



Exclusive: Monitor Audio AirStream radio review

Stream On

Who says radios should be rectangular? Monitor Audio's wonky Air Stream 10 web radio tears up the rule book with its classy doorstep design.

The old FM fuzzbox went digital with the launch of DAB and then truly global when it logged onto the tens of thousands of internet stations around the world. The AirStream 10 can do all of these things too, but with its curious curves, Monitor Audio has created a classic.

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Until now, Monitor Audio has made its fortune designing hi-fi speakers in Essex, so it came to project AirStream with a blank canvass – hence the unusual wavy shape that allows this transforming tranny to either stand on its narrow edge like a kitchen radio, or lie down like a bedside clock.

With its handsome real wood veneer - something MA's speakers are famous for – and heavy metal construction it looks like a curiosity from the Antiques Roadshow, but it's definitely at the cutting edge of internet radio tech. There's an ethernet port, but also built in Wi-Fi letting you log into any wireless network using the big dial to punch in the password. This'll give you access to tens of thousands of web stations from around the world.

The Internet radio portion is based closely on Pure's excellent Evoke Flow web radio (it also uses the same AC adapter), so it's relatively easy to find some Tibetan throat-singing in a sea of weird and wonderful web stations. When you find something you like, just hold down the preset button to memorise it. It took us just a few button presses and dial twists and less than a minute to find Australia's finest indie station, Triple J, from a standing start.

The DAB section is just as easy to navigate using the big central dial and the LCD display to spin through the digital channels. The black and white panel is big enough to read the station name and scrolling track titles easily. It'll even tell you the bit rate, so you can see who's broadcasting at the best quality.

And for those that prefer to scroll through white noise to find a fuzz-free FM station, it also has an analogue tuner. This can actually sound richer and more detailer than some of the more compressed DAB stations.

There wasn't the room for stereo apparently, but the surprisingly expansive single speaker manages to fill the room with a full and snappy sound that plastic portables can't quite manage. It's no hi-fi replacement, but the rigid wood and metal construction means it can rock out at almost full volume without distorting.

Flipping the AirStream onto its belly makes it ideal for use as a bedside radio, especially with the alarm clock built in, but it obviously means the speaker is pointing straight down. It's actually not a problem, because the three-inch gap that remains between the speaker and your table top allows the sound to disperse evenly. It'll sound quieter, but remarkably, it still sounds just as clear.

This web radio is a little simpler than the hi-tech Evoke Flow and it doesn't offer the online Lounge club that lets you browse for internet stations on your PC and there's no USB input for hooking up an MP3 player. On the other hand, this slick web, DAB and FM wireless presents a whole lot of functionality in a singularly stylish way. A modern classic design perhaps? We think so.



