

Review: Audioengine HD3

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Lots of power in this engine...

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It's hard not to be enamoured with Audioengine. They make some of the most enjoyable speakers available, from the superlative A5+ powered speakers to the thundering S8 subwoofer. And they've really turned heads with the product on the block this week: a pint-size pair of [wireless speakers](#) that is their attempt to attract previously casual users who want a real upgrade to their audio.

Wireless models aren't always an easy sell – especially with single, self-contained units available, like the [SONOS PLAY:1](#). The [Audioengine HD3](#) is a twin set of speakers, which is a daring enough move in itself, but they also operate entirely through Bluetooth, rather than the more stable WiFi. This is a manufacturer with a serious pedigree, and if anybody can pull it off, they can – but how do the HD3s stack up?



Design

In terms of the actual speakers themselves, it's hard to give anything but top marks. They look and feel fantastic.

The two separate cabinets, each approximately seven inches tall, were finished in smooth, brown walnut (satin-black and cherry-red options are also available). They were nicely matched, with a brushed metal panel on the front above a small vent, the master speaker containing an on switch/volume knob, Bluetooth light and headphone jack on the panel. They immediately set themselves apart as being well designed with the speaker grills: magnetically-attached, they separate from the cabinets with the merest tug, revealing a 2.75" woofer and a 0.75" tweeter.

The speakers are designed to be unobtrusive, and are best used as part of a desktop setup. They are light enough and slim enough to put just about anywhere, and could become doubly stashed below a monitor or on either side of a laptop.

Pairing with a Bluetooth device is as simple as it gets, and the signal was never anything but strong and solid. Once the initial pairing was complete (a matter of moments) the light glowed yellow, and we were away. With the speakers turned on – achieved by simply turning up the volume knob – Bluetooth connection was almost instant. We tested it with multiple devices, and it got absolutely top marks.

Things get a little trickier when you flip to the back end. For speakers that advertise themselves as wireless, they sure do have some seriously chunky wires back there. Not only does the power cable use a brick, but the speakers themselves don't communicate via Bluetooth, relying instead on a thick, tough set of speaker cables. This isn't a problem in and of itself; once you've set everything up and got the position you want, you can more or less forget about it, as we did. But it's further complicated by the connections at the back of the speakers. Unscrewing them

reveals a hole, as it does on most speakers, but it's far easier just to plug the gold connectors into the top end. The manual doesn't make it clear which method to use, which is a bizarre oversight on the part of Audioengine.

Outside of that, the master speaker has a screw-on antenna, USB input, a very subtle, almost invisible bass reduction switch, and a pair of RCA inputs and outputs. The array of options is pleasing, showing that the speakers are capable of slotting into just about any setup. And if you can get past the quirks of the wiring, you'll find that these are a pair of superbly designed speakers that will fit naturally into your office or home environment.



Sound

We were a little worried when he heard the speakers were Bluetooth only. Anybody who spends even five seconds on the site will know that we much prefer WiFi, which in our experience gives a more stable signal and a better audio experience.

We needn't have worried. Whatever Audioengine have packed inside these tiny cabinets, it results in some truly stellar sound. We were particularly impressed with the bass – despite their tiny size, the low-end was rounded and punchy, quick to respond, and immensely satisfying. Although they didn't have quite the shine in the highs that we would have liked, the overall sonic picture was still excellent. We couldn't stop marvelling at how something so tiny could produce sound so good – it puts most other wireless options to shame.

We tested the speakers over the period of a month, trying a variety of genres on them almost daily. As we got deeper into the sound, we found ourselves enthralled with the warm mids as well as the bass, and just how polished everything sounded. Undoubtedly, the wires connecting the speakers (as opposed to a Bluetooth connection) make a real difference here. We also didn't notice any real difference when using the headphone jack in the front, or the USB or RCAs. Throughout it all, the HD3s didn't falter.

There is, however, one caveat. The sound quality might be impeccable, but the HD3s simply aren't very loud. Even at maximum volume, you'll struggle to fill anything larger than a medium-sized room. Again, that's not necessarily an issue, as these are clearly designed for small offices and other, similar spaces. But if you're looking for something to really pound out the noise, you might be best off looking elsewhere.

It's also worth noting that if the bass reduction switch isn't hit, the HD3s put on a lot of air. You can actually cool your hand down by holding it next to the vent while a bass-heavy track is playing! The first time we encountered it, it was surprising, to say the least.

Still, just like the design, the sound quality here is almost flawless. Top work, Audioengine.



Should You Buy It?

There's no denying that the HD3s are pricey. At \$399 on Amazon for a pair, you've got to be pretty keen on getting an upgrade to your existing system to buy them. But it will be one hell of an upgrade, and given how well-designed they are, and how excellent the overall sound quality, we got no hesitation in giving these a big thumbs up. They were a genuine pleasure to use, almost effortless in their operation, and we were very sorry to have to send them back.

If you have a big room, or you're looking for a more self-contained experience, then there are other options you should look at. But for everyone else, these are absolutely the wireless speakers you should go for.

