

Magic Mu-So

Naim's new Mu-So 2 sets a standard for one-box systems, says Jon Myles.

It's hard to believe – but it was five years ago Naim unveiled its Mu-So one-box speaker system. At the time it was a unique offering of wireless network multi-room streaming, physical connectivity, amplification and speakers. At the time it almost created a new category of hi-fi.

Since then many manufacturers

have followed Naim but few have managed to match Mu-So's ability in terms of sound quality.

Now we have the Mu-So 2 – which promises a significant upgrade on the original unit although the price has also increased from £995 to £1299.

Side by side old and new look very similar. The same shaped cloth fascia at the front, familiar heat sinks

at the rear and the rather brilliant rotary control at the top of the box – that allows you to select inputs, volume and access streaming services such as Tidal, Spotify and Apple Music.

Look a little bit closer, though, and things have changed. The heatsinks on the rear are much closer together while the cloth grille on the front has a different texture

– that Naim says enhances sound quality. Under the surface Naim have really upped the ante on the original Mu-So. Sitting beneath the grille are six drivers, redesigned in collaboration with Naim's French sister company Focal. They consist of two silk-dome tweeters, two doped-paper mid-range drivers (with tuned mass damper technology derived from Focal's high-end offerings) and two bass drivers. In addition low-end reinforcement comes from a bass reflex port that vents at the bottom of the cabinet. Each driver is powered by 75 watts of Class D amplification which means there's 450 Watts of power on offer.

The amplification module also includes the digital-to-analogue conversion circuitry in an arrangement Naim refers to as "direct digital amplification".

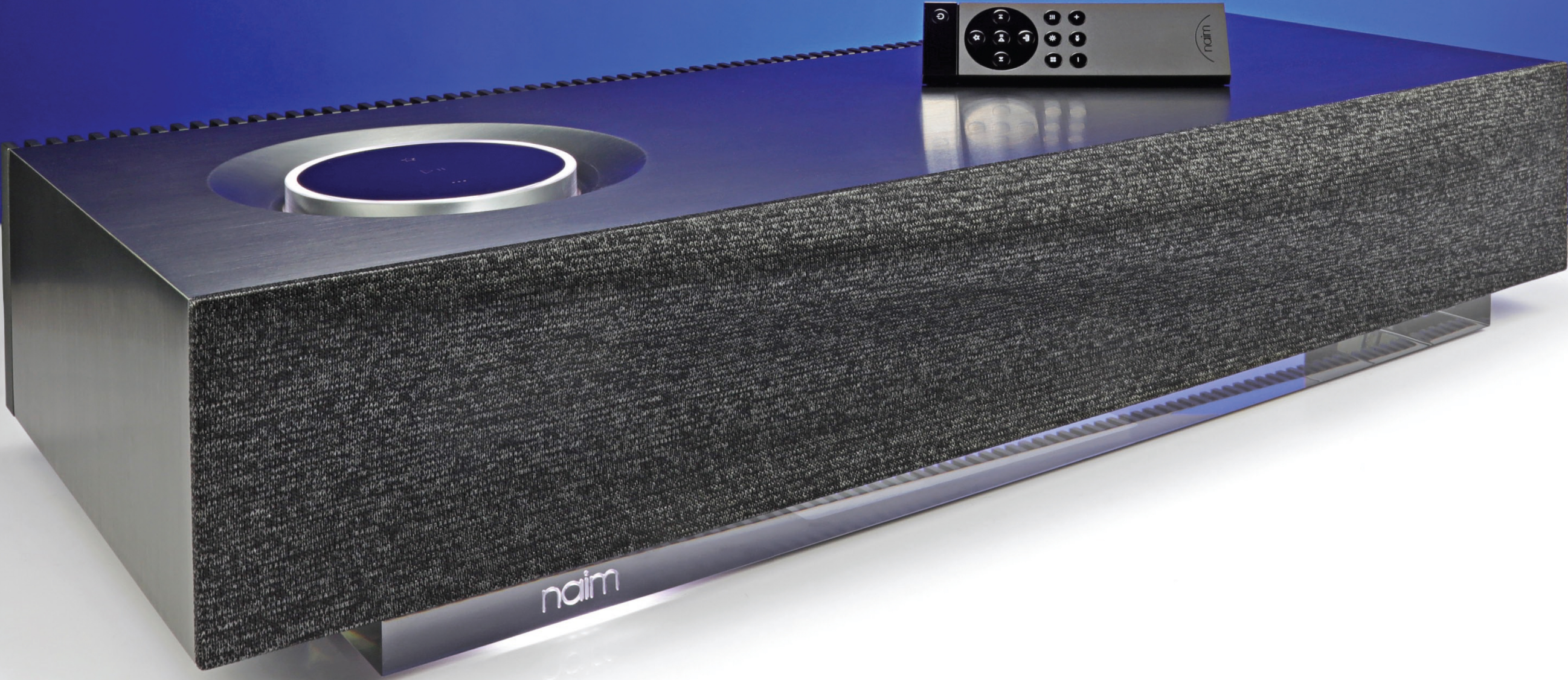
"as one-box systems go the Mu-So 2 is hard to beat. It combines superb construction with an easy control system and a sound that belies its dimensions."

