



## DESKTOP AUDIO SYSTEM

# KLIPSCH THE THREE WITH GOOGLE ASSISTANT



The classic design cues mask a thoroughly modern product – Klipsch's The Three is a wireless speaker entirely devoted to streaming and offering full Google Assistant functionality.

**W**e're fans of the Heritage styling adopted by Klipsch for its range of wireless speakers and also headphones, emphasising as it does the history of this iconic US company which stretches back to 1946 when acoustics pioneer Paul W. Klipsch set up shop in Hope, Arkansas, from whence the company became known as the great American speaker company. Hope has other claims to greatness; Klipsch's Michael Burrato once told us that the 'welcome' sign marking entry to the town celebrates not Klipsch but two other things — the birthplace of Bill Clinton, and Lloyd Bright's world record watermelon in 2005 (it was 122kg; see [www.giantwatermelons.com](http://www.giantwatermelons.com)). While on

this subject, we should apologise for a recent news piece in which we erroneously placed Klipsch's founding in Hope, Arizona, where the welcome sign promises only 'Gas, Food Mart & R.V. Park', and on its reverse "*Your now beyond Hope*"...

In any case, Klipsch is now in Indianapolis, and is part of Vox International, a group which includes Acoustic Research and Jamo. But Klipsch certainly has the history to leverage the 'golden age of wireless' feel of its Heritage line, especially as we're now enjoying a different golden age of wireless, with today's wireless speakers not only allowing the convenience of streaming music from devices and from the internet, but also now adding the ability to control them with your voice.

## EQUIPMENT

So 'The Three' is a wireless table-top stereo system first unveiled a couple of years ago, resplendent in its use of real-wood veneer and metal switches and knobs, while delivering a rich and sizeable sound from its 35cm-wide cabinet. But this new version adds built-in Google Assistant to this classic design, which not only allows you to ask it how long to cook your eggs, it brings the streaming and multiroom abilities of Chromecast to the system. The previous 'The Three' used Klipsch's own DTS PlayFi-based streaming with Alexa capabilities, so this new version allows Klipsch to be platform-agnostic for those who already have a preference.

The Three is of a medium size which doesn't hog too much table space, a 35×20cm footprint, its woven grilles rising 18cm to the woodgrained top where the metal controls are available. Our review unit had the current walnut finish; we gather a darker Ebony version will follow.

Within are five drivers — no dedicated tweeters but twin treble-mid 57mm drivers,



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a single 13cm bass driver, and a pair of 13cm opposed bass radiators (which have, as we'll see, quite the effect).

There are many ways to bring music to The Three. If you subscribe to a music service like Spotify, YouTube or Google Play, you could simply get The Three on your home network and then ask it to stream music from your service: 'Hey Google, shuffle Tyler the Creator' (it's always worth saying "shuffle", otherwise you're likely to get the same order of playlist every time).

While those three music services are the only ones Google's voice tech currently supports as default subscription services, others can be 'cast' to The Three's internal audio Chromecast, and of course anything can be streamed to it via a direct Bluetooth connection.

The Chromecast inside also allows grouping of multiple Chromecast-enabled devices using the Google Home app, so that a simple but effective multiroom ability is available.

## PERFORMANCE

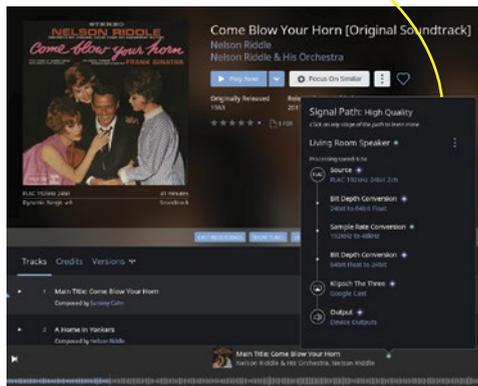
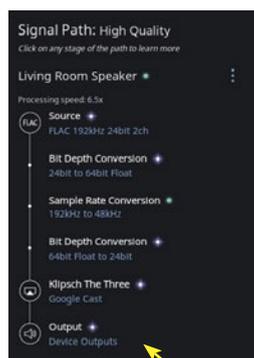
In our early listening we were unusually drawn to The Three's delivery of electric bass guitar; its bottom octave emerged fully realised whether it was the rolls and staccato plucks of bass on Thomas Dolby's impeccably produced *Pop Culture* or the rattlier Rickerbacker of JJ Burnell on the Stranglers' *Nice & Sleazy*. Its achievement is the full tone it delivers; you can almost see the fingers sliding on the fretboard. Nor does it exaggerate or bloat this low-end, other than perhaps being fuller at the very bottom than in the octave above (its output is louder below 70Hz than above it); otherwise it just sits underneath the rest of the frequency range doing its job. This balanced worked well, for example, with Leonard Cohen's often tricky vocal, merging its deeper content with the midrange whisper for a single vocal image without either the bloat or separation that can occur on some smaller systems.

