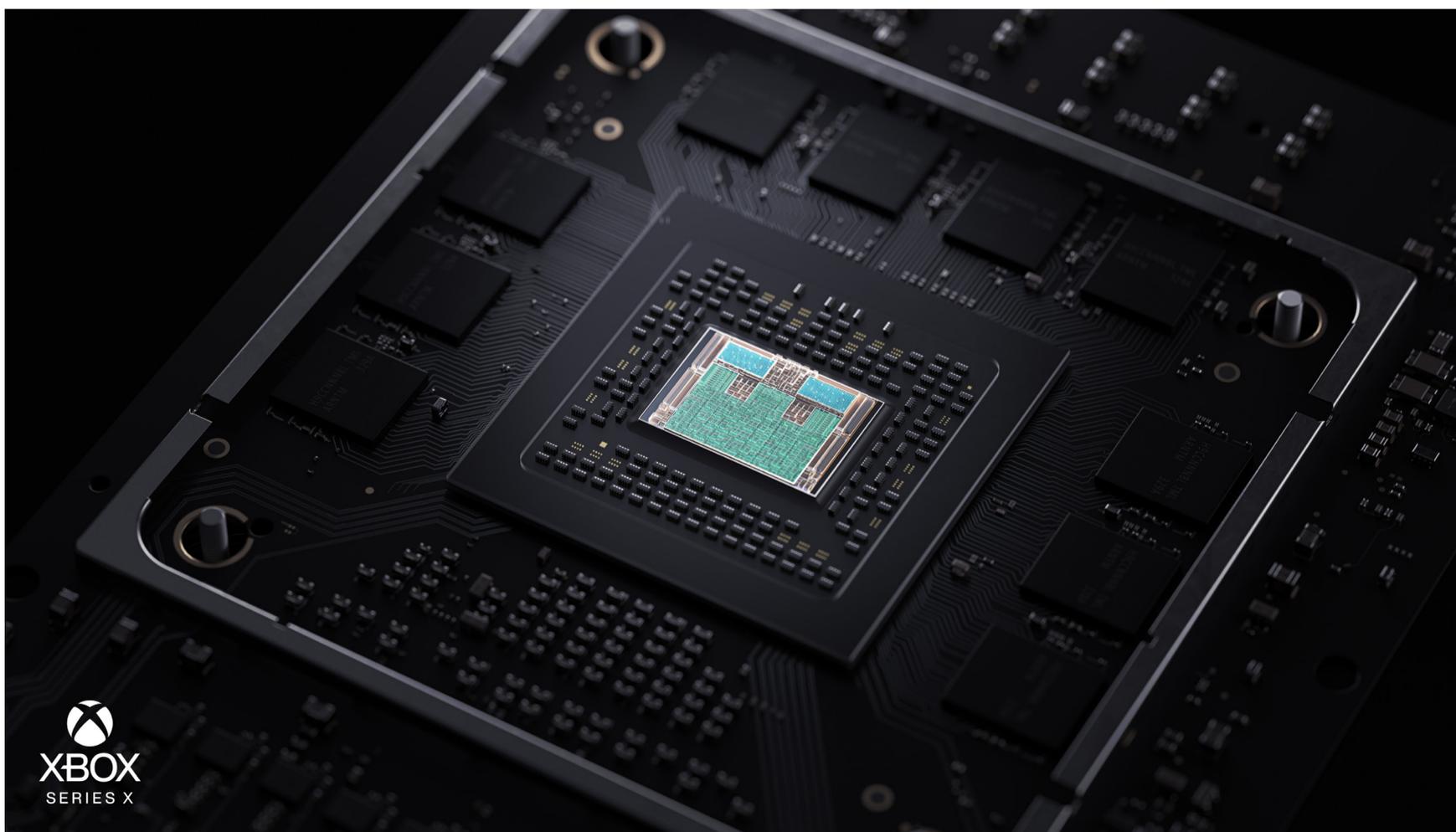




those isn't even about the Series X. It's nice and quiet during use and even quieter when it's not reading from the disc. With the old console, I couldn't leave it in quick start mode as the fan was too loud whilst "off". With it being in the bedroom, it wasn't conducive towards a good night's sleep. Thankfully, the Xbox Series X is nice and quiet in quick start mode, and it's downloaded a whole bunch without disturbing my night.

Hopefully this has convinced you one way or the other about which console you want to buy this generation. If you have a bunch of Xbox One and Xbox 360 game discs (and a few Xbox discs) hanging around, then this is a worthy upgrade that will keep you playing for the generation ahead. But even if you don't have them, it might still be worth a look.

