



▼ Mad Catz S.T.R.I.K.E. 7



► Logic3 TopDrive FreeBird

# The Big Gaming Peripheral Guide

From mice and keyboards to headsets and more, we look at some performance peripherals that have caught our eye...



▲ Thermaltake Tt eSports Talon



► Qpad QH-90



For as long as it's been possible, people have used computers for more than just serious work. Sure, plenty of users learned to code on Spectrums and Commodore 64s, but it's a safe bet that many people just used them to play *Pac-Man* or *Paperboy*. And as these games became more sophisticated and gamers began to demand better graphics and sound, more powerful hardware was needed. Thus gaming became one of the key forces driving progress in computer hardware.

There are, of course, loads of other reasons to own a powerful PC, but there's no doubt a lot of components and systems are aimed specifically at gamers. Most obviously graphics cards, processors and other internal hardware are marketed with a marketing spin, as are high-definition, quick-response monitors. But it doesn't stop there. Peripherals like mice, keyboards and headphones are also now created with gamers in mind, and the number of companies invested in this market is expanding all the time.

As with many gaming products, though, these aren't only suitable for gamers. They normally offer high-end design and features, and the very things that make them good for play also make them work well for more serious tasks. So whether you're shooting zombies in *Left 4 Dead* or shooting off emails in a web browser, many of the peripherals here should be of interest.

## Mice

If you've only ever used cheap, bog standard mice, it's hard to appreciate just how much different a gaming mouse can be. For a start, their physical designs are frequently more comfortable (although it's worth bearing in mind that many of them are right-handed only). They also tend to have more buttons than ordinary mice, which can be useful outside of games as well as within them.

More importantly, they usually have highly sensitive sensors, which allow for much greater levels of accuracy than you might otherwise be used to. Even if you're just word processing or filling out spreadsheets, this will help you to click on the things you want the first time you try and not the second or third. And in games, that means shooting the enemies, rather than the walls behind them.

“ The very things that make them good for play also make them work well for more serious tasks ”

Other features to look out for are DPI switches, which enable you to change the sensitivity on the fly; programmable buttons; profile buttons, so you can quickly change between your custom configurations; on-board storage for your profiles; specialist software for macros and fine tuning; and build quality designed to withstand years of long gaming sessions.

## Budget buy (£1 – £24)

If you're really on a tight budget, you can get a mouse with gaming features for less than £3. As you can no doubt guess, though, at this price it's going to be from an unnamed Chinese brand, which comes with all the risks and disadvantages you'd normally associate with such items. But at such a low price, it still might be worth consideration. For example, we found a decent-looking wireless gaming mouse at GearBest ([goo.gl/6256GY](http://goo.gl/6256GY)) for only £2.72 with free shipping. It has a maximum 2000dpi sensitivity, a four-level DPI switch, six buttons, on-board memory and 2.4GHz wireless with an operating distance of up to ten metres. It's also available in black or red. What you

► Element Gaming Mouse Cobalt 120





▲ GearBest Wireless Mouse



▲ Mad Catz R.A.T. Pro



▲ Razer Naga

probably don't get is high-quality configuration software or a decent warranty.

If you're willing to spend a bit more, then there are tons of non-brand gaming mice on Amazon and eBay for around a tenner. But if you're spending that much, then you might as well pay a bit more and get one from a company you've actually heard of. For example, you could pick up the Gigabyte M6900 for just £15 from Dabs.com ([goo.gl/z6TkIG](http://goo.gl/z6TkIG)). It offers three sensitivity levels up to 3200dpi, a DPI switch, a scrollwheel with left and right tilt, a total of seven buttons and a specially designed software tool. What we couldn't find was any mention of on-board storage, but if you're not taking your mouse away from your own PC, then that won't matter too much.

There are loads of other capable mice at this kind of price too, but a couple of notable ones are the Thermaltake Tt eSports Talon (£15 from CCL – [goo.gl/DZ6izi](http://goo.gl/DZ6izi)) and the Trust GXT 152 (£14.62 from Kikatek – [goo.gl/jx0EgS](http://goo.gl/jx0EgS)).

