SPECIAL AWARDS THE BEST AND AV GEAR OF THE YEAR

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FOR HIGH FIDELIT ENTERTAINMENT



THE BEST KIT FROM 2002 THE BEST BUYS FOR 2003



PLUS

HE LATEST KIT TESTED TO THE LIMIT...

Pioneer's DV-757Ai universal player – the definitive review Heavenly highs from Dali's high-end Euphonia speaker EXCLUSIVE: Superb CD sound from Krell and Classé









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LIVE IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

OCTOBER 2002





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To make sure you get the best advice, Hi-Fi Choice employs the most talented and experienced writers in the business.



Jason previously edited Hi-Fi Choice, but can now be found swanning about the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sational (trust us) and his



A former editor of Hi-Fi Choice Paul has been writing about his ved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has ne one of the world's mos probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also ites for respected US hi-fi journal Stereophile



Science officer Miller is hi-fi's undisputed king of lab testing. He employs his own specially designed equipment to pull apart every measurabl parameter and explain its effect on a product's performance



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 can think of (and several more besides). Few can match his encyclopedic knowl edge of al things audio.



a professional musician. experienced recording engin and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiast to boot. He's ticularly nerdy about cabl It's probably Freudian.

elcome to the first official Hi-Fi Choice Awards, a new annual event that's set to become the highlight of the hi-fidelity calender. This issue is crammed with the very best gear we've seen and heard this year, from CD and DVD separates to turntables, amps, speakers and accessories.

Hi-Fi Choice leaves no stone unturned in the quest to find the best components, be they purely for music or a wider range of home media. The common thread is high performance - nowhere will you find a more comprehensive collection of high fidelity gear for the discerning individual.

But before you turn to p28, consider first what other delights lie inside this issue. Our Audio File section brings its regular concoction of reportage news, information and advice. You'll find first reviews of the latest kit in Incoming and a selection of low-cost performance boosters rated in Instant Upgrades. We showcase another great system solution in System Addict, highlight some superb music in Choice Cuts and review a selection of state of the art high-end gear in Statements. Then there's our definitive In-Depth review of Pioneer's latest

'universal' DVD-Audio/SACD player, the remarkable DV-757Ai, painstakingly deconstructed on p58. There's just one dilemma. Which article will you turn to first?



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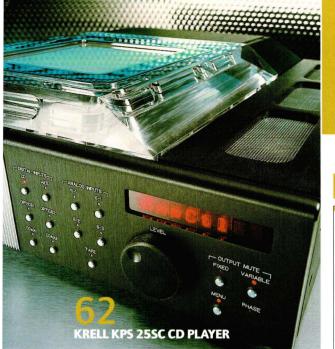
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はなる。 はななな。 VERY GOOD はなななな。 AVERAGE

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 and In-depth sections that really blow us away are eligible for a special Award badge. The coveted Editor's Choice Award 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.

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PRODUCT NEWS

Onkyo DV-SP800



UNIVERSALLY CERTIFIABLI

NEW THX ULTRA-CERTIFIED ONKYO 'UNIVERSAL' DVD AND RECEIVER

Onkyo's Integra-badged DV-SP800 'universal' DVD player is the latest disc spinner to boast both DVD-Audio and SACD compatibility. The new £1,200 player is in fact the first THX Ultra certified DVD player - something that Onkyo claims "guarantees the highest quality standard in picture and sound".

Under the hood lies some impressive electronic trickery including the Analog Devices 12-Bit/108 MHz noise shaped video converter that is said to offer the finest picture available. On the audio side, 24-bit/192 kHz DACs are used and further noiseshaping circuitry is employed to improve the analogue output.

Also sporting THX Ultra certification is Onkyo's new £1,600 'network' receiver, the TX-NR900E. This comprehensively specced receiver contains unique Windows-based software technology called Net-Tune, that allows users to connect the unit to a PC or Local Area Network (LAN). This makes it possible to compile and transfer MP3, WMA and WAV file databases and playlists that can then be accessed through the receiver's remote control. With a broadband internet connection, users can also directly access internet radio stations and store them in one of 30 presets. Both products should be in the shops soon.

KEY FEATURES

TX-NR900F RECEIVER

- THX Surround EX, DTS, DTS-ES, Discrete/Matrix 6.1, DTS Neo:6, DTS 24/96, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX. Dolby Pro Logic II decoding
- MP3, WAV, WMA decoding
- Ethernet (Net-Tune) port
- 6 x 150 watts RMS
- 192 kHz/24-bit audio D/A converters
- 7.1 channel input for DVD-Audio/SACD
- 39 DSP modes
- Crossover adjustment
- (40/60/80/100/120 Hz)
- HD DSP (High Definition DSP)
- Full-function backlit remote

ACOUSTIC BOOMERANG

THE RETURN OF ACOUSTIC ENERGY'S AE1

Acoustic Energy's AE1 loudspeaker will go MkIII next year. The original speaker, launched in 1988, was primarily designed for studio monitoring but it caught on quickly in audiophile circles. This latest model is the result of a three-year R&D programme which has produced a number of significant improvements. A new 120mm ceramic-coated alloy cone is being used for the bass/mid driver and the tweeter is an all-new wide-bandwidth unit with claimed low distortion and an ultra-linear response.

The baffle is formed from a 10mm thick billet of aluminium for mass rigidity and the cabinet's internal walls are laminated with anti-resonance steel plating with tensioned steel cross braces. It's likely to sell for £1,690 a pair.

- www.acoustic-energy.co.uk





GOODMANS GOES DAB

DAB PRODUCTS FROM BUDGET SUPREMOS

With DAB tuners under £130 these days it was just a matter of time before the big-name budget brands got in on the act. The Goodmans is one of the first, incorporating DAB tuners into a range of budget hi-fi gear including a portable CD player, in-car head unit and personal CD player. The most exciting product is a standalone GTS2000 DAB tuner, likely to

retail around the £130 mark when it launches in early 2003. All the products benefit from additional FM/ MW tuners to provide radio in areas where DAB is not yet available. The GPS280 portable CD player is the first product to hit the shops and will be available before the end of the year.

www.goodmansdigital.co.uk



KIND OF BLUENOTE

ITALIAN TURNTABLISTS' NEW DESIGNS FOR THE UK

Italian turntable specialist Bluenote is hoping to delight analogue lovers by introducing a number of its turntables to the UK. The Florence-based manufacturer specialises in producing vinyl spinning components, and in the last two years has concentrated much of its effort on producing high performance record decks. The range set for the UK includes the £999 Bellavista, the £2,500 Belvedere (pictured) and the £4,200 flagship Bellagio.

A choice of three one-piece polished aluminium tonearms of 'unipivot' design are also available priced at £375 (U3), £595 (Borghese) and £999 (Borromeo). An as yet unnamed solid titanium tonearm is also promised for next year. Distributors Eminent Audio will also be offering two Bluenote loudspeakers for this year, a two-way A3 standmount and A6 floorstander, both available in a choice of finishes.

Bluenote also has a range of electronics including CD players, amplifiers and phono stages, which are likely to brought to the UK in early 2003.

- Eminent Audio 01746 769156
- www.eminentaudio.co.uk



TEAC LEGACY

SYSTEMS FROM TEAC

Three new small and stylish AV systems are coming from TEAC, just in time for Christmas. Topping the new Legacy range is the Legacy 800 surround receiver and DVD player (pictured), followed by the 700 DVD receiver with matching three-channel power amp, and the 600 CD receiver.

A choice of matching loudspeakers is also available in two-channel and multichannel sub/sat varieties. The Legacy series is available now with prices starting at £250 for the 600 CD receiver.

☎ TEAC UK 01923 819630

www.teac.co.uk

CRESTAVAWAVE

BUDGET CRESTA RANGE FROM KEF



audiofile PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites

MORDAUNT-SHORT has a new subwoofer set to launch officially at the CES 2003 show in Las Vegas this coming January. The new MS909W will the brand's £500 flagship sub sporting its proprietary 'continuos profile cone' technology. The 300mm drive unit is powered by a highefficiency 300 watt 'digital' amplifier that's claimed to offer low distortion and a huge dynamic range. ☎ 0845 128 3951

NAD's latest receiver, the T752, is the first of three new multichannel AV amps from the brand offering 7.1 channel decoding. Priced at £600, the new model offers 5x80 watts of continuos power from within the familiar battle grey casework. Capable of decoding a compehensive array of audio formats the T752 also offers a 7.1 channel input for use with DVD-Audio and SACD sources. NAD's PowerDrive amp technology means that the amp can efficiently drive a range of speakers including those with low impedance ratings. ☎ 01908 319360



TITAN the Essex-based loudspeaker manufacturer of 20 years has just launched a new standmount speaker, the T2/ S. The new model uses a 130mm handcrafted aluminium bass/ mid driver and a FOCAL inverted-dome titanium tweeter both housed within a rigid 20mm MDF cabinet. The T2/S sells for £500 and is available now in a choice of veneers. ☎ 01702 206870

FARADAY sound has launched a new speaker called the Emperor. Priced at £595 the new model uses a titanium dome tweeter and a new 180mm Polykevlar mid/bass driver all housed in a unique low-density concrete cabinet that Faraday claims virtually eliminates panel vibrations. Weighing in at 19kg the new biwirable Emperor has a claimed six ohm impedance and a sensitivity of 90.5dB.

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(S) Soundbites



SHARP's latest personal MiniDisc recorder, the IM-MT899H, is the brand's first model to feature Net MD – a technology that allows the user to download MP3, WAV and WMA files from a PC at high speed via a USB connection. With the supplied Open MG software audio files can be transferred from a computer at up to 32x speed with "no loss of quality". Also featured is MDLP recording and a 160 second anti-shock memory **2** 0800 262 958

TerraTec's Phono Preamp Studio is a specialist plug

and software which allows you to convert your vinyl or cassettes into MP3s on your PC. We've got five to give

away. All you have to do is answer this simple question:

WHAT MATERIAL ARE LP RECORDS MADE FROM? A: polycarbonate B: vinyl C: interesting cheese

Send your answer enclosing your name, address and phone number to: TerraTec Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker St, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date for entries 1 January 2003.

