

[Skip to main content](#)

TAG THE FISH

Search this site:

[Home](#)
[News](#)
[Blogs](#)
[Reviews](#)
[Forums](#)
[Magazine](#)
[Spotlig](#)
[Latest reviews](#)
[Latest iPod/iTunes reviews](#)
[Search reviews](#)

iPod/iTunes > Reviews > ZVOX Mini

Latest issue: N

ZVOX Mini

Wednesday, 27 December 2006

Superlative competitor to the iPod Hi-Fi

Dan Frakes

Manufacturer: [ZVOX Audio \(www.zvoxaudio.com\)](http://www.zvoxaudio.com)

Pros: Unmatched sound and build quality for the price, easy setup, compact, great system for TV

Cons: No iPod-specific features, portable setup less convenient than some competing systems, high-maintenance battery

Price: \$200, \$300 with bag and battery (Pricing and availability in the UK to be confirmed)

Star rating: ★★★★★ **Macworld Editors' Choice**

With the Mini, ZVOX has taken much of what was good about its older 315 system, improved on it, and then put it into a smaller, transportable enclosure. The 13 x 10 x 3.3in high gloss-finish Mini is less than half the size of the 315 and a lot lighter.



Behind the grey metal grill on the front of the Mini you'll find three 2.5in drivers and a 4 x 6in woofer. A 40W amplifier powers the system. To the right of the grill are an infrared receiver (for the Mini's remote control), a volume knob, and a Phase Cue knob. The latter controls how much of ZVOX's Phase Cue virtual-surround/soundstage technology is applied to your music. Having these controls on the front of the unit is very convenient.

The back of the Mini includes a large, horizontal port for the system's woofer, the main power switch, a power connector, the bass control (used to adjust the Mini's relative bass level), and two 1/8in (minijack) stereo connectors. The first connector is input-only, whereas the second automatically switches between a second (mixed) input and a subwoofer output for connecting to an external, powered subwoofer.

Unlike Apple's iPod Hi-Fi, the ZVOX Mini's power supply/AC adaptor is an external model. Although this adds cable clutter and some bulk to the system, it has one welcome advantage:



Full contents c

Search review:

RSS

Have the latest news and reviews delivered to your desktop. Click below to get a blog, news, or

[XML](#) News
[XML](#) Review
[XML](#) Article
[XML](#) Jonny
[XML](#) Karer
[XML](#) Mark
[XML](#) Simon
[XML](#) Rick

Macworld reac

Aside from a c
do you wish th

A larger

when taking the Mini with you and using battery power you can leave the power supply at home and shave 3lbs off the system's weight.

Although you can use the Mini's main power switch to turn it on and off, it's more convenient to place the switch in the Standby position, which takes advantage of the system's power-saving feature: after three minutes without detecting audio input, the Mini's amplifier shuts down, reducing power usage to a minimum; after detecting a couple seconds of audio input, the amplifier automatically turns on again.

The ZVOX Mini's design isn't the only thing that's uncomplicated. The system's 'manual' is basically an 8.5 x 11 in card with clear instructions and a few images. You connect your audio source(s) using minijack-to-RCA or minijack-to-minijack cables (both included).

If your source - an iPod or other portable player, a TV, a CD or DVD player - has a line-level output, you can use the ZVOX Mini's volume control to adjust volume levels. If the source supplies only a variable-level output, such as a headphone jack, ZVOX recommends turning the source's volume to approximately 75 per cent of maximum and then adjusting the Mini to your maximum comfortable listening level; after this one-time adjustment, you can use the source's own volume controls, leaving the Mini alone.

The latter approach, combined with the Mini's wide, flat design, make the Mini perfect for placing on top of a TV or DVD player; a portable TV can sit directly on top of the Mini, thanks to the Mini's sturdy construction. Either way, the Mini is perfect for a bedroom - you can hook up your TV and iPod.