**RRP: £449.99
/ \$499.99**







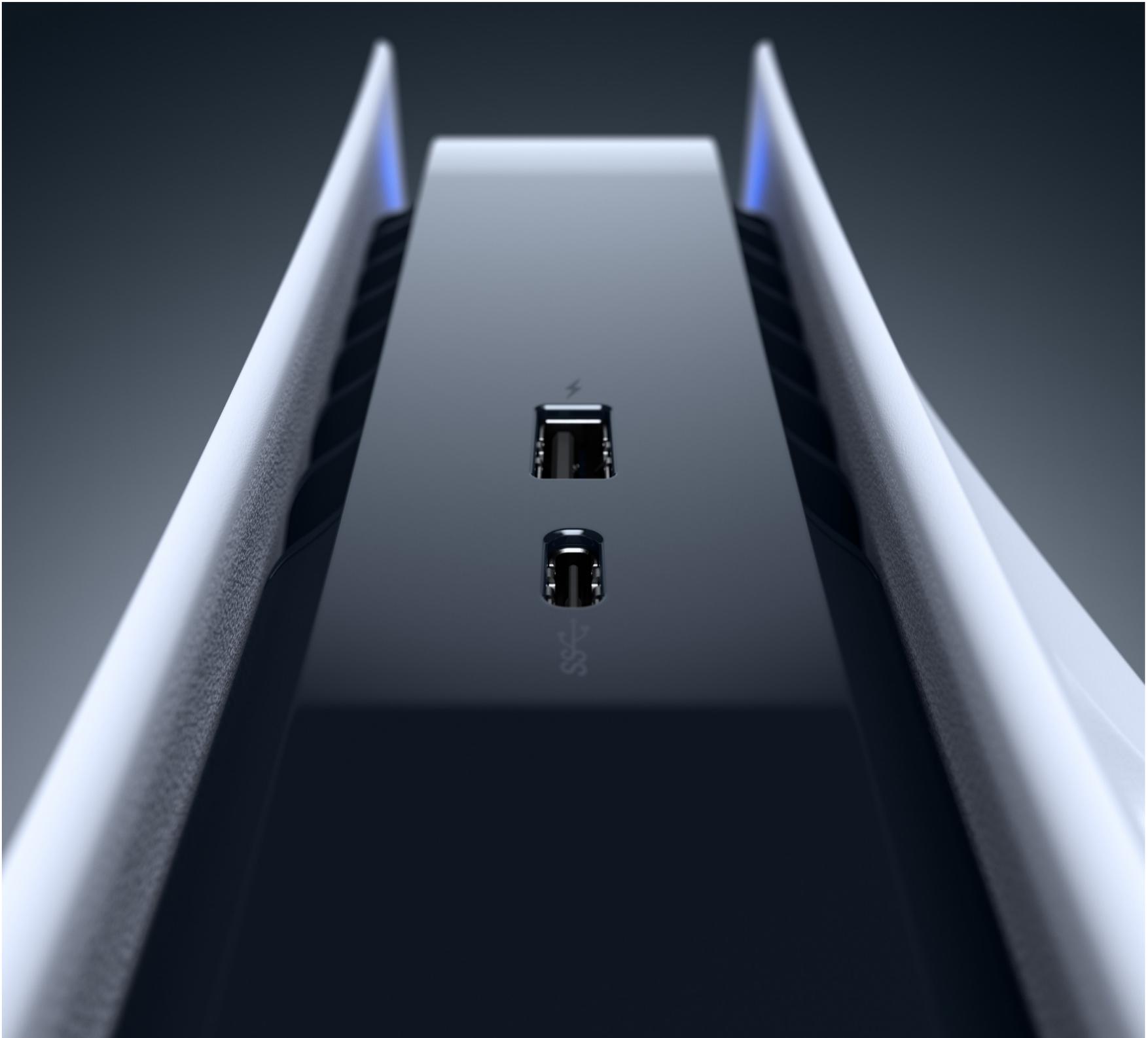
PLAYSTATION 5

The PlayStation 5 is the 5th console that Sony has produced (it's the 7th overall, but the 5th non-handheld) and possibly the biggest leap in technology and graphic fidelity for a console launch since the original PlayStation. Let's start off by talking about the specs of this beefy console shall we? The CPU is based on Ryzen's Zen 2 with 8 cores and 16 threads at a 3.5GHz frequency which is variable, with power shared with the GPU when one is required more than the other. It is coupled with an AMD RDNA2 GPU that is able to pump out gorgeous visuals and maintain steady FPS whilst doing ray tracing. There's 16GB of GDDR6 RAM, and an incredible SSD that is able to load you into games in a matter of seconds. The exact speed of the SSD is 9 GBs / sec which is very hard to even find for a PC at the moment without paying at least half of what the console is worth.

Ok so let's talk about one of the things that makes the PlayStation 5 stand out when compared to its Microsoft; the controller. The DualSense controller is different to the DualShock 4. Instead of going down the route that Xbox took, by making all Xbox One controllers compatible; Sony actually made a next-gen controller and damn does it feel good. One of the stand out features that really shows the difference

between the DualShock 4 and the DualSense controller is the new haptic triggers. This may sound like a tiny feature whilst reading this review but in fact, it plays a major part in games that take advantage of it. Take Call of Duty Black Ops: Cold War for example, whilst on PlayStation 4 you get the standard vibration that you are used to. On the PS5 however, you really feel the bullets coming out of your gun thanks to the haptic feedback, this isn't just a gimmick though, it actually changes gameplay. As you are firing bullets your gun's





recoil pattern will be felt through the controller. This feature really is hard to explain in writing but it definitely makes the controller feel next level.

Another new feature of the DualSense controller is the haptic feedback. This is very similar to the Nintendo Switch's controllers, where you can actually feel different things based on the environments you are walking through or the things that you are doing. This is showcased well by Astro's Playroom, which takes all of the new controller features and showcases them in

different levels throughout the game. It is worth noting that Astro's Playroom is free and is pre-installed on every PlayStation 5 and is definitely worth a try. The rumbles are certainly felt towards the start of the game by showing how even little steps that your character takes can really be felt in the controller. You can also feel the difference between walking on a surface like glass and walking over a giant block of ice for example.

The PlayStation 5 launches with two major games that are worth looking at with other





major titles in the works like Horizon Zero Dawn: Forbidden West, God of War: Ragnarok and Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart. All of these games have had trailers shown and are definitely worth keeping an eye on in the future.

The console does have launch games including titles like Demon's Souls, Astro's Playroom and Spider-Man: Miles Morales. With my console I picked up Demon's Souls and I am enjoying my time with it, (check out our review to read our impressions of that title). So whether you want to play great PlayStation 4 games like Uncharted 4 or Bloodborne through the PlayStation Plus Collection, or enjoy the new games that are coming to the platform like Cyberpunk 2077, this collection of launch titles show that Sony's latest console can fight off the competition.

The PlayStation 5 is deadly quiet. Throughout my time spent with the console I haven't heard a peep, even when playing games that were very demanding on the PlayStation 4. The Last Of Us: Part 2 is a very loud game when running on PlayStation 4. However, when playing on PlayStation 5 through backwards compatibility, I heard nothing. This could be due to Sony making the consoles ventilation better or due to the better hardware meaning the games are less demanding, but either way it is definitely an achievement.

