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## Music box for brickies and chippies

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TAIWAN'S Sangean brand builds a barrowload of radios, ranging from sleek, hand-sized portables to leading-edge digital radios for Sony, Panasonic, JVC, Grundig, Philips and many other top-flight labels.

But the model that continues to impress is one out of left field that looks like a generator: the U1 utility radio.

You won't fail to spot the U1 in the store. It's the size of a small Esky, rugged and bright yellow. A new iPod it isn't.

Its target market is anyone doing hard yakka outdoors, such as tradesmen, or anyone wanting a portable PA system with a built-in radio.

If you've ever been involved in even the most modest renovation, you know that sparkies, chippies and brickies take a well-weathered radio along with the hammer gun and circular saw as an essential tool.

These radios take a fair beating, surviving paint splatters, timber and plaster dust, rain and knocks.

These conditions are factored into the making of the U1, which has crash bars, a thick, tough plastic case -- good, Sangean says, for a fall of up to 3m -- and a soft, malleable antenna. Operating controls -- volume, tuning dial and on/off switch -- are big, and intelligently placed on the top and front of the U1.

The set has a tuning LED indicator that lights up when it homes in on a station, an earphone and microphone jack and an auxiliary connection useful for playing back a portable CD player.

So the U1 can be a portable PA system for use on boats, in caravans or out in the garden.

Versatility is a cinch thanks to a retractable 240-volt power lead that winds back on to a retractable reel that slides in and out of a compartment on the back.

There's also a tiny 9-15 volt DC jack in the side, and underneath a bay that takes three D-size batteries.

Reception is superb and the sound is big. At \$189, the U1 is one of the year's audio bargains.



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