Also, check out the the Element Gaming Mouse Cobalt 120, which can be yours for a mere £8 (Ebuyer – [goo.gl/V5xgrn](http://goo.gl/V5xgrn)). This has all the features of a more expensive gaming mouse, like navigation buttons and a DPI switch, but it's far more affordable.

### Mid-range (£25 – £59.99)

This is the price range in which you'll find the majority of gaming mice from reputable manufacturers. At the cheaper end of the scale, you can get something like the Speedlink Kudos RS (£29 from CCL – [goo.gl/motUok](http://goo.gl/motUok)). This offers seven programmable buttons, a collection of weights that can be put inside the mouse, a scrollwheel with tilt, a DPI switch, a maximum sensitivity of 5700dpi, a profile switch and on-board storage that can save up to five profiles. Plus you get the necessary software to tweak its settings and get the most out of it.



▲ Gigabyte M6900

Also worth checking out at this sort of price are the SteelSeries Rival (£29 from Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/WKgZr](http://goo.gl/WKgZr)) and the Logitech G300s (£32, Ebuyer – [goo.gl/8hC9iM](http://goo.gl/8hC9iM)).

Climbing the price scale a bit (between £35 and £59), you'll find mice from all the big names, including gaming peripheral specialists like Razer, Roccat and SteelSeries (They also offer cheaper products, but they tend to be quite basic, missing features like navigation buttons and DPI switches.) You'll also find names like Corsair, Gigabyte and Logitech selling great mice at these kind of prices.

The Gigabyte M8000X can be found on Amazon for just over £40, which isn't bad for a mouse with a 5600dpi sensor, a weights system, a set of replacement feet, on-board storage, a tilting scrollwheel, a DPI switch and navigation buttons. Also, check out the odd-looking Mad Catz R.A.T. 5, which you can get from Box.co.uk for £45 ([goo.gl/tZRFBo](http://goo.gl/tZRFBo)), the ambidextrous SteelSeries Sensei Raw (£41, Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/aRSU6J](http://goo.gl/aRSU6J)) and anything from the other big names we've mentioned. At this kind of price, you really are spoilt for choice.

### Gamepads

Although keyboard and mouse is the traditional control system for PCs, controllers are becoming more useful for a number of reasons. For a start, they're supported more often in new games, and there are more console ports than ever before. And things like Steam's Big Picture mode and streaming devices show that many PC gamers want to play games while sitting on a sofa instead of a desk chair.

Our first recommendation is definitely the official Xbox 360 controller for PC, which you can currently get from Amazon ([goo.gl/nmF06q](http://goo.gl/nmF06q)) for £20. Not only does this provide guaranteed support for most modern games, it's also just a really good controller. There are plenty of other controllers worth considering, though, including ones that feature the same Xinput support as the Xbox controller. These third-party pads, however, usually have extra functionality, such as turbo button modes.

It would remiss to leave out the Steam Controller. Available directly from Steam for 40 quid ([goo.gl/iPNjJ](http://goo.gl/iPNjJ)), it's an innovative piece of kit, which uses dual trackpads instead of joysticks, and although the learning curve is steep, reviews have generally been positive. Definitely worth it if you're after something a little different.



▲ Logitech G910 Orion



▲ Gigabyte Aivia Osmium

### Money is no object (£60 or more)

Although it's not necessary to spend this much on a gaming mouse, there are plenty of them that cost in excess of 60 quid. For example, you could buy the Mad Catz R.A.T. Pro X for around £150 ([goo.gl/A7aYnP](http://goo.gl/A7aYnP)), if you're feeling flush or if you just take your gaming that seriously. Like other R.A.T. mice, it looks like some kind of miniature robot, but it also offers some intriguing features, like three hot-swappable sensor units, a magnesium alloy chassis, and an analogue scrollwheel with adjustable tension and the ability to pivot. Plus you get the usual extras such as built-in memory, ten buttons, maximum 5000dpi sensitivity and so on. Is it worth 150 quid? Maybe, but other models in the R.A.T. range offer similar features for less.

