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HI-FI CHOICE

AUGUST 2002 ISSUE 230

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An award-winning journalist of considerable experience, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for *Hi-Fi Choice*. He also writes about cars, but who needs to take the latest Lotus for a spin when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive?



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A former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also writes for respected US hi-fi journal *Stereophile*.



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Paul is our resident scientist and hi-fi's undisputed king of lab testing. He employs his own specially designed equipment to pull apart every measurable parameter and explain its effect on a product's performance.



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin cut his hi-fi teeth in the retail trade, and has now been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). Few can match his encyclopedic knowledge of all things audio.



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is one talented guy: a professional musician, experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiast to boot. He's particularly nerdy about cables. It's probably Freudian.

Keep your fingers crossed: in an ever more complex digital world, our hopes for a higher fidelity musical future rest on the still shaky shoulders of DVD-Audio and SACD. Of the two, the Super Audio camp's launch programme has been the better orchestrated; the format got a head start with music titles and the quality of its hardware has been more consistent.

But DVD-A is showing signs of rousing from its slumber. The last few weeks have seen the emergence of the first genuine high-end disc players to support the format – hot on the heels of Marantz's superb DV-12S1, exclusively reviewed last month, come Denon's DVD-A1 and Meridian's 800/861 V3 combo, featured in this month's *Statements* section. Both players provide a digital audio first: proprietary digital links that transmit high bandwidth DVD-A data to matching processors and amps. Another step towards unwrapping the full potential of high definition multichannel music.

An industry standard for such a link will eventually be ratified, for video as well as high-band audio, but with piracy petrifying the software providers this is still a few years away. Rest assured we'll keep you up to date – *HFC* reviews more SACD and DVD-Audio technology than any other magazine, so for the latest news you know where to come.



Tim Bownen **editor**

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Flagship DVD-Audio player



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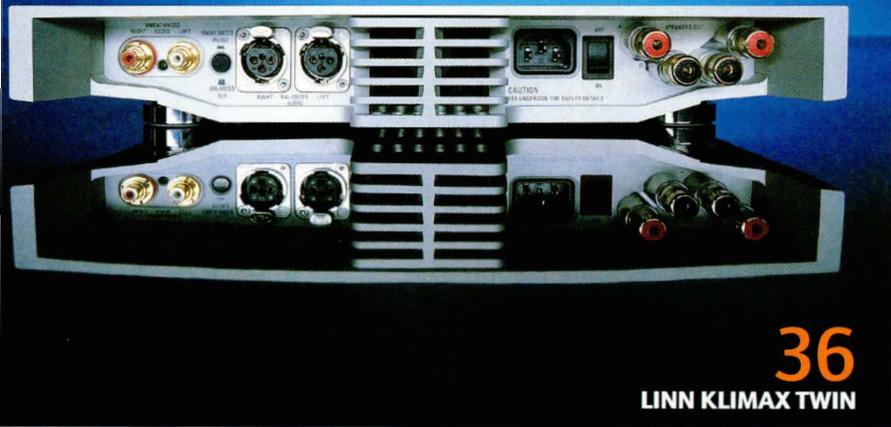


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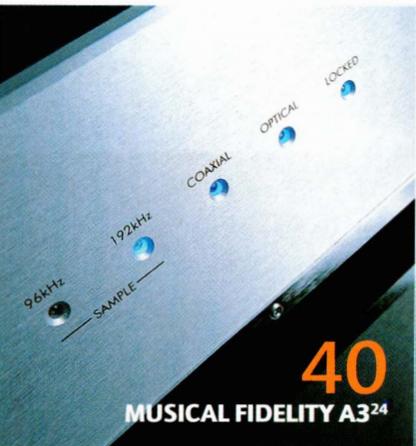
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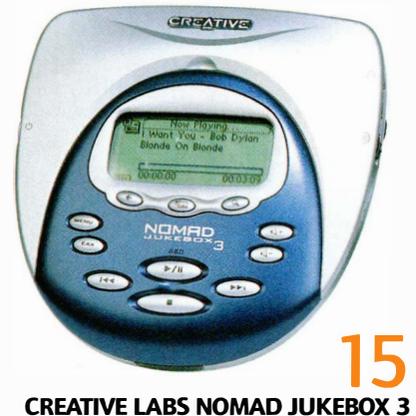
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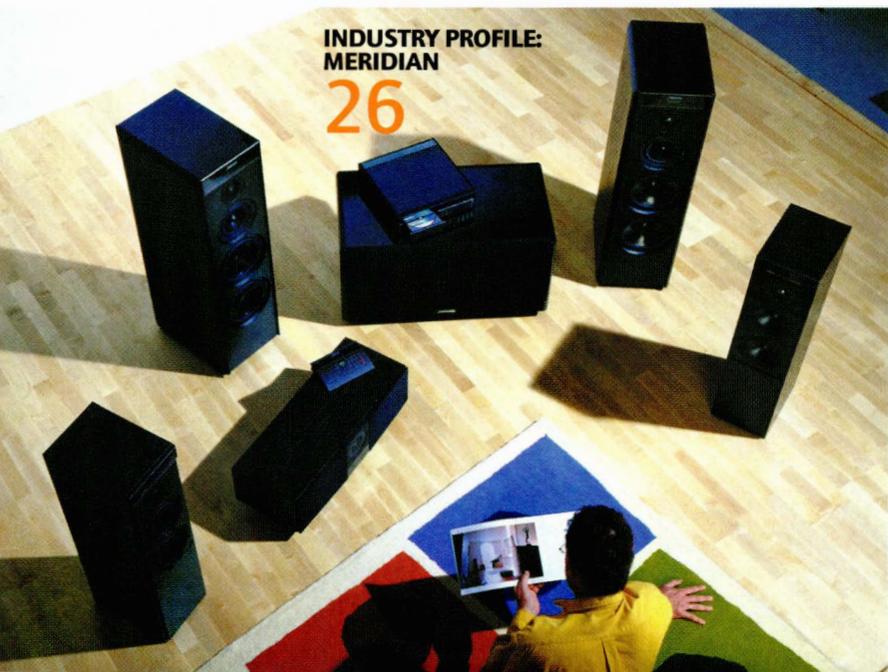


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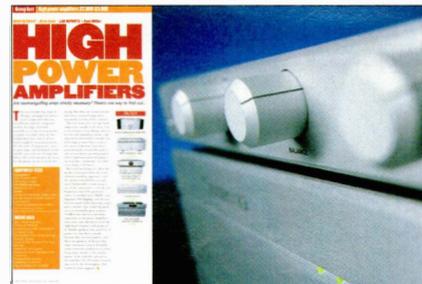
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STAR RATINGS

- ★★★★★ EXCEPTIONAL
- ★★★★☆ VERY GOOD
- ★★★☆☆ AVERAGE
- ★★☆☆☆ SOMETHING LACKING
- ★☆☆☆☆ RUBBISH

AWARD BADGES



Best Buy

The Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy badge is only awarded to products found to offer exceptional performance and value for money in an HFC Group Test. Buy this kit with absolute confidence.



Recommended

Awarded to outstanding products in our Group Tests that may not offer such exceptional value-for-money as a Best Buy, or may not be suitable for everyone, but still turn in a convincing performance.



Editor's Choice

Products in the Statements section that really blow us away are eligible for a special HFC Award badge. The coveted Editor's Choice recommendation is reserved for high-end products of exceptional quality.

For 27 years, our unique tests have brought you the most accurate guide to buying hi-fi. Our mix of thorough Group Tests and in-depth solo reviews ensures HFC is the magazine to trust.





THE COMPONENTS



Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck turntable/Spacearm tonearm £1,380

No frills, high-mass, solid plinth (suspensionless) turntable and unipivot arm with a wonderfully natural, dark sound. Simplicity is the key, there's not even an on/off switch. The motor is a low torque design that will spin the vinyl at 33.3 or 45 once you have kick started the platter by hand.



Sugden A21 integrated amplifier £900

Canny Yorkshire hi-fi amplifier, developed from a design first seen before The Beatles split up. Low powered (25 watts per channel) Class A amplifier makes a beautiful and detailed sound with efficient speakers. If you have a good speaker match, this will save you thousands!



Duevel Venus speakers £1,795

Oddly shaped omnidirectional floorstanders. May look a bit too Greco-Roman post-modern for some tastes, but these are efficient and enjoyable omnis that place the emphasis on a very natural balance. They need to sit in free space, however.

NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE | SUMIKO | TRICHORD | SUGDEN | DUEVEL

SYSTEM ADDICT

Each month we ask a dealer to recommend a dream system. Then we check it out...

Walking into Walrus Systems is like walking into a world where CD almost never happened. It sells CD players, but the shop in London's plush Mayfair district is a shrine to vinyl, with the accent on high-end. So, when looking for a turntable-based system costing around £5,000, Walrus immediately sprang to mind.

The turntable in this case is the £863 Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck, partnered with the matching £518 Spacearm and a £280 Sumiko Blue Point Special moving coil cartridge. This high-mass suspensionless deck is made out of MDF with a heavy alloy platter. The Spacearm is a unipivot design with machined metalwork and a carbon-fibre beam. The Blue Point Special is a denuded version of the high-output moving coil Blue Point cartridge, with a bolstered-up mounting assembly.

This is equalised by the small £298 Trichord Dino phono stage, with its £200 optional beefed-up power supply and reputation as a secret superstar among those who still appreciate LP. From here, a set of Townshend cables link the RIAA stage to the £900 Sugden A21a integrated amplifier. This is a 25 watt per channel pure Class A design that is based on a classic Sugden model first seen in the 1960s. Still, if it ain't broke...

Yet more Townshend cables link this amplifier to the £1,795 Duevel Venus loudspeakers. A two-way floorstanding design, the 34mm fabric dome tweeter fires down and the 220mm carbon fibre bass unit fires up onto an exposed wooden spinning top-shaped thing. This makes it a fully omnidirectional design. With a claimed sensitivity of 88dB and nominal impedance of four ohms it is said to swing down to 40Hz in the bass. This is a speaker that needs some space and is distinctively styled. Innovative or odd? Your call.

As a system, it makes you question why we need CD. Those usual fallbacks for a hi-fi reviewer, like 'rich', 'open' or 'coloured' all seem out of place here, this just sounds like music. Granted, there is some slight

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★☆☆☆
BUILD ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
£4,853

CONCLUSION

If you ever wanted proof that vinyl still has a place in the hearts and minds of hi-fi, this is it. Omnidirectional speakers may not be for everyone, but the complete system is so strikingly natural many will be won over. You'll need a blindingly good CD player to keep up with this standard of vinyl replay.

slowness and a bloom to the bass, but compared to the norm, this is alive, dynamic and the most un-hi-fi sounding hi-fi you're likely to hear. And, to answer a criticism levelled at LP from the CD camp, the background noise is practically non-existent. Even a very crackly record – Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* (Ashkenazy/Perlman) – puts the accent on the music not the noise.

With less contemporaneous LPs to choose from, all the old classics came out to play. For example, Donald Fagen's *Nightfly* sounded full and open and more like musicians playing than the CD cut ever will. It also starts and stops extremely well; playing *Break & Enter* by The Prodigy with a repeated sound of glass smashing in the right channel is a barometer of a system's transient-wrangling abilities. On this kit, it is so fast and realistic, you wince at every shard.

Omnidirectional speakers are not for everyone, but the Venus boxes make a stronger case than most. They are sensitive and dynamic and can cope with voices well (often a stumbling block with omni speakers). You can hear each instrument in its own space all carefully delineated and defined, but (like the real world) you cannot pinpoint instruments in a holographic 3D soundstage.

We experimented with other amplifier and phono stage combinations, especially the £1,500 Lavardin IS integrated amp partnered with the £295 Clearaudio Basic phono stage, but although even more fluid and slightly more lively, this lacked some of the sheer vinyl detail of the Trichord./Sugden combo. Ultimately, systems like these restore your faith in music and will make you trawl the record stores anew. At around £5,000 with the cables, that seems like money very well spent. **C**



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01684 573524
☎ Sugden (Audio Synergy)
01924 406016
☎ Duevel (Walrus)
020 7724 7224

audiofile



Denon 3800 DVD-Audio/Video player



Denon 2800Mk2 DVD-Video player

DISHY DENON DVD-AUDIO

HIGH PERFORMANCE DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER FOR UNDER £1,000

➤ If our review of the £2,500 Denon DVD-A1 DVD-Audio/Video player (page 42) whets your appetite, how about a more affordable version priced at £1,000? The new DVD-3800 is said to be based around the same technology but housed in a less substantial chassis and case.

Inside, the player boasts Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs and a healthy dose of audiophile-grade components. A two-box,

five-block layout isolates the analogue, digital and video circuits, and a special metal and plastic composite disc loader helps to combat vibration. Though build quality is less brick-like than the DVD-A1, it still sports an alloy front panel and multi-layer top and bottom plates.

For video, the DVD-3800 uses advanced 12-bit/108MHz Video DACs and Silicon Image's PureProgressive Scan 'decoding engine'. It decodes DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital 5.1 surround

soundtracks, as well as HDCD, MP3-encoded CDs and MLP audio for DVD-Audio music titles.

Denon is also launching a new upgraded version of the more video-oriented, non-DVD-A DVD-2800. The £750 DVD-2800Mk2's main specifications are very similar to the DVD-3800 but with 24-bit/96kHz audio DACs and no DVD-Audio playback. Both players should be landing on shop shelves now.

☎ Denon UK 01234 741200



ONE BOX WONDER

INTEGRATED AV SOLUTION FROM T+A

➤ German high end audio specialist T+A has unveiled a sleek, chic one-box solution to music and movies. The brand's "big push" into home cinema takes the form of the Pulsar K6 integrated DVD player and surround sound receiver. The K6 is designed around eight independent audio channels each using its

own 24-bit/192kHz DAC. T+A's shielded twin-laser DVD transport mechanism is mounted on a decoupled sub-chassis and is claimed to be one of the most accurate around. It comes with a pop up display and costs a cool £3,900.

☎ BBG Distribution
020 8863 9117



Now you see it, now you don't - T+A's Pulsar K6 features a pop-up screen.

ICKLE ELACS

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST HIGH END SPEAKER?

➤ German loudspeaker maestro ELAC claims its new 'micro monitor' is the world's smallest high end speaker. Priced at £398 a pair, the 301 measures 91x106x121mm and is based on the aluminium driver technology used in the larger 3 series. It features an ultra-rigid 1.2kg extruded aluminium cabinet and is fitted with an alloy sandwich mid/bass cone and a wide dispersion 19mm dome tweeter. A matching active subwoofer is also available - the £399 SUB 301 ESP packs 130 watts of power from its built-in amp and sports a 180mm

long-throw alloy driver. Complete multichannel packages start at £1,299 for a 5.1 channel set-up, featuring five 301s plus the SUB 301 ESP for discrete and stylish surround sound.

☎ Sennheiser 0800 652 5002



The ELAC 301: the world's smallest high end monitor?

⊕ **Soundbites**

MINISTRY OF SOUND has launched a new range of audio products aimed at clubbers in association with Alba. It includes mini, portable and personal audio equipment and future products in development include DAB digital radios. Full specs and launch times will be announced soon.
 www.ministryofsound.com/audio

DENON has launched a new range-topping mini component system - **System 201**. Each component is a miniature hi-fi separate with circuitry based on the full-size Denon products. The system's focus is the 201 CD, a 24-bit, CD-R/ RW compatible player. Buyers also have the option of adding a cassette deck or MDLP MiniDisc recorder. Prices start at £650 for CD, amp and tuner.
 01234 741 200



CRANE AUDIO is a new loudspeaker manufacturer specialising in multichannel speaker packages. Its new Oceana set uses slender aluminium cabinets housing multiple Kevlar drivers. The speakers are bi-wirable with an 87dB sensitivity, capable of handling 100 watts of power. The Oceana package costs £650.
 0870 444 1056

PANASONIC has a new CD/ DVD/ VCR combination player for those with cluttered TV stands. It's operated by a single remote and allows you to record TV programmes while watching DVD. It also has a full roster of VHS recording facilities such as VideoPlus and 12-hour LP recording. Price tbc.
 07805 357357



Above: Two-channel KAV-2250
 Below: Three-channel KAV-3250

KRELLRAISERS

TWO SUPER POWER AMPS FROM ACROSS THE POND

⊕ US high end manufacturer Krell has unleashed two mighty new power amps, designed for both two-channel and multichannel applications. They join the brand's KAV Series and feature Krell's mammoth 2,000 VA toroidal transformer, sporting a claimed power of 250 watts per channel. For even more power, adjacent channels can be bridged to deliver 1,000 watts into eight ohms. Utilising technology developed for the

flagship Full Power Balanced amplifiers, both models feature 'oversized' power supplies, Krell Current Mode circuitry and balanced signal paths. Extensive power supply filtering and decoupling between stages is said to give low noise and high stability. All this power will set you back £4,690 for the two-channel KAV-2250, and £5,998 for the three-channel KAV-3250.

☎ Absolute Sounds 020 8971 3909



PRIME TIME MOVIES

PRIMARE LAUNCHES STYLISH NEW DVD PLAYER

⊕ Swedish brand Primare has a new high end DVD-Video player winging its way to the shops. The V25 is one of a small but growing group of DVD players that can utilise progressive scan - an improved picture quality system popular in the US but still only available on NTSC discs and limited to video displays with

component video inputs - in Europe that mostly means high end plasmas and projection systems. Video outputs include S-VHS and RGB on Scart and it comes clad in Primare's traditional stark, sleek casework. Decent CD playback is also promised from the £1,000 player.
 ☎ CSE 01423 359054

Primare's progressive scan-capable V25 DVD player



Tempted?



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Digital Radio

www.ukdigitalradio.co.uk

 DAB digital
RadioTM

i love you

FILL UP, BURN OFF

WORLD'S FIRST HARD DISC/CD-R RECORDER FROM YAMAHA

⊕ The world's first hard disc audio recorder with an integral CD-R drive was unveiled by Yamaha this month. The CDR-HD1300 allows you to make permanent CD copies of music you've stored on the hard disc in any order you like - potentially brilliant for creating music compilations. The hard disc's capacity is a whopping 80GBs,

which means you can store around 1,200 tracks of uncompressed music ripped from your CDs. A full range of editing functions is available and album information can be added via the player's controls or with a PC using the built-in RS232 port.

It is also the first product to utilise Yamaha's Audio Master Quality Recording System, a



Yamaha CDR-HD1300

technology said to create longer 'pits' and 'land' on the CD-R disc and so provide more accurate disc reading, tracking and longer disc life. Facilities

include timer recording, CD Text and a nippy 10x rip speed from CD to hard disc. It is available from July at £600. ☎ Yamaha 01923 233166

Soundbites



KRELL unveiled its new Showcase multichannel amp and preamp/processor (above) at the Home Entertainment 2002 show in New York this month. These are Krell's most affordable multichannel products to date, with prices starting at £4,900 for the preamp/processor and £5,490 for the five channel amp. ☎ 020 8971 3909

TILE-TV is coming. Marata Vision has released the TileVision TFT flat LCD screen, which replaces a standard large bathroom wall tile so you can watch your favourite soap in the tub. It provides a heated 260mm screen in the 4:3 format and comes with a built-in amp. Prices start at £1,990. ☎ 01923 495595

Hi-Fi diary

JUNE

18-20 Cedia UK Expo 2002, Brighton 01462 627377

SEPTEMBER

6-8 Gothenburg Hi-Fi Show, Sweden
13-15 The Hi-Fi Show, London
020 8774 0847

OCTOBER

3-6 Stuff Live 2002, London
020 8307 2300
12-13 The Practical Hi-Fi Show, Manchester 01524 36991
19-21 The VAD Hi-Fi Show, Netherlands a.neve@planet.nl

NOVEMBER

9-10 Dublin Hi-Fi & Home Cinema show, Dublin
00 353 1 288 9449

SECOND SIGNATURE

B&W LAUNCHES NEW SIGNATURE SPEAKER

⊕ Following the creation of its new flagship N800 Signature speaker (see review next month), B&W has given the same Signature treatment to the baby in the N800 range, the N805. The standard £1,400 stand-mount speaker has been refined to produce a £2,250 variation that's designed to show just how good a small speaker can sound.

Changes include a bigger magnet on the mid/bass driver, which now has a copper shrouded pole piece and a solid aluminium



B&W N805 Signature

phase plug - the bullet-shaped bit in the centre. The tweeter now has a silver plated pole piece for maximum conductivity and a short coil former which gives greater contact between itself and the metal dome. Even the crossover has changed into a first order design using Caddock thick film resistors and very low loss ICW caps.

To distinguish the N805 Signature from its forebears there are two dramatic new finishes, tiger's eye and bird's eye. *HFC* was able to hear these at B&W's R&D facility and we can't wait to get our hands on a sample. Check our exclusive review in two issues time.

☎ B&W 01903 750750



Classé CP65 preamp

CLASSÉ ACT

HIGH END PREAMP

⊕ Canadian manufacturer Classé promises no holds barred in its search for "the perfect balance of force and delicacy". Its new £4,799 preamp is a dual-mono design based around a symmetrical circuit that employs an oversized toroidal transformer with a power supply housed in a separate case. Useful features include sensitivity adjustment across all inputs and a unity gain function for an external processor. ☎ B&W 01903 221500

PIANOFORTE

NHT'S SHINY LITTLE SPEAKER

⊕ Need a pair of speakers for a small room? Try the new entry-level SB1 from US brand NHT for size. This compact stand-mount model packs in a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter and a 130mm polypropylene bass driver, and is claimed to deliver a deep and realistic soundstage. Though only 25cm high, its maker quotes a frequency response of 68Hz to 22kHz. It comes clad in NHT's traditional high gloss piano black lacquer, yet costs a tempting £299 per pair. It's also available in white. ☎ Peach Amber 01327 706560

NHT's entry-level SB1





A3.2 SERIES.
MACHINED, MIL-SPEC ALUMINIUM FRONT PANEL.
PLATINUM PLATED FITTINGS. REMOTE CONTROLLED. PHONO STAGE.
POWERFUL, ROBUST, BUILT.

DVD-A RISING (slowly)

UK audiophiles are still losing out to the US in the choice of DVD-Audio discs available. American audiophile specialist Music Direct stocks 176 of the 250 DVD-A titles said to be on the US market. But UK mail order specialist Vivante Music only lists 67. Sean Almond of Vivante says the company is limited by the expense of importing from the US and the difficulty in finding suppliers. Plus of course the comparatively limited demand for the format. He's looking for more titles that will appeal to the audiophile market, such as Queen's *A Night at the Opera*, due on DTS soon. His hopes may be met with a further 20-30 new releases promised

from Warner Music International (the largest music label actively backing DVD-A) later this year.

With SACD the balance is more even – Vivante's SACD list extends to 293 titles against Music Direct's 384. Sony's official figures are, "around 430 titles available in Europe and around 650 world-wide."



NAIM EMBRACES XIVA

Naim is making the move into next generation hard disc-based audio. The UK hi-fi specialist has signed an agreement with home networking firm Imerge to use its XiVA technology in a new multi-room audio system. XiVA comprises embedded software and hardware which allows audio and video material to be stored, accessed and managed from anywhere in the house. Software updates as well as news and content can also be downloaded via the internet from XiVA's dedicated site.

CREEK FLIES THE FLAG

London-based Creek Audio has decided to make its latest 'budget' series in the UK, renouncing an earlier decision to move its manufacture abroad. The first of the line, the CD50 CD player, shown at this year's Bristol hi-fi show, was originally earmarked to be manufactured in China to keep costs down. But negative reactions to the move from both public and press persuaded Creek boss Michael Creek that it should be made here instead.

Creek's 53 series has already shown a move upmarket for the company, but a Creek spokeswoman insisted that the company is determined to produce a budget line in the UK: "After Bristol, Michael said let's just bite the bullet and make the product here."

As well as being an obvious selling point in the UK, British-made products have a marketable cachet in many foreign markets, particularly the US, Creek's biggest export destination.

B&W EXPANDS

B&W has expanded its Worthing manufacturing base with a new 100,000 foot plus factory next to the existing facility. The new building includes manufacturing, storage and office elements and employs 200 people.

Manufacturing has been broken down into "product focused factories", where individual teams produce complete loudspeaker systems rather than having sub assembly work done elsewhere. Production capacity is now comfortably over 28,000 pairs of speakers a month.



A BILLION DOBLIES

Dolby Laboratories has announced the launch of a new MPEG-4 AAC data-reduced digital audio format, an advance on the current MPEG-2 AAC format which is itself an improvement on the popular MP3. The new system promises improved audio quality using lower bit rates though we may have to wait some time to see any products using the technology in the shops.

Dolby is the licensing administrator for this format, and recently celebrated the sale of over a billion products containing its licensed technologies. The key to its success has been to focus on licensing rather than manufacture, which has allowed it to form partnerships with manufacturers and sell its technologies to a wider audience than any component producer could ever hope for.



SINGLE SPEAKER SURROUND SOUND

A radical approach to surround sound has been created by 1 Limited of Cambridge. The Digital Sound Projector can mimic multiple channels from a single source with its computer controlled, 254-driver loudspeaker. It does this by altering the phase relationship of the signal which is sent to each driver so that they interfere with one another's outputs to create 'focal points' around the room.

Created by Dr Anthony Hooley of the Cavendish Laboratory, the design has been seven years in development. The technology is available for licensed production to anyone with the inclination and the resources to do so.

BRIAN O'ROURKE (AUGUST 1930 – APRIL 2002)

The highly respected founder of Ruark loudspeakers passed away on 29 April. Brian O'Rourke leaves a wife and three children, one of whom, Alan, runs Ruark Acoustics with his brother-in-law Neil Adams.



Incoming

➤ First tests of essential new kit from hi-fi's front line



★★★★☆ Myryad Z120 DVD player £600

➤ Myryad's new Z-series is mostly hi-fi oriented; the "budget esoterica" range also features a CD player, tuner, preamp and power amplifier. So, wouldn't a DVD player seem a bit out of place in such a purist two-channel line-up? Not so – the Z120 is designed for the CD-loving audiophile who wants a good stereo sound but doesn't want a DVD player and CD player in the same rack.

This is a scaled down version of the company's successful MDV 200 DVD player, in a new streamlined and elegant casework, all brushed alloy and centre groove, common to the Z-series products. It features a 24-bit digital-to-analogue delta-sigma audio converter; this may seem like small potatoes when compared to big gun multichannel 24-bit set-ups seen on the top flight SACD and DVD-Audio players, but this is more than fine for CD audio. Like most of Myryad's product range, it has very good power feeds, with no less than eight specific power supplies for different sections of the player. It has all the usual digital and analogue audio and video inputs and outputs including component video and a Scart socket, although thankfully there is no built-in multichannel decoder to wreck the stereo sound.

The Z120 behaves as a good CD player should and that alone gives it most of its high star rating. It is, for a DVD player, keenly dynamic with an

- KEY FEATURES**
- ▶ DVD-Video player
 - ▶ Supports Video CD, CD, CD-R, Video CD
 - ▶ MP-3 replay on CD-R
 - ▶ 24-bit delta sigma DACs
 - ▶ Composite, S-Video output
 - ▶ Scart socket
 - ▶ Component video outputs
 - ▶ Electrical & optical digital outputs
 - ▶ Stereo audio outputs

extended, detailed yet not over-bright treble, with coherent rhythmic abilities and a tight, lean bass. The dynamic range of the player is enough even to cope with Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*, although ultimately, it lacks the absolute scale of a good CD-only device. It even has an innate sense of timing, a quality that is almost impossible to find in DVD players unless you are fortunate enough to be able to afford top-table prices. Naturally, it is not so ordered or as funky sounding as a similarly priced, dedicated CD player, but even fast-paced live Led Zep rock sounds open and filled with drive. Its DVD replay is also very fine and can cope with the toughest video torture test (such as the moodily lit *Seven*), but compared to the audio side of things, it is a bit run of the mill; there are many DVD players that produce clean and competent pictures. It's the sound quality that sets the Z120 apart.

It is a shame that DVD-Audio and SACD are not a part of the Z120's line-

up; one or both would be a natural inclusion for so musical a player as this. It is good for video and well above average with music – it gets closer than most DVD players to producing good quality CD sound.

Myryad Systems 02392 26 5508
www.myryad.co.uk

MYRYAD TESTING

Myryad doesn't make loudspeakers. But many loudspeakers are made using Myryad kit. You see, aside from making hi-fi and home cinema electronics, Myryad makes test oscillators that are used in the production of loudspeakers. In fact, Myryad claims to be the UK's number one manufacturer of speaker test oscillators and if your speaker has a UK brand name, there is a 50:50 chance it has been tested on Myryad gear. Even the speakers Ford puts in its cars use it. If nothing else, it is a sign of Myryad's build quality that its electronics are routinely used as regular test gear.

"The Z120 behaves as a good CD player should and that alone gives it most of its high star rating."



★★★★★ EXCLUSIVE

Creative Labs Nomad Jukebox 3 portable hard disc audio player £350

MP3 continues to go from strength to strength, if the latest crop of portable jukeboxes is any guide. Hot on the heels of the Rio Riot comes Nomad 3, the latest model from Creative Labs. The former DAP has been totally revamped. It's now packing a 20GB hard disc – enough for around 500 albums at 128kbps, or 250 albums at a more audiophile-friendly 320kbps. When Apple's iPod debuted last year, its speedy Firewire data transfer made the DAP's humble USB look dozy by comparison. Nomad 3, however, boasts a Firewire-compatible SB1394 data transfer ports

11 hour battery life. Dimensions (WxHxD): 123mm x 130mm x 35mm. Weight: 294g (not including battery). 13.2x6.4pixel backlit display. Supports MP3 (64 kbps-320kbps), WMA and WAV. Creative Playcenter software provided. Rechargeable lithium ion battery supplied.

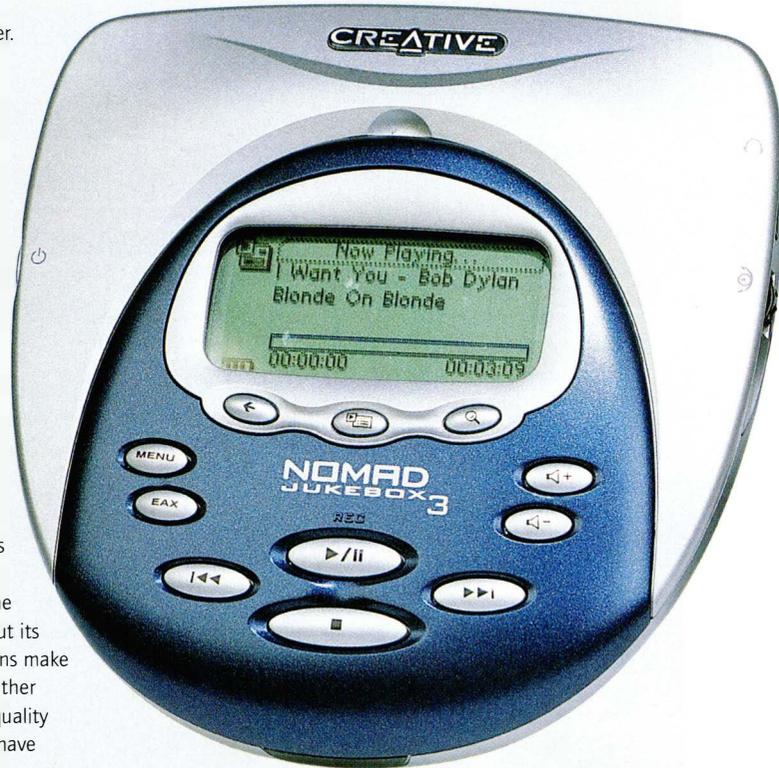
KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 20GB drive stores up to 5,000 tracks
- ▶ USB and Firewire-compatible SB1394 data transfer ports
- ▶ 11 hour battery life
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 123mm x 130mm x 35mm
- ▶ Weight: 294g (not including battery)
- ▶ 13.2x6.4pixel backlit display
- ▶ Supports MP3 (64 kbps-320kbps), WMA and WAV
- ▶ Creative Playcenter software provided
- ▶ Rechargeable lithium ion battery supplied

supports Windows Media Player. You can also record directly to the jukebox using its real-time MP3-encoding capabilities. Once they're on, the new scroller navigation wheel makes it easy to navigate through your track collection. The other major improvement is battery life. Nomad 3 uses a rechargeable lithium ion battery rather than AAs, almost tripling the battery life to 11 hours.

Most importantly, its solid and punchy sound is as good as you're likely to get from any portable music device, regardless of format. How does it compare to the Riot? The Nomad is heavier, and lacks the built-in FM tuner of its rival. But its sound quality and audio options make it difficult to separate them. Either way, with two devices of this quality duking it out, MP3 jukeboxes have truly come of age.

Creative Labs 0800 973 069
www.europe.creative.com



★★★★★

Tannoy mX2-M speakers £150 EXCLUSIVE

The latest mX-M evolution of Tannoy's entry-level Mercury line-up places a new doped paper mid/bass cone in the impressively solid cabinets developed for the mX range it replaces.

The mX2-M is the larger of two stand-mount models in the range, sporting a

25mm soft dome tweeter and a 145mm paper bass driver housed in a sturdy enclosure finished in Ikea-like all-over cherry veneer. Bi-wired and rear ported, the mX2-M has a removable foam bung in the port to allow for boundary or free space placement. The

crossover kicks in at 2.8kHz – higher would be better, but it is still outside of the sensitive part of our hearing.

The combination of Mercury and mX makes for a decent, if laid-back, performance. It's a very traditional interpretation of hi-fi sound – don't expect SACD-ready high frequencies or stark detail in the midrange or bass. What you get instead is a solid, slightly warm sound that masks the rough edges of the sort of cheaper electronics it will be partnered with. *This Mess We're In* from PJ Harvey typifies what is good and bad with the speaker; PJ's voice is clean and easy to follow, but the slightly deeper tones of Radiohead's Thom Yorke are muted enough to make him sound even more depressed than usual (and that's a real feat).

But, overall this muted solidity is a lot better than brashness and for £150 it is clear Tannoy has another winner.

Tannoy 01236 420199
www.tannoy.com

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Two-way loudspeaker
- ▶ 25mm fabric dome tweeter
- ▶ 145mm doped paper mid/bass cone
- ▶ Suggested 88dB efficiency
- ▶ Claimed eight ohm impedance
- ▶ Rear ported
- ▶ Bi-wirable
- ▶ Dimensions: (HxWxD) 330mm x 185mm x 246mm
- ▶ Weight: 5.1 kgs





Teac Reference 350 AV system £700

Midway on the TEAC ladder, the Reference 550 system comprises the DV-H350 DVD player and the AG-H350 integrated receiver and although genuinely separate components (they don't share the same power supply) these are not available separately; it's the system approach or nothing.

The DVD player part is a full-function single disc DVD spinner complete with a Scart socket output and S-Video connection in case you plan on running it through the receiver. It also has optical and coaxial digital outputs and a simple on-screen display. The slightly taller receiver delivers a claimed 50 watts per channel in stereo and 30 watts per channel in 5.1 mode. It is surprisingly feature-rich, although digital source selection isn't perfect.

How you rate the Reference 500 depends on what you want. It sweeps aside all those one-box slim 5.1 systems currently doing the rounds. The DVD player is also better than any of the cheap Chinese players you can buy in supermarkets – it has better colour balance and sounds more natural to boot. Compared to those, this is real hi-fi and very real home cinema with a performance that is powerful, dynamic and detailed. Compared to bigger separates kit though, the limitations begin to show; power is not so authoritative, nor is the performance so coherent.



Most people who would buy this are not looking for separates; they want separates performance in a mini system case. Anyone considering a mini or

micro system should listen to this first. It'll blow you away.

Teac 01923 819630
www.teac.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ DVD mini component system
- ▶ Scart socket on DVD player
- ▶ S-Video and composite video switching
- ▶ Claimed 50 watts/channel in stereo
- ▶ Claimed 30 watts/channel in 5.1
- ▶ Dolby Digital, DTS & Dolby Pro-Logic surround sound

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Moving magnet (MM) phono stage. Moving coil (MC) version also available, for £198
- ▶ 24 volt plug-top PSU
- ▶ Input sensitivity claimed 3mV for 200mV output
- ▶ Input loading: 47KΩ in parallel with 100mF
- ▶ Maximum input level: 100mV
- ▶ Minimum output load impedance: 36.5dB
- ▶ Frequency response (50KΩ load): suggested 17Hz (-3dB) to 100KHz (-0.2dB)
- ▶ RIAA accuracy (50KΩ load): claimed +/-0.2dB 100Hz to 100KHz



Rega Fono phono stage £148 EXCLUSIVE

The Rega Fono is basic to the point of hair-shirt minimalism. An aluminium box with a plug-top power supply, it has just a single on/off button with a built-in red LED, a pair of input and output phono sockets and an earth tag. There are no adjustments (if you want a moving coil version, you'll have to stump up an extra £50) and no upgrades are planned. It's an entirely discrete design; not an IC (integrated circuit) in sight on the garish orange circuit board, a more traditional, departure from the Tom Evans/TAG/Linn approach to phono equalisation.

