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Hands on: JBL Link 20 review

A strong entry into the Google Assistant speaker bracket

★★★★★ Not yet rated By [Gerald Lynch](#)

12 days ago



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OUR EARLY VERDICT

With powerful performance, portability and connected smarts, the JBL Link 20 is

looking like a solid entry into the growing Google Assistant speaker space.

✚ FOR

Slick portable design
Multi-room smarts

✚ AGAINST

Google Assistant will need a solid connection

At this year's [IFA 2017](#) conference, there's hardly a speaker that's been launched that's not had a voice assistant of some kind baked in.

From the [Sony Smart Speaker](#) to the Alexa-powered [Harman Kardon Allure](#), there's been connected boombox for almost every occasion and price point. One of the most promising looking ranges we've seen so far is the JBL Link series – we went hands on with the JBL Link 20, and came away impressed.

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Google-powered

The JBL Link 20 sits in the middle of the Link range. Available in white or black, it's a cylindrical speaker that stands 210mm tall. A wraparound speaker grill covers the majority of the speaker, with a small connectivity indicator on the front base, and controls sat on its top, flat surface.



One of those buttons you'll note has the Google Assistant logo on it, and it's the search-giant's voice helper that the JBL Link 20 draws its connected powers from. Once hooked up to a Wi-Fi connection, you'll be able to use the 'OK Google' trigger command to make all kinds of requests from the JBL Link 20, from controlling smart home connected lighting systems to thermostats, accessing facts and figures from the internet and streaming your favorite songs, among many other functions. Power and mic-mute buttons are found on the rear.

It's essentially the same connected feature set as the [Google Home](#) (including built-in [Chromecast](#)), but the JBL Link 20 separates itself from the competition with two notable features. First, its portability – the speaker can go on-the-go for 10 hours from a single charge – and secondly its waterproofing, with an IPX7 rating, making it safe to use in the shower. With built-in Bluetooth you'll be able to play tunes from a mobile device too, though you're going to need a solid Wi-Fi connection to get the most out of the Google Assistant features.

Sound quality

It's always tough to get a good sense of the quality of audio devices at busy tech conferences – there's so much competing noise that detail can be lost during demos.



What can be said confidently about the Link 20 is that it can be cranked up to impressive volume levels for its size, with some real heft to its bass despite the portable form factor. It looks to be serious competition for the UE Boom speaker line, and if its clarity can hold up in more sedate listening environments, its connected feature set could end up giving the Link 20 the edge.



Alongside the Link 20 will also be the smaller Link 10 and larger Link 300. The Link 10 is the cheaper of the three, but retains the Link 20's portability (with five hours of playback) and waterproofing, while the Link 300 is the top-end model with beefier speakers, designed just for use at home and as a result is mains powered. These weren't available to listen to at IFA 2017 but, in a Sonos-rivalling welcome touch, all three models can be grouped together over a Wi-Fi network for multi-room music playback.

Early verdict

With a clean design a solid feature set and Google Assistant built in, the Link 20 looks to tick every box you'd want checking from a portable speaker. We're keen to see its connected performance capabilities when removed from a home Wi-Fi network, and whether or not its audio can match its many features. But it's looking like a solid entry into the smart speaker range.

The JBL Link 20 will hit shops in November priced £179.99, which is around \$230 or AU\$290. We'll have more on the JBL Link rage in the run up to launch.

- [IFA 2017](#) is Europe's biggest tech show. The TechRadar team is in Berlin to bring you all the breaking news and hands-on first impressions of new phones, watches and other tech as they're announced.

WHAT IS A HANDS ON REVIEW?

'Hands on reviews' are a journalist's first impressions of a piece of kit based on spending some time with it. It may be just a few moments, or a few hours. The important thing is we have been able to play with it ourselves and can give you some sense of what it's like to use, even if it's only an embryonic view. For more information, see [TechRadar's Reviews Guarantee](#).

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