Hi-Fi diary

JANUARY 2003

CES, Las Vegas, USA 001 703 907 7041

FEBRUARY

AudioJumble 2003, Tonbridge 01892 540022 www.audiojumble.co.uk

21-23 **Sound & Vision show** Bristol, 01242 239 839

MAY/JUNE

High End Society, Frankfurt +49 202 702022 or email Paxa@highendsociety.de



CONNOISSEUR'S CHOICE

A FINE BIEND OF CANADIAN LOUDSPEAKERS

A new form of Energy has recently been discovered in Ontario, Canada and is making its way over to UK shores. The new Connoisseur loudspeaker range from Energy descends from the original 22 Reference Connoisseur of 20 years ago, with prices starting at £250.

The range comprises eight models: three floorstanders, two standmounts, two rear channel speakers and a centre speaker for multichannel applications. Matching stands are available, and there's also a choice of two active subwoofers.

All models feature the latest tweaks from Energy, delivering increased cabinet rigidity and improved damping of the bass/mid drivers. It's rumoured that local lumberjacks may have provided the fine Canadian Maple finish option and all you connoisseurs will be pleased to know prices range from £250 for the C-1 standmount, to £1,000 for the C-9 floorstander

2 API 01787 249656

www.energy-speakers.com

SATELLITES LAUNCHED

HIGH-END PROAC SATELLITE PACKAGE

Respected two-channel loudspeaker brand ProAc's new satellite and subwoofer package is touted as a true high-end solution to compact multichannel audio. The Hexa package is based around four satellites each employing 125mm bass/mid cones and a new 25mm tweeter. An active subwoofer with a 200mm high power drive unit ioins a dedicated centre channel speaker to complete the package, which is available in real wood veneer for £2,500.

₾ Celef Audio 01280 700147

www.proac-loudspeakers.comk

CELESTION ELECTRICA

FIRST ELECTRONICS UNVEILED

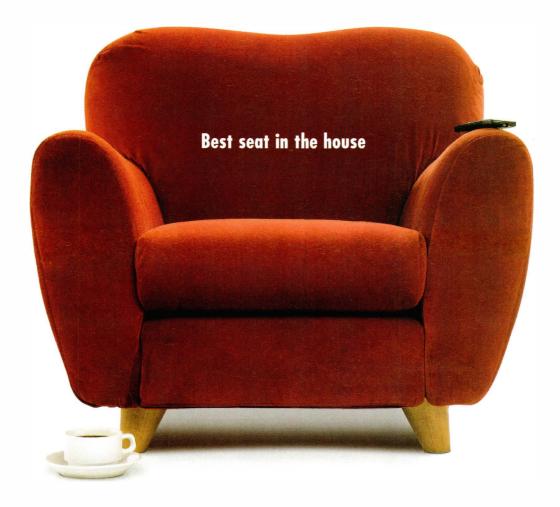
Original loudspeaker brand Celestion has made the move into electronics this month.

Two new products, the AVR300 receiver and the DVD 300 DVD player will form a new slender line-up in a contemporary silver finish. **Matching Celestion speaker** packages including sub/ sat

offerings will be available to give consumers a packaged multichannel AV solution. Prices for a complete system start at £1,500 for DVD. receiver and the AVP305 speaker package. The new Celestion electronics are in the shops now

 Celestion 01622 687442
 ■ • www.celestion.com





The experiences this chair has had! The amazing performances, concerts and gigs it has witnessed from all around the musical world

From the front row at Carnegie Hall to the stalls at Brixton Academy, from the dress circle of the Sydney Opera House to the bar in

Ronnie Scott's – this chair has been there! It has experienced music as it should be heard – alive and vibrant, with every nuance and

emotion as clear as the musicians intended

The Rotel O2 Series is a new range of hi-fi from a company with a reputation for delivering award-winning sounds at realistic prices.

The O2 Series' superb sound is the result of Rotel's Balanced Design Concept – an integrated approach that ensures five star performance

To find out how the Rotel O2 Series can take you to the world's greatest musical venues, call B&W Loudspeakers on 01903 221500.

The new Rotel 02 Series

also available in black









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PUMP UP THE VOLUME

Prêt à porter audio has finally arrived in the shape of Music Pumps monoblock power amps encased in stiletto shoes and the Music Purse preamp housed in a handbag. Naturally, they're available in your own choice of colours. A collaboration between shoe maker Classic Pumps and Canadian hi-fi company Blue Circle (a designer from from the latter is a Classic Pumps customer), the idea was to make a unique amplifier based

on the theory that we have both left and right shoes and left and right amplifiers. Music Pumps power amps deliver 25 watts from a size 11.5 Lola shoe for \$800 (£511) a pair. The Music Purse preamp costs \$500 (£320) and has three line inputs, it comes in a Californian-style model 708 purse for which you can specify any stock patent leather or kid leather colour in stock. Genuine fashion victims can also have the Music Pumps Strap interconnect at \$75 (£48)/2m. Music Pumps

OOD LEAVES HOME

Kenwood Japan has announced a technical withdrawal from the European home audio market as of 31 December. It will be shutting down home audio distribution in all markets except Germany and Italy where operations will be scaled down. Its in-car and communications businesses will remain as they are. In the UK the effect will be a loss of six jobs for staff at the Watford HQ, though Kenwood will continue to offer full service support for at least the next seven years.

PROTECTION RACKET

Sunncomm is the latest brand to join the CD copy protection scramble. It has been developing an anti-piracy system called MediaMax CD-3 designed to restrict the use of both CDs and DVD-Audio discs. The technology integrates with the Windows platform on a PC to restrict the way material can be used. Specifically, you can't play the standard PCM tracks that a CD player accesses – only the compressed WMA versions. These files cannot be sent via email or shared on other networked computers.

On the subject of compatibility with hi-fi equipment, Sunncomm's Bill Whitmore says: "Our tests have shown MediaMax to be compatible with the CD audio and DVD players on the market today... I believe that this suite of products has achieved the correct balance between playability and security".

It seems unlikely that users will be able to download the WMA files on to portable devices however. The company is in the process of licensing its technologies to a variety of record companies.



NEW BLUE

Adding to the general confusion over enhanced disc formats, Toshiba and NEC have announced an alternative blue laser technology to industry standard Blu-ray. In much the same way as Sony and Philips came up with SACD when the audio world was awaiting DVD-Audio, NEC and Toshiba have their own data storage format lined up to succeed DVD in the coming years, but pitted against Blu-ray which is supported by nine major electronics companies.

The advantage of this as yet unnamed format is that it is backwards compatible with existing DVD software while being capable of storing 20GB per side (DVD has a capacity of 4.7GB, though Blu-ray can handle up to 27GB). Blue lasers will not however play CD-R discs, something that the music industry might welcome but not a great commercial proposition. The new format seems to be a rival to Toshiba's work with Warner on HD/DVD9, a new high resolution red laser format, reported last month.

The purpose of both blue laser formats is to increase the amount of data on a 12cm disc and allow high definition video or longer playing/recording times for ordinary video. At the CD bit rate a blue laser disc could store several day's worth of audio, but given that existing DVD software and recorders are not aiming to provide several hour's worth of music, this is an unlikely application.

AIWA AUGMENTS SONY'S LOW EN

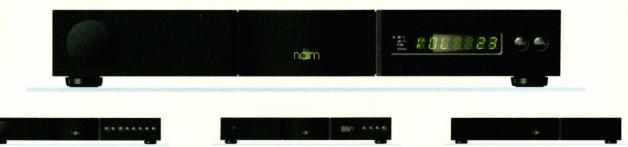


Aiwa has now become a wholly owned subsidiary of the Sony Corporation. In February this year Aiwa, which was previously halfowned by Sony, agreed to integrate its business operations with those of the new parent company. That agreement became concrete in October. The two brands will retain

separate identities but the effect of the move will be for Aiwa to cover the lower end of the market in order to compete with the multiplicity of cheap brands coming out of China.

In a report in electronics industry bible EE Times, Sony President Kunitake Ando said: "Chinese and Korean brands are a threat to us. They are strong in the price zone that Sony does not carry products (for). We can develop products with the Aiwa brand making full use of Sony's engineering and manufacturing technologies". He added that, "Unless we take drastic measures we will be hit and sunk by countries like China and Korea".







Introducing the latest addition to the Series 5, the Naim AV2 (Audio Video) processor. It not only enhances anything you listen to, it makes everything you watch come to life. People talk about 'Surround Sound', at Naim we immerse you.

THE ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



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BEATS'N'PIECES

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Behind The Glass Bv Howard Massev



Backheat LJK You may have bought this magazine for advice on how to get the best

out of your recorded music collection, but spare a thought for those wheyfaced troopers who spend nights on end buried in their sonic bunkers. crafting the sounds that will eventually make their way into your record collection. Veteran iournalist Howard Massey has compiled over 30 interviews with some of the greats from his years at EO magazine, including George Martin, Brian Wilson, Arif Mardin, John Leckie and Nile Rogers. Each interview is short and pertinent, well balanced between technical advice and a producer's eye views of the stars

Though aimed primarily at anyone who's likely to see the inside of a recording studio, it also has plenty of tips to offer the hi-fi enthusiast and a wealth of insights relating to classic (mostly rock and pop) albums, including yet more info on Pet Sounds, Prince enhancing the ambience by transforming any studio he plays in into a purple palace, and the theory behind throwing feedbacking quitars off cliffs. Fast, fun and informative.

SYSTEM BUILDER

EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Rage Against the Machine Epic

For many, this disc is as far as their penchant for hard rock goes. Now ten years old, the debut from the angry Californian Ragers revolutionised the rock scene with their uniquely fresh fusion of heavy rock and hip hop. Punctuated with jazz and punk elements the vocal message is hard-hitting, left wing political rap, delivered with heavyweight punch and unpretentious passion.

What's more, it's also a superbly slick piece of studio work that's clean, expressive and dynamic, and particularly fine on vinyl. Drop the needle into the groove on the dynamite system we've assembled on the right and feel the rage - only the coldest and blandest of hearts could fail to be invigorated.

TURNTABLE

Michell Gyro SE

Not only does it look the canine's cojones, the beautifully engineered Gyro SE is very at home with any style of music you demand of it. Rhythmic detail is recovered with vigour and the clean and open treble won't fatigue

all-night rocker's ears. HFC 223



Living Voice Auditorium £1,500 The most affordable product from an award-winning line-up, the Auditorium is an incredibly dynamic and coherent loudspeaker that tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the musical truth. This speaker rocks in style. HFC180



AMPLIFIER

Sugden A21a £900/£1,000 (with Phono MM/MC) This expressive solid state amp uses single-ended Class A circuit topology to good effect – its glorious midband paints music on a grand scale. Not hugely powerful, but it can match the sensitive Auditorium speakers perfectly. HFC 224





WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Audiophile Candy



For the uninitiated, Audiophile Candy is the accessories branch of hififorsale.com - two sites that when

combined offer perhaps the most comprehensive range of hi-fi bits and bobs in the UK.