The traditional approach gives a traditional sound. It's one of the most natural-sounding phono preamplifiers around, making some of the more chip-



oriented devices sound like a lab experiment instead of music. How natural? Stick John Coltrane on the record deck and by the end of the first track you start coughing from all that clubby cigarette smoke. The Fono has all those hi-fi niceties like soundstaging and vocal articulation, of course, but it's the disappearing act that really invites you into the music. The only downside is hiss. It's quieter than virtually any

phono stage built into an integrated or preamp design, but there's a bit more equalisation noise compared to the silent Trichords or Linn Lintos of this world. Silence remains the domain of the IC based design.

But this is a trifle. The Fono is top stuff – just what you'd expect from one of the last masters of the LP art form. Rega Research 01702 333071
www.rega.co.uk

★★★★★

KEF Q7 speakers £800 EXCLUSIVE

The top of KEF's revamped Q series is a three-way design, with a 19mm aluminium dome tweeter sitting inside the 165mm shiny plastic midrange cone driver in familiar (yet heavily revised) KEF Uni-Q fashion. Deep bass is covered by a 228mm x 152mm oval plastic driver that KEF calls a 'Racetrack' cone. It has a pair of ports; a small round one at the front and an oval design round the back.

The statistics reflect typical Uni-Q design. The Q7 has a rated sensitivity of 91dB, but that Racetrack driver means the speaker reaches down through a suggested 35Hz and all the way to 27kHz. It is bi-wired, magnetically shielded and beautifully finished in a wraparound wood veneer.

KEF has improved the Uni-Q immeasurably, especially when it comes to vocals. Male and female vocals come alive, whether solo, in a band or massed with an orchestra. In particular, difficult-to-define voices like Thom Yorke and the slightly distorted vocals of The Strokes are clean and clear and better still, clearly delineated from the rest of the band.

But it is not just voices. This is a balanced and detailed sounding speaker from the mid 30Hz region right up to bat-eared SACD levels. Deep bass is not overstated and can be tuned to suit less-than-ideal rooms.

All of this, plus plenty of retrieved detail, fine imaging and a refreshingly unfussy speaker position make this a good speaker regardless of room. But it also makes it a good speaker regardless of musical genre, too. It is rare to find a speaker that can cope with a vast scale opera, a piano concerto, a small jazz set and house music with equal aplomb. Whatever you play, it sounds big and thoroughly engaging.

Now comes the crunch: this speaker demands fine quality components as a

match for its skills. Use a pair of Q7s with a lacklustre source and a mediocre amp and the sound sucks. But match with top notch gear and you get top notch results. Moreover, despite the high sensitivity figure, this is a speaker that needs a powerful amp behind it to grab hold of that 'Racetrack' woofer.

But, achieve those requirements and you get a slice of hi-fi perfection. It is a big speaker with big speaker sound that can fit into the smallest rooms. You may need to make it the cheapest part of the hi-fi chain to get near that hi-fi perfection, but if you are serious about your sound, it will reward the expense.

☎ KEF 01622 672261

🌐 www.kef.com

DUAL PORTING

The front and rear ports have an optional inch or so of dark grey foam to lodge inside the port. These are designed to modify the effect of each port. Ports tune the bass of a speaker, but so does the speaker's position relative to a load-bearing wall, so the port's effect needs to be minimised when the speakers have been placed closer to the wall's boundary line.

With two ports you can effectively tune the speaker to suit your room with reasonable effectiveness. The unbunged sound is the most free, but this may not suit a smaller room. Go forth and experiment.



KEY FEATURES

- Three-way Uni-Q floorstanding speaker
- Magnetically shielded
- Bi-wirable
- Claimed 91dB sensitivity
- Frequency response claimed: 35Hz-27kHz
- 19mm tweeter in 165mm midrange unit
- Racetrack 228mm x 152mm bass unit
- Front and rear ported

★★★★★

Rotel RA-02 stereo amp £350 **EXCLUSIVE**

KEY FEATURES

- 40 watts/channel
- MM phono input
- 4 line inputs
- Tape source/monitor switch
- Preamp out
- 2 pairs of speaker outputs
- Tone controls
- Headphone socket
- System remote control
- 12V trigger and external remote control sockets
- Silver or black finishes

➤ Replacing the RA-971 MkII and the RA-972, the RA-02 brings almost the whole RA-972 feature set, but with a 40 watt per channel power stage, to a new, lower price point. The amplifier has a symmetrical circuit layout and a sprinkling of specialist audio grade components, and is powered by a toroidal transformer of Rotel's own design.

The new aesthetic scheme common to the range splits the fascia into three sections, but way the front panel furniture is grouped makes for a rather untidy layout. What's more, the small rotary controls are rather stiff and not properly centred in their front panel cutouts. On the other hand, the newly fashioned fascias and optional silver finish undoubtedly improve on the previously rather frumpy appearance.

On the functional side, the remote control is a full system design which is notably well laid out, and the amp includes system trigger outputs and socketry for an external remote control. The same basic design is also available

in a non-remote control version as the RA-01, for a full £100 saving.

The bold, matter-of-fact quality of the RA-02's appearance carries through to the way it performs. It is a surprisingly ballsy and direct-sounding amplifier, perhaps not the most subtle in its class, but the bass is solid and tuneful, and the treble detailed and explicit. Bass performance is on the lean and dry side of the line, but the amp's punchy presence band demeanour makes for a musically engaging performance any amp at the price would be extremely hard pressed to beat.

The RA-02 is not at its best with large, extended bandwidth floorstanding speakers, something its maker would probably be the first to admit. But it is a real monster of an amplifier for a design rated at only 40 watts a side and priced at just £350. It just goes louder and louder, and it doesn't balk at electrically difficult loads. All in all, it's a bit of a bargain.

☎ 01903 750750

🌐 www.rotel.com



★★★★★

Rotel RCD-02 CD player £375 **EXCLUSIVE**

➤ Like the matching amplifier, this is a strong and solid looking model, and Rotel's literature bills it as a direct replacement for the RCD-961. It has a central loading drawer, with all of the operating controls and the display on the right hand side, mirrored by a next-to-nothing LED on the left, giving the player a rather unbalanced appearance.

Operationally this is a simple player with few surprises. Random track access is available from the system handset and also using the remote control, which also accesses the programming, repeat modes and the like. The one feature that stands out however is not on the spec sheet, but is very obvious when the player is cranked up for action. It is the quick response to commands, and above all the very rapid drawer action, a welcome relief compared to most other players in this class. The technology is 18-bit with 8x oversampling using a Burr-Brown Delta Sigma processor, with proprietary low

KEY FEATURES

- 8x oversampling Delta Sigma DAC
- Calendar type track display
- HDCD
- 12V trigger and external remote control sockets
- Silver or black finishes
- Remote control



jitter circuitry taken from the more costly RCD-1070 CD player.

Although the acid test will come only when we put it up against other like-price models (see next month's group test), it is clear from its performance with the matching RA-02 amp and Mission m51 speakers that it sounds crisp and clear and that it has good timing. Here is a happy example of a player that is capable of keeping several balls in the air at once. Complex, large-scale musical events – orchestral

recordings for example – are handled without any one performer or section dominating, and with subtle, low-level ambient detail and background instruments remaining audible in the m \acute{e} l \acute{e} . At times there's a hint of edginess that is responsible for an exaggerated sense of detail, a kind of false highlighting that is endemic with CD. But overall the RCD-02 is a distinguished addition to the sub-£500 CD player class.

☎ 01903 750750

🌐 www.rotel.com



Rotel RT-02 FM/MW radio tuner **£275** EXCLUSIVE

➤ New FM tuners are not exactly two a penny, with the rate of introduction having slowed in part due to the promise of digital radio. New cheaper chipsets will soon make affordable digital radio a reality, but perhaps too late as the broadcasters reprise the mistake they made with ITV Digital, of cramming too many stations into too narrow a broadcast spectrum. Already the result is sound quality on most music stations that has a cartoon cutout quality, devoid of subtlety or detail, and it will get worse as more stations compete for bandwidth. So where do you go for good quality broadcast sound? Shockingly, it is good old analogue Band II FM.

The RT-02 tuner is Rotel's latest entry-level FM/AM tuner. The FM section includes RDS, most of whose options are available exclusively from the remote control. There is no switchable IF bandwidth or assignable aerial inputs, features often beloved of radio enthusiasts, but the Rotel does have a strong suite of tuning and

presetting options, including direct tuning by inputting the frequency on the remote control numeric keypad. AM is limited to MW only, so optout Radio 4 programming on LW is not assessable with this design.

There is an untidy quality to the front panel controls, with some secondary controls (memory, auto tuning, preset tuning, preset scan and band selectors) masquerading as preset keys. But the most obvious inconsistency is the large, extremely bright dot matrix display which is visually at odds with its counterpart in the CD player.

MW has little to offer music lovers of course, but FM does. The Rotel is a clean, concise-sounding tuner on this band, with good treble delivery and explicitly laid out stereo. It is not a great FM tuner, but it more than holds its own at this price level, subject only to needing quite a strong signal to subdue hiss below nuisance levels. No extraneous whistles ('birdies') were encountered at the test site, and overmodulated transmissions (Capital is

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 30 random presets
- ▶ Fluorescent dot matrix display
- ▶ Direct tuning
- ▶ Signal strength indicator
- ▶ RDS, inc RT, PTY, TP, TA, AF, CT
- ▶ Stereo/mono switching (via remote)
- ▶ 12V trigger and external remote control sockets
- ▶ Silver or black finishes
- ▶ Remote control

a persistent offender) were handled with more grace than they perhaps deserve. The main BBC networks, available with good signal strength, sounded clean, subtle and assured.

☎ 01903 750750

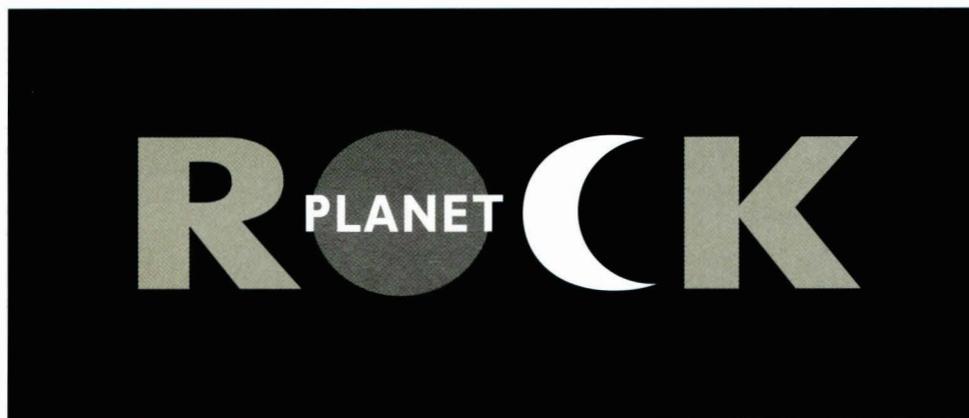
🌐 www.rotel.com

"The Rotel is a clean, concise-sounding tuner on FM, with good treble delivery and explicitly laid out stereo."

ROTEL IN 2002

The new aesthetics introduced with the 02 range coincides with a change of distribution for Rotel in the UK. Rotel is now handled by B&W of loudspeaker fame – the two have long shared distribution in other markets – and one of the first changes is an overhaul of the dealer network. You'll probably find Rotel in fewer dealers than before, and in particular this is likely to mean reduced representation on the shelves of some of the high street multiples. The quid quo pro is that Rotel will be more prominent in the ranks of committed specialist dealers, the kind who generally offer the most comprehensive pre and after sales support.

Tempted?



www.ukdigitalradio.co.uk

 DAB digital
Radio™

i love you

Design a speaker and **WIN** a fantastic Cyrus system!

Have you ever dreamed of designing your perfect speaker? Now's your chance to confirm your untapped genius and win a superb Cyrus hi-fi system into the bargain. Here's the deal...

Draw us a diagram of the speakers you would love to see (and hear) in your own living room and label the bits that make them special. You don't need a degree in audio engineering - we're not looking for anything really technical. But we are interested in what your speakers would look like, how big they would be, the sort of materials you'd use and so on. For example, do you prefer big, powerful boxes or something more compact and convenient? Would you prefer traditional real wood veneers or modern paint finishes and bold fabrics? And if you feel like designing a full system to go with your speakers, feel free!

The competition will be judged by Cyrus and entries scored on the basis of design, detail, overall concept and ease of production. It doesn't matter whether your design is computer drawn or hand sketched - just dream up the air shifters that would really make your earth move. As well as getting a highly nifty hi-fi system, the winner will be invited to visit Cyrus, see the factory and discuss your ideas with the development team. You might even have an influence on the brand's next range of speakers.

THE RULES

- The closing date for all entries is Friday 12 July. ■ This competition may only be entered by UK residents who are aged 18 or over. Terms and conditions apply.
- No purchase necessary. ■ Employees of The Future Network and Cyrus Electronics are not allowed to enter. ■ There is no cash alternative. ■ You must fill in all your personal details correctly if you want a chance to win. ■ The judges' decision is final. ■ By entering the competition, all entrants waive the rights to any aspects of the designs submitted to Cyrus Electronics. ■ Names of the first, second and third prize winners will be published in issue 232 of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

TO ENTER

SIMPLY FILL IN THE DETAILS BELOW

Pop the coupon in an envelope along with your speaker design and send it to: **Design a Speaker Competition, Cyrus Electronics, Spitfire Close, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6XY.**

The closing date for entries is Friday 12 July.

Name _____ Date of birth _____

Address (inc. postcode) _____

Daytime telephone no. _____

Email address _____

Do you already own a hi-fi system? If so, what kind? _____

Please tick here if you do not wish to receive further information on other products or services.



FIRST PRIZE SYSTEM

Cyrus Quattro CD player/preamp/FM tuner, Cyrus SmartPower power amp, Cyrus CLS 70 speakers, Cyrus Tripod speaker stands (not pictured). Total system value: £2,350 Plus... A VIP visit to the Cyrus factory!



SECOND PRIZE SYSTEM

Cyrus Quattro CD player/preamp/FM tuner, Cyrus Q-Power power amp, Cyrus CLS 70 speakers, Total system value: £2,050



THIRD PRIZE SYSTEM

Cyrus Quattro CD player/preamp, Cyrus Q-Power power amp, Cyrus CLS 50 speakers, Total system value: £1,700

Headphones

Some of the finest oracular accessories your money can buy



JVC HA-G55 £30

JVC's latest full-size cans are big and cosy with a spring-loaded headband and a single-entry 3.5 metre cable terminated in dual plugs for hi-fi or computer/personal stereo use. The earpieces are allowed a degree of swivel and comfort is about average, although this type of furry pad cover can get warm over time.

In performance terms the HA-G55s cover their relatively affordable tracks reasonably well so long as you don't play particularly challenging material. Voices, for instance, sound warm and convincing and Fontella Bass came across very nicely on The Cinematic Orchestra's *Everyday* track. But there are times when they sound a mite crude – piano on another TCO track hardens up in the high notes for example. But for the price it's hard to complain and they provided some very entertaining listening.

JVC UK 0870 330 5000 www.jvc.co.uk



Audio-Technica AH-M30 £50

These compact yet robust cans with closed back, fully reversible capsules and stainless adjusting system on the headband shout DJ, but are just as suitable for bedroom DJs as the nightclub or radio variety. The left capsule is permanently attached to a thick 3.4 metre cable that terminates in a minijack with a screw-on quarter inch adaptor – an approach used by all the models in this group.

Next to its price competitor, the Sennheiser, these A-Ts have a heavy balance with less high frequency energy but a solidity and smoothness that makes for relaxed long-term listening. There is a shortfall in detail but this is made up for with a weightiness and body to the sound that is quite involving. There's a slight plumminess or sense of the luxury button being pressed but timing is good enough to overcome this.

Audio-Technica UK 0113 2771441 www.audio-technica2.co.uk

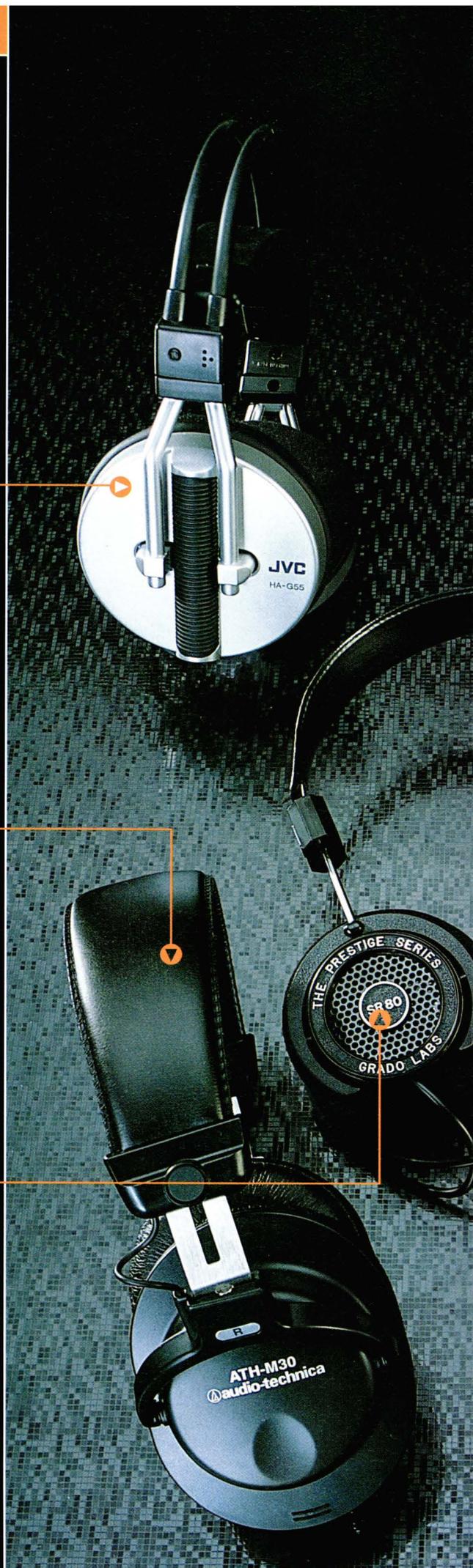


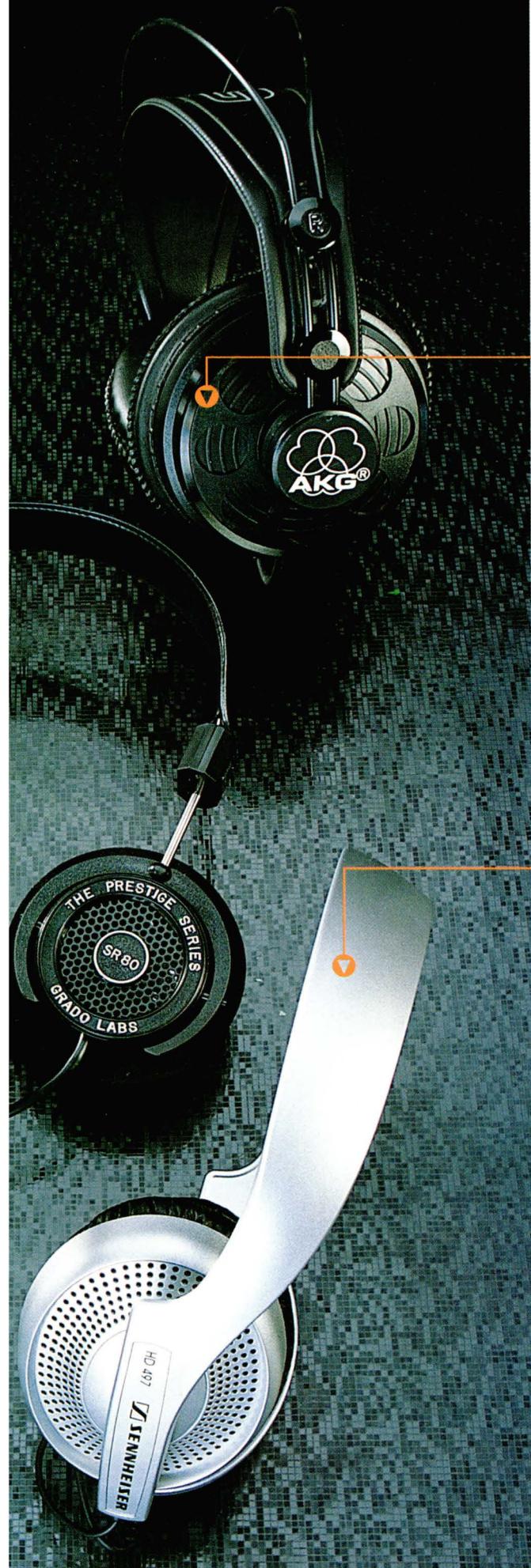
Grado SR80 £110

The SR80 is third from bottom in a range of similar designs. It has larger ear pads and more copper in its (2.5m) lead than the SR60 below it but not the high purity copper of the superior SR125, or for that matter the oxygen-free copper (OFC) found in most of the competition. Construction is basic but functional, band adjustment is by friction and the open back capsules can swivel through 360 degrees.

The SR80s manage to combine both a sense of spaciousness and of substance or body in the music. They're not as open as the AKGs but outgun them in terms of welly and grunt, while retaining openness and air. This, alongside fine timing skills makes for engaging listening with plenty of detail, and all of it in a remarkably relaxed fashion. All too often cans tend to thrust sound at you but the SR80s kick back and roll with it. Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point.

Veda Products 01279 501111 www.gradolabs.com





AKG K270 Studio £129

AKG's K270s are proper 'phones: big ear-enveloping cups with two drivers a side and plenty of room for your lobes to spread out and relax. If you are going to be using your cans for a long time this matters as much as anything else. The K270 is a closed back design, so noise doesn't get in or out very easily, and is reasonably light at 270 grams. Support is via a wide-sprung headband with the capsules able to twist adequately for comfort if not DJ'ing. The three metre cable is attached to one capsule only.

The unusually large space between your ear and the drive units in this design gives a sense of spaciousness to the music that escapes the 'in-head' effect of much of the competition. This significantly enhances stereo effects and makes listening a more relaxed and enjoyable experience. Detail resolution is good too and the midrange is the finest in this group, revelling in acoustic recordings and getting to grips with less natural material to boot. The bass could have more weight and it's possible that an amp better suited to its high 75 ohm impedance would help in this respect. But in all other respects the K270 Studio lives up to its price and warrants your attention.

Arbiter Group ☎ 020 8202 1199 🌐 www.akg-acoustics.com



Sennheiser HD 497 £50

Sennheiser's latest ear cosies are the lightest in this bunch and seem at least partially designed with personal stereo use in mind. This doesn't explain the three metre lead, but even armchair listeners will feel the benefit of fewer grams on their heads. The medium-sized capsules have leather-look pads and the Y connection lead is replaceable should you manage to damage it. Comfort, though aided by the weight is slightly undermined by the tightish pressure exerted on your lugs.

The HD 497s show great treble extension and clarity whatever you play. Detail abounds and timing is aided by the good leading edge definition. Thankfully, all this treble energy is not at the expense of the low stuff – these cans do bass with precision and weight, and while not quite as much as some of the alternatives here, you can't complain at the price. Some of the heavier designs seem to have more grunt in this area but the HD 497s have a nimbleness and speed that more than makes up for this.

☎ Sennheiser UK 0800 652 5002 🌐 www.sennheiser.co.uk

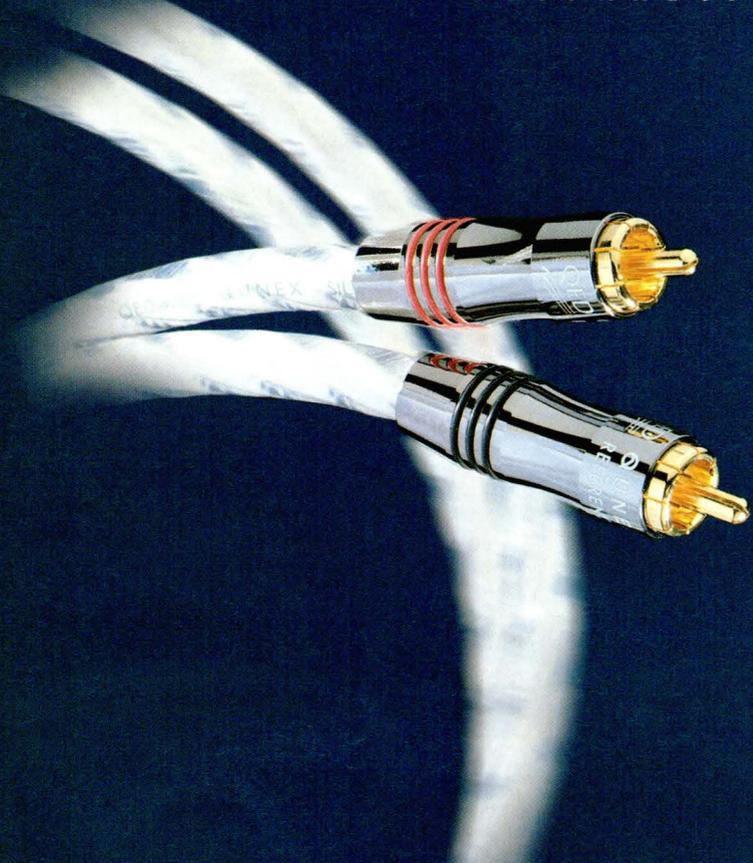
GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR CANS

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. For this test we started out using the headphone output of a Sony SACD player but soon discovered that all the headphones sounded pretty lifeless that way, so an old QED headphone amp was unearthed to see if that would improve matters. And it did! The things sprang to life and started playing music with life and energy and musical entertainment was finally on the agenda. So if you are planning to do some serious listening invest in a dedicated headphone amp. QED's current model costs £80, there's a nice alternative from Creek and if you're really into cans look up the valve-powered Earmax – it's damn funky.

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The Qunex multi-award winning range of interconnects are designed with a single purpose in mind – to deliver the purest signal possible from one hi-fi component to another.

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† 01483 747474 e info@qed.co.uk w www.qed.co.uk

ChoiceCuts



Our favourite musical morsels, old and new

Reviews by Tim Bowne, Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



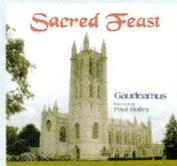
KINOBE

VerseBridgeChorus?

SACD multichannel Zomba

Music: Chillout meisters Kinobe's second album has received the Strongroom SACD treatment to good effect, especially if you are able to enjoy the full multichannel experience. A combination of instrumental and male and female vocal lead tracks, this is a diverse and evocative album with some unusual touches, not least the use of a huge *Summer In The City* sample and the lashings of real strings on tracks like *Butterfly*. The best music is to be found on the instrumentals such as *G-Spot* and *Tooth & Nail* where Kinobe paint graphic scenes of exotic places. **★★★★**

Sound: This is a very clean, almost sharp recording with plenty of sparkle to show off the strings, the SACD factor reveals its clear advantage in the multichannel mix which is enveloping and rich. **★★★★ JK**



SACRED FEAST

Gaudeamus (choir), Paul Halley (dir)

SACD multichannel dmp SACD-09

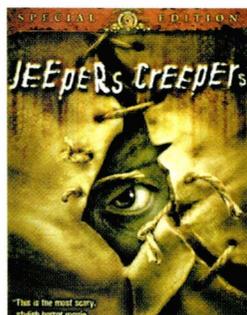
Music: This choral recording was one of the first multichannel SACDs – indeed the cover describes it as the world's first fully loaded disc, with six and two-channel SACD as well as CD compatibility.

Subsequently it has acquired the status of a classic, much like the (in)famous *Cantate Domino* from Proprius several decades earlier. The music styles cover an eclectic range from baroque to contemporary, and the performances are superb, flattered by the lush cathedral-like recording venue. **★★★★**

Sound: A height ambience channel replaces the usual LFE (low frequency effects) channel, an idea that had a brief airing at the launch of multichannel SACD, but which now seems to have gone by the wayside. Even with this channel ignored, however, the recording works, with the rich enveloping acoustic never overwhelming the music. **★★★★ AG**

CINEMA SELECTION

Because these days hi-fi doesn't always just mean music



JEEPERS CREEPERS

HELKON

Film: Just when you thought the teen-scream genre had drawn its final, tedious breath, along comes another one. Fortunately though, director Victor Salva (mostly) eschews the usual self-aware clichés and heads into darker territory. A pair of siblings are driving home across the rural South on vacation when a mysterious van driver waylays them. They narrowly escape a shunting only to see him up to some mighty suspicious behaviour further down the road. A bizarre, breathless and

bloody pursuit follows until the teenagers come face to face with their sinister assailant and learn his true, terrifying purpose. A superior supernatural spine-tingler. **★★★★**

Sound & Vision: The transfer is pretty good: the contrast of open, sunny countryside and claustrophobic darkness as the trip home descends into chaos is handled impressively and there is little or no picture noise. The sound is also faultless: the yawning expanse of the highway is nicely conveyed by accurately mapped ambient noise and the crashes, bangs and screams, once they start, keep your surround speakers busy. A well executed film transferred onto disc to good effect. **★★★★ JF**

CD/VINYL



DOVES

The Last Broadcast

EMI

Music: A thing of beauty this. A breeze of a disc that wafts through your speakers with somnolent grace; cool guitar-drenched music with widescreen vision and timeless, unchained melody. Layered and swirling, it glances back to early nineties shoegazing, Nick Drake-ish melancholy and Talk Talk's pop subtlety, packaged with a freshness reminiscent of prime Stone Roses. No clumsy foot-to-the-floor, verse-chorus-verse here – instead an indigenous ebb and flow that snakes, soars and seduces. Few guitar albums will shout louder this year. **★★★★**

Sound: A cleverly constructed set awash with layered effects yet still supremely fluid. But the CD's sound quality is a little sat-on and doesn't climb the same heady heights as the music. (Also available on double vinyl.) **★★★★ TB**



BACH GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

RosalyN Tureck (piano)

DGG 289 459 6002/601-2

Music: Those who know the monumental Goldberg Variations from better known accounts – Murray Perahia for example – may find this reading slow almost to the point of pedantry. But for me this remains the most compelling account I know of JS Bach's single most important work. The playing has a unique concentration and architectural strength, combined with sensitivity. Above all the music is allowed to speak for itself – a classic recording in every sense. **★★★★**

Sound: The piano sound is not always successful, and objectively this one too can sound close and dry, but it can sound remarkably dynamic and lifelike on a good system, with a strong physical quality. **★★★★ AG**



FUNKI PORCINI

Fast Asleep

Ninja Tune

Music: Funki Porcini AKA James Bradell has been laying down uncategorizable tunes for ten years now and his latest is probably his best. You can hear all sorts of influences in here but DJ Shadow, Vangelis and the Apollo missions are the most obvious. The opener *What Are You Looking At* is a huge, solidly underpinned landscape while the superb *The Great Drive By* features a strong beat over a swelling background that draws you inexorably in. A heavily distorted weather report and the odd speech sample add to a strong cinematic feel that's never short on musicality. **★★★★**

Sound: Lots of space and atmosphere, not to mention some lovely deep synth bass to exercise your sub with. Best played loud, this is a good recording of its type if not up with the very best. **★★★★ JK**



BOB DYLAN AND THE BAND

Bob Dylan Live 1966

Columbia

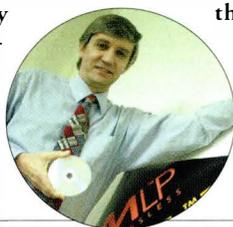
Music: The latter part of this Manchester concert, reflecting Dylan's sea change from acoustic to electric, has long been available as a poor quality vinyl bootleg. This 1966 performance is finally available as a double CD, one disc covering the initial solo acoustic set, the other the famous electric set, punctuated by cries of "Judas" from aggrieved folk fans. **★★★★**

Sound: Despite the long wait, it's great to have a decent quality recording of this event, transferred directly from the original three-channel master, though it's ironic that the acoustic set works rather better, musically and sonically. Maybe the duffel-coats that walked out were right! *acoustic* **★★★★** *electric* **★★★★ PM**

The world according to Meridian

▶ INTERVIEW: Paul Messenger

Meridian can line up a very impressive list of technological 'firsts' down the years, from its introduction of radical modular construction techniques and active loudspeakers in the seventies, via



the early CD years and pioneering multiroom systems through the eighties, to the development of the full digital multiroom/channel components and packages that represent its core today.

Chairman Bob Stuart is the only specialist hi-fi representative on the DVD Forum's Working Group 4, which is one reason why Meridian's 800 (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) is the first DVD-Audio player with genuine high-end audiophile pretensions, and the first to feature an 'approved' digital link from disc player to processor. Naturally Bob supports DVD-A rather than SACD, but irrespective of any bias, few can match his knowledge, experience and foresight in both the multichannel sound and digital audio fields.

I'd already been using the 800/861 combo prior to this interview, and had particularly enjoyed the 861's Trifield mode, used for multichannel reproduction from two-channel stereo sources. I asked Bob how the whole surround/multichannel thing got under way.

"Our first surround sound demo was way back in the early 1980s, when we demonstrated Ambisonics and Hafler arrangements at one of the London shows. We were a very early Ambisonics licensee, and worked closely with people like Michael Gerzon and John Wright.

"However, we didn't make a commercial product until the 565 Surround Processor in 1995. That was the first time anyone had done ProLogic in software, without using a Dolby chip, and

it concentrated on music rather than movie replay. It had both Meridian Music mode and Trifield mode, way back in '95, and was very successful because people wanted to play music on their systems.

"Subsequently, a lot of high-end companies did Surround Processors, but most simply used a bypass mode when dealing with stereo music signals. We knew from the Ambisonic work that a centre channel, properly used, could be an extremely powerful tool with stereo signals. It stabilises the image so that you no longer have a sweet spot for good imaging, and listening can be much more of a shared

experience. It also makes room imperfections much less critical, because it's much more robust than a 'phantom' image.

"For many years now I've felt that a Trifield-type approach offers a better way of representing stereo. If you go back to the 1930s, the American studies or Blumlein's work found that three was the minimum number of channels needed to create a proper image. The reason we ended up with two is to fit into the two sides of the record groove.

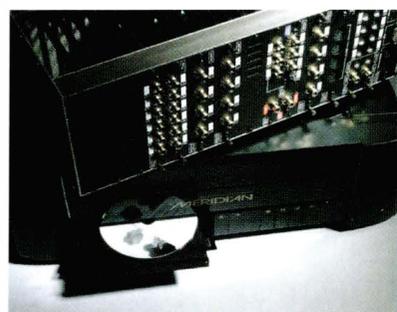
"We've tried to distinguish between microphone feeds, speaker feeds and recorded channels. Just because there are two channels on a disc, it doesn't necessarily follow that two speakers is the right way to play it back. We could probably convince you that more than 95 per cent of your collection sounds better with a correctly used centre speaker!

I dragged Bob onto the subject of the new 'high band' formats, pointing out that Pioneer got a great reaction to its 'combi' DV-747A player which plays both DVD-A and SACD. Could Meridian do something similar?

"Not in the timescale, and to do SACD replay, we have to be convinced it's worth making the investment, because it may just go nowhere. At the moment, I'm not convinced."

I play Devil's advocate, referring

More software and stronger audiophile approval indicate that SACD may have won the first round of the high resolution audio war with DVD-Audio. But Meridian chairman Bob Stuart has other ideas...



Top: Digital theatre, Meridian style.
Above: Reference 800 and 861.
Right: Meridian 800 DVD-A player and friends.
Below: Optional cards for the 861 digital surround controller (below right with 800)



Past Glories

100-SERIES

The cute and exceptionally compact 100-series consisted of preamp, outboard power supplies, tuner, and monoblock power amps. It introduced modular construction in both the units themselves, and in plug-in modules used to match different cartridges.

200-SERIES

The 200-series, introduced in 1986, was among the very first in the world to encourage multiroom systems, and also served to pioneer the concept of the separate, outboard DAC.

M2

A hugely influential and compact active speaker, the M2 evolved into the M3 and ultimately the current M33 and DSP33, all based on twin 5.25-inch main drivers mounted above and below a central tweeter.

"A problem for SACD is that high resolution is simply not enough. In fact, I don't think either SACD or DVD-Audio would survive without DVD-Video."

to the superior number of titles and the excellent press SACD has enjoyed. Bob remains unfazed, and sees SACD essentially as an attempt by Philips and Sony to extend the considerable parent royalties they share from CD. He acknowledges that SACD's launch strategy was much better planned and executed than DVD-A's, but feels that the latter gains considerably from being part of the hugely successful DVD 'family'.

"The real key, I believe, is that the silicon companies and Chinese makers are tooling up to make DVD-Audio rather than anything else. A problem for SACD is that high resolution is simply not enough. In fact, I don't think either format would survive without DVD-V. The fact that many DVD-Audio discs have a video layer compatible with 40 million DVD-Video players out there means you've got a market for the discs that could never have been created just by 'high band' machines.

"DVD-Audio might have had a slow start, but it's an exceptionally flexible platform which is already inspiring original new music from a large number of sources. It also promises all sorts of future possibilities, now that copy protection is in place, and the music industry is getting on side.

"To go back to whether we could make an SACD player, the answer is that of course we could. But building the 800 to be the best at CD, DVD-V and DVD-A was itself an enormous project, and we couldn't have maintained the same standards in a more universal machine, because SACD is so completely different. The two technologies diverge right back at the laser.

"Many of the things we'd want

Current Key Products



507 CD PLAYER £1,195

A new entry-level CD player, it uses 800 series-style de-jittering and buffering techniques at a much more affordable price.

