



AV INFO

PRODUCT: Multiroom audio system with Link and Amp options

POSITIONING: HEOS 7 is the current flagship speaker in the range

PEERS: Sonos; Pure Jongo

Steve May discovers there's a new multiroom system in town – and it wants to play in your home theatre too

When multiroom and home cinema collide

THESE DAYS ANYONE can cast music like a graduate of Hogwarts. With wireless and multiroom hi-fi *du jour*, a simple swipe can throw an entire discography to multiple rooms. It's enough to make spinning a humble CD seem positively prehistoric.

But while a seductively compact, convenient and expandable multiroom hi-fi setup has obvious appeal, until now it's not been clear just what a system can offer patrons of multichannel home cinema. HEOS by Denon seeks to change that. Using it, you quickly get the sense that there's a universe of interweaved functionality up for grabs.

Of course, HEOS can function as a simple mobile-to-speaker wireless hookup too, but it can also be something infinitely more complex that embraces all manner

of home entertainment. Naturally this piques our interest.

The HEOS system has launched with three active speakers, the £250 HEOS 3, £350 HEOS 5 and £500 HEOS 7, along with the £300 HEOS Link pre-amp and £400 HEOS stereo amplifier. Of the former, the HEOS 3 is the entry-level carrot. Like its siblings, it's a well-made piece of kit with a slightly wacky design. Unlike the others, it can be aligned either horizontally or vertically. The HEOS 5 is a relatively small,

but extremely well-balanced mid-range model, while the 48cm-wide HEOS 7 is a thumpingly potent tabletop speaker distinguished by silver trim and a casual disregard for the laws of physics.

The missing Link

Of the two system boxes, the Link pre-amp is key to integrating the HEOS ecosystem with your existing AV kit. The accompanying HEOS stereo amplifier needs only be paired with conventional (passive) speakers of your choice and source components. While it can be run independently, perhaps in a games room or den, its birthing in the HEOS gene pool means that you can route whatever is playing elsewhere to the amp as well.

The entire system is driven by the HEOS app (currently available for iOS and Android). This is used to connect hardware to your

network – simply link the device to your smartphone by 3.5mm cable (supplied) and follow the Add Device prompts – as well as casting music to whatever speakers/rooms you fancy. It's a well-designed piece of software, and getting used to it won't take you long.

Sharing content between devices is straightforward. Whether you have music on your smartphone, networked on a DLNA NAS or lurking on a laptop, the app will discover it all. Every HEOS device also has a USB input, which can be used to play content locally from a thumbdrive or across the network, and streaming services currently supported by the HEOS ecosystem include Spotify, Pandora and Tunein radio.

Unspecified power

Denon isn't actually publishing any technical specifications for all its HEOS hardware, much like rival Sonos, so

like-with-like comparisons are tricky. However, I certainly never felt for lack of volume. Indeed, the HEOS 7 wears such heavy boots, the temptation is to see just how much of a kicking it can deliver. Suitable for larger rooms, it's capable of prodigious bass. But this deep end is also tempered by a really rich mid-range.

While I can't vouch for its performance with the *Best of Bach* (because, well, I don't want to), it sounds outrageously good with ballsy soundtrack albums like *A Nightmare On Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*. *Love-Hate*, by satin-looned rockers Angel, may be outrageously overblown but the big HEOS is up to the job. The somewhat more sedate Blondie classic *Rip Her To Shreds* sounds equally satisfying, the HEOS evangelising

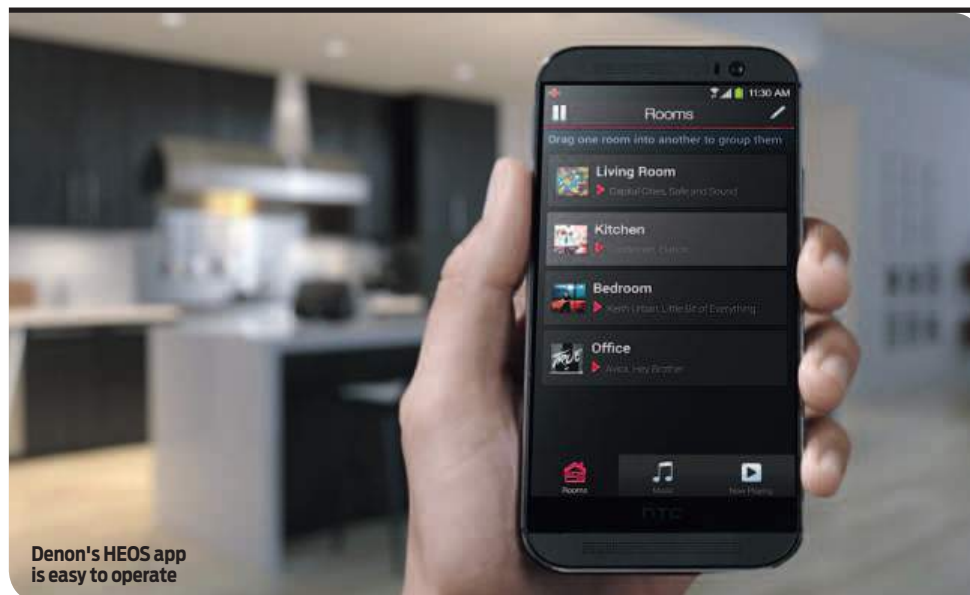
Debbie Harry's silky mid-range and Jimmy Destri's beatnik keyboards.

