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August 23, 2007

REVIEW: Tangent Quattro WiFi Table Radio



The Tangent Quattro WiFi radio has been making PR waves over the last few weeks, with looks and a spec sheet that would suggest it's the pick of the crop in the sector this summer.

Some great things have come out of Denmark over the centuries - Hans Christian Andersen, Lego, Peter Schmeichel. Is it time to add the Tangent Quattro to the list?

First Impressions

The Tangent Quattro is a solid piece of kit. Weighing in at around the 4kg mark, this is no flimsy, flyaway radio. You instantly feel as though you are handling something of quality. Unfortunately this also translates into a lack of portability, but then Tangent is not trying to deceive you. The Quattro is labelled a WiFi *table* radio and the table is where it is going to stay.

WiFi Radio Review received the unit with the walnut finish. There are four cases to choose from and Walnut is one of the cheaper options, but it still adds to the feeling of quality. It may just be a wood veneer but, to be honest, we couldn't tell. You wouldn't quite go so far as to say that the Tangent has retro looks but, like many of its competitors, it has pretensions in that direction.

Our one issue with the build quality was that the volume and tuning knobs didn't have quite the resistance to turning that you would expect from a quality appliance. In fact the tuning knob on our review unit was slightly wobbly.

What you can say is that the Tangent looks great and is certainly something that you would love to have sitting on a prominent shelf anywhere in your house.

However, we've got ornaments that do that job pretty well already and they don't cost just shy of £200, so the important question is how does the Tangent perform when the power is on and the streams are flowing?



Setup

The setup process takes several minutes, but it is a one off so you don't have to reschedule your life now that you are sharing it with a Quattro.

When first switched on the Quattro runs through a short self-analysis before scanning for available wireless networks. Here at WiFi Towers we can pick up three or four networks on a laptop, but the Quattro only noticed one, fortunately the one that mattered. This may have been because the Quattro receiver is not particularly sensitive or perhaps because during the setup process it uses a minimum signal strength threshold.

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If your network is encrypted (and if not, why not?) you will have to enter the key to go any further. The Quattro has no keypad so this involves twiddling the tuning knob back and forth as you select each character in the key. We found it no easy process, but as said above, it's a one off. Once the correct key is entered the Quattro connects to the Reciva database and downloads the complete station list. At last count there were well over 6000 to choose from.

Operation

Let's be clear about one thing. Like almost every other WiFi radio device out there the Tangent is built on [Reciva](#) technology. This means that much of the functionality is common to its rivals and therefore its unfair to pin the blame for some problems we encountered on the Tangent, just as it would be equally unfair to praise it too highly for features that are shared by the £49 Logik. Wherever possible we'll make it clear if we think it's a Reciva or a Quattro driven issue or highlight.

The Tangent has three major functions; internet radio streaming, file streaming from a networked PC and a clock.

The first feature is the one we really care about, but it is good to see file streaming included in the package.

Finding a radio stream is a simple matter.

First you decide whether to browse by location or genre. Location allows you to look at available stations by country, but not at a more granular level than that, so the 2000+ stations available in the USA cannot be split up by state. The makes the alphabet soup of US station names a little confusing for the non-American. This is not the fault of the Tangent, but is how the data is delivered by the underlying Reciva technology and so afflicts all radios using the same platform.

"Finding a radio stream is a simple matter"

Once browsing a country's available streams you have the option of breaking them down by genre or viewing all. In the case of the larger countries such as the USA and UK this is quite a long list.

Navigating around the menus and options is by a combination of 'select' and 'back' buttons and the tuning knob. For some reason the tuning knob and 'select' buttons are adjacent, but the 'back' button is divorced from them and lined up with another grouping of buttons in the centre of the radio.

We found this a strange layout to get our head around at first, often hitting the 'back' button when we meant 'select'. There's no doubt in our minds that this would have been more intuitive if the two buttons had been adjacent.

The Tangent's LCD screen is quite small with only two lines of text. This means that all interaction takes place in the horizontal plain and only one selection can be made at any one time. As a result you are using those select and back buttons an awful lot. We also found that some station names were too long for the screen. This is not a problem if you are just talking about cutting off the last few characters, but in one particular case it caused much consternation. BBC Radio Five live comes in three flavours via Reciva - there is the normal channel, Five Live Xtra and then Five Live International. Each channel starts with the name BBC Radio Five Live, which is unfortunately where the Tangent's LCD screen stops. Only experience teaches you which is which.

Button layout aside, we were on the point of listening to our first station within seconds of connecting to the network.

Each station can have several options. Many are broadcast as Real and WMA streams so you have to choose between them. The Tangent doesn't care as it cope easily with both.

Some stations operate on demand broadcasting and the Tangent handles this beautifully too. Choose the 'On Demand' option and then select the programme you want to listen to. In many cases you can then choose which day as well, giving you an archive of several days of listening to choose from. The BBC is especially good at giving you access to a back catalogue of content and we

"Some stations operate on demand broadcasting and the Tangent handles this

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found ourselves far more likely to listen to on demand content via the Tangent than we ever would via a PC. However, you are still limited to the content that Reciva knows about, and newer On Demand content is not always available. Here in the UK the football season has just kicked off and the BBC is delivering a daily podcast. This hadn't yet found its way into Reciva's listings, two weeks after it was first available.

beautifully too"

Browsing by Genre was hit and miss, with the classifications often a little wide of the mark, especially when music style was used, but it still acted as a useful guide to foreign stations.

When you power down the Quattro it will remember the last channel or file you were listening to and attempt to reconnect when you turn it back on. In many cases this reconnection was almost instant and amazingly challenged the startup time of a DAB radio in the office.

Our testing did not pass without some glitches. On one occasion the Quattro crashed completely and would not allow us to switch to a new channel. On another it dropped the WiFi connection and failed to reconnect to the network altogether, despite the fact that the laptop sitting next to it was happily connected with good signal strength. However, those were isolated incidents in what was a lengthy test period

Sound quality

The Quattro has a single speaker placed at the top of the unit. The sound quality from the speaker was rich and deep especially with the higher quality streams. Tangent claim that the rigid case prevents resonance and improves the sound and we noticed that there was no vibration even at very loud volumes. This seems to be about as good as you can expect from a mono system and was a very satisfying listening experience.



File streaming

The Quattro can connect to a PC (not a Mac) on the same network and stream music files from its hard drive in a range of common formats. Obviously only shared folders can be accessed, but once they are the Quattro will scan the folder for compatible files and then play them in order, shuffled or according to a pre-prepared playlist. The Quattro can also connect to a uPNP media server such as Windows Media Player 11.

Clock

The Tangent also has a built in clock that gets its timing from an online time signal. There is an alarm function so you can wake up to the internet radio station of choice as well as the obligatory snooze button so that you can tell it to go away if you feel like staying under the duvet. If you fancy being lulled to sleep by a late night night chat show from a far away place then there is also a sleep timer to turn the Tangent off after you have drifted away.

Conclusion

The Tangent Quattro has the best quality of sound we have yet come across in a WiFi radio. The build quality is good, but not perfect - we are slightly concerned about the tuning knob, but it feels essentially solid and is hard to fault in the looks department. Being tethered to a power cable means that it's not really portable despite its small size.

This is one of the premier devices in the WiFi radio arena at the moment. If it had a rechargeable battery the Tangent Quattro may well have been a clear leader.

Pros

Excellent sound quality
Good looks

Cons

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Key layout and build quality
Not portable

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