800 £10,805

Modular construction with extensive de-jittering and buffering techniques, this is the first audiophile DVD-Audio player to feature an approved digital link, and delivers no compromise performance with CD and DVD-V too.

DSP 33 £2,595

A very discrete and compact loudspeaker that accepts digital input signals, deriving performance advantages by processing crossover networks and protection circuitry in the digital domain.



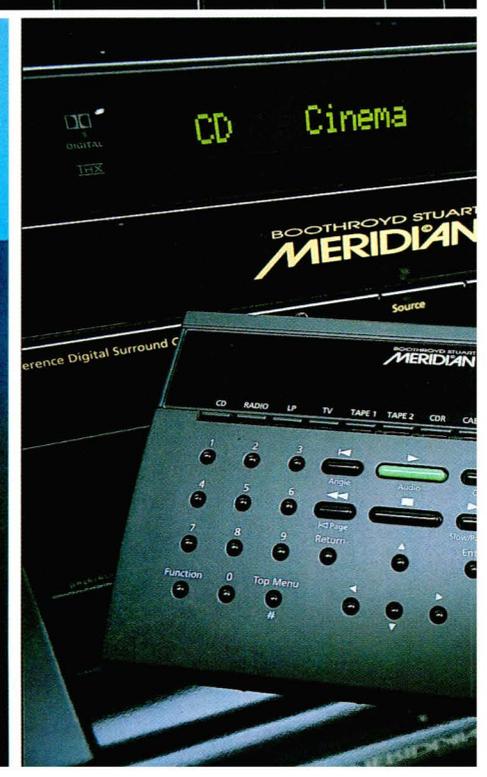
to do to create the best possible SACD player would tend to work against best PCM performance. We'd probably opt to make a completely separate machine instead. At the really high end, a universal player is an essentially spurious concept, the more so because SACD doesn't, as far as I know, permit a digital output. And if it did, it would probably use a different encryption system to DVD-A. It all starts to get very complicated indeed... ☹

You can contact Meridian on:

☎ 01480 445678

🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

Turn the page for a review of Meridian's new 800/861 V3 DVD-A player and digital surround controller.



EXCLUSIVE

Ultimate DVD

Meridian's 800/861 V3 combo promises the ultimate in optical disc replay from (nearly) all formats, alongside the ability to control any desired speaker combination

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Few components leave this reviewer lost for words, but Meridian's 800-series is so extraordinary, it's hard to know where to begin. One can describe the 800 and 861 as two large, hefty and beautifully crafted black-and-lacquer-finished components. But 'component' isn't quite the right word for devices that have more in common with a mainframe computer than hi-fi's traditional 'black box'.

Modular hardware construction and card-based electronics lie at the heart, and this has various implications. You don't 'buy' one of these and then figure out how to connect it up. Instead you 'specify' each according to your particular requirements. Which provides the flexibility to change things later if you

SMART LINKING

Because a piracy-plagued music industry panicked at the prospect of allowing access to the raw digital datastreams for the SACD and DVD-Audio 'high bandwidth' multi-channel music formats, early players covering both formats have been fitted with multiple analogue digital outputs.

This represents a major drawback, because both bass and time delay management require digital signal processing. While this would normally be carried out within the AV processor, the prohibition on high-band digital outputs means it has hitherto had to be performed within the player, duplicating costly facilities, and effectively handicapping the performance.

Meridian's 800-series Version 3 models are the first to break this mould (closely followed by Denon – see page 42). They include the MHR (Meridian High Resolution) Smart Link connections which transfer high-band digital data in a proprietary encrypted form (with approval from the 4C copy protection entity), from the 800 player to the powerful 861 processor. Other brands including TAG McLaren Audio have also announced plans to link players and processors in the digital domain, and more will presumably follow in due course. So in theory the current clumsy arrangements with multiple analogue outputs and inputs should eventually disappear.

VERDICT

**MERIDIAN
800 V3
DVD-A/V player
& 861 V3
digital processor**
£10,805 &
£10,000

▲ Brilliantly versatile and flexible combo for playing nearly all optical disc formats, through to any multi-channel amp/speaker configuration that takes your fancy.

▼ Lacks the ultimate transparency and delicacy of similarly high end stereo-only hi-fi. Needs expert help with installation.

CONCLUSION

Billed by Meridian as the most advanced optical disc player on the planet, and for once such claims have justification. Probably the best DVD-Audio player money can buy and a lot more besides.

KEY FEATURES

MERIDIAN 800

- Flexible modular construction
- Upsamples discs to 24-bit/96kHz
- Encrypted digital output via Smart Link

MERIDIAN 861

- Multi-room compatible
- Automatic mode and speaker management
- Up to ten outputs at 96kHz/24-bit
- Unified bass management for all formats
- MHR Smart Link digital input
- Flexible modular construction
- All six channels have current feedback circuits

want to, or if new technology comes around – which it has a habit of doing in the surround sound field. Software updates are also available when appropriate, via Internet downloads.

Don't, however, use the internet to buy this kit on the cheap. In my view a trained and experienced dealer is absolutely essential, first in planning the system and hence the components, and subsequently carrying out the installation. Despite having played around with hi-fi kit for more than thirty years, I wouldn't attempt to install this gear without expert assistance (partly because a PC is part of the set-up procedure, and I've always used a Mac). Once this is all done, however, the whole thing is a joy to use, thanks to a nicely laid out (if bulky) remote control, and a degree of built-in 'intelligence'.

The 800 is the source component. It usually comes with a single CD-ROM-type drive mounted in one of two drive bays. It's primarily intended to replay CD and DVD (both Video and Audio) optical discs to the highest possible standards, and can additionally handle CD-R, Video CD, MP3 and DVD-R, plus presumably Uncle Tom Cobby and all. It can be used alone (ie without the 861), feeding Meridian's DSP speaker systems directly, and offers considerable flexibility in configuring both inputs and outputs, the latter including Meridian's encrypted digital Smart Link (see box). This new Version 3 incarnation also features much enhanced digital processing power and uses 48-bit internal resolution, and up-samples all the various formats (including the movie soundtracks) to 24-bit/96kHz prior to sending the data on its way.

The 861 Digital Surround Controller takes both the signal and the control digital data from the 800, and performs the necessary data processing to generate, where appropriate, the multichannel surround soundfields. No shortage of choice here – too much perhaps, as cycling through the 14 DSP modes takes a while and is apt to breed indecision.

Plenty of real estate on the remote, but with components of this complexity, it has a lot to do.

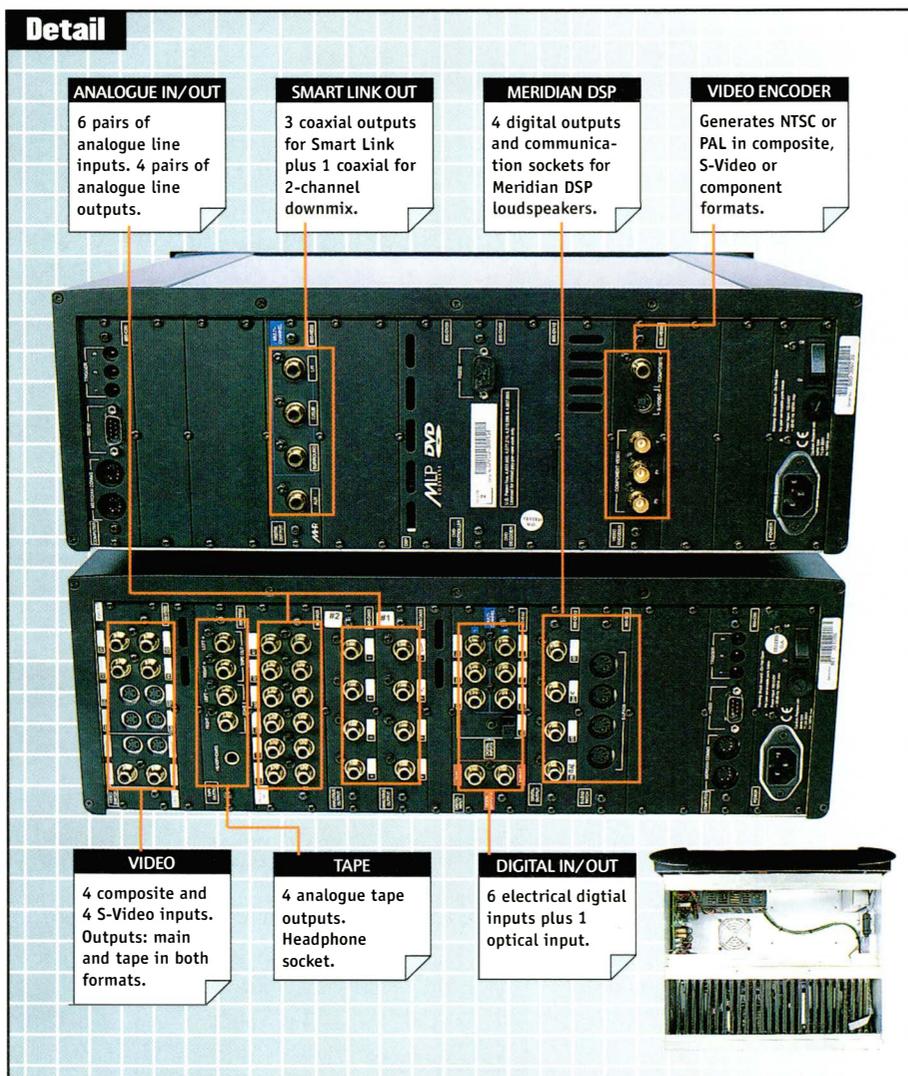
Tempted?

PrimeTimeRadio

www.ukdigitalradio.co.uk



i love you



“I have to admit a degree of cynicism towards DVD-Audio. Yet the Meridian experience turned any such preconceptions completely on their head.”

Again, the Version 3 upgrades involve dramatically increased processing power, partly used to enhance the internal operating architecture. Its volume control cleverly combines analogue and digital techniques and is designed to avoid the disadvantages of both.

The remote control is more of a table-top than a hand-held affair, which might or might not be to taste, but it does at least have superior button layout and differentiation to most hi-fi handsets.

PERFORMANCE

Most Meridian customers are likely to combine an 800/861 with the company's DSP/active loudspeakers. That was the original plan here, but unfortunately a van, fully loaded with the equipment for this review, was stolen.

We therefore ended up with the

800/861 combo, plus a DSP5000 centre speaker and a pair of DSP33s for the surround channels. I used my regular stereo system to supply the main front left/right channels – a Naim NAP500 power amp driving various loudspeakers, notably Tannoy TD12s, B&W Nautilus 800 Signatures and Spendor S8s.

Meridian's individual approach to operational ergonomics can prove a tad confusing at first. But I soon got used to it, found it made sense, and very much enjoyed the way it helped me find my way around. I love the way this combo thinks for itself, whatever optical disc format you choose to play. For CD replay, for example, our 861 was set up to use stereo/direct when the CD input was selected, but automatically chose Trifield surround if the DVD input was selected.

DVD-Audio might be the 'glamour'



Meridian's 800 series components are complex and flexible beasts – it is a good idea to get professional help both when you're deciding on the configuration and for the installation itself.

music format for this combo, but in practice it is going to spend most of its time in the immediate future replaying regular stereo material. And while it does a very fine job of straight stereo playback, it seems a waste to tie it down to two-channel replay, and I found myself listening in Trifield mode most of the time. This is an excellent way of handling regular stereo material, with some notable advantages over the two-channel approach. Above all, its action is very subtle, adding just enough synthesised surround channel info to remove the slightly 'boxy' quality of the normal listening room, and just enough centre-front to nail down the front soundstage stability and focus.

An equally pleasant surprise is how good DVD-Audio sounds through this Meridian system. I haven't really been blown away by DVD-A as yet, mainly because none of my favourite albums are available in the format, and have to admit a degree of cynicism towards it. Yet the Meridian experience turns any such preconceptions on their head. The format might currently be software-limited, but the best discs sound exceptionally engrossing and entertaining, with great delicacy and transparency.

Movies are equally well handled, DVD-Video discs delivering fine picture quality, as well as a superior rendition of the soundtrack, thanks to the upsampling. Off-air movies are well handled too, via Dolby Pro-Logic II's Movie mode.

In the final analysis, the Meridian combo perhaps just lacks the delicacy, transparency and tension in straight stereo mode to match a high end stereo-only system of similar price. But that's arguably an irrelevance, as the *raison d'être* for these components is their ability to create surround sound experiences that arguably transcend mere stereophony, and take domestic sound reproduction to a new level of enjoyment and involvement.

Meridian 01480 445678

www.meridian-audio.com

ALSO CONSIDER

TAG MCLAREN DVD32R/AV32R EX
£3,995/£2,749

Tour de force of engineering that produces a combination of picture and sound quality that is a bench-mark for the industry.

MARANTZ DV-12S1/SR14EX MKII
£2,500/£3,300

Superb build combined with smooth, powerful and grounded sound and excellent video performance combined with a weighty 7.1 channel amp of considerable prowess.

PIONEER DV-747A/AV-AX10
£899/£2,700

The only 100 per cent format-compatible disc player on the market is also a great CD player while the matching amp not only sounds superb but sets itself up automatically.

Technical report: Meridian 800/861

Meridian's 800 series player and processor partnership is a technical tour de force

Rarely has a product insinuated such elegant simplicity and yet proved so devilishly intricate to set up. This is because, instead of the usual on-screen display, Meridian has endowed its 800 series with bi-directional PC control via an RS232 interface. This PC software interrogates the attached 800-series components to determine which analogue, digital, video cards and associated hardware are installed. Here we see why PC control is useful, because the menu software must adapt to your choice of Meridian's plug-in cards.

THE SOFTWARE

Fig 1 shows a pic of the 861 set-up software, detailing the configuration of an all-analogue 5.1 channel system. For our listening tests, Meridian had set up its 800 DVD-A player and 861 processor for large analogue front speakers but used digital feeds to service its partnering, active centre and rear speakers. The speaker menu incorporates 'Layout' (shown) with tabs for Sizes, Distances, Crossovers, Precision (for digital connections), Phase/Gain and Connections. The level of sophistication and flexibility offered by this combination of software and hardware is quite unsurpassed.

THE HARDWARE

The 800 DVD-A player is based around a DVD-ROM drive with a proprietary FIFO buffer for both audio and video data and custom software for disc management and MLP processing. The 800 will decode multichannel DVD-A, Dolby Digital and dts to 5.1 channels, which are then upsampled and transmitted as pairs of encrypted 96kHz/24bit datastreams, a format described as MHR (Meridian High Resolution). Two-channel, 192kHz DVD-Audio is downsampled to 96kHz/24bit data.

Three of these connections carry a full 5.1 channels of data to the 861 processor which includes 'Meridian EZ' processing to create additional side channels. True 7.1-channel Dolby EX decoding can only be accommodated by passing a raw Dolby bitstream from the 800 to be decoded fully in the 861. Otherwise, the

861's digital inputs are crystal-locked, buffered and will also accept normal S/PDIF data from 44.1kHz-96kHz (CD and DVD)

PERFORMANCE

Jitter from CD amounts to just 130psec via the 800/861 combination and falls to as low as 30psec with 96kHz/24-bit data – one of the lowest figures ever. The 861 is equipped with four, two-channel 192kHz DACs, although there's no further upsampling performed unless the digital input is S/PDIF at 44.1kHz or 48kHz. Distortion at peak output (0dBfs or 3.03V max at Volume = 93) is <0.0017% across the audible frequency range, and <0.007% at -20dBfs with two and multichannel audio.

Fig 2 illustrates the supremely low level of ultrasonic noise and distortion (<0.004%, black trace) achieved by this combination, replaying an extreme 40kHz signal at -3dBfs (96kHz/24-bit DVD-A). Only the relatively poor rejection of digital 'images' (77dB re 40kHz, as shown) is less than state-of-the-art, but this is a function of the digital filter. Stopband rejection with 44.1kHz and 48kHz digital audio is better than 105dB. Meanwhile, the splash of orange-coloured noise behind is a comparable signal derived from an SACD player, showing its characteristic increase in out-of-band noise. Consequently, the 800/861 should offer a more consistent level of performance with different choices of amplifiers.

With DVD-Audio, errors in linearity are within 0.2dB to -118dBfs, which is very close to a true 20-bit performance and limited only by analogue, rather than digital circuitry. Its response is -0.3dB down at 20Hz (low bass) but flat to 45kHz (beyond audibility) unless "HS Output" is selected on the 861, which invokes a steep cut beyond 32kHz, reaching -1.8dB at 45kHz. Interestingly, this also affects CD replay, imposing an HF cut of -0.9dB with "HS" selected and -1.75dB without.

Otherwise, the 861's response is also influenced by speaker configuration. Bass management is controlled by the 861

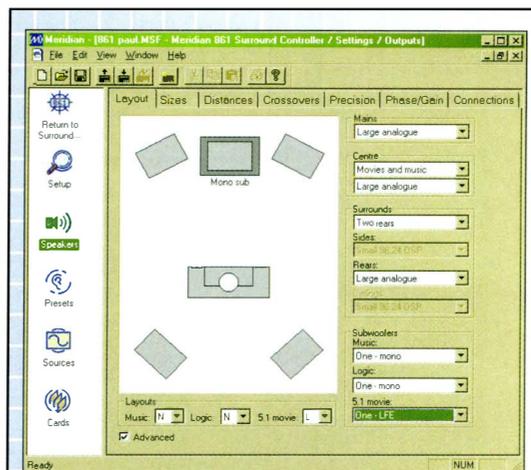


Fig 1

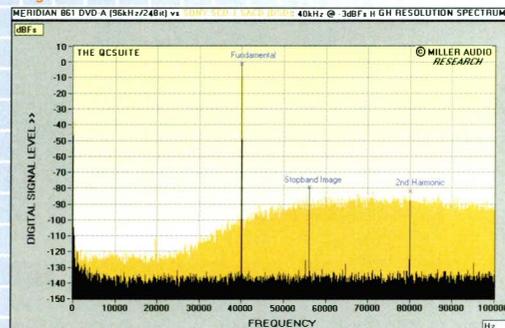


Fig 2

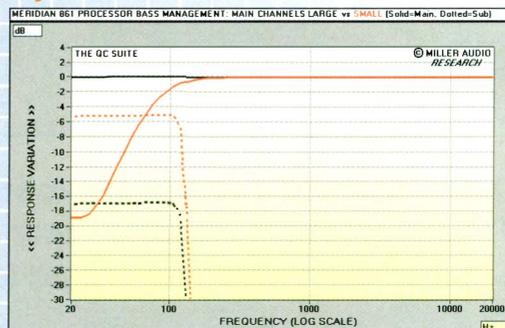


Fig 3

Fig 1: A screenshot from Meridian's PC-based set-up menu. Comprehensive is putting it mildly.

Fig 2: A supremely clean decode of a 40kHz signal (96kHz/24bit DVD-A data) compared to an equivalent DSD (SACD) player.

Fig 3: Perfectly executed bass management. Low bass from "Small" speaker channels (red) is redirected to the sub (red, dotted) without overload.

and Fig 3 shows how the nominally flat response enjoyed by "Large analogue" speakers (black trace) is rolled off below 120Hz if they are switched to "Small analogue" (red trace) via Meridian's PC-based menu. The equivalent subwoofer output is also shown (dotted traces), with the increased level reflecting the amount of bass that's being redirected from main to sub.

Meridian's bass management is expertly handled. Even in the most extreme cases (front=Large, centre/rear=Small, no sub), no overload is encountered with peak-level material provided the volume setting is not increased beyond 76. In short, the 800/861 is a *tour de force* whose modular architecture promises even more to come. **D**

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How does the colour of a loudspeaker affect its sound?
JBL's Ti-2K attempts to sway our perceptions with some lovely lacquer

VERDICT

JBL Ti-2K
stand-mount
loudspeakers
£2,000 lacquers
£1,250 veneers

Highly detailed, hugely entertaining and beautiful design with good resolution and plenty of power.

Fiddly terminal access, slightly exposed top end, high price of (admittedly beautiful) lacquered finish.

CONCLUSION

Superbly built cabinet instills a precision and clarity to the sound that's rare at the price (the venerated price that is!).

KEY FEATURES

Boat-tail shaped laminated MDF cabinet offers an impressively rigid body and reduces standing waves.

Downward-firing reflex port

Gold-plated bi-wire cable terminals

Sensitivity/impedance: 88dB/8 ohms

Frequency response: 45Hz-30kHz

Mid/bass driver: 170mm polypropylene cone

Treble driver: 25mm titanium dome

Dimensions (HxWxD): 42x28x42cm

Weight: 13kg

JBL's TiK range can be purchased in beech or black ash wood veneer but the style conscious who can afford it will be hard pressed to resist the five lacquered colour finishes: red, white, yellow, blue or black. The premium may be high, 60 per cent in this instance, but you do get one of the most gorgeous speakers the hi-fi world has ever seen.

The Ti-2K is the stand-mount in a small range which also includes floorstanders, subwoofers and a centre channel, many of which share the Ti-2K's distinctive boat-style tail section. This is not merely a means of making the speaker look elegant but has the twin advantages of making the cabinet extremely stiff and the internal space devoid of parallel surfaces. Stiffness and rigidity mean that the cabinet will be less likely to resonate at audible frequencies and a lack of parallel surfaces means that you can minimise the effect of standing waves inside the box.

One factor that helps this speaker look so special is that both reflex port and bi-wire speaker terminals are hidden in the base. When it comes to standmounting you need an open frame stand to be able to connect them up, or you could get the matching Ti-K stands (£325).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF JBL

James Bullough Lansing formed the company that was later to shorten its name to JBL in 1946 when he started making loudspeakers for the domestic market. Prior to that he had been building sound systems for cinemas and establishing a relationship with the studio world that led to JBL speakers inhabiting 70 per cent of recording studios by 1976.

Over the intervening years the company had created some classic designs including 1958's Paragon, the ultimate sideboard-cum-one-box stereo loudspeaker system based on horn technology. During the sixties JBL started to domesticate some of its studio designs and created the legendary L-100 three-way, which sold 250,000 units during the seventies.

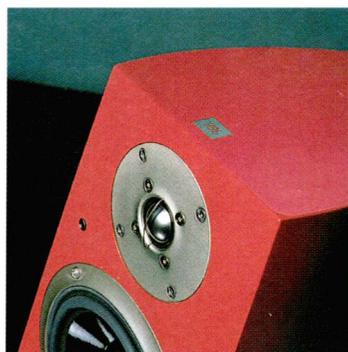
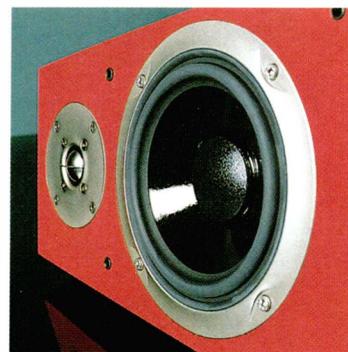
JBL's cinematic experience led to the company designing the world's first THX system in 1983 and the subsequent explosion in home cinema saw the brand establish itself with the renowned Synthesis systems.

The drive units are one of JBL's favoured titanium tweeters coupled with a mid/bass driver which incorporates a polypropylene cone. The speaker is reasonably efficient and seems to present a fairly benign load for the amp to drive.

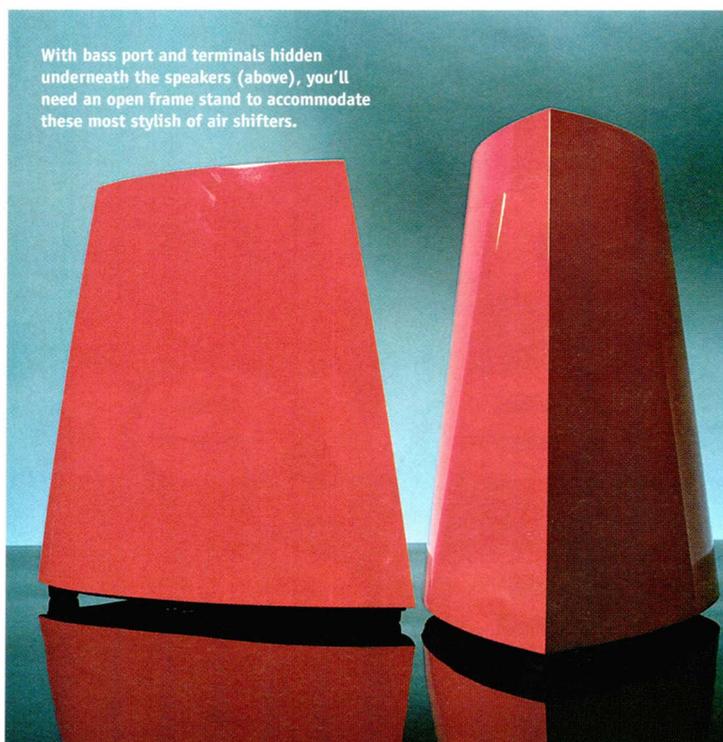
PERFORMANCE

Being compact and solid, these red devils have a head start when it comes to creating big, three-dimensional imaging. This is particularly apparent with the *Gaudeamus* choral SACD that was recorded in a church and has extraordinary depth of image. The Ti-2Ks bring out more of the scale of the venue than previously encountered, layering the different voices so that each can be clearly picked out. The 30kHz high frequency extension further assists matters by opening up the top end to make the most of SACD's broad bandwidth.

Ali Farka Touré's *Niafunke* is an atmospheric recording of bluesy Malian music made in a vaulted grain store. These speakers reveal the reverberant nature of the location to a tee, raw electric guitar



With bass port and terminals hidden underneath the speakers (above), you'll need an open frame stand to accommodate these most stylish of air shifters.





EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
 magazine
 ★

cutting through the heat of deep drum beats. This track does however bring out a sensation of the air in my listening room being pumped or pressurised on the drum notes. We suspect that their port frequency is exactly the same as a major room mode, because lugging them to another room saved the day (if not my back!). We'd encourage in situ auditioning before purchase.

Having rigid boxes also helps bass control and they certainly delve deep and tight whenever the low stuff comes along. The JBLs do Groove Armada's *Suntoucher* (on SACD) plenty of favours in terms of speed, power and energy. Bass is more entertaining if it is nimble as well as deep and with a decent amp doing the pushing this is most certainly on the musical menu here.

The quality of high frequencies is more varied and source/material dependent. Most CDs sound extended and clean, but some SACDs are inclined to a splashiness that brought undue attention to the tweeter's activities. This even happens

"The Ti-2K is not just a fantastic looking speaker, it's a superb sounding one too – abundant detail combined with solid build and excellent dynamics make this one hell of an all-rounder."

with vinyl which suggests that this treble emphasis is revealing a shortcoming in the reference system!

Timing, that elusive yet critical quality, is not found wanting. Leading edges are well served and you'll have difficulty sitting still if something like The Prodigy's *Fire* is turned up high. You'll have trouble keeping a straight face as well but that's not the speakers.

The arrival, late in the day, of a rather tasty new valve amplifier (Border Patrol's 22-watter) resulted in a tremendous synergy that prompted a startling performance, both in terms of bass tunefulness and sonic liveness. The result

caused a further re-evaluation the JBLs, elevating our opinion of their abilities to greater heights. It's debateable how many users are going to use an amp of this quality, but it's good to know that JBL appreciates tubes.

The Ti-2K is not just a fantastic looking loudspeaker, it's a superb sounding one too – abundant detail combined with solid build and excellent dynamics make this one hell of an all-rounder. So does colour count? It's hard to tell, they only sent a red pair but they're damn hot.

☎ Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670
 🌐 www.jbl.com

ALSO CONSIDER

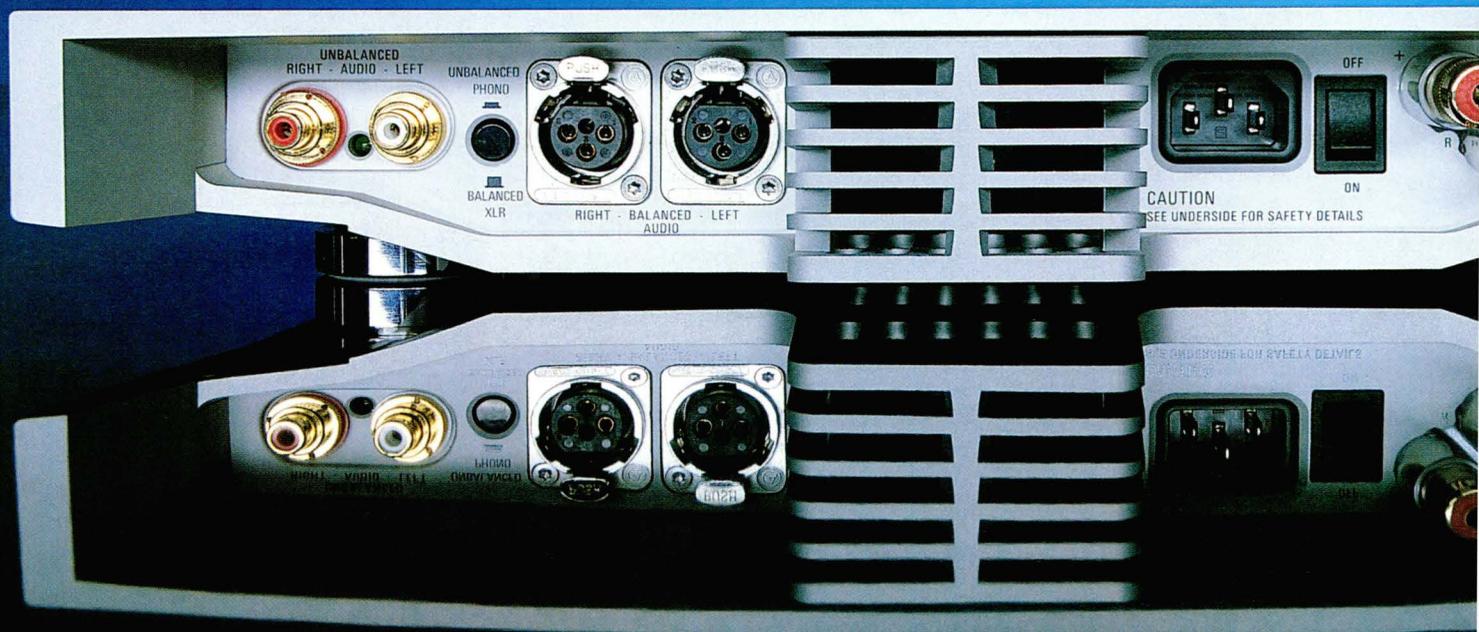
ATC SCM10A, £1,269
 Stylish active design of considerable capability and power for their size.

B&W NAUTILUS 805, £1,400
 Another beautiful standmounter with bundles of detail if relatively small sound.

JMLAB ELECTRA 905, £1,149
 Compact but massively engineered stand-mount that sounds coherent, agile and exceptionally dynamic.



“It is quicksilver-fast, but when it needs to kick up a ruckus, the Klimax Twin has seemingly titanic amounts of power on hand.”



Klimactic conditions

When it comes to a Klimax, Twins have more fun. But does Linn's new high end stereo power amplifier break out of Linn-world?

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Beneath the Klimax Twin's minimalist outer casing lurks a beast with truckloads of power, but also superior sensitivity.

Scottish hi-fi specialist Linn Products has a commanding reputation for source components. It also makes amplifiers and loudspeakers of fine repute, but it is the LP12 and CD12 that people keep praising. A couple of years ago, Linn produced the Klimax Solo, a mono power amplifier with paradigm-shifting qualities like Linn's sources. At £12,000 a pair, these have a limited audience, so now there's the new Klimax Twin, a £6,000 stereo amplifier that was designed to bring most of that performance to a (slightly) wider market.

Linn has taken industrial design to the bleeding edge. Normally, the bigger the price tag, the larger the product, but this is not the case with the Klimax. Each part of the inch-high precision machined clamshell is made from a single alloy billet and has a clever integral centre-mounted heatsink, while the discreet front panel with its blue LED smile gives Linn the edge in minimalist chic.

Beneath the casework it is equally advanced and explains how the Klimax Twin can be so slim yet powerful. Most big power amps feature a traditional power supply with dirty great big toroidal transformers and reservoir capacitors to deliver high voltages. In contrast, Linn's '4G' switch mode power supply delivers the same high voltages, but is switched by semiconductors at extremely high speeds. This makes the power supply more reactive to changes in current requirement from the amplifier stages, as well as using far smaller components (the transformer in the Klimax is less than 4cm across but can deliver 1,000 watts running in switch mode).

Standard switch mode designs are not for audio use; they are more commonly found in PCs. Switch mode supplies are inherently more complicated than traditional designs, especially if designed not to create high-frequency noise which affects audio signals. Linn (along with Chord Electronics) is one of the driving forces behind the use of switch mode in audio, and has effectively removed all

VERDICT

**LINN KLIMAX
TWIN
stereo power
amplifier
£6,000**

▲ Gets closer to 'no amplifier' sound than most power amplifiers; built like a tank; blindingly fast and very powerful.

▼ Only works well in the best systems; can run hot; those who equate cash with size will need a rethink!

CONCLUSION

Stunning, fast and powerful stereo power amplifier, one of the world's best. And not just one for the Linnies only!

KEY FEATURES

▶ Rated 125 watts/channel into 8 ohms

▶ Rated 250 watts/channel into 4 ohms

▶ Balanced and single-ended line level inputs

▶ '4G' switch-mode power supply

▶ 'Silent Power' integrated circuit/bipolar-based power amplifier circuit

▶ Auto-on signal sensing circuitry

▶ Completely screened and isolated power supply and audio circuits

▶ Clamshell case made out of solid alloy billets, precision machined

▶ Optional Neutrik or binding post speaker connections

the sonic problems that can beset this kind of power supply. The only thing Linn can't do with hi-fi grade switch mode supplies is make them cheaper!

On a completely isolated PCB, the Klimax Twin features Linn's Silent Power power amplifier circuitry. The Klimax circuit uses both integrated circuits and bipolar amplifier devices in a unique combination to deliver 125 watts into eight ohms and 250 watts into four ohms. Integrated circuit chips have a bad name in high-end audio, but the chip itself is designed by an audiophile who paid close attention to the circuit topology, using MOSFETs in the power output stage. The power amplifiers do run hot, though. They need airflow and, although the centre convection grilles act as a

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LINN

You can't talk about the recent history of hi-fi without mentioning Linn Products. The company practically redefined hi-fi a little over a quarter of a century ago and has been at the forefront of top-end home entertainment systems ever since.

The legend began with the Sondek LP12 turntable, first launched in 1972. Back in the early 1970s, the LP was king, but many of the record decks at the time lacked the precision engineering to replay records with any kind of clarity and the thinking at the time understated the importance of the source and focussed instead on the loudspeakers. Linn's turntable successfully challenged this outlook by promoting comparative demonstrations. It's a fitting tribute to the success of Linn's approach that the LP12 is still available (in a substantially upgraded form) to this day.

New products soon began to appear thick and fast from Linn's Glasgow base, including Linn's first amplifier products, the LK1 and LK2 pre/power combination of the mid-1980s. Although these were well received in systems featuring Linn turntables and speakers, they were less commonly used with components from other brands, thereby creating a systemic approach that Linn has stayed with ever since. Until the Klimax, that is!

The only difference between men and boys is the size of their feet and the price of their toys

Sooner or later you'll want to hear McIntosh sound systems. Sooner's better.

For more than fifty years McIntosh has produced world beating hi-fi equipment. Currently that includes state-of-the-art valve combinations, technologically advanced solid state amplifiers (some boasting megawatt power output) highly specified CD/DVD players and hugely expressive loudspeakers.

Now McIntosh has applied the same meticulous design and production processes to introduce easy-to-use multi-channel equipment that demonstrates comparable sonic subtleties and similar unbridled power characteristics to that of their two-channel masterpieces.

There's a very compelling 'retro' feel to all McIntosh equipment which has a tangible authenticity. Materials and controls

feel just right and massive construction suggests a long term investment rather than just an acquisition. In fact it's worth knowing that in the United States McIntosh enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty in the industry.

McIntosh is very highly specified, demonstrably convincing sound equipment that stands head and shoulders above mainstream audio and home-cinema systems. An impressive range of products is available to meet the widely different requirements of serious music lovers and film enthusiasts.

As the London McIntosh Centre, we hold the largest stock of McIntosh equipment in Europe. So, whatever your preference, two or multi-channel, please call into KJ West One for a very special experience.

You know that sooner or later ...

McIntosh C2200

Pre-amp

Fully balanced from input to output, a configuration that essentially cancels all distortion. Even unbalanced signals are processed and converted to balanced. Includes MM/MC phono section.



