

HI-FI CHOICE

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EXCLUSIVE!

SURROUND SOUND MUSIC IS HERE!

DVD-Audio and SACD multichannel players are the future of hi-fi – and we've tested them all

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£1,500



DVD-A & SACD SOFTWARE REVIEWS
HOW GOOD DO THEY SOUND?



LIFESTYLE SYSTEMS

10 sexy combos that look stunning and sound great



SMALL WONDERS

Micro Utopia delivers radical results from a compact package



PLUS!
STANDS AT WAR
12 new speaker stands on test

FROZEN WIRES
Cryogenic tech comes to hi-fi
TAG APHRODITE
Is this the ultimate style system?



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Media with passion

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RECORD



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The new Philips DVD Recorder.



For more details, call 020 8665 6350 or visit our website
www.ce.philips.co.uk/dvdrw



PHILIPS

Let's make things better.

CONTRIBUTORS



Tim Bown runs both stereo and multichannel systems with kit including Arcam, PMC, Bryston and TAG McLaren.



Dan George likes rock music and plays it on a Naim CD player, Bryston amps and B&W Matrix 801 loudspeakers.



Richard Black plays piano professionally and uses EAR electronics and ATC speakers for classical and world music.



Paul Messenger likes dance, folk, rock and classical music on vinyl and uses Linn, Naim and Rehdeko kit with gusto.



Paul Miller is the king of the technical world when it comes to hi-fi. He uses DPA amps and Audio Note speakers.



Alvin Gold prefers serious classical music and has a predilection toward expensive amps and JM Lab speakers.

HOW WE TEST THE PRODUCTS

Our reviewing process is the most rigorous in the business. We focus on transparency and resolution, mixing traditional hi-fi values with the latest technological developments via a blend of subjective views and scientific analysis.

BENCH TESTS Our main group test each month concentrates on a key area, with products from across the separates market. The testing consists of three stages: 'blind' listening, hands-on subjective testing and scientific measuring. The latter phase is conducted by our Technical Editor using the QC Suite Functional Testing Station.

GROUP TESTS Each issue features a number of additional tests aimed at narrowing the field in a specific product area. Here the testing involves just the reviewer concerned with no lab or panel testing, but plenty of comparisons.

SOLO REVIEWS As well as group tests we also review single components. In our First Impressions section, you'll find brand new products that warrant early exposure, while High Performance concentrates on the latest aspirational, high tech components.

AWARD TAGS



BEST BUYS are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price.



RECOMMENDED products are first class components, losing out to Best Buys only because of a higher price or less competitive sound quality.



EDITOR'S CHOICE, a third award, is reserved for those products reviewed solo and awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.

M

ultichannel could very well be the future of high fidelity music. However good your two channel system, and I've heard some stunning ones, it cannot compete with the solidity of sound that a good multichannel system and recording can produce. It's going to be a while before people in the

average commercial recording studio make uncompressed multichannel recordings from the ground up, but when they do we'll be having the time of our lives. As it stands there is a steadily growing selection of surround material being released on DVD-A and SACD, and Alvin and his listening panel have been using some of the better ones to assess our latest group of multichannel audio players. We haven't found the same recording on both formats yet but nonetheless Alvin has managed to draw a pretty distinct conclusion as to which format he thinks is in the lead. This may be down to the specific discs themselves - we have all heard great and poor recordings but we don't, as a rule, attribute these variations to the format itself, but rather the producers of the discs. So it seems a little early to suggest that one format is significantly better than the other, but on the whole SACD seems to have the better sounding discs and players thus far.

In an effort to find out which software is worth hearing we have been encouraging record companies to send in high resolution software. At this stage only Alvin and Tim have got themselves a full high res surround set-up, so the impressions that Dan and I have proffered are based on stereo performance. Guessing that most *HFC* readers will be in the same boat this will hopefully be forgiven.

Elsewhere in this issue David Vivian shares his views on a stack of 'lifestyle' systems, offering a higher than usual degree of interoperability and a splash of style to boot. It's good to see some home grown brands competing in this growing market place, and helping spread the hi-fi message.

Paul Messenger has been playing with those lumps of ironmongery that many of us use to support our speakers. Stands do make a big difference to sound quality, not least because of the variations in loudspeakers and floor types that they are used with. Paul used a selection of speakers on a wooden floor so his findings will be accurate for most of us, but if you have concrete under the carpet I suggest a home trial would help in finding the best supports.

"HOWEVER GOOD YOUR TWO CHANNEL SYSTEM, AND I'VE HEARD SOME STUNNING ONES, IT CANNOT COMPETE WITH THE SOLIDITY OF SOUND THAT A GOOD MULTICHANNEL SYSTEM AND RECORDING CAN PRODUCE."



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HI-FI CHOICE

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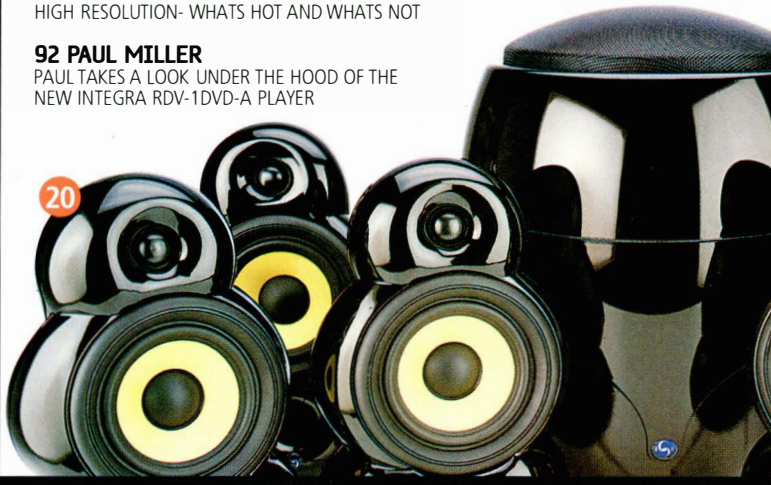
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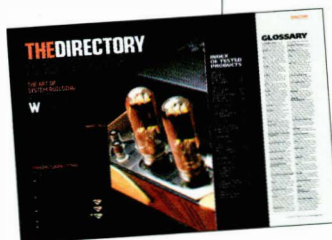
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Track down a hi-fi bargain by checking out our plethora of pre-owned classics.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

TIM BOWERN, DAN GEORGE, PAUL MILLER AND JASON KENNEDY GET FAMILIAR WITH THE LATEST GEAR.



Take a Thunder 1, add an array of new components and features and you have a Thunder 1.1.

TALK ELECTRONICS THUNDER 1.1 CD PLAYER

★★★★★ £599.95

“THERE'S A REFRESHING OPENNESS ABOUT THE SOUND THAT PROVIDES ROOM FOR THE MUSIC TO BREATHE.”

DATASTREAM

BURR-BROWN 24-bit/96kHz DAC, Sony CDM14-BD25 transport with CD Text and improved servos, CD-R/CD-RW playback, optical digital output, analogue stereo outputs, input for external power supply, remote control, available in black or silver finish, brushed aluminium fascia, 5.9kg weight, dimensions (WxHxD) 43x9x30cm.
TALK ☎ 01276 709966

Considering the wholesale changes made by Talk to its Thunder 1 CD player, you'd think it might have come up with a more innovative name than the Thunder 1.1. There's been no change to the £600 price tag nor, on the face of it, to the essential style of the player with its various function buttons riding the crest of a 'wave' cut into the brushed alloy fascia. The player is now built into a steel chassis – to lend it the weight expected of a player costing the best part of £600 – but the key ingredients have been entirely revised.

The BD25 version of Sony's popular transport mechanism is now used, offering extra facilities such as a track calendar and compatibility with CD Text. Many manufacturers are still using the older BD10 transport, while Talk's upgrade to the BD25 delivers full compatibility with CD-R and CD-RW media plus the option to play hybrid SACD discs (i.e. SACD discs with an embedded CD layer). The optical digital output may be 'muted' via an internal jumper while the matching remote combines both RC5 and NEC codes, which means it'll also fire-up a host of other equipment.

The power supplies have all been overhauled while the DAC and analogue filter stage are

completely new. Gone is the Crystal DAC used in past Talk players in favour of a 24-bit/96kHz replacement from Burr-Brown – the same DAC that has steered Musical Fidelity, among others, to success. The output level is somewhat higher than the notional 2V standard and could confuse an A/B demonstration, but the Thunder 1.1 is otherwise a potent sounding machine, bubbling with sharp detail but avoiding the trap of sounding hard or fatiguing. There's a refreshing openness about the sound that provides room for the music to breathe. Percussive detail sounds quick and alive but not too fierce, while vocals typically enjoy an impressive presence. The bass, meanwhile, combines depth with weight without drawing unnecessary attention to itself.

So there's really very little point comparing the Thunder 1.1 with its forebear. The 1.1 is a new player with a fresh, vibrant sound, greater flexibility and a chunkier build. Only the price remains the same. **PMi**



UNISON S2K VALVE AMPLIFIER

★★★★★ £1,295.00

It's not very often that you see a valve amplifier in this part of the magazine, and for every person that sits on one side of the valve fence, there's another who probably hasn't had any exposure to this, the original variety of amplifier technology. Unison Research is an Italian company that employs some 15 people to produce its hand-built amplifiers. The S2K we have here evolved from the popular S2 amplifier following a suggestion by GT Audio (which services Unison amps in the UK) that it incorporate KT-88 valves in single-ended mode in place of the S2's EL34 pentode.

Both the output transformer and the power supply transformer are designed and produced in-house, and are responsible for the colossal weight of the thing. Whether you like the look of it is down to you, I happen to love it as its so far removed from the generic black and silver boxes most of us are used to. The volume control knob is beautifully silky smooth, and machined from solid aluminium, while the hardwood trim

is artfully carved to stylish effect.

Volume can also be controlled through the matching wooden remote, a luxury that is still quite rare with valve amps. I was surprised to find the Unison matching the performance of my conventional, and notably more expensive, transistor amplifiers with some select acoustic material. Tonally warm with a lush presentation, the S2K was a treat to the ears with plucked guitar strings. However, general comparative triumphs were few and far between as the limitations of valve amplification left some music dynamically challenged and lacking ability in the frequency extremes. In some areas the S2K is a winner, it certainly surprised me a few times and it clearly displays a build quality and style that the rest of the hi-fi world could learn from. If valves do it for you, this unit provides sonics with style. **DG**

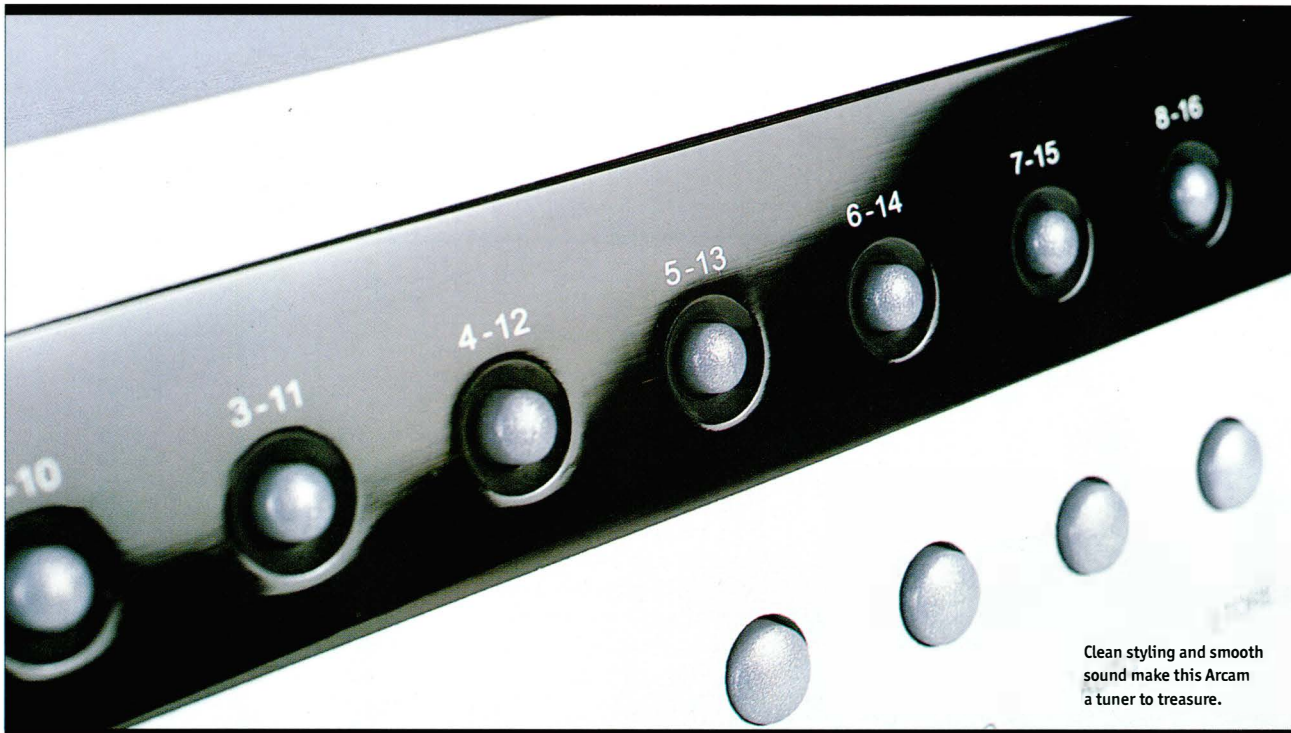


You don't get many of these to the pound: This Unison employs a pair of high spec KT-88 valves.

DATASTREAM

POWER rated at 16 Watts per channel, KT-88 valves in single ended configuration, remote handset (volume only), four line inputs, tape loop.
UKD 01753 652669





Clean styling and smooth sound make this Arcam a tuner to treasure.

ARCAM T51 FM/MW/LW TUNER

★★★★★ £279.90

"THE T51 HANDLES SPEECH WELL AND WITH ACCURACY, WHILE MUSICALLY IT OFFERS A PLEASINGLY SMOOTH TONAL BALANCE."

If the latest statistics are to be believed, radio is more popular now than it's ever been. Ratings are on the up, and it's claimed that the UK population on average spend more time listening to the radio than watching TV. And with shows like 'Crossroads' on the box, you can understand the defection.

Arcam says that 'tuner design is a long established tradition' for the company, and you'd have to agree that it's turned out quite an attractive bit of kit with this new wave-surfer. The T51 comes under the DiVA (Digitally integrated Video and Audio) banner and is a three-band, remote controlled unit with 24 station presets. Speaking of presets, the unit couldn't be easier to program: search for the station, then press a numbered button to store. Simple. The only modern convenience you don't get is RDS, a surprising omission in this day and age.

Once up and running, I achieved an excellent signal with just the standard indoor aerial, but Arcam advise you to install a rooftop FM aerial if you can. The remote control is hugely comprehensive and appears to be a generic item, so really only a few buttons apply unless you have other Arcam products connected up.

A simple tuner then both in operation and looks, the aesthetic is clean and simple and looks pretty fine as tuners go.

That Jonathan 'Woss' fellow does a fairly good show on Radio 2 on a Saturday, and his selection of tunes had the Arcam reminding me of the earlier Alpha equipment, which was often warm, and laid back. The T51 handles speech well and with accuracy, while musically it offers a pleasingly smooth tonal balance, again that warm tonality affirming the analogue sound of radio. It's a nice unit with sturdy build quality and a cool design that's reflected in the price. There are cheaper tuners around, but the T51 makes radio listening a real pleasure. **DG**



DATASTREAM

THREE BAND TUNER

FM/MW/LW, system remote control, 24 station presets.
ARCAM ☎ 01223 203200

The New D2-ISO-5
Speaker System



"solidity, presence and believability ... listen to music as it was meant to be, realistic is the only way"

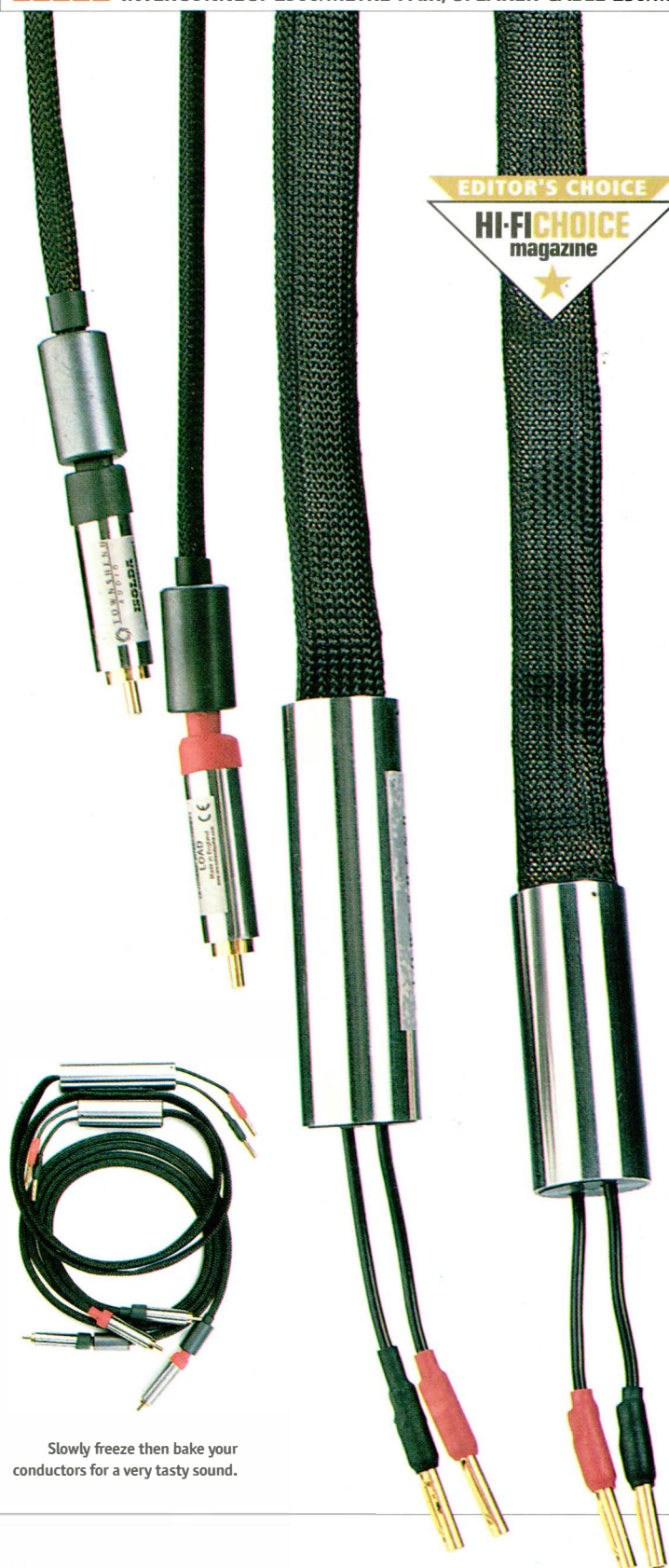
- Jason Kennedy, Editor Hi-Fi Choice, August 2001

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TOWNSHEND AUDIO ISOLDA DEEP CRYOGENIC CABLES

★★★★ INTERCONNECT £300/METRE PAIR; SPEAKER CABLE £50/METRE UNTERMINATED



Slowly freeze then bake your conductors for a very tasty sound.

Townshend Audio has been giving its cables a hard time. Subjecting them to deep cryogenic treatment by slowly freezing and baking them until the linearity of the crystal structure within the copper has been altered to such an extent that more of an audio signal will pass through it. That, at least, is the claim.

The Isolda speaker cable differs significantly from most cables in that its conductors are flat ribbons which are stuck together to give the lowest possible impedance. This is a desirable thing with the drawback that capacitance increases to a level that affects the stability of some amplifiers. Townshend counters this with a simple network at the amplifier end, making Isolda compatible with any amp/speaker combination.

Isolda interconnects use a much smaller ribbon shape housed in a PTFE tube which effectively means that only the cable edges are touching the insulator, with air – the ultimate dielectric – surrounding the ribbon’s flat surfaces.

The paired ribbon style of speaker cable is the best we have heard when it comes to creating a three dimensional soundstage, and Townshend’s original Isolda was already a very good example. The Cryogenic process has enhanced that cable’s qualities by increasing solidity of stereo – making voices and instruments sound more real and in the room – and also increasing the richness of tone and detail. This is a first-class speaker cable that does transparency, detail, speed and evenness of balance extremely well but is of the highest standard when it comes to imaging and bass.

Isolda interconnects are also very capable and matched our reference in all important respects, we didn’t have original non-cryo for comparison, but the richness and focus revealed would suggest that the process offers real benefits. Like the speaker cable it has an even balance, superb transparency and little apparent character – if you’re in the market for a top notch set of cables these should be at the top of your must-hear list. **JK**

“THIS IS A FIRST-CLASS SPEAKER CABLE THAT DOES TRANSPARENCY, DETAIL, SPEED AND EVENNESS OF BALANCE EXTREMELY WELL.”

DATASTREAM

CRYOGENICALLY TREATED flat copper conductors, 8 Ohm impedance, hand insulated copper strands, very close spacing of conductors for RF rejection, polyester braid sheath, PTFE insulated silver-plated copper wire tails.

TOWNSHEND AUDIO ☎ 020 8979 2155



SONY CDP-XE570 CD PLAYER

★★★★★ £140.00

Walk into a Sony store with music in mind, and you can build a budget CD based system, embrace the future with SACD, or forget them both with an MP3 player with PC connectivity. By now most regular readers of HFC should be familiar with all three possibilities, but what if you're new to the game?

Luckily companies like Sony have the means to continue producing straight CD players, while other big corporations are putting their faith in the CD-spinning capability of their DVD players. The new CDP-XE570 is a dedicated budget player, and is built with the reassuring solidity Sony has become known for. Our example had a superbly slick CD drawer, and was extremely quiet in operation. The player has had a bit of a facelift compared to earlier CD models, yet it bucks the current trend for a silvery chassis with its black-only option. The drawer and display is stylishly recessed into the main body, and despite a fairly comprehensive array of buttons, Sony still manages to make this entry-level spinner look classy.

Put a couple of discs in the drawer, and you're presented with a sound quality that you might

expect to pay a lot more for. It's a well-mannered balance, if a little reserved and dry, but for a budget player it offers a superior level of detail and cohesion across the frequencies. It really only lost its cool a couple of times when pushed in the upper midrange, in this instance with some Jethro Tull? You could probably find a more exciting player elsewhere, but you may lose out on composure. The build and features are commendable, and it'll also play those tricky-to-read CD-RW home recordings. Sony Centre customers who don't read the hi-fi press will be well served as long as there are machines like this still in production. **DG**

**"FOR A BUDGET
PLAYER IT OFFERS
A SUPERIOR LEVEL
OF DETAIL AND
COHESION."**

DATASTREAM

CD-R/RW compatible, CD Text, headphone socket, jog dial, optical digital output, remote control, stereo analogue outputs, only available in black.
SONY ☎ 08705 111999





PRIMARE D30.2 CD PLAYER AND A30.1 AMPLIFIER

★★★★★ D30.2 £1,499.99/A30.1 £1,499.99



"IN PRACTICE THIS COMBO PROVES SONICALLY SEDUCTIVE."

Swedish brand Primare has worked up a fair head of esteem in these parts, particularly in relation to its amplifiers. Their sound is alluring, with rock-solid build and distinctive styling, so if you're chasing a matched CD/amp partnership it makes sense to take an all-Primare combo for a spin.

And now more than ever, because Primare's upmarket 30 series has been substantially revised and in the case of the D30.2 CD player the changes are rather significant. The digital-to-analogue conversion system has been uprated, the old Burr-Brown 20-bit DACs replaced with newer 24-bit/96kHz-compatible units from the same marque. The old Philips transport mechanism has been swapped for a Sony and a new custom-built transformer supplies power, with separate windings for the digital and analogue circuitry.

On the amp side the revamp is less comprehensive, though its predecessor was a hard act to follow. The most obvious change is the addition of a preamp output, the reason for which is clear once you discover Primare's new addition to the range. The A30.2 power amp follows the A30.1's dual-mono topology and provides a useful upgrade path – add one and use the A30.1 as a preamp, or configure both to bi-amp.

Aesthetic reasons for matching the D30.2 and A30.1 are obvious. They make a striking pair, machined controls and industrial silver trim standing proud against stark, brooding fascias. But there's more to this match than meets the eye. Round the back, both components give a balanced connection option in addition to the common single-ended, phono-plugged variety. Indeed, this must be one of the most affordable CD/amp pairings to offer fully balanced connection, a real bonus if you have similarly equipped kit.

In practice this combo proves sonically seductive, though it's fair to say the CD player remains the weaker of the two components. Both products sound fluid and substantial, but while the A30.1 combines richness with close detail and fine dynamics, the D30.2 never really sets the pulse racing.

That said, the new version is an improvement and as CD/amp partnerships go there's much to beguile the listener. On many occasions I lost myself amid the flow of some alt-country or sweeping classical, a Whiskytown album or a Vaughan Williams symphony. And it looks and feels fantastic. If it's within your budget, it deserves a listen. **TB**

DATASTREAM

CD PLAYER: Measures 43x10x38.5cm (WxHxD), Burr-Brown 24-bit/96kHz-compatible DACs (two per channel), balanced and phono analogue outputs, coaxial digital output.

AMPLIFIER: Measures 43x10x37.5cm (WxHxD), dual-mono topology, three line-level inputs, tape loop, two balanced inputs, preamp output, power rated at 100 Watts per channel into 8 Ohms, remote control.

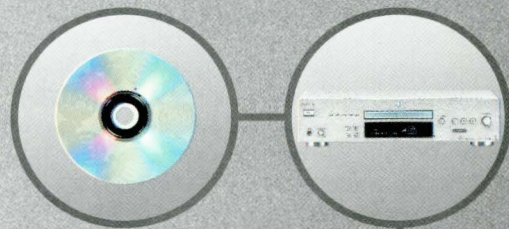
PRIMARE ☎ 01423 359054



Get inside the music.
Sony Super Audio CD.



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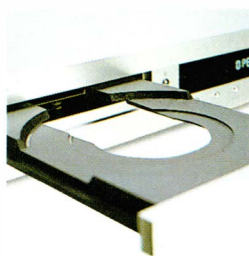
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BROUGHT TO YOU BY TIM BOWERN AND DAN GEORGE.



GREAT UNIVERSAL

FIRST DVD-AUDIO/SACD COMBINATION PLAYER HITS THE UK



Put any audio or video disc you like in this tray and the Zenix will play it!

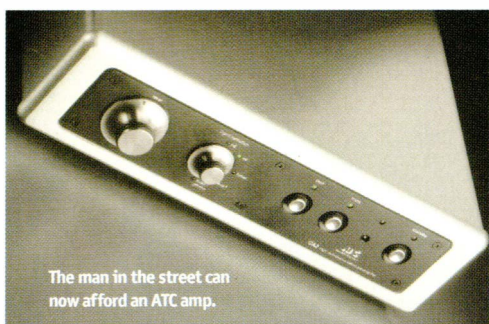
The UK's first genuinely 'universal' audio/video disc player will hit the streets this Autumn. And staggeringly, it'll cost less than £300! The Zenix Z-1016L-S is compatible with both the new high-definition music formats – DVD-Audio and SACD – and will also play back DVD-Video, CD, MP3-CD and CD-R/RW discs into the bargain.

Everything you need to play back any one of these music and movie disc formats is supplied in one box. Dolby Digital, dts and MP3 decoding is built in, there's a 5.1 analogue output, audio DACs up to 24-bit/192kHz for full-resolution DVD-A, decoding for 'lossless packing' technologies employed by DVD-A... the list goes on. On the video side there's a 10-bit DAC and a full range of outputs including component video with progressive scan. How well all this is implemented and the level of quality achieved remains to be seen, but it's an amazingly comprehensive playback machine for the price.

Zenix is an audio/video brand that manufactures in China. Unbound by the politics that currently compels bigger brands to focus on one format or the other, Zenix has simply bought-in the necessary components for both DVD-A and SACD playback and forged ahead, building a machine for the lowest possible price. Other low-cost Chinese-manufactured Universal players are set to follow later in the year, and the effect on the market may mirror the DVD-Video price crash caused by Chinese manufactured players a couple of years back.

The Z-1016L-S is currently only compatible with two-channel SACDs (5.1 channel surround sound is supported for DVD-Audio and Video, of course) but multichannel SACD playback is planned for next year. It's expected to be available in October from regular high-street outlets, priced between £250 and £300. Check *HFC* for the first UK review.

Zenix Helpline ☎ 01494 730380



The man in the street can now afford an ATC amp.

SERIOUS PREAMP FOR LESS

HIGH-END PERFORMANCE AT MID-BUDGET PRICE

ATC's latest 'budget high end' preamp is based on the £3,000 SCA2 and is said to concede nothing in quality, yet it costs just £750. The new CA2 is a two-channel stereo model designed to offer a high level of performance from a compact box. Socketry includes five line-level RCA inputs plus a tape loop and a headphone socket, with both professional grade XLR and standard RCA outputs. A remote control is included and turntable users can add the CA2 phono stage for an extra £280.

ATC ☎ 01285 760561

SATELLITES LAUNCHED INTO INFINITY

METAL DRIVER SURROUND SOUND SPEAKER PACKAGE ON A BUDGET

Infinity has launched a new multichannel satellite speaker package. The Alpha Home Cinema System (HCS) incorporates five Alpha 5 satellite speakers, plus an active subwoofer. Infinity's Alpha 5 satellite is a two-way design featuring a 110mm Ceramic Metal Matrix Diaphragm (CMMD) mid/bass driver, and a 10mm polycarbonate tweeter. CMMD material is a layered structure of alumina and aluminium that claims to offer true piston operation due to its characteristic stiffness, lightness and self damping. The package is available in beech, cherry or black ash and sells for £499.

Harman Consumer UK ☎ 020 8731 4670

Surround sound with style that won't break the bank.



MORE MULTICHANNEL SACD

SONY LAUNCHES NEW SACD PLAYERS FROM £300 TO £2,500

Sony's Super Audio CD assault continues with the addition of three new multi-channel players. Hot on the heels of the recently announced DVP-NS700 and DVP-NS900, both of which combine multichannel SACD with DVD-Video replay, come three new audio-only players – including a new entry level model.

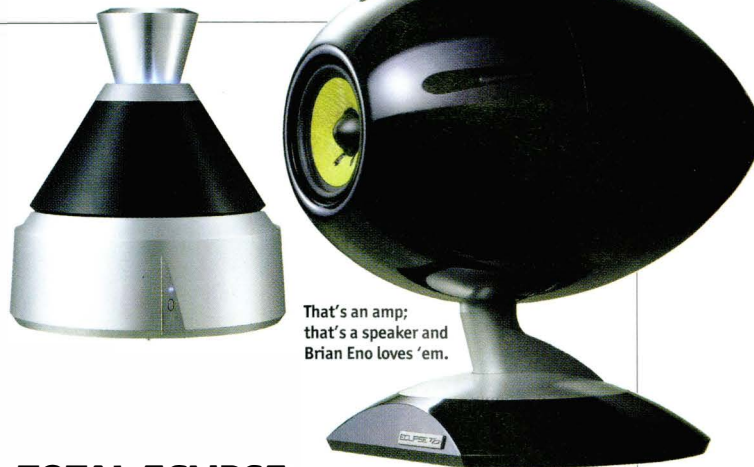
Designed for music lovers with more limited budgets, the SCD-XE670 is expected to cost around £300. It's compatible with both two-channel stereo and multichannel surround versions of the new high-resolution audio disc, and like all SACD players it plays ordinary CDs too. It comes in either silver or black and sports a 'bass management' function, so you can tailor its output to suit your speaker set-up.

If your budget is a little larger – £1,300, say – you can stretch to the SCD-XA333ES, which combines audiophile-grade components with superior build quality for a higher level of performance. And for the best that multichannel SACD can currently deliver there's the SCD-XA777ES, a £2,500 player promising exceptional levels of resolution and musicality.

The SCD-1, SCD-XA555ES and DVD-Video compatible DVP-S9000ES are now the only non-multichannel SACD players in Sony's range, and when existing stocks run out they'll all offer the facility. There are currently upwards of 440 SACD titles available and though only around 50 of these are multichannel, the proportion is expected to rise markedly as the format progresses.

Sony ☎ 08705 111999

Sony's new breed of SACD players is here.



That's an amp;
that's a speaker and
Brian Eno loves 'em.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

WE'VE SEEN THE FUTURE AND IT'S EGG-SHAPED

Fujitsu spin-off Fujitsu Ten has developed a rather radical new monitor speaker called the Eclipse TD 512. The Japanese firm says it went back to basics in designing the speaker, ending up with a startling egg-shaped enclosure and a single drive unit, anchored by a low-slung stand.

The main enclosure is fashioned from marble composite, its shape born out of a desire to create a truly transparent-sounding product. The lack of flat surfaces is said to present soundwaves with an effectively infinite baffle, eradicating the sonically damaging effects of internal standing waves and reflections. And because of its circular front, there's effectively no baffle and therefore no diffraction.

The single 120mm driver is claimed to avoid the time and phase distortions associated with multiple drive units and their crossover electronics. Priced at £2,600, it comes complete with its own cables and an equally oddball integrated amp. It's also endorsed by none other than Brian Eno: "I like the fact that this is a beautiful shape and that it looks like something from the 21st century, not from the last one. It also sounds like something from this century. The Eclipse speakers are very accurate in getting close to the real sound." Well, if Bri likes 'em...

Fujitsu Ten UK ☎ 020 7328 6100

NAD PLUMPS FOR DVD-AUDIO

AUTUMN SEES THE LAUNCH OF THE BRAND'S FIRST DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

Legendary hi-fi specialist NAD is entering the realm of next generation music machines with the launch of its first DVD-Audio player. And true to the brand's audio roots, it's claimed to make the most of the new high-resolution multichannel format despite costing just £550.

Like all DVD-Audio players available so far, the T 582 is compatible with the movie-oriented DVD-Video format as well as DVD-Audio discs, CD (including HDCD), CD-R and CD-RW. But while NAD claims that other manufacturers treat DVD as a video format with scant regard for audio performance, its new machine draws on the brand's sonic heritage to make the most of

music. To that end, it employs high quality Wolfson 24-bit/192kHz DACs for the front left and right channels and Burr-Brown 24-bit/96kHz DACs for the rest, along with carefully designed analogue audio circuitry.

Dolby Digital and dts decoding is built-in for DVD-Video playback, and on the picture side of things 10-bit DACs are said to contribute to "vivid colours, faithful to the original". Progressive scan is also delivered via a component video output for use with high-end video monitors and projectors. It's in the shops from late October.

Lenbrook UK ☎ 01908 319360



Serious DVD-Audio
for under £600.

IN BRIEF



CELESTION has launched a new multichannel speaker package. The AVP100 set includes four 50-watt, 2-way AVS101 satellites and an AVC102 centre channel. Bass comes from the S8 active subwoofer and all speakers are available in black and white or green finishes, except the charcoal-coloured subwoofer
☎ 01622 687442

CUSTOM DESIGN has launched a new range of modular supports called Ultra, for both hi-fi and A/V applications. The range is available in a variety of configurations and colours, and complements the current E'lite range.
☎ 0191 262 4646

TAG MCLAREN is offering a HDCD upgrade to all its AV32R processors. For a £40 fee, this latest upgrade can be downloaded via the Web and incorporates full blackout of all displays, improved TMC Surround and a maximum volume setting.
☎ 01480 415600

LINN has completed its multichannel speaker line-up with the launch of the Trikan centre channel speaker. The Trikan can be configured actively or passively, and features twin 130mm polypropylene mid/bass drivers and a 19mm soft-dome tweeter. The Trikan is available in one of three finishes, with black starting at £450.
☎ 0141 307 7777

SONIC LINK has released a new interconnect the SG control, which replaces the decade-spanning Blue Nickel cable. The screened cable features pure nickel solid-core conductors of

IN BRIEF CONTINUES ON P.16



NEW CREATIVE RANGE BLASTS OFF

SOUNDCARD SPECIALIST LAUNCHES NEW RANGE OF HIGH-SPEC, MULTICHANNEL CARD KITS

Creative Labs has a new range of Soundblaster cards called Audigy for the audiophile PC user. Incorporating six 24/96 DACs and as many ADCs, the Audigy blasters are designed for multichannel processing and to give enhanced effects with games and music. They also feature what Creative has dubbed SB1394, a PC variant on the IEEE1394 Firewire con-

nection mooted to revolutionise hi-fi interfacing. There are three Audigy models available, the base unit costs £99 while the Platinum adds an internal drivebay and extra software for £179, finally the no compromise Platinum EX has an external connectivity expander and even more software for £229. *Creative Labs* ☎ 0118 934 4322



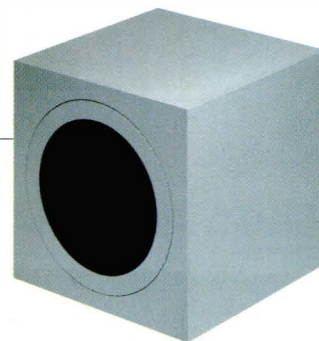
THE LATEST PHASE

SHEARNE MARKS 10TH YEAR WITH NEW CD

Shearne Audio has launched the Phase 7 Anniversary CD player. The player uses a new Sony transport with custom servo and control electronics. Separate power supplies are used for the transport and dual delta/sigma multibit DAC sections, while a three-position power switch allows the player to be left in a standby state that keeps the sensitive DAC and analogue output sections permanently on.

