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reau Westside, London W1 Printing St Ives (Plymouth) Ltd. is published 12 times a year by Future Publishing Ltd, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW • All material © Future 2000. All rights reserved.

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Hi-Fi Choice is the UK hi-fi magazine representative of the European Imaging & Sound Association (EISA). Every year EISA honours the finest hi-fi and home cinema products throughout Europe

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

OPINION

Jason Kennedv

considers what Y2K brought to hi-fi and why HFC is the real thing.

nother year, another 172 Best Buys, Recommendations and Editor's Choices – about 20 up on last year. A likely reason for this increase is the sheer amount of kit we have reviewed since the January 2000 issue; we don't keep count, but the diversity of product types has certainly broadened this year. There has been the arrival of MP3 as a commercial reality and the continued, albeit slow roll-

out, of SACD players - not to mention DVD-A's slow, painful birth. Read more about the ups and downs of hi-fi this year on page 10...

It's certainly been an eventful year at Choice towers. We had to move towers at the beginning of the year when the title was purchased by Future Publishing - a disrupting event, but one that has panned out well for the title. We now have 13 issues a year for your delectation, and thanks to our proximity to technophile title T3 we manage to get our hands on some extremely hot product before our competitors. The magazine has seen a radical change in cover style, which we hope you like, and the insides will shortly be following suit.

The Best Buy Guide is essentially the Hi-Fi Choice annual, rounding up our favourite kit from the year. What these potted reviews don't reveal is the effort that goes into making sure that the results we present are reliable. Our Mega Tests entail both lab tests and objective blind listening by a panel of experts, a costly and laborious process that no one else in this business undertakes. Yet this is the most comprehensive way of evaluating a hi-fi component, and if a product does well in a Choice Mega Test it will do well anywhere. Our lab tests alone are the envy of the industry. The virtual instrument software, which Technical Editor Paul Miller has devised to stretch each component to its limits, is the most sophisticated there is.

Products that we review in our first-look Heatseekers section, or the class acts department we call Statements, do not qualify for the BB or Rec flags - but where warranted they can be awarded a coveted Editor's Choice. As a rule I award them to products that a contributor finds

genuinely inspiring or particularly good value for money, and there are rarely more than two such products a month.

While there is a sort of hierarchy with our commendations, anything that gets a flag is a fine product and worthy of anyone's shortlist. But remember that hi-fi is an interactive hobby: we don't want to tell you which components to buy, but rather to guide you to the products to choose from. At the end of the day it's a matter of taste, and a whole lot of fun to boot.



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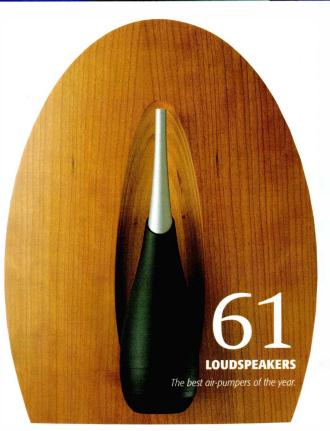
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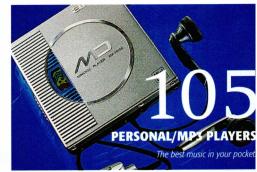
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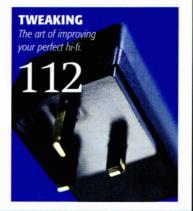
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NDWS

Resident roving reporter Tim Bowern brings you the latest hi-fi news.

NEWS IN BRIEF



PMC has launched a replacement for its TB1 stand-mount speaker. The TB2 employs improved transmission line technology and a revamped cabinet, and is said to have much in common with the excellent FB1 floorstander, both tonally and stylistically. Price is £600, or £650 for a magnetically shielded pair. A centre channel version is available separately at £325 - see next month's issue for a complete FB1/TB2 multi-channel package review! **2** 01707 393002

PLINIUS has introduced two

improved models to its UK range. The New Zealand based amp specialist has upgraded its 8150 integrated model (£2,250) with a new power supply, increased power and a tweaked phono stage. The less costly 2100l (£1,450) has also been improved

2 020 8459 8113

LG has announced its support for the DVD-RW recordable DVD format, also championed by Pioneer and now, it appears, Sony, Its first machine was given an airing at a show in Korea in October and could reach UK shores sometime

2 01753 500400

SONY has launched a second solid state personal, hot on the heels of the NW-MS7 reviewed last month. The NW-E3 is even smaller, with 64MB of flash memory built in, though it operates without the removable Memory Stick cards used by its big brother.

2 0990 111999

SNELL'S latest range of speakers is the QBx Series. "QB" stands for Quiet Box, the inference being that the cabinet doesn't colour the sound. Three basic models are available, ranging from the QBx 15 Mini at £630 to the QBx 25 Tower at £1,176, together with a centre channel, rear effect speakers and a subwoofer.

@ 01233 813111

TAG McLaren's new formula



TAG McLaren's first DVD player is with us at last. Priced at £3,995, it's one of the most ambitious yet But some might be surprised to learn that this is not a DVD-Audio compatible player, particularly given its maker's hi-fi pedigree and that rather substantial price tag. Like a number of other

specialists, TM has decided to wait until the new DVD music format has settled down before offering a full upgrade to existing owners. In the meantime, its designers have concentrated on coaxing the most from DVD-Video discs, be they movies or music, along with plain vanilla CD.

It's a top-loading player for reasons of stability, featuring an aluminium transport sub-chassis mass-loaded with lead. At its heart is an extremely well specified MPEG decoder chip and attention to detail is strong throughout, at least on

paper. There's extensive internal decoupling, high quality PCB construction. a large toroidal transformer, carefully implemented clocking, separate drivers for its two coaxial digital audio outputs... the list is long and impressive. Audio-wise, it outputs Dolby Digital, dts, MPEG and PCM stereo data at up to 96kHz/ 24-bits. It also boasts strong future-proofing, its firmware upgradable via Internet downloads



Also new from TAG McLaren is a bass

unit for its £1,499 Calliope stand mount speaker. Priced at £2,995 per pair, the Calliope Bass

Extension Module sits under its smaller sibling to form a three-way floorstander. It features three 15cm composite-coned drive units and an aluminium cabinet 'wrap', available in a range of colours. Finally, there's now a match-

ing centre speaker for multi-channel applications – the Calliope Centre Loudspeaker, priced at £1,199. TAG McLaren 2 0800 783 8007

hfc.rules.ok

TAG McLaren DVD32R



HI FI CHOICE

Internet users voted CD their favourite format in Hi-Fi Choice's first Online poll. The familiar silver disc had a significant lead with 37% of the

1,500 votes. MiniDisc came second with 24%, just ahead of vinyl with 23%. DVD and SACD received only 15% between them, but it will be interesting to see how this figure changes in the future. Then in our follow up poll, we asked about upgrade intentions and it appears the majority of readers are eyeing up a new recorder -35% of over 2,300 votes.

Re-launched last August, the all-new Hi-Fi Choice Website features content from the old site plus all the latest product reviews, industry news and the opportunity to get the latest headlines fed to your own site absolutely free. The site will continue to be developed and welcomes reader interaction. Poll results will be published fortnightly and you can discuss the latest gear

in our exclusive online forum. So go on... have your say. Website: www.hifichoice co.uk

Psion of the times



There's more to digital radio than cool, crisp digital sound. The transition from analogue is cracking open a new world of interaction between

broadcaster and listener, and palm-top computer expert Psion claims to be the first to take advantage.

The company has launched WaveFinder, a weird and wonderful digital radio tuner that plugs into a PC. Users can listen to broadcasts via their computer's sound card and speakers, while using the screen and keyboard to obtain broadcast information and interact with stations and services. Recordings can be made in real time, without the need for Internet connection, and the opportunity for broadcasters to supply information is staggering. Onscreen biographies of artists now playing, the ability to order discs at the touch of a button; the possibilities are endless. Much of this is yet to come, but the otherworldly WaveFinder is available now at £299. Check the February issue of HFC for a review.

Psion 2 020 7317 4100





Rega Revamp



As the new millennium's first year draws to a close, Rega has taken the opportunity to give its range a thorough overhaul. The result is Rega 2000, a

product portfolio full of familiar names but boasting an all new look and some serious improvements under the skin.

The top-loading Planet CD player (£498) remains, but now sports a thoroughly swanky extruded aluminium case and an improved CD lid assembly. Inside lurks a new Sony mechanism, a custom-built 24-bit DAC chip with an extra power supply for the digital section and a toroidal transformer with separate windings for the display and audio stages. Similar improvements have been brought to the Jupiter, a more expensive model featuring twin DACs and beefed up power supplies (price to be confirmed).

In the amp department, the existing Brio (£298) and Mira (£498) names are retained but the models they describe are substantially different. They too feature new aluminium casework and redesigned internals – the Brio 2000 includes an entirely new output stage with uprated power transistors and capacitors. Rega has also made changes to its entry-level turntable line-up for the first time in years: more details next month. Rega Research 2 01702 333071

T+A=DVD magic



True high fidelity sound is the priority for T+A's DVD 1210 R DVD-Video player. The German outfit has paid particular attention to CD replay, and

claims its new £1,700 machine is a musical match for many top-notch dedicated CD players.

Inside, a high quality twin-laser mechanism nestles alongside a 10-bit video DAC and the same level of 192kHz/24-bit audio D/A conversation featured in the brand's respected CD players. There are three digital audio outputs, one of which is pure stereo, and a choice of five filter settings for a degree of personal sonic tailoring.

The DVD 1210 R is the latest model in a comprehensive range now distributed in the UK by BBG. Various product lines are available: The R Series of traditionally-styled hi-fi components, the M Series of compact separates, the K Series of one-box systems, various aluminium clad speakers and even a widescreen TV.

BBG Distribution 2 020 8863 9117



Hi-fi imitates art

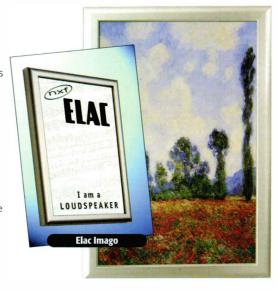


Tired of obtrusive boxes? Ever wished a Monet could make music? Now it can says Elac: the German firm claims to have made the first serious

wall-hanging loudspeaker. NXT technology has been harnessed to create the Imago panel, from which Elac has made a 'flat' speaker measuring 60x40cm with a depth of

Each panel sports two 'exciters' round the back to produce the necessary vibrations; they'll be sold singularly for installations or in pairs with a subwoofer for hi-fi or home cinema use. There are plenty of frame finishes available, including aluminium, real woods, anthracite and night blue laquer, and hundreds of panel images are said to be on the way, Monet included. Different sizes are also planned, but UK prices are unconfirmed as we go to press.

Sennheiser 2 0800 652 5002





Tannoy's new Dimension



Tannoy has unveiled a new high-end loud-

speaker line-up under the Dimension moniker. The aim was to create a true wide bandwidth speaker system for both two and multi-channel sources, incorporating SuperTweeters to extend treble response well beyond the realms of normal human hearing. Already tried and tested in HFC, this technology is intended to resolve the ultra-high frequency information available from new-generation disc formats while also enhancing the listening experience in the audioband.

The range entails three floorstanding pairs - the TD8 at £4,000, TD10 at £5,000 and TD12 at £6.500. There's also a £3.000 active subwoofer called the TD SUB and a £2,000 centre speaker, the TD C1. Fach model bar the sub features a main Dual Concentric driver, with a new fibre composite cone and centre-mounted tweeter, augmented by an separate SuperTweeter housed on top of the cabinet. Main enclosures are made from solid wood, with heavy internal bracing to counter cabinet resonance.

Tannoy 2 01236 420199

2000: A year in brief

These are momentous times for hi-fi: never have we encountered a more defining period of technical change than now. 2000 has been something of a whirlwind so let's recap on the events and trends that have shaped the year and our prospects beyond. **Tim Bowern** is your guide.

DVD-Audio off the blocks

ollowing a series of delays, DVD-Audio is finally edging its way towards retailer's shelves - at least as far as the hardware is concerned. It's touted as the next generation music format for the home, an extension of the now familiar DVD disc intended (in theory) to supercede CD. Unlike movie discs, DVD-A devotes a large portion of the disc's massive capacity to ultra-high resolution audio, with two channel or multi-channel options available to artists and producers.

Unfortunately, concerns over copyright security were compounded by the exploits of a Norwegian hacker last year, contributing to a succession of launch postponements dating back as far as Autumn 1999. The all-powerful music labels stalled software production until an improved protection system was developed, in turn forcing hardware manufacturers to wait. This work is now completed although there is still concern about the Verance watermark, an anti-piracy device which has caused consternation among quality conscious insiders because of its potential audibility.

Despite the format's troubled birth, the first wave of DVD-A hardware is now emerging. These are so-called DVD Combination or Universal players, compatible with both DVD standards - DVD-Audio and the established, movieoriented DVD-Video discs. We've already tested machines priced between £500 and £900 from JVC. Kenwood and Technics, the results of which have been mixed, a situation exacerbated by the continued non-existence of commercially-released software. To make matters worse, our own Technical Editor has uncovered something of a scam going on with non-commercial demonstration discs currently in circulation. Some of those purporting to employ DVD-A's maximum resolution do nothing of the kind, a clear indication of the lack of suitable recordings even within the industry itself. But despite such tribulations our hopes are still

high for DVD-A. If the hardware and software industries get their acts together, including the Big Five music labels which have all declared support, then next year could see the medium's fruition.

SACD gets hea

s DVD-A stalled on the starting line, Super Audio CD capitalised on its less troubled launch last year to gain a useful head start. The format is a rival for DVD-A, an alternative CD-beating, high-resolution music disc. And though it lacks the direct association with DVD, the most rapidly adopted new format of all time, its Direct Stream Digital technology is potentially superior from a pure audio perspective. This year we've seen new players from Sony, including one at £550 which brings the format closer to mass-market level, together with a £5,000 flagship design from Marantz which has to be the best digital source component we've ever heard. But despite its proven pedigree, and the existence of some impressive commercially available software, SACD's future is yet to be secured. Next year could prove pivotal as the extent of support among hardware and software producers becomes clear, and SACD makes its move into multi-channel.



P3 made it into mainstream consciousness this year, helped by the high profile court case involving Napster, a file-swapping Internet site enabling users to search each other's hard drives for MP3 music files. Rock band Metallica and rapper Dr Dre filed lawsuits against Napster for infringement of copyright, bolstered by legal action from the Recording Industry Association of America, and a preliminary hearing resulted in a court order to cease operation. Napster appealed and was granted a reprieve, but its future still hangs in the balance until a full hearing takes place. More news is expected as we go to press.

Whatever happens, the issue isn't going to go away. Similar sites like Gnuttella and Scour have emerged, and there are even plans to launch sites incorporating copyright holder permission – Napster founder Bill Bates has formed one such organisation called Applesoup. But the ironic thing about all this Napster-related fuss is how far it has served to raise the profile of Internet audio. Newspaper coverage and TV slots on programmes like *Newsnight* have helped drive unprecedented demand for download and swap sites.

Further fuel was siphoned in as high profile bands like Radiohead spoke out in favour of Internet file distribution, while sundry industry mavericks proclaimmed it as the future of music, pure and simple. Former Creation Records boss Alan McGee was one such cove – the 'man who discovered Oasis' jumped ship to create a new Internet-focussed label called Poptones. Traditional music labels are all but dead, claimed McGee; this was a revolution, because of the freedom digital distribution can give to artists and consumers alike.

On the hardware side, two things happened to the burgeoning MP3 market this year. One, memory card capacity increased and new storage formats offering far greater space began to enter the fray. Two, MP3's position as the dominant codec for compressed digital audio began to be threatened, as improved codecs like the Dolby-backed AAC emerged. For more information, check out the Personal and Internet Audio section in this issue

Recordable CD really took off in 2000, with CD-R/CD-RW machines emerging from a variety of sources and disc prices continuing to fall. There were some delays – several manufacturers were basing their efforts on Philips technology and had to wait while the Dutch giant got its house in order. But the choice of brands now looks healthy and this excellent recording format is making an impact in the high street, egged on by some innovative twin deck products.

MiniDisc continues to do well, many punters attracted by its supreme flexibility, portability and downright 'funkiness'. But some think its days are now numbered, threatened by the superior sound quality of recordable CD and even 'funkier' solid state personals.

Recordable DVD made its world debut in 2000, with three formats vying for success – DVD-RW (Pioneer), DVD-RAM (Panasonic) and DVD+RW (Philips). Expect some or all of these to hit the UK before the end of 2001.

The style council

t should be the priority, but good sound alone isn't enough to shift units these days. Aesthetic style has never been so important in audio design and it's not just down to the hugely popular, heavily stylised micro systems that fly off high street shelves. Traditional hi-fi manufacturers like Arcam, Myryad and NAD have this year launched serious separates intended to look as good as they sound, extra shiny with a high level of convenience thrown in. And these have been matched by some thoroughly outlandish speakers from the likes of O'heocha Designs (right), TAG McLaren and the resurgent Blue Room, not to mention a clutch of NXT-based 'flat speakers' from Cyrus, Mission and Elac. It seems silver was this year's black, and now even bright colours are cool...



\$ 22 th

DAB soldiers on

The digital radio debate continued this year, with many audiophiles still not convinced by its quality. However, it is here to stay and does offer a number of distinct to advantages to both broadcasters and consumers.

But progress in the domestic market is slow. Most of the new DAB tuners in 2000 were in-car units, though we did see an excellent domestic model from Sony, a well-specified high-end tuner from TAG McLaren, a portable unit from Roberts and a just-launched £300 tuner from VideoLogic – the most affordable yet. Many more are expected in 2001.

Old favourites return

2000 has seen the welcome return of some favourite names from the recent past, with Audio Partnership taking the lions share. Mordaunt-Short and TDL ceased trading in 1998 and 1999 respectively, but Audio Partnership bought both brands to sell through its Richer Sounds retail chain. Subsequently, an all-new Mordaunt-Short range was unveiled this year.

Sadly, we also lost an old friend in 2000. Julian Vereker MBE, the man behind top British hi-fi company Naim Audio, passed away earlier this year. His energy and ideas will be greatly missed.

And finally...

The venerable publication you now hold in your hands celebrated its 25th birthday in 2000. And in keeping with this incredible period of change for hi-fi and music replay in the home, we too have some new developments up our sleeve. For the past couple of months we have been applying copious spit and polish to the magazine both inside and out, the result being an all-new look smoother, smarter and all-together more sassy, but with the same depth of content you've come to expect from HFC. Add to that our spruced-up Website (www.hifichoice.co.uk - see News story this issue) and the future's looking bright. You know where to come for that monthly hi-fi fix...

Records of the Year

Where would hi-fi be without the music? And who better to pick out their favourites from the last year than our reviewers, the guys who listen to it day in, day out – it's a hard life!



Frank Martin Mass for double choir

Pizzetti Requiem

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR. COND JAMES O'DONNELL.

HYPERION CDA67017

I don't often go for church music, or indeed choral music of any sort, but this is one of my very favourite CDs. Why? Because both works are simply among the most beautiful pieces of music ever written. Both date from 1922, and both composers wrote in a highly individual, contemporary yet very melodious style. The result, in each case, is a most beguiling combination of melody and harmony, performed here with technical near-perfection and a magnificent range of emotional colour. Richard Black



Eminem

The Marshall Mathers LP AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE 490 629-2

My only true Y2K find so far is Eminem's brilliant The Marshall Mathers LP - the best rap record since Grandmaster Flash first spun the Wheels of Steel. Eminem's rap is still heavily loaded with the infantile mysogeny of the genre. But the scansion is absolutely brilliant - even Will Shakespeare might have learned something - and the whole thing is percolated by a delicious sense of irony and scathing criticism of the music biz. Sound quality rates an unspecial 3/5, but it warrants five stars for performance and content. Paul Messenger



Peace Orchestra

Peace Orchestra

G-STONE GCD-004

There were several strong contenders for this accolade, but this solo outing from Austrian Peter Kruder is probably the finest. Anyone who has heard Kruder and Dorfmeister will have an idea of what's to be expected but if you haven't, think mellow electronica escaping the bounds of the synthesiser and taking in real instruments to create lush, vivid soundscapes that are strong on melody. It will appeal to those who eniov ambient material as well as those with more mainstream tastes, such is the quality of tunesmithing. And it sounds gorgeous, natch. Jason Kennedy



Mahler Symphonie Nr. 9 CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, COND. CARLO MARIA GIULINI.

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 463 609-2

The release that's given me most pleasure this year is a reissue from 1977 of Mahler's 9th with the Chicago symphony orchestra. The performance heartfelt, passionate, sincere, deeply personal - I've known and loved for almost a quarter of a century, and it's great to have it on newly remastered CD. Guilini takes infinite pains to shape and shade every note, and the result is an interpretation that gets right to the heart of Mahler's angst-ridden score. Jimmy Huahes



Toru Takemitsu

Ouotation of a Dream PETER SERKIN, LONDON SINFONIETTA. COND OLIVER KNUSSEN

DCC453495-2

I discovered this recording last year, a couple of months before it won a Gramophone Award, so it is not brand new. Nevertheless it was an easy choice, partly for the pellucid purity of the sound, but mostly for the music. Takemitsu is an authentic voice of late 20th century music in a clear line of decent from Debussy and Messian, but there is a startling freshness and originality to this incandescent yet sparse, elliptical music. Every note, every instrument tells, like chamber music writ large. Alvin Gold



Madonna Music

MAVERICK/WARNER 9362-47865-2

Music is a marked and mature contrast to the days of Material Girl, its content as beautifully recorded and produced as you'd expect from Madonna and coproducer, French technowhiz Mirwais Ahmadzai. Her voice sounds crisp and clean while the miking ensures the stereo imagery is very tactile. Strings are on the edge - positive and dynamic without spilling over - while the bass is a big, multi-layered affair. The title track is the one for bass fiends, but the two standards are *Impressive Instant* and I Deserve It for their leading-edge detail and sweeping vocals. Paul Miller



Lambchop Nixon

CITY SLANG 20152-2

For the most part, guitar music's creative malaise has continued through 2000. But a handful of jewels have blazed through the fog; from the UK there was Six by Seven's urban rush, Doves' heady swirl and even the mechanical crossover of David Holmes' latest opus. But perhaps the brightest light hails from Nashville, Tennessee. This unwieldy collective has spun some heart-pinching moments in the past, but none surpass Nixon's mercurial melding of caustic country and understated soul. It's saintly. And it's sinful. Let it swoop and glide through your (hi-fi) system on its majestic musical curve. Tim Bowern



Steely Dan Two Against Nature **GIANT RECORDS/WARNER 24719**

Donald Fagen, he of the fluid keyboard fingerwork, has said Two Against Nature (the Dan's first studio album since Gaucho) is the band's defining work. That if you had to bin all your Dan albums but one, this is the one you should keep. Crap. You'd keep 'em all. That said, even a merely adequate Dan album - which this is - has more music, funk, chops, cool, endearing quirkiness, production polish and sheer long term listenability than a bucketful of Robbie Williams. Get this and your hi-fi will love you forever. David Vivian

For high performance sound you don't need as much space as you think.

Pascal

Try Sony's award-winning Pascal speakers for size. 50 years of audio expertise condensed into a sleek case measuring just 86x169x130mm. Small. Perfectly formed. Yet beneath that cool aluminium surface beats a heart of pure fire. The world's strongest magnet, Neodymium, delivers enough drum and bass (and violin and flute) to make all of your crystal ornaments rattle. They're the perfect little speakers if you want to get the most out of your music and movies. You may have limited space, but why have limited sound?

go create



Disc Players

Not so long ago, the only optical disc available was the CD. Now there are a host of disc formats emerging: from CD to DVD, SACD and beyond. It may seem complex, but with our help **you can pick the player that's right for you.**



Hints & Tips

For best results, site your player on a dedicated equipment support – it'll sound better than on a bookshelf or sideboard. An additonal isolation platform, metal cones or rubbery 'feet' might also be beneficial, particularly with a relatively basic main support – these can be fairly inexpensive so feel free to experiment. Bear in mind that CD players don't like to be run from cold, so if you switch it off don't expect optimum performance for a good half hour or so. It may be best to leave it on, or use the standby feature if it has one.

CD is the most prolific format for music recordings, and that won't change for a good while yet. All the various types of disc player now out there will play CDs, but it's proving difficult to make a DVD player that does the job to a high standard. Until someone breaks the mould, a dedicated CD player will make more of your music so don't be fooled into thinking the technology is defunct. CD players still rock!

DVD is a much newer audio-visual format and its players are improving all the time. Most of those currently available are DVD-Video players – predominently movie machines rather than hi-fi music components, though several players now emerging from specialist manufacturers aim to make a better fist of CD. New to the scene are DVD-A/V 'universal' players, compatible with forthcoming DVD-Audio music discs in addition to DVD-Video titles. Early examples have proved disappointing with CD, but DVD-Audio itself promises much as a music format for the future.

The first SACD-compatible players have essentially been CD players with the added benefit of SACD playback, in keeping with the format's philosophy of extension from the traditional CD family. Samples thus far from Sony and Marantz have proved adept with both formats.

However, compatibility boundaries are expected to blur further next year. Sony has just launched a DVD-Video player which also plays SACD, and entirely universal machines compatible with all formats – DVD-Audio and SACD included – should begin to emerge at high price points.

Jargon Buster

CD: The shiny disc has been with us for a couple of decades, in which time it has established itself as the primary music format. Despite the emergence of alternative formats, it will remian the dominant musical force for many years yet.

SACD: Touted as a natural extension of the CD family, purely for music. Employs a high density disc and Direct Stream Digital technology to raise audio resolution way beyond that of CD. Some discs are CD/SACD hybrids, combining a standard-quality CD layer which will play back in any player and a high-resolution SACD layer for those with suitable players. Discs and players are so far two channel only and results have been hugely impressive, but discs are still limited in number. Multi-channel SACD is expected to emerge, perhaps in 2001. **DVD-VIDEO:** The DVD discs you'll find in your local Blockbuster – a specification of the DVD format designed primarily to carry movies. Some music video titles are available, but high fidelity sound is not the priority.

DVD-AUDIO: Another specification of DVD, this time developed for music. Both two-channel and multi-channel sound may be included at a resolution greater than that of CD, and visual extras are also available (assuming the player is connected to a TV). No software is yet available, but hardware has now begun to emerge.

MP3 CD: No pre-recorded software is available, at least not yet. However, by using a computer with a CD-RW drive you can create your own MP3 CDs containing far more music than an ordinary disc, albeit at a lower quality. If this is of interest, MP3-compatible CD and DVD players are beggining to arrive on the scene.



Arcam Alpha 7SE

CD PLAYER €299.90 △

Arcam has just introduced its brand new DiVA range, countering criticisms that the Alpha series was looking increasingly long in the tooth, cosmetically speaking. That said, the Alpha 7SE has long been the UK's best selling CD player, and Arcam is making sure that it still has a bright future by cutting the price from £349 to just under £300. This latest evolution has a new, higher resolution Burr Brown D/A converter, a revised motherboard, and an improved (though still cramped) remote handset.

A quality product with sturdy internal build quality, there's a good range of features, including optical and electrical digital outputs, display on/off/dimming, and a wide range of programming functions. It's also possible to upgrade from a 7SE to any of the more senior Alpha models.

The listening panel wasn't quite unanimous about this player, but the general trend was enthusiastic. The Eve Cassidy track, for example, was described as "lively, clear and coherent" by one, and "natural" by a second, but there were odd complaints of a "thrummy" acoustic guitar sound and occasional sibilance.

Despite stiff competition from others, the Alpha 7SE was never less than likeable, and it frequently managed that most important task of making difficult and unfamiliar material more accessible. It sounded slightly lightweight in the hands-on testing, with a certain untidiness at times, but is a clean, agile and detailed player overall.

An improved version of an existing Best Buy and at a lower price, the sound quality rating has dropped a star because of stiffer competition, but the overall BB rating is confirmed.

A&R Cambridge 22 01223 203203

Reviewed in HFC 207

Cambridge Audio D500

CD PLAYER £199.95 ▽

From the outside, the D500 is a master of understatement, with some poor looking switchgear, a plasticky front panel (in fact an alloy extrusion that just looks like plastic) and a feeble-minded display. Inside there's a 20-bit Crystal Delta Sigma DAC, and features are limited to skip, search, random, repeat and programme play. But there's more to the D500 than this rather dismissive summary suggests. The 20-bit Crystal part is based on the same substrate as the '24-bit' equivalent, and particular care has been exercised over the various power supplies. Proprietary jitter reduction strategies have also been instigated, and the player is equipped with electrical (BNC) and optical digital S/PDIF outputs.

Initial impressions weren't entirely positive, the D500 sounding rather underwhelming and soft around the edges. But what it lacked in immediate upfront appeal is made up for in long term use. Early comments that the D500 was rather "dull and flat" led on to praise for its "drive and rhythm", and for the "great acoustic, the presence of lots of detail and the way it builds the tension in the music". It provided a cleaner, more open window, and more of a feel of solid, propulsive timing than the opposition could muster, and these are the qualities that make sustained listening rewarding.

After some reflection, this model rates a Best Buy. A little more fire in its belly might be no bad thing, but the D500 came closer to stripping bare what was on disc after disc than any its competition. Note that Cambridge Audio is available only from Richer Sounds (in the UK).

Richer Sounds 2 020 7940 2222



Arcam FMJ CD23 CD PLAYER £1,099.90 ▽

Arcam's FMJ series was originally a response to requirements from German and US distributors, but it has been a significant success here too, especially (according to Arcam) in the case of the FMJ CD23. It's broadly based on the Alpha 9 CD player, complete with

HIFI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

dCS 'Ring DAC' technology, but the FMJ model sports a 'Trilaminate' chassis (a three-layer composite made from two layers of steel damped by a rubberised polymer core), and an 8mm thick machined aluminium fascia. Other changes include a re-laid motherboard and an enhanced power supply. The CD23 lacks a headphone socket, but otherwise has a conventional feature count, including HDCD. Sonically this is a beautifully balanced player. The bass is slightly lightweight, but of fine quality,

while the treble has a smoothness and lack of grain that is extremely unusual with CD, hinting at the performance of DVD-A and SACD here. Detail resolution is also very good. Stereo imagery has explicit depth and width, which implies accurate handling of subtle ambient information, the hallmark of a fine player.

The only real sin was a certain lack of electricity at times, but the ability to hear the inner structure of recordings allowed the music to tell its own story, and our experience was that switching to other players was almost always an anticlimax.

To an extent the FMJ story is one of new bottles for old wine, but the old wine in question is an impressive player in its own right, and has been significantly enhanced before being decanted into its smart new home.

A&R Cambridge 🕿 01223 203203

Reviewed in HFC 206



The original Q Series won so many awards that it was tempting to leave well alone.

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CD Players

BEST BUYS

Cyrus dAD3 Q24

CD PLAYER £900.00 ▷

The £900 dAD3 Q24 is based closely on Cyrus' dAD3 CD player, but is fitted with the newly developed internal Q24 module, the original's twin mono 18-bit converters replaced here by a 24-bit integrated filter/DAC. The design also includes extensive anti-jitter measures, including a regenerated clock near the DAC. Elaborate power supply arrangements include nine regulated supplies within the player, plus two in the Q24 module. The player can also be upgraded with an external add-on supply, the PSX-R.

Features are fairly basic, except that absolute phase is controllable and even programmable on a track-by-track basis, and the only digital output is from an optical Toslink socket. The player comes in the familiar simplified Cyrus die-cast housing, with an ABS moulded base, with the standard, rather artless, Cyrus full-feature remote control.

The dAD 3 Q24 received consistently strong comments in three separate panel presentations, and was described with impressive unanimity as sharp and analytical, with an almost master tapelike solidity and presence, and a positive, well timed bass.

Even though this player was the most expensive in the test, it delivered a consistently impressive performance that served a wide range of music well, both in the panel sessions and the separate, sighted listening tests. The treble can sound rather aggressive in the wrong system, and there's a



lack of warmth that again demands sympathetic system balancing. But taken overall its resolving power, stability and consistency point to a safe Recommendation, with the useful ability to upgrade with a PSX-R power supply.

Cyrus Electronics 2 01480 435577

Reviewed in HFC 200



dCS Delius/Purcell

CD PLAYER £8,450 △

Pro-audio digital converter specialist dCS has adapted a number of its designs for hi-fi users, though the sheer flexibility of these devices, especially in terms of socketry, attests to the pro origins. The Delius is a decidedly upmarket (£5,000) DAC (digital-to-analogue converter), while the £3,450 Purcell is an 'upsampler' which acts as an intermediary between transport and DAC, and is claimed to use extremely accurate interpolation filters to refine the bitstream.

Tested with digital masters as well as commercial software, the Delius is a rather special piece of kit sonically. Even bad recordings come up cleaner than one might expect, but good ones develop a whole new dimension compared with most digital replay equipment. There's that certain 'rightness' to everything: images drop securely into place, the frequency response suddenly flattens out, noise drops, instruments seem to breathe properly and in general one can hear just that little bit more of familiar recordings.

If listening to the Delius alone is not exactly a hardship, running the Purcell at its maximum 24-bit/192kHz in between transport and DAC most obviously and dramatically improved depth resolution. To a far greater extent than anything else we've tried, the Purcell shows that three-dimensional musical information is on our regular CDs, waiting to be revealed, and it's this that gives the Purcell its 'analogue' quality.

If you love analogue sound but have to use digital software, the Purcell will get you as close to that goal as anything. Just remember you'll need a top notch DAC to make the most of it.

dCS © 01799 531999

Reviewed in HFC 207

Denon DCD-655

CD PLAYER £179.99 ▽

Denon's DCD-655 CD player slots firmly in the budget category, and features the company's proprietary Lambda Super Linear Converter as a way of eliminating zero cross-distortion. The player has a fairly full set of controls on its front panel, and tracks can be selected or preselected using an excellent rotary control. A pair of controls allow replay speed and pitch to be adjusted either way by up to 12 per cent, and you also get a full complement of tape editing features.

On the whole, and despite come criticisms, this player was well liked in the panel tests. "It has a lightness of touch and a pleasing deftness (which gives it a) soft, mellow feel," was one response to the Buena Vista Social Club track. Another panellist wrote that the Denon sounded "forceful and a bit 'thick', but otherwise fine", while a third described a particularly high-octane track as "easy to listen to".

A slightly soft-edged quality was also apparent in the hands-on testing, but there was also plenty of detail, and a pleasant, ambient glow from appropriate recordings. Initially open and vibrant, the DCD-655 can come across as a little lacking in dynamics and energy, but this impression tended to fade with time. The inherent clarity and definition made this a good choice for long term listening, and one that rose to the occasion with difficult, densely scored orchestral and vocal recordings.

Avoid this player if your system is lacking in presence or tonally dull, but many budget systems tend to err in just the opposite direction, so the Denon is a well-judged choice. Hayden Labs 22 01753 888447

Reviewed in HFC 200





Marantz CD6000 OSE

CD PLAYER £299.90 ▽

Here is a neat CD player from Marantz, its OSE suffix indicating that this is the Original Special Equipment version of the standard 6000. At its heart is a dual differential mode bitstream processor, with a discrete HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module) low output impedance, high slew rate output buffer amplifier. The mechanically quiet VAM-1201 mechanism is combined with a quick acting laser servo, which can handle CD-Rs and rewritable CD-RW discs.

Improvements over the standard article include more screening around the HDAM module, which also includes a new low pass analogue output filter, an increased power transformer capacity and better OFC windings, higher quality capacitors and a reinforced base plate.

This player delivers the familiar Marantz 'house sound', which means that it is smooth and refined, with a constrained, and perhaps even slightly rolled-off treble, while the bass is full and – by some accounts – a little heavy-handed. "There's a lack of bass control," complained one listener of the Buena Vista test track, "but timing is good, and the vocals sound natural and enjoyable". About the worst that can be said is that it could be more muscular and dynamic, and there is more than a hint of the 'politeness' or 'restraint'.

Here is a player for under £300 built like one costing twice as much, and if it doesn't sound as good as it looks, it comes close, only occasionally sounding a touch heavy-handed. This player is remarkably good value, and on that basis an obvious Best Buy.

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 2 01753 680868

Reviewed in HFC 200



Marantz CD6000

CD PLAYER £249.90 \wedge

The CD6000 is the base version of the 6000 OSE, also reviewed here. It's a 1-bit player, with bitstream converters driven in dual differential mode to improve linearity and reduce noise and distortion. An HDAM buffer output amplifier ensures low output impedance and high slew rate, which is nice.

Most of the features are those expected of a mainstream player. Peak search can assist in setting record levels, and the CD6000 can handle CD-RW discs and CD Text. The player itself is well turned out, with a number of decent quality controls, and a very neat remote control handset featuring all the toys.

The family resemblance between the CD6000 and the OSE variant is not hard to hear. This model also has the same characteristic smoothness and grace, the same openness and air, and the same bold architectural quality. It even has much the same slight reticence in the upper registers, but there is nothing here to indicate any significant loss of clarity or detail. While it doesn't have quite the range or clarity of the OSE model, it is a supremely well balanced player, and moreover one whose strengths and limitations are particularly well attuned to the kind of ancillaries it is likely to be used with.

One panellist managed to sum up the Marantz well by commenting that he could forgive this player anything, and the Marantz does indeed have the seductive quality that is often needed, but too infrequently encountered in budget CD players, at a particularly keen price.

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 207

Kenwood DPF-3030

The DPF-3030 is a large slim CD player with a Resolution Intensive Vector Enhancement circuit, designed to reduce distortion at low signal levels, and a 'high performance' 1-bit D/A converter, with a claimed 24-bit resolution. Potentially useful features include CD Peak Search, and various tape edit functions. CD Text data is delivered from the optical digital output and, recorder permitting, can be included on MD recordings. There is no electrical digital output, however, or CD-RW replay compatibility.

Sonically this is an above average CD player, though it is up against stiff competition at similar or lower prices. "It's on the lean side," commented one panel member after listening to the Eve Cassidy track, "but nice to listen to. Instruments are well portrayed, and the voice has a sense of scale." Others agreed. "It's nice and warm, almost like a live PA sound," wrote one, while another remarked that the song sounded "well balanced and enjoyable".



In the hands-on testing, it gave an airy, spacious account of a wide range of music types, if less sure-footed with very dense choral and orchestral recordings. But, for the most part, the Kenwood sounded clean, lively and entertaining, with plenty of grip and purpose, and with a powerful and extended bass. It retained these qualities even at very low levels, where some players begin to lose control. This decent, well-organised sounding player from Kenwood is not a giant killer, but it more than held its own in a large and surprisingly diverse group.

Kenwood Electronics № 01923 816444 Reviewed in HFC 207

Award winning performances



Winning two of the industry's top awards proves that the Aegis Series has the ability to perform.

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Winner





CD Players



Marantz CD-17 MkII

CD PLAYER £799.90 △

The £800 CD-17 MkII is a low slung visual delight reeking of class, finished in a pale matt gold, and featuring a sculpted front panel with just a minimum of controls. It's familiar enough, as we have already reviewed the original version (in *HFC* 155), and also the KI Signature variation (*HFC* 176).

This is an audiophile CD player without too many baubles and toys. It continues to use much of the same digital clockwork as before, but the digital filter is new, using DSP to compensate for the characteristics of the analogue output filter. A number of other new features include a new power transformer, CD-RW and CD Text compatibility, and a bright, shiny new stick-type remote control in a finish that is similar to the player.

Sonically the CD-17 Mkll is a much better player than many. On balance its timing seemed slightly loose, but it sounded solid and physical, with strong dynamics, and a distinctively full tonality. It was intriguing, however, that although the best of the new high resolution media (which, at the time of writing, means SACD) sounds sharper, more focussed and more expressive, plain vanilla compact disc can still put up a good show, and the solidity and architecture of the Marantz pays dividends.

No direct comparison with the original version of this player was possible, but it seemed generally improved. It also benefits from the added functionality, especially the CD-RW compatibility. The fact that this has been achieved while retaining the original price makes for a very attractive player.

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 🕿 01753 680868

Reviewed in HFC 206

Musical Fidelity A3

CD PLAYER £849.00 <

The A-series has virtually identical internals to the X-series, and the A3 is modelled on the similarly priced X-Ray, providing a non-radical styling alternative. It has been designed with the kind of tactile and visual quality deemed necessary in other markets, especially the Far East. The quality image is reinforced by a thick-section, brushed-alloy extruded front panel, with gold-plated brass trim, and the player feels solid and well put together. It uses a Burr-Brown PCM1728 Delta Sigma DAC, which is capable of reading 24-bit wordlength data from the 8x oversampling filter. The five-pole output (analogue) filter is said to be linear phase, and jitter reduction measures have been given priority.

"Lively and the bass bounces along, while the vocals are sweet sounding, but a little soft," said one panellist of the Janis Ian track, using a word – soft – that appeared consistently throughout the listening sessions. Others pointed to the A3's good timing, and vocal quality and instrumental tonality were explicitly praised. But again, words like "soft", "mellifluous" and "sweet" made slightly too regular appearances.

The A3 CD can indeed sound a touch less than industrial-strength at times, with a loss of brilliance and air, but in every other respect this is an extremely sorted player. Despite a certain lack of sparkle, the A3 CD is a very strong mid-price player. It works consistently well in a wide range of systems, is largely free of identifiable colorations, does not underplay musical dynamics, and offers particularly believable and well anchored soundstaging

Musical Fidelity 22 020 8900 2999
Reviewed in HFC 200



NAD C520

CD PLAYER £170.00 ▽

The £170 C520 is the entry point to the world of NAD CD players. It maintains the status quo, including the characteristic grey paint job, with an improved back-lit electroluminescent display, and other subtle styling improvements that make the new model look a little sharper than its predecessor.

Basic play controls are available on the player itself, and a full set on the neat and practical palm-sized remote. The feature set has been extended slightly to assist when dubbing from CDs. Rear furniture is limited to a pair of analogue outputs and the welcome addition of a fully buffered digital electrical S/PDIF socket. Internally, the C520 features a 20-bit, Burr-Brown Delta-Sigma DAC, with separate analogue and digital power supply regulation. New measures have been adopted to reduce jitter, including damping the master clock crystal.

Although clearly more competitive than the model it supersedes, the C520 remains uneven in balance, but on the whole its limitations are sins of omission rather than glaring faults. Dynamically it's quite forthright, and rock music tends to bounce along with impressive energy, but bass is on the heavy-handed

side (drawing words like "plummy" from the panel), while stereo imagery was too large in scale and lacking in central focus. That said, its forwardness does tend to make

the system sound closer and more forthcoming than many.

An evolutionary advance over the model it replaces, the Na

An evolutionary advance over the model it replaces, the NAD C520 is a quite decent, if slightly opaque sounding player, and at the price just merits a Recommended rating.

Lenbrook UK 2 01908 319360
Reviewed in HFC 202







CD Players



Onkvo DX 7222 CD PLAYER £150.00 \triangle

The £150 DX7222 is an apparently conventional budget CD player based around a 1-bit PWM converter with an 8x oversampling digital filter. The player is solid and well built, and still manages to offer more features than many people will ever find a use for, including a headphone socket with a volume control, programming for up to 36 tracks and delete programming. Also on tap are time edit, to cram more onto tapes of specified lengths, peak search, random play, and five repeat modes. The player itself is pretty well laid out, and the display includes more information than you'll probably ever want or need to know, although it lacks CD Text.

The DX-7222 showed a "lack of sparkle" and an "overblown bass", especially in the Buena Vista recording, according to one listener, who also felt the player sounded "big and well controlled" outside the bass region, and that the band had "considerable drive and tension". The hands-on testing brought out some loss of clarity and image focus, especially in quite simple pieces. Image scale was exaggerated with chamber recordings used in the test (mainly solo piano, wind ensemble and string quartets), and the bass was again identified as overblown and not entirely natural in quality with some rock recordings.

Certainly not a great player, the Onkyo was nevertheless a broadly satisfying one on the whole - particularly so given the two-year guarantee and recent price drop from £170 to £150. Taking the strong equipment levels into account, a Recommended swing tag seems in order.

Jamo UK 2 01788 556777 Reviewed by HFC 200

Sony CDP-XE330

CD PLAYER £100.00 ∇

Selling at a very modest £100, the CDP-XE330 looks similar to other budget Sonys, but the feature set is shorter and more conventional. The best by far is the indented rotary track selector, which enables tracks to be pre-selected at blinding speed, although track search itself is much tardier. The display is bright and clear, with a calendar-type track readout, but it can't be dimmed or switched off. The remote control is a simplified version of the 'stick' remote that comes with the senior models, and is a little more ergonomic than some. The player itself is a flyweight, and no better built than you'd expect at the price – but at £100, who's complaining?

The Sony was received surprisingly well for such an inexpensive player. It has a straightforward honesty that meant it easily held its own at the price. The panellists commented on: "Good rhythm, pace and speed without harshness"; "cymbals a touch splashy, almost slippery, like silicone on Teflon"; "fairly robust, rounded sound," and "tight bass, but lacks some detail."

Hands-on listening was in line with the panel view. The Sony does sound rather thin and lightweight, and although there's plenty of detail, this is partly because the rather grainy and congested mid/top tends to dominate the sound to the detriment of the solidity and structure that better players are able to capture.

Not for the first time, an indifferent musical performance is rescued by a low selling price. The difference is that this player is not as indifferent as some, and by any standards the price is very low

Sonv UK 2 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 202



Yamaha CDX-596

CD PLAYER €229.95 ▷

The CDX-596 is a comparatively straightforward CD player but, for the first time from Yamaha, CD-RW and CD Text compatibility are included. Both optical and electrical digital outputs are fitted, and all outputs can be attenuated using the output level control, and range of features is available to help when dubbing CDs. Technology highlights include Pro Bit circuitry, which re-samples 16-bit data, supposedly to 20-bit precision, applying proprietary curve smoothing as it does so, and something called Intelligent Digital Servo which attempts to compensate more effectively than usual for warped discs.

This player caused a curiously ambivalent reaction from the panel, who thought there was a lack of focus, with much of the sound localised at the left and right extremes, almost as though the player was out of phase. Other key findings from the panel were of muddle in Eve Cassidy's guitar, and of a "lack of tension" in the Takemitsu. But it wasn't all bad, and the Garbage track was felt to offer good timing and good vocal quality - "the best today" in one opinion.



In the hands-on testing the Yamaha acquitted itself guite well, and there seemed little to justify the complaints of a lack of imagery, except for a trace of image spread around the centre position. There was also little of the architectural quality that a really top rank CD player can bring to the table. Nevertheless, this appears to be a clear step up from recent Yamaha CD players we have tested, with good lateral imaging, respectable levels of detail, and a smooth, attractive overall standard of presentation.

Yamaha Electronics 2 01923 233166

Reviewed in HFC 207

Wadia 860x

CD PLAYER £7,495.00 ▽

The 860x (now available as the 861) is another incarnation of Wadia's upmarket single-box CD player, though in truth the 860x is a digital preamp as well, with four sets of digital in/outputs and a digital volume control. Because its output level may be set between 0.25 and 4.4 Volts, it can be optimised for direct connection to most power amp/speaker set-ups (though the closer you can run its digital volume control to maximum output, the better the resolution).



It's possible to avoid a conventional preamp entirely if just digital sources are used, with consequent potential sonic benefits, but this is rather less practical (though not impossible) if analogue sources are also part of the system. The rear panel connections consist of phono and AES/EBU balanced analogue outputs, combined with digital in/outs in ST glass, Toslink, XLR and BNC varieties.

The Wadia 860x proved an extremely entertaining CD player. Indeed, it's hard to believe that CD could be as good as this player proved. The key talents in its considerable array were the ability to resolve timing, dynamics and vanishingly low-level detail. It provides a highly analytical picture, yet holds up the whole musical performance in all its glory (or otherwise).

There aren't many turntables that can do everything this CD player can, and even fewer that have such ghostly levels of noise. Coming from an analogue die-hard, that's praise indeed. This Wadia simply defies the law of diminishing returns, so forget the new formats and find out what your existing software is really capable of. *Musical Design Company* 201992 573030 *Reviewed in HFC 199*



Kenwood DPF-R6030 MULTI-DISC CD PLAYER £179.99 \triangle

The five-disc carousel effectively determines the exterior dimensions, so just make sure you have plenty of shelf space. Not many would describe Kenwood's £180 DPF-R6030 as attractive. It's strictly utilitarian, adequately finished and quite lightly built, with a poorly damped lid and plenty of dark plastic. Equipment levels are fairly basic, but include CD Text

The Keb' Mo' track was reproduced with a rather plummily textured, yet lightweight, bass, while the midband and treble were crisply articulated, and a similar pattern was repeated with a wide range of other material. Only the sonorous Mahler extract split ranks by sounding distinctly superior, thanks to the player's excellent midband transparency, and a smooth, detailed and spacious top end.

The player was clearly at its best with the Mahler extract, which is unusual in that much of the musical energy here is concentrated in the bass and through to the lower midband. Much of the other test material was more evenly distributed across the audio frequency band, and it was mainly with them that the rather odd, sometimes anaemic, bass behaviour began to raise its head. The rather too obviously contained and lightweight bass led to the conclusion that the Kenwood sounded thin and raw with some tracks, but this appears to be no more than a spotlighting effect as mid/treble sound quality is well above average.

In most respects deeply average, the DPF-R6030 does just what it says on the tin. There is a sound quality hit to pay for its ability to juggle five discs at once, but taking price into account, it represents decent value.

Kenwood Electronics UK ☎ 01923 816444
Reviewed in HFC 204

Nakamichi MB-10 Music Bank

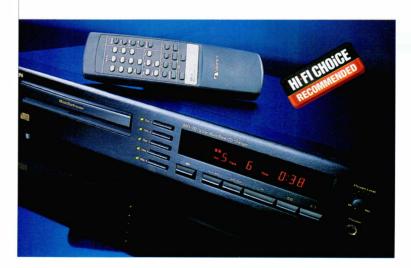
MULTI-DISC CD PLAYER £399.99 $\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,$

The Nakamichi MB-10 MusicBank CD changer is a little different to the norm, with the emphasis here firmly on 'MusicBank' and 'little'. The MusicBank stacking mechanism stores up to five discs one above another, instead of around the edge of an inevitably enormous rotating 'carousel'. As well as being extremely compact, changing from disc to disc is also very quick. The mechanism is indeed very slick, and the control system places no undue obstacles in the user's path. Indeed this was the most smartly designed player in the group by a long chalk.

There is no equivocation with this player. It sounds as good as it looks, amply justifying the above average pricing. It has a particularly fresh, lively and detailed presentation, leavened with stability and solidity. Instrumental timbre is clean and realistic through the midband, with just a hint of a metallic, too keenly polished edge in the treble. At the opposite end of the band, the Nakamichi was occasionally guilty of being on the lightweight side of neutral. This was a common if not universal finding with this group, but the absence of weight and – as it was sometimes perceived – muscularity was far from severe, and often wasn't an issue at all. This is not just a good-sounding player; it's a thoroughly likeable one

Although a little more costly than most multi-disc players, and modest in terms of features, the MB-10 is compact, easy to use and engaging musically. Despite a one-off transport 'glitch', this model clearly deserves to be Recommended.

BBG Distribution **2** 020 8863 9117 Reviewed in HFC 204



CD Players



Marantz SA-1

SACD PLAYER £5,000.00 △

Marantz describes the SA-1 as 'showpiece model', and at £5.000 this is no idle boast for a substantial machine constructed from zinc and aluminium castings and supported by a copper-plated steel chassis. Sonically the SA-1 is an astonishing player. By communicating a wealth of unforced and natural-sounding detail, the SA-1 succeeds in bringing you a step closer to the music. So how does the SA-1 rank as a plain vanilla CD player? In practice, rather highly. So highly in fact, that its subjective performance here is knocking on the door of SACD.

Listening to hybrid discs demonstrated that SACD can offer the 'instant upgrade' that's still sadly lacking with DVD-A at present. There's no wholesale change here, but SACD just seems to open the musical window a little wider and deeper, expanding the level of information still further. Just when CD sounded very good indeed, seemingly lacking no relevant detail, SACD quietly raises the bar to expose hitherto hidden nuances that leave you scratching your head in bewilderment.

As it stands, the SA-1 seems to offer the best of all worlds. Not only will it lift the performance of your existing CD collection, but it also provides a platform to begin collecting SACDs. Marantz Hi-Fi UK 2 01753 680868

Reviewed in HFC 208

Technics SL-MC7

MULTI-DISC CD PLAYER £299.99

The SI-MC7 can accommodate an entire collection of discs for instant access. It's a HI FI CHOICE little taller than regular players, but otherwise looks deceptively ordinary. However, the whole front panel hinges down to reveal a cavernous internal space capable of storing 111 discs in a long line, jukebox fashion (110, plus one 'single disc play' slot reserved for listening to a disc without disturbing the permanently stored collection). A number of features are designed to manage a large disc collection. Random play can deal with up to 250 tracks, which is a great party feature.