Covering a vast range of products from isolation cones to mains conditioners, the site provides something for everyone and is likely to carry just the tweaking tool you've been searching for. Clear, secure and easy to use, audiophilecandy.com puts a wealth of hard-to-find products within easy reach. But be warned - bashing the plastic is all too easy.

www.audiophilecandy.com

CLASSIC DEMO DISCS

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JOHN MARTYN

Solid Air Island

"John Martyn's 1973 classic is one of many highlights of a fascinating career. The marriage of his unique guitar playing and Danny Thompson's double bass still sounds fantastic nearly 30 years on. Island's remastered CD sounds absolutely

breathtaking and is an ideal workout for any demonstrations. Why does he remain a cult figure?" **Matthew Savine**, via email

What's your favourite disc for hi-fi auditioning? Why not write in and tell us – 100 words on what and why – we'd love to hear about it. Email your choice to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk or write in to Classic Demo Discs, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #3

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES - HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



Spike adjustment

Spiked feet can be a mixed blessing – the increased tightness and control are palpable, but there is a danger that you might sacrifice a certain relaxed ease and natural warmth. If you're using spikes and want to get the best out of them, careful adjustment is critical. This means setting the relative height of each spike

exactly so that there's no rock or play – not easy when four points are used. To find the correct height, use a spirit level and make your adjustments without load.

With a speaker stand, remove the speaker and adjust the spikes so that the stand sits firmly on the floor, then tighten the locking nuts. Put the speaker in place and check for movement. This should eliminate situations where the spikes are slightly out of kilter, but the mass of the item supported disguises this by distorting the shelf or frame. It's especially important with shelves which are made from glass or other hard materials.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Orbital In Sides

Yann Tiersen L'Absente
Missy Elliott Under Construction
Various Artists Urban Culture
Cannonball Adderley

Somethin' Else

Foo Fighters One By One Bootsy Collins Play With Bootsy Philip Glass Naqoyqatsi Various Artists Cuisine Non Stop Badly Drawn Boy

Have You Fed The Fish?



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY SPOTTED EMERGING BLINKING INTO THE DAYLIGHT AFTER COMPLETING THEIR LATEST MASTERWORKS



MASSIVE ATTACK

Title tbc Virgin, Feb 2003
Massive Attack have spent more than four years working on the follow-up to Mezzanine. They've scrapped material and started afresh several times, but with release scheduled to coincide with tour dates in the new year, deadlines are now looming. Guest vocalists include Damon Albarn and Horace Andy.

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS

Nocturama Mute, Feb 2003

Recorded in Melbourne with the Bad Seeds, the 12th studio album of Cave's career follows swiftly on the heels of 2001's No More Shall We Part. Production is by Cave and Nick Launay (Talking Heads/Cang Of Four). The ten tracks include Bring It On, due to be the first single.

BLUF

Title tbc EMI, March 2003
Minus guitarist Graham Coxon, Blur have just spent a month in Morocco finishing their seventh studio album. They've recorded 28 tracks and recruited producers including Norman Cook, the Dust Brothers and the Neptunes. "It's a luxury having so many songs and I haven't started thinking about which will make the record," says Damon Albarn.

RYAN ADAMS

Love Is Hell Lost Highway, early 2003 "I've finished tracking the songs for the next record and now I'm going into the studio to finish them with Ethan Johns producing," says the ludicrously prolific other Adams, whose current album, *Demolition*,

was only released in September. "It's a totally New York obsessed album, quite dark and fucked up", quoth the country rock saviour.

THRIN RRAKES

Ether Song Source, Feb 2003
"If the first album was a journey across a desert, the new one is a journey into the ether," south London duo Turin Brakes say mysteriously of the follow-up to their 2001 Mercury Prize shortlisted debut, The Optimist. Produced by Tony Hoffer (Beck, Air, Supergrass), song titles include Rain City, Blue Hour and Long Distance.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/POI

Kelly Rowland Simply Deep (Sony) 12 Dec, The Orb Back To Mine (DMC) 12 Dec, Reef Together (Sony) 20 Jan, Stereo MCs Title tbc 27 Jan, Erasure Other People's Songs (Mute) 27 Jan

CLASSICAL/ JAZZ

Janusz Olejniczak/ Wladyslaw Szpilman The Pianist (Soundtrack) (Sony) 10 Dec, Wynton Marsalis All Rise (Sony) 10 Dec, Terje Rydal Lux Aeterna (ECM) 10 Dec, Anne Sophie Von Otter Offenbach Arias (Universal) 20 Jan, Ry Cooder/ Manuel Galban Mambo Sinuendo (EastWest) 27 Jan

DVD

Austin Powers 2: Gold Member 2 Dec, Björk: Royal Opera House 2 Dec, Deep Purple: Machine Head 2 Dec, Madness: Take It Or Leave It 9 Dec, Men In Black II 27 Jan

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

EXCLUSIVE ***

JMlab Cobalt 816 S speaker £999

The JMlab Cobalt 816 Signature is a tall, front-ported grey aluminium box edged with two-side cherry wooden cheeks and a metal grille which is claimed to be entirely acoustically transparent. At the back, the crossover is on show, hidden behind a clear plastic panel - beneath that is a pair of bi-wire terminals. The speaker is a two-and-ahalf-way design, featuring a 165mm bass unit, a matching 165mm mid-range driver and a single 25mm inverted 'Tioxid' tweeter unit with a 19mm voice coil. This speaker is claimed to have a sensitivity of 91.5dB and a nominal impedance of eight ohms (which swings down to 3.3ohms at worst).

Like the plain Cobalt 816 before it (tested in HFC 224), the Signature combines strong bass with a near-holographic midband and treble, which extends way past the threshold of hearing. This might not mean supertweeter style extended frequency range, but it does sound clean and more extended than most floorstanders at the price. That means a sound that is exceptionally open and detailed with fantastic imagery, but perhaps not the sweetest around. This makes a great sound for good classic hi-fi discs - the acoustic pop of Rare On Air, for example, sounds fantastic - but can be uncomfortably raucous with The

○Two-and-a-half way speaker

CFloorstanding design

25mm Focal inverted tweeter

□ 165mm bass/mid unit

165mm bass unit

91.5dB sensitivity

28 ohm nominal impedance

Maximum power rating 125 watts

Strokes. On balance, though, the brightness is easy to live with, especially as you end up with a speaker with a stereo image normally reserved for electrostatics and ribbon designs.

While the Cobalt 816 S doesn't time like a decent sealed-box speaker fast-paced rhythms tend







"The brightness is easy to live with, especially as you get a speaker with the kind of stereo image normally reserved for electrostatics and ribbon designs."

to blur and slow thanks to the bass port - the bass depth more than makes up for the lack of precision timing. Again, this steers the speaker away from driving and raucous music, as The Clash will sound more like a mild ruck and Metallica more like flabby plastic than hard metal. But, on the Dead Man Walking soundtrack, this depth, allied to a stunning midband, will make you hungry for more.

One of the hidden joys of the 816 S is that the speaker uses tailor-made speaker drivers. This is common among JMlab speakers, with more than 200 different Focal drive unit designs in the portfolio. The advantage is in the crossover network which is a shade simpler than most at this price. This offers more revealing performance without the hike in efficiency such detail normally requires. It also allows the speakers to play loud if needed -Metallica's Enter Sandman can fill a room at concert levels easily.

But there are downsides. The speakers are not perfectly shielded and also need more space than most. They come with foam port bungs, but this is a speaker that lives and breathes for free space and lots of it. Also, there is the not insignificant matter of run-in. Normally speakers of this price level are working at their best within a couple of weeks

of use - but in this case hundreds and hundreds of hours are recommended to rid the speakers of the peaky treble that appears from time to time.

Overall, these speakers win out. They image with stunning precision, have a vanishing 3D midband and treble, even if it has a touch of brightness. Even the bass is good and deep, if not the fastest in hi-fi. In short, if you have a big room and want a vivid and vital sounding speaker for around a grand, this French newcomer is a must-listen.

☑ JMlab 0121 616 5126

www.focal-jmlab.co.uk

THE 'S' EFFECT

The differences between this model and the standard Cobalt 816 are small but significant. The tweeter sports the latest Tioxid 5 anodising process and the midrange speaker has been tweaked for even greater clarity. This has also meant the crossover has been revoiced and modified slightly. Finally, the Signature features damping material from the more up-market Electra range.

JMlab can revoice its speaker drive units with ease - it not only makes loudspeakers, it makes its own drivers thanks to its drive-unit manufacturer division, called Focal, which also makes drive units for many of the other top loudspeaker companies, too.

Panasonic DVD-RA82 DVD-Audio/Video player £235

Panasonic realises that many people like their multichannel gear small, sleek and relatively cheap - perhaps to counter the extra space and money consumed by the speakers. The DVD-RA82 is part of the company's ultra slim range of mirror-fronted kit, and it looks pretty smart, even if it feels a bit lightweight. It's a DVD-Audio player – the cheapest yet – and therefore has the requisite six-channel output along with a reasonable selection of video and audio connections (but sadly no component video) as well as onboard decoders for Dolby Digital and DTS.

The main unit may appeal, but the remote certainly doesn't. Bluntly revealing the budget nature of this kit, it's awful to look at, and awful to use. Operation is a bit of a pain, whatever source you're using, especially as the minimal fascia controls don't offer much assistance either.

But this minor irritation would matter not, if only the music playback wasn't so anaemic and spiritless. It's not that it's bad at playing stereo CDs - not compared to many of the more affordable DVD players around – it's just so darn bland. It may not sound as bright or harsh as some, but it does sound thin and lacks excitement.

DVD-Audio playback is better served, and it begins to convince with Linkin Park's Reanimation. But it still lacks the dynamic range and sense of space the surround sound format revels in - especially with classical music, which once again falls flat. Movie performance is only passable at the price and we'd recommend bypassing the internal decoders, as those in even the most modestly priced receivers outperform

> them when it comes to punch and guts.