If you want to keep your spending below £100, then there are plenty of other high-end mice to consider. The Razer Naga, for instance, can be found on Amazon for about £70 ([goo.gl/UfEjxR](http://goo.gl/UfEjxR) – £60 for the 2014 version). Designed for MMO players, it features an impressive 12 thumb buttons, as well as a DPI switch, 16,000dpi sensitivity, a tilting scrollwheel and fully customisable colours for the built-in LED lighting.

“ As you've probably noticed, cheaper keyboards tend to have a soft, springy feel to them ”

Also, worth checking out are the Logitech Proteus (£62 from Viking Direct – [goo.gl/eMFNZO](http://goo.gl/eMFNZO)) and the Roccat Kone XTD (£60, Scan.co.uk – [goo.gl/QJTbHA](http://goo.gl/QJTbHA)).

### Keyboards

As you likely know, there are two main types of keyboard: membrane and mechanical. If you buy a cheap keyboard designed for basic office tasks, then it's most likely a membrane model – or, more accurately, a full-travel membrane keyboard. Whether they use full-size keys or flat ones (also known as chiclet or island-style keys), the technology is essentially the same. Below the keys, there's a rubber or silicone membrane (hence the name), and under each key, there are domed areas. Press down on a key and you invert this dome, causing it to press down on a kind of circuit called a switch matrix. This then sends a signal to your computer that you've pressed a key and which one it is.

As you've probably noticed, cheaper keyboards tend to have a soft, springy feel to them, and this is why. They can still feel fine

to type on, but they can be error prone and slow, due to the way the circuit works.

That's one reason why a lot of gamers and other computer users prefer mechanical keyboards. These work in a much different way. Instead of a membrane under the keys, each individual key has a separate switch. If you've ever used one, you'll notice they often produce a satisfying clicking sound when pressed. They're also said to be more comfortable to use, causing less stress on your fingertips.

Ultimately, which one you go for depends on how much you're willing to spend, how much typing you plan to do and which kind of typing feel you actually prefer.

### Joysticks

Before the Nintendo Entertainment System and its ilk came along, the joystick was the dominant form of control system for video games. These days, though, they're generally only used by fans of flight simulators, but they're a lot more complicated than the simple one- or two-button sticks of the Amiga or Atari days, and their prices vary massively. A Thrustmaster HOTAS Warthog, for example, will set you back at least £258 (YoYoTech – [goo.gl/MaBu27](http://goo.gl/MaBu27)), but it's a very high-end device, featuring mostly metal construction and all manner of other goodies.

For those with more limited budgets, though, there's still plenty of choice. The Thrustmaster T.Flight HOTAS X, for example, costs just £32 from Scan ([goo.gl/DWbGK1](http://goo.gl/DWbGK1)), but it's still a highly rated stick, which will be perfect for anyone dipping their toes in the waters of flight sims.

There are plenty of other familiar names in this market, including Logitech, Speedlink and Saitek, so do shop around before making a purchase.





▲ Logitech G19s



▲ Speedlink Parthica Core

## Mechanical Keyboards

### Budget buy (£1 – £59.99)

If you're not sure which type of keyboard to get, the good news is that for less than 60 quid, the decision is pretty much made for you. At this kind of price, mechanical keyboards are nearly impossible to get hold of.

Nearly but not quite. If you once again turn to GearBest, purveyor of cheap Chinese imports, then you'll find you can get a Motospeed Inflictor CK104 mechanical keyboard for around £38 ([goo.gl/k4ZwLO](http://goo.gl/k4ZwLO)). Available in a selection of different colours, it offers a variety of backlighting modes, blue switches, anti-ghosting and... well, that's pretty much it. Details are scant on the GearBest site, but there are some YouTube videos of the keyboard in action. From what we can tell, it doesn't really have any gaming features, other than some pretty lights, but it is a mechanical keyboard for less than £40, so maybe it's worth taking a risk on. However, we'd recommend spending more and getting something more reliable.

You might also find the Zalman ZM-K500 in your search for a new keyboard. Available for around £38 from places like Maplin and Dabs.com, it comes from a company that's well known in computing circles, mainly for its cooling products. Unfortunately, user reviews have been mixed. Some suggest it has poor reliability, with keys failing after a relatively short time. It sounds tempting, but we'd still suggest exercising caution before buying this keyboard.