The native DAC resolution is 24bit/88.2kHz although the Mu-So 2 is capable of downscaling files of up to 24bit/384kHz via UPnP or wired/wireless network connection and 24bit/96kHz via its digital optical input.

Naim recommends a wired connection for high-resolution material – but, to be honest, I've never had any problem using a wireless connection.

The cabinet has also been re-engineered to deliver an additional 13% internal volume, while the internal bracing and baffle moulding have been redesigned to aid rigidity and control internal vibrations.

The Mu-So 2 comes with a supplied remote control but it's best accessed via Naim's own app (Android and iOS) which gives a variety of features including album artwork, playlists and internet radio.



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The Mu-So's new drivers have been developed in partnership with sister brand Focal. There are two silk dome tweeters, two mid-range drivers and a pair of bass drivers. It's a significant upgrade to the original Mu-So. The supplied remote can be used to access all functions – but Naim's app gives more options.



As with the original Mu-So, offline streaming is catered for with Bluetooth while USB, optical and 3.5mm inputs offer the ability to connect another source such as a CD transport, CD player or television. With the latter, Naim have also added a HDMI ARC socket so users can connect the Mu-So 2 to a television or AV receiver to pass-through high-quality Blu-ray formats.

All in all it's a fully featured device that can be connected to almost any hi-fi source or act as a standalone device. But how does it sound?

SOUND QUALITY

Achieving true stereo sound through a one-box system is never easy – but the Mu-So 2 gets as close as any other device I've heard.

The new drivers are impressively

balanced and integrated. They work well together with a good bass response, smooth mid-range and a treble that brings out detail without being harsh.

Depending on where Mu-So 2 is positioned it's possible to tailor the sound from three settings – Near Wall, Near Corner or when out in the open No Compensation.

I started out with the latter the using the Mu-So on a hi-fi rack in the middle of Hi-Fi World's listening room.

Playing Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds' 'The Mercy Seat' the sonic swirl of the guitars took on thrilling atmosphere. Everything was in place – from the bass, drums and Cave's growling vocals to the pace of the track.

The Mu-So also manages to throw out a wide image, the sound extending beyond the sides of the cabinet to fill the room. This was playing the track via UPnP streaming from a Melco N10 NAS (network attached server).

Listening to the same track via Spotify saw a slight diminution in scale with the soundstage closing in and the guitar parts becoming a little more clogged. That said, though, there was still thrilling excitement to the overall presentation.

Moving on to St Etienne's gentle 'Milk Bottle Symphony' the Mu-So 2 tackled this with impressive delicacy. The clash of the glass bottles at the start comes over well. The only criticism here is that the tweeters sounded a little soft – I would have liked to have heard a little more bite.

That said, when the whole track kicks in it's not devoid of pace or detail. Sarah Cracknell's



A USB input on the right side enables users to load their own tracks.

voice was very well rendered, her vocals standing out clearly against the backing track. They were also superbly projected into the room. No, not quite as 3D as a true stereo system but not that far off for a one-box system.