This is budget kit, and attempts to squeeze in too much for the money - it therefore ends up not doing enough of anything in particular.

Panasonic 08705 357357

* www.panasonic.co.uk

DVD-Audio, DVD-/ideo, CD playback

DVD-RAM playback RGB Scart socket

S-Video output

Optical and coaxial digital outputs Dolby Digital and

Thin, stylish design



Project RPM 6 turntable & tonearm £500

Project's latest £500 RPM 6 is a very basic design with a tall (but not high-mass) platter, a heavy brass clamp and an outrigger armboard with a Project 9 tonearm fitted. And that's basically it - the power supply is a plug-topper, there is no cover and changing the speed involves lifting the outer platter and changing the belt position like a Rega deck.

But 'basic' doesn't mean 'bad' - far from it, in fact. That Project 9 tonearm, featured in practically every Project turntable, is infinitely adjustable and tweakable. Similarly, that big, mediumweight platter is made from MDF and features a 4mm vinyl mat - all perfect for minimising stray resonance. The three screw-in cones provide both finetuning levelling and also act well to sink yet more resonance away from the all-important diamond/vinyl interface. And although it is a rigid deck, there is one concession to suspension - the AC motor is on a metal plate that is decoupled on a neat rubber band.

The RPM 6 is a strikingly good

- □ Turntable/arm combination
- Non-suspended
- AC motor with
- underside of deck Powder-coated
- brass record puck Tonearm bearings
- to ABEC7 quality
- O VTA adjustable arm

CARTRIDGE E IOUETTE

Henley Designs supplied this turntable with an unconventional cartridge, given the deck's cost. It came with a £300 Ortofon MC 25 FL, a low-output moving coil with a fine line stylus. Why unconventional? Simply because, more than any other aspect of hi-fi systems, record players tend to follow a strict hierarchy and a £300 cartridge on a £500 turntable/arm combination breaks that hierarchy. Typically, a £100 moving magnet cartridge would be the more common partner to a £500 deck. But, the RPM 6 is no normal £500 deck; it can confidently handle cartridges far more demanding than it has any right to.

from worn-out mono pressings of the Beach Boys' Pet Sounds right up to date with the excellent Hustle! LP of reggae versions of disco classics, in particular, Xanadu and Sweet Lady's mental cover version of Rapper's Delight. This last also highlights just how good the RPM 6 is at digging up bass tones. Ultimately, this bass - especially the upper bass - can be a bit leaden, but this is not significant in the grand scheme of things, so long as you don't partner the RPM 6 with lots of warm and woolly-sounding equipment.

The Project RPM 6 is extremely good, so good in fact that it could be your first taste of high-end audio. You could even hook this up to high-quality valve pre-power amplifiers and speakers far more expensive than the RPM 6 and still not notice its limitations. And that spells 'bargain' to us.

✿ Henley Designs 01235 511166

the RPM 6 more than able to cope with the entire canon of pop and rock music, mww.henleydesigns.co.uk "This stunning, holographic imagery is coupled to a bouncy, yet not overt sense of rhythm with a fair lick of speed to it."

of the SME, perhaps it isn't quite as musical as a Linn LP12 or have as much

deep bass as a Nottingham Analogue or

those decks cost many times more than

a VPI. But then the fact that most of

the Project, implies that it must be

It is. The RPM 6 is wonderfully

articulate and lucid, allowing you to

holographic imagery is coupled to a

bouncy, yet not overt sense of rhythm

with a fair lick of speed to it. It makes

listen into the recording as if you were

doing something very right.

in the studio. This stunning,



\star \star \star \star

Monitor Audio S1 speaker £300 EXCLUSIVE

Unlike the hoards of 'modded' motors triggering GATSO cameras throughout the county, the new Silver Series range of speakers from Essex-based Monitor Audio is claimed to have been built from scratch rather than 'evolving' from old SS designs. The manufacturer promises new cabinet engineering and driver technology in the six-strong range, starting with the £300 S1 stand mount and extending to the S10 floorstander at £1,000.

All-new C-CAM drivers use a Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium alloy to increase cone rigidity, reduce distortion and give a more linear frequency response (see box). To our ears this should mean speed, good neutrality and detail. The same technology is applied to the 25mm tweeter that extends to 30kHz, future-proofing the little S1 against the new breed of extended bandwidth music formats. Both new drivers are housed in an equally new and slender 19mm MDF cabinet that minimises diffraction due to its minuscule cabinet to driver ratio. Our 'rosemah' finish, one of four, looks superb - in fact, overall the speaker is one of the most impressive looking boxes we've seen this year for under £300. Build quality is excellent, with smart looking drivers and stunning vinyl.

Ported at the rear with terminals for bi-wiring, the little S1 enjoyed having some space behind it and lapped up the Arcam bi-amplification we fed it.

C-CAM

Monitor Audio has long specialised in metal coned drivers. The latest units designed for the Silver Series are claimed to be more powerful and space efficient, using re-designed C-CAM alloy cones - a ceramic alloy coating that increases the drivers' rigidity and pistonic operation, giving a smoother frequency response. The larger units also benefit from new surrounds that allow greater cone excursions, giving lower distortion and slimmer cabinet widths. A new C-CAM tweeter has been developed for this latest Silver Series, with a superior surround and motor system, which helps extend the frequency response to 30kHz - useful with wide bandwidth sources.

True to our expectations of the ceramic/alloy-coated drivers, the S1 proves very quick with fabulous transient speed and a musicality that instantly engages the listener and draws you in. The drivers take some running-in, sounding a bit harsh at first (metallised drivers can be a bit much for unaccustomed ears – imagine Dylan playing harmonica in your tiled bathroom), but patience is rewarded with an explicitly detailed treble that resolves subtle high-frequency detail with ease.

Free from boxiness, the S1's agility extends to a midband that projects vocals with a genuine realism and accuracy. However, in our test the S1 was on the end of a relatively laid-back system and we would suggest a diligent audition if you have a forward system, or a fairly bright room. With Tori Amos's

KEY FEATURES

- Two-way rear ported
- 90dB sensitivity
- Impedance: 6 ohms25mm Gold DomeC-CAM tweeter
- 150mm C-CAM bass/mid driver
- Dimensions: 17x30x24cm (WxHxD)
- Finishes: Warm beech, black oak, natural oak or rosemah

Caught A Light Sneeze, a useful test track, the S1 delivered impressive bass slam and impact with the opening passage, progressing to offer an articulate presentation of vocals and the many layers of instrumentation.

Most notable however, was the way in which the S1 accurately delivers all the drama of fast-paced rock – capturing the pace and rhythm essential for such energetic styles. Stringed instruments retain plenty of attack, making classical guitar appear very natural and open, piano too benefits from an impressively accurate timbre. It's hard to fathom how Monitor Audio does it for £300 – the S1 has to be the bargain of the Silver Series and comes heartily recommended if you crave speed and resolution.

- Monitor Audio 01473 824768
- www.monitoraudio.co.uk

"Metallised drivers can be a bit much for unaccustomed ears – like Dylan playing harmonica in your tiled bathroom."









TerraTec CAR 4000 hard drive jukebox £799

The name doesn't bode well: CAR stands for Compressed Audio Recording. Let's not beat about the bush, this is basically an MP3 personal jukebox disguised as a hi-fi component. For the hefty outlay, you get a 40GB hard drive, a CD disc drawer, and various connection options, some familiar optical and line level - some less so - USB port and memory card slot - all in a plain looking black box.

The theory is simple. You can store music on the hard drive in MP3 or WAV format at a variety of different bit rates - ranging from 48 to 320Kbps. Music can either be 'recorded' from the disc drawer or from an external source via line level or optical inputs, or 'imported' via the USB port.

The unit's functionality is reassuringly good - something that is helped by the inclusion of the Gracenote online CD database. This recognises a CD when you put it into the drawer, saving you the effort of typing in the name and track listing - this is a feature we definitely approve of. The database is quite surprisingly comprehensive, and can be updated on a regular basis via the internet.

You can also create playlists, add and delete tracks etc if you've ever used one of the more copious portable MP3 jukeboxes you'll be familiar with the interface.

Anybody with the remotest interest in sound quality is only ever going to listen to this machine at the higher bit rates which are available. Even then, the output lacks power and drive,

40GB hard drive O USB port MCC memory card slot Gracenote CD database Variable recording rates Headphone socket

Microphone inputs

sounding a little bit thin compared to Yamaha's CDR-HD1000 uncompressed harddisc component. And that's what it comes down to in the end - if you're keen to download music from the net and store and play it in a highly compressed format, then this will make an interesting addition to your system - but for anything else forget it.

□ TerraTec 0118 982 1612

⊕ www.terratec.co.uk

"Anybody with the remotest interest in sound quality is only ever going to listen to this machine at the higher bit rates."



CDP-10 **CD** player

The centre of gravity of the disc playing market has been drifting steadily towards multi-function players that also act as DVD-Video players - or high resolution SACD or DVD-Audio players. But by an absolutely crushing margin, compact disc remains the 'quality' digital music storage medium of choice world-wide. Nothing is going to change this for a long time to come, even if the most optimistic forecasts made on behalf if the alternative formats come true overnight. So there is still room for component CD players, and new models aimed at the quality-first audiophile market are particularly welcome.

The CDP-10 is precisely this. Canadian high-end brand Classé has only recently been reintroduced to the UK market after a long gap. It is being distributed by one of the most powerful hi-fi companies in the world, B&W Loudspeakers, so its future should be assured. The CDP-10 however is new, not just to the UK, but world-wide. We first heard the product in its prototype stage, and there have been significant improvements since that time.

Packaging is in Classé house colours, with the familiar distinctive black and aluminium banded front. The face is extremely thick, and the rest of the box





KEY FEATURES

- O Single play CD player
- CD-R/RW compatible
- HDCD decoder
- 20-track programming
- Random access track selection from remote control
- Balanced and unbalanced outputs
- C Electrical digital out
- ♠ External IZR in and outputs
- 12V trigger

is also made from unusually heavy gauge aluminium, fulfilling one of the key requirements of any player that asks to be taken seriously - that it provide a stable, low resonance platform for playing discs. The player is equipped with external triggers and remote control repeater inputs, and is supplied with one of Classe's ultra-classy solid metal remote controls.