### Mid-range (£60 – £99.99)

Once you reach this level of spending, you have a good chance of getting a decent mechanical keyboard from a reliable manufacturer. The Gigabyte Aivia Osmium, for example, can be bought for £65 from CCL ([goo.gl/gck3nb](http://goo.gl/gck3nb)), which is a bargain, considering you get Cherry MX Brown switches, backlit keys, a USB 3.0 port on the side, headphone and mic ports, anti-ghosting, support for 64 simultaneous keypresses, five macro keys, five on-board profiles, a volume wheel, a backlight adjustment wheel and the software you need to set it up. It's a few years old now, hence the low price, but it will still do the job perfectly well.

For the same price, you can get the Cooler Master Quick Fire TK from Box.co.uk ([goo.gl/CkCsVP](http://goo.gl/CkCsVP)), which also has Cherry MX Brown switches. It also offers backlighting, a detachable braided USB cable, N-key rollover and seven multimedia keys. Pay £5 more and you can change to Blue or Red switches, which is great if you know exactly which sort of keys you like most.

There are many more high-quality mechanical keyboards at this price, so here's a quick list of some notable ones: the Razer BlackWidow Tournament (£70, Currys – [goo.gl/8z6l1g](http://goo.gl/8z6l1g)), the Corsair Vengeance K65 (£75, Dabs.com – [goo.gl/HajXqw](http://goo.gl/HajXqw)) and the Thermaltake eSports Meka G-Unit (£67, Scan – [goo.gl/4RxiOo](http://goo.gl/4RxiOo)).

### Money is no object (£100 or more)

Although you can buy specialist keyboards for a few hundred quid, mainstream mechanical gaming models tend to top out at around £160. For that price, you can purchase a Logitech G910 (you can also find it for about £142 on Amazon – [goo.gl/uH8rF7](http://goo.gl/uH8rF7)), a keyboard that uses a relatively new type of mechanical switch designed by Logitech itself. Named Roma-G switches, they've been created from scratch with gaming in

## Steering Wheels

As with joysticks, the name Thrustmaster comes up a lot when looking at steering wheels for the PC, but Logitech, Speedlink, Trust and others crop up too. For just £30 (LambdaTek – [goo.gl/Mdbca0](http://goo.gl/Mdbca0)), you can get the Logic3 TopDrive FreeBird, which is a wireless steering wheel, complete with two pedals, adjustable steering sensitivity and force feedback. Plus it's compatible with PS2 and PS3 as well as PC. It looks very plasticky, but you can't really expect more at this kind of price. At the other end of the scale, you have things like the Logitech Driving Force G929 wheel and gearstick bundle, which comes in at £230 from Currys ([goo.gl/ZMtj63](http://goo.gl/ZMtj63)). With this you get a dual-motor force-feedback mechanism, helical gearing, stainless steel paddle shifter and pedals, 900° rotation so you can turn the wheel two and a half times, and an all-round more realistic driving experience.

Whatever you go for, try to take your chosen wheel for a spin, so to speak, before laying down any cash, because you obviously want the most realistic driving experience you can get for your cash.





▲ Novetech headset



▲ Element Headset Neon 250

mind. Cherry switches, apparently, did not have this focus when they were originally designed.

Logitech's switches offer a shorter travel distance and a higher actuation point, and they're said to be 25% faster than other mechanical switches. Also, the spring and stem have been designed in such a way that more effective backlighting is possible.

That's not all you get for your money, though. As well as the usual sort of gaming features like nine programmable buttons, anti-ghosting and so on, the G910 is compatible with Logitech's Arx Control mobile app, which enables you to monitor your PC settings using your phone or tablet, as well providing system information and a second display for supported titles. It might be expensive, but clearly Logitech has tried to make it worth the cost.

Also, look out for the SteelSeries Apex M800 (£140, Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/ilgcbu](http://goo.gl/ilgcbu)) and the Roccat Ryos MK Pro MX (£120, PC World – [goo.gl/UrvFJK](http://goo.gl/UrvFJK)).

