



Even Mr McGregor of Beatrix Potter fame had to start his garden somewhere. Long before he regularly chased Peter Rabbit and friends away with his rake, he presumably built it from scratch. Maybe starting with a couple of pot plants. For Mr McGregor's garden, read Tangent Ampster X4: a kind of grow-your-own hi-fi, consisting of a bite-sized stereo amp and pair of standmounters.

Despite its diminutive stature the amp is well equipped, with Bluetooth 4.0, optical and line inputs; all you need is a smartphone to stream your music, but it leaves scope for adding a CD player or turntable, or even amplifying your TV.

The speakers in this package are Tangent's Spectrum X4, available in black or white with a slim wooden base. We sit them on a couple of Atacama speaker stands, but Tangent is happy for you to place them on a bookshelf, or chip in a bit extra for wall or ceiling mounts. At 27.5cm tall, they won't take up heaps of room.

Assault on your ears

Even in that compact shell you're treated to a 25mm tweeter, 10cm bass/midrange driver and rear-firing reflex port, so don't anticipate timidity. The only thing really



The Ampster X4 is an entry-level system, comprising Tangent's Spectrum X4 speakers and a bite-sized amp

Tangent Ampster X4 | Hi-fi system | £300

"Sweat-drenched, knuckle bruised"

FOR Bold presentation; lots of features; good entry level hi-fi

AGAINST Rather forward presentation



lightweight about this package is the remote, but we can't have any complaints at this price. It works perfectly well.

To begin, we load up Tidal and stream Frank Carter and The Rattlesnakes' acerbic debut album *Blossom* and are nearly blown backwards from our seats. There's no pride in being coy upon delivering an opening track named *Juggernaut*, and this Tangent's presentation is fittingly vigorous. From the song's volatile opening, through Carter's shrieking vocal and its sweat-drenched, knuckle-bruised breakdown, the Spectrum X4 is armed with the artillery to maintain this assault on our ears.

But we ought not paint the performance as one-dimensional. Timing, in particular, is impressive given the weight and girth of

"For a £300 system, we are very much entertained and content with the versatility the X4 has to offer"

the sound, and the amount of body and bottom end Tangent has worked hard to offer. Sometimes it lacks a bit of space, but the arrangement is never cluttered and the Spectrum X4 is sharp and fleet-footed enough to keep up with the frenetic pace.

Taking things down a notch with John Frusciante's eclectic *To Record Only Water For Ten Days*, the Tangent showcases its nuance and satisfying attention to detail.

The presentation is still forward, and we find ourselves wanting a little restraint and a greater hold of dynamics, but for a £300 system we are very much entertained and content with the versatility on offer.

As we vary inputs, preamplifying Rega's Planar 1 turntable as a suitable companion and plugging our laptops in with an aux cable, there are the expected variations in quality and nature of the sound, but its general personality is unchanged. For an entry-level amp with decent connectivity, that consistency is a notable achievement.

Of course, when we switch the speakers for Q Acoustics' Award-winning 3020s, the improvement is immediately obvious; there's greater space, detail and delicacy with dynamics. You could pair the

KEY FEATURES



190 x 52 x 139mm



10cm bass/midrange driver



25mm tweeter

Q Acoustics with our cheapest Award-winning stereo amplifier, the Onkyo A-9010, for £390 and get a better-rounded overall sound but, as well as forgoing features such as Bluetooth and the Tangent's compactness, that almost 30 per cent price hike is still quite a distance.

In many ways, that reaffirms the Ampster X4's place among entry-level hi-fi. Here you're getting a starter system, with amp and speakers already matched, gaining a bunch of features and the scope to upgrade as and when you can. We've been terrifically entertained by the Tangent, and that is the best endorsement we can give.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT If you want a quality mini-system or to start building something with greater scope, the X4 should be on your shortlist