A new vacuum fluorescent display replaces the LCD variety used previously, and is claimed to offer improved clarity. The remote controlled player retails for £1,499, unchanged from the price of its predecessor, and is pictured with the Phase 2 Anniversary integrated amplifier.

Shearne Audio ☎ 01438 740953



CUBIC BASS

ORELLE ENTERS CUBIST PHASE WITH ART OF BASS SUBWOOFERS

B³ is the first range to emerge from Orelle's new subwoofer brand, Art of Bass. There are three models in all, each one cubic by name and cubic by nature. Move through the range and you get a bigger box and more bass – the smallest is the B³S at £299, then comes the B³M at £499 and finally the B³L at £999. Each model is available in a choice of silver, white or black finishes, with additional colours available to order.

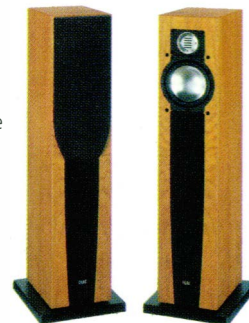
Orelle ☎ 020 8991 9200

JET SET

NEW RIBBON TWEETER SPEAKER

Elac has launched a new floorstanding speaker, the 512 JET. The two-way model is a wide-bandwidth design featuring a proprietary folded ribbon tweeter with a 180mm alloy-sandwich mid/bass cone. Elac claim the technology 'delivers spacious imaging with the ability to go loud without strain or compression'. The heavily braced cabinets are mass fillable and are claimed to work well with near-wall placement. Four finishes are available, while coloured lacquers are available to order. Expect to pay around £1,299 for a pair.

Sennheiser
☎ 0800 652 5002



IN BRIEF CONTINUED

varying diameter. A 0.5 metre pair will set you back £110.
☎ 01332 361390

MINI CD steps into the limelight again courtesy of Freecom technologies which has developed the first portable MP3 player designed to store and play music on the format. Each mini CD can store three-and-a-half hours of music downloaded from the internet, and discs can be created using any PC with a CD-R/W drive.

Mini CD can be played on any MP3 compatible CD player, or computer with a CD-ROM drive.
☎ 01423 704727

CLEARLIGHT AUDIO has developed two new interconnect cables the NF-1 and NF-2. Both use twin-axial cables with a tinned copper conductor. Ferrite RF filters are incorporated at the cable ends which are terminated with Neutrik phono plugs. Prices start at £175/1m pair.
☎ 01256 851486

TDK MEDIACTIVE is launching two new classical music DVD titles. The first *Swinging Bach* is a jazz interpretation of the composer's works, and the second is called *Waldbühne in Berlin 2000*. Both titles were launched on the 20th August and offer stereo, Dolby Digital 5.1 and dts playback options.
☎ 01737 773773

FREECOM technologies has launched the Traveller II series, a range that's claimed to be the

world's smallest CD recorders. The Traveller II is a CD-R/W and DVD combination drive that enjoys PC connectivity via USB and FireWire/Link amongst other connection options.
☎ 01423 704727

WINNERS have been announced for both the recent Hi-Fi Choice website competitions. Congratulations go to Steve Bell from Cornwall, winner of the JMLab Chorus 705s, and Jamie Stewart of Edinburgh who wins

a fab Ecosse/Reference cable package. Keep your eyes peeled for more top competitions soon at www.hifichoice.co.uk.

PANASONIC has just launched a new DVD-R drive called the DVD Burner. This multi-function unit can burn both DVD-ROM discs for consumer use, as well as DVD-RAM media. The drive includes blank DVDs and burning software to get you started. The expected cost is £549.
☎ 0845 600 3535

HEAVY METAL



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Email: info.uk@harman.com

A CLASSICAL DEMISE

WES PHILLIPS CHARTS THE TROUBLED TIMES BEING ENDURED BY THE CLASSICAL RECORD INDUSTRY IN THE US – A TREND THAT MAY WELL HAVE REPERCUSSIONS OVER HERE.

The classical music recording industry has been steadily weakening for the last decade. The major classical labels have all but given up anyway, conceding the 'true' classical field to budget labels like Naxos, seemingly content to chase after the next crossover hit. The once-proud Deutsche Grammophon now releases a scant four discs per month. Ditto for Philips. Polygram briefly tried to turn London into 'the opera label' before closing down the marque completely. (Shhh! It's dormant, not dead, claim Polygram execs.) Sony's classical release sheets lean more on the label's past glories and crossover albums and, while Erato and Teldec still exist in the US and UK, Warner's has shut down the labels' German and French offices.

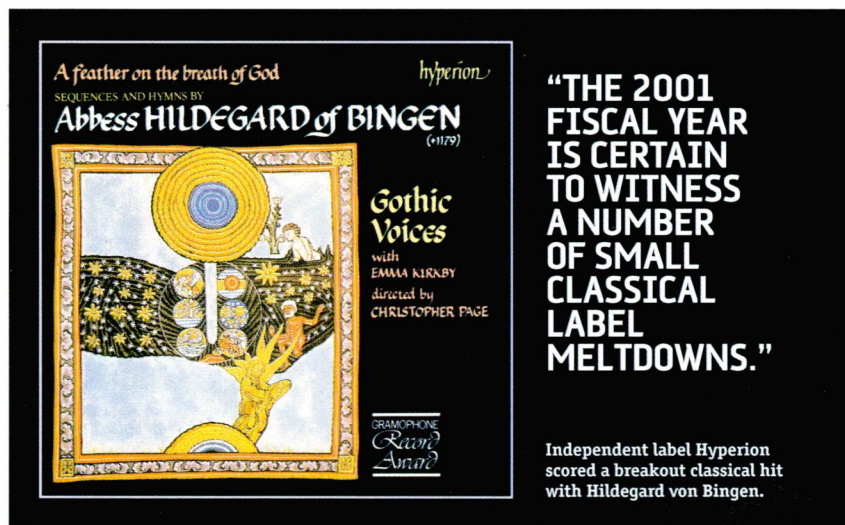
CAN'T COMPETE WITH POP

In the pop realm, it's the boy-bands and teen-goddesses who generate the profits that keep the merely 'successful' acts afloat. However, the economic picture is somewhat different in the classical world. A blockbuster hit such as the original Three Tenors release, might generate sales in the region of three million copies. But over in the pop section, 'N Sync's *Celebrity* sold almost two-thirds of that in its first week.

Given that bleak economic picture, it's no wonder the major labels have given up on serious classical music. They aren't set up to survive on marginally successful releases, that's always been the forté of the independent labels. A single 'breakout' hit can keep one of these labels producing marginally successful releases for years. Hyperion survives primarily thanks to Hildegard von Bingen's *A Feather on the Breath of God*, while Harmonia Mundi owes much of its continuing existence to the success of the *Anonymous Four*.

THE TOWER RECORDS BOMBSHELL

But it's a precarious existence based on tiny profit margins. A recent develop-



"THE 2001 FISCAL YEAR IS CERTAIN TO WITNESS A NUMBER OF SMALL CLASSICAL LABEL MELTDOWNS."

Independent label Hyperion scored a breakout classical hit with Hildegard von Bingen.

ment in the US now threatens the existence of the classical independents – and possibly the classical recording industry.

Back in the spring of 2001, Tower Records, reeling from a decade of falling profits, 'renegotiated' its payment schedule with the major classical labels. According to a label executive who spoke with me on the condition of anonymity, Tower essentially demanded that its suppliers sell to it at a premium per-disc price (one equivalent to that of fast-selling pop releases), demanded 360 day terms, and established a \$1 per disc 'marketing fee' to be charged on every disc stocked in the classical section.

The major labels weren't happy about this, but they complied. Tower no longer represents their number one outlet in the US, but for most companies it ranked among the top four or five. It was a case of losing a leg or dying.

INDEPENDENTS HIT HARDEST

The choice was less clear-cut for the independent labels, however. Either choice was a killer. And, in reality, most indies did not expect Tower to keep faith with the 360-day terms. One label-owner confided in me that Tower had already pulled all of his unsold inventory from its stores and returned it before the end of the last business year, rather than pay

for the unsold stock. It sent a marginally profitable year plunging into loss.

This is the real fear the small labels harbour – that after keeping their merchandise for almost a year, Tower will return the unsold stock and simply re-order, giving them another year without having to pay for it.

Not surprisingly, most indies have declined Tower's terms. And on May 1st, Tower instructed its classical buyers to shun the three leading indie distributors: Allegro, Qualiton and Harmonia Mundi.

This will have an enormous impact on Tower's stocking policies. The chain has always prided itself on being a 'deep catalogue' operation. Indeed, the chain's depth of catalogue and long opening hours were considered bigger inducements to shoppers than its prices, which were seldom the lowest. It remains to be seen whether Tower can survive a sales philosophy of ignoring anything not listed in the Top 200 sales charts.

Whether or not independent labels can withstand the loss of Tower's patronage is another matter entirely. The 2001 fiscal year is certain to witness a number of small label meltdowns. For an industry hanging on by its fingernails, the after-shocks may take the rest with them.

Wes Phillips is our US news correspondent, blues music lover and vinyl enthusiast.

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people
have
it.

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IN POD WE TRUST!

DAVID VIVIAN TRAVELS TO SUNNY BRIGHTON TO MEET THE BRAINS BEHIND BLUEROOM'S MINIPODS.

"MINIPOD'S BECOME A KIND OF ICON AND BUILT UP A CULT FOLLOWING, ESPECIALLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE."

Robert Trunz looks as if he's on holiday. Leaning back in his chair, his already tanned pate peeks out from the shadow cast by a big umbrella planted on the terrace decking of Brighton seafront's chic Alfresco restaurant. I approach from the stairs, scanning the assembled diners for someone keeping an eye out for an overdressed hi-fi hack.

"What are you doing wearing a jacket in this weather?" Robert chides with a smile, making the correct assumption that I'm me. Good point. It must be 80 in the shade. The erstwhile chairman of B&W loudspeakers is the very embodiment of laidbackness, dressed in a baggy shirt, shorts and sandals. He beckons me to sit down.

Across the table is a man I will cheerfully call Richard throughout lunch although I know his name is Lawrence. Lawrence Dickie. Everyone calls him Dickie, Dick for short. Dick's a bit informal for someone I don't know so Richard it is. I'm an idiot but he doesn't seem to mind. In fact, Richard (Dickie, that is) looks like someone who gave up minding about life's trivial irritations around the time of Woodstock, including all the subsequent hair styles. But then he was the main engineering dude (he won't mind me calling him dude, even though he talks fluent boffin) behind B&W's Nautilus speakers, arguably the most audacious loudspeaker us Earthlings have ever seen and the completion of which he claims he had been moving towards his whole life.

Dickie is so laid back he makes Relaxed Robert look twitchy. He has a flat in Brighton and talks about how the town's starlings, tens of thousands of them, swarm like time-lapse thunder clouds over the roof tops when the sun sets. Ah, the sunsets and the music. Something of a local hero is Dickie. Back in Brighton's years of rave, his semi-disposable spiral-wound cardboard bass tubes – a spin-off from his simultaneous involvement with B&W and the pro-audio business – became the stuff of legend. If the old Bill confiscated them then, hey, no big deal.

"They worked really well," recalls Dickie. "I used more or less standard B&W drivers – admittedly with a bit of reinforcement – but really did get good results. Okay, it wasn't the loudest system on the south coast, but many thought it was one of the cleanest sounding." "Beautiful bass. Really, really beautiful sound..." adds Robert.

So welcome to club Blueroom, probably the coolest, least stressed hi-fi loudspeaker manufacturing operation in the world. When Robert sold his shares and parted company with B&W at the end of the '90s, he took two things with him: his love of electronic music and the Nautilus-inspired Blueroom Minipod (curvy, cute as hell but canned by B&W a few years earlier). Shortly after that, Dickie – suffering post-Nautilus motivation deficit disorder – decided Blueroom, and the speaker equivalent of the iMac, would ride again. Given the upsurge in all things lifestyle, the timing could hardly have been better.

"It's very gratifying that we were able to re-release the Minipod after a gap of four years and the enthusiasm is still there," muses Dickie. "No trace of 'ah, we saw that when it first came out', none at all. I think it still has an impact."

David Vivian talks to the movers and shakers in the hi-fi industry about the subjects close to their hearts.



More so now that it has a matching Bass Station subwoofer – bass lightness was always a Minipod shortcoming – so satisfying the 5.1 brigade into the bargain. It's Blueroom's first all-new product and Dickie is very proud of it.

"If you look at the Bass Station it's even closer to ideal than the Minipod, being completely symmetrical around its axis. Clearly with Minipod it's a two-way loudspeaker with a port. Certain compromises have to be made in order to have the tweeter on top of the mid/bass unit. If the Bass Station was entirely dictated by function – with no style input at all – it would be a sphere. This is as close as we could get."

Robert has a less purist take on the matter. "At some stage there will be an improved model with more power," he says exhibiting more than a hint of personal indulgence. "For certain things it's on the limit. I'd like to have a 'tank' version." Dickie proffers a quick technical explanation why this shouldn't be a problem. Most reflex enclosure subs are limited by their port distortion. The Bass Station has a superior port design

meaning it can take more power. Robert smiles and continues.

"Then there'll be a dedicated centre channel speaker and a more compact surround system. After that we'll go back to a further development of what we started with, the Housepod." (Housepod is the floorstanding forerunner of the Minipod).

While Robert's been talking, Louise Donno, Blueroom's PR lady, joins us at the table. I ask her if she's got an easy job. "A year and a half after going to the press with Minipod we still get a huge amount of calls coming in," she replies. "We've had everyone across the board, including all the design magazines. Minipod's become a kind of icon and built up a cult following, especially with young people. We've got people like DJs Phats and Small – who are Brighton-based and have known Blueroom a long time – and they actually endorse the products. Sky TV filmed Russell Small's house [he's got a 5.1 system] for a gadget programme."

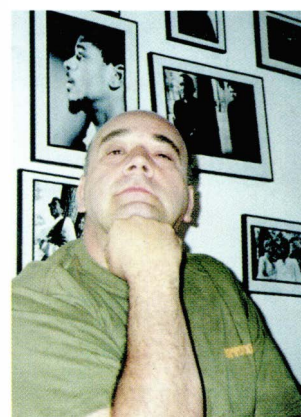
Robert picks up the thread. "We get a lot of requests for product placement on TV as well. The new Lexus car ad has MiniPods. They're a permanent feature in the Hollyoaks gadget shop and on the set of *The Big Breakfast*. They feature in the Capital Radio TV ad, too.

"Even Spielberg likes them, he's putting them in his next film. And you remember *The Truman Show*? They had Housepods. And *Lost in Space*... it goes on. Brand awareness."

I'm getting the impression Robert isn't too unhappy about the way things have turned out. "I was upset leaving B&W because of the way it ended, but getting out of this whole 400 people-plus rat race is really good. Just to get back into working with people on a more relaxed basis. We're a team of friends. It's the best way."

Louise concurs. "I think that comes through with the products. We don't have a corporate mentality. It's a nice organic approach, the whole philosophy."

Club Blueroom works for me. I could have stayed there all day.



Former B&W high-flyers Laurence Dickie (top) and Robert Trunz (above) went it alone to ensure a bright future for the Minipod.



PERFECT STATE?

JMLAB'S MICRO UTOPIA ISN'T EXACTLY SMALL, SO THE QUESTION IS: DOES IT LIVE UP TO THE OTHER HALF OF ITS NAME?

m

icro is a word which conjures up images of things that are very small and cute, neither of which describes this beefy speaker very accurately. Utopia, on the other hand, is an imaginary place where perfection is achieved, and therefore a quite appropriate name for any com-

REVIEW PAUL MESSENGER

pany's seriously high end range of speakers. French loudspeaker specialist JMLab has five stereo speakers in its 'Utopia Ligne', and the reason this new addition is called a Micro is simply that Mini, Mezzo, and Grande have already been used up. Choice reviewed the three-way, floor-standing Mezzo Utopia in 1999, and it remains one of my all-time favourite loudspeakers, particularly well-suited to medium-large British rooms – indeed, fellow reviewer Alvin Gold currently uses the Mezzo as his main reference speaker.

This Micro is the smallest of the quintet, but that doesn't mean it's particularly small. Indeed, in most respects it's the classic two-way stand-mount, and is actually somewhat bulkier than most, taking up nearly 50 litres of room space, because of its massively engineered enclosure. It's also probably one of the most expensive two-way stand-mounts money can buy. There are two versions: ours is called Ebony and is finished in a cunning mixture of textured and piano lacquer black, with a pricetag of £2,749/pr. The Standard finish, which uses natural real wood veneers, costs £3,099, while the Micro's matching stands cost a further £749/799 per pair. The whole affair tested here therefore totals a considerable £3,500, for a package

that is unquestionably beautifully finished, but whose proportions look just a little dumpy to these eyes.

Made predominantly from wood-based composite and supplied fully assembled, the Ebony stand makes a good cosmetic match for the speaker, with nicely shaped sections and plenty of black lacquer finish. It lifts the speaker 55cm from the ground – 5cm less than the current norm – and the central pillar is large enough to ensure good fore-and-aft stability. Mass loaded by what sounds like a sand filling, 6mm spikes without lock-nuts fit into the base for floor-coupling; four more fit into the base of the speaker itself, locating into dimpled metal discs set into the stand's top surface.

The speaker itself incorporates all the usual Utopia Ligne features, including the very highest quality examples of the company's unique and highly regarded Focal drivers. The 25mm inverted (concave) dome tweeters have long been a particular trademark, and those fitted to the Utopias have oxide-coated titanium diaphragms with a small diameter voice coil. This is more like a baby cone driver than the usual periphery-driven convex domes, offering advantages in stiffness and edge damping, it also has a low inherent inductance. The tweeter motor metalwork is made from a special high purity (low carbon) Telar 57 steel which permits unusually high magnetic flux without saturation.

The 160mm bass/mid driver has a 115mm cone made from a composite material quite different from those used by other brands. Known as 'W-sandwich', a structural foam is held between sheets of woven and resin-impregnated glass fibre. Sandwich construction makes intuitive sense when trying to optimise the conflicting requirements for high stiffness, good internal damping and low mass. It's a technique reminiscent of the successful Leak Sandwich models from the 60s, but the 21st century offers a far wider choice of foams and skins than was available back then.

The enclosure follows the Utopia 'split baffle' ▷



The Micro may not be as compact or cute as its name suggests, but the piano black finish on both cabinets and stands is straight from the top drawer

JMLABS MICRO UTOPIA LOUDSPEAKERS HIGH PERFORMANCE



HIGH PERFORMANCE JMLABS MICRO UTOPIA LOUDSPEAKERS



Above: Bi-wiring and bi-amping are eschewed in favour of a single set of high-grade terminals and a state-of-the-art crossover.



◁ tradition, separating the two drivers, and tilting the mid/bass unit to provide a measure of time alignment with the tweeter. Another Utopia tradition is lining the enclosure with lead, which probably explains the 20kg weight.

The reflex-loading port is not immediately visible, but is actually incorporated into the slots above and below the tweeter sub-baffle. There's just a single pair of very classy WBT multi-way terminals, as JMLab (like some other respected brands) is unconvinced of the merits of bi-wiring or bi-amping. Only the very best crossover components and wiring are used.

One would expect a good measured performance from such a well-appointed design, and the Micro Utopia doesn't disappoint. However, the port here is tuned to a highish 70Hz, so ultimate bass extension is inevitably limited, with no real in-room output below 50Hz.

The averaged in-room balance is smooth and holds within impressively close limits right across the frequency bands. This is an essentially neutral speaker, with just slight excess warmth in the upper bass, mild presence restraint (1.5-3kHz), and a slightly too strong treble (in the JMLab tradition). Sensitivity is around 89-90dB/W, though the impedance stays around 3 Ohms through much of the midband.

Since the carrier managed to misdirect one of the stands (twice!), I had to use my regular 600mm Kudos S100s for the first 72 hours. Once the Micro's 550mm stands had arrived, comparing room measurements showed that in this instance the lower stand gave a significantly smoother bass alignment.

SOUND QUALITY

The first impression of a loudspeaker is always significant, and the first reaction here was of the sheer brilliance of the sound the Micro creates. This wasn't just a warm-up thing, as they'd been playing for some hours when my partner came home and made exactly the same observation. And it didn't take long for both of us to adjust, because the top end is superbly well integrated, with little timesmear and no sibilant 'splash'.

The MU is a bright speaker, for sure, and for that reason it might not meet with universal approval. But the quality of this treble is quite exceptional, often resolving finer details than I even knew existed on long familiar recordings. Tom Waits' *Bone Machine* is pretty tough going, especially the closing bars of *Murder in the Red Barn*, which for all its recording weirdness simply made more sense through these speakers. Then there was a TV documentary, with voice-to-camera in the rain – and I couldn't help noticing how eerily realistic the rain sounded.

One nice consequence of this sparkling detail is that the speaker shows marvellous clarity at very low volume levels. The corollary, however, is that it can get a tad 'edgy' with the wrong material when you turn it up loud. And because there's plenty of treble and no deep bass, there is a slight thinness and lack of body, notably with full-scale orchestral material. Yet if the occasional soprano could sound a shade shrill, the analysis and insight it brought to choral works was quite wonderful.

That superb top end is matched by an almost uncanny lack of 'boxiness' through the lower registers. Dynamic range is consistently wide, and dynamics themselves are lively and expressive, yet without exaggeration or fierceness. Perhaps predictably, stereo imaging is magnificently precise and tightly focused. And if the bass lacks the bottom octave and a bit of extension, it supplies the rest with considerable clarity and dynamic literacy, and a real sense of purpose.


CONCLUSIONS

Beautifully clean, natural and neutral, delivering bags of detail and musical insight, this is an excellent loudspeaker, its superior enclosure and drive unit engineering undoubtedly delivering class-leading performance amongst 6.5-inch two-ways.

The downside is that it is unquestionably expensive, and not the prettiest proportioned around, to these eyes at least. In the final analysis, the lack of deep bass remains a limitation that may tend to favour smaller rooms.

£2,749, Focal JMLab UK ☎ 0121 616 5126

"THE TREBLE IS QUITE EXCEPTIONAL, OFTEN RESOLVING FINER DETAILS THAN I EVEN KNEW EXISTED ON FAMILIAR RECORDINGS"



"ITS ABILITY TO DIP INTO THE MUSIC AND PULL OUT OODLES OF RESOLUTION MAKES FOR AN EXTREMELY LISTENABLE EXPERIENCE."

W

e may be looking towards a future of high-resolution multi-channel music, but like John Major, the majority of us it would appear are happy to 'wait and see'. Decent software is slowly beginning to trickle through now, but most of us have hundreds of CDs that we simply want to get the best out

of. Fortunately, we can thank companies like Myryad who share our passion for music and keep pushing the boundaries of two-channel CD reproduction.

The company although only in its seventh year, is backed up by a team of old-school hi-fi professionals who have gained valuable experience from companies such as A&R Cambridge, NAD and Mordaunt-Short. In 1995 when Myryad started life, the first product, the MI20 integrated amplifier, was quickly complemented the following year by its first CD player. Now the company has two ranges of traditional hi-fi, the

REVIEW **DAN GEORGE**

entry-level T-series, and the more upmarket M-series, which comprises eleven components. A third line, the Cameo 'lifestyle' system, adds a further dimension by offering a classy option to would-be system buyers, looking for better sonics than are usually on offer from 'style' systems. Myryad's engineering philosophy is to produce components that work consistently well in all manner of different hi-fi systems, and they strive to achieve this by developing products that are competent from a technical and engineering point of view.

Of the two CD players in the M-Series range, the MCD200 and MCD600, the latter holds top-of-the-range status. Evolving from the popular MCD500, the new product is one of the first CD players around to use the new Crystal CS4396 'Super DAC'. This multi-bit DAC can accept data with up to 24-bits at sample rates up to 192kHz (not coincidentally DVD-A's maximum resolution), and Myryad found that in operation, it offered both a superior measured and sonic performance.

Internally as with its predecessor, a Sony mechanism is used, albeit this time a more recent model with advanced digital servos and CD Text ability. Elsewhere some re-working of the play-

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MIGHTY APHRODITE

TAG MCLAREN CHALLENGES THE NOTION THAT SERIOUS HI-FI NEEDS TO BE HARD EDGED AND SQUARE WITH ITS MOST ELEGANT SYSTEM TO DATE.

m

aybe you picked up this copy of *HFC* because you were tempted by the promise of stylish, space-saving systems inside. Maybe you're looking for a cost-effective music machine for another room in the house – the dining room

REVIEW **TIM BOWERN**

say, or your home office. Or maybe, just maybe, you're wondering what sort of stunning one-box stereo creation you could afford if money was really no object. If you won the lottery or came in for an unexpected windfall.

Something like this. If you were David Coulthard, this would be your bedroom system in that luxurious Monaco apartment. After all, it's called Aphrodite and it oozes style from every inch of its chic, curvacious body. Oh, and it's made by the same people who make his Formula 1 racing car.

MAKING A STATEMENT

With a fanfare of great intentions, TAG McLaren Audio first gate-crashed the hi-fi scene four years ago. Its premise was simple: engage engineering and electronics expertise from its parent's automotive business and create a unique audio experience. Pride of ownership derived from exquisite attention to detail, hi-fi as a lifestyle statement, like TAG Heure watches or the McLaren F1, the fastest road car in history.

Early marketed products failed to live up to the hype – competent hi-fi components, comparatively dull both physically and sonically. But those who visited the hi-fi shows frequented by TAG McLaren in the early days knew there was more to come. Stunning prototypes littered the displays. And nestling among them was the Aphrodite.

As a statement of intent it's as bold and audacious as the company's early declarations. Its aluminium form is graceful yet muscular, strongly reminiscent of McLaren's automotive creations. From front to back it slopes then swoops like the nose cone of an F1 car, its metallic finish gleaming as if it were the chassis of some exotic roadster. As for build quality and finish? Just touch and be amazed.

Despite its complexity – CD player, FM

RDS/MW/LW tuner and 50 Watt amp in a single three grand box – the Aphrodite maintains a clean visage. But a fine array of connection options exists round the back: a line-level input labeled 'TV', a 'tape loop' to hook through a recording device, an optical digital output, a headphone socket, a preamp output for adding an off-board power amp and a set of impressively solid binding posts for whichever speaker cables you care to choose. A 'TAGtronic Communication Bus' is also available for data transfer – one potential use is to obtain



The Aphrodite's build quality is right up there with the best money can buy.



CD FIGHTS BACK

DVD-AUDIO AND SACD MAY HERALD THE FUTURE OF HIGH-END AUDIO, BUT MYRYAD ISN'T TURNING ITS BACK ON THE HUMBLE CD JUST YET.

ers' internals has introduced higher grade components from the likes of Burr-Brown, plus fourteen separately regulated power supplies.

This is certainly one of the prettier CD players out there, a thick brushed aluminium fascia gives the unit a cool, contemporary look, and the red standby LED is transformed upon powering up to a tasteful blue to match the display. The remote control was likeable and worked well, with very positive buttons that made for a quicker mode of track selection than the fascia controls, which were sometimes slow to react. The only minor gripe with our unit was the poorly aligned CD drawer that could have fitted the player better considering the level of engineering, and price tag.

To the rear can be found a coaxial digital output, plus the 'MyLink' communications in/output, which allows other Myryad components to 'talk' to the CD player. This allows you to play a disc from standby mode simply by opening and closing the CD drawer in an all Myryad system.

SOUND QUALITY

After much comparison of this player against my resident Naim CD3.5 source, and living with the Myryad over the last month or so, the most obvious quality evident is the abundance of detail. Its ability to dip into the music and pull out oodles of resolution is endearing, and makes for an extremely listenable experience. The real beauty of this attribute is the way that it is

delivered, with a tonal balance that is just right. Never does the player sacrifice balance in order to resolve the detail, and it performs with an enviable neutrality that seems to increase its fidelity when reproducing acoustic music. Classical pieces and acoustic works were brought to life particularly well by this player, and given the MCD600's preference for the warm side of the sonic spectrum, the balance was never clinical despite the amount of information retrieved.

The Myryad is noticeably strong in the reproduction of vocals. It gives an extra depth to voices as well as instruments, which creates a convincing soundstage with realistic presence.

You could argue that the Myryad just loses the rhythmic edge to my reference Naim spinner, but its high resolution gives the impression that you couldn't possibly be missing any of the detail.

CONCLUSION

I can see why it's called a 'super DAC' now. There's a lot more technical trickery to the Crystal chipset than we've gone into here, certainly Myryad thought it offered a superior performance and the results, quite frankly, are very impressive. For those of you concerned about buying a CD player because of the impending DVD-A/SACD future, let me allay your fears, as machines like this one will give you many years of listening pleasure.

£1,299.95, Myryad ☎ 01494 551551



Superb build quality plus some serious under-the-lid engineering make the MCD600 a class act.



FORUM LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS A TDK GOODIE BAG



Send us your views of the magazine and the world of hi-fi:

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"I FIND IT UNLIKELY THAT A SHORT RUN OF MAINS CABLE WOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE MUCH PROTECTION."

IAN JOHNSON – FAITHLESS

"WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW IS WHETHER CD RECORDING IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO CASSETTE FOR FM BROADCASTS"

JOHN ORMEROD – MASTERING ANALOGUE

"I AM INTRIGUED AS TO WHETHER WRITING AUDIO CDS AT 16-BIT 48KHZ-SAMPLE RATES WILL WORK THROUGH THE CD PLAYER"

COLIN GREENGRASS – EXHUME TO CONSUME

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Even rural locations can suffer from 'noisy' mains – a common cause of hi-fi distortion.

BOARD DECISIONS

The recent article by Jimmy Hughes on the quality of mains cables and mains distribution boards (*HFC* September) proved to be food for thought. I live in a semi-rural location with very little heavy industry nearby, and thought that the mains quality in the area was relatively free of the nasties of RF. I found a board in Argos (£17), with both surge and RF suppression and decided to purchase one. On arriving home I gave my system a quick spin and then quickly disconnected and reconnected everything through the new board and played the same piece of music again. I could not believe the improvements in sound quality that I was now hearing. My advice is to go out and buy one, your system will more than reward you for it, and your ears will certainly appreciate the many sonic improvements brought about by such minuscule financial outlay.

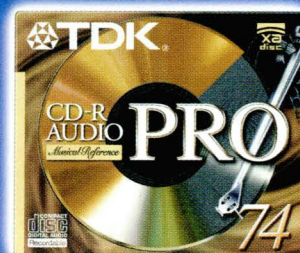
Chris Firth, via e-mail

FAITHLESS

I work at the sharp end of the audio business repairing all manner of equipment, and I read your mains cable group test with some incredulity. Under adverse conditions, I realise that mains noise can harm the performance of electronic equipment. I can understand the Maplin product giving some benefit, but cable on its own I have to question.

My first remark is that I find it unlikely that a short run of mains cable, regardless of its material, would be able to provide much protection from all the mains nasties out there. Most of the problems come from switch mode supplies and fluorescent lights, especially the new low power lamps. I have spent many hours trying to get my local electrical supplier to take action with regard to flicker and other disturbances. They just make excuses, not wanting to admit that their cables and substation are at the end of their working life. I wonder

Audio CD-R Range



firmware updates via the Internet.

Under that sparkly bonnet lie some impressive audio components. The CD section employs a 24-bit/96kHz-capable DAC and a top-loading mechanism, suspended to escape vibration, while the amp employs 'straight line' technology for the shortest, purest signal path. For the hi-fi buff, such audio-centric attention to detail is a pre-requisite, but in the aesthetics-led system market it's exceptional. But then again, so is the price.

For those tempted by Aphrodite, there are two additional decisions to be made. First the choice of speakers, the obvious candidate being TAG McLaren's own aluminium-clad Calliope stand-mounter at £1,495 a pair. Its curved sides and slanted surfaces are reminiscent of a racing helmet (is there a theme emerging here?), yet serve the practical purpose of eliminating parallel sides and thus reduce the effect of sonically-damaging standing waves inside the box. Drivers consist of a 150mm mid/bass unit with a woven glass fibre cone and a silk dome tweeter, and for an additional £379 you can buy a pair of matching stands.

The final choice is one of speaker cable. We tried various and with variable results, from low-cost QED copper wires to some exotic Townshend stuff, but as a general rule don't skimp, go for neutrality and avoid solid silver – this system doesn't like it!

SOUND QUALITY

There are two ways of assessing the Aphrodite/Calliope system's performance. One is to forget its physical form and consider it as a £4,500 system like any other, no matter how ugly or bulky. In this context it's a mixed bag – clear and crisp but also rather cold and unemotional, particularly with discs that are less than

pristine in sound quality. It's a lean sort of sound, lacking some extension at the frequency extremes, most obviously in the bass region, and also some dynamic expression.

It's not really a rocker, or a progressive houser come to that, but it does have a knack of avoiding 'boxiness' and its clarity comes to the fore with a well-produced slice of classical or acoustic music. Not surprisingly, a good deal of its tonal qualities boil down to the speakers; considerably warmer and richer results may be gained by swapping in another set.

But assessing the Aphrodite without considering its aesthetic is like proffering an opinion on an author without reading his book. This is a beautifully engineered one-box 'style' system with genuine hi-fi sound, and that fact alone blows most of the 'luxury' all-in-one competition out of site. In fact, it's probably the best one-box stereo system in the world – another notch on TAG McLaren's increasingly busy bedpost of achievement.

Aphrodite £2,995, *Calliope* £1,495,
TAG McLaren Audio ☎ 0800 783 8007

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SYSTEM

BUDGET WELLY

I'm about to replace my Sony micro system with my first separates system, for use in a small room – bookshelf speakers only I'm afraid. Thing is, I listen almost exclusively to progressive and industrial metal and I'm not sure which components would suit this music best. I need a system that delivers confident rhythm and speed, but I'm worried that most budget kit offering this kind of articulation may be a bit lean in the bass. Which CD player, amp and speakers would you recommend to get energy and impact from my music? How about a Denon DCD-835 CD player with a Rotel RA-971 MkII amp and Monitor Audio Bronze 2 speakers (pictured)?
Matt Dorrell, via e-mail

Don't worry too much about bass extension – it's more important you capture the fundamental energy of your music, and the system you suggest would do that just fine. And while you won't get any truly deep bass, there'll be



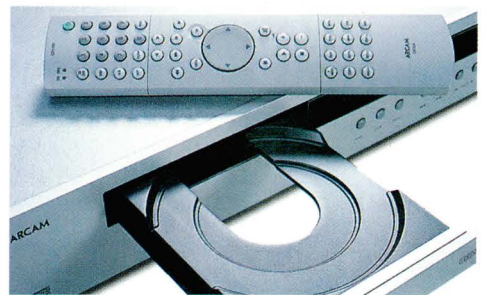
plenty of solid punch to ensure those kick drums thud home.

LOUDSPEAKERS

NAD MEETS NUNEUTRONS

I need a new pair of loudspeakers to go with my NAD C370 amp, Arcam Alpha 7SE CD player and Pioneer PDR-609 CD recorder. I'm into classical, opera and rock 'n' roll, and I'm considering buying a pair of AVI NuNeutrons. Would they suit? My room is 18x12ft.
William Brewster, Staffordshire

The NuNeutron III (pictured) is a lovely little speaker with a beautifully voiced midband that should suit your music tastes well, though other speakers in the £500 ballpark offer greater extension in the bass. It's a speaker that works best in small rooms – yours may just be a touch on the large side, in which case you could plump for the larger Biggatron Red Spot or the weightier, punchier Dynaudio Audience 42 or 52.



AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER

ARCAM ACCOMPLICE

I recently bought an Arcam A85 amp, based on its features and strong musicality when auditioned with Arcam's CD92 CD player (pictured). However, I'm wondering whether one or two other CD players would make an even better combination with the amp. The choice is limited on this side of the globe, but I can get hold of the Musical Fidelity A3 or NAD Silverline S500. Which would be better?
Greg Friede, Australia

We rate all three players highly. Both the Musical Fidelity and NAD players have acquitted themselves well in group tests, and you should audition both with your Arcam amp. If you like it smooth and deep, the NAD may serve you well, or plump for the A3 if you prefer a sharper etched sound. That said, you've obviously found the Arcam A85/CD92 combo to be an effective partnership, so why steer from that course? After all, the CD92 makes a great combination both visually and sonically with the A85.



This Maplin mains filter really can clean up the sound of your kit

what Jimmy Hughes' supply is like?
Ian Johnson, via e-mail

The Editor replies... There was a time when many doubted the potential of speaker and interconnect cable to make a difference. It's also worth remembering that specialist mains cables often incorporate some form of RF suppression. Anyone who has had difficulty getting the Maplin ASC 431 board may have more luck with its code: BJ84F.

MASTERING ANALOGUE

In the context of hi-fi, rather than recorded music in general, I expected the CD recorders review in the September edition to cover how well each machine records from analogue sources. Clearly, comparison of CD copies is probably the best way to tell how well the basic mechanics of recordings are handled, however, this in itself is of very limited interest to a hi-fi audience. What we want to know primarily at this stage of technology change, is whether CD recording is a viable alternative to cassette recorders for those things we record today, such as FM broadcasts.

It's a real shame that you did not include their performance on recording FM broadcasts. And this raises another feature omitted in the reviews – is it possible to set the machine to go into record mode when powered on? I use this a lot on my cassette recorder to tape Radio 3's jazz programs, which are never at a time when I (or anyone?) can listen. I also imagine that some people will want to know if CD offers a reasonable means to archive LPs?
John Ormerod, via e-mail

The Editor replies...The only CD recorder I know of that can be used for 'time-shifting', or recording by clockwork, is the TEAC RW-800, which has a 24-hour clock for this purpose. As for quality of analogue to digital conversion with these machines I accept that for some readers this would be an interesting area to investigate and am planning to compare the best machines from the group in this respect.

