

Tivoli Audio NetWorks stereo Internet/FM radio

Test Report

By Michael Antonoff
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For sheer diversity, radio stations streamed from the Internet eclipse AM, FM, shortwave, CB, and even satellite offerings. But not everybody wants to do their radio listening sitting in front of a computer. For them, Tivoli Audio has introduced a handsome Wi-Fi radio incorporating full-range 3 1/2-inch speakers in real wood cabinets. The NetWorks radio with FM is designed for use on a tabletop or bookshelf. It's available in several configurations, including a one-speaker unit or with an optional second speaker or subwoofer. I reviewed the stereo system with the FM option in a cherry/gold finish. It's also available in walnut or wenge (dark brown).

SETUP

Getting started takes less time than booting up Windows on your PC. I plugged in the power cord of the left speaker — the one with the display that houses all ports in a recess on the back — and next attached the right speaker using the included 15-foot cable. Since I hadn't plugged in my own Ethernet cable, a list of wireless networks appeared on the LCD display and I chose mine. If necessary, you can enter your network password using navigational buttons on the remote and characters on the display. I adjusted the clock and pressed the first of five existing presets on the remote, and the BBC World Service started playing. You can store 200 more stations under Favorites.

PERFORMANCE

Searching for a station by location, genre, and name is simple, but you can't search or sort by bit rate. That's a shame, because the sound quality put out by the NetWorks radio is constrained by what comes in. I stumbled upon a number of music stations from Paris and Hilversum, Holland, pumping 256 kilobits per second, way above the typical 128 or 96 kbps for music and 64 or 32 kbps for news or talk. I was hard pressed to tell them apart from a CD. An EQ menu lets you choose from various genres, or you can adjust the treble and bass on your own. With the classical and jazz presets selected, both types of music sounded just right to my ears.

You can also access podcasts, which is a type of audio on demand. So, for example, when I had to leave my Wi-Fi-fortified apartment during a live broadcast of *Le Show* on KCRW from Santa Monica, Calif., in order to liberate my wash from the drier, I was able to retrieve the broadcast later by streaming the podcast.

Having the NetWorks radio in the living room enabled me to listen to *Morning Edition* between 6 and 7 a.m., which I'd been unable to do since my local NPR station, WNYC, bounced the show from FM to AM only. (WNYC's AM station doesn't operate at full power until after sunrise, making reception difficult.) I was also able to catch up on network broadcasts I missed by tuning to stations located on the West Coast. I even found a station in Guam where it was already the next day!

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The NetWorks radio begged me to compare the sonic subtleties of FM and streaming. So, one Saturday I kept switching *Idiot's Delight* between WFUV and WFUV.org. (The latter is a 128-kbps MP3 format.) Maybe I'm biased due to years of listening to FM DJs like Vin Scelsa (currently on WFUV), but the bit stream, though clearer, just didn't sound as warm and satisfying. I was also able to successfully stream non-protected music from the hard drive of a networked computer in another room with the NetWorks Radio. It wasn't able to recognize an iPod Touch attached to the USB port, but I was able to play music loaded on a flash drive. With portable digital music players, you can always use the NetWorks' Aux or Mix inputs. Still, Tivoli should have included an iPod dock like those found on many clock radios.

BOTTOM LINE

Web radio should work like, well, a radio, and the NetWorks Stereo Radio with FM does just that. It powered on instantly and let me jump around to favorite stations, even ones thousands of miles away, within seconds. There are less expensive Internet radios available, but they're usually made of plastic and have teeny speaker drivers that provide no stereo separation. The NetWorks Stereo Radio with FM has the look and heft of something crafted in an earlier decade, but it's built to deliver the renaissance that is Internet radio today.

The Short Form

\$750 / TIVOLIAUDIO.COM / 866-848-6544

Snapshot

An exceptional tabletop system for painless listening to a multitude of radio stations from everywhere

Plus

- Rich sonics
- Bright, readable display
- Easy to set up and use
- No subscription required

Minus

- No iPod dock
- No search or sorting by bit rate for finding best-sounding stations first

Key Features

- Connects to Internet or networked PC via Wi-Fi or Ethernet
- Supports MP3, WMA, and Real Audio formats
- Stores up to 200 favorite Internet radio stations
- Blue 3-inch LCD display shows 4 lines of white text, including one that crawls
- Receives over-the-air FM with Radio Data System
- Two alarms with discrete source and volume settings
- Credit card-size remote
- Inputs/Outputs (rear) FM antenna, headphone, aux in, mix in, record out, right speaker out, subwoofer out; Ethernet and USB; 12-volt DC (adapter not included)
- 5 1/2 x 8 3/4 x 5 in; 4 lb (per speaker)