

TWO'S COMPANY

Using a two-way radio on site could help you keep the mobile phone bill down. **Michael Le Caplain** checks out models to suit every budget

1. Icom IC-4088SR

While this model is less than half the price of its sibling, there's no discernible drop in build quality or sound reproduction. It's also considerably easier to handle thanks to the fact that power comes courtesy of a simple NiMH battery pack and not the dearer model's heavier Li-Ion pack. It has superb-quality controls, too, with just four rubberised buttons plus the push-to-talk (PTT) side button to contend with. While Icom does not quote a maximum range, we found the radios worked well within a large and extremely busy shopping centre environment, meaning they'd be ideal for keeping in touch at large indoor or outdoor shows. In terms of size, the Icom is on a par with the dearer of the two Doros, although it is slightly heavier.

WELL BUILT

2. Icom IC-F 4029 SDR

They cost a whopping £200 each but there's no denying the quality you get for your money. Powered by a dual-stage rechargeable Li-Ion battery pack, the Icom has a healthy nine-hour life from one charge. It sports a top-mounted on/off/volume rotary dial, solid PTT side button and simple front-mounted rubberised controls for channel and zone selection. Being capable of both analogue and digital operation, the sound quality is absolutely superb, although we did notice occasional bursts of interference static filtering through when the units were on standby. Price aside, our only real concerns with this radio were its relative heft – 280g – and (thanks to the antenna) bulky shape.

HIGH QUALITY

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £233.43 each
Range: not quoted
Power: 1 Li-Ion battery (supplied)
Supplied: radio, rapid desktop charger, belt clip
Contact: call 01227 741741 or see icomuk.co.uk

3. Binatone Terrain 550 Twin

This is a pretty good all-round radio set. The RRP is impressive (we found them considerably cheaper than this online, too) and this is one of the few models within this test to sport a decent-sized LCD display. You can't really complain about the quoted range either, although it's worth noting that we discovered some degradation in sound quality beyond 6km across open land. Inside this area, however, Binatone's Trusound noise reduction system worked extremely well, and little extra touches like the voice-activated hands-free capability are useful. Build quality is lacking a little where the shiny, plasticky casing is concerned, although the rubberised buttons are of a decent size and feel good to the touch.

EASY TO USE

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £39.99 per pair
Range: up to 8km (open area)
Power: 4 x AAA batteries (supplied)
Supplied: 2 radios, 8 batteries, twin desktop charger
Contact: call 0845 345 9677 or see binatonetelcom.com

4. Motorola TLKR T3 Twin Pack

If you have children and want to keep in touch with them – on the beach, say, or during a walk – these funky little walkie-talkies could be a good bet. They may appear a little 'toy-like' but in a way that's a good thing, as kids won't feel intimidated by them. The LCD display is a little small but the casing can be attached to a neck lanyard, thereby reducing the chances of it getting lost – the upper hoop is also the antenna, however, so you'd be better off using the lower one. The controls – key lock, PTT, call and volume/channel up/down – are easy to use and the sound quality's pretty decent, too. Further plus points in the Motorolas's favour include their dinky size – they'll fit easily into your pocket – and temptingly low price.

GREAT FOR FAMILIES

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £24.99 per pair
Range: Up to 5km
Power: 3 x AAA batteries (not supplied)
Supplied: 2 radios, 2 belt clips
Contact: motorola.com

5. Doro WT96 Pro

If it's range you're looking for in your next pair of two-way radios, the Doro WT96 Pro is the only choice. Managing a mighty 14km maximum distance between units (300-900m in built-up areas, 50-150m indoors), this is the most powerful of our chosen radios. It's a well-made unit, too, sporting a splash-proof rubberised coating and large, easy-to-use buttons. The buttons could do with white markings on them, however – black on black is very difficult to read. In terms of size and weight it's very much on a par with the Binatone radio.

TERRIFIC RANGE

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £69.99 per pair
Range: 10-14km (open area)
Power: 4 x AAA rechargeable batteries (supplied)
Supplied: 2 radios, 8 batteries, 2 belt clips, 1 twin desktop charger
Contact: call 1753 883080 or see doro.com



PHOTOGRAPHY: Andy Parkington at Radius

NEXT MONTH
 WE PUT TRAVEL HAIRDRYERS AND STRAIGHTENERS TO THE TEST



6. Doro WT87

We were immediately taken with these little radios from Doro – given the relatively low asking price, they appear to be well made and feel comfortable in the hand. They also fit easily into a jacket or trouser pocket, despite their inch-long antennas. The LCD display is clear despite its size limitations and the controls, while small, are relatively easy to use. The radios live up to their range billing, with 7km easily achieved over open ground. Doro does warn, however, that this

GOOD VALUE

drops to around 200-600m in built-up areas, and between 50 and 150m indoors. We reckon this is more than enough for holiday and recreational use and a price tag of just over £40 for two makes them good value, too.

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £42 per pair
Range: 7-10km (open area)
Power: 4 x AAA rechargeable batteries (supplied)
Supplied: 2 radios, 8 batteries, 2 belt clips, twin desktop charger
Contact: call 1753 883080 or see doro.com