

technopolis

Cruise the highways and rat runs of Gizmo City with the grand wizard of gadgetology, Jonathan Margolis.

ULTIMATE EARS 700

My toppest, favouritest in-ear iPod headphones these past couple of years have been Denon's all-metal bullet-like AH-C700, which are still around if you hunt them down, for £150 or so. Don't, though, because these new ones, from another high-end maker, Ultimate Ears, are even better. These matters are horribly subjective, but I'd say the tiny UE 700 model is 50 per cent better than the Denons. Which is amazing. To my ears, they give a startling, perfect sound, with physical sound isolation simply as a result of fitting snugly – a feature that makes electronic sound isolators a bit unnecessary. Ultimate Ears, recently acquired by Logitech (good guys, they), has superb credentials in the rock biz. These wonderful headphones show why. Don't be put off by the slightly lame, cheapo packaging, or that there's no iPhone version with a mic, which is dumb. Especially as they do come with a great (but unusual) accessory – an attenuator to use on aircraft, where, if you plug proper headphones into the seat jack to watch the movie, cabin announcements can blast your ears off.

£150, from www.logitech.com, www.amazon.co.uk, [Selfridges](http://Selfridges.com), [Apple Store](http://AppleStore.com) and other retailers. See www.ultimateears.com.

ROTHDOCK

Here is an interesting and supremely useful little, ahem, "solution" from a fine and growing British brand, Roth Audio, whose beautifully finished Alfie one-piece hi-fi I reviewed in our April Interiors edition.

The RothDock is an excellent device that wirelessly streams music from your iPod or iPhone (or other MP3 player, but it's really an iPod accessory) to another, usually bigger and brawnier stereo.

It's one of the idiot-proof streaming products that are, er, streaming onto the market – and with good reason. I would guess that most readers of this page have a nice hi-fi but actually listen to most of their music on an iPod or iPhone (and yes, I will have to invent a generic term for the two some time).

A nice touch on the RothDock – indeed, one of its main features – is that if you're blasting out the sounds from your iPhone via the RothDock to your hi-fi and someone phones you, rather than your having no idea someone's calling, it will fade the music and play the ringtone through your hi-fi – loud. Which is useful. The RothDock also charges your whichever-Pod while it's working, and works at up to 10m distance. One gripe is the unpleasant thin, shiny plastic finish. This makes it too light and not nice to handle. Founder James Roth should consider a heavier, nicer finish – people would pay extra. But good gadgetry, nonetheless. £100, from www.carphonewarehouse.com and branches. See www.rothaudio.co.uk.



WWW.QYPE.CO.UK

The site and its app, Qype Radar, are one of the best examples to date of the way the idiot number-crunching power of computers and the internet can combine with the extraordinary potential of low-power, ultra-high-frequency radio (aka mobile phones) to produce a public amenity that, far from being geeky, is perfectly attuned to social needs of normal, gregarious, non-techie citizens – in this case, people who love eating out.

OK, restaurant reviews both delight and repel most of us. It is wonderful that there are people whose job is to test restaurants, many of which, by accident or design (I can never work out which) are disgusting, a rip-off or both. Reviews by critics usually focus on what's new, top-end and unusual, whereas we restaurant users are normally just hungry and want the best nearby place to eat well and eat now.

Qype is a fantastic resource. It's a social networking site for foodies to share their views and experiences and, crucially, to do so on the hoof, via their iPhone. Qype Radar works out where you are and beams you Scotty-like to the best dining options as they are now, not a year ago, which in reality is what most of us need. The reviewers aren't all brilliant or sophisticated, but a steer of any kind is better than none.

Foodie readers will know that there is at least one similar site, www.urbanspoon.com, but although it also has an iPhone app and is good, it's too American-biased and covers only a handful of major UK cities. If you're serious, use both, although I suspect you'll find Qype more useful. I love it.

www.qype.co.uk and *Qype Radar iPhone application*, both free to users.



YELPIE BEACH SAFE

One of the most enlightening things I learned on my university politics course was a theory that, for me at least, explained the mystery of why extremely left-wing people and extremely right-wing people are often so very similar. The further left or right your views go, this theory holds, the more alike as a person you become to those whose policy ideas are the mirror image of your own. Your level of authoritarianism, it is argued, overrides your beliefs on policy. So the political spectrum is, in this model, not a straight line, but a circle, which explains why so many people find it easy to switch from communist to fascist beliefs and vice versa – when they journey the surprisingly short distance from one to the other (just a fraction of the circle rather than the full length of a spectrum) they find they are among like-minded folk.

It is a model that rather reflects the agonising I often go through here deciding whether an item is a worthwhile, interesting and/or useful innovation – or a piece of, albeit inspired, daftness and hence destined for the Silly Street slot. When I heard about this portable safe designed to guard your valuables on the beach or poolside, my daughter commented that it sounded about as much use as a solar-powered torch. I was also reminded of my genius brother, who after several burglaries installed a safe – and had it firmly bolted to the flimsy back of a wardrobe. The next thieves in the ever-growing queue outside his house sensibly hacked out the plywood and made off with the safe still attached to its lump of wardrobe.

The Yelpie Beach Safe seems initially a tad loopy, then, but it does make sense. It's a small but thick and sturdy plastic box, just big enough for a wallet, a purse, a couple of phones and a camera or iPod. It whirrs satisfyingly closed with a motorised lock and can only be opened again, like a hotel-room safe, by inputting a PIN number. When you leave your spot on the beach for a swim – a moment I have never been comfortable with, even on a quiet, well-brought-up beach – you arm a 90-decibel alarm which activates when the safe is picked up or moved. The alarm stops by inserting the PIN or if no further movement is detected after 30 seconds. And for added security, it's wholly feasible to bury the Yelpie between arming the alarm and it activating. Is the alarm loud enough? Yes. I've beach-tested it a few metres from a lively sea. The racket was piercing enough to startle an elderly couple 50m away.

It's not a perfect product. If you were a clever thief you could stifle the Yelpie's alarm substantially by covering up the holes where the sound comes out. But for me, this gadget provides an extra little bit of relaxation and security in a situation where I'm always a bit edgy. Hence, it's a leading, non-Silly Street slot for the admirable Yelpie.

£39.94, including p&p, from www.cutebitz.com, 020-3286 7414. See www.yelpie.co.uk.

SILLY STREET

Another reason for the Yelpie Beach Safe appearing among my sensible selections for this month of July is this, which is approximately 400 times sillier. OK, I am way out on a limb with this item. In fact, as far out as Japan, which is the only place you can get it. But you know what, I don't care. You're all bound either to be going some time, or know someone who is.

So do this. Send yourself, or someone, to one of the omnipresent Tokyu Hands stores, which are wonderful for everything from stationery to interesting tools. And once there, lay your hands on this – the Honda EarAlarm.

It is a gadget you wear in your ear and sounds an alarm if your head slumps. It's designed for salarymen coming home late on the Tokyo subway pickled in sake and worried about zizzing off and missing their stop. But I think it could also be the perfect device for the duller type of board meeting.

Although the instructions are in Japanese, the EarAlarm is perfectly easy to use. An indispensable gadget, obviously. £1,029 (about £6.70), from Tokyu Hands in Japan and Taiwan.