Musically, this is a classic seven-out-of-10 product. Strengths in one test track included high levels of detail and strong separation between singer and instrumental parts, and an equally clear demarcation between the direct sound and the reverberant soundfield. A recording of Ravel's Piano Trio sounded airy and spacious, again with plenty of detail, but on the negative side, the Technics sounded very flat after the reference players, with little sense of differentiation in the depth plane, and a rather inorganic sense of musical expression. Detailed but a little crude is a fair summation. Still, it's not a bad sounding player, especially taking price into account, and ironically it should stand easy comparison with some of its single disc siblings. Not the best of the multi-disc players, the SL-MC7 is nevertheless a basically clean, lively performer with an enormous disc capacity and an attractive selling price.

Panasonic UK 2 0990 357357 Reviewed in HFC 204



Sony SCD-XB940

SACD PLAYER £549.99 ▽

The SCD-XB940 is one of the first players in the world capable of playing SACDs, yet it looks just like any CD player – except simpler, with fewer controls. The only distinguishing features are discreet SACD and DSD badges, and display recognition of an SACD. Unlike earlier Sony SACD players, this one starts playing an SACD or CD as quickly as most CD players.

As a CD player, it is quintessentially Sony, with the benefit of CD Text, and a five-way digital filter. CD data can be extracted from optical or electrical sockets, but this is another option closed to SACD at present, as no DSD interface has yet been defined. Physical build has been stripped down to a bare minimum, and the loading drawer in particular is interestingly bendy, but the finish is good.

With both disc types, the Sony is characteristically refined and detailed, with an agile and tuneful, but not particularly heavyweight, bass, and could also be described as lacking drive and pace. SACD performance was assessed using hybrid CD/SACD discs, and in every case, switching from CD to SACD meant a richer and wider, subtler and sweeter tonality, a more three-dimensional quality, and significantly enhanced timing. Switching deliberately back to CD was discouraged by the flat and inorganic sound, which is a full vindication of the complaints that have

been levelled against CD since its introduction.

While it's not a fully fledged multi-channel player, this is a good CD player, and demonstrates that even at this price level, SACD is much better than CD Sony UK 2 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 206

9 1 4.020 HI FI CHOICE

Sony SCD-777ES

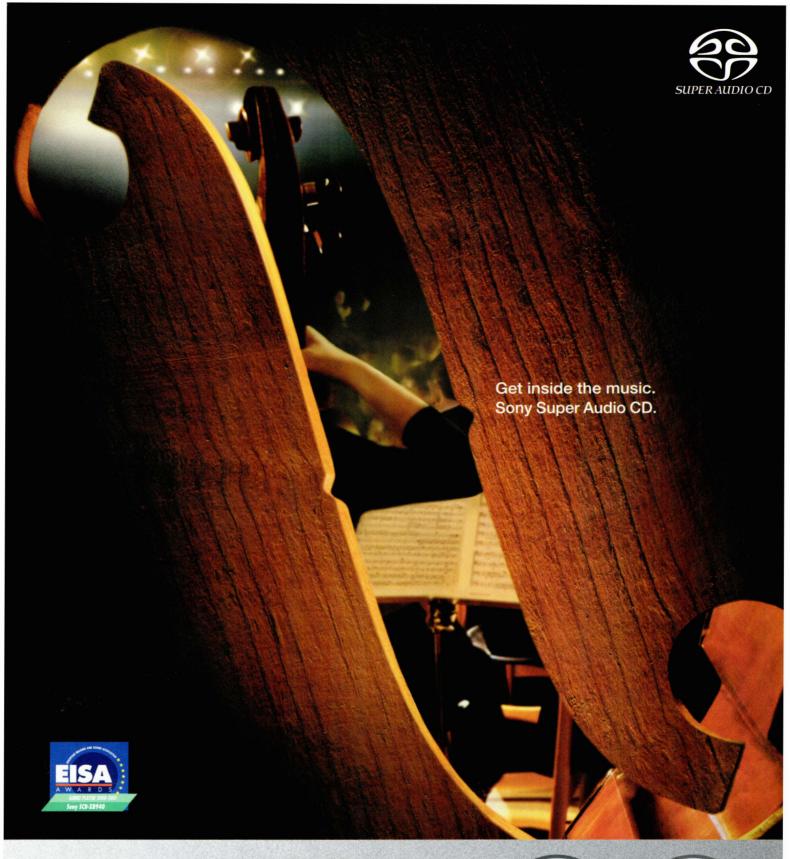
SACD PLAYER £1,700.00 \wedge

The SCD-777ES is a very attractive and meaty SACD machine for the money: 25kg of finely finished disc player should not cost £1,700, and one is forced to surmise that Sony is foregoing profitability for the sake of long-term format success. Even if you didn't intend to play SACDs this is a bargain as a CD player. Operationally it has some of the slowest TOC reading and playback starting we've encountered: suffice to say this is not a player for the impatient.

With a very limited amount of SA software available at the time of writing, I have to say that SACD does not offer a chalk-and-cheese upgrade over CD: what SACD brings to the party is a refinement and broadening of what we have with CD. It's capable of considerable presence and energy, and is also extremely natural. A whole layer of digital style distortion has been removed: the insidious and nowadays extremely well disguised edge that CD adds to the picture but which nonetheless is not apparent with vinyl or live music.

The SCD-777ES is also a very fine CD player, and fantastic value in this role alone, so the ability to play this intriguing new format is like the icing on the cake. I recommend you consider taking advantage of Sony's mighty marketing budget by auditioning one of these golden beasts straight away.

Sonv UK 2 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 198



No other music system gets you closer. Sony's new Super Audio CD (winner of the EISA European Audio Player of the year 2000-2001 award) provides you with unrivalled sound reproduction thanks to Direct Stream Digital (DSD). A clever little 1-bit recording system that samples audio signals at a rate 64 times higher than conventional compact disc. Giving you a dynamic range of over 120db and an unprecedented bandwidth of over 100kHz. SACDs also benefit from 6 times the capacity of regular CDs and incorporate a reserved space for non-audio data such as text information which can highlight track, disc and artist name. And because all Sony SACD players are compatible with conventional CDs, there's no need to replace your CD collection. To see Sony's range of Super Audio CD players visit the Sony website. To hear one, why not try your nearest philharmonic orchestra.



DVD Players



Alba DVD 103 DVD PLAYER £147.00 △

The Alba DVD 103 typically costs just under £150, which makes it one of the least costly players on the market at the time of writing. Made in Taiwan, it appears to be adequately constructed, and it supports a wide range of video standards, including RGB, S-Video (via Y/C) and composite. Rear panel socketry includes a Scart, a 5.1 channel set of analogue outputs, a separate stereo output, optical and electrical digital outputs. There's a Dolby Digital decoder, though options for speaker size and bass management are limited. Features include a zoom, and the player is capable of reading any disc with any regional code straight from the box.

Perhaps inevitably, the Alba was not a particular success on audition. Musically it sounded rather soggy, with little presence, life or vitality, and results were consistent with the kind of loss of immediacy often encountered with higher than normal levels of jitter. Picture quality was below par, with some moiré and a rather grey overall cast. Some weaving of angled lines was noticed, with higher than normal levels of pixellation in some moving scenes.

It's difficult to know how to sum up a machine which is quite obviously superb value for money by any standards, but which becomes less appealing as a substitute for a hi-fi CD player. Recommended then, on the basis that it has to be the best £150's worth you can buy, but not necessarily because it will answer all your musical needs.

Alba **☎** 020 8787 3111 *Reviewed in* HFC 207

Encore DV-450

The £200 Encore DV-450 has a relatively plain front panel, with all but the most basic controls available only via the remote control. This Region 2 DVD player is easily hackable to work with Regions 1 through 6, and has an on-board Dolby Digital decoder. As well as handling CD-Rs and RWs, the Encore will also play CDs recorded as MP3 files, and dts datastreams can be delivered through the digital audio outputs.

Video scanning is available up to 30x normal play speed, and there's a multi-speed slow motion facility, plus a pixellated 2x and 4x zoom. The single Scart socket can be programmed for RGB, S-Video or composite video, and other connections include an S-Video Y/C socket, two composite outputs and two pairs of stereo/mixed audio outputs, as well as the usual optical and electrical digital outputs.

Musically the Encore was on firm ground, impressing as an inviting player, nicely detailed, although a little messy with more complex material. It showed some heavy-handedness with certain recordings, particularly simple acoustic material that would normally reproduce with a more tangibly physical feel. There were some limitations. The Encore was the only player on test to trip up with some of the technical wizardry of *The Matrix*. There was also some moiré, high resolution stills looked a tad unstable, and colours a little grey. Not quite the cheapest DVD player around, it's well equipped, and for many it will be more than worth premium.

Encore Direct 2 01895 450450



Philips DVD750

DVD PLAYER £280.00 >

The £280 DVD750 looks – not to put too fine a point on it – cheap and plasticky, but the remote handset is excellent. It has all the usual widgets, but unusually is equipped with a second laser to replay CD-R and CD-RW discs. It lacks some of the picture tweaking found elsewhere, although a ten-bit video processor is employed. There are two Scart sockets, composite and S-Video outputs, but the Scarts do not stretch to S-Video or RGB.

With a slow control response, a grindingly noisy loader and other mechanical noise too, and with its acres of shiny plastic, this DVD player does not immediately impress. Which just shows how appearances can deceive. Picture quality is notably stable, with good colour and definition which will come as a revelation to those who set their standards by VHS.

But it's sound quality we're most interested here, and the Philips springs a real surprise, not just with a jitter result that's near state of the art, but with a standard of sound reproduction as dynamic and responsive to subtle dynamic shadings as a CD



player. It can sound slightly raucous when extended, and with complex choral material the Philips becomes slightly untidy and lacking in subtlety and cleanness. Overall, the DVD750 has a level of audio resolution and soundstaging from compact disc in particular that makes a credible hi-fi/home cinema crossover component, as well as an affordable one.

Philips 2 020 8680 4444
Reviewed in HFC 198



Primare V20

DVD PLAYER £999.99 ▽

At first sight, the V20 looks a tad out of place alongside other DVD-A and SACD machines, and in fact closely resembles any of Primare's CD players, with the standard Primare fascia and control system, consisting of a bank of six buttons and a rather cramped display. This video player was designed by audiophiles, and pays more than the usual lip service to matters musical, though it won't output 96kHz from its digital output. There is no Scart socket, but instead there's a set of separate component video outputs, plus composite and S-Video outputs, and optical and electrical digital audio outputs. The Philips video section is interfaced by a Primare designed buffer, and all D/A converters and audio electronics are kept well away from the transport and laser assembly. It has a plasticky and not very well laid out remote handset, but the player was particularly quick responding to control commands.

DVD-Video players don't generally make very good compact disc players, but given their purist audio leanings we expected something more from Primare, and were not disappointed. It's not a great CD player but, unlike most DVDs, it's far from being a poor one. Its slightly soft-focus presentation is in tune with other Primare components, and the V20 is smooth, easy and articulate. It also gave a particularly clean, vivid picture. The levels of motion artefacts were a little higher than some, but the V20 was sharp and detailed, with excellent black level.

Pioneer DV-525

DVD PLAYER £399.00 △

Pioneer's 'entry-level' DV-525 is able to read CD-R discs and CD-RW discs, and can also deliver a 24-bit/96kHz digital signal for outboard processing (an esoteric facility given the paucity of 24/96 audio software). The Scart socket can now output S-Video (supplementing the S-Video socket) and RGB. The remote handset, however, is a super-concentrated mass of little buttons with no display, joysticks or other sexy gimmicks.

Among the best of the DVD players when assessed with compact discs, the DV-525 was variously praised for its "good dynamics and piano tone", its "very musical quality, with strong imagery, textures and instrumental tone colours", its "solid impact" and for "a level of brilliance not heard in the others". This is indeed an excellent player: detailed and clean sounding, although the bass is a little on the thin side, and perhaps as a result imagery tends to lack depth and space.

Although ultimately it still only ranks alongside a decent budget CD player, it's one of just a handful of DVD players which manage that feat. It's fast, lucid and detailed, and though the bass is on the lean side, it's refined enough, and rises to the occasion well with some of the more complex material we tried. It is no less impressive as a video player, with average or slightly above average picture definition and colour, and the ability to deal with 24/96 recordings and CD-R/RWs places it in a class of its own at the price.

Pioneer High Fidelity ☎ 01753 789789 Reviewed in HFC 202





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Sonv DVP-S7700

DVD PLAYER £800.00 \triangle

The £800 DVP-S7700 is a superbly built, high grade DVD player that understands Dolby Digital, MPEG-2 and dts, all of which are delivered from the electrical or optical digital outputs. One of the two Scart sockets can provide RGB component video, and Y/C component video is available from an array of three phono sockets, along with S- and composite video to boot. The articulated mechanism which covers the loading drawer is a tour de force, and the case itself is solid and heavy, and day-to-day operation is aided by a well equipped remote handset.

By any standards this is an impressive machine. Discs are handled smoothly, and everything about the Sony screams quality. As a CD player, this was one of relatively few to pass muster, and despite a rather lean, dry overall balance, the Sony could easily be mistaken for a respectable (though not an £800) CD player. Ultimately it sounded slightly dulled and lacking transparency, but was also notable for its easy precision and stable, sharply presented, well focused imagery. There was none of the greyness and spread that afflicted some, and the state of the art jitter result is almost certainly a powerful contributory factor.

This is a costly player even taking build quality into account, but it really does deliver a standard of picture and sound quality that is out of the ordinary. Its easy, confident and highly articulate sound quality is an excellent demonstration that CD and DVD can mix in a single box. Sony (UK) 2 0990 11 1999 Reviewed in HFC 198

Toshiba SD-100E

DVD PLAYER £230.00 ▽

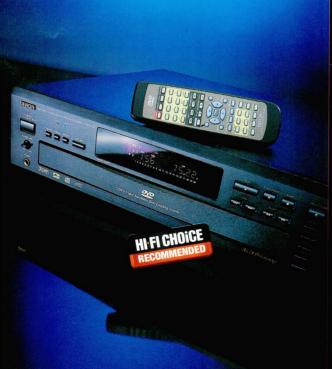
One of four new Toshiba models, the SD-100E is one of a number of DVD-Video players claiming enhanced video resolution, but perhaps of more direct interest to HFC readers, it also claims superior audio performance as a CD player, with a wider dynamic range and lower harmonic distortion than usual. The player also boasts what Toshiba describes disarmingly as "a wealth of digital trickery", and proved capable of playing CD-RWs. There is no on-board surround sound decoder, but Dolby Digital and dts data are available from the digital output sockets. Other socketry is limited to composite and S-Video, plus a Scart.

The SD-100E was not disliked on test, but neither did it excel, and seems to us a rather average player. Picture quality was one the stronger points, while musically the hands-on testing suggested that the panel got it about right. It is a modestly decent sounding CD player, but without the authority and dynamics of a good CD player, and there were clear indications of increasing congestion and spatial flatness when the music got going.

This player can be upgraded merely by playing a disc that alters the onboard firmware, but it is hard to see what practical use it will be, still a degree of future proofing can do no harm. What you're left with is a perfectly adequate but unexciting DVD player which sounds about as good when playing CDs as most DVD players – that is, not very – and which has rather average video picture quality too. Toshiba UK 🕿 01276 62222

Reviewed in HFC 207





Denon DVM-3700

MULTI-DISC DVD PLAYER £999.99 <

Denon's DVM-3700 is a five-disc 'carousel' changer, handling CD or DVD software. As a DVD-Video player it's fully up to date, recognising dts discs and delivering the data through electrical and optical digital outputs. The video signal is available through composite and S-Video outputs, and also Y/C component video, but little has been done to customise the model for the UK (other than Region 2 compatibility of course), leading to the omission of RGB and Scart outputs. Video processing is 10-bit 27MHz, now the industry standard for quality players, while the audio from DVDs is handled by twin 24-bit D/A converters. Simply as an example of electro-mechanical engineering, the DVM-3700 is impressive stuff.

Although a little fussy about disc cleanliness, the Denon performed well. As a DVD player, picture quality was a little soft, but as a CD player, it performed above expectations - indeed it managed to outperform all but the best of the (admittedly much cheaper) CD-only multi-players in its compact disc-playing role. It sounds colourful and varied, with better anchored imagery, and a good variety of tonal hue and instrumental texture. It lacks only the propulsive drive and physical edge available from a truly top class CD player, but it really excelled in the upper midband and treble, delivering its message with unusual clarity, verve and presence. It is an enjoyable player to listen to, and to listen through. With the caveat that DVD changer prices are likely come down in due course, this is an impressive player by current standards.

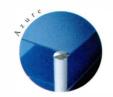
Hayden Labs 🕿 01753 888447 Reviewed in HFC 204

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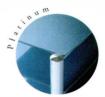
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Turntables



Ever since the digital dawn, the imminent demise of vinyl has been predicted. CD has long been the dominant music carrier, and the emergence of DVD-A and SACD has heralded the digital disc's latest evolutionary phase. But the black stuff is proving stubborn; turntables are still being made and they're better than ever. **Is this vinyl's golden age?**

So what is it that makes this cumbersome old format so enduring in these convenience-obsessed, vinyl-starved times? On a practical level, many of us have irreplaceable record collections and need something to play them on, but the appeal goes deeper. There's the satisfyingly tactile nature of software and hardware, the hands-on interaction beloved of DJs and hi-fi nuts alike; the beauty of tunrtable mechanics and the gorgeous kinetic sculptures formed by the most desirable designs. And most of all there's the sound – CD may offer ultra-low noise and a flat frequency response, but it can't match the dynamics and timing of a serious turntable.

When choosing a turntable, decide how important records are to you and set your budget accordingly. At the lower end of the scale, some models offer automatic or semi-automatic operation for convenience, but few of the type compete sonically. The best entry level turntables are usually manual, even down to the user shifting the belt on the spindle to change speeds. But further up the ladder are some excellent models with electronic speed change – handy if you regularly switch from 33.3rpm to 45rpm.

Some turntables come without a tonearms and cartridge, so you may need to budget for them. However, that's part of the fascination of a good turnatble – there's so much scope for customising and improving sound. These elements are crucial to performance, so talk to your dealer and use our Directory recommendations to help find the right combination.

When choosing a cartridge, make sure it's compatible with your amp's phono stage. Some only take moving magnet designs, as opposed to the more costly but generally superior moving coil type, which need additional amplification to raise their signal to line level. If your amp doesn't have a phono stage built-in, or you're looking for an effective upgrade, an off-board phono stage can make a huge difference to performance.

Jargon Buster

CARTRIDGE: Tracks the walls of the record groove with a flexibly-mounted stylus. The movement of the stylus in relation to the catridge body generates the electrical signal.

PLATTER: The circular platform that supports the record, usually driven by a motor via a rubber belt. Sound can vary with different platter materials and weights.

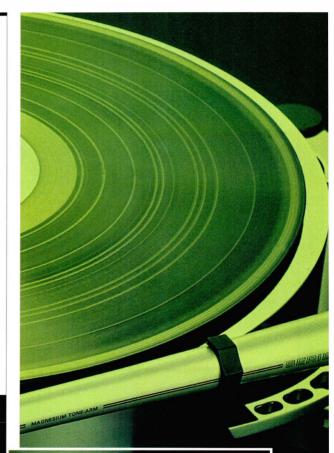
PLINTH: The turntable's base which supports the motor and suspension (if used).

SUBCHASSIS: Platform on which the platter and armboard are mounted in a suspended deck in order to isolate them from motor borne and external vibration.

SUSPENSION: This mechanically separates the platter, arm and cartridge from the outside world using springs or rubber, and sometimes materials like carbon fibre.

TONEARM: A slender tube, usually pivoted, which sweeps the stylus across a record in an arc. As with all turntable components, the material and level of engineering are critical to performance.

PHONO STAGE: This is necessary in order to equalise and amplify the low level signal from a cartridge to line level. Can be built into the amp or be an entirely separate unit.

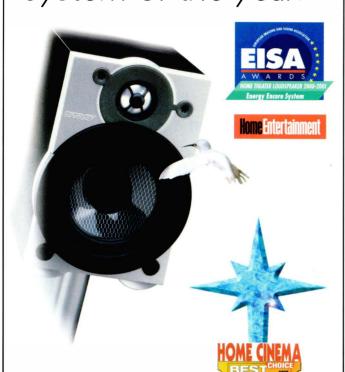


Hints & Tips

A turntable is a very sensitive device that measures mechanical vibrations right across the audio band. Even with good isolation, turntables are significantly affected by the surface upon which they are sitting. Experiment by trying alternatives if at all possible. Ensure the supporting surface is level and use whatever means is on the deck itself to level the platter; suspension systems often require tuning for optimum results.

Careful alignment is important if you're planning to install a cartridge yourself. Use a proper protractor and take particular care with alignment to the inner grooves of the record as this is where errors are magnified.

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TURNTABLE £425.00/£169.00 \

Audio Note's £425 TT1 comes optionally fitted with either of two Rega-based tonearms, both of which are fully re-wired by Audio Note. Our sample had the less expensive ARM1, at a total price of £594. The TT1 uses an acrylic platter and hub, and in outline bears a marked resemblance to the 'classic' Systemdek IIX. All is studiedly plain and unadorned, though usefully compact, and while it features a full floating subchassis layout, that's about it for frills. Should one need to, the subchassis is easily levelled using three allen bolts.

A turntable at this price has no right to sound this good or involving. Auditioned with the supplied Audio Note IQ1 cartridge, the TT1 delivers a beautifully open coherent sound with impressively wide dynamic range and bandwidth. It does lack a little bottom end weight and warmth, and the perceived balance is consequently dry and a little 'forward', but the midband's openness and dynamic vividness is quite exceptional, giving voices great expression, power and subtlety.

True, it can get a bit edgy and in-yer-face with some (e.g. modern, heavily compressed) recordings. This turntable doesn't paper over any cracks, but that's what hi-fi should be about, and for the most part it's thoroughly seductive and communicative, sounding particularly 'clean' and natural with acoustic material. Audio Note's TT1 might not be the prettiest, or the easiest to use, but it delivers a real taste of true high end performance at a realistically affordable price.

Audio Note (UK) 2 01273 220511 Reviewed in HFC 203

#### **NAD** 533

TURNTABLE £220.00 ▽

NAD's £220 533 turntable is a close relation of the Rega Planar 2, and comes ready fitted with a modest Goldring-sourced moving magnet cartridge. A budget device oriented towards performance rather than convenience, there's little in the way of frills, but critical components like the platter and tonearm bearings maintain very close engineering tolerances. It's sombrely styled in black and dark grey, and the tonearm is the simplest and least expensive of Rega's RB-series – but still benefits from the structural integrity of the single-casting tube/headshell. Initial set-up shouldn't take more than ten minutes, and, speed change apart, operation is very simple and intuitive. However, do take some care in siting, as its 'solid' construction provides little protection against external vibrations; a wall shelf arrangement will probably give the best results.

Given the low cost, it's hardly surprising the sound quality is a little coarse and crude, but it gives a rather good account of itself for the price, with a pleasing overall coherence which is pretty effective at getting the musical message across. The top end seems a little lacking in ultimate extension and transparency, and the overall impression is of a sound which is a little small – in scale, weight and dynamic range – but which keeps all the most important bits hanging together pretty well. It handles small scale material better than the very complex, which has a tendency to get a bit congested, but it always remains cheerfully communicative, swinging along with enthusiasm. A simple, well-founded turntable, this NAD delivers an impressive level of sound quality at a very modest price.

Lenbrook UK 2 01908 319360





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#### **VPI** HW19 Junior

TURNTABLE £650.00 >

An American company best known in Britain for its record cleaning machines, VPI's HW-19 Junior turntable is unusual in being upgradeable. This Junior version costs £550 (£650 with the supplied Rega RB300 tonearm), but can undergo two substantial upgrades at later stages if desired, mainly to the main bearing, suspension system and platter. It's a large and hefty unit, built into a solid hardwood plinth, with four Sorbothane pucks providing the suspension. The platter is thick acrylic, weighing some 7lbs, and a clamping system closely mechanically couples disc to the platter.

This VPI delivers quite a big, generous sound with a decent dynamic range and good overall tonal balance. Initially, when placed on the metal frame of a wall bracket (being too large to sit on the shelf proper), the sound was marred by noticeable 'thickening' and upper bass emphasis. When moved onto a large,

heavy wooden cabinet, the bottom end sounded altogether cleaner, less lumpy and with less overhang. There's still some loss of precision and weight on the more complex dance beats, but the bottom end is adequate enough and doesn't get in the way.

The tonearm takes very good care of the mid and high frequencies, bringing pleasing coherence to the voice band, and the whole thing hangs together pretty well musically, and is commendably free from 'nasties'. In all, the HW 19 Junior is an impressively neutral and capable performer – bulky to accommodate perhaps,

stage upgradeability.

Cherished Record Company 2 01579 363603

Reviewed in HFC 203



### Allaerts MC1B CARTRIDGES £1,295.00 △

Jan Allaerts is a Belgian who started out repairing hi-fi in the late 70s, gradually becoming more and more of a cartridge specialist before eventually making the leap from mechanic to manufacturer, incorporating the best design elements from his wide experience into his own creations. He found that it's the details that count: the magnetic pole pieces are hand carved, for example, and the box-shaped aluminium body is internally plated with 24-carat gold, forming a Faraday cage to keep out RF noise. The coil wire is too fine to be wound by machine, while the cantilever suspension is designed to avoid perishing. Of the four Allaerts cartridges (priced from £850 to £2,995), this £1,295 MC1 Boron features an alnico magnet, copper/silver coil wire, a Boron/Sapphire cantilever, and tracks at 2g.

Mounted in the trusty SME Model 20A and connected to the Tom Evans Audio Groove phono stage, the MC1 Boron made a positive impression from the out, delivering alarming bass power alongside broad dynamic and tonal variety. It also revealed timbre, string tone and presence with considerable aplomb. Compared to CD it had a slight softness, but better timing, different imaging and greater subtlety of tone. And what it lacked in bite, it made up for with strong image depth, and a very high degree of transparency. This is a very, very good cartridge. I imagine there are models that might equal it, but would be most surprised if there were any that could beat it at the price.

### **Well Tempered** Reference

Arguably the least conventional vinyl-spinners on the planet, the Well Tempered range starts below £2,000, but this top-of-the-line Reference costs a hefty £5,500. Its large and massive plinth has a sandwich construction, while the motor is a separate standalone unit that sits inside a cutout in the plinth. The most extraordinary part of this record player is the tonearm, which in place of conventional bearings is suspended from a gantry by a couple of 'fishing line' filaments. Below the arm tube a 'paddle' sits inside a bath of silicone fluid, giving a 'bearing' free of play, 'chatter' and friction, but with very heavy damping. Set up is a little intimidating, but once done it's a delight to use, with excellent shock resistance. The turntable bearing is as bizarre as the tonearm's, using a trestle-type arrangement again to eliminate bearing play or chatter.

but particularly interesting to enthusiasts for its two-

Auditioned primarily with the rather wonderful Dynavector XV-1 cartridge (see page 37), this record player sounds exceptionally clean and controlled, if a little constrained in extreme bass and treble. It actually makes vinyl sound remarkably un-vinyl-like, as it seems to 'clean up' the signals from the cartridge to a remarkable degree. The result is certainly more CD-like in terms of balance and coloration, but still retains vinyl's magic. The sound might be a little too heavily damped for some tastes, but it's hard to imagine a turntable which gives cleaner reproduction from vinyl, or which tells you more about how your recordings were made.









### **Dynavector** DRT XV-1 CARTRIDGES £2,500.00 $\triangle$

At two and a half grand, the DRT XV-1 is the most extreme cartridge Dynavector has produced, and one of the most radical looking to boot. The front elevation reveals a deep 'V' cartridge yoke, with stabilising coils. These combined with a flux equalising piece in the magnetic gap are said to produce an extremely homogenous and linear magnetic field, generated by no fewer than eight alnico magnets, around coils which produce a modest 0.3mV of specific output. It weighs a substantial 13.5 grams, is equipped with a boron cantilever and line contact stylus, and rated downforce is 2g.

Initial sonic impressions were extremely positive, and didn't really change whatever I clamped on the platter. Its balance is 'darker' than the Grasshopper: the top end seems a little shy, and the bass is simply prodigious in depth and quality. It's also very sensitive to dynamic changes within the music, and likes nothing more than some heavyweight material to get its teeth into. The space resolved between and behind performers was never less than extraordinary, and timbre is equally well reproduced, with both instruments and voices showing depth and colour that's usually denied them.

This cartridge is pretty damn special, it's extremely natural in balance but is capable of reproducing every nuance that the record player lets it get out of the groove, and with a solidity and assurance that makes some of the competition seem nervous. If you have a decent record collection and matching turntable, I suggest you audition this remarkable beast.

Pear Audio 2 01665 830862 Reviewed in HFC 208

### Pass Labs Xono

PHONO STAGE £2.995.00 ▽

Clearly well into 'exotica' territory at £2,995, this beast doesn't have the most attractive exterior, but is immaculately put together, and features a wide selection of audiophile parts inside. It's particularly flexible too, with both MM and MC inputs, adjustable gain for MC, input impedance variable in very small steps from 5 Ohms to 1,000 Ohms, and balanced outputs. Maximum gain is unusually high, and circuitry apparently avoids feedback, with J-FETs at the input, and full dual-mono power supplies.

This phono amp delivers the kind of soundstage that most of us simply learn to live without: deeper, broader and more precise than the run-of-the-mill. There's no feeling of either lack or excess in the bass, which is strong but never forced, and treble is open and cleanly extended. Noise is low and there's little to interfere with the listening experience and everything to draw one into it. Listening to CDs via an inverse RIAA filter, the sound was rather larger than life, the inescapable conclusion being that the XOno actually adds something, as it made CDs sound more like the best points of LP.

In the lab, the XOno gave great results in all areas but distortion, where it added quite low but not necessarily negligible levels (around 0.02% to 0.1%) of low harmonics – just enough to add the smallest amount of 'euphonic coloration' perhaps. While it's not strictly accurate, it's so lovely to listen to that we heartily Recommend it.

Zentek Music 2 01892 539595 Reviewed in HFC 201



### **Pro-ject** Phono Box PHONO STAGE £40.00 ▽

Pro-Ject's £40 Phono Box contains a surprising number of components in its diminutive case, and is remarkably flexible. It can handle MC cartridges (although admittedly the gain is only suited to those with an output of at least 0.25mV nominal), and it even has adjustable input impedance. Changing gain and impedance must be done inside the case, by moving jumper plugs, and the 'wall wart' power supply has enough voltage to offer decent overload headroom. Construction relies on electrical connections to support the circuit board, and I wish Pro-Ject had put the earthing post some-where sensible – as it is, it's too far for the earthing leads on some tonearm cables to reach.

As an MM stage this is a modestly capable unit. There are no glaring colorations in the sound (and indeed the frequency range is largely unrestricted, apart from a slight lack of bass weight at times), but there's not ever so much detail to be found, and imaging is decidedly small-scale and imprecise. Still, it's listenable, and a perfectly acceptable accessory for an amplifier without a phono stage – those fitted to most budget integrated amps sound much like this.



The MC input sounds broadly similar, but is arguably even woollier and a bit on the hissy side. It also hummed badly at first use, but a little modification largely cured this problem (and not many people would use a £40 phono stage with an MC cartridge anyway). Ultimately, this is a perfectly honourable product, which is also very cheap.

Henley Designs 2 01491 834700 Reviewed in HFC 201





#### **Primare** R-20

PHONO STAGE £449.99 ▽

There's a definite Scandinavian appearance to this smart unit, an understated elegance and practicality that extends to all aspects of the design. The back panel is neatly and intelligently laid out, with the input impedance and gain switches clearly labelled; the only internal control is a jumper link which can be used to raise MM gain if necessary. (Be aware that the impedance switch also affects MM cartridges,



which won't work at all well if set to 10 Ohms!) MC gain is a little low and may not suit the lowest output levels. Primare has included the mains transformer in the main chassis, with a little shielding against hum. The audio circuits, using both discrete transistors and op-amps, are mounted on a pair of relatively small circuit boards.

Sonically, the R-20 put in a good performance. Its weakness lies with dense, heavy music, which tends to lose precision, coherence and bass, but under most conditions it has an even-handed balance which makes for pleasingly natural sounds from all instruments and voices, alongside very good imaging. It's probably at its best with what one might call 'more civilised' kinds of music, but it can still handle the raw excitement of rock or a lively jazz band with confidence. The slightly imperfect precision had little effect under such circumstances, only really surfacing when one tries to hear every part in a large operatic ensemble, for example. The measurements were fine, although hum is just audible. This is not quite a phono stage for all seasons, but it's sufficiently capable to merit Recommendation.

CSE 2 01423 359054 Reviewed in HFC 201



#### **Tom Evans** The Groove

PHONO STAGE £1,500.00 △

Tom Evans has designed for many companies in the past, and this new product bears some family similarity to amps like the Michell Iso (HFC 189). The £1,500 Groove's casework is built of dark Perspex, and the sockets on the back panel are well spaced apart and clearly labelled. The inside has high quality op-amps, and many regulator ICs. Everything is true dual-mono, right down to the twin mains transformers, and construction is hand-built, but solid enough. Gain is fixed and suitable for all MC cartridges up to a nominal 0.4mV nominal output.

This amplifier clearly aims for the whole, unvarnished truth. In a most critical test (comparing music off CD via an inverse RIAA filter), it was just possible to hear a tiny bit of coloration on bright sounds such as trumpet; however, that's neither pronounced nor in the least bit distracting. Otherwise, it's hard to find any fault in the tonal balance: The Groove handles the full sweep from bass to high treble seamlessly. Detail is among the best, only very slightly compromised, and imaging is precise and broad, with good front-to-back placement. Solo vocals could seem a bit harsh, and on speakers with good bass a hint of hum may just be audible in silences. There's a very small treble lift, which may tie in with the coloration, but otherwise all's well, and bandwidth exceeds the audio range by three octaves at each end. The price is rather high, but Recommendation still seems to be justified.

Tom Evans 2 01443 833570 Reviewed in HFC 201

#### **Tom Evans** Microgroove

**PHONO STAGE** £399.00/£699.00 ▽

The Groove is a phono stage of revelatory resolve, but at £1,500 it isn't exactly cheap, so what can Evans do for those with more limited means? The Microgroove, that's what. It is, in effect, a stereo version of The Groove's dual-mono design, amalgamating its twin circuit boards into one and employing less costly components in a few key areas. Two versions are available, the basic Microgroove at £399 and a more costly version with Lithos voltage regulation at £699. An Intel-style badge distinguishes this from its cheaper counterpart, suggesting a Lithos inside will do for your music collection what a Pentium III does for a PC!

Available for both moving coil and moving magnet cartridges, I opted for moving coil and listened to both basic and Lithos versions. Immediately prior to this review, I hadn't listened to vinyl for a while, and the Microgroove quickly reminded me what I was missing. Never has this system dug so much detail from the grooves of my much-valued record collection as it does with the £699 Lithosequipped Microgroove. From Hendrix to House of Love, it brings pin-sharp focus to each note and rhythm, with every edge and nuance placed in sharper relief. It is fundamentally honest, so the ride isn't always smooth, but its analytical ability doesn't come at the expense of musicality. It just makes it that much more engrossing. The character of the basic £399 version is similar, albeit with less space and resolution. Ultimately, both are exceptionally good for the money.

Tom Evans 2 01443 833570 Reviewed in HFC 206



### LIVING VOICE



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### Recorders



The digital revolution has ushered in a new age of music recording. Bit-perfect copies, instant edits and hard-wearing blank media have made clunky old cassette decks a thing of the past. Perhaps you want to make compilations of your favourite tracks, or digitise a treasured vinyl collection? **So which format should you choose – MiniDisc or recordable CD?** 

#### MINIDISC

It took a while, but Sony's flexible little format is now officially a big seller on the high street.

Limited pre-recorded material is available but that's not the point – MD's raison d'être is its versatility.

For a start, you can record and re-record many times over. And its compact, hard-wearing discs are comparatively cheap for a re-writable digital format. What's more, its editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations.

However, recording quality is below that of recordable CD. MiniDisc uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and general ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of a bog-standard cassette deck – clean and hiss-free.

#### RECORDABLE CD

When Pioneer first brought CD recording to consumers a few years back, buyers had to shell out well over £1,000 to enjoy the experience of making their own CDs; now you can indulge for as little as two or three hundred quid. There are even twin decks available for one-box disc-to-disc dubbing and the likes of Pioneer and TEAC are incorporating CD recorders into mini and micro systems.

The current generation of CD recorders all support CD-RW, a re-writable CD launched by Phillips. You have a choice of two disc types on which to record – CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record on them once. CD-RW discs are more expensive, but you can re-record on them hundreds of times.

Although the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, recordable CD is not as flexible as MiniDisc. However, recording quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is effectively identical to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but many have trouble with CD-RW (though you can play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R disc on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

#### **Jargon Buster**

ATRAC: Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding. A data reduction algorithm that reduces the size of a digital file by discarding data deemed non-essential to the end result. Similar in function to MP3; there are various versions of ATRAC in existence.

**SCMS:** The copy management system employed by CD-R/RW and MiniDisc. For the user, it means you can't make a copy of a copy.

**SAMPLE RATE CONVERTER:** Some digital sources operate at a different sample rate to CD's 44.1kHz. For that reason, MiniDisc decks and CD recorders incorporate sample rate conversion. However, some recorders unnecessarily pass all data, including stuff from CD, through the converter. This can be to the detriment of the final recording, so look out for models where this can be by-passed.

**FINALISE:** A process carried out at the end of CD recording, whereby the disc's Table of Contents is permanently burned (a process that can be reversed with CD-RW). This is essential if the disc is to be playable on ordinary CD players.



t's suitable for digital (i.e. a 75 Ohm

recording digital-to-digital, but ensure it's set corre

When choosing your recorder, remember that this type

of technology is progressing with each product genera-

tion. For example, the latest MiniDisc recorders may

improved editing facilities, so it's worth investigating

quality blank media with sufficient recording time to

the most recent gear. And make sure you use good

incorporate a more recent version of ATRAC and

when copying from an analogue source.

cable). No recording level adju

suit your needs.



#### Pioneer MJ-D508

MINIDISC £200.00  $\triangle$ 

The £200 MJ-D508 is extremely attractively priced, and more than routinely equipped, using Pioneer's own mechanism as well as its own variant on the ATRAC data reduction codec, the data-compression heart of MiniDisc. The Pioneer jumps through all the usual MD-type hoops, and in addition has an internal memory, which allows late starts to recordings without truncating the beginning of the music. There are some other unusual features too, such as the ability to adjust the record level when making digital recordings, and it is also possible to use the internal D/A converters separately from the rest of the recorder.

"It was not great for me," was a concluding comment from one of the panel. "The whole effect is disjointed, with a start and stop character, a loss of musical integration." And another: "Musical detail seems too carefully ironed out, and ultimately it all seems rather mundane. Fine detail is rounded down, and although the player sounds fairly smooth, there is no slam in the bass." The hands-on testing suggested that the Pioneer was bland and uninvolving, and tonally rather dull, though on the whole it was not unpleasant. As usual, the failings were reinforced when listening to pre-recorded MiniDiscs.

Ultimately, the MJ-D508 is bland and lossy, and evokes no real sense of occasion or insight. On the other hand its failings are not different in kind to any other MD recorder, and the Pioneer does at least have the benefit of some useful value-added features, and a sharp selling price, and for this reason is Recommended.

Pioneer High Fidelity 2 01753 789789

Reviewed in HFC 205

#### Sony MDS-J555ES

MINIDISC £649.99 ▽

Merely unpacking this £650 Sony is enough to show that it's in a quite different league from other MiniDisc recorders in this test. It weighs much more, and its power supply is extremely well endowed. In every respect construction quality is in a class of its own. The key to this flagship model is ATRAC DSP Type R, which as the name suggests uses DSP (digital signal processing to refine bit allocation between bands, plus other measures designed to improve the computational accuracy of the coding, along with much enhanced D/A and oversampling filters. It also includes a version of the manufacturer's now traditional variable digital filter, the ability to adjust replay pitch, and a fade in/out facility.

PHILIPS

The panel was in no doubt that this Sony was quantitatively and qualitatively different from other MD recorders, but there was some concern that it was not completely consistent musically, and that its strengths were more in areas associated with tonality and musical expression than in the dynamic properties of music.

This is a classy machine, and recordings have a feeling of space and ambience that eluded other MiniDisc recorders, along with an unusual measure of musical consistency that sustains the musical flow, irrespective of dynamic changes in the musical landscape. Compared to others of its type, the bass and the treble both seem more alive, and imagery is more finely resolved around the speakers. If you're keen to exploit the benefits of the powerful editing and convenience features of MiniDisc, there is certainly no finer tool for the job.

#### **Marantz** DR-17

CD-R/RW £1,499.90 >

This £1,500 Marantz weighs more and is much better endowed, inside as well as out, than other CD-R decks. Indeed, it is intended to be the best possible CD player for the budget, but also happens to be able to make CD-R and CD-RW recordings. Only a discreet record level control and some apparently minor associated switching distinguishes it a more upmarket CD player. Back panel fittings are comprehensive, with good quality socket.

panel fittings are comprehensive, with good quality socketry. Internally the DR-17 features many of the technologies associated with the brand. The die-cast mechanism is quick acting, and the 'finalise' function that prepares discs for replay on CD players is particularly quick acting. On the recording side, the sample rate converter that allows recording from non-44.1 kHz sources is bypassed when not required.

"I really like this one," was one quite typical comment from the panel. "Everything sounds more closely miked than (the last



player), and a wealth of detail shines through." Others highlighted some edginess on the orchestral strings, however; so once again, there appears to be a relationship between the playback jitter identified by the lab tests, and a degree of hardness and grain. But although recordings could be improved by replaying on a better CD player, this remains an excellent sounding machine in all modes. It has a much more polished and subtle sound quality, a more potent bass and more three-dimensional imagery than was achieved elsewhere in this group. The relatively high jitter takes some toll on performance, but this remains a distinctly superior recorder and CD player alike.

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 🕿 01753 680868

Reviewed in HFC 205

## 7308 O O O 00

**Philips** CDR951

**CD-R/RW** £380.00 △

The £380 CDR951 might look pedestrian, but a lot of new thinking has gone into this model, which has resolved some shortcomings of its predecessor, and the technical specifications have also been significantly enhanced. It's easier to use too, thanks to much needed display feedback, providing clear guidance through key operating procedures. The record level and channel balance can be adjusted when recording digitally, and fades applied, the recorder will also act as an A/D processor, and Philips has been generous with rear panel socketry.

There were consistent if mild complaints throughout the panel tests of a 'tinselly' and sometimes plain 'aggressive' treble, but these complaints were more than outweighed by praise for the "good bass definition". "It's spot on, and easy to follow," was one of the final comments, and "musical and exciting" another. There is no gainsaying the occasionally strident balance of this model, but equally there was no gainsaying its overall superiority among less expensive CD-R/RW recorders. The CDR951 sounds more lively and engaged, and in the end this makes it more persuasive. The strong, but not in any sense overblown, bass and excellent soundstaging play a key role here, offset only marginally by a slightly cluttered feel in the mid/high frequency area. Recordings retained the qualities of the original discs from which they were made.

There is no magic here, just some diligent design work which has produced a flexible and relatively easy to use recorder that unlike some of the direct competition is also a decent player in its own right. Best Buy.

Philips 2 020 8680 4444 Reviewed in HFC 205

#### **Pioneer PDR-W739**

CD-R/RW £400.00 <\

The £400 PDR-W739 combines a CD-R/RW recorder with a three-disc play-only mechanism, the latter using a single drawer and a complex internal clockwork consisting of a series of winches, pulleys, a couple of wings and a prayer. Though quite complex to operate, there are better than average instructions and a quick set-up guide, and little here will cause confusion for long. The feature set parallels the PDR-

509, but includes the ability to record complete discs at double speed, and to record a selection of tracks programmed from one, two or three discs.

> In the sighted listening tests, this model was all but indistinguishable from the PDR-509, and is capable of making excellent recordings. It can sound dynamically challenged at times, but it's a smooth performer which retains the essence of a musical argument. The multi-

disc replay mechanism sounds spatially a bit flat and lacking in ambience and stereo focus, and the best quality recordings will be those made with a good outboard

player through a digital input. The internal mechanism still makes good quality recordings, however, which sound virtually identical whether recorded at normal or double speed. In this respect at least, comparisons with double cassette decks should not be stretched too far.

This model is an excellent solution for those who want

#### **Pioneer PDR-509**

CD-R/RW £300.00 ▽

The PDR-509 is Pioneer's £300 single-disc CD-R recorder. It is a lightweight machine, quite button bound, but with attractive and well weighted controls and a selection of verbose control labels. As a result it probably won't be necessary to do more than skim the instructions. The capabilities of this unit are broadly standard for its type, and there are relatively few unusual extras – or omissions. Digital record levels can be adjusted, which can be used to normalise the volume level with different recordings, and there's also a fade in/out feature.

The panel was unanimous that this Pioneer is a decent, middleof-the-road recorder, capable of making CD copies that are within spitting distance of the original discs, but also with a hint of safeness in its delivery. The replay electronics (the digital filter perhaps?) appear to impose some loss of presence and detail, which may explain the nature of the comments from the panel, and indeed the hands-on tests. However, this quality is not inherent in the recordings, which played back through the Krell test player with verve and distinction, sounding very similar though not identical to the original CDs. Used on lesser CD players, the CD-Rs even appeared to deliver an advantage over the original.

This model has a graunchy loader, although it functions satisfactorily, and its replay electronics sound a tad lazy and soft. But the Pioneer is capable of making excellent recordings, so assuming a user will already have a CD player as a source, this model can be welcomed with open arms.

Pioneer High Fidelity 2 01753 789789 Reviewed in HFC 205

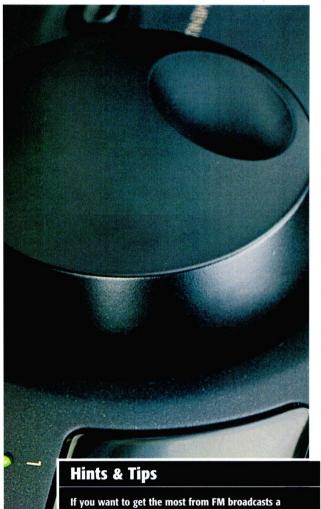






### **Tuners**

What does radio mean to you? A painful racket that wakes you in the morning perhaps, or something you stick on to pass the time when you're driving? If so, you're missing out. Radio can be a revelation – a free diet of new music, entertainment and information, all at the spin of a dial. **And a hi-fi tuner will help you make the most of it.** 



Never the most fashionable of hi-fi components, tuners have hit the limelight of late because of the emergence of Digital Radio, aka Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB). Just like TV, radio is in the process of switching from analogue broadcasts (FM/MW/LW) to digital. It is inevitably a long process – even the most conservative estimates reckon FM will still be around as this decade draws to a close. But digital is already with us for those ready to take the plunge, so should tuner buyers embrace the new or stick with the old?

There are strong arguments on both sides. The digital camp points to increased choice compared to the overcrowded FM waveband, with scope for a much wider variety of specialist stations. There are also a number of performance benefits: Digital Radio is immune to certain forms of interference that can plague FM, and offers the potential to banish 'poor reception' and the huge roof aerials for good.

However, the response to Digital Radio from audiophiles has been mixed, largely because of the data reduction system which is fundamental to its operation. Quality varies not just from station to station but also broadcast; it's gradually improving as broadcasters discover how to eke more from the system, but critics say it will never beat the depth and detail on offer from a top-notch FM tuner. (Albeit with a humungus roof aerial!)

Should you go digital? It partly depends if your area has coverage yet. Even if the answer's yes, the tuners are still quite costly and casual listeners are likely to find a good budget FM/AM model does perfectly well. Likewise, serious radio listeners may find it more fruitful to invest in a top-flight analogue model with a substantial roof aearial. Or perhaps one of the emerging hybrid tuners, serving up FM, AM and LW as well as DAB – in theory the best of both worlds. In the meantime, broadcast quality will improve, prices will fall and one day we will all go digital.

good roof aerial is important – it's just as fundamental as a turntable's arm and cartridge. Contact a local aerial specialist to find out which type of 'twig' is best for your area. Conversley, digital tuners only require an insubstantial indoor aerial, and providing your area is covered there's no such thing as poor reception – you either get sound or you don't. You could try experimenting with an external DAC, as you might with a CD player. A good quality support is beneficial and make sure you use respectable interconnect cables.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**DAB:** Digital Audio Broadcasting, the system used to broadcast digital audio in the UK and which is available to around 70 per cent of the population.

MPEG2: The data reduction system employed by DAB. Aims to cut the data rate by a factor of up to 20 while maintaining audio quality. Typically up to a maximum 256kb/s.

RDS: Radio Data System, data piggybacked on FM broadcasts allowing suitably equipped tuners to display station and track names alongside the ability to have traffic info and news interrupt whatever you are listening to.



#### **Arcam** Alpha 10

DAB TUNER £799.90  $\triangle$ 

Arcam's £800 Alpha 10 is a DAB-only tuner, but equipped with 'loop through' connections so that it can be used alongside an existing AM/FM tuner, without taking up an extra amplifier input. The casework is common to the entire Alpha range, and the unit is tidily and efficiently built. The business end of DAB reception and decoding is handled by a Roke Manor module, while Arcam converts the module's digital output to analogue, and provides the control logic and power supplies.

Connections are much like any analogue tuner, with an aerial input (on a BNC socket) and two pairs of audio outputs, but in addition, there are two digital outputs: Toslink optical and coaxial, for connection to an external DAC and/or digital recorder. Ergonomically friendly, it can scan the entire DAB spectrum and store the stations in memory, so all you have to do is spin that chunky knob to scroll through them, as they appear by name on the display.

On 'DAB-friendly' material (not too much high-frequency energy), this tuner sounds very good, and the lack of interference is welcome. It lacks nothing in clarity and spaciousness and its trump card is the feeling of solidity it brings to the sound, something you don't find with the competition so far. All the same, in busy textures where the MPEG2 data reduction has the most work to do, the seemingly intrinsic characteristics of that system come to the fore. Since DAB now offers its own exclusive programming, especially in the London area, and since this is the best sounding DAB tuner to date, Recommendation seems wholey appropriate.

A&R Cambridge 2 01223 203203

Reviewed in HFC 199

#### Sony ST-D777ES

DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER £549.99 ▽

This £550 ES model is Sony's first foray into the world of DAB, the radio network which offers noise-free reception from the most insignificant of antennas. But the ST-D777ES keeps its options open by including both FM and AM tuners as well. It takes a bit of getting used to at first, feeling a little like a computer to operate, but with a bit of practice and familiarisation with the myriad features you can soon track down your favourite stations on any band. It's even possible to scroll through as yet inactive service ensembles, and store up to 99 presets across all bands. One surprise was that it displayed the (correct) station name Oneword (where the Arcam showed PB&C), another was its ability to pick up a station called Primetime that the Arcam didn't 'see'

Sonically the Sony is pretty impressive with both DAB and FM, reflecting the quality of the broadcasts and the diversity of compression used by various stations. With DAB it's not quite as transparent or powerful in the bass as the Arcam; and via FM, my old Audiolab 8000T had slightly more life. But taken on its own the quality is extremely high, with solid imaging and fine timbre from the better (largely Radio 3) broadcasts. Given its price, build quality and plethora of features this Sony makes a very convincing argument for a tuner upgrade, and if you're in a good DAB coverage area it'll save you the price and hassle of installing a 'real' aerial.

Sony UK 2 0990 111999



#### **Technics** ST-GT1000

DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER £499.99 ▽

The first DAB tuner from a major electronics multinational to hit these shores, Technics' £500 ST-GT1000 is (at the time of writing) less expensive than the competition, and conveniently also includes FM and AM alongside DAB. Construction is typical of Far East models with a reasonably intelligently laid out front panel, concealing many of the buttons behind a door. The rather clumsy method of tuning requires the user to tune to the 'ensemble frequency' (DAB stations are broadcast in blocks or 'ensembles' sharing



one frequency), and then select the station from within the ensemble. There are also presets, but you still have to program them somehow.

Inside the unit, almost everything is concealed inside shielded modules, but it's well assembled. There are aerial sockets for all three bands, and Toslink digital audio out and Radio Data Interface sockets.