RRP: £449.99 / \$499.99



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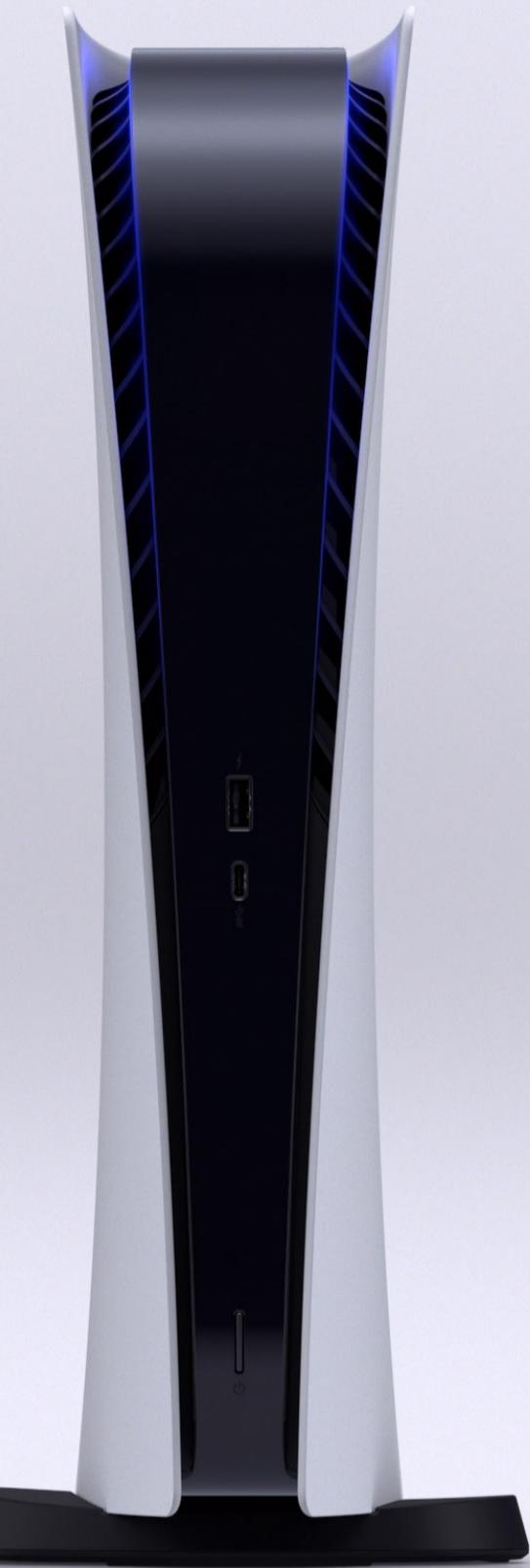
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DELL XPS 13 9300 LAPTOP

The XPS line of laptops is Dell's premium line, encompassing the very best engineering and specifications that the company has to offer. The XPS 13 sits at the lowest end of the bunch, with the XPS 15 and 17 sitting higher up as, with what you have probably already guessed, much larger profiles. All of these models have now been refreshed for 2020, sporting Intel's 10th generation Ice Lake processors, based on its troublesome 10nm manufacturing process.

The model I am reviewing here features the Intel Core i7-1065G7, which features vastly improved Intel Iris Plus graphics. The only other available option at the time of writing is the i5-1035G1, which on the spec sheet looks very similar to its i7 equivalent. Both feature four cores and eight threads, with stock and all-core boost clocks 300MHz higher on the

i7. The biggest difference, though, is in the integrated graphics specifications; but we will get into more of that later when we take a look at the performance. My model also has 16GB of LPDDR4X memory, 1TB NVMe storage, 4K touch display, enclosed in an arctic white woven glass fibre palm rest. This retails for just under £1,720. The cheapest model starts at £1,418.99 (although there are savings available).

Construction & Design

The XPS line of laptops is up against some strong competition, most notable that from Apple, alongside HP and Lenovo. The CNC aluminium chassis from Dell stacks up very well against these, with an overall solid and weighty feel. I would say that the unibody design from Apple looks cleaner, but the XPS 13 comes in just





behind. Eight T5 screws hold the underside cover in place, which then pulls right off, giving you access to the internals. Unfortunately, memory isn't upgradeable, which is a trade-off you must swallow when opting for high-speed LPDDR4X memory. However, in a departure from previous models, you can now upgrade the SSD. Be aware, though, as some models feature tiny 2230 drives rather than larger 2280 (which is the limit), so the provided heat sink, which also doubles as a cable guide for the WiFi antenna, will not be sufficient. Replacements are available online though, and to be honest, you could potentially get away without one.

Aside from the chassis construction, the other vital part of a laptop is its keyboard. The edge-to-edge backlit keyboard included here has slightly enlarged keycaps compared to previous years, but it is amongst the best I have used, particularly on a laptop this size. It may miss out to some since Apple ditched the fan un-favourite butterfly keyboard and switched to the new magic keyboard, but not by much. There is a satisfying click with every press, and on the whole I have found it very easy when typing on for long periods

of time. I've written a few reviews for this site on it since I got it, and have had no issues at all. The touchpad is the best I have used apart from, again, a Macbook. Much better than any Lenovo or HP touchpad I have ever used, though.

Finally, there is the screen. It's available in two flavours - a 1920 x 1200 FHD+ unit, or a 3840 x 2400 UHD+ display, both outputting 500nits of peak brightness. The FHD+ unit can be had with or without touch functionality, whereas the UHD+ is exclusively touch. Word of warning though - the touch enabled units, the UHD+ version of which my model is equipped with, has a good amount of glare in direct sunlight. At full brightness, it's sort of OK, but if you're going to be using it outdoors more often I would definitely opt for a touch-less unit. If you're wondering why the resolutions are slightly off, it's because Dell has rid itself of its logo under the display to expand the screen to a 16:10 scale, which the company says makes it 6.8% larger than before. With its almost entirely frameless bezel, it looks truly stunning. 4K scaling in Windows is still a little bit iffy at times, but I can hardly blame the laptop for the OS' shortcomings. Sitting slightly above



the display is the webcam, along with infrared cameras that have full support for Windows Hello, or Howdy if you're running Linux.