And the one thing the Mu-So 2



Simple and clear legends on the top control wheel make it a go-to for operating the Mu-So, but there's an app and a remote control unit as well.

does have – in typical Naim fashion – is real punch and power. It's very pacy, imbuing tracks such as New Order's 'Age Of Consent' solid drive, Peter Hook's bass sounding deep but neither sluggish nor overly dominant.

Moving the unit close to a rear wall and dialling in the requisite setting proved interesting. With No Compensation as the default there was a slight boominess at the lower registers – but with the Near Wall option everything fell into place again. It's a clever use of DSP processing that actually works and allows the

Mu-So 2 to be used in a variety of locations depending on your requirements.

In fact, however and wherever I placed the Mu-So 2 I was always impressed at just how good it sounded.

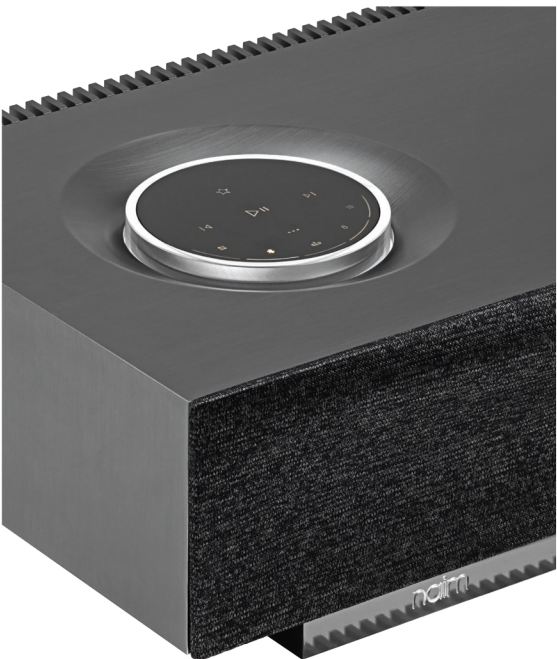
Having reviewed and been impressed by the original Mu-So I was expecting the upgrade to be an incremental increase in quality. But actually it is much more than that. In terms of sound quality it is a big step forward on the original. The new drive units, improved DSP

and redesigned cabinet have all paid dividends.

CONCLUSION

As one-box systems go the Mu-So 2 is hard to beat. It combines superb construction with an easy control system and a sound that belies its dimensions. No, it won't beat a full-size hi-fi set-up but it gets pretty close.

And if you are looking for a compact system that can belt out a tune but also do delicacy as well then the new Mu-So 2 really has no rivals..



The large, illuminated control wheel makes access to most functions quick and easy. It has a smooth action.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Naim's Mu-So 2 internal loudspeakers comprise an elliptical bass unit, a small conical midrange unit and silk dome tweeter, making it a three-way loudspeaker – ambitious for such a small cabinet – and there are two of them facing forward. The bass units are reflex loaded via a hidden port that works through a hand lift at left on the cabinet.

Frequency response was in keeping with high fidelity loudspeakers, our third-octave, pink noise analysis shows. Output was reasonably smooth and completely flat to 20kHz with grille on, as shown, or a small amount of plateau treble lift (+2dB) grille off.

Bass extends low, the port taking over below 60Hz to add deep bass at 30Hz (red trace).

The room position Wall response (near wall placement) reduced bass output by a small amount, a few dB, but Corner compensation (shown) was more severe, to dampen room boom.

Selecting Loudness made no difference at any level, either acoustic or related to the volume control settings, on our review sample. This will presumably be corrected with final

product.

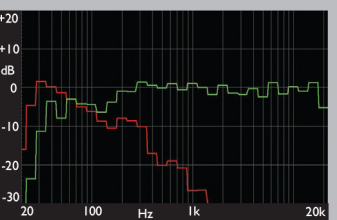
For a small one-box solution the Mu-So 2 offers full hi-fi performance. Its loudspeakers deliver a smooth, wide-band response free from artificial enhancement and usefully adjustable for room position. Impressive for such a small unit. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



FREQUENCY RES. CORNER



NAIM MU-SO 2

£1299

OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT
Possibly the best one-box system available today. Not cheap but undoubtedly worth the money with its sound quality, ease of use and connectivity options.

FOR
- balanced sound
- build quality
- ease of use

AGAINST
- not cheap

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