The player did exhibit some peculiarities. Notwithstanding its heavyweight construction, the structure is not as well damped as it might be, and there were some improvements to be had by placing a heavy weight on top to damp the cover. The manufacturer could easily address this with internal damping. Another curiosity was that when the disc was first inserted, the mechanism would sometimes spin it extremely fast, before falling back to a proper speed. This was reported back to the maker on the grounds that it might have been a fault, but not so. Apparently its simply a side effect of the way that the servo has been designed, a harmless one with beneficial sonic consequences. The only criticism that sticks, and it's a minor

one, is that the firmware doesn't allow tracks higher than the first to be selected until the drawer has closed, and the Table of Contents read.

Auditioned with Classé pre and power amps and B&W Nautilus 800 speakers, the CDP-10 clearly prefers being left connected on standby, and warmed up for a half hour or so at the beginning of a listening session before it delivers its best. But that best is really something. The player has what could be described as the Classé 'house sound', which is elegant, natural and extremely refined. It is free of any synthetic artefacts that cannot be pinned on the disc, and if there are any such problems they escaped notice, subsumed by the players' expressive, fluid persona.

And not just expressive and fluid. The player is more than man enough to cope with bold, dynamic music in the appropriate fashion. Simon Rattle's recording with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra of Bernstein's Candide overture (reviewed this month) was a real barn-stormer which shook the rafters and waved the floorboards. There was no holding back, no lack of excitement, and every ounce of detail

on disc was reproduced without any sign of coloration from the electronics. Its best quality however is its timing, which is propulsive and exciting.

Of course there are better players around. You can read about one such on p62 in the shape of the Krell KPS 25sc, and Classé itself produces a reference class SACD/CD player in the Omega, at half the Krell's cost, which is still enough to buy a more than decent new car. But even in such elevated company, this is a more than excellent player, which consistently surprises with the extravagant wealth of detail it extracts from supposedly known discs, and its precise, articulate yet fluid and expressive music making.

- B&W Loudspeakers 01903 221500
- @ www.classeaudio.com

TECHNOLOGY

The CDP-12 uses a Philips professional standard VAE1250 mechanism, which is CD-R/RW compatible. The transport is modified by moving the digital clock to a quieter electrical environment adjacent to the D/A converter. This stage employs two 24-bit Burr-Brown Delta Sigma PPCM1738 DACs, each a dual channel processor in its own right. It has balanced (XLR) as well as single-ended outputs, and even the single-ended output is driven by a balanced source. HDCD compatibility is offered with the Pacific Microsonics PMD 200 decoder. Finally, the power supply is based on a large toroidal transformer and 11 regulated supplies, some multi-regulated with discrete regulators and quality low-ESR capacitors to further reduce noise and ripple.

"The player has what could be described as the Classé 'house sound', which is elegant, natural and extremely refined."



Instant upgrades

Some quick fixes for your system's woes

Ecosse 'The Composer' interconnect cable £30 (0.8m pair)

Such is the wealth of features claimed for this cable that one might expect a much higher price. In fact, however, it's a simple enough design, a basic coaxial type with stranded 'Monocrystal' central conductor and a tape-and-braid screen. Materials are of good quality throughout, giving the cable good measured performance, nice handling qualities and a good grip in phono sockets.

Performance is better than one might expect at the price too. If there's a touch of hardness on occasion it's not much of a drawback, especially as it really is quite slight. Likewise, the lack of the last word in image depth is hardly a serious criticism, and on the positive side there's a very neutral balance with good solid bass to enjoy and generally good detail. Dynamics are excellent and overall the sound is lively and appealing. A very safe buy for any decent budget system.

Ecosse 0141 353 0509 # www.ecossecables.co.uk

Lauri Volpi cork speaker interfaces £12

Eight tiny cork circles, sticky underneath and with a little sticky gunk on top, and a blob of 'Blu-tack' – what can that do for your speakers? The publicity material is not entirely clear, but evidently the basic idea is to provide a more compliant and somewhat lossy alternative to spikes as an interface between speaker and stand. The circles replace spikes while the tack sits in the centre of the stand's top plate, contacting the speaker's underside.

There's a degree of logic in all this: the compliance afforded by cork and 'tack may reduce the degree of vibration induced in the stand. At any rate, the sound is noticeably different from that with spikes, with slightly less coloration but also less immediacy. Tonal balance seems broadly similar, but the definition of both bass and midrange is a touch improved. Worth a try, though it's only fair to point out that something remarkably similar can be arranged using household odds and ends.

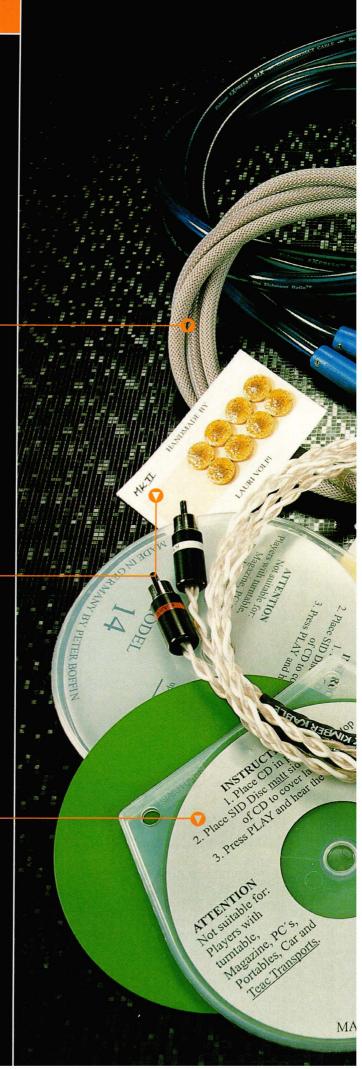
Lauri Volpi 0113 252 2820

Sound Improvement Disc £18

Available in two versions with different centre hole diameters for different players, this plain green plastic disc is alleged both to damp mechanical vibrations in the CD and to reduce stray reflections of the laser light used to read the disc. Snake oil? Not necessarily, and indeed a source inside Philips' own research labs has indicated that both of those effects can contribute jitter and distortion (at low levels) to the audio output.

The problem with reviewing this item, however, is that effects will vary from player to player and even from disc to disc – and worst, from play to play. At most (most likely, but not exclusively, with cheap players) it can help bring the sound into focus, reducing 'haze' and improving detail and clarity – at least, it will achieve precisely nothing. On balance, that makes it worth the small price and very minor hassle of use, and a great stocking filler for an audiophile friend!

hififorsale.com 0870 241 2469 # www.hififorsale.com





\star

Eichmann eXpress 6 interconnect cable £140 (1m pair)

Australian inventor Keith Eichmann clearly has his own ways of looking at electromagnetics and this cable is the result. At heart a simple pair of parallel conductors, it features the 'Eichmann Ratio' – a thicker ground conductor than is used for the 'hot' leg – plus passive conductors to "reduce electro-magnetic field interaction". Plugs are unusual too, with plastic body and single-point ground contact.

Whatever the merit of Eichmann's exuberant claims, this cable doesn't seem to offer any dramatic insights. The sound is certainly very 'present' but less flatteringly, it's a bit on the forward side. There's more dryness than a well-behaved cable at this price should induce, and while balance is very fair in simple musical textures, as often happens, more dense sounds cause bass to retire and upper midrange to dominate. If you like your music very upfront this cable might suit, but for neutrality it's not the best choice.

- Redline 0131 555 3922
- www.eichmanncables.com

LAST Power Cleaner £40

Forty quid for half a fluid ounce seems steep, but not much gets used in each cleaning. A few drops on one of the applicators is sufficient, then gently sweep the surface of the record a couple of times and wait for any remaining liquid to evaporate (it smells odd but not too strong, and soon vanishes). The system is claimed to remove not only dust but also finger oils, mould release agents and other general gunge.

It's not all that convenient to use, but there's no doubting the benefits. Records recently cleaned by other methods benefitted little, but those cleaned some time ago, or bought second-hand and dirty – and even one bought recently new – showed gains between subtle and very obvious indeed. Apart from removing dust-induced ticks and pops, background rustle is lowered and as a result you can hear more details and are less distracted. Worth it, especially for much-treasured vinyl.

- nififorsale.com 0870 241 2469
- www.hififorsale.com

\star

Kimber Tonik interconnect cable £51 (1m pair)

Kimber's trademark three-conductor interconnect recipe clearly ain't broke and don't need fixing – but there was room for a cheaper version and this is it. Three 'varistranded' conductors, insulated in 'special recipe' polythene, plaited together and terminated in basic but decent phono plugs, make up this cable. The lack of screening will be no problem in the majority of installations (at line level, anyway) and basic electrical and mechanical characteristics are all exemplary.

As for sound, it's remarkably fine for the price. Maybe the more expensive Kimbers beat it, but not by much, and it will happily stand against other budget class leaders. More than anything else, the sound seems beautifully uncluttered with great definition and precision in both imaging and tonality. Maybe bass is the tiniest hint shy, but if the price seems right don't waste much time hunting around for better performance — this is really very good.

- Russ Andrews Accessories 01539 825500
- www.russandrews.com



THE COMPONENTS



Audio Analogue Paganini CD player £795

A solidly built, slimline CD player from a front-runner in mid-priced esoteric kit, the Paganini has undergone radical change since its review in *HFC* 191. It doesn't sound very dynamic, but remains musical, especially in this system.



Unison Research Unico R integrated stereo amp £750 (line version)

An ultra-simple 80-watt hybrid integrated with only volume and source selector controls to play with. Extremely natural sound, especially in the mid and high frequencies.



Opera SuperPavarotti loudspeakers £1,150

You'd expect a SuperPavarotti to be huge and sound big and fat. Nothing could be further from the truth for this tall, slim three-way. Sadly not entirely magnetically shielded, but beautifully finished and with a deft touch.



AUDIO ANALOGUE CD PLAYER | UNISON RESEARCH AMP | OPERA SPEAKERS | £2,695

SYSTEM ADDICT

Exquisite, delicate and frankly lovely system for cultured listening

f you want something that looks and sounds different, but don't have a king's ransom to spend on your hi-fi, then this CD system consisting entirely of Italian thoroughbreds could well be the answer you seek.

The system is fronted by the Audio Analogue Paganini CD player. Built like a tank, this £795 behemoth was thoroughly revamped last year and now features 24-bit/96kHz upsampling like its bigger Maestro brother. This is an ultra-minimalist design, with only a single but solid coaxial digital output and a pair of similarly butch phono analogue stereo sockets, a rear on/off switch and just eight buttons on the thick alloy front panel.