This bass also supports what we thought to be a two-tier performance. It leaps into life somewhere above the halfway mark, the sound

filling out in the lower midrange and upper bass. These can sound a little recessed when playing at lower volumes, where the lower bass plus midrange and up can dominate, still perfectly listenable but slightly lacking in fullness.

Past that halfway mark, however, The Three can go as big on sound as you might hope the company's reputation would promise, easily filling a medium-sized room with an energising level of music enjoyably free of any audible distortion. We played some of our private Google play collection, cast from the Home app to the Klipsch; that Thomas Dolby album quite rocked the house, while the grungier Stereophonics' 'Pull The Pin' album was underpinned with that remarkable bass performance to give a real but rapid thump to kick drums, as well as the bass strength already identified.

We switched to Spotify and enjoyed easy Google Assistant voice control, requesting music and controlling volume. Tyler, the Creator's *Earfquake* was given a bassline worthy of its track title, while the deep rolling bass descents and kick drums of *I Think* similarly pushed far forward of the main track. (We doubt Tyler fans will object to this.) One hazard with a Google speaker that's good to crank — we'd leave it turned



RIGHT: A Roon screenshot with detail showing delivery of 24-bit/48kHz from high-res files.

up, so next time anyone asked Google a question it would reply at terrific volume! It's easy to reset; Google understands 1 to 10 for volume, so you can simply say 'Hey Google, set volume to 5'.

And of course all manner of other Googleness can be accessed in the same way — weather, news, traffic, jokes, smart-home control; the Google-ised The Three does them all just as well as any other Google Assistant device. We were quite impressed, also, at its ability often to hear a shout of 'Hey Google' even over music playing at a fair old tilt.

Klipsch promotes the inclusion of 24-bit/192kHz decoding "for services which support high-res", but we're not sure how you'd get any of those — we did use AllCast to DLNA high-res files to the Klipsch but Chromecast currently tops out at 24-bit/48kHz (we played files via Roon to confirm this, see screengrab bottom left). The only other source here is Bluetooth, which of course doesn't get even that far.

Connecting via Bluetooth is easy-peasy — hold down the press stud on the Klipsch, pair your phone, and play away. We couldn't anywhere find a list of supported codecs, which probably rules out aptX, but it sounded better than the default SBC codec, so we suspect AAC is available as well. Incoming phone calls simply rang on our phone and didn't send the caller blasting out through the Klipsch; on hanging up the music resumed.

## CONCLUSION

We're still a bit shocked that there's no auxiliary input here at all — a sign of the times! But with streaming the thing, and The Three offering Chromecast plus Google Assistant for so many ways to play music here, who needs to plug anything in? The Three impressed with its natural bass in particular and for being able to play loud with pleasure, as well as being a visual asset to any home where wood is welcome. ■

### Klipsch The Three with Google Assistant

- Great Heritage styling, and not too large
- Great sound especially when turned up
- All the merits of Chromecast and Google Assistant, plus Bluetooth

- No physical inputs at all

**Price:** \$999

**Inputs:** Chromecast, Bluetooth

**Outputs:** none

**Drivers:** 2 x 57mm drivers, 1 x 133mm woofer, 2 x 133mm passive radiators

**Enclosure type:** sealed

**Quoted power:** 60W continuous @<1% THD

**Dimensions:** 348 x 178 x 203mm

**Weight:** 4.7kg

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