On balance, this tuner comes quite close to its more costly brethren, and with the 'right' programme material it sounds very nearly as lifelike as they do. It has the usual DAB attributes of low noise, extended treble (clean just as long as there's not too much of it) and solid, well defined bass. But, as with the DAB medium as a whole, it all goes rather horribly wrong with 'busy' music, with the data reduction artefacts quickly noticeable and long-term listening relatively fatiguing. The GT 1000 puts in a decent performance on the FM band – perfectly listenable with no obvious nasties and commendable detail under good reception conditions. Given the low price this is the most enticing DAB prospect yet, although no doubt time will bring substantially cheaper models.

Panasonic UK ☎ 0990 357357 Reviewed in HFC 199

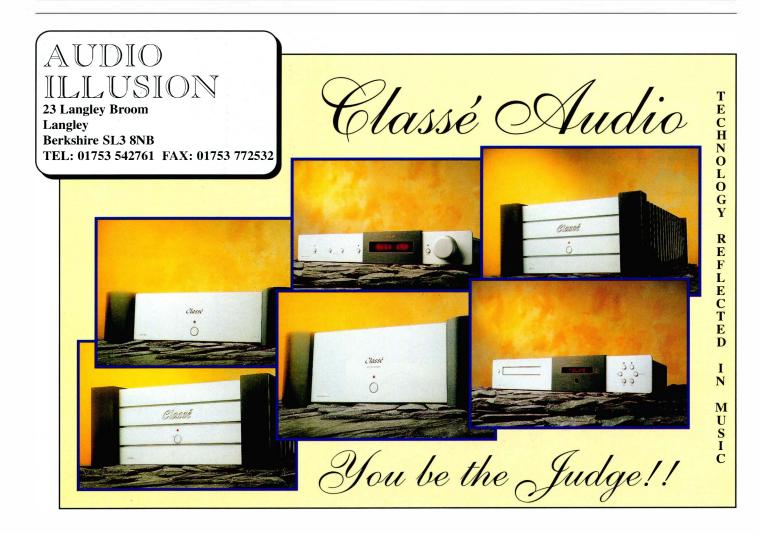
### SIVIE MODEL 10



The stiffer a structure the less it will flex and vibrate. The more massive the less it will vibrate. Therefore to be structurally inert, with a given weight of metal, a turntable should be a compact as possible. The extreme opposite, *ie* the same weight of metal spread over a large enough area, would be aluminium foil. These simple facts of physics should be borne in mind if you aim to hear your records rather than your turntable!

Details and reviews on request from:

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# **Amplifiers**



An amp is the heart of a hi-fi system, the control centre through which sources are selected and volume specified. It boosts the output of your source components to the level required to drive your speakers and is a crucial element of any system's performance. **But the variety** is huge, so how should you choose?

Most low to mid-priced amps are integrated designs – a preamp and power amp combined in one box. As price increases there's more choice: you can still buy an integrated model if you feel it's the neatest solution, or you can buy separate pre and power amps.

There are several sonic advantages in going the two (or more) box route, assuming the manufacturer has made full use of them. First, it helps ensure that delicate line-level signals are isolated from interferance from the power stage. Second, it allows the power supplies for each stage to be optimised for their particular function. Third, it gives the manufacturer more scope to optimise internal circuitry and gives the buyer more choice in tailoring amplification to his/her specific needs. However, pre/power combos aren't always better than integrateds – it's what's under the hood that counts.

It may sound obvious, but make sure the amp you choose has all the facilities you need. Decide whether you want the convenience of remote control and make sure there are suffucient inputs to take all your source components now and in the future. If you use recorders, make sure there are enough in- and outputs to suit your needs and if you think you may want to upgrade with, say, additional power amps or a multi-channel processor then check the necessary sockets are provided.

Turntable users will require a phono stage, either built-in or off-board, and then there's the tone control issue. These are traditionally frowned upon in hi-fi circles because they over-complicate the signal path, but there are times when tone adjustment can be useful, for example when playing a bright or bass-heavy recording. If you do decide you need them make sure the amp has a 'tone defeat' switch so you can switch them out when they're not required.

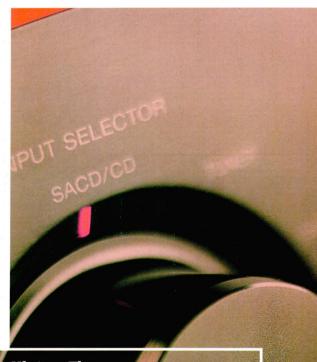
The amp/speaker interface is a crucial part of system building – make sure they suit each other. If your speakers offer a tricky load or aren't particularly efficient, make sure the amp has enough muscle to handle them properly. Unfortunately power ratings are no indication of quality: measured power outputs do give some idea of how loud you can play, but loudspeaker sensitivity is just as good an indication of that. Buy with your ears and not the specs or bells and whistles.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**VALVES:** Once, all amps used valves (or vacuum tubes) to amplify the signal. Now they're the preserve of enthusiasts – some swear by the timbral clarity and soundstage depth they can deliver, others find them soft in the bass. Sensitive speakers are essential.

**TRANSISTORS:** Introduced around the late 50s, these have replaced valves in most amps. For most people they're easier to live with and their greater power output makes them easier to partner. They also tend to sound firmer in the bass.

**BI-AMPING:** Using two stereo power amps (or a power and an integrated) to drive a pair of speakers - one amp drives the tweeters and the other the main drivers. A useful upgrade option if supplied.



#### **Hints & Tips**

Amps need to be strectched to attain optimum performance – they may need a week or so to run in and could take around an hour to warm up prior to serious listening. Keep ventilation holes clear and avoid stacking equipment on top of the amp; if direct stacking is unavoidable, put the amp on top. It's best to site amps well clear of source components, on a separate shelf of a dedicated hi-fi support if possible. Power amps may be placed on the floor, as long as they're on something solid (not carpet).

If you want multi-channel amplification that performs well with music it's best to avoid budget A/V models. Ideally, save up for a more specialist design - preferably one employing a separate processor and power amp, though some of the more costly integrated A/V amps are getting better in this respect. If you're on a tighter budget, consider buying a good two channel integrated amp then adding a processor/three channel amp for basic multi-channel use.

# Whatever your taste in music...





#### **Canary Audio CA-608** INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £1,795.00 \(\triangle\)

This Californian integrated valve amp seems very decent material value at £1,795. It has a (decidedly optimistic) 40 Watts/channel power rating, delivered from a pair of EL34s operating in push-pull Ultralinear configuration, and is pretty much pure class A throughout. It's a bulky beast, mounting all the components on the same plane, and solidly built, with a 10mm thick alloy front panel. There are good quality components throughout too, and output terminals for four or eight Ohm speakers, but channels were reversed between input and output on our review sample, which is an unfortunate oversight. Our measurements showed just 24 Watts midband at the onset of clipping, with five per cent distortion in the bass region above 10 Watts.

This Canary's sound will probably appeal strongly to some folks and far less so to others. It's got true valve character - said in full knowledge of the baggage such a comment carries, both good and bad according to taste. Best of all is the Big Picture, the grand sweep of a piece of music, and the overall feel of the thing. It manages a pretty good balance across most of the audio spectrum, and is particularly good through the important midrange, though there's something of a veil in the way when one wants to listen more intently.

For many people's tastes, I suspect this amplifier is a lot of what valves are all about: luxurious timbre, engrossing musical flow and plenty of life, and it's worth a try just to see whether it suits you. Audio Connoisseurs 2 0151 645 0007

Reviewed in HFC 202

#### Arcam FMI A22

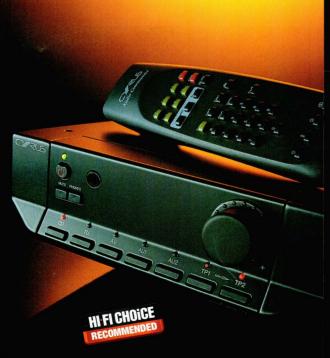
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £999.90 ▽

The FMJ house look is based on a steel base with an aluminium wrap in a light grey paint finish, and a superb extruded aluminium fascia with fully machined controls. The finish and detailing are first class, and a full system remote control is included. The £1,000 FMJ A22 is essentially a transplanted version of the Arcam Alpha 10, a stripped-down 100 Watts/channel stereo integrated amp with five standard line inputs, two tape circuits, a headphone socket and no tone controls. However, this basic amplifier can be reconfigured by adding internal modules, such as the MARC multi-room controller that turns the A22 into the core of a multi-room system, or the DAVE module which, with a 3-channel version of the P25 power amp, turns this model into a high-performance, multi-channel amplifier.

Early samples of the Alpha 10 sounded rather bright and coloured, but the FMJ A22 is a much more refined and capable animal. The amp was auditioned extensively, both in and outside the test group context, with consistent results. Overall, it's a better than average amplifier that sounds harmonically interesting and flows well. Imagery is stable and consistent, with just a hint of image scale contraction, and dynamically it is the epitome of good manners, sounding sweet, tidy and reasonably, but not excessively, dynamic. If it wasn't always the most exciting amplifier in the group, it was one of the most consistent, and most consistently enjoyable. It also looks the part, and on balance rates as fine value. A&R Cambridge 2 01223 203203

Reviewed in HFC 201





#### **Cyrus** Integrated 5

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £500.00 <

Cyrus has made good use of its trademark metal cast casework, which is about as small as is plausibly possible for the job in hand. The £500 5 integrated amp has a useful rated output power of 40 Watts per channel, and the simple front panel layout is augmented by extra features via the handset: different gain settings may be made for each input, for example. Various upgrade paths are also available, including bi-amping, or upgrading the 5 to a 7 at the factory, and after that you can add a PSX-R external power supply. Construction is up to Cyrus' usual high standards, with many surfacemount components, and next to no loose signal wiring.

Although the Integrated 5 never quite managed to produce a completely transparent window on a musical performance, its good points include a neutral tonal balance with a very comfortable bass, which doesn't obtrude but confidently underpins the music when required, and sweet, undistorted treble. There's a slightly opaque character to the sound when the amp is dealing with densely textured music such as a Mahler symphony. It's quite hard to pinpoint, but there is a rather consistent veiling of subtle details in pretty much any kind of music, leading to somewhat limited stereo image depth and climaxes which are a bit flat dynamically. Then again, if you're not such a detail freak, the amp's impeccable manners will please, as it never seems to become stressed or coarse. There's no denying that this amp, especially as part of a complete Cyrus system, is in many ways a most appealing proposition. Taking the excellent flexibility and good construction into account, it just achieves Recommendation.

Cyrus Electronics 2 01480 435577 Reviewed in HFC 205

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### **Amplifiers**



#### **Denon PMA-255UK**

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £139.99  $\wedge$ 

Amplifiers don't come much more straightforward than this £140 Denon. The front panel has a large volume, plus bass and treble controls, a source direct switch, a balance control and a rotary selector for five line inputs. Replacing the long running and popular PMA-250SE, the 255UK has bigger, beefier, all-new internals. Modestly rated at 30 Watts/channel, typical power output is said to be in excess of 45 Watts into eight Ohms. Design highlights include short signal paths, audiophile grade ELNA reservoir capacitors, new bipolar output devices, plus short circuit protection by relay.

Many of the sonic features of the PMA-255UK are consistent with its PMA-250SE predecessor. Indeed, this is an easily identifiable amplifier on audition, one listener recognising it explicitly in a repeat presentation, while the others came close. The Denon was generally received very favourably, and although there were criticisms, they should be assessed in relation to price, as no one knew that this amplifier cost considerably less than the others in the test.

It gives a big, if somewhat clinical sound, tonally consistent, full bodied and capable of solid drive, with good low frequency resolution. Presentation is a little forward, with some colouration, and a 'thin' midband. This is a sharp – sometimes too sharp – and articulate all-rounder, with a surprisingly heavy power output, even with large, wide bandwidth loudspeakers. While plenty of criticisms can be made, it remains an impressive amplifier for such a low price. At £140, the Denon is almost in a class of its own.

Havden Labs 🕿 01753 888447 Reviewed in HFC 208

50 HI-FI CHOICE Best Buys 2000

#### **Musical Fidelity** X-A2

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £500.00  $\nabla$ 

The £500 X-A2 is essentially the same amplifier as the X-A100R (HFC 189), except that the remote control has been stripped out, and so has the price, which is just half that of the X-A100R. This is a two-box amplifier. All the audio circuits are housed in the main box, an oval version of the A-series alloy extrusion. The power supply is housed in a separate moulded case on the end of a long umbilical. The control system is simplicity itself, with large rotary controls for volume and source selection. Power output is rated at a useful 75 Watts/channel.

There were initial problems with the test sample power supply, but once this was sorted the listening tests found clean, slightly sanitised, but attractive and vital sounding amplifier, albeit with specific criticisms of two female vocal tracks. It was described as losing its way in the Marianne Faithful recording, and of dubious image placement and stability with the Tracy Chapman.

Musical Fidelity amplifiers are characteristically lacking in brightness and edge, and don't always shine in comparative listening tests, but they do tend to sound very clean and musical on their own. The X-A2 has a fluid, organic quality, arguably a little grey, but still inherently musical, and more than capable of rising to the occasion when required. It gives a faithful, well-shaped and consistent account of a range of material of different types, but especially acoustic. Not a dramatic or obvious amplifier, the X-A2 is musically adept, with an open, solid and unexaggerated quality. Musical Fidelity 2 020 8900 2999

Reviewed in HFC 208





Kenwood KAF 3030 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £249.95

The only remarkable bit of technology that Kenwood advertises about its £250 KAF 3030 is 'TRAIT' (Thermally Reactive Advanced Instantaneous Transistor) that refers to a neat trick that should have been done years ago. Instead of using the usual output transistors and associated biasing circuits, Kenwood has produced its own devices which integrate thermal and current sensing elements into the same package as the output transistor proper. That apart, this amp follows the current trend for enhanced bandwidth to complement the new digital audio formats, coupled with low distortion and noise. Construction is absolutely typical of its class – decent enough components, but nothing tweaky. Most of the audio circuitry uses discrete transistors, though there are a few ICs in evidence. Black finish is also available.

The phono stage sounds grainy, lacks detail, and could seriously justify upgrading for anyone intending to listen to a lot of vinyl. Otherwise this amp is really rather lovely. The best feature is its clarity. The tonal character of instruments is faithfully preserved, textures are easy to follow and dissect, and imaging is generally good too. There's a slight coloration in the upper bass, but the treble is really very sweet and open. The only area where it seems to fall down slightly is with complex, high-frequency-rich sounds such as orchestral violins, which develop just a touch of artificial sheen, robbing them of some immediacy. This particularly well-judged amp has an excellent spread of virtues and a very small collection of vices – all of them minor.

Kenwood Electronics UK 🕿 01923 816444 Reviewed in HFC 205



#### **NAD** C350

#### INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £329.95 △

If you were to stumble across this amplifier down an unlit alley on a foggy night, the NAD family resemblance would still be obvious. The £330 C350 is rated at an identical 60 Watts into both eight and four Ohms, but has impressive dynamic reserves, with a claimed 135, 190 and 240 Watt dynamic (peak) power into eight, four and two Ohms respectively, and a peak current capability of 55 amps. It has standard NAD features like bypassable tone controls and 'soft clipping', and a second preamplifier output can be used with a gain matched power amplifier (like the C270) for bi-amping. Full remote control operation is available using the supplied handset.

This model received a clean bill of health from the panel: "Overall one of the best of the day" was a typical comment. One listener felt it had worked particularly well in the two classical pieces, thanks in part to a well-developed image depth. Dynamics could have been stronger, but it sounds well controlled, and very natural and listenable. It's not quite as crisply defined or as detailed as some, and also has a warm, full bass, but doesn't overhang. It seemed equally capable of good results into most loudspeakers, and is a thoroughly enjoyable and completely consistent sounding design, with plenty of power on tap for normal circumstances.

This excellent, all-purpose near budget amplifier offers modest analysis and dynamics, but excellent levels of consistency, tonal accuracy and a general feeling of 'rightness'.

Lenbrook UK ☎ 01908 319360 Reviewed in HFC 208

#### **Primare** A-10

#### INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £499.99 $\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,\,$

The £500 Primare A-10 is a chip off the old block. It has the same highly engineered finish, ultra-solid construction, and clean, elegant lines as other Primare amplifiers, and is heavier than you might expect from such a slimline product. The black alloy front panel accommodates a turned volume control that works through an impulse generator calibrated in 1dB steps over an 80dB range, with balance adjustable to 0.1dB precision (inconceivable with a mechanical wiper). The amplifier has rudimentary features, namely six line inputs, including tape, but not phono. It uses V-FET input and bipolar output circuitry, the latter delivering over 60W/8 Ohms/channel, with a DC servo to ensure stability, and active protection circuitry which mutes the output if necessary.

The panel test results were not completely in keeping with hands-on experience here. The Primare's character is a little sweeter and more laid back than average, and the sound it generates is a little warm and lush – perhaps too much so with large, wide bandwidth speakers. But it also has an unusually elegant and progressive quality. It doesn't pull the music apart, and it may not be a rock'n'roll hero, but the A-10 remains highly intelligible and articulate, with an unusually natural tonal quality, especially with acoustic instrumental orchestral and vocal recordings, and the treble certainly settles down with use. Although there are split opinions on this amplifier, I'm happy to override the panel on this occasion, and although a careful audition is advised, a formal Recommendation is in order.

CSE 2 01423 359054
Reviewed in HFC 208





#### Roksan Kandy KA-1

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £495.00

Part of a range of Kandy separates available in various colour schemes, the modest-looking £500 KA-1 is actually something of a powerhouse, with 110 Watts on tap according to the book (even more in practice). Fit and finish are excellent, but most of the money has evidently been spent on the important bits – notably a monster toroidal transformer. There are twin pairs of MOSFET output devices per channel, and the circuitry looks fairly straightforward. Input switching is handled by relays and the volume control is motorised.

One doesn't expect an amplifier at this price to be completely unblemished. The key is to make the blemishes relatively insignificant to a majority, and Roksan has been quite successful in this. There's a slight lack of bass extension and a small degree of 'dryness' in the sound, but on the plus side there is good detail available across the board, and particularly admirable stereo imaging with creditable depth. Dynamics are natural and free-flowing, and with all that power on tap it's good to find that the sound stays clean up to the peak of a climax. Orchestral violins sound sweet, while at the other end of the musical spectrum there's plenty of energy available for a bit of techno or rock-'n'roll. The power is always delivered with refinement, though, and the amp is perfectly happy playing string quartets at low levels. Although the phono stage lacks the detail and insight of the rest of the amp, the technical performance looks clean enough, and the overall sonic performance certainly seems to warrant Recommendation.

Roksan Audio 2 020 8900 6801 Reviewed in HFC 205

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### **Amplifiers**



### Rotel RA-931 Mk II

One up from the entry level A-921, the £190 A-931 Mk II is a development of the A-931. The basic nuts and bolts are pure Rotel, and utterly consistent with others in the range. The essentials are that this is a 35 Watt/channel amplifier (eight Ohms) whose input count is three at line level, plus tape plus moving magnet phono, with a tape monitor switch, switchable tone controls, a headphone socket, and that's about it folks. Changes from the original are largely concerned with component substitutions.

In the light of the component substitutions, it's interesting to note that we found the original 931 dry, lacking in subtlety, and with an excessively sharp top end. This brittleness is said to have been addressed, and sure enough this is exactly how it came across, along with the fuller bass also claimed for the new model. In fact we are confident this is an altogether better amplifier than the one it replaces. This is a clean, agile and musical amplifier, one whose compromises are particularly well adapted for use with like-priced ancillaries. It does not favour particular music types, but is more than good enough to give a good account of itself even with difficult large-scale acoustic material.

There are manufacturers out there who will put old wine in new bottles. Rotel takes the opposite approach, using the old packaging to wrap their new and revised circuitry, with results that are less glamorous perhaps, but fundamentally more musical. Best Buy. Gamepath © 01908 317707

Reviewed in HFC 208

#### **Roksan** Caspian

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £795.00 ▽

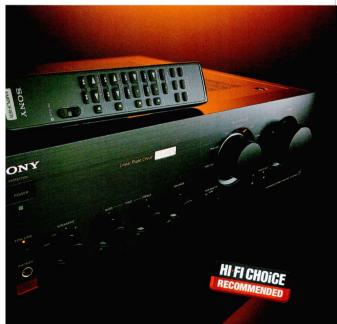
The Roksan Caspian, revisited here because of changes that have been made since our original review back in 1997 (*HFC* 168), is a mid-market amplifier, rated at 70 Watts/channel (eight Ohms), but with a healthy peak current delivery of 50 amps. It has six line level inputs, one of which is for tape and has off-tape monitoring; a preamp out/power amp in link is available for outboard processors, and a second preamp output is available to drive a second power amplifier in a bi-amplified system. A motorised volume control and logic input source switching lend themselves to remote control.

The Caspian received a clean bill of health on listening, with a forwardness and richness of instrumental textures I hadn't noted among its rivals. It sounds well controlled, especially in the bass, while the midband is even and powerful, with good timing and well separated notes in busy passages, although some of the beauty of the harmonic relationships seemed slightly watereddown. One of its best features is consistency, irrespective of the spectral or dynamic content of the music, and whether the volume was set low or high. The bass is certainly powerful, but more important, it is tuneful and times well; and the treble is clean and detailed without being aggressive or bright.

The Caspian is an excellent amplifier, aided by its microprocessor and remote control systems, but most of all because that's how it sounds, almost all of the time, whether played loud or soft, with most speakers and with most types of music.

Roksan Audio 2 020 8900 6801 Reviewed in HFC 201





#### **Sony** TA-FB740R

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £200.00

Sony trumpets this £200 amp as one of a new breed expressly designed to make the most of SACD's ultra-wide bandwidth. Hence the 740's 'Linear Phase Circuit' which achieves, according to the blurb, a bandwidth of 300kHz. The output stage uses MOSFETs, biased to an unusually high current so that about half a Watt is delivered in Class A – meaning a static power dissipation in excess of 30 Watts, so don't block ventilation holes! Construction is pretty good for a product at this price, though tone control operation is a little odd.

On the whole, the sound is not half bad, the biggest problem being a lack of 'wow!' factor. The theme here is more one of quiet competence and as such there's little to complain about. Detail is not at an all-time high, but it's never a sufficient loss of information for one to be unable to follow the music, more a very slight veiling which mildly compromises the textures.

On the other hand, dynamics are well handled and the way this amp can reach a climax without strain is wholly admirable. Tonal evenness is excellent too, the high treble very smooth, while bass extends deep with decent weight. Even the phono stage seems unusually capable for an amp of this class. One of Sony's best of late, this is a highly competent all-rounder and a very safe Recommendation. Sony UK 20 0990 111999

Reviewed in HFC 205



#### Musical Fidelity X-P100/X-A200

PRE-/POWER AMPLIFIER £800.00/£1.000.00  $\triangle$ 

These units are part of MF's distinctive tubular range, which has grown like Topsy since its introduction a few years back, in size as well as numbers. The complete package here costs £1,800, and the two monoblock power amps put out a hefty 200 Watts each, and weigh accordingly. Three pairs of power MOSFETs make up the output stage, with the case itself acting as a more than adequate heatsink. The X-P100 is constructed along similar lines, although to minimise hum its power is fed from a separate plastic box. Again, the circuits use discrete transistors rather than ICs. Component and build quality are good, although the black paint scratches rather easily.

The predominant impression was of a distinctly 'fruity' balance not really bass-heavy, but just a shade weighted towards the 'Barry White regions' to add a little extra roundness to sounds. If your system and/or room are already inclined towards warmth this small extra amount could just tip the balance. Apart from that, results were mostly good. There's a little brightness on some music, and front-to-back imaging isn't always the very best, but with plenty of detail and a pleasing 'hear-through' quality, long-term listening is enjoyable and rewarding.

And when the going gets tough, those 200 Watts are useful. Deep bass is generally truthful and well integrated, although just occasionally a rhythmic track would sound very slightly lazy, and the phono input is a little veiled. Not without its foibles but, all things considered, this combo is certainly worth a listen.

Musical Fidelity 2 020 8900 2999

Reviewed in HFC 200

#### **Tube Technology** Unisis Signature

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £2.400.00 ▽

Tube Technology has been around for a while, and so has this £2,400 amplifier, although a few tweaks have earned it a 'Signature'. It follows the classic Leak (and others) layout, and does it very smartly with a high standard of finish. Rated at 30 Watts/channel, the output uses two parallel push-pull pairs of (inexpensive) EL84 pentodes connected in Ultralinear mode. Bias is adjustable, but you'll need to buy the optional digital meter bias meter, which is well worthwhile. Tube Technology has even managed to incorporate an all-valve (MM only) phono stage. Full rated power is available right down to 20Hz, bandwidth is wide and distortion well controlled, at less than one per cent at half power.

The most rounded and polished overall performer in the group, the Unisis has the odd minor weakness, but it does a lot of things well. It has the ability to sweep listeners along on the crest of a musical wave, yet without losing sight of the little details that make up said wave. It isn't the last word in detail recovery, but tonal balance is good, and the bass was far and away the best in the group, though a hint of harshness sometimes afflicts the top end. The phono stage sounds decently open, albeit with just

This is a nicely judged amplifier which, if it doesn't blow all its competitors into the weeds, certainly shows many of them a thing or two. It combines many virtues in a very practical package and deserves

Tube Technology 2 01932 821111



#### NAD Silverline S100/S200

PRE-/POWER AMPLIFIER £600.00/£1,400.00 ▽

NAD's £2,000 Silverline pre/power amp combo is a far cry from the company's regular budget fare. These two beautifully smart units have solid aluminium casework, complete with friendly, deburred heatsinks and corners. Then take the lid off and admire the immaculate construction, and top quality parts. The S200 revels in one of the biggest toroidal transformers I've ever seen, plus four pairs of bipolar output transistors per channel, and enough heatsink to make sure that the unit can meet its speci-

> fied 200 Watt output pretty much indefinitely. NAD has never been big on frills, and the S100 offers little beyond selection from seven inputs (one of which can optionally be turned into a phono stage) and volume control. Measurements for

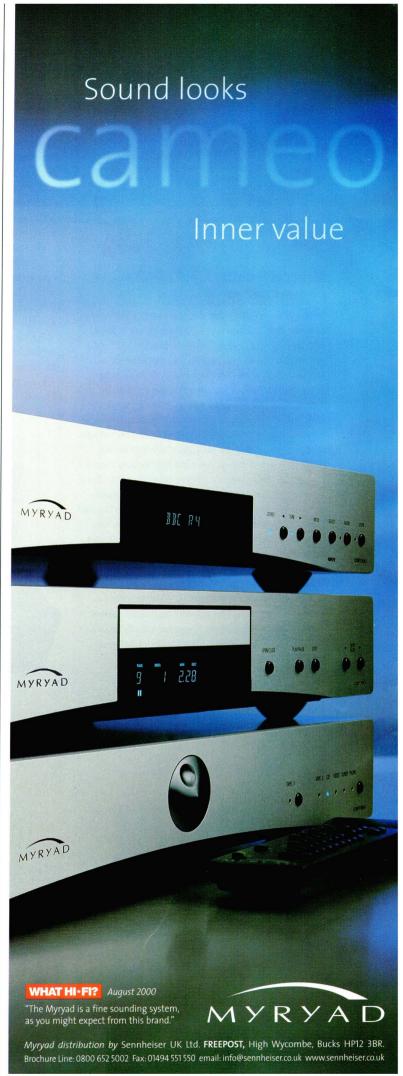
both units were exemplary.

This pair started off by offering the most natural tonal balance in the group and, thanks to some rather vigorous orchestral sounds, proceeded to demonstrate bass extension of a high order, albeit without quite the ultimate in control. This amp is particularly impressive with human voice, which is full, round and altogether believable, solo or in choirs. Imaging is also very good, and resolution is only likely to be bettered by really high-end exotica. Big climaxes are well served by the power on offer, with no sense of strain at all. Nor does that power in any sense compromise performance at lower levels. It's perfectly happy playing string quartets one minute and Aerosmith the next. There's little to criticise here and the performance in all areas more than justifies the price. Strongly Recommended.

Lenbrook UK 2 01296 482017 Reviewed in HFC 200









#### Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P

A/V MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIER £1,649.80/£849.90 △

Described by Arcam as a "Modular Integrated Amplifier", the £800 Alpha 10 is a flexible beast, able to be configured in various ways. Adding a DAVE (Digital Audio/Video Entertainment) module (£850) turns it into most of an AV amplifier, decoding DPL, DD and dts formats and offering a host of new audio, video and digital inputs. For the extra channels of power amplification, however, you'll need to add a three-channel Alpha 10 power amp too.

Not surprisingly, the Alpha 10 did well as a conventional two-channel amp. Our CDs simply seemed so much more alive, vibrant and believable. Importantly, there was a fundamental lack of processing to the sound, less of the sat-on effect and more contrast between the 'light and dark' of a musical performance. This very positive impression carried through to our multi-channel session, with an up-beat rendition that was deemed to be more accurate, or at least more realistic.

The Alpha 10s gave the impression of more going on without sounding untidy. There seemed to be less 'digital rubbish' emanating from the rear channels, and what appeared was now cleaner, better separated and in obvious sympathy with the sound from the front. In light and shade, in orchestral positioning, dynamic contrast and sheer diversity of musical colour, the Arcam proved streets ahead of the other amplifiers in this test. Here is a combination that makes a strong case for switching from two to five-channel audio, even with data-compressed formats like DD/dts. The Alpha 10s are the costliest duet in our survey, but they make a cracking pair and come heartily Recommended.

A&R Cambridge № 01223 203203 Reviewed in HFC 198

#### **Rotel** RC-995/RB-911

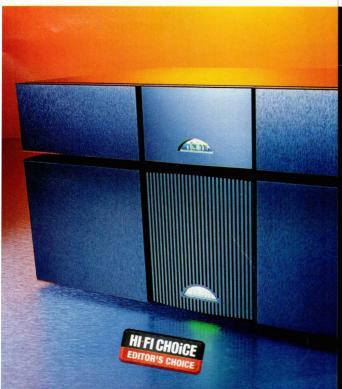
PRE-/POWER AMPLIFIER £525.00/£650.00 ▽

A 'Made in China' badge helps explain the relatively modest £1,175 pricetag on this powerful Rotel pre/power combo (although the power supply capacitors are actually made in the UK!). The casework is nothing special, for instance, but it's perfectly adequate. The power amp is arguably the more impressive: a THX-approved design, it offers 200 Watts per channel. The remote control RC-995 has seven inputs, including a phono stage that's switchable for MM or MC gain. Input switching is via relays, and the front-panel knobs in fact operate incremental encoders which control source selection indirectly, making for very user-friendly operation. The two may be linked with balanced or unbalanced connection, though the former handicapped by extra op-amps in the circuit.

The basic balance of this combo favours the mid-to-upper bass region, and really deep bass is truly excellent, although with some music it can seem to slow the pulse. Stereo imaging is just a little forward, and detail resolution a little inconsistent – better with big, heavy textures than small ensembles. In fact, the power amp, with various other partnering preamps (the MF X-P100 seemed a good match), scored very highly indeed in this regard, combining an excellent grasp of the big picture with a real knack for small details such as isolated taps on a triangle. Evidently the preamp is slightly veiling the sound – particularly via the phono input, which is serviceable but not really up to the line stages where resolution is concerned. A few reservations, then, mostly about the preamp, but the price looks very tempting indeed.

Gamepath № 01908 317707 Reviewed in HFC 200





#### Naim NAP500

POWER AMPLIFIER £9,995.00

Naim's first truly new power amp in 25 years, the NAP500 is a two-box stereo power amp, separating the multiple power supply from the amplifier proper, and carrying an intimidating £10,000 pricetag. It has a 'triptych' front panel and a dramatic heatsink on the rear, while the centre section forms a 'chimney' with thermostatic fan. A cornerstone of Naim's design philosophy is to avoid multiple parallel devices to achieve high power, so the company worked with a semi-conductor manufacturer to develop a bipolar transistor combining very high current, power rating and bandwidth. Each channel here uses two power amp modules, operating in 'bridged' mode to give a rated 140 Watts/channel (8 Ohms).

Connection protocols are pure Naim, and therefore different from everybody else, but the NAP500 slipped into my Naim-oriented system a treat. And what a treat! Even straight after powering up it was sounding pretty remarkable, and after a few minutes listening I felt no desire to return to my regular NAP135s. The bottom end is cleaner and more neutral, but the really big changes are in the upper mid and presence, which is altogether less congested, with a much wider and more transparent dynamic 'window'. The top end too is much sweeter and more delicate.

Essentially neutral and 'characterless', ultimately it does have a slightly 'shiny' quality, and while it might not win over valve aficionados, the NAP500 sets an important benchmark for solid state amplifiers. It remains quintessentially Naim in information retrieval and transient accuracy, but adds a sonic delicacy and transparency which should win the brand many new friends.

Naim Audio ☎ 01722 332266 Reviewed in HFC 208





#### **Marantz SR5000**

A/V MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIER £499.90 △

This Marantz AV receiver sells for a near-budget £500. Video switching is kept to a minimum, and there's no on-screen menu, so the multi-channel music enthusiast can simply dial-up DD or dts decoding. Trimming the channels is quickly accomplished. The rotary encoder volume control is a little stiff and requires seemingly endless revolutions, but otherwise, the SR5000 is a doddle to use and there's even an RDS FM/AM tuner section. The engine room easily meets Marantz's 5x70 Watts specification with a full 5x105 Watts into eight Ohms. Noise is a little high and distortion picks up a little through upper mid and treble, but for the price this looks a very well judged package.

This receiver has a big, bold and confident sound, a little 'dirtier' than some, but with a moodier, darker personality that portrays the rawness and natural roughness of a performance to good effect. By daubing its music across the room with the broad strokes of a palette knife, the SR5000 succeeds in sounding loud and entertainingly busy, albeit with what was described as "a uniform grubbiness". Frankly, it seems to want to party all the time and this, with hindsight, will prove more convincing with some musical styles than

others. But even with this in mind, it's difficult to see how the SR5000, with its onboard decoding and 5.1 channel analogue inputs to accommodate future outboard decoders, can be

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 198

#### **Roksan** Caspian DSP/5-channel

A/V MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIER £1,295.00/£995.00 ▽

Roksan's £995 Caspian '5-channel' power amplifier has five identical power amp cards, each with its own rectifier and reservoir capacitors, bipolar power transistors and heatsinking, and each tapping into a huge 1,000VA toroidal transformer. Roksan rates the beast at 5x85 Watts, but it's really capable of 5x130 Watts plus into four Ohm loads. The partnering £1,295 Caspian DSP AV preamp is very straightforward to set up. A DIPswitch selects both surround and centre speakers (which are always band-limited as 'small') while also activating the subwoofer channel, these hard settings directly linked to the bass management section of the Zoran-based DSP. Our sample lacked dts, decoding, but this is now included as standard.

The Caspians have a very even-handed balance, although the (two-channel) soundstaging was described as a little "convex". Switching to Dolby Digital brought the best from the DSP decoder and also demonstrated the true capacity of those additional power amp channels. A great deal of 'real' musical and ambient detail was audible from the surrounds (rather than what was often perceived as digital hash), while the front was bonded with a strong but taut bass. This rich-sounding Roksan has a genuinely classy sound, free of greyness, a clean, dark and deep presentation that allows orchestral climaxes to grow and soar without any obvious compression. The sound just gets bigger, bolder and indomitably confident.

A powerful-sounding combination capable of driving big systems with great confidence, the so-called '5-channel' amplifier represents particularly good value. This is a multichannel combination for the committed audiophile. Roksan Audio 🕿 020 8900 6801 Reviewed in HFC 198



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#### Rotel RSP985/RB985 III

A/V MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIER £1,700.00/£700.00 ▽



The RSP-985 is one surround preamp you just can't use without a television... Step-by-step on-screen menus are provided for setting up the speaker configuration and interchannel delay, the digital input status (including volume offset), the subwoofer configuration (including the mix level for DD and dts software) in addition to setting the balance between all 5.1 channels.

Rotel's £1,600 RSP-985 processor is dominated by a large, rotary volume control and flanked by push-button input/tape out selectors, with a row of LEDs to denote dts, DD or Pro-Logic surround modes. It's augmented by a button-fest of a remote control (more than 50) to give access to the comprehensive software within. There's even THX Ultra processing in addition to dts, DD and DP-L, while as an aid to reducing cable spaghetti, there are two 25-pin D-Type sockets to accommodate multiple analogue in/outputs such as 5.1-channel audio. This is complemented by another D-Type socket on the rear of the RB-985 MkII power amplifier has been designed from the outset to drive five channels, reflected in the relatively small drop in output from 2x160 Watts to 5x130 Watts in multi-channel mode.

With two-channel CD, the Rotel combo's slightly lumpy bass brought some unevenness to the music as a whole. Plucked strung bass was often difficult to isolate from the mix, but voices were projected in a positive and forward fashion, while top-end percussion sounded light and sharply detailed. Any 'mugginess' is evidently dependent on the music at hand. Light and fresh-sounding recordings are better suited to the Rotel, which has a close-up but rarely invasive sound, clear and detailed but 'acoustically damped', lacking full and spacious ambience.

This is a slightly "soft-sounding amplifier", described as "a safe pair of hands", but the panel applauded its seamless, unfatiguing quality, and were content to Recommend it, while recognising a slight shortfall in vitality and tonal colour range.

Gamepath ☎ 01908 317707 Reviewed in HFC 198

#### **TAG McLaren** AV32R (and CDT20R)

A/V MULTI-CHANNEL PROCESSOR €2,000.00 (£1,499.95) 

∇

TAG McLaren's £2,000 AV32R digital processor has been received with almost universal acclaim. Its ability to decode Dolby Digital, Pro-Logic, THX Cinema, dts and MPEG-2 surround formats suggests a product of daunting complexity, but the elegant appearance demonstrates otherwise. A few key functions are represented on its solid alloy fascia and others are shifted onto a comprehensive system remote control while the bulk of its set-up and menu items are accessed via an on-screen display. The AV32R's 'TAGtronic Sync Link' returns a DC feed to the CDT20R transport, synchronising its output clock to the master reference.

Over several months the AV32R was used with a variety of different CD transports and DVD players, and has continually proved its mettle with an unflappably relaxed sound that has the capacity to seem 'natural' regardless of the music or, indeed, the movie effects that are thrown its way. It's perhaps best described as 'characterless', so smooth, so transparent and exquisitely detailed is its performance.

Fully synched up with TAG's CDT20R, the effortless, see-through sound of the AV32R lets the music through with minimum clutter and colour, though the partnering CD transport does bring a slight dryness to the party. However much subjective 'control' seems to be exercised by the CDT20R, the music itself still flows. There's no hint of precision for precision's sake, just an influence best described as 'sobering' or 'mature'. It's a tricky line to tread, but the CDT20R/AV32R combination can evidently tippy-toe through the most challenging musical performances without ever losing its composure.

TAG McLaren Audio 🕿 0800 783 8007

Reviewed in HFC 198



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# Loudspeakers



Formats come and formats go, but the loudspeaker has remained a constant throughout hi-fi's illustrious history. Most of those sold today work the same way as designs decades old, but new materials and manufacturing techniques have wrought improvements aesthetically, sonically and fiscally. **How do you make the right choice?** 

Choosing the right speaker is crucial to the cumulative sound of your system. It has a more fundamental influence on character than any other part of the chain, and buyers need to consider how a prospective candidate will interact both with the system in question and the room in which it will be sited.

It used to be that tall floorstanding speakers were only an option at higher price points, but the low-cost breed has become something of modern phenomenon. It's not hard to see the attraction over smaller standmounting or 'bookshelf' designs – a tall cabinet is generally much more aesthetically pleasing than a small box perched on a piece of hi-fi stand ironmongery.

However, on sonic grounds standmounting speakers often beat their larger counterparts, particularly in the average-sized British living room. While the greater cabinet volume of a floorstander makes it easier to achieve deep bass, it brings with it another set of problems as designers attempt to control the effect of the box. Small speakers are a better shape acoustically and mechanically, and often have the advantage in terms of timing and imaging. There are, of course, excellent examples of both broad types, but as a general rule stick to smaller speakers for more diminutive rooms, while larger models may be better able to fill big spaces sonically.

Speaker position is crucial to a system's performance and experimentation is the key. Some benefit from placement close to a rear wall, others prefer free space, so start by siting them fairly close and gradually pull them towards you to get the optimum balance between bass weight and soundstage depth. If you need speakers to place close to a wall make sure the ones you choose are suitable, and bare in mind very few work well stuck in the corner.

Ideally, the distance between the speakers should be equal to or less than the distance from the plane of the speakers to where you listen, otherwise you're likely to end up with a hole in the middle of your stereo image. It's also worth experimenting with toeing or angling your speakers in towards the listening position – that can help to improve imaging with some speakers, and can also help to tame bright-sounding systems, but may have an adverse effect on image depth.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**DRIVE UNIT:** Transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy. Most hi-fi speakers have at least two: a woofer (for mid/bass) and a much smaller tweeter (for treble).

**FRONT BAFFLE:** the front panel of a loudspeaker to which the drive units are attached.

**CROSSOVER:** A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

**IMPEDANCE:** The electrical load that a speaker presents to an amp which is driving it. As impedance decreases the demand on the amp increases – choosing a speaker with an 'easy' impedance of 8 Ohms or more helps ensure compatibility with weaker amps.

**SENSITIVITY:** The relative loudness generated for a specific voltage input. A speaker with high sensitivity will provide greater volume with a given amount of power than one that is not so sensitive, and will also tend to sound more dynamic. High sensitivity – say, 90dB or more – is particularly interesting if you're using a low or medium powered amp.



#### Hints & Tips

Most floorstanding speakers come with spikes to provide a rigid coupling with the floor. Listen to the system with and without them, results depend on the floor and loud-speaker. Wooden floors tend to resonate at low frequencies if spikes are used. Site smaller speakers on purposemade hi-fi stands to ensure best results. These are usually spiked at the bottom and often at the top. If not, use some sticky pads or Blu-Tac to place the speakers on, and make sure the tweeter is roughly at ear height when you're sitting down.

Remember that a cable is the only conduit from an amp to a speaker, and a good one ensures more of that signal remains intact. Use the best cable you can afford and keep the runs as short as possible. The majority of modern speakers allow for bi-wiring (connecting treble and bass drive units independently); if the option is there it's probably worth doing for optimum performance, though the effect varies from speaker to speaker.



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#### **Acoustic Energy** Aegis Two





The Aegis range is Acoustic Energy's budget range, the two-way standmount Aegis One (£150) gaining a confident Recommendation in HFC 187. Enter the Aegis Two, which is actually an Aegis One sitting on an integral, matching, vinyl-wrapped, mass-loaded stand. It's actually a sensible (and not uncommon) strategy to take a proven two-way stand-mount and re-package it as a floorstander, because many prefer the look of a floorstander to a smaller box on a metal stand.

Finished in vinyl woodprint cherry (with rosewood or black alternatives), a black textured front part-baffle adds extra strength here, and the speaker is supplied already mass-loaded. The main driver has a 100mm matt-silver metal alloy cone, mounted in a regular pressed steel basket. The tweeter uses a 25mm soft fabric dome, and a flared port is mounted on the back panel, along with a single terminal pair. The drivers are both flush-mounted. Room measurement points towards free space siting.

The Aegis Two did well in the panel listening tests, attracting particular praise for its stereo imaging, and for its openness and clarity, with fine detail projection. The bottom end showed generally good control and evenness, though no great weight, and sometimes seemed to struggle to keep up. Long term and hands-on it was rather less satisfying, with a distinctively 'shiny' quality that becomes a little relentless over the long haul.

The Aegis Two is a good all round speaker at a very competitive price, but a pair of Aegis Ones on budget stands is likely to have the edge, on both performance and price.

Acoustic Energy Ltd 2 01285 654432 Reviewed in HFC 201



#### **BC Acoustique** Araxe

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £1,140.00 <



It's a two-and-a-half-way design, using twin main drivers with 115mm cones, running the upper one right up to the crossover point, but using the lower one just to reinforce the bass. The tweeter is a full horn-loaded pressure device. Input terminals use 10 (!) 4mm sockets with bridging links, to select between three different relative tweeter levels, and single or bi-wire/-amp connection.

The Araxe did pretty well in the listening tests, though the panellists were a little unsettled by its 'differentness', and at least one panellist didn't find the horn tweeter particularly to taste. Another found his reaction varying from track to track, which perhaps indicates that this speaker is rather good at drawing out the very real differences between recordings. That certainly seemed to be the case during the hands-on work. More than any other speaker in the test group, it proved capable of generating some genuine dynamic grip and tension, though ultimately a lack of deep bass remains a minor handicap.

Neat, compact and attractively finished, the Araxe might not have the weight and scale of some rivals, but its dynamic literacy and ability to create real musical tension seems more than fair compensation. The Audiophile Club 🕿 020 8882 2282 Reviewed in HFC 204

#### **Audio Note** AN-E/D

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £1.520.00 △

Originally reviewed and Recommended way back in 1992, the Audio Note Type E has long been a favourite tool amongst HFC reviewers. A design with a long and chequered history, it certainly looks a bit of a throwback design-wise. Normal stands are quite inappropriate, so Audio Note supplied its own matching heavyweight platforms (£199). The speaker is also available in a whole variety of versions, ours being the basic 'entry level' £ 1,520 AN-E/D

Finished in good quality vinyl woodprint, bi-wire terminals and a large port are fitted on the rear. The tweeter has a 25mm doped fabric dome, the main driver a 200mm cast frame and a 150mm paper cone, terminated in a foam surround. In-room measurements point towards free space siting.

Praised for providing loads of detail, subtlety and insight, this is a good all-rounder. It draws its compromises very artfully, delivering an even overall tonal balance with excellent low bass weight and extension, yet also creating music with lively and invigorating dynamics. It's a very 'busy' sound, with loads going on. The music has fine pace and drive, but can sound just a tad untidy, lacking some of the smoothness found in less sensitive designs. There is, perhaps, just a slight lack of presence energy, which dulls the impact and explicitness of voices a little, but those are minor quibbles about an otherwise very well balanced design.

The AN-E/D might look like a bit of a throwback, but the music it makes is as good as ever, and is a most elegant compromise with a fine balance, wide bandwidth and expressive dynamics. Audio Note UK Ltd 2 01273 220511 Reviewed in HFC 204







**** MHAT HI-FI? NAD C350 October 2000





**** ** MATHIFF? NAD C370 Supertest winner September 2000

#### Modesty prevents us from quoting the rest of these reviews, but you get the idea!

When the time came to update the heavyweight members of our amplifier range, we knew it would be no easy task - just the kind of challenge our engineers relish and the breathtaking results have just scooped the coveted What Hi-Fi? Amplifier of the Year for an amazing **third** year in succession! Listen to NAD for yourself - you'll soon swear by us!



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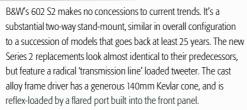






#### **B&W** DM602 S2





No one would describe the large chunky vinyl woodprint box as stylish, but that's not really the point. The purpose is essentially to offer the best sound quality for the money. The shape is determined by the desire to use a single, relatively large main driver, and the vinyl is all about keeping the price down. Our room responses point towards free space siting, though some wall proximity should also be tolerable.

Top of the lists on the first listening test day, and a close second on day two, the 602 showed a real touch of class when presented alongside its contemporaries. This had much to do with an unusual measure of dynamic authority and accurately drawn contrasts, alongside a warm, rich balance.

Crescendi were handled with noteworthy headroom and freedom from strain, and the adjective 'communicative' kept cropping up in the listeners' notes. "Big; delivers the 'live' feel very successfully", commented one panellist. While the presence might be a little too restrained for some tastes, in every other respect this is an excellent speaker that's all the more impressive because of its relatively modest price. Best Buy.

B&W Loudspeakers 2 01903 750750

Reviewed in HFC 201



#### **B&W** DM601 S2

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £199.95 △

A classic two-way stand-mount, the DM601 S2 has an impressive history that can be traced back at least two decades. Its immediate ancestor is the original 601 reviewed in 1996, and this new version looks almost identical, but incorporates some significant underskin engineering changes, including a radical new 'tubeloaded' tweeter. The vinyl finished enclosure has an internal volume of around 14 litres, while the main driver has a 120mm diameter Kevlar cone, and a tough cast alloy frame.

The build is solid enough, using a foam-lined box built from 13mm chipboard, while the front panel is a combination of structural plastics backed by 12mm MDF. The plastic moulding incorporates a small flared port, while twin terminal pairs provide bi-wire/-amp options for those that wish to use them. The bass alignment is approximately suited to either free-space or closeto-wall siting, indicating that best results are likely to be found somewhere in between.

Sonically, the 601 S2 is a classy and clever all round compromise, combining a nicely voiced, if slightly 'shut in' midband, with a degree of authority and bass drive that's unusual in this price zone. The treble is perhaps a little too obvious on some tracks, but is also clean enough to get away with it (on most material anyway). However, textures do seem a little 'thickened', and there's a degree of 'boxiness' evident in the upper bass.

Ultimately, this is a highly competent all round performer, which perhaps plays it a little too safe in trying to avoid causing offence, and ends up a little lacking in vim and vigour. B&W Loudspeakers 2 01903 750750 Reviewed in HFC 207





Smallest and least expensive of B&W's upmarket Nautili, the 805's pricetag is a substantial £1,400 for a compact two-way standmount, but advanced technology provides some justification, and the striking styling is likely to be a major selling point for many prospective purchasers. This design is stuffed with features to promote sound quality. The curved cabinetwork avoids parallel sides (and hence frequency-specific internal box modes), while the shape is inherently very stiff, and further reinforced by an internal 'honeycomb' matrix.

The teardrop-shaped tweeter is mounted externally on top of the enclosure proper, to provide wide radiation, while a long tapered tube absorbs rearward radiation. The main driver has a cast-frame and 120mm Kevlar cone with large phase plug. A front panel port features the stippled 'golf ball' surface which minimises turbulence at high air velocities.

The Nautilus 805 had a mixed reception in the listening tests: disappointing when the speaker was about 1ft away from the wall, but much better when it was placed clear of walls – even though it was recognisably a little bass light here. The sound is definitely bright, but clean enough to remain relatively easy on the ear. It's smooth and even, with a remarkable freedom from the usual 'boxy' colorations, and a wide dynamic range, but the midband could be more convincing dynamically.

This remains a small loudspeaker at heart, with limited dynamic vigour and excitement. But it has a wickedly clean treble, a lovely lack of boxiness, loads of detail, and looks very stylish indeed. *B&W Loudspeakers* **№** 01903 750750 Reviewed in HFC 198



A NEW REALISM-Audio Research delivered true reference sound quality with its Reference 1 preamp and Reference 600 monoblocs. A number of customers looking for Reference 600 sound quality have asked for slightly lower output power and a smaller chassis. The new Reference 300 is the smaller, guieter and cooler answer to these customer's needs. Good news too for existing Reference 600 customers who can opt for the MkII factory update while new-build Reference 600MkIIs are now available. The all-valve

Reference 2 stereo line preamp offers the same full microprocessor remote control of volume, balance, record and input selec-

tion with both balance and single ended inputs (eight plus full tape loop) and outputs (two main, one tape) as its illustrious predecessor. But all new audio and power supply circuits have advanced the state-of-the-art yet again. **REAL VINYL** — LP record lovers will be delighted at the arrival of the

Reference Phono allvalve phono stage. The Reference Phono features two sets of inputs one for low-output mc pickups and one for highoutput mc and mm designs. Used with the Reference 2 or similar preamp there is enough gain for any cartridge. Flexible loading is offered.

REAL PARTNERS — Audio Research introduced the LS8 in 1997 as an affordable reference-calibre valve preamp. The new MkII version is a pure Class A design with improved component quality, improved isolation feet and chassis damping. The LS8/II is a single-ended design. Perfect partner for the LS8 is the 100.2 solid-

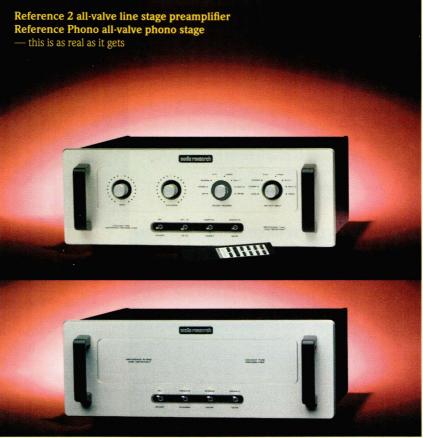
state power amp which we believe sets a new standard. Liquid and grain-free, it possesses a fine midrange transparency.

**REAL PRIORITY** — **Audio Research** has also announced the **125.5** Audiophile Standard Multichannel solid-state power amplifier for home theatre installations. Though coming late to the home theatre market, Audio Research believes priority had to be given to audiophile quality sound and delayed introducing a home theatre product until fully happy with the sound quality.