A minimalist approach is shared by the £750 Unison Research Unico R integrated amplifier. Once again, the on-off switch is moved to the back leaving only a source selector and a pair of green LEDs on the front panel. When first powered up, these flicker like a lighthouse on speed for the first 30 seconds or so, the only sign of the valve line stage within. But, like the Paganini, the 80-watt Unico R is built like a brick outhouse and has extremely solid speaker terminals. It comes with a small wooden radio frequency remote with just two buttons – volume up and down.

The system is topped off by the tall, thin three-way £1,150 Opera SuperPavarotti floorstander. The speaker has a downward-firing port, so the speaker sits on a plinth with four inch-high risers. Inside is a pair of asymmetric internal bass-loading chambers behind each of the 110mm polymer bass/mid units, which is claimed to give deeper bass from the small drivers. A 26mm soft-dome tweeter completes the line-up, but despite a three-way design, the SuperPavarotti eschews multi-wiring and instead has a single set of very solid gold-plated brass terminals. Sadly, although suggested to be magnetically shielded, the speakers do show some staining of a TV screen, mostly from the tweeter. The speaker is claimed to have a sensitivity of 87dB, a

four-ohm nominal impedance, and a maximum power handling of 85 watts. As with all Opera speakers, the fit and finish is excellent.

Taken separately, the CD player is warm, soft, a bit undynamic but musical – the amplifier is light and pretty sounding (unless you play at insane levels) and the speakers are a slightly light-sounding design with fantastic imaging at the expense of some dynamic 'thwack' and bottom-end drive.

Mixed together however, a lot of the individual limitations seem to fall away. With a CD and speaker that are hardly dynamic, and an amplifier and speakers that are both bass-light, it wouldn't be beyond the bounds of imagination to expect a sound that was severely dynamically constricted and incapable of producing any bass information at all. In fact, the reverse is true – the bass is lean,

but tidy, ordered and surprisingly deep at times. Similarly, the dynamic range seems perfectly matched within the system. A clear case of genuine sonic synergy.

The system has excellent strengths, most noticeably a holographic image and extremely attractive and natural mid and high frequencies. The whole *Rare On Air* CD (live acoustic recordings from an LA radio station) seem like you are one step closer to the studio. On the other hand, deep, rhythmic bass on the first *Leftfield* CD sounds a bit flat and one-notey. This is definitely a system for classical, opera or jazz-lovers – and any dance music nuts need not apply.

This is a system where the whole is definitely better than the sum of the parts, though the parts ain't bad either. It maxes out on melodic beauty and vocal communication – but dub reggae/dance music fans may not be so impressed.



DEALER CONTACT

This system was recommended and supplied for review by: Audio Consultants, 7 Comet House, Calleva Park, Aldermaston,

Reading RG7 8JA 2 0118 981 9891

www.audioconsultants.co.uk

SILVER ANNIVERSARY SPEAKER CABLE WITH NEW 'AIRLOC' TERMINATION

Silver Anniversary, available in single and bi-wire, is just about every magazine reviewers favourite affordable speaker cable, with its brilliant, clean, accurate and neutral signal transfer. It is now available with the New Airloc range of performance enhancing connectors.

SILVER ANNIVERSARY by QED, NATURALLY.











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NEW MUSIC FORMATS



THE ROLLING STONES

Beggar's Banquet SACD (stereo) ABKCO

Music: American label ABKCO has reissued the entire Decca period Stones catalogue on hybrid CD/SACD stereo discs that, mysteriously, make little mention of the new format on the cover.

Beggar's Banquet is the one with Street Fighting Man and Sympathy For The Devil backed up by eight superb tracks from a band approaching the peak of its creative powers. There are a couple of back country-style tracks with Jagger doing his best bluesman voice and, honestly, not a poor song in sight. This album's influence can be heard on modern bands too numerous to mention and yet it remains as potent and entertaining as ever. Sound: By modern standards this is not a high fidelity disc but considering the vintage of the material the result is stunning. Original LPs might compete but you won't find a better version on silver disc.



JS BACH: ST MATTHEW PASSION

Nikolaus Harnoncourt (cond)/Concentus musicus Wien/Arnold Schoenberg Choir etc (played on original instruments) DVD-Audio/Dolby Digital 5.1 Teldec Das Alte Werk 8573-81036-9

Music The 'Great Passion', arguably JS Bach's

signature work, has inspired many recordings over the years, but here is a rare example of one that combines artistic and technical distinction with the benefits that multichannel recording can bring in an acoustic like the Jesuitenkirche in Vienna where it was recorded. The disc suggests a venue of rare quality – a large, reverberant space that retains real transparency through crescendi. This is an elegant, beautifully judged performance of an extraordinarily complex score that reveals more of itself each time it is

Sound: Sonically the most compelling and successful DVD-Audio to date, this disc is as free from the cloying excesses of many traditional 'big band' versions as it is of the cold sterility of many earlier original instruments recordings. This is a landmark recording for Bach lovers and for DVD-Audio alike.

CINEMA SELECTION

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



MINORITY REPORT

Film: Minority report is Steven Spielberg's most effective foray into grown-up territory in years. Tom Cruise puts in a solid performance as a framed cop in a future where criminals are fingered by geneticallymodified seers before they can commit their intended crimes. This intriguing premise is executed with some verve against a stunning CGI backdrop and the pace of the story is spot-on. There are a few gaps in the plot you could drive a bus through and, like AI, some of the trickier philosophical issues are shirked, but it's

never less than utterly gripping. ₩₩₩

Sound and Vision: It's Spielberg, it's Fox: you know what to expect. This is a first-rate job on a technically demanding film. The washed-out blues, greys and greens of the cinematography are captured beautifully and the sound, while muscular in the right places, is surprisingly subtle for a blockbuster. With a feast of behind the scenes info, it's a great two-disc set.

CD/ VINYL



BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

6 CD box set (Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Wagner, Sibelius, Hindemith, Verdi, Mahler) Berlin Philharmonic EMI 7243 5 75612 2 8

Music: This tribute to the Berlin Philharmonic under some of its most famous conductors consists mostly of completed works, with some bleeding chunks on a bonus CD. Highlights include an imperious Brahms 3 from Furtwangler, Wagner Ring Preludes from Karaian and Simon Rattle's Mahler 10. The intensity of many of these performances underpins Richard Osborne's view in the supplied notes that the Berlin Phil has created "a tradition of sustained excellence which is almost without parallel". ₩₩₩₩ Sound: With recordings spread over 90 years - Nikish's Beethoven 5 from 1913 - sound quality is mixed, but

from Karajan's day (disc 2 and later) it

is serviceable or better.



TORI AMOS Scarlet's Walk

Epic

Music: Tori's eighth album sees the flame-haired confessional singer/songwriter rekindle the style that harks back to her early emotive records. Scarlet's Walk follows an imaginary musical journey through America, drawing on a diverse range of influences as she goes. The songs are beautifully arranged for her piano and regular band, with oodles of lush vocal layers projected into a broad sound stage. The work is far more focused, more accessible and much more Tori she's picking up where she left off in 1996 after the superb Boys for Pele. ***

Sound: Slick and assured studio album mixed and produced by Tori's hubby Mark Hawley. Lots of clean layers and no nasties.



LOW Trust

Rough Trade

Music: Stripped bare minimalists Low have been painting rarefied rock atmospheres for years, often aided in their calling by producer Steve Albini, a legendary professor of bare bones beauty. The controls have changed hands for this offering and the result is a grander sound, if still as melodiously downbeat as ever. Much of the album is conducted at funereal pace, the deep echo of a bass drum beating in slo-mo. the slothful atmosphere punctuated by splatterings of ambient noise. Look elsewhere if you're craving histrionics, but for somnolent 3am textures, trust in the power of Low.

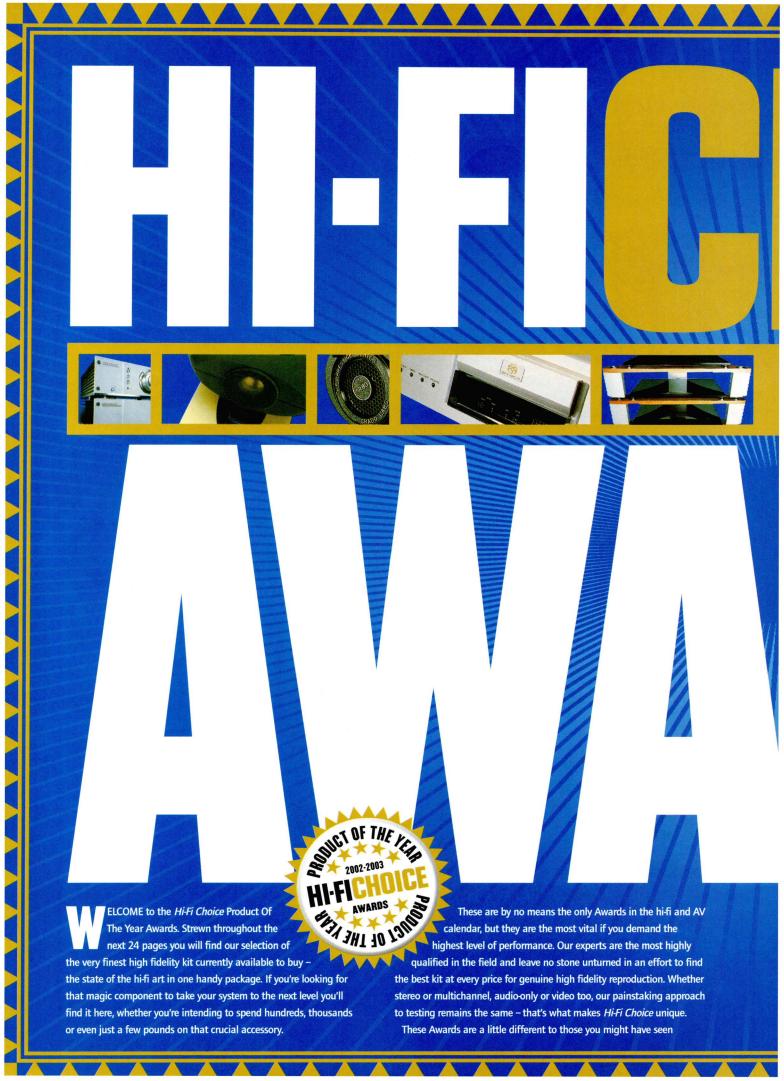
Sound: If your system does real bass you'll catch that low, thudding drum in the chest, while soft yet sonorous vocals drift above it. Nothing spectacular, but a suitably atmospheric mix.