McIntosh MA6900 Integrated Amp

Critically acclaimed 200 wpc integrated amplifier provides truly natural music reproduction with no dynamic limitations. The MA6900 is the equal of the world's best pre/power combinations. Wt: 74.5lbs



McIntosh LS360

Loudspeakers

Majestic soundstaging, musical sensitivity and passion combined with effortless delivery distinguish the LS360's from the 'academic' presentation typical of many 'monitor' speakers. Supplied as a stereo pair or left/right in the multi-channel **Academy IV System**. Available in a wide selection of veneers and finishes. Size: 125.1(h) x 34.3(w) x 44.1(d) cms. Weight: 80kg (176 lbs)

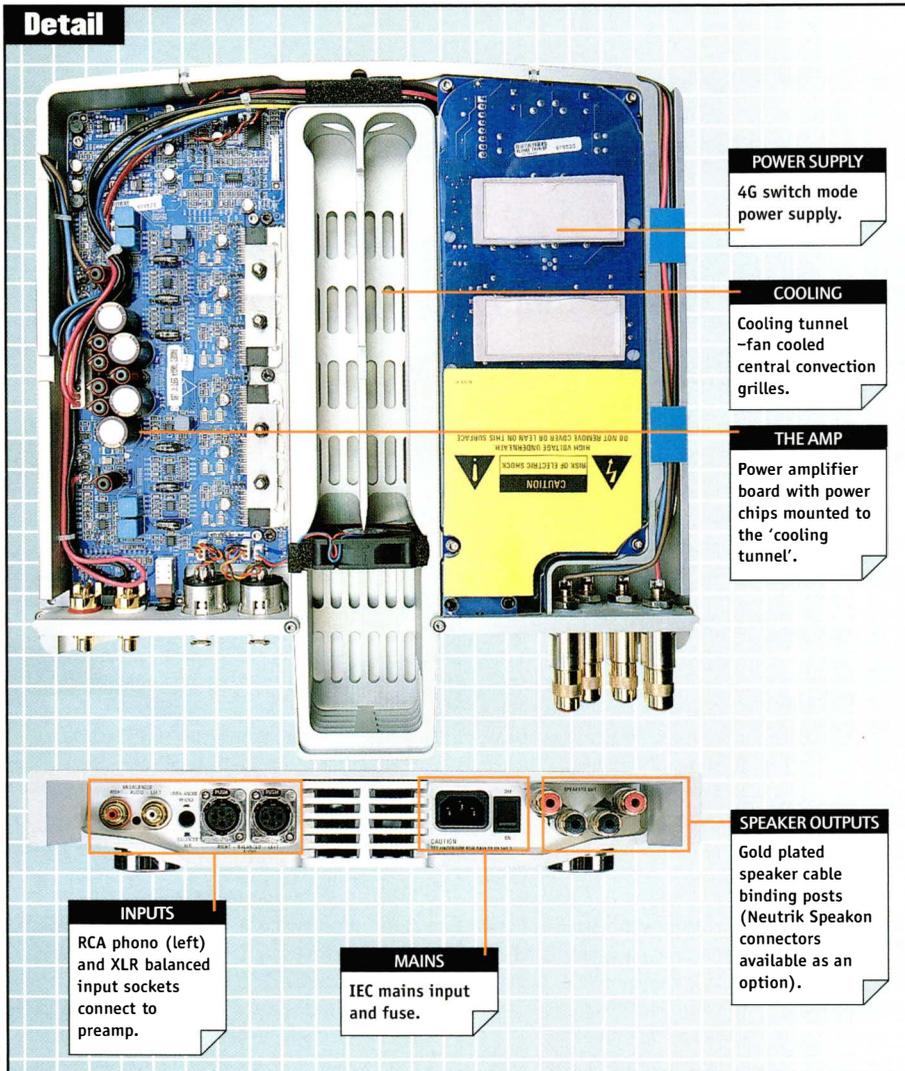
McIntosh MHT100 A/V Controller

Multi-channel Controller/Processor/Amplifier for serious home cinema installations. Powerful DSP engine for decoding Dolby Digital[®], Pro-Logic and DTS soundtracks. Easy to use, one time "Set and Forget" operating procedure. Zone A: (Theatre) 6 x 100 watts (4ohms) Zone B: (Multi-room) 2 x 100 watts (4ohms)



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Detail

POWER SUPPLY

4G switch mode power supply.

COOLING

Cooling tunnel –fan cooled central convection grilles.

THE AMP

Power amplifier board with power chips mounted to the ‘cooling tunnel’.

SPEAKER OUTPUTS

Gold plated speaker cable binding posts (Neutrik Speakon connectors available as an option).

INPUTS

RCA phono (left) and XLR balanced input sockets connect to preamp.

MAINS

IEC mains input and fuse.

“Linn wants its top-flight products to be as ground-breaking as the mighty CD12 and LP12, and it has achieved just that with the Klimax Twin.”

chimney the amount of heat dissipated across the casework is considerable, too. The design features both balanced (XLR) and single-ended (phono) inputs and a choice of either Neutrik 4 speaker connections or the more commonplace binding posts. You can select the balanced or single ended inputs using a small switch at the back of the amplifier.



PERFORMANCE

Because they are designed with systems in mind, Linn products are often excellent in a Linn system but less good out of context. Those that work well in and out of a Linn system are often beyond parallel. The LP12 turntable and CD12 CD player are fine examples; you can plug one of these into any system and the quality shines through. The Klimax

Twin has the same character; you could wire the Klimax Twin between a Krell pre-amplifier and a pair of Wilson Audio speakers and it will sound just as great as if the preamp and speakers came from the Linn factory. Naturally, it also sounds pretty tasty in an all-Linn system, too. There are attributes that all hi-fi struggles to attain; speed, weight, transparency, dynamic range. There is often a

dichotomy between huge powerhouse power amplifiers and lithe designs that have less grunt but more pace; big US iron has plenty of power on tap, but lacks the speed and liveliness of something like a single-ended triode design. The Linn has it all. It is quicksilver-fast, but when it needs to kick up a ruckus, the Klimax Twin has seemingly titanic amounts of power on hand.

The acid test for any amplifier is huge-scale, complex pieces like the introduction to Mahler’s *Eighth Symphony*. This has every instrument (and voice) Mahler could call on in the late 19th Century at full tilt. Amps generally convey the scale of the piece at the expense of the pace, or vice versa. The Klimax is one of the select few that does both successfully. Add to this a fundamentally neutral character and the Klimax Twin does a remarkable disappearing act in the audio chain.

This means, of course, it is only as good as the source you use it with. Linn proved this to us by loaning the jaw-droppingly good CD12 along with the Klimax Twin. The two combined push the edge of the musical envelope, digging out hidden refinement in P J Harvey’s *This is Love*. It has that characteristic dryness common to much of Linn’s kit. But here, like the mighty CD12, it is born out of precision and detail, not an absence of dimensionality. Don’t expect a rich presentation, however, unless the recording is rich to begin with.

The honesty of the Klimax is a double-edged sword, however. Most preamps and speakers are not up to the mark. We tried the Klimax using a very good integrated amp as a preamp; it sounded thin and nasal, even on overproduced soul like Lewis Taylor. Similarly, speakers designed to paper over the limitations of cheaper electronics sound uneven. But, with the right partners, the Klimax is spot on.

Linn wants its top-flight products to be as ground-breaking as the mighty CD12 and LP12, and it has achieved just that with the Klimax Twin. It is one of those few products that can be summed up in just one word: cor!

Linn 0141 307 7777
www.linn.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

CHORD SPM-4000 £8,500

Another switch-mode powered amplifier, sharing many of the Klimax’s strengths, in an equally striking case.

MARK LEVINSON NO334 £5,995

Big, transparent sounding US-built heavy-weight power amplifier that maxes out on refinement and authority.

NAIM NAP500 £10,000

The big amp from Linn’s traditional rival. Like the Klimax, it is fast, dynamic and neutral.

DAC to the future

Musical Fidelity takes the digital heart from its NuVista CD player to create an affordable, upsampling DAC

Ten years ago, outboard DACs were in their heyday, launched to supplement a rash of new players featuring digital outputs, before it was realised that a good, integrated CD player often represented the better compromise. Nowadays, new add-on converters, other than outboard AV processors, are a rare breed. But time and technology have marched on, and sufficiently so that new outboard DACs like Musical Fidelity's £799 A3²⁴ are better equipped to deliver the promise of upgraded performance in conventional, two-channel audio systems.

Its purpose is quite simple – to replace the digital filters, converters and analogue stage in your CD or DVD player with superior technology, and all by diverting data from the player's digital

TECHNOLOGY: UPSAMPLING

Upsampling is a technique that takes data at one sample rate and increases it to a higher sample rate, say from 48kHz to 96kHz. Depending on how the process is executed, there may be some benefit in reduced ultrasonic distortion and the sort of 'time-smear' effects caused by harsh digital filtering. Converting 48kHz sampled data to 192kHz data is a simple example of 4:1 upsampling. So how is it achieved?

Essentially, three extra samples are added in-between each existing pair of samples. The time period between each successive sample is now one-quarter what it was, so the sample rate is increased by 4x. These extra samples are generated by interpolation, achieved by (digital) filtering of the data to 'fill-in' the missing points.

Despite the claims of over-active marketing departments, it's important to remember that upsampling cannot uncover any musical information lost at the point of recording. So, if a CD was recorded at 44.1kHz, then there's no information on that disc beyond 22.05kHz, regardless of whether it's upsampled to 96kHz, 192kHz or beyond at some later stage.

VERDICT

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3²⁴

Outboard DAC £799

▲ An elegant design that unifies the performance of existing CD and DVD sources. Smooth, open and engaging sound quality.

▼ Its single pair of unswitched digital inputs prevents the A3²⁴ from being used as the 'hub' of a multi-source digital system.

CONCLUSION

A technological derivative of both the 3D CD player and CD-Pre²⁴ combi-unit, designed to upgrade competing products but at a fraction of the price.

KEY FEATURES

► Two digital inputs will accept sample rates from 32kHz to 96kHz, with immediate upsampling to a default 96kHz internal data rate.

► A further 2x digital filter allows the user to experiment with either 96kHz or 192kHz operation. The latter is typically ideal.

► There's no volume control, input selector or remote control. This is as close to 'plug and play' as you'll get from a slab of audio hardware.

outputs. This makes the A3²⁴ extremely simple to negotiate. You simply hook your digital source, from CD, DVD, MD player or even a PC sound card, to the A3²⁴'s choice of coaxial and optical digital inputs. Input selection is automatic, there's no digital volume, no phase invert facility (once popular on early converters) and so, no need for a remote control.

Spoilt for real estate, the A3²⁴'s brushed alloy fascia is decorated by a string of five blue LEDs, denoting sample rate, input and status. And that, quite frankly, is that. The A3²⁴ hunts for an input, locks onto the data and immediately upsamples to 96kHz via a Crystal SRC (sample rate converter). Not content with this little innovation, MF has also equipped its A3²⁴ with a further 2x digital filter from NPC, which elevates this 96kHz data to a heady 192kHz.

You can switch this additional stage in or out, via a pushbutton on the rear of the A3²⁴. The choice of 192kHz sampling is no coincidence by the way, for it's ideally suited to the PCM1738 DAC chip, which is sourced from Burr-

Brown and was originally developed for compatibility with 192kHz DVD-Audio.

PERFORMANCE

Because the A3²⁴ will accept a digital input from a wide variety of sources of differing quality and sample rate, its sound quality is something of a moving target. At its best, the A3²⁴ has a gloriously open and relaxed sound that's not too short of the 3D CD player. Strings retain their bite and vibrancy, but their immediacy is not achieved at the expense of any harshness or edginess. Bass is powerful but, once again, relaxed in delivery so that even the most thunderous tracks from the likes of Leftfield, Massive Attack or, for that matter, Mahler sound both weighty but also even-handed and fluid.

Comparisons are tricky, but we were left with the feeling that data from 48kHz or even 96kHz DVD music discs derived as much if not more benefit from the A3²⁴ than plain CD. Rebecca Pidgeon is available on both CD and Chesky DVDs, where comparable tracks sound just that little bit smoother, that



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3²⁴ 192K UPSAMPLING DAC

96kHz 192kHz COAXIAL OPTICAL LOCKED
— SAMPLE —

POWER

POWER

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3²⁴ 192K UPSAMPLING DAC

“At its best, the A3²⁴ has a gloriously open and relaxed sound that’s not too short of the 3D CD player.”

little bit more open and detailed with the latter at the helm. The natural and unforced quality of the A3²⁴ is also slightly better integrated, more wholesome and ‘together’ sounding – what some listeners might describe as more ‘organic’ or ‘analogue’ – when driven directly from a 48kHz or 96kHz source.

In practice this makes a great deal of sense, for if all digital inputs are passed through the A3²⁴’s sample rate converter,

then the path from 48kHz to 96kHz is considerably smoother than the tortuous mathematics required to massage 44.1 kHz up to 96kHz. Without sufficient processing horsepower, this upsampling can result in compromises to noise, distortion and jitter (a form of digital distortion). Which is one reason why professional upsamplers, like those from dCS, are usually so costly. Here, jitter amounts to 480psec with CD-derived

The A3²⁴ automatically upsamples to a rate of 96kHz, though it can upsample to a heady 192kHz – the top sample rate used by DVD-Audio.

16-bit/44.1 kHz data regardless of whether the 96kHz or 192kHz upsampling mode is invoked. However, it falls to 100psec with 24-bit/48kHz data and just 80psec with 24-bit/96kHz, reflecting the fact that the A3²⁴ is optimised to run at elevated bit and sample rates.

We are not for a moment suggesting that subtle differences in sound quality with 48kHz and 96kHz inputs are solely down to jitter, but they are a reflection of the reduced processing required of the A3²⁴. Which makes me doubt whether upsampling per se, is key to the A3²⁴’s performance. Rather, this product is the sum not only of its digital filters and DACs, but also of its high quality power supply and discrete, analogue output stage. All play a role in determining the sound of this add-on upgrade, a sound that’s not far short of its costlier cousin, the acclaimed 3D CD player. 

☎ 0208 900 2866

🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

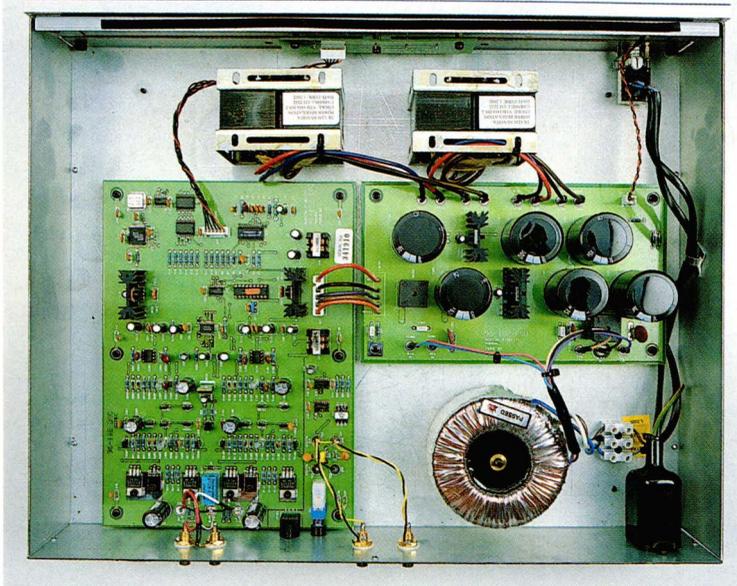
ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIO NOTE DAC ZERO 1X £750

Colourful sound made all the more unpredictable by this product’s lack of digital filtering.

ROTEL RSP-976 £900

An outboard DAC, preamplifier and multichannel AV processor all bundled into one fine-sounding package.



EXCLUSIVE

DVD-Audio dynamite

At over 18 kilos, Denon's range-topping DVD-A1 is affectionately known as 'the battleship', but does its performance match its moniker?

Denon's move to integrated DVD-Audio/DVD-Video players came pretty soon after the birth of the DVD-Audio format. But it's taken until now for Denon to launch a truly high end player in the shape of the bulky DVD-A1 – a £2,500 piece of hardware that harks back to the musical heritage of Japan's oldest hi-fi company.

This player really is a monster. Heaving all 18.5kg of it from the box is nearly a job for two, and lugging it around is far from easy. The colossal weight (this is currently the heaviest commercially-manufactured DVD player in the world) is down to a supremely rigid construction and the extraordinary levels of dampening that Denon has employed in order to keep the effects of vibration to an absolute minimum. The chassis is made of a hybrid material comprising a 1.2mm thick copper-plated metal sheet and three 1.6mm metal sheets (making it 6mm thick in total). In addition, the three-box chassis design uses 1.2mm thick copper-plated reinforcing plates

TECHNOLOGY: DENON'S DIGITAL LINK

The DVD-A1 is the first DVD player with Denon's proprietary Digital Link technology. You can connect the player to a suitably equipped amplifier, such as the AV-A1SR or an upgraded AVC-A1SE. The Digital Link enables data transfer of six-channel 24-bit/96kHz signals (or two-channel 24/192) at a very low voltage – 1.2Gbps (gigabits per second) at 0.3Vpp (voltage peak per peak). This type of low voltage differential signalling (LVDS) is less susceptible to noise and interference (from radiation, for instance), thereby ensuring a good, clean signal. Such a link also means that high bandwidth digital data can be processed by the amp instead of relying on processing in the player itself. After a relatively brief test using a pre-production AV-A1SR, we have to say we're impressed.

and a 3.6mm top cover. The actual loading mechanism is painted with a vibration-resistant protein material and sintered alloy insulators attached to the player's four feet help to further reduce vibration. It is, without doubt, a solidly made piece of machinery.

The internal components of this THX Ultra-certified player also make for some impressive reading: Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz DACs are augmented by Denon's own AL24 Plus analogue waveform reproduction technology, which aims to suppress quantisation noise. The claimed result is a clearer, more musically accurate sound when decoding linear PCM data.

One major claim to fame is the inclusion of a propriety Digital Link output (see box), able to carry high bandwidth audio data at full DVD-A spec – six channels at 24-bit/96kHz (or two at 24-bit/192kHz). This data may be transferred directly to Denon's forthcoming flagship AVC-A1SR amp or a new upgraded version of the AVC-A1SE. So far, Meridian is the only other company to develop such a link (see page 28).

Video circuitry is equally well specified, with special attention paid to reproduction of the interlaced image, rather than concentrating all the technical wizardry on the PureProgressive output as is common with modern DVD-V players, though largely redundant for UK models. A 14-bit/108MHz video DAC lies at the core of the player's video capabilities.

The DVD-A1's fascia sports buttons and dial-switches with a solid and purposeful feel, including a Pure Direct switch with which you can cut off the digital processing and video circuitry for improved sound with analogue music signals. It looks very natty in its champagne gold finish and all of the terminals at the rear are, as you'd expect, gold-plated.

VERDICT

DENON DVD-A1 DVD-A/V player
£2,500

▲ Superb with DVD-Video and one of the best DVD-Audio players we've yet heard. Makes a great CD player too!

▼ Given what it does there's little to find fault with. It doesn't play SACD, it's a pain in the back to move around and CD playback falls short of a good dedicated CD player at a similar price – but that's hardly the point!

CONCLUSION

The DVD-Audio format has had a troubled birth but this Denon makes a convincing case for its existence – a fine all-rounder for music and films.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Digital 24-bit/192kHz output (proprietary)
- ▶ Heavily engineered chassis
- ▶ 8 Burr-Brown audio DACs
- ▶ AL24 Plus firmware
- ▶ Digital throughputs for other hardware

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



"You'd be foolish to expect a £2,500 DVD player to sound like a similarly priced, dedicated CD machine, but would you be happy with one that, say, sounded as good as a £1,000 CD player?"



Heavy duty: at 18.5kg, the DVD-A1 is the heaviest commercially produced DVD player in the world, largely due to extreme chassis reinforcement and dampening to counter the effects of vibration.



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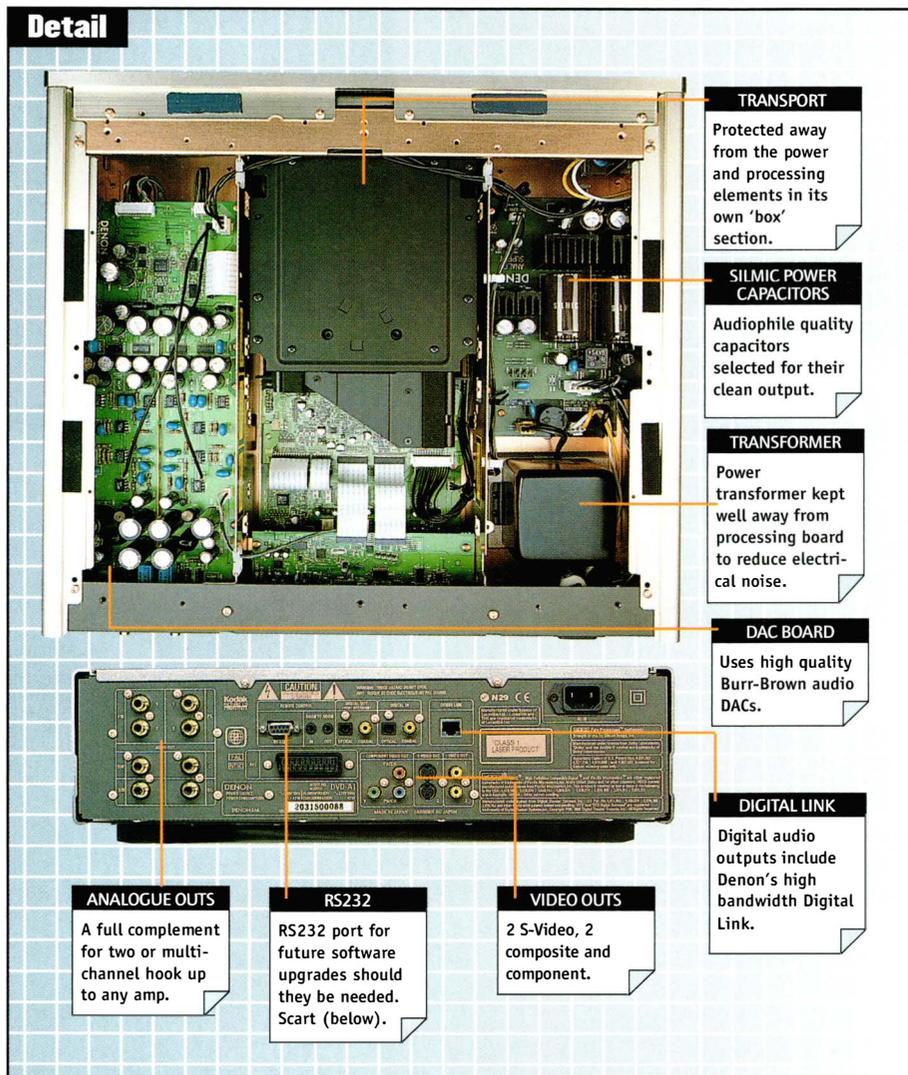
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TRANSPORT
Protected away from the power and processing elements in its own 'box' section.

SILMIC POWER CAPACITORS
Audiophile quality capacitors selected for their clean output.

TRANSFORMER
Power transformer kept well away from processing board to reduce electrical noise.

DAC BOARD
Uses high quality Burr-Brown audio DACs.

DIGITAL LINK
Digital audio outputs include Denon's high bandwidth Digital Link.

ANALOGUE OUTS
A full complement for two or multi-channel hook up to any amp.

RS232
RS232 port for future software upgrades should they be needed. Scart (below).

VIDEO OUTS
2 S-Video, 2 composite and component.

PERFORMANCE

DVD players with truly high-end audio capabilities (especially in two channels with CD) are rare beasts, even those that have been musically honed for DVD-A playback. For too long the hi-fi enthusiast with penchant for both music and movies has had to settle either for two boxes to get the most out of CD and DVD-Video, or for a single-box DVD player with sacrificed musical capabilities. But not any more. This Denon joins the narrow ranks of players that really do manage to cut it as both a video source and as a means of reproducing good stereo hi-fi – ranks that include the likes of Marantz's DV-12S1 and the new Version 3 800 Reference model from Meridian (see page 28).

Indeed, the DVD-A1 manages to succeed on all levels for which it was designed: for CD playback, DVD-Audio reproduction and as a means of enjoying movies in all their surround-sound glory. With DVD-Audio recordings it's especially capable, with a really involving sound

that's never too punchy nor too laid back. Listening to *Satin Doll* by jazz band leader Les Brown and his Band of Renown, there's a flow to the music that delights – this is a player with spot-on timing. This track's attacking trumpets aren't harsh at all, and the rolling double bass keeps the piece driving with superb extension and a precise, natural sound. Switching to something of an even wider scale, the London Philharmonic Orchestra's rendition of Orff's epic *Carmina Burana* on a Teldec DVD-A, and the Denon player is more than capable of reproducing a big sound without losing either control or track of the timing. It's definitely one of the best DVD-A machines that we've listened to and a must-listen if you're considering buying into the format, which is still taking its time to win the hearts (and ears) of dedicated audiophiles.

DVD players are commonly attacked for their inability to get a decent sound from the surface of a CD – and in most cases the criticism is entirely justified.



But it's less easy to find fault here. Sure, you'd be foolish to expect a DVD player costing £2,500 to sound like a similarly priced, dedicated CD machine, but would you be happy with one that, say, sounded as good as a decent £1,000 CD player? Because that's the kind of quality that the DVD-A1 offers. The sonic character of its CD playback is similar to its reproduction of a DVD-A signal in that it is easy to listen to, never wearing, but upbeat and arresting at the same time. After two weeks of fairly intensive testing we couldn't really find a genre of music that the DVD-A1 didn't like. From Dido's ethereal vocals on *No Angel*, to the aggressive quasi-rap of Michael Franti on Spearhead's *Stay Human* CD, the Denon coped with whatever we threw at it. Dance, rock, jazz, the works – this is a great all-rounder with the humble compact disc.

Film soundtrack playback and video quality are just as important as music for a DVD player for all the obvious reasons. And it's obvious that when Denon was designing the DVD-A1 the company was building on its previous experience in this field. When watching movies it has a really up-front delivery with bags and bags of power and attack, though the subtleties and atmospheric of 'quieter' films aren't neglected. Watch, for instance, *Moulin Rouge* and the love scenes are as powerful as the crash-bang-wallop of the stage performances. Partnered with the AV-1SR via its Denon Digital Link, the DVD-A1 provides a breathtaking performance with movies such as *Gladiator* and the much-maligned *Phantom Menace*, such is the pace and scale of the combosound. And, what's more, the picture quality is beyond reproach.

So Denon has something of a winner on its hands. Although DVD-A may be well behind SACD in terms of the number of titles available, this machine makes a very convincing case for the format. And as a DVD-V player, it is up there at the top of the class. **D**

Denon UK 01234 741200
www.denon.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

MARANTZ DV-12S1 DVD-A/V PLAYER £2,500
The first DVD-A player from Marantz is a stunner. Superb with CD and both kinds of DVD.

PIONEER DVD-747 DVD-A/V/SACD PLAYER £899
A bit of a bargain: the Pioneer player accepts DVD-V, CD, DVD-A and SACD – to date the only UK machine that can.

MERIDIAN 800 DVD-A/V PLAYER £10,805
Possibly the best DVD player in the world, the Reference 800 now also features a proprietary high bandwidth digital link.



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16	17	18	19	20

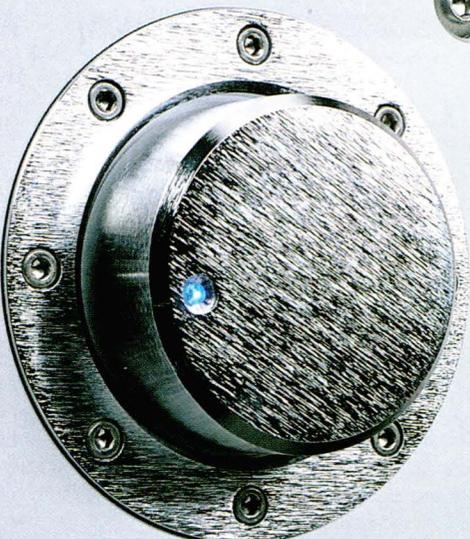
PLAY / PAUSE



STOP



OPEN / CLOSE



HIGH END FOR THE REAL WORLD...

Is affordable high end hi-fi an oxymoron, or can you really get big bangs for relatively small bucks? As you might expect, it all depends what you mean by 'affordable'...

Imagine you could buy a brand new Ferrari 360 Modena for £30,000. You'd hesitate for one reason. It's far too good to be true. Of course it is. Life isn't like that.

But there is a neat cheat if you're prepared to forego the key fob snobbery. Get a rally-bred supersaloon – a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII, say – and you can have 98 per cent of the Ferrari's point-to-point performance for a quarter of the price. Bogus? No. Bodacious.

Curious, then, that hi-fi gives the impression of offering precious little of that convention-inverting opportunism. The traditional rules of the game are that there's 'high end' (which is such an expensive and exclusive club that only a fortunate few gain admittance) and hi-fi for the rest which, at its best, is wholesome, fine value, well designed and, frankly, not as good.

But that's a lazy and defeatist view of hi-fi reality in 2002, and misleading. 'High end' hi-fi may habitually wear stratospheric price tags, but it's also increasingly a mindset informing upper-mid market designers; the hugely attractive idea is that you shouldn't have to spend a mint to experience mind-blowing sound.

So here are three systems that aim to haul dream performance into real world listening rooms. We've drawn the line at £10k for source, amplification and speakers (peanuts by high-end standards) but several of the rigs check in well below that. The bar calibration starts at 'extraordinary sonic ability'. Now let's see how high it can go.

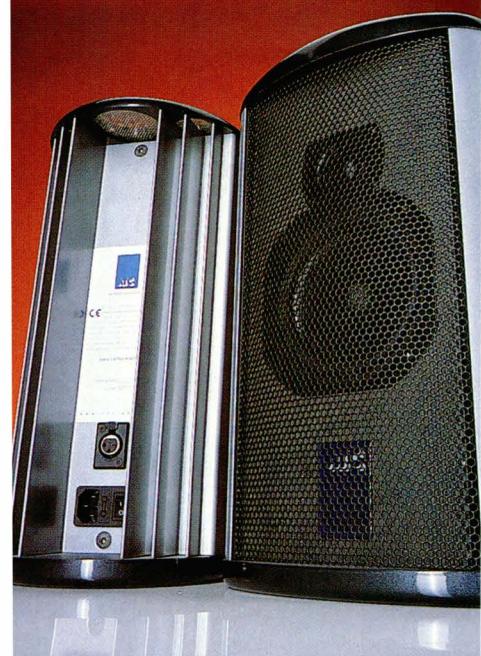
Tune into issue 232 for the next instalment of 'High End For The Real World...'



Musical Fidelity CD-Pre²⁴ CD/preamp £2,000

A key component in this combined CD and preamp is 96kHz upsampling technology which not only gives the CD-Pre²⁴'s CD sound a dose of salts but can also administer the appropriate minerals to an external disc player via one of the two digital inputs. For a more detailed analysis of this technology turn to our review of Musical Fidelity's A3^{3/4} DAC on page 40.

☎ Musical Fidelity 020 8900 2866



ATC SCM10A-2 active speakers £1,269

The 'active' component is the 250 watt onboard power amp. This directs – via fourth order electronic crossovers – 50 watts to the tweeter and the rest to the bass/mid driver. The amps operate in Class A for two thirds of the maximum power output, a trait confirmed by the hand-warming potential of the full length heat sink fins and top plate vents at the back of each enclosure.

☎ ATC 01285 760561

➤ MUSICAL FIDELITY CD-PRE²⁴ ➤ ATC SCM10A-2 ➤ TOTAL: £3,269

MIRACLE PACKAGE

It may look cute but don't underestimate this discreet trio's potential

If simple is good, it's also amazingly cost effective. Not only does this deliciously tough-looking MF/ATC active combo boast the lowest box count of all the systems in this opening group (a stark three) but also a barely believable price of £3,269.

It seems ludicrous. Challenging the high-end ethos with a budget of £10K is controversial enough. But three grand hardly buys you a top-notch 'mid-fi' system these days. It's almost as if someone is extracting the Michael.

Or perhaps that should be the Michaelson. It shouldn't come as any great surprise that MF boss Antony Michaelson's new CD-Pre²⁴ – a one-box preamp, CD transport and upsampling DAC – provides the giant killing impetus for this system. The supporting press release pulls no punches on the matter, claiming independent measurement superiority over American high end exemplar Krell's similarly conceived KPS25S (a 1998 design, now superseded). Thing is, the Krell costs £20,000 and the MF is £1,999. If nothing else, it brings the price versus performance conundrum into sharp focus. Familiar territory for Michaelson: MF's Nu-Vista line of CD players and amplifiers is made up of zealously 'real world' high end products.

Unsurprising, then, that the CD-Pre²⁴ sips from the Nu-Vista parts pool. The CD section uses the same 24-bit DAC, filter and control as the company's limited edition flagship Nu-Vista 3D disc spinner. The preamp has also been sprinkled with a little Nu-Vista dust, not least the inclusion of completely separate power supplies.

So the 'techy' stuff is very much on the pace. But there's no denying that a



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



☉ It looks like a macho upmarket lifestyle system (minimalist, house-trained) but, for such a modest outlay, this is most definitely as serious as it gets. Synergy here lies as much in the density of technology and functionality MF and ATC cram into such svelte forms as the control and honesty of the sound. Less is more? Never truer.

major part of this product's appeal stems from its perfectly calculated kick-ass appearance – chunky aluminium fascia, big CD text display, twinkling blue LEDs, more hex-headed screws than RoboCop, sturdy copper-plated steel base and backplate – and clutter-killing single box architecture. Three analogue inputs, two digital, a tape loop – that's pretty much it. Apart from the all-important pre-out sockets, of course.

Despite being unbalanced, these easily have enough output oomph to drive the lengthy runs of interconnect needed to hook up the balanced XLR inputs of ATC's £1,269 baby SCM10A-2 active monitors (though you'll need a phono-to-XLR cable – ATC has these). Both from an aesthetic and a "how on earth do they do that for the money?" viewpoint, the partnership is stunning.

A classy blend of curved aluminium and gloss-lacquered MDF composite, the charcoal hued ten-litre ATCs hail from exactly the same functional-yet-elegant school of design as the MF. This is one potent and purposeful-looking system. And it isn't kidding. Clearly visible beneath the black mesh grilles are the close-coupled high performance drivers: a 25mm soft dome tweeter and hand-built 125mm mid/bass driver, weighing in at a rugged 3.5 kg and with a cone excursion of over 20mm.

Each sealed box – laden with a 250 watt power amp remember – weighs a beefy 15.5kg and needs both solid support (we used 24-inch Slate Audio stands) and careful placement to achieve just the right amount of boundary bass lift. Claimed frequency response is 45Hz – 22kHz (-6dB), so bass extension fans may feel a bit cheated. That said, back

“What it does, as snooker-playing music lovers will recognise, is play it dead straight with fine precision.”



them up against a wall (we found five inches about optimum) and the bottom end – already agile and authoritative – fills out nicely, especially in a small to medium-sized listening room.

PERFORMANCE

This combo is emphatically not a demo room diva. Expect to be blown away by the “wonders of hi-fi” and you’ll remain resolutely rooted to the spot, even if you slip Prince’s super-high-octane *The Rainbow Children* import into the CD-Pre24’s Sony transport mechanism.

Attempted snapshot assessments will leave you bemused. The system doesn’t do flashy, soundstage pyrotechnics, the Ali shuffle or, come to that, any other variety of showboating.

What it does do, as snooker-playing music lovers will recognise, is play it dead straight with fine precision. Presentation at first seems a little dry and lean but this is partly down to the absence of any obvious sonic signature. It means that after the initial shock of not being shocked (if you get my drift) it starts to communicate music with an

honesty and even-handedness that’s completely absorbing.

The active ATCs are the guiding influence here. Their integration, timing and coherent handling of detail are so good, they soon become transparent in the best sense of the word. Effortless loudness (ATC claims a continuous 105dB) and convincing dynamics are specialities, too. This isn’t a big, ‘impressive’ sound but it does have fabulous structure, oodles of insight and the sort of clean, unexaggerated delivery seldom found outside a recording studio. ☉

➤ TAG McLaren Audio CD20RT2L ➤ CHORD DAC 64
 ➤ CHORD CPM 2600 ➤ KEF REFERENCE 201 ➤ TOTAL £8,645

CLOSE TO THE EDGE

This deeply satisfying combo encapsulates what high end is all about

TAG McLaren Audio CD20RT2L CD player £1,250

A good CD transport needs decent mechanical damping and TMA provides this at the base of the chassis. It claims, brings additional improvements in general signal purity and low level detail by reducing microphonic effects on components and circuit boards and so suppressing a potential source of jitter. The full width unit is reassuringly weighty and easy to use thanks to its large, clear display and slick remote handset ergonomics. TAG McLaren 0800 783 8007

Chord DAC 64 D-to-A converter £1,900

This is a seriously singular product. The 'eureka!' component is a radically new type of filter called the Watts Transient Aligned Filter (WTA) which, to cut a very long story short, is said to reproduce transient information far more accurately than any DAC has done before by using an algorithm that works on the already extreme sampling rate of the Chord DAC to mimic the theoretical ideal of 1MHz at which timing information is preserved without phase anomalies. It's enough to make Austin Powers go cross-eyed.

Chord CPM 2600 amp £3,495

As with all Chord amplifiers, the 2600 is built around a high frequency, high efficiency switched-mode power supply which is key to marrying the kind of muscle and speaker load tolerance traditionally attributed to back-breaking American behemoths with comparatively compact and lightweight (though exquisitely engineered and executed) build. The official stats are 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms (170 watts into 4 ohms). There are six line-level inputs, two XLR balanced inputs and two tape loops. Chord 01622 721444

You're going to spend the best part of £10K on a stereo. Lucky you.

