

even Slimmer

The ink had barely dried on our review of the SqueezeBox when SlimDevices announced the new MkII, so Neal Gibbons couldn't resist listening in again...

For those who missed the original review, SlimDevices' SqueezeBox is a versatile device that streams digital music from a PC or Mac to your hi-fi. It features a large, fluorescent display and an easy to use menu interface controlled by an infrared remote. The new unit is physically the same as before with phono, headphone and S/PDIF connections, so the big changes are on the inside.

There is a superb new high-definition graphical display, which has much greater clarity and resolution. It supports new features such as graphical VU meters and a 64 channel animated spectrum analyser! FLAC decoding is now performed on the 'fly' by the inbuilt SlimDSP (Digital Signal Processing) software instead of being decoded by the PC. This places less demand on the network to supply a continuous datastream. SlimDevices have also added a deeper 64Mbit data buffer to help minimise 'dropouts'. The network interface has been upgraded to 100Mbit and attention given to the wireless 802.11g interface. 64/128bit WEP and WAP personal encryption have been added plus a network-bridging feature. This latter feature allows a third party network device such as a Playstation or TIVO box to be connected to the internet via the SqueezeBox, neat!

The Internet Radio, Alarm Function and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) News ticker features are all carried over but a new one called SlimNetwork, yet to be released, will allow them to work without a PC in operation. The Internet Radio feature has been enhanced with the inclusion

of Alien BBC, this was a 'third-party' and not so easy to setup plug-in on the previous version. Alien BBC gives you access to the BBC web site Radio Streams for either Live playback or for 'Listen again' programs.

For the Audiophile, SlimDevices have been to work on the digital and analogue circuits. The PCB has been completely redesigned and now sports a Burr Brown PCM1748 24bit DAC and new associated output circuitry. Attention has been given to the power supplies with separate dedicated and regulated supply rails for the analogue audio stages and DAC. Also, independent clock circuits have been implemented for the S/PDIF output and DAC, this is said to greatly reduce jitter, a critical area for good sound quality. In the MkI version a single supply rail was used for all the stages and a single crystal clock with PLL circuit used to regenerate the clock signal for the S/PDIF, not an ideal situation as the clock accuracy could be affected by power supply noise.

My review sample was the combined Wireless & Wired version, I chose to use the wireless connection and had no trouble in setting up a WAP encrypted link to my home network in about 10 minutes! The UK importers, Progressive Consumer Electronics Ltd advised me of a low cost Network Attached Server (NAS) they have been developing aimed at

complimenting the SqueezeBox. The NAS box is like a large network attached disk drive intended to replace the PC or Mac used for replaying the stored music. It is an interesting proposition, as it should prove to be less bulky and noisy, running 'standalone' without the necessary keyboard and screen a typical PC or Mac requires. Unfortunately it was not ready in time for this review.

The attention paid to the power supplies and new audio circuits have made a very positive improvement to the sound quality. The MkI version was challenged at the frequency extremes and while it could play studio music in a beguiling way it was limited when fed with more demanding material. The MkII addresses those limitations, it is better balanced with good low-end weight and detail. The midband is clearer with more depth than before giving a better insight into the recording. The top end has more sparkle and presence with greatly improved dynamics. Above all the new MkII SqueezeBox is much more musical and enjoyable to listen to than before. Couple this with class leading features and versatility, SlimDevices have yet another winner on their hands.



SLIM DEVICES SQUEEZEBOX II	£200
www.slimdevices.com	