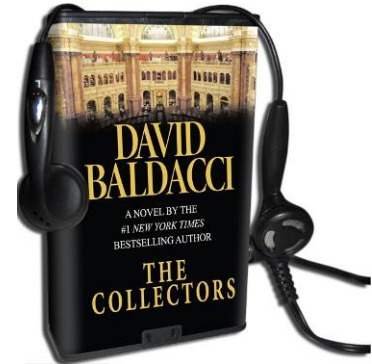


PC LIFELINE

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By Robert Sanborn

Another package I got from CES was from Playaway, www.playawaydigital.com, and it is simply a digital copy of a book. The difference with this package is that it comes complete with a battery, earplugs, and a very easy to use interface for listening to the book. They call it the first ever self playing digital audiobook and while I am familiar with books on tape, books on CD, and books over the internet, this was something new and different and I wanted to give it a try. We often use the books on tape when traveling and in fact have a bunch of them that we take on some of our longer road trips. But I never really liked the tapes because you have to deal with tape problems whether in the unit or in the car and the CDs are nice but you end up with a bunch of CDs for one book. Same with the tapes. So this sounded like a neat way to package things.



For about \$30, you get the entire package and in my case I had them send me a Hemmingway book to listen to and was very pleasantly surprised at how easy to use it is, and how convenient to carry around. Small enough to easily fit into a shirt pocket but big enough so that the buttons are easy to find and use which include volume control, fast forward and reverse to chapter beginnings, on off switch and an equalizer to shift the speaker to a different mode. There is also a tiny LCD screen to tell you how many minutes till the end of the chapter which is convenient when traveling. The earphones that came with it work just fine and since it uses the standard 3.5mm audio jack, you could also plug in your favorite noise cancelling headphones if you are traveling. Or in my case with my car, I simply use the car adapter I got with a portable CD player to plug it in so that everyone in the car could listen at the same time. With the book I got, it is unabridged and so the running time is 8 hours.

There are even more cool features if you like such as shuffle play if you get a music box, or there is a way to speed up the recorded voice in case you need to get through the book in a hurry. Using a standard AAA battery, it is ready to go and you can be listening to your book in a matter of a minute. I listened to my book while waiting for my van to be worked on and the controls worked very easily and the control logos are intuitive. Hard to beat and if you don't want to fight with downloading books to your mp3 player, this is a great alternative to listening to your books. Available online or at Borders & other book stores. They even have a return program to save you %50 off on your next book.

CES First Impressions

The more I dig, the more stuff I find from CES and as I look back on it, while it may not have been a spectacular show, there were certainly enough things there to make it worth while.

One such item to catch my eye was the Eclipse AVN, Audio Visual Navigation system by Fujitsu. See it at www.eclipse-web.com. It is an in-dash unit for your car that combines audio, visual, and navigation features in one unit. The AVN model 2210P was an Innovations award at CES and it was something to see. A new step ahead in auto navigation was what got me first interested in it but all the other features make it a really neat product. It will have Bluetooth built in so you can add



mobile content via all sorts of devices, a USB port on the front to plug your mp3 player to it, a built in CD player, and it comes with a three year warranty. The screen will be 3.5 inches wide because it is a removable Tom Tom navigation device that fits flush into the unit, if you undock the navigation unit, you can still take advantage of the audio features because there are separate controls on the front of the unit. It is also satellite radio ready. For in-dash mounting, it requires a double din space. Available sometime this spring at Circuit City and auto shops for around \$900.

Thinking about Plasma televisions? Panasonic has a ton of them and was showing them off along with a ton of other companies. I think what sets these apart is the better technology behind them. Of course, a 103 inch plasma screen is nothing to sneeze at and it was something to look at and they had that and a number of others down to 42 inches in size. We saw better screens, higher resolutions, faster refresh rates, and so as the new round of screens comes to stores near us, they become even more exciting to look at.

The Razer Mako speakers have to be some of the coolest and best sounding speakers to hear in a while for home users. They will cost around \$300 when they come out but look like Curling Stones if you have watched much of the winter Olympics and they are conversation pieces. Look for them in the 2nd quarter of the year. The samples I saw in their listening room sounded wonderful. Razer is big in the gaming market with some really high performance products, see them at www.razerzone.com.



Midland is long known for their radios for the marine industry has come out with a neat one that caught my eye as I do a lot of camping and traveling. It is their ER102, Emergency Weather Alert Crank Radio. And crank here is the operative word. To power it, you just open the handle and crank it away to generate power for the radio. It is an AM/FM radio with seven weather channels that includes the usual clocks, alarms, is backlit, and water resistant, but also has a freeze Alert in case it gets too cold. It does come with an AC adapter to normally plug in but if you lose power, you are all set to go. Around \$50. <http://www.midlandradio.com/>. Keep one of these in your storm cellar or camper.

When you finally get your iPod, I have the accessory just for you. From H2O Audio, www.h2oaudio.com They have the waterproof housing just for the iPod. The one that I liked mounted directly onto bicycle handlebars to keep at least your music high and dry. Great for the beach and anywhere else you might run into weather problems. From there, clip it to your armband or belt and go swimming or strap it to a backpack and go hiking. Truly take it with you anywhere and not worry about the elements. Weighs next to nothing and costs around \$40.