Thing is, you want it to buy a system that sounds and looks so unbelievably good, the only conclusion your friends will be able to come to is that you sold ageing members of your family or bagged a rollover lottery jackpot. Mission impossible? Nope. Falling off a log would be complicated by comparison.

It's because some of Britain's specialist hi-fi manufacturers have got cutting-edge on a sane budget down so cold even global warming couldn't thaw it out. If you choose to go solid techno – and it has to be said, the world's first '64-bit/384kHz' DAC, chromium-plated 'Hypertweeters', super-efficient switched-mode power supplies and wall-to-wall machined aluminium won't float everyone's boat – we reckon this system is all but impossible to trump.

Starting at the front, we've chosen a CD transport that looks quite understated (compared to the rest of the system) but, in action, lives up to everything you might expect from that notoriously slick and thorough Woking-based outfit, TAG McLaren Audio. The snappily-named CD20RT2L combines rock solid build with immaculate engineering and bang-up-to-date circuitry.

Since this is largely an exercise in harnessing technology that pushes things further we opted for an electronics ensemble from Chord Electronics that, by most standards, is heading for orbit. The controversial £1,900 DAC 64 is already something of a landmark product in digital technology, not least because it looks like a very large, elongated bar of soap hewn from thick aluminium with a mag-

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★☆

© This is a deeply talented and satisfying combo that sees so far into any given recording it's almost pathological. What seems to set it apart from most other fiercely analytical kit, though, is its forgiving nature. Warts 'n' all, yes, but the musical part of the deal is so well handled that production vagaries – while laid bare for inspection – aren't distracting. The hallmark of high-end without a doubt.

nifying porthole revealing innards bathed in purple light. DACs aren't meant to look fabulous. This one does. That said, Chord's equally gorgeous entry-level integrated amp, the CPM 2600, is hardly a slacker on the spec front.

Five minutes down the road from Chord's East Farleigh converted pump-house premises just outside Maidstone is KEF's headquarters. Naturally a fair bit of kit swapping and pint buying takes place between the two companies, so while system synergy is never a forgone conclusion, we had a hunch that rounding this one off with the £2,000 stand-mount 201 from KEF's new Reference Series range might work a treat.

The company describes the latest incarnation of its most revered line as "a quantum leap forward", justifying the claim with the 19mm titanium dome Hypertweeter that sits atop every model in its own shiny, bullet-shaped, low diffraction enclosure – though just as obvious a departure are the stunningly well built curved-back and dome-topped enclosures. As with all supertweeters, KEF's shadows the upwardly extended bandwidth of SACD and DVD-A and claims a flat response to 50kHz that gradually falls away thereafter, though KEF says it's still hanging in at 70kHz.

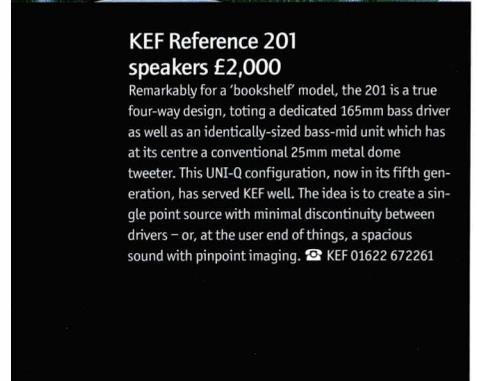
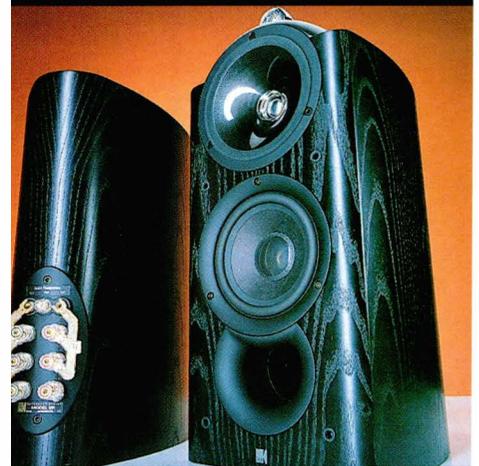
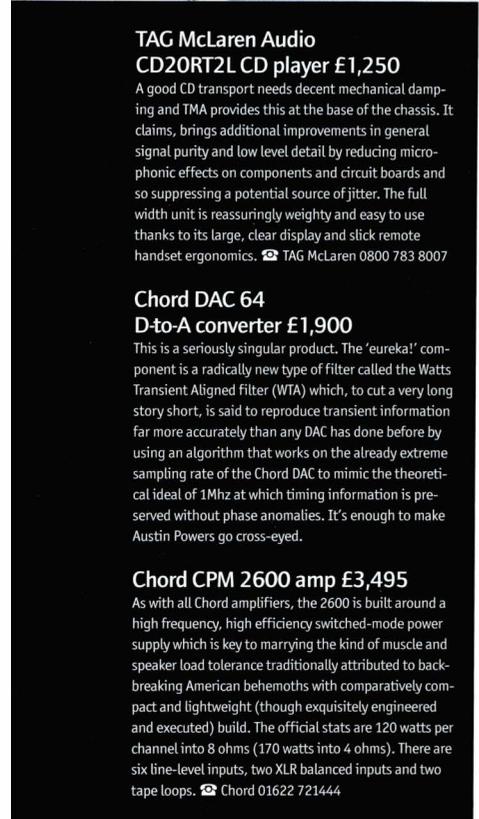
PERFORMANCE

In a word, extraordinary. The sound of this system is so wide open, so three dimensionally anchored and so finely textured it's sometimes hard to believe it's emanating from just two speakers.

That's one thing. It motors, too. Well recorded bass guitar has believable weight, power, extension and drive. Pace

KEF Reference 201 speakers £2,000

Remarkably for a 'bookshelf' model, the 201 is a true four-way design, totting a dedicated 165mm bass driver as well as an identically-sized bass-mid unit which has at its centre a conventional 25mm metal dome tweeter. This UNI-Q configuration, now in its fifth generation, has served KEF well. The idea is to create a single point source with minimal discontinuity between drivers – or, at the user end of things, a spacious sound with pinpoint imaging. KEF 01622 672261

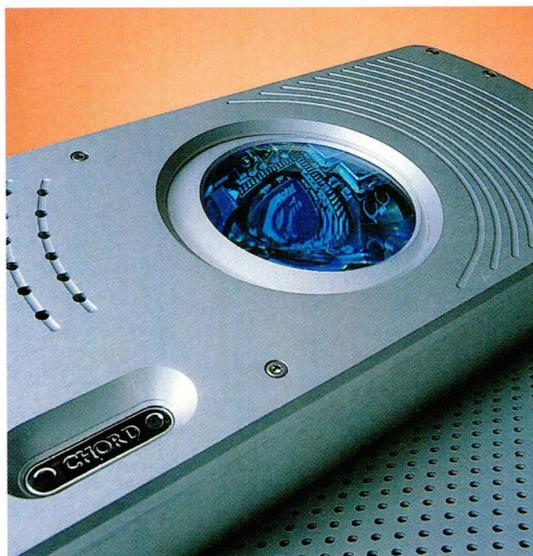




“It’s at once natural, spacious and relaxed yet also fast, rhythmically tight and hard-hitting.”

and control are beautifully conveyed. At the other end of the spectrum, cymbal strikes are imbued with a natural smoothness and sheen most hi-fi struggles to reproduce. Best of all, though, is how all of this meshes so smoothly with the gorgeous midrange. Joni Mitchell’s voice on *Both Sides Now* has an almost tangible presence – scalp-tinglingly so – and the wash of strings behind her have exquisite tone and an almost unbearably plaintive lilt.

So it connects emotionally, as the best hi-fi should. But truth is, the sound of this system covers all bases effortlessly – at once natural, spacious and relaxed yet also fast, rhythmically tight and hard-hitting. A masterful mix of virtues. 🍷



➤ NAIM CDX ➤ NAIM NAC 82 ➤ NAIM NAP 250
 ➤ WILSON BENESCH ARC ➤ TOTAL: £10,075

DREAM TEAM

This seemingly odd couple pairing produces the stuff of hi-fi dreams

Naim CDX CD player £2,470

Miss the "hands-on" involvement of a turntable? This could be the CD player for you. Not only do you have to pull open the CD drawer by hand – prettily, it swings out in an arc – but also place a dinky and surprisingly powerful magnetic puck on top of the disc to clamp it stable. The transport itself is meticulously engineered and uses a VAM 1205 transport mechanism and Phillips SAA 7376 servo controller.

Naim NAC 82 preamp £2,500

£2.5K is a hefty investment in a preamp but this is an extremely fine one even by Naim's exacting standards, totting five line-level inputs and one phono for hooking up a turntable. And when that upgrading urge finally does kick in, the fact that the 82 doesn't have its own internal power supply means you can ditch the power amp feed and go for one of Naim's dedicated supplies. We opted for the mid-range £795 Hi-Cap.

Naim NAP 250 power amp £1,910

Although the NAP 250 has been around since 1975, it has heroically stood the test of time (with a few deftly judged updates from Naim, of course) and is widely regarded to be a solid gold classic. As with all Naim power amps, it is claimed to drive reactive (real life) loads without any appreciable change in distortion or loss of musical information. Claimed power is 70 watts into eight ohms. ☎ Naim 01722 332266

Naim sometimes seems like the Jedi of hi-fi; old fashioned guys with rigid traditions and unshakeable beliefs who are able to tap into a mysterious and invisible power of nature. In *Star Wars* it's 'the Force', in Salisbury it's 'the music'. No, silly, not the stuff that comes out of most hi-fis but the stuff that comes out of all musicians – good, bad or indifferent.

It's a music system's ability to finely differentiate between, say, a good performance, a better one and a great one, contends Naim, that is the true measure of its worth, not having the lowest possible measured distortion or the widest bandwidth. A system that doesn't make sense of the music – the timing, the nuance, the emotions behind it – is a non-starter and it doesn't matter how neutral it sounds. Dull is dull and flat is flat: music is made by real people, the best hi-fi should have that 'human' quality, too.

Which, let's face it, is just about the best philosophy a music system manufacturer could possibly have. And many's the time we've been blown away by a properly set up and supported Naim system's ability to create the illusion of a band actually playing in your living room (don't even think about plonking the electronics on the nearest available coffee table, by the way). On top form, no other hi-fi does 'excitement' and 'presence' quite as well.

But there is a downside. To some, Naim systems – especially all-Naim systems – can sound verge-of-shouty loud, lacking in air, overly taut and mid-prominent. Naim would argue that these are largely 'hi-fi' issues and have little to do with communicating the musical

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★☆
BUILD
★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★☆

☉ It's hard not to be enthralled by the way this Naim/Wilson Benesch system does things. It puts the music first and hi-fi second. There's no mush or unnatural warmth, no hyped-up sharpness or attack; it just gets on with the job in a palpable, honest and highly enjoyable fashion. The brutally functional styling and all-DIN connectivity might seem deliberately quirky but the philosophy is sound in every sense of the word. No frills, plenty of thrills.

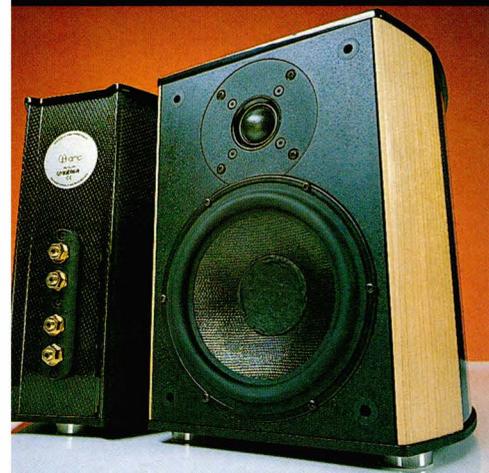
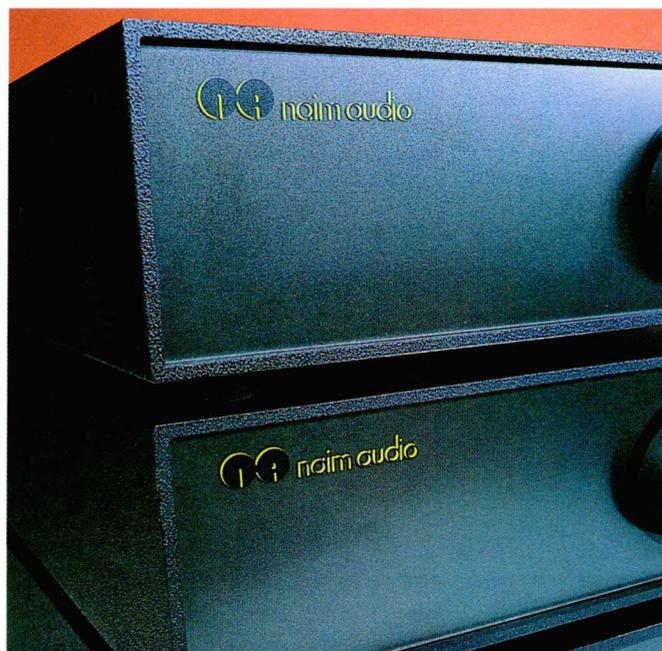
message. There's some truth in that but it's equally true that Naim systems tend to sound their best with certain types of music – rock is often cited but anything with energy and a musical pulse is grist to the Naim mill.

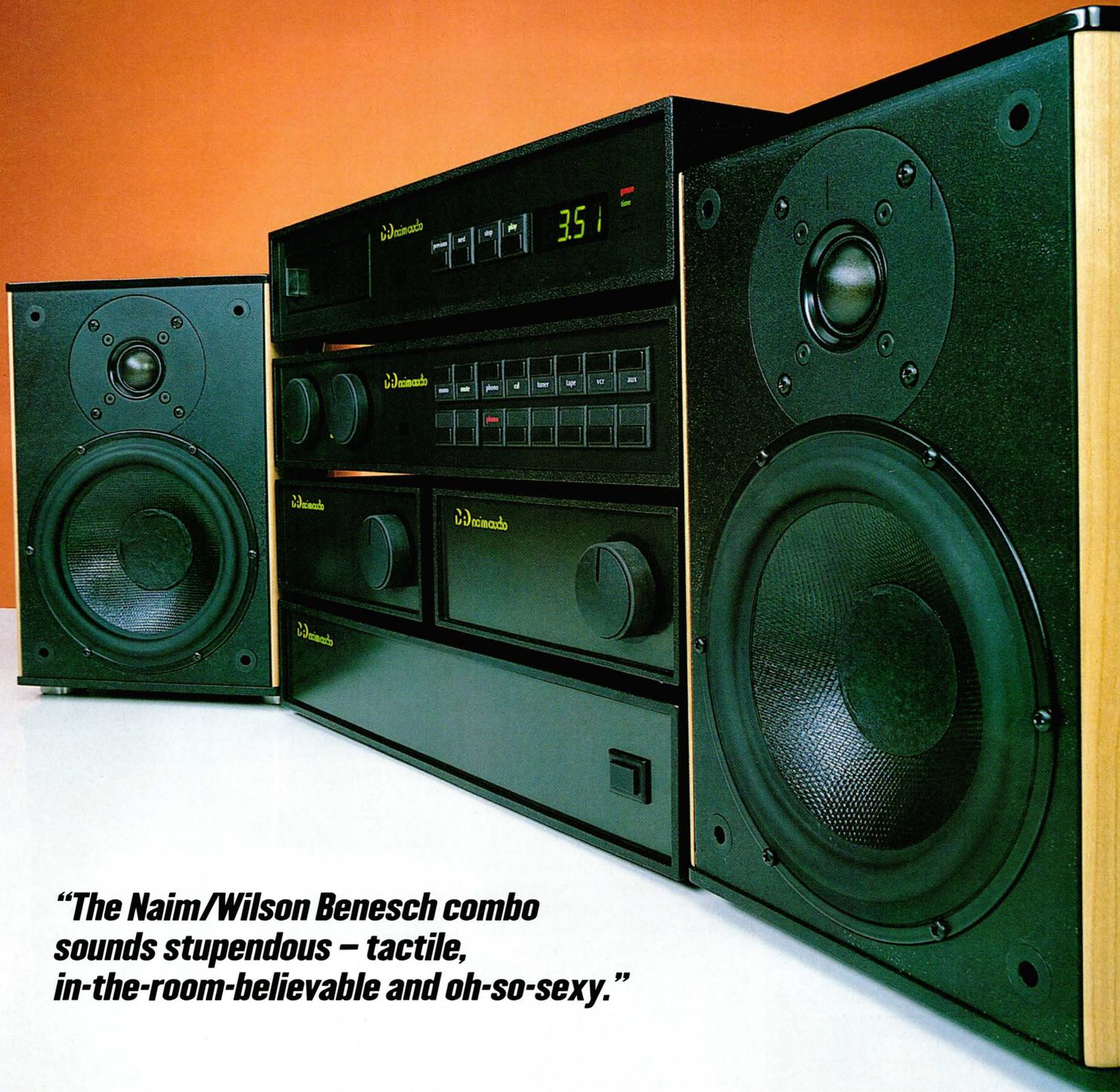
So the question is this: how do you preserve all that excitement, drive, verve and vitality and, at the same time, pull a few inches back from the ragged edge?

If we've chosen right with the little Arcs, they should hold the answer by being transparent to the Naim kit's abundant musical skills without revving up, as some of Naim's own speakers seem to, the already full-on presentation. The ideal is a vanishingly subtle filter and the Arcs certainly have a lot to be careful with. CDX/NAC180 (Hi-Cap)/NAP 250 is one of the great Naim combos, packing plenty of real world wallop and fabulous front-to-back coherence. Naim's signature speed and timing is as much a part of the CDX CD

Wilson Benesch Arc speakers £3,000

The baby of the Wilson Benesch range is an absolute beauty. Costing as much as many would be prepared to spend on an up-market floorstander, the Arc is unswervingly true to its maker's high-end ideals with curved-back carbon fibre enclosures, extremely high quality drive units and a holistic design approach that includes dedicated, bolted on, metal stand with strategically-shaped top plates to accommodate each enclosure's twin downward firing ports. The Arcs' reputation for killer bass from such a compact enclosure precedes them. ☎ Wilson Benesch 0114 2852656





“The Naim/Wilson Benesch combo sounds stupendous – tactile, in-the-room-believable and oh-so-sexy.”

player – which uses a specially selected chipset with two 20-bit, eight times oversampling DACs – as is the famously athletic amplification.

PERFORMANCE

Any qualms that Naim and Wilson Benesch would turn out to be an odd couple were blown away in the first few bars of jazz trumpeter Rick Braun's beautifully produced *Kisses In The Rain* CD. It sounded stupendous – tactile, in-the-room-believable and oh-so-sexy. The Arcs and Naim electronics love each other; they even look good together. The combination has almost uncanny

resolving power and grace with a terrifically lucid and expressive midband. Bass is deep and powerful with a seductively sumptuous quality, yet it's also wonderfully agile and tuneful without being overtly 'taut 'n' twangy'. Treble is clean, extended and rich with shimmering detail, yet completely free from grain. It sounds like the real thing.

Unsurprisingly, timing's right on the money, capable of capturing the deftest shifts of tempo and brilliant with fancy cymbal work. And, of course, there's massive drive for rock. If this system doesn't put a huge smile on your face, we don't know what would. 



MAIN REVIEWS – Richard Black | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

RADIO TUNERS

Does FM still rule the airwaves or is it time to dip our toes in the digital pool?

Ah, the old steam wireless... Radio may now be as high-tech as everything else, but it still offers the same as ever – free entertainment piped to your home. Free, astonishingly diverse and often (not always!) very high quality. The BBC stands as a bastion of quality, both in programming and on the technical side, but many commercial stations are worth hearing too. Special interests are better catered for than ever, with stations dedicated to, for instance, the Asian community, classic rock

enthusiasts, or lesbians and gays.

In a hi-fi context, most listening is now FM, and this group assembles five upmarket FM tuners which should please the audiophile. But Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is clearly the coming thing, and indeed the cheapest tuner here receives only DAB, while the dearest receives DAB and FM (and MW and LW to boot). DAB offers stations that FM doesn't, but quality can be disappointing. Yes, it is interference-free with a simple antenna and as such gives a higher baseline quality than FM, but the digital processing used, coupled with the audio compression which most broadcasters apply anyway, means the sound can be inferior to decent MP3.

It's worrying that the BBC has already cut the quality of all DAB stations but Radio 3, and even that suffers noticeably from "birdy"-type distortion due to the data reduction system used. The effects of that can be reduced in the tuner, but as yet no manufacturer has seriously addressed it. So does an expensive FM tuner still make sense?

Frankly, yes, as long as you have access to a decent FM signal. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that a hundred quid or more spent on an outdoor aerial (antenna) can transform any tuner, and with it any of these models will perform very well. City-dwellers may well find practical reasons to bless DAB, but don't rush in blindly: costs are falling and it is to be hoped that quality will improve. 

EQUIPMENT USED

EAR 802 preamp
EAR 519 power amps
ATC SCM20 speakers
Cables by Townshend,
Kimber and Bespoke
Revox A76 analogue tuner

RECOMMENDED PROGRAMMING

Radio 3 and Radio 4 stand head and shoulders above the other networks for sound quality. These days, Radio 3 carries an eclectic mix of music in addition to its core classical output, while Radio 4's current affairs and drama are the envy of the world. Radio 2 can be dull in the daytime, though Jimmy Young is always worth hearing for his splendid verbal lynching of politicians, and evening programmes are often excellent and in better sound. Of commercial stations, News Direct (97.3FM in London) carries good solid news with good technical standards, and Jazz FM seems to make more effort than most. Planet Rock on DAB is fun, and Virgin and XFM (yes, it's called that on DAB too) have well-above-average sound.

ON TEST



ARCAM FMJ T21
£400



NAD S400
£600



NAIM NAT-05
£745



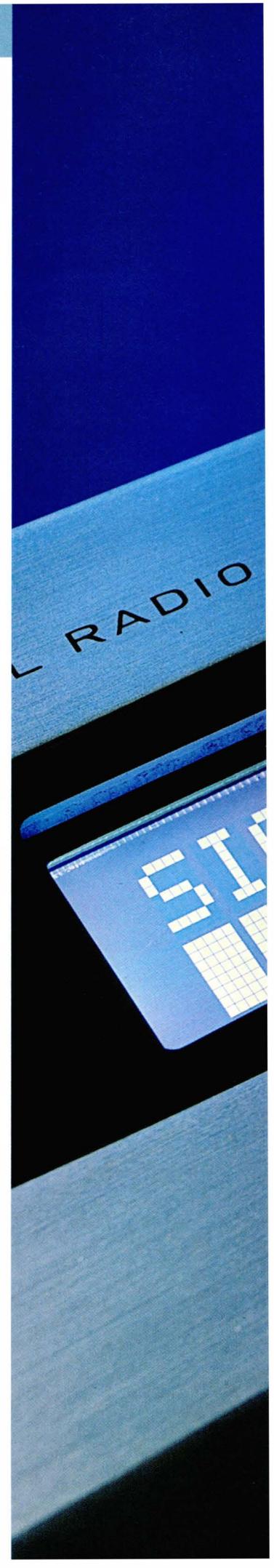
PRIMARE T21
£600



PURE DRX-601 ESM
£330



TAG McLaren T32R + DAB
£2,290



UNER DRX-601ESM

Bright

Info

Displ

SIGNAL STRENGTH



digital  radio



ARCAM FMJ T21 FM, MW, LW £400

☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

A Solid, sensible and good-looking tuner from a top UK brand

A typically smart and well-thought-out unit from Arcam's top-flight FMJ range. For less than the price of this unit you could buy a Far Eastern tuner with lots more presets, more features and probably a second aerial socket. Then again, do you actually use, or feel the need for, any of these? A few people do, most don't. 16 presets on FM, plus eight on AM (MW and LW, usefully) will suffice for most of us: and then there are the very good looks, the pleasant green display and the intelligent provision of internal jumpers to convert between European and Stateside standards for FM and AM transmissions.

Arcam has realised all this using a common enough selection from the ubiquitous Sanyo range in integrated circuits, assembled on a single circuit board apparently of Arcam's own design. Ease of use is pretty good, aided by the one-touch preset buttons, though scan tuning is a little slow and one can't enter station frequency directly.

PERFORMANCE

Although there are seldom any very striking differences between decent FM tuners these days, this one manages to

define its character quite effectively: it is light, nimble and agile on its feet. Yes, the corollary is true that its bass is not the utmost, so if that's a big deal for you, be aware. It's not badly lacking, though, and there really is a most involving quality to upper octaves, with detail clear to hear and a minimum of spit on voices and percussive sounds. It's not absolutely as clean as the best FM tuners around, but it is certainly well up to showing what's not so great about a lot of DAB sound, managing a more natural high treble. Just occasionally classical music seems a little detached and distant, but with the better pop and rock stations it's quite impressive just how much insight this tuner manages to achieve.

Listening to a few 'problem' stations showed that this tuner manages as well as most in the face of poor signals, keeping hiss and interference tolerably at bay. The lack of a high blend feature

"Some cheaper tuners need more signal for good sound than for merely quiet stereo, but this one scores well in that respect."

VERDICT

- SOUND**
★★★★☆
- FEATURES**
★★★★☆
- BUILD**
★★★★☆
- VALUE**
★★★★☆

A good honest tuner which concentrates on the essentials with lots of detail and clean treble. Bass is not outstanding, but fine build quality and smart looks contribute to its appeal.

KEY FEATURES

- REMOTE CONTROL ✓
- PRESETS 24
- SIGNAL STRENGTH METER ✗
- RDS ✗

is a shame, since with very poor reception one has only the option of switching to pure mono. But as long as there's enough signal for quiet stereo reception the sound hangs together very well. Some cheaper tuners need more signal for good sound than for merely quiet stereo, but this one scores well in that respect. It's a good all-round performance – not a great deal better than models at half the price but a little more polished in most respects. AM is okay but not outstanding. Ⓞ

LAB REPORT

▶ With a maximum stereo output of just 540mV in response to a fully modulated FM signal (100dBuV RF/75kHz deviation), the T21 is the 'quietest' tuner in our test.

▶ The overall A-wtd S/N ratio is pretty good, however, and at 72.4dB is second only to the Naim.

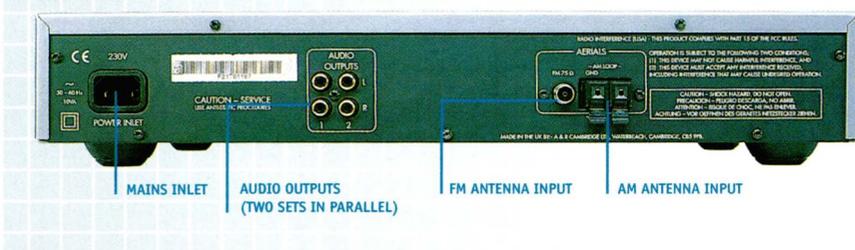
▶ This tuner is not terribly sensitive, requiring 32dBuV RF before breaking through the stereo muting threshold. At 33dBuV distortion falls to 0.14%, reaching a minimum of 0.055% through its optimum RF range of 46-72dBuV (0.2-4mV RF).

▶ Arcam is employing a degree of built-in hi-blend filtering with very little attenuation of the 19kHz pilot. The result is a poor 40dB pilot tone rejection with a weak FM stereo separation of 23-36dB.

▶ As with Naim's tuner, audio distortion peaks at 0.4% through the bass but falls to a respectable 0.03% through the upper midrange and treble frequencies.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** This tuner gives of its best with moderate-strength signals but its RF performance lags behind more modern designs.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





NAD S400 FM £600

01908 319360 www.nadelectronics.com

EXCLUSIVE An FM specialist that works hard to get the most out of the band

Part of NAD's upmarket Silverline range, this distinctive-looking tuner carries an unusual legend on the back, 'Manufactured in Denmark'. With both common sense and modesty, NAD has gone to an FM tuner specialist, Larsholt, not only for the tuner 'head' (the bit that first receives and conditions the incoming RF) but for the whole RF and audio

LAB REPORT

Many areas of performance are influenced by the IF bandwidth and hi-blend settings. With a wide IF bandwidth/no hi-blend, the S400 drops out of mute with an RF input of 13dBuV but distortion does not fall to 0.08% until 30dBuV is reached.

The lowest distortion of between 0.02-0.04% is achieved with RF inputs of 40-95dBuV (0.1-56mV). With a narrow IF selected, the minimum distortion achieved is 0.15%, increasing to 0.6% at high (>60dBuV or 1mV).

Narrow IF improves co-channel interference but also reduces the maximum FM output from 750mV to 450mV. The response, with its 'brightening' +0.6dB boost around 10kHz is unaffected.

The hi-blend facility trades a deterioration in stereo separation from 45dB to just 12dB at HF for an improvement in the A-wtd S/N ratio from 71dB to 73dB.

NAD's signal strength display begins at 6dBuV for 'S1' through 12, 17, 21, 28, 34, 38, 45 to 55dBuV (0.56mV RF) to 'S9'. In many areas, and with a decent FM aerial, all these indicators will be lit.

LAB CONCLUSION: A brighter-sounding version of the Primare T21 with similar RF characteristics, poorer pilot rejection but lower audio distortion.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Beautifully made and with a very nicely judged performance that maximises the potential of FM broadcasting. Frequency extension and detail are very good, and it's extremely smart too!

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
PRESETS	30
SIGNAL STRENGTH METER	✓
RDS	✓

board. Like all manufacturers of affordable FM tuners, Larsholt uses predominantly integrated circuits for reception functions, but they aren't the usual bunch of chips from Sanyo – rather, they are from about the only other manufacturer in the field, Philips. Will this result in a distinctively different sound? We'll have to see...

Construction in and out is first-rate and there's a generous mains transformer. There are the usual features of high-frequency blend and wide/narrow IF bandwidth to cope with poor reception conditions, and a second antenna input. There's also RDS, but it only shows the station and programme name and doesn't seem to support any other features. Operation is pretty straightforward, helped by clear layout and labelling, though programming presets are a bit fiddly.

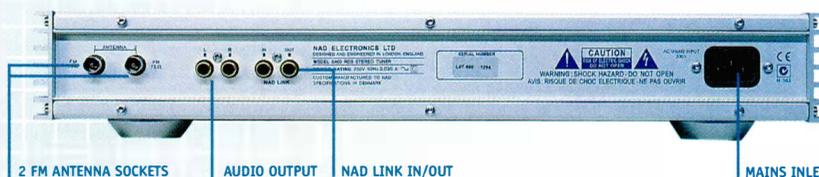
PERFORMANCE

Whether due to those Philips chips or to precisely what Larsholt has done with them, this tuner does seem to have a good insight into a decent broadcast. The basics are much on a par with the others here: it is perhaps slightly better than some at coping with

weak radio signals, but there's not much in it, and subjectively, noise seems much the same as the others (ie low). Tonally it manages a neat trick in sounding both strong and forthright in the bass, and also light and airy in the treble. In fact this is really more to do with good detail retrieval than with tonal variation – the treble may in fact be a tiny bit prominent by comparison with other tuners but it's very slight.

With many commercial radio stations it's frankly hard to distinguish between tuners, such is the damage inflicted by merciless dynamics compression. But even here, the S400 recovers a tolerable semblance of music, minimising the 'spit' characteristic of voices and maintaining a consistent edge over most of the competition in terms of life and musicality. On the other hand, with good broadcasts it's happy to get out of the way and let the programme come through, whether it's a rock documentary on Radio 2, a string quartet on Radio 3 or *The Archers* on Radio 4. The differences aren't vast compared with other good tuners, but they are worth having and although the NAD isn't cheap the high quality of its design and build ensures a great FM buy. **C**

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





NAIM NAT-05 FM £745 ☎ 01722 332266 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

Superb sense of rhythm makes this a great tuner for jazz and rock music

Naim's reputation for tuners rests largely on the NAT-01, a long-standing model widely regarded as one of the great FM statements. The NAT-05 is less ambitious but follows similar aims, firmly in the Naim mould: sound is everything, frills are irrelevant. OK, this tuner offers presets and scan tuning, and it also has an 'RC5' input for connection to a remote-controlled multi-room system. But it doesn't have RDS or any sops to poor reception conditions except a mono switch. It does, however, come with a flyer for one of Ron Smith's famous 'Galaxie' aerials which, if your chimney can support it, will do more for your reception than any amount of fancy electronics.

The NAT-05 is simple to use, although it's a bit confusing that the frequency up/down buttons work in 50kHz steps while the display only indicates to the nearest 100kHz – use scan tuning and/or presets to avoid mistakes. Construction is good, with circuit boards mounted compliantly on the cast metal chassis to minimise microphony. The main tuning board is a bought-in item, complete with positions for AM reception components, using a couple of Sanyo's popular chips for

most of the work. The output from this is buffered and further filtered by Naim's own board.

PERFORMANCE

According to hi-fi lore, Naim does bass with aplomb. Fair enough: this tuner manages better than most in that regard. It's not massively boosted or anything gross, but it is certainly noticeable when present. It's not Naim's fault that on many stations the bass suffers due to the processing used at the transmitter, but when the broadcast is up to it this is the tuner to make the most of those lower frequencies. The treble isn't shy either, though it isn't always quite as clean as with some tuners.

Excitement scores relatively highly – again, the tuner won't put in what the broadcasters didn't, but it does like to get stuck in and bounce along.

With good classical broadcasts there is slightly less detail than the best of

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★☆

FEATURES
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★☆

VALUE
★★★★☆

A relatively bare-bones tuner which places sound quality ahead of facilities – though there are presets and a remote. Bass is great, sound is generally exciting but perhaps not always the subtlest.

KEY FEATURES

REMOTE CONTROL ✓

PRESETS 99

SIGNAL STRENGTH METER ✗

RDS ✗

the rest in this group, resulting in somewhat limited stereo depth and a less open window on the performance. Speech is fair, with just a little more sibilance than some. But it's with jazz and rock that this tuner is happiest – basically, anything with a solid rhythmic foundation which it latches on to with gusto. In such circumstances, its lack of detail is less of an issue and long-term listening becomes simply fun. With a poor radio signal noise is a little higher than ideal, but Naim's answer – buy a proper aerial – is hard to argue with. **C**

LAB REPORT

▶ Naim has engineered a sweet-sounding, mid-treble roll-off for its NAT-05 which drops by some -0.4dB at 2kHz and -1.3dB at 13kHz.

▶ Filtering of FM artefacts is very good with the -60dB pilot tone rejection second only to the Primare and its 38kHz subcarrier intermodulation the best of the bunch at -33dB.

▶ The FM S/N ratio bests all others in this test, including the BBC broadcast specification, at 75.5dB (A-wtd).

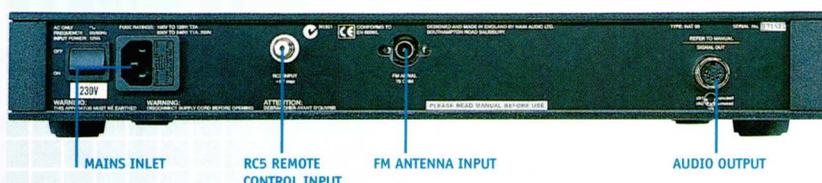
▶ Naim's muting threshold is exceeded with weak 13dBuV RF inputs, but noise and distortion are very high at around 5% till the FM input exceeds 34dBuV. Optimum signal strengths lie across a wide 35-88dBuV (0.06-25mV RF).

▶ Audio distortion reaches a high 2.5% through the upper bass but falls to around 0.06% through the midrange.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** This is no NAT-01 on the cheap but with good pilot/sub-carrier rejection and low noise, it should yield a consistent sound in all systems, albeit with a coloured bass.

“It's with jazz and rock that this tuner is happiest – anything with a solid rhythmic foundation which it latches on to with gusto.”

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





PRIMARE T21 FM £600

01423 359054 www.primare.nu

EXCLUSIVE Great FM performance from a Swedish hi-fi specialist

Head to head with NAD's S400, give or take a penny, this Swedish beastie has more in common with its competitor than one might guess. It is in fact the same animal almost entirely. Remove the lid and the same circuit boards – even the tiny one carrying the mains inlet – look up at you, even bearing the legend 'NAD S400', same revision number, same parts. Well, almost: Primare

LAB REPORT

▶ Primare's T21 uses the same building blocks as NAD's S400 but the performance is not identical. Here, the 'S1-S9' signal strength display reads from 16dBuV through 20, 25, 29, 36, 40, 46, 52 to 61dBuV (1.1mV RF)

▶ Once again, performance depends on the IF bandwidth and hi-blend settings. Narrow IF reduces adjacent channel interference but increases the muting threshold from around 13dBuV to 18dBuV.

▶ Under optimum conditions, FM distortion is a low 0.05% with low RF inputs of 43dBuV (0.14mV) to excessive inputs of 95dBuV (56mV) where, equally, there's no overload of the RF input stage.

▶ Narrow IF and hi-blend may improve selectivity and reduce noise (the S/N increases from 69dB to 71dB) but distortion increases to typically 0.1% right across the audioband and stereo separation falls from 32dB to just 15dB.

