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Audioengine B1: Audiophile Bluetooth?!

Apple has backed itself into a corner- they haven't really improved AirPlay significantly since release, and it now lags behind the competition. Thanks to network issues that cause stuttering and drop-outs, it's no longer the reliable, high-quality solution that it seemed at first. If you aren't addicted to Apple hardware, you've always needed to look elsewhere. But even if you did upgrade to the iPhone 6 upon

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look elsewhere. But even if you did upgrade to the iPhone 6 upon release, love your AppleTV, and are excited about the still-unannounced Apple Television Set, you should still consider other wireless audio solutions.

The Audioengine B1 Bluetooth Music Receiver fills a specific need, instantly turning your old-school hi-fi audio system into one that supports wireless Bluetooth. Thanks to beefy specs- 24-bit sampling, support for the aptX high-quality codec as well as A2DP and AVRCP, and both digital optical (SPDIF) and RCA analog outputs- even the most serious audiophile will approve. Where the music comes from, goes to, and exactly what plays on the station is totally up to you- but we tested using both Macbook Air laptops and smartphones operating on both Android and iOS 7/8, and using everything from 96K MP3s to higher bitrate classical files. The Audioengine is a plug-and-play solution, with no drivers or software necessary, and unlike with AirPlay, there is no need for a router. Unlike Sonos and other similar systems, though, there is no multi-room support so you'll be limited to a single system. And you'll need to be within a closer range- about 30 feet.

The aluminum body is solid and sleek, and similar to the D1 that we checked out last year, with a big antenna that was able to receive signal even through a wall. The B1 includes the DAC circuitry inside, but if you require or desire a wired solution, you should opt for the D1 or pick up their cute USB DAC, the D3. We did enjoy using both receivers with our Audioengine A2+ powered desktop speakers, some of our favorites. And we also tested using a variety of apps, from Spotify and Pandora, which work easily directly from the mobile apps (unlike with AirPlay). You can use just about any decent speakers, and of course route through your stereo receiver. We've seen other Bluetooth receivers, from Arcam and Mass Fidelity, and this one distinguishes itself with it's superior output options and true 24-bit digital-to-audio conversion.

Clear out your cables, and skip the dock. Keep your phone nearby, in your pocket, or use your iPad for movies without worrying about their tiny speakers- thanks to the magic of Bluetooth. The Audioengine B1 is simple and effective, and offers clean, crisp, and consistent audio with no

degradation or issues with compression. Bluetooth 4.0 is ready for prime time, and you can experience the clarity and straightforward one-step pairing along with impressive clarity and versatility with the Audioengine B1 Bluetooth Music Receiver, available now for around $190.

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