For connecting the Mini to an iPod, ZVOX recommends Kensington's Stereo Dock, although any Apple-branded or third-party dock cradle that provides a stereo output (including Apple's Universal Dock and Remote) will work fine. You can even hook your iPod up via its headphone jack in a pinch. Unfortunately, the Mini doesn't include an iPod dock cradle.

The Mini's remote continues the minimalist trend, featuring only two buttons - Volume Up and Down. Even then, ZVOX recommends using the remote only if your audio source doesn't include its own remote or provides only a line-level audio output.

Surprising sound

Given the Mini's limited feature set, iPod owners may be wondering why we're so impressed by the system. The answer becomes obvious as soon as you press play: the Mini sounds great.

The Mini's treble detail and midrange are both excellent, revealing the most delicate details without sounding tinny or harsh, and reproducing female voices as well as any portable system we've seen. Its bass response is also surprisingly good - not quite as extended as the (much larger) iPod Hi-Fi, but tighter and more balanced with the rest of the frequency range.

In fact, 'balanced' is perhaps the best word to describe the ZVOX Mini: unlike the iPod Hi-Fi, which has a distinct lack of upper treble detail, the Mini provides a relatively flat frequency response, and sounds excellent with pretty much any type of music.

When compared directly to the iPod Hi-Fi, the Mini doesn't sound quite as full and warm - few speaker systems do, thanks to the Hi-Fi's midrange emphasis - but is much clearer and sounds much more natural to the ears. In fact, we haven't heard a speaker system for the iPod that sounds this good for this price. (Monitor's i-deck is likely the closest competitor in terms of sound quality, but isn't portable/transportable.)

The Mini also outclasses every other one-piece system we've heard in terms of soundstage and imaging. ZVOX's PhaseCue technology is designed to simulate the ambience and sense of space you'd get by listening to a live performance (or at least a system with separate left/right speakers), and it works exceptionally well.

As we tested the Mini, we were regularly surprised by the expansive soundstage we heard; on many tracks, audio appears to come from well outside the Mini. In fact, when we had the Mini set up in a listening room - in between two home stereo speakers, which are placed on stands approximately eight feet apart - a number of people mistakenly thought the Mini's music was

- A small
- Office a
- A physi
- 3G supj
- VoIP su
- Games
- DivX vic

Vote

[View poll resu](#)

[Have your say Macworld foru](#)

[Register now](#)

Stay on top of Mac news and professionals about the issue. Register with I join our forum twice-weekly Macworld Mai

Sign up

being produced by the left and right speakers. And when connected to a TV, on several occasions we thought someone in the next room had said something when it was actually someone 'off-screen' in the movie or TV show.

At the same time, individual instruments – for example, a saxophone in a jazz ensemble – remain distinctly placed in space, so you don't get the sort of fake surround sound produced by less effective processing.

You control how much of the PhaseCue effect is applied to your audio via the PhaseCue knob on the front of the Mini: too little and the Mini sounds much like any other one-piece system; too much, and audio sounds artificially processed. But once you find the right spot it's a welcome feature that truly enhances the listening experience.

On the other hand, one area in which the Mini can't truly compete with the iPod Hi-Fi is output: Apple's Hi-Fi system blows away most competing systems in terms of bass response and maximum volume. Because of this, the Mini doesn't fill larger rooms as well as the Hi-Fi, and can't saturate the back garden as thoroughly.

That's not to say it won't play loud; it has more than enough presence to saturate any living room to uncomfortable levels. Just don't expect to host a house party using the Mini as your sound system. But if these aren't environments in which you'll be using the Mini, its better overall sound quality more than makes up for its lower output.

Travellin' band

Although the \$200 Mini isn't truly portable out of the box, for an additional \$100 you can add a battery and custom-fit bag (sold separately for \$50 each). The main compartment of the padded, nylon PortaParty carrying bag holds the Mini itself and either the AC adaptor or the battery. It also includes a number of additional pockets for carrying an iPod, portable CD or DVD player, or other portable audio source along with cables and earbuds. A document pocket on the back can hold magazines or files, and a thick strap on the back accommodates the retractable handle on most rolling luggage, making the PortaParty bag easy to take with you on a trip.