**REAL TRADITION**—the **PH3 phono preamplifier** is eagerly sought out by those enjoying the renaissance of interest in vinyl. A total of 109 part changes now see the PH3 in Special Edition guise as the **PH3SE**. An upgrade will be available for existing owners.

**REALITY CHECK** —the all-valve **LS25** brings down the cost of true **Audio Research** high-end performance. This line stage preamplifier can be perceived as a slightly small Reference 1. It is a pure Class A design with

Winning the race DEALISIV



smooth detailed sound, clean focus and plenty of bass impact. It has the flexibility to integrate with high quality audio and video components. REAL PERFORMANCE —the LS16 preamplifier is for those looking to make a transition into real high-end yet wish to retain the convenience of full remote control of all front panel functions. It offers both singled ended and balanced inputs with microprocessor controlled relays for gain control and switching. Enthusiasts looking for the traditional qualities of an all-valve line preamplifier will find them carried over into the LS8 which replaces the popular LS7 and LS9. REAL POWER -The 100 watt per channel VT100 power amplifier is a hard-driving amplifier

> with true bass slam matched by a liquid mid and top. Its speed and control have to be heard. Robert J Reina (Stereophile March 1999) concluded his VT100 review: "This extraordinary amplifier is beginning to make me wonder if current tube technology may once again be edging ahead of solid-state in the race for ultimate sonic realism". The VT100 MkII build features doubled power supply energy storage, cooling fan and valve damping rings. MkII enhancements are available as a factory upgrade for existing owners. The mid-power VT100 comes between the classic VT50, at around £3300. and the mighty VT200. Jonathan Valin writing in Fi magazine (October 1998) went so far as to rate the VT200 as: "The best high powered stereo amplifier I've heard — a genuine hi-fi masterwork". **REAL PARTNERSHIP** — The LS16/VT200 pre/power partnership puts excite-

ment back into your music with its detail resolution and dynamic slam.

**REAL INTEGRATION** — enthusiasts waited a long time for the CA50 all-valve, remote control integrated amplifier. Conservatively rated at 50 watt per channel the CA50 is designed to be stunningly musical, handsome in appearance — its styling cues coming from the awesome Reference series — and completely convenient. Audition this important **Audio Research** first and find out why Ken Kessler (Hi-Fi News February 1997) said, "**So much for the superiority of separates...".

**REAL QUALITY** — An entirely new full 20-bit CD player, the CD2, is styled to match the CA50. As a complete player **Audio Research** is convinced the CD2 can compete with any single or two-box player in the market with its astounding resolution of detail and dynamics. Don't lose out in the race for sonic realism?—contact **Absolute Sounds** for full information and a list of dealers where you can experience **Audio Research**.



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#### Castle Severn 2SF

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £699.90 <

The original Severn 2 was apparently Castle's most successful model ever, a fact which I suspect owes much to its exceptionally lounge friendly size, shape and appearance. Now it's back, this time in SE form, featuring changes to the drive units, crossover and port. Essentially a simple port-loaded two-way, the Severn 2 SE looks notably compact, standing just 84cms tall and with nicely radiused edges to 'soften' the lines. It has a neat matching plinth, classy real wood veneer, and flush-mounted drivers, all contributing to the speaker's good looks.

The 150mm cast chassis main driver has a 115mm carbon fibre composite (CFC) cone, while the tweeter uses a 19mm soft plastic dome. The main driver is loaded by a 'hidden port', which fires down through the base of the box and out through a precisely dimensioned slot between the cabinet base and the separate plinth. The in-room measurements indicated that some wall reinforcement is likely to be beneficial.

The listening test findings were a little disappointing, though in a price context the 2 SE didn't fare too badly. The sound is crisp, clean and impressively literate dynamically, with good coherence and lively dynamic expression, right down through the bass region. The complex bass lines on Basement Jaxx were handled with considerable competence, but voices can be a little coarse and crude.

The Severn 2 SE is more engaging and involving than its predecessor, if rather less neutral through the voice band. It remains one of the best looking compact floorstanders around at its price, so cautious Recommendation seems appropriate.

Castle Acoustics Ltd 2 01756 795333

Reviewed in HFC 204



The several Dalis which have come HFC's way over the years have included at least two floorstanders of notably good value, and that same characteristic clearly applies to this massive Evidence 870. It is, in truth, a bit of a monster, turning the scales to around 28kg, and standing comfortably over a metre off the deck; the 24cm width is hardly 'slimline', while depth is half as much again.

The finish looks very good from most angles, with real wood on the front and the double-tapered sides, plus a shiny glass top. A full three-way design, a hefty integral plinth provides secure accommodation to the chunky spikes. Bass is supplied by two drivers, each with 150mm cones, augmented by a port. The midband is delivered from a 93mm cone driver, while the tweeter uses a 28mm dome. Even with the speakers well clear of walls in a reasonably large room, in-room measured output is rather strong through the bass and lower midrange.

The sound is undoubtedly big, full scale and genuinely authoritative, while the ample headroom also provides excellent analysis and dynamic contrasts through the bass region in particular. But it can also sound a bit heavy-handed, thickening textures somewhat, and does have some thumpy tendencies, and the midband does sound a little constrained.

You get a whole lot of speaker for your money here. The smooth balance comes with massive headroom reserves and copious bass output. Perhaps slightly more suited to movie than music replay overall, the total package looks impressive enough for Recommendation.

The Audio Club 🕿 01296 482017 Reviewed in HFC 204



#### **Dali** Evidence 870

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £1,299.95 <

Successor to the Isis (reviewed and Recommended in HFC 170), like all Castle models, the Richmond has an attractive real wood finish. and is available in a wide range of different veneers, mostly at the 'standard' asking price (a deluxe version is priced at £299.90). It's a small two-way design loaded by a front port, with a single terminal pair on the rear.

Castle Richmond

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £249.90 △

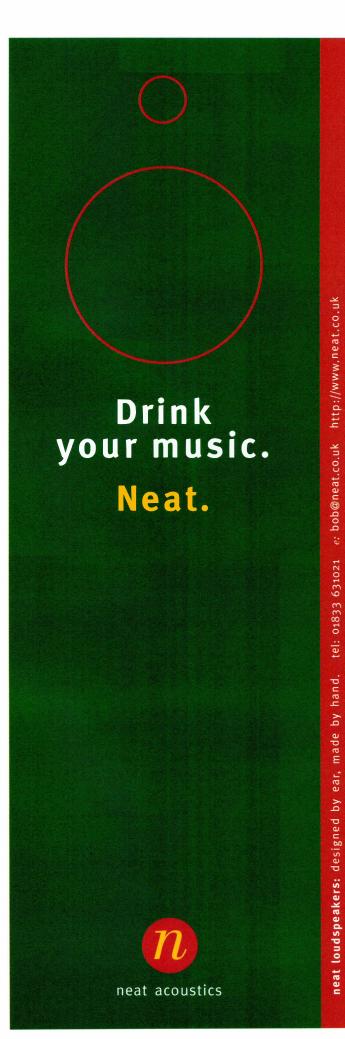
The classy main driver features a cast frame and a cone made from a polymerised woven carbon fibre matrix. Said cone is a modest 100mm in diameter, which is bound to limit bass headroom and extension, but also more likely to preserve integrity towards the top end of its operating range. Placed with backs against the wall, the Richmonds deliver a smooth and well-balanced bass down to around 50Hz in-room.

But even with wall reinforcement, the Richmond's lack of bass weight and power was evident enough in the listening tests, and an inevitable handicap. At the same time, its fine midband coherence and a basically lively, if forward, disposition proved rather attractive, and was certainly very informative when reproducing human voices. One panellist remarked: "Not fazed by big transients, though not much low frequency extension. Tight, bright and clean; quite coherent and exciting." That said, others were a little more cautious, finding the midband a little 'shouty' and coloured, and the treble a tad ragged, suggesting this Castle might not suit all tastes.

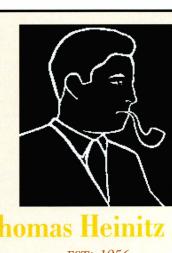
Clearly a speaker that's better suited to smallish rooms, the Richmond delivers an outstandingly clean and coherent midband performance, and looks a prime candidate for use alongside a good quality active subwoofer.

Castle Acoustics Ltd 2 01756 795333 Reviewed in HFC 201









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#### **Dynaudio** Audience 50

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £577.00 <

A long-established Danish company best known for its unusual main drive units, the Audience series is Dynaudio's 'budget' range of complete speakers, though £577 for this vinyl-finished compact two-way stand-mount is hardly what the marketplace regards as a 'budget' price. The Audience 50 was originally reviewed back in *HFC* 174, earning itself a BB rating. It has since undergone a number of changes, including moving the tweeter much closer to the main driver, to improve acoustic integration through the crossover transition.

The box feels reassuringly solid, and its chunky shape is sensibly dimensioned. The main driver is a notably tasty device, using an over-size voice coil to drive a cone/dome plastic diaphragm some 115mm in diameter. A solid cast frame ensures fine overall mechanical integrity. Dynaudio's own tweeter has a 28mm fabric dome. Room measurements indicate free space siting, though foam bungs are provided for blocking the port if the speakers are placed close to a wall.

That original Audience 50 did startlingly well in the blind listening tests, so one interesting question was whether this new version would repeat the trick. Gratifyingly, it did. Naturally, it doesn't have the scale or weight of some floorstanders, but it doesn't give a whole lot away, and does manage just about everything else rather well, sounding impressively clean, with a wide dynamic range. The bass is always lively and agile, while the balance and voicing, with just a touch of mid forwardness, is just about ideal. The Audience 50 remains a stand out performer in its price class, and deserves to retain its Best Buy rating. Dynaudio UK 22 01732 451938

Dynauaio UK 🕿 01/32 43.

Reviewed in HFC 204



FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £399.90 <

Energy is based in Canada, quite close to the forests that supply the raw material for the enclosures, which makes a certain amount of sense. The e:XL 25 is a compact, slimline floorstander with two main drivers, presumably operating as a 'two-and-a-half-way', with the lower of the two drivers merely used to augment the bass

Finish is vinyl woodprint, and the box edges and corners are sharp, but it's still a very good looking speaker, attractively proportioned and unusually slim. Neat little plastic mouldings extend the floor spikes an inch or so outside the line of the cabinet, ensuring excellent overall stability. The drivers each use 100mm polypropylene cones, while the tweeter has a small asymmetric 'horn' loading a 19mm metal dome. The in-room responses indicate that close-to-wall siting is probably best avoided (though you might get away with it).

The e:XL 25 scored the highest mark of the day, which has less to do with excelling in any one particular area, and more because it does everything competently-to-well, with no obvious weak spots. The sound is just a tad thin and could be smoother, but it's basically very well ordered, making a nice attempt at dynamic expression, and delivering some bottom end grunt too, though the top end can get a bit wearing over time. This is a very impressive loudspeaker, which looks neat and compact, is acoustically well matched to the typical listening room, and has a good all round balance of performance compromises.

API (UK) Ltd 20 01473 240205

API (UK) Ltd ☎ 01473 240205 Reviewed in HFC 201



#### **Heybrook** Heylios

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £269.00  $\triangle$ 

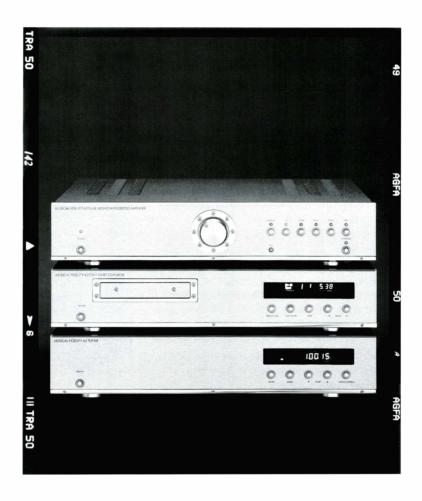
This attractive compact stand-mount was originally reviewed as a Best Buy back in 1997, but Heybrook have since been taken over by the much larger AGI group (JPW et al), and production efficiencies have allowed the price to be cut. This new £269 Heylios is effectively unchanged in any significant way – apart from being much more competitively priced!

The shape and finish both have a slightly old-fashioned 'Classic' look. Trendy it's not, but it should fit in well with traditional, period style furnishings. The proportions allow for a decent size main driver, with a moulded plastic frame and a doped paper cone about 125mm diameter. The tweeter uses a 25mm soft fabric dome. In-room responses indicate that the Heylios is well balanced when clear of walls, but should be able to tolerate some wall reinforcement if preferred.

The Heylios did pretty well in the listening tests, though it didn't hit the top of anyone's charts. "Perfectly adequate – doesn't do anything badly wrong – just not very exciting", was one comment that seems fairly typical. The slight mid forwardness helps create a good first impression, delivering good expression without pushing so far as to create unwelcome 'shout'. It also helps retain good voice intelligibility at low levels, though a slight lack of 'body' and 'warmth' was also noted, and it does seem a little short of dynamic freedom and bottom end drive. Even though the sonic performance didn't stand out quite as obviously as those originals, it still delivers plenty of the goods for the money, and it's pretty obvious that the BB rating should continue.

Audio Group International ☎ 01752 333800 Reviewed in HFC 201





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#### JMLab Cobalt 815

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £999.00 <

Known initially for its Focal drive units, leading French brand JMLab now has a vast portfolio of complete loudspeaker systems. The seven-strong Cobalt line-up fits exactly on the halfway mark in terms of price and pretension, and this £999 815 is just one step below the biggest Cobalt.

It's a very substantial loudspeaker, weighing 21 kg without mass loading, and fitted with two hefty cast-frame main drivers with 120mm 'polyglass' cones. Both drivers work together (along with the front port) through the bass region, the lower one then rolls off early while the upper one carries on up to one of Focal's classy Tioxid inverted dome tweeters. The box is finished in a decent real wood veneer, though the front baffle is a rather more severe black. In-room traces confirm this speaker is best kept well away from walls.

The panel members were rather unimpressed by this Cobalt 815, but on this occasion I disagreed. The 815 does have a certain 'boom-tizz' character, which imposes itself on the music, and the broad upper midband does seem a trifle undernourished and laid back. But I quickly found myself getting into this speaker during the hands-on listening, coming to respect its lack of strain, its effortless dynamics, and the sort of dynamic tension small speakers simply don't seem to generate.

As big speakers go, this one's far from perfect, but its heart's very much in the right place, and one good reason for Recommendation is that it does the dynamic thing in a way no small design can manage.

Sound Image UK Ltd № 020 8255 6868 Reviewed in HFC 198



STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £799.00 △

A heftily built and generously proportioned two-way stand-mount, the Duet carries a similarly hefty price tag, reflecting the high class nature of both cabinetwork and drive units. The main driver here has a 120mm carbon-fibre-cone unit, crossing over to an unusual looking Audax-sourced

tweeter, which has a quite large (28x42mm) elliptical diaphragm made of gilt polymer, driven via a gas-filled envelope from a piezo-electric transducer.

The styling looks a little old-fashioned, with 'classic' proportions and a somewhat anonymous deep red real wood veneer. The far-field in-room response shows a fairly 'dry' bass alignment which suggests that some wall reinforcement might be beneficial – try placing the speakers about a foot clear of the wall for starters.

We used the Duet as the (sighted) warm-up act to the first listening test day, and the panel was quite uncomplimentary. It was then quite a shock when the second day's panel put it close to the top of their lists. Subsequent familiarity has brought not contempt but respect, even though the Duet took a little time to worm its way into my affections. In truth, it does sound rather 'middly', and a relative lack of treble is immediately obvious, especially under direct comparison with other speakers. But said top end (what there is of it) is at least delicate and free from attention-grabbing resonances.

The Duet doesn't come cheap and does have its peculiarities and colorations. But its heart is in the right place, with fine temporal coherence and a liveliness that serves the music well, and therefore deserves cautious Recommendation.

Audio Group International 20 01752 333800

Reviewed in HFC 198



Indigo 3

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £500.00 △

A new name on the scene, Indigo was created early in 1999 by an experienced team who felt the time was right to try and do it differently. As a result, they've come up with something a long way from usual stereotypes, which picks up many of its styling cues from the professional monitoring sector.

With a £500 pricetag, the Three's squat, dumpy shape flies in the face of current hi-fi fashion. It's a simple two-way stand-mount with an internal volume of 15 litres. All is magnetically shielded, the front baffle attractively sculpted, and the rest clothed in real wood veneer. The most controversial feature, perhaps, is that internal damping has been omitted. In-room measurements confirmed this design's suitability to

close-to-wall siting.

Prior to the formal listening tests, I was really taken by the Indigo's fine timing, crisp dynamics and effortless communication skills, and was rather disconcerted when the panel awarded relatively poor marks – the more so when I went back and was again immediately seduced by its charm.

The sound is rather more obviously coloured than smoother designs, with some hollow, 'wooden box' and 'cuppy' effects, while the rolled-off top end robs it of a little air and transparency too. But its intrinsic lack of time-smear confers a rare ability to cut through to the heart of the music, coping admirably with the complex rhythmic interplay of modern dance beats in particular.

Controversially different in presentation, fine basic communication skills make music of all types interesting and involving, which is a persuasive argument for a (cautious) Recommended flag.

Indigo Technologies Ltd ☎ 01480 861175 Reviewed in HFC 198





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#### JMLab Flectra 905

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £1,199.00 <



Amongst an enormous line up of complete loudspeakers, the Electras sit one level below the top-of-the-line Utopias, and can therefore be expected to supply something pretty close to the ultimate in performance, at rather less than the ultimate price. The baby stand-mount in the Electra range, the 905 is still pretty expensive for a speaker of its size, but at 14kg it's as heavy as many floorstanders.

This is no simple box. Sober, classy, and cunningly shaped, the three drivers are not only in a vertical line, but their diaphragms are also equidistant from the listener. This is, in short, a d'Appolito with added time alignment. The main drivers use the same 'W-sandwich' cones as those in the Utopias, and have cast frames and 90mm cones, while the tweeter has an inverted, oxide-coated titanium dome.

Liked by the listening panel for its refinement and delicacy, the 905 shows a lovely freedom from 'boxiness'. The bass is tight and well controlled, driving on with a measure of power and authority rare in a stand-mount, if a little constrained in air and freedom, and inevitably lacking in bottom octave weight. And if the treble is a tad obvious, it's also notably sweet and clean.

The midband may not be the last word in dynamic expression, and voices do sound slightly 'pinched', but the sound is both smooth and detailed, and the actual dynamic range is very wide. What it might lack in sheer weight and power handling, it more than makes up for in coherence, subtlety and agility. Amongst top quality stand-mounts, it has few peers.

Sound Image UK Ltd 2 020 8255 6868 Reviewed in HFC 204



#### **KEF** Q15.2

STAND MOUNT SPEAKER £199.99 ▽

Originally reviewed and Recommended in *HFC* 186, this Series 2 update looks very similar indeed. It shares the same pricetag, and the same slightly four-square, dumpy shape enclosing its 11.5 litre port-loaded, vinyl-clad enclosure. One of the more obvious changes is that said vinyl is now an altogether more convincing imitation. Less obvious is a larger and more powerful tweeter magnet, while the main driver's 125mm diameter polypropylene cone has been stiffened.

One feature unique to KEF is the Uni-Q drive unit, where the tweeter is mounted 'co-axially', directly onto the polepiece in the middle of the main driver cone, an axi-symmetric arrangement which should make it that much easier to accomplish successful crossover integration. The bass alignment is beautifully judged for close-to-wall siting.

In sound quality terms the Q15 remains the cherry in KEF's budget range, no question, and this review of the Mk2 version merely confirms that this speaker is a well balanced and lively communicator that doesn't get in the way of the music, handling any kind of material you throw at it with composure and aplomb. In the final analysis, the bottom end has a slight tendency to lose the plot on some of the most 'difficult' material, but in every other respect this remains a thoroughly impressive all-rounder.

The improvements in woodprint finish and treble output are both welcome, while the simple fact that it works so well when conveniently mounted close up to a wall will continue to win the Q15.2 many friends and customers.



HI FI CHOICE



#### **KEF** 035.2

enhanced finish options.

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £349.99  $\triangle$ 

KEF's Q Series has proved quite a success for this Kent-based company. The range is built around KEF's patented Uni-Q drive unit, a dual concentric design sporting a soft dome tweeter mounted in the centre of a polypropylene mid/bass cone. The entire line-up has recently been revamped to Q.2 status, with a new fourth generation Uni-Q driver and

The Q35.2 is a compact floorstander with just a single full-range Uni-Q driver, reflex loaded via a front firing port. There are standard binding posts to the rear, four apiece for bi-wiring should you require. The speaker features a neatly curved baffle, two additional finishes (dark apple and natural cherry) and the main driver cone now has a silver finish.

It's not, perhaps, the most exhilarating performer at first listen, and rock or dance purists may want for more bite and dynamic zeal. But with a broad range of music across a lengthy listening period the Q35.2 sails through with flying colours. Soundstaging is excellent: big, broad and seemingly well beyond cabinet confines, it fills the room with well-spaced sounds without demanding that the listener sit in a precise spot. Bass is fulsome, though a little thuddy, and the net effect is believable and cohesive.

Treble could be cleaner and crisper, say, or the bass better defined and the cumulative sound more dynamic. But few competitors come close to such an appealing mix of all-round attributes: a neatly-proportioned floorstanding form, clean-cut good looks and a sound you can simply sink yourself into.

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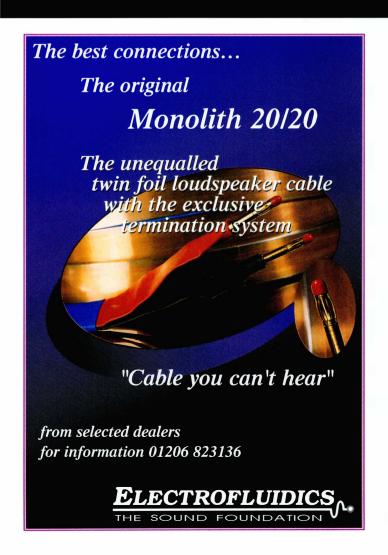
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#### Mission 775e

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £799.90 <

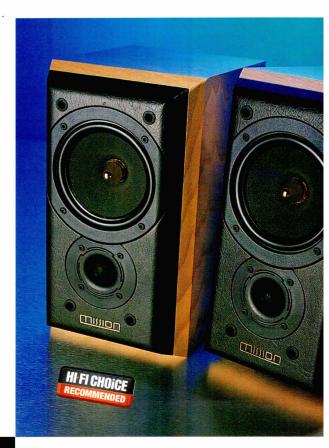
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One of the larger members of Mission's aerogel-coned 77-series, the floorstanding 775e is finished in real wood around the wrap, stands well over a metre tall and turns the scales to a hefty 21 kg, which makes a whole lot of classy-looking speaker for the £800 asking price. It's a two-way design, and stands tall to accommodate a d'Appolito style driver arrangement (with twin main drivers mounted above and below the tweeter), while also keeping the tweeter axis up at seated ear level. The two main drivers each have 120mm cones, and should give plenty of bass radiating area in conjunction with a large port. The tweeter is Mission's familiar 25mm fabric dome, mechanically decoupled using a leaf spring arrangement.

The panel reacted quite positively to the 775e, appreciating its openness and lack of 'boxy' effects, and a fair measure of transparency. The midband 'breathes' well, delivering a wide dynamic range right through the bass and midrange, albeit with a mild 'thickening' of textures and slight voice 'chestiness'. There's some lack of dynamic grip, and the sound as a whole lacks serious weight and authority, though there's plenty of headroom on tap, so no sense of strain when playing loud. Timing is very good, and the 775e delivers music with good pace and drive, all of which adds up to an involving, fun-filled experience.

Not a true heavyweight sonically, nor perhaps as neutral as some of the competition, the 775e is a very entertaining and communicative performer, with an unusually generous material content for the price.

Mission Electronics 2 01480 451777 Reviewed in HFC 204



#### Mission 782

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £699.99 <

The 782 is a new and radical design throughout, and unquestionably maintains Mission's deserved reputation at the forefront of modern loudspeaker design. It's exceptionally slim from the front, because the bass driver has been mounted on the side of the enclosure, and the front baffle only has to accommodate the smaller midrange and tweeter drivers. These bass drivers are mounted alongside their loading ports, low down and close to the floor, to deliver a more even and predictable response in room-coupling terms.

The midrange driver uses a brand new ceramic type cone material, code named Keraform, which Mission has helped develop with drive unit specialist Audax, 90mm in diameter, while the bass driver has a 120mm cone, and the tweeter a 25mm fabric dome. Best results in overall balance terms were found with the speaker as close as possible to the wall but that arrangement also created some alarmingly large modal swings.

"Nice mid, shame about the bass" was the succinct sum-up from one panellist, hitting the nail firmly on the head. Another singled out the treble sweetness for particular praise, and there's no disputing the 782's exceptional class through the midband and top end. There's a delicacy, coherence, sweetness and transparency here which is highly seductive, but the bass remains the Achilles heel, as much for its unpredictability as anything.

A beautiful and exceptionally lounge-friendly design in the Mission tradition, the superb midband should seduce many customers, and also seems sufficient justification for cautious Recommendation. Do take time to experiment with precise positioning, as optimising bass alignment is not easy.

Mission Electronics 2 01480 451777 Reviewed in HFC 199

#### Mission 771e

STANDMOUNT SPEAKER £199.90 △

Mission's original 771 was reviewed (and Recommended) in HFC 186, and this e-suffixed variation is remarkably similar in nearly every way. This is a true 'miniature', with an internal volume of just 6.5 litres and a main driver cone only 95mm in diameter, so it's no surprise that this 771e is the baby of the 77series, all of which have real wood veneer work, an ultra-lightweight Aerogel cone, and a very classy line in industrial design.

The enclosure uses an ultra-thick (38mm) front baffle, with heavy edge chamfering to narrow the perceived frontal area and aid lateral dispersion. A clever touch is the way the 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter has a form of leaf-spring decoupling. Twin bi-wire terminals pairs represent the most substantive difference between the 'e' and its predecessor. The in-room response indicates that a little wall reinforcement will help fill out the midbass, but too much can upset the midband smoothness. So leave around 20cm between speaker and wall.

The 771e sounds a bit small, thin, and undernourished through the bass and lower midband. There's some lack of warmth and tonal 'richness' here, whose impact depended rather on the material being played. Dynamic expression and range are not strong points, but the mid and top sound clean, clear and coherent, with plenty of detail and expression, thanks to a touch of forwardness.

This little Mission does have its sonic limitations, especially at the bass end of things, but it handles the midband and top end like a thoroughbred. It's an obvious choice provided your room is fairly small, and you value the real wood finish. Mission Electronics 2 01480 451777





KONICA HEXAR RE



**CANON EOS 1V** 



**MINOLTA RIVA ZOOM 150** 



**CANON IXUS Z-50** 



**OLYMPUS CAMEDIA C-3030** 





KODAK PROFESSIONAL SUPRA 800 TAMRON 3.8-5.6/28-200 SUPER II





**PANASONIC DVD-LV75** 





**EPSON STYLUS PHOTO 2000P** 



**FUJICHROME PROVIA 100F** 



PHILIPS 32PW9616



PANASONIC TH-42PW3E/B



MINOLTA DIMÂGE SCAN ELITE

THOMSON 'SCENIUM' 44RW65ES





**ONKYO TX-DS989** 



**PANASONIC DVD-RV60** 

**PIONEER PDR-W739** 



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SONY VPL-VW10HT

YAMAHA PIANOCRAFT



**MARTIN LOGAN PRODIGY** 

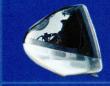


**JVC TH-A10R** 

VDO DAYTON MS 4100 SAMSUNG S-P2450 WINGO



MISSION 782



APPLE IMAC DV 'SPECIAL EDITION'



SONY DCR-PC5E



**JVC HR-S9700** 



SONY SCD-XB940



**MARANTZ PM7000** 



**CANOPUS EZ EASY DV** 



**ENERGY ENCORE SYSTEM** 

#### **Musical Technology** Kestrel Evolution

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £314.95 <





This Kestrel Evolution has a starting price of £315, but a string of options are available at extra cost. The base version is just the speakers themselves, complete with spike kit and finished in woodprint vinyl, but a £30 steel plate plinth is pretty well essential, and there's also a more attractive £80 ceramic plinth, used in our tests. A wide variety of real wood veneers and coloured lacquer finishes are also available.

With ten litres of enclosed volume and a 100mm main driver cone diameter, it's one of the smallest floorstanders around. The enclosure is pentagonal in plan cross section, with the advantages that non-parallel faces help avoid focusing internal standing waves. Metal diaphragms are part of MT's stock in trade, and the main driver here has a classy cast alloy chassis.

The Kestrel was very well received, rating just behind the best of the day: "Plenty of space... Just pleasing and natural without being artificially detailed or trying too hard". The Kestrel has a lovely open sound, smooth, very unboxy and transparent, despite a touch of detectable 'cuppy' nasality on voices. It could be more dramatic dynamically, with more sheer grunt, but dynamic range is quite wide, and total coherence impressive - provided you don't try and hammer it hard with demanding material.

The Kestrel Evolution is inherently better suited to smaller rooms and modest ultimate listening levels, but it is also refined and well sorted, giving an unusually delicate, open and transparent sound. Throw in the cute styling and vou've got vourself a Best Buv.

Musical Technology 2 01656 842000 Reviewed in HFC 201



#### Naim NBL FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £6,175.00 >

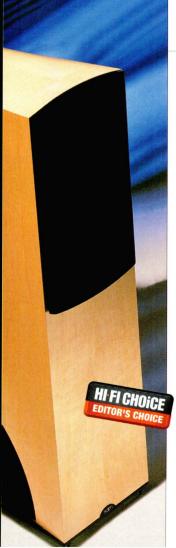
Naim's NBL 'nested box loudspeaker' is a four-driver, threeway design which costs £6,175 the pair. It shares the principles and drive units of its older siblings, but the very different execution is altogether more elegant and practical, while the sheer complexity of the design makes it seem very decent value for money. Available in active and passive versions, the latter tested here comes with a large and complex external passive crossover network.

This is a large and very hefty (41kg) loudspeaker, but by no means an unattractive one, thanks to high class real wood veneer, and an interesting shape. The speaker is intended to be placed close to a wall. The main enclosure is rigidly fixed to the cast base, but the drive units are all mounted in sub-enclosures with a variety of mechanical decoupling techniques.

The NBL is an astonishingly good loudspeaker in most respects, especially its wonderful dynamic range and freedom from boxiness. However, there's no avoiding a somewhat cold and clinical character. The dry bass delivery takes a bit of getting used to at first, but the freedom from boom, resonance and box coloration gives a very clean and articulate performance, with very subtle texture and tonality.

The NBL delivers a stunning amount of musical information with as wide a dynamic range as you'll hear from any loudspeaker, at any price. Some will certainly find the forward balance not to their taste, but anyone seeking serious speaker performance at a surprisingly realistic price ought to run a pair of these past their ears.

Naim Audio 🕿 01722 332266 Reviewed in HFC 200



#### **Monitor Audio Bronze 2**

STANDMOUNT SPEAKER £179 95 \

The new Bronze series represents MA's first ever real tilt at the true budget sector, and this £179 Bronze 2 more than matches the competition on size, weight and price. The front panel has classic Monitor Audio styling cues, and the familiar gold coloured tweeter dome, though in other respects the ingredients look pretty much standard budget speaker fare.

One item of interest is a new cone material used for the main driver, code named MMP for metal matrix polymer. At this price and size, vinvl finish is inevitable, but the woodprint used here (black or cherry) is prettier than most. The main driver has a 120mm MMP cone, the tweeter a 25mm alloy/ceramic dome. Although the Bronze 2 works pretty well in free space, the in-room traces show a classic 'wall-mount' alignment.

The Bronze 2s had the dubious privilege of following a pair of large £5,000 three-way monitors into the listening room, but it quickly dawned that these small speakers were actually doing a very decent job. When it came to mixing and matching the Bronze 2s with its price competitors, any initial enthusiasm had not been misplaced. This little Monitor Audio really is a bit special. The balance is pretty good, if just a tad shut in with some nasal coloration, but it also delivers a sound that has some authority and dynamic vigour. The bass has as much weight as you're entitled to expect from such a package, and drives things along with good authority. This new Bronze 2 is a real corker, looking good and combining solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance.

Monitor Audio Ltd 2 01223 242898 Reviewed in HFC 207

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### Loudspeakers

#### PMC LB1

STANDMOUNT SPEAKER £999.90 <

First reviewed and Recommended more than seven years ago, when PMC was a young fledgling company, the LB1 is a small, rather curiously shaped standmount – very slim, but quite tall and deep for its type, with an oblique slice through the top and back which helps direct internal reflections down into the absorptive transmission line that loads the main driver. Beautifully finished in real wood veneer, rebated drivers enhance the appearance. The main driver is a small Dynaudio device with 100mm plastic dome/cone, while the tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome. The in-room responses confirm that the LB1 should be kept well clear of walls.

Top gun on the first day's listening, with excellent consistency too, the LB1 was rather less well received on the second day, perhaps reflecting the different panel's reactions to a mild presence suckout, which is the LB1's most obvious character. While it's clearly no great bass excavator, it can still give clear insight into what the bottom end is doing and where its going, while the midband provides a very clear and transparent view onto the recording session. Within inevitable limitations of loudness capability and power handling, this is a genuine monitor design that adds very little of its own signature to the sound.

Still very much a contender despite its long history, the LB1 retains the fundamental character that earned Recommendation way back in *HFC* 110 – that it imposes very little character of its

own, onto either the system or the music.

PMC 2 01707 393002
Reviewed in HFC 198



#### PMC FB1

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £1,275.00 ▷

PMC has built itself a fine reputation in the professional monitoring sector over the past 10 years, but fashion is not a company priority, which explains why this new design is actually the company's first domestic floorstanding model. The £1,275 FB1 is attractively slim and rather tall, with nicely rounded baffle edges, finished in a choice of five high quality real wood veneers. A plinth extends the footprint, providing secure accommodation for chunky floor spikes.

Transmission lines are PMC's favourite bass loading method, and a metre tall floorstanding enclosure makes a natural partner. The main driver uses a 170mm cast alloy frame with a 125mm doped paper cone, while the tweeter has a 25mm metal dome with protective phase compensator. In-room measurements indicate the speaker will give the most even

balance when clear of walls.

The listening tests gave mixed results, two panellists giving the FB1 their top marks for the day, whilst the other two were rather less impressed. I suspect the doubters were reacting against the characteristically laid back balance, as extended subsequent hands-on listening left me quite convinced that this is an exceptionally fine loudspeaker, sonically very cultured and refined, with exceptional dynamic range, excellent timing, and clean, lively dynamics. Stereo images have good ambience recovery and fine transparency, combining a freedom from boxiness with delicate detailing and plenty of weight.

A class act, no question, the FB1's real strength is the way it combines the lively coherence of a high quality two-way, with the sort of bass weight and extension normally only found with multi-way designs.

*PMC* **№** 01707 393002 *Reviewed in* HFC 204





#### **NHT** Super Two

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £600.00  $\, < \,$ 

"Now Hear This" was the challenging slogan that originally helped build this American brand, along with some rather good loudspeaker designs it should be pointed out. The Super Two three-way is a logical step up from the Super One and 1.5 models, and is essentially a Super One with built-in subwoofer.

The all-over shiny black laminate is distinctive, if not quite genuine piano lacquer finish, and there are clever touches elsewhere, especially in the shaped steel brackets which take the place of plinth and spikes, looking neat, keeping the downward-facing bass driver the requisite distance above the floor, and ensuring good mechanical coupling with excellent overall stability.

The bass driver is completely hidden from view, the port is on the rear panel, so the Super Two looks quite understated, even though its midrange driver's 120mm pulp-cone is as large as most bass units these days. The tweeter is a soft fabric dome affair, 25mm in diameter and modified by short horn in its faceplate. Both drivers are flush-mounted into the front panel, while twin terminal pairs permit the bi-wire/-amp option.

The panel was quite taken with the Super Two, appreciating its unusually open, smooth and even-handed balance, and rating it ahead of several more expensive models. Ultimately, however, it's a little lacking in excitement. It has a very self-effacing sound which would be easy to live with long term, but there's some lack of exuberance too. The Super One and 1.5 had already established NHT as a brand to watch, and this Super Two floorstander only serves to enhance that reputation.

Recoton 2 01367 252605 Reviewed in HFC 198



#### Tannoy MX1

STANDMOUNT SPEAKER £119.90 △

Tannoy's Mercury M-series has dominated the budget speaker charts for the past three years, so this major revamp is big news. The new mX1 has the same basic configuration of a small port-loaded standmount, very sharply priced at £120, but features a number of sonic and aesthetic changes – not surprisingly, since production has been moved from Hungary to Taiwan.

HI FI CHOICE

The new model looks even more impressive for the money, with a strikingly white 100mm main driver cone, made from paper treated with a ceramic film. The cabinet has been substantially re-engineered, with screwed-and-glued front panel, rebated drivers, and extra internal bracing.

The mX1's balance errs on the side of caution, and those after a more overtly 'exciting' listening experience should maybe look elsewhere. But its smooth, slightly laid back presentation is amongst its greatest assets, carefully pitched to appeal to the majority of tastes and work well with all manner of budget electronics. This is a highly intelligent, low-cost, small-room design.

It loses a little weight in the bass, and adds some punch and pace through the midrange, the overall effect more agile and informative. There is perhaps some loss of apparent scale, but the gain in terms of overall poise outweighs this by some margin. There's more insight with classical material, while pop/dance fare is delivered with greater pace. Treble is still a touch blunted, and one or two similarly priced rivals deliver more sonic bite, but for allround guile at a remarkably low price, but the mX1 is definitely five star material.

Tannov Ltd 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 202

#### Tannoy mX2

STANDMOUNT SPEAKER €149.90 ▷

Tannoy's compact floorstanding mX3 earned a Best Buy rating in HFC 201, and the £150 stand-mount mX2 actually uses the same drivers, packaging them in a much smaller box costing some £80 less. Since the mX2 will need a pair of stands, which is likely to soak up any difference in price, the advantage would seem to lie

> with the floorstander, but it's not really that straightforward.

The mX2 is a port-loaded design, with a special foam bung which resistively loads the port, providing a little extra siting flexibility. Available in 'light maple' or 'nearly black' vinyl, the speakers come with an attractive silver-grey grille, and the drivers are now flushmounted into the front panel. The overall balance looks very well judged for free space siting with the port open, or with bung in place if close to a wall.

This speaker simply gets out of the way and lets the music come flowing through. Many audiophiles believe that a carefully chosen paper cone gives the best results, and the mX2's midband openness and delicacy, and its ability to deliver subtle

and believable textures, would seem to reinforce that point of view. It might be a little laid back for some tastes, and dynamic is not the first adjective to come to mind, but even away from its obvious midband strength, the mX2 hangs on remarkably well, and scarcely puts a foot wrong.

The mX2 is a thoroughly impressive all round compromise at a remarkably modest price, and should be well suited to budget electronics. All that, and good looks too!

Tannoy Ltd 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 207



FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £229.90 >

The Mercury mXs look very similar to their predecessors, and hit exactly the same retail price points, but have actually undergone a number of changes, including moving production from Eastern Europe over to the Far East. This floorstanding mX3 has

a highly competitive £229 pricetag, and comes in 'light maple' or 'nearly black' vinyl, with a silver-grey grille. The drivers are now flush-mounted into the front panel, adding a touch of class.

The main driver enclosure doesn't use all the box, and a cavity may be mass loaded. The joinery uses tongue-and-groove joints, plus internal bracing and mass damping. The main driver has a modest 110mm treated paper cone, strikingly white in colour, while the tweeter is a 25mm soft dome device. Foam plugs are supplied for blocking the port, but the bass balance is quite dry even with the port, indicating that some wall reinforcement may be helpful.

The mX3 didn't particularly distinguish itself from the herd in the blind listening tests, but did comfortably pass muster, which is a creditable result in view of the very modest price. It also delivered the sort of sound quality that's likely to work very well in a budget system context.

Its main strength is a beautifully voiced midband, which is both informative and relaxingly easy on the ears, and always somehow invites you to keep on listening. The mX3 represents excellent value for money. The scale of the sound doesn't quite match up to the size of the box, but fine midband voicing and expression make it always entertaining and enjoyable, and a deserved Best Buy.

Tannoy Ltd 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 201



FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £15,000.00

The photograph will tell you much more about the F1's strikingly different styling than mere words. Its super-shiny, extravagantly curvy, deep blue carapace sat very oddly in an essentially Edwardian lounge, but for such a large loudspeaker, the F1 manages to look surprisingly compact, the clever tapering towards the top and back creating a delicacy denied rectangular boxes.

Intended as a 'no compromise' solution, this is a large and very heavy loudspeaker, weighing some 65kg. It's also unquestionably very expensive, at £15,000 a pair. There are four drive units, but the system actually operates as a 'three-and-a-half-way'. In other words, the three upper drivers operate as a three way, while the big bass unit adds extra welly in the lowest octaves.

If the F1 is flashy to look at, the sound it delivers is restraint and neutrality personified. The first impression is likely to be underwhelming. Don't expect this speaker to reach out and grab you with melodrama and hype. Just sit back, relax, and give the sublime subtlety of this device time to work its magic. It's the little things that sneak up on you, like the smoothness and accuracy of the tonality, the spaciousness and exquisite focus of the image, and the simple (but very rare) observation that bass only happens when the music demands it. The speakers themselves seem to disappear as the perceived sources of sound, leaving just the soundstage itself behind. I tried several high quality amps and sources over the course of the review, and the F1s simply told it how it was, reproducing just what was fed to them, accurately and clearly.

TAG McLaren Audio 🕿 0800 783 8007 Reviewed in HFC 202





# Inside the new Total Film...



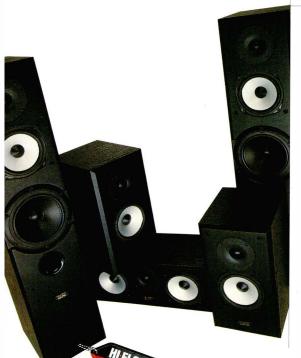


On sale now!

#### **Acoustic Energy** Aegis

MULTI-CHANNEL £639.85





Take a pair of floorstanding Aegis Threes for the main front left and right channels, a pair of the compact stand-mount Aegis Ones for the surround channels, and one Aegis Centre for the middle of the front soundstage, and you have a complete five-channel surround sound package for just over £600. Given the size of the Aegis Threes, it should be possible to do without additional subwoofery, at any rate when replaying music.

Smooth and even-handed to a fault, this package can hold its head up alongside significantly more expensive systems. However, it does also have a slightly sluggish and leaden quality, and seems rather lacking in the sort of dynamic punch and drive delivered by some of its more expensive competitors. The bottom end seems well enough rooted, but a little stolid and 'earthbound'.

The extra brightness in the centre-front does occasionally attract attention, and detracts a little from the front soundstage coherence, but the restrained balance elsewhere seems to work very well, and more importantly - should be well suited to the sort of budget electronics likely to be used with such a speaker package.

With good ancillary equipment it isn't difficult to hear the difference between a £600 and a £1,200 surround sound speaker package, and this is, in the final analysis, a beer-budget system. But it's also a remarkably good example of the type, which in overall smoothness and coherence can hold its head up alongside much more pretentious equipment, so a Best Buy rating is clearly appropriate. Acoustic Energy 2 01285 654432 Reviewed in HFC 198



#### Vienna Acoustics Mozart

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER £1,500.00 <

There are currently five models in Vienna Acoustics' 'Composers' series, and this £1,500 Mozart sits exactly halfway up (or down) the ladder. There's real wood finish and real wood finish, and the Mozart has a lovely, highly polished and figured rosewood veneer. The shape is the height of fashion too – ultra-slim from the front, with nicely rounded baffle edges too.

The two main drivers are small but classy cast-frame affairs, and their 95mm cones use a hard clear plastic codenamed XPP. Each operates into its own chamber, separately port-loaded at the rear. The tweeter has a 32mm soft fabric dome, and power is fed in through a single pair of terminals.

Despite some obvious balance anomalies, the panel really warmed to the Mozart, and gave it the top score of the day. The distancing of brass and voices in particular was obvious enough, but it somehow didn't seem to spoil things unduly. This speaker remained musically convincing and communicative despite – or perhaps because of - what one panellist aptly described as an "easy-listening" balance. The lack of presence energy became rather more obvious during the longer hands-on listening work, where its effect was most noticeable on speech. The bass has an occasional tendency to 'thump', but there's no denying the all round quality and essential musicality of this design.

Under normal circumstances the balance anomalies might disqualify the Mozart from formal commendation. But the underlying virtues of a musically very literate and communicative design nevertheless deserve a Recommended flag.

Henley Designs 2 01491 834700 Reviewed in HFC 198

HI FI CHOICE

#### **B&W** LCR6/ASW1000

MULTI-CHANNEL £2,249.70 △

B&W has adopted the most technically logical – if not the most lounge-friendly – approach to 5-channel surround sound, simply by supplying five identical loudspeakers. The stand-mount LCR6 looks just like a 'stretched' version of the 602 II, with two main drivers mounted above and below B&W's familiar metal dome tweeter. In build, finish (black woodprint vinyl) and appearance, the LCR6 looks very much part of the 600-series – in every respect except price. At £349 each, they cost significantly more than the three-way floorstanding 603 II, which seems a bit odd. Movie fans will welcome the impressive subwoofer, but for music the five LCR6s needs little if any extra bass.

Stereophonically, this is a stonking loudspeaker. The LCR6s take on a real mantle of authority, telling it like it is with the sort of dynamic grip and drive that's rare at any price. Perhaps they could sound smoother and a little more forward through the broad midband, and while the treble is clean and clear, it does tend to draw a little too much attention to itself.

I've yet to find 5.1 software which has the dynamic grip and focus of the best stereo material, but the fine delicacy, evenhandedness and dynamic range of this speaker all helped build up a remarkably seamless soundfield all around, convincingly recreating 'live' recorded acoustics.

The 5x LCR6 combo isn't the cheapest or most lounge-friendly package around, but its sparkling performance adds up to a redoubtable stereo/surround speaker system that fully deserves enthusiastic Recommendation.

B&W Loudspeakers 2 01903 750750 Reviewed in HFC 197



#### Loudspeakers

#### **BEST BUYS**



#### **REL** Storm III

SUBWOOFER £800.00

REL has long preached the gospel that discreet, high quality bass is a musical asset to any stereo (or surround) sound system, and quite different from the 'maximum bang for your bucks' approach from others in the field. According to REL, a properly integrated sub can help drive a room without drawing attention to itself, making music all the more moving by adding depth that's powerful but not obvious - until you switch it off!

REL's music-oriented ST-series has now reached MkIII status, the Storm III selling for £800 in black, or £900 in a choice of real wood veneers, and combines a 'musically correct' and quite flexible active crossover with a 150 Watt amplifier. Various connection possibilities are available, with speaker terminals preferred.

For some home cinema fanatics, REL subwoofers can sound a little soft-hearted. They don't supply the visceral impact of some American designs, that ultra-quick, sharp thud some enthusiasts crave as a hail of bullets rattles across the screen. But with music such subs are far too mouthy, failing to offer the coherent qualities necessary for high fidelity reproduction.

The Storm III is an altogether different box of tricks. It delivers tremendous depth when required, yet never makes a fuss, blending in seamlessly with the music when properly set up. Stick it out of sight and you may forget it's there, but you can be sure it's doing its work, unlocking hugely satisfying extra low frequency information. Music has more power without gaining unnecessary force - that's the magic of real bass.

Quite simply, the Storm is our favourite sub at less than £1,000, for music or general multi-channel applications. REL 2 01656 768777

Reviewed in HFC 203



This surround sound speaker package is actually christened Cinema 7, so there's no doubting where its coming from, or what sort of customer it's aimed at. Combining several different models, the £400/pair 733 is a very slim and elegant real-wood floorstander for the main left/right front channels. Similar in style, finish and drive units is the £200 77C, a much smaller centrefront channel speaker. The £200/pair 77DS surround speakers are very different indeed, and designed to be as discreet as possible once installed. None of these speakers is likely to produce much in the way of serious bass, so the whole package is underpinned by a £400 active (powered) 7AS2 subwoofer.

A pair of 733s operating in stereo provide a sound which is pleasantly open and beautifully voiced, if a little lightweight and bright in character. Add the 7A2S subwoofer into the equation and you get a very different animal, with bags of really deep grunt and some lack of warmth. The top is a trifle elevated too, so there's something of the 'loudness contour' about the overall effect, which is by no means unpleasant.

Surround sound music had a similar overall character, giving a marvellous impression of scale. Midband dynamics did seem a trifle constrained, but the voicing is delightfully natural and musical, and the sheer spaciousness and freedom from boxiness seemed fair compensation for the slightly wayward balance.

This Mission package does have its idiosyncrasies, but it also has considerable charm and an easy musicality that is difficult to resist. It's good looking, and seems well worth a Recommended flag at under £1,200.

Mission Flectronics 2 01480 451777 Reviewed in HFC 198

Tannoy Ltd 2 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 198



Tannoy's Saturn range of mid-price speakers have been developed with more than half an eye on the

enclosures are economically vinyl finished, but the star attraction is undoubtedly the classy cast-frame,

dual-concentric main driver with 120mm main cone used throughout. The total package comes to a few

pounds less than £1,100, which seems very good value. It consists of two Saturn S6 floorstanders for the

main left/right channels (£500/pair), plus a pair of stand-mounts (£380) and a centre channel (£200).

very well-controlled box colorations, though the treble might be just a little sweeter to advantage.

Surround sound operation was equally impressive, placing this relatively inexpensive Tannoy package

right up amongst the leaders. The surround soundfield has a tension, coherence and stability which

makes it seem almost tangible – the effect can be quite creepy at times – and none of the individual

This 5-speaker surround sound system makes a whole lot of good sense for £1,080. The use of

matching high class, decent size main drivers all round seems the very sensible recipe for sonic success,

even if that does make the individual boxes a little bulkier than some rivals. Plenty of serious welly and

Stereophonically this system works very well indeed, with fine tautness, some dynamic tension, and

The two floorstanders with their extra bass drivers obviate the need for a subwoofer.

loudspeakers broke the spell by drawing unnecessary attention to itself.

deep bass extension at this price adds up to a comfortable Best Buy.

home cinema sector, and take on board elements of the company's extensive pro-audio activities too. The





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## Systems

Hunting for separates is half the fun, but not everyone wants to spend time trawling the shops for a motley collection of hi-fi boxes which make the right kind of noise when combined. What's more, once you've found a mix to delight your ears, chances are your eyes may be less impressed. **So why not try our one-brand system reviews for size?** 



#### **Hints & Tips**

Building a system can be an unpredictable process – always listen to combinations of components before you buy. And don't assume components will automatically work well together just because they're sourced from the same brand – it doesn't always work that way. If you're building a separates system, make sure each component is properly supported, preferably each on a separate shelf of a dedicated, isolating hi-fi rack.

Cables are important, particularly if you want to get the most from a high quality system. Keep runs as short as possible and spend as much as you can afford – as a general rule of thumb, around 10-15 per cent of your total budget should be sufficient. And make sure you take care when setting up your speakers, as their position can make an enormous difference to overall sound.

In the high street, style systems are all the rage. Once termed 'lifestyle', these cute and compact little devils are a convenient one-stop purchase for people who want to play music but don't want it to dominate their environment (Lightweights – Ed). What's more, there are some stunning-looking designs out there – if you're searching for a conversation piece to match your Conran coffee table you'll find one of these the perfect *objet d'art*.

But do they actually sound any good? If not, they they're ignoring the very purpose of their existence. It's true to say many are a veritable triumph of design over performance, and we wouldn't recommend anyone who cares about music to come within shouting distance. But there are a few honourable exceptions, systems that combine an enjoyable quality of sound, cool features and neat visual appeal, ideal as a second system for the bedroom, kitchen or study. One or two even come remarkably close to the performance of a good quality full size separates system – Linn's Classik being a notable example.

But what if you're looking for that bit more, a system that gives a performance akin to the Holy Grail of high-end hi-fi sound? Are you doomed to a life of disparate black boxes taking up valuable space? Not a bit of it. Many specialist manufacturers are taking aesthetic style seriously, crafting separate components that look and feel as good as they sound. It's a bit like an enthusiast buying a car – performance may be the crux of the matter, but pride of ownership also comes from style, build quality and attention to detail. The little things matter.

