

Digital radios for under \$200

CUT THE CRACKLE ON YOUR FAVOURITE STATIONS AND DISCOVER MORE NEW ONES — WITHOUT IT COSTING AN ARM AND A LEG. HERE ARE THE CHEAPEST WAYS TO TUNE IN

[JENNETH ORANTIA]



To tune in to digital radio, you'll need to be in an area that supports it (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Darwin and Hobart) and have a device with a DAB+ tuner. If you're still rocking the same clock radio or stereo system from five or ten years ago, then chances are, you'll need to upgrade to a newer model.

Thankfully, prices are far more affordable than they used to be, with entry-level models available for below a hundred dollars. DAB+ is also available in plenty of form factors, from smartphones and pocket radios through to car stereos and bookshelf audio systems.



As well as the station variety, digital radio has many benefits to recommend it. It's clearer than analogue radio and less susceptible to electromagnetic interference, sends additional information with the digital audio stream such as song and artist information, weather and news updates — all of which are displayed on the radio's screen — and you can pause and rewind live radio on devices that support it.

Sangean DPR-35 DAB+ Pocket Radio PERFECT FOR YOUR POCKET.

IF YOU WANT to listen to digital radio on the go, the Sangean DPR-35 is one of the few options available in a pocketable form factor. Smaller than even the most compact of smartphones, it has a built-in rechargeable battery that lasts for up to 28 hours. Portability, rather than audio quality, is the DPR-35's forte, but it's still a touch better than the 'tinny' output of the typical kitchen radio. What it lacks in bass response and depth, it makes up for with gusto. Sound output via the supplied headphones is

surprisingly loud — pushing it beyond the midway point will challenge your eardrums. The 0.15W built-in speaker isn't as powerful, but the volume mid-point makes for perfect background listening.

The DPR-35's value proposition comes down to the money it can save you off streaming music on your smartphone. While tuning into FM and digital radio is completely free, a full day of streaming music via services like Spotify, Apple Music and Google Play can use up to 1GB of data.

Panasonic RF-D20UGN-K RATED AS AN ALL-ROUNDER.

THE PANASONIC RF-D20UGN-K is an interesting addition to the mix. As well as functioning capably as a bedside clock radio, it doubles as a portable Bluetooth speaker, with an IPX3 'splash-proof' design that makes it suitable for kitchen and outdoor use.

But is it good enough to replace a dedicated Bluetooth speaker? Not if you're expecting the audio quality of similarly-priced units. Notably, the Panasonic lacks the

multidirectional, 360-degree sound that have become all the rage with portable speakers — even ones in the sub-\$100 spectrum. Its built-in speaker is strictly front-firing only, and while it produces a fuller, more detailed sound than most rivals in this price range, it lacks the low-end oomph favoured by popular Bluetooth speakers from the likes of Ultimate Ears and Bose.

Our main quailm with the Panasonic was that it wasn't always responsive to button presses. We frequently had to push buttons two or three times before the radio would wake up and spring into action.

Sony XDR-S41D VIRTUALLY IDIOT-PROOF.

SONY'S ENTRY-LEVEL DIGITAL radio is a good option for those seeking a simple yet easy-to-use digital radio that can produce low-level background noise for the home or office. It adopts the upright, rectangular form factor of a traditional AM/FM radio, with five top-mounted preset buttons, a telescoping antenna that tucks into a slot



withstand being immersed in water, and the thick plastic casing feels sturdy enough to survive quite a few hard knocks.

A retractable handle on the top can be used for either carrying the device or hanging it from a shower rod or other fixture, and it comes with a bracket kit for mounting it on a wall. Additional 'outdoor features' include a built-in torch and an 'emergency buzzer' that you can activate in SOS situations.

The H203D's waterproof form factor and rugged construction make it best suited for portable use, and to that effect, it comes with two D-sized batteries in the box. It

can also run off AC power, but oddly, no power adapter is included in the box. Digital reception is strong, but you'll have to revert to using a fiddly wire antenna for tuning in.

Sony XDR-S61D GETS THE JOB DONE.