Although the bag isn't the most attractive we've seen – black and grey with aqua-coloured ZVOX logos – it compensates by letting you use the Mini without removing it from the bag: the compartment for the Mini has a zippered mesh cover; just flip the bag's top flap open, fold it under the case, and start playback. The mesh cover keeps the Mini from falling out of the bag, but lets the audio through. The bottom of the bag has a padded, zippered flap – with an additional mesh layer behind it for protection – that you can open to expose the Mini's rear vents during playback. Several openings in the bag accommodate cables for connecting your audio source and the battery to the Mini. (You can use the AC adaptor with the bag, but unfortunately there's no opening in the bottom of the bag for the cable, which means you have to snake the cable out the front of the bag.)

The Mini's battery is the weak link in its portability: It's a large, 12V, sealed lead-acid model, weighing approximately 3.5lbs. After an eight-hour charging cycle, the battery provides four to six hours' playback time. We say 'weak link' because of the short playback time – by comparison, the iPod Hi-Fi plays over ten hours on six D batteries – the battery's size and weight, and the battery's maintenance needs. Unlike lithium-ion batteries, lead acid batteries provide fewer charge cycles, prefer to be stored at full charge, and can be damaged by under- or over-charging.

One nice bonus you get with the battery is an adaptor that lets you plug the Mini into a cigarette lighter. However, given the low cost of such an adaptor, it would be nice to see it included with the Mini itself.

If you think you'll ever want to move the Mini from place to place, the PortaParty bag is well worth the \$50 price tag. However, you'll only need the \$50 battery if you plan on using the system where there's no access to AC power. (Kudos to ZVOX for making both an option to keep the cost of the Mini itself down.)

Buying Advice

ZVOX Audio's ZVOX Mini doesn't provide an iPod dock or any other iPod-specific features. However, if your primary goal in shopping for a speaker system is sound quality, the Mini's performance will more than make up for these omissions. We haven't heard another system, portable or stationary, that sounds as good for the price.

As a transportable system, the Mini may not be as convenient as iPod-specific solutions, some of which, again, have dedicated iPod cradles that keep your player safe during transit. However, it's only slightly less convenient than Apple's iPod Hi-Fi, which also requires you to carry your iPod and cables separately.

In case it isn't obvious by now, it's really the iPod Hi-Fi against which the Mini should be compared: both are one-piece speaker systems designed to work with multiple audio sources and replace a traditional bookshelf stereo. But the Mini is much smaller, lighter, and cheaper than the iPod Hi-Fi (especially if you factor in the cost of a carrying case), while actually sounding better. If its design fits your lifestyle, then the ZVOX Mini is highly recommended.

Submit to:  [Digg](#)  [Slashdot](#)  [Del.icio.us](#)  [Reddit](#)

[What is this?](#)

[<<prev article](#) | [back to index](#) | [next article>>](#)

MACWORLD MARKETPLACE



Broadcast yourself!

Upload your video and earn \$1000 or the latest PDA phone! Download free video!.



Download



Get 25 Free Music Downloads

eMusic is the No. 1 Site for Independent Music. Choose from 2 million songs. Music for any MP3 player.

eMUSIC



The Friendly ISP

Up to 8Mb Broadband from the Mac friendly ISP, starting at just £11.99 a month. Includes FREE install and a F



zCover

zCover is a pioneer and trend-setter in the fashionable silicone products market. zCover iSA silicone cases was in the iPod Accessory Category at the Macworld Awards.



Trace Services

CD & DVD Duplication, printing & packaging. high & low volumes, high quality fast turnaround nationwide



Digital SLR and Photo Printers at Discount Prices

Park Cameras - Canon Pro Dealers for 35 Years - offer huge discounts on all Digital Cameras, A3 Printers, Lar



EazyDraw

Make drawing fun on OS-X with EazyDraw: Vector drawing application of choice for Engineers, Scientist, Entre



Mexi Marketplace

Copy all the Music, Playlists, Videos, Photos and Games on your iPod back into iTunes on your Mac or PC. Try