Multiroom mayhem

The Iron Maiden OST to rocky-documentary *Flight 666* features a similar selection of rock anthems. Pretty soon, I was streaming *Can I Play With Madness* into HEOS zone one (aka my kitchen), *Run to the Hills* in zone two (the living room), and *Fear of the Dark* into zone three (my theatre). The neighbours must have thought I was holding an Eddie fan convention. The system can officially support 32 HEOS-equipped rooms, but I wouldn't be too surprised if it managed more. Thankfully, the synchronicity between units is excellent, so if you want to shunt the same source >

Connect the Link (left) to an AV receiver to integrate your cinema setup into a HEOS system

REVIEWS



to all connected zones, for a real headbanging party, there's no timing echo. You can, incidentally, custom name these zones to suit your own domicile.

Note that the system doesn't support hi-res files – try and stream them and you'll get an unsupported playback error. But it's pretty happy with MP3, AAC, ALAC and 16-bit FLAC.

Intriguingly, the smallscale, defiantly monophonic HEOS 3 can be partnered with a second 3 to form a stereo pair. Of course, to achieve this will set you back more than £500, which isn't much of an incentive. Could you use a pair of HEOS 3s flanking a flatscreen TV? The setup certainly looks

'I've come to love the grunty audacity of the HEOS 7 and the mellower power of the HEOS 5'

cool, but in practice it transpires to be a non-starter because there is simply too much lag. Because the audio is buffered by the HEOS speaker, the output is significantly out of sync with the video. Recognising this, Denon is now prepping a HEOS-enabled soundbar (with wireless subwoofer) designed to operate without lag.

The company has teased us that it is also working on a multichannel whole-home audio amplifier that's HEOS-enabled. This will presumably serve up distributed audio to in-wall and in-ceiling speakers, making them HEOS audio zones in the process. Such kit should have instant appeal to the custom install industry.

Bring your system to the party

What we don't yet have any word on is a HEOS-enabled AV receiver – although that will almost certainly come later this year.

In the meantime, however, you can integrate an existing AVR using the HEOS Link pre-amp. If you have a post-2010 networked Denon or Marantz receiver you can even use the Link to control the receiver over IP for power, input selection and volume control.

There's also a 12V trigger, for compatible component integration, and an IR control option for non-networked AVRs and stereo amplifiers.

Just like the speakers, the Link features dual-band Wi-Fi, supported by Ethernet. Connectivity includes USB (the port can also function as a charger for USB devices); stereo phono input and output; coaxial and optical digital outputs; and one digital audio input. There's also a subwoofer output for connection to a powered bassmaker. With an AV source connected to the Link, you can play that source in other HEOS rooms when they are grouped. This is pretty cool if you want to have your favourite TV channel relayed to the office or kitchen – there's nothing like listening to the zombie-munching antics of *The Walking Dead* when you want to pop to the kitchen to get a quick bite.

Versatile contender

With easy-to-accommodate speakers, versatile Link and Amp units to expand the HEOS ecosystem into your AV listening room or a standalone two-channel system, not to mention the promise of more interoperability to come, HEOS proves to be an exciting new product line for Denon. Like its well-known competitor Sonos, it thinks of multiroom audio as more than just a collection of one-box speakers dotted around the house, and I rate it as a good alternative.

Installation simplicity and ease-of-use are high, and following the latest round of DSP tuning tweaks delivered via firmware, performance is stonking. I've come to love the grunty audacity of the HEOS 7 and the mellower power of the HEOS 5. I'll be keeping an eye on where Denon takes its new audio range next ■

SPECIFICATIONS

HEOS 7

DRIVERS: 2 x tweeters; 2 x midbass drivers; 1 subwoofer; 2 x passive radiators for additional bass augmentation
POWER: 5 x Class D amps
DIMENSIONS: 203(h) x 479(w) x 164(d)mm
WEIGHT: 4.5kg

HEOS 5

DRIVERS: 2 x tweeters; 2 x midbass drivers; 1 x passive radiator
POWER: 4 x Class D amps
DIMENSIONS: 209(h) x 294(w) x 166(d)mm
WEIGHT: 3kg

HEOS 3

DRIVERS: 2 x full-range drivers
POWER: 2 x Class D amps
DIMENSIONS: 130(h) x 272(w) x 165(d)mm (horizontal alignment)
WEIGHT: 1.9kg

HEOS SPEAKER FEATURES: iOS and Android app controller; Pandora, Spotify, Rhapsody and TuneIn support; MP3, WMA, AAC, WAV and FLAC file playback (32kHz, 44.1kHz and 48kHz); bass/treble controls; dual-band Wi-Fi; Ethernet; USB; 3.5mm line-in; headphone output on HEOS 7

HCC VERDICT



HEOS by Denon

→ From £250 approx → www.denon.co.uk
 → Tel: 0289 0279 830

HIGHS: Easy to install and expand; exciting audio performance from the HEOS 7 and 5; AV interoperability via the HEOS Link
LOWS: HEOS 3 is pretty average and can't be used as a stereo pair with a TV source; not hi-res audio compatible

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★