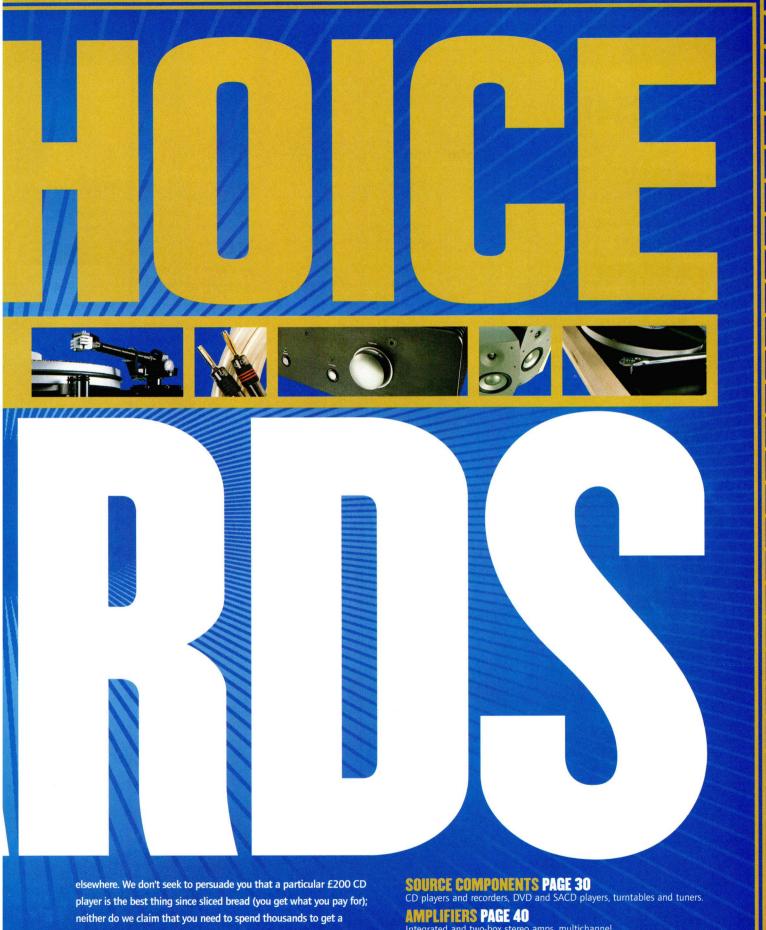


BJÖRK

Family Tree

One Little Indian Music: As well as a greatest hits selection, Björk's latest brings together a mix of new, rare and unreleased elements from her career, including stints with her pre-fame punk band KUKL and the erratically brilliant Sugarcubes (including an Icelandic version of Birthday), string experiments with the Brodsky Quartet and more. By turns challenging, accessible, insightful and bizarre, Family Tree pulls together some of the missing links for Björk spotters and offers plenty of aural treats for everyone else. Sound: Björk's work has always depended as much on its sound as its form for its effect and this collection doesn't disappoint - even the early 'punk' tracks have a startling clarity. THE DO





semblance of high quality sound. Simply, these are the products that have given us the most pleasure in the past year and will continue to do so into the next. There are components here to suit every pocket and every system – the best that high fidelity entertainment has to offer. These are the Awards you can trust, so read on. And enjoy!

Integrated and two-box stereo amps, multichannel AV amps, receivers and processors.

LOUDSPEAKERS PAGE 46Stereo speakers, complete multichannel packages and subwoofers.

CABLES AND ACCESSORIES PAGE 54 Wires, supports and other useful gadgets.



£330 🕿 Lenbrook UK 01908 319360 🐞 www.nadelectronics.com

NAD C5411 cd player

One of several great value CD players from this classic budget stable, the NAD C541 i is far better equipped than its unassuming appearance might suggest. Under the skin you'll find audiophile components galore, including Nichicon Muse caps and an HDCD-compatible Burr-Brown 24-bit/96kHz Delta/Sigma DAC. The back panel reveals an inclination toward multiroom use should the user desire, the 12-volt trigger socket and remote IR connections both being dedicated

KEY FEATURES

CDR/RW PLAYBACK 12V TRIGGER SOCKET REMOTE IR INPUT 24/96 DAC HDCD FILTER to this increasingly popular approach to music delivery. What's more, the buffered digital output will aid any digital recordings you make from this player and the low output impedance on the analogue sockets means that cables have less effect on the end result. The C541i has a mix of ingredients for hi-fi cred aplenty.

Once fully run-in its balance is at once dynamic, colourful and assured. With no shortage of detail and full, tuneful bass, this player has considerable transparency with the

finer aspects of music. Performance is highly impressive at the price, with clean, open textures, while its smooth and expressive demeanour works well with classical and contemporary music alike. On test, Brahms' Clarinet Quintet came across with all its colour and subtlety intact, and tracks by Garbage were driven along with poise and power in equal measure. This modestly priced NAD is a strong all-rounder that's dynamic, tonally varied and confident, with class-leading detail. Reviewed in HFC 231



£500 🕿 Marantz 01753 680868 @ www.marantz.co.uk

MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIGNATURE CD PLAYER

The £500 price point is one of the hardest fought in the CD player market and it takes a special kind of machine to make its mark. Not for the first time the outstanding contender is a Marantz, a fully stacked KI (designer Ken Ishiwata) Signature version of the classic CD6000 which comes in at twice the price of the base model. But like a Honda Integra R it's the extras that count and the engine of this particular hot hatch is a dual differential delta/sigma digital to

KEY FEATURES

CD-R/RW PLAYBACK
CD TEXT
DUAL DIFFERENTIAL
DACS
HDAM OUTPUT BUFFER
COPPER PLATED
CHASSIS

analogue converter of some repute.

A neat remote handset offers a degree of volume control and could in theory be used to drive a power amp direct, but also adjusts the headphone output. The KI displays CD text from suitable discs and plays CD-R/RWs, but perhaps its most striking feature is its copper plated and damped internal metalwork, which reduces the effects of RF noise on digital circuits.

More impressive is the player's sound which is perceptibly rich but very forceful, our *Mahler Six* track coming

across with a strong sense of solidity and architecture, the player displaying an electrifying sense of grip. A more sedate Brahms piece was given appropriately gentle treatment – tremendous definition combined with pungent tonality and an open yet well-defined sense of space. This KI Signature shows what can be done with a basic chassis when all the building blocks are carefully selected, a stunning musical result that puts more expensive alternatives to shame. Reviewed in HFC 231





£1,150 ☎ Cyrus 01480 435577 **⊕** www.cyrus.co.uk

CYRUS CD7Q CD PLAYER

If it's CDs you're into rather than DVDs you can't beat a dedicated CD player for giving the last word in musical engagement – and there are plenty to choose from. Few however are in the same league as the top dog in the Cyrus range.

An enhanced version of Cyrus's basic CD7, the CD7Q comes in the brand's preferred half-width alloy

case, which benefits from integral heat sinking and good structural integrity. Equipped with four 24-bit Burr-Brown DACs in differential balanced mode, it features one of the lowest jitter measurements we've seen.

In action it's a subtle and engaging player without the electronic thumbprint of many of its ilk, managing to be both smooth and

KEY FEATURES

DIFFERENTIAL
BALANCED 24-BIT DACS
OPTIONAL PSX-R POWER
SUPPLY UPGRADE
MC BUS COMUNICATION
SYSTEM REMOTE
NON-MAGNETIC CASE

punchy with genuine dynamics. Piano is particularly well served, our Ravel piece being reproduced with bell-like percussiveness and ripeness. It's easy on the ear yet has a physical sound with real gravitas when the music requires. Its standout quality is imaging which is unusually precise and well focused, while subtle ambient cues are remarkably well served.

Refined, expressive and articulate as well as tonally neutral, the CD7Q is a genuine upgrade on its favourably received forebear, with bolder tonal colours and a remarkable ability to differentiate depth information.

Ceding nothing in build quality to the heavyweights in its class this attractive player combines precision with musical coherence to produce music that will distract you from all but the most pressing of activities. (We've all got to eat sometime!) And that, in our book, is Award-winning stuff.

Reviewed in HFC 226



£1,500 ☎ CSE 01423 359054 ⊕ www.primare.net

PRIMARE D30.2 CD PLAYER

If you're looking for something a little bit more serious to play your CDs on, something that could be considered high end for want of a better term, this substantial Primare is a superb choice.

Weighing in at a solid 11 kg the D30.2 sits at the top of this Swedish brand's range and incorporates a veritable armoury of high technology. It has an unusually sophisticated and well-endowed power supply with 13 regulated supplies, its digital to analogue converter uses two high-

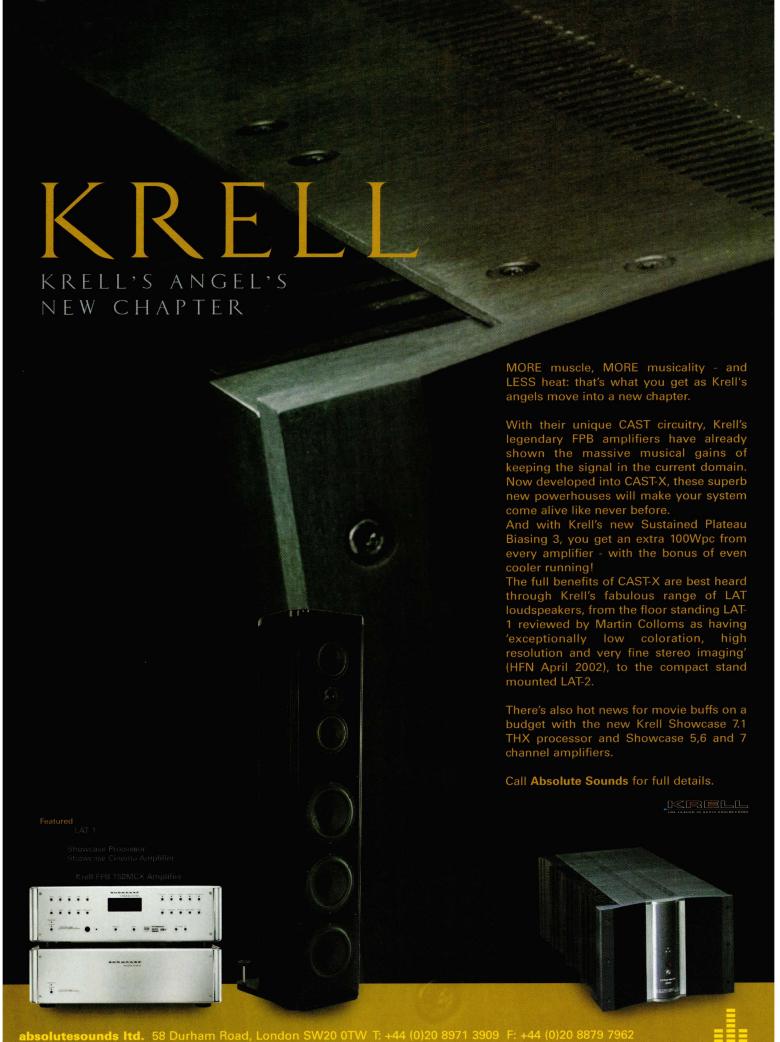
precision Burr-Brown 24-bit/96kHz DACs per channel and it incorporates a variety of techniques to get on top of digital audio's worst enemy – jitter.