Audio & Connectivity

Dell have gone all-in with USB type C with two Thunderbolt 3 compatible ports, and a single headphone port. For better or worse, the dongle life is here, but at least there are some good options out there now. In the box is a 45W charger, so if you do opt for a dongle with USB-PD, you'll probably want to upgrade to a higher power brick as the unit can potentially pull more than 45W in some workloads. There is also a full size SD card slot on the left side, which is handy should you have a need.

Internally, the Killer AX1650 is included with all models in the range, offering the latest WiFi 6 spec with speeds of up to 2.6 Gbps if you have a wireless system to saturate it. Bluetooth 5.1 is also standard across all.

Perhaps one of the most disappointing parts is the external audio. No amount of "professionally tuned" marketing speak from Dell escapes the fact that these dual 2.5W, with 4W maximum output between the two, downward firing speakers are really quite poor. They are tinny and lack clarity at pretty much all volume levels. They're OK for some background music or the odd YouTube video, but for films or TV shows you'll be clamouring for something better.

Performance

Whilst Intel struggles with getting desktop CPUs on its 10nm node to release, Ice Lake brings about a decent level of performance - particularly with its integrated graphics, which comes at a good time considering AMD's substantial improvements in this segment.

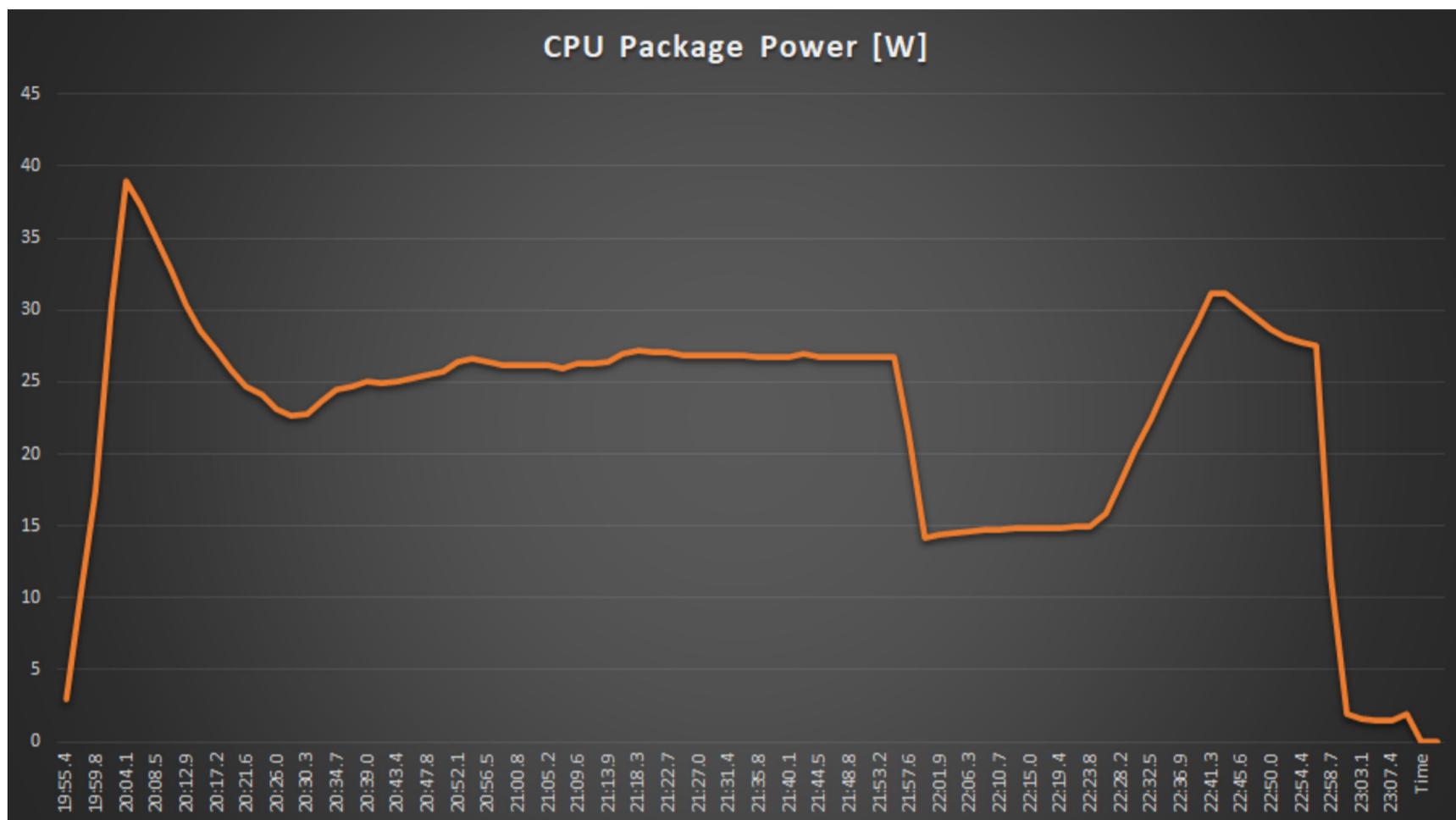
At a purely CPU level, the improvement from the i5 and i7 probably isn't worth it to the vast majority of people. The slightly higher clock speed of the i7 doesn't have strong enough gains to justify the higher price. Where it is better, though, is in graphical performance; the i7 features 64 Iris Plus execution units, compared to 32 on the i5, dubbed as UHD Graphics. It appears to scale quite well, so you can expect roughly 50% performance gains on the i7 over the i5 - although I won't be directly comparing them here.

Other outlets have seen this i7 pull above 40W, however in Cinebench I did get it to just shy of that to 38W. That is quite clearly above the advertised 15W TDP - even 25W turbo TDP - which causes temperatures to skyrocket dramatically to 100 degrees C. There is momentary boosting across two of the four cores (usually) at 3.8GHz, but it's not long (i.e. a couple of seconds) before it is dropped down to 3.4GHz all core and tends to hover at 2.9GHz, drawing around 30W of power. This is within Intel's specs, so nothing surprising at all.

