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CABLES & ACCESSORY REVIEWS

## Audioengine B1 Bluetooth Music Receiver

By Michael Lavorgna • Posted: Feb 19, 2015

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**Device Type:** Bluetooth Receiver/DAC  
**Inputs:** aptX, A2DP, and AVRCP Bluetooth 4.0  
**Outputs:** Toslink, analog RCA pair  
**Dimensions:** 3.5 x 4.0 x 1"  
**Weight:** 1.0lbs  
**Availability:** Online Direct and through Authorized Resellers  
**Price:** \$189.00  
**Website:** [audioengineusa.com](http://audioengineusa.com)



### I Like Bluetooth

Audioengine makes a number of well-priced products that deliver their fair share of musical enjoyment. I favorably reviewed their A5+ speakers ([see review](#)) and we own two pairs of their original A2 speakers. Under inspection today is their B1 Bluetooth Music Receiver which adds Bluetooth connectivity to any hi-fi while also offering an internal DAC as well as a Toslink output if you already own a DAC you enjoy. What's the point of Bluetooth? Fun.

Inside the relatively tiny rounded aluminum rectangle lives a AKM AKM4396 DAC. Audioengine claims that all incoming data is converted to 24-bit for processing when sent through this DAC and out through the RCA outputs. You can also opt to bypass the D/A process by using the B1's Toslink output connected your DAC of choice. These outputs are located around back along with a micro USB port for power through the included cable and wall adapter.

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Audioengine also includes a pair of RCA cables and a microfiber carrying bag in the B1 package. The company claims a range of up to 100ft (30m) "typical" and I was able stay connected to the B1 from about 35', which is as far as I can get within my barn without venturing out into the teen-digit temperatures, give or take a few feet.



Up front you'll see the glowing white LED power/pairing button and the antennae. When you first plug in the B1 it automatically enters pairing mode so just go to your device of choice and select "Audioengine B1" from its Bluetooth settings. If you want to connect a new device, just disconnect the old device which will set the B1 into pairing mode again. For the purposes of this review, I used my iPhone 6 and connected the B1 to the review sample Exogal Comet DAC via Toslink as well as directly to my Pass INT-30A amp via RCAs. Pairing was a snap, and the B1 worked without a hitch or dropout during the review period. The B1 remembers up to six different audio devices.

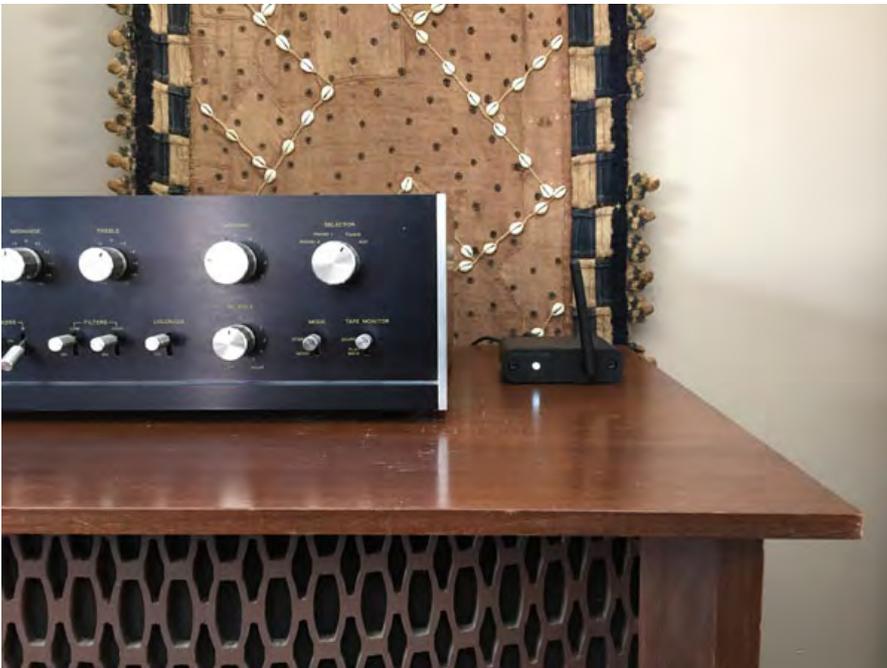
Why do I like Bluetooth? While it may seem like a strange thing to like seeing as it employs lossy compression (the exact data rate and Bluetooth profile/codec employed will depend on the sending device), Bluetooth allows anyone with a Bluetooth-enabled device and music in it to play their music through your hi-fi. Friends and family members can, with a few taps, be enjoying their music on your hi-fi in minutes. Bluetooth also does not rely on your home wi-fi network so it can deliver a more reliable signal. This is all, to my way of seeing and hearing, a beautiful thing.