Having traveled a bunch and on trips that sat me on the jet for upwards of 14 hours, I have come to love my noise cancelling headphones so I am always looking for something new and improved. So I went back to Sennheiser at CES to see their new noise cancelling headphone line that looks to be a big winner. Can't wait to try these out. Their new model is the PCX450 and besides being their top of the line units, also has some really neat features not found in any of the others I have tried out. What this is, is their "Talk Through" technology. The unit incorporates tiny microphones to pick up surrounding sounds, and what is really cool is that the headphone's can tell between noise such as that of the aircraft engines and the voice of the

person sitting next to you. Too Cool, and it works. Tried them on at the show and you can imagine how noisy that place can get, and I could easily hear the lady next to me. These are not inexpensive but for the quality, the quiet, and for those long trips, might just be worth it. Around \$500 at www.sennheiserusa.com.

Small technology is enjoying a rebirth of products and Via is one of the companies to watch. Not only them, but the partners they have are creating some of the coolest, neatest, and smallest, computers around. Take a look at their web site: http://www.via.com.tw/en/products/ultra_mobile/. Not only will you be seeing small things from big companies like Samsung and their mobile computer, but they offer the components for at home builders to create their own unique systems. The other website to see is the Ultra Mobile destination at: <http://www.ultramobilelife.com/>. For those of you who might remember, this is what my Poqet PC wanted to be when it grew up. Just browse the websites to see what the possibilities are.

I have to admit that I have a soft spot for Torchiere lamps. I like the style and the light, especially the 300 watt types and so when I see on the floor the fact that someone has put together a stylish lamp with a speaker built in, I had to see for myself. This thing is so neat, Soundolier won two CES Innovation awards. The best part is that you can put it anywhere you have a wall outlet for the light because the speaker is wireless. The speaker is omni-directional so it can be placed anywhere in your room making it absolutely ideal for any living space. Don't need the wireless, then just plug your mp3 player into the stereo line in jack in the base of the unit. There is also a line out jack at the base to connect to a sub-woofer if you need or another repeater for extended range to another unit elsewhere. If you have two, you can set them for left or right channel sound. Check them out at www.speakerlamp.com. The lamp itself is just \$300.



Under the trivial information category, Casio just sold its one billionth calculator. The 001 model which used electronic relays, was sold in 1965. The mini came in 1972 and we have zillions of them around. They even have one of their models in the Museum of Modern Art in NY, as Yogi would say, you could look it up. So what is new with Casio is four innovative award winners, two cameras, one phone, and one projection unit. I have to admit, the

cameras are pretty cool but I couldn't get excited about the projection unit, guess you need to look at what it can show. The cameras are slim sized but sport a 2.8 inch very bright LCD screen and are very cool looking. For \$349 you get a 10 megapixel 3X Zoom camera that can fit in your shirt pocket. www.casio.com.



I have talked about the Sanyo Eneloop batteries and what a difference it makes to have a rechargeable battery with a long shelf life and they will definitely have a place in my battery collection but to be honest, if you want sheer power in a battery, you have to look at the Energizers. Their rechargeable batteries come with up to 2500 mAh of power and that is quite a bit when I consider that my first rechargeable batteries from Olympus only carried 1300 mAh. That equates to nearly 250+ more digital pictures that I can take with my camera. Or that much longer that the Bluetooth mouse and keyboard will work with my computer without having to replace them. Want to

double your picture taking capacity or really lengthen the time between battery swaps, then look to the Energizer e2 Lithium batteries. Plugged them into a set of headphones and we are talking days of music and listening rather than hours. A couple of other goodies that the pink bunny people have come out with is the Energi to Go Instant cell phone chargers that really work and

the new Energizer Easy Charger that is so easy to use that any neophyte can use it. I mean it has an on off button, and two led lights, one that says charging, and the other that says done. It is not super fast but even a computer geek like me finds it easy to operate so it will stay out of the closet. About \$21. The Energi to Go has found a place in my travel bag, just pop a couple of AA batteries in it and it will give your phone the power it needs when you run down the main battery. It is about \$20. www.energitogo.com and www.energizer.com.



For more cool stuff, it has to include the Infill G4 unit. www.infill.co.kr, be sure to click on the English link. A full blown Windows XP computer for your dash. Simple, elegant, compact, expensive, and full of all the features you need for your car including navigation, entertainment, web surfing, and even movies. How about high speed wireless? Take a look and think of the possibilities.

Need something to keep your iPod, Blackberry, or iPaq high and dry no matter the weather conditions? Then look to the Otterbox line of cases, truly world-class protection for your technology gear. I got one of these for my PDA, an HP iPaq and it works great, keeps it dry and clean, and really is allweather material. Look to use these boxes for the next round of GPS systems as they get more and more mobile. Find them at www.otterbox.com. For now, if you have a Palm Treo and are an outdoor user, these are really the way to go. Same for taking your iPod to the beach or hiking. I even found one of their cases that will work great for my Bluetooth GPS receiver which I can mount on top of my van for truly unobstructed reception. Now if the batteries would only last that long but what is really neat about the ones for the phones and iPods is that there are places to run the power and headphone cords and still keep your unit dry.



As a photographer in a former lifetime and someone who still enjoys taking pictures, the stop by the Bogen booth is always a treat for me and they have a new line of super lightweight tripods and monopods that are definitely worth taking a look at. With today's lightweight digital cam-corders, you need more then ever something solid and stable to sit them on but the problem has always been the massive weight of the tripods. Take a look at the Manfrotto Modo line of tripods and you will be very impressed. All less than \$100. www.bogen.com.



TP926

My trinket of the show comes from Teleforce USA, www.teleforceusa.com, and from them I got a nice protective cover for my Motorola Razr cell phone. Great selection of stuff and reasonably priced as well. One look at the image and you can see why I had to get it. Very sturdy as well and it does protect it against scrapes and scratches. Thank you James.

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