EXHUME TO CONSUME

I have just purchased a CD writer for my PC and am currently 'remastering' to PC some old analogue cassettes of my band. I also plan to work on the DAT recordings soon. I am intrigued, however, as to whether writing audio CDs at 16-bit/48kHz-sample rates will work through the CD player and DAC.
Colin Greengrass, via e-mail

The Technical Editor replies... As CD data is sampled at 44.1kHz, you will need the services of a sample-rate converter (SRC) to downsample from 48kHz (DAT) to 44.1kHz (CD) before copying to disc. Domestic CD burners include automatic SRC when copying from 32kHz and 48kHz digital sources, but your PC burner software may, or may not, include this facility. Add-on packages like Cool Edit 2000 provide SRC for dubbing between DAT and CDR, for example.



CD-recording: great for dubbing discs but what is it like with analogue sources?

Letters Page Sponsored by



at the heart of it

SYSTEM

BEST BUY FAVOURITES

I'm putting together a stereo system and based on your recommendations I've narrowed it down to a Marantz CD6000 OSE CD player, Kenwood KA-3030R amp (pictured) and Tannoy mX2 speakers. Would this combination work? I listen to all kinds of music from classical to surfer punk, but I guess I'm most interested in classical, opera and jazz.

David Stokes, e-mail

It's always worth taking a selection of recommended products from our Directory and auditioning a few combinations to get the one that's right for you, but we see no reason why the above system choice wouldn't work very well indeed. The level of detail will be impressive for a budget-priced system, with good clarity in the midband to capture instrumental and vocal character. Above all, it should prove a pretty good all-rounder, with plenty of energy for those surfer punk sessions!



FORMATS

PSEUDO SURROUND

What's the difference between Dolby Pro-Logic II and dts Neo 6, as featured on certain Denon products? Which format can we rely on for the future?

Nasser, via e-mail



Good question. Essentially, Pro-Logic II and dts Neo 6 perform the same job – they are both matrix surround sound formats, as opposed to discrete digital formats like Dolby Digital and straight dts. That means they're both intended for turning any stereo source into surround sound, whether it be music CDs, Dolby Surround (2.0) movies or stereo TV broadcasts.

Which is best? Well, we've yet to do a head to head, but both have special modes specifically 'tuned' for music. DPLII is limited to pseudo-5.1 surround, dts Neo 6 will deliver pseudo-6.1 for those with 6.1-channel systems.

We wouldn't recommend either for serious music listening, but both are effective at producing a room-filling soundfield that works surprisingly well for background purposes. As to which you can rely on, you don't need to worry – because neither is reliant on specifically encoded software, a shortage of things to listen to won't be an issue.

LOUDSPEAKERS

NEW ROOM, NEW SOUND

My system consists of an Arcam Alpha 9 CD player and Alpha 10 amp with Monitor Audio Silver 7 speakers. I've moved to a new house with a much larger sitting room (9x5m). My speakers no longer sound as good as they did in a smaller room, seeming rather too soft and laid-back. Can you recommend some replacements?

John Giblett, Dubai

There are a number of speakers around the £1,000 mark, or a little over, that spring to mind – namely the Castle Harlech S2, JMLab Cobalt 826 and PMC FB1. Though each offers a rather different take on the art of loudspeaker design, all convey music with energy and dynamics intact. Your Arcam amp shouldn't encounter difficulties with any of them, so it's down to personal taste. Good luck with the auditioning!



LOUDSPEAKERS

PRIMARE PARTNER

I'm looking for a stand-mount speaker to go with my Primare A30.1 amp and Sony SCD-555ES. I listen to new wave, rock, pop and acoustic music in a room that's 4x5m. How about Celestion's A1 or PMC's TB2?

Eddy, Taiwan

Either of the speakers you mention should match up fine and make worthy candidates for audition. The Celestion has a full-scale, weighty delivery, while the TB2 is a touch lighter on its feet, but both offer an inherently musical performance. You should also consider the Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII, a superbly balanced stand-mount that should suit your Primare amp well.

AMPLIFIER

PUCCINI PLUS

I'm thinking of buying the Audio Analogue Puccini amplifier, but I've heard there's also a more expensive remote control version with a slightly higher power output. Does it actually sound any better than the standard version? Are there any newer competitors I should consider?

Adil Gotla, via e-mail

The remote version of the Puccini does sound a little more robust and powerful, but is it worth the £200 premium over the standard model? That's debatable, and definitely something you should decide with an audition. As for alternatives, you'd do well to check out NAD's C370 and Primare's A10.

TURNTABLE

MICRO SEEKS VINYL

I want to add a turntable to my Denon UD-M30 micro system. Any suggestions?

Jon Grover, via e-mail

There aren't any record players specifically designed for micro systems, but there are budget decks available from Dual and Pro-ject that will work fine if you get a phono stage to boost and equalise the signal. If you're looking for something a bit more impressive consider the NAD 533 (£220 inc cartridge, below) or Rega P2 (£198 plus cartridge).



Live Alchemy



"WHAT I HEARD LIFTED ME OFF MY SEAT. IT WAS AS THOUGH I'D EXPERIENCED THE ORIGINAL CONCERT."

WHY IS IT THAT OUR RESPONSE TO A RECORDING CAN VARY DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH WE HEAR IT? JIMMY TACKLES THE ULTIMATE HI-FI MYSTERY.

A live musical performance is a once-only chance event. Recording turns it into something fixed and permanent. Like recording a football match, the score remains the same however many times you watch it. But is the analogy fair? The event may be frozen, but is the performance likewise set in stone?

I'd say not. Emotional involvement is subjective, dependant on subtle intangible things. A musical performance has to be recreated, not merely reproduced. If you've ever heard a recording of a live concert you attended, chances are the experience of actually being there was not replicated.

Of course not. There's the excitement of being part of an audience and hearing the music in real time as the players perform live on stage. Listening at home is never going to have the same immediacy. Yet, if your hi-fi system does its job well, it can get you close to the live experience. Not by faithfully replicating the sound made at the time, but by recreating the spirit of the performance.

Some 15 years ago I caught a radio programme about conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. Excerpts were played from his recordings – in particular the incandescent finale of Sibelius' second symphony with the BBC symphony orchestra – taped live at London's Royal Festival Hall in 1954. What I heard lifted me off my seat. It was as though I'd experienced the original concert.

Beecham was inspirational that night.

Somehow, he transformed a respectable assembly of musical civil servants into a bunch of marauding bandits who took no hostages. How, only God knows, probably a mixture of fear and loathing – at times you can hear him bellowing at the orchestra, driving them on to greater heights. The LP

was long out of print at the time, and not yet issued on CD.

So began the hunt for a clean secondhand copy! I eventually found one, paying arm and a leg prices for the privilege.

Nevertheless, I was grateful, telling myself

it was worth the expense. Sadly, the BBC's live recording proved execrable – harsh, hissy, with overloaded climaxes. It's since been issued on CD, and the sound is still terrible.

It remains a great performance though. Hearing this music live in such a blazing interpretation must've been a life-changing experience. You can tell the audience were blown out of their seats by the frenzied roar that goes up at the end. Even hearing the recording on a portable radio some thirty years on was cataclysmic – I was 'there' in the hall in spirit.

Yet, it's curious, having subsequently had the chance to listen again on LP and CD, I have to admit the magic sometimes fails to work. On some systems, the inexorable grandeur and cumulative power that originally impressed so much, seems diluted.

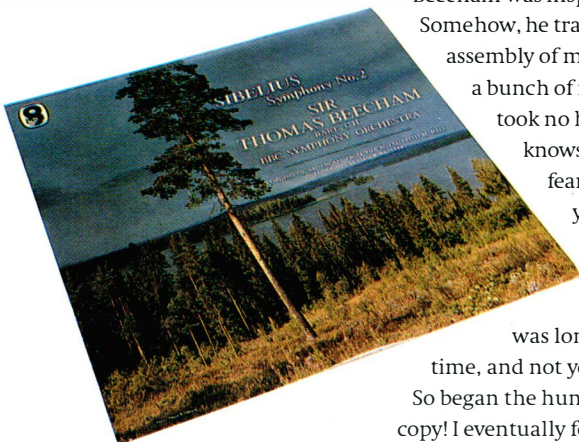
Every detail is in place, but the temperature fails to rise. LP grooves (or CD pits) can convey music and the general outline of an interpretation – tempi, balance, dynamics – but a convincing emotional recreation of the actual performance is not so easily achieved. Only electro-mechanical alchemy can reconstitute its heart and soul.

The audience probably staggered shell-shocked out of Beecham's 1954 Festival Hall Sibelius concert – a musical experience to tell your grandchildren about. But Grandson (bless him) could challenge that, saying "Sorry, I've got the CD. And the performance is nowhere near as good as your rose-tinted recollections".

Proof? Don't kid yourself. Owning the recording does not give you the performance – only base metal waiting to be turned into gold. No hi-fi system will fully recreate what actually happened, but some get closer to communicating the magic than others. When that happens, the narrative behind the notes makes sense and you're transported to a different time and place.

It's not a hi-fi thing. Sadly, the cost or ultimate quality of your equipment may have little or no influence. It depends more on exceptional compatibility between individual components and having a sympathetic listening room. Luck plays a part, too. It's elusive, enigmatic, and so worth striving for.

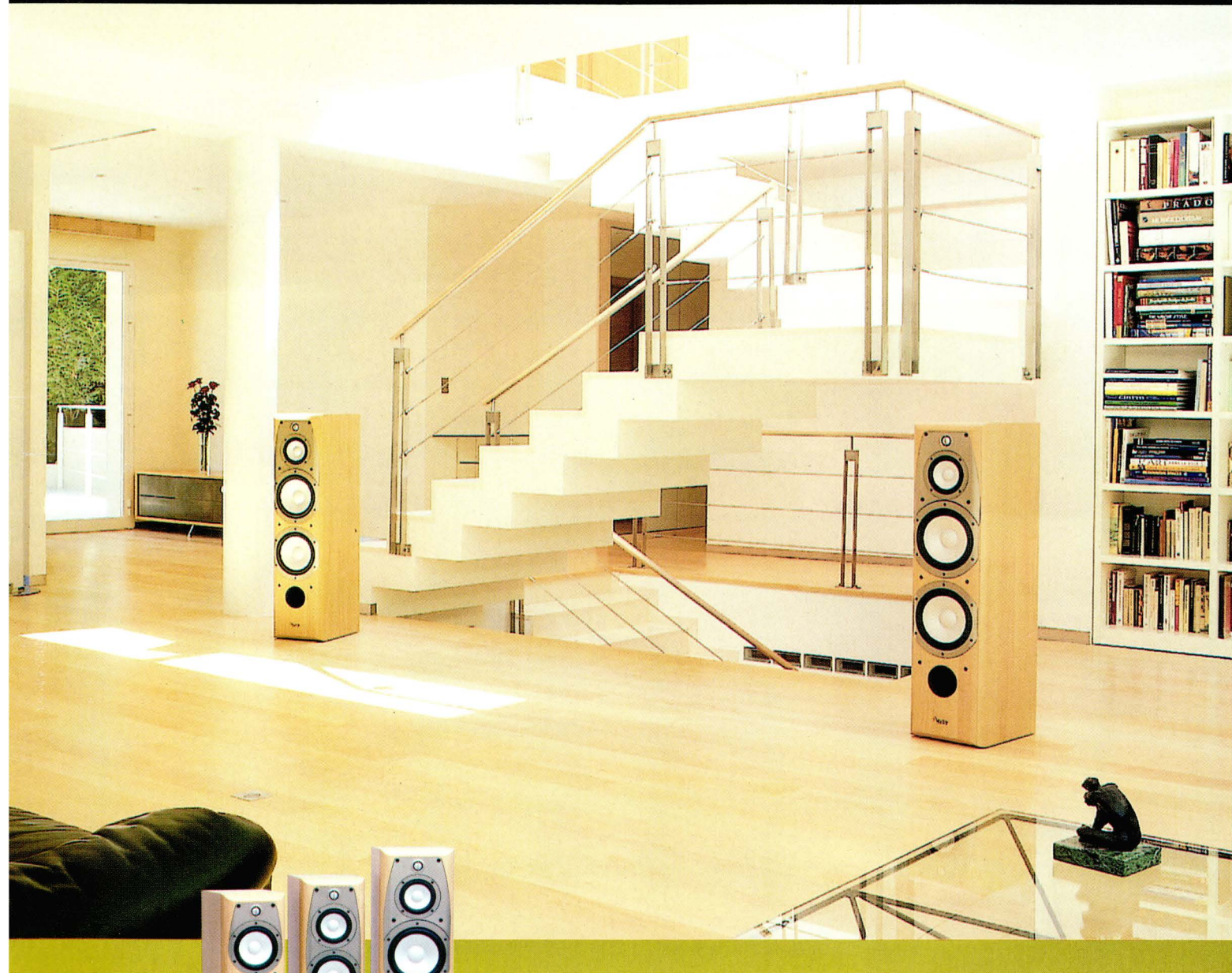
Jimmy Hughes repairs professional cameras by day and plays far too many CDs by night, and they're all spotless.



A superb concert performance can lose its magic in recorded form.

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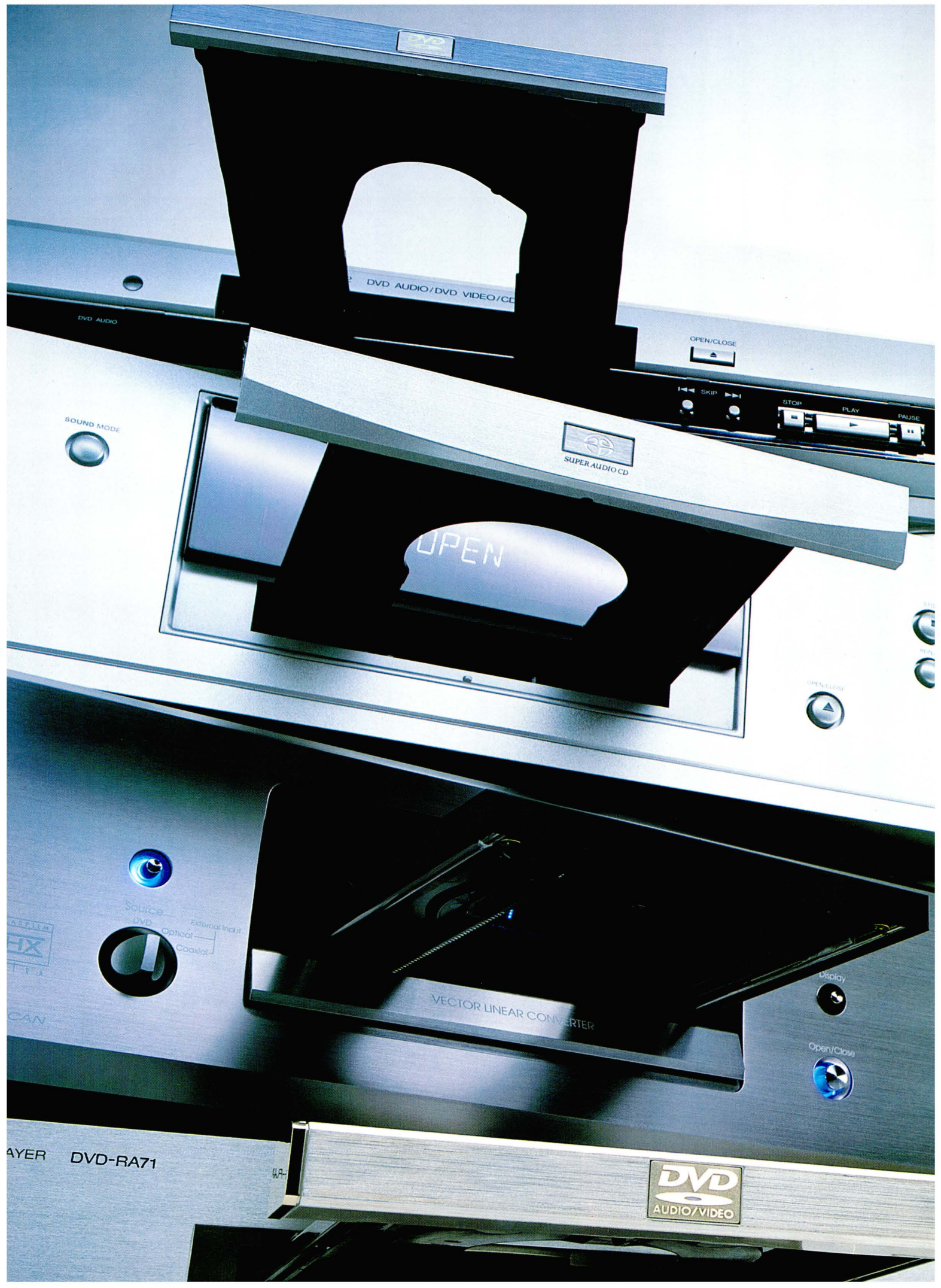
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* C.M.M.D. - Ceramic Metal Matrix Diaphragm



DVD

DVD AUDIO/DVD VIDEO/CD

DVD AUDIO

OPEN/CLOSE

SKIP

STOP

PLAY

PAUSE

SOUND MODE

SUPER AUDIO CD

OPEN

OPEN/CLOSE

Source
DVD
Optical
External Input
Coaxial

VECTOR LINEAR CONVERTER

Display

Open/Close

PIONEER DVD-RA71

DVD
AUDIO/VIDEO

MULTICHANNEL SACD & DVD-A PLAYERS

ALVIN GOLD LINES UP A SELECTION OF SACD AND DVD-AUDIO DECKS AND LETS THE BATTLE FOR THE HIGH-RESOLUTION HIGH GROUND COMMENCE

Once upon a time, a CD player was a CD player was a CD player. Now we have players for DVD movies, players that make high-res music from DVD-Audio or SACD, and a variety of subsidiary formats such as Video CD, CD-R and CD-RW. And recordable DVD raises compatibility issues that may already have a bearing on any choice you might make.

This test is concerned with players that cope with the highest quality music carriers available, namely DVD-Audio and SACD. At present there is no such thing as a player for multichannel versions of both formats. DVD-Audio machines that will play SACDs in stereo are emerging, but no one has announced a multichannel player for both formats. Most but not quite all are also capable of replaying DVD-Video movies. This is no surprise as DVD-Audio is closely based on DVD-Video technology, while SACD explores a different digital storage route. The fact that most SACD players are also DVD-Video players is a tribute to the key importance of DVD-V to today's buyers. Yet one of our SACD players is a stripped down audio player, with no DVD-Video pretensions.

The one thing all these players, indeed all DVD and all SACD players, have in common is the ability to play CD. No matter what happens to the new high resolution media, compact disc will continue to be the common digital denominator on which the audio industry is based, perhaps for many years to come. It has long been obvious that multi-format players too often shortchange compact disc, indeed there are sound technical reasons for this, and a key priority in the tests that follow was to determine how good they are with regular CDs. If in the process, we could come to any kind of conclusions on the hottest potato around, the battle between DVD-Audio and SACD, then so much the better...

ON TEST

INTEGRA RESEARCH RDV-1	£2700
JVC XV-SA72SL	£400.00
ONKYO DV-S939	£1999.99
PANASONIC DVD-RA71	£499.99
PHILIPS SACD-1000	£1299.99
PIONEER DV-646A	£540
SONY DVP-NS700V	£380
SONY SCD-XB770	£400

EQUIPMENT USED

TAG McLaren Audio
AV32R surround processor
TAG McLaren Audio 100x5R power amps
Musical Fidelity A3/A300 pre/power amp
JMLab Mezzo Utopia & Sonus Faber Home system speakers

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

ON DVD-AUDIO

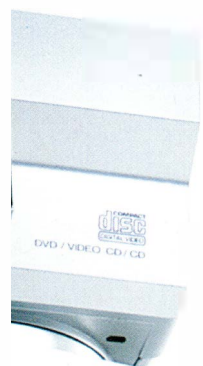
Fleetwood Mac - *Rumours*
Bach/Stuttgarter Kammerorchester - *Six Brandenburg Concertos*
Chie Ayado - *Life*
Beethoven/Barenboim - *Symphony No 7*

ON SACD

Red Rose Music sampler/Bill Sims - *Big Leg Woman*
Philips sampler/Ivan Fisher/Dvorak - *Slavonic Dance*
Doug MacLeod - *Unmarked Road*
Gaudeamus/Halley - *Sacred Feast*

THE LISTENING PANEL

Rowena Pratt (Rotel)
Mike Martindale (Arcam)
Roger Batchelor (Denon)
Alvin Gold (HFC)



SAMPLING FREQUENCY 192kHz
QUANTIZATION 24bit



INTEGRA RESEARCH RDV-1 DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£2,700.00	CONTACT 01788 556777	www.integraresearch.com	GUARANTEE 3 years
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Integra Research is a new prestige spin-off of the Onkyo brand, which produces a select range of mostly home cinema oriented components aimed at the high end buyer. This battleship player is based on the Onkyo DV-S939 (reviewed on p40), and has the same headline features, namely DVD-A, DVD-V and CD/CD-R/CD-RW compatibility, with jitter-busting digital technology from Apogee Electronics, progressive video (NTSC only – you'll have to recode the player for Region 1 discs to use the facility) and THX Ultra.

There are some curious omis-

sions. The two digital inputs are limited to 48kHz, and there is no 96kHz digital output option. Dolby Digital decoding is available on board, but dts can only be decoded externally, and Dolby Pro-Logic II has not been included at all. RS-232 and IEEE1394 ports are available, along with a proprietary multichannel analogue output.

The player is smooth and polished in operation, but it can take an age before DVD-Audio is fed to the speakers because the control system is optimised for use with a TV display, though the video output can and should be switched off for audio purposes.

SOUND QUALITY

A mixed bag on audition, the panel noticed a general lack of resolution with this player, and a particular problem with a loss of background detail on the Fleetwood Mac track. But they liked its presentation, which was described as "big, bold, fat and deep", while the Chie Ayado recording, which could sound relentless through some players, was reproduced with a greater sense of emotional depth, and more vocal colour than usual. "This player restores my faith in DVD-Audio" was one typical comment, and another who had been critical of the Bach recording in other presentations, praised it here for sounding "enthusiastic and interesting".

The separate hands-on testing tended to confirm that the Integra Research player has a smoother, fuller and somewhat more sophisticated sound than most, but where multichannel recordings sprang

This Integra Research deck is a customised THX-Ultra version of Onkyo's DV-S939.

convincingly to life, a lack of resolution was evident with the 24/192 stereo material on a number of tracks found on test discs. As a CD player the Onkyo doesn't pass muster. It retains the plush sophistication it showed with DVD-Audio, but there was little life and vitality in what I heard. It's a good DVD-Video player, though, with the best picture tweaking facilities in the group, and picture quality was maximised in RGB as expected.

CONCLUSION

Although promising in some ways, there are too many examples of a lack of joined-up thinking here, and too many obvious performance deficiencies to merit endorsement of what is first and foremost a video product – and a US-centric one at that.

"THE INTEGRA PLAYER HAS A SMOOTHER, FULLER AND MORE SOPHISTICATED SOUND THAN MOST."



THE LAB REPORT

The full story of the success, or otherwise, of the development of this esoteric DVD-A player is covered on p92. On the face of it, the RDV-1 is a true flagship product with an innovative D/A conversion system (Vector Linear Conversion) and pro-grade crystal reference clock supplied by Apogee. In practice, the RDV-1 is no more intuitive to operate than the DV-S939 upon which it is based. Technically, its response has a more pronounced treble roll-off (-1.2dB at 20kHz) while, ironically, the clock accuracy

is slightly worse (-32ppm instead of -26ppm). Jitter is higher at 760psec and there's far more noise-like jitter to cloud the picture. Of course, 'clouding' might be interpreted as 'smoothness' while the loss of S/N (signal to noise ratio) to 97dB will certainly influence its low-level resolution. Distortion, too, is significantly higher above a few kHz, reaching some 6% at 20kHz and >10% with high-sample-rate DVD-A material. So, this player may look the part, but looks can be deceptive.



JVC XV-SA72SL DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£400.00** **CONTACT** 020 8450 3282 www.jvc.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

These things change almost by the week, but as I write, this must be the least expensive DVD-Audio player on the market – and perhaps the slimmest, standing just 73mm tall on its outsize feet. The JVC's appearance also benefits from its wide, semi-silvered panel through which the dot matrix display shows when activated. Sexy.

This visually tasty audio-visual spinner also boasts this year's must-have feature, a dual wavelength laser, enabling it to read CD-R and CD-RW discs. MP3 format discs can also be played. A 54MHz video DAC provides high speed video processing, with many picture parameters under the user's control. Dolby Digital and dts can be decoded on board, and the remote control has a code library so that your TV can be zapped from the same handset.

SOUND QUALITY

There were some minor disc handling and tracking issues during this test. Disc blemishes that other players ignored caused the electronic equivalent of indigestion in this one, but with clean discs it was quick to obey orders. The review sample was the first in the country, and may not have been fully representative – or it may have suffered from excessive manhandling.

The panel's view of its sound was generally positive, despite occasional complaints of a "cardboardy" quality when auditioning in stereo. The Fleetwood Mac track was credited with "sweet" sounding vocals and good separation. "All threads can be heard; individual parts are easy to discern," said one, though another found the balance forward: "a bit like listening to studio monitors; in your face," he wrote, though he confessed that the JVC was "quite

impressive in its own way", and that it was "good on detail".

And detail resolution is a strong point here, while despite a suggestion of midband emphasis, there is little harshness or aggression. CD replay quality is easily overlooked in budget players where the emphasis lies with the headline features, but in the event it works well too. It sounds articulate and there is plenty of detail without excessive brightness. Imagery is well focused, and the frequency extremes are subjectively well extended yet controlled. As a video player, however, the JVC suffers to

The slimline styling and silver finish make for a particularly eye-catching player.

an extent from video noise and some moiré. Dimly lit scenes look rather compressed, but when using RGB or S-Video, results were never less than reasonable.

CONCLUSION

The XV-SA72SL may not set new standards, but it successfully skirts most of the usual traps, and turns in quite a mean standard of music making from DVD-Audio and CD alike. It's only DVD-Video that loses a little to its rivals. Brilliant value.

THE LAB REPORT

This particular sample of the XV-SA72 is from an early production batch and did suffer one or two 'bugs' that should be addressed by the time it hits the streets. Specifically, tracking and track access were not always secure while, on more than one occasion, its microprocessor 'hung', requiring the player to be reset via the power switch. Otherwise, two of JVC's MN35505 PLM DACs feed the surround, centre and sub outputs from a daughter board with the main (front) channels presum-

ably driven from a third DAC under the main board. The 365psec of jitter hides a more substantial, noise-like jitter that persists with high-level, treble signals but the overall S/N is impressive at 107dB, response is flat as a pancake and distortion low at 0.001-0.0008% over the first 10dB. Resolution is within 0.5dB over a 100dB range, while stereo separation and balance are good. The digital filter is a little weak, however, with digital images getting through just -37dB below full output.

"DETAIL RESOLUTION IS A STRONG POINT HERE, WHILE THERE IS LITTLE HARSHNESS OR AGGRESSION."





ONKYO DV-S939 DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

SOUND ★★☆☆	VALUE ★★☆☆	£1,999.00	CONTACT 01788 556777	www.onkyo.net/uk	GUARANTEE 3 year
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Onkyo's flagship is an impressive dreadnought, bristling with sophisticated technology and go-for-broke power supplies. It also operates like a dream, but the remote control suffers because it has to cover so many functions. Note that this model is the basis of the Integra Research RDV-1 reviewed separately.

The DV-S939 is a DVD-Audio and DVD-Video player that can also cope with CD, CD-R and CD-RW. A basic set of front panel controls includes a switch to douse the video output, while the rear provides access to a full set of

video and audio socketry, including two sets of component video outputs, a Scart socket, and IEEE1394 and RS232 sockets to access the home automation, custom install and upgrading options. The list of features is long and impressive, and includes THX Ultra certification and NTSC progressive scan. The video DAC is a fast 10-bit 54MHz device, and 5.1 channel speaker management is available for DVD-Audio and Dolby Digital signals decoded internally – dts can only be decoded externally.

SOUND QUALITY

'Underwhelmed' is the word that

best sums up the panel's response to this player, with a multitude of throwaway remarks along the lines of "not wonderful", "good depth, but jangly", and even "I lost concentration". Some tonal brightness was consistently identified; certainly the Onkyo sounds leaner, brighter and more detailed than the Integra Research model, but the balance was clearly linked to some harshness and a flat, one-dimensional quality in the solitary DVD-Audio recording available that really stokes the coals. This is the Chie Ayado (24/192 stereo) recording, which customarily sounds rather like a cross between Bessie Smith and Eartha Kit, but with tremendous range and vitality – here she sounded as though she was on steroids. Indeed, one panellist made a general comment about all the DVD-A decks we'd heard: "none of these players is gripping or really involving... they all lack the 'wow

The big Onkyo weighs in with a high-end video performance, but is no audio star.

factor". In case this sounds like a comment on the partnering kit, it all dramatically turned around later with the SACD players.

CD replay is competent, if unexciting, with a smooth-rolling mid-band but a rather morose, muddy bass and a treble with a gritty edge. The Onkyo's video credentials however are high. The range of picture set-up options are as wide as they are effective, and it becomes perfectly clear where your money goes with this player.

CONCLUSION

A perplexing mixture, the DV-S939 is capable of vivid, dynamic pictures with strong detail, low noise and an impressive freedom from motion artefacts. As an audio player however the Onkyo doesn't quite cut it, especially given the price tag.

"'UNDERWHELMED' IS THE WORD THAT BEST SUMS UP THE PANEL'S RESPONSE TO THIS PLAYER."



THE LAB REPORT

Onkyo's DV-S939 has a lot in common with the well-respected SD-900E from Toshiba. Both use the same OSD menu system, for example, and share three of Analog Devices' top 24-bit/192kHz dual channel DACs (theAD1853) to service their two-channel stereo and 5.1 multichannel analogue outputs. The effectiveness of the player's digital filtering changes with the sample rate so digital 'reflections' are almost entirely squeezed out with CD (44.1kHz) at -112dB but increase with DVD to -78dB (48kHz sampling)

and just -25dB (96kHz sampling).

It's worth noting that with the Audio Out set to anything other than "Analog 2Ch", all analogue audio outputs are downsampled to 48kHz (where appropriate). Otherwise, the SD-900E is the more polished player, as the DV-S939 has a weaker S/N ratio (107dB vs 111dB), a little extra PSU-related jitter (270psec vs 175psec) and a slightly 'droopier' response (-0.6dB vs -0.2dB at 20kHz). Nevertheless, in its own right, the DV-S939 is free of any serious handicap.



PANASONIC DVD-RA71 DVD AUDIO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£499.99** **CONTACT** 08705 357357 www.panasonic.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

Panasonic has reached its second generation DVD-Audio players before some have even established their first. The DVD-RA71 replaces the DVD-A7, bringing the old formula up to date by adding CD-R and CD-RW compatibility to a player that can also play almost anything round and silver – apart from SACD and CD-ROMs. Video outputs are available as composite, S-Video and RGB, with twin Scarts for good measure, and the on-board decoders look after both Dolby Digital and dts. The player also includes VSS, a virtual surround sound algorithm for those systems limited to two speakers. There's even a version of VSS optimised for headphone use. To add spice to the mix, the RA-71 is awash with picture condition and tuning aids, and a feature called 'Digital Remastering', an algorithm stored in the player's firmware that highjacks the video processing DSP when video is not

involved, and which attempts to enhance the sound quality of regular CDs.

SOUND QUALITY

The panel was agreed that the new Panasonic was a likeable enough player, but that it was far from being a high resolution one – a factor with several of the models in this test, and a surprise given that DVD-Audio is all about reproducing the kind of fine detail that gets swept under the carpet with CD. In general, the Panasonic was felt to be: "warm and cuddly – quite bouncy an enjoyable" (Fleetwood Mac), "less clinical and sterile" than the preceding player (Chie Ayado) and so on. But a "loss of insight" was responsible for a preference by one panellist for the preceding player, despite a less polished presentation.

In the hands-on listening, the Panasonic simply got on with the job in a fairly businesslike way, but without the endless dynamics and

range that a recording the Chie Ayado hinted at from the best players, or that SACD was able to achieve as a matter of routine. The sound was simply lacking in expressiveness and transparency. CD replay generally benefited from the Digital Remastering, which seems more effective than with the first generation Technics DVD-A10. Video performance, however, rated a straight 'A' at the price. The Panasonic's speciality is the ability to suppress MPEG motion arte-

The RA71 doesn't scale the heights as a music source, but offers superb pictures.

facts, so that subtle rippling colours, for example of water in motion, were beautifully preserved.

CONCLUSIONS

There's no question that the RA71 is an excellent DVD-Video player that will spin DVD-A and CD/CD-R/W discs to a serviceable quality. It's just a shame that the audio side fails to shine.

"THE NEW PANASONIC WAS A LIKEABLE ENOUGH PLAYER, BUT IT WAS FAR FROM BEING A HIGH RESOLUTION ONE."



THE LAB REPORT

In every respect but one, Panasonic's DVD-RA71 is technically solid which, bearing in mind the affordable ticket, is no mean feat. This player is, after all, equipped with 5.1 channel Dolby Digital/dts decoders and is fully able to support multichannel DVD-A software in its various guises. Specifically, distortion is very low at 0.0008% over the top 10dB of its dynamic range, increasing slightly to 0.013% at 20kHz. The response is pretty flat with mere treble losses of -

0.2dB (20kHz, CD) and -1.2dB (44kHz, DVD) while the A-wtd S/N ratio is knocking on the door of 17-bits at 101dB. Low-level resolution and distortion are also impressive, but it's the debilitating 7990psec of jitter that utterly floors the product and overwhelms its subjective performance. Having learnt the lesson of high jitter with its very first DVD player, Panasonic seems to have forgotten again some years later.



PHILIPS SACD-1000 SACD & DVD VIDEO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,299.99** **CONTACT** 020 8689 4444 www.philips.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

A true landmark product, the Philips SACD-1000 was the first multichannel SACD player to reach the market on both sides of the Atlantic. It's a solid, elaborately engineered unit that combines SACD with DVD-Video, with CD, CD-R and CD-RW replay. An internal surround sound processor can unwrap Dolby Digital, though dts recordings need to be fed digitally for external processing.

The hardware owes much to Marantz – a Philips subsidiary at the time the player was developed, but since floated off as an independent company. This link explains

much of the Philips' sophisticated internal topology and heavy-duty power supplies, the rigid demarcation of the video, digital and audio circuitry, and the discrete output buffers, which are Marantz HDAMs. Separate two and six-channel feeds are available, the former for connection to a TV, along with digital outputs for CD replay, standard composite video and S-Video and a pair of Scart sockets for loop-through connections to a TV. RGB is not available, and neither is component video. A switchable filter provides attenuation of the output above 50kHz, which enhances compatibility with equipment that

wasn't designed for wide bandwidth 100kHz audio.

SOUND QUALITY

There was an intriguing difference in SACD presentation between the Philips and the Sony models. The SACD lacks some of the Sony's "rounded, warm" quality, and according to one of the panellists it was "less detailed with less depth of image". Perhaps, but the slightly more clinical sound is also perhaps more familiar and arguably more realistic, more able to show the rough and raw side of music making when it's called for. The Gaudeamus recording was no less opulent than usual, but its textures were cleaner, and *Big Red Woman* from the Red Rose compilation was even bolder and more in-your-face than through the Sony. The panel warmed to this player through the session, concluding that it would probably be the most satisfactory of

The Philips is a talented all-rounder, taking SACD, CD and DVD in its stride.

the SACD players in the long term.

The Philips was also a real success with CD, which was reproduced to a high standard. Without sounding mechanical, it made solid and articulate music, which it projected with a strong sense of authority, and good resolution. SACD was clearly on a different plane, but within its narrower margins, CD was treated well. And so were DVD-Video discs. Picture quality matches all but the very best, with crisp definition and good colour registration, with little video noise and modest MPEG artefacts. But why no RGB?

CONCLUSION

This is a first-rate SACD player, an excellent CD player and a more than routinely good DVD player, which must be counted a remarkable achievement.

"THE PHILIPS WAS ALSO A REAL SUCCESS WITH COMPACT DISC, WHICH WAS REPRODUCED TO A HIGH STANDARD."



THE LAB REPORT

Although the SCD-1000 is no budget model, it does contain six channels of SACD technology together with all the decoding required of a fully-fledged DVD player. Jitter is exceptionally low at 165psec for such a complex machine while any clock noise or uncorrelated noise-like jitter is utterly banished. Distortion, too, is just about the lowest ever recorded at 0.0002% (or -114dB) through the midrange at peak output. This 'increases' to 0.0005% at -10dBfs and just

0.005% at -30dBfs. Even at the treble extremes, distortion is some 1000x lower than the unfortunate Integra RDV-1 at 0.006% while the wide 112dB S/N ratio is close to a true 19-bit performance (the theoretical limit for SACD is about 20-bits). Combine this with complete freedom from digital images, excellent low-level linearity, >100dB channel-to-channel separation and it's easy to appreciate why the SCD-1000 is such a clean and impressive-sounding product.

fig.1. AV receiver that sounds great in Dolby Digital.



"A strong budget contender for forward thinking music fans" **Hi-Fi Choice September 2001**

"Great stereo performance; commendably solid build" **What Hi-fi? Sound and Vision September 2001**

fig.2. AV receiver that sounds great in stereo.