▶ Similarly, the T21's maximum output level falls from 900mV to 570mV.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Like the NAD S400, the T21 gives its best audio performance with IF set to wide and hi-blend switched off. The perfect example of modern FM tuner design.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Practically identical to NAD's S400, and sound quality differences are near-vanishing. Well ahead of the run of the mill in FM tuners – recommended for extended listening – and good value.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✗
PRESETS	30
SIGNAL STRENGTH METER	✓
RDS	✓

doesn't implement NAD's proprietary remote control linking system, so a few circuit board positions are vacant, and the T21 has only a single antenna input. The T21 also has a slightly smaller mains transformer from a different manufacturer. But basically it's the same tuner, made by the same firm, Larsholt, and packaged by Primare. Features are the same – 30 presets, IF bandwidth switching, RDS Radiotext, and hi-blend. A few more button presses are needed for some of these.

Before everyone cries 'foul', it's worth pointing out that this sort of thing is not entirely unknown. Many CD players share substantial subassemblies, and as already noted a great many tuners share large chunks of circuit design. I can even recall a similar instance of finding internally identical tuners in one batch, and then there was a substantial price difference.

PERFORMANCE

Interesting, then, to compare two nearly-identical products sonically. Essentially the character is the same, with good detail retrieval and that same agile treble. It's hard to be sure, but there seems to be very slightly less

bass with this than with the S400, or to be more precise less bass insight. The tonal balance is about the same, but the degree to which one can hear 'into' the bass lines is just a little less. Whether that's due to the different mains transformer or minute differences in alignment between the two tuners is impossible to say for sure. Midrange is similar to the S400, detailed, clear and unforced, and again there's that small advantage over most other tuners in lack of sibilance, something that is quite hard to hear in quick A/B comparisons but which makes all the difference in long-term listening.

Comparisons between this and other tuners, particularly the Naim, showed that one can't always have one's cake and eat it. The T21 is very good at clarity and precision, but with highly dynamic music it is not quite so confident. One might choose to argue that it is more truthful at revealing how compressed dynamics often are on radio, but all the same listeners who favour commercial stations and Radio 1 might just find this tuner a little bland. It's very much horses for courses – for Radios 3 and 4 particularly, as with the NAD, it makes a great choice. **B**

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



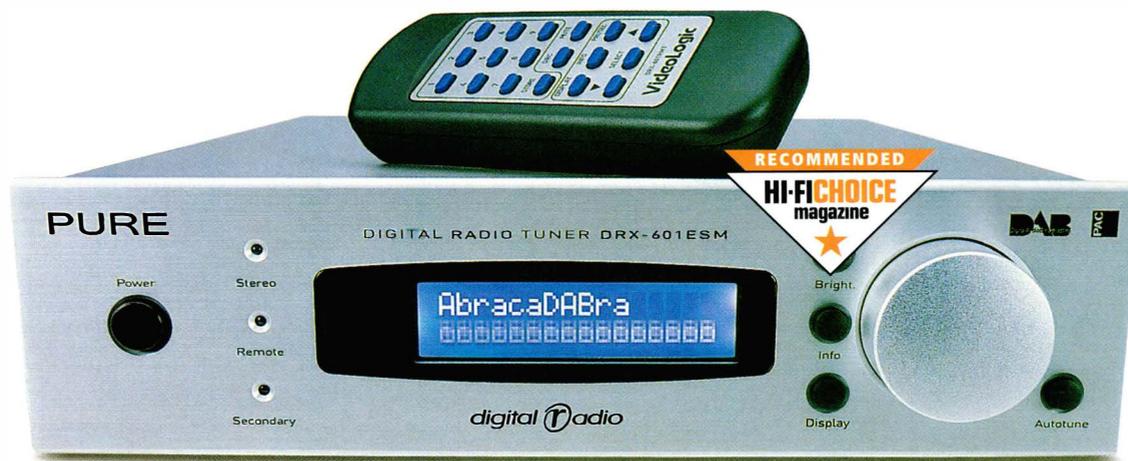
Temp

oneword

www.ukdigitalradio.co.uk



i love you



PURE DRX-601ESM DAB £330

01923 277488 www.videologic.com

EXCLUSIVE Low cost and no frills but an excellent introduction to Digital Audio Broadcasting

Pure is Videologic's new name for its hi-fi separates, and this tuner bears a considerable similarity to the earlier DRX-601 E and '601ES tuners. Essentially it's a '601ES in a slimline case, with the same features. It's a DAB-only tuner which covers only the VHF DAB band (Band III) and not the L-band used in Europe but not (so far) in the UK. There is support for the full range of DAB options on that band, including Dynamic Range Control – but this is simply off or on, lacking the degrees of compression which so far

only Arcam has implemented. Note that it is audio dynamics that are being compressed here – the digital data is 'compressed' (one ought really to say 'reduced') by the DAB transmission system by the same amount!

Pure still seems to be the cheapest game around in DAB, so it's no surprise that the display is a little basic. It's smart enough, though, and legible if one looks reasonably square on. A signal strength display is available which needs to be near full scale for decent reception. Internal construction is tidy and uses Panasonic's chipset, which seems to be the only one around that allows near-instant tuning from station to station.

PERFORMANCE

The sound of this tuner, compared with other manufacturers' DAB offerings, is dominated by the grandly-titled 'Psycho-Acoustic Compensation' (PAC) that Pure has incorporated. Recognising that the treble of DAB broadcasts is frequently beset by twittering-type artefacts of the MPEG data reduction system, Pure has built in a basic treble-cut filter which reduces output above

about 2kHz by some 3dB. The trouble is that while this makes the tuner sound richer and more luscious in A/B comparisons, with prolonged listening one simply attunes to this tonal variation – and the artefacts are still there.

That apart, there is not all that much to choose between this and other DAB tuners. Bass is full and tuneful, midrange is on the whole quite detailed and treble is extended and clear when not dominated by the twitters. And of course background noise is lower than on FM and interference generally non-existent as long as one has enough signal. As a quick expedient for reviewing purposes, reversing (as near as possible) the effects of the PAC filter to allow more immediate comparison between this and other DAB tuners showed that Pure has sacrificed little in performance despite the modest cost, with general tonal behaviour and detail not greatly behind the more costly leaders. There's just the slightest hint of roughness which the sensitive listener will detect, but it's only apparent in careful comparisons. All the same, the PAC-less '601 E may prove preferable – use a tone control if you want less treble! 

LAB REPORT

▶ Pure's low cost DAB tuner is very sensitive indeed, requiring just 7dBuV (or -100dBm into 600ohm) before the error rate falls below audible levels. Bit error rates increase, once again as the tuner is overloaded by signals >110dBuV (-27dBm).

▶ The 'colour' of this tuner is dominated by its tailored frequency response, courtesy of PAC. A mid/treble 'shelf' has been engineered-in so that the response is -0.9dB down at 2kHz, decreasing gently till it reaches -1.7dB at 16kHz.

▶ Distortion is generally very low at 0.004% through bass and midrange but increases very sharply to 0.42% at the very highest (16kHz) frequencies with 128kbps data.

▶ Spurious ultrasonic output, notably a peak at 40kHz, is less well controlled than it is with the costly T32R.

▶ This tuner's analogue output level is very healthy, however, at 1.25V (re, -6dBFS encoded data) and 2.5V at peak encode levels.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** If you fancy dipping your toe into the DAB pool, the DRX-601ES is the ideal choice. The modified response colours its sound, however.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE

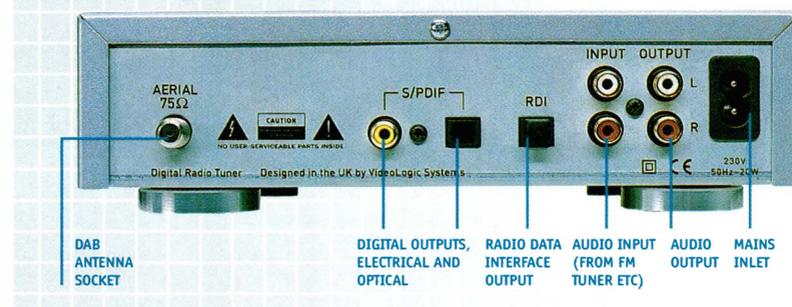


Psycho-Acoustic Compensation seems a touch misguided, but the basic performance is much of a muchness with most other DAB tuners, all of which are dearer at present.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
DYNAMIC RANGE CONTROL	✓
SIGNAL STRENGTH METER	✓
L-BAND COMPATIBILITY	✗

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





TAG MCLAREN T32R + DAB

DAB, FM, MW, LW £2,290 ☎ 0800 783 8007 🌐 www.tagmclarenaudio.com

If money's no object, the F1 of DAB tuners is the one to go for

Mclaren's one road car, the F1, was the fastest ever but faintly ludicrous. This tuner is more of a Mercedes S-class or top-of-the-range Jaguar – full of technology but all of it very much at the service of the owner's comfort. Build quality is impeccable, with a heavy front panel, solid machined tuning knob (and oh, the joy of high speed FM and AM tuning!), damped chassis panels and beautiful internal layout. Features are plentiful, especially connections, with two FM and two AM antenna inputs,

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★☆

A seriously classy product which has the edge with both FM and DAB reception. A few minor operational niggles aside, this is the epitome of luxury hi-fi.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

- REMOTE CONTROL ✓
- DYNAMIC RANGE CONTROL ✓
- SIGNAL STRENGTH METER ✓
- L-BAND COMPATIBILITY ✗

digital output (DAB) on BNC, phono and Toslink, and TAGtronic bus. There's full RDS, switchable IF bandwidth and hi-blend, Dynamic Range Control on DAB and a very funky display. You can even use the 'wake-up' function as the world's most expensive alarm clock.

It's all about pride of ownership, and the T32R has it in spades. Even if its performance were not particularly special, it would still be a lovely product. All the same, there are points to criticise at this price. The front panel may be neat but it's terribly fiddly with those tiny buttons and labelling which will be invisible to anyone with even slightly imperfect eyesight. Some more information on DAB signal strength and quality would be nice, and the DAB tuning tends to be slow.

PERFORMANCE

It really would be a shame if this tuner didn't sound good – but don't worry, it does. On FM it's pretty much the equal of any around, with impeccable tonal balance and clarity which if anything slightly excels that of the NAD S400, already praised in this group. And

there's a general quality of laid-back control which is really very welcome, as it makes for relaxed listening without losing treble extension or bass impact. Across the spectrum of musical taste there is a consistent knack of making the most of a broadcast, delving deep into the orchestral intricacies of Richard Strauss or kicking ass with Eminem's latest. I suppose one might look for more raw-edged excitement at times, but that's about the most serious criticism one can make and it's not much of one. Noise is low and sonic effects of poor reception are minimal.

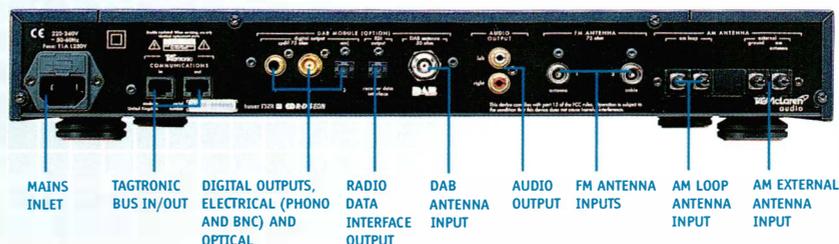
DAB reception is less obviously in the front of the pack: the differences between this and other tuners are frankly small. Nevertheless, there is still a confidence and polish to the sound, at best, which doesn't ameliorate DAB's ills but does capitalise on its strengths. TAG has gone to some lengths to make the most of the DAB data stream in terms of jitter reduction and so forth, and it does show. More could still be done, though, and TAG might just be the people to do it. AM reception is unspecial, as usual, but listenable. 🗣️

LAB REPORT

- ▶ This unit arrived too late for our 'analogue' FM testing program, but it did make it into the all-important DAB test sequence where it set the reference standard.
- ▶ With program encoded at -6dBfs and transmitted at 50dBuV (-57dBm), the tuner's output reaches 730mV, equivalent to 1.45V with peak level program material.
- ▶ The useable input sensitivity is 15dBuV before the decode error-rate becomes unacceptable. This is equivalent to -92dBm, which clearly bests the BBC's minimum input sensitivity requirement of -75dBm.
- ▶ In its useable range (15 to >127dBuV RF), distortion holds to a low 0.0014% at 1kHz, 0.002% at 8kHz and 0.0045% at a very high 16kHz. And all this at a mere 128kbps data rate!
- ▶ The frequency response varies with data rate and encode sample rate, but with non-complex material remains flat to within +0.3/-0.0dB right up to 16kHz.

LAB CONCLUSION: The T32R demonstrates that if you throw enough money at an inherently limited format (DAB), then performance can be stretched to the max.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



Agencies include:

- ARCAM
- LINN
- NAIM
- MERIDIAN
- REGA
- B&W NAUTILUS
- PROCEED
- M+K
- NEAT
- PMC
- LOEWE
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TUNERS CONCLUSIONS

Richard Black finds much to get excited about with the current crop of tuners

This is a very strong group representing much that's best about current FM and DAB reception practice. At the pinnacle, with little question, must be TAG McLaren's lovely T32R. It's not the ultimate that could be done but it's about as good as anyone has actually put on the market to date, especially on the DAB side. In pure 'sound per pound' terms it doesn't look so great, but if you understand why some people will spring £40,000 for a Jaguar when a Skoda crosses town at the same speed for £10,000 you'll appreciate why it's worth £2,300.

At the other extreme, Arcam's T21 sounds that wee bit better than the average Far Eastern budget tuner, and although it's short on features it is particularly smart and is nice to use too. The law of diminishing



returns hasn't hit it too hard, and it's a safe bet for any system. If it's DAB alone you're after, Pure's DRX-601ESM does the business very well and doesn't take much shelf space, but PAC is a question of taste.

Moving up a little, the NAD and Primare tuners are basically the same product at the same price and for most people the decision on

which to buy will be based as much on what the local dealer stocks as on a preference for black or silver finish. Both are excellent products and do a fine job with all kinds of radio programming, their price fully justified by build and performance.

Naim's NAT-05 is not such an all-rounder but has qualities that mark it out for the dedicated foot-tapper.

TRY THEM WITH THESE

ROTEL RA-971 MK II AMP £275

A cheap amp that doesn't sound it, well suited in character to the Arcam, NAD and Primare models especially.

CREEK P43R/A52SE AMP £949

Very capable and detailed-sounding amps with extended and smooth treble which flatters any good tuner.

NAD S100/S200 AMP £2,000

Pre-power combo with both grace and power, which would complement the TAG McLaren no less than NAD's own.

PMC TB2 SPEAKERS £700

A neutral and transparent speaker with a tuner-friendly lack of treble sibilance.

ATC SMC20SL SPEAKERS £2,051

As used in review system, a mid-size speaker with honest bass and plenty of treble insight: good with speech too.

HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ **Most important by far:** use a good antenna. Even DAB needs a decent signal, so take care at least to optimise the position of a wire antenna or 'whip'. FM seriously benefits from an outdoor antenna, mounted as high as possible.

⊕ **Cables:** tuners are no more or less fussy than other equipment. Don't be too cheapskate!

⊕ **Support:** FM tuners can be a little microphonic, often at high frequencies. A little sorbothane (or similar) placed on top of the case can be useful.

⊕ **Interference:** if you get occasional interference from passing cars on FM, try putting a ferrite clamp or two over the antenna lead just as it enters the plug. If you get interference from other stations, experiment with antenna positioning.

BEST FOR...

⊕ ROCK AND POP

Tricky, but according to taste the Naim or NAD tuners should answer on FM. On DAB the Pure is appealing, but do try Pure's DRX-601E too.

⊕ CLASSICAL

The TAG McLaren has it all the way here on both bands, thanks to its clarity and neutrality. However, the NAD and Primare are very, very nearly as good and a lot cheaper!

⊕ SPEECH

Again, it's hard to beat the TAG. But in fact the Arcam scores well here, perhaps because its very slight bass-lightness offsets the chesty sound of too much speech radio.



STEREO TUNERS AT A GLANCE

Make	Arcam	NAD	Naim	Primare	Pure	TAG McLaren
Model	T21	S400	NAT-05	T21	DRX-601ESM	T32R+DAB
Price	£400	£600	£745	£600	£330	£2,290
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Features	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Build	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Conclusion	No-nonsense tuner with good detail, clear and agile treble: just a touch bass-shy.	One of the best – bass and treble are well extended and detail is excellent.	Trademark Naim excitement and verve, just occasionally at the expense of subtlety.	Essentially identical to NAD with very minor differences. A fine tuner.	Low cost, small and capable. Doesn't sound neutral but a good introduction to DAB.	Classy (and costly) hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB and a joy to use.

LAB REPORT

Minimum RF signal required	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
Pilot tone rejection	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	N/A	N/A
Audible distortion	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
Noise	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	N/A	N/A
Overall rating	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████

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Wadia 860x - ex dem - boxed.	£4950	£7950
Analogue		
Nottingham Analogue 'The Foot' - 12" carbon fibre tonearm - it's new and it's long.	£700	£1100
Helius Cyalene - beefcake tonearm, Victoria sponge sound.	£500	£1350
Loudspeakers		
Living Voice Auditorium - walnut.	£900	£1500
Cadence DS - rosewood - give away.	£600	£1750
Klipsh LaScala - black - zippy horn.	£1750	£3500
Quad ELS63 - untidy bargain.	£390	£3000
Amplifiers		
Border Patrol 300B SE - with new Western Electric valves - light oak - the best SE available - New - excess stock.	£4000	£4500
Art Audio VPS - valve line pre-amp.	£600	£1400
Art Audio Diavolo - with 320B valves - chrome + gold - line integrated - juicy.	£3500	£4700
Art Audio Concerto - 40w line integrated - black + chrome.	£1500	£2650
Art Audio Concerto - 40w power amp.	£1350	£2250
Joule Electra - 2 box phono pre-amp.	£800	£2000
Linn Classic - CD, amp, tuner, thing.	£500	£1000
Cary '2A3' - 7 watt power amp. 1992	£850	-
Cary 5500 - line pre-amp. 1992	£550	-
Unison Mystery One PR+	£950	£1750
Tube Technology MAC - phono pre-amp - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors.	£900	£1400
Tube Technology line pre-amp with separate power supply - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors and a stepped attenuator.	£850	£1450
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Tune in

Paul Miller compares the measured performance of FM and DAB tuners

This is a landmark test for *Hi-Fi Choice*. Not only is it the first time we've compared analogue (FM) and digital (DAB) tuner formats in the lab, but also because it marks the first occasion that independent DAB tests have been published. No other magazine has this facility, so what follows is a unique insight into the pros and cons of the two formats.

Traditional analogue radio represents and transmits the audio program as the Frequency Modulated (FM) component of a VHF carrier. This is the radio frequency you tune into, typically between 88-106MHz in the UK. The received quality of this program is directly influenced by signal strength, atmospheric and electrical interference and by reflections off tall buildings or hills (so-called multipath distortion). Nevertheless, under ideal conditions, an FM program may achieve a wide 75dB S/N ratio, low (<0.05%) harmonic distortion and a frequency response that extends as close to the 19kHz pilot tone as the receiver's filters will permit.

DAB HANDY

DAB, by contrast, represents the audio program as packets of digital data, which are quite distinct from background noise and interference. Provided the data is received at sufficient strength to render it largely intact (small losses in data are corrected in the receiver's decoder), then its technical performance remains consistent. In practice, DAB's inherent ruggedness allows signals to be successfully transmitted at lower power than FM and at a single frequency countrywide. With DAB, there's no need to re-tune your car radio as you cross from one county to the next.

Furthermore, multiple services and programmes can be combined onto a single DAB frequency. This mix of different Service Components may include multiple audio programs together with Fast and Auxiliary Information Channels (FIC and

AIC) that tell the DAB receiver how all the components are linked.

For example, the special test signals developed for our DAB program were all multiplexed onto a single channel – 225.648MHz or Channel 12B, which is the BBC's national multiplex within VHF Band III. The different signals used for our distortion and response tests could then be dialled-up from the DAB tuner itself, which can distinguish the audio programs from information carried by the AIC.

SMOKIN' SIGNALS

Our test signals were transmitted at a 128kbps (kilo bits per second) data rate and were originally sampled at 48kHz. Practical DAB transmissions can benefit from a high 256kbps data rate – which retains more of the original audio signal – but with either 48kHz sampling for wide-band music program or a reduced 24kHz sampling for voice-oriented news items, for example. Figure 1 demonstrates that once the Pure DRX-601ES tuner has successfully locked-onto the DAB broadcast (>7dBuV RF), then its best case performance of low noise and distortion (around 0.004%) is realised immediately (black trace). Because the DAB digital data is either on or off, there's no real change in reception quality as the signal strength increases until it becomes so high that the DAB receiver is overloaded (>110dBuV, in this instance).

Compare this with the performance of the NAD (red trace) and Arcam (blue trace) tuners as they receive an analogue FM signal. The tuners' muting threshold is exceeded at 13dBuV and 32dBuV, respectively, but it requires a further 10-20dBuV of additional signal strength before noise and distortion in the audio program is optimised. Once the incoming signal exceeds 80-90dBuV, then distortion begins to increase again through RF overload.

While the frequency response of an FM

Technical Graphics



Figure 1: Provided the signal strength is above a minimum threshold, DAB reception benefits from consistently low noise and distortion.

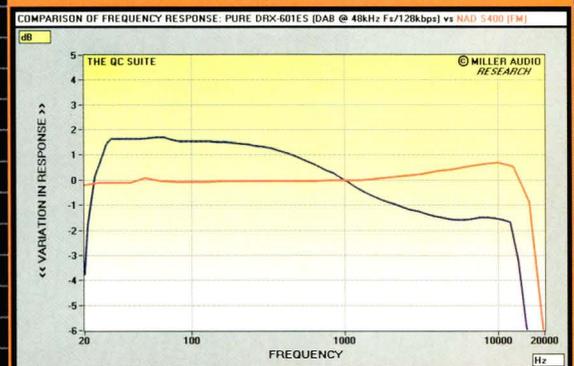


Figure 2: Under ideal conditions, there's no practical difference in the bandwidth of an FM or 48kHz-sampled DAB broadcast.

“Because the DAB digital data is either on or off, there's no real change in reception quality as the signal strength increases.”

tuner is restricted by the severity of its 19kHz pilot filter, the bandwidth of a DAB broadcast depends on original sample rate, the eventual data rate and the complexity of the audio program. Figure 2 shows the 'brightened' HF response of NAD's FM tuner (red trace) against the 'engineered' warmth of Pure's DAB receiver (black trace). The response of McLaren's T32R (not shown) is pretty much ruler-flat – as it should be with DAB – so the modified character of Pure's receiver is something of an oddity, if implemented with the best of intentions! 

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MAIN REVIEWS – Alvin Gold | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

HIGH POWER AMPLIFIERS

Are room-engulfing amps strictly necessary? There's one way to find out...

This test includes big amps of all types: preamps with stereo power amps and with twin monoblocks, and two integrated models, the larger of which ironically is not the more powerful on paper. In reality, there are few loudspeakers that can't be driven loud enough for most purposes by 50-100 watts of clean power, even in quite large, well-furnished rooms, and the case in favour of amps that deliver 250 watts/channel, the mean for this group, doesn't look all that

strong. But there are sound reasons why lower powered amps don't necessarily provide all the answers.

The real *raison d'être* for big, beefy amps is not usually to do more, but to do it better. Generalising, there is an ease and naturalness about a big amp rarely matched by a smaller one delivering no more than a watt or two most of the time, but where peak demands consistently push it into its non-linear operating region. And a rapid succession of instantaneous peaks – transients – are what most music is all about.

But you'll need space to allow the speaker to pressure drive the room without sounding oppressive, and the speakers should have enough lower bandwidth to make proper use of the extra power – it is the low frequency end of the spectrum where it's needed most. B&W's new Signature 800 flagship, and the test bed for much of the listening, is just such a model. Like many big speakers it is electrically quite sensitive (91dB/w/m), but it is extremely responsive to the power amplification used, and only thrives with the right kind of power, and plenty of it. Smaller speakers may need lots of power too, but this is usually because they are less sensitive, and there are speakers of all sizes that make enormous current demands under transient conditions at certain frequencies thanks to the reactive nature of the load they present to the amplifier. So 250 watts of power may not be the extravagance that common sense suggests. ☉

EQUIPMENT USED

Loudspeakers

B&W Signature 800
JMLab Mezzo Utopia
CD/DVD-Audio player
Marantz DV-12S1

Cables

Nordost SPM Reference speaker cables
Nordost Quattro Fil & TAG McLaren interconnects

Transparent balanced interconnects

Blind listening panel test members:

Mark Hockey (Kenwood), Russell Kaufmann (Classe)

MUSIC USED

Mary Chapin Carpenter
A Place In The World
Richard Strauss/RSB/Soile Isokoshi
Orchestral Songs
Edie Brickell *Picture Perfect Morning*
Garbage *Garbage*
Nancy Griffith *The Last Of The True Believers*
Radiohead *OK Computer*
Buena Vista Social Club *Buena Vista Social Club*
Fleetwood Mac *Rumours*
Lambchop *Is A Woman*
Puccini/Metha/LPO *Turandot*

ON TEST



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BALANCE



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An Italian charmer that's at home with Puccini but less happy with Radiohead

Designed, according to Audio Analogue to disprove the aphorism that "the more powerful the amplifier, the worse its sound", the Maestro is built and specified on a grand scale. It weighs 52kg, making it among the heaviest single box components available, and inside you'll find two 750VA toroidal transformers and eight 15,000µF reservoir capacitors, driving the load through four pairs of 250 watt bipolar output devices per channel. Although eight ohm rated power is a comparatively modest 150 watts/channel, output wattage doubles with each halving of load impedance down to two ohms, and is said to be stable into one ohm loads, irrespective of phase angle. This implies a prodigious current yield, which you might have guessed from the weight and enormous heatsink area.

The Maestro offers separate source and tape selection for its six inputs, including phono, which is internally switchable between MM and MC, and one balanced XLR input. Preamp level outputs are also available, and the tape output can be switched off. Finally, it comes with a simple but beautifully presented five button remote control.

PERFORMANCE

A curious design this. A poorly sign-posted control system and a volume control where much of the action takes place in the first part of the rotation

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★☆

FEATURES
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★☆

The beautifully presented Maestro always sounds in command, but its character, perfectly judged for Puccini, is adrift in the world of high speed, precision music making, be it Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* or Radiohead's *OK Computer*.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
TONE CONTROLS	✗
PHONO INPUT	✓
LINE INPUTS	4
TAPE LOOPS	1

means that unpleasant and very noisy surprises await those who don't take care. This is also not an amplifier to rush at from new: it sounds rather thin and lifeless for the first 50 hours or so. Once run in, the high current yield is probably a major reason for the Maestro's elegantly in-command tenure at the helm of the B&W Signature 800s, but this elegance, so typical of the Italian high end, was there regardless of the demands of the music. It worked beautifully with Italian opera (now there's a surprise!), but its timing was never sharp enough to make a real mark with Lambchop's *Is A Woman*. Although it's a clean and initially a dynamic sounding amp, it lacks leading edge definition, and tends to fall flat with raw, energetic material.

The blind listening panel felt the Maestro sounded a bit safe, even bland,

and although vocals tend to be very easy to follow and the tonal balance is generally spot on, the subtle low level detail that marks the best from the rest simply isn't there. The vital Buena Vista Social Club recording was just a little too laid back to fully engage. But the amp's deep, wide soundstage and composure under duress will attract those not looking for high octane music. 🟡

LAB REPORT

▶ Distortion is heavily influenced by speaker load, power output (0.02% at 10mW to 0.13% at 10W/8ohm) and audio frequency (0.12% at 20Hz to 0.4% at 20kHz/10W/8ohm). Distortion was twice as high on the Left as the Right channel.

▶ A 200W/8ohm and 380W/4ohm power output translates into 215W, 415W, 770W (19.6A) and 870W (29.5A at 2% THD) under dynamic conditions into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads but with typical *minimum* distortion figures of 0.1%, 0.3%, 0.6% and 1% above a few watts.

▶ Overall amp gain very high at +44.4dB (166x) and the S/N ratio surprisingly poor at 70dB (re. 0dBW) courtesy of strong 50Hz, 150Hz and 250Hz mains harmonics.

▶ Aside from a slight subsonic bass roll-off, the response is very flat, though its high 0.23ohm output impedance will probably cause some HF variations depending on the speaker load.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Continues Audio Analogue's trend for power amps but it is coloured by high (and asymmetric) distortion and poor noise performance.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



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Solid as a rock in more ways than one, this is an amp for all seasons

Bryston is a lynchpin of the Canadian hi-fi industry – per capita, one of the strongest on the planet. The BP20 is an elegantly designed slimline preamp with an out-board transformer; the rest of the power supply is housed within the main box. It is partnered here by the 4BST, a stereo power amplifier, and incidentally Bryston's biggest selling product.

LAB REPORT

▶ I tested the 'professional' 4BST three years ago and this 'domestic' version is even more powerful, now delivering 2x325W/8ohm and 2x470W/4ohm.

▶ **Dynamic headroom and current delivery is massive** – 400W, 630W, 790W (19.9A) and 770W (27.8A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively. This combo will drive *any* speaker you choose.

▶ Brutish power does not mean high distortion. Figures of <0.002% through bass and midrange are typical while at HF, the BP20/4BST still bests its competition with 0.005% or less.

▶ The combined response is flat (errors of just +0.0/-0.04dB) while the low 0.013ohm output impedance of the 4B further benefits its high current potential.

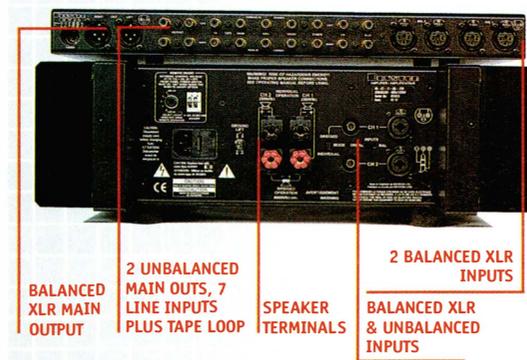
▶ DC offsets are extremely low at <1mV while stereo separation holds good to 85dB through the midrange.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** This is what *real* high power amplification is all about – bomb-proof engineering for the studio and home.

The BP20 has two balanced inputs and one balanced output, in addition to six unbalanced line inputs, one a tape circuit, though the amp is available optionally (or can be retrofitted) with phono input. There is no remote control, but the control set includes absolute phase invert, tape monitor, muting, mono and a headphone socket.

The 4BST continues the house theme by offering balanced and unbalanced inputs and it can be bridged for a rated 800 watts/8 ohms/mono. In stereo the amp is rated at 250 watts/8 ohms or 400 watts/4 ohms. Little known fact No. 648: all Bryston power amps are trimmed by hand to minimise distortion figures by a man called Dave Trimmer (true!). Bryston products have a reputation for solidity and consistency, reinforced by a confidence inspiring 20 year transferable guarantee.

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



This is a masculine amplifier, with class leading control of difficult, wide bandwidth speakers. But it is in touch with its feminine side too, with warmth, grace and subtlety.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	×
TONE CONTROLS	×
PHONOINPUT	×
LINE INPUTS	7
TAPE LOOPS	1

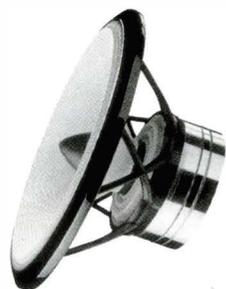
PERFORMANCE

In the olden days, when Bryston gear was mainly for the studio pro market, it had a reputation as unbustable, consistent and solid as a rock, but also tight and a little grainy. Just right for drawing detail out and making life easier for the engineer, but not ideal in an audiophile context where subtlety is king. Bryston produced the kind of sound that many sought refuge from in alternative technologies – valve amps for example.

The current Bryston sound remains as taut and as clean as they come, and is also very well balanced, with virtually none of the underlining of transients and the granularity that blighted older models. Centre focus is also extremely well defined and timing is propulsive.

The BP20 and 4BST improve greatly on older products. Imagery is better and detail more explicit, while the amps have that understated quality of real authority and bass definition. The Lambchop test track, often underwhelming through lesser equipment, was particularly well handled with a strong sense of a wide, expansive soundstage. With heavy duty material like the eponymous Garbage album, the system rocked and rolled superbly, perhaps for the only time in this test. But the amp remains subtle enough to make hair-raising sense of Soile Isokoski's Strauss, at which previous Brystons would have baulked. 🟡

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MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2^{CR}/M250 x2

£2,698 ☎ 020 8900 2999 🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

EXCLUSIVE Is MF's flexible mono power amp a match for its excellent preamp?

If sound quality was assessed by weight, the Musical Fidelity A3.2^{CR} preamp, at 12.5kg heavier than many quite powerful integrated amps, would be a stone cold cert. The weight is partly down to solid build, but even more to the full choke-regulated power supply driven by two humungous power transformers. The high capacity supply allows all gain to be provided before the volume control, minimising noise

LAB REPORT

▶ The M250 does not quite meet 250W output at very low (20Hz) or high (20kHz) frequencies, but reaches 260W/8ohm and 420W/4ohm through the midrange.

▶ Under dynamic conditions, this increases to 340W and 635W (12.6A) into 8 and 4ohm before being current-limited to 485W (15.6A) and 230W (15.3A) into lower 2 and 1ohm loads.

▶ Distortion is a low 0.001-0.002%, and just 0.015% at very high frequencies, while the M250's low 0.02ohm output impedance helps maintain a flat response (+0.0/-0.2dB) with most speaker types.

▶ The gain of the combo is +42.5dB (+30dB for the M250) and the A-wtd S/N amounts to a very wide 91.1dB. With a combined residual noise of -81dBV (0.09mV), this is a very quiet amp.

▶ Whoops! MF quotes a channel separation of >85dB for the M250, which is meaningless for a mono amplifier. The 1kHz separation for the A3.2 preamp is >95dB.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Reliable low-noise amps, well-engineered but not excessively powerful.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Curiously ill-sorted pairing fails to make the best of a clearly exceptional preamp. The modestly specified power amps are powerful if pedestrian, but relatively low pricing means the package is good value.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
TONE CONTROLS	✗
PHONO INPUT	✓
LINE INPUTS	4
TAPE LOOPS	1

levels without sacrificing overload margins, while choke regulation ensures an ultra clean power supply waveform. Facilities include an MM/MC phono stage and remote control – a new, slim and rather attractive full system design – but other fittings are strictly on an as-required basis.

The M250 monoblock is a different story. Not an obvious partner for the audiophile-oriented A3.2^{CR}, the M250 is designed for multichannel flexibility. It lacks the choke regulation of the pre-amp, but instead switches on and off automatically in the presence of a signal input, or it can be switched by external hardware – but not by the A3.2^{CR} which lacks a trigger output.

PERFORMANCE

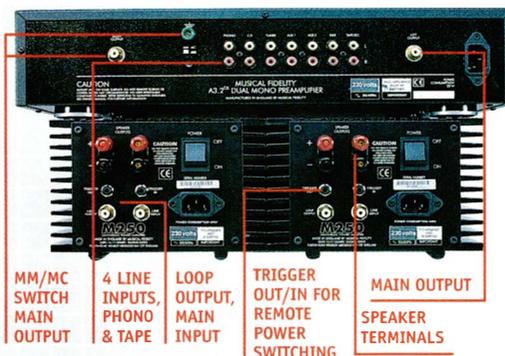
Despite being first and foremost a home cinema design, the M250 is a pretty good power amp. It has more

control and authority than some more costly models, and it coped manfully with the difficult and exacting B&W test speakers which as far as amplifiers are concerned don't suffer anything less than powerhouses gladly. But at the same time it lacks the performance of the preamp, a fact that became all too obvious by using the A3.2^{CR} with other power amps.

The A3.2^{CR} is a clearly exceptional preamplifier: clean, transparent, large scale and lifelike, with a typical Musical Fidelity-like cool and measured quality that suits acoustic material especially well and other music types scarcely any less. But the system is dominated by the monoblocks, which are not in the same league as a stereo proposition.

The M250 is not lacking power or authority; indeed it does a surprisingly credible job controlling the B&W Signature 800s, but it is not fully in keeping with the preamplifier. It is a solid enough performer, but a little pedestrian, even heavy handed at times, and when driven hard it tends to sound a little edgy and uncomfortable. On one extreme, *Supervixen* from Garbage lacks the raw, grungy vitality it showed with some of the other Strauss recordings, and at the other the Strauss recording sounds somewhat compressed, with a rather dull vocal quality and an orchestral accompaniment that tends to sound heavy handed and even rather coarse when the musical temperature rises. ☹

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



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T+A PA 1520 R

£2,400 ☎ 020 8863 9117 🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de,

EXCLUSIVE A distinctive integrated amp from a high tech, high end German brand

T+A is a big cheese in its native Germany, but so far has failed to make much of a dent over here. This may be about to change. This review coincides with new UK distribution arrangements, which should give the brand much broader recognition.

The PA 1520 R is a synthesis of two core models in the T+A range, the P 1220 R preamplifier and the 1520 R power amplifier. Dressed in finely finished aluminium panels, and with a trademark button-rich fascia, the amp will handle six line inputs (one on the front behind a front panel flap, along with a number of secondary controls) and two tape decks. One can be converted to phono operation, either MM or MC. The amp can be powered on and off with various other T+A components using wire data links, and even by a sleep timer. Full bass, treble and loudness controls are also included, and two pairs of speakers can be connected, while remote control is an optional extra. Last but not least, a proprietary interface socket, known as TASI, can be used to connect a T+A surround decoder.