## Membrane Keyboards

### Budget buy (£0 – £39.99)

If you're not after mechanical keys, then it's much easier to find a gaming keyboard at a low price, usually stuffed with all kinds of features for gamers. The Sharkoon Shark Zone K30, for instance, can be yours for £27 from Novatech ([goo.gl/P05S4f](http://goo.gl/P05S4f)). That's a great price for a fully backlit keyboard with dedicated software, five micro keys, three profile buttons, a full-size numpad and more. You don't get dedicated media controls, but the Fn key does enable you to use the F keys for this purpose. At this kind of price, it's never going to match up to more high-end keyboards, but you do get a surprising amount of features for your money.

Increase your spending a bit more, and you'll be able to get a Speedlink Parthica Core for approximately £38 from CCL ([goo.gl/x8FWA2](http://goo.gl/x8FWA2)). This is a fairly hefty keyboard, and it's absolutely packed with features, like anti-ghosting, six-key rollover, a Windows key toggle, five macro buttons, ten multimedia keys, 128KB of internal memory, dedicated software, four levels of response time and a profile button. For the price, it's a great item, even if it doesn't match up to mechanical units.

Other budget buys that caught our eye include the Asus Cerberus (£30, Kikatek – [goo.gl/YDQMFO](http://goo.gl/YDQMFO)), the Roccat

Arvo Compact (£30, LambdaTek – [goo.gl/YNZ116](http://goo.gl/YNZ116)) and the Thermaltake Challenger Prime (£27, CCL – [goo.gl/St3aTI](http://goo.gl/St3aTI)).

### Mid-range (£40 – £79.99)

At this kind of price level, things open up a bit more, and we even start to find keyboards from premium peripheral brands like Razer and SteelSeries. Beginning with a cheaper item, though, the Genius GX Manticore (£45, Ballicom – [goo.gl/Tla1sT](http://goo.gl/Tla1sT)) is a decent buy. With its backlit keys, eight macro keys, three profile

“ If you're not after mechanical keys, then it's much easier to find a gaming keyboard at a low price ”

buttons, on-board memory, two USB ports, Windows key toggle, mechanical switch simulation and more, it offers a lot for your money. It's not without its problems, but it's good for the money. At the time of writing, however, there were only two in stock, with two more at CCL and a few at Amazon, so this model is probably on its way out.

Raise your budget a little, and your options increase hugely. Any of the following keyboards would be well worth checking out, because they all come with similar features, such as on-board memory, macro buttons, multimedia controls, backlighting, configuration software and so on: the Roccat ROC-12-902 Isku FX (£64, Amazon – [goo.gl/Ky9D5S](http://goo.gl/Ky9D5S)), the Razer DeathStalker Essential (£53, LambdaTek – [goo.gl/nQmiU7](http://goo.gl/nQmiU7)) and the SteelSeries Apex 300 (£57, Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/i2tcQe](http://goo.gl/i2tcQe)).

Any of these will do the job, but it's worth looking around as much as possible to find the keyboard with the right features for you.

### Money is no object (£80 or more)

At this kind of price, you could buy a mechanical keyboard, which are generally more highly regarded by gamers and typists alike.

But each to their own, of course, and there are actually a fair few membrane-based keyboards that cost more £80, and as you'd expect for this kind of financial outlay, they come with all the premium features you'd expect.

Once again, Logitech provides one of the most noteworthy high-end examples – this time with its G19s gaming keyboard, which has an RRP of £180, with most sellers listing it at around £150. Currently, however, you can pick one up on Amazon for £109 ([goo.gl/yxC1P2](http://goo.gl/yxC1P2)), which makes it an intriguing prospect. It has all the usual kind of features you'd expect from a gaming keyboard, like programmable buttons, profile keys, multimedia controls and backlighting (fully customisable in this case), but none of this alone would justify such a high price for a non-mechanical product.

What might sway you, though, is the LCD screen that sits upright near the back of the keyboard. This full-colour screen, called the GamePanel, can display all kinds of information, like game statistics, system feedback, VoIP data, custom applets, images and even YouTube videos. Of course, such technology needs to be powered, which means you'll need a spare plug socket to use the G19s, which isn't ideal. It does, however, mean

“ If you've only ever used cheap, bog standard mice, it's hard to appreciate just how much different a gaming mouse can be ”

the two USB sockets it has are powered, which could be useful for things like external hard drives.

Another high-priced membrane keyboard that stands out is the Mad Catz S.T.R.I.K.E. 7, which comes in at a quite ludicrous £214 at CCL ([goo.gl/S7SHHJ](http://goo.gl/S7SHHJ)), and that's actually cheaper than most sellers. Like a lot of Mad Catz products, you get a huge amount of functionality, but most notably it has a detachable touchscreen LCD, active wrist rests and a detachable numpad. The amount of features this thing has could probably fill a whole page, but ultimately it's let down by its lack of mechanical keys and its high price.

### Headsets

Possibly more than any other peripheral, what makes a good gaming headset is extremely subjective. Audiophiles might well point to things like driver size or impedance values, but in our experience even cheaper headsets can sound decent, while premium brands aren't always as amazing as they're cracked up to be.

In general, though, you do get what you pay for. While some cheaper products might punch above their weight and more expensive alternatives might not live up to expectations, most of the time if you pay more, then you'll get better-quality headphones. This same logic applies also to headset microphones, with higher-quality products generally having more effective noise cancelling.

And as with anything, build quality varies massively. Since you'll probably be wearing a headset for extended periods of time, you want something that's going to be both comfortable and robust.

### Budget buy (£0 – £34.99)

Although you can get a headset for just £2.22 from DealsMachine ([goo.gl/frilfM](http://goo.gl/frilfM)), it's highly likely that this headset will be of very low quality. Of course, at such a low price, you wouldn't have much to lose if you did buy one. This seller, though, as you can guess, is based in China, so if your item does ever arrive, it'll probably take a long time to reach you.

For this reason, we'd recommend upping your expenditure a tad and looking at something like Novatech's own-brand gaming headset, which costs just £10 ([goo.gl/uPSyJZ](http://goo.gl/uPSyJZ)). This uses 3.5mm connections for both the mic and the headphones themselves. We haven't had one to test, so we can't comment on the sound quality, but a tenner is a small investment and, unlike cheap alternatives from overseas companies, you get peace of mind, knowing that you're buying from a UK firm.

If all this unbranded stuff is of no interest to you, then you might be happy to hear the name Turtle Beach. For £30, you can easily find the company's Earforce Recon 50P headset, which is available from many retailers, including Currys ([goo.gl/E0FKle](http://goo.gl/E0FKle)). This is a standard 3.5mm headset, with an in-line volume control. Unfortunately, customer reviews suggest it's particularly fragile, with some saying it broke within a matter of weeks. This isn't surprising, because at this kind of price, you'll find most headsets are made almost entirely out of plastic, which is often not strong

### Virtual Reality

As you are no doubt aware by now, there are lots of virtual reality headsets coming our way, with the HTC Vive and Oculus leading the charge for PCs, and Microsoft's augmented reality device, Hololens, coming at some point too. But they're not the only names in the VR market. In fact, there are loads of other companies vying for a slice of the VR pie, many of which you can find at [www.virtual-reality-shop.co.uk](http://www.virtual-reality-shop.co.uk).

These might seem tempting, because they often cost considerably less than the Rift or the Vive, with the 3Glasses D2, for instance, costing just £265 (Gearbest – [goo.gl/peqi7a](http://goo.gl/peqi7a)). But it's unlikely that any of these devices is going to get the kind of support that the main players are going to, and they probably won't offer the same level of customer support either. We can't comment on the quality of the hardware without trying these other headsets, but for now, you're best off either saving up for a mainstream VR headset or waiting for their prices to come down.



enough to last. On the plus side, most people seem to be happy with the sound quality, so if you're careful, this headset could still be a good buy.

Perhaps of more interest is the Element Gaming PC Headset Neon 250, available for just £24.99 from Ebuyer ([goo.gl/IzEb56](http://goo.gl/IzEb56)). This comes with USB headset comes with 3.5m cable, a retractable microphone and a reinforced headband. But its headline feature (other than the low price) is 7.1 virtual surround sound with built-in vibration – the kind of feature usually found on more expensive products.

Finally, just making it into this price bracket, we have the Mad Catz Tritton Trigger headset (£34.99, PC World – [goo.gl/dGMFWR](http://goo.gl/dGMFWR)), which has a 3.5mm connection and an in-line control module. What it also offers is better quality audio, larger earpieces and stronger build quality. It still can't compare with more expensive alternatives, but it's not a bad investment, if you handle it with care.

### Mid-range (£35 – £89.99)

As soon as you get over £35, a lot of familiar names will suddenly be in reach, whether it's the Corsair Raptor Hs30 (£35.50, Ebuyer – [goo.gl/GlmXBn](http://goo.gl/GlmXBn)), the Logitech G230 (£40, John Lewis – [goo.gl/2EUChr](http://goo.gl/2EUChr)), the Speedlink Xanthos (£36, Scan – [goo.gl/yMr7GD](http://goo.gl/yMr7GD)) or something else. These all have 3.5mm connections and in-line control modules, and although their quality will vary, they should all be perfectly adequate for gaming and media use, even if they don't match the fidelity of more expensive solutions.

For £50, you can afford the Razer Kraken USB Essential surround sound headset from Laptops Direct ([goo.gl/ZUTN9D](http://goo.gl/ZUTN9D)). As you'd expect from a Razer product, the sound quality is excellent, with the virtual surround sound being a particularly useful feature. The unidirectional, noise-cancelling microphone will also enhance your gaming experience. If we have any concerns, though, it's about the build quality. It might be a mid-range 'essential' product, but 50 quid is a still a lot to spend on a wholly plastic headset, and experience tells us that even the most fancy of plastic headsets are liable to snap one day, due to frequent bending when putting them on.

Unfortunately, plastic construction is abundant in the gaming headset market. Whether it's the SteelSeries Siberia 150 (£45,

Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/ehQ84z](http://goo.gl/ehQ84z)), the Corsair Void (£50, Scan – [goo.gl/KJRCzd](http://goo.gl/KJRCzd)) or one of countless other such sets, they're often characterised by great sound but potentially weak physical materials. Of course, if you're careful with your headphones, then you won't experience any problems. Also, there are some very affordable metal-reinforced headsets too, like the Element Gaming PC Headset Xenon 700 (£45, Ebuyer – [goo.gl/8E1YFk](http://goo.gl/8E1YFk)), which are definitely worth a look.

Headsets can cost several hundred pounds (as we'll see momentarily), but you can also get some high-end features and technology for around £70. The Qpad QH-90 Pro (£71, Amazon – [goo.gl/4G6AZq](http://goo.gl/4G6AZq)) is a good example of this, with its strong aluminium construction, detachable microphone, 55mm drivers and excellent sound quality. You'll also find names like Plantronics, Asus and more at this kind of price, so it's worth shopping around.

### Money is no object (£90 or more)

If you really wanted to, you could easily spend around £200 on a headset, with something like the SteelSeries Siberia P800 (£190, Box.co.uk – [goo.gl/q0Tj7Y](http://goo.gl/q0Tj7Y)). Undoubtedly, this is made more expensive because it's wireless, but you also get top-quality (although still plastic) construction, lag-free audio, two 20-hour lithium-ion batteries, Dolby technology and an excellent level of comfort.

That's a pretty hefty chunk of cash to drop on a headset for most people, though, and there are even more expensive alternatives, from companies like Audio Technica and Beyerdynamic. But unless you have money to burn, you don't have to spend this much to get great-quality audio. For £94 from Amazon ([goo.gl/AI9B56](http://goo.gl/AI9B56)), the Thermaltake eSports Level 10M gaming headset features an aluminium reinforced frame, a removable headphone cable that can be connected to either the left or right ear cup, a noise-cancelling microphone and an adjustable headband that can be locked into place. It's a few years old now, and there were only three in stock at time of writing, but it shows the kind of quality you can get for your money if look at older headsets.

Also worth checking out: the Sennheiser PC363D (£171, Amazon – [goo.gl/uXz6gy](http://goo.gl/uXz6gy)). **mm**