THE BIG BROTHER of the S41D, this model justifies its larger form factor and steeper price tag with a beefier (albeit still mono) built-in speaker, along with audio input and output jacks. The latter makes the S61D more versatile, as you can connect an external music player (such as a smartphone) and take advantage of the built-in speaker, as well as listen to music privately via headphones.

It's no prettier than its cheaper stablemate, with the same generic black box design, but the big five-line display is easy on the eyes in the sense that it offers larger text and a plussized digital time display. It also offers similar ease of use thanks to its large, clickable knob. The only downside is that this looks very much like a volume control, and our stubborn muscle



memory insisted on reaching for it every time we wanted to adjust the speaker output. The top-mounted scrollwheel — which is the actual volume control — isn't as intuitive an option, and unless you're an avid station surfer, it would have made more sense to swap these functions around.

VQ Monty NOT YOUR FATHER'S RADIO.

GUNNING FOR MORE of a fashionista following, the VQ Monty offers an attractive 'contemporary classic' design that evokes a wireless from the '40s and '50s. It's not quite as slick as digital radios

on the pricier end, with a rougher wood finish and lower-quality LCD display, but it's still an impressive-looking package for the asking price.

The VQ Monty actually beats its competitors in a couple of key ways. It's one of the few digital radios that support the AM radio band, and it also supports a proprietary rechargeable battery that runs for 36 hours. Sadly, this removable battery isn't included in the box, and while we couldn't find a local retailer selling it, the converted price will set you back approximately \$50.

Support for Bluetooth music streaming is thrown into the mix as well, along with a useful built-in carry handle for carting it between rooms and outdoors. The 10w stereo speaker produces a better-than-average audio quality, and we like the ability to tweak the sound levels via EQ presets.

Richter Wake RR40 RISE AND SHINE.

THE RICHTER WAKE adopts more of a classic bedside radio form factor, with a



low, compact frame that won't hog space, and a large topmounted knob that does triple duty as a volume control, scroll wheel and select button. Despite its unassuming appearance, the Wake comes with full functionality, including Bluetooth streaming, audio in and out jacks, and a USB port for fast-charging mobile devices. Thoughtful extras for bedside use include an auto-dimming display, dual alarms, and an

over-sized snooze button for stealing a few extra zzz's in the morning.

Sound quality, too, is surprisingly good — certainly better than its Sony counterparts. The bass response won't blow you away, but the mid-range is well-rounded, producing a warm sound, with clear and detailed higher frequencies. Perfect for bedroom listening and easing you into wakefulness. The Wake RR40 is easy to use for



press and hold one of the side-mounted buttons every time you want to use it — we'd have preferred a slider or switch for manually locking the device.

Sangean DPR-45 THE BEEFY BATTLER.

IF PRACTICALITY IS more important than a pretty face,

you'll appreciate the sheer variety of buttons and controls on the DPR-45.

While many radios go for a minimal aesthetic that requires you to dig through the menu settings every time you want to do something, the DPR-45 heads full bore in the opposite direction. As well as the five large preset buttons on the top (which can accom-

modate 15 stations per band), there are two over-sized dials on the side for station navigation and volume, dedicated bass and treble dials, and buttons for sleep, nap and screen brightness controls. We were pleased with the sound quality. The extra-large speaker is powerful enough to be heard from another room, and easy access to the bass and treble — controls that are typically absent or hidden in this price range — means you can quickly tweak the audio to suit your preferences.

The DPR-45 is one of the few sub-\$200 radios that support the AM band, but we were disappointed that the one-line LCD screen doesn't display song information.

Philips AJB4300W BEST FOR A SLEEP-IN.

THE PHILIPS IS well-suited for the bedroom. Its compact, cube-shaped design looks right at home on a bedside table, and all-important controls like the volume and snooze function are large and easy to access. The two-line LCD screen can also be dimmed with a single button



The AJB4300W doesn't offer a battery-powered option like many of its counterparts, but there's a USB port on the back for charging a mobile device, along with an audio in port for playing music through the radio from said mobile device. There's no headphone jack, though, so night owls won't be able to listen to the radio while their partner's asleep.

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Bump it Dump it



hold on to the DAB+ signal, while FM radio is noticeably noisy. It also 'locks' the buttons after a few seconds of inactivity, requiring you to