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

Easy on the ear, with an airy, open presentation. Power delivery is good but not unstinting. There is some hardness when stressed hard, though it controlled the exacting B&W test speaker well enough.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	×
TOPE CONTROLS	✓
PHONO INPUT	×
LINE INPUTS	6
TAPE LOOPS	2

PERFORMANCE

The T+A has a very particular sound, superficially not unlike the TAG package in some ways, though without its definition and ability to project a musical performance free of the speakers, and not in the same class overall (though less than half the price).

Dipping in to the lucky box of CDs, Nanci Griffith's *The Last Of The True Believers* displayed a rather hollow, metallic tone through this amp, and Edie Brickell's wonderfully languorous *Good Times* sounded boxy and enclosed. It did better with more contemporary recordings. Mary Chapin Carpenter's *A Place In The World* sounded taut and clean, while Soile Isokoski's Strauss recording was simply ravishing. This is without straying outside the world of female vocal, albeit in rather different genres, but it turns out that this selection is broadly representative. The T+A gives an interesting, enjoyable ride, with plenty of punch and local detail, but it is not tolerant of poor or inadequate recordings. Both the Edie Brickell and to a lesser extent the Nanci Griffiths recordings fall into this

category; the former especially sounding boxy and opaque through the T+A.

The short version then is that this amp has an open and agile balance, with explicit imaging and a strong sense of atmosphere making up for a marginal loss of detail. Dynamic behaviour is interesting – what might be described as microdynamics, the way individual notes stand out from the background and from each other, are handled well, but there was a pervading feeling that very loud, hard hitting passages were a little muted in impact. At this price though, it is clearly Recommended. 🟡

LAB REPORT

▶ This amplifier's built-in fan kicks into life with continuous outputs >1W/8ohm and reaches its noisy full speed from 2W/8ohm onwards.

▶ T+A's specification does not adequately reflect the extremely stiff power supply of the PA1520R, which provides a theoretically perfect increase in continuous power from 2x150W/8ohm to 2x300W/4ohm.

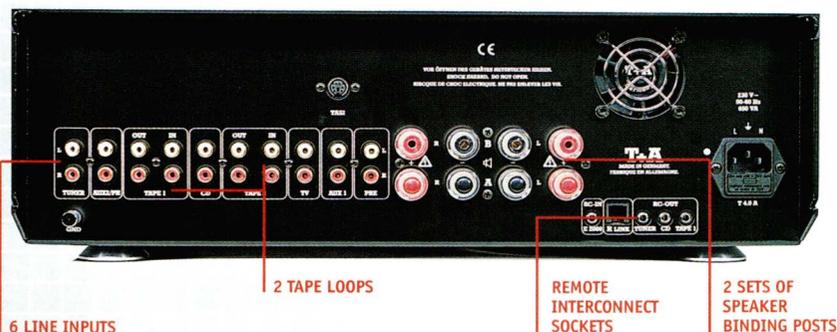
▶ Stiff regulation leaves no headroom for dynamic signals, but with 1x160W, 310W, 575W (17A) and an astonishing 985W (31.4A) available into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, it will master any speaker load.

▶ Distortion is exceptionally low at around 0.0006% midband and <0.005% at very high frequencies.

▶ The A-wtd S/N ratio is about 'average' at 88dB (re. OdBW) but the 0.01 ohm output impedance is usefully low and response all but ruler flat.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** This amplifier has possibly the tightest supply regulation of any commercial design and combines power with an iron grip.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





TAG MCLAREN DPA32R/250MR x2

£4,940 ☎0800 783 8007 🌐 www.tagmclaren.com

Highly flexible and upgradeable pairing with precise and controlled sound

The DPA32R preamplifier could be seen as a specialised two-channel version of the AV32R home cinema processor. It is equipped with loads of digital and analogue inputs, all of them available on both the analogue and digital tape outputs, so it can be used as a D/A converter. Analogue inputs remain in the analogue domain

throughout, however, despite the use of a sophisticated digitally stepped volume control. The new 250MR monoblocks are also derivative of an AV model, in this case the 250x family of multichannel power amps. Power output is 250 watts/eight ohms, rising to 400 watts/four ohms, with short term bursts up to 1kW into two ohms.

Our two TAG McLaren components are purist high tech, like other recent models from the marque, and they offer all the established benefits of the brand. They can be interconnected to provide synchronised power up/down (the power amps have a soft start feature) and LED brightness levels. Both components can be upgraded with new firmware and (with the DPA32R) hardware add-ons, which currently include an optional DAB tuner, and the 24/192 D/A stages already on board. Full and basic remote controls are supplied.

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★☆

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★☆

A costly package, but you do get a flexibility and upgradeability you won't find elsewhere. Performance though favours precision over dynamics or control, and is shaded by others in this group.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
tone controls	✗
PHONO INPUT	✗
LINE INPUTS	5A, 5D
TAPE LOOPS	1A, 1D

PERFORMANCE

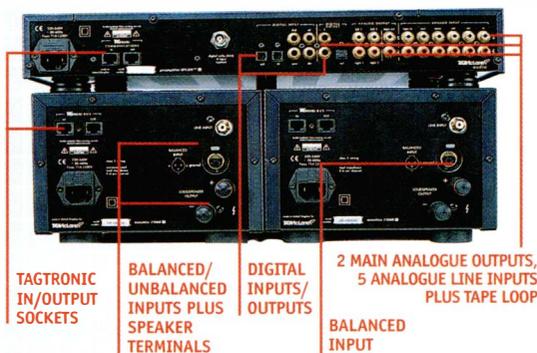
The TAG combination is the costliest in the group by a wide margin, and the outlay can be justified on many grounds, some outlined above. But, although the package offers unusual clarity and precision, when push comes to shove the 250MR was fazed by the test B&W Signature 800s. It simply doesn't have the grip, control or authority to cope with the system, and as a result the system as a whole sounded underpowered at highish volume levels, even those well within its operating compass. More precisely, the midband is open, detailed and fluid, but the bass sounds as though it's trying too hard, and imagery tends to lack differentiation in the depth plane. It should be added that with other speakers, the JMLab Mezzo Utopia in particular, these limitations were not really an issue.

Through the B&Ws, the Strauss lieder recording sounded dry and lacking in space, and the bass end was peculiarly constrained, while the voice failed to lift itself properly above the orchestral accompaniment. The Lambchop track was also rather thin and lifeless, but other titles, Mary Chapin Carpenter's *A Place In The World*, for example, sounded clean, precise and articulate, and it's with this kind of inherently open and well defined material that the TAG system sounds most at home. With the JMLab speakers, and with other smaller speakers too, you'll find the TAG combination's refinement and exquisite resolution makes much better sense – at a price. 🍷

LAB REPORT

- ▶ 250 by name, they actually deliver >275W/8ohm (20Hz-20kHz), 490W/1kHz/4ohm under continuous conditions.
- ▶ With dynamic, music-like signals, this increases to a heady 360W, 670W (13A) and 855W (20.7A) into 8, 4 and 2ohm but just 40W (6.3A) into 1ohm as the 250MR is protected against what it perceives to be a short circuit.
- ▶ The power amp is not especially sensitive, but the overall gain of the pre/power amounts to 42.1dB (x127) and the A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is a decent 86.6dB via McLaren's unbalanced connections.
- ▶ Distortion is exceptionally low at typically 0.001-0.002% from very low (<1W/8ohm) to high (250W/8ohm) power outputs. Distortion only increases to 0.01% (10kHz) and 0.02% (20kHz) as feedback diminishes at higher frequencies.
- ▶ The combined pre/power response is flat to within +0.0/-0.1dB from 20Hz-30kHz while the low 0.025ohm output impedance of the 250MR renders it quite insensitive to variations in the speaker load.
- ▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** A good, but not exceptional, example of modern, well-protected amplification.

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS



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KJ West One - Where 'budget' does not mean compromise!

As hi-fi enthusiasts you all know how easy it is to fall for something that creates an impact during a demonstration but then proves to be tiresome over the longer term.

At KJ West One, we're exposed to some phenomenal sounds every day, and whatever music we're playing usually leaves us with a deep benchmark when we leave for home. Happily, sometimes those sounds have been created by equipment that offers remarkable value compared to some of the esoterica with which we like to indulge ourselves in store.

So, when asked to demonstrate a system that aspires to the high-end, yet is rather more affordable, what do we recommend?

Without question, the finest sounds we can recreate (at any price) are with simple two channel systems. It's the most convincing and natural arrangement for us to make worthwhile judgements on what we know of live music, real instruments, human voice, and the ambience in which they have been recorded.

Just two high quality audio channels, two ears (and the miraculous faculty between them) can help us interpret all of this information to appreciate a most realistic and astonishingly convincing sound stage in all its dimensions.

Our 'budget reference system' qualifies in this regard, seemingly uncompromised in its ability to recreate all the drama, subtlety and scale of any type of music.

Individually, each of the components we're recommending here features tried, tested, even revered technologies that have influenced (sometimes for decades) the high-end of audio reproduction, but it's as a truly compatible combination we've 'lived' with for some time now, that we've come to appreciate the manner in which it can reassert itself in our affections even after an occasional 'affair' with some awesomely convincing (and often hugely expensive) systems.

To arrange your personal demonstration of totally satisfying music reproduction at a realistic price, please phone to make an appointment at any branch of KJ West One.



Copland CDA822 CD Player £1499



The new CDA822 incorporates a 24bit, high resolution, dual differential DAC with increased oversampling of 96kHz - similar to systems used in some of the most influential components we've heard. 'Upsampling' reveals the transparency of recordings and reduces compression effects - so much so, once you've heard reproduction like this, ordinary digital congestion becomes obvious and intolerable!

Deliver this unfettered clarity through a single ended Class A, integrated amplifier and you'll soon realise that the term 'budget' becomes irrelevant. This is music reproduction of a purity that defies categorisation.

Unison SR2K Integrated Amplifier £1295

There's something undeniably satisfying about valves, even the limited intervention of a tiny tube in a hybrid amp can bring an emotional benefit to music reproduction. Better still, with the remarkable value of this beautiful Class A integrated amplifier from Unison, we're able to enjoy one of high-end audio's most elegant configurations, one with which the speed and sonority of this technology becomes immediately apparent, especially through efficient, full range loudspeakers.



Triangle Celius 202EX Loudspeakers £1095

Since we first commented on these seductive speakers they've received several very favourable reviews. Satisfyingly full range, and with 92dB sensitivity, they maximise the potential of our chosen components, combining to provide effortless dynamics in a natural, free flow of music, intimate in details like voice and solo instrumentals, yet majestic with powerful works of all types.

There we have it, the type of system we enjoy for ourselves, not only at work, but at home too. Why not call in to hear it?

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HIGH POWER AMPLIFIERS CONCLUSIONS

Alvin Gold finds the enticing lure of big amps difficult to resist

One thrust of the test was to determine the optimum package: integrated, pre and power amps or preamp and monoblocks. Each has its pros and cons. Integrations can be cheaper, but combining the low and high level circuits increases the electro-magnetic influence of the power amp on the low level preamp circuits. Stereo power amps enjoy a cost advantage over monoblocks – but only monoblocks allow speaker cable runs to be minimised, maximising control over the load. But the specifics of individual designs, and the skills of each designer, outweigh these generalities.

The evidence of this test is not entirely unequivocal (or statistically valid of course), but what there is leans in the direction of separation.

The T+A PA 2520 R proves that you can get a quart from a pint pot, and this is an impressive performer in many other ways too, but there is at least a subliminally perceived sense that the preamp is somehow being modulated by the power amp, or at least this is a convenient explanation for a sense of 'gain riding' that prevented the sound expanding seamlessly with the music. It works very well with electronic music but less so with acoustic material, which is better served on the whole by the Audio Analogue Maestro. This model shows no such dynamic compression, but it is built on an even grander scale, and rarely seems to do more than coast along, to the extent that it has difficulty portraying musical tension.

In the middle ground, the Musical Fidelity has a superbly mannered preamp, but the AV-flavoured monoblocks are not quite of the same standard, and they are hampered by a music sensing circuit that inevitably misses the first beat of the tune. However, they remain a worthwhile prospect for a flexible multichannel system.

The TAG McLaren can grow with the user in a way the others can't match and sounds very precise, though its lean, slightly dry quality won't suit all systems. But it is the Briston that comes out smelling most of roses. It is no beauty, but it has a blend of passion and drive with virtually any loudspeaker that is unmatched in this group. It earns our highest commendation for just about all music types.



HIGH POWER AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE

Make Model	Audio Analogue Maestro	Briston BP-20/4BST	Musical Fidelity A3.2CR/M250	T+A PA 1520 R	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR
Price	£2,600	£3,375	£2,698	£2,400	£4,940
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
	Very powerful, but sounds arguably too smooth and relaxed.	Powerful and quick all-rounder which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly.	The preamp is a high end design but the AV-oriented power amps, though good, can't match them.	Powerful, punchy amp with many good points, but sometimes seems to try too hard.	Superbly extendible and tremendously subtle, if a bit constrained dynamically.

LAB REPORT

Dynamic power output					
Speaker load tolerance					
Audible distortion					
Noise					
Overall rating					

TRY THEM WITH THESE

DISC PLAYERS

PRIMARE D30.2 £2,499

Top class CD player, with a characteristically powerful and authoritative but also a subtle and engaging sound; works well in ambitious systems.

MARANTZ DV-12S1 £2,500

One of a kind: high class DVD-Audio player that is also an exceptionally powerful, authoritative CD player.

MARANTZ CD17 MKII KI £1,200

Although not the most exuberant CD player around, this model shows real subtlety and grace, and successfully breathes life into music.

LOUDSPEAKERS

JMLAB MEZZO UTOPIA £7,250

Uncommonly agile, coherent loudspeaker with the most transparent and articulated midband in the business; demanding of amplifier quality, but not especially power hungry.

TANNOY DIMENSION TD12 £6,500

Undeniably coloured, but unusually vital and physical sounding, the TD12 is a handful from a system-matching point of view – these amps might help.

B&W NAUTILUS 803 £3,500

Middle range Nautilus model is a refined all-rounder with moderate bass reach, and benefits from powerful, well controlled amplifiers.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Minimising speaker cable runs makes the amp's job easier, but actually makes less difference than the inherent ones between different cable flavours. In every case the high-end types outperformed more prosaic types, and given their cost, reducing cable runs is a simple and very worthwhile economy.
- ⊕ Use bi-wire connections at the speaker end of the cable, and use an isolating support for the amps. In the case of the TAG McLaren amp, for example, taking this simple measure elevated their performance extraordinarily, not akin to the changes you'll find when switching from one amp to a better one – a firmer, more stable sound, better dynamics, enhanced imagery.
- ⊕ You might be surprised what can be done by placing a (suitably dressed) brick on top (smart-casual? – Ed). Finally, use the cleanest and most uncluttered mains supply you can find – usually the one with the fewest other components plugged in – and some specialist mains cables can make a big difference too.



PRO-JECT

Sale

Free
Goldring Exstatic Record Cleaner
worth £12 with all PRO-JECT Turntables

Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DIVA T51 Tuner	£229.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£109.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable	£1749.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£119.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable	£144.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£129.95
Sony ST-D77ES FM/DAB Tuner	£499.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner	£269.95

Debut II Turntable (Black) **£114.95**

"The original Debut turntable romped away with a Product of the Year Award in 1999, and the MKII version continues the extremely good work. It's a simple affair, that's easy to set up, but don't let the price fool you - it sounds a whole lot more expensive than that. This is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

It's available in six funky colours, so you should find one to suit your decor, and at just a smidge over £100, you can have no excuse not to keep that old vinyl collection in employment for a good few years yet." **★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2000**

Selected outlets are Project Turntable Centres. Colour Options are available at additional cost



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player **£999.95** A3.2 Amplifier **£979.95**

Sale

Free
*Interconnect Cable
worth £150
when A3.2 CD &
A3.2 Amplifier
purchased together

Replacing the What Hi-Fi? Award Winning A3 CD and Amplifier, the new A3.2 models have been further refined and re-styled. The A3.2 CD Player now incorporates the same DAC, filter assembly and control mechanism as the highly-acclaimed Nu-Vista CD Player. The A3.2 Amplifier draws on experience gained through the development of the Nu-Vista M3 amplifier and as such has inherited many of its qualities, producing a sense of ease and flexibility that is normally only associated with far more expensive designs.



CD Players

Arcam DIVA CD62T.....	£349.95
Arcam DIVA CD92T.....	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1149.95
Denon DCD485	£129.95
Linn Genki	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£429.95
Meridian 507	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D.....	£2999.95
Roksan Caspian MKII	£994.95
Roksan Kandy.....	£544.95
Rotel RCD1070.....	£499.95
Sony CDPXE570	£109.95

Free Interconnect Cable* worth £50 with ALL CD Players over £300

Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW	£299.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW.....	£199.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....	£229.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....	£199.95

B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM601S3 Speakers **£249.95**

"Ultimately it's the 601 S3's lack of any weakness that makes them so special. Their talent is so widespread that most of the competition is left reeling. Detail, resolution, dynamics, insight... everything is present and correct, and these speakers rate highly in every area.



What more can we say? These new B&Ws are a terrific buy. The price rise over their predecessors pits them against tougher rivals, but on this showing B&W has little to worry about. Unlike the competition."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? January 2002

Sale

Free
Speaker Cable*
worth £30
with ALL Speakers
over £200

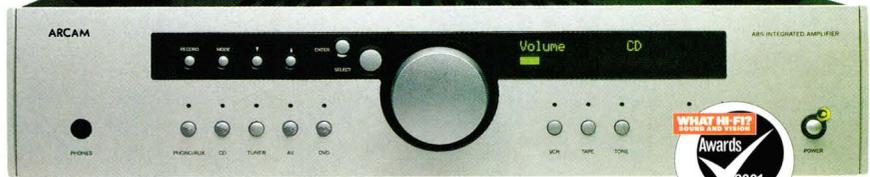
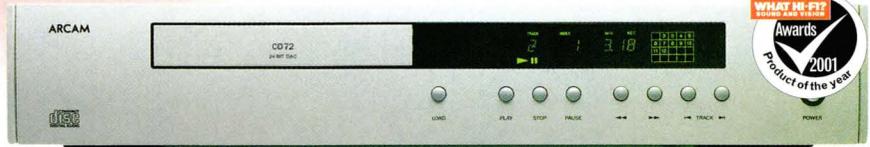


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Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£349.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£449.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1099.95
Cyrus ACA7.5 Pre Amplifier	£699.95
Cyrus Smart Power Amplifier	£549.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£199.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£139.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista M3 Amplifier	£2974.95
Roksan Caspian MKII Amplifier	£894.95
Roksan Kandy Amplifier	£544.95



Stereo Amplifiers
Best Buy £601-£1000

ARCAM

DiVA CD72T CD Player DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£429.95
£749.95

Save £80
When CD72T & A85 purchased together (Package Price £1099)

DiVA CD72 "The CD72 will have you jumping out of your seat from the very first notes. Both powerful and punchy, it delivers every ounce of air and detail present from detailed midrange to smooth, singing treble. Sometimes a product comes along that sets new standards..."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

DiVA A85 "You'll have realised by now that we rather like this amp. It took us completely by surprise, and further strengthens Arcam's already impressive product range... The A85 is superb, and we can't wait to put it up against its peer in a group test."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? March 2001



MONITOR AUDIO

Silver 8i Speakers £699.95

"No other speaker in this test can match the Monitor Audios when it comes to delivering seismic basslines with sofa rattling power and weight. That this part of the spectrum also enjoys plenty of speed and control confirms the Silver 8is' position as bass kings... A great speaker needs more than simply great bass, however, and the Silver 8is do far more than merely thump. With the likes of Curtis Mayfield's 'Move On Up', they produce a sound of such verve that it becomes hard to sit still... They produce music with plenty of excitement - but don't forget the subtleties too. Add excellent build and an easy load and these Monitor Audios make a formidable case for themselves."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? April 2001

Free
Speaker Cable*
worth £60
with ALL Speakers
over £500



VideoLogic DRX-601ES Digital Tuner £299.95

Save £30

"New name, new format, new winner: the VideoLogic story is as simple as that. The £299 DRX-601E digital tuner came out of nowhere to establish the firm as a major player in the digital tuner market. With this upgrade, VideoLogic goes one step further: it's still a DRX-601E at heart, but quite apart from the sleek silver styling and sexy blue LEDs it now has a better, white-on-blue display, and what the company calls 'Psycho-acoustic Compensation' - a form of signal processing designed to make the tuner sound less digital... And it works: the DRX-601ES has a presentation that's rich, clean and extremely informative. Bass is big and powerful, while the midband and treble are well controlled. The style alone would justify the slight price rise; the sound quality makes it a Product of the Year." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001



Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 3rd July 2002, E&OE. * From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.



CYRUS

**Quattro CD Pre-Amplifier
Q Power Power Amplifier
Package Price £999.95**

"Looking at first glance like the CD7 CD player, this elegant box has a lot more going on under the bonnet. As well as a CD transport, it contains a preamp and can accept an optional FM RDS tuner... Add to all that the fact that the Quattro also has outputs for an optional multiroom facility, and what we

have here is a claim for the tag of a serious hi-fi style system with great flexibility. You need to partner it with a power amp, of course, and for this purpose we're using Cyrus's new SmartPower. Put them together, and it's not hard to see that style and ease of use are a big factor in the Quattro's design. And it performs impressively. Space, detail and lightning quick transients make for a precise punchy sound... The depth and realism of acoustic instruments also make this a great listen, whether with Neil Young's acoustic guitar or Steve Reich's ensemble of woodwind, strings and pianos."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? January 2001

Also Available: Cyrus Quattro System Package fitted with FM Tuner Module £1199.95



MISSION

78 Series



782 bases its performance on a 165mm Nomex bass unit fitted to a reflex enclosure ensuring excellent low frequency extension from a graceful and compact cabinet. The **783** houses a larger 200mm bass unit with massive motor system, capable of floor shaking, yet tightly controlled low frequency extension. Both use Keraform midrange drivers for outstanding clarity and midrange detail coupled to superb dynamic range together with Mission's silk dome tweeter.

The **780** and **781** are the pinnacle of Mission's research into creating a three dimensional soundstage, extensive bandwidth and dynamic range from the smallest possible cabinet dimensions. The **780** is massive in its sonic capabilities. Its 130mm Keraform bass unit is carefully matched to a novel reflex enclosure for full bodied bass extension, the qualities of Keraform produce a dynamic and ultra detailed midrange. In the **781** a 165mm Keraform driver takes advantage of a larger cabinet to extend bass performance and increase efficiency whilst maintaining that superb midband transparency and finely detailed treble.

780 "Versatile and with a sound that works well with a wide variety of hi-fi kit, these speakers were worthy of this title last year, and this year have achieved the tough task of making it the double."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001



Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM603 S3.....	£599.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Cresta 2.....	£99.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£249.95
Mission M71.....	£129.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale Diamond 8.1.....	£99.95



KEF Q1 Speakers £249.95

"Overall the Q1s are excellent speakers. Some rivals may edge ahead on a short audition, but give these standmounters a little time and they're sure to impress. Are they better than the likes of B&W's 601S3 or Mission's 780s? The answer will have to wait for a group test. But until then it is fair to say that these are the most competitive speakers that KEF has had at this price point for years"

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? May 2002



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System Selection

- Denon** 201 Ex Speakers **£599.95**
- Denon** DM50 Ex Speakers **£249.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 19 Inc Speakers **£549.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 21 Inc Speakers **£649.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 22 Inc Speakers **£699.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 25 Inc Speakers **£799.95**
- Tag McLaren** Aphrodite Ex Speakers **£2994.95**
- Teac** Reference 100 Inc Speakers **£269.95**
- Teac** Reference 500 Ex Speakers **£679.95**
- Yamaha** Pianocraft E150 Inc Speakers **£249.95**



LINN

Classik Music System **£999.95**

"Since the Scottish company added a tuner to the amp/CD player, mouths have gaped even wider in appreciation. The addition of colour options panders to the public's taste for kit to match their interior design, but it doesn't just look lovely in the lounge: the Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001**

Free Sale

Mission M71 Speakers worth £129



TEAC

Reference 300 System **£499.95**

Save £50

"Teac's Reference 300 system is an absolute belter. The company's Reference series has won lots of awards and many admirers in the past, and the 300 range at £200 less than the bigger 500 series, is no disappointment. Your £600 buys you everything but speakers: an amplifier, tuner, CD player and cassette deck... As beautifully built as we've come to expect from Teac, this system delivers the goods with style." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001**

DENON

D-M30 CD Receiver
SC-M50 Speakers

£199.95
£69.95

Save £30

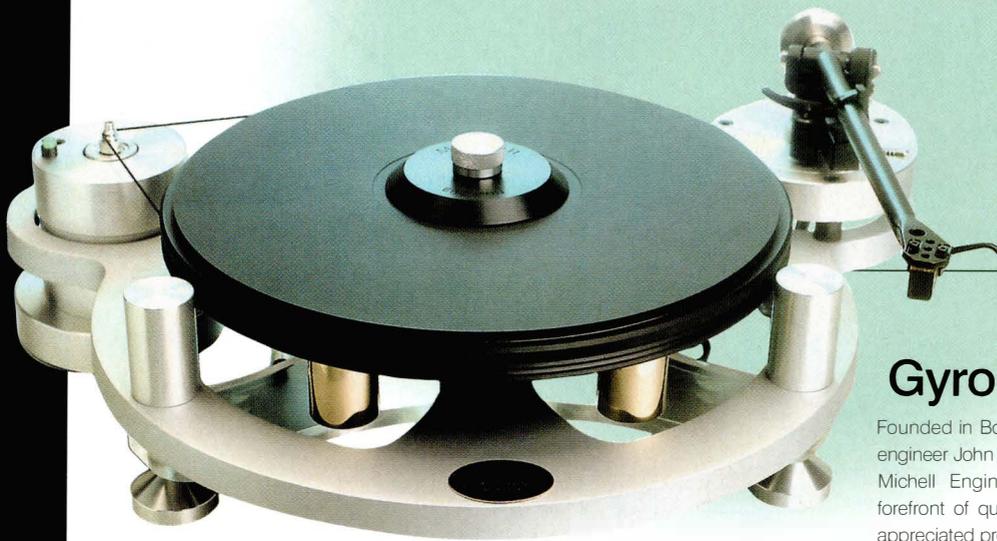
"Denon's gorgeous D-M30 has a fine pedigree - and a record of success. Its forebear the D-M3 kept impressing us with its balance of good looks and great sound, winning two What Hi-Fi? Awards on the trot. Now the latest generation takes home a Product of the Year gong two years in a row. On its own merits, too, as this is much more than a rehash of the D-M3. Upgraded audio circuitry, improved power supply and the Mission-designed speakers all improve the package. The sound is superb, well-balanced and weighty... It's a big system in a very cute box." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001**

Optional Recorders:

CDR-M30 CD-RW Recorder • DMD-M30 MiniDisc Recorder • DRR-M30 Cassette Deck

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 3rd July 2002, E&OE. *From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.





Turntables
Best Buy £501-£1000

J A Michell Gyro SE Turntable **£1017.95**

Founded in Borehamwood by mechanical engineer John Michell. For over thirty years, Michell Engineering have been at the forefront of quality audio, with world-wide appreciated products like the GyroDec and Orbe Turntables. In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and effective suspension system, was introduced. The Gyro SE is a smaller and cheaper package that retains the classy sound of the GyroDec and can be upgraded to the full GyroDec specification by adding a plinth and dustcover.

Save £50
towards a *Cartridge
of your choice

Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? July 1999**



LINN

Genki CD Player **£994.95** Majik Line Amplifier **£694.95**

Free Interconnect
Cable* worth £150 when Linn
Genki & Majik purchased together

Genki "Tempting though it is to think of Genki as a Glaswegian word, it's actually Japanese, and the nearest definitions we could find involve vitality, vigour and spirit. And used as adjectives, these words go a long way towards describing the sound of the Genki, which always manages to communicate the music first and foremost, and let the rest of the hi-fi thing look after itself.

It's a very well-thought-out player, too, from its clear and simple control layout to the provision of four sets of analogue outputs, two at fixed level, and two with level control. Completing the package is a 24-bit Burr-Brown DAC and Pacific Microsonics HDCD filter. Few owners will worry about all that stuff, however, as they'll be too busy enjoying the way Genki plays music, its purity of tone and sense of drama on Mozart's Don Giovanni being a fine example of its talent. By any standards this is a superb player, and not just one for the army of Linn enthusiasts." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? March 2000**

Majik The Linn Majik is a sophisticated control amplifier complete with on-board stereo power amplifiers. A core entry-level product for powerful and flexible control of hi-fi, video or multi-room installations. "Sneaky" add-on modules expand its functions. It can accommodate many source components. The Majik is available in two versions: The 'Phono' version has five line-level inputs and one Moving Magnet phono input and the 'Line-level' version has six line-level inputs.



A limited edition of 500

Musical Fidelity has enough nuvistor tubes to build 500 Nu-Vista 3Ds and also to hold a spare set for every unit. (The limited edition Nu-Vista preamp, power amp and integrated are proving to be remarkably reliable, with a tube failure rate of about 0.1%). Music lovers don't need SACD technology, they just need a better CD player. Now a lucky few will be able to own the Nu-Vista 3D compact disc player. Out of the total production of 500, 265 are allocated for sale in England, and of these, 97 have already been reserved.

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 3rd July 2002, E&OE.
*From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.

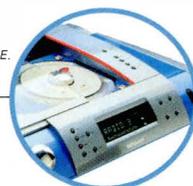
MUSICAL FIDELITY

3D CD Player **£2999.95**

Nu Vista

Free
*Interconnect Cable
worth £150

"It's hard to put your finger on exactly why and how the 3D CD Player turns in such a performance and to a certain extent it's a pointless exercise: it just does. OK, so at three grand it's a serious financial commitment, but if you're after a CD player to last 'til you take your final breath it could well fit the bill. Get a move on, though, numbers are limited to just five hundred and they'll sell, believe me. Simply get a listen to one and go back to your reference player - all will be revealed." **HI-FI World October 2001**



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scotland and north

- Aberdeen** 491 Union Street **01224 587070**
- Edinburgh** 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 7267**
- Glasgow** 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655** Open Sunday
- Hull** 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
- Leeds** 112 Vicar Lane **0113 245 2775** Open Sunday
- Liverpool** 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
- Manchester** 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
- Newcastle** 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
- Preston** 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
- Sheffield** 635 Queens Road, Heeley **0114 255 5861** Open Sunday

midlands and east

- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
- Cambridge** 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
- Ipswich** 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
- Leicester** 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
- Lincoln** 20-22 Corporation Street **01522 527397**
- Norwich** 29/29a St Giles Street **01603 767605**
- Nottingham** 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
- Oxford** 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
- Peterborough** 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday

midlands and west

- Birmingham** 12 Queensway Arches, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
- Bristol** 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
- Cardiff** 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
- Cheltenham** 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
- Exeter** 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
- Plymouth** 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
- Swansea** 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday

london and south east

- Brighton** 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
- Bromley** 39a East Street **020 8290 1988**
- Chelsea** 403 Kings Road **020 7352 9466**
- Crawley** 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
- Croydon** 369-373 London Road **020 8665 1203** Open Sunday
- Epsom** 12 Upper High Street **01372 720720** Open Sunday
- Guildford** 73b North Street **01483 536666**
- Holborn** 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
- Kingston** 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
- Maidstone** 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
- Reading** 3-4 Kings Walk Shopping Centre **0118 959 7768**
- Sevenoaks** 109-113 London Road **01732 459555**
- Southampton** 33 London Road **023 8033 7770**
- Southgate** 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777**
- Swiss Cottage** 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
- Tunbridge Wells** 28-30 St Johns Road **01892 531543**
- Watford** 478 St Albans Road **01923 213533** Open Sunday
- Witham (Essex)** 1 The Grove Centre **01376 501733**

Please call to verify hours of business.

Contact our outlets via **E-Mail** outlet@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

who are sevenoaks?

Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision are one of the largest, and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from DVD Players to Widescreen Plasma Televisions and Projection Systems, all at highly competitive prices.

Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.



sevenoaks online

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 44 outlets nationwide. The website is designed to provide you with answers to the questions you may have when buying new equipment.

The site has comprehensive guides to a range of products and technologies from vinyl and compact disc to all the latest formats, including DVD Audio, SACD and widescreen plasma monitors and front projection systems.

There are regularly updated stock clearance lists with hundreds of products on offer and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest outlet.

For impartial advice and information, just click on sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

stock clearance

With over forty outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As technology delivers improvements in performance, so individual models and product ranges are changed or superseded. The preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock, listed by outlet, within the Sevenoaks Sound and Vision group.

0% finance option[†]

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock. [†]Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

pricing policy

Whilst we do not claim always to be the cheapest, we try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. Take into account the expert advice, unrivalled product selection, demonstration facilities and excellent pre, during and after sales service and the lower price might not look such good value.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention. We will always endeavour to offer you the best deal.

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 putting 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 speaker 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, ie 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 laying 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 in the high end *Statements* section. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers an outstanding level of performance.



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: Fore-runner to DD that 'steers' information to the front LR, 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 CD-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, helping to stabilise the signal.

