

Review: Wireless speaker Sonodyne Antara dials it up to 11

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Bluetooth speakers have become an indispensable gadget segment. Everybody's got one somewhere by now. Whether you use your speaker around the house, or in the shower, or bring it to the park, or maybe you're one of those folks who keeps it on the balcony and shares music with everyone nearby.

The thing about Bluetooth speakers is that once you buy one, there is no need to update for years, especially when the sound quality is good. No wonder, Sonodyne continues to invest heavily in the sound department.

Everybody growing up in '80s and '90s India has heard of this brand, which has delivered in the era of big-box home loudspeakers with their full-bodied sound as much as it is offering now through portable speakers. After coming up with the excellent Malhar system a few years ago, the company, started in 1970 by IIT engineer Ashoke Mukherjee, has come up with Antara, a portable wireless music system that can be defined with two words — sound sorcery.



The design and sound are inspired by its elder brother Sonodyne Malhar. Picture: The Telegraph

Sound is constant

Unlike the Apple HomePod or Bose SoundLink Max, Sonodyne is focussing on what matters — sound and sound alone. Innovation is restless but sound is constant.

The small, portable Sonodyne Antara sounds phenomenal, delivering true stereo sound. The company hasn't crimped on the technology driving the 25cm x 8.6cm x 9.8cm sturdy wireless device: It comes with two 2.5-inch LF transducers (woofers) with 2.5-inch passive radiator and two HF drivers (tweeters). So a total of four drivers and two passive radiators create a rich soundstage.

Antara delivers expansive sound with a surprising amount of bass and crucially, that low end isn't muddy or boomy, instead, everything about this speaker is rich, clear, and detailed. All this is very important: Recently we reviewed Sony ULT Field 1, which too is a good speaker but make no mistake, its bass output can overpower and kill a song like Queen's Another One Bites The Dust or even something fresh out of recording studios — Sabrina Carpenter's Please Please Please.

Whether you lay the speaker flat or carry it around, the sound is warm and surrounds the listener, which is quite unlike most of the offerings from a market that's becoming stagnant.



Small box, big sound. Picture: The Telegraph

Consistency matters

One may point out there's no built-in microphone so you can't use it as a speaker phone. The point is: Who wants to take calls on a speaker? Even the Bose SoundLink Max speaker doesn't have a microphone. But there is one feature that the Sonodyne speaker offers: You can connect two Antaras in "duet mode" for a more immersive sonic experience.

Sonodyne has gone with Bluetooth 5.4, which is the latest version. One of the main improvements in Bluetooth 5.4 is the bi-directional communication with thousands of end nodes from a single access point. It also translates into energy efficiency, reliability with connection and better security. Range? It remains as good as before but there is better connectivity.

Another feature you will find highlighted on the box if you choose to explore the product is DSP or digital signal processing technology. It's integral to audio engineering that makes use of specialised mathematical algorithms to measure and modify digitised audio signals. Using DSP, the device can precisely manipulate digitised audio signals, besides using it to monitor and control audio signals presented to input and amplifier circuits. Like a race car is optimised for a certain type of racing, the audio DSP is optimised to process audio data efficiently and accurately.

The hardware translates into rich sound quality, which is ultimately what makes this speaker special. The passive radiator enhances bass performance and, at the same time, there is some fancy digital processing to reduce distortion, even at high volumes. The speaker holds up together quite well. Sonodyne has done a good job creating a wider sound stage than you'd expect with the max giving sound more depth and openness. It offers more of a stereo experience than many Bluetooth speakers that claim to be stereo speakers.

Sonodyne Malhar, the bigger brother, has a more booming sound but Antara doesn't fall far behind, both in terms of volume and bass performance. It certainly ticks all the boxes to become a companion for a pool party, besides filling a small- to medium-sized room, taking up very little space.



The speaker offers better bass and clarity than most wireless Bluetooth speakers. Picture: The Telegraph

Should you buy it?

Despite the size, the sound is big. Personally, I don't care for a Bluetooth speaker to have a companion app as long as the soundstage is accommodating. This one can be moved from room to room or carried outside. The choice of ports is also worth noticing: Aux In, Pre Out, USB and USB-C charging. The 3,350mAh battery can offer up to 12 hours of playtime and there is IP65 rating, ensuring you can use the speaker outside. The only thing I find missing is a handle, which can be useful to carry the 1.5kg speaker around. Overall, Sonodyne Antara definitely helps the listener escape the boundaries inherent in streaming audio over Bluetooth to a small speaker. This is affordable sonic sorcery.



The button panel is on the top. Picture: The Telegraph

At a glance

Device: Sonodyne Antara

Price: Rs 14,999

High notes

** Sounds excellent for its compact size

** Battery life is very good

** Comes with Bluetooth 5.4

** Sturdy and has IP65 rating

Muffled note

** A handle on the speaker would have made it easier for those on the move