CPU Package Power

That's still pretty impressive though for what is

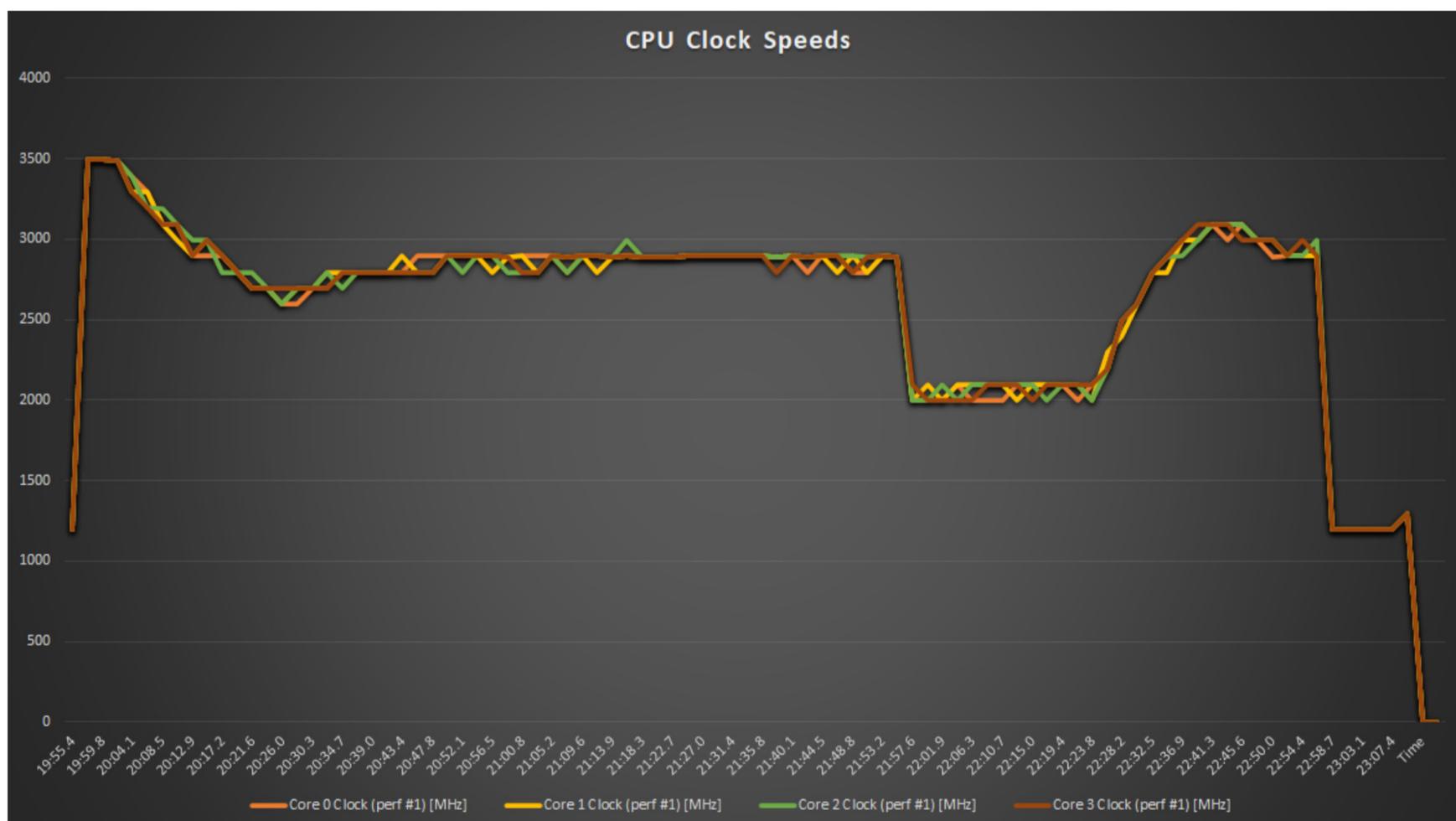


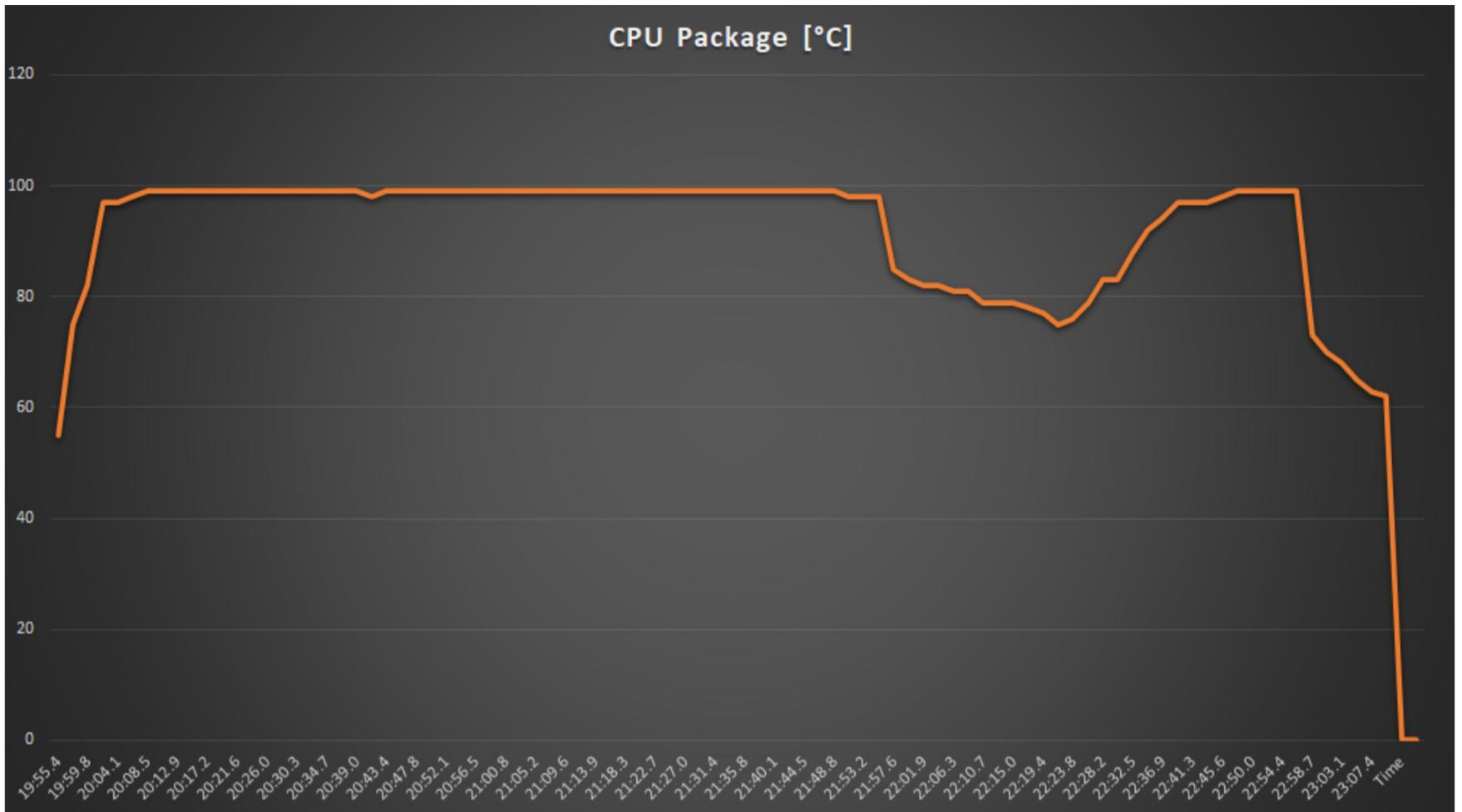


a very small and compact machine. Of course, the fan kicks in at full whack, but even then it's really not too loud considering how much air it is trying to pump out. If you were playing a game through the built-in speakers, you probably wouldn't even be able to hear anything aside from a slight whine during quieter moments.

CPU Clock Speeds

CPU Package





These charts are taken from the same run in Cinebench, which is a purely CPU bound test. After running other benchmarks, the result is usually the same, with Cinebench R20 earning a result of 1698 multi-core and 398 single core, over an average of five runs. Here's how it compares against the top end (ish) Ryzen 7 Pro 4750U and two of its direct competitors:

