

Neat petite

As one of the smallest music systems he's seen, **Lee Dunkley** discovers a do-it-all mini hub offering great sound per pound

Once derided by the hi-fi cognoscenti, one-box music systems have gained greater credibility in recent years, and Novafidelity has been one of the key brands helping to reshape opinion. With a growing reputation for turning computer-based technology into audiophile solutions, its family of multi-talented models first established in 2003 continues to grow. The X14 is its newest member and the baby of the current lineup, but despite its diminutive dimensions it's a remarkably capable and flexible music system that can handle streaming, ripping (via an add-on USB-connected CD drive), storage and Class D amplification duties that claim 2x 30W into 8ohm from a unit measuring just 180 x 100 x 150mm (WxHxD).

For the £689 asking price, you don't get any storage built in, but this is an easy after-market option and the X14 supports 2.5in and 3.5in SATA HDD or SDD drives up to 8TB, which should be enough to comfortably store more than 10,000 CDs in WAV format. The ripping software is as slick and as fast as I've seen from any other Novafidelity model and you can specify the format and quality of the rip from the setup menu that's accessed using the navigational

controls on the front panel or the button-festooned remote handset that comes supplied. The 127mm LCD TFT colour display (800 x 480 pixels) is usefully informative and shows album artwork and song titles during playback, but seemingly not the bit-rate or sampling frequency of streamed music files.

A Novatron Music X app satisfies my touchscreen sensibilities and allows me to control the unit, navigate the menus and browse my UPnP network-connected music library along with content that's stored on the prefitted 1TB SDD for this review from the comfort of my armchair.

Digital file handling is via a Dual Core ARM Cortex A9 processor with CS4350 DAC chipset. It supports files up to 24-bit/192kHz PCM, MQA and DSD up to DSD128 while format highlights include: WAV, FLAC, ALAC and AIFF, to name a few.

Sound quality

Ripping and storing CDs is an effortless business and the first album I try – REM's *Automatic For The People* – is ripped and tagged in around three minutes. It's a slick and satisfying process that's strangely addictive as each rip is tagged correctly and added to the internal storage to build a library.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Novafidelity X14

ORIGIN
South Korea

TYPE
One-box
music system

WEIGHT
1kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
180 x 100 x 150mm

FEATURES
● Up to 8TB HDD or SSD storage
● Quoted power output: 2x 30W into 8ohm
● 24-bit/192kHz PCM and DSD128-capable DAC
● Input: 1x RCA; Bluetooth
● Outputs: 1x RCA; 1x digital optical; 1x digital coaxial
● 3.5mm mini-jack headphone output

DISTRIBUTOR
SCV Distribution

TELEPHONE
03301222500

WEBSITE
scvdistribution.co.uk



The rear panel offers two digital outputs, a single line-level in and line-level output that enables you to hook up the X14 as a streamer or music server with an external amplifier, where it performs admirably and runs quietly.

With speaker cable connections made at the rear panel to a pair of Monitor Audio Silver 1 standmounts (HFC 309), the X14 has plenty of drive and the pairing does a good job of pushing Michael Stipes' vocals out into the room. The X14 doesn't short change you in any way and the quality of the ripped version compares as close to the original as expected, and expertly conveys all of the album's mix of sombreness, melancholy and playfulness.

It's not as engaging as systems with greater power reserves at pushing out levels of details or in delivering bucketloads of bass. Moses Sumney's haunting vocal on the beautifully recorded *Doomed* – a 24/44.1 stream via Qobuz – sees it tap into the track's raw emotion with his every note, but the X14 manages to make it sound just that bit more ragged and hard edged than I am used to hearing.

Connecting to the 3.5mm headphone socket, the X14 starts out respectably with Nils Frahm's *Sunson* – a 16/44.1 stream via Qobuz once again – but as the track continues it lacks some control as the headphone stage appears to be trying to manage too many elements and struggles to drive the Grado SR125 headphone (HFC 389) as effectively.

Conclusion

The X14 has to be praised for the degree of functionality it manages to squeeze into such a compact and elegant chassis. Its well thought out and practical approach will see it attract those looking to take the first steps into network audio, and it makes a great starter or second-room music hub that's easy to enjoy ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Engaging sound; ripping and networking capabilities

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Takes time to master; build

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A great little network music system aimed at those that are short on space or just starting out

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL



Don't be fooled by its compact size, this is a versatile hub