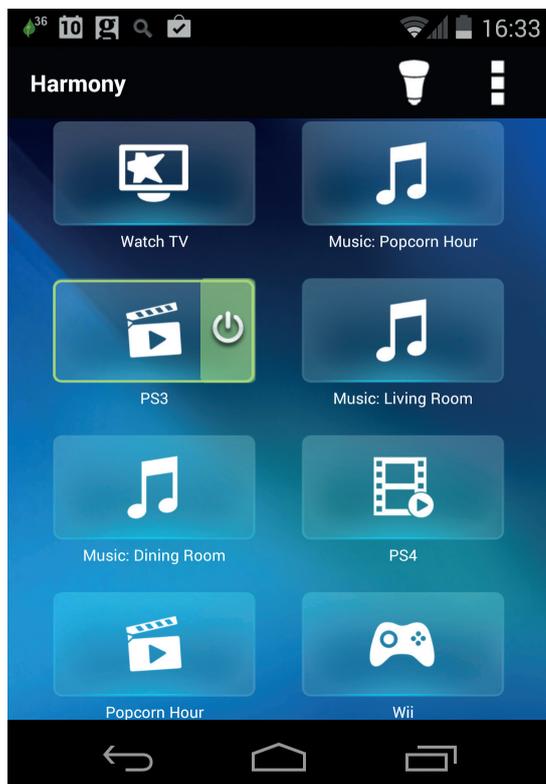


Harmony Smart Control

Graham Morrison discovers the one controller to rule them all. If only Logitech would recognise there's another rather excellent operating system

First thing; this is a programmable remote control with no Linux support. So why is this in a Linux magazine? Because it's the first Harmony remote from Logitech that doesn't require either Windows or OS X. Specifically, you need an Android device to make it work. This is significant because the old Harmony series of remotes has been the best-fit for complex home entertainment systems. They allowed you to control an amplifier, a games console, a digital receiver and a television from the comfort of a single control in a relatively intuitive way. If you pipe audio into an amplifier, for example, the volume controls on your remote would send a signal to this for volume whilst still sending channel changing signals to your television. Setups like this are known as activities, and you could switch between different activities with a single button. You might have an activity for listening to music, for example, controlling just an amplifier and a music streamer, or an activity for playing a games console - amplifier, games console and television. Logitech's firmware would take care of input switching and power management, turning things on and off as you changed activities. It sounds complex and configuration could be, but after adding the devices and creating the activities, the results were easy



Add, remove, assign and control your hardware from an Android app or a physical remote



The base unit receives RF and wifi signals and beams out infrared and Bluetooth for Wiis and Playstations with up to two expanders, so you can lock your kit away out of sight.

enough for the whole household to use.

Ultimate Control

This draconian requirement for Windows eventually led to the creation of a wonderful open source solution called Concordance, freeing us of both the Microsoft tax and Logitech's clunky web-alike user-interface. But the latest generation of remotes don't require a USB connection nor the use of a desktop application. This is thanks to the Harmony Hub, a base station that connects to your wifi network and beams out instructions to your equipment. It's meant to be used predominantly with a smartphone app that acts like a remote control, but we found it clunky and unintuitive. Prodding a screen to pause, fast-forward and rewind takes extra mental effort, for instance, despite the physical volume keys on your device being mapped to volume in your activity. Luckily, the slimline remote that's included with the package as a stop-gap is more than adequate, and 100 times easier to use from the palm of your hand. It communicates with the base station using RF, which is incredibly liberating. You're no longer restricted to a line-of-sight technology that should have died out with the compact cassette. And while there only enough buttons to handle six different activities, we think there's just enough - and just enough for other levels of control - to make it perfect for the majority of installations. 

DATA

Web
<http://www.logitech.com/>
Developer
Logitech
Price
£84.99

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

A cynical 8 device limitation and lack of Linux holds back what is otherwise a brilliant piece of hardware.