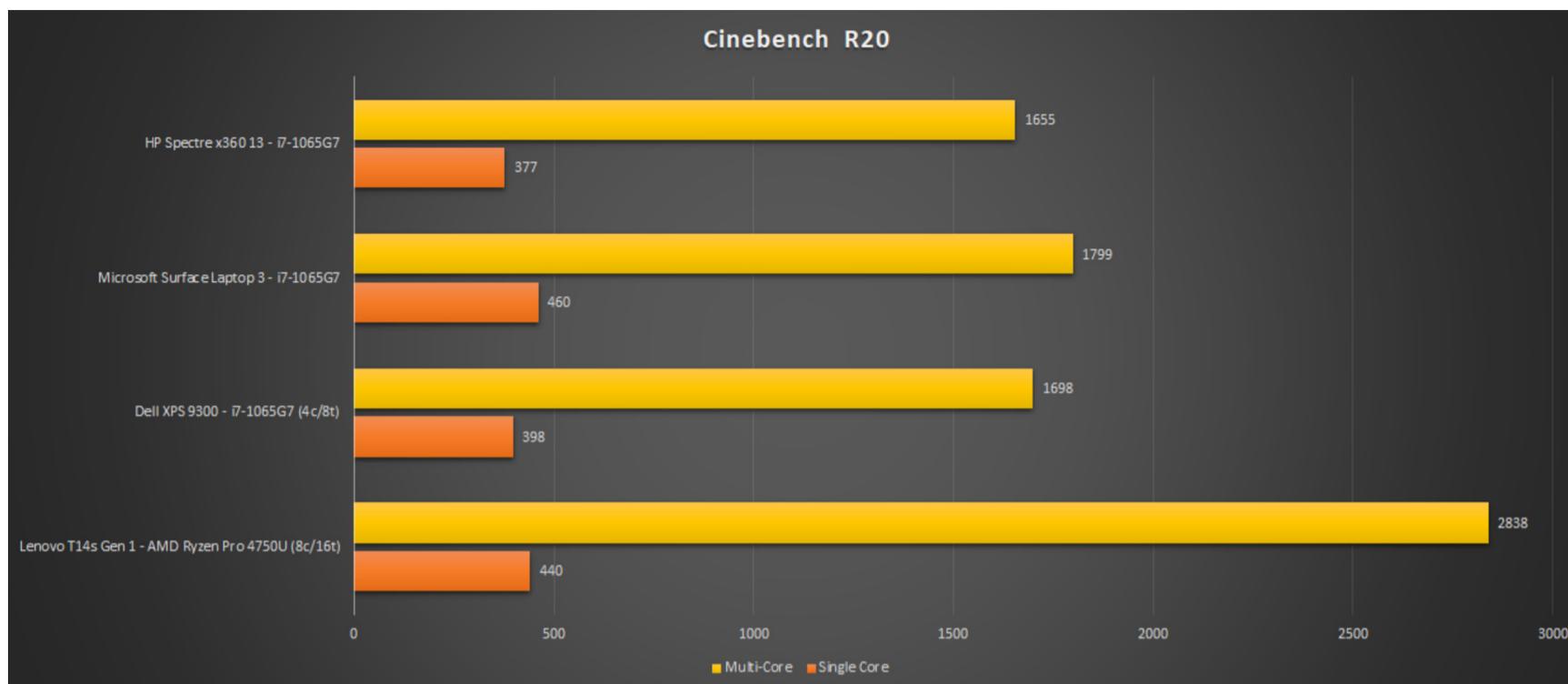
In terms of productivity, PC Mark 10, which measures things like opening spreadsheets, video conferencing performance, amongst others, measures up with a score of 3,377 - just shy of the average 3,916 (at the time of writing) for an office laptop in 2020. The graphical scores bring this down, with typical office tasks scoring pretty highly. After all, the included Kioxia 1TB SSD in my model performs very well, with a low power draw. In average use, with Chrome, Discord, Steam and Spotify open, you're looking at around six to seven hours of battery life, which can be improved by opting for the 1080p display rather than the 4K touch enabled version.