"A strong budget contender for forward thinking music fans" **Hi-Fi Choice September 2001**

"Great stereo performance; commendably solid build" **What Hi-fi? Sound and Vision September 2001**

Sounds obvious, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, AV products have always been a trade-off, usually sacrificing musical finesse in favour of brute strength and making too many compromises for them to ever find a place in an audiophile system. Now, NAD brings its wealth of experience in producing award-winning, no-nonsense stereo products to the world of home cinema, and the same principles of simplicity and value that make our amplifiers and CD players world-beaters, are now producing truly earth shattering AV receivers, DVD players and multi-channel amplifiers.

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power amplifier I have used"*

Ivor Humphreys, HiFi News



PIONEER DV-646A DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£540.00** **CONTACT** 01753 789789 www.pioneer.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

The DV-646A makes a fair stab at being a universal disc spinner.

DVD-Audio/Video, CD, CD-R/RW, Video CD, DVD-RW, and even MP3 encoded discs are grist to its mill. DVD-RW compatibility demands an explanation: these discs can be recorded in two modes, one of which allows up to two hours of video on discs that should play on any DVD player. The other, the so-called Video Recorder (VR) format, allows full video editing, trick play, and variable quality/record time settings but is not DVD compatible. This player is one of the first to work with both DVD-RW formats.

Other highlights include an internal Dolby Digital/dts decoder, with limited speaker management options, a new Legato Link digital filter with four settings, twin Scart with RGB and a wide range of picture parameter settings.

SOUND QUALITY

Panel test results were mixed, with strong resolution offset to a degree by a rather aggressive presentation. One listener found the Pioneer more expressive than previous players, while another made precisely the opposite point. A third noted that the player was "agile, with rhythms that bounced along nicely" (Fleetwood Mac), but there wasn't complete agreement on this either. In a second presentation one found the player "gave good instrumental positioning and tonal balance, but the timing seemed all over the place, making the sound seem unreal". This was a general point by the way, unrelated to any specific musical extract.

Playing 5.1 channel DVD-Audio material in the hands-on listening, the Pioneer displayed a slightly brittle sounding, but informative and spatially well-layered sound,

which is not far off the panel view. It doesn't always give an easy ride, and it can make recordings like the Chie Ayado rather edgy and wearing, but it made a good fist of the Beethoven which can sound grainy on some players, giving a convincing sense of presence and good instrumental separation within a rather lean, characterless acoustic.

It was this dry, rather synthetic quality that ruled the roost in two-channel CD replay mode with Legato Pro deactivated, but the Standard setting was a little softer around the edges, and generally gave the most consistent and like-

The Pioneer packs in the functions but lacks refinement in both audio and video.

able results. Picture quality was serviceable rather than exciting, but a little more grainy than expected – U-571 looked more old fashioned than was perhaps strictly intended.

CONCLUSION

A very strong feature set and a standard of music making that offers more resolving power than many at the price, but with an occasionally synthetic presentation that means care may be needed when choosing the DV-646A.

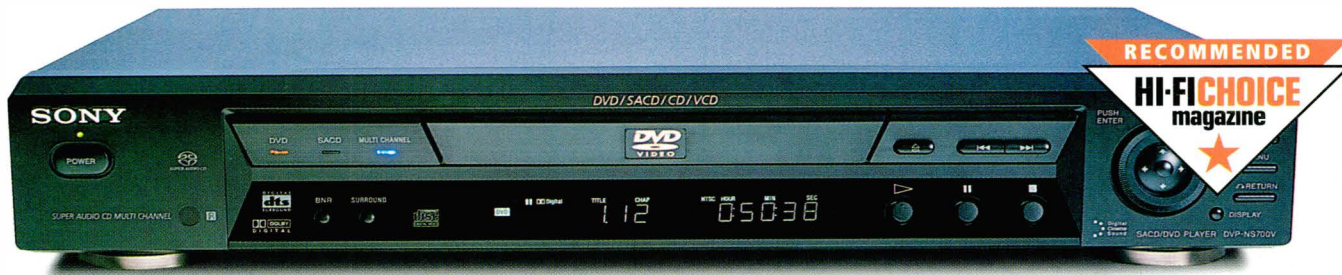
"THE PIONEER DISPLAYED A SLIGHTLY BRITTLE SOUNDING, BUT INFORMATIVE AND SPATIALLY WELL-LAYERED SOUND."



THE LAB REPORT

The DV-646A is equipped with three 24-bit/192kHz DACs (the Crystal CS4392) to service its front, centre, surround and subwoofer channels but the output of ultrasonic noise with all 44.1kHz (CD) and/or 48/96kHz (DVD) discs remains excessive. This is a throw-back to the days of DACs including the PCM1710, which caused players like the budget Arcam Alpha to be so variable with different amplifiers. Similarly, the DV-646A might sound OK with an amplifier unfazed by such noise, but partnered with a

model that's susceptible to ultrasonic 'hash', the result is unlikely to be so pleasing. Distortion is low at 0.002% through the midrange but increases to 0.03% at HF while jitter, at a moderate 640psec, does not include the substantive uncorrelated, noise-like jitter typically caused by interference between audio and video clocks. Incidentally, Pioneer's 'Legato Pro' digital filtering is a variation on the theme offered by T+A and Sony, trading different rates of HF rolloff for more or less ultrasonic distortion.



SONY DVP-NS700V SACD/DVD-VIDEO PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£380.00** **CONTACT** 01932 816000 www.sony.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

High resolution audio is still barely out of its infancy, but prices are already tumbling as the main protagonists jostle for position. This inexpensive player is low, sleek, and not very heavy, but there is little missing from the spec sheet. Video connection possibilities include two Scart sockets, S-Video and RGB, and the audio outputs deliver multichannel audio from the SACD circuits, and Dolby Digital and dts from the video circuits. The digital output is even capable of delivering 24-bit/96kHz

data, but only from appropriately coded DVD-Video/DAD discs, as a digital output is not possible with SACD recordings. One unusual, if largely unheralded feature is the TVS algorithm, which enables surround-like effects via two speakers, or can even apply compression (TVS Night) to any multi-channel source, not just Dolby Digital, which has its own night mode. The player is also one of the first to read DVD-RW discs in the Video Recording (VR) format – which is not DVD-Video compatible, but allows full disc editing.

SOUND QUALITY
The first outing for this player followed soon after the DVD-Audio sessions were concluded, and there was an almost palpable sense of relief as the realisation sunk in that the SACD sound was on a different plane. In and out of the panel test sessions, SACD from this Sony was large scale, smooth and clean – almost too clean according to one panellist. It was routinely able to conjure up a realistic soundstage, with no apparent ceiling on the sound as the music soared, and yet still continued to breathe. It seems almost redundant to single out individual pieces of music, since the sound was always limitless and it always “flowed well” as one put it. “It’s not quite as atmospheric as the last player [the Philips SACD-1000],” wrote one panel member after a second presentation, “and I am not quite as conscious of the vast space in the Gaudeamus

recording, but it almost made up for it with its warmth and naturalness. The bass works well, too.” The rest of the story is one of competence but not excitement. The best that can be said is that CD replay is smooth and civilised, but clearly lacks resolution, range and image depth. As a DVD-Video player, it is highly proficient, with bold colours, fair colour registration, highlight and shadow detail, and well-controlled noise at standard picture settings, but MPEG artefacts were occasionally noticeable.

CONCLUSION
The DVP-NS700V is not as good as the SCD-XB770ES, a dedicated SACD player, but it is not that far behind, and it is hard to believe that it is as good as it is for this sort of money.

“IT WAS ROUTINELY ABLE TO CONJURE UP A REALISTIC SOUNDSTAGE, WITH NO APPARENT CEILING.”



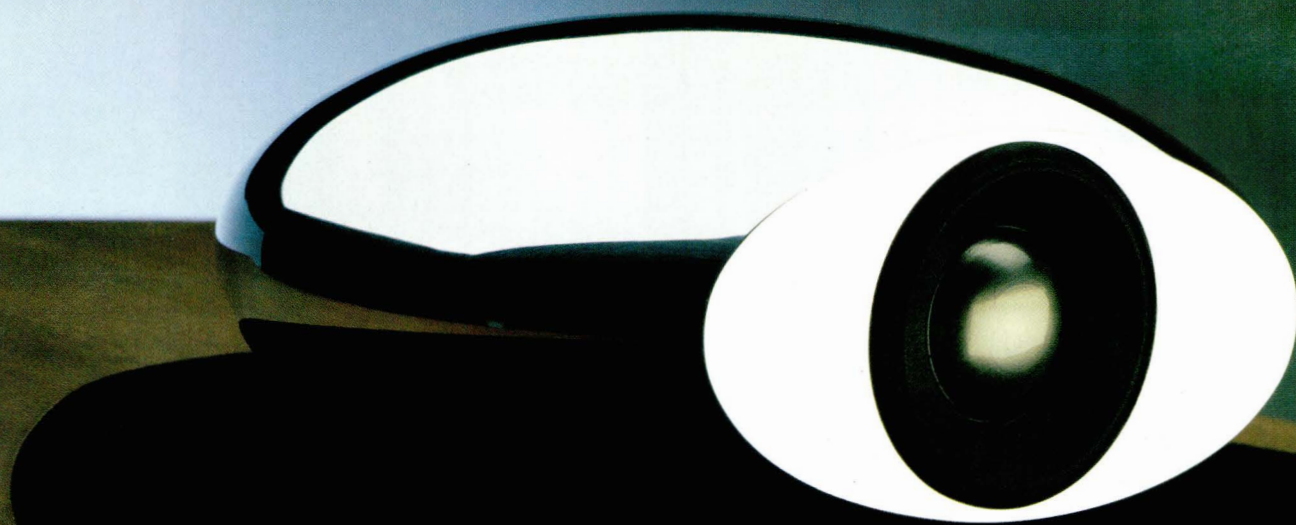
THE LAB REPORT

While some of the cheaper Sony DVD players are less than ‘Sony like’ in their behaviour, the DVP-NS700V is – I’m glad to report – the genuine article. While the suppression of digital images is modest at -56dB, any remaining ultrasonic noise is very well controlled and far less likely to upset a partnering amplifier than the Pioneer DV-646A, for example. Excellent stereo separation (>100dB) and a proper response with pre-emphasised discs shows the design has been thought

through while the impressively low 190psec jitter, a mere +7ppm clock error and low 0.001% distortion (from 0dBfs to -10dBfs) indicates that quality parts are used where it counts. This DVD player also includes a Direct Stream Digital processor to handle SACD software which, in turn, further benefits from a healthy 107dB S/N ratio and a response that extends out beyond 50kHz (-0.2dB @ 20kHz). All in all, the DVP-NS700V is a fine multi-format player with a surprisingly modest price-tag.

Dimension

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SONY SCD-XB770UK SACD PLAYER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£400.00** **CONTACT** 01932 816000 www.sony.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

The SCD-XB770 is the first pure multichannel SACD player, with no DVD pretensions and no video circuits. This means a significant simplification of the player compared to the others tested, with further simplification thanks to the optical system, which uses a beam splitter and combiner instead of two lasers for the two required wavelengths. This in turn means a smaller laser assembly and reduced servo requirements.

The 770ES will play SACDs and CDs in all their main iterations, which includes CD-R/RW discs, and of course hybrid SACDs with a CD layer. The player includes six-channel analogue outputs and an independent stereo analogue out which can drive different amplifier/speaker chains if required, and digital electrical and optical outputs are available for CD only. SACD is blocked from delivering digits, even at CD resolution, in deference to paranoia

about pirating (you can of course play the CD layer).

The rotary track selector is a great idea, but sometimes caused the player to hunt around for long periods finding high track numbers before timing out.

SOUND QUALITY

After a false start, while a loose cover on the laser assembly was fixed, the Sony SCD-XB770 made some of the best music of the day. Although there was some disagreement about exactly where to rank this player, the majority voted it the one that provided the most musical pleasure and fun. "It bounces along nicely," said one. "It sounds effortless: the music just hangs in the air, where some of the other players seem to be working hard." Although they were all agreed on this, one listener concluded that the player didn't quite "follow through", that it

lacked the grunt and the gravitas to mix with the real heavyweights, but there was no disagreement about the 770's warm, large scale and open delivery.

This is very much in accord with what I heard, too. The Sony is open to the charge of being a little warm and woolly on occasion, but its ability to paint the enormous acoustic canvas of the Gaudeamus recording without obscuring detail was truly impressive. There is no mistaking that this player has a far wider expressive and dynamic compass than plain CD. As a CD player however it disappointed, even

Sony's first dedicated multichannel SACD player excels with high-resolution discs.

when compared to half decent entry level CD players from Sony itself. The player sounded rather metronomic and mechanical, and failed to resolve much detail.

CONCLUSION

If Sony has knobbed the CD side of this player to underline the superiority of SACD (perish the thought!), they needn't have bothered. Both stereo and multichannel SACD is so well presented, that it still ranks as a fine buy.

THE LAB REPORT

New technology quickly becomes more affordable so, despite its QS Series positioning, the SCD-XB770UK utilises the same core Direct Stream Digital (DSD) audio processing technology found in Sony's reference SACD player (the SCD-1). A new Super Audio D/A Converter system (SA DAC), includes CD signal D/A conversion, and a new multichannel DSD decoder to service front, centre, surround and subwoofer outputs. The CD response is some -0.4dB

down at 20kHz while SACD extends to -0.9dB @ 30kHz, -2.3dB @ 40kHz, -4.7dB @ 50kHz and -27.7dB @ 100kHz. Sadly, however, the S/N ratio is poorer than expected at just 101dB and its low level linearity is a little wayward at HF (-1.4dB @ -90dBfs/20kHz) on the front left channel. And, as I've mentioned in a previous review, the 1190psec of correlated, PSU-related jitter will have some impact on the strength and clarity of the 770's bass performance.

"THE MAJORITY VOTED IT THE ONE THAT PROVIDED THE MOST MUSICAL PLEASURE AND FUN."





SACD & DVD-A AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	JVC XV-SA72	ONKYO DV-S939	INTEGRA RESEARCH RDV-1	PANASONIC DVD-RA71
PRICE	£400.00	£1,999.00	£2,700	£499.99
SOUND VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CONCLUSION	Entry level DVD-Audio is not as sophisticated as some, but it gets the basics right, and does well as a CD player, too.	A very fine DVD-Video player, but the prestige price isn't reflected in the DVD-Audio or CD performance.	Integra's wallet-busting revamp of Onkyo's DV-S939 ups the ante for DVD-Audio, but still disappoints with CDs.	An excellent DVD-Video player, but plays it rather too warm and woolly with DVD-Audio and CD to satisfy.
GUARANTEE	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR
THE LAB REPORT				
LOW DISTORTION				
LOW JITTER				
WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE				
DIGITAL FILTER (EFFECTIVENESS)				
OVERALL RATING				
MEASUREMENTS				
CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1KHZ	104DB	103DB	97DB	103DB
FREQUENCY RESPONSE @20HZ/20KHZ	0.0DB/-0.1DB	0.0DB/-0.55DB	0.0DB/-1.2DB	0.0DB/-0.2DB
THD VS. LEVEL, -90DBFS @ 1KHZ	2.75%	30%	4.3%	35%
OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R	1.97V/1.97V	2.00V/2.00V	1.96V/1.95V	1.95V/1.96V
S/N RATIO (A-WTD)	107.3DB/108.3DB	106.8DB/108.0DB	97.4DB/97.4DB	100.9DB/100.9DB
TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER	365PSEC	268PSEC	757PSEC	7995PSEC

CONCLUSIONS

ALVIN GOLD CHECKS THE SCORES ON THE MULTICHANNEL DOORS

The battle for supremacy now raging between SACD and DVD-Audio has an added resonance now that SACD is finally available in multichannel form, putting the two formats on a more equal footing. It was not the intention to make any such comparison in this piece, because there is no common base of recordings on which a firm conclusion can be hung. In the end though there was a clear victor. Using the best recordings available in both formats, there was an obvious and indisputable ramping up of sound quality standards when switching from DVD-Audio to SACD.

Now it is one thing to find a consistent difference in sound quality, and quite another to say why those differences exist. It may not be because one technology is inherently better than the other, and indeed I am not suggesting that this is the case. But I have my suspicions. The fact that the one DVD-Audio recording that came close to matching SACD standards was the solitary 24-bit/192kHz disc may be significant, the difficulty for DVD being that such recordings are limited to two channels. The other potentially significant factor is the presence of Verance digital watermarking on the Warner group titles and perhaps all of the others. We sim-

ply don't know what effect Verance has on the sound, and the industry is reluctant to provide properly conducted, meaningful trials.

A measure of the varying quality of the players was that the differences were audible, whether listening via the analogue or a digital outputs. There is a clear case to be made for the budget models, in particular the JVC and the two Sonys, while the considerably more expensive decks from Onkyo and Integra, although adding a veneer of sophistication to the sound, did not always offer greater musical definition or musical enjoyment. That said, the £1,300 Philips SACD-1000 emerged as a first class all-rounder.

SACD & DVD-A AT A GLANCE

PHILIPS SCD-1000	PIONEER DV-646A	SONY DVP-NS700V	SONY SCD-XB770UK	MAKE MODEL
£1,299.99	£540	£380.00	£400.00	PRICE
★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	SOUND VALUE
This model represents the best that multichannel SACD has to offer, but it is also a fine DVD-Video player and CD player.	A well-equipped player that does an acceptable job with DVD-Video, DVD-Audio and CD. It just fails to thrill.	Sony's budget multi-channel SACD/DVD-Video player has much of the grace and space of the non-DVD SCD-XB770ES.	The first Sony multichannel SACD player is a wonderful performer with SACD discs. Not a great CD player, though.	CONCLUSION
1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	GUARANTEE
THE LAB REPORT				
				LOW DISTORTION
				LOW JITTER
				WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE
				DIGITAL FILTER (EFFECTIVENESS)
				OVERALL RATING
MEASUREMENTS				
107DB	105DB	106DB	96DB	CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1KHZ
0.0DB/-0.65DB	0.0DB/-0.2DB	0.0DB/-0.2DB	0.0DB/-0.5DB	FREQ. RESPONSE @20HZ/20KHZ
2.6%	2.8%	2.8%	3.9%	THD VS. LEVEL, -90DBFS @ 1KHZ
1.89V/1.88V	1.96V/1.96V	1.90V/1.89V	1.79V/1.81V	OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R
111.7DB/111.5DB	106.3DB/106.5DB	106.8DB/107.4DB	101.2DB/101.2DB	S/N RATIO (A-WTD)
165PSEC	640PSEC	190PSEC	1190PSEC	TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER

DIGITAL AUDIO: THE NEXT GENERATION

DVD-AUDIO AND SACD ARE CAPABLE OF GOING WHERE NO DIGITAL AUDIO FORMAT HAS GONE BEFORE. JOIN US AS WE EMBARK ON OUR DEBUT VOYAGE INTO THE LAND OF HIGH-RESOLUTION MUSIC REVIEWS.

There are a few things to bear in mind when taking the plunge with the next generation formats – the first is that all the high res discs we've heard sound better, usually far better, than their CD counterparts, even when restricted to two channels. The second is that there's a price to pay for that extra quality. Amazon.com does DVD-A at \$22.47 and SACD at \$18.97, while Vivante, a UK mail order operation, charges £24.95 for either type (www.vivante.co.uk, 020 8977 6600). We're told that they're now moving into the largest HMVs and Virgin's too, so keep checking the racks.

There are also a few things to remember when playing these discs. DVD-A discs contain either two or three versions of the material: Dolby Digital which ensures compatibility with DVD-Video players, and either separate stereo and multichannel high definition DVD-A versions or a multichannel version that can be downmixed to stereo. Selecting the mix you want is a lot easier if you have a TV connected.

SACD is more straightforward. Players can be set to play either the stereo or surround track automatically, and the discs are usually hybrids which will play on normal CD players, too.

DVD-AUDIO



CHIE AYADO – LIFE EWE RECORDS

This stereo only disc surfaced during a recent Technics press conference, and the label notes acknowledge that it was remastered with help from Matsushita, Technics parent company, though an SACD version is available, too. It is one of the very few stereo 24-bit/192kHz recordings available for the format, but the disc also includes a 24/96 surround version with graphics. The recording is largely of jazz and rock standards – it opens with *New York State of Mind*, and includes *Route 66* and *Let it Be*. Chie has a dark, sensuous voice, an improbable mixture of Bessie Smith and Eartha Kitt. But the singing is suffused with life, passion and soul, and for once the technology doesn't get in the way. Arguably the best DVD-Audio disc to date, it's a real show stopper. AG



DANIEL BARENBOIM/ BERLINER STAATSKAPELLE – BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY NO 6 (PASTORAL) TELDEC

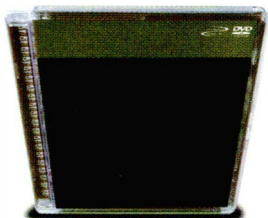
A complete high profile cycle of the Beethoven symphonies under the baton of a conductor of the stature of Barenboim, with a band as disciplined as the Berliner Staatskapelle, is a rare treat, and a symbol of how important DVD-Audio is to Teldec/Warner. Sadly it also exposes the current limitations of the format. The sound is rather ungraceful and there is a residual granularity which won't go away. The sound becomes messy where it should sound animated, and the mix makes heavy handed use of the rear channels. But the finely judged Pastoral is perhaps the high point of the set, with the 7th in hot pursuit, and technology notwithstanding it makes a compelling listening experience. AG



THE CORRS – IN BLUE ATLANTIC

When the Corrs were originally brought to our attention they were a fiddling good bunch of promising talent in more ways than one. The latest album *In Blue*, however, is a sanitised, poppy disappointment. It often doesn't sound like real instruments are being played and to that end it's a bit cold. Andrea Corr's vocals however are particularly sweet; even if the resolution uncovers her dubious pronunciation of R's. *Radio* is the best track on the album, and *All in a Day* is a great piece to demonstrate DVD-A's capabilities. Bass fans will like *One Night*, which is probably the most listenable track here. DG

EXTRAS: PHOTO GALLERY, DISCOGRAPHY, BREATHLESS VIDEO CLIP, WRITTEN COMMENTARY.



METALLICA – METALLICA ELEKTRA

Many people discovered Metallica through this album. The Bob Rock-produced '*Black Album*', is a slick, polished affair that saw the band gain mass appeal and heavy rotation on MTV. The mastering to DVD-A is superb. Key descriptive words here are depth, resolution and impact. Particularly with Lars Ulrich's drums you get slam, extension and speed, transients are very quick with excellent timing. James Hetfield has a great 3-D vocal presence in a very wide, deep and airy soundstage. Apart from the renowned opening track (*Enter Sandman*), *Nothing Else Matters* is a lovely ballad written about Hetfield's girlfriend, and rockers will dig *Sad But True*. Old-skool metallers look out for *My Friend of Misery*. DG

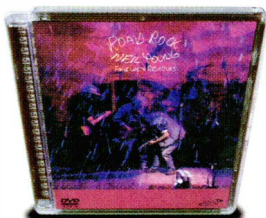
EXTRAS: THREE MINUTE VIDEO – THE MAKING OF THE BLACK ALBUM.



JONI MITCHELL – BOTH SIDES NOW REPRISE

This lush recording has been used in demonstrations by both SACD and DVD-A camps, but as Reprise is a Warner label the latter format got the release. *Both Sides* was conceived to 'trace the arc of a modern romantic relationship', a common theme in many of her recordings. In this instance, however, the material is largely not her own but a selection of standards old and new. *A Case Of You* is the only Mitchell composition aside from the title track. The full orchestra gives this disc tremendous presence and atmosphere, and it's probably the best non-classical DVD-A I've heard so far. Mitchell's voice doesn't have the range that it once did but this is recompensed by the emotion and warmth in the performance. JK

EXTRAS: ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



NEIL YOUNG – ROAD ROCK REPRISE

Young is famous in hi-fi circles for railing against digital audio, and has not been a fan of the CD format. But he is quoted as being very keen on DVD-A, so possibly he'll be making future discs at 24-bit/192kHz from the start. Recorded last year, this collection of eight tracks is played by 'Neil Young, Friends and Relatives' including bassist Donald 'Duck' Dunn and drummer Jim Keltner, the style is relaxed yet energetic albeit not as full on as his Crazy Horse sets. The sound is pretty congested and dense, in stereo it barely breaks free of the space between the speakers but being a genuine live recording there's no shortage of atmosphere and 'charge'.

Not Young's finest hour but an engaging performance nonetheless. JK

EXTRAS: VIDEO FOOTAGE FOR TWO SONGS

SACD



STUTTGARTER KAMMERORCHESTER – J.S. BACH BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS TACET

Tacet, a Stuttgart-based specialist label, was quick off the mark with this DVD-A release of all six Brandenburgs on a single disc. The performances and the sound are good rather than outstanding, but what sets this disc apart is the way that the multichannel mix explores the surround possibilities. The channels are used in different ways, either in a conventional forward layout with ambience from all around, or with the performers in an arc, or even encircling the listener. In the 4th and 5th concerto the soloists are placed in front, and the orchestra behind, but the arrangements are always sensitive to the music. AG



PAUL HALLEY/GAUDEAMUS – SACRED FEAST DMP

One of the very finest SACDs to date, there really are not enough superlatives around to do justice to this early multichannel recording, which has an opulent and three dimensional sound of tremendous scale and an exquisite sense of presence and detail. The sound perfectly complements the immaculately performed choral music performed here, which ranges from Tallis to Messiaen. This is one of a number of SACDs which use a novel speaker configuration that eliminates the 0.1 LFE channel, which is redundant with music, in favour of a full bandwidth overhead channel to provide height information, though it is safe to regard this as optional. AG



TOMMY SMITH – BLUE SMITH LINN

Linn released this jazz disc last year and I have been using it for reviewing ever since. Originally an analogue recording it was DSD mastered for the SACD release and comparing the SACD and CD layers on this hybrid disc it's easy to hear why, the extra detail is not subtle. A slightly hard edged recording, it nevertheless has atmosphere, good image depth and plenty of fine detail. Smith's style occasionally hints at Jan Garbarek but is not easy to pin down aside from having a Northern European feel. Guitarist John Scofield also plays and his angular sound works well against Smith's tenor sax, injecting extra colour and dynamics into the music. JK



PIETER WISPELWEY/DIE DEUTSCHE KAMMERPHILHARMONIE BREMEN – TCHAIKOVSKY/SAINT-SAËNS/BRUCH CHANNEL CLASSICS

One of the shorter works on the disc, the Bruch *Kol Nidre*, a solemn Jewish prayer, is an excellent reason for buying the disc. The Saint-Saëns concerto is a fine work too, but the Tchaikovsky, though melodic, is vapid by comparison. Orchestra and soloist work together to provide a moving and at times impassioned ensemble, and this has been matched to a gloriously rich and solid orchestral timbre. Overall the sound is a little more pedestrian than the best SACDs, and doesn't exploit SACD's ability to reproduce a rich and complex acoustic without smothering detail, but it's still a clear advance on CD. AG



ON/STAND-BY

CD

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(BAND)

AUX
(DEMO)

TUNING

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LIFESTYLE SYSTEMS

LOOKING FOR A STYLISH HI-FI SOLUTION OR A COMPACT SECOND SYSTEM TO LIVEN UP LIFE IN THE BEDROOM? DAVID VIVIAN INVESTIGATES THE LATEST OPTIONS.

In the big wide world of audio system building, we'd all like to think we're something of a hi-fi masterchef. We know where to lay our hands on the best ingredients and how to bung them together for the tastiest results. Boy we're good, and it's worth all the effort. Nothing quite hits the spot like a lovingly prepared separates hi-fi system.

No crime in scoffing the occasional 'ready meal', though. Shrink-wrapped, freeze-dried miracles of mass market food technology maybe, but handy, cleverly packaged and zero hassle.

Convenience wields a powerful influence in modern life. Sometimes we want to make a song and dance, sometimes the line of least resistance is just fine. It helps to think of the choice as a luxury. Besides, who among us isn't vulnerable to a finely crafted compromise? Plug 'n' play rocks.

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Hell, some of the stereos in this group even look like toasters. Others have got more motorised functions and winking lights than R2-D2. All the stuff, in fact, that used to be anathema to hi-fi purists. But that was when the flashier micros and minis tended to sound uniformly grim. Now, if you're prepared to spend upwards of £400, most don't. People who were never going to buy a 'real' hi-fi anyway can now invest in something that's small, looks good and is a doddle to use without getting horribly ripped off. Those of us who run more extravagant main systems can splash out on a bijou number for the kitchen, bedroom, study or wherever and actually enjoy the experience. Especially as many of the thoroughly modern systems represented here come with (or at least have as an option) a CD burner or MiniDisc recorder. Digitally pristine compilations courtesy of the 'second' system. Nice thought.

So maybe it's finally time to start believing the dream. That gadgets can do hi-fi. That cute, domestically harmonious styling and sublime user-friendliness can dovetail with top sound quality. Style-fi has landed. Hold the flying pigs.

ON TEST

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JVC FS-SD1000R	£400.00
KENWOOD CD-R RXD-M92RW	£600.00
MARANTZ ECLIPSE 25	£800.00
MYRYAD CAMEO	£1500.00
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ONKYO CR-205	£640.00
SHARP SD-NX10H	£1000.00
TECHNICS SC-HD550	£400.00

OTHER EQUIPMENT USED

B&W DM303 speakers
Blueroom Minipod speakers
Kimber PBJ interconnects
Slate Audio speaker stands

MUSIC USED DURING TEST

Martin Taylor - *Nitelife*
Various artists - *A Twist Of Marley*
Anastacia - *Not That Kind*
Marcus Miller - *M2*
Joni Mitchell - *Both Sides Now*
The Crusaders - *Healing The Wounds*



CYRUS QUATTRO CD/PREAMP/TUNER & SMARTPOWER

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £1,400.00 CONTACT 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.co.uk G'TEE 2 years

When it comes to giving your product range a lifestyle spin, Cyrus is left twiddling its thumbs. It doesn't have to do a thing but consider colour. Its hi-fi building bricks have been half width from day one – for so long now, in fact, that even the latest products have a classic, almost iconic air. A lick of silver paint and it's pretty much a case of 'eat your hearts out, wannabees'. Aesthetically, the two-box Quattro combo is the very embodiment of style-fi: clean, cool, instantly desirable.

As if that wasn't enough, of course, Cyrus is a glittering name from the heartland of 'real hi-fi'; it possesses audiophile credibility, something even the pure lifestyle might sneakily draw some reassurance from.

With good reason, too. Cyrus hasn't had to cut too many corners by trying to cram everything into a compact casing as the standard deal. The main Quattro unit is configured as a CD/preamp costing £650. The CD bit is essentially a dAD3 with its 24-bit Burr-Brown DAC. There's one line-level input and two tape loops, a coaxial digital output and an input for an optional PSX-R power supply. This unit can be teamed with any of the power amps in the Cyrus line up, though the most appropriate is probably the 60 Watts a side Smart Power at £550. An extra £200 secures the plug in, nine-preset RDS FM tuner module, a further £350 gets you multi-room zoning. We stuck at the tuner and an overall system price of £1,400.

Upgradability is an obvious advantage of the Cyrus approach. If you don't want to go for one of Cyrus' more expensive stereo power amps you can buy another SmartPower and monoblock the pair (105 Watts each) at the flick of a switch. Even as it stands, though, it's the most powerful system in the group. And just about the easiest to use. Connections are rudimentary; ergonomics a model of clarity; the remote brilliantly simple.

SOUND QUALITY

Clean, fast, detailed, transparent and snappy. Typical Cyrus, and the comments hold good for the tuner which is probably the best in the group. Presentation has plenty of verve and sparkle but is probably a little lean for some tastes. There isn't an awful lot of meat on that textbook bone structure. It's easi-



ly rectified, though. Quattro comes sans speakers. Choose something with a bit of bottom end welly and warmth – I found B&W's £180 DM303s worked better sonically (if not aesthetically) than Blueroom's £289 Minipods – and the colour returns to the Quattro's cheeks.

Bass quality is actually a highlight – smooth, extended and nicely tuneful with convincing leading edge definition and agility. Good stuff. The topmost octaves are clear and bright but not fizzy. It's a busy sound but never less than fluent.

The midrange is crisp, quite prominent and very explicit. If not terribly forgiving. The edgy production on Anastacia's *Not That Kind* CD militated against easy listening.

You're unlikely to miss anything, though. The Cyrus system is nothing if not on the pace and bubbling with detail. There was a huge amount going on in jazz guitarist Martin Taylor's multi-layered *Chaff & Grain* from the CD *Nitelife*. And Joni Mitchell's voice was portrayed in all its melancholy glory on *A Case Of You* from *Both Sides Now*. The Quattro's powers of insight are intense but don't pull the music apart.

CONCLUSION

Quattro is expensive for a secondary system and largely bereft of the bells and whistles found on many of its cheaper rivals. In some ways, it's almost too good to be tucked away in a bedroom or a study. But that's hardly Cyrus's fault. It looks great, it sounds even better. Real hi-fi without the hassle. Recommended.

“CLEAN, FAST, DETAILED, TRANSPARENT AND SNAPPY. TYPICAL CYRUS.”



The Quattro's compact main unit comprises a CD player, preamp and optional RDS tuner.



DENON UD-M30

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£600.00** **CONTACT** 01753 888447 elec.denon.co.jp/europe/ **GTEE** 2 years

What Denon doesn't know about crafting classy, well-engineered mini and micro systems could probably be scratched on the back of a pin head. The image it has nurtured is that of 'proper' separates hi-fi that have somehow been squeezed into stylish, half-width boxes. Of weighty, nuggety build quality and jewel-like detailing. Nothing flash or even mildly racy; no attention-seeking whatever. Just a full measure of understated quality, reasonably priced, pitched at the informed design-conscious home maker and hi-fi cognoscenti alike.

The M30 series has the routine down to a degree that surpasses just about everything the company has done before – including, of course, the DM-3 which this model supersedes. Okay, hair has been let down with the remote – oval section, purple flashes, a few triangular buttons – but usability is superb with satisfyingly tactile, intuitive controls that operate precisely and large, clear, uncluttered displays.

Just two units do the business in this combo, a 20 Watts per channel CD receiver with 40 preset FM/AM tuner and a matching CD-R deck. Compared to their DM-3 forbears, both units benefit from upgraded audio circuitry and beefier power supplies. And the compact SC-M10 speakers that round off the package – made for Denon by Mission – have had a change of tweeter and realignment of the crossover.

Copying from CD gives you the choice of using either the optical digital or analogue connections (optical's better), while synchro recording, high speed finalising and text input for album and track titling are all tackled from the receiver.

SOUND QUALITY

Straight out of the box it's clear the Denon is a class act. With both radio and CD it sounds fresh, incisive, musically adept and convincing – if not quite as colourful and dynamic as the Myriad or imbued with the inner detail of the Cyrus. Rhythmically lucid and surefooted, you never feel the Denon's dragging its feet. It keys in to up-tempo material enthusiastically. Bass is solid, well-shaped, nimble and quite dry in char-



acter if obviously a little lacking in weight and extension.

Presentation is helped by a clear, informative midrange with bags of ambience and good attack on strings and brass. The M30 renders complex productions surprisingly easy to analyse yet retains its musically deft touch. For a micro, there's considerable discrimination and finesse and the system's imaging capabilities are well above average. It makes excellent CD copies, too, even at double speed.

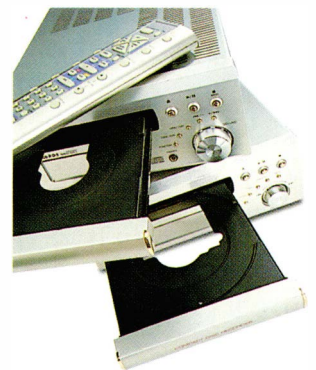
Really tug on the volume and just occasionally you become aware of slightly thickened tonal textures. The sonic picture starts to clog up. Yet it's hard not to like the way the Denon does things. Crucially it puts the music first and hi-fi second. There's no mush or unnatural warmth; it just gets on with the job in an honest, revealing and enjoyable fashion.

If you value clarity, subtlety and coherence above scale and flesh-pummeling volume, this will do very nicely, thanks.

CONCLUSION

If BMW made style-system hi-fi, it would probably look and sound something like this. The baby Denon oozes engineering integrity and is a dream to use. Better still, it makes convincing music from all sources. Maybe it misses out on a few hi-fi niceties but, in the context of this group, it clearly bags a Best Buy.

“WITH BOTH RADIO AND CD IT SOUNDS FRESH, INCISIVE, MUSICALLY ADEPT AND CONVINCING”

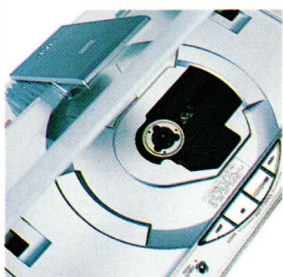


The beautifully designed and built UD-M30 offers digital recording in the shape of a CD recorder.



JVC FS-SD1000R

“THE IDEA SEEMS TO BE TO REPLACE CONVENTIONAL SPEAKERS WITH A PAIR OF SEXY SILVER CANDLESTICKS.”



The visually striking JVC system eschews traditional component and speaker design.

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£400.00	CONTACT 0870 3305000	www.jvc-europe.com	G'TEE 2 years
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And now for something, er, defiantly different. JVC is clearly driven by a mission to reinvent the micro system on an almost monthly basis and this latest version of the Lumirage must be in with a shout as its most radical twist on the well-worn theme yet.