If style is important to you – and let's face it, it is to most people – then sourcing a saucy separates system from a single brand could be the answer. That way you can get components that match visually and perhaps obtain a healthy dollop of system synergy into the bargain. It's an important element of system building: components that rate extremely well on an individual basis may not actually match well together, while other components that don't seem so hot on their own can come to life if they happen to find synergy together. In hi-fi, as in life, the whole can be more than the sum of its parts.

It's finding this balance that makes system building a fascinating and at times frustrating experience, and that's where our separates system reviews are designed to help. These tests sometimes throw up surprising results, with winning combinations emerging from unexpected origins. And sometimes there isn't even a black box in sight.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**LIFESTYLE SYSTEM:** A term sometimes used to describe stylish, pre-packaged systems. Often used generically, though American giant Bose claims ownership of the term. It's a rather outmoded word anyway...

**SEPARATES SYSTEM:** Any system which is built out of separate boxes – e.g. a CD player, an amp and a pair of speakers – is called a separates system. Separates can be bought from just one brand, or several can be combined to make up your ideal system – often the best way if sound is your absolute priority. The distinction is blurred by the existence of mini and micro systems consisting of separate components, but a separates system should really only be called such if its components are available separately.



#### **Marantz/Tannoy**

SEPARATES SYSTEM £729.80 △

Two of the bigger names in specialist hi-fi, Marantz and Tannoy forged an alliance back in 1995. Marantz taking on the role of distributing Tannov loudspeakers alongside its own electronics. The two companies work closely together in marketing and development, so a degree of sonic synergy is definitely on the cards. This system brings together the £300 Marantz CD 6000 OSE (original special edition) CD player, the £230 PM-6010 OSE integrated amplifier, and Tannoy's small £200 Revolution R1 speakers.

Both electronics components (see HFC 196) feature Marantz's 'soft-edged' alloy fascias, though the amplifier is much bulkier than its partnering CD player. The latter uses bitstream conversion, and is compatible with both CD Text and CD-RW. It has a clean, simple front panel, reserving less basic functions for the remote handset. The amp is a stripped-down affair, without tone controls and optionally bypassing even tape and balance. It has five line inputs including two tape loops, an MM vinyl input, and delivers a measured 98 Watts per channel. Tannov's R1 is a true miniature. prettily finished in real wood and using a 100mm main driver.

Sonically this system produces an impressively 'big' sound surprisingly so in view of the small loudspeakers.

Marantz 2 01753 680868 Tannoy 2 01236 420199 Reviewed in HFC 199



SEPARATES SYSTEM £599.97 ▽

This Sony package allocates half its £600 budget to the source, the well regarded CDP-XB930E CD player (HFC 195), one third goes towards the TA-FB730R amplifier (HFC 196), and just one sixth to the small SS-86E loudspeakers (the latter a venerable model, sent because a new design was not finalised in time). That CD player did particularly well when tested as an individual component, and has exceptional build quality for its price. The amp was less consistently well received in our tests, but partnered with the right gear and with full remote control, it's persuasive value for money.

Sonically the speakers were undoubtedly the limiting factor here, without the resolution, extension or control to show the electronics at their best, and limiting the system's ability to play loud. That said, overall results were surprisingly good, the razor-sharp timing and strong dynamic abilities of both CD player and amp ensuring that music was delivered with its energetic spirit intact. From the leading edge of a piano note to the snap of a pulsing rhythm, this system shows resolution rare in a set-up costing less than £600, and has a commendable ability to pull ambience from a recording and present a believable sound stage

Consider the speakers as something of a stop-gap, ripe and ready for upgrading when funds permit in order to take better advantage of the potential quality of the electronics. But even as it stands, this is still an impressive little system for the price.

Sonv UK 2 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 199



#### NAD/Dali

SEPARATES SYSTEM £999.85 <

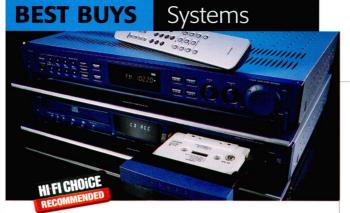
This combination of NAD amp and CD player with Dali speakers total very close to £1,000, the money spread quite evenly between NAD's £330 C540 CD player, its £270 C340 amplifier, and a pair of Dali Royal Menuet II speakers (£400) which are imported from Denmark by the same distributor.

Tested in HFC 190, the latter are true miniatures with just an 80mm diameter main diaphragm, which means they're really only suited to driving smallish rooms (and a subwoofer might be a particularly worthwhile accessory). The upside is a delightful line in polished real wood veneer. The relatively new C540 CD player comes in NAD's familiar grey battle garb, but looks altogether more 'styled' than earlier generations. The same is true of the C340 amp (HFC 192), which delivered a healthy 62 Watts on test.

Besides the caveat about smaller rooms, this system is probably not ideal if you like listening at high volumes – it can be a touch fizzy with cymbals, and a little soft-centred when it comes to dynamics. Provided you play within its limits, however, this is a hugely enjoyable performer, civilised and communicative, able to hang an image adroitly between the speaker and present a soundstage unbettered by any system in its test group. Its performance with classical music really sets it apart, where it sounds cogent and unforced; none sound more 'together', or bring the music together with such three dimensional depth. If you want discrete hi-fi to play at moderate volume, this system delivers in spades.

Lenbrook UK 2 01908 319360 Reviewed in HFC 199





#### **Marantz** Perla

STYLE SYSTEM £999.90 △

This system effectively gives standard width hi-fi components (an RDS receiver and CD/cassette deck) a makeover, with an aluminium case and slick motorised door. The effect is quite impressive, and this system also wins the award for sexiest remote of its test. Operation is a bit complex (to keep the button count down), but the major functions of both components are catered for. Connections at the rear are pretty much the standard: an auxiliary input, a single set of speaker terminals, although the addition of a secondary tape loop is handy.

The Perla is a powerful little system. With Tannoy mX1s, the sound is punchy with no shortage of grunt. Rock tracks make the most of this, but a blurring of instruments and loss of subtlety can weaken more complex or delicate material. With Aegis Three loudspeakers, the Marantz lets rip with a weighty performance that gets better as the volume increases. Radio had a warmer, smoother and more solid sound; tuning sensitivity is excellent. Tape functions are less than intuitive, and it took a while to work out how to go about dubbing, but the Perla worked very well with or without Dolby noise reduction. Played in other hi-fi equipment, tapes recorded on the Marantz sounded a little lifeless but were blissfully free of any obvious pitch distortions.

The Perla offered potentially the best compromise of sound quality and aesthetics in the group test, mixing a solid and gutsy performance with serious style kudos. Careful partnering of speakers is essential.

Marantz Hi-Fi UK 201753 680868

Reviewed in HFC 203



STYLE SYSTEM £650.00 ▽

This sexy little VH-600 comprises a CD receiver (£400) and MD recorder (£250), mini-sized boxes with a quite unique look – especially when installed vertically – their bright blue LCD displays showing just about every function you could ever want. The amplifier section operates in class A at low volumes (which means it gets rather hot). The remote handset is very plain by Kenwood standards, offering all the functions of the main unit but only basic MD features. The standard speakers look a million dollars even with grilles in place, and have a sexy blue aluminium mid bass unit and cup-shaped tweeter.

The bass output of the supplied speakers is rich and full, and a very good match for the system. The overall balance is pretty lively, with good extension across much of the more demanding material I tried. Hooked up to Aegis Threes, the sound is expressive and clear without any overbearing features at either end of the spectrum. The bass is deep and even-handed, and is backed up by a particularly clean midband presentation. The MiniDisc produces off-CD recordings that are as near as dammit impossible to tell from the original on the system itself. The tuner does a similarly fine job, although it prefers a strong signal to reveal anything like its best.

This Kenwood consistently presented a lively and enjoyable sound that, while a somewhat simplified view of music, has a strong appeal, with all the right ingredients for a lifestyle Best Buy. *Kenwood Electronics UK* 201923 816444

Reviewed in HFC 203



#### **Teac** Reference 100

STYLE SYSTEM £550.00 <

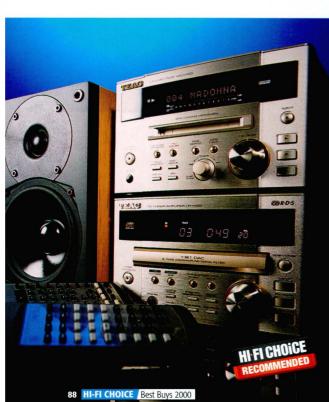
Teac knows a thing or two about stylish gold kit, and the 100 series is a sexy little system. Finish and build quality isn't up to the classy Reference 300 or 500 series, but this smaller system retains much of their character and appeal. In size terms this is firmly into micro-system territory, being only a little more than 17cm wide and supplied here with a pair of tiny bookshelf speakers. These are almost the same height as the two stacked components, which rather encourages using the system all pushed together. Despite taking up no more room than a portable, this wouldn't extract anything like its full potential.

The CD receiver offers a number of pre-set sound equalising modes listed as classic, vocal, pops and rock. Each has a quite obvious effect on the sound by highlighting various frequencies in the range in which the title material dominates. After an initial play, these are best forgotten: they simply colour the sound.

One of the more pleasant surprises of this test was the Teac's little speakers. They've got it where it counts, sounding relaxed and well balanced. Upper frequencies are well projected, giving a firm sense of space and imagery. Bass is lightweight, but also tight and tuneful, and they go impressively loud for such a dinky design. This Teac makes fine MD recordings with very little noticeable degradation of the sound. Bass remains delicate and agile, and the top end sounds well extended without the blandness than can affect MD recordings. The RDS tuner is not sensational in sonic terms, giving FM broadcasts a distinctly shut-in sound.

The Reference 100 is a good looking and reasonable sounding system straight out of the box. It has an enviable synergy with the standard speakers, and this lends the sound a sonic delicacy very rare in budget systems.

Teac ☎ 01923 819630 Reviewed in HFC 203





#### Onkyo FR-435

STYLE SYSTEM £550.00  $\triangle$ 

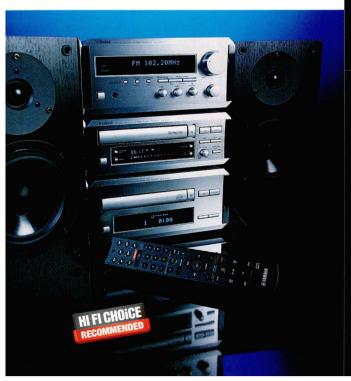
Dancing the fine cosmetic line between style and tradition, Onkyo's £550 FR-435 is a complete lifestyle system in a very 'hi-fi' 440mm wide box. This in itself lends a hint of audiophile pretension, but does mean losing an acreage of shelf space. Despite combining CD, MD and an RDS receiver, the Onkyo is very much a minimalist design with a flap to hide many of the minor controls. The remote control is festooned with small buttons.

With a detailed and immediate presentation set within a wide soundstage, this system has a crisp and uncluttered nature that lends itself well to more subtle music, especially female vocal and lighter classical. Rebecca Pidgeon's voice elicited a healthy spread of goose bumps – and that's always a good sign. Floorstanding speakers added several degrees of bass weight, while pushing the volume up allows the sound to get well out of the boxes, although there isn't sufficient grunt to fill a larger room.

The Onkyo proved very capable of hauling in distant RDS radio signals, but emphasises FM hiss and tends towards splashy treble as the volume increases. MiniDisc recording from either CD or the radio could not be simpler, and the performance is eminently capable.

The open and lightweight sound is never going to establish the Onkyo as a party animal, but in terms of offering a crisp and detailed performance there were few models in the group to touch it. It is best partnered with larger, preferably floorstanding, speakers, to assist the bass.

*Jamo UK* **№** 01788 556777 *Reviewed in* HFC 203



#### **Linn** Classik

STYLE SYSTEM £1,020.00  $\nabla$ 

Linn's £1,020 Classik redefines the term 'lifestyle system'. A single-box amp, tuner and CD in a neutral coloured case, build is solid and inspiring. Linn recommends its stylish Local speakers (£195) or traditional Kans (£325), so we tried both. The design is unerringly Linn, a plain, odd-sized box with all the controls and display clustered to one side. The Classik has no built-in recording device, and a lack of digital outputs effectively bars digital recording to an MD or CD-R deck, while connection protocols are also unconventional. The 'sausage finger'-unfriendly remote control is functional but uninspiring, though once you get used to it, operation is quite easy.

The little Local speakers were no match for the Classik system, sounding thin, tinny and coloured. Hooking up the Kans was an altogether more enjoyable experience, providing a fast-track journey back to the world of real hi-fi. The sound is rich and detailed, giving well-recorded female vocals a very tangible presence. Rock and dance tracks have plenty of weight and drive, and the system retains enough air at the top end to sound equally impressive with female vocal and light classics. The tuner is also rather good, albeit with a hint of mush in the treble range.

The Linn Classik is supremely neutral and well balanced, and would not sound out of place up against a similarly priced stack of traditional hi-fi separates. There are a few niggles, but for pure sound quality in a compact system there is very little to touch it at this price

Linn Products 🕿 0141 307 7777



#### Yamaha Piano Craft

STYLE SYSTEM £650.00

Yamaha's £400 (£650 with MD) Piano Craft system comes in three boxes as standard, comprising a receiver, CD player and cassette deck. (An MD option was not available in time for this review.) Cosmetically it has a clean and uncluttered appeal, though things get a little untidy around the back. Among the usual selection of analogue and digital connections is a line-level subwoofer feed for Yamaha's SW45 active sub (an extra £140) to boost the bass. The controls feel a little plasticky, but the system is supplied with a single, well laid-out remote control.

'Brash and aggressive' summed up the initial performance, although matters improved noticeably as the speakers were run in, and on day two the sound was much improved. The treble is still on the bright side of neutral, but this is accompanied by oodles of gung-ho bass that thumps out of the speaker's rear port enough to ruffle wall-curtains half a metre away. The overall effect is a colourful, up-front and impressively loud performance.

Cassette replay is a little more laid-back than the original, but this benefits hiss even without noise reduction. Radio performance is more than acceptable with a strong signal, but there's an awful lot of background hash with weaker ones. Something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, the sexy piano-finish speakers and subtle looks hide the heart of a rocker. Sonic subtlety is not high on the agenda, but raw energy and enjoyment is – and that isn't altogether bad.

Yamaha Electronics 🕿 01923 233166

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### **Systems**



#### NAD Silverline S500/S300

**CD/AMP** £2,500.00 △

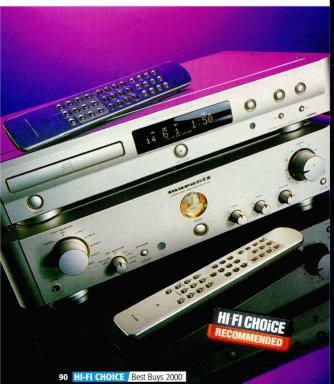
NAD's Silverline components are a far cry from the company's traditional budget machinery. The £1,500 Silverline 300 is an awe-some integrated amp. For one thing it has an extraordinary powder silver finish; for another it weighs 27.5kg and is amazingly nose-heavy. The mass comes partly from its dual mono construction (separate toroidal power transformers) and partly from an almost unbelievably weighty double-walled front panel. Claimed rated output is 100 Watts per channel. As svelte and dainty as the amp is big and bruising, the Silverline 500 CD player makes an arresting partner, which looks gorgeously lean and clean with the bare minimum of fascia controls. In fact, there's more going on round the back.

First and foremost, the NAD duo is an object lesson in how text-book hi-fi should sound. The combo has clarity and grip, high powers of resolution, analysis and organisation, knockout dynamics and bags of musical insight. Last, and far from least, though, it has extraordinarily powerful bass. The S500 CD player is already a favourite with people who like drive, power and good dynamics, and the S300 amp seems to leap at the chance to show what its 100 Watts can do.

The NAD combo might seem a little pricey, but you can see where the money has been spent. Truly synergistic bonding results in a terrifically dynamic and propulsive sound with killer bass.

Recommended without hesitation. Lenbrook UK 2 01908 319360

Reviewed in HFC 208



#### Cyrus CD7/7

CD/AMP £1,500.00 ▽

The elegantly finned die-cast bricks that house Cyrus CD players, amps, tuners and power supplies look as fresh today as when they first appeared – indeed fresher still in their new optional silver finish. The Cyrus 7's power output exceeds its rated 60 Watts per channel, belying its svelte build, and can easily integrate with the company's multi-room controller or AV processor. The matching CD player uses a Philips transport (capable of playing CD-RW discs) and Cyrus's latest 24-bit DAC technology. Upgrade paths include adding a PSX-R power supply.

In much the same manner as the best Cyrus products of the past, the 7 combo kicks out a fresh and lively sound that's beautifully clear, quick on its feet and particularly strong in the areas of resolution and focus. A good deal of the credit for this goes to the CD player's openness, grip and sheer resolving power. But more than that, it displayed a real penchant for killer bass and capturing subtle ambient cues. The Cyrus amp not only shrank the scale of the sound but also sapped some of its colour and richness. Listenability remained high and the 'sense of air' convincing, but everything sounded just a little thinner. Perhaps a little more drive and body and a slightly 'juicier' presentation would have been welcome.

The compact, lightweight build continues to poke fun at more expensive lumbering behemoths, most of which its beats hands-down in sound quality. Good system synergy, great looks, keen price. *Cyrus Electronics* 20 01480 435577

Reviewed in HFC 208



#### Marantz CD-17 Mk2/PM-17 Mk2

CD/AMP £1,699.80 <

If they were a box of chocolate, this Marantz duo would veer dangerously towards the Ferrero Rochet school of subtlety. Glamour without a hint of irony: boy, does this combo flirt with your attention in the company of the merely sleek and the silver. The £800 CD player is the less showy component, and reads CD-RW discs. The PM-17 Mk2 amp has five source inputs (including an MM/MC phono stage), source direct, defeatable bass and treble controls, and a new HDAM four-gang active volume control. 60 Watts per channel rises to 100 Watts into four Ohms, while the rigid die-cast chassis and aluminium casing are said to cut vibration.

The Marantz team just gets on with the job, doing its very best to make music, mostly successfully. A smoother combination than many, it may not have quite as many tonal colours as some, or quite the dynamic clout of others, but it does manage to sound remarkably weighty and controlled, and has a better, more 'architectural' bass performance than most. I suspect the CD player is the slightly more dynamic and thrusting performer. In the reference system, it displayed real grip and presented music in a tangible, coherent way with fine drive and rhythmic integrity. Restoring the Marantz amp removed some of the excitement. But, thankfully, not too much.

The Marantz system grabs your attention aesthetically and sonically, the glam look is matched by an equally confident sound that trades a little subtlety for scale and impact, and exhibits admirable synergy. Quite expensive but recommended.

Marantz Hi Fi UK № 01753 680868 Reviewed in HFC 208



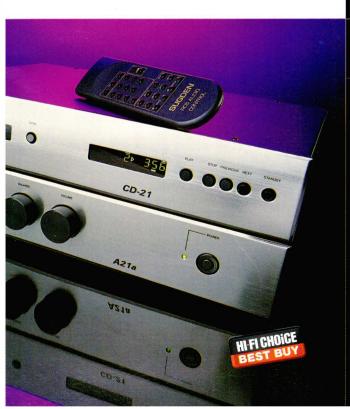
#### Talk Electronics Thunder 1/Cyclone 1

CD/AMP £1,099.90 △

Reviewed in HFC 208

Talk's in the business of marrying real hi-fi virtues with a genuine sense of style, at a price (£1,100 here) that won't necessitate taking a hammer to the piggy bank. The current Thunder 1 CD player and Cyclone 1 integrated amp have thick casing panels and machined aluminium control caps. 'Lightweight' still describes the overall build, but it's certainly no longer flimsy. The Cyclone 1 is a MOSFET design that delivers 65 Watts into eight Ohms and 90 Watts into four Ohms. The Thunder 1's sonic abilities are founded on a Crystal CS4390 (nominally) 24-bit DAC.

This is one of the more characterful combos in the group. Overall tonal balance is quite lean, and it's possible to point to the odd papery coloration in the upper mid band. An edginess and over-emphasised sibilance is evident with some material, too. None of which detracts from the system's fine dynamism and ability to rock. It's good with jazz, too. On the David Sanborn Up Front CD, Sanborn's saxophone sounds not at all artificial and it is imbued with just the right amount of bite. In contrast, lush orchestral arrangements can end up sounding somewhat undernourished and bleached. But the Talk duo's ability to track a rhythm and keep its finger on the pulse of the music is impressive. For brio and musical involvement, the Talk pairing ranks with the very best. Sometimes it can sound almost reckless but, for me, that beats safe and bland every time. Talk Electronics 2 01276 709966



#### Roksan Kandy KC-1/KA-1

CD/AMP £950.00 ▽

At fifty guid under the grand, this Kandy combo looks a lot more expensive than it is, with presentation and build quality that isn't embarrassed by the most expensive pairings in the group. The remote puts most rivals to shame, and the two boxes match harmoniously and symmetrically. Control ergonomics are beautifully simple. And then, of course, there's the colour – purple in this instance (but there are plenty of other options). It's a bit silly, but hi-fi needs an injection of silly, and everyone who saw it liked it. The final trick is to fuse a very grown-up spec with its delightfully junior price, the amp leading the way with 110

Rather running against the group grain, the Kandy amp has the measure of its CD sibling. To be honest, the CD player lacks refinement and smoothness and could occasionally sound a touch ragged and over-exuberant. Yet, with the Kandy amp doing its bidding, matters took a dramatic turn for the better. If system synergy is the Holy Grail of this exercise, the Roksan combo found it. Still not the last word in refinement or finesse, the Kandy duo sounded big, authoritative, dynamic and, well, just plain interesting.

A perfect example of synergy in action. The Kandy CD player is no great shakes but it combines with the beefy and rather more talented amp to play a blinder. Sonically clearly more than the sum of the parts, visually ahead of the game and the least expensive package on test, this really is a Best Buy with knobs on. Roksan Audio 🕿 020 8900 6801

Reviewed in HFC 208



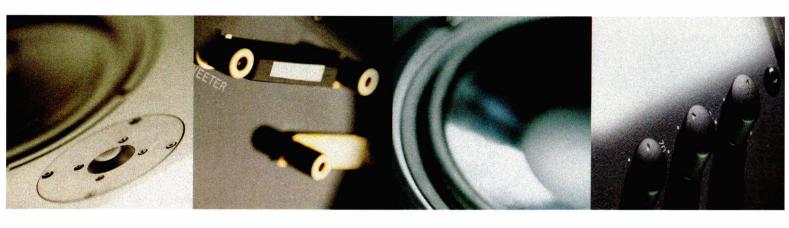
#### Sugden CD21/A21a

CD/AMP £1,749.90 <

Not fixing something that ain't broke smacks of laconic Yorkshire pragmatism. No surprise, then, that laconic Yorkshire-based hi-fi manufacturer Sugden has managed to avoid fixing its classic A21 class A amp for 30 odd years. Sure, it's evolved a little – more power and refinement and slim new boxes – but the basic circuit is pretty much the same. As ever, it generates the heat of a miniature Aga to generate a modest 25 Watts per channel (compared with the original's 10). Desperately inefficient speakers should be avoided, but little else should present problems. The CD player is a development of the earlier Audition series, the main changes being more sophisticated zero feedback class A output stage, and a much modified digital output.

The £1,750 Sugden A21a/CD21 combo is the best sounding in the group. Neither the most muscular nor the most exciting but, by a surprisingly breezy margin, the most consistently musical and enjoyable. Both components are class acts, and together they're even better. The sound is characterised by an extraordinary lightness of touch and a lovely delicate treble, which is almost entirely free from grain and fatiguing effects. The music is allowed to communicate without tripping over the mechanics of reproduction. The result is a seductive warmth and weight that's impossible to resist. Complicated tunes are delivered without fluster or muddle, simple ones with pace and conviction.

The Sugden combo draws its strength from an amp design that is 30 years old, and the CD player's no slouch, either. They work beautifully together, and look rather smart too – a clear Best Buy. Audio Synergy 2 01924 406016



# Five Stars For Value

Paul Messenger explains why you should visit an independent specialist dealer if you are searching for real hi-fi satisfaction

Why use a specialist hi-fi dealer? The short answer is because he knows one hell of a lot more about hi-fi than you do. And if you've gone to the trouble of picking up a specialist magazine on the subject, you're obviously interested in something rather more than a mini system from the nearest electrical superstore.

STAR QUALITIES

value for money ★★★★
service ★★★★
facilities ★★★★
verdict

You've probably bought this magazine for one of two reasons. You're looking for advice (presumably unbiased and good) on choosing and using your hi-fi system, and/or you're checking out the ads to decide where to go and buy it.

The independent specialist dealer doesn't know everything, and he doesn't know much about you, but if music's an important part of your life, he's the only guy around who's able (and hopefully willing) to help you choose the equipment which will give you the best long term satisfaction.

#### Power of the Press

Dealers sometimes moan to me about the power of the press, and the disproportionate influence of its 'Best Buy' and multi-star ratings. Well, I've been in the press for twentysomething years, and still feel more ignorant than powerful.

The more I mess around with hi-fi gear, the more I become aware of our lack of real understanding of the subtleties involved, and the more I appreciate the importance of the dealer's skills and experience, in bringing together components so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We hacks get paid to write words, often about components in isolation, because individual product reviews are still the staple diet of the press. They can sometimes provide a useful guide to the way a product performs, but only under the particular

circumstances in which the review was conducted.

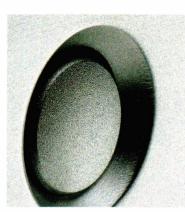
The hi-fi reviewer attempts, with varying degrees of success, to evaluate a particular component, and find something interesting (and hopefully positive) to say about it. That's about the end of it, and it's on to the next product.

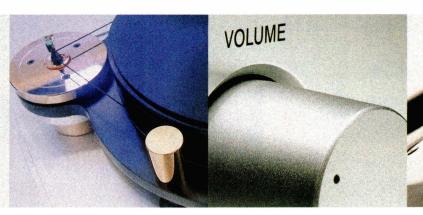
The magazine prints the review, and that very process magically confers a measure of authority. Experienced hi-fi enthusiasts, who read reviews over a period of years and try out various products themselves, soon start to realise the limitations of that approach. Some reviews are better than others, but none can get to grips with the real heart of the problem - whether a given product will improve your musical satisfaction, in your system and your room.

#### The Role of the Dealer

The dealer's role is very different, and potentially much more valuable. He has the chance to talk one-on-one. If he's good at his job, he'll use that opportunity to find out what you as an individual are looking (or listening) for.

His motivation is very different too. Sure he wants to make a sale. That's the lifeblood of any shop. But he also knows that if something he sells really does deliver long term satisfaction, there's a very good chance you'll come back again to see if he can repeat the trick some time in the future.





If you go into a shop and demand a particular CD player, on the basis that it got seven stars (out of five) in last month's magazines, the shop will probably simply take the line of least resistance and sell it to you. (Or switch-sell you to a similar price alternative, if he's fresh out of stock of that particular flavour-of-the-month.)

If you go in and say you're looking for a CD player, and want his advice on what to choose, things are liable to become more interesting. The onus is now on the dealer to show what he can do. His first task is to ask the right questions to try and get some idea of what you might be after.

Asking the questions is the easy bit. The real skill comes in using the information to come up with a shortlist of likely contenders, and then conducting a demonstration so that you have a real chance to play a central role in the decision making process.

Putting together a successful hi-fi system might not be as difficult as it was twenty or thirty years ago, but it's just as easy to make a mess of things. Put the 'wrong' combination of components together and it'll still sound a lot better than any cute little mini system package. It might even rate a five star review. But it won't match the potential of a carefully balanced and properly installed system, and it

certainly won't cater for your own particular preferences and personality.

We British are notoriously undiscriminating consumers, at a mass market level at least. The majority of the population don't even bother to drive a car they're thinking of buying, never mind take the trouble to listen to hi-fi equipment.

The majority will therefore end up with hyperstore mediocrity, and hi-fi that's about as tasty as supermarket bread. But if music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet. you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority.

You know full well that your music collection is as individual as your wardrobe, and just as precious too, so it's worth taking the time and trouble to search out the dealer and equipment that will make that collection come alive, and give you a new buzz every time you play your favourite discs.

The independent specialist may not beat the chain store on price, but he continues to thrive in a hostile environment because real hi-fi is so much more than a matter of price. The people who work in these shops are themselves enthusiasts, often with many years of experience in meeting customer's needs, and the very necessary expertise to ensure that the whole thing is properly set up to deliver the best results.

The better the hi-fi, the more important it is to get the fine details right at the installation end of things, but even the least expensive equipment can be made to sound a whole lot better if good care is taken over the fine details - the support furniture, the cabling, the positioning of speakers and so on.

Without expert assistance even high class hi-fi can give mediocre results. With it you'll stand a very good chance of ending up with something rather more than a consumer durable - something which will be a source of considerable pleasure and genuine emotional satisfaction for decades to come.

I agreed to write this signed piece, irrespective of the specific sponsors, because I believe the independent specialist dealer plays a vital role in giving customers long term hi-fi satisfaction. The views and opinions expressed here are my own and not necessarily those of Hi-fi Choice.

#### Paul Messenger

The specialist Dealers listed here are professional and enthusiastic. Give your nearest a ring for a demonstration.

#### TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

#### LONDON **GRAHAMS HI-FI**

190a New North Road 020 7226 5500

**ORANGES & LEMONS** 61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea 020 7924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER 109 Chiswick High Road 020 8400 5555

#### SOUTH

**SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI** 40 High St. 01233 624441

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 216 Moulsham Street 01245 265245

**AUDIO DESIGNS** 26 High St. 01342 314569

INFIDELITY

9 High Street Hampton Wick 020 8943 3530

RAYLEIGH HI-FI Dansk International Furniture World 01708 680551

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 44a High St. 01268 779762

PHONOGRAPHY Star Lane 01425 461230

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 132/4 London Road 01702 435255

MARTIN-KLEISER 278 High Street 01895 465444

PHASE 3 HI-FI 213-217 Tarring Road 01903 245577

#### **MIDLANDS**

Banbury OVERTURE 3 Church Lane 01295 272158

SOUND ACADEMY 152a High Street, Bloxwich 01922 493499

**CYMBIOSIS** 6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

LISTEN INN 32 Gold St. 01604 637871

**CREATIVE AUDIO** 9 Dogpole 01743 241924

Cheadle AUDIO COUNSEL 14 Stockport Road 0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL 12/14 Shaw Road 0161 633 2602

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS 184 Fitzwilliam St 0114 275 6048 SOUND ORGANISATION 2 Gillygate 01904 627108

#### SCOTLAND

RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI 34 Northumberland Street 0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO 260 St. Vincent Street 0141 248 4079

N. IRELAND Belfast LYRIC HI-FI 161 Stranmillis Road 028 90 381296



# Peripherals

While we have grouped cables, headphones, stands and mains accessories in one section, it is important to appreciate that these optional extras are pretty essential if you are after a decent sound. **If you want to add the finishing touches this is where to start...** 



#### **Hints & Tips**

Spend as much as you can afford on cables – around 15 per cent of your total system budget is a starting point. Plugs are important, so make sure the cable you use has secure, high quality terminations. A separate headphone amp is a good idea for serious headphone listeners. Make sure equipment supports and speaker stands are level, and spikes, where used, are well fastened.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**OFC:** Cables need to be good conductors, which is why Oxygen Free Copper (OFC) is commonly used. Some coat this in silver, or even use silver alone. Conductors may be stranded or a single, solid core.

**CAPACITANCE, RESISTANCE, INDUCTANCE:** Electrical parameters of a cable. Low resistance is good; capacitance and inductance vary in roughly inverse proportion and their importance for sound quality is subject to debate.

**DIELECTRIC:** a cable's non-conducting insulating sheath.

**OPEN BACK/CLOSED BACK:** Types of headphone. Open back designs tend to sound more open but allow more sound to escape into the outside world. Closed back models offer less leakage and often sound more solid in the bass, but can be more coloured overall.

CIRCUMAURAL/SUPRA-AURAL: More headphone types. Circumaural 'phones have the earcup enclosing the ear, while supra-aural 'phones feature a flat pad pressing directly on the ear.

#### CABLES

No hi-fi system will work without cable. For audio, two types are necessary: interconnect cables, which link together source and amplifier components, and speaker cables, which run from an amp to the speakers. Many source components come with interconnects in the box, but these are rarely much cop. Even spending a tenner on new wires will bring improvements; spend more and you may be surprised at how much difference a cable can make.

Interconnect cables split into two sub-groups: analogue and digital. Analogue cables are supplied in stereo pairs and are used for the majority of applications – hooking a CD player to an amp etc. Then there are digital interconnects, used to carry a digital signal between, say, a CD player and a CD recorder or a DVD player and a surround processor. These also come in two forms: optical and coaxial (75 Ohm electrical). For hi-fi applications coaxial tends to be preferred over optical, but not all players have the option.

The only systems that tend to come with speaker cable are pre-packaged jobs of the mini/micro variety. If you're buying a separates system you *have* to choose a speaker cable, which is actually no bad thing as its nature can have a pretty profound effect on the overall sonic picture. As with interconnects, there are a huge variety of cable types out there. The best way to find out what works well with your system is to listen, preferably with a home trial, and remember that fatter doesn't necessarily mean better!

#### **HEADPHONES**

Not everyone needs a pair of headphones for the home, but to some they're an absolute boon. A good pair can let you enjoy your music at any time of the day or night, without threat of violence from the family or neighbours. What's more, a *really* good pair can prove something of a sonic revelation. Plugging yourself directly into your own private sonic universe can be profoundly different to listening through full-size speakers; at its best it's wonderfully intense. So if you haven't considered a pair of headphones, maybe you should.

#### MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

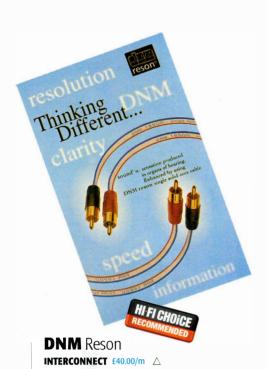
Mains electricity is the fuel that powers your hi-fi system – just as a high-performance car needs the right fuel to give maximum performance, so too a hi-fi depends on the quality of the mains you feed it. The increased use of TVs, computers, mobile phones, and large household appliances like washing machines and freezers (not to mention noise from industry) creates a cocktail of noise and distortion on the mains.

To help lessen the problem, there are a variety of specialist products on the market designed to regulate and condition the mains, at all kinds of prices. Various black boxes can be bought to sit between mains and component to clean things up and keep the supply constant. A better grade of mains cable can help too; even a specialist plug and socket can make a difference.

#### **SUPPORTS**

All hi-fi components benefit from stable support and a degree of isolation, though sensitivity varies. Turntables are most susceptible to vibration, and a dedicated support is crucial for optimum performance. With amps and other source components its is perhaps less crucial, but different types of support can still have a substantial affect on sonic character. The purpose of a support is to isolate, though some do this particular job more effectively than others. Some contribute their own effect to the sound, which may or may not appeal. As ever, taste is a personal matter; our reviews should help to guide you.

Similarly, if you're using 'standmount' speakers, do the decent thing and place them on a pair of dedicated stands. There are various different types available, some of which favour a lightweight, high stiffness approach while others go for high mass damping. Sonic character can vary widely, but whichever you choose the sound you receive should be markedly better than the bookshelf.



#### **Audioquest** Coral

INTERCONNECT £100.00/m

It may look like the flex from an iron, but there's actually quite a lot of technology in this interconnect. The novel feature is 'Perfect Surface Copper', which involves plating copper on top of copper to give a very pure, very smooth surface. Audioquest's finest silver-plated copper phono plugs are fitted, and welded rather than soldered. Construction seems robust.

Coral offers good performance at the frequency extremes, with solid yet clear bass and clean, effortless treble. Detail is good going on very good, and tonality very neutral. Imaging also scores highly, but sometimes sounds - particularly solo voices - seem to come from surprisingly far forwards. Large, complex sounds are well handled, and this gives the cable great assurance with orchestral material, heavy rock and the like. Perhaps bass drive isn't always the most solid, but long-term listening is unfatiguing and rich in detail.

With very little to criticise and excellent measured characteristics, albeit at a highish price, this cable seems to offer the sort of all-round performance that can be comfortably Recommended.

Goldring Products 2 01284 701101

Reviewed in HFC 200



This classic solid-core cable has been in production longer than most, and what you see is what you get: two thin solid copper conductors, identical but for the colour of their insulation, spaced apart by a 'web' of polythene, with no screening, for £40/m-pair. The phono plugs were chosen because they have less metal in them than most other types.

Because of its construction, this cable has very little resistance to RF interference, so results might vary depending on local environmental conditions. In an RF-rich city location, the Reson sounded just a little harsh in tone, particularly with busy treble material, which has a knock-on effect in compromising imaging and detail. Bass and treble are generally well extended and simple musical material is admirably clean: it's the bigger sounds that suffer most. No one musical style is particularly favoured and the uniquely low capacitance is suited to the widest variety of components. Sound quality is on a par with many dearer cables, and the price very reasonable.

Virtual Reality Audio Systems 2 01277 227355

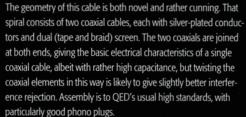
Reviewed in HFC 200

HI FI CHOICE



#### **QED** QNECT Silver Spiral

INTERCONNECT £90.00/m



Glaive 2 01622 664070 Reviewed in HFC 200





#### **Insert Audio** Image 5.1

INTERCONNECT £45.00/m  $\triangle$ 

This cable can serve, says Insert, equally well for analogue or digital audio, composite video, component video... You name it. Silver plated conductors, foamed PTFE dielectric, good, solid plugs and a flexible sheath make up the no-nonsense recipe. Sold singly for digital duty (and the rest), this cable costs £45 for each terminated metre, or £85/m-pair.

If there's a weakness it's the bass, which, although detailed, sometimes seems a little distant and understated, and subtly curtailed. But leave Image 5.1 in the system for half an hour and one adapts completely to its balance. Otherwise it's really good news all the way, with detail in the midrange and treble really in the top league and very good stereo imaging, including depth. Driving rhythms are clear and convincing, gentle ballads peaceful and unforced - aided by an apparently quieter background than at least some other cables. All things considered, this is a well-judged cable that sets out to deliver everything, and seems to succeed.

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### Cables

#### **TCI** Viper

INTERCONNECT £54.99/m

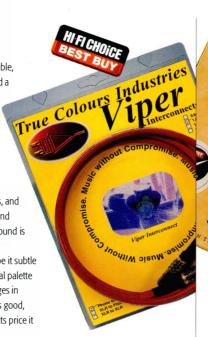
TCI's £55/m-pair Viper is a simple pseudo-balanced cable, using two stranded conductors, low-loss insulation and a braided screen. An unusual luxury at this price is locking phono plugs, which give about as good a contact as one can make on a standard phono socket. Quality of construction is good, and the cable handles well.

Despite a fairly modest price, the Viper was subjectively among the most successful in its group. The slightest hint of sibilance creeps in on vocal solos, and orchestral violins can sometimes sound a little hard and unforgiving, but apart from that minor quibble, the sound is admirable all round.

Bass is particularly extended, clean and detailed, be it subtle as in dinner jazz or massive as in reggae, and the tonal palette remained in proportion through all the various changes in dynamics of any kind of music I threw at it. Imaging is good, and simpler sounds have a pleasingly airy quality. At its price it seems very fine value and should be a Best Buy.

True Colour Industries 2 0771 019 6949

Reviewed in HFC 200





#### van den Hul D102 II

INTERCONNECT £79.99/0.8m △

Van den Hul makes a point of using radical materials in its cables, like Linear Structured Carbon (basically, carbon fibres) used in this D102 II hybrid, which combines silver-plated copper and LSC to give a combination of the former's low resistance and the latter's lack of 'metallic sound'. The sheath is halogen-free 'Hulliflex', and good quality collet-type phono plugs with a split centre pin are used. A pseudo-balanced type, this cable was supplied for review as an £80 0.8m pair (all others were 1m).

There's no doubting the assurance of its bass or the extension and sweetness of its treble, but on the detail front it is equalled, perhaps even slightly bettered, by a couple of others here. Imaging is good, dynamics are wide and assured, and tone remains true on any kind of music, but the ability to hear into the middle of a mix is not absolutely the best. That said, this is still a very good, and broadly compatible cable.

van den Hul 🕿 020 8997 4280 Reviewed in HEC 200

#### **Audioquest** Slate

SPEAKER CABLE £15.00/m <

Slate uses Audioquest's proprietary 'Hyperlitz' construction, in which separately insulated solid-core conductors of different diameters are wound together in a long, hollow centred helix. Conveniently, this £15/m cable can be used for bi-wiring by splitting the eight separate conductors between bass and treble – although it's normally supplied pre-terminated in either single or bi-wire form.

It offers a nicely rounded performance overall, with secure bass, natural-toned midrange and open, extended treble. Limitations are minor: when there is a need for really deep bass, it falls just slightly short of the best, and also has a touch of dryness which can affect voices, percussion and other transient-rich sounds. Imaging is wide and precise laterally, but lacks the last word in depth. Across a wide range of music it is gratifyingly easy to hear what is going on and to follow all the lines. Be it lively or laid back, no musical style fazes Slate. Widely compatible, this is one of the best from the brand we've heard to date.

Goldring Products **2** 01284 701101 Reviewed in HFC 203





#### **IXOS** Gamma 6003

The basic idea of lxos' Gamma Geometry is to criss-cross conductors

in order to reduce pick-up of electromagnetic interference but without actually twisting them together. Hence the third core, whose sole purpose is to align the two conductor cores. It's a practical and modestly priced cable at £3/m, and the review sample came fitted with some particularly clever proprietary banana plugs.

In such a budget cable it's unreasonable to expect perfection, but 'thinly spread and minor vices' is a good start. The bass is ultimately not as extended as some, but is at least highly consistent with musical style and playback level. Midrange and treble are a little dry but not seriously so, and detail is there if one goes a little way to meet it. Transient-rich sounds such as percussion and vocals occasionally become slightly spitty, and imaging is probably its weakest suit, but by the standards of its peers this cable offers a good deal for its relatively small premium over the very cheapest.

Path Group ☎ 01494 441736 Reviewed in HFC 203



#### **Supra Ply** 3.4/S

SPEAKER CABLE €7.95/m △

Supra Ply has been around for a little while but in this new £7.95/m version, the 'S' designation refers to the addition of a braided screen over the basic Ply 3.4 construction. Two rectangular cross-section conductors are each made up of stranded, tin-plated copper and insulated in high quality PVC.

Having already tested basic Ply 3.4 (*HFC* 183), we spent most of the time with the screen connected. It does make a difference, but a small one, and comments here largely mirror those for the original. The screen gives a small increase in perceived detail, but it doesn't alter the basic character, which is rich in the bass and generally neutral. There's a little treble roughness, but it has a pleasing ability to hold everything neatly together right up to climaxes. Voices are reasonably clear and easy to follow, and imaging is good. The screen may be something of a red herring, but the sound of this cable is good in all areas and it deserves Recommendation.

*Glaive* **☎** 01622 664070 *Reviewed in* HFC 203

#### Kimber 8TC

**SPEAKER CABLE** £224.00/3ft terminated pair ▷

Much like the 4TC (*HFC* 168) but with twice the number of conductors, 8TC is normally supplied in pre-terminated lengths (eg £348 for a 5m pair). Kimber uses a mixture of wire gauges, with a weaving technique that makes for an altogether very practical design.

Having a couple of lengths of 4TC on hand I couldn't resist the comparison, and indeed 8TC does offer more of pretty much everything, while retaining the family sound. In fact it's quite hard to find anything critical to say about it. It's maybe just a little lacking the ultimate in bass, but there's certainly an excellent sense of solidity here. Detail and neutrality are first-class, and treble is very well extended and open. Imaging is good, too, with some of the best depiction of depth I've heard, and it's also very dynamic when it needs to be, making for exciting rock and dance music. This is a very capable cable by any reckoning – expensive, admittedly, but I think not too much so for a Best Buy.

Russ Andrews Accessories 2 0800 373467
Reviewed in HFC 203

#### **Sonic Link AST 75**

SPEAKER CABLE £2.95/m ▷

Another of SonicLink's 'AeroSpace Technology' cables, this £2.95/m AST 75 isn't quite the cheapest, but still offers unusual materials at the price: tin-plated copper rather than the more common plain or silver-plated variety, insulated with silicone rubber with its low dielectric loss factor.

This is a distinctly bassy cable – perhaps not ultimately accurate, but likely to be a good foil to the bass restrictions of many small speakers. The word 'fruity' came to mind more than once, and it seemed to be less happy with plucked double bass, slightly losing pitch precision. I don't think one could legitimately describe it as neutral, but it can make for quite an exciting sound, particularly when everything comes together in a big climax, and it's a compromise some listeners will choose to make. Treble is cleanly extended, imaging fair to good, and tone on voices quite natural. Although it's a bit of an oddity, this cable deserves Recommendation, so suck it and see!

Sonic Link 2 01332 674929
Reviewed in HFC 203

#### **Prowire** Out of Sight

SPEAKER CABLE £1.99/m >

Clearly designed to 'fit and forget' under the carpet, it's sticky-backed, with two conductors of solid copper tape laid side by side. Performance is essentially that of a conventional, medium-spaced, figure-8 cable. The terminations supplied (normally an extra) proved far too loose, and I would recommend simply screwing amp and speaker terminals down over bare ends.

Despite the unpromising appearance, the sound of this cable is not at all bad, especially given its low £2/m price. Yes, the bass is a bit on the lumpy side and lacks real extension, but there's enough of it there to give a decent impression under most circumstances. Similarly, the treble can be a little bit dry, and even coarse at times, but it's nothing too serious. There's some reasonable detail in evidence, tonality (bass apart) is certainly plausible and even imaging is quite good. As a special-purpose design Out of Sight seems to justify its (small) premium. Most alternatives are a good deal dearer, so Recommendation is not out of order.

Vivanco UK ☎ 01442 403020 Reviewed in HFC 203







Best Buys 2000 HI-FI CHOICE 97



SPEAKER CABLE £50.00/m  $\triangle$ 

To meet the design goal of nominal characteristic impedance roughly equal to the 8 Ohms of typical speakers means very high capacitance and very low inductance in audio terms. One complication is that not all amplifiers can happily drive such a high cable capacitance, so Townshend has added a small inductor in series at the amplifier end, enhancing stability.

Isolda is one of the very best cables I've yet heard in bass definition, nor is there anything wanting at higher frequencies, with detail, imaging and treble extension all absolutely first-rate. Everything seems beautifully in place and there's that intangible 'rightness' to the sound that is very satisfying to listen to, in both the short and the long term. Nothing is taken away (that I can hear, in comparisons with other cables however short) and nothing is added either – no brightness or the sort of 'artificial detail' that can be a result of dryness and attenuated bass. Not cheap at £50/m (plus £100 for termination), but nonetheless warmly Recommended.

Townshend Audio 2 020 8979 2155

Reviewed in HFC 203



#### Ross OP004

DIGI-LINK £19.99/m △

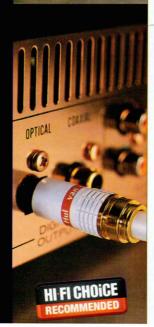
Pretty much yer basic fibre optic lead and, at £20, one of the cheapest you'll find easily on the high street. This cable also comes with a couple of nifty accessories, including a pair of adaptors to allow its use with portable MiniDisc (etc.) players which have those clever combined 3.5mm jack/optical sockets.

There's honestly little enough to distinguish this lead from the dearer optical types. The overall 'signature' of the Toslink optical interface is still very much present in the lack of detail compared with electrical cables. But let's not get too despondent: the total degradation is still only about the same order as that of some medium-grade analogue cables, and because of the way a digital signal effectively gets completely regenerated when it's recorded and replayed, there's effectively nothing to choose between this cable and any other when used to connect a recording device to a source. Although it just falls short on the ultimate subtlety front, this lead is certainly cheap and very practical, and perfectly fine for any recording duties.

Recoton (UK) ☎ 0161 702 5000 Reviewed in HFC 207







#### **Audioquest** Digital One

DIGI-LINK £35.00/m <

Looking indistinguishable at first glance from some of Audioquest's analogue interconnects, this simple coaxial cable is built to the usual 75 ohms digital specification. The conductor is solid copper and the insulator Teflon, with a double screen of foil and copper braid – all good basic engineering. The phono plugs are of decent, though not outstanding, quality.

This cable seems to offer a particularly solid and clear bass, extended but without ever being excessive, and passing the acid test of remaining steady and controlled whatever else may be happening in the music, which is always a good starting point for relaxed long-term listening. At higher frequencies performance is similarly praiseworthy. Detail is good, stereo imaging excellent and the way the sound holds together right through a climax is most gratifying. No one musical style seems unduly favoured by this cable, which does what any cable should – puts out exactly what is put into it. Its vices are extremely minor, the £35 price is reasonable, and it can certainly be Recommended.

Goldring Products № 01284 701101 Reviewed in HFC 207

#### **QED** Qunex P75

DIGI-LINK £25.00/m <

This straightforward £25 coaxial cable has a solid '99.999% OFC' copper conductor, foamed polythene dielectric, foil and double braid screen, and a soft PVC jacket. The phono plugs are QED's own, with their 'ergonomically shaped' metal body, and have a solid centre pin but give plenty of grip on the earth contact.

In many areas, this emerged as the most plausible cable in the group, low price notwithstanding. It's hard to be dogmatic about areas such as tonality, but when a cable offers all-round better detail than its peers, without apparently sacrificing any other parameter, it's hard not to be impressed. And that's basically what Qunex P75 achieved. In several familiar recordings I was struck by things I had not previously registered.

Tonality certainly seems fine, imaging is excellent and there is no detectable change in character with level. It's nice to find a product that sounds comfortable with any material under any circumstances, and even nicer when it's cheap.

QED Audio Products **№** 01276 451166 Reviewed in HFC 207

#### van den Hul Optocoupler

DIGI-LINK £49.99/m <☐

The Optocoupler has domed ends to the fibre, which according to vdH leads to better focussed light within the fibre and hence less 'modal dispersion' and lower jitter. That appears to make sense. Construction is much like other 'upmarket' Toslink leads, with metal-bodied plugs.

Of all the optical leads, this seemed the only one that was clearly differentiated from the others. Even so, differences are not vast, but there is a greater amount of detail on offer right across the spectrum, approaching that of some electrical leads. Bass is extended and quite strong, if not quite as tuneful as electrical connections, and although voices still lack some precision, they are better defined than with the other optical leads. Overall, there is a greater sense of ease to the sound and any kind of music is easier to follow and to listen to for long periods. Although it's hard to get wildly enthusiastic, this lead does achieve a better performance than competing products and, as such, Recommendation is appropriate.

van den Hul ☎ 020 8997 4280 Reviewed in HFC 207



#### **JVC** HA-DX3

STEREO HEADPHONES £250.00 △

The £250 HA-DX3 is guaranteed to make its wearer stand out from the crowd, with shiny copper ear pieces that look like a couple of small saucepan lids strapped to your head. The cans are ergonomically styled to snuggle perfectly around the ears, and the super-soft cloth pads are comfortable for long and short periods. Its 340g weight is the heaviest in the group, but the double headband belittles the heft, and the end result is near-perfect luxurious comfort. The cable is detachable for easy replacement, and four metres long.

Not only great to wear, the HA-DX3 is a lively and enthusiastic performer with a wide soundstage that exudes confidence, precision and clarity. Unlike other 'phones, JVC has widened the source projection within the cans, resulting in an ethereal listening experience which simulates a much larger acoustic arena than usual. From jazz to pop, this headphone breezed through the test.

It is difficult to fault the HA-DX3. It is responsive, beautifully balanced and most importantly, a set of head-phones you could wear all day. The only negative point is its price tag.

JVC 2 020 8450 3282 Reviewed in HFC 205

#### **AKG** K100

STEREO HEADPHONES £59.95 <

While the majority of manufacturers prefer to issue their headphones with a wrap of cloth on the pads, it's pleasure to see AKG still adopting 70s style faux leather. Employing speaker diaphragms of a reasonable size, these headphones have something of the Jaguar feel about them. The £60 K100 is an open-back design. The leatherette cushions are extremely comfortable, but on those hot summer days, they can get humid and sweaty with extended use. The cord length is a healthy three metres.

The K100 made an excellent first impression: the mid-range and treble are balanced and precise, while the bass is crisp and beguiling. The sonic environment created is a positive and uplifting experience. The various test tracks sounded wonderfully rich with a strong attack and timing. The timbre of each instrument was captured with admirably clear detail and without any muddiness.