If you're looking for a laptop to game on, then this isn't it. Whilst the i7 does have greater graphical power than the i5, it will struggle with modern games, especially if running at 4K. With Rocket League, it struggles to run even at 640x400 with all the options turned down. At native 4K with everything disabled, it averages around 20FPS, making it practically unplayable. Lowering down the resolution can get you above 30FPS, but there are still frequent stutters. Minecraft, at least the Microsoft Store version, is perfectly playable at decent settings, along with other less demanding games like FIFA. But you won't go much further than that. Still makes a good Football Manager machine though if that's your thing.

Conclusion

If you're after a small laptop with a decent amount of power for its size, decent battery life and a crystal clear screen, the 2020 XPS 13 is certainly a compelling device. It certainly doesn't come cheap, and there are definitely many more





affordable laptops in the £500 - £800 range that offer similar performance. However, they don't typically feature near bezel-less designs whilst keeping Windows Hello support, or such fantastic keyboard and an almost perfect touchpad.

**RRP: £1,468.99
/ \$1,099.99**

It also supports Ubuntu, with the developer edition coming pre-loaded with the Debian based OS. Dell offers compatible drivers for everything, however the fingerprint reader present on all other models (the developer edition does not feature one) can be a bit of a pain to get working, and there is some issue with the Killer WiFi adapter - it constantly complained to me that it wasn't working as intended and to search for a new driver, even though it appeared OK to me. Battery life is slightly worse in Ubuntu, but I didn't run any proper tests whilst I was testing it out. Some tweaking with CPU power governors would likely yield some better results.



It is disappointing that Dell isn't currently offering any AMD variants of the XPS 13, but as it is, if you're looking for a premium compact laptop, you can't go far wrong.





THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONSOLES

Trying to decide which console to buy isn't being made any easier, with upgraded versions of consoles, and the brand new ones which just came out this year. Do you need an Xbox One S or a Series X? Will a PlayStation 5 Digital Edition meet your needs? And what about the Switch; where does that fit into the whole equation? Hopefully this will help you pick out which one you're looking for.

PlayStation 4 £199.99

The "slim" is now the standard PS4 model and is 30% smaller, 16% lighter and 28% better at power consumption, with fewer USB ports. If you understand what all that means, you'll also be glad to know it houses the exact same innards as the original PS4 so your games won't look any different. Unlike the original, the Slim comes with both a 500GB and 1TB options with prices starting from around £230. In a nutshell, it's more of the same, in a better looking and smaller body.



PlayStation 4 Pro £409.99

The PlayStation 4 with more power, perfect for those obsessed with crisper graphics, better frame rates and a 1080p resolution. The PS Pro has a more powerful and faster GPU & CPU at its core, as well as harnessing the latest in HDR and 4K technology. Though there is no 4K Blu-Ray player for films (Sony are working with Netflix and YouTube on 4K streaming apps), the games you play will be the best looking ever seen on a PlayStation 4 console, appearing all the better if you have a 4K television. Having the new console won't hinder the games you can play either, all PS4 games will be compatible with the Pro, some even receiving patches to optimise the Pro's technology.



PlayStation 5 £449.99

This is the best PlayStation gets in 2020. It plays PlayStation 5 games and 99% of PlayStation 4





games. Discs? Digital? It doesn't matter what form your games take, this machine will accept them. Additionally, it also plays 4K Ultra HD Blu-rays, regular Blu-rays and your old-fashioned DVDs (if you've still got some laying around). With 825GB of solid-state storage (667.2GB usable), you shouldn't need to worry about running out of space immediately after launch, but don't be surprised if those gigabytes get used up quicker than an F1 car uses fuel. Oh, and while the PlayStation 5 can play games in 4K resolutions, you don't need a 4K TV to use the console; your regular old 1080p TV will do just fine.



PlayStation 5 Digital Edition £359.99

Did you read that last paragraph? Well all of it still applies here, except for the portion regarding discs. While this model is cheaper (plus a touch lighter and thinner) than its subtitle-less older siblingsilbing, it comes at the cost of a reliance on digital goods. Your only choices for accessing content for this machine comes from the PlayStation Store or any other content provider Sony gives the "go ahead" to. For many consumers, this won't be an issue; for some, however, it'll be a major turn-off. In terms of performance and storage, though, this is identical to its costlier counterpart.



Xbox One S £249.99

4K blu-ray player, 40% smaller and slightly more powerful than original Xbox One. Offers HDR content, can be positioned vertically and the internal power supply avoids the blocky object attached to the cable, allowing better fitting into more confined areas. Built-in storage available is up to 1TB. HDMI 2.0 allows 4K and 60FPS. IR (InfraRed), TV controller compatibility, more updated controller.



Xbox One X £319.99

Whereas the S allows 4K media playback, the X is much more powerful. It is more than twice as powerful as it's predecessor, and still packs in a 1TB hard drive. This allows you to play games in 4K, with more games being enhanced to give you much better graphics in higher resolutions.





Xbox Series X £450

No, it's not a sleek modern fridge; it's an Xbox Series X. This is Microsoft's top-tier console going into this generation, and by all accounts, it's the most powerful one of the lot. You're not here for specs, but just know that this is capable of running games in native 4K at 120FPS with variable refresh rates and ray tracing. It's a beast. In terms of storage, you'll have a 1TB SSD packed into the box (802GB usable), with convenient, albeit not cheap, expansion options available via a proprietary expansion card from Seagate. If you don't fancy shelling out £219.99 for the aforementioned storage, you can invest in a cheaper external hard drive, although you'll still have to transfer most games over to the console's main storage pool to play them. Just like the higher-end PlayStation 5 model, the Series X plays all your discs—DVDs, Blu-rays, 4K Ultra HD Blu-rays—as well as games from every previous generation of Xbox. The list of old games which are compatible with the Series X, sadly, shrinks the further back you go; almost every single Xbox One game is supported, but the number of compatible original Xbox games doesn't quite reach 50.



