



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

