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Component Reviews

Audioengine B1 Bluetooth Music Receiver SRP: \$189

It is clear to see the appeal of having music play from "nowhere"—no wires and just a few button pushes.

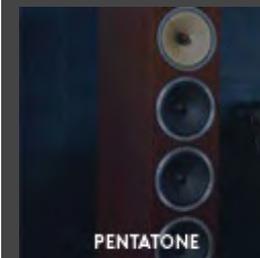


Published on September 1, 2014



**Audioengine B1
Bluetooth Music
Receiver
SRP: \$189**

*Specs:
Dimensions: 3.5 x 4.0
x 1"
Weight: < 1.0 lb.*



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Supports: AtpX, A2DP and AVRCP
Outputs: Toslink, analog RCA Stereo
Rated Latency: ~30ms
Warranty: 3 years

Wireless music is here to stay. A day doesn't go by when someone asks me how to get music from their phone or tablet to best play through their stereo. For those who don't

have i-devices and can't utilize Airplay with compatible Apple products, the alternative is Bluetooth. The B1 offers a built-in AKM4396 DAC to upsample audio to 24-bit or a direct digital output via an optical connection to hook right into a surround amp or similar component.

Inside the box is a small carrying bag (that only fits the main unit and not the cables, power supply etc.), analog cables, power supply with a USB cable that either hooks into a standard USB jack for power or the included power adapter and a quickstart guide. The actual unit is surprisingly small but solid and has (what looks like) quality RCA jacks.



Setup was easy—connection took about a minute and I grabbed a loose optical cable so I could try the B1 in both analog and digital. If you don't pair the unit fairly quickly the flashing light (indicating the unit is ready to pair) will go out. A simple unplug and re-plug will reinitiate the pairing process. I used my old iPhone 4s, went into the settings, selected "Bluetooth" and within an





instant "Audioengine B1" showed up as an option. I clicked it and the unit was connected. I then put the volume from my phone at max and selected some music. I played lossless music

stored on my phone as well as [using Pandora](#) to stream.

The distance from the B1 and my listening position is about 18'. From this distance (and anywhere within the room) the signal never faltered. There was a difference between the analog and digital sound out of the unit, but my guess is that most people won't discern much if any difference with a typical stereo. With a higher-end system I'd put the difference somewhere in the 5-10% improvement with the optical connection.

Typically I was able to go 1-2 rooms away with no interference whatsoever. Due to distance or obstructions when I got to the end of the second room or just a bit farther (and this distance was always repeatable within the environment) I was able to cause the unit to stutter. This usually meant I was out of the area where I'd be listening. This turned out to be approximately 25-30' away with two walls in between. (The manual suggests the upper limit is 100'—I always laugh when I read wireless ranges in manuals and they always bear little or no relation to reality.) If I walked completely out of range the music would stop and when I came back into range I would have to start the music playing again manually (by hitting "play" in the application). Skipping also occurred at times when I changed the music on my phone—but I expect this had more to do with the phone than with the B1.

The manual states that the B1 will remember up to six devices, so that others can make use of its capabilities without the need to go through the pairing process every time. I only had one other device to test, but it didn't have any music on it.

Okay, so more detail on the sound...I listened to a variety of music from classic rock to jazz and pop. It is clear to see the appeal of having music playing from "nowhere" and the ease at which I can play high-quality music to my system with no wires and just a few button pushes. Some might be wondering how the sound compared to a hardwired connection. For this test I used music streaming from an HTPC [running XBMC](#) with the [Musicpump application](#) off my NAS.

I set up a playlist containing a few of the songs on my phone so I could go back and forth. The music from the B1 was slightly louder than the HDMI out of the HTPC, so I

had to try and take this into account during the listening. I was highly impressed with the sound quality from the B1 and had to go back and forth to hear differences. If you desire the ability to wirelessly stream music to your stereo from a non-Apple product then the Audioengine B1 is worth an audition. There is a 30-day trial period, so if it doesn't live up to your expectations you can always send it back. My guess is that once you have it up and running it won't be going anywhere. [Bluetooth sonic quality was pretty bad at first, but recently it has been greatly upgraded, especially when using AptX, as the Audioengine unit does...Ed.]

—Brian Bloom

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