Xbox Series S £250

Unlike the PlayStation 5 Digital Edition, there's more (or rather, less) to this cheaper model than the mere removal of a disc drive, although it doesn't have one of those either. The Series S is noticeably less powerful than the Series X, topping out at a native 1440p resolution reaching up to 120FPS (with upscaling to 4K, so it'll look fine on your 4K TV). Additionally, this model doesn't apply all of the same retroactive upgrades to previous-gen games as the Series X. While your Xbox One and Xbox 360 games will still look better on the Series S, they won't look quite as good as they would on the Series X. A lack of storage also serves as a blow to this console's appeal: it only offers a 512 GB SSD (with 364 GB usable). No matter how you look at it, that's not a lot of storage. Microsoft assures fans that the Series S versions of games can be optimised and cut down in terms of GB in comparison to their Series X equivalents, but it remains to be seen whether most developers will put in the work required. It's less powerful, it's got worse specs and it doesn't have all the goodies present in the Series X (including a lack of disc drive), but at such a low price and with such a sleek profile in comparison to the chunky Series X, it's still a tempting purchase.





Nintendo Switch £279.99

Nintendo's mega popular console hit the market with one compelling gimmick: "what if your main console could be played like a handheld?" The answer: it'd sell like gangbusters! The switch is the must-have for playing Nintendo's line-up of superb titles (plus a plethora of other outstanding games). If you want to make use of it as a home console (i.e. you want to plug it into your TV with that handy little dock and those detachable controllers), you'll need to grab yourself the more expensive Switch, this one. With 32GB of inbuilt storage (25.9GB available to use), you'll probably need to consider picking up a micro SD card to expand it. It accepts cards up to 2TB, but you hopefully won't be needing that; a sizable micro SD card can be picked up for next to nothing nowadays.

series), although there are workarounds that involve connecting a separate pair of Joy-con to your Switch Lite, but... well, who wants to do that? Other than the key points above, the Switch Lite is slightly smaller with a smaller screen to match, although not drastically so on either front. The storage solution is the same too: 32GB (25.9 usable) with micro SD expansion options.



Nintendo Switch Lite £199.99

What's a Switch without its gimmick? The Switch Lite! This is a slightly cheaper version of the Switch, one that—technically—still plays all the same games, only exclusively in handheld mode. With no detachable controllers or motion controls, there are a handful of games that'll present you with issues on the Switch Lite (most notably Super Mario Party and the Just Dance

Buyer beware:

Prices will vary depending on a variety of factors such as location, stock availability and the amount of items bundled with the console. Bundled items may include games and controllers, depending on which retailer you buy from.

The prices on these pages are the recommended retail price in the UK. Beware ordering from websites you are unfamiliar with, or from private sellers.



GAME MICRO-REVIEWS

**SWPC**

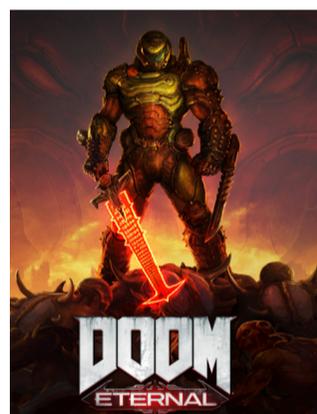
A Short Hike is a tightly-crafted, charming, and heart-warming game that comes in a bite-sized package for a delightfully low price.

A Short Hike 9.5/10

**PS PC**

Bugsnax is special. Young Horses have a unique, interesting and charming concept that's been executed perfectly. There are a few nitpicks here and there but if you have any interest in Bugsnax you'll find a game unlike any other and one I can't stop saying good things about.

Bugsnax 9/10

**XB PS PCSW**

A great, if disjointed, continuation of the demon killing franchise. Visually stunning, tight controls and satisfying combat make for an exciting and enjoyable experience.

Doom Eternal 8.5/10

**XB PS PC**

This is the pinnacle of Formula 1 in videogame form. In a year fraught with difficulties for real world motorsport, Codemasters have delivered a solid experience that should keep you in the hot seat, especially with the immersion factor of the new My Team mode.

F1 2020 9.5/10

**PS PC**

With just a few small additions, such as private matches and cross-play, this would quite simply become one of, if not the best party games available on current platforms. It can't be underestimated how difficult it is to create something quite so accessible and fun simultaneously.

Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout 8/10





You might be looking for something to go with your new hardware - well here's what GameOn think about this year's biggest titles



PS PC

Despite lacklustre multiplayer and a frustrating paywall to unlock characters and items, Genshin Impact is a brilliant experience with hours of fun-filled exploration. It also has Paimon and she is perfect.

Genshin Impact
8.5/10



SWPC

The three-pronged combination of satisfying moment-to-moment combat, a plethora of long-term permanent upgrades, and an intricately woven story that seamlessly unfolds make Hades a dangerously enjoyable game.

Hades
10/10



XB SW PC

I cannot express enough how much I enjoyed this game. It does require you to be a fan of both point-and-click and platform games, but if you are, then this is an absolute diamond-studded must buy.

Lair of the Clockwork God
10/10



XB PS PC

An excellent campaign diminished by the intrusion of the game's multiplayer elements. Some peculiar bugs and sloppy proof-reading can pull you out of the experience but enjoyable combat and an excellent take on some Marvel staples make for an overall fun but grindy core gameplay loop.

Marvel's Avengers
7.5/10

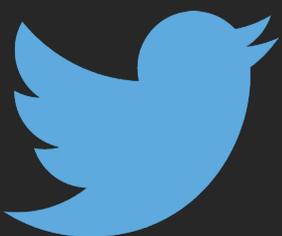


XB PS PCSW

A fantastic arcade throwback, Streets of Rage 4 remains faithful to the classic series, whilst adding its own fresh twist.

Streets of Rage 4
8/10





[Click here to see if you have the latest version](#)