All this groundwork pays off handsomely when it comes to the important bit – sound quality. This Primare has life and sparkle, making for exhilarating listening and a sense of grip and musicality that is rarely heard. Basically it responds precisely to whatever you put in the drawer – rock music rocks and orchestral crescendos build with a sustained sense of power.

KEY FEATURES

BALANCED XLR OUTPUTS RCA PHONO ANALOGUE OUTPUTS ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT OPTIONAL SYSTEM REMOTE BURR-BROWN PCM1704 DACS It is clearly a physical and potent sounding player that likes to get to grips with the material. It needs a decent system to give of its best but the price would suggest as much, and the fact that none of the other players in its test group could compete in all respects suggests that it is indeed top of its class. Anyone with a transparent and dynamic system will kick themselves if they buy a new CD player before hearing this beautifully built and highly entertaining machine. Reviewed in HFC 226







£2,300 ☎ Sony 08705 111999 **⊕** www.sony.co.uk

SONY SCD-XA777ES SACD PLAYER

SACD is a music format after every audiophile's heart. It offers extended 100kHz bandwidth and CD-beating dynamic range — what's more, the range of software is growing at an astonishing pace for what is still a niche technology. The cause has been helped in no small part by the extraordinary pieces of audio engineering that have been coming from the biggest brand behind the format, Sony.

Being a dedicated audio player, Sony's top multichannel machine will accept any form of SA or CD-based disc, including CD-RW, and will display any titles that are encoded onto them. It uses a dedicated DSD decoder for each of its six channels but in stereo mode sums their outputs to reduce noise and distortion to a minimum.

In two-channel mode this is a highly impressive CD player with a consistent and open musical tenor, albeit one that is never going to compete with the same material on SACD. The Sony makes a remarkable case for the newer format with a more relaxed and colourful sound that makes instruments sound real and musicians become full, three-dimensional personalities.

The transition into multichannel SACD, however, bowled us over completely. We just didn't expect the

KEY FEATURES

ALTERNATIVE DIGITAL FILTERS FOR CD SIX CHANNEL SACD SEPARATE

MULTICHANNEL &
STEREO OUTPUTS
FRONT/BACK
BALANCE CONTROL

CD TEXT

cascading wash of music that fully evokes the atmosphere of the recording venue, and the deep and easy bass that plugs every nook and cranny in the room. This is simply a very exciting music player that will allow you to get the most out of this superb new format – if you want first-class transportation to the recording studio there is no better conduit. Reviewed in HFC 223



£3,650 ☎ MDC 01992 573030 ⊜ www.wadia.com

WADIA 301 CD PLAYER

Every year we search high and low to find the best CD player on the market. A not altogether thankless task, it is nonetheless hard to find truly stunning examples that fully warrant the asking price, but digital specialist Wadia tends to come through with the goods.

New for 2002 and built into a fabulous aluminium chassis, the 301 has a high quality built-in volume control and the option of multiple digital inputs so it can also operate as a preamp/DAC. Use it

conventionally or hook it directly to a power amp and you'll hear dynamics and bass detail few players can match.

This Wadia uses a Pioneer stable platter transport mechanism and its own oversampling technology to remarkable effect, producing a sound so convincing and engrossing that it becomes addictive – you cease to hear the player and become distracted by the music (which doesn't happen to reviewers all that often). It responds to the tonal richness of each disc in such a way as to bring out the best in the

KEY FEATURES

DIGITAL VOLUME CONTROL

BALANCED XLR OUTPUTS DIGITAL PREAMP

OPTION
BURR-BROWN

NUMERICAL OUTPUT LEVEL DISPLAY

ANDUCT OF THE

recording, double bass sounding vibrant and round, atmospheric soundscapes taking on previously unimagined graphic qualities. We were surprised by the depth of tone available from familiar discs and couldn't fail to appreciate the player's deft touch when it came to timing.

There are plenty of highly priced disc players around but the 301 combines flexibility with a powerful and transparent sound that will have you reassessing the medium's potential. Reviewed in HFC 228





£400 ☎ Pioneer 01753 789500 @ www.pioneer.co.uk

PIONEER DV-656A 'UNIVERSAL' DVD PLAYER CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD

The most competitively priced 'universal' player of 2002 bar none is Pioneer's slimline DV-656A. Rarely has such a discreet bit of packaging contained so much potential for high quality home entertainment

It will play just about anything you care to stick in the tray - CD, DVD-Video, SACD, DVD-Audio, DVD-R and RW, MP3 and even S-VCD, the list goes on. Chances are, if you've got a 12cm silver disc that contains audio and/or video this Pioneer will play it. It doesn't skimp

KEY FEATURES

INTERNAL DTS & DD DECODERS

TWIN SCART SOCKETS COMPONENT VIDEO OUTPUT

SEPARATE STEREO & MULTICHANNEL OUTPUTS

BURR-BROWN 24-BIT/192KHZ DACS

on features either, with full remote control, Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz DACs and onboard Dolby Digital and DTS decoding. Setting it up in a multichannel system is made easy with a high-resolution on-screen display to guide you through the process and the simplified speaker set-up procedure is a doddle.

The fact that this machine plays so many formats is remarkable enough at its price point. That it plays them all to a very decent standard is the proverbial icing on the cake. As a CD player it is surprisingly solid, and

capable of a dynamic integrity that insists the music stands out from the speakers and take up residence in the room. The high-resolution formats were also impressive at the price, the DV-656A revelling in the low-level resolution and impressively natural sound of these media. It's no slouch as a video player either, with good colour and low video noise.

As an all-round solution this is unbeatable at the price - it does everything except make the tea and does it all very well. Reviewed in HFC 234



£400 ☎ Sony 0990 111999 ⊕ www.sony.co.uk

SONY DVP-NS905V

This has been the year of the multi-format player, with all the major brands bringing variations to the market. Sony has concentrated on combining its SACD technology with DVD capability and this machine adds the ability to play DVD-R/RW and its variants along with CD, VCD and MP3 compatibility in a beautifully finished slimline case.

Features include a childproof drawer lock and a CD Direct function for improving the sound of that medium. There's also a wide range of picture tweaking features alongside

superior image processing thanks to the 12-bit/108MHz video DAC.

This Sony is a very decent CD player that provides a clear, open window onto the music, allowing it to reproduce a great sense of presence and internal tension with even difficult recordings. SACD sound quality is significantly better, sounding smoother and with greater stereo depth. Instrumental texture and colour are remarkably well served and multichannel recordings add a whole new dimension and sense of involvement to the performance.

KEY FEATURES INTERNAL DTS & DD DECODERS

TWIN SCART SOCKETS SEPARATE STEREO AND

12-BIT/108MHZ VIDEO DAC

CD DIRECT

It clearly has a strong affinity to the home-grown format (SACD being a Sony/Philips creation), sounding punchy and alive with strong detail resolution in all modes.

It's also a superb video player at the price offering sharp, clean images with very low noise. Moving backgrounds are handled smoothly, without the jerkiness of some of the competition. In a field of very strong contenders the DVP-NS905V has got what it takes to stand out, providing unbettered sound and picture quality for the money. Reviewed in HFC 234







£1.000 @ Denon UK 01753 888447 @ www.denon.co.uk

DENON DVD-3800 MIII TI-FORMAT DVD PLAYER CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO

Denon's latest DVD-Audio player is a solidly built and beautifully finished example of 'affordable high-end' AV tech. Second down from the range-topping A1 it has the physical integrity and power supply sophistication to be found on models costing considerably more.

Its claims to fame features-wise lie with the Silicon Images progressive processing and de-interlacing technology which promise big things for projector users and anyone with an NTSC monitor. It has unusually comprehensive onboard speaker management facilities and useful picture tweaking aides to optimise monitor settings. On the audio side it is HDCD compatible and has two 'Pure Direct' output modes.

Sonic performance is excellent and underpins the remarkable value that this machine represents. CDs are played back with an unusually organic and subtle sound with plenty

of detail. It is clearly a neutral and transparent player that always sounds credible and wouldn't be embarrassed next to dedicated CD players close to its price. DVD-Audio has a similar feel only more so, with oodles of fine detail, giving the music a suggestion of acoustic that contrasts strongly with the sterility of lesser players.

As a video player it's in a class of its own - with a good projector you can

KEY FEATURES **PROGRESSIVE** SCAN (NTSC) DIGITAL AUDIO INPUT TWIN SCARTS BURR-BROWN 24-BIT / 192KH7 DACS

12-BIT/108MHZ

VIDEO DAC

fully appreciate the excellent contrast and detail, and the progressive processing produces a picture that is deep and clear with well-controlled motion artefacts.

The bottom line is that this is a top-notch video player that can also be taken very seriously in the world of nurist audio

Reviewed in HFC 234



IARANTZ DV8300

This was the year that saw the arrival of truly 'universal' disc players, machines to satisfy the ever expanding array of formats on the market. Marantz took Pioneer's DV-747, the first on the UK market. and built on it to produce its own player for all seasons – one that that accepts any form of 12cm audio or video disc. even those made on most DVD recorders. It ups the Pