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Ads by GoooooogleAdvert**Latest reviews****Apacer Audio Steno AU822**

17/10/2006

Well it seems there are many manufactures aiming to provide slim mp3 players to compete in what is now a competitive market and today we see a similar trait from Apacer with its AU822 MP3 and video player with b radio and voice recorder.



The small box provides a window which reveals the AU822. Overall the packaging is nothing special and see standard box with no distinct features. In fact there is no clear big text apart from the letters MP3 which sta everything else printed on the box. You would've thought it'd be the product name.



Upon opening the box and removing the contents you will find yet another box which looks almost identical to this one but in white rather than emerald green.



The basic package consists of the player, earphones, USB lead, and a quick start guide.



Oh dear, what you immediately notice is the unoriginality of the design straight away. Has the iPod Nano had influence on the AU822's design? It doesn't just stop there though.



Yes even the AU822's back is finished off with a reflective metal back. In fact when comparing it to the Nano there isn't much difference at all. Everything from logo placement and overall appearance is strikingly similar.



As you can see there is cause for plenty head scratching as to what Apacer were thinking at the time when they went through the designing stage. Despite the somewhat copied design the Nano is still thinner than the AU822.

Getting past the similarities the AU822 shares with the Nano, let's take a look at what it actually has to offer.



At least the buttons used for operating the device don't share the exact same design as the Nano. You are presented with some fairly bright orange buttons with a mode button in the middle. It's kind of like a d-pad found on game controllers. It should be easy to use, hopefully. On the side you will find the main power switch and USB port. The bottom edge (as opposed to the Nano) features a standard 3.5mm audio port. That about covers the physical features of the device.

Testing

Ultimately and obviously we need to put it through some tests so we start with ease of use. Like many good

today, when you pick them up you should be able to navigate through its menu system without too much trouble if the buttons have a logical layout and operation. In more than 3 pairs of hands the AU822 proved to be a controller that buttons do not operate in the way that you would expect them to and especially since they're placed in a way that's similar to many other controller styles it makes it a little annoying. To switch the device on you press and hold on the power button for about 1.5 seconds after which you are presented with a rather goofy animated 'Welcome' screen with floating icons. Another downside is noticed upon switching the device on and that's its low resolution screen in comparison to the Nano's. Each feature can be selected by using the up and down buttons and they are represented with low resolution animated icons to help you distinguish each selection.



Unfortunately things get very annoying and awkward when you're in playback mode. As mentioned earlier, the volume control button does not work in the way that you would think is common sense. Pressing the left button will make the volume icon appear on the screen to let you know that you're in volume level adjustment mode. Why you can't just adjust the volume directly is beyond us. It's the feature that you would expect to access most frequently with immediacy. The up and down buttons allow you to navigate between different tracks. Keep in mind though, if you have any voice recordings they won't be listed here for your inconvenience. As far as we could make out there is no feature to create and save play lists or folders. You can only create folders and put tracks into those folders for example copying Track1.mp3 to a folder name 'Audiobooks'. This can only be done when the device is plugged into your computer's USB port upon which it can be used as a standard storage device.

It takes some time getting used to navigating around the AU822's cumbersome button functions but once you realize how much more this device offers than what its inspiration (the Nano) does.

Voice recording

This feature works rather well. All voice clips are recorded in WAV format and thanks to the AU822's sensitive microphone it allows you to record conversations discreetly too if that's what you have in mind. The screen can display useful information when in record mode such as time elapsed and total recording time available.

In our tests we found that the quality of the voice recordings were fair. Voices sound a little muffled and subdue to the 32Khz recording nonetheless they were certainly picked up by the microphone and recorded conversations were comprehensible.

FM Radio

Certainly the ability to tune into your local radio station sound pretty neat no? Thanks to this feature you can use the AU822 as a radio player and we have to admit it does the job well. Audio quality is exceptional and the tuning into different stations is made very easy. You simply press the up and down buttons to fine tune into your station or alternatively you can press and hold on the buttons and the tuner will auto scan to the next station. The AU822 also has the ability to record from the radio as well. Each recording is saved in WAV format and you have the option of 'Short Rec' or 'Long Rec' with the latter being of lesser quality but allowing for longer recordings. Once tuned into your station you can save the station by pressing the mode buttons and selecting save. Each save you make will save the station as a new separate channel. Channels can be toggled by pressing the play/pause button and the switch is instant.

Overall the radio functionality is excellent.

Video player

The video playing capabilities of the AU822 provide it another trump card when pitting it against similar players in the same camp. Playback of video is actually quite good, however, there is a significant amount of image ghosting when playing back certain files.

the screen due to the pixels not being able to refresh quickly enough. The player also uses the AMV video for many other MP4 players. To skip forward or backwards through a video you simply press and hold the up or track, previous track) buttons. The fast forward speed is quite acceptable and it performs this quite smoothly.

Photos

Viewing pictures on the AU822 is just as easy as using the above mentioned features. You simply drag your finger onto the device and it's ready to play them back in either a slideshow mode or manual selection. The only downside to photo playback feature is that images which are sized down to be shown on the AU822's screen seem like distorted images.

Music

Of course it all boils down to how well the device can cope with mp3 playback. After all it is designed primarily for that purpose. As mentioned earlier in the review changing volume is a bit annoying as you first need to go into setting mode by pressing the volume (left) button. This makes changing the volume a bit tedious especially when the device is in your pocket and reach in only to perform this function. What's even worse is after a period of time the screen which becomes blank turns on after pressing any button. Sort of like waking up a computer from standby were we would have to change the volume whilst the device was in your pocket you would first need to press any button to then press the volume button and then finally adjust the volume. Skipping through a track is a very painful process when you compare it to skipping through a video the results are kind of disappointing. It took us a pathetic 4 seconds to fast forward a 4 minute audio track. How slow is that?!

There are some nifty playback effects however, and this doesn't apply to just mp3s but also video files. Upon stopping tracks you get a nice fade out.

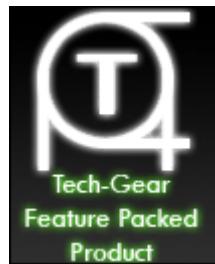
Settings

There are a good number of configuration options to tinker with such as date & time, lcd set, language, power replay mode, and online mode. Online mode is basically how the device acts over an active USB connection. There are three options to choose from being: Multi drive, Normal, and Encrypted. You also get to see memory information, firmware version and there is an option to upgrade it too.

Finally you may also like to know that when turning the device off you are presented with a very feminine "E" screen.

Conclusion

Overall we're quite pleased but at the same time quite disappointed with the AU822, there are so many things it does well and yet it offers so many cool features at the same time. The player is very slow and responds with delays when playing back videos or music. Navigating through the menus and doing something as simple as playing back an mp3 can be a hellish experience. For first time users it will take a good while to get used to how the player works. There is a learning curve with the way the buttons work and so as a result this is definitely one mp3 player you will be needing the quick start guide. While the design is almost a complete rip off the iPod Nano, if you get past that aspect, the goofy startup animation, screens, and the fact that it takes a while to master the menus you will find that this player certainly has a lot going for it. For this reason we bring out Tech-Gear's new award.



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