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 – 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 is more stringent than THX 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
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
	Arcam Diva A75 Plus	450	Quick, lively and well presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●		●	●	50	224
	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,100	Remarkably flexible and well featured with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrators for breakfast	5			●		150	228
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
	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
	Audio Analogue Maestro	2,600	Beautiful powerhouse housed in a massively engineered chassis, big sound and silky smooth presentation	4	●	●	●		150	228
	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
	Canary Audio CA-608	1,695	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
	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
	Cymbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6			●		40	178
	Cymbol CA3	999	Great sense of timing and good all round coherence with plenty of get up and go	6			●		60	228
	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
	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
	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
	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
	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 Venticinqe	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
	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-300iL	3,698	Good looks, stunning build and great all-round sound. Needs more inputs and a headphone socket though	4			●		200	229
	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 PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5	●		●	●	60	224
	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
	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	McIntosh MA6900	4,650	Heavyweight design from a classic brand that makes a very easy to listen to sound and will drive almost anything	7	●		●	●	200	227
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
	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
	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
	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●	●	50	192
	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
	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 some finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
	Naim Nait 5	800	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
	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●		●	●	45	186
	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
	Pracisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
	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
	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
	Red Rose Music Passion	2,999	Basically equipped amp from Mark Levinson that has speed and power if not the last ounce of resolve	5				●	100	226
	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●				35	208
	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
	Rotel RA-1070	1,000	Well equipped powerhouse has features designed to support multiroom operation, but sonically it lacks subtlety	7	●		●	●	100	224
	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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	M/M PHONO INPUTS	M/C PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208
RE	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5	●	●			25	224
	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 Audioclab 8000LX replacement	6				●	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audioclab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
	TAG McLaren 60iRv sl	1,000	Highly coherent and solid sound with a slightly loud balance and plenty of features	6			●	●	60	228
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●		65	196
RE	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●		50	175
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1	850	Not as clear or as lively as some, but essentially musical, and upgradeable for multichannel audio purposes	6			●	●	100	224
	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-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
RE	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
	Unison Research Unico i	800	Open, engaging sound from an Italian charmer with limited bass power but plenty of spirit	5			●		100	228
	Unison Research Aria SR1	1,250	Drop dead gorgeous looks from this valve/MOS hybrid, but sonically it is lumpy and awkward, with poor definition, albeit with good image scale	5			●		80	224
	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
RE	YBA Intègre	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	M/M PHONO INPUTS	M/C 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
RE	Arcam Alpha 9C/10P	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
RE	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1					60	165
RE	Arcam A85 int & P85 pwr	1,249	Well thought through integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			●	●	85	225
RE	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,900	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	7	●	●	●	●	100	227
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5				●	221	221
	AudioAnalogue Bellini/Donizetti	1,155	Curious pre/power amplifier has a number of objective and subjective character traits that make it difficult to recommend	5	●	●	●		60	225
	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
RE	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	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	6	●		●		100	216
EC	AVI S2000M	2,348	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	5					150	221
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
RE	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
RE	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine valve preamp	6			●	●	100	187
RE	Creek P43R/A43	1,050	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●		140	212
	Crimson 610C/620D	775	Limited in what it does, the Crimson combo has real precision, verve and timing within those limits. Preamp is due to be replaced shortly	4	●	●			55	225
	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1					50	181
RE	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
RE	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	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
RE	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	7				●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7	2,950	Very stylish four-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	191
RE	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
RE	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	6	OPT			OPT	100	216
RE	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/1200MB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	6					120	216
	Exposure 2010 I/2010 P	1,098	Interesting match of integrated and more powerful power amp is not as sure footed or as dynamically consistent as some rivals	6			●		75	225
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and dynamics (balanced inputs). 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 Linstage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Linn Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-Linn system	9	●	●			62	212
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II/SM-17	1,699	Flexible, beautifully made and as smooth as silk, but ultimately the combination fails to build on the unaided PM-17 II in biamp mode	6	●	●		●	60	225
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6				●	100	187
RE	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness	6	●				200	200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfill the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
RE	Myrrad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
RE	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	1,850	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
RE	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,699	Powerful, smooth, but slightly uneven performance in some combinations, but excellent control and separation in others	6			●		100	225
	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
RE	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	5				●	178	178
	Rotel RC-1090/RB-1090	2,650	Prodigious powerful pre/power combination with a wide range of inputs, but not ideally subtle or uncoloured	7	●	●	●	●	380	225
RE	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	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	201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			●	●	100	225
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●				188	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	200

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	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			●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character			●				189
	Cyrus AEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough		●					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			●				189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise		●	●				189
SP	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, with any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage			●				189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too			●				189
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist		●	●				201
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer		●	●				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		●	●				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		●	●				189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components		●	●				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			●				201

AMPLIFIERS



MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR200	800	Arcam upgraded its AVR100 giving it Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo sound, bit bass-light for multichannel	6			●	●	70	229
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered A/V amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema – what more could 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 multichannel 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
	Denon AVR-1602	350	Low-cost home cinema amplifiers don't usually set out to excite, and this one is no exception. Listenable, but dull	6			●	●	80	223
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
	Denon AVR-3802	850	Feature-packed AV receiver with a good tuner, but low on grunt and excitement, especially in stereo	4	●		●	●	110	229
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
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR5000	600	Complex and capable home cinema receiver features automatic setup, HDCD and excellent interconnection possibilities	8			●	●	70	223
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR 5500	749	Powerful sounding receiver with some clever features like an automatic set-up. Powerful but a bit hard-edged	8			●	●	85	229
	JVC-RX-8012R	400	Undistinguished home cinema receiver with USB in, and modestly satisfying sound at lowish power levels	9	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-X9050D	399	There are some benefits from THX Select processing in home cinema mode, but musically this is a rather mechanical, unengaging performer	7	●		●	●	100	223
	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
	Lexicon MC12 Pro	9,000	Balanced output equipped behemoth of a 12 channel processor that does everything you can imagine and more	12			●	●	N/A	227
R	Marantz SR5200	400	Marantz provides undemanding but broadly satisfying listening from a well engineered, near budget home cinema receiver	8			●	●	90	223
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 two-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
R	Myryad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD T761	650	First rate home cinema amplifier that sounds more powerful than its specifications imply, and competes with specialist stereo amplifiers	9			●	●	80	223
	NAD S170/S250	5,700	Flexible and fine sounding THX Ultra processor/five-channel power amp combo with great timing	9			●	●	125	225
R	Onkyo TX-D5595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
BB	Onkyo TX-D5696	850	Excellent all-rounder for both hi-fi and home cinema use. Slightly characterful, but very smooth performance	7	●		●	●	100	229
	Onkyo TX-D5787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-D5989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad subtle	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSX-D810S	450	Thin, raw sounding AV receiver fails to stir the right nerve endings, but is materially fair value	7			●	●	100	223
	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
	Pioneer VSA-AX10	2,700	Seven-channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and EQ, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD	8			●	●	150	229
	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
R	Sony STR-B1070	600	Technical intriguing AV receiver which succeeds in extracting detail and space from recordings that sounded coarse and unexpansive elsewhere	10	●		●	●	100	223
	Sony STR-VA555ES	1,000	Feature-rich AV amplifier that performs extremely well as a multichannel device, but less so with stereo	10	●		●	●	110	229
	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			●	●	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			●	●	N/A	215
	Technics DX-950	279	Ultra-low cost home cinema receiver is impressively equipped for the price, but musically it lacks grace and air	5	●		●	●	100	223
	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 A/V 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
R	Acoustic Research Master	70	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	•		•		•			224
	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
	Cable Talk Professional 3	75	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion	•		•		•			224
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price		•	•		•			176
	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
	Chord Silver Siren	75	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good	•		•		•			224
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	•			•	•			200
EC	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price		•			•			211
R	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass		•	•		•			224
	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
EC	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	•		•		•			211
	Ixos Gamma 1001	70	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough	•		•		•			224
	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
	Kimber Crystal-Cu	115	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness	•		•		•			224
BB	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
EC	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	•		•		•			224
	Neotech NA11085	100	Balance is OK, but detail could and should be better		•	•		•			224
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	Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension		•	•		•			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
BB	QED Qnec 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value		•	•		•			176
R	QED Qnec 45	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	•		•		•			188
R	QED Qnec 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
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
R	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	•		•		•			188
	Sonic Link SG Voices	95	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact	•		•		•			224
	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
BB	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
EC	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value	•		•		•			200
BB	van den Hul The Bay C5	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable		•	•		•			224
BB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent		•	•		•			188
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
R	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value		•	•		•			224



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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		●		●	●		F	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		●		●	●		F	207
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced		●		●	●		F	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
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	F	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	DIG CABLE TYPE					ISSUE NUMBER		
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER		SILVER	
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●					●		183
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	Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	76	Great kick in the bass, but the treble can sound dry and recessed. Price for 1m terminated pair	●				●	●		227
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 LSC8500	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	5.75	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	●				●	●		215
R	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●	●		227
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round	●			●	●			203
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
R	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	●				●			192
BB	Kimber 8VS	108	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●			●	●			227
BB	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
	Monster Z2 Reference	240	Basically competent but never outstanding, and suffers some bass muddle. Price for 3m terminated pair	●				●	●		227
	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
	QED Original	2.50	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel	●				●	●		157
BB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●				●	●		192



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LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGI CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 5300	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
	Supra Octopower 25	77.98	Very low losses over long runs, but essentially sound is lacklustre – sluggish bass and hard treble. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
	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
	TC1 Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	5.99	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●		●	●	●			203
Q	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
Q	van den Hul D-352 Hybrid	84	Can be a touch dry, and bass is not massively extended, but mid and treble are pleasantly airy and detailed. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
	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								
R	Audiolink 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
	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 B184F)			●		●			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	50	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								206
	SonicLink SG Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies			●		●	PLT		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

CASSETTE DECKS

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 high/low 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
	Nakanichi 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 three heads and dual capstan transport	●		●					●	146
R	Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●	●						164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●		●		●				171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest three-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●		●	●					184
BB	Technics RS-AZ7	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

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CD PLAYERS



ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBY ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	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 CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	Arcam Alpha CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,500	Super smooth CD replay from this CD 'processor'. Fantastic casework compliments a loveable sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	228
	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 Series 21 MC4	999	Solid, if not stolid player designed for a long lifetime, and musically proficient, if lacking in airs and graces	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
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	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
R	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	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	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well built player – balanced outputs too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
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
R	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
BB	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	Refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range, builds on the qualities of the lesser models	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
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 ameliorator 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
	Docet-Lector CDPO.5T	999	Valve powered CD player lacks resolving power, though it musters considerable physical presence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
BB	Exposure 2010	599	Smooth, restrained but warm and physical balance from this well turned out and well priced player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	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
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 all rounder, a well-appointed, good-value package	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	206
R	Marantz CD17 Mk II Ki Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	Marantz SA1251	3,500	Highly refined and beautifully built multichannel SA & DVD-V player that doesn't quite match Sony's best	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	223
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
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
	Meridian 588	2,100	Not the most immediately striking CD player, but its neutrality and timing prove beguiling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	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
EC	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE24	2,000	Gorgeous looking, substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	229
	Myryad MCD 600	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	NAD C521	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 C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 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
	Naim Audio CD5	1,125	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
EC	Naim NACDSII/XP5	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
R	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
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 C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
BB	Philips SACD-1000	1,300	Not quite a universal disc player, but it does SACD multi-channel, DVD-Video and CD to a universally high standard	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
	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
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	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 a 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
R	Rotel RCD-1070	525	Though technically sound and well equipped, the Rotel failed to generate much excitement or involvement	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●								212
	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
	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●		●							195
R	Sony DVP-NS700V	400	Outrageously good value for money DVD-V/SA player, though SACD replay quality trails the audio-only Sony SCD-XB770ES	●		●						●	220
	Sony SCD-XB770UK	400	Expressive and expansive player in the best SACD tradition, but CD replay is disappointingly lacklustre	●		●						●	220
EC	Sony SCD-333ES	1,200	Entry-level high-end multichannel SA player is excellent with both CD and the new format, but particularly impressive in surround	●		●						●	224
	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-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●		●			●			●	223
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●		●			●			●	194
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1	649	Attractively turned out, with bare bones features (though the power supply can be augmented), the Thunder 1.1 gave equivocal results on test			●							226
	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 the availability of a complete upgrade path makes 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, individualistic 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
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Highly insightful player with digital preamp options and very good onboard volume control, try it direct for maximum effect	●		●			●				228
	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
	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/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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 CD/DVD 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
R	Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●		●							162

DACS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/EBU 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
	Denon Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)										191
R	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
	Chord DAC 64	1,900	Beautifully encased converter with variable input buffering but inconvenient input socketage and a sound that doesn't quite match the looks										225
EC	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/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Diva DV88	1,000	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-1600	500	Classy to look at and to use, picture quality is good, but CD and DVD-A performance is a little soft and wayward	●		●						●	228
	Denon DVD-2800	750	First-rate all-rounder, this is a gimmick-free design that is well-built and offers good CD and DVD sound quality and finely resolved pictures	●		●							221
R	Denon DVD-3300	1,000	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too	●		●						●	213
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	449	Reasonable DVD-Video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good upgrade choice for buyers who put music first	●		●							228
	Integra research RD-V1	2,700	Refined in use and on audition, but a lack of resolving power and an unbalanced feature set militate against this model	●		●							220
	JVC XV-S42	250	Unprepossessing DVD-V player fails to excite with DVD material, or as a surrogate CD player	●		●							221
R	JVC XV-SA725L	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●		●							220

DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
EC	Marantz DV-1251	2,500	THX Ultra progressive DVD-A player is a classy all rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●	●	●	●					●	229
	Marantz DV4100	399	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet	●	●	●	●						221
EC	Meridian DVS596	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●	●	●						218
	NAD T531	330	Standard far eastern DVD-Video player in NAD clothing fails to stir the juices	●	●	●	●						228
	Onkyo DV-S939	1,999	Superb build, plenty of features, but more convincing as a video player than an audio one	●	●	●	●					●	220
	Panasonic DVD-RV41	300	Well presented DVD-Video player has an attractive, but far from high resolution sound, and picture quality also lacks definition	●	●	●	●						221
	Panasonic DVD-RA61	399	A nice DVD-Video player cohabits with a relatively nondescript DVD-Audio section	●	●	●	●					●	228
	Panasonic DVD-RA71	449	Well priced, but rather slack sounding with DVD-A material, but CD sounds OK, and DVD-V is excellent	●	●	●	●					●	220
	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
R	Philips DVD-712	200	Rough and ready looking DVD-Video player turns out to be well equipped, and an unexpectedly vital performer, on screen and via loudspeakers	●	●	●	●						221
	Philips DVD Q50	300	Designer DVD player with oddball ergonomics and lacklustre audio performance, but video performance is fine	●	●	●	●						228
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●	●	●	●						216
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player is an extremely attractive all rounder	●	●	●	●						221
RE	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-646A	530	One of the first DVD-RW compatible DVD-Audio players is informative but not the sweetest sounding machine around	●	●	●	●					●	220
R	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
EC	Pioneer DV-747A	899	UK's first Universal player, compatible with DVD-A and SACD as well as DVD-V and CD. Remarkably good with every format	●	●	●	●					●	226
	Primare V10	700	Beautifully presented DVD-video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay	●	●	●	●						221
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possesses 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
	Sanyo DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is a quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player	●	●	●	●						216
RE	Sony DVP-NS400D	300	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability	●	●	●	●						221
	Sony Art Couture DVP-S435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●	●	●	●						216
RE	Sony DVP-NS900V	500	A great all rounder, and an excellent example of the current strengths of the SACD format	●	●	●	●						228
	Sony DVP-CR850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●	●	●	●					●	204
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●	●	●	●						210
	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 on-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound	●	●	●	●					●	213
	Thompson DTH-4500	229	DVD-V player comes with an excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods, with bland sound to match the iffy visuals	●	●	●	●						221
RE	Toshiba SD-510E	320	Great all rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba	●	●	●	●						228
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●	●	●	●					●	213
RE	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
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting DVD-Audio performance round of a good, if rather costly player	●	●	●	●					●	228

DIGITAL RECORDERS



SPECIFICATIONS

CD RECORDERS (CD-R/RW), MINIDISC (MD), HARD DISC (HD)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/HD	●	●	223
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR 30	590	Well built copier capable of good recordings but playback quality is indistinct and the asking price high	2	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room S1000 also available	2	CD/HD	●	●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	A hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●	●	205
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	MD	●	●	205
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	1	MD	●	●	191
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
RE	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Mid-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●	●	177
	Philips CDR 600	230	Low cost Philips machine makes great recordings but playback is poor and the controls a mite fiddly	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
RE	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that receives its Recommendation due to price	1	MD	●	●	205
RE	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
RE	Sony MDS-JE770	260	Smartly attired, packed with features and capable of recordings closer in quality to CD-R than MD's detractors might think	1	MD	●	●	223
	Sony MXD-D40	330	One half CD player, the other half MD recorder. Functions well enough but CD playback is weak	2	CD/MD	●	●	223
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	1	MD	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JA333ES	650	Serious build, serious features, serious sound. Maybe high-end MD isn't such a peculiar idea after all – but would you pay £650?	1	MD	●	●	223
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes sold, believable music, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD recorder and hard drive in one – save your discs to hard disc, edit then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	CD-R(W)/HD	●	●	223

HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190	32		219
	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
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal						250	66		194
	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phones						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
	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor						200	250		172
	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
	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
	Grado SR-125	150	While these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality						200	32		186
	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	1/R		172
	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
	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful midrange and high comfort factor						340	90		205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome 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
	Philips HP890	66	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	32		219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled midrange and overexcited bass						247	32		205
	Sennheiser HD 570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear						210	64		219
	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband						255	150		172
	Sennheiser HD 590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						270	120		205
	Sony MDR-CD 480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too						250	40		219
	Sony MDR-V700D	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass						300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for sweaty 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
	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics						160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Luxurious design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof						230	32		172
	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
	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
	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 IR5800	50	Consistently musical infrared design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2		226	1/R		172
	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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FREQ (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER	
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		86	6	30				226
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 300	400	Chunky real-wood stand-mount sounds big, smooth and shiny, but also dynamically limited	21,40,30		86	6	24				227
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 309	700	Real wood heavyweight with fine neutrality and dynamic range; could have more brio	21,98,30		90	5	23				224
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone standmount 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
	AR S20	150	Classic standmount 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/standmount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	4	45				201
	Arcaydis AKF	299	Budget compact real wood floorstander lacks some warmth; could be better finished	17,77,21		88	5	38				227
	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,199	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
	ATC SCM20 SL	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
	ATC SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	A	45				221
	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	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
	Audio Note AZ One	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

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRICE	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audio Note AN-ED	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round 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	559	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
R	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband, and a restrained top end	20.33,23	88	4	23	●	●	226
R	B&W 602 53	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour; comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29	89	3	22	●	●	224
R	B&W DM602.5 53	400	Pretty floorstander sounds rather laid back and lacks the agility of its stand-mount stablemates	20.5,88,29	89	4	38	●	●	227
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29	89	7	30	●	●	208
R	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29	91	3	35	●	●	219
R	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
R	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass, wide dynamic range and a laid-back balance	29,108,42	89	3	20	●	●	210
R	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The priciest 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	39,111,55	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	52,111,69	91	8	34	●	●	186
R	Blueroom Minipod	249	Blobular aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17	91	4	50	●	●	225
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	94	3	40	●	●	204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-her-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	92	5	28	●	●	180
R	Carrison OA52.2	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-her-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20	90	5	50	●	●	201
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wall-mount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	90	5	45	●	●	227
R	Castle Stirling	730	Handsomely veneered compact floorstander with expressive dynamic vigour, but a little hard and unforgiving too	20,88,24	90	6	28	●	●	224
R	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
R	Castle Howard 53	1,350	Looks gorgeous, and is a solid all rounder too, with uniquely spacious imaging; difficult to justify price premium over Harlech	21,99,32	88	8	38	●	●	229
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
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
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy-looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28	87	4	45	●	●	187
R	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
R	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
R	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32	87	8	40	●	●	211
R	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
R	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
R	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 8008	540	Deep bass and high sensitivity from a large vinyl-clad floorstander which could have more transparency and tension	25.5,101.35	93	4	22	●	●	224
R	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	89	4	41	●	●	225
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
R	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding standmount with laid-back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29	85	5	45	●	●	219
R	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
R	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 Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	90	4	30	●	●	229
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Stand-out performer among compact standmounts; 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
R	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
R	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
R	Elac CL 330 Jet	2,500	Arguably the most 'technical'-looking speaker in the world. Design matched by an equally explicit and dynamic sound	18,28,35	88	4	40	●	●	225
R	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
R	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
R	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 eXL 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	Energy Veritas 2.2	1,295	Luxury three-way standmount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid-back sound with good bass	46,22,33	88	4	25	●	●	223
R	Excel 20ZA	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

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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
	Epos M12	499	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
	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
	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
EC	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23,5,36,27		89	6	45	●	●	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	25	●	●	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
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	300	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
	Infinity Alpha 40	500	Cool hi-tech looks and drivers, but sounds closer to competent than emotionally engrossing	22,92,33		89	4	20	●	●	224
	Infinity Prelude MTS	9,700	Strikingly slim, elegant 'tower/subwoofer' combo sounds exceptionally clean, neutral and spacious; clever bass tuning	24,94x52		88	4	<20	●	●	228
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●	●	207
R	Jamo E 850	300	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	17,5,87,34		86	5	30	●	●	224
	Jamo A410PDD	650	Clean-edged and space-efficient solution with neat wall-mount sub for anyone who wants to move into decent 5.1 channel sound	Various	●	N/A	5	35	●	●	225
	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	JMLab Ti200	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 Xti 80	579	Big and good looking three-way goes loud with beefy bass delivery, but lacks coherence and lightness of touch	23,100,32		89	4	28	●	●	227
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
EC	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
BB	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28		90	4	22	●	●	227
R	JMLab Cobalt 816	860	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29		90	3	22	●	●	224
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	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34		91	3	35	●	●	219
EC	JMLab Micro Utopia	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		89	3	50	●	●	220
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
	JPW 201	150	Looks very sharp with shiny silver front and clever grille, but sound is a bit small and midband coloured	15,5,26,24		86	4.5	45	●	●	226
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good-looking value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	22,5,37,24		91	4	40	●	●	195
R	KEF Reference One-Two	1,200	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	20,5,87,35		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	295	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
	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 shiny 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 wallmount 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 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		86	6	45	●	●	207
R	Mission M71	130	Neat looking and very discreet sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28		88	4.6	40	●	●	226
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
	Mission M74	300	Lots of speaker for the money, and a big, weighty sound, but a bit bright and also dynamically weak	20,97,33		90	5	25	●	●	227
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
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 on serious weight and authority	23,115,30		93	3	25	●	●	204
	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
	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
	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
	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25		87	4	45	●	●	207
R	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
R	NaimAllae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander with complex mechanical decoupling has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28		90	6	40	●	●	229
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
BB	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
R	Neat Neat Petite III	845	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
R	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
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40		88	6	20	●	●	226
	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
	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 marvelously even balance and good coherence	18,5,100,26		87	8.5	25	●	●	199
	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn-shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers to make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37		89	8	30	●	●	217
	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31		90	4	40	●	●	190
R	Opera SP-1	525	SP1s make a strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. U-shaped back does wonders for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		86	8	50	●	●	225

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
	PMC TB2	700	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
	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	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact standmount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	204
	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
	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
	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
	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
EC	Ruark Revalation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	85	4	20	●	●	221
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
	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 Prologue II	1,250	An attractive shape and a compact enclosure alongside a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	92	8	40	●	●	219
R	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,99,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	229
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
	Sequence 400	300	Very affordable pseudo panel offers flexible design options and acceptable sound. Limited bass, though, and doesn't like playing loud	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready standmount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●	190
	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
	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	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
	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
	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut'n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,5,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
	Sony SS-LA500ED	340	Versatile metal miniaturs with integral stands. Given a little more bass and a slightly less excitable treble, they'd be hard to resist	17,25,19	●	89	4	55	●	●	225
	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 S3	600	Beautifully voiced and unboxy sub-miniature lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	16,5,30,5,21	●	82	6	30	●	●	224
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
R	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency in a good-looking floorstanding package, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	89	8	40	●	●	229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	90	8	37	●	●	223
	Syn Factory U-Vola	1,480	Hefty oval shaped speakers designed to be hung from the ceiling. Sound is tight and detailed but also a little flat	21,42,21	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	92	2.5	23	●	●	225
	Tannoy Kingdome 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
	Tannoy mX1	120	Smooth and very well behaved but a bit dull and unexciting; makes a good surround speaker	16,5,30,22	●	87	4.5	40	●	●	226
	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18,5,33,25	●	89	4	45	●	●	207
	Tannoy Revolution R1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
	Tannoy mX3	230	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
	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
	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
	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
N	Tannoy Eyris 1	599	Pricey but very cute wall-mount miniature, oddball but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26	●	88	6	40	●	●	227
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
	Tannoy Eyris 3	1,200	Strikingly unusual styling with top-mounted supertweeter, the sonics show fine scale, weight and spaciousness, but lack dynamic excitement	20,102,26	●	89	6	38	●	●	229
R	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver effortlessly musical results with superb imaging. Great marriage of style and sonics	15,130,17	●	90	4	30	●	●	225
	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
	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
	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
	Triangle Celius 202	1,095	Very tall and not too pretty, it has magical midrange communication skills, but could be smoother, warmer and richer	22,113,30	●	94	4	28	●	●	229
N	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Cosmetically weird, but very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness, and splendid stereophony. A genuine classic	41,109,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	229
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
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with absolutely any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way, too, though bass is detached	21,100,21	●	90	4	45	●	●	225
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,36,5,25	●	86	4	30	●	●	226
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
	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
	Wdale Diamond 7.2Anniversary	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
	Wharfedale Pacific P1-20	350	Good material value and a decent fun factor, though a somewhat wayward balance compromises neutrality	22,95,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	224
	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 25	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub which comes with handy infrared remote control	41,37,29,5	●	A	A	35	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price	●	●	A	A	20	●	●	225
	Jamo DBSUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the DBSUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5	●	A	A	30	●	●	210
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A	A	25	●	●	210
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features	●	●	A	A	●	●	●	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	A	A	27	●	●	225
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	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	A	25	●	●	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,5,62,33	●	A	A	18	●	●	225
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43	●	A	A	16	●	●	217
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	●	A	A	16	●	●	217
R	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	●	A	A	20	●	●	210

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SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	REL Q50	375	This good-looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31	●	A		20			210
R	Bandor Trident II	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A		<20			210
BB	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	●	A					225
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	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)	FLOORSTANDER	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	1,230	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, and 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
Q	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

SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	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
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit pkg	1,230	Could sound more exciting, but imaging, solidity and neutrality all impressive. Poor centre magnetic shielding	var	var	90	5	23	var	var	224
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
BB	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. Decent size, high quality drivers in standmount enclosures still make sense, whatever the prevailing fashion	var	var	89	3	22	●		224
	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
R	Castle package	1,199	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	var	var	85-90	6	28		●	224
	Dali Blue system	1,007	Incorporates some interesting ideas, and decent value for money too, but a rather movie-oriented package	var	var	88-93	4	22	var	var	224
	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
	Infinity Alpha package	833	Distinctive high tech styling, fine build and advanced drivers. Sounds thoroughly competent, but didn't excel	var	var	84-89	4	20		●	224
	Jamo E8 package	775	A tad bright for some tastes, and without quite the grip and drive to make the most of multichannel material	var	var	86	5	30	●		224
	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	1,190	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40		●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt package	1,707	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	var	var	88-90	3	22	●		224
	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
	Martin Logan system	9,991	Stunning electrostatic-based multichannel package, as adept with stereo music as it is with surround sound	var	var	89	4	20	●		227
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration	var	var	n/a	4	20		var	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 M package	480	A very inexpensive and good looking system, but the surround bits are better suited to movies than music	var	var	88	4	25	var	var	224
	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
	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	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,485	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	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
	Spendor package	1,630	Ultra-tunes lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness; best suited to smaller rooms	var	var	82-86	6	30		●	224
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
BB	Wharfedale Pacific package	700	Plenty of loudspeaker for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining	var	var	87	3	25	●		224

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	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	55,23,20		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 TB2M/C	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

PERSONAL STEREOS

SPECIFICATIONS		ISSUE NUMBER
STORAGE FORMAT	IN-LINE REMOTE RECORDING	STANDARD CAPACITY
	CODEC	PC CONNECTION

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	IN-LINE REMOTE RECORDING	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette					204
	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-ear-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●			216
	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD					216
	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-MR220	180	The smallest MD recorder in the world, at the time of writing. Lacks some oomph but fully featured and good value	MiniDisc		●			223
	Panasonic SJ-MR100	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●	●			204
	Philips ACT7582	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD					204
	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
	Sharp MD-MT888H	230	An MD personal that's packed with features and delivers a powerful, involving sound	MiniDisc	●	●			223
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette					204
	Sony D-EJ925	150	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●			216
	Sony MZ-G750	200	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●			216
	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●			204
	Sony MZ-R900	250	Gorgeous little MD personal with a well-balanced sound. Makes great recordings but lacks a little punch	MiniDisc	●	●			223

INTERNET AUDIO

SPECIFICATIONS		ISSUE NUMBER
STORAGE FORMAT	IN-LINE REMOTE RECORDING	STANDARD CAPACITY
	CODEC	PC CONNECTION

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	IN-LINE REMOTE RECORDING	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
	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agnostic	USB	5.7GB	208
	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/HD	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
	Intel Pocket Concert	171	Big, substantial sound and large 128Mb built-in memory, but no expansion slots	Solid State	●		MP3/WMA	USB	128MB	223
	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	Novel MP3 player that uses omega Click! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Click! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
	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
	Philips eXpanium EXP401	150	Neat little personal that plays 8cm CD-R discs, two-thirds the size of regular CDs. Use your computer's CD writer to burn on MP3s	Mini-CD	●		MP3/AAC	USB		223
	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			
	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
	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
	Rio 500	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
	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
	Samsung Yepp YP-305	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	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-M57	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-M59	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
	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
	Thomson Lyra Personal Jukebox	300	Neat portable with a big 10Gb capacity – enough for 1000s of MP3 tracks. Some control foibles but sounds good	Hard Disc	●		MP3/MP3Pro	USB	10GB	223

RECORD PLAYERS

TURNTABLES

SPECIFICATIONS		ISSUE NUMBER
MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS
		SUSP SUBCHASSIS
		EXTERNAL PSU
		SUPPLIED WITH ARM
		SUPPLIED WITH CART

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	●		33/45	●	●			229
	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
	DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●		33/45			●	●	144
	Dual CS415-2	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough		●	33/45			●	●	214
	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
	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph		●	33/45			●	●	103
	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank			33			●		103
	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains			33/45	●	●			91
	Moth Alamo	285	Basically a Rega P2 with a Perspex platter: doesn't seem to justify the price difference			33/45			●		214
	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price			33/45	●				192
	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price			33/45			●	●	203
	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever			33/45			●	●	159

TURNTABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CABT	ISSUE NUMBER
BR	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
BR	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45			●		214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	●			33/45			●		214
BR	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●			33/45		●			203
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter, and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	●			33/45			●		228
BR	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with midband 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
BR	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

CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
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
BR	Audio Technica AT110E	28	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	4.5	6	214
	Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting		●		0.4	8	192
BR	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy		●		0.55	11.5	175
	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
BR	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
	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
	Goldring 1006	70	Disappointing sound, marred chiefly by persistent harshness which affects all but very quiet music	●		●	6.5	7	214
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
R	Grado Prestige Black	49	Capable of admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	4	6	214
BR	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
	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
BR	Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues — weight, clarity and neutrality		●	●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	Bright, cheerful and bouncy, but subtle — take it as it comes		●		3.3	4	103
BR	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
BR	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
BR	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 MC3000I	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	42	Can sound a little hard and lacking bloom, though often exciting	●			5	4	214
	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
BR	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 DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
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 GLA III	1,999	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				EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS						
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

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS							
	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
	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 Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	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 Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
	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
	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	480	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
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar stands, 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	Towshend Seismic Sink Stand	900	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

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS							
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	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
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●	●		220
R	Cyrus CL550 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
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
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15					220
R	Ine Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19,21		●			189
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
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
	Mission Stantcette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordaunt-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5		●			220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19,22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●	●		220
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
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33,24,24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65,45	20,22.5		●			202
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			220
	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
	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	Towshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48					202

TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS



SPECIFICATIONS

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
BE	Harman Kardon TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●		●	●	221
	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
	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BE	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
BE	Marantz ST6000	180	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
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●			●	221
	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
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16	●	●	●	●	221
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	211
	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●		199
	Pision Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●		●		211
	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30	●		●		221
	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
Q	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
BE	VideoLogic DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●		●	●	211
	VideoLogic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	221



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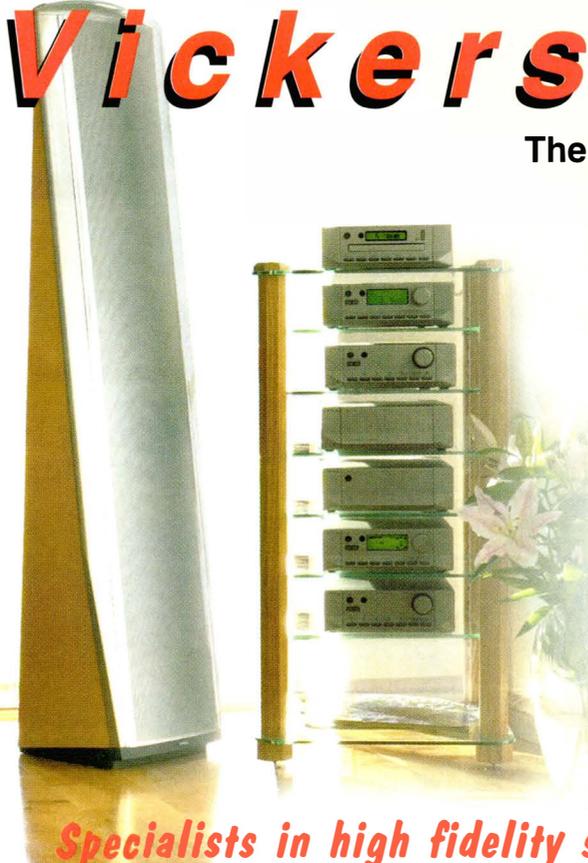
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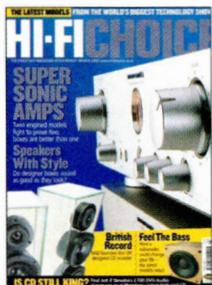
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- How to match multichannel speakers
- Loudspeakers group test
- Interconnects group test



MAR 2002/ISSUE 225

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- Subwoofers group test
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NEXT MONTH...

HI-FI THAT ROCKED THE WORLD

The definitive list of kit that has shaped hi-fi as we know it today – our esteemed contributors have nominated their favourite products from the dawn of hi-fi time.

CD PLAYERS

Time to put a new spin on things? We cherry-pick the latest CD players to hit the shops including new models from **Rotel**, **NAD** and **Primare** in the most comprehensive test of sub-£1,000 players you'll find.

SPEAKERS

Looking for some tasty new cabinets to spend your folding stuff on? Our in-depth group test reveals the good, bad and downright ugly from £500-£1,000, with all the big players submitting their hopefuls – **Mission**, **B&W**, and **Tannoy** to name but a few.

STATEMENTS

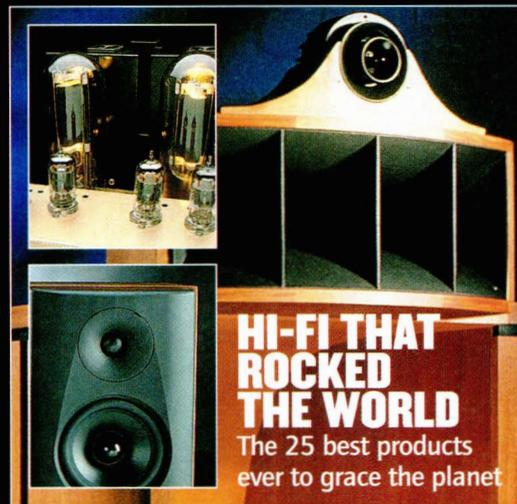
If this issue's high end kit has got you drooling, check out next month's exclusive reviews of the **Mark Levinson** 390S CD player and **Musical Fidelity** 208 pre/power amp, along with the debt-inducing **B&W** Signature 800 loudspeaker, rumoured to be the finest product yet to emerge from the highly regarded brand.

PLUS

- Some of the freshest and most exciting new kit available, including **Philips'** budget SACD/DVD player, **Exposure's** 2010 tuner and the new £400 **Black Cube** phono stage.

- All the regular stuff, including **System Addict**, **Choice Cuts**, **Instant Upgrades** and the very latest news in the most reliable read on the shelves – *Hi-Fi Choice*.

HFC 231 ON SALE 11 JULY



PLEASE PHOTOCOPY

Digital insomnia

CD was supposed to be perfect. David Vivian's glad it isn't.

In the coming months this page will hunt down phenomena from the distant far side of planet hi-fi. Stuff that will make your eyes pop, jaw drop, neck hairs bristle and, indeed, toes curl. Backwards.

On the one hand, we're talking weirdness that scrunches up normal frames of reference into tiny pellets and flicks them at your forehead. On the other, hi-fi scarier than Jim Carrey on a roll and only slightly less twisted than the plot of *Vanilla Skies*.

So it's only right that we kick off with the humble Compact Disc. Back in 1983, the then brand new digital disc not only promised perfect sound forever, but also an end to the kind of front end tweaking, fettling and preening that had previously kept hardcore audiophiles up all night. Some still stayed up all night staring at the tough little silver frisbees, cursing their absurd slickness, ease of use and hermetically sealed performance, even if it was "perfect".

It wasn't, of course. Far from it. And although the makers of CD players and music producers almost immediately set about lifting the new format's game, the tweekers were rubbing their hands with the glee of Jeremy Clarkson about to make a potato bazooka out of a spaghetti jar and a can of hairspray. They were back in business – big time.

X-FILES

Today, the subculture that has grown up to enhance, condition, treat or otherwise ameliorate the sound of CDs is almost an industry in itself and puts the efforts of the turntable brigade in the shade. Deck hands may have their alignment protractors, stylus scales and fluff eliminators, but these pale next to the *X-File* tinted liquids, wobble dampers, static busters, laser light scatter

"The tweekers were rubbing their hands with the glee of Jeremy Clarkson about to make a potato bazooka out of a spaghetti jar and a can of hairspray."



Green paint absorbs unwanted infrared light from your CD player's laser. CDs sound better and look prettier.

management systems and deep freeze regimes that have come to the rescue of the digital disc.

It would be easy to poke fun, but hi-fi hacks get sent these products on a regular basis and the shocking thing is, many of them work. The really spooky thing, though, is that – to a greater or lesser extent – they all appear to do precisely the same thing to the sound. You may have noticed this in the claims or reviews: less grain and hardness, improved sound stage dimensionality, more solid bass. In a nutshell, that's it.

FOR TWEAK'S SAKE

This worries me. One CD fix, the ART CD Mat Q-Damper (made of special synthetic graphite), claims to absorb the electromagnetic waves attracted to a spinning CD, which acts as a sort of antenna, and thus reduce "digital noise". Yet the now legendary AudioPrism CD Stoplight – a pen that coats the edge of your CD with a green water-based acrylic paint – absorbs the infrared wavelength of the CD player's laser, "dramatically improving the sound of all CDs". I once sprayed my CDs with a clear liquid from Russ Andrews that did much the same thing, as did a CD-shaped plastic foil with holes in it called the Statmat – both static zappers I seem to remember. Different technologies, but with the same result.

Hell, even shoving your CDs in the deep freeze for ten hours and bringing them slowly back to room temperature seems to work – and precisely along those reduced grain/improved dimensionality lines. What's going on? No idea. But, against the odds, extracting better sound from your common or garden CD is preventing people from going to bed. Hi-fi lives. ☺

Quote of the month

"When a man passes 30 and realises he can't be out partying every night, he decides to get in touch with his inner hi-fi enthusiast."

The Sunday Times Style Magazine
12 May 2002

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There's also hot news for movie buffs on a budget with the new Krell Showcase 7.1 THX processor and Showcase 5,6 and 7 channel amplifiers.

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Far right_Krell FPB 750MCX Amplifier





a modern classic

600 Series 3



Our 600 Series hi-fi and home theatre speakers have always represented unbeatable performance in their price sector. Numerous awards and accolades have recognised that fact.

And just when you thought the best couldn't get any better – 600 Series 3 shows it can.

Our high-end expertise influences every part of the design - tube-loaded metal dome tweeters, improved Kevlar® cone midrange drivers, new aluminium cone bass drivers and Flowport™ are all skillfully blended with revised crossovers. Subtle styling changes bring the series right up to date with modern interiors and new models enable the range to cater for any application.

Experience sound as it was intended, with all its original colour and texture.

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