The bass-heavy Cyprus Hill track was presented with a fantastic sense of aplomb and structure, and fast, rhythmic dance tracks fared just as well. The K100 is an all-round mature performer. It looks cool in its leatherette rags, and sounds great too.

Arbiter Group plc № 020 8202 1199 Reviewed in HFC 205





#### **Technics** RP-F800

STEREO HEADPHONES £49.99 🛆

Positioned in the competitive sub-£50 category, the Technics RP-F800 might be small and compact but this little firecracker packs a powerful punch to ward off potential bullies. Built to the usual high Technics standard, this model features a single bar headband, and a sleek black livery, the ear-pieces dressed in tough cloth. Mixing balance and poise, the design is joyfully traditional and functional.

For both long- and short-term usage, the RP-F800 is great to wear, the only shortcoming being the lack of full ear enclosure from the relatively small capsules.

Stunning, was our first reaction. No matter what your musical preferences, the RP-F800 is a consummate performer with them all. Bass, treble and mid-range work effortlessly together to generate a rich and sensational listening experience. The soundstage and environment created is second to none. From jazz to hip-hop, the results were surprisingly positive, with particularly impressive bass on Cyprus Hill. Technics is to be congratulated for this tasty design – not only has it a sound to die for, but it also carries a commendably low price to boot. Panasonic UK 20990 357357

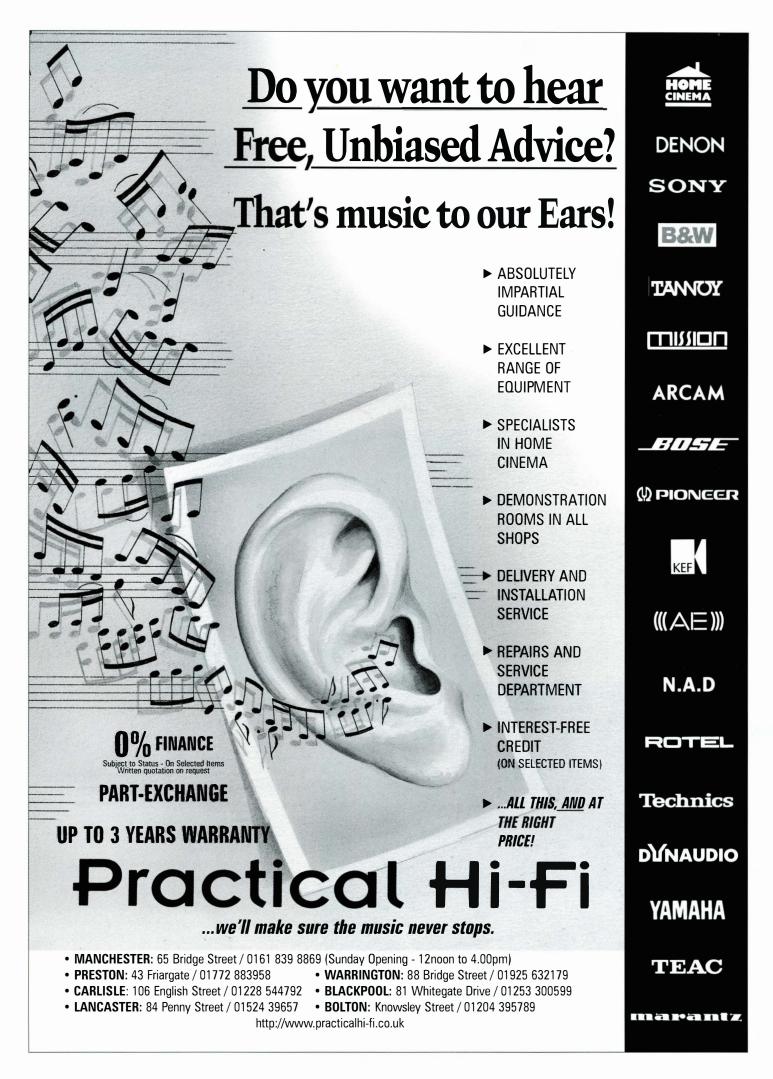
Panasonic UK № 0990 35/35/ Reviewed in HFC 205



Costing upwards of £400, you might expect the Stax System II to conquer all with one metaphorical hand tied behind its back. Supplied with its own headphone amplifier and power supply, the reason for the high price and separate driving amp is that this is one of those rare beasts, an electrostatic headphone, which is a Stax speciality. Initially the System II does feel awkward and ungainly, but after some use the comfort level is remarkably good. The only gripe is the short length of cable.

The sound is the best I have had the pleasure of experiencing. The piano on Miles Davis' *Flamenco Sketches* never sounded so delicately pure and defined. Each musical note, instrument and inflection in the recording could be instantly plucked from the performance and enjoyed separately. Even on the faster dance and pop rhythms, it still had no difficulty in combining its rich and dynamic bass, midrange and treble to produce a truly enlightening experience. An exceptional gem, this neutral performer confirms the old adage that simple is best. Once again Stax has managed to produce a highly transparent system that warrants the finest ancillaries.

Path Group № 01494 441736 Reviewed in HFC 205



# HIFICHOICE

#### **RA** Kimber Mains Powerblock

MAINS £350.00 △

Kimber cable has miraculous mains conditioning properties, cancelling high frequency noise through special inter-woven construction. Not only is it efficient at lowering residual mains noise, it also deals with airborne interference such as RFI.

Looked at coolly, £350 is a lot to pay for a mains distribution board with a 3ft (0.9m) Kimber mains cable. But the effect on sound quality is well worth the outlay. You'll find the music sounds cleaner and more three-dimensional, with greatly improved stereo imagery – though interestingly any measurable 'before and after' difference seemed minimal. The more Kimber mains cables you use, the better it gets, and the improvement in vividness, clarity, and separation is quite remarkable. However, some listeners misinterpret the reduction of 'hash' as a lack of treble sparkle and top-end detail, so there's no pleasing everybody.

Russ Andrews Accessories ☎ 0800 373467 Reviewed in HFC 206



#### **Trichord** Powerblock

MAINS £299.00 ^

A one-to-one isolation transformer rated at either 500W or 1000W depending on the version, the Powerblock 500 retails for £299, the 1000 for £450. High frequency bandwidth is limited to about 200kHz, so any noise above this is filtered out naturally. At the same time, Common Mode distortion (disturbances present on both positive and negative lines) is greatly reduced – very important, as this is difficult for many equipment power supplies to deal with.

The Powerblock 500 eliminated a slight mains buzz, and having used one regularly for almost a year, our reviewer had grown slightly complacent about its positive effects. It's very much a fit-and-forget device that can be left on all the time (case temperature rises only marginally). Sonically, it improves clarity, openness, and refinement, making music sound purer and more natural. It's the sort of product you easily underestimate and only fully appreciate when it's not there any more.

Trichord Research ☎ 01684 573524 Reviewed in HFC 206

#### **Lynwood** Mega Power Supply

MAINS £295.00

Lynwood's Mega Power Supply is quite reasonably priced at £295. It's designed to act as a power reservoir, in effect beefing up the power supplies in the equipment. It isolates your equipment from mains distortion and noise, and other irregularities such as DC, which can cause transformer buzz. With extended use there's a mild rise in case temperature, but nothing severe, and the unit can safely be left on all the time. With an output rated at 1kW continuous power, the Lynwood Mega Power Supply can be used with all but the very biggest power amps.

Objectively there's a definite quietening of mains noise. Sonically, the Mega Power Supply made the music sound sweeter and more realistic, with improved focus and a tighter cleaner bass. Playing tracks from k.d. lang's CD *Shadowland*, the voice lost much of its electronic glare (caused in part by too much added reverb), sounding truer and more natural. *Lynwood Electronics* 20 01709 873667

Reviewed in HFC 206

#### **PS Audio** Power Plant

MAINS £1,200.00 ▷

The £1,200 Power Plant provides clean regenerated AC power. Not a filter or conditioner, it takes AC mains, converts it to DC, then back to balanced, noise-free AC. It also allows the mains frequency to be adjusted from 50Hz to 120Hz (PS Audio suggesting that transformer efficiency is related to the rate of change, and that higher mains frequencies improve performance). According to a transformer manufacturer it shouldn't make a difference, but I nevertheless found transparency improved as frequency increased.

Most '50Hz' (UK) equipment will run perfectly well at 60Hz or higher, the only exception being turntables with AC synchronous motors and no electronic speed regulation. Sonically, Power Plant greatly improved the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving the music an impressive three-dimensional quality. The only caveat (aside from size and price) is heat; surface temperatures exceed 110F (41 C) after the unit's been on for several hours.

Ultimate Sonics № 020 8699 2446 Reviewed in HFC 206

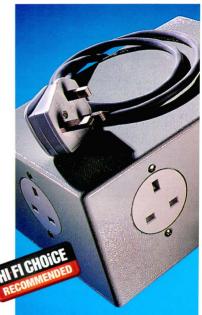
#### **RA** Silencer

MAINS €39.95 ▷

It's one thing to achieve a clean noise-free mains supply; maintaining cleanness is something else again. There's the omnipresent problem of self-generated noise and interference – noise produced by the equipment itself and other household electrical items plugged in and switched on. One solution is use a £40 Silencer, a small black box that plugs into spare mains sockets in the house. Use it remotely, or plug it into an adjacent socket on your hi-fi's mains distribution board to reduce self-generated noise from the equipment itself.

The Silencer uses passive filtration components to reduce mains 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy. Plugged into a spare socket on my hi-fi system's mains distribution board, I felt it made silences 'blacker', helping voices and instruments stand out in sharp relief from a clean quiet background. This enhances depth and clarity, giving a deeper broader soundstage with increased dynamic range.

Russ Andrews Accessories 20800 373467









#### Quadraspire 04

EQUIPMENT SUPPORT £280.00 △

Based on an MDF and metal pillars theme, the £280 Q4 is not so much a model as a range, with a choice of several veneers or glass for the shelves, and various pillar height options. Assembly is very easy, and some meaty-looking adjustable spikes meet the floor. The modular construction means that it is easy to add extra shelves.

Sonically, there's a mixture of low frequency and midband resonances, but most are fairly well damped and hence not too distracting. This support had one of the least pronounced bass coloration and loss of detail of the whole group. Plucked double bass retained most of its tunefulness and body, and solo male vocals were also notably full-bodied. At climaxes there was still some hint of harshness and loss of solidity to the sound, but on the whole tonality was good.

If you like the subtle ringing that glass shelves can contribute (with quite pleasant effect) to simpler musical textures, you may find this unit a bit lacklustre - in which case try the version with glass shelves. In all, this is an attractively designed and versatile stand.

Quadraspire 2 01225 333360 Reviewed in HFC 206

#### **Atacama** Nexus 6 SPEAKER STAND £49.99 ▷

For less than £50 you get a well-engineered and pretty pair of speaker stands, in a choice of two heights (50cm, 60cm) and four finishes (metallic silver, plum red, gloss black and matt textured black). The supplied Nexus 6 tested was filled with a £20 carton of Atacama's Atabites filler (triangular shaped steel chippings), which is a worthy investment.

The Nexus 6 is no less impressive value in sonic terms. Female vocals breathe into life with a natural and unforced character and the soundstage gets blissfully clear of the speakers. Beth Orton's distinctive voice sounded rich and managed to retain its slight edge on higher nótes, which can sometimes easily get brash or glossed over completely. Bass response is neutral and well detailed with good instrumental differentiation, if not the last word in depth or weight.

The Nexus 6 hits a winning combination of looks and a neutral sound. It affords a lean but otherwise wellbalanced presentation that will make it an ideal platform for a wide range of bookshelf-type speakers At the price, it's a bit of a hi-fi bargain Atacama Audio Supports 🕿 01455 283251

Reviewed in HFC 202

#### **Custom Design Aspect 650**

**EQUIPMENT SUPPORT** £269.99

Another steel and glass design, the £270 Aspect 650 is supplied flatpacked. Assembly takes a few minutes, with mounting points fitted at 1-inch increments. The mounting brackets are simple, tough and have a small, soft support for the 6mm glass shelves. Construction is very good with a particularly nice champagne paint job (black, blue, red or green options). Additional shelves are available, and adjustable feet can be ordered instead of the normal spikes.

The highly resonant materials used in the construction of this stand give it a distinct sound, with ringing clearly audible across most of the midband and treble. As a result, the stand's character is generally quite pronounced. The main subjective effect is in the bass, which is quite definitely thick in texture. This slightly takes the edge away from instruments like electric bass guitar or piano, and makes orchestral double basses quite indistinct. Keep it well out of line of the speakers and your ears, and this stand will perform well. Recommended for its looks and practicality.

Custom Design (Newcastle) 2 019 262 4646 Reviewed in HFC 206





#### **Townshend** Seismic Sink Stand AV1-4 **EQUIPMENT SUPPORT** £599.25 ∧

The £599 AV1-4 is a simplified member of Townhend's comprehensive line-up, all of which share the crucial feature of air suspension. In this case, the lower three shelves are effectively hung from the top one, which is supported by an air bladder. The point is to provide isolation from structure-borne vibration, down to sub-audio frequencies. In the case of turntables this certainly provides worthwhile attenuation of feedback: with other kit the argument is less obvious.

The benefits of this stand to a turntable are not hard to hear or measure. There is an increase in clarity when compared with a solid stand, and bass definition is improved too, while detail and imaging move up a notch or two. With other equipment there is still a change in sound, though considerably smaller and not so unambiguously positive. Compared with no stand, there is some slight added roundness to the sound but also some loss of detail, and front-toback imaging is a little compressed.

It's quite expensive, but this stand gives notable benefits to turntable owners, and seems to perform as well as any in other contexts. Townshend Audio 2 020 8979 2155



#### Partington Dreadnought Ultima SPEAKER STAND £299.99 △

Scary name - but not half as scary as the stand itself. Behind that neat black textured powder-coat facade, Partington has created a 20kg £300 monster, using a shell of neatly bonded steel reinforced with a several generous layers of fibreglass. Even the top plate and plinth are inverted trays filled with GRP resin. In addition the central pillar is part-filled with silicon-iron alloy chippings. Once levelled this stand feels solid enough to support just about anything from the petite B&W 601s to a three-storey house extension.

It took a long and hard audition to determine the sound quality of the Dreadnought Ultima – because it hasn't got one. It's ruthlessly transparent and leaves you listening to nothing but the speaker itself, which with less capable speakers can be something of a double-edged sword. On the other hand, a suitably impressive speaker will sing to the very best of its ability and create music that bypasses your ears and goes straight to your soul. Recommended, for its quite stunning ability to do nothing but support the speaker. Partington & Co 2 01474 709299

Reviewed in HFC 202

#### **Custom Design R/S300 II**

SPEAKER STAND £99.00

Custom Design's original R/S 300 scooped a Best Buy back in HFC 189, and this Mk II version sports twin upright columns and a slightly heftier price tag (£99). The 61 cm tall R/S 300 II was supplied filled with an inert material that adds £35 to the price and about 8kg to the weight of each stand. It is available in black, champagne, gloss black and gunmetal grey (and, at £199.99, in polished chrome).

The original R/S 300 was praised for its gutsy and weighty performance and the Mk II is no less of a rock star. The bass is prominent but well defined, and even the diminutive B&Ws boogie along happily on these stands. The punchy bass on Underworld's Kittens really got the room going, and although this effect was subtler on the larger speakers tested, it always translated into an enjoyable and up-tempo listening experience. The treble is lively, well detailed and infuses the music with a bit of extra spice, though some coloration in the midrange lets the design down in terms of ultimate resolution. Custom Design (Newcastle) 2 0191 262 4646

Reviewed in HFC 202



# HI FI CHOICE

#### **Sound Organisation 7522**

SPEAKER STAND £89.00

The Z522 has four tightly packed rectangular uprights, and is complex to put together, but this does afford a very rigid structure that is not too lively. The floor spikes are tapped into a spar of sheet steel, and some caution is needed to avoid stripping the threads. The top plate is a solid piece of 3mm steel with threaded holes for the top spikes supplied. The whole stand is coated with deep lustre paint, which looks good but is a little prone to scuffs and knocks.

The Z522 is one of few stands to produce decent plug-and-play results without filling, with a clean midband backed by solid and rhythmic bass lines. Listening critically, the very lower frequencies tend to blur into a single note, but it's not a bad compromise. Upper frequencies are polite, with a relaxed air that also makes for easy-going entertainment. Three-quarter filling with sand offers

more of the same, albeit with greater refinement and a little more bite. The Z522 rates as a Best Buy, as a good all round choice with an easy-going and enjoyable nature at less than £90.

Goldring 2 01284 701101 Reviewed in HFC 202

#### **Townshend** Seismic Sink

SPEAKER STAND £499.00 △

In absolute contradiction to every other speaker stand design in this test, Townshend's Seismic Sink aims to isolate speaker-born vibration from reaching the floor, and vice-versa, by decoupling the two. Which is why the same basic design started out as an equipment isolation platform. The Sink is made from two overlapping steel trays separated by an inflatable air bladder, one problem being that heavy cables can pull the speaker backwards.

On a concrete floor the effect of the Seismic Sink is subtle strange, considering how radical the design is. The Aegis Three sounded less shut-in and the bass became quite dry and lean. Standmounted speakers showed a gentle tightening at the bottom end. In an older-style house with suspended wooden floors, the resonant and boomy bass of the Aegis Three was drawn into tight focus. This seemed to open the door for a spring clean across the entire frequency spectrum and produced the sort of natural and open sound more akin to concrete floors. Townshend's Seismic Sink might go against the grain of traditional thinking, but it can provide notable improvements when the circumstances are right. Townshend Audio 2 020 8979 2155



# Well I'll be dog-gone! Sony reveals its next generation robo-pup exclusively in 73

Don't miss issue 53 on sale Thursday 2nd November



www.t3network.co.uk

## **Personals**



The world of personal stereos has become a fascinating part of the great audio universe, a hotbed of competing technology from the past, present and future. From good old tape to MP3, this is an area where the 'new format' debate is in full swing. What's more, a personal means you never have to be without your music, **wherever you happen to go.** 

When the first Walkman was launched in 1979, could even Sony have envisaged the way the technology would unfold some 21 years on? From the beefy original design through smaller subsequent generations, the personal stereo became a lifestyle proposition, an essential accessory, a must-have travel companion. You could use it to block out the outside world and immerse yourself in music as you moved from place to place. That rectangular box and headphones quickly became a symbol for an entire generation.

As the analogue world gave way to digital, so new personal formats arrived on the scene. The first attempts with CD were cumbersome and plagued by an impractical aversion to jogs and knocks, a problem only recently overcome to an effective degree. Shock protective memory systems steadily improved as CD models shrank a little year by year, but only now can we say CD is a truly portable medium, compact and unflappable according to the best examples of the breed.

But while CD struggled to find its feet as a viable format for music on the move, another digital format arrived with ideal credentials for the job. MiniDisc (MD) was another Sony creation and had all the right ingredients: compact and hard-wearing media, lower susceptibility to jogging and – wonder of wonders – low cost digital recordability. OK, so it didn't sound as good as CD *per se*, and there never has been much in the way of pre-recorded software, but in a personal stereo context it has proved an absolute boon. For recording it is incredibly versatile and easy to use, while the hardware itself is now pretty much at its apex –funky little gadgets that slip easily into a pocket, some of which are recordable and ideal for making compilations for the road.

If there's a threat to MD's superiority as a portable recording format it's probably MP3, or to be more accurate the 'portable digital audio players' to which MP3 files or similar may be downloaded (see *What is MP3*? panel, right). This area has exploded since 1998, with a sea of manufacturers spewing out products as they struggle to gain a foothold in a rapidly expanding market.

From a home audio point of view, it all began with a new breed of personals using solid-state technology to store MP3 files downloaded from your computer, either sourced from the Internet or encoded from your own CDs via a CD-ROM drive. They actually record music on silicon, which means there are no moving parts – perfect for jog-free music on the move – and because there is no tape or disc to insert these portable MP3 players can be smaller than ever. Some have built in memory and most are expandable via tiny flash memory cards – storage is currently limited and these cards are expensive but this will improve over time. The same can be said of playback quality, which is generally sub-MD standard but will get better as new codecs and improved hardware emerge.

But it's the limited storage capacity that has received most attention in 2000. Most current solid state personals will store only 30-60 minutes of decent-quality music at any one time, but the past few months have seen a number of portable devices emerge featuring much higher capacity digital storage mediums.

Hard-drive equipped players can use their huge capacity to store more than 100 CDs-worth of music in MP3 form – perhaps an entire collection. And then there's the good old CD: by using a computer with a CD-R drive, you can burn a disc full of MP3 tracks – in the region of 10 CDs-worth. These can then be played back on one of an emerging clutch of MP3-compatible CD and DVD players, either portable or home-based. So now you only need to take one CD when you head for your hols!

#### What is MP3?

MP3 is a 'codec', a lossy compression algorithm used to reduce digital audio files to a more manageable size – about a twelfth of the size of a CD file. It does this by discarding data deemed non-essential to the end result. This has led to something of a revolution in Internet circles, making it practical to upload music onto the Web and download it via a normal telephone line while maintaining reasonable quality. Newer codecs are now beginning to threaten MP3's dominance, with AAC in particular expected to prosper in 2001.

MP3 has two main uses for music fans. One is to obtain music files from the Internet, either free or paid for. The other is to 'rip' existing CDs, converting tracks into MP3 files so they take up less space. For the first you need a Net-ready computer. The same has been true of the second up to now, but products enabling one to utilize this technology without the need for a computer are beginning to emerge. Without data reduction systems like MP3, the notion of solid state audio storage would be impractical, as would the idea of storing oodles of tracks on a hard drive-based product.

#### **Jargon Buster**

**DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER:** Catch-all term for components which can play back compressed digital audio files (MP3 et al). Most are personal stereos which download files from a computer to solid state memory, though other types are emerging.

**DOWNLOADING:** Saving an MP3 music file from a Website to your computer or from your computer to an MP3 portable.

**RIPPING:** Copying files from a CD, ready to be 'compressed' using a codec like MP3.

**PARALLEL/USB:** Some MP3 portables attach to your computer via a parallel (printer) port, others use USB connection. USB is a more efficient 'plug 'n' play' type of connector, but only newer PCs and Macs are equipped.

**ENCODING RATE:** Measured in kilobits per second (Kbps). The higher the figure, the better the quality and the more memory it will use. 128Kbps is often considered the 'optimised' rate for MP3.

**MMC CARD:** Multi Media Card. The most popular type of flash memory card for MP3 players. Capacity is measured in megabytes (MB) – a 32MB card will store around 35 minutes of music at 128Kbps. A CD-ROM offers 650MB of storage.

#### **BEST BUYS**

#### Personals



#### **Panasonic** RO-SX71

CASSETTE PLAYER £69.99  $\wedge$ 

This £70 aluminium-bodied Panasonic isn't much thicker than a cassette, but it boasts every facility a tape aficionado could ask for: Dolby B, auto-reverse and music search, together with a clever little function for reducing hiss between tracks. A stick-type rechargeable battery is supplied (less bulky than the cylindrical kind) and a clip-on battery adaptor is provided for normal 'AA' batteries as back-up. A whopping 80 hours of play time is claimed if you use both rechargeable and dry cell battery types at the same time.

Though not the best we've heard at the price, this Panasonic's performance is more than respectable, It is a little on the bright side but offers decent clarity and pace, and for once the bass boost function is worthwhile. A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features make this a tempting tape buy.

Panasonic LIK 22 0990 357357

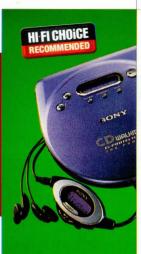


#### **Philips ACT 7583** CD PLAYER £115.00 △

This £115 CD personal from Philips follows the sporty route, with chunky build, bright colours and translucent plastics. Its splashproof body is perfect for poolside use, though the clip that clamps the player shut can be irritatingly stiff when you want disc access. It's also a rather bulky machine which some will think ugly, while others find its rubbery texture enticingly touchy-feely.

It's a sprightly performer, up-front and comparatively strong on detail, though also a little bright. It zips through rock and dance tracks with zest, while orchestral stuff comes across as more than just a wall of sound. The shock protection works a treat, and the supplied in-ear 'phones are OK, though their cliparound-the-ear fit takes some getting used to. Up-front and entertaining, though a little bright in character, this splash-proof model could be the perfect personal to take on holiday.

Philips 2 020 8680 4444 Reviewed in HFC 204









#### Sony D-EJ815

CD PLAYER £139.99

Sony's £140 D-EJ815 is super-stylish, hi-tech and highly desirable. It has ultra-effective shock protection, and also delivers a whopping playback time of 76 hours, if you combine its 'AA'-sized rechargeable batteries with alkaline ones placed in the canister supplied.

Ergonomics are good and build quality excellent. The in-line remote is intuitive when it comes to basic controls, though less commonly used functions are hidden rather awkwardly round the back, and the supplied in-ear headphones could be more comfy. Sound-wise, it's rather soft around the edges, and some may crave more detail and excitement, but its character is a comfortable listen over time and the overall sound is pleasingly robust. Hi-tech build and features make this a highly desirable personal for the money; sound is soft-edged but substantial.

Sonv UK 🕿 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 204

#### Aiwa AM-HX50

MINIDISC PLAYER £150.00 <



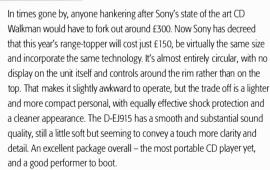
This tiny player combines beefy sound with tidy looks, as light as a cigarette packet and small enough to slip into a pocket. Given that few buy into MD simply to play back the limited pre-recorded music available, it's likely you have a home MD deck to make recordings, and this Aiwa is a pretty tempting way of making those recordings portable. The in-line remote isn't particularly well designed and the rubber-clad in-ear headphones feel a little bulky, though they're comfortable enough.

Its sound is a little indistinct in the treble, but the compensation is a substantial low-end thump to give bass lines a good kicking. Detail is not its forte, but it doesn't sound over-bright like some, and the sheer proportion of its sound is impressive. A neat playback MD personal, the HX50 is a little short on detail but endowed with impressive bass.

Aiwa 🕿 020 8897 7000 Reviewed in HFC 204

#### Sony D-EJ915

**CD PLAYER £149.99** <1



Sony UK 2 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 204

#### **Digimedia** Music Store/Soulmate



Take a 6.4GB hard drive for storage, add a CD drive, MP3 encoding/ decoding and put it all in a single £350 box – all the joys of MP3 without a computer. Slip in a CD, convert it to MP3 files and store on the hard drive. Or download Internet files via the USB port. As a CD player, the Music Store doesn't cut it, but with MP3 it's one of the better units - not overtly harsh though still opaque. But the ace up the Music Store's sleeve is the Soul Mate, a solid state personal with a 48MB memory. This docks into the Music Store so you can transfer 30 to 60 minutes of music. Although it isn't expandable and sound is average, the package is impressive in concept and execution.

Digmedia www.digmedia.cc Reviewed in HFC 208

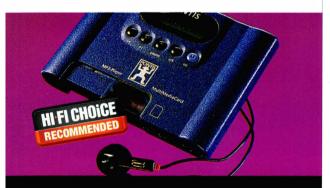


#### Sharp MD-MT831H MINIDISC PLAYER €229.00 △

For the last few years Sharp's recordable MD personals have been among the best around. Compact and solidly built, the MD-MT831H is an excellent example of the breed. Controls are neatly laid out, if a touch fiddly, and the main display is the large and informative. The in-line remote is pretty well designed too, and there are both optical and line cables for digital and analogue recording and playback.

Performance is notably up-front. It's the best of the bunch with classical and acoustic material, able to convey a greater sense of detail and separation between instruments, while sounding impressively vital with cleaner sounding rock and dance tracks. However, with rougher material it can get a bit bright and edgy, partly due to somewhat over-enthusiastic in-ear headphones. Smart design, a sprightly sound and a well-appointed package, this is an impressive piece of kit.

Sharp Electronics (UK) 22 0161 205 2333
Reviewed in HEC 204



#### Pontis SP504 MP3 PLAYER £158.20 △

Pontis' parallel-linked SP503 earned a reputation as one of the better sounding MP3 players around, and this new USB-equipped SP504 keeps that tradition intact. The player itself is rather heavy and not too pretty, but the overall package oozes quality. There's no built-in memory but two card slots are incorporated and one 32MB MMC card is included in the price. Management software is comprehensive and compatible with both PC and Mac.

This player really scores on sound quality. Pontis claims to have chosen internal components carefully, and the result is the best-sounding MP3 portable we've heard. Treble definition is good and the overall tone is clear, which is particularly audible if you upgrade the supplied in-ear 'phones. This is a great buy for anyone who cares about performance, and one of the first MP3 portables to approach the quality of a MiniDisc personal, albeit with the inevitable storage limitations.

Pontis www.pontis.de Reviewed in HFC 204

#### Sony MZ-R91

MINIDISC PLAYER £249.99 ▷

In the 'must-have-shiny-toy' category, this little Sony scores a perfect 10. It measures just 78x72x17mm, which makes it the smallest recording MD in the world, with a light yet rigid body. It looks super-slick too; a vision of subtle curves and ellipses with a choice of metallic finishes and perfectly proportioned controls. Unfortunately, it's rather less intuitive to operate than models of old.

Playback performance finds the Sony a little podgy in the bass and a touch wayward up top, but fine mid-frequency strengths carry it through with a substantial yet unassuming character. Recording quality is roughly similar, though tainted by a degree of sibilance. Be warned that no cables are supplied for recording, so if you want optical and/or line interconnects you'll have to buy them separately. Surely the sexiest recording MD personal yet, with good sound and excellent facilities.

Sony UK **№** 0990 111999 Reviewed in HFC 204

#### Creative Labs Digital Audio Jukebox

MP3 PLAYER £349.00 ▷

We wouldn't claim to be clairvoyant, but we've a sneaking feeling we've seen the future. This £350 Jukebox is one of the most iconoclastic bundles of technology we've ever had the pleasure to stroke, though the concept is really quite simple. A 5.7GB, shock-protected hard drive (like those in laptop computers), allied with MP3 decoding, a USB interface and a neatly ordered file management application are all packed into a svelte plastic case that fits perfectly into two cupped hands. It's bigger than the average MP3 personal, but light enough at 400 grams to lug about without difficulty, powered by mains or rechargeable batteries. The big advantage is a storage capacity of around 1.000 tracks (at 128Kbps).

Sonically it inevitably suffers from the cold, flat quality that afflicts compressed digital music, but from a portable perspective it's perfectly listenable and certainly one of the best MP3 units we've tried – a blinding product.

Creative Labs www.europe.creative.com Reviewed in HFC 208

#### **Rio** 600

MP3 PLAYER £169.00 ▷

When MP3 first gatecrashed the audio scene a couple of years back, Rio was the name knocking loudest. Now the new 600 takes design cues from mobile phones to make the concept more accessible, replacing the rather fiddly memory cards with interchangeable memory 'backpacks'. The size and shape fits neatly in your hand, the display is eye-catchingly comprehensive and the menu system works like a dream.

Sound quality is robust: not quite the sweetest thing in MP3, but usefully tunable via a fine array of tone and EQ adjustments. It's 'codec agnostic' too: it supports MP3 and WMA file types as standard, and firmware can be upgraded via Net downloads. An in-line remote would have been cool, and 32MB of memory as standard is rather miserly compared to the 64MB models now emerging for not a great deal more. But for its excellent design and strong future proofing, the Rio 600 is safely and soundly Recommended.

Rio www.riohome.com Reviewed in HFC 208







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## **Room Tunes**

One of the basic precepts of *Hi-Fi Choice* is to test every component in the hi-fi chain, preferably in groups. Every component bar one, that is. We stop when it comes to the loudspeakers, and ignore what is genuinely the last link in this chain – the listening room. **Paul Messenger** gets his tape measure out, and plays hi-fi estate agent.

hat is certain is that the room is really important - probably as important as the loudspeakers themselves. The boundaries (walls, floor, ceiling etc) absorb/reflect much of the sound generated by the speakers, while the mass of air in the room couples the vibrations from the diaphragms to your ears. The main problem, of course, is that it's likely to be a lot harder to change than your hi-fi system. It might not be terribly helpful to suggest that the serious enthusiast should first choose a good room before worrying about the hardware, but there's no denying the validity of the statement. There are no easy answers, but gaining some understanding of how the room operates is at least a start in making the best out of whatever space you're lumbered with. (If it's a true disaster area, headphones of course avoid the room entirely.)

Problem number one is that several different mechanisms are involved, so any room represents some sort of balance of compromises. Placing a given pair of speakers for best stereo imaging might not give the best overall tonal balance, for example. More seriously, there's just as much disagreement over the right approach to rooms, their treatment and their qualities as there is about any of the other components in hi-fi.

#### **DIMENSIONS & PROPORTIONS**

The most important factor of all is probably the room modes, and these are closely related to the basic dimensions of the room itself. In point of fact these modes or standing waves are created at frequencies (fundamentals and harmonics) whose wavelengths correspond to the main dimensions of the room.

The majority of rooms are regular and rectangular in shape, and in these cases it's possible to calculate the main axial (length, width and height) modes. Such calculations won't necessarily exactly coincide with measure—ments, as each room has its own peculiarities, but they're usually pretty-close. Conversely, it's very difficult indéed to calculate the modes in an irregular-shaped room.

However, it isn't so much the individual modes which cause the trouble. The problems really start to arise when the modes from different dimensions coincide, so that they interact with and reinforce each other. The worst case of all, of course, is the perfect cube, where length, width and height- anothleir corresponding modes - are all the same. Likewise if much better to avoid one dimension being a simple multiple of another, because their flarmodics and fundamentals will chipeide.



			fig. 1
ROOM DIMENSI	8ft	12ft	16ft
FIRST MC	71 Hz*	47Hz	35.5Hz
SECOND MC	142Hz**	94Hz	71 Hz*
THIRD MC	213Hz	141Hz**	106.5Hz
FOURTH MC	284Hz	188Hz	142Hz**

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ROOM DIMENSION	8ft	13ft	21ft
FIRST MOD	71 Hz	43.5Hz	27Hz
SECOND MOD	142Hz	87Hz	54Hz
THIRD MOD	213Hz	130Hz	81Hz
FOURTH MOD	284Hz	174Hz	108Hz

As examples, I'll go back to David Lewis' excellent Room Service feature (*HFC* June 1997), in which he cites a room 16'L x 12'W x 8'H (see fig.1 above).

This room has problems because its length is twice its height, and the width is exactly halfway in between. The problem modes can be clearly above seen at 71Hz* and 142Hz**.

To calculate your own room modes, divide 1,130 (the speed of sound in feet per second) by twice each room dimension (in feet). This gives the first mode (in feet) is then doubled, trebled and quadrupled to give coold third and fourth respectively. (You don't

Lewis goes on to describe an ideal' room that he built, with dignerations in proportion according to the 'Golden Section' (based on the mathematical Fibonacci sequence) of 1662 T. Following this rule he built a room measuring 21°Lx 13°W x.8°H with the modes shown in fig.2. As you can see, none of these modes coincide, and, having built the thing, David discovered that this room actually worked very well indeed to practice.

It's pointy obvious that 'rectangularity' tends to promose specific room modes, so less regular shapes with non-parallel main boundaries could well give a smoother mode distribution. It's probably one reason why 'cathedral' ceilings sound good (and may also explain why high ceilings generally are beneficial).

There's not a lot you can do about the basic modes which exist in a particular room. Large items of furniture (such as vinyl storage) can be strategically sited, and adding a false ceiling to damp floor-to-ceiling modes is a possible though rather extreme strategy. A more practical approach is to experiment with both the loudspeaker and listening positions, so as to minimise the acoustic coupling of the subjectively most intrusive modes.

# CONSTRUCTION

Just as much as the dimensions and proportions, the building materials used in a room will have a considerable impact on the sound. The sound a listener hears from a typical pair of box loudspeakers is certainly led by the direct wave from speakers to ears, but such loudspeakers radiate sound in all directions, especially at low frequencies, so a lot of the sound energy that reaches the listener will have been reflected one or more times before it gets there.

The boundaries of a room do three things to an arriving sound wave: they reflect, absorb or transmit the sound energy. The reflection component is the part that affects the perceived sound, but the reflection/absorption/transmission ratios vary considerably according to frequency, and according to the materials from which the boundary is made. Very few walls have anything like a 'flat' reflective frequency response (which is not necessarily desirable anyway).

We know plenty about how different materials and surfaces behave. The trouble is, there's little if any consensus about what constitutes the 'right' approach. Let's take a look at the extreme cases. An anechoic chamber is totally non-reflective (and ought therefore to give the most accurate steree, like headphones), but it wouldn't be a nice from to live in at all. The same could be said of a fully tiled room at the opposite extreme

In practice our rooms fall somewhere in between. If stereo imaging is a major preoccupation, it's probably better to try and add some sort of absorption, especially around in areas with a direct one-reflection path to the listening zone. Others, however, (myself included) prefer to listen in a 'livelier' acoustic – some even reckon that untreated stone or brick gives the best results, though such a surface ought really to be irregular to provide some diffusion.

Surface treatment (or not) can help modify the mid and top end, but the actual building materials used affect the whole band, bass included. Concrete, stone or solid brick will absorb/transmit much less bass energy than the plasterboard-on-stud construction used for modern internal partition walls. An all-concrete room is likely to have stronger bass than a brick-built room with joist-supported floor and ceiling, and that in turn will have more bass energy than a room with stud walls.

# PLACEMENT

Speaker placement is no less controversial than the previous sections, though there are one or two rules which are generally accepted. Make sure the mid-range and treble drivers are roughly at seated ear height, and place the speakers so that the bass/main driver is not the same distance from side and rear wall and floor.

All sorts of issues of personal preference come into the frame. Some like to listen fairly close to the speakers, with a fairly wide stereo angle; others prefer to be further back with a narrower angle. The former might prefer to operate across the width, rather than down the length of the room. And of course there are the practicalities and overall aesthetics of the room in question. Doorways have an inconvenient habit of being just where you'd like to put a loudspeaker, and cable runs need to be considered too.

Precise placement with respect to room boundaries should really be a matter for *in situ* experiment. Placing a speaker close to a rear wall will tend to give a significant boost to the midbass region (50-100Hz), so it's possible to 'tune' the bass balance of a speaker according to how close to the wall you place it, albeit to a rather crude degree.

Although some prefer the bass 'room drive' of close-to-wall placement, and some brands deliberately align speakers to make use of boundary effects, there's usually a price to be paid in a less even and more coloured midband, and less precise imaging. As with so much about speakers and rooms, it's a matter of trial and error.

Optimising mid-bass alignment isn't the only reason to experiment with placement. The position of the speakers and the listeners will also affect how the room modes are driven and perceived. There isn't space to go into the mathematical relationships here, but shifting the speakers or the armchair by as little as a foot can significantly affect the mode distribution and maybe give a smoother result.

# CONCLUSIONS

Rooms are tricky things, just like the loudspeakers we put in them. There's no real substitute for starting off with a good room in the first place, but there are quite a few tricks you can try to make the best out of a bad job, and they're mostly to do with 'fine-tuning' speaker and listener positioning. And don't be afraid to back your own taste. We all listen to music in our own peculiar ways, and what's just right for my preferences might be anathema to you.

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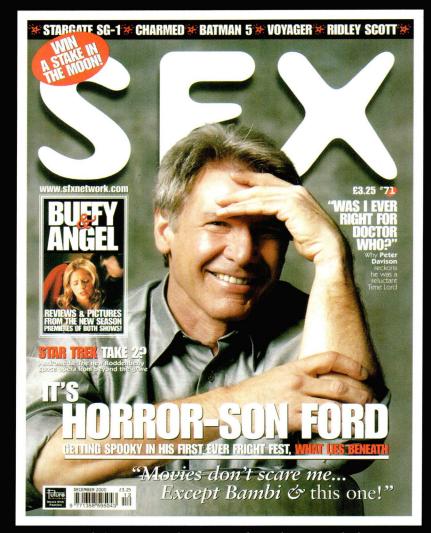
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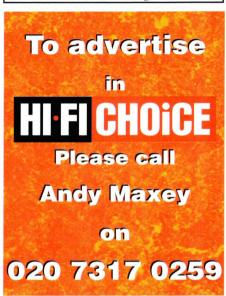
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Cary CAD855 CD player	399
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Pink Triangle Dacapo HDCD 20 Bit	695
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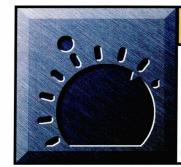
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# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS: Number of input | MC PHONO INPUT: An input sockets for line-level (non-vinyl) for moving coil (low output) sources such as CD players, tuners and cassette decks specially designed for moving magnet (high output) phono pickup cartridges.

phono pickup cartridges. REMOTE CONTROL: An infra-MM PHONO INPUT: An input | red handset to adjust volume etc. HEADPHONE SOCKET: An integral output for headphones. POWER OUTPUT (Watts):

Our measurement of an amp's RMS power output into 8 Ohms **RECEIVER:** An amplifier with built-in radio receiver (tuner). ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

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# **Amnlifiers**

STATUS				MC PHONO POWER OUTSUT NUMBER O					NUMBER		
•	PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS				A	M	V		BABA A
1	Affordable Valve Co. EL34	650	A real bargain on the face of it, but the sound is oh so soft, warm and old-valve. Too much of a good thing	4					15	40	202
l_	Alchemist Kraken APD6A	599	Compact, with Darth Vader styling, yet sound quality is meek and mild, despite strong midband dynamics	5	•					55	175
0	AMC 3025a	140	Surprisingly potent and easy on the ear, if not especially analytical — classic bargain-basement material, in fact	4	•				•	30	171
0	AMC 3050a	170	Tremendous value for money, and a full, big, if rather uninformative sound	4	•		• (	•	•	45	167
0	Arcam Alpha One	230	Rather like an Alpha 7 but without the remote control and what appears to be better sound quality still	6					•	35	186
1	Arcam Alpha 7R	300	Decent, if slightly system fussy amplifier that no longer pulls all the right strings	5	•			•	•	45	196
	Arcam Alpha 8R	350	Workmanlike amplifier is well thought through, but is now beginning to show its age.	5	•			•	•	50	208
0	Arcam Alpha 9	500	Not quite a match for the Alpha 9/9P combo, the solo integrated is nevertheless colourful and explicitly detailed	7			9		•	70	168
0	Arcam Alpha 10	800	Although not the best sounding in its class, the Alpha 10's modular nature demands it be taken seriously	5			•			100	181
0	Arcam F J A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7				•	•	100	201
E	ATC SIA2-150	1,984		4				•		150	192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4						12	190
0	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	•		9			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	•		•			40	181
0	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			•			100	175
1	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5					•	60	175
0	Cambridge Audio A500RC	200	Solid value, decent build and a surfeit of watts make this an attractive proposition, but it can sound slightly loose	6				•		50	196
0	Canary Audio CA-608	1,495	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4						24	202
0	Copland CSA8	945	Sophisticated yet transparent, this is one of those amplifiers that sounds good even when the gloss has worn off	5						60	168
0	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	•		200			60	189
l	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	•		•	•		35	193
۱_	CR Developments CR324	569	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5						150	181
0	Cymbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6						40	178
	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	•					40	192
	Creek 4330SE	499	Somewhat perplexing, though always interesting, miniature audiophile amplifier, needs careful system matching							50	208
0	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7					•	45	205
0	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			•		•	60	196
0	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5					•	30	208
	Denon PMA-535R	230	The kind of amp they made in the 70s, dressed to the nines, and nowhere to go	5	•				•	50	192
	Denon PMA-725R:	350	Warm, bold, up-front presentation, but musically unexciting	5	•	•			•	97	157
0	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	•	•			•	70	181
0	Densen Beat B-100 Mkll	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5						60	175
	Densen DM-10	1,375	Big, bold and expressive amplifier, but sometimes rough around the edges, and not as powerful as it appears	6			10			75	189
	Edmund Audio ESI10	400	Honest but unexciting straight line amp from REL associate company	6						85	192
	Electrocompaniet EC1-3	1,000	Basically good, but too many rough edges to warrant recommendation	6			•			75	201
	Ezo Aria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5					•	40	208
	Graaf Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6		1				25	202
0	Harman/Kardon HK630	200	Sharp, clean but sometimes slightly raw-sounding budget amp	4	•		•		•	40	192
	Harman/Kardon HK690	530	Bold, dynamic amplifier with plenty of balls, but not the most sophisticated sound on earth	6	•				•	100	196
	Holfi Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	•	1				65	181
	JoLida 202	695	Well-built and technically accomplished, affordable valve integrated with subtle refined, if not quite gripping sound	4						40	168
	JVC AX-R5	200	Versatile, and lots of even-handed, articulate detail; but let down by superficiality	5	•		•	)	•	45	149
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	•		•	)	•	70	186
0	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Highly capable amp with good treble, bass and fine detail	5					•	65	205
	Kenwood KA-5090R	300	Large, well equipped and high tech integrated, but TRAITR output still gives a harsh, unsubtle performance	5	•	•	•		•	65	171
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			•	)	Nee i	250	192
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5						23	196
0	Magnum IA120	265	Mirror finish amplifier with bold, colourful delivery, but needs careful system matching to avoid loss of clarity	6					•	65	171
	Magnum Class A SE	795	A MOSFET amplifier drawing inspiration from the world of valves, this is an erratically refined, detailed amplifier	5	•					80	175
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	•		•	,	•	50	196
	Marantz PM7000	300	Lots of power for the price, but detail and subtlety seem to have been sacrificed	6	•		•	,	•	115	205
	Marantz PM6010 OSE KI Sig		Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	•		•	,	•	50	208
	Marantz PM-17	900	Probably worth it for the WBT terminals and other build features alone, but this model doesn't sing as it should	6	•	•		,		60	181
	Same of the Same		,								ALC: U

# Amplifiers

SPECIFICATIONS
LINE PHONE PHONE REMODER OF RESSUE
MM PHONO INPUTS CONTROL OF CONTRO

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STAI	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	V			V	V	V	
	Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	•	•	•		60	189 178
0	Monrio Asty  Musical Fidelity E1	400 <b>199</b>	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility  Richly flavoured tone and realistically-scaled imagery distinguish this entry-level Richer Sounds special	5 <b>6</b>					55 <b>30</b>	178
w	Musical Fidelity E11	299	Well built minimalist amp with a five year guarantee, but can sound congested when extended	6					60	178
0	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6					75	208
	Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	•	•	•		85	196
D	Musical Fidelity X-A100R	999	Sings like a thoroughbred, but better with Mozart than Mötörhead	6			•		75	189
	MVL A2	970	Curiously designed, and curious sounding amplifier with Sound Sentinel circuits to address perceived weaknesses	9	•			•	100	201
	Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	•		•	•	50	192
O .	Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			•	•	60	175
0	NAD 310	100	Fleet and sure of foot, it seems likely to set all appendages tapping with its blend of enthusiasm and artfulness	5					20	149
0	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better darity and neutrality and good build	6		- 8			40 50	186 192
0	NAD C340 NAD C350		A dassic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum  A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7	•				60	208
B .	NAD 317	300 470	Build quality aside, the current improved version is a real powerhouse, but smooth and detailed too	6				•	80	196
	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no shortage of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			•		100	189
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	•	•			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			•		55	202
D .	Pioneer A-300R	200	Its bright and breezy sound is a natural tonic to those of us worn down by the ongoing stress of life	5	•		•	•	50	1149
0	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	•		•	•	45	186
D	Pioneer A-607R		Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	•		•	•	60	192
B	Pioneer A-300R Precision	400	Sophisticated variant of the A-300R. Not an obvious winner, but it slowly plys you with its subtle charms	5	•		•	•	35	162
_	Pioneer A07	999	Curious blend of high-end attributes and inconsistent, though undeniably detailed sound	5	•		•		80	175
0	Præcisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			•		100	189
0	Primare A-10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			•		50	208
0	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			•		70	181
0	Primare A30.1		Superb build and aesthetics, and undemonstrably musical down to its smallest screw	6			•		100	189
	Rega Elex	398	Minimalist amplifier, derived from Elicit, is a little uninspiring, although at least it is well behaved	4	•				50	162
	Restek Fantasy II	1499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6			•		100	189
0	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	•		•	•	120	205
0	Roksan Caspian	<b>795</b>	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances  Unique two-box integrated gives real subtlety and low level resolution, but the sound lacks scale and weight	<b>6</b> 5	•		•		<b>70</b> 65	<b>201</b> 168
	Rose Scion Rotel RA-931 Mk II	615 189	Unique two-box integrated gives real subtlety and low level resolution, but the sound lacks scale and weight  Simple, non-remote amp majors on darity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4					35	208
B B	Rotel RA-971 MkII	225	Improved AR971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6				-	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	450	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6		1 200	•	•	90	205
			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	n/a					110	200
D .	Sony TA-FB740R	200	Very open and dear sound, comfortable with a wide range of musical styles	5			•	•	60	205
₩. Di	Sony TA-F448BE	250	Minimalist interface is matched to carefully considered circuit with satisfactory effect — but keep the volume in check	5	•			•	55	171
Ψ.	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	•		•	•	70	208
0	Sony TA-F3000ES	500	Champagne 'shoebox amp' may lack power reserves, but is quick and articulate. In every sense a knockout	5	•		•	•	35	178
_		1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			•	•	100	189
		7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a			•		150	194
	TAG McLaren 60i	800	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6				•	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	999	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			•	•	60	184
0	Talk Electronics Storm 1	500	Good soundstaging and strong detail are provided by this unassuming and not especially powerful model	6					50	162
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			•		65	196
0	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			•		50	175
	Teac A-E2000	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6					50	195
	Technics SU-A660 Mk 3	200	Plenty of wellie for the price, but the sound can be a tad coarse and lacking in fine detail	5	•			•	37	186
	Technics SU-A808		Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	•		•	•	55	196
0	Technics SU-AROOD Mk 2	<b>300</b>	Two-box amplifier looks great, has plenty of gadgets, and makes good, if slightly overexuberant, music	<b>5</b>	•			-	<b>55</b>	178
	Technics SU-A900D Mk 2 Token Audio K50	400 <b>350</b>	Looks like a pre/power amplifier, but in effect it's an integrated, with a rather soft-centred sound to match  Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5	•				70 <b>50</b>	175
<b>B</b>			A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	•				30	186 202
	Yamaha AX-392	2 <b>,400</b> 170	Standard budget fare, and it's easy to pick holes, but in undemanding surroundings it works creditably	6		100	•	•	60	192
	Yamaha AX-496	179	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough				•	•	85	208
0	Yamaha AX-492		Powerful, well equipped amplifier at an attractive price, offers powerful and engaging music-making	5	•		•	•	85	178
	Yamaha AX-592	280	Fine, middle ranking amplifier, with a detailed midband but performance declines at frequency extremes	5	•	•	•	•	100	171
ı	PREAMPLIFIERS		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	100000						THE REAL PROPERTY.
		3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5			•	•	50	187
	Alchemist Kraken APD7A MkII	_	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6				Fire	3,44	187
3	Arcam Alpha 9C		Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			•	•	100	187
	Audio Note M Zero	299	Neat shoe box-size preamp. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5						191
O	Copland CTA-301 MkII	1,249	Sweet sounding, but never gets bogged down in audio treade	4	•					151
3	Creek P43R	350	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from this fine value preamp	6			•	•		187
)	Crimson CS610		Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited	3	•	•				187
	Cyrus aCA7		A decent enough unit at the price but not as good as the Cyrus aPA7 power amp it was tested with	5			•	•		190
			A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	•	•			Sec. 10	191
E		3,995	True high end preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability	6		1	•			195
	LFD Mistral Linestage	449	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6		- 65				165
			Extremely sophisticated analogue controller with tremendous flexibility and a fast and tidy presentation	7			•			162
			Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound. (Tested with Alecto power amps)	6			•			187
	Moth 30 Active Line Stage	349	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp	4						165
			Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160 power amp	5			•			166
0	Musical Fidelity X-PRE Musical Fidelity X-P100	200 800	Cleverly configured preamp with many upgrade options, and open, lively and engaging sound Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness (tested with X-A200 power amp)	6			•			175 200
D.	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6				•		165
•		270	see sages prearry when sound recisely detailed and consistent	0			10000			103
0 0	NAD Silverline S100	600	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks (tested with S200 power amp)	7		22.0			DE LA CONTRACTOR DE LA	200

Best Buys 2000 HI-FI CHOICE 121

(	CONTINUED	Carlotte Co.		CDE	CLEL	CATI	O N	- 14 CA 10/50	
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ST	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS		V V	V V	~	_	VV
	Naim NAC92R	630	Upgradeable preamp uses proprietary socketry. (Tested with NAP90 power amp)		5	•	1.4		165
	Naim NAC102	1,000	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtl	,	5	•			200
0	Rega Hal Rotel RC-971	<b>998</b> 150	Passive line stages dedicated to Exon power amps  Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music. (Tested with RB-971 power amp	)	CHARGE LIVE	• •	•		165 178
	Rotel RC-995	525	Highly capable, though less astonishing value than matching RB-991 power amp (tested as pair)	7	CHARLE				200
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal facia - precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	(		•	•		201
	TAG McLaren PA20R Talk Hurricane 2L	1,500 649	Refinement of Audiolab original with clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power. (T/w 125M monoblocks) Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	(	CONTRACTOR .	•	•		184 165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involv	1500	THE RESERVE TO THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TWO IS NOT THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TWO IS NAMED IN COLUMN TW				188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	Ŭ	5	•			200
	POWER AMPLIFIERS Alch. Kraken APD8A Mk II	E 40	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	50			17.00	55	187
0	Arcam Alpha 9P	549 <b>400</b>	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction					60	165
0	Arcam Alpha 10P	600	Well made and flexible: upgradeable to 3 channels. Good sound lacking the last degree of detail					100	187
	Audio Note P Zero	599	Neat shoe box size valve monoblocks, priced per pair. Impart music with life and soul. (Tested with P Zero prear	np)				8	191
E	Border Patrol 300B SE Cary CAD 2A3SE	<b>3,995</b> 1,575	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot  Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency					<b>8.5</b> 5	186 196
	Copland CTA-505	2,099	Grown-up amplifier with a refined, yet never over-civilised air		town (i)			67	151
	Chord SPM-4000	8,500	Sound is as stylish as its appearance is bold. Probably one of the best amps you are likely to hear		WEIGHT !			410	202
0	Creek A52SE Crimson CS630	599 800	Well designed and built amplifier with plenty of power, detail and refinement  Space-saving slimline monoblocks with both grunt and finesse		5	ein .		100	187 187
0	Crimson C3630 Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is rais	100				50	181
	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-s	oft	Total Control			50	183
	Cyrus aPA7	1,896	Low feedback design that's a positive departure from the transistorised norm. (Tested with Cyrus aCA7 pre		91192			150	190
(G)	Densen B-300 Gamut D200	800 2,995	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only). Formerly Sirius					100 200	183 183
1	Levinson 334	5,495	A mailed fist in a velvet glove; refined, authoritative and transparent					125	195
-	LFD Mistral Power	449	Infectious upper band vitality, but LF dynamics lacking — likewise 'grip' and transparency					60	165
	Michell Alecto Monoblocks		Hefty beasts offering real power and striking imaging. Not the last word in timing. (Tested with Orca pream		Marine .			100	187
0	Moth 60 Watt Stereo  Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	599 <b>879</b>	Miniature power amp lacks control and finesse – not comfortable with difficult speaker loads  Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities					60 100	165 1 <b>55</b>
0	Musical Fidelity X-A50	500	Geverly configured and attractively packaged, open, lively and engaging sound. Reviewed with X-PRE					50	175
0	Musical Fidelity X-A200	1,000	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruity (tested with X-P100 preamp)	10				200	200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic mate					350	199
	Myryad MA120 NAD 214	450 <b>370</b>	Based on MI120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI  A little lightweight, but detailed, consistent sound quality, and excellent value for money	120				60 <b>80</b>	165 165
0	NAD Silverline S200	1,400	eautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power (tested with S100 preamp)		203505			200	200
١	Naim NAP90	450	Power amp from a Nait integrated with some improvements					30	165
	Naim NAP180	1,122	More of a 'character act' than a truly neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtle	ty				60	200
E	Naim NAP500 Samuel Johnson ppa100	10,000 2,200	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition  Stylish wood and metal facia - nimble, high resolution and highly coherent sound					140 50	<b>208</b> 201
	Technics SE-A1010	350	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less		State of the last		•	90	200
	Technics SE-A3000	2,997	Price includes SU-C3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involved	ing			•	100	188
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean					100	187
0	Rega Exon Ro n Caspian Power	1,196 595	Monoblock, priced each, dedicated for Hal preamp. Bold, outgoing, in-command kind of sound Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mir	d I				125 70	165 183
0	Rotel RB-971	200	Somewhat better than the accompanying preamp — clean, mean and bridgeable. (Tested with RC-971)	u				70	178
0	Rotel RB-991	600	Top stuff and stunning value: rather outshone the matching RC-995 preamp (tested as pair)					200	200
	Rotel RB-980BX	450	Tames enthusiastically recorded material with a laid-back and occasionally smeared sound		6.000			120	155
	TAG McLaren 125M Talk Tornado 2	2,400	Refined Audiolab replacement monoblocks with clean sound but limited thrill power. (T/w PA20R preamp) Good, but slightly retiring sound which lacks the authority to stand out in a crowd		West Connection			145 65	184 165
	PHONO STAGES	600	Good, but signify feating sound which lacks the authority to stand out in a crowd		Military Company			03	103
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance marrs the performance of this lively performer	(	COLUMN TO THE REAL PROPERTY OF THE PERTY OF	•	(18%)		201
0	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	(	-	•			189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	826 350	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality	(	100000				189 189
0	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise	(	CONTRACT CON	•			189
0	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	(	COLUMN TO THE REAL PROPERTY.	•			189
	Musical Fidelity X-LP2/X-PSU	628	An enjoyable listening experience in its way, but a bit short on inner details  A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	(		•			201
0	NAD PP-1 Pass Labs XOno	40 <b>2,995</b>	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	(		•			189 <b>201</b>
0	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer	(	Market .	•			201
0	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway p		Table 1	•	19		201
0	QED Discsaver DS-1 Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	35 1,150	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refine Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	-	ACCOUNT NAME OF THE PARTY OF TH				189 189
	TAG McLaren PPA20	1,549	One of the best-equipped phono stages available. Resolution is excellent, but timing is marginally behind the be	-	NO. OF THE REAL PROPERTY.	•			187
0	Tom Evans The Groove	1,500	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any		10222	•			201
	MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIF		Desired with a discussion of places of a desired and a second and a second and a second and a					110	100
0	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P Cyrus AV5	1,000	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good  Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multi-channel solution for music fans	2	22702	•		110 N/A	198 201
0	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multi-channel sound	-	ORDER OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN 1	•	•	75	• 198
0	Marantz SR5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package		AUTO		•	105	• 198
	Musical Fidelity HTP/HT600	3,998	A very well matched pairing with considerable musical talents			•		100	207
	NAD T770 Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	Lacks both transparency and subtlety while the omission of dts will be a drawback for some at this price  A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	2	20000	•	•	90	<ul><li>198</li><li>198</li></ul>
	Pioneer VSX-908RDS	1,000	A flexible heavyweight AV receiver whose sound is just a little too stodgy and lacking in crispness	2	ORBIGOS .	•	•	80	• 198
0	Roksan Caspian DSP	2,290	A potent combination offering the bare essentials of DD and dts decoding	4	SCHOOL .	•		130	198
0		2,225	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	mh (				130	198
	Sony TA-VA777ES Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	1,500	Dual purpose model with enthralling midrange and presence, that does music and movies with equal aplo Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	mb 6	NAME OF THE PERSON		•	100	205 198
	33117 171 2300023/113000123	2,500	50, 60.0) Potterial and remainably resource but falls to cat the softe mustalu	N	018		TEST.		.50



# Cables

- ables are an integral part of a hi-fi system, required to connect source components to amplifiers, and the latter to speakers
- Analogue Interconnects connect source components and amplifiers, and run between pre and power amps. They are priced for one-metre terminated pairs.
- Digital interconnects connect CD transports to DACs or digital recorders. They come in optical and electrical varieties, the former being made of plastic or glass. The prices shown are for a terminated linear metre.
- Speaker cables are used between the amplifier and speaker. Our prices are per unterminated metre. Termination (plugs and soldering) costs vary.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

RECOMMENDED

- SYMMETRICAL: A twisted pair
- COAXIAL: A central 'hot' conductor and a shield that carries the negative signal.
- STRANDED: Multiple strands with no intervening insulation.
- insulated strands.