The main idea seems to be to replace conventional speakers – be they boxy or curvy – with a pair of sexy silver candlesticks. Don't, whatever you do, try jamming candles in them, though feel free to stick them on a mantelpiece – they'll look convincingly Habitat. In fact, within reason, you can plonk them pretty much where you please. Because of their unusual design, they're not fussy.

The look is deceptive. Inside the foot or so high columns are rectangular polymer track diaphragms, 10mm wide and 90mm tall, with purpose built voice coils and pairs of neodymium magnets – not a conventional cone or dome in sight. A case of fashion subsuming function? Not so, according to JVC. The company says the speakers were developed to mimic a single point source for 'higher definition' and that the cylindrical shape dramatically reduces enclosure diffraction for unusually wide directivity and a smooth spread of sound. Sound devoid of bass, that is.

That's where the 60 Watt active subwoofer comes in. A small but solid and impressively weighty unit, which is easy enough to tuck away behind a sofa or in a corner, leaving visitors unfamiliar with the sonic trickery of sub-sat systems to ponder exactly what it is in the room that's generating such full bodied music.

Surely not anything connected with (or to) the tiny, low-rise unit that contains the electronics. Dinky in stature but big on flashing lights, this perspex-lidded, chrome-buttoned control centre packs in top-loading CD, three-band tuner

and a 15 Watts per channel amp. Gently whirring servo motors slide back the lid (to reveal the main control buttons) and up (for CD loading) while the sort of vivid blue light that used to bathe 'alien underground cave' sets in early episodes of Star Trek not only beams out of the main LCD display but pulsates around the perimeter of the CD hub. A gimmick but kind of fun, too.

SOUND QUALITY

The JVC has some admirable qualities – a certain warmth, good bass weight and, perhaps most remarkably, the ability to conjure up a reasonably convincing stereo image wherever you're sitting. What it doesn't have is quite enough treble energy and presence to sparkle. This gives its sound a refined but slightly grey and shut-in quality. Actual treble detail isn't bad, and the candle stick speakers are by no means inarticulate; they communicate well but will never send a tingle down your spine.

Of course, their shortfall of bass is masked by the punchy little sub. Trouble is it isn't so much a shortfall, as a complete absence of bass. Integration isn't a strong point and the mid range inevitably suffers, sounding a little phasy and recessed, the more so when you whack the volume up – a tempting proposition given the sub's penchant for going loud without apparent strain.

CONCLUSION

That said, this is a clever take on the style system which will work well in a variety of situations. Its smooth-sounding treble and stable stereo imaging gives it a number of practical advantages over many of its rivals. It scores a cautious recommendation.



KENWOOD HM-982RW

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£600.00** **CONTACT** 01223 203200 www.kenwood-electronics.co.uk **GTEE** 1 year

Simple idea, slightly crazy perspective. Instead of having two separate boxes placed one on top of the other, Kenwood has siamesed them at right angles to form a single unit that's defiantly lopsided. What this amounts to is full-on design funkiness, no untidy connectivity issues and instant must-have status. Indeed, the 'what's that?' appeal of the oh-so cute Kenwood took Japan by storm where it immediately installed itself as the best selling micro.

But there must be more to it than a zany shape. Well, yes, and just about everything this side of the kitchen sink. All surfaces have been utilised. The vertical stack houses the comprehensive two-line display window, cassette slot, about half the fascia buttons (handily, those for the RDS FM tuner and cassette deck) and the headphone socket. On the horizontal base we have the CR-RW recorder drawer to the front and the main, CD transport on top, plus the remainder of the buttons, which govern CD replay and digital recording. Great ergonomics, motorised flip perspex CD transport lid, cool-sheen aluminium-look, two-way reflex speakers precisely as tall as that distinctive vertical pillar with its green-tint perspex scuff guard and... a gimmick free remote that's easy to use. Shocking style maybe, but bullet-proof execution.

To talk of 'set up' would suggest a degree of messing around this thing simply doesn't require. Haul it out of the cardboard, plug it in, connect tuner aerial and speaker cable via spring clips both sides (pretty much universal in this test, I'm afraid) and the Kenwood's cooking from a standing start in well under five minutes.

SOUND QUALITY

The tuner's strong, clear and, given a half decent signal, hiss and crackle free – indeed good enough to dub to

CD-R. Much less impressive is the cassette which is mediocre in all respects and seems something of a token fixture. The best results, unsurprisingly, are obtained with CD and making all-but identical copies (double speed dubbed discs are a little less perfect but still better than MiniDisc) is push-button child's play.

Rated at a fairly modest 20 Watts a side, the Kenwood nevertheless produces a big, warm and surprisingly muscular sound. The pseudo-techy speakers don't feel particularly sturdy but have a fair stab at delivering believable bass weight and extension. For instance, the amp/speaker partnership refuses to muck up bassmeister Marcus Miller's fearless fret runs on *Power* from the CD *M2*. Despite getting a bit boomy on the rich deep-brown notes, they don't buckle.

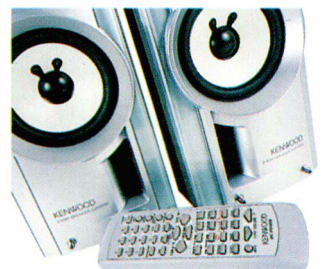
Thankfully, the treble is kept in proportion. It isn't forced but sounds quite natural, even laid back. Maybe the top end could do with a little more energy and air; this is far from being the most transparent or open sounding system here. What's more, stereo is somewhat squashed in breadth and a bit two dimensional.

But the Kenwood has an enjoyably fleshed-out sound and plenty of drive. What's more, it's decently even handed with most musical styles, up to and including heavy metal.

CONCLUSION

You have to ask yourself how much a finely detailed musical soundscape matters, because it isn't the Kenwood's bag at all. Even by the standards of the group, this isn't the sort of hi-fi with which to plumb the depths of musical insight. But it is fun to listen to, goes loud enough for parties and, cassette deck performance excepted, seldom grates. Given the talking point design, digital recorder as standard and decent tuner, a recommendation naturally follows.

"THE KENWOOD HAS AN ENJOYABLY FLESHED-OUT SOUND AND PLENTY OF DRIVE."



This system's unconventional and eye-popping L-shaped design meant it was a big hit in Japan.

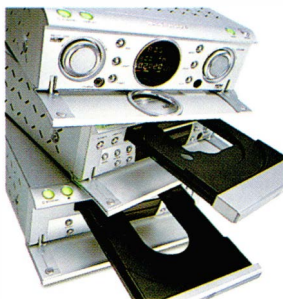
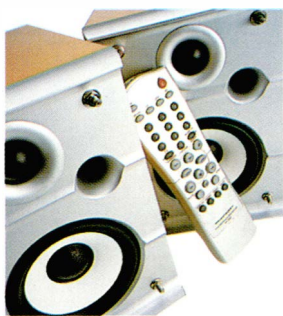




MARANTZ ECLIPSE 25

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£899.90** **CONTACT** 020 8581 9160 www.marantz.co.uk **GTEE** 2 years

“EVEN ANASTACIA'S NOTORIOUSLY 'EDGY' VOICE GAINED SOME WARMTH WITHOUT SHEDDING ANY OF ITS CUT AND DEFINITION.”



Styling on the separate receiver, CD player and CD recorder is luxurious.

Marantz's niche instincts are alive and well if its new range of Eclipse components is anything to go by. What the company seems to have spotted is a glint of daylight between the kind of obviously well engineered but undeniably samey half-width systems produced by the likes of Denon, Onkyo, Technics, Teac and Sony and the more seriously hi-fi orientated all-in-one boxes from Cyrus and Linn.

Eclipse offers two design options. The full-width range, not tested here, is a makeover of the Slim series components that have been on sale for several years. Silver finish and neon-lit detailing (check out the Lywellen-Bowenesque vent patterns on the casings) contribute to a uniquely sophisticated, busy look which can be transformed to perfect sleekness by pushing shut the beautifully damped flip down front panel, a carry over from the Slim range.

The half-width components you see here have all the same design cues but are about the size and shape of the Cyrus Quattro units and, Marantz being Marantz, priced a lot more aggressively. All are available separately but, more typically, will be bought as packages inclusive of speakers designed and produced by Marantz itself. It all kicks off with the £500 Eclipse 19 which combines separate CD player and RDS receiver with the two-way, twin ported LS110 speakers.

What we have here is the £900 25 which adds the DR110 CD-RW recorder to the 19's line up. Although each unit comes with its own remote, a D-Bus connection allows them to fall under the control of the receiver's handset. Jog control and 'WOW' – yet another bass enhancement circuit – mean the Eclipse can mix it with the best on the gizzmo front, but 25 Watts a side and 30 presets for the RDS tuner is hardly playing fast and loose with the more conventional spec benchmarks.

First impression when you pull the units out of the cartons is that they're beautifully screwed together and dripping with intriguing, tactile detail. If they sound as good as they look and feel, they can't lose.

SOUND QUALITY

A delivery mix-up meant that the tiny but immaculately put together LS110s, Marantz's first foray into speaker production for many years, didn't arrive with the rest of the boxes. A no show would have been disastrous. Auditioned with the B&Ws and Minipods while the intended boxes were in transit, the Eclipse 25 turned in a distinctly middle-of-the-road performance, pristine CD dubbing and clean, glitch-free tuner performance notwithstanding. Sonic reach seemed to be a little longer than the Onkyo's, but fell short of the standard set by the Denon, never mind the Cyrus and Myriad.

Non-believers in system synergy should have heard what happened when the Marantz LS110 speakers were plumbed in. Forget 'WOW', it was as if someone hit a button marked 'music'. Thus equipped, the Eclipse 25 acquired an impressively deep and stable sound stage and found the ability to image convincingly. CDs that had previously sounded two dimensional and plodding filled out in a subtle but seductive way. Instruments and performers sounded tangibly believable and played together. Even Anastacia's notoriously 'edgy' voice gained some warmth without shedding any of its cut and definition.

Listenability is sky high. With the LS110s in situ, though, full fat rock 'n' roll is off the agenda. This has a lot to do with the bass which, while agile and tuneful, is a bit of a powder puff when it comes to slamming it out. Neither does it go particularly deep. Ironically, this was the one thing that wasn't a problem with the B&Ws hooked up. Better, of course, an attenuated bass than a flabby, overpowering one, but a bit more welly in the basement wouldn't have gone amiss. The rest is so good, a subwoofer could be worth investigating.

CONCLUSION

The Eclipse 25 might not be the very best sounding combo in this test but it is the one that most successfully blends beauty, facilities, performance and value for money. Marantz has done its homework and filled that niche. Best Buy.

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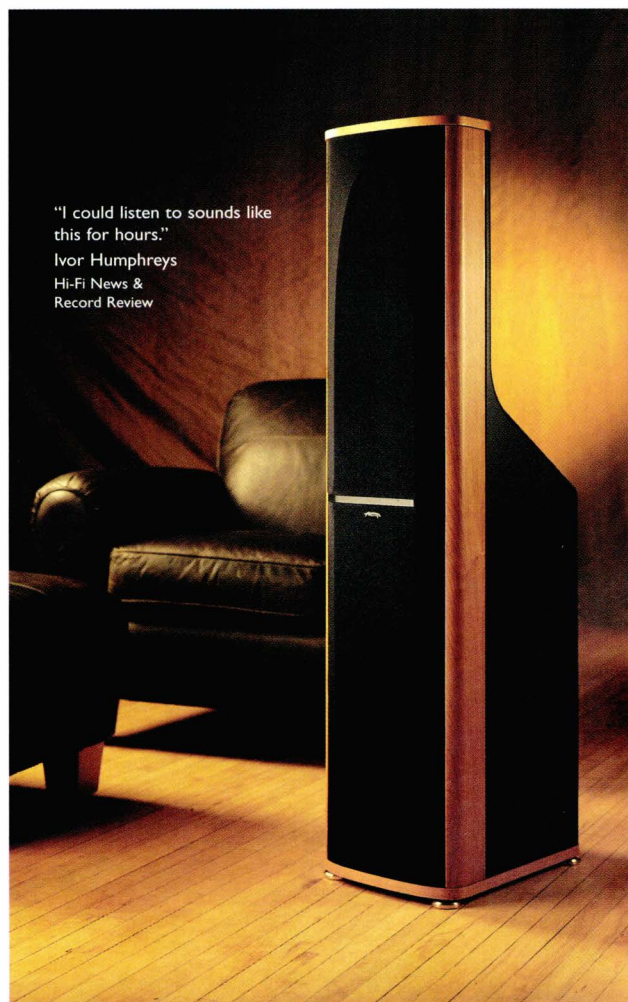
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MYRYAD CAMEO

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,499.95** **CONTACT** 01494 551551 www.myriad.co.uk **G'TEE** 3 years

If the very notion of a micro system, however accomplished, puts a crease in your brow, try this for size. Anything but bijou, the Myriad Cameo combo comprises three full width units – amp, CD player and tuner – and they're heavy, too. The alleged 'slim-line' bit in the brochure is mostly an illusion of de-emphasis created by the arching bottom edge of the aluminium front panel. Either way, this is an exceptionally handsome and imposing stack – more audiophile statement than style-fi. Even at £1,500, making it the most expensive system in the group, you feel you're getting your money's worth.

In fact, this looks suspiciously like a one-make separates system. Each unit has its own power cord and could be used as a component in another system. Except you can't buy any of them separately. You'll have to shell out for speakers, too; Myriad doesn't do them. I had the B&Ws and Minipods standing by.

Appearances can be deceptive. Cameo may look like purist hi-fi but it boasts mini/micro style connectivity. Something called a 'My-Link bus' allows you to connect all three components so that they talk to each other. Which means one remote rather than three and a dimension of control intelligence. Press 'CD' on the remote from cold, for example, and just the CD player and amp powers up. What's more, the amp automatically switches to CD input. Nothing novel about this; the Myriad needs it just to compete with its more plasticky rivals on an operational convenience basis.

No problems on a spec basis: the CD player has a 24-bit/96kHz compatible DAC and a coaxial digital output. Amplification runs to 50 Watts per channel, there are four line-level inputs plus phono and two tape loops. The tuner is RDS FM only but has a generous 29 presets.

SOUND QUALITY

Bigger boxes, bigger sound? No question. And the best sound? You could argue the Myriad's case. Certainly, overall tonal balance is probably the most even of the group and – with the help of the B&W DM303s (which hit well above their weight) – superbly integrated top to bottom. The deep, smooth and notably agile bass doesn't have even a hint of boom or bloom. And Poogie Bell's powerhouse drumming on Marcus Miller's *Cousin John* was convincingly taut, fast and weighty. Treble's just about spot on, too: open, detailed,



neither too forward nor reticent.

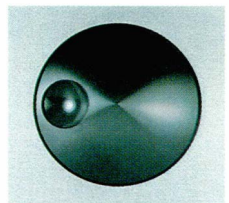
The overall system sound is ever so slightly cool with both CD and tuner (excellent in all departments) but that's no bad thing. If the Cameo's a little short on romance, it more than compensates with clarity and dynamics. It also disproves the notion that you have to have a warm-sounding presentation to be able to listen for hours on end without fatigue. This system lets the music flow and, more importantly, draws you right in. Okay, in absolute terms, the Cameo's performance doesn't quite scale the heights of a comparably-priced separates system. But, in all honesty, it doesn't fall that far short. If you want to relax and enjoy a broad spectrum of music, the Myriad won't get in your way.

To sum up, the Cameo sound has admirable even-handedness married to a dynamic and playful character that's very likable and rewarding.

CONCLUSION

By making the minimum number of concessions to half-pint convenience and gimmickry, the Cameo wears its purist colours on its sleeve. You'll have difficulty tucking this one away in a corner, but then it really is a bit too good for that. If sound quality matters above all else, we can strongly recommend this Myriad combo.

"THIS SYSTEM LETS THE MUSIC FLOW AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, DRAWS YOU RIGHT IN."



The Cameo system is more like a collection of proper hi-fi separates than an all-in-one design.



NAKAMICHI CMS-5

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£550.00** **CONTACT** 020 8863 9117 www.nakamichi.com **G'TEE** 2 years

“IT GETS MOST OF THE BASICS RIGHT BUT THOSE IFFY SPEAKERS SEEM TO PUT A LID ON SONIC AMBITION.”



The Nakamichi receiver and CD player perform well, but the speakers let the side down.

Being able to name drop ‘Nakamichi’, as in ‘my other system’s a ...’ has some clout. After all, the company’s reputation as a manufacturer of high-end cassette decks a few years back was without peer. And its reinvention as a purveyor of cutting edge lifestyle kit that can teach B&O a thing or three about minimalist chic has been nothing short of a revelation. The SoundSpace 9, for example, looks more like high art than hi-fi.

The CSM-5, on the other hand, looks exactly like a micro system. One so anonymously styled you wouldn’t give it a second glance in an identity parade. In fact, it’s almost inconceivably straight-laced measured against the freewheeling inventiveness of SoundSpace. Then again, its low-key, self-effacing design isn’t that dissimilar to those old, world-beating cassette decks – especially the in-car units. So perhaps Nakamichi is just being subtle and knowing.

CMS stands for Compact Music System and that’s an accurate description. The electronics – receiver and CD player – are pleasingly slimline, solidly built, thoughtfully detailed and well finished. As for the dedicated compact speakers – two way, front ported – they look smart enough, too, but don’t really stand up to close inspection: the offset tweeters might well improve imaging but construction’s lightweight, the drivers look low rent and spring clips preclude the use of anything other than bell-wire style cable.

Main control for the 1-bit CD player is a jog dial which works smoothly and the fascia ergonomics of both units are neat and simple. The RDS FM/AM tuner is quite plushly specced with 30 presets and the amp section is rated at 20 Watts a side (and that’s using a flattering measurement of 1kHz into 6 Ohms). Round the back there are inputs for two tape decks plus a processor loop and the CD player has an optical digital out for hooking up to a digital recorder.

SOUND QUALITY

The crisp, hiss-free reception on FM is impressive. Good enough to distinguish between compressed pop on Radio 1 and live classical broadcasts, which says something about the system’s basic transparency and the midrange performance of the speakers.

Even with CD things stay smooth, slick and easy on the senses. Certainly, this was the case with Lee Ritenour’s Bob Marley tribute, *Get Up Stand Up*, from the brilliantly produced *Twist of Marley* CD which, while lacking deep bass, chugged along in an amiable, laid back fashion with a tidy, detailed midrange and even-tempered treble.

As more discs were despatched into the transport, however, it became clear that the Nakamichi had a homogenising influence on the music and was tailoring things to sound ‘nice’. The cut from Marcus Miller, for instance, came across as being tight, precise and neat but didn’t breathe as it would have on a well-chosen, similarly priced separates system, or even some of the other style systems in this group. The acoustic space sounded a bit hemmed in and the instruments drained of colour; the music lacked ‘juice’.

Joni Mitchell didn’t sound too compromised with most of the production’s live vibrancy surviving the Nakamichi’s tendency to benignly edit presentation. Nothing to offend here, then, but by the same token, nothing much to excite, either.

CONCLUSION

A neat little system, this, that’s very easy to use and live with. It gets most of the basics right but those iffy speakers seem to put a lid on sonic ambition; substituting B&W DM303s for them proved that the electronics really aren’t bad at all. Not quite good enough for recommendation, though.

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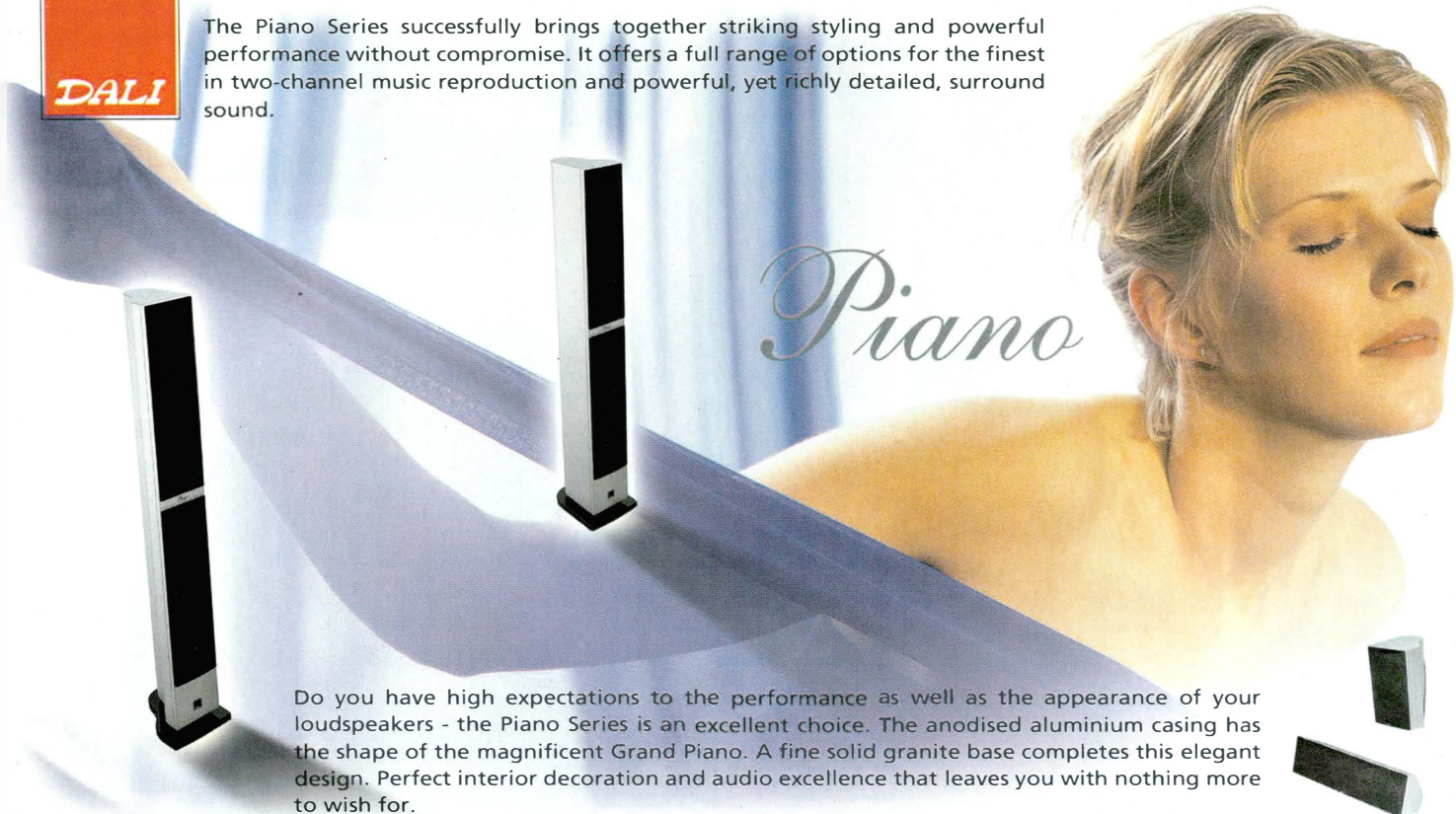
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ONKYO CR-205 SERIES/JAMO E800

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£640.00** **CONTACT** 01788 556777 www.onkyo.net/uk **G'TEE** 2 years

This constitutes but a modest dip into the Onkyo component pool. In all, there are eight micro-sized units in the 205 Series line up, including a surround decoder amp, MD and CD-RW recorders. What we have here, though, is the £250 R-805X FM/AM receiver (RDS and 30 presets) and the £190 C-705X CD player. The CD receiver totes single-bit conversion, 20 Watts a side of power, two optical digital outputs and three recording loops – one each for tape, CD-R and MD.

Design-wise, the Onkyo combo is clearly chasing the same customers as Denon and Nakamichi. Particularly Denon: look, feel, weight, layout and control presentation – right down to the champagne-sheen facias and gold edge trimmings – are uncannily close. The display window is a little larger but character size and clarity are about the same. And the Onkyo deserves at least a handful of Brownie points for eschewing spring clip speaker cable terminals. The back of the receiver is equipped with binding posts meaty enough to match those on the recommended Jamo E800 speakers supplied with the combo (Jamo shares importers with Onkyo, but try anything that takes your fancy). The only real concession to gimmickry is the 'acoustic presence' function, a kind of latter day 'loudness' button for listening at low levels.

The two-way Jamo E800 speakers cost £200 but look more expensive with their blonde wrap finish, chunky silver name plates and shield-shaped grilles. Driver complement comprises a 25mm soft dome tweeter and a 150mm mid-bass unit using a fibre reinforced paper cone. Round the back are two sets of terminals for bi-wiring and a rear-firing port. With this in mind it's best to leave about half a metre of free space to the rear wall as this isn't really a bookshelf design.

SOUND QUALITY

The tuner's right on the money – decently sensitive with low background noise and good definition. Switching to CD, though, the Onkyo begins to show signs of real talent, especially on vocals which sound open and natural, exhibiting fine intelligibility and presence.

High frequencies are just as pleasantly rendered with good tonal colour and shading. The 205 combo certainly had the right touch with the lush massed strings on the Joni Mitchell cut which was warm, expressive and touching. These large-ish Jamos aren't the most foot-tapping of designs, though. They didn't really nail the groove with Marcus Miller's bass-driven jazz funk – they couldn't muster enough articulation and control for that.

There's nothing much amiss with low frequency weight or extension, though. The bottom end sounds full and meaty all right, it's just that it lacks shape and drive; textures are thickened, meaning things can get a little thumpy.

If there's a disappointment with the Onkyo's sound, it's an overall lack of snap and excitement. For the most part it sounds open and tonally neutral but tends to undersell music with a strong rhythmic content. In short, it's a little too smooth and relaxed for its own good.

CONCLUSION

Compact, neat, easy to use and flexible, the Onkyo just misses out on that sense of musical conviction that marks the difference between background music and genuinely involving hi-fi. Maybe that's all that could be expected of it, but several rivals here break the mould.

"THE 205 COMBO HAD THE RIGHT TOUCH WITH THE LUSH STRINGS ON THE JONI MITCHELL CUT."



The Onkyo receiver and CD player were partnered with Jamo's chunky E800 speakers.



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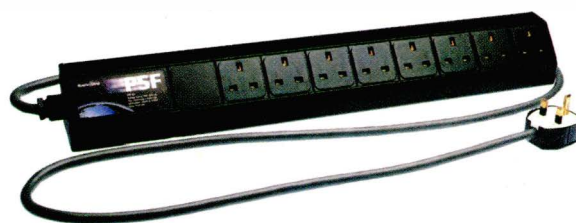
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SHARP SD-NX10H

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£1,000.00** **CONTACT** 0800 262958 www.sharp.co.uk **GTEE** 2 years

Sharp has moved swiftly to make its name synonymous with digital amp technology, though its 1-bit implementation is, so far, unique. A digital amp, rather obviously, delays the point where a digital source has to be converted to analogue until the very last moment. To do this, Sharp employs a 1-bit data stream sampling at over 2.8 million times a second which is similar to SACD's DSD system, though all digital sources benefit from the technology, not just the Super Audio discs.

Apart from the claimed improvements in sound quality – summarised by Sharp as clearer, faster, more accurate – there are a couple of physical benefits, too. One, the SD's separate power amp takes up roughly a third of the space of comparable analogue designs. And two, it consumes around 20 per cent less electricity and generates less heat. Certainly nothing like enough to be mistaken for the chrome-faced designer toaster it so closely resembles.

The main unit, which contains the natty widescreen colour display (a different hue for every function!), controls and software slots – looks like an even bigger toaster with a brushed aluminium finish. CDs and MiniDiscs slide in where you'd insert the bread. There's also an AM/FM tuner with RDS and a whopping 40 presets.

If that wasn't enough, the speakers look almost preposterously sci-fi – all silver surfaces, see-through grilles and macho ribbing – though they're actually made mostly out of plastic and dead ordinary with a 30mm dome tweeter and two 100mm bass-mid drivers. Whether you think it all looks gorgeous or slightly daft (for what it's worth, I like it), there's no denying that Sharp has turned convention on its head with this system. Or, at the very least, onto its side.

SOUND QUALITY

Something of a crowd-pleaser, the Sharp. If dynamic wallop and a sharply-etched presentation are what you crave, this system can deliver by the bucketload. Articulation and low frequency drive are particularly impressive, albeit manifested as a slightly boomy upper bass on the Marcus Miller cut which soon became wearing. But digital grunt certainly knows how to belt it out. In-yer-face and then some.

Treble doesn't have as much finesse as expected but is quite bright and breezy. And lots of leading edge information gives the impression of crisp timing, but that muscle-bound bass sometimes drags behind. At least you could never accuse the sound of being reticent or bland. True, everything seems a bit larger than life, but then a forthright and bold presentation is the Sharp's forte. Definitely a front-row seat.

In the end, though, it's all just a bit relentless. Everything is tackled at 150mph. Big, bold and colourful is fine, but it was too much on the Joni Mitchell tracks which really required a bit more 'air' and finesse to develop their full emotional power. It isn't that they didn't sound intimate and detailed, more that they were strangely forced and unconvincing.

You almost sense the Sharp is trying too hard to please. Initially it does but, just occasionally, it needs to take its foot off the gas.

CONCLUSION

In Sharp's case, daring to be different goes well beyond aesthetics. There seems to be a bit of a grudge match between the Japanese heavyweights over who can generate the most visual impact. Sharp wins. As for the sound, it's great strengths are stymied by a few small but significant weaknesses. Huge potential but, for now, no recommendation.

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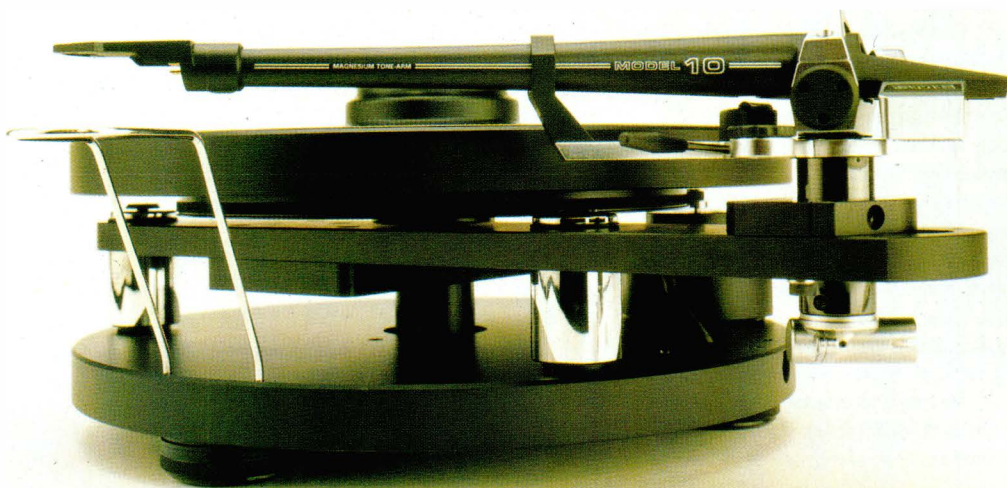
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TECHNICS SC-HD550

SOUND ★★☆☆ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£400.00** **CONTACT** 01344 862444 www.technics.co.uk **G'TEE** 2 years

If the Sharp and JVC systems in this group are the keenest representatives of 'cutting edge' in this test, Technics counters heroically with the very definition of 'old-school orthodox', a multi-stacked micro tower. No flashing lights, no dangerous angles, no attempt to shrink-ray the whole caboodle down to the size of a pound of butter.

On the contrary, the HD-550 comprises no less than four individual units – amp, CD player, cassette deck, and RDS tuner – and they all come with deluxe, wood-effect cheeks. Decadent or what? Moreover, because this stalwart system has been around for a few years, its price is now very competitive. Four chunky boxes plus beefy looking speakers – with mandatory bi-wiring spring clip terminals to accommodate the twin cable runs dictated by what Technics calls its 'multi-drive, bi-amp technology' – is an awful lot of kit for £400.

There are a few technical swerves under the bonnet. The 25 Watts per channel amp wears a back-lit 'VGCA' badge. It stands for Variable Gain Control Amplifier and claims a higher signal-to-noise ratio than the opposition. And the speakers' mid/bass driver cones are formed from PP (polypropylene) Mica which gives them a techy shiny yellow appearance.

The cassette deck is huge but weighs almost nothing and contrasts sharply with the nuggety little amp which, of all the electronic components, is the one that looks as if it means business. Set-up is simplified by the computer-style ribbon cable that links all the units so they can be controlled from the dowdy-looking but intuitive remote.

SOUND QUALITY

The Technics makes a good first impression. It sounds bold, confident and musical – anything but weedy. A CD I thought might suit it well was The Crusaders' excellent *Healing The Wounds*. This is a bright and slightly thin recording that nevertheless bristles with life and energy.

The SC-HD550 successfully removed the sting from the production but dulled the normally appealing sheen in the process. Not so good. That said, this is fairly undemanding material and the Technics' assertive yet well organised approach drove it along with infectious verve. Joni Mitchell



pared less well on *Both Sides Now*, orchestral climaxes sounding powerful but somehow failing to assume much scale or impact. At the same time, massed strings sounding just a tad too sweet and silky to be realistic.

Another of the Technics system's thrill-muzzling traits is a slight lack of openness and 'air'. For all its zip and weight, this mild closed-in feeling does put a cap on the last few degrees of expressive power. And the soundstage, while reasonably broad, lacks depth and low level ambient detail is often smudged.

At its worst, the SC-HD550 can sound a little raw and there is some mid-range colouration ('cuppy' with some added glare). But the presentation is mostly pacy and involving and can bring a dimension of fun and vitality to the music. In truth, it serves the really very good cassette deck and capable RDS tuner just as well.

CONCLUSION

A strange fish, the Technics. Looking about as fashionable as Ken Clarke's Hush Puppies, it's clearly one of the more up-beat sounding systems in the group and well suited to dance music. At £400 it's affordable, too. Sound quality's too mixed for formal recommendation, but it would actually make a fine system for a discerning teenager's bedroom.

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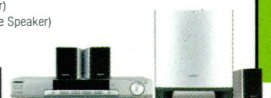


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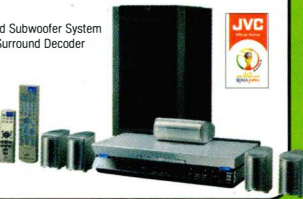
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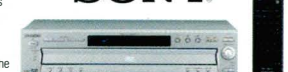
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CONCLUSIONS

DAVID VIVIAN GIVES THE SYSTEM LOWDOWN

Once the novelty of those sleek lines, layzeeboy functions and innate cuteness start to wane, what are the prospects for long term satisfaction? Remarkably good; better than we could have hoped for. If you want to keep the brief fairly loose, there are no real losers here. Even the Nakamichi system – electronically sound, but wounded by its second-rate speakers – more than passes muster as a maker of classy background music. It even has an alarm function to wake you up.

Okay, that's not strictly fair: it can belt it out, too, if required. Actually its overall performance is some way ahead of what would have been considered good for a lifestyle micro a handful of years ago.

That it doesn't shine in this company, though, probably tells you all you need to know about how far standards have advanced. That and the fact we were able to award four Recommended swing tags and a couple of Best Buys.

Point is, the sonic stars of this group – the Cyrus Quattro and Myryad Cameo – are snapping at the heels of comparably priced separates in hi-fi terms but leave them looking clay-footed when it comes to style and convenience. The more aesthetically avant-garde and gadget-laden examples of the genre push the boundaries of how little effort you have to expend to play music to seriously neighbour-worrying levels. Yet some of these – most notably the Denon and Marantz –



raise the art of uncritical listening to unprecedented heights.

The only real disappointment was the Sharp with its 1-bit digital amp which managed to sound stunning and strange at the same time. But give it a little fine tuning and who knows?

LIFESTYLE SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE

MAKE MODEL	CYRUS QUATTRO	DENON UD-M30	JVC FS-SD1000R	KENWOOD CD-R RXD-M92RW	MARANTZ ECLIPSE 25
PRICE	£1,400.00	£600.00	£400.00	£600.00	£899.90
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★ ★★★★★	★★★★★ ★★★★★	★★★★☆ ★★★★☆	★★★★☆ ★★★★☆	★★★★★ ★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Expensive for a second system. Almost too good to be tucked away in a bedroom. Real hi-fi without the hassle.	Oozes engineering integrity and is a dream to use. Better still, it makes convincing music from all sources.	Clever take on style system that works well in a variety of situations. Stable stereo gives practical advantages.	Talking point design, digital recorder, decent tuner and fun to listen to.	Successfully blends beauty, facilities, performance and value for money. Marantz has done its homework.
GUARANTEE	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	1 YEAR	2 YEAR

LIFESTYLE SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE

MAKE MODEL	MYRYAD CAMEO	NAKAMICHI CSM-5	ONKYO 205 SERIES	SHARP SD-NX10H	TECHNICS SC-HD550
PRICE	£1,500.00	£550.00	£640.00	£1,000.00	£400.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★ ★★★★★	★★★★☆ ★★★★☆	★★★★☆ ★★★★☆	★★★★☆ ★★★★☆	★★★★★ ★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Cameo wears its purist colours on its sleeve. Sound quality is just about top of the pile.	A neat little system, this, that's very easy to use, position and live with. Let down by poor speakers.	Compact, neat, easy to use and flexible, the Onkyo just misses out on musical conviction.	Great sonic strengths let down by a few small but significant weaknesses. Huge potential.	At £400 it's affordable, but sound quality's too mixed for formal recommendation.
GUARANTEE	2 YEARS	3 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS

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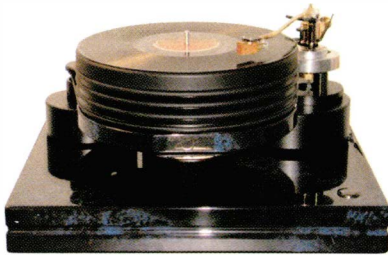
There are rumours going round...

