

The Squeezebox's display has liquid-like transitions and even supports True Type fonts. Fancy!



SUPER STREAMER

Squeezebox

It may be slim by name, but you'll be pleased to hear that it's grotesquely distended with features by nature

Price: £229 **Manufacturer:** Slim Devices **Web:** www.slimdevices.com

The internet, remote controls, mechanical corkscrews, motorised spaghetti forks – all these technological things have become so essential to our daily lives that we barely know we're using them, and wouldn't even dare to think how we got along without them.

Slim Devices has been trying to get a piece of kit into that enviable position for a while now, the SLIMP3 player came painfully close back in 2002 but it was fiddly to set up and mightily expensive. Eagle-eyed readers will notice that one of these niggles is still present, but the other has disappeared without a trace.

NO PRESSURE

The Squeezebox couldn't be easier to set up. Plug it into a wall, fire it up and bingo, it'll sniff out any wireless networks in the area. From there simple menu navigation makes entering any WEP keys or passwords a doddle and then the hardware is good to go. The software backend that sits on your PC is open source and free for anyone to download. It's equally simple to get running, requiring none of the .Net framework nonsense some other media streaming

hardware demands. With these two components working you can beam your entire MP3 (WMA, OGG, ACC or just about any other audio codec) collection around your house to the Squeezebox and thence to your stereo.

It doesn't end there, either. Even with your PC turned off, the Squeezebox can still access the internet through your wireless router and stream stuff from the web. Suddenly a virtually infinite world of podcasts, ShoutCAST stations and internet radio is available in every room. An eclectic selection is pre-



Bridge of sighs Is there nothing this box can't do?



The Squeezebox can also be used as a wireless bridge. We had it set up with a Pinnacle Showcenter 1000 and were streaming movies from our PC while listening to Hancock's Half Hour on BBC 7, and reading Slashdot RSS feeds. All were smooth as silk. Now that's the future, right there.

“One of the most desirable pieces of wireless kit we've ever seen”

programmed, but cut and paste a URL into the backend interface and you can add as many streams as you like.

Factor in programmable RSS feed news tickers, a bewildering array of ambient natural sounds (we are currently falling asleep to the digitised sound of heavy rainfall and a distant thunderstorm), games (sideways *Tetris* anyone?) and, this being open source, an already blossoming plugin development community (TV listings, a download manager for listening to the BBC's Listen Again radio archive...) and you have one of the most well-thought-out, accessible and desirable pieces of kit we've ever seen.

Our sole complaint with the Squeezebox is the price. If you're loaded, waste no time at all and purchase one of these beauties today. If you're a person of limited means you should be aware that an Xbox 360 and all its media centre goodness could be yours for the same money. We know this though: the people at Slim Devices will have to pry the Squeezebox from PCFormat's cold, dead hands if they ever want it back...

James Carey

Inputs 802.11g wi-fi, ethernet

Outputs Digital optical out, Digital coax out, analogue out (RCA), Ethernet, headphone mini jack

Dimensions 192x93x80mm

Screen 320x32 pixels, greyscale

92% PCF says... "Totally awesome and essential hardware. Sell your children to own one."