**BEST BUY** 

- SILVER: Material used for conductor.
- DIG CABLE TYPE: O optical digital; E - electrical digital for CD Players, DACS
- ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in

EDITOR'S CHOICE

● SOLID CORE: Single or multiple, individually which an original review appeared.

and digital recorders.

**Cables** 

SYMMETRICAL DIG CABLE TYPE COAXIAL STRANDED CORE

STA					-	9	-		-
S	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS		-	VV			<b>V V</b>
	ANALOGUE INTERCONNE	CTS (I	PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)						
ı	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction	18		• •			188
ı	Audio Note AN-A	18	Not especially impressive: warm but well-rounded balance that restricts 'air' but is quite clear		•	•	Can S		108
ı	Audio Note AN-C	35	Neutral but lacking in subtle texture and unable to distinguish fine detail			Value of	•		131
0	Audio Note AN-S	99	Up-beat and enthusiastic sound with satisfyingly deep and grumbly bass		•		•	•	131
	Audio Note AN-V	179	15 individually insulated silver strands make up this very clean and dynamically unchallenged cable		•	•		•	131
ı	Audioquest Topaz X2	60	Well made but let down by a pervading sense of muddle and congestion in the sound		•		•		188
0	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail		•				200
0	CableTalk Advanced 2	35	Slight roughness in loud music barely detracts from a well-balanced performance with good imaging		- Page 1				176
0	Cable Talk Studio 2	65	A first-class performer from tonal, dynamic and rhythmic standpoints		•				160
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price			• •			176
0	Cambridge Audio Studio Ref	40	Dynamic cable with strong soundstaging and only a slight lack of detail						160
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments		•				188
ı	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces					•	176
ı	Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance		•			•	188
0	Connections Midas HD	39	Canary yellow cable with excellent plugs and an open sound. Slight treble glare		•		(	9	160
0	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried		•		•	•	200
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)		•		•		176
ı	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness			•		•	176
0	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging: perhaps a touch bass-light						200
0	Ixos 104	20	Open and detailed presentation, full bass and silky if overly smooth treble	200					131
	lxos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	100	•	. •		•	176
0	lxos 103	45	Even-handed and generous sound, bass has a well-rounded, bouncy quality					•	131
	lxos 102	60	A bit bright and undynamic, this cable is nevertheless a good all-rounder, whose faults are largely subtra	ctive					160
ı	lxos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price		•				200
ı	lxos 101	100	A cable with personality: its veiled and shut in quality bring an earthiness to vocals and rhythm guitar alil	ce					131
0	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble – excellent performance all round					•	188
0	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed		•		(		176
0	Moth Ley Line Black	100	Offers a full sound, neutral yet very solid and confident in delivery. Expansive imaging retains music's en	ergy	•	•			108
	Moth Ley Line Grey	200	Detailed, but there's a sense of distance between music and listener: vocals are coarse rather than liquid		•				108
	Nordost Black Knight	60	Flat black cable that is distinctive but slightly coloured – but not in a wholly negative manner		•			•	160
0	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music		•		•		188
0	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable		•		•	•	176
	Precious Metals SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic	10				•	188
0	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness					•	176
0	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value				1000	•	176
0	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid		•				188
0	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds		•			•	200
	Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes		•			•	188
1	Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfatiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight					•	160
0	SonicLink Silver Pink	35	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. We're unsure about the flesh-coloured finish, though					•	160
0	SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integr	ation	•	•		•	176
Ĺ		1							
_		2			100000				

# UNISON RESEARCH

for a lifetime of musical enjoyment

SR1

Integrated amplifier The perfect combination

The grace of triode valves

The power and control of solid state 80 watts dynamic Class-A Radiowave remote control

for more information on the range of Unison Research products please contact:



23 Richings Way, Iver, Bucks SL0 9DA England Tel: 01753 652669 / 07000 853443 Fax: 01753 654531 www.ukd.co.uk e-mail: nick@ukd.co.uk

Model shown: SR1, £1,250

(	CONTINUED	1		SPECIFIC		
STATUS	Cabl	e	S	SYMMETRICAL SOLID CONTRANDED	COPPER SILVER	SSUE NUMBER
2	PRODUCT	<b>(£)</b>	COMMENTS	▼ ▼	<b>* * *</b>	
	SonicLink Lilac	65	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the b	Western Committee of the Committee of th	• •	1
	SonicLink Violet	85	Better bass than treble – a little dry in the upper octaves	•	•	2
3	Straight Wire Chorus Straight Wire Sonata	40 80	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss  Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable			1
3	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable			2
3	Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticise			1
3	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results	in a		1
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material		• •	2
)	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value			2
•	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent	•	• •	1
•	van den Hul Source HB	65	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness		• •	1
•	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack	•	•	2
		35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			E 2
)	Audioquest Digital One Chord Optilink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslir	nk leads		0 2
	Chord Prodac	50	Price for 0.6m length. Lively detailed treble, drives music along confidently with no hint of fi			E 1
•	lxos 1051-100	39.95				E 2
)	Kimber Kable Opti-link	50	Appears to be a bog-standard PMNA fibre, yet sounds a little brighter and livelier than most			0 1
	Moth Leyline Datalink	140	A thin, coaxial version of Leyline Black with a rather hard and unforgiving character. Too exp			E 1
)	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced	•		E 2
	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value			0 2
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical decent	figital link		0 2
	SonicLink Green	60	Spacious, positive and engaging if a bit over-crisp at times — very compelling, however	•	• •	• E 1
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes	•	•	• E 2
	van den Hul Optocoupler		Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types			0 2
)	van den Hul The First	140	Exceptionally natural albeit slightly cautious compared to some. Plenty of subtle information	and integration		E 1
	LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (I			•		• 1
,	ALR Jordan QMM Audio Note AN-B	5 16.50	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative  Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical			
	Audio Note AN-L		Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to	o accept its foibles		• 1
	Audio Note AN-SP	150	A calm and civilised presentation, very quiet in the way it reveals subtle low level detail. Grea	The state of the s		• 1
	Audioquest F-18	3.60	Slightly lumpy bass and lack of midrange detail: can also be a bit dry	to poise and clarity		1
	Audioquest Type 4	5	Four 18-gauge OFHC copper conductors wound in a Litz-type fashion increases capacitance	0.0.00000		1
	Audioquest Type 6	9	A very inflexible cable in which the sonic ends don't quite justify the means	Dat restrains bite		1
	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable	•		2
	Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings		•	1
	Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	•	•	1
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained		•	1
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices		•	2
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass		• •	1:
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble exte	ension	• •	10
	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	•	•	1
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area		• •	2
	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pour		•	1
	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere - one of the best cables available by the best cables available b	and the second s	• •	2
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system  A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value			1
	Gale XL315 Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative		• •	1
	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	•		1
	Hitachi LC-OFC	7	Very crisp, very clear and very confident. In the right system would be very expensive to bet			10
	lxos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent			2
	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	•		1
	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is s	The second secon	•	1
	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	•	• •	1
	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	•	• •	- 1
	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m termi	The second secon		2
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unsubtle music – can be dry and edgy		• •	1
	Naim NAC A5	5.5	A 'dinosaur of a cable', this stiff wire rod doesn't belong outside Naim systems, where it wor	The second secon	•	10
	Nordost Octava	3	Fair bass but confused treble and some coloration		• •	10
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-yer-face', and bass is not always even	too.		
	Ortofon SPK100 Ortofon SPK200	3 4.99	Grey-sounding — strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, t Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	100	•	1.
	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass — if slightly bright at tin			1
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical			1
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	di textures		20
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board			20
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound — but too messy and bloated for its own good	•		11
	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	•		1:
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel			
	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	•		19
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding	Mary Mary		16
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the	ne best at its price	• •	20
	SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces		• •	10
	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced		•	1
	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plen	ty of bass	•	20
	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together		• •	1:
	C 'I' L ACTOOR 2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details			19
	SonicLink AST200x2	_			1	The state of the s
	Straight Wire Duo Straight Wire Rhythm	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	•	•	20

(	CONTINUED			FELE	I C A T I O N	
STATUS	Cabl	e		-	CATION  DIC  COPPER  SILVER  CORE	150
5	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	V	<b>*</b> * * *	<b>* * * *</b>
0	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	•	•	183
0	Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction	•	•	183
0	Supra Ply 3.4/S	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	•	•	203
0	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	•		183
1	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	•	•	203
1	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	•	•	203
0	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	•	•	203
1	van den Hul The Clearwater	7.99	Despite its evocative title, the Clearwater turns out to be a disappointingly murky-sounding cable		• •	109
1	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	•	• •	203
1	van den Hul CS122 HB	13.99	Good dynamics can make for exciting sound, but fine detail suffers and the treble is often dry	•	•	192
	van den Hul The Magnum	40	Touted as vdH's most prestigious twin-lead cable, The Magnum sounds soft and old-fashioned		• •	109
0	van den Hul The Wind	44	'The Wind' kicks up a storm with its lush midrange and bone-crunching bass		•	109
	van den Hul Revolution	80	Silver-plated OFC combined with carbon fibre prompts a sombre character with an easy and relaxed treble		•	133
	MAINS CABLES AND CON					
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	,				206
0	Lyrwood Electronics Mega Power		Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass	EAST		206
0	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality	BE		206
1	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound			206
0	Russ Andrews Kimber/Power Block	350	Improved version that elevates music to a cleaner and more three-dimensional experience with greater stereo imagery			206
	Russ Andrews The Purifier	250	More ambitious version of the Silencer that gives a cleaner, quieter background, allowing more low level detail			206
0	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy	00000		206
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise	PER I		206
0	Trichord Research Powerblook500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound	d man		206



Lyra Lydian Beta

Lyra Clavis Da Capo

Lyra Parnassus D.C.t

Ortofon 520/P

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# Cartridges

Carbidges fall into two groups: high output MM (moving magnet) models, capable of working directly into most phono inputs; and generally more expensive low- and very-low-output MC (moving coil) models MC carbidges usually have better mechanical integrity, tighter tolerances and give better performance. Many amplifiers are no longer equipped with the necessary phono in ut for a carbidge, and a separate phono stage is necessary. Phono-inputequipped valve amps need a transformer to cope with MC carbidges.

■ Even basic high-output MM carbidge designs will benefit from a customised amplifier in ut load. Consult your dealer for further details on this topic.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- MM: Moving-magnet cartridge with a normal output, suitable for all amplifier phono inputs.
- MC: Moving-coil cartridge with a low output, only suitable for high-sensitivity MC amplifier phono inputs.
- REPLACEABLE STYLUS: Most MM cartridges have a stylus (needle) that can be removed and replaced when worn out.
- OUTPUT (mV): Cartridge output in millivolts
- MASS (g): The mass of your chosen cartridge affects the choice of partnering tonearm. Consult dealers or manufacturers to establish which arms and pickups work well together.
- ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

BEST BUY

R RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S

Cartridges REPLACEABLE STYLUS OUTPUT MASS (8)
SLE STVILLE ISSUE NUMBER 1,295 Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford Audio Technica AT-95E 2.8 Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced Audio Technica AT-OC9ML 330 A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting 0.4 192 Clearaudio Signature A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy O 0 Denon DI 110 A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well Denon DL160 Although listeners just preferred the 110, its brother here survived lab tests and is still 'thoroughly competent' 0.1 43 6 Denon DL103 100 Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail . 0.1 103 Denon DL304 200 Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price 0 Dynavector DV-20X L 299 Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high quality turntable and arm 0.25 192 8.6 Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2 450 Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent 0.15 5.3 158 Dynavector XX-1L 998 Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm 0.25 12 84 Dynavector Te-Kaitora 1,698 A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk 0.25 175 0 8.5 E Dynavector DRT XV-1 Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining Goldring Elan 19 A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body 50 0 67 Goldring 1012GX 79 Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent 0 6.5 Goldring 1022GX 99 As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved 6.5 85 0 Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative 0 Goldring Eroica LX 110 0.5 8 Goldring 1042 120 Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Ouite lively, though 6.5 91 Goldring Elite The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest 0.5 103 8 Goldring Excel VX 525 Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end 0.45 8 175 0 Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge Grado Reference 995 Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users 1.7 175 Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus a 45 London Decca Maroon Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever London Decca S Gold 399 Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records 5.0 6 84

A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge - smooth, agile and dynamic in character

Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound

A stable tracker, and one of the finest cartridges we've heard

For the price, a good blend of virtues - weight, clarity and neutrality

Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed

A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak

0.5

0.22 10.5 175

30

192

158

67

# Cartridges

MC EABLE STYLUS ISSUE NUMBER

			_				
PRODUCT	(E) COMMENTS	▼ .	V	V	V		
Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes		•		3.3	4	103
Ortofon MC15 Super II	130 A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up		•		0.35	7	103
Ortofon MC25E	180 An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable		•		0.5	11	139
Ortofon MC25FL	250 A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP		•	i de la	0.5	- 11	139
Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300 A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings		•		0.5	10.7	192
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings		•		0.5	10.7	158
Ortofon Rohmann	1,000 A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound				0.25	8.5	175
Ortofon MC3000II	1,100 A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best		•		0.12	10	84
Ortofon MC5000	1,500 Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		•		0.12	10	91
Rega Bias	39 Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound	•		•	5	4	67
Rega Elys	85 Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	•		•	5.0	5	67
Reson Reca	250 If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	•		•	6.5	6.3	192
Roksan Corus Black	130 Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	•		•	6.5	5	91
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250 A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		•		2.5	9	192
van den Hul MM-1	250 If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	•		•	5.5	6	103
van den Hul DDT-II	600 Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT II is a bit lazy		•		0.35	7.6	158
van den Hul MC-10	750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		•		0.4	6	60
van den Hul MC-One	900 This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale – worth all the extra money		•		0.4	6	60
van den Hul MC-Two	1,200 MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		•		0.4	6	72
van den Hul Frog	1,500 Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm		•		0.65	7	175
van den Hul G' hopper IIIGLA	2,800 Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		•		0.4	6	122
Wilson benesch Matrix	786 Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		•		0.58	6	158
Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573 Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound		•		0.45	7	175
							1130
	Ortofon MC3 Turbo Ortofon MC15 Super II Ortofon MC25E Ortofon MC25FL Ortofon MC 10 Supreme Ortofon MC30 Supreme Ortofon MC30 Supreme Ortofon MC3000II Ortofon MC5000 Rega Bias Rega Elys Reson Reca Roksan Corus Black Sumiko Blue Point Special van den Hul MM-1 van den Hul MM-10 van den Hul MC-10 van den Hul MC-Two van den Hul MC-Two van den Hul Frog van den Hul Frog van den Hul C' hopper IIIGLA Wilson benesch Matrix	Ortofon MC3 Turbo  130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes  Ortofon MC15 Super II  130 A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up  Ortofon MC25E  180 An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable  Ortofon MC25FL  250 A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP  Ortofon MC 10 Supreme  300 A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon MC30 Supreme  525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings  Ortofon RO3000II  1,100 A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best  Ortofon MC5000  1,500 Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo  Rega Bias  39 Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound  Rega Elys  85 Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing  Reson Reca  250 If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this  Roksan Corus Black  Surniko Blue Point Special  250 A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300  van den Hul MM-1  250 If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm  van den Hul Frog  1,500 Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm  van den Hul Frog  Van den	Ortofon MC3 Turbo  130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes  Ortofon MC15 Super II  130 A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up  Ortofon MC25E  180 An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable  Ortofon MC25FL  250 A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP  Ortofon MC 10 Supreme  300 A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon MC30 Supreme  525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings  Ortofon Rohmann  1,000 A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound  Ortofon MC3000II  1,100 A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best  Ortofon MC5000  1,500 Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo  Rega Bias  39 Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound  Rega Elys  85 Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing  Reson Reca  250 If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this  Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised  Surniko Blue Point Special  250 A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than £300  van den Hul MM-1  250 If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10  750 A seems to control/suppress su	Ortofon MC3 Turbo  130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsublle – take it as it comes  Ortofon MC15 Super II 130 A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up  Ortofon MC25E 180 An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable  Ortofon MC25FL 250 A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP  Ortofon MC 10 Supreme 300 A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon MC30 Supreme 525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings  Ortofon Rohmann 1,000 A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound  Ortofon MC3000II 1,100 A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best  Ortofon MC5000 1,500 Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo  Rega Bias 39 Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound  Rega Reson Reca 250 If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this  Reksan Crous Black 130 Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised  Sumiko Blue Point Special 250 A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300  If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through  van den Hul MC-10 750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10 750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10 1,200 MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal  van den Hul MC-Two 1,200 Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm  van den Hul Gropper IIIGLA 2,800 Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically a	Ortofon MC3 Turbo  130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes  Ortofon MC15 Super II 130 A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up  Ortofon MC25E 180 An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable  Ortofon MC29FL 250 A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP  Ortofon MC30 Supreme 300 A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon MC30 Supreme 525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon RO30 Supreme 525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings  Ortofon RO30 Supreme 525 Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge with a sa special affinity with female vocal recordings  Ortofon MC3000I 1,000 A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound  Ortofon MC3000I 1,100 A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best  Ortofon MC5000 1,500 Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo  Rega Bias 39 Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound  Rega Blys 85 Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing  Reson Reca 250 If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this  Roksan Corus Black 130 Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised  Sumiko Blue Point Special 250 A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300  This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale – worth all the extra money  van den Hul MC-10 750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass  van den Hul MC-10 750 A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm,	Ortofon MC3 Turbo  130	Ortofon MC3 Turbo 130 The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsublle – take it as it comes



# **Cassette Decks**

The compact cassette is still the world's most versatile and ubiquitous music storage medium. Cassette decks hook up to the 'tape loop' inputs and outputs offered by most modern amplifiers. It's worth taking care to choose the best tapes for a specific machine. For example, expensive metal tapes will be a wasted investment for a cheap deck. Many better-specified decks have manual or automatic bias adjustment to get the best from specific samples of tape. Twin decks offer the possibility of copying from tape to tape, playing two cassettes sequentially or recording onto two tapes at once. Autoreverse is a useful feature, but uni-directional mechanisms promise better sound. Dolby S is the ultimate noise reduction system, and three-head decks permit record monitoring off-tape.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

 DOLBY B/C: The first and second Dolby hiss-killers. DOLBY S: A desirable

derivative of Dolby SR professional noise-reduction.

 DOLBY HX-PRO: Extends headroom for cassette recording. the cassette.

• 3-HEAD: Permits monitoring • AUTO CALIBRATION: The

TWIN DECK: Contains two deds for dubbing and AUTOREVERSE:

Automatically plays both sides of

off-tape while you're recording. deck will automatically set up bias and EQ for any tape. ADJUSTABLE BIAS: Permits

> manual optimisation of tape. ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

**BEST BUY** 

RECOMMENDED

EDITOR'S CHOICE

# Cassette Decks

DOLBY HY PROAD DECK REVERS BRADE BY S DOLBYS

STATU	COOK		7000 200120			TRO		-CK	CRSE	MATION	BIAS	ER
-25	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	77.7	V	V		V	V	V		
0	Aiwa AD-F450	120	Basic but well-designed deck. Astonishing value; only the poor metering gives the game away		•		•					136
0	Aiwa AD-WX727	170	High-class twin for those who want bells, whistles — and music		•		•		•	•		146
0	Denon DRM-550	160	There are some technical limitations, but this remains a fine-sounding deck, and excellent value		•		•					158
	Denon DRW-580	200	Twin deck: OK for casual use, but will quickly pall with more quality critical applications		•		•		•	•	•	171
0	Denon DRS-640	200	Draw-loading deck, with simple facilities and smooth, well-adjusted sound		•		•		•			140
0	Denon DRM-650S	230	An improvement on predecessors, it offers a wide-ranging, sound. Dolby S is not the best feature		•	•	•			•	•	164
	Denon DRM-740	270	Breathed-on DRM-710, with good external treatment, offers good, if somewhat detached sonics		•		•		•		•	136
	Denon DRS-810	310	Draw-loading deck, carefully designed yet lacking in subtlety on audition		•		•	•				127
	Harman/Kardon TD420	250	Minor inconsistencies detract from a well-conceived, minimum features design		•		•		•			140
	Harman/Kardon TD450	350	Draw loader with poor tape navigation features; good midband but shallow bass		•		•	•	All Indoors		•	164
0	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced		•		•			•		158
0	JVC TD-V662BK	270	Assured, clean and agile-sounding recorder, if not quite the most refined in its class		•		•					146
	JVC TD-W718	300	Twin deck. Good for creative live recording, but no timer standby. Respectable performance		•		•		•	• (	•	171
0	Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass		•		•		•	•	•	171
	Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound		•		•		•	•		184
1	NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise		•		•				•	158
1	NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use			ONL C	•		•	•	- 800	171
1	Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD		•		•	•			•	195
0	Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with 3 heads and dual capstan transport		•		•				•	146
0	Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality		•	•	•	•			•	164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended		•		•		•	• (	)	171
0	Pioneer CT-S830S	500	High-class mechanism, if lacking in battleship externals, and superb sound	個門	•	•	•				•	146
0	Sony TC-KE600S	300	Mild setting-up problems notwithstanding, this UK-tweaked design has a smooth, open sound		•	•	•	•			•	158
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound		•		•	•				184
0	Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head		•		•					164
0	Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art		•	HILE	•		100	•		158
0	Yamaha KX-490	200	Electrifyingly transparent and capable deck whose only flaw is a trace of audible wow and flutter	dis	•		•		100		•	158
0	Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	in an	•	•	•				•	171



# **CD/DVD Players**

A II CD players offer a basic selection of facilities, and some can keep you entertained for hours as you programme in disc names and track orders. All but the excessively inexpensive feature remote control. Most CD players can be upgraded by adding an outboard DAC (see p129). To do this the player needs a digital output of either electrical or optical type. The former is preferable for the ultimate sound. A CD player can be split into two basic components: the disc drive or transport, and a device which converts the disc's digital bitstream into an analogue audio signal. This is called a digital to analogue convertor, or DAC. Although most players are contained within a single box, expensive players are usually two-box affairs. The first new DVD players have not excelled with CD software.

**BEST BUY** 

RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S CHOICE

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT: For electrical connection to an outboard DAC.
- AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUTPUT: Balanced digital output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT: For optical connection to an outboard DAC.
- ST OPT DIG OUTPUT: High-speed optical output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT: Balanced analogue output for amplifiers equipped with balanced inputs.
- HEADPHONE SOCKET: For 'can' users.

- variable output: Remotely adjustable
- output level (usually non-audiophile).

   MULTI-DISC: Equipped with a carousel or multi-tray system for continuous play of
- DAC TYPE: BS Philips Bitstream; MB multi-bit; Hyb – hybrid of multi-bit and bitstream technologies; 1bit – single bit types eg MASH, bitstream, PWM, etc; CC – constant calibration, DS - delta/sigma
- ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

  Factsback information page.

# CD/DVD Players

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W				UT	DUT "	PUT		A ME	TOP	1	9	-
LS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	- 7			V	7	<b>V</b>	V V	V	7
0	Acurus ACD11	899	First-rate if costly player, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness	•	139						1bit	166
_	Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850	Seriously customised Pioneer with extraordinary resolution and world beating imaging and bass	•				95.29			1bit	165
	Advantage CD1S		A CD player of some stature – what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	•	•	•		•			20bit	193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249			•		-				24/96	190
0	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	•							Hyb	169
_	AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable			•		•			BS	172
0	AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	•							CC	179
Ŭ	Anthem CD1	1,595		•	•					•	MB	178
0	Arcam Alpha 7SE	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before	•	17/10	•	11900				DS	207
0	Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	•							MB	178
0	Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	•		•					1bit	176
0	Arcam Alpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	•			777				Ring	188
0	Arcam FMJ CD23	1,100	World class presentation allied with innovative technology to deliver an engaging standard of music making	•		•	•	•			Ring	206
w	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	•							24bit	191
	Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	•							Hyb	188
	Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	•	0.00						MB	195
	AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-yer-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	•	-		TING.				MB	176
_	AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399		•							MB	169
0	Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5		A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	•				•			18bit	194
	Cambridge Audio D100	120	Hard, clangy and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic			•				100	DS	200
	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use							9	DC	200
0	Copland CDA-266		Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	•	-			10000			MAD	176
0	Copland CDA 289	1,199		•							MB	-
		1,898	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	100000000							100000000000000000000000000000000000000	
_	Cymbol CDP12	1,299	. , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	•			-				Hyb	176
0	Cyrus dAD7 024	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	•							Hyb	191
0	Cyrus dAD3 Q24	900	Bold, lean and lively player demands sympathetic system matching			•					DS	200
0	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor			•	of case on		•		DS	191
	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems			•			•		MB	200
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	•		•			•		MB	179
	Denon DCD-1650AR	700	Powerful, authoritative, and well equipped too, but this player sometimes lacks subtlety	•		•			• •		MB	195
	Harman/Kardon HK720	230	Sometimes aggressive and ill-disciplined player, but at least it's well built	•					•		1-bit	202
_	Harman/Kardon HD740	300	Powerful but subtle and involving player: welcome back, Harman/Kardon	•		•			•	28.5	DS	191
	Harman/Kardon HD760	500	Sophisticated internally, but mildly disappointing when treading the boards in anger	•		•	1000		•		MB	195
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	•		•	•	•			MB	206
_	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features			•			•			207
0	Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music — and has CD Text too	•		•			•		1bit	172
	Kenwood DP-5090	300	Disappointing senior brother to the excellent DP-4090, but surface interface is good	•		•			•		1bit	179
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	800	Kenwood's first DVD-A player suffers from a mild compression of dynamics resulting in a polite yet matter of fact sound	•		•	•	•	•	•	A SHAREST AND A SHAREST AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTY OF TH	206
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	•		•			•		1 bit	202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well equipped	•	w e					•	CC	204
B	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	•							1-bit	207
0	Marantz CD6000 OSE	300	Superbly constructed, slightly emasculated sounding, but smooth and articulate	•		•			•		1bit	200
_	Marantz CD-17KI Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	•		•					BS	176
0	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new found bounce in its step	•	100	•	•	•	•		MB	206
0	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	•	100	•		•			16bit	194
E	Marantz SA-1	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD	•		•					1bit	208
0	Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics – but it's not cheap	•			1				DS	169
	Meridian 506		Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	•		•	7.57				1bit	176
_	Monrio Asty		Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	•	1						DS	_
	Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well-engineered, but ultimately rather heavy-handed and dull, if refined player	•							MB	-
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	•		•					MB	
	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	•		•					DS	200
_	Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	•							100000	184
	Myryad T-20		Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	•	1000						-	195
	Myryad MCD500		Well-built, attractive player, showing much promise, but can be a little heavy-going on audition	•	TOTAL		70.7				1bit	
	NAD C520		Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	•	1000		1				DS	-
	NAD 524		Clean, clear and essentially musical player in the NAD mould	•	1000		-				100000000000000000000000000000000000000	191
	NAD 523		Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test; so was the absence of a digital output		100				- 100	•	DS	-
		230	escalable master presentation has assaypointing on test, so was the absence of a digital output									
							Be	st Buys :	2000	HI-FI CH	OICE	127

	CONTINUED			S D	E C I	FIC	ATI	0 N			67-7 C.
STATUS	CD/I	D	VD Players	OPTICAL . ELEC DIG	ST OPT DIG OUT	AL ANALO	And a second	ABLE OU SOCKET	UT-DISC	ISSUE NUMB	ER
E	PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS	V	7	V	_	V V		V V	V
	NAD C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	•						DS	200
0	NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	•	•	•		•		MB	195
ı	Naim CD5	1,125	Smoother than the CD3.5 but retaining the Naim character of excellent drive and attention grabbing busyne	ess	1.7					Hyb	207
0	Naim Audio CD2	2,000	•	1812				10		MB	200
0	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	•		•		•		• DS	
E	Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625		S. A.						MB	
0	Onkyo DX-7222 Onkyo DX-7511	150 300	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically  Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite	•		•			-	BS 1-bi	
1	Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred							Hyb	
l	Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	•						1bit	0.00
l	Pioneer PD-S507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled		-	•				DS	
0	Pioneer PD-S707	300	Idiosyncratic Legato Link dominated sound, but always subtle and interesting	•		•				MB	184
	Pioneer PD-F906	350	Interesting appearance and concept, but this changer's sound is lacklustre and ergonomics frustrating		100	•		•		• 1bit	178
0	Pioneer PDS-06	550	Technologically sophisticated. Pioneer's first multi-bit player for years is polished and capable	•		•				MB	176
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	•	16.					BS	188
	Revox Exception E426	2,250	_ , ,	•					55	BS	182
_	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	•		•				DS	7,000
0	Roksan Caspian	895	Solid, articulate, and fundamentally well-engineered player, but with some subtle low-level limitations					5		Hyb	
0	Rotel RCD-951 Rotel RCD-971	300 450	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 – buy the original  Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	•	2012					MB MB	
0	Rotel RCD-991	750	Confirms Rotel's status as must watch brand: great stuff						12.00	MB	
U	Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	•						BS	163
0	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable			•				100000	e 202
"	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight			•			•	7272	200
	Sony CDP-XE510	180	Souped up CDP-XE500 which tells a rather bland and unengaging story		100	•			•	1bit	172
0	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	•		•	1			Pulse	195
0	Sony CDP-X3000ES	500	Shoebox format player, looks to die for, switchable digital filters to tweak the already excellent sound	•		•				BS	169
0	Sony SCD-XB940	550	First mainstream SACD player that easily outstrips comparable CD players at this price	•		•	•	•		MB	
E	Sony SCD-777ES	1,700	Beautifully built SACD player that looks like a bit of a CD player bargain	•		•				BS	198
E	Sony SCD-1	2,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but there's not much competition and limited software as yet	•		•				BS	194
	T+A CD1210R		Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	•		•				DS	188
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1 Talk Electronics Thunder 2	550 699	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted  Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradable in various ways							DS 1-bit	100
0	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition							DS	195
0	TAG McLaren CD20R		Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence – recommended with caution	•						BS	188
0	Teac CDP-3450SE	200	For once a budget player where gadgets take second place to respectable, budget amp-friendly sonics							1bit	
	Teac VRDS-8	600	Superb build quality is matched to good, but not exceptional sound quality	•		•			•	MB	-
	Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	•		•			•	Ibit	176
	Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	•		•	•	)	•	MB	195
	Technics SL-PG390	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap	Teet		•				MASH	AND PROPERTY.
	Technics SL-PS7	200	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,		•			•		MASH	
0	Technics SL-MC410	250	If you fancy a CD player that holds 111 discs, this one's cheap, pretty capable, and easy to use							<ul><li>Hyb</li></ul>	
0	Technics SL-MC7	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multidisc)			•			•	MASH	
	Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	•						DS	188
	Trichord Genesis Trichord Revelation	549 799	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority  Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well			200				Hyb 1bit	
	Tube Technology Fusion MkII		Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good	•		•	•			MD	NO. 100 CO. 10
	Tube Technology Fulcrum		An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	•	•	•				-	194
	Wadia 830	3,000	Envelope busting dynamics, power and imaging in a rather unexciting box (digital volume control)	1283	-10/0				•	МВ	183
E	Wadia 860x		If you want to discover what CDs are really capable of, this has few peers	•	•	•	. (	)	•	MB	199
	Yamaha CDX-493	180	Open and lively, but this player is also messy and lacking resolving power		CONT.	•		•	•	Hyb	191
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	•		•		•	•	BS	207
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	•		•		•	•	BS	184
_	YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid	2831		1001			DES	MB	195
U	YBA CD1α	3,895	A remarkably fluid and graceful sound – one of the best we've heard below £5,000	•						IBDIT	194
	TRANSPORTS Audio Note CDT Zero	399	Neat shoe box size transport sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with DAC Zero)	•					5000		191
	Linn Karik		Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing			•					144
	Roksan Attessa ATT-DP3		Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	•		•				1bit	162
	Teac VRDS-T1	550	Superb quality engineering is mated to tidy and composed sound. (Tested with D-T1)	•	1	•				1510	144
	Theta Carmen	3,299	A well equipped and extremely upgradable CD/DVD transport. Right now, the finest of its type	•	1989						203
	Theta Data Basic II	2,397	Uses a Philips CDM9 Pro mechanism and works a treat with more lively DACs	•							130
	Thorens TCD2000	999	Lively presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble. (Tested with TDA 2000 DAC)	•	144	•					162
0	Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	•		•					162
	DACS										
	Alchemist TS-D-1		24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDs							BS	187
	Audio Note DAC Zero		Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)							-	191
P			Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price		•		0			Hyb	
•	dCS Delius dCS Purcell		State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	•	•		0			1000000	207
E	Musical Fidelity X-24K	300	24/96 ready with a warm, natural sound and good soundstaging (tested with Pioneer DV-717)							MB	187

# CD/DVD Players

AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT 

E				_					-		-
S	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	DA ASS	V		V	V			
L	DVD PLAYERS	100			12732590				10000	24/0	6 207
0	Denon DVD-1500	400	Colourful and engaging (if lightweight) sound, with excellent picture quality	•				•	10000	24/9 DS	96 207 198
	Denon DVD-2500	500	Good picture, but nondescript sound, except when using the digital output at full 24/96 throttle	~		_	1.4			1000	
0	Denon DVM-3700		One of the first multi-DVD players, and a fine all rounder, with average to good pictures, and better sound	•		•				• DS	187
E	Denon DVD-5000	1,600	The first DVD-V player that ain't bad as a CD player. A fine musical device			•				B2	
0	Encore DV-450	200	Superb value for money, though mainly of interest to the videophile on a shoestring	•		•					6 207
	Hitachi DVP-505	300	DVD player has rather dark, unexpansive sound, but good picture quality	•		•				n/a	
1	JVC XV-D701	500	Good video player, but rather undeveloped musically – CD Text is neat, though	•		•		•		DS	
1	JVC XV-523	280	Looking impressive on screen, but lacks resolution and consistency when pushed hard	•		•					6 207
1	JVC XV-515GD	300	Musically soft as a baby's bottom, and as surprising as yesterday's news	•		•				DS	2000
1	JVC XV-D723	500	The first DVD-A player is more of a DVD-V with A added rather than the next generation of hi-fi	•		•					92 205
1	Kenwood DVF-R9030	900	Kenwood's entrée into DVD-A is a multi-disc machine with great potential (pre-production)	•	1000	•					92 206
0	Kenwood DVF-9010	1,000	DVD player with brilliant picture and clean, lively sound	•		•					190
	NAD T-550	500	Soft-centred but likeable player in the classic NAD mould	•	18	•	10			DS	
1	Nakamichi DVD-10	800	Not the most compelling model in the resurrected Nakamichi line-up	•		•		•		DS	
1	Panasonic DVD-RV40	350	Modestly equipped, gives good pictures, but is musically unengaging	•		•					6 207
_	Panasonic DVD-A360E	580	Powerful equipment, and unthrottled digital output notwithstanding, sound quality is modest at best	•		•				DS	
0	Philips DVD750	400	Clever DVD with CD-R/CD-RW compatibility and surprisingly keen sound	•						DS	
0	Pioneer DV-525	399	Lean, clean and lively sound quality. CD-R and 24/96 compatible, too	•		•				MB	
0	Pioneer DV-626D	450	Superbly equipped, and more than respectable sound quality	•		•				DS	
	Philips DVD960	530	DVD-V player has strong sound quality and good, though slightly washed out, pictures	•	No.	•	1200			24/9	6 207
0	Pioneer DV-717	550	Superb DVD player with good picture quality and which really knows how to play 24/96 discs	•		•				MB	Carried Co.
0	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possess a strong picture quality and decent CD player	•		•	1.00			MB	
	Samsung DVD-907	500	DVD player with below average picture, and lacklustre sound quality	•		•	10.25	14.00			6 190
1	Sony DVP-S735D	500	DVD-V player looks great on and off screen, but sounds rather coarse	•		•		•		24/9	6 207
1	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	•		•				• DS	
	Sony DVP-S7700	950	Powerfully endowed player offers articulate and believable sound	•		•		•		DS	
0	Sony DVP-S325	330	Bare bones DVD with workmanlike sound, although it can sound 'loud'	•		•				DS	
	Sharp DV-760	500	Reasonable picture, but sonically brings new meaning to the term rough and ready.	•		•				DS	
1	Teac DV-1000	400	Blowsy, and occasionally astringent sounding, but otherwise straightforward and reasonably priced	•		•				DS	198
I	Theta DaViD	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricey for a DVD transport, but worth it	•	•	•	•			24/9	6 191
ı	Toshiba SD-100E	250	Mainstream player offers so-so features, performance and pricing	•	1	•	1311			24/9	6 207
	Toshiba SD-3109	380	Defocused and soft-edged, this is more attractive for its picture than its sound quality.	•		•				24/9	6 202
1	Toshiba SD9000	800	Costly, high tech player with stunning pictures and crisp, slightly lightweight sound	•		•				DS	198
	Yamaha DVD-S795	529	Fare price, and an unconstrained digital output, but otherwise unexciting	•		•	300	•		DS	198
			,		and the					I TO SERVICE STATE OF THE SERV	



# **Digital Recorders**

omestic digital recording has been possible since the launch of digital audio tape (DAT) in the '80s. Since then DAT has remained expensive and largely esoteric, favoured only by well-heeled or professional users. Digital Compact Cassette and MiniDisc (MD) were launched in the early '90s but only MD has stayed the course. A little later came domestic CD-Recorders using CD-R discs, while the latest twist is the arrival of re-recordable CDs know as CD-RW discs. The recording quality hierarchy is as follows: DAT, CD-R/CD-RW, MD. MD is probably the most convenient to use, and offers sophisticated editing facilities, while CD-R is ideal for making digital 'clones' of prerecorded CDs. DAT is the medium of choice for high-quality location recording.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

 DAC TYPE: Digital to analogue converter: BS - Philips Bitstream; MB - multibit; Hyb -

hybrid of multibit and bitstream; 1bit - single bit types such as MASH, bitstream, PWM etc

digital convertor (ADC) converts Digital socketry for optical cable sound into digits during live recording. Types of ADC are as

per DACs (gv). PORTABLE: Battery operable, but not necessarily personal-stereo-sized.

● ADC TYPE: The analogue to | ● OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS: • ELEC IN/OUTPUTS: Digital socketry for electrical cable. • ISSUE NUMBER: The issue

of Hi-Fi Choice in which an

BEST BUY

RECOMMENDED

**EDITOR'S** CHOICE

# Digital Recorders



₹			-	0		PUTS	12	CR
2	PRODUCT MINIDISCS	(E) COMMENTS	V	V	V	<b>V V</b>	V	
	Denon DMD-1000	300 A good machine, but it still doesn't manage to shake off the MiniDisc plague of losing the listener's interest	MD	MB	BS	•	•	184
1	JVC XM-448	220 An hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	MD	BS	BS	•	•	205
1	Kenwood DMF-5020	250 it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	MD	BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Kenwood DMF-9020	500 One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	MD	BS	BS	•	•	191
	Marantz CM635	500 CD player and MD recorder in one box: a practical idea but sound and features don't really match the asking price	MD	BS	BS	•	•	191
ı	Onkyo MD-121	450 Midi-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	MD	BS	BS	•		177
0	Pioneer MJ-D508	200 Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that deserves its recommendation due to price	MD	BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Pioneer MJ-D707	250 A handy set of features for the price, though sound is not outstanding	MD	BS	BS	•	•	191
	Sharp MDR3H	300 Nifty machine combining a 3-disc CD changer with a MD recorder. Sound on both is rather below par, though	MD	BS	BS	•	•	184
0	Sony MDS-JB920	300 One of the better MD decks, its sound is neutral and dynamic. European Audio Recorder of the Year '98-'99	MD	BS	BS	•	•	184
0	Sony MDS-JA20ES	500 Sound quality about as good as it gets with MD to date, and a very comprehensive features set too	MD	BS	BS	•	•	191
0	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650 Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	MD	BS	BS	•	•	205
	Teac MD-8	600 Womanlike choice, but sound-wise it is middle ranking, despite the price	MD	BS	BS	•	•	205
1	Yamaha MDX-793	300 Nice machine to use and has some useful features, but sound quality a little wanting	MD	BS	BS	•	•	191
1	CD RECORDERS		-					
	JVC XL-R5000	450 Flexible, rattly build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•		205
	LG ADR-620	350 A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•	•	205
	Marantz DR700	600 Dearer than Philips and Traxdata equivalents, with apparently only a smarter front panel to show for it	CD-R	BS	BS	•	•	191
0	Marantz DR-17	1,500 Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Philips CDR951	380 An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•		205
0	Pioneer PDR-509	300 Straightforward design and excellent recording properties that are slightly dulled by the replay chain	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Pioneer PDR-W739	400 Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Pioneer PDR-555RW	480 Competitor to Philips' CDR-880; can't make perfect copies but has the edge in replay and analogue record sound	CD-R(W	/)BS	BS	•	•	184
	TEAC RW-800	350 Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	CD-R(W	)BS	BS	•	•	205
0	Traxdata Traxaudio 900	399 Identical to Philips and Marantz models: it makes bit-perfect copies of CDs and has perfectly acceptable replay	CD-R	BS	BS	•	•	191



# Headphones

There are several different ways or making a necoupract of expensive models employ electrostatically-driven diaphragms within an here are several different ways of making a headphone. The most open-backed earcup. Most mid-price designs feature dynamic, moving-coildriven diaphragms in open, semi-open or dosed-back designs. An openbacked headphone can sound remarkably transparent, but also permits the ingress of external noise. Closed-back designs keep out unwanted sound, but may be less comfortable to wear and more coloured. The latest development is the cordless headphone using either infrared light or, more recently, radio waves. Quality is improving, but has yet to match the best corded designs.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

• TYPE: Operating principle: D - dynamic; E - electrostatic.

pad presses on the outer ear.

earcup endoses the ear. OPEN BACK: Offers an open sound but lets in noise. CLOSED BACK: Keeps out be incompatible with the

• MASS (g): Mass in grams lacktriangle SUPRA-AURAL: Where a flat lacktriangle IMPEDANCE ( $\Omega$ ): Load offered to the headphone CIRCUMAURAL: Where the amplifier. Many headphones offer a significantly higher value than loudspeakers, for example, original review appeared. but this does not mean they will

• 3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR: Compatible with mini-acked components, eg personal stereos. • ISSUE NUMBER: The issue

of Hi-Fi Choice in which an

B BEST BUY RECOMMENDED

**SPECIFICATIONS** 

EDITOR'S CHOICE

# Headphones

	Hea	1	phones	TYPE TYPE	CIRCUM	OPEN I	CLOSEL BACK	MA	IMPED,	mm JAI	ISSUE, K ADAP	Av.	
STATUS	1100	u	himing	TE A	URAL	URAL	ACK	BACK	(8)	WCE (S.	ADAP	TOP	R.
ST/	PRODUCT	(£	COMMENTS		_	-	_	_		V	~	V	
0	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		D	•		•		190	9	•	205
	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight		D		•	•		230		•	194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt		D		•	•		240	600	•	186
0	AKG K1000	700	One of the best dynamics on the market, hooks directly into speaker outputs		D		•	•		270	120		99
0	Audio Technica ATH910PRO	80	The closed back 910s are an improvement on the 909s, with a nice rhythmic quality rarely for	ound	D	•			•	280	40		55
0	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal		D		•		•	250	66		194
0	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone		D		•		•	250	60		186
1	Beyer DT311	50	Uncharacteristically tight, unrefined sound quality from this otherwise well engineered 'phor	ne	D	•		•	118	124	40	•	133
	Beyer DT411	63	A reasonable but not very thrilling headphone that doesn't really offer enough at the price		D	•		•		120			111
1	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass		D		•	•		210	40	•	194
1	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100	per cent	D		•	•		210	40	•	186
1	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite		D		•	•		245	7.00	•	205
0	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor		D		•	•	4	200			172
0	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velve	et ear pads	D		•	1/2		295	250	•	186
ľ	Beyer DT100	160	Rugged, modular professional design, but bass is woolly and treble lacks detail		D		•		•	350			157
	Denon AH-D550	80	A competent 'phone with integrity, but little panache or charisma. Hard headband causes br	ain strain	D		•		•	200		•	157
	Denon AH-D750	130	Loud and gutsy, meaty bass, good with rock and dance. Can sound thick and clumsy		D		•		•	250	100000	•	172
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable	e	D	•		•		120	32	•	172
0	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's		D	•		•		200	32	•	194
ľ	Grado SR-80	100	Open and dynamic with pedantically open mid-band. Crude physical design, rough frequence		D	•		•	William	60	8	•	157
0	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality	,	D	•		•		200	32		186
0	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the mi	usic	D	•		•		200	32		163
١٣	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design		D	•		•		200	32	•	205
0	Jecklin Float Model 1	79	While very unusual in appearance, the Floats give remarkable sound quality and openness		D		•			400	200		55
١	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design		D	•			•	165	I/R	•	172
0	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily		D		•		•	4 2000	20,000		186
1	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful mid-range and high comfort factor		D		•		•	340	90	•	205
١٣	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing		D		•		•	250	60	•	194
1	Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange e	xcitement	D		•		•	215	60	•	186
1	Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top		D			•		380	100		163
1	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled mid-range and over excited bass		D		•	•	152	247	32	•	205
	Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infra-red phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the	illusion	D	•			•	192	I/R	•	172
0	Sennheiser HD 570 Symph	90	Comfortable, light-weight 'phones with a detailed and open sound but lacks bass depth on weight		D		•	•		210	64	•	194
0	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband	,	D		•	•		255	150	•	172
0	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable		D		•	•		255	150	•	157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort		D		•	•		270	120	•	205
	Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy		Е		•	•		260	N/A		163
	Sony MDR-605LP	50	Funky looking headphones that have a very bold, but tiring sound, with coloured bass		D		•	•		145	40	•	186
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass		D	•			•	300	24	•	194
1		200	Astonishingly detailed, uncoloured and free of the usual artefacts from a sealed back headph	ione	D		•		•	325	32	•	163
_		2000	200 Large pads make for sweaty listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass		D		•	•		300	32	•	205
	Sony MDR-F1	100	Natural, easy-going sound teamed with great looks and comfort. Shame about the lightweigh	nt bass	D		•	•		300	12	•	172
	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics		D	•			•	160	40	•	205
1 -	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-	proof	D	•	73		•	230	32	•	172
		400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way		E		•	•		295	50	•	205
0		395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards		E		•	•		347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality		D	•		•		248	32	•	205
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM to	uner	D	•			•	210	FM	•	172
1	Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven		D	•		1/2	7.19	226	I/R	•	172
	Vivanco SR650	50	Unusually comfortable 'phone with excellent detail resolution but aggressive		D	•		•		175		•	157
- 1	Vivanco SR750	60	Cossetting physical design, attractive sound, though suffers overhang and lacks ultimate dyna	mics	D	•		•	F. 201	188		•	157
_	Vivanco SR 950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones		D					252	32		194
_	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable	2	D	•	- 1		•		9,000	•	186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive		D		•		•	240	9,000	•	186
ı							- 4	5,00					4



# Loudspeakers

s the last link in the hi-fi chain, loudspeakers are at the mercy of incoming A sthe last link in the hi-ti chain, iouospeakers are active missey. the most obvious. Inside the average loudspeaker is a simple electrical circuit (the crossover) which splits the incoming, full-frequency-range signal for the specific drive units to handle: highs to the 'tweeter', lows to the 'woofer'. For any speaker, designers must balance the 'sensitivity' of the loudspeaker (how loud it goes for a given electrical input) against bass extension (how low it goes). Subwoofers augment bass and are either passive (unamplified) or, preferably, active (self-amplified). Our 'bass from' figures are based on measurements in a particular room therefore results will vary in different environments.

#### T O SPECIFICATIONS

- SIZE WattaD (cm): Width by | IMPEDANCE (Ω): height by depth in centimetres.
- FLOORSTANDER: Requires indicates how much resistance no stand support.
- much sound results for a given decreases, demands on an electrical input – the higher the amplifier increase. figure, the louder the speaker. An BASS FROM (Hz): The 'A' indicates active operation.
- the speaker presents to an SENSITIVITY (dR/W): How amplifier. As impedance
  - lowest frequency that a speaker
- can reproduce effectively. Impedance, measured in Ohms, FREE SPACE: Speakers which
  - should not sit dose to walls. ● CLOSE TO WALL: Speakers which should sit between 3 and
  - ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

12cm from the rear wall

BEST BUY

RECOMMENDED

EDITOR'S CHOICE

# Loudspeakers

SIZE WXHXD (CM) TOORSTANDER (Ob)M) (NZ) ISSUE NUMBER

¥				(M) CR	- VI	9	4	4)	-		
ST	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	V	V	V	V	•	V		V
0	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20	19/11	89	5	50	•		198
0	Acoustic Energy Aegis One	150	At a new low price, this has a very natural and transparent midband, erring a little on the dull side	19,36.5,24		87		40	•		187
0	Acoustic Energy Aegis Two	250	Floorstanding variation on the Aegis One theme, with a neutral, even and detailed if slightly shiny sound	19,87,24	•	89	8	40	•		201
0	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25		90	5	22	•		198
	Acoustic Energy AE120SE	500	Attractive styling and good sonic headroom, but a heavy, uneven overall balance, and a difficult amp load	18,97,28	•	89	5 10	25	•		199
0	Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000	Could be more neutral, but high-class build is reflected in a high-class sound. Very elegant too	21,98,30	•	91	3	25	•		190
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone stand-mount has a generous performance envelope, but sound quality was controversial	20,33,29		90	) 4	22	•		201
	ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32	•	92	4	25	•		196
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/stand-mount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	) 4	45	•		201
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25.5		80	8	65		•	192
	ATC SCM70ASL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46	•	A	Α	20	•		205
0	Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty, compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21	•	87	6	40	•		164
0	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large stand-mount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional allround sound	36,79,28		92	_	20	•		204
	Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Tall and unusually-styled floorstander has stunning stereo but suspect bass tuning	22,107,47	•	88		28	•	•	143
0	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27	•	90		20	•		190
0	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30	•	89		22	•		180
0	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86		50		•	190
	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small-scale way	17.5,74,245	•	85		40	•		174
0	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated stand-mount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20.5,36,23		89		30	•		207
0	B&W 602 S2	300	Large stand-mount has fine dynamic literacy and good communication skills at a very competitive price	23.5,49,29		90	5	28	•		201
0	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20.5,55,32	100	90		20	•		198
0	B&W 603 S2	550	Capable of being driven seriously loud, but the cautious balance seems less happy playing at low levels	23.5,87,29	•	91		22	•		193
	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing stand-mount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89		30	•		208
_	B&W CDM-7NT	1,250	A very classy floorstander, in sound as well as looks, with fine bass drive, authority and overall neutrality	22,95,29	•	90	_	20	•		208
0	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89		28	•		199
-		2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101.5,24.5	•	89	-	38	•		200
E		6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55		91	8	34	•		183
0		8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	•	91		34	•		186
0	Blueroom Minipod	249	The Minipod can show its competitors a thing or two about freedom from boxiness and looks fab	18,34+,17		91		50		•	193
0	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short of deep bass grunt	21,92,21-30	•	94		40	•		204
0	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-yer-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32		92		28		•	180
	Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37	•	90		20		•	195
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,27-29		88		45	•		198
0	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-yer-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20	-	90		50	•		201
	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking standmount is a good all-rounder, commendably free from boxiness	19-22,42,25		91	_	30		•	193
0	Castle Kendal	500	A beautifully finished compact floorstander with a decidedly forward but communicative sound	17,76,20	•	86		45		•	177 204
0	Castle Severn 2SE	700	Pretty little floorstander is lively and communicative, if a little coloured in the voice band	21,84,24	•	88		28		•	
0	Castle Harlech	1.075	Handsome big-sounding floorstander, great value and dynamic midrange	20,96,33		00	8	20	•		160 195
		1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26.5,111,45	•	91		20	27.70	•	
1	Celestion 12i Celestion 23i	119	Not without virtue, but the relentless enthusiasm and mid-band colorations can become wearing	19,31,21		88		45 30	•		179 177
		300	Cosmetically flawed, but the bottom end has fine get-up-and-go, and works well with dance tracks	24,86,27	•	90		45		•	-
0	Celestion A Compact Celestion A1	600	Provided the room isn't too large and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90		40			193
0		1 500	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build Full-scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,41,35 24,93,39	•	89	6	22	•	•	164 180
0	Chario Syntar 100	1,500 249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27		89	_	45	•		170
	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	-	45	•		187
0	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26	100	87		40	•		190
	Chario Academy Millennium 2		Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	•		190
•	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,00,00	•	91	4	25	•		174
0	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87		50		•	190
0		1,300	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24.5,106,36	•	93		20	•		204
	Definitive Technology CLR2002		Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55.5,17.5,31		90		40	•		198
Ψ.	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15	H	94		120		•	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004		Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	•	91	_	28	•		198
7.0	Dynaudio Audience 5	400	Follows the Dynaudio tradition for fine midband transparency, but the overall timbre is a bit thin	20,31,26		85		40		•	177
-	Dynaudio Audience 40	400	Classy engineering content creates a winning combination of neutrality, dynamic range and involvement	17,28,25	-	87	4	40			190
9	Dynaudio LR/C 120	439	Slim centre and front standmount, has an evenhanded but rather laid back balance but lacks drive	16.5,57,31		89		25	•		198
0	Dynaudio Audience 50	577	Understated in looks and finish, this compact stand-mount can mix it with floorstanders at more than twice the price	20,33.25		88	4	30	•		204
_		1,100	A highly competent and neutral speaker, but pricey for vinyl finish, and doesn't quite drag you into the music	20.5,93,25	•	88		20	•		199
0		1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	•	85	4	20	•		167
_	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	•	88	9	23	•		199
	Elac CL 310i Jet	800		12.3,20.8,28.2		86	4	42	•		191
-	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20.5,38,34		86	4	25	•		187
-	Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	•		177
		300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	•	87	4	25	•	18.8	201
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STATUS	Loud	ls	peakers	FLOORSTANDER (SI) MO (N) (NZ)									
S	PRODUCT	(£)		V	V		<u> </u>	V		V	V		
0	Energy e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	•	90	4	25	•		201		
	Epos ES12	499	High quality luxury standmount has great midband and stereo imaging	20,38,25		CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY OF THE	8	45	•		160		
	Epos ES25	1,655	Handsome floorstander with a rather uneven and bass heavy balance	24,90,35	•	88	6	22	•		143		
٦	Gale 2i Heybrook Prima 2	140 159	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd  Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	22,40,27 20,29,18	La Auril	88 87	7	40 50		•	170 179		
0	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	20,29,18			3	50	•	•	207		
0	Heybrook Heylette	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19.5,30,22	100	88	4	45			187		
0	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	•	94	4	30	•		193		
0	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled stand-mount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23.5,36,27		89	6	25			201		
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29	•	89	6	45	•		174		
0	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		2000000 011	11	27	•		199		
1	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	•	THE REAL PROPERTY.	6	25		•	180		
0	Indigo Three	500	Cute 'n' chunky standmount is an entertaining communicator. Great fun, despite some sonic weirdness	23,30.5,32		1937093	17	24		•	199		
1	Infinity Delta 60	700	Striking and massive floorstander, lots of speaker for the price, but seems a victim of its own complexity	16-29,115,41	•	13/13/20	4	25	•		183 204		
ı	Infinity Kappa 70 Jamo E800	795 200	Fine material value. Sonically big, smooth and even, but lacking in coherence and dynamics  Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	16-26,96,27 17.5,33,29	•	Section 19	3	25 30	•		204		
ı	Jamo BX100A	350	Offering a cracking output for their size, these rock boxes can be a bit bright but have decent bass	31.5,54,28		Part Control	8	40	•		155		
1	Jamo Classic 8	400	A lot of speaker for the money; good when playing quietly, but boom'n'tizz character sounded crude	22,90,29	•	10000	4	28	•		152		
	Jamo Cornet 195	350	Loads of bass, should have plenty of yoof-appeal — it looks the business, and is priced attractively	20.5,91,31	•		3	26	•		183		
	Jamo 477A	500	Very prettily styled, but build and sound quality are disappointing at the price	19,77,28	•	-	4	40	•		138		
	Jamo 507A	700	Imaginative styling keeps the front view super slim yet still it packs a punch. Glass top is a nice touch	22,94,37	•	88	3	40	•		174		
0	JBL LX2	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	•	116	170		
	JBL Ti200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30	200	100.00	5	40	•		193		
0	JBL L20	700	Pricey, heavy and a bit laid-back, but this is a fine rock'n'roller which is dynamic and communicative	26,42,28			8	30	•		138		
	JBL SVA1500 JBL L40	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump  Classic, large, three-way standmount is full of vim and vigour, with a superb sense of balance	17.5,51,31		-	8	40 23	•		174 167		
0	JBL 4312 II	1,000	Crude but startlingly effective dynamics. The original party animal knows just how to rock'n'roll	30,65,31 36,60,30		10000	4	25		•	190		
0	JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	•	-		$\sqrt{20}$	•		180		
0	JBL L90	1,500	A classic monitor which communicates with gusto and enthusiasm, though it can sound a bit crude	24,94,35	•	-	6	23	•		143		
١	JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26.5,94,30	•	1000000		33	•		183		
	JMLab Tantal 507	295	Competent all-rounder, this compact standmount has a good heart and sweet treble, but sounds a bit small	21,38,27		93	4	40		•	193		
0	JMLab Tantal 515	495	Lively and open if bright. Sound is entertaining and informative, but presentation is nondescript	20,94,26	•	200000	5	32	•		183		
0	JMLab Cobalt 815	999	Hefty real-wood floorstander has a slight 'boom'n'tizz' character but delivers big speaker grip and dynamics	22,100,31	•	90.5	_	22	•		199		
0	JMLab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23.5,47,28		20000	4	40	•		204		
1	JMLab Spectral 909.1	1,375	Multi-driver array in a large and very substantial enclosure. Good scale but lacks delicacy and sweetness	27,107,35	•	22420	-	20	•		180 195		
٦	JMLab Electra 915 JMLab Mezzo Utopia	1,795 7,250	Fine headroom and bass, and classy engineering too, but also a tricky amp load which lacks delicacy  Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	26.5,106,36 35,115,47	•	-	4	20 30	•		186		
0	JPW Mini Monitor	60	Ultra-cheap miniature works well in a limited way	18,27,17.5		-	8	50			156		
0	JPW Gold Monitor	80	More informative than Mini Monitor – but fiercer, too	18,27,17.5		10000	8	50		•	156		
0	JPW ML510	130	Lots of good quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components	20,34,22		COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED STATE OF THE PERSON NAMED STATE OF THE PERSON NAM	5	50	•		169		
ľ	JPW ML910	330	Loads of speaker for the money, plenty of headroom and loudness capability, but sounds dull	23,104,30	•	91	4	43	•		183		
0	JPW ML1010	400	A seriously substantial speaker for the price, and an obvious choice for those who like their music loud	22.5,115,40	•	COLUMN TO THE REAL PROPERTY.		25	•		170		
1	JPW Ruby 1	400	Very pretty but pricey luxury metal-cone miniature has good if slightly edgy balance	19,32,21		DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TWO IS NOT THE PERSON NAMED IN COLUMN TWO IS NAMED IN COLUMN TW		55	•		139		
0	JPW Ruby 4	1,000	Twin metal-cone main drivers improve the dynamic performance and bass extension, with little sacrifice	22,94,26	•	_	_	25	•		174		
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20.5,37,24	1			40		•	195		
0	KEF Q15.2	200	A vigorous and entertaining compact speaker that remains particularly well aligned for close-to-wall siting Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice		•	_	_	30 40	•	•	207 189		
ı	KEF RDM Three KEF Reference Model 2	1,500 1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	24,100,27 23,103,34	•	COLUMN TWO IS NOT THE OWNER.	-	30	•		167		
<b>B</b>	Keswick Audio Aria II	379	Confident and dynamic sound, if a little crude and shut in	21,42,24		10000	8	20	•		148		
0	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	18-26, 93,28	•	-	-	20	•		167		
0	Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		10000	_	45		•	187		
0	Linn Keilidh Passive	750	Stunning timing and coherence, awesome bass drive	20,83,28	•	-	4	22		•	138		
0	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21.5,98,29	•	10000	4	25	•		180		
E	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with valves	21.5,104,27	•	The second second	8	45	•		196		
	Magnat Vintage 320	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30	•	-	-	20	•		201		
٦	Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	•	O'STAN	-	30 20	•		183 180		
0	Magnat Vintage 720 Martin-Logan Prodigy	1,200 8,967	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity  Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	29,113,32 42,179,71	•	-	-	28	•		204		
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17.5,95,32	•	-	200	25	•		204		
	Mirage OM-5	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42	•	-		22	•		206		
0	Mission 700	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,34,26		-	_	40	I View	•	179		
0	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		100000		100		•	198		
0	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		2200	4	120		•	198		
0	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		-	_	45	-	•	207		
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16.5,28,27		COLUMN TO SERVICE STATE OF THE PERSON SERVICE STATE OF THE	-	40	•		201		
0	Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17.5,88,26	•	CONTRACT CO.	_	30	1.00	•	193		
0	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	•	20000	_	40	•		183		
0	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16.5,82,28	•		_	25		•	199		
0	Mission 775e	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short of serious weight and authority  A real correct which combines solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance.	23,115,30			-	25 30		•	204		
0	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance  A good all-round standmount with intimate midband focus	18.5,35,27 20,40,25		2000	- 100	30	•		174		
0	Monitor Audio 702PMC Monitor Audio MA703PMC	700 800	A good all-round standmount with Intimate middand focus  Lovely but pricey floorstander has upfront, coherent, 'shiny' sound	20,40,25	•	20000		50	•		160		
0	Mordaunt-Short MS902	150	Gorgeous metal-finished budget stand-mount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25		-	-	45	•		207		
0	Musical Tech Kestrel Evolution	315	Cutely styled, cleverly compact and a smooth, subtle and coherent performer, best suited to smaller rooms	20,85,19	•	-	_	40	•		201		
0	Musical Technology Harrier	400	Very pretty package, good measured performance and even sound. Sensitivity is low, and dynamics limp	25,80,23	•	100000	100	25	•		152		
0	Musical Technology PM15	450	A subtle, understated but very involving example of the 'classic' luxury-finish compact standmount	20,41,27		_		38			183		
0	Musical Technology Falcon	680	Big speaker has a big but also surprisingly smooth and civilised sound. Fine material value too	33,117,30	•	10000	4	22	•		190		
0	Musical Technology Condor	1,000	Lots of clever ideas in a floorstander, which places transparency and smoothness ahead of dynamic drama	25,91,23	•			28	•		174		
0	Naim Intro	660	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24,89,27	•	89	6	30	•	1976	164		
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PRO		(£)	COMMENTS	<b>V</b>	V	V	ALCOHOL:	A SEC	The second		
	Credo SBL Passive	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness  Lively and punchy – smoother but more upfront than before	24,89,30 27,89,27	•	88		28 25	•	•	
Naim		1,970 6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	•	89		20	•		i
	Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24		86		50		•	đ
	Mystique Mk2	575	This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent	20,86,18	•	85	6	23			
Neat I		1,195	A highly entertaining all-rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	•	88		25	•		
	etite II/Gravitas	2,000	Beautifully presented miniature/subwoofer combo with ribbon weeter gives smooth, laid-back sound	23,105,40	•	1 85		25	•		
-	Super One	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18.5,29.5,23 18,42,19-26		85	8	30	•	F12.00	
NHT	Super Two	400 550	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills  Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18.5,100,26	•	87		40 25		•	
	Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31		90		40	•		i
-	Live Conqueror	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	•	88		30	•		į
	Swing	1,200	A superb example of what an essentially small loudspeaker can do, with bags of brio and enthusiasm	18,101,28	•	87	8	45	•	100	Ì
PMC '		430	Pro-audio version of TB1, cheaper because of black paint finish	20,41,30		87		40			
PMC 1		4 2	A classy, laid-back performer that likes going loud and loves the bass guitar	20,40,31	100	87	-	45	•		
PMC I		999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17.5,53,26		87		40	•		
PMC I		1,275 800	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension.  No enthusiast tweaks here, but powerful and beautiful balance.	20,105,31 27,83,29		88		20	•		
Polk R		799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22,105,39	•	91		22		188	
	S 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35	THE STATE OF	92	-	25	•		ı
	RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	•	91		25	•	77	
ProAc	Response 2.5	2,700	For aspirant high-enders looking for seriously good boxes, this speaker should be firs port of call	22,107,25	•	86		30	•		
	Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact stand-mount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26		87		30	•		ĺ
	Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	•	87		28	•		
	Signature	1,000	At ractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	•	83	_	25	•	100	
Rega .	Jura ELA Mk II	450 498	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'  Pretty and smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	22.5,92.5,26 30,80,20	•	90		25 40	•		
Rega )		1,040	Looks and sounds great: balance bright but even, with delightful coherence and timing	20,82,30	•	89		40			
	ko RK 115a	1,700	Single-driver system has limited bandwidth and obvious coloration, but wondrous dynamic coherence	34,42,27		95	100	55		•	i
	Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compac with integral port/stand – clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	•	81	_	22	•		i
Roksar	n ROKone	595	Large standmount is musically very communicative, if a little coloured	21,45,33		89	6	30			
	n Ojan 3 Black	795	Squat, stylish and black, great bass extension and somewhat uneven balance	28,76,46	•	88		20	•		
	n OJ3X Black	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	•	84		20	•		
	Minstrel	275	Not much welly or loudness, but fine coherence and timing, a bit bright	18,69,12	300	86		30	•		
	Doublet	485 595	Great value compact floorstander: lively and very informative, if a little uneven	18,93,19	•	90	7.7	28 35	•		
-	The Sorcerer Epilogue	269	Extremely musical and communicative speaker that's fun to listen to. Aesthetics could be better, though  Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	20,31,18 17,29,23		87	_	47			
	Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31		87		40	•		i
	Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17.5,93,28	•	88		25	•		Ì
Ruark	Crusader	1,599	Elegant luxury three-way with wonderfully even-handed, if rather laid-back balance	24,94,31	•	85		22	•		ġ
Ruark	Equinox	1,849	The primary strength of this speaker is its ability to vanish behind the music	25,88,34	•	88	6	45	•		ı
		7,000	A big, handsome speaker with a big, laid-back but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	•	90		30	•		į
	nce 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7		86		45		•	ı
	do Raider	695	Beautifully built audiophile compact: neutral if bright, tough work for amps	20,40,25		83		30		•	
Snell k		795	Classy AV-ready stand mount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30		87		25	•		ł
		4,500 1,095	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.  Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	28,117,50 35.5,19,30	•	91		25 45			ł
	Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29		87		30	•		i
	Coast Speakers Lancelot		Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26		84		45	•		
	or 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	•	87		30	•	1919	ı
-	n Audio 1130	499	Super-slim, super-smooth, involving experience, but not ideal if you like your bass deep and loud	3,100,21	•	89		43	•	A STORES	j
	n Audio 1150	749	Pricey but persuasive, sonic subtleties sneak up to confound a dodgy first impression. Super-slim	16,105,26	•	90	4	30	•		I
		15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	•	87	8	25	•		ĺ
	y mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband de	and the second second		89	4	45	•	0.533	ı
Tanno Tanno	y R1 y Saturn S6C	200	Pre y li tle mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22		86		30	•		ı
	y mX3	300	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver  A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	38,21,29 18.5,87,26	•	90	5	25 40	•		ı
	y Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	•	90		20	•	- 12 A	ı
	y Saturn S6LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25			ı
	y Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29		91	4	20		History of	Í
Tanno	y Revolution R3	550	Handsome real-wood floorstander does a decent job, but lacks the evenness of its smaller R2 brother	18.5,103,28	•	89		28	•		İ
	y D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too	16-24,85,23	•	87	6	26	•		ĺ
		1,200	This supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage at a price	15,10.5,6	•	95		N/A	•		
		1,999	Plen y of muscle and stereo, but short of poise and delicacy. Hard work for amps	31,93,34	•	91	6	20	•	77/34	ļ
	cs SB-M20	200	Well-balanced with natural perspectives and fine midband coherence, but bass is a bit boxy and uneven	20,32,23		70		50	•		ļ
	cs SB-M500 e Cometes	450 359	This model offers a clean, open sound, offset by midbass, heavy balance and low sensitivity  Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	25,78,37 22,40,29	•	85 91	8	25 42	•	•	H
	le Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,40,29	•	91	4	25			f
×		1,195	Utterly delightful but exasperatingly expensive luxury miniature sets the benchmark for its size	17,31,23		87	4	28	•	Table 1	f
Veritas		6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	•	104		50		•	f
		1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	•	88		25	•	12-10-5	f
		20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	•	89	4	S20	•		f
	edale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29.5,23		88	4	45	•		I
	Diamond 7.2 Anniversary		Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it, can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29.5,24		88	4	40	•	in the	ſ
	edale Valdus 400	200	Very loud with a minimum of amplification, but the sound is thick and uneven, with a heavy upper bass	25,80,26	•	91	8	30	•		I
		300	These rock boxes can move plenty of air, albeit not as subtly as alternatives	25,108,26.5	•	91	4	40	•		ļ
	OOFERS	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38		90	8	25	•		I
		299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43						•	ø

#### SENSTINITY (OBJUNCE (Q) Loudspeakers FREE SPACE TO WALL SIZE WXHXD (CM) FLOORSTANDER BASS FROM (HZ) **B&W ASW1000** Bulky heavyweight is a high quality item, able to generate more bass output than music is likely to need JPW SW60 0 A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible 55,47,39 179 20 KEF Model 30B (Active) Commendably discreet with good sense of timing but limited extension 499 154 38 5 37 43 45 M&K MX70 (Active) Justifies cost and belies its diminutive size, with an agility that makes sense of the toughest material 900 25.5.46.35 179 Mission 7AS2 399 Ugly if very effective at supplying very low bass, but filter could do with more flexibility higher up 56.30.31 <20 198 REL Q50 (Active) Genuinely deep, clean bass from an attractively compact and cost-effective package 179 40.41.42 20 Soliloguy S10 1,050 (Active) Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong 196 51,30,5,46 25



# **Stands & Supports**

Hi-fi supports are more important than you might imagine — they can have very unsubtle effects on the sound of your system! There are two kinds of support: those for equipment and those (stands) for loudspeakers. Equipment supports keep vibrations and resonances from affecting electronic components, while speaker stands hold endosures stock-still and ensure they are at the correct height for your ears. Equipment supports may be rigid affairs fabricated from steel or more exotic materials; or they may have a form of suspension. Speaker stands come in a vanety of sizes and styles to suit different models, and vary between open-frame and solid-pillar types. Always check with speaker and electronics manufacturers to see which supports they recommend.

# KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

HEIGHT (cm): How tall is your support?TOP PLATE SIZE (cm): Dimensions of top

surface on stand or equipment support.

• FILLABLE: Some speaker stands can be massloaded with sand or lead-shot to improve sound.

 WELDED: The better stands and supports are welded together rather than just bolted.  NUMBER OF SHELVES: The number of tiers on an equipment rack or support.

 SHELF TYPE: The material from which shelves are made. Wood generally means Medium

Density Fibrehoard (MDF)

● ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

**BEST BUY** 

RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stands & Supports

TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)

MELDED OF SHELF TYPE

MELDED OF SHELF TYPE

MELDED OF SHELF TYPE

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS	5		and the same			NAME OF TAXABLE PARTY.					
Analk Cet 200 Artsche wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured 77 47 4 4 4 Analysis Condo sund and stylch Scandinana looks at an affordable price 80.5 47 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4	•			COMMENTS						V	
Alphason (2171/As) 250 Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money (36 60,39 4 Alphason (2171/As) 250 Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money (36 60,39 4 Alphason (2171/As) 250 Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money (36 60,39 4 Alphason (37 4 5 Supple steel and glass stand which majors in exclement factor but lacks precision (73 4.65 4 Apullo Sappano 275 Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be better at this price (6.83 4.55 4 4 Alphason (2171)				Annual and California de la	77	177				MDE	200
Apollo Saprano   25   Simple setal and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision   73   46.5   4										MDF	
Apollo Symphory Apollo Symphory Apollo Symphory Apollo Sypopano 275 Apollo Sypopano 275 Apollo Sypopano 275 Apollo Sypopano 275 Dinsipsing looks and sonic performance that can be betten at this price 685 486 Alacama Europa 240 Audiosokhelf 100 Audiophile Furniture Base 65 Price is justified by its earth-shattering some abilities – a worthy upgrade 67 Audi soschelf 100 An enthusasse equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up 875 48 5 Custom Design Aspect650 270 Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loos of detail 66 46 46 47 Elemental Jaudio Isotube 478 67 Elemental Audio Isotube 478 67 Elemental Isotube 478 67 Elemental Isotube 478 67 Elemental Isotube 478 67 Elemental Audio Isotube 478 67 Elemental Audio Isotube 478 67 Elemental Audio Isotube 478 67 Elemental Isotube 57	0				1500000					Wood	
April 2008 Oprano 275 Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price 685 455. 4  Audiophile Furniture Base 615 Syfskin, eapardable modular design with agreeable (Libbodied sound great value 67 486. 44  O Audiophile Furniture Base 615 Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade 82 43 4 4  O Audiophile Furniture Base 615 Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade 82 43 4 4  O Audiophile Furniture Base 615 Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade 82 43 4 4  O Eastern Design RepectSo 27 Smart looks and practical Thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail 66 46 4 4  O Elemental Include Isotube x 4/Ret 199 Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality 92 45,499 4 4  O Farmeworks 1500/H175 404 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos Deadrock 704 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos Deadrock 704 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos Deadrock 704 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos Deadrock 704 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos 10 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos 10 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos 10 500 Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular seel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos 10 500 Two-shelf stand and seel stand seel stand seel seel spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 toos 10 500 Two-shelf stand									-	Glass	
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Custom Design Aspect550 270 Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail 66 46 46 47 48 199 Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality 92 45,49 4 4   Blemental Audio Isotube x 4/Ref 1,199 Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality 92 45,49 4 4   Frameworks 1560/H175 404 Now-shelf stand and solation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52,34 5 5   Isos Deadrock 704 20 Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting 167 167 167 167 167 167 167 167 167 167	0									MDF	193
Blemental Budulo Isotube X4 PME 1.199 Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality  Elemental Audio Isotube X4 949 4 94 94 94 94 94 94 94 94 94 94 94	0		1,100		87.5	48			5	MDF	193
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	0		270		66	46		•	4	Glass	CALL STORY
Non-sheft Stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel — made a spectacular impression on audition 70 52;54	0	Elemental Isotube x 4/Ref	1,199		92	45,49		•	4	Marb	181
Mana 4-tier   Source   Mana 4-tier   Mana	0	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49			4	Glass	193
Mana 4-tier 500 The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds' resonance in a way you'll love or hate 6 Optimum Int 2000 OPT6490 299 25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass 50 60,40 4 4 Coptimum Int 2000 OPT660 349 Cilitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome 82 60,52 5 5 Projekt Furniture 44 215 An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound 56 48 4 4 Coption 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	0	Frameworks H500/H175	404	Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition	70	52,34	Fig. 1		3	Glass	166
Optimum Int 2000 OPT490 299 25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass 50 69,40 4   Optimum Int 2000 OPT660 349 Clitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome 82 60,52 5   Projekt Furniture A4 215 An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound 56 48 4   Ouadraspire Q4 280 Simple but modestly effective and very attractive 52 49 4 4   Sound System Elite 330 Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands 68 50 4   Sound Organisation Z545 160 Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value 90 46,36		Ixos Deadrock 704	250	Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting	in day	46,39			4	Resin	181
Optimum Int 2000 OPT660 349 Clitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome Projekt Furniture A4 215 An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound 56 48 4 4 5 6 4 8 4 4 5 6 5 6 4 8 4 4 5 6 5 6 4 8 5 6 5 6 8 5 6 7 5 6 5 6 8 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5		Mana 4-tier	500	The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds resonance in a way you'll love or hate	87	45		•	4	Glass	206
Optimum Int 2000 OPT660 349 Clitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome Projekt Furniture A4 215 An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound 56 48 48 4 4	0	Optimum Int 2000 OPT490	299	25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass	50	60,40			4	Glass	166
Quadraspire Q4 280 Simple but modestly effective and very attractive Sonus System Elite 330 Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands 68 50 4 4 50 50 50 4 4 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50 50	0	Optimum Int 2000 OPT660	349	Glitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome	82	60,52			5	Glass	181
Sonus System Elite 330 Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands 68 50 4 4  Sound Organisation Z560 160 Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value 90 46,36 5 5  Sound Organisation Z545 160 Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand 73 46 4 49,28 4 4  Soundstyle X5100 230 Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright 64 49,28 4 4  Soundstyle X5100 270 Less character than other similar strands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency 72.5 49,5 4 4  Soundstyle Radius SR100 280 Stylish looks and a smooth sound 63.5 49,5 4 4  Soundstyle Finewoods W105 320 Veneered shelves clamped between tubular uprights. Delivers with classical material 82 48,27 4 4  Standesign Design 4 190 An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance 88.5 50.8 4 4  Townshend Seismic Stand 1,245 It's big, it wobbles and it's pricey. But this is the ultimate equipment support 72 58,45 3  Wilson benesch Asside 590 Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful 72 37,50 4 4  SPAKER STANDS Alphason Akros II 6 A well-specified budget stand but the sound is as subtle as a house party 60,45 16.5	X-AL I	Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56	48			4	Wood	193
Sonus System Elite 330 Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands 68 50 4 4  Sound Organisation Z560 160 Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value 90 46,56 5 5  Sound Organisation Z545 160 Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand 73 46 4 49,28 4 5  Soundstyle X5100 230 Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright 64 49,28 4 4  Soundstyle X5100 270 Less character than other similar strands, but sound 50 Soundstyle Radius SR100 280 Stylish looks and a smooth sound 63,55 49,5 4  Soundstyle Radius SR100 280 Stylish looks and a smooth sound 63,5 49,5 4  Soundstyle Finewoods W105 320 Veneered shelves clamped between tubular uprights. Delivers with classical material 82 48,27 4  Standesign Design 4 190 An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance 88.5 50.8 4 4  Townshend Seismic Stand 1,245 It's big, it wobbles and it's pricey. But this is the ultimate equipment support 72 58,45 3  Wilson benesch Asside 590 Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful 72 37,50 4  SPEAKER STANDS Alphason Akros II 6 A well-specified budget stand but the sound is as subtle as a house party 60,45 16.5     Apollo Olympus 75 A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards 40-60 15,12.5     Apollo Ad/6 82 A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd 51,40.51 Ill 8     Atacama Nexus 6 50 An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain 60,50 145,18     Atacama RZ24 150 Alacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price 60 15,17     Atacama RZ24 150 Alacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price 60 15,17     Atacama Nexus 6 50 An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain 60,50 145,18     Atacama Nexus 6 50 An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain 60,50 145,18     Detailed	0	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		Jan S	4	MDF	206
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Sound Organisation Z545 160 Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand 73 46 4, 49, 28 4 4 5 5 0 Soundstyle X100 230 Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright 64 49, 28 4 49, 28 4 4 49, 28 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 5	0	Sound Organisation Z560	160	Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value	90	46,36		•	5	Wood	166
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#### **Stands & Supports** TOP PLATE SIZE (COI) NUMBER OF SHELVES ISSUE NUMBER SHELF TYPE FILLABLE WELDED A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes 189 Sound Organisation Z524 61 Easy going and likeable performer straight out of the box Sound Style Select OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522 59 16,17 202 A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma 202 Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers Townshend Seismic Sink 38.48 202



# **Tonearms**

ess expensive turntables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). However, hard-core vinyl fans should invest in a more expensive separate motor unit with specialist tone-arm - the only way to make the most of vinyl LPs. It is essential to achieve operational synergy between such components, so this is one area of hi-fi where the skills of a knowledgeable dealer are invaluable. The quality of a tonearm's construction and design affect sound quality significantly. There are three basic arm designs listed in the key, and each has strengths, but pivoted designs are the most popular, being usually the most practical and affordable.

### KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

 EFFECTIVE MASS: This relates to cartridge compliance. Generally high mass arms are suitable for low compliance cartridges and vice versa.

 PARALLEL TRACKING: An arm which allows the cartridge to track the disc in a linear fashion.

 PIVOTED: Arms which allow the cartridge to describe an arc as they traverse the record.

• UNI-PIVOT: Pivoted arms with a bearing that

• EFFECTIVE LENGTH (CM): Length of the arm from bearing to cartridge mounting.

 ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT: Important for accurate cartridge set-up

• ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

RECOMMENDED

**EDITOR'S** CHOICE

# **Tonearms**

EFFECTIVE LENGTH(ON) PARALLEL TRACKING ADJUSTABLE LENGTH EFFECTIVE MASS ISSUE NUMBER Kuzma Stogi Ref Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness 0 Linn Ekos 1,500 Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths 67 The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural
Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables 174 Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though Roksan Tabriz Basic 350 low 240 9 SME Series IV 983 233 Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration 60 0 Low Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price



# Tuners

TV has stolen radio's status as the foremost broadcast entertainment medium, but with its Radio Four plays and Radio Three music, the BBC still makes a potent case for audiophile reception equipment. For how much longer, under he cost-conscious Birlist régime, remains to be seen. Another new imponderable is the arrival of dig tal radio broadcasting, though reception apparatus is currently non-existent outside of the in-car market. These days tuners play second fiddle to hi-fi sources like CD, but in many ways they are a greater engineering challenge han digi al equipment, and thus higher pricetags clearly equate to superior performance. High-quality, roof-mounted antennae are essential for audiophile listening, so factor them into your budget

#### KEY T O **SPECIFICATIONS**

PIVOTED UNI-PIVOT

■ WAVEBANDS: FM – (VHF) M - MW, L - LW.

PRESETS: Number of station

frequencies that can be stored.

 RDS: (Radio Data System) vas originally designed for in-car applications, RDS tuners can identify and display the name of

information about broadcasts • REMOTE CONTROL: Infra-

traffic news and other

red control handset supplied SIGNAL STRENGTH

METER: Indicates strength of signal from aerial – useful for aligning your 'twig' during

Experience has shown that this analogue throwback is ergonomically far superior to the button-based approach.

ROTARY TUNING KNOB:

• ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

the radio station being received, **BEST BUY** 

RECOMMENDED

SPECIFICATIONS

**EDITOR'S** 

Best Buys 2000 HI-FI CHOICE

# **Tuners**

SIG STRENGTH METER ROT. TUNING KNOB REMOTE CONTROL ISSUE NUMBER WAVEBANDS PRESETS RDS Performance adequate but price is sharp, especially with remote control. Some hum 0 Arcam Alpha 7 Indifferent RF performance but a touch of audiophile sound quality with clean, strong signals FM.M.I 166 Arcam Alpha 10 DRT The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's till not perfect DAB 199 800 Cambridge T500 180 Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions FM.M.I 193 Creek T43 399 Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price FM.M.I 64 193 Cymbol C-DAB 1 1,000 The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish DAB 199 The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as eve A fine all-rounder with advanced RDS, good RF performance and decent sound. Remote extra Denon TU-1500RD FM,M 250 A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension 40 0 184 Magnum Dynalab FT11 499 All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality FM 184 200 Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance an'd good sound for the price Leak Trough Line - GTA 300 A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance FM 206 Linn Kremlin 2,600 Controversially good sound at a very high price FM 80 A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models Myryad T-30 Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial FM 193 0 400 Myryad T-10 530 A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price FM 184 **NAD C440** 200 Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites FM.M 30 193 Pioneer F-504RDS 250 Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound FM M 40 166 Pioneer F-504RDS Precision 300 Lots of features, plus a sound that's low on noise and high on communication, adds up to a good value package FM,M 40 184 Roksan Caspian Neat facia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price 184 Sony ST-SE500 140 A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration FM,M,L 30 . 193 Rotel RT-935AX Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity FM.M 166 Sony ST-SA3ES Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best FM.M.L 30 157



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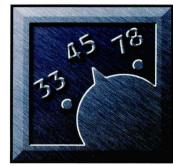
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**Tuners** 

SIG STRENGTH METER S P E C I F I C A T I O N S REMOTE CONTROL WAVEBANDS PRESETS

ATUS	1 un	C1	D	EBANDS	CSFTS MOS	0.	VTROL	H METER	KNOB	MBER	•
15	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS		V	<b>V</b>	V	7	AND	▼ .	V
0	Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packet	ed tuner	FM,M,L	30					184
0	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for	r DAB entry	DAB,FM,M	97					199
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun		FM,M	59	•		•	•	157



# **Turntables**

**S** pecialist turntables are at the heart of high-fidelity sound. CD players may offer ultra-low noise and a flat frequency response, but they can't match the dynamics and superlative rhythmical timing taken for granted by serious tumtable users. Less expensive tumtables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). Still better quality is found at higher prices among the separate motor unils and tonearms. Because tumtables are mechanical devices, designed to retrieve micron-small modulations engraved into viryl, engineering quality is of paramount importance. This is also the reason why tumtables cost as much as they do, and require the finest equipment support systems.

#### TO SPECIFICATIONS KEY

- MANUAL: You do all the work.
- AUTO: The record player does all the work.
- SEMI-AUTO: You put the needle on, the turntable lifts it off at the end of the record
- SPEEDS: In RPM to correspond with long-
- playing records or seven/12-inch singles. ● SUSPENDED SUBCHASSIS: Sprung
- suspension to minimise structural interference.
- EXTERNAL PSU: Outboard power supply:
- generally indicative of higher-quality performance ■ SUPPLIED WITH ARM: Many tumbbles do
- not come with a tonearm fitted, but if this category is checked, the deck is already thus equipped
- SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE: If a tumtable comes complete with arm and cartridge.
- ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.



RECOMMENDED

EDITOR'S CHOICE

# **Turntables**

SPEEDS EXTERNAL PSU WITH CART. SEMI-AUTO ISSUE NO. AUTO

5	PRODUCT	15)	COMMENTS	WANT A	-		A AMIA	All I		
		(£)	COMMENTS		A A	27/45				207
0		594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high end performance at an affordable price	•	- 80	33/45	•	•	14	203
E	Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	•	158	33/45	•	,		194
	Clearaudio Reference	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	•		33/45				144
0	DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	•		33/45	•	•	•	144
١.	Dual CS 455.1	220	Neat record player with automatic convenience (and 78rpm), but doesn't match simpler manual rivals sonically		•	33/45/78	•	. •	•	203
0	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph		Area	33/45	•	•		103
0	Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	•		33/45	•	•	65.00	91
0	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank			33	•	•		103
0	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains		No.	33/45	•			91
0	Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	•		33/45	•			55
E	Michell Gyro SE	775	A stunningly desirable combination of looks, solidity and sound make this a tempting tumtable	•	1008	33/45	•			190
0	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	•		33/45	•			192
	Moth Kanoot	329	Rather coarse-sounding deck that requires decent isolation and comes with a Rega RB300 arm	•		33/45		•		164
0	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	•		33/45			•	203
0	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm		No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	•		33/45				159
0	Pink Triangle Tarantella II	850	A turntable that looks unlike any other, with rare ability too. Quirky, but sound is immensely likeable	•		33/45	•			192
0	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	•		33/45			•	164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	•		33/45		•		203
ı	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	•	11.5	33/45	•	•		192
0	Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi – it's that good	•	100	33/45	•	•		138
0	Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	•		33/45				48
0	Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability			33/45		•		164
0	Rega Planar 25	619	Great looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	•	1	33/45				203
0	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail			33/45				159
0	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	•		33/45	•			159
E	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	•		33/45				195
E	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	•		33/45/78	•			186
0	Thorens TD166 VI/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges		-	33/45	•		•	103
	Thorens TD 146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	•		33/45	•	•		203
l	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	1000		<ul><li>33/45</li></ul>	•	•		159
0	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	•		33/45				203
0	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards		100	33/45	•			136
E	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	•		33/45				205
0	Wilson benesch The Circle	795	A beautiful turntable with a sumptuous sound, all at a very reasonable price – a clear Best Buy	•		33/45	•			192
										_



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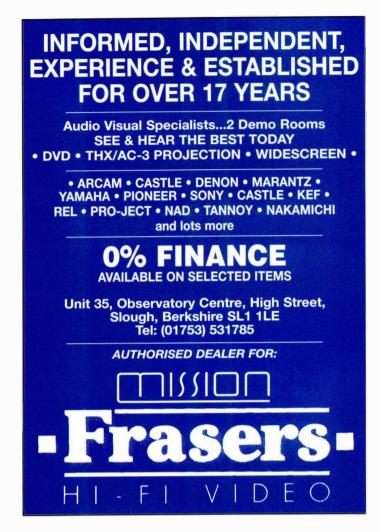
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- Castle Severn Series 2 speakers, cherry wood, as brand new, boxes, receipt and five-year guarantee, £295. Call Dave (020) 8644 4424.
- Rotel 971 CD player, mint condition, *HFC* Best Buy, boxed with manual, £195. Call Dave (020) 8644 4424.
- Nakamichi 582Z cassette deck, high quality from the past. Overhauled by the makers, very good condition, manual and box, £190. Call (01903) 247779. (Sussex)
- AudioQuest Video Z digital interconnects, 2x5m. Brilliant reviews, suit Meridian digital speakers, etc. Cost

£500, will sell £295. Call (01235)

- Z-System RDP-1. Digital preamp and equaliser. Stereophile Class 'A' component. As new. Bargain at £2,750 (new £3,950). Call 07957 473 012. (NW London)
- van del Hul D102 III HB interconnect cables. 2x0.8m pairs available, £45 per pair. Call (01403) 230070 (evenings).
- DJ gear: pair Technics SL1210s inc cartridges, £800. Pioneer CDJ 500S CD player, £725. Blue mixer, £300. Sennheiser HD25 headphones, £150. £1,100 the lot. Call 07712 550405.
- Drive belts Thorens fit, boxed, £4 each or 3 for £10, postage paid. Call (01642) 594645.
- Ruark Solus speakers (rosewood), as new, £750. Rothwell Indus/Lupus valve pre/power (unused), £750.

Audiolab 8000A, £225. Rega Planet CD player + remote control. Call (01952) 502097. (Telford)

- Sony SCD-XB940 CD/SACD player, unwanted competition prize, £400. Sound Organisation two-shelf Hi-fi stand, £25. Call (01708) 457691.
- Technics 1000 Mk1 pre/power amp, cassette deck, tuner and CD. Mint condition. £550. Call 07801 393567.
- B&W DM7 loudspeakers, £200. Meridian 203 DAC 7, £150. Musical Fidelity XD10 buffer stage, £60. Call (0191) 417 1669, after 6pm.
- New Sony TA-FB730R amp, 60W (£200 new), £155. Kenwood DP5090 CD player, with CD Text (£300 new), £150. Morduant Short 207 speakers, 150W (£440 new), £350. B&W CDM1SE (£600 new), £550. All boxed. Call (020) 8374 0592.
- Revox Evolution system. CD, tuner and amp in graphite finish with stick remote and high style. No speakers. £1,250 ono. Call (020) 7231 6184.

# WANTED

- Incognito or Sixstream tonearm rewiring kit for Rega RB series, Linn 45rpm adaptor, Rega R200 or Linn Basik tonearm. Call (01642) 594645.
- Printed circuit diagram required for Legend P300 power amplifier, circa early 80s. Manufactured by Audi Concepts Ltd. Call Mick (01926) 740254.



# BUYING TIPS Buying secondhand can be

a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly-expensive secondhand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product engineered down to a price. Do some research on which brands and products have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a second-hand hi-fi dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty. So it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Products such as speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amplifiers, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be troublesome — have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

# Gilding the Lily

Even when you've put together the world's best hi-fi system, there's bound to be room for improvement. **Jimmy Hughes**, master of hi-fi's uncrossed 't's and undotted 'i's, explains...

week may be a long time in politics, but it's the mere blink of an eye when it comes to evaluating the tweaks and upgrades that improve the sound of your hi-fi. Which isn't to imply it takes weeks or months before any difference is discernible – quite the opposite; often you hear a change straight away.

However, whether or not it's a genuine improvement can only be judged long-term. Mao Tse-Tung understood this – and he didn't know *anything* about hi-fi. Apparently someone once asked him if the Norman Conquest of Britain had been successful. He thought for a moment, then replied, "It's too early to say."

I utter similar words when folk ask me if stereo will ever catch on, or whether shellac 78s are obsolete...

However, I am pretty sure about the long-term benefits of Kimber mains cables. Although kitting out your entire system with Russ Andrews' Kimber PowerKords and matching eight-way PowerBlock distribution board isn't cheap, it should produce substantial improvements in clarity and detail that are difficult to obtain by other means. These devices will allow you to hear precisely how good your hi-fi can sound by reducing very high frequency noise on the mains.

Naturally the degree of improvement heard will depend on how noisy your mains is to start with. Since RA's products are obtainable on a money-back-if-not-satisfied basis, you can buy with confidence knowing it can all be returned if there's no difference. If your amplifier or CD player has a detachable mains cord with an IEC plug, the easiest way to dip a toe in the water would be to order a PowerKord of the requisite length. A 3ft (.9m) Standard PowerKord costs £75, while the high current version of similar length costs £99.

Because polluted mains is a fact of life for virtually all of us, some form of noise control is desirable. A simple and cost-effective remedy is to buy Russ Andrews' Silencer at £39.95. This device should be plugged into a spare socket near your hi-fi – or perhaps next to a large domestic appliance such as a refrigerator. You can use more than one Silencer to reduce noise already on the mains, as well as noise added by other electrical items already plugged in.

Russ Andrews offers a Noise Sniffer box for hire so you can hear how polluted your mains supply is, and how effectively products like The Silencer lower mains noise. It's interesting to try the Noise Sniffer at different times during a 24 hour period; if your experience matches mine, you'll find noise level varies quite noticeably according to time of day.

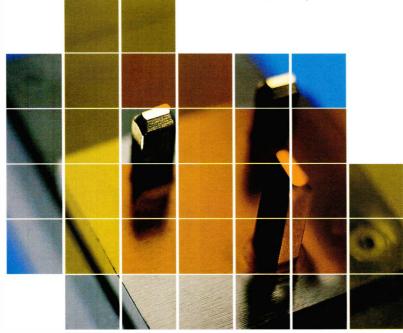
Another effective upgrade is Townshend's Siesmic Sink for loudspeakers. This air-cushioned platform introduces a degree of decoupling so the speaker is no longer rigidly connected to the floor. This frees up the sound in ways you couldn't begin to imagine. The whole sound becomes more comfortable and effortless, with an added ease and naturalness that makes listening to music a real pleasure. Instruments and voices occupy their own independant space, improving clarity and separation, yet coherence and integration seem better at the same time.

Even if (superficially) there's a slightly loss of impact and attack compared with rigid spiked feet, this is massively offset by the vast improvement in sheer listenability. It's the difference between relaxed natural music and 'hi-fi', where everything spits and shouts to gain your attention. Try your speakers with and without Seismic Sinks on a track with heavy bass, and notice how (with Sinks in place) the bottom end keeps its weight and fullness, but does not over-power the mid-band and treble. If you want to hear the music, and not your system, this is one accessory you can't afford to ignore.

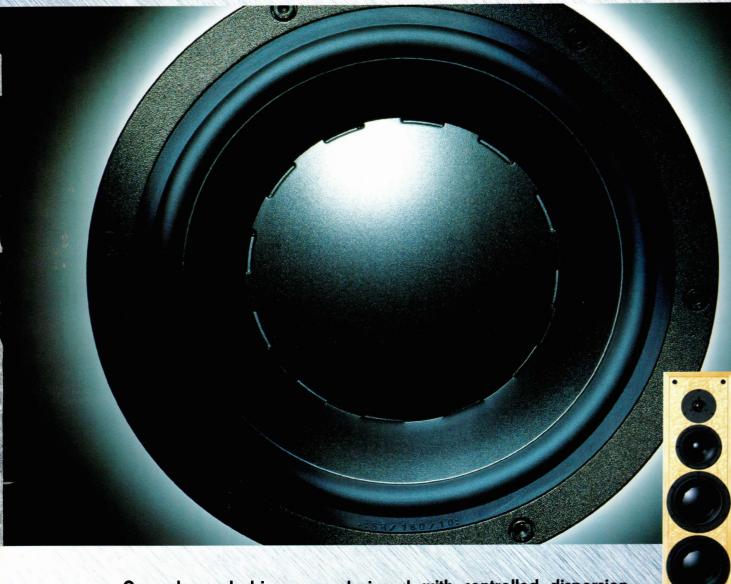
Another upgrade I never tire of is QR Developments' Ringmat for turntables. It's been improved several times since the original was released, making it quite possibly the finest turntable mat ever produced – and I say that in all seriousness. I not only like the effect it produces sonically, I also believe the benefits go beyond improved sound – it's my view that Ringmat extends cartridge life while reducing record and stylus wear.

Just listen to the difference in the quality of stylus needletalk between the Ringmat and any other mat. Not only will you find needletalk is reduced with Ringmat, but what's left is softer and less hard and spitty than it is with conventional mats. This comparison holds for turntables designed for use without a mat – even the ones that clamp the LP straight to the platter. Again, a moneyback guarantee is offered if you don't like what you hear!

The version for CD, the Statmat, is also very good. Though whether or not static is being controlled is a moot point. Certainly, the Statmat doesn't seem to lessen static charges – the fact that it often clings limpet-like to the CD when you've finished listening seems to point to limited control of static charges. But it does improve sound quality, no question.



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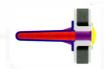


The tip.



The iceberg.

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