#### **The B1 Makes Music**

I was very pleased with the sound quality of the B1. Using its internal AKM DAC and connected to my Pass INT-30A which drove the DeVore Fidelity The Nines, the overall sound quality was surprisingly pleasant. Damn good, actually. From CD-quality songs loaded on my iPhone to streaming from the Tidal lossless streaming app on my iPhone, I enjoyed plenty of old and new favorites. Fast, easy, fun.

In my review setup, I preferred running the B1 through an external DAC, the Exogal Comet, as the sound quality was superior to its internal DAC. There was a more lively sound, things were more lit up, the place of the recording was more easily heard, and generally music sounded more engaging. The B1's internal DAC, by comparison, sounded a bit dark, flatter, and less dynamic. I should hope that adding a \$2500 external DAC will offer some sound improvement and it proved to be the case.





That said, I could easily live with the B1's internal DAC. We have a "vintage" hi-fi in our family room which consists of a pair of Altec Valentias (c. 1967) driven by a Sansui AU-555A integrated amp. I brought the little B1 inside, hooked it up to the Sansui via RCAs and streamed away in seconds. And it sounded just fine. While you can certainly get better sound quality from a dedicated, wired DAC in this price range, that's hardly the point. This is exactly the type of setup that seems to me to make the most sense for the B1—an existing hi-fi that does not offer Bluetooth connectivity where you'd like to add the ability to stream from your smartphone or tablet wirelessly and also allow others to do the same. By using the B1's internal DAC, you are also making full use of its full features.

In terms of sound quality, the B1 paired with a decent hi-fi will obviously crush any portable Bluetooth speaker, especially one costing in the B1's \$189 neighborhood. During its stay in our family room system, my family also took full advantage of Bluetooth's open invitation and we had a wonderful time sharing each other's music. Here's how it went with our daughter Nicole once she hit Play on her iPhone—"Is this something you're going to write about? Can you leave it? Can we keep it?"



### **Get Yourself Some Bluetooth**

If you've got a hi-fi that you'd like to easily share, sans wires, take a look at the Audioengine. The B1 is a well made and very good sounding Bluetooth solution whether you use its internal DAC or roll your own.

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### Associated Equipment

Also in use during the B1 review: Exogal Comet DAC

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## COMMENTS



### Hope lots of hi-fi comanies read this

Submitted by DH on February 19, 2015 - 6:57am

"Is this something you're going to write about? Can you leave it? Can we keep it?"

Perfect. Just the kind of stuff audio companies need to produce to ensure today's generation will become audiophiles. Cheap.Convenient. Good SQ.

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### Love the vintage gear.

Submitted by John Smith on February 19, 2015 - 12:10pm

Back in 1973 I worked in a stereo store that sold Sansui. The AU-555A was our hottest selling integrated. In 1979 I worked where we sold Altec Lansing, but the Valencia was before my time. If they sound like the Heathkit AS101, then they must be amazing. When I heard the Heathkits (which have Altec drivers) about a year ago, I wondered where we have come in the last 40 years.

As far as the Audioengine gear goes, they offer some of the best value in the audio industry.

My findings are; they know how to voice their equipment.

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### Me too.

Submitted by Michael Lavorgna on February 19, 2015 - 12:26pm

The Valencia sound just wonderful and they are easy to drive, my favorite combination of attributes for a loudspeaker ;- ) I got them years ago off eBay (it took a long time to find a pair within driving distance) along with the Sansui. Makes for superb "budget" system.

Cheers.

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### Altec +

Submitted by Bev on February 25, 2015 - 1:41pm

Try combining the Altecs with a subwoofer such as a REL T-5 using the high-level inputs. If you liked the Altecs before, adding the sub will blow your mind.

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