



● **MP3 PLAYER**

# Rio Carbon 5GB

**PRICE** £153 (£180 inc VAT)

**INTERNET** [www.rioaudio.com](http://www.rioaudio.com)

**DELIVERY** £4 (£5 inc VAT)

**SUPPLIER** [www.pcworld.co.uk](http://www.pcworld.co.uk)

**VERDICT** Sensational battery life, ease of use and looks make the Carbon highly desirable.

**R**io's Nitrus player stormed our last MP3 player Labs (see *Issue 117*, p124), with our only concern being its overall styling. With the Carbon, gone is the dowdy black plastic, replaced by a chrome finish that's as tough as it is shiny. It even has a mirrored chrome iPod-esque back, feeling fabulous in the hand and looking fantastic.

Despite offering 5GB of storage over the Nitrus' 1.5GB, the Carbon is even smaller and lighter than its forebear; just 12mm at its fattest, and just 78g in weight.

The backlit screen is clear and provides a host of information. The menu system has the occasional frustrating dead-end with no obvious means of going back up a level, but for the most part it's satisfyingly tidy and mature. The navigation system dispenses with its predecessor's joystick, favouring a stylish set of buttons, as well as a jog dial at the top corner – slightly more difficult to operate by touch than the Nitrus, but still feasible.

Once playing, the battery life will last

an amazing 20 hours of WMA playback. The Carbon will charge over its USB connection, with the supplied power adaptor terminating in a mini-USB plug.

Transferring data is simple, with the Carbon acting as a removable storage device for files, and Rio's music transfer software being a pleasure to use. It offers configurable synchronisation profiles allowing, for example, a 65 per cent random exchange of music on the player, without losing music transferred manually. You can also use Windows Media Player 10, and the Carbon will support Digital Rights Management 10 (via a free flash upgrade), used by online music stores such as MSN Music and Napster.

There are weaknesses though. It takes a tedious 14 seconds to start up and the lack of a hardware Hold button is an irritation, although you can lock the player via the menu system. There's also a slight design flaw: headphones with a metal collar at the end of the jack will come into contact with the metal



The Rio Carbon: music to our ears.

casing, causing crackling. This can be cured with a piece of tape, but it's hardly ideal and an oversight in the otherwise superb design. Sound quality is great though, and the five-band equalizer allows you to compensate for the weaknesses of small headphones.

Despite the few niggles, this is a fabulous player. The iPod Mini will undoubtedly continue to sell in huge numbers but, for the money, we'd go for the smaller and lighter Carbon every time.

DAVID FEARON

## PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

**SPECIFICATIONS** 5GB hard disk; USB 2 interface; fixed lithium-ion battery; support for MP3 and WMA formats. Dimensions: 61 x 12 x 84mm (WDH). Weight: 78g