...that vinyl LPs are obsolete technology, that valve amps are quaint artefacts from a better age, and even, heaven forbid, hi-fi as a pursuit is finished, overtaken by home cinema and the computer. We have only one thing to say to the scurrilous mischief makers behind these vicious rumours. Sour Grapes! If you can make a better sound from your digital sources, your tranny amps, and specially from your umpteen channel surround sound monsters, then we take our metaphorical hat off to you.

And, we'll close our shop tomorrow.

Thankfully (phew! mops brow with handkerchief) we're not going anywhere. Not even for a lunch break, it seems. If any of these rumours are true, nobody's told our customers! As each month passes we get busier and busier. Not too busy, though, to give you our unrivalled turntable set-up ability, advice on system matching and cable selection, and generally on buying a vinyl playing system which will blow away the digital opposition and leave the home cinema crowd gnashing their teeth with frustration!

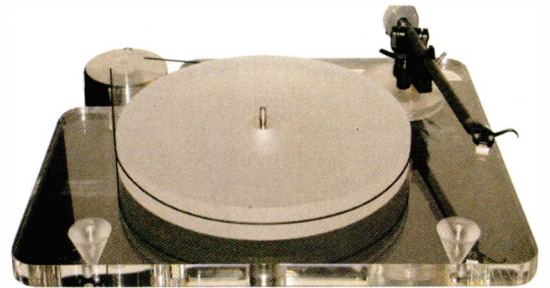
If you're into music, we are your dealer. Give Les or Pete a ring now!



Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace - £1700 (arm and cart extra) - next up in the range from the acclaimed Spacedeck, the Hyperspace successfully takes on decks double its price! Superb British engineering.



Duevel Bella Luna - from £2995 - these German speakers redefine reproduction at this price level; they are simply exceptional!

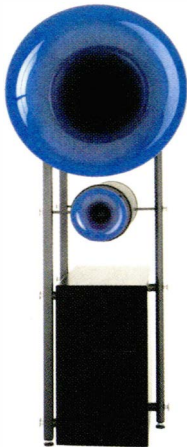


Clearaudio Champion - £725 (arm and cart extra) - new model from this German company. Just add a Rega arm for a sonic and visual feast.



Michell Gyro SE - £829 (arm and cart extra) - natural evolution from the Gyrodeck, the SE is not only cheaper, but even better too. Now there is a rarity!

NB: We do some other very nice loudspeakers too!



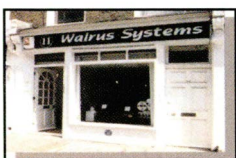
Croft Vitale - £425 - possibly the best value phono pre-amp in the world.
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- 1) The Closing Date for the LG/Warner Competition is **Friday 26th October 2001**.
- 2) Winners of the LG/Warner Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date given in 1) above.
- 3) All winners will be notified by post.
- 4) The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- 5) The LG/Warner Competition is not open to

- employees of Future Publishing Ltd, LG/Warner nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
- 6) We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
- 7) No cash alternatives will be offered.
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SPEAKER STANDS

EVERY COMPACT SPEAKER DESERVES A SOLID STAND TO SIT ON. PAUL MESSENGER CHECKS OUT A DOZEN LIKELY CANDIDATES.

The speaker stand has survived the invasion of the floorstanders in good health. The stand makers I spoke to are busier than ever, now that enthusiasts have realised that a properly supported two-way stand-mount still offers the best price/performance ratio around.

It's five years since I last did a speaker stand group test for *HFC*, and in revisiting the task I was quite shocked to hear how obvious the sonic differences were between the various models. Having high quality sources and amplification is important, of course, but thereafter I rate the speaker stand almost as importantly as the speaker itself – and rather more so than the speaker cable.

Traditionally the ugly duckling of the hi-fi world, the speaker stand definitely seems to be lightening up. Black and dark grey are still in the majority, but lighter greys and silver are now common alternatives, and materials like glass and stone are very welcome additions to the engineering armoury.

Two problems facing stand makers are that stylish design costs money, and that eye-pleasing design is often less than ideally compatible with optimum performance. As a hi-fi magazine, our main priority must be to assess the hi-fi performance of these stands. Style judgements should really be down to the customer, but a review needs to take some account of aesthetics, in order to make appropriate value ratings.

The speaker stand's role is part acoustic, part mechanical. The acoustic is easy. It's about getting the main drive units up off the ground, and away from walls too if appropriate. Virtually any stand will do that.

The tough part is the mechanical role. Every loudspeaker generates a broad range of vibrations, yet its front panel must be kept as inert as possible in order to ensure a wide dynamic range. The stand therefore has to try to support the speaker securely, while also itself coping with the vibrations it receives through the speaker's base.

Different materials, shapes and coupling techniques will all affect the end result, and what will suit one speaker and system might not be the best solution for another. The control of vibration in loudspeakers is still something of a black art, but for the moment the speaker stand seems a very cost-effective solution. Just don't underestimate – as many do – the vital role it can play in the total sound of a high quality system.

ON TEST

ALPHASON AKROS II 60D	£79.00
ATACAMA R724 AT	£249.99
CYRUS CLS50	£200.00
GALE T60	£59.95
GREEN APPLE DIAMOND BEVEL	£225.00
HNE CABLEWAY	£395.00
KUDOS S50	£114.95
MISSION STANCETTE	£59.90
MORDAUNT-SHORT ATLAS	£89.95
PARTINGTON DREADNOUGHT	£100.00
QUADRASPIRE QS	£170.00
SOUND ORGANISATION Z522	£95.00

OTHER EQUIPMENT USED

B&W LCR6, PMC TB1, Rega Ara, JMLab
Micro Utopia speakers
Naim and Linn sources and amplification

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

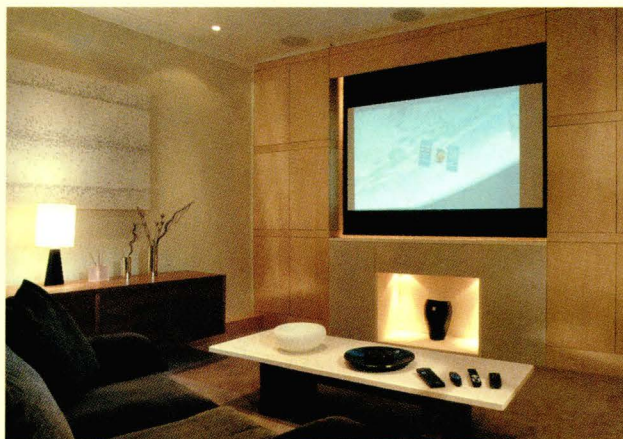
The KLF - *The White Room*
Massive Attack - *Mezzanine*
Tom Waits - *Bone Machine*
Grateful Dead - *Reckoning*
Eva Cassidy - *Time After Time*
BBC Radios 3 and 4

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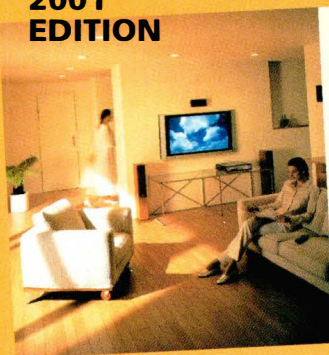
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ALPHASON AKROS II 60D

CONTACT: 01942 678000 www.alphasondesigns.com G'TEE: 1 YEARS

SOUND ★★☆☆ VALUE ★★★★★ £79.00

Making an inexpensive speaker stand look good is a real challenge. This new £79 Alphason Akros II 60D, replaces the plain II tested in *HFC* 202, the £15 price hike presumably going largely towards the new and curvaceously streamlined silver-grey plastic moulding that covers up all the ugly bits around the base. However, fixing the spikes lifts this cover some 3cm off the floor, probably leaving a gap to the carpet. Assembly is a little more complex and time-consuming than most.

Alphason has stuck to a similar basic format for many years, gradually refining the details. Here, embossed stripes decorate the twin side-by-side support pillars, which can also hide the speaker cable.

The Akros comes in a compact and substantial flat-pack, linking flat top and bottom plates with twin elongated tube columns, held by twin long-threaded bolts that pass through the columns and hold everything together. The fine detail is impressive: bags of sand are supplied for mass-loading; the bottom plate is particularly hefty, to aid stability; optional 'dimple' spikes are supplied for the top plate, and chunky 8mm ones for floor-coupling.

The Akros delivers a well-balanced sound, but one that's definitely in the budget category, with a 'soft' character that is effective at avoiding unwanted coloration, but which does tend to emphasise the midband at the expense of the extreme bottom and top.

This good looking stand is well equipped with decent quality ingredients. It sounds even-handed but lacks some dynamic range and enthusiasm.



ATACAMA R724 ATABYTE

CONTACT: 01455 283251 www.atacama-audio.co.uk G'TEE: 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★☆☆☆☆ £249.99

A market leader here in the UK, thanks in no small part to the considerable long term success of budget models like the SE60, Atacama's R724 provides an interesting opportunity to see what the company can come up with at the more serious end of the stand scene.

You might find the R724 listed for around £150, but the samples provided for this review were shipped alongside a remarkable 36kg of Atabytes, and assessed with this ballast installed. Like SoundBytes, these small steel chips are a by-product of nail manufacture. They have little intrinsic value but cost a lot to package and ship, and work much better than sand according to Atacama's Carl Sambell.

The complete package price here therefore totals £250 for the pair. Fully stuffed, each stand weighs a back-breaking 30kg, as the stand is itself quite substantial, thanks in part to a 6kg baseplate. The top plate comes with stud-spikes, and is welded onto the top of a truncated pyramid pillar, larger at the base than the top, further assisting the R724's stability.

Sonically clean and neutral with a firm and extended bottom end and a notably wide dynamic range, the R724 has plenty going for it. Coloration is very low, and the sound has great confidence and imperturbability, even when the system is working very hard. But it does lack some transparency and could do with a little top end sparkle and air.

A good example of what can be achieved with fairly basic engineering and plenty of mass, this fine sounding stand is one of the stronger contenders at its price, if not the most stylish.

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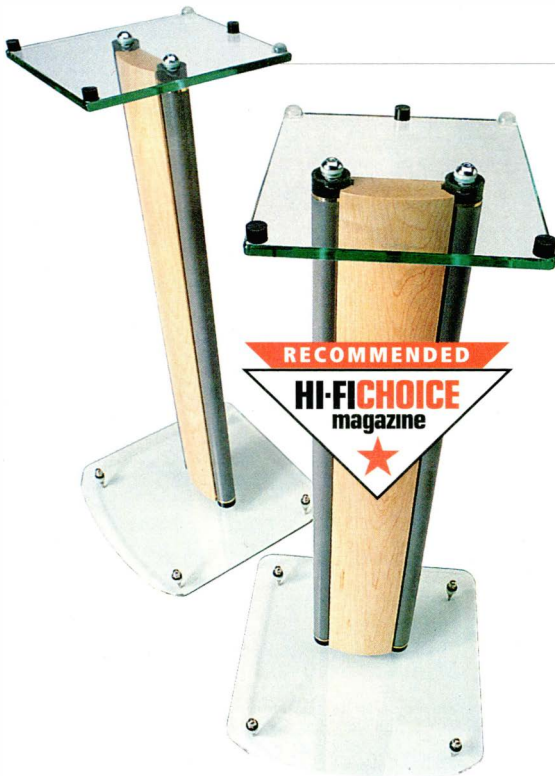
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CYRUS CLS50

CONTACT: 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com G'TEE: 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £200.00

The Cyrus brand owes its success to a cunning blend of style and performance, so you'd expect there to be a dose of both in any speaker stand the company produces. In fact produces is not the right word for the £200/pr CLS50. Stands Unique is the reputable stand-maker behind this unusual looking design, which Cyrus is marketing alongside its own range of speakers.

It's an impressive looking stand, combining a number of different materials to striking effect. The top and base are thick glass, while the support pillar is formed by two slim steel metallic grey tubes flanking a chunky solid wood fillet. Another key Stands Unique ingredient is carbon fibre, which is formed into washers placed between the spikes and the glass base, and between the rods and top-plate. Three carbon fibre studs support the speaker itself.

Perhaps it's down to this carbon fibre, or maybe the glass, but this Cyrus stand does have its own distinctive character. First impression is that it's a little understated, but the sound is actually very clean and subtle, with an impressive ability to reproduce information across a wide dynamic range and bandwidth, while adding very little coloration of its own to the sound.

Most impressive perhaps is its clarity through the bass region. The sound is dry, but largely because it's exceptionally clean and free from congestion here, yet its powers of analysis are formidable.

The CLS50 stand is a definite contender for the right aesthetic and sonic environment, with an unusual combination of style and performance at a realistic price.



GALE T60

CONTACT: 020 7940 2200 www.gale.co.uk GUARANTEE: 1 YEAR

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £59.95

In its current incarnation, Gale is a budget speaker brand operated by The Audio Partnership (associated with the Richer Sounds retail group). The £60 t60 is one of the least expensive stands in our test group, and one of the most basic in engineering terms too. However, it's actually the most elaborate of six Gale stands, using three support pillars where the others have just the one.

The t60 comes flat-packed with sketchy instructions. No mention is made of filling the pillars with aggregate, and none is supplied, though this might be beneficial. All the metalwork is finished in crackle black, with 2mm top and base, dimpled so the bolt-heads don't stand proud. Undisguised 6mm spikes fit through holes in the corners of the base. The top plate has corner holes too, though no spikes are supplied for them, and they're too small for 6mm types, so Blu-tack is indicated.

The t60 suffers from a rather lightweight and cramped bottom end, as well as some loss of upper treble resolution, the net result being a rather over-projected upper mid and a 'thin' overall sound. As a result there's plenty of apparent detail, but also a rather 'flat' overall effect, with some lack of dynamic expression.

The three least expensive models in this group test show strong similarities in materials, construction and sound quality. This Gale model, however, is neither the least expensive, nor the prettiest, and the sound in no way distinguishes it from its peers.

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Helios Model CD2i - new	£890	£1200
Helios Model CD3i - ex-dem	£690	£900
Micromega Duo BS - DAC	£190	£600
Analogue		
Nottingham Analogue Mentor - with reference platter	£1900	£2900
- Reference power supply for above	£490	£800
Nottingham Analogue 'Foot' - 12" carbon fibre tonearm - new	£700	£1100
Nottingham Analogue Space Deck - with SME arm mount	£660	£850
Helius Cyalene - tonearm	£590	£1350
Hadcock GH228 Super - 9" tonearm - nearly new	£440	£640
Loudspeakers		
Living Voice Auditorium - Hi-Fi Choice 'Best Buy'		
4 pairs - Walnut - ex-dem	£1150	£1500
Living Voice Avatar - Hi-Fi Plus 'Product of the Year'		
2 pairs - Cherry and Rosewood - ex-dem	£1900 / £2100	£2500
Living Voice OBX-R - Hi-Fi Choice 'Editors Choice'		
2 pairs - Cherry and Rosewood - ex-dem	£2900 / £3700	£4000
Cadence DS	£750	£1750
Dali 104 (MS)	£390	£650
Lowther Bi-Core 2000	£500	
B&W CDM1 SE - inc' custom stands - mint - 'give away'	£290	£650
Amplifiers		
Border Patrol 300B SE - with new Western Electric valves.		
Light Oak - the best SE available - ex-dem	£3750	£4500
Canary Audio 301 - 24 watts stereo power amp with		
2 matched pair Western Electric 300B - fabulous	£3900	£5200
Art Audio Concerto - integrated 40 Watts Class A, V. good	£1500	£2650
Art Audio VPI Special - phono and line pre amp	£850	£1900
Audio Innovations S1000 - 50 watt class A monos	£790	£1550
Joule Electra 2 box phono pre-amp	£800	£2000
Art Audio VPS - valve line pre-amp	£600	£1400
Sugden A21 - integrated ex-dem - mint condition	£750	£900
Musical Fidelity A1000 - 'super pre main' class A	£850	£1800
Tom Evans Micro Groove - phono stage - new	£290	£400
Tom Evans Groove - phono stage - new	£490	£750
DNM PA 3S - 200 hours - ex-dem	£2290	£2900
DNM Pre 3C Primus - inc' phono - 200 hours - ex-dem	£1590	£2100

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GREEN APPLE DIAMOND BEVEL

CONTACT: 020 8455 4411 www.greenapple.co.uk G'TEE: 1 YEAR

SOUND ★★☆☆ VALUE ★★★★★ £225.00

This extraordinary looking speaker stand is like no other. Style clearly takes precedence over all other considerations here, but this 100 per cent glass creation certainly counters all those criticisms about having to put up with bits of oil rig in the lounge. Green Apple is essentially a design company, and makes a whole host of very attractive glass furniture.

The transparent, green-tinted glass doesn't quite do a disappearing act, but that's not the intention. Rather, a lovely irregular bevelling along several edges catches the light in interesting ways. The base and top are diamond-shaped, and there's asymmetry in the uprights too, all of which adds to the visual intrigue, though the diamond top looks a little odd under rectangular speakers.

The stands came securely packed and fully assembled. They're only 51cm tall, compared to the 60cm norm, but that's not necessarily a disadvantage. This is not an enthusiast product, so no spikes here – the glass base merely sits on four squidgy transparent studs. This stand doesn't look particularly strong, so I made a quick call to establish that 12kg is the recommended upper limit for load bearing – which of course covers the vast majority of speakers.

The sound quality is a little soft and gentle, somewhat dulled at the top end and decidedly short of muscle and drama in the bass. Apart from making voices sound just a tad nasal and shut in, there is no obvious coloration, but there is some loss of excitement and involvement.

Although I can't recommend the Green Apple on sound quality grounds, it certainly takes top honours for style.



HNE CABLEWAY

CONTACT: 01777 708673 www.hne.co.uk GUARANTEE: 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £395.00

The priciest stand in our test group, hne's £395 Cableway differs considerably from the norm, and is specifically aimed at the enthusiast for whom performance is the prime criterion. Which is not to ignore the fact that it's also one of the best-looking stands around, in a nicely understated way. Although ours were general purpose examples, hne supplies stands specifically to suit a large number of the more serious stand-mount speakers out there, while also offering customers an exchange service.

The key ingredient here is granite, forming the base and top plates and combining with wood-based sections (to add a degree of damping) in the solitary large central pillar. One key feature is that the whole stand is non-metallic, and so won't affect the speaker drive signals in cables ducted up through the central pillar. Some care needs to be taken when fixing the spikes, and Blu-Tack top-plate coupling is recommended.

Pricy it may be, but the Cableway is immediately and obviously a class act, assisting a quality loudspeaker to deliver an awesome dynamic range. Tonally it's dry, lean and a little forward, which will suit some speakers better than others. I wasn't the least surprised to hear that it frequently partners B&W's Nautilus 805, for example.

Dynamics do sound just a shade muted, and there does seem to be a slight thickening in midbass textures, but the Cableway's clean, sweet and neutral transparency is exceptional in sorting out large scale orchestral material. If your speakers are deserving of such a costly support solution, it comes highly Recommended.



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KUDOS S50

CONTACT: 01833 631021 www.kudosaudio.co.uk G'TEE: 5 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £114.95

A Best Buy when I reviewed it some five years ago, Kudos disappeared for a while, but has since been bought and revived by the guys at Neat Acoustics, who are making S50s and S100s as close as possible to the originals.

Very much a simplified S100, the £115 S50 shares the large diameter central steel tube pillar, and the wide, stable tripod base, but the latter is simple sheet steel here, and the pillar has no additional tensioning.

It comes as a flat pack of very black metalwork, and is very easily assembled, the only option being to add some mass/damping ballast to the steel pipe pillar. The flat base and top plates are good and thick, and are fitted with chunky spikes decorated by large-domed lock-nuts. Tripsods – especially with a large footprint, as here – prove easy to level and ‘self-adjust’. The top plate comes without spike holes so use cones or Blu-tack, or specify one with holes.

It's some years since I'd heard an S50, and I was really surprised at how good such a modestly priced stand could sound. Tonally it's quite distinctive – warm and rich, without the over-projected voice band so often found with other speaker stands.

Alongside that full and slightly laid-back balance, the S50 has formidable bass delivery with real power and authority, and an impressively wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth. Presence projection and sweetness are a little less than the best, but in truth the S50 gives very little away, and clearly continues to deserve Best Buy status, though perhaps it's time to lighten up that crackle-black finish a trifle.



MISSION STANCETTE

CONTACT: 01480 451777 www.mission.co.uk G'TEE: 1 YEAR

SOUND ★★☆☆☆☆ VALUE ★★★★★ £59.90

The least expensive in this review group, Mission's £60 Stancette looks very good value for money, and is deliberately conceived as a partner to the budget 70-series range of speakers. Indeed, it costs thirty pounds less than the Stance reviewed in *HFC 202*, yet the two look strikingly similar.

As you might expect, this is a pretty basic flat-pack stand, though it does use three upright tubes between base and top plate, and most of the components have a very attractive 'metallic silver' finish. In fact the whole thing looks very smart indeed, even though there's nothing terribly substantial about the materials. The top-plate is a 2mm steel sheet, with no corner holes, so Blu-tack is the obvious coupling method. The base is a much beefier 4mm thick, with welded sockets for the hefty silver 8mm spikes.

Sonically, this budget stand sounds no more than that. It is pleasingly coherent and well ordered through the mid-band and presence, without obvious coloration, but it does lack dynamic range throughout, and resolution fades away quite obviously towards the frequency extremes.

The net result is a sound that is a little forward and 'small', and lacking real authority and drive through the bass region. Speech sounds clear and nicely balanced at low levels, but a little pushy and thin when the volume level is raised.

Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price make for a clear incentive if money is tight. The sound is as good or better than the immediate competition, and can be improved by mass loading/damping.

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MORDAUNT-SHORT ATLAS

CONTACT: 020 7940 2200 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk G'TEE: 1 YEAR

SOUND VALUE £89.95

The second brand in this test to fall under the Audio Partnership/Richer Sounds umbrella (Gale is the other), Mordaunt-Short recently introduced its striking 900-series loudspeakers, which are distinguished from the herd by their shiny silver driver cones and front baffles. It therefore comes as no surprise to find that MS's Atlas speaker stand enjoys a similarly fond relationship with the colour silver.

The result is undoubtedly both attractive and stylish, and the standard of finish is very good. However, cosmetics seem to have been the overwhelming priority here. You get super-smart, chrome-polished spikes top and bottom, but only the top ones have any sort of lock-nut arrangement, and they're infernally fiddly. Both top and base plates are just 2mm thick, though that does allow the latter to be stamped into a dished shape, avoiding abrupt edges.

Lower than most at 53cm, one large and two small tubes form the pillars, the former with plenty of capacity for adding mass-loading/damping materials, though no mention of this is made in the very skimpy instructions.

The Atlas sounded thin and bright, over-emphasising the upper midband and lower treble to a significant degree. The root problem is that there's no real bass drive or authority. The bottom end is undernourished and anaemic, seeming more to go along with what the music's doing, rather than providing it with appropriate weight and impetus. As a result, the midband sounds rather exposed, tending to exaggerate voice detail at the expense of warmth and richness elsewhere. A good-looking stand certainly, but one that doesn't transcend its rather basic engineering content.



PARTINGTON DREADNOUGHT

CONTACT: 01474 709299

GUARANTEE: 3 YEARS

SOUND VALUE £100.00

One of the longest established speaker stand manufacturers around, Partington is fond of the Dreadnought name. We reviewed the £300 Ultima version in *HFC* 202, though there's little similarity to this £100 model.

Nicely presented in a metallic slate-grey finish, styling is maybe a little prosaic here – you don't get to see much daylight through this stand, for example. But in engineering terms, the Dreadnought is very impressive indeed, especially considering its relative affordability.

Uniquely in this test group, this stand is fully welded together, and shows considerable attention to fine detail elsewhere too – for example the base spike sockets are notably effective and versatile. The top and base are filled with a silicon/iron-loaded resin, for optimum damping, and the pillar uses five separate sections – four tubes plus a heavily webbed central box-section, giving the rather small top plate no opportunity for flexing. The latter has no holes, but Partington supplies self-adhesive metal cones for those who prefer a spiked contact here. Ours came with some sand ballast in the uprights, but that's something you'll normally have to do for yourself – three-quarters full is recommended.

Clean and sweet for such an inexpensive design, the Dreadnought has a dry, tight bass. It's notably free from thickening or overhang, yet provides genuine authority and drive when required, underpinning a compellingly coherent projection of detail and expression up in the voice band.

A fine sounding stand that's exceptionally well built and realistically priced, the Dreadnought inspires a confident Recommended rating.

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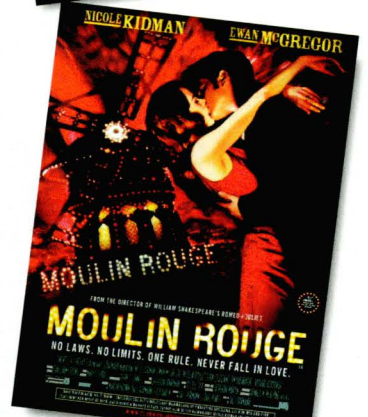
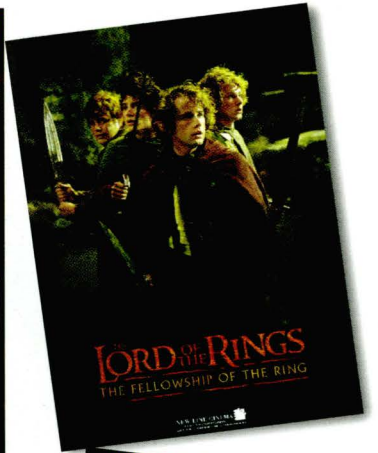
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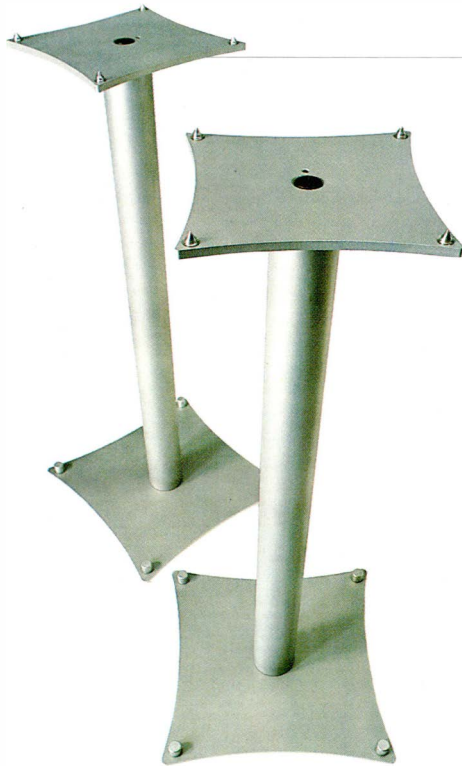
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QUADRASPIRE QS

CONTACT: 01225 333360 www.quadraspire.co.uk GTEE: 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★☆☆ VALUE ★★☆☆ £150/170

Quadraspire is really an equipment furniture maker, and has enjoyed considerable success in recent years with its simple and elegant towers, combining real wood shelves with scalloped edges and non-ferrous alloy uprights. Speaker stands are a new departure for the brand, and the company candidly acknowledges the main motivation was demand from customers via dealers for supports to match their other products.

The result is the elegant QS Speaker stand, where style clearly takes priority ahead of either price or performance. Simplicity is a keynote, with a solitary, slim central pillar, beefed up by sealed mass-loading/damping, and bolted between thick flat top and base plates, both with Quadraspire's characteristically concave edges.

Aluminium alloy is the material of choice here, for everything bar the top and bottom bolts – even the spikes are alloy (which is taking things a bit far). The stands come in black at £150, while the silver versions cost £170.

The sound quality is respectable, without setting new standards. It's pleasingly coherent and well balanced through the vital midband, so voices sound natural and unforced, if a tad gentle and short of a little dynamic expression.

The bottom end is not its forte. It's clean without obvious 'overhang', but sounds just a little 'dead' tonally, and doesn't generate a great deal of authority. But the midband is where the real action is, and here the QS does shine, with a clean and wide dynamic range with minimal coloration.

If the style appeals, this is a very decent-sounding speaker stand at a reasonable enough price.



SOUND ORGANISATION Z522

CONTACT: 01279 501111 www.soundorganisation.co.uk GTEE: 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★☆☆ VALUE ★★☆☆ £95.00

A classic name in hi-fi support furniture, Sound Organisation's Z522 did very well in last year's group test (*HFC 202*), so what's it doing back again this year? Well, the price has crept up from £89 to £95, and there's now a handsome slate grey finish, which is already out-selling traditional black by a handsome margin. The base-plate has been modified too, and now uses 3mm sheet steel – like the top plate – while floor spikes now fit into large chromium-plated sockets.

The rest is as before, with four substantial rectangular-section 'tubes' forming the pillars, each held by four bolts, top and bottom. The result is a stand that tips the scales at 10kg, even without the addition of mass-loading/damping materials, and with those in place, the Z522s are considerably heavier than all but two (much more costly) models in this test group. I can't say it's amongst the more stylish models around, though – the multi-pillar array ensures that the speaker hardly floats on air – but it's thoroughly purposeful and well-engineered for the price.

The sound quality is up there with the better models too. It's dynamically just a little 'soft' compared with the best, but still musters plenty of pace and authority. It delivers the bass end with good drive and solidity, albeit adding a mild thickening to textures. Meanwhile, the top end is open, clean and explicit, even if it can become slightly unruly at times.

The Z522 delivers a solid performance at a price that will appeal to owners of a wide range of systems and deserves a confident Recommendation.

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CONCLUSIONS

PAUL MESSENGER PICKS THE STANDS OUT FROM THE CROWD...

Our 12 pairs of speaker stands cover a broad spread, from the £60 Mission Stancette and Gale T60 up to the £399 hne Cableway. The further upmarket one goes, the less similar the stands become, but the four least expensive models down at the budget end have quite a lot in common – indeed, the Mission, Gale and Mordaunt-Short are so alike they could well have come out of the same factory. These least expensive stands are all rather lightweight affairs, and give a lightweight sound. Even the addition of sand or other fill to add mass and damping doesn't truly disguise their limitations.

The next three models up the price ladder, from Sound Organisation, Partington and Kudos (£95 to £115), show significantly beefed up components

and construction, and deliver a substantial sound quality improvement as a consequence.

These three have to represent the peak in overall 'sound for your pound' terms. All three are very capable, though each has its own 'character', and none would win a beauty contest down at the Design Museum. If you want something more stylish and elegant, be prepared to pay extra for it.







The Quadraspire, Cyrus and Green Apple stands all offer welcome palliatives to 'son of oil rig' syndrome, but only the £200 Cyrus/Stand Unique with its unusual mixture of materials can really match the performance of the £115 Kudos S50.

Above the \$50, the law of diminishing returns does begin to kick in. But there

are still significant improvements to be had, and it's when you start looking further upmarket that it becomes increasingly important to choose the right stand to suit your own particular system, sonic and musical preferences.

Materials clearly play a key role in all this. The granite-based hne Cableway has a very distinct character which seems particularly well suited to dense orchestral music. It sounds quite different from either the Cyrus CLS 50 with its glass and carbon-fibre confection, or from the steel/mineral-resin Kudos S100 which has been my reference this past five years. Each sounds so distinctive that adjectives like 'better' or 'worse' don't really apply. What matters is finding the right stand for your speakers and tastes that meets your budget.

SPEAKER STANDS AT A GLANCE

						
MAKE MODEL	ALPHASON AKROS II 60D	ATACAMA R724	CYRUS CLS50	GALE T60	GREEN DIAMOND BEVEL	HNE CABLEWAY
PRICE:	£79.00	£2249.99	£200.00	£59.95	£225.00	£395.00
SOUND VALUE:	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Good looking and well made. Evenhanded but lacks some dynamics.	Basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine sounding stand.	Very nice combination of style and performance. A definite contender.	Neither the cheapest nor the prettiest, and the sound isn't that hot.	Sounds soft, gentle and a bit dulled at the top, but top of the heap for style.	Clean, sweet and neutral. Looks great, too, so start saving!
GUARANTEE:	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	1 YEAR

						
MAKE MODEL	KUDOS S50	MISSION STANCETTE	MORDAUNT-SHORT ATLAS	PARTINGTON DREADNOUGHT	QUADRASPIRE QS SPEAKER STAND	SOUND ORGANISATION Z522
PRICE	£114.95	£59.90	£89.95	£100.00	£150.00/£170.00	£95.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Fornidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range.	Smart styling and finish. Sounds OK for the price.	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't live up to appearances.	Fully welded, high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound.	Styled to match the company's racks; a very decent sounding stand.	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good drive.
GUARANTEE	5 YEARS	1 YEAR	1 YEAR	3 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS

A tale of two technologies

ONKYO'S FLAGSHIP BRAND INTEGRA RESEARCH HAS LAUNCHED A DVD-A PLAYER THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AS GOOD AS IT SHOULD. PAUL MILLER FINDS OUT WHY.

"TRUE COLLABORATION BETWEEN JAPANESE AND WESTERN AUDIO COMPANIES IS A RARE THING."



The Integra Research RDV-1 DVD-Audio player reviewed this month (page 38) marks a rare collaboration between Western and Far Eastern technologies. The bedrock of this player is Onkyo's DV-S939, which is hardly a hi-tech slouch in its own right. To this heavyweight chassis with its THX Ultra certification, progressive scan video outputs and on-board decoders, is brought a wealth of experience from US company Apogee Electronics, leader in the development of crystal clock and digital to-analogue conversion technology for the professional sector.

APOGEE LOW-JITTER CLOCK

The key differences between the DV-S939 and the 'audiophile' RDV-1 lie in changes to the master clock and choice of DAC technology driving the L/R stereo analogue outputs. Onkyo describes in excruciating detail the benefits of reducing digital jitter and yet, in practice, the RDV-1 suffers more jitter (760psec) than the minimal amount (265psec) enjoyed by the DV-S939. Fig 1 clearly highlights the higher correlated jitter incurred by the RDV-1 (red trace), though this figure does not include the substantive uncorrelated, or noise-like jitter (1) centred around +/-400Hz.

Ironically, this effect is often found in budget DVD players where the audio DACs are 'timed' from the MPEG (video) clock instead of a dedicated device. Obviously that's not the case here, but with Apogee's reputation for precision clocks being inviolate, I can only assume that it's the implementation, rather than the clock itself, that's gone awry.

Meanwhile, both players use the same dual-channel, 24-bit/192kHz DACs from Analog Devices (the AD1853) to service their centre, surround and sub outputs. So the revisions within the RDV-1 principally affect the replay of two-channel material such as CD and 192kHz DVD-Audio. On the face of it, the cheaper DV-S939 offers a more

symmetrical performance from all 5.1 outputs as these are accommodated by six, identical DAC and analogue filter stages.

Nevertheless, much of the effort in crafting a new front channel output for the RDV-1 concerns the simplification of its analogue filtering. All CD and DVD players employ some sort of final, analogue filter to remove the ultrasonic by-products of D-to-A conversion. Indeed, in 99 percent of players, the application of such a filter is unavoidable if the original musical waveform is to be accurately restored. However, the steeper or more aggressive the analogue filter, the greater is its impact on the phase of high frequency musical sounds. This is what Onkyo refers to as 'temporal distortion'.

VECTOR LINEAR CONVERSION

With its Vector Linear Converter (VLC), Onkyo and Apogee have sought to reduce the output of ultrasonic noise and distortion so completely that a simple first-order analogue filter is all that's required to complete the job. Naturally, a first-order filter subjects the music to minimal "temporal distortion". How is this achieved? In practice, VLC resembles a latter-day version of the 'Realtime Linear Smoothing' DAC technology developed by Harman Kardon and launched in 1993 as the 'wheels' for its HD7625 CD player.

This also explains why there are two of Burr-Brown's PCM1704 DACs for each of the front channel outputs plus a separate oversampling filter (the NPC SM5847). For each channel, the oversampled data is divided into two parallel streams. One stream is addressed directly to one DAC while the other is delayed by one (over)sample period before passing to the second DAC.

Each DAC separately converts its data back into analogue form. The output of the first is used to determine both the rate and direction of change of signals emerging from the second, delayed DAC. Because the first DAC is always one sample ahead of the other, Onkyo can use a relatively simple comparator circuit to integrate (or draw a line between) successive samples. If the out-

When the hi-fi industry needs the truth about technology, Paul Miller is its first port of call.

put of a conventional DAC resembles a staircase (each sample represented by a step on the musical waveform) then the integrated output of Onkyo's two DACs represents a far smoother 'line'.

Of course, Onkyo's digital circuit is more complex, requiring a pair of DACs per channel and a digital delay, called a shift register, to create the two datastreams. On the other hand, the subsequent analogue filter is proportionally simpler. Reduced ultrasonic noise and digital images are assured, along with a minimal phase shift, but the success of the technique relies on accurate timing by the shift registers and, crucially, precise matching in the characteristics of the two DACs. If the DACs are not wholly identical in performance then the predictive process is compromised, leading to errors that increase at higher frequency and lower signal levels.

This at least partially explains the surprising test results for the RDV-1. The S/N ratio, for example, falls from 108dB in the DV-S939 to 97.5dB in the RDV-1. This is 16 rather than 24-bit performance. More alarming still is the dramatic rise in distortion from midband through to high treble frequencies, regardless of the disc format or sample rate (44.1kHz, 48kHz or 96kHz). From just 0.0008% at 1kHz, distortion increases to 0.02% (2kHz), 0.1% (5kHz), 1.5% (10kHz) and approximately 6% at 20kHz.

Figure 2 compares a 22kHz signal (labelled as the Fundamental) replayed via both the DV-S939 (black trace) and RDV-1 (red trace). The 2nd, 3rd and 4th harmonic distortions are marked for the DV-S939, with those for the RDV-1 clearly extending way above. The clump of uncorrelated jitter, or clock noise, is also visible on this spectrum (2) while the black peak from the DV-S939 continues as a sharp line into the noise, as it should. Neither is this a case of peak-level overload, because distortion persists at approx 4% (-6dBFS); approx 1% (-12dBFS); 0.25% (-20dBFS) finally falling to 0.04% at -40dBFS through main stereo and (front) 5.1 channel outputs at 20kHz.

Figure 3 shows an ultrasonic 44kHz signal (from DVD-A) with higher distortion still (approx 12%) and more obvious jitter/clock noise. One benefit of the RDV-1's oversampling/VLC process is its superior rejection of stopband images at high DVD sample rates like 96kHz and 192kHz. In this instance, the DV-S939 only rejects these images by 35dB or so (black peak,

labelled Digital Image) while the RDV-1 achieves 90dB or more.

True collaboration between Japanese and Western audio companies is a rare thing and, despite the hiccups in execution witnessed here, is still something I would see encouraged. Yet the path is a rocky one, as the recent Technics/DVD-A software debacle served to demonstrate (see HFC209). The analogy with Onkyo's RDV-1 DVD-A player is clear enough: too many cooks and all that...



THE LAB REPORT

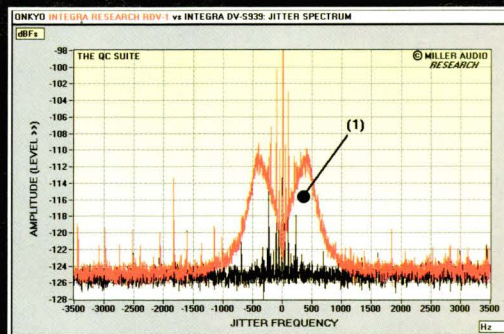


Fig (1): Despite Onkyo's best efforts, the RDV-1 (red trace) suffers more jitter than the cheaper DV-S939 (black trace).

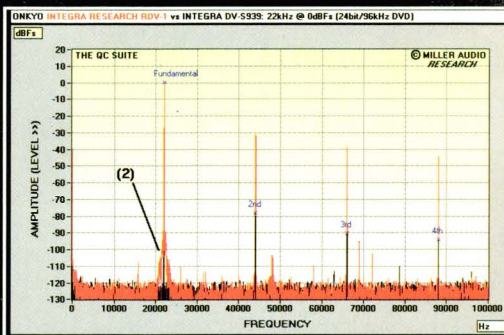


Fig (2): Distortion increases dramatically through the treble and is 450x higher than that from the DV-S939 around 20kHz.

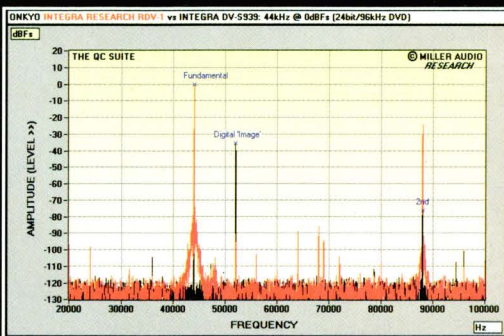


Fig (3): Higher frequencies yield higher distortion still, though the rejection of digital 'images' is superior.

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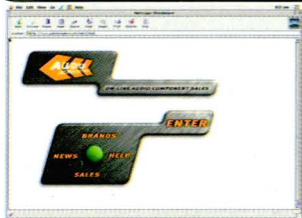
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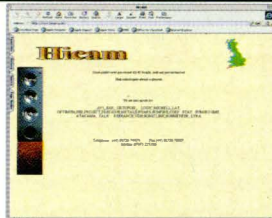
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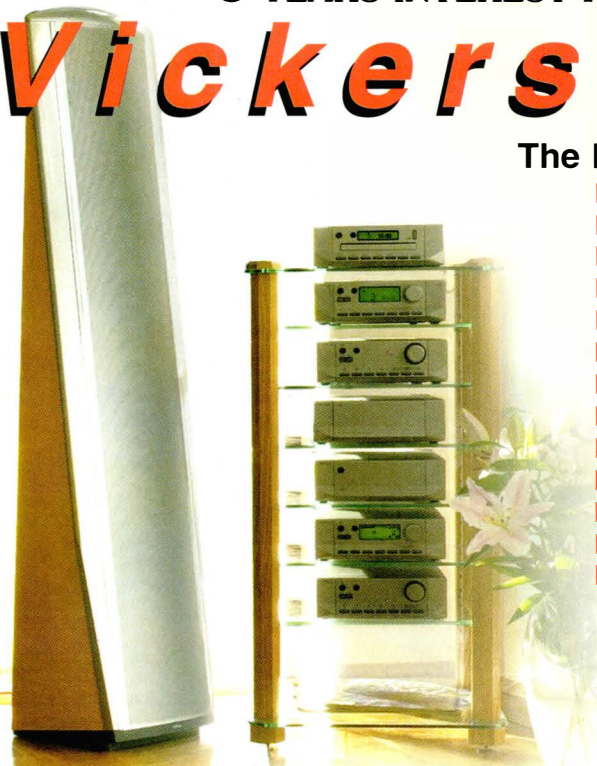
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FOR SALE

B&W CDM7SE LOUDSPEAKERS,

cherry real wood veneer, mint condition, can demo to buyer only. Call Tony 01954 200086 (eves).

KRELL KAV300I, £1,700, transparent balanced Musiclink ultra, £950, Musicwave plus bi-wire 10ft, £300. ProAc response ISC Burr oak with Target R4 stands £950. Call 0161 829 5591 or 07941 424322.

B&W MATRIX 801s Series 3. Top of the range B&Ws, ex-Abbey Road Studios, used for Pink Floyd & Beatles remastering! Black, mint, stunning performance. £2,500 Call 07899 808918 (Kent).

CYRUS components, black, boxed excellent condition. AV5 £700, dAD7 CD £550, power (x2) £325 each, PSX-R (x3) £225 each. Call Phil 07958 373514.

AUDIO SYNTHESIS silverblue SQ interconnect, WBT phonos. 2x 0.5 metre, £90, 1x 0.75 metre, £100. All three £250. Call Terry 020 8482 0363.

VIDIKRON VISION ONE projector for sale (new cabinet style – marque 9500UL) Still in original unopened packing case and on a pallet. White. Serial number 320010005NJ. UK rrp £49,995. Will deliver for £29,995 edwardlaing@yahoo.co.uk.

SPENDOR SP 2/3 loudspeakers (limited edition) walnut finish with Target HJ12 stands £550. Arcam Alpha 6 CD player £150. Call 01628 524869 (Bucks).

B&W CDMSE centre speaker £200, Apollo Aria support/stands £100. Richard Allan Minette Gold speakers £50, Van den Hul 'The Snowtrack' 2x7 metre pro bananas £75. Call Mark 01924 491982 (after 6.30pm).

NAIM SBLs beech, fantastic sound, gorgeous looking, (matches beech laminate floors!), new £2,540, yours for

£1,750 including Mana stands. Call 07966 160258.

TRICHORD RESEARCH DINO MM/MC phono amp, with upgraded power supply, under guarantee, manual & boxes. (£700), £490. Call 01903 247779 (Sussex).

REGA RB300 TONEARM, c/w Sumiko BPS cartridge, four years old but little used. Cost £425, accept £100. Call Robert 07831 634531 (Kent).

QUADRASPIRE Q4MINI x2, 4-shelf hi-fi supports in American cherry £110 ono each. Call 07785 774158 days, 01273 206057 eves (Hove).

AVI MEGATRONS amazing 3-way speakers 2x10" bass per side, mid and top separate boxes. Cherry finish, move forces sale, 1 year old. Over £4,000 new, £2,200 ono. Call 07980 211447 or 020 7439 1365.

B&W P4 speakers £290, Dynaudio 60 speakers £390, Dynaudio 62 speakers, £475, Project One turntable £115, Dual 505/4 £120. Call 01732 364007 (Tonbridge).

SONUS FABER signum speakers with fixed stands in walnut and leather. Gorgeous looks that sound very special £850. Call 01932 444176 (Exeter).

AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V3.0 HDCD, BNC & optical ins/BNC out. Excellent condition (£600+) sell for £300 ono. 2x 1 metre pairs of Cable Talk studio 2, as new, £65 for both (£130). Call 0118 967 1909/07957 344541.

SONY FM-AM tuner with RDS and Marantz PM-44 special edition integrated stereo amplifier. Excellent condition £120. Call Alan 01244 401313.

HI-FI NEWS rack mid brown, wooden, three tiers, large bottom tier, top platform isolated, £100 with spare shelf. Call 01392 444176 (Exeter).

KEF REFERENCE 3.2 (Albina Burr) unused £2,000. Alchemist Forsett

APD20A Mk2 poweramp, unused, £650. Burmester 785 preamp, £600. Call 01952 502097 (Telford).

SONY CDP-915 CD player, cost £300 new, will sell for £165. Boxed as new. Call Michael 020 8421 4343 (Middlesex).

REGA R200 ARM £50; Sony ST80F tuner 1970s, £25; laser discs (15), £100; Pioneer PD91 CD Player, £400. Call 01708 457691.

NAIM NACDS 2/NAXPS (new £6080), £4,500 ono. Naim NAC52 (new £3,635), £2,700 ono. All 18 months old, mint & boxed. Townshend turntable support (new £235), £150, Linn ARKIV cartridge vgc £300. Call 0118 958 5463 daytime/0118 946 1421 eves.

SPEAKERS EPOS ES22, cherrywood, £635. REL Storm Mk1, £325. Both in excellent condition, original packaging and manuals. Super sounds, will demonstrate. No offers thanks. Call Mark 0131 538 9073 evenings.

B&W CDM7NT SPEAKERS black, £895. Arcam power amp A85, £595. Arcam CD92, £700. All six months old including boxes. Call William 020 7622 5151 (work) or 07973 123897 mobile (Surrey)

MONITOR AUDIO 1200 GOLD speakers, teak finish, £200. Call 01689

828680 (Kent).

PINK TRIANGLE ORDINAL 22-bit DAC, £250. Call 01286 870194 (Gwynedd).

TWO AUDIO INNOVATIONS power amplifiers, £125 each, ideal for bi-amping. AI pre-amp MC – needs attention, £75. Call 01286 870194 (Gwynedd).

MOJO MAGAZINE, issues 1-36 including three variants of issue 24, and two variants of issue 12. Issue 65, and three issues of Q magazine, 97 and 98. Tenth anniversary 121. Offers over £200. Call Nick on 01223 413614

MUSICAL FIDELITY A200 class A amplifier £325. Arcam Alpha 6 CD player £150. Call Steve on 020 8531 5152 (after 5:30).

KIMBER SELECT KS-3035, 12-foot speaker cable with jumpers, holographic imaging, 8 months old, £3,250. Call 02890 480078 (after 6pm).

WANTED

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-Tone wanted, will pay good price. Call 01484 427426 (Huddersfield).

AUDAX HM170 carbon fibre drive units, or similar HDA units. Decca International or LVX Plus tonearm. Moth/Hart phono stage. Valhalla p/s board. Call 01642 594645.

BUYING TIPS

Buying secondhand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand 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!

THE DIRECTORY

THE *HI-FI CHOICE* DIRECTORY ROUNDS UP OVER 1,000 PRODUCTS REVIEWED IN PAST ISSUES. HERE YOU'LL FIND OUR OPINIONS ON THE BEST HI-FI COMPONENTS, ALONG WITH GUIDANCE ON HOW TO ASSEMBLE THEM INTO FIRST CLASS HI-FI SYSTEMS.

THE ART OF SYSTEM BUILDING

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT BRINGING TOGETHER AN IMPRESSIVE HI-FI SYSTEM? IT GOES A LITTLE LIKE THIS...

When it comes to getting together a great separates system, identifying decent individual components is fundamental, but it isn't the whole story. There is the business of system synergy to consider, which put simply means how well your components gel as a whole. The degree to which this can affect the end result tends to increase with price, thus budget components are relatively immune (a competitively priced Best Buy disc player, amp and loudspeaker pairing of almost any hue will combine to make a good system). When considering a purchase it's always good practice to listen to alternatives. It's the only way you can learn what different components sound like and find out which ones appeal to you.

So once you have shortlisted some components, the next step is to track down a knowledgeable dealer to take you through the options available. As well as getting the basic hardware right there is the question of which cables to use; should you stick with what comes in the box or pay extra for interconnects and speakers leads? We firmly believe that cables make a worthwhile difference, but if you are sceptical any dealer should be able to demonstrate this for you.

And don't skimp on supports. The temptation is to use any old shelf or sideboard for system and speakers, but it's worth the outlay for speaker stands and proper system support.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

WIRING UP A SYSTEM IS REALLY QUITE STRAIGHT-FORWARD IF YOU FOLLOW A FEW BASIC GUIDELINES.

- When bi-wiring (see glossary) with speaker cable you will sometimes need to connect two plugs to one socket on the amp. If the amp has a binding post connection you can usually put one plug through the hole that goes across the post and one in the end. If this is not possible you may need to use spade connectors or have both pairs of cables soldered into single plugs at the amp end.
- If a cable has an indication of directionality, i.e. if there are arrows on the casing, use these with regard to the way the signal travels. If there are no arrows you can try it both ways and see if you hear a difference or just route the signal in the direction of the writing on the cable jacket.
- In multichannel AV systems you may have the option of routing video signals via the amp, or bypassing it. The former option gives easiest functionality if you use several sources, but by bypassing you are removing a switch and connection which should improve quality.
- Try to avoid lying mains cables across or beside signal cables as the field they produce can have a negative effect.
- Try to keep all cable runs as short as possible (unless you use Naim, in which case refer to manufacturer's recommendations).

AWARD TAGS

Whenever HFC reviews a group of like components we have the opportunity to give the best products a Best Buy or Recommended award. Best Buys are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price.

Recommended products are first class components losing out to Best Buy status only because of a higher price or less competitive overall sound quality.

A third award, the Editor's Choice, is reserved for those products reviewed solo, such as you see in the First Impressions or High Performance sections. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.



GLOSSARY

5.1 CHANNEL AUDIO: Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE: Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS: The lowest three octaves of the audio band – hence 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz); 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz); and 'upper bass' the 80-160Hz octave.

BI-AMP: (sometimes tri-amp): Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE: (sometimes tri-wire): Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each driver can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R: Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW: Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A: Operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to give lower distortion.

CLASS AB: Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING: An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK: Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal.

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

DAC OR DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTER: The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL DD (AC3): A compressed (10:1) digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where discrete side channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL: Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER: A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSP OR DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR: Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS OR DIGITAL THEATRE SOUND: Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-A: High resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range, discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL: Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS: Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FINALISE (CD-R): The process of copying the Table of Contents from its temporary area on CD-R and RW to the final position where it will be recognised by ordinary CD players.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE: With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier which is driving it.

JITTER: An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, being imprecise.

LINE-LEVEL: Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION: A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION: Reduction in data density by recourse to a psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE: The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

NETWORK: see Crossover.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE: A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (say, below 100 ohms or so) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even when using long or unusual interconnect cables. A high impedance, especially in conjunction with an amplifier with a low input impedance (some are as low as eight kOhms, although the standard is 47 kOhms) can result in audible treble losses.

PLL OR PHASE-LOCKED LOOP: A technique by which a clock of defined characteristics is used to generate a new clock at a different frequency from the original.

PRESENCE: Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE: A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD: high resolution music only format developed by Sony/Philips and offering 100kHz bandwidth without digital filtering and its associated ills.

SAMPLE RATE: The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY: The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W).

THX: Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. THX Ultra being more stringent than Select.

TOSLINK: The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET: the two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE: High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, eg above 3kHz.

TWEETER: Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY: Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a 2-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (PER CHANNEL): the Watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

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AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	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					40	202
	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
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful.	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A85	700	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
R	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
HH	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
EC	ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4			●		150	192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
HH	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40	181
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			●		100	175
	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
R	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
R	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
	Chord CPM 3300	5,495	Very powerful yet compact amp with rather complex ergonomics and transparent sound. Oh, and a lovely blue glow	5			●		220	214
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●		●		60	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●		●		35	193
	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
	Cymbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
R	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	5			●		50	208
	Creek 5350SE	799	Smooth, open and articulate sound and quality build, but bass is a tad heavy handed	6			●	●	85	214
R	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7			●	●	45	205
	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			●	●	60	196
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5				●	30	208
	Denon PMA-355UK	230	Detailed, but rather inexpressive sound which doesn't quite live up to the claims.	5	●		●	●	50	217
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60	175
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned out amplifier, with mainstream appeal but bland with it	6			●		50	214
	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					25	202
	Holfi Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65	181
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass but excellent mid and treble.	5	●		●	●	50	217
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			●		250	192
	Linn Majik	845	Slightly rough and ready power amp modules, but capable preamp that can be expanded into a multiroom system	5	●		●	●	33	214
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
	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	400	Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	●		●	●	50	208
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II	999	Big, bold, but over-fruity balance – the 'fat uncontroller' as one put it	6	●		●	●	60	214
	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
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
R	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
	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
R	Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			●	●	60	175
	Myryad MI 240	1,500	Big and powerful integrated amp sounds clean and neutral if a bit short on musical tautness and dynamic tension	8	OPT	OPT	●	●	120	216
BB	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
R	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●	●	50	192
EC	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra-high power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse.	6	●		●	●	120	217
	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no shortage of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
	Naim Nait 5	799	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources				●		30	214
	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
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●		●	●	45	186
R	Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●		●	●	60	192
	Plinius 8100	1,450	Slightly rough and ready, but plenty of balls from this stripped down antipodean.	6			●	●	100	214
R	Præcis Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
R	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
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●		100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	Restek Fantasy II	1499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6			●		100	189
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 Mk II	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●		●	●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved RA971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6			●	●	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●	●	90	205
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
	Sharp SM-SX100	10,000	The world's first stable, 1-bit digital amplifier is a technological milestone that should go from strength to strength	n/a					110	200
R	Sony TA-FB740R	200	Very open and clear sound, comfortable with a wide range of musical styles	5	●		●	●	60	205
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	Tact Millennium MkII	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	500	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6				●	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●		65	196
R	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	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	Thule IA60B	700	Dry, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some.	6			●		60	214
R	Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5					50	186
	Tube Technology Unisis Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	●				30	202
	Yamaha AX-496	240	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6			●	●	85	208
	Yamaha AX-596	300	Clean, agile and lean this amplifier isn't. Bold and powerful, however, it certainly is.	5	●		●	●	100	217
R	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6			●		50	214

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Amp Flux System 2	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/8A II	1,098	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6					55	187
R	Arcam Alpha 9C/10P	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1					60	165
	Audio Note M Zero/P Zero	998	Neat shoe box-size components. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5					8	191
R	AudioNote M2Phono/P2SE	3,198	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	4	●				18	216
EC	Audio Research LS25/NT100	11,489	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/NT100 MkII)	6	●		●		100	216
EC	Border Patrol 300B SE	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1					8.5	186
	Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5			●		150	216
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			●	●	120	212
	Cary CAD 2A3SE	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1					5	196
	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	1					410	202
BB	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine value preamp.	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Creek P43R/A43	1,148	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●		140	212
	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1					50	181
R	Crimson CS610/CS630	1,250	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited. Slimline monoblocks with grunt and finesse	3	●	●			100	187
BB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	1625	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	3	●				30	216
	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1					50	183
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners, recommended	7				●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7/aPA7	2,694	Low feedback power amp design that's a positive departure from the transistor norm, preamp is functional but not as impressive	5			●	●	150	190
	Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R aPA7	2950	Ve y stylish 4-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●				191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
R	Densen Beat 200/300	1,850	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote L300 extra)	6	OPT		OPT		100	216
BB	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3250	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension.	6			●		120	216
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linestage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Linn Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully tuned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all Linn system	9	●	●			62	212
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●		100	187
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1					100	155
	Moth 30 Active LS/60 Stereo	948	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp, power amp lacks finesse and control, however	4					60	165
	Muse Model Three	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160 power amp	5			●			166
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness (tested with X-A200 power amp)	6	●		●		200	
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
	Myryad MA120	450	Based on MI120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI120	1					60	165
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
R	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6		●		●		165
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7			●		200	200
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,375	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	6			●		50	213
	Naim NAC112/NAP150/FLATCAP 2	1,800	Adding a FLATCAP 2 brings a very worthwhile sonic upgrade to the basic NAC112/NAP150 combo	6			●		50	213
	Naim NAC102/NAP180	2,122	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtlety	6			●		60	200
EC	Naim NAP500	10,000	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition	1					140	208
	Quad QC-twenty four/II-forty	4,000	A classic valve amplifier in circuitry and sound, but with modern ingredients and gorgeous retro styling	7					40	213
R	Rega Hal/Exon	2,194	Passive line stage dedicated to Exon monoblock power amps, bold outgoing, in-command sound	6	●	●	●		125	165
BB	Roksan Caspian Power	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1					70	183
	Rotel RC-971	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music. (Tested with RB-971 power amp)	5				●		178
BB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1448	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6					10	216
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia - precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●		201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	Talk Hurricane 2L/Tornado 2	1,249	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					65	165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●					188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	6	●		●			200
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1					100	187
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5				VOL	24	216

PHONO STAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance mars the performance of this lively performer	0		●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	0		●				189
	Cyrus iEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough	0	●					189
	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality	0		●				189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise	0	●	●				189
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	0	●	●				189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	0	●					189
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	0	●	●				201
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer	0	●	●				201
R	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	0	●	●				201
R	QED Discsaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined	0	●					189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	0	●	●				189
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP	0		●				201

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered AV amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	2,500	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good	5			●	●	110	198
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema - what more can you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●		120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multi-channel solution for music fans	4			●		N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls.	3			●		60	210
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multi-channel sound	4			●	●	75	198
R	Denon AVR-3801	800	Well-endowed, sharply priced receiver is also a musical high roller.	8	●		●	●	105	217
BB	Denon AVC-A10SE	1,200	State of the art sound quality, a strong feature set and reasonable pricing. What more could you want?	11	●		●	●	125	210
BB	Denon AVC-A1SE	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally at home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music.	10	●		●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with 2-channel music and multichannel AV.	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
	Musical Fidelity HTP/HT600	3,998	A very well matched pairing with considerable musical talents	8			●	●	100	207
R	Myryad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,800	Superb three-box, five-channel AV amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD T760	650	More than adequate home cinema receiver that unusually doesn't muck up the music	7			●	●	60	210
	Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	4			●	●	140	198
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver.	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle.	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music.	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●	●	120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels.	4			●	●	80	210
	Rotel RSX-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too.	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●	●	120	215
R	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●	●	130	198
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder 9	9			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●	●		215
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel AV solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music.	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

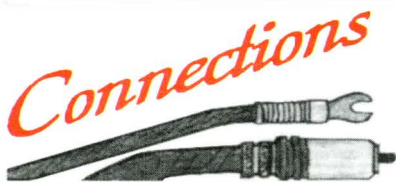
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction		●	●		●			188
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment		●			●			211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail	●		●		●			200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●		●		●			211
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price	●		●		●			176

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DIG. CABLE TYPE						ISSUE NUMBER
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments	●		●		●		188
R	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price			●		●		211
	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces			●		●		176
	Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance	●		●		●		188
R	Connections Midas HD	39	Canary yellow cable with excellent plugs and an open sound. Slight treble glare			●		●		160
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	●			●			200
SB	Ecosse The Composer	29	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price		●	●		●		211
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)	●			●	●		176
	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness			●		●		176
R	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging: perhaps a touch bass-light		●	●		●		200
SB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		●		211
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	●		●		●		176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price	●		●		●		200
SB	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble — excellent performance all round			●		●		188
R	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed	●		●		●		176
	Nordost Black Knight	60	Flat black cable that is distinctive but slightly coloured — but not in a wholly negative manner	●		●		●		160
R	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music			●		●		188
R	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable	●			●	●		176
	Precious Metals S535	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic		●	●		●		188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy		●	●		●		211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price		●	●		●		211
R	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness			●		●	●	176
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables		●	●		●		211
SB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value			●		●		176
R	QED Qnect 45	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	●		●		●		188
R	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
	Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfatiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight		●	●		●		160
SB	SonicLink Whisper (Silver Pink)	45	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. We're unsure about the flesh-coloured finish, though...	●		●		●		160
R	SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration	●		●		●		176
	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	●		●		●		188
	SonicLink Violet	95	Better bass than treble — a little dry in the upper octaves	●		●		●		200
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss		●	●		●		176
R	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable		●	●		●		188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable	●		●		●		200
SB	Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticise	●		●		●		188
R	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results		●		●	●		188
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material	●			●	●		200
SB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value	●		●		●		200
SB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent		●	●		●		188
R	van den Hul Source HB	65	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness		●	●		●		160
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack	●		●		●		200

DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DIG. CABLE TYPE						ISSUE NUMBER
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
R	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		●		E 207
	Chord Optilink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads			●		●		O 207
	Ixos 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement			●		●		E 207
SB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		●		E 207
R	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value			●		●		O 207
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical digital link			●		●		O 207



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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	E	207
R	van den Hul Optocoupler	49.95	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types							O	207

LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●		●			●		183
R	Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical			●		●			133
R	Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to accept its foibles	●			●		●		133
R	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable	●			●	●			203
R	Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings			●		●			157
R	Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	●		●		●			168
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained	●		●		●			157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices	●		●		●			203
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	●		●		●			192
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension	●			●	●			168
R	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	●		●		●			192
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	●		●		●			203
BB	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire	●			●	●			133
	Ecosse Reference CS-2.15	12	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	●			●	●			215
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere - one of the best cables available all round	●			●	●			203
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●		●		●			168
BB	Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value			●		●			157
R	Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative			●		●			157
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●			●	●			168
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent	●		●		●			203
BB	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant - though only slightly	●		●		●			192
R	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●	●		●				192
R	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●		●		●			183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	●		●		●			168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		●			203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music - can be dry and edgy	●		●		●			183
	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail	●		●		●			215
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-yr-face', and bass is not always even	●			●	●			192
	Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding - strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too	●				●			133
R	Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	●		●		●			183
R	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass - if slightly bright at times	●			●	●			133
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	●		●		●			183
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	●		●		●			203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board	●			●	●			203
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound - but too messy and bloated for its own good	●		●		●			183
	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	●		●		●			157
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel	●		●		●			157
BB	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●			●	●			192
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding	●		●		●			168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail - wears its achievements lightly	●		●		●			215
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging; good, but not the best at its price	●		●		●			203
	SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	●		●		●			168
R	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced	●		●		●			157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	●		●		●			203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together	●		●		●			157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	●		●		●			192
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics	●		●		●			215
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style	●		●		●			203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	●		●		●			192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	●		●		●			183
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view	●		●		●			215
R	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
R	Supra Ply 3.4/S	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		●			203
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues - and very minor vices - across the board	●		●		●			183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●		●			215
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	●		●		●			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●		●		●			203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		●			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●		●		●			203
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	●		●		●			215

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered				●		PLT		218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others				●		●		218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing - maybe too sharp			●			PLT		218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation			●			●		218

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price								206
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound								206
R	LAT AC-2	99	Excellent clarity, music sounds clean and easy to follow - enthusiastic recommendation		●	●		●			218
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass								206
	Maplin Bowthorpe ASC 431	50	Excellent mains purifying abilities - including other equipment used elsewhere in the house (Maplin code BJ84F)			●		●			218
	Olson Sound Fantastic	80	Reasonable price, superior build quality - all in all, a bit of a bargain			●		●			218
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality								206
R	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Kord	70	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference					●	●		218
BB	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
BB	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy							PLT	206
	SonicLink 5G Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies			●		●			218
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise								206
R	Synergistic Res. Master Coupler	238	Absolutely outstanding performance, but extremely expensive					●	●		218
R	Trichord Research Powerblock500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

CASSETTE DECKS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●		●			●		●	158
R	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 highflow speed compromises sound	●		●			●		●	184
	NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise	●		●					●	158
	NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use	●		●			●		●	171
	Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	●		●	●				●	195
R	Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with 3 heads and dual capstan transport	●		●					●	146
R	Pioneer CT-5550S	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
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●		●	●				●	184
BB	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
BB	Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	●		●					●	158
R	Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●	●					●	171

CD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBLY ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acuris ACD11	899	First-rate if costly player, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness	●								166
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850	Seriously customised Pioneer with extraordinary resolution and world beating imaging and bass	●								165
	Advantage CD15	3,995	A CD player of some stature - what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●		●		●		193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●								190
R	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●								169
	AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable					●	●	●		172
BB	AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	●								179
	Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●						●	178
BB	Arcam Alpha 7SE	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before			●						207
	Arcam CD72	400	Easy going, slightly soft-centred reworking of Alpha 7 in new, svelte DiVA clothing	●		●						212
R	Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●		●					●	178
BB	Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●		●						176
R	Arcam Alpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●		●						188
	Arcam CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●		●						212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23	1,100	World class presentation allied with innovative technology to deliver an engaging standard of music making	●		●	●	●				206
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●								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	●								188
	Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	●								195
	AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-fer-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●								176
R	AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●								169
	Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●				●		●		194
	Cambridge Audio D100	120	Hard, clanky and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic	●				●				200
BB	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●				●				02
R	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	230	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness	●				●				217
R	Copland CDA 266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●								176
	Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●								194
R	Cymbol CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●							●	176
R	Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●								191

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASFB/DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●									212
R	Cyrus dAD3 Q24	900	Bold, lean and lively player demands sympathetic system matching			●							200
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor			●			●				191
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems			●			●	●			200
R	Denon DCD-835	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration	●		●			●	●			217
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●		●			●	●			179
	Densen B-400	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws	●		●							212
	EZO Fog Stage 3	1,170	Curious player is difficult to drive, and has sound quality that both enchants and sometimes confounds	●				●					212
R	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features	●		●			●	●			207
BB	Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music — and has CD Text too	●		●			●	●			172
	Kenwood DP-5090	300	Disappointing senior brother to the excellent DP-4090, but surface interface is good	●		●			●	●			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	●		●	●	●	●		●		206
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal								●		212
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	●					●	●			202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well equipped	●						●	●		204
BB	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●		●			●	●			207
BB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context — a real bargain	●		●			●	●			217
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Signature	500	Excellent allrounder, a well appointed good value package	●		●			●				212
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a sho t but attractive feature set, and a new found bounce in its step	●		●		●	●				206
R	Marantz CD-17K1 Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	●		●				●			176
R	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●		●		●		●			194
EC	Marantz SA-1	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD	●		●		●				●	208
R	Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics — but it's not cheap	●									169
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●		●							176
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●				●					200
	Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well-engineered, but ultimately rather heavy-handed and dull, if refined player	●									166
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●		●							184
BB	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	●		●							200
	Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	●									184
	Myryad T-20	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	●									195
	Myryad MCD500	1,300	Well-built, attractive player, showing much promise, but can be a little heavy-going on audition	●									176
R	NAD CS20	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●									202
	NAD CS21	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention	●									217
	NAD 523	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test; so was the absence of a digital output	●								●	204
	NAD CS40	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the CS40 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	●									200
R	NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●		●					195
R	Naim Audio CD5	1,120	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses	●									212
R	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●		●			●		●		204
EC	Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●									188
R	Onkyo DX-7222	150	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically	●					●				200
	Onkyo DX-7511	300	Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite	●		●			●	●			207
	Parasound CDP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●									184
	Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	●					●				172
	Philips SACD-1000	1,300	The first multichannel SACD on the market makes a good case for the format but doesn't match the 2-channel Sonys with CD	●		●						●	216
	Pioneer PD-5507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●					●				191
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●									188
	Revox Exception E426	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing	●				●					182
	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	●		●							200
	Roksan Caspian	895	Improved Caspian (retested for 2001) is still bold, dynamic player, but rather more subtle and expressive	●									212
	Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 — buy the original	●									191
BB	Rotel RCD-971	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●									184
K	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●								212
	Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●		●							163
	Sharp DX-SX1	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical	●		●			●	●	●		211
R	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable	●									202
	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight	●					●	●			200
BB	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●		●							195
BB	Sony SCD-555ES	1,200	Fabulously built with superb sound using both CD and Super Audio software, you'll be hard pressed to find a better CD player at the price	●		●						●	213
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but there's not much competition and limited software as yet	●		●		●				●	194
	T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●		●							188
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1	550	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted	●									200
	Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradable in various ways	●									191
R	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition	●									195
R	TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence — recommended with caution	●									188
	Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●		●							176
	Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualist player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●		●			●				195
	Technics SL-PG390	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap	●		●							202
	Technics SL-PS7	200	Strong, but ultimately rather opaque and hard-sounding, high tech CD player	●		●			●				207
R	Technics SL-MC7	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multidisc)	●		●					●		204
	Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●									188
	Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●					●	●			169
	Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●					●				166
	Tube Technology Fusion MkII	1,350	Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good	●									206
	Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●	●								194
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	●		●			●	●			207
	Yamaha CDX-496	180	A rather splashy and approximate sound, further hampered by mechanical noise	●		●			●	●			217

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/ES/BU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●		●				●	●		184
	YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid										195

CD TRANSPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/ES/BU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio Note CDT Zero	550	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with DAC1)	●	●								212
	Linn Karik	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●							144
	Roksan Attessa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	●									162
	Theta Carmen	3,299	A well equipped and extremely upgradable CDDVD transport. Right now, the finest of its type	●									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)	●		●							162
	Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●		●							162

DACs

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/ES/BU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alchemist TS-D-1	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDs										187
	Audio Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)										191
	Audio Note DAC Zero1x	750	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with CDT Zero)										212
	Audio Note DAC 5	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price										203
	dCS Delius	5,000	State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat	●	●			●	●			●	207
	dCS Purcell	3,500	The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	●	●			●				●	207

DVD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/ES/BU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alba DVD103	150	Good value for money but not much of a CD player, crude and serviceable but remarkably inexpensive	●		●				●			207
	Arcam DiVA DV88	899	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolescence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	●		●							213
	Arcam FMJ DV27	1,600	Spirited CD performance and a great DVD-V upgrade path	●		●							219
	Denon DVD-1000	300	Fine, stripped down player concentrates on the essentials, and scores a direct hit.	●		●							216
	Denon DVD-1500	400	Colourful and engaging (if lightweight) sound, with excellent picture quality	●		●							207
	Denon DVD-3300	999	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too.	●		●						●	213
	Denon DVM-3700	1,000	One of the first multi-DVD players, and a fine all rounder, with average to good pictures, and better sound	●		●						●	204
	Denon DVD-5000	1,600	The first DVD-V player that ain't bad as a CD player. A fine musical device	●		●							187
	Encore DV-450	200	Superb value for money, though mainly of interest to the videophile on a shoestring	●		●							207
	Hitachi DVP-505	300	DVD player has rather dark, unexpansive sound, but good picture quality	●		●							207
	Hitachi DVP-705	380	Mild mannered player works best with Radio 2 music, and gives clean, well endowed picture quality to match, along with sharp pricing.	●	●	●							216
	JVC XV-D701	500	Good video player, but rather undeveloped musically - CD Text is neat, though	●		●							198
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●		●		●	●				206
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	899	The first multi-disc DVD-Audio player is physically large and ergonomically obstructive, but it is a smooth, slick operator	●		●						●	213
	Kenwood DVF-9010	1,000	DVD player with brilliant picture and clean, lively sound	●		●							190
	Meridian DVDS96	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●		●							218
	NAD T-550	500	Soft-centred but likeable player in the classic NAD mould	●		●							202
	Nakamichi DVD-10s	600	Well engineered, but lacklustre specifications, moderate performance - and overpriced.	●		●							216
	Panasonic DVD-RV40	350	Modestly equipped, gives good pictures, but is musically unengaging	●		●							207
	Panasonic DVD-A360E	580	Powerful equipment, and unthrottled digital output notwithstanding, sound quality is modest at best	●		●							198
	Panasonic DVD-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A10 retains most of the flagship's headline features with well balanced, but less refined and less articulate sound	●		●						●	213
	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince.	●		●							216
	Philips DVD750	400	Clever DVD with CD-R/CD-RW compatibility and surprisingly keen sound	●		●							198
	Philips DVD960	530	DVD-V player has strong sound quality and good, though slightly washed out, pictures	●		●							207
	Pioneer DV-636D	400	Bold, dynamic and detailed sounding player, with slightly simplified video feature set, sharper pricing and A1 pictures to match.	●		●							216
	Pioneer DV-717	550	Superb DVD player with good picture quality and which really knows how to play 24/96 discs	●		●							190
	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Fine player with near state of the art video performance and attractive, easy on the ear music making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike.	●		●						●	213
	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possess a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●		●							206
	Rotel RDV-995	700	Bold, sometimes aggressive sounding player needs RGB output to bring picture quality up to scratch.	●		●							216
	Samsung DVD-907	500	DVD player with below average picture, and lacklustre sound quality	●		●							190
	Sanyo DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player.	●		●							216
	Sony Art Couture DVP-5435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●		●							216
	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●		●						●	204
	Sony DVP-S7700	950	Powerfully endowed player offers articulate and believable sound	●		●							198
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●		●							210
	Sharp DV-760	500	Reasonable picture, but sonically brings new meaning to the term rough and ready.	●		●							202
	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	A tour-de-force of engineering, albeit with matching price tag. But picture quality is second to none	●		●							212
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-audio upgrade path	●		●							213
	Technics DVD-A10	899	Well built, early generation DVD-A player with full in-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound.	●		●						●	213
	Theta DaVID	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricy for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●	●	●						191
	Toshiba SD-100E	250	Mainstream player offers so-so features, performance and pricing	●		●							207

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS										ISSUE NUMBER	
				ISSUE NUMBER	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	MULTI-DISC	VARIABLE OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ASS/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	ELEC DIG OUTPUT		
	Toshiba SD-3109	380	Defocused and soft-edged, this is more attractive for its picture than its sound quality.	•	•										202
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material.	•	•										213
	Toshiba SD9000	800	Costly, high tech player with stunning pictures and crisp, slightly lightweight sound	•	•				•						198
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive.	•	•										213
	T+A DVD-1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-Audio upgrade path	•	•										213

DIGITAL RECORDERS				SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS		
					JVC XM-448	220	An hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	MD	
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	MD		•	•	205	
R	Harman/Kardon DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	MD		•	•	191	
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Midi-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	MD		•		177	
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that deserves its recommendation due to price	MD		•	•	205	
	Sharp MDR3H	300	Nifty machine combining a 3-disc CD changer with a MD recorder. Sound on both is rather below par, though	MD		•	•	184	
R	Sony MDS-JA55ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	MD		•	•	205	

CD RECORDERS				SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS		
				R	Denon CDR-1000	339	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	CD	
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	CD		•	•	218	
	Harman/Kardon CDR-20	499	High jitter player makes quite good recordings that sound less good when played back internally, especially when using the internal record capable transport	CD		•	•	218	
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	CD		•	•	218	
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, rattly build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	CD		•	•	218	
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
BB	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	CD		•	•	218	
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	250	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	CD		•	•	218	
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	CD		•	•	218	
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	CD-R(W)		•	•	205	
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes solid, believable discs, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	CD		•	•	218	

HEADPHONES				SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR		
				BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain		•	•	•	•
R	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		•	•	•	•	190	100	•	205
	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight			•	•	•	230	100	•	194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt			•	•	•	240	600	•	186
R	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			•	•	•	250	66	•	194
R	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone			•	•	•	250	60	•	186
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass			•	•	•	210	40	•	194
	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent			•	•	•	210	40	•	186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite			•	•	•	245	250	•	205
R	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor			•	•	•	200	250	•	172
BB	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads			•	1/2	•	295	250	•	186
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable		•		•	•	120	32	•	172
BB	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		•		•	•	200	32	•	194
R	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality		•		•	•	200	32	•	186
R	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music		•		•	•	200	32	•	163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design		•		•	•	200	32	•	205
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail			•	•	•	260	32	•	219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design		•		•	•	165	I/R	•	172
R	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard			•	•	•	280	20,000	•	186
R	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful mid-range and high comfort factor			•	•	•	340	90	•	205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tressesome on the head with prolonged wearing			•	•	•	250	60	•	194
	Koss R/200	80	Basic sound is OK, but sensitivity is too low to be useful. Features stereo width control			•	•	•	210	60	•	219
	Koss R 100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement			•	•	•	215	60	•	186
	Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top			•	•	•	380	100	•	163

HEADPHONES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	32		219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled mid-range and over excited bass						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						192	I/R		172
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance - but detailed, and comfortable to wear						210	64		219
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband						255	150		172
SA	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable						255	150		157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						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						260	N/A		163
R	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too						250	40		219
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass						300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for swea y listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass						300	32		205
	Technics RP-F500	40	Just too bright for general recommendation, though they play along with gusto						225	40		219
BB	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics						160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof						230	32		172
R	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
SA	Stax Lambda Nova Basic	395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence - and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards						347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality						248	32		205
R	Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates						250	32		219
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner						210	FM		172
	Vivanco IRS800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2		226	I/R		172
R	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STEREO SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dBW)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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	6	40			187
R	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
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	Clean and capable 2.5-way budget floorstander with fine dynamic range but some mid-bass excess. Mass-loaded	19,5,93,25		90	5	25			215
	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
R	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 3	1,000	Very substantial, with tuneable ABR for better room matching. Sounds good but could be more neutral	24,5,37,32		89	5	30			211
	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
R	AR 520	180	Classic stand-mount might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28		90	4	28			215
	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
R	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,200	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26		86	7	25			211
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25,5		80	8	65			192
	ATC T16	1,750	Compact active 'home studio monitor' in colourful cast box, with considerable loudness potential	27,45,33		A	A	45			214
R	ATC SCM20	2,051	Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		84	5	65			219
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,000	350 Watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48		A	A	38			218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20			205
R	Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty, compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21		87	6	40			164
R	Audio Note AZ1	449	A fine partner for low power valve amps, it delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29		92	6	30			215
R	Audio Note AN-ED	1,520	This classic large stand-mount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional allround sound	36,79,28		92	4	20			204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SpE	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24,5		90	5	38			219
R	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	4	20			190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30		89	4	22			180
R	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50			190
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	600	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		88	7	30			211
	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small-scale way	17,5,74,24,5		85	6	40			174
R	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated stand-mount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20,5,36,23		89	4	30			207
BB	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
R	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	4	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	7	30			208
	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29		91	3	35			219
	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	6	20			208
R	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	12	28			199
	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass, wide dynamic range and a laid-back play load	29,108,42		89	3	20			210
	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,5,24,5		89	8	38			200
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,5,5		91	8	34			183
R	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,6,9		91	8	34			186
R	Blueroom Minipod	249	The Minipod can show its competitors a thing or two about freedom from boxiness and looks fab	18,34,17		91	4	50			193
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short of deep bass grunt	21,92,30		94	3	40			204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-er-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32		92	5	28			180
	Carlsson OAS2.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37		90	8	20			195
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-er-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50			201
	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking standmount is a good all-rounder, commendably free from boxiness	22,42,25		91	4	30			193
R	Castle Severn 25E	700	Pretty little floorstander is lively and communicative, if a little coloured in the voice band	21,84,24		88	6	28			204
BB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good looking too	20,96,33		89	6	50			219
	Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26,5,11,45		91	8	20			195
R	Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45			193
BB	Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35		88	6	25			164

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Celestion A2	1,500	Full-scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39	●	89	6	22	●	●	180
	Chario Syntar 100	249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27	●	8	6	45	●	●	170
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28	●	87	4	45	●	●	187
	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26	●	87	3	40	●	●	190
	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31	●	87	4	42	●	●	219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35	●	90	4	55	●	●	190
	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32	●	87	8	40	●	●	211
	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29	●	84	8	18	●	●	216
BB	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●	●	174
	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18	●	87	3	50	●	●	190
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36	●	93	2.5	20	●	●	204
	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding stand-mount with laid back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29	●	85	5	45	●	●	219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24	●	87	4	40	●	●	215
	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention; could be more communicative	20,97,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	211
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,200	Stand-out performer amongst compact stand-mounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29	●	88	3.5	45	●	●	219
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	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	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	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
	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	201
R	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
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very Pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition - neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21,5,36	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
BB	Epos M12	429	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26	●	86	7	40	●	●	215
	Gale 2i	140	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd	22,40,27	●	88	7	40	●	●	170
	Genelec HT206	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24	●	A	A	40	●	●	214
R	Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18	●	87	6	50	●	●	179
	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25	●	88	3	50	●	●	207
BB	Heybrook Heylette	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22	●	88	4	45	●	●	187
BB	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
BB	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
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30	●	88	11	27	●	●	199
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●	●	180
R	Indigo Three	500	Cute 'n' chunky standmount is an entertaining communicator. Great fun, despite some sonic weirdness	23,30,5,32	●	86	17	24	●	●	199
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	299	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression adds up to a great value floorstander	22,86,29	●	89	4	30	●	●	215
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29	●	87	3	30	●	●	207
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24,5,38,32	●	88	5	30	●	●	211
BB	JBL LX2	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27	●	87	8	40	●	●	170
	JBL T1200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30	●	92	5	40	●	●	193
	JBL SVA1500	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	17,5,51,31	●	86	8	40	●	●	174
R	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	●	91	8	<20	●	●	180
	JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26,5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●	●	183
BB	JBL Xti40	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	88	6	40	●	●	210
R	JMLab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28	●	90	4	40	●	●	204
BB	JBL JM Lab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big 3-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	91	3	35	●	●	219
R	JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●	●	186
BB	JPW ML510	130	Lots of good quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components	20,34,22	●	88	5	50	●	●	169
	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
R	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	●	91	6	25	●	●	170
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24	●	91	4	40	●	●	195
R	KEF Q15.2	200	A vigorous and entertaining compact speaker that remains particularly well aligned for close-to-wall siting	20,5,31,27	●	89	3	30	●	●	207
	KEF Q35.2	350	A very decent and good looking compact floorstander, but a pair of stand-mounted Q15.2s is likely to have the performance edge	21,78,5,27	●	90	2.5	25	●	●	215
	KEF Q55.2	500	Beefy vinyl-finished UniQ delivers loads of bass, but might have more control	21,87,29	●	90	4	25	●	●	210
R	KEF Reference One-Two	1,350	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35	●	89	3	40	●	●	211
	KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●	●	189
	KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	30	●	●	167
R	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28	●	90	4	20	●	●	167
R	Linn Kan	19,315	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19	●	86	4	45	●	●	187
R	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23	●	A	A	40	●	●	214
BB	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●	●	180
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21,5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●	●	218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21,5,104,27	●	89	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	●	90	4	20	●	●	201
	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	●	89	5	30	●	●	183
	Magnat Vintage 710	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shy sound	20,27,42,32	●	90	5	25	●	●	211
R	Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●	●	180
	Martin-Logan Prodigy	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71	●	91	4	28	●	●	204
BB	Meridian M33	1,495	Compact active wall-mount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22	●	A	A	45	●	●	214
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17,5,95,32	●	90	4	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	●	90	6	22	●	●	206
	Mirage OM-10-1	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30	●	88	4	20	●	●	210
R	Mission 700	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,34,26	●	87	8	40	●	●	179
R	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22	●	86	6	45	●	●	207
BB	Mission m73	200	Sharply priced and good looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87,5,31	●	88	3	25	●	●	215
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27	●	86	6	40	●	●	201
R	Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17,5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●	●	193

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEADANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	183
R	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16,5,82,28	●	86	9.5	25	●	●	199
R	Mission 775e	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short of serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●	●	204
R	Mission 783	1,000	Plenty of bass weight, and a clean, articulate midrange, but the two don't quite seem to gel	20,5,97,33	●	87	5	20	●	●	211
BB	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance	18,5,35,27	●	89	3	30	●	●	207
R	Monitor Audio Bronze 3	270	Very similar to the Bronze 2, though not necessarily better. Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	18,5,87,24	●	90	3	30	●	●	215
R	Monitor Audio Silver 5i	450	Great looking, sharply priced real wood floorstander, but bottom end lacks drive and tension	20,81,21	●	87	5	30	●	●	210
R	Monitor Audio GR20	1,500	Solid and confident design with all metal drivers and neutral if slightly uninspiring sound	20,92,5,30	●	89	6	30	●	●	212
R	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget stand-mount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25	●	87	4	45	●	●	207
NA	Naim Intro	660	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24,89,27	●	89	6	30	●	●	164
NA	Naim Credo	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness	24,89,30	●	88	8	28	●	●	180
EC	Naim NBL	6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	89	4	20	●	●	200
R	Neat Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24	●	86	6	50	●	●	183
R	Neat 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	●	●	177
K	Neat Neat Petite III	795	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,30,5,20	●	86	5	30	●	●	211
K	Neat Elite	1,195	A highly entertaining all-rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	●	88.5	6	25	●	●	195
R	NHT Super Zero	200	If tiny size is top priority, the Super Zero is worth considering. It looks nice and sounds articulate, but it definitely needs a subwoofer	14,23,14	●	84	8	100	●	●	215
BB	NHT Super One	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18,5,29,5,23	●	85	8	30	●	●	170
BB	NHT 1.5	400	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills	18,42,26	●	85	6	40	●	●	177
R	NHT Super Two	550	Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18,5,100,26	●	87	8.5	25	●	●	199
R	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●	●	217
R	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	190
R	Origin Live Conqueror	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	●	88	8	30	●	●	167
K	Orelle 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	●	●	195
BB	PMC TB2	600	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31	●	88	8	30	●	●	211
R	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	●	87	6.5	40	●	●	199
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
R	PMC AML1	3,525	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
R	Polk RT16	799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22,105,39	●	91	4	22	●	●	160
R	ProAc 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	6	30	●	●	204
R	ProAc Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●	192
R	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
R	QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●	167
R	Quad ESL-989	4,600	A very 'different' speaker experience, with magnificent midband transparency and imaging, but limited loudness capability	67,134,32	●	83	3	38	●	●	213
R	Red Rose Music R3	3,500	Compact two-way with lovely veneer and ribbon tweeter: probably the most sophisticated small speaker out there	20,40,5,26	●	87	4	46	●	●	219
R	Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom n' tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●	193
R	Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	139
R	RMS Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compact with integral port/stand - clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	●	81	8	22	●	●	167
R	Roksan Ojan 3X	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter, great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	167
R	Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23	●	87	8	47	●	●	183
R	Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31	●	87	8	40	●	●	174
R	Ruark Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17,5,93,28	●	88	5	25	●	●	204
R	Ruark CL20	1,500	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	219
R	Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big, handsome speaker with a big, laid-back but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●	186
R	Sequence 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	164
R	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready stand mount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●	190
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	89	4	20	●	●	211
R	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
R	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●	196
R	Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29	●	87	5	30	●	●	193
R	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut'n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,25,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
R	South Coast Speakers Lancelot	895	Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26	●	84	8	45	●	●	199
R	Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	160
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large stand-mount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency - a genuine classic	28,55,33	●	88	8	50	●	●	219
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball esthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
BB	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18,5,33,25	●	89	4	45	●	●	207
R	Tannoy Revolution 1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
BB	Tannoy mX3	300	A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	18,5,87,26	●	90	5	40	●	●	201
R	Tannoy mX4	350	Pretty 2.5-way has a clean and unboxy sound with respectable transparency, but lacks the dynamic grip and drive to make music really involving	18,5,96,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	215
BB	Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●	193
R	Tannoy 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	8.5	28	●	●	199
R	Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too	24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●	167
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
EC	Tannoy TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
R	Tannoy Kingdom 12	6,000	Something of a throwback, but great fun, with fine dynamics and authority, but a tricky amp load	54,106,46	●	92	3	28	●	●	213
R	Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29	●	91	4	42	●	●	193
BB	Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●	●	190
BB	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50	●	●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	●	88	7.5	25	●	●	199
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	●	6	45	●	●	212
EC	Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity, lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	S20	●	●	189
R	Wharfedale 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	●	●	169
R	Wharfedale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24	●	88	4	40	●	●	187
R	Wharfedale Pacific P140	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller P130 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
R	Zingali Overture 2S	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SIZE WxHxD (cm)
FLOOR STANDER
SENSITIVITY (dB/W)
IMPEDANCE (Ω)
BASS FROM (Hz)
FREE SPACE
CLOSE TO WALL
ISSUE NUMBER

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOOR STANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy AE108S	299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43				20		●	179
R	B&WASW1000	499	Bulky heavyweight is a high quality item, able to generate more bass output than music is likely to need	54,47,50	●	A		A20	●		198
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5		A		30			210
R	JPW SW60	349	A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible	55,47,39				20		●	179
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A		25			210
	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
R	Paradigm PDR-10	150	Not much grip, drive or authority, but it doesn't get in the way and it is very cheap	34,5,36,42	●	A		25			210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more movie than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A		25			210
R	REL Q50	375	This good looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31				20			210
R	Ruark Log-Rhythm	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A		<20			210
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	(Active) Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A		25	●		196

SATELLITE & SUBWOOFER SYSTEMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOOR STANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent. (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10,12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,228	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, but lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay - one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

LOUDSPEAKERS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

SPECIFICATIONS
SIZE WxHxD (cm)
FLOOR STANDER
SENSITIVITY (dB/W)
IMPEDANCE (Ω)
BASS FROM (Hz)
FREE SPACE
CLOSE TO WALL
ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOOR STANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	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
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,55,53,2		90	5	20	●		198
	B&W Nautilus package	6,500	This classy, laid-back package is arguably too good for current programming. Very bulky centre speaker	var	var	n/a	3	20	●		210
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120	●		198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28	●		198
	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	5	25	●		198
	Jamo Concert package	2,500	Lovely main speakers sonically overshadow the centre, while surrounds are a bit obvious too	var	var	n/a	5	30	●		210
BB	JBL Xti-series package	1,100	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40	●		210
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25	●		210
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration var	var	var	n/a	4	20	●		210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120	●		198
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30	●		210
	Polk 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	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30	●		210
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected var	var	var	n/a	3	25	●		210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,200	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20	●		210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	920	Classy real wood package does a good all round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	var	var	n/a	4	25	●		210
BB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20	●		210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25	●		198
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20	●		198

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOOR STANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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		89	5	50	●		198
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too - a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30	●		210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100	●		210
BB	JBL Xti10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50	●		210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120	●		210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50	●		210
R	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		91	4	100	●		198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100	●		210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good looking partner to the Silver 5is, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100	●		210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120	●		210
R	PMC TB2MC	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50	●		210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120	●		210
BB	Tannoy mXC	100	Could be more exciting, but a very impressive centre speaker at an unusually reasonable price	42,16,21		88	4	120	●		210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198

PERSONAL / INTERNET

SPECIFICATIONS

PERSONAL STEREOs

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	JVC XL-PG31	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided.	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-yer-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
R	Panasonic RQ-SX71	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic RQ-SX91	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic SJ-MR100	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●	●				204
R	Philips ACT7582	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD						204
R	Sharp MD-MT877H	230	Pleasantly up-front sounding player in a sexy little package, well worth your attention if you like that kind of thing	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
BB	Sony D-EJ925	149.99	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
BB	Sony MZ-G750	199.99	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●				216
BB	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●				204

INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa MM-VX100	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Audio ReQuestARQ1	568	Full size separate containing CD player, hard drive and PC connection. Sign of things to come?	CD/HDD	●		MP3/WMA	APR/USB	17GB	208
BB	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive			Agnostic	USB	5.7GB	208
R	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/HDD	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
	JazPiper MV32P	125	First wave player that looks good but sounds bright. Includes voice recording and phone book features	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	LG MF-PD360	130	Good looking and temptingly affordable, but features and performance are nothing special	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	208
	LG AHA-FD770	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Logix Evzone	219	Novell MP3 player that uses Iomega Klik! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Klik! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
R	Neo-25	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
R	Philips eXpanium EXP103	190	The best MP3-CD personal, at least at the time of writing... An effective solution for MP3 on the move	CD			MP3			213
	Philips Rush SA126	250	Sound is a little thin and wishy-washy, and the fiddly controls and lack of remote make it difficult to use	Solid State	●		MP3	USB/PRL	64MB	216
R	Pine D'Music	120	Good build, solid sound and a voice recording mode make this a good first-time buy	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Pontis SP504	158	Not the best aesthetically, but exceptionally good MP3 sound	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	204
R	Rio 500	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
R	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
R	Rio 800	300	If you're interested in solid state, this player's great sound and ease of use make it worth a look	Solid State	●	●	Agnostic	USB	64MB	216
	Sanyo SSP-PD7	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	Schneider MPMan F20	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	Sony NW-MS7	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-MS9	300	It's got size and simplicity on its side, but it's up-front, boomy sound is significantly below par	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	216
R	Sony MDC-PC3	350	A MiniDisc deck which hooks to a PC. Introduces cheap and flexible MD media to the world of MP3	MiniDisc	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB		213

RECORD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

TURNTABLES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUPR SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high end performance at an affordable price				33/45	●	●	●		203
	Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	●			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
R	DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table				33/45	●	●	●	●	144
	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
R	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph			●	33/45	●	●	●	●	103
R	Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	●			33/45	●	●	●		91
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank	●			33	●	●	●		103
R	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●			33/45	●	●			91
R	Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	●			33/45	●	●	●		55
EC	Michell Gyro SE	775	A stunningly desirable combination of looks, solidity and sound make this a tempting turntable	●			33/45	●	●	●		190
BB	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●			33/45	●				192
BB	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●			33/45		●	●	●	203
BB	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●			33/45		●	●		159
BB	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
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●			33/45	●	●			192
R	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	●			33/45	●	●	●		138

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS						ISSUE NUMBER		
				MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS		EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM
BB	Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	●			33/45				48
R	Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability	●			33/45				164
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●			33/45				203
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail	●			33/45				159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●			33/45				159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●			33/45				195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●			33/45/78				186
BB	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 TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45				203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●			33/45				159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●			33/45				203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●			33/45				136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●			33/45				205
BB	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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS						ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	
EC	Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		0.5		203
BB	Audio Technica AT-95E	20	Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced	●		●	2.8		48
	Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting		●		0.4	8	192
BB	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy		●		0.55	11.5	175
BB	Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well		●		1.0	6	48
	Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail		●		0.1	6	103
BB	Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price		●				103
R	Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high quality turntable and arm		●		0.25	8.6	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent		●		0.15	5.3	158
R	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm		●		0.25	12	84
R	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	8.5	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		0.3	13	208
R	Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body	●		●	5.0	7	67
R	Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent	●		●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved	●		●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative		●		0.5	8	84
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●		●	6.5	6	91
	Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest		●		0.5	8	103
	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
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●		●	4	6	158
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●			1.7	6.5	175
BB	Linn K9	125	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus	●		●	4.5	5	Col
	London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever	●			5.0	6	67
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●			5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge – smooth, agile and dynamic in character		●		0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed		●		0.3	7	158
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons. Albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			0.5	8	215
	Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak	●	●		0.22	10.5	175
BB	Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues – weight, clarity and neutrality		●	●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound	●		●	3.0	5	67
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes		●		3.3	4	103
BB	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		●		0.5	11	139
BB	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
BB	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
R	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
R	Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●		●	5.0	5	67
R	Reson Reza	250	If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	6.5	6.3	192
R	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●			6.5	5	91
BB	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
R	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 DDF-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDF-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		●		0.4	6	60
R	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
R	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		●		0.4	6	72
R	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
R	van den Hul G' hopper III/IIA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●		0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		●		0.58	6	158
R	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

TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●			79
R	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Med		●		229	67
BB	Rega RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

SPECIFICATIONS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF-TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER	
	Aavik C4	200	Attractive wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured	77	47			4	MDF	206	
R	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47			4	Wood	193	
	Alphason GR 17/17-AS	275	Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money	36	60,39			4	Glass	181	
	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206	
	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193	
	Apollo Mezzo Soprano	340	Heavyweight contender packing a big sonic punch. Looks cool, but can contribute a bit of character	68.5	53.5,44			4	Glass	217	
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193	
R	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		●	4	Glass	217	
BB	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193	
R	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193	
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	549	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well damped design. Its performance makes the price tag seem rather good value	75	53.5,45			4	MDF	217	
	Custom design E'lite E4	250	Fairly laid back for a glass/steel rack. Just loses out sonically to the competition	51	62,51			4	Glass	217	
R	Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46		●	4	Glass	206	
R	Elemental Isotube x 4/Ref	1,199	Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality	92	45,49		●	4	Marb	181	
R	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193	
BB	Frameworks H500/H175	404	Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition	70	52,34		●	3	Glass	166	
	Ixos Deadrock 704	250	Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting		46,39				4	Resin	181
	Kestrel Furniture Nightingale	495	Well engineered furniture quality rack with thoughtful extras. Large with pleasing but not winning performance	91	62.5,53.5			5	wood	217	
	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	
R	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	
R	Optimum Int 2000 OPT660	349	Glitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome	82	60,52			5	Glass	181	
	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	
R	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49			4	MDF	206	
R	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	440	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5			4	Wood	217	
	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206	
	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193	
R	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, 5 shelves too! Well balanced and under £200	92	50,40			5	Glass	217	
R	Soundstyle X100	230	Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright	64	49,28		●	4	Glass	181	
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar strands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206	
	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193	
BB	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8		●	4	Glass	193	
BB	Townshend Seismic Sink Stand	980	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one	61	53,39.5			4	MDF	217	
BB	Wilson benesch Asside	590	Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful	72	37,50			4	Wood	181	

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF-TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II	65	A well-specified budget stand but the sound is as subtle as a house party	60,45	16.5		●			202
	Alphason HD5	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5,15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15,12.5					189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51,40,51	18		●			202
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	50	An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18		●			202
R	Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60	15,17		●			189
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube SZse	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61	23,27		●	●		189
R	JPW H51	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19,21		●			189
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29,32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19,15		●			202
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than almost anything below £150	50-100	19,22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5,23.5		●			202
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5,24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65,45	20,22.5		●			202
	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16,17					189
BB	Sound Organisation Z522	89	Easy going and likeable performer straight out of the box	59	16,17		●			202
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16,17		●			202
	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16.5,19		●			202
R	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48					202

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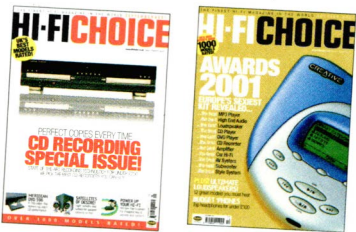
SPECIFICATIONS		WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40	●			●	193
R	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM,M	40	●			●	184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●	●	184
BB	Harman/Kardon TU950	200	Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance and good sound for the price	FM,M,L	30	●			●	166
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0			●	●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●	●	●	211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		142
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
	Marantz ST6000	150	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
R	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		●	●		193
	Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●	●	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
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●	●	●	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
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM, M	20					166
	Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	157
R	Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	184
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	199
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	211
	Symbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●		199
	Psonic Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●		●		211
	Sony ST-D777ES	550	Smart and useful with DAB and FM in one box, but neither band really shines	DAB, FM, M, L	99	●	●	●	●	211
R	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for DAB entry	DAB, FM, M	97	●	●	●	●	199
BB	VideoLogic DRX-601E	299	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●		●	●	211

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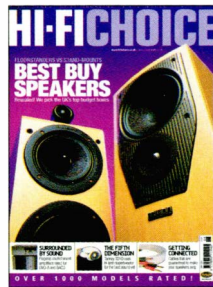
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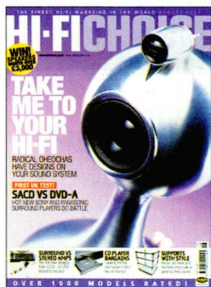
MAY 2001/ISSUE 214
 ■ Integrated Amps £500-£1,500 tested
 ■ Budget turntables and cartridges
 ■ Active speakers tested
 ■ The key to system synergy



JUNE 2001/ISSUE 215
 ■ Loudspeakers £160-£500 tested
 ■ High end Multichannel amplifiers
 ■ Check out the best speaker cables
 ■ Tannoy's superb TD10 loudspeakers



JULY 2001/ISSUE 216
 ■ DVD players £219-£600 tested
 ■ High end valve and solid state amps
 ■ CD, MD and MP3 personals tested
 ■ Philips SACD-1000 multichannel SACD



AUG 2001/ISSUE 217
 ■ Stereo versus surround amps
 ■ Budget CD players
 ■ Equipment supports
 ■ SACD versus DVD-A in surround



SEPT 2001/ISSUE 218
 ■ CD recorders Bench Test
 ■ Sat/sub speaker systems tested
 ■ High quality mains cables group test
 ■ ATC SCM50A SL active loudspeakers

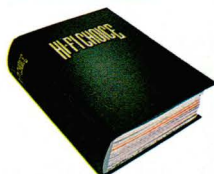


OCT 2001/ISSUE 219
 ■ European Hi-Fi Awards
 ■ High end loudspeaker bench test
 ■ Sub £100 headphones group test
 ■ Arcam's FMI DV27 DVD player

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NEXT MONTH...

COMPLETE HIGH RESOLUTION SYSTEMS

We put together four complete high-res multichannel systems based around our favourite DVD-A and SACD players, creating a set-up for every budget. Take source players from Philips and Toshiba, add some amps, stir in some speakers and you've got a recipe for the ultimate in future-proof listening pleasure. Look out for the first appearance of the new Mordaunt-Short premier speaker package, plus a hot new multichannel amplifier from Sony. Hi-Fi Choice does the hard work so you don't have to, miss this and you're a madman!

DVD DIVAS THAT SING WITH CD

If you want a DVD player that excels with movies and shines with CDs, check out our in-depth December Bench Test. We dissect ten of the latest DVD players that have a way with music. Our lab team and blind-listening panel tell you what's really going on, in true no-stone-turned Hi-Fi Choice fashion. With CD player manufacturing in decline, you can trust Choice to lead you into the future with players that do it all.

FM OR DAB? ATTENTION ALL RADIOHEADS

Radio is where it's at, and we're listening to it more than ever in the UK. But should we stick with FM or take a dive with digital? We test three tuners from either side of the divide to find out where the sound-per-pound swingometer settles. A Terry Wogan-approved group test.

PLUS...

Mighty amplification from AVI, some cone-caning welly from ATC as we try its new SCM10A loudspeakers, and a peek at something very tasty from speaker supremos Royd. All this plus news, advice and reviews from the UK's definitive guide to music-playing products.

HFC 221- ON SALE 8TH OCTOBER

All future contents subject to change



PLEASE PHOTOCOPY

Heavy Metal

PAUL CHARTS THE RISE AND RISE OF DEDICATED STANDS AND SUPPORTS

The view past my PowerBook screen is littered with iron-mongery, 24 items in toto, all of which will have to be despiked and dismantled and re-packed in the all-too-imminent future.

Check out the nooks and crannies of this house – it has plenty – and you'll likely find a small coven of speaker stands, huddling and trying not to look too conspicuous.

It goes with the territory. I review loudspeakers, ergo I need the stands to test them on. Models and makers tend to come and go, which accounts for some of the detritus, and I've also got some of the 'classics' squirreled away – stands like the Linn Kan and Heybrook HBS1, which started the whole thing going, aeons ago.

Well, it seems like aeons, though in truth it's really only been about 20 years. The very first stands I can recall were those used by classic BBC-type monitors like the Spendor BC1, in the early 1970s. But those weren't stands as we know them today. Small 30cm affairs, their sole purpose was acoustic, to get an odd shaped enclosure (30x60x30cm) the right height off the ground, and out away from walls. They even had castors, so you could wheel them back out of the way when they weren't being used.

The speaker stands that we know today added a mechanical dimension to the original acoustical purpose. As I recall, these first appeared in the late 1970s. The aforementioned Kan and HBS1 were the 24-inch and 19-inch stereotypes for one approach. Welded up from one inch square section Speediframe, they were spiked top and bottom, unfilled, and opted for stiffness and stability rather than mass.

It wasn't long before the Blu-tack 'n' mass-loaded alternatives appeared. I have fond memories of a very compact but back-breakingly heavy design from stand specialist Foundation, and this invariably gave a different type of sound from the lighter, spike-topped affairs.

By the time we'd just about managed to rationalise the need for speaker stands, someone, presumably at prominent

retailer The Sound Organisation, started trying turntables and other electronics on different types of support furniture, developing a quite light and simple affair, with thin chipboard shelves and a 0.75-inch Speediframe structure.

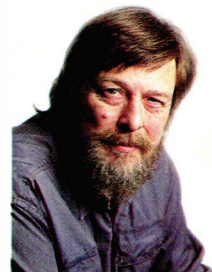
Sceptics abounded, but those who heard believed, and the Sound Org' tables became something of a standard. Visiting Studio 99 at Swiss Cottage around this time, I found a row of perhaps a dozen SO tables running most of the way down one wall of a very large dem room, in order to accommodate a Naim six-pack amplifier system, plus sources, power supplies etc, each on its own separate table. Stacking rack systems were an obvious necessity, and appeared in due course.

This was still the pre-CD era when vinyl was king. Since a turntable can be a very efficient seismograph, it wasn't difficult to appreciate that a well conceived table was very likely to improve its sound. But people did initially find it much harder to accept the idea of investing in proper support furniture for CD players, amplifiers and the like.

That attitude gradually changed. I well remember the first British hi-fi show with production compact disc players, in the mid-1980s. The unforgettable 'Perfect Sound Forever' slogan promised immunity from all sorts of ills, such as wow, flutter and feedback, so everyone chuckled to find the iconoclastic Peter Marshall (of Profile Loudspeakers), grinning broadly and standing next to one of those original midi size, top-loading CD players, sitting on a Sound Org table. Peter gleefully and effectively showed that even CD players sound better when they're used on a dedicated support, adding to the momentum.

Today we have a wide choice of equipment racks in a huge variety of styles, materials prices and philosophies. I was talking to fellow *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewer Dan George, who did the recent equipment support group test (*HFC217*), and he was, if anything, even more surprised by the very obvious differences between models, than I was by this month's speaker stands. So, whatever else you do, don't ignore the importance of stands and supports.

Paul Messenger is our resident loudspeaker guru and his knowledge of stands and supports is second to none.



“PEOPLE DID INITIALLY FIND IT MUCH HARDER TO ACCEPT THE IDEA OF SUPPORT FURNITURE FOR CD PLAYERS.”



It wasn't hard to convince audiophiles of the advantages of good turntable support.

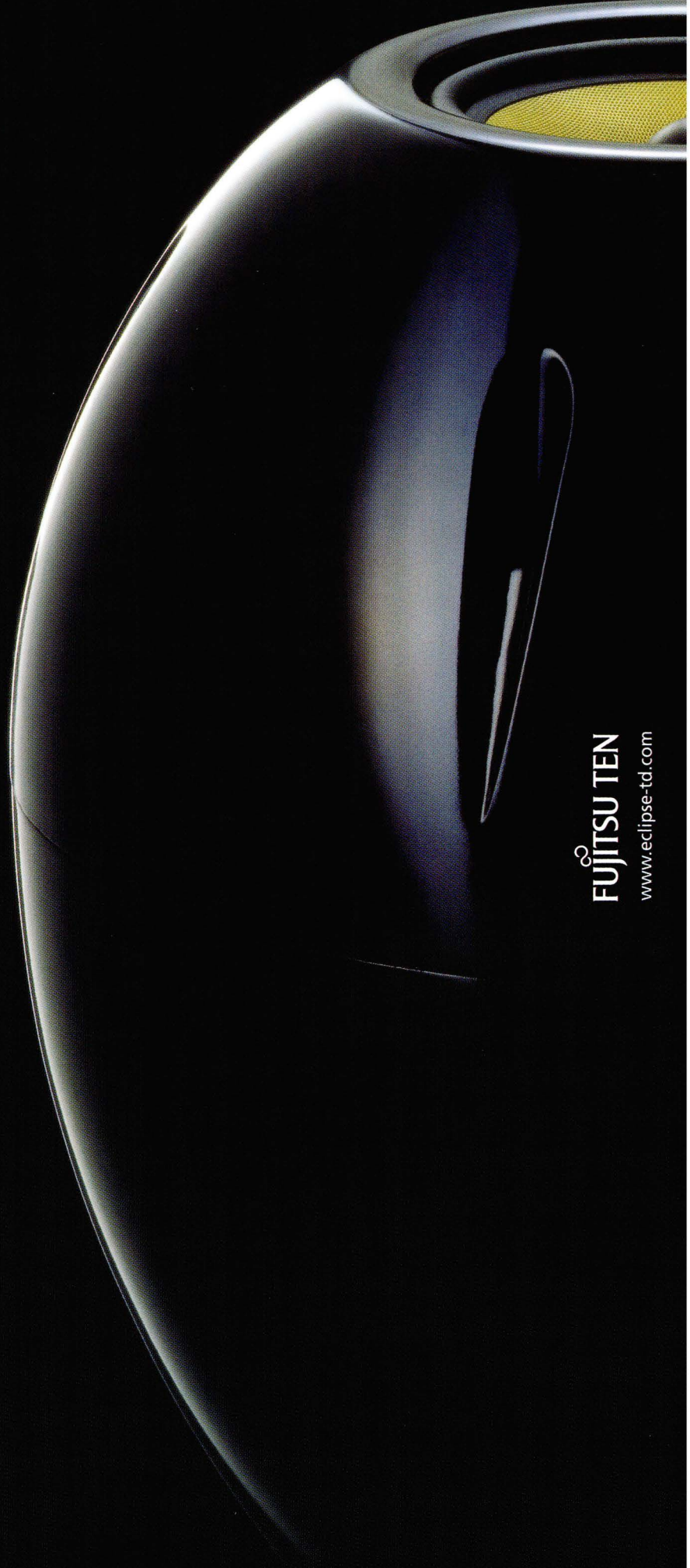
ECLIPSE TD

AUDIO SYSTEM

as it was, so it will be again...

Eclipse TD, based on Time Domain technology re-engineers from first principles the way we listen to recorded music. The result is a speaker uniquely able to replicate the accurate time and phase imagery of the recorded source. What you hear is the sound as it truly occurred at the point in time it was recorded.

Witness the launch of Eclipse TD at the Hi Fi Show 2001, 13 - 16 September. Visit us at soundbooth 5 on 1st floor at the Novotel, Hammersmith, London W6.



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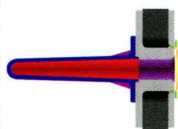


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One look tells you that this is a speaker that will enhance any environment. Finished in real wood veneers with a stylish brushed aluminium baffle, no other speaker in its class brings music to life with such realism yet fits so effortlessly into your interior. The CM doesn't only look beautiful, it sounds amazing too. Including audio technology derived from the ground-breaking Nautilus™, the CM Series is the perfect solution for interior design-conscious music enthusiasts.

For further information contact B&W Loudspeakers UK on 01903 750750

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