

Better than a bar

Bluesound's Pulse Mini 2i introduces new functionality and sounds musically adroit. **Steve May** also discovers it makes a fine TV partner too



The speaker uses two 4in woofers and twin tweeters

WHEN IT COMES to better TV sound, a soundbar doesn't always cut it. Offered in evidence is the Bluesound Pulse Mini 2i, not just a fearsomely fine multizone wireless speaker, but also a top-notch TV audio upgrade.

The Pulse Mini 2i is one of the smaller offerings in the Bluesound brigade, but that doesn't mean it makes a small noise. Indeed, this thing sounds huge. Behind the metallic grille are a pair of 4in woofers, and 0.75in tweeters, driven by 100W of amplification. And despite the compact cabinet design, this array manages a clean, full-bodied stereophonic presentation.

It looks identical to the previous iteration (the Pulse Mini 2), but it boasts big

improvements in functionality and performance. Regular readers will know that Bluesound was the original hi-res multiroom wireless player. But now connectivity includes dual-band Wi-Fi, Bluetooth aptX HD, and AirPlay 2 support.

The latter will be welcomed by the Apple faithful, who

can stream from their iPhone, iPad, or Mac to an entire connected ecosystem, and call on Siri voice assistance.

And by grouping this second-generation player with older Bluesound boxes, you can extend AirPlay 2 compatibility across an entire, existing BluOS ecosystem.

Naturally, standard Bluesound interaction is undiminished. You can group the Pulse Mini 2i with other Bluesound players in sync, or stream to speakers directly.

The Pulse Mini 2i even offers two-way Bluetooth. Using Receive and Transmit functionality, you can listen to connected sources on your preferred wireless headphones.

Two Pulse Mini 2is can also be coupled in stereo mode, but this trick really makes little sense, as for the same £1,000 outlay, you could buy something like KEF's LSX. The joy of this diminutive speaker is that it's a self-contained little belter.

No optical illusion

The build quality is superb and commensurate with the asking price; the Pulse Mini 2i has a wonderful, tactile feel. Physical connections around the chassis's rear are Ethernet, a 3.5mm digital optical/analogue input, USB, and legacy headphone jack. To connect the sound system to a TV, you'll need the digital optical audio adaptor supplied in the box.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 4in woofers; 2 x 0.75in tweeters

ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 100W

CONNECTIONS: Ethernet; combo 3.5mm analogue/optical input; USB

DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No/No

SEPARATE SUB: No

REMOTE CONTROL: No. Via the BluOS app

DIMENSIONS: 172(w) x 335(h) x 155(d)mm

WEIGHT: 3.6kg

FEATURES: USB media playback; FLAC, MQA, WAV, AIFF, MP3, AAC, WMA, OGG, ALAC and OPUS audio file compatibility; Bluetooth 5.0 aptX HD with two-way transmit and receive

The speaker itself has a selection of touch controls atop the moulded carry handle, but to swap between sources you'll need to use the slick BluOS app as there's no conventional remote control. This lists the optical input alongside your music library and radio feeds.

While it's obviously not designed to sit between the feet of a flatscreen, if you have your TV on AV furniture, it's compact enough to reside on a shelf below. All drivers are forward-firing, so placement is relatively fuss free.

Hi-res compatibility is comprehensive. In addition to 24-bit/48kHz over Bluetooth, connect over Ethernet and you'll make the most of any 24-bit FLAC, etc encodes you have on a Bluesound Vault or NAS.

Musically, the Pulse Mini 2i is a revelation. It has a level of refinement that really showcases higher-res sources. There's mid-range muscle to force a beat, while treble has a prosecco sparkle.

This is a hugely entertaining speaker. It may only accept a stereo digital signal (make sure your source device isn't bitstreaming Dolby Digital), but it's consistently dynamic and exciting.

Superior upgrade

Impressively updated, the Pulse Mini 2i is hard to resist. As a wireless speaker it's unapologetically premium, thanks to its hi-res audio support and wide-ranging functionality. However, it also makes a superior TV audio upgrade, comfortably outperforming budget soundbars, and offering a designer form factor that oozes style. If you can take advantage of all its talents, then the asking price doesn't look too steep at all. Recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



Bluesound Pulse Mini 2i

→ £500 → www.bluesound.com

WE SAY: Revised and refined, this wireless speaker is both a great hi-res music player and a belting TV audio system.