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Speakers

JBL Playlist review

The budget Bluetooth behemoth enters the multi-room space

★★★★★ By [Jon Porter](#)

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OUR VERDICT

The JBL Playlist brings the Bluetooth speaker maker's signature sound to a multi-room speaker for the first time. Between the Google Cast and Spotify Connect integration you're sure to be able to connect everything you need to this speaker, whose sound has a real punch to it.

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 FOR

- Punchy, energetic sound
- Decent connectivity options
- Compact and good looking

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 AGAINST

- Some Wi-Fi connectivity issues
- Sound lacks refinement
- Power cord is far too short

JBL is a company that has an exhausting number of Bluetooth speakers on the market, and these bright and colorful rugged speakers have become outdoor music staples.

But the JBL Playlist is something a little different. Instead of being a portable battery-powered speaker, this is one meant for the home that you're going to need to keep plugged in at all times.

The reason for this change is that this isn't a Bluetooth-only speaker. Instead it's equipped with a couple of different Wi-Fi streaming technologies, namely Google Cast and Spotify Connect, that make the speaker more similar to a Sonos-style multi-room setup than anything we'd expect to see from JBL.

For the most part the functionality is solidly implemented, resulting in a speaker that's enormously versatile. By integrating into these well-established ecosystems, JBL has ensured that you get all the functionality you'd expect from a multi-room system without having to build its own dedicated app and services.

The only potential downside is that the Playlist still absolutely has JBL's signature sound which, while completely at home in a rugged Bluetooth speaker, some users might feel is out of place in a home speaker.



Design and features

Available in black or white, the JBL Playlist is a fun-looking speaker that's all bold curves and speaker mesh.

Aside from a small JBL logo and Wi-Fi connectivity light, the front of the speaker is otherwise one large speaker grill.

Along the top there are a couple of control buttons. From left to right there's an on/off button, volume down, play/pause, volume up, and a button to put the speaker into Bluetooth mode.



Yes, in addition to supporting streaming over your home internet connection, the JBL Playlist can also be streamed to via Bluetooth, which is helpful if your home network is being slow or unreliable.

Direct controls on the speaker are also helpful. Depending on the speed of your home network there can sometimes be a delay when you want to turn the speaker's volume up or down - directly controlling the speaker removes this problem.

Round the back of the speaker you've also got a 3.5mm input (just in case you want to opt for a wired connection for any reason) and a two-pin power connector that accepts the speaker's annoyingly short power cable.

If you've ever set up a [Chromecast](#) before then the setup process for the JBL Playlist shouldn't be too unfamiliar. Simply download the Google companion app, 'Google Home', and it will guide you through connecting to the speaker and subsequently getting it connected to your home's Wi-Fi.

If you want to sync up the speaker with other Google Cast-equipped speakers then the setup is a little more involved, but it's still deftly handled by the same app.



We got the JBL Playlist paired with a Chromecast Audio to allow the same music to be played across two different rooms, and the two streams synced up perfectly, as we'd expect from Google's ecosystem.

It might seem strange to include support for both Google Cast and Spotify Connect. After all, both are accessed in exactly the same way in the Spotify app where you select the JBL Playlist from the bottom of the 'Now Playing' screen, and Google Cast does more or less everything that Spotify Connect does but with support for many more apps including Tidal, Deezer and podcasting apps like PocketCasts.

But Spotify Connect also has its own unique functionality whereby you can use Spotify players on a desktop or laptop to control the speaker - which isn't available using Google Cast. We found this especially useful when listening to music while working; it was simply much easier to control Spotify with a keyboard and mouse rather than picking up our phone.

Sound quality and performance

This is a JBL speaker through and through, and so for better or for worse it shares the same DNA that's made the company's Bluetooth speakers so popular.

In short that means a bass response that's thick and chunky, with mids and trebles taking a backseat to a certain extent.

It seemed only fitting to start off our listening session with some energetic pop punk from The Offspring. The driving offbeat drumbeat in *You're Gunna Go Far, Kid* had power aplenty, with the Playlist providing a really energetic listening experience.

It's a similar story if you switch to *From Her Lips to God's Ears (The Energiser)* by Against Me! where the song's frantic pacing is delivered in spades by the speaker.



When a JBL representative described this as a speaker that's meant for parties, we can see exactly where they're coming from.

But the JBL Playlist is a lot less sure of itself when it comes to a more laid back track like *I Fall In Love Too Easily* by Chet Baker or *It Was A Very Good Year* by Frank Sinatra you'll find the mids and trebles getting lost in the mix a little, not to mention not having quite the same level of detail.

This isn't a speaker that responds well to being put in a corner and used for background music. It wants to be front and centre in a party environment.

If you're looking for a more laid back listen, then the slightly more expensive [Sonos Play:1](#) might be more up your alley.

Our only other issue with the speaker was that the stability of the audio playback will vary depending on the quality of your home's Wi-Fi signal. On a couple of occasions we experienced the speaker being kicked off our network, which required us to restart it to resume playback.

This might not be a problem if you have a more robust network, and it's also worth noting that switching to a Bluetooth connection will remove your home network from the equation.

Nevertheless, it's a problem that rarely affects a [Chromecast Audio](#) that we have connected to the same network.



Verdict

If you like the punchy and energetic sound signature of JBL's existing Bluetooth speakers, then the Playlist offers exactly that in a home-listening form-factor.

The connectivity options are exactly what you need in this setting, and make it easy for everyone in your house to get their music playing no matter what streaming service or device they're using.

But if you're looking for a speaker to sit discreetly in a corner and play ambient music then you might find the JBL Playlist a little too punchy for this purpose.

As a party speaker, though, it does its job with gusto.

- Check out our guide to the [best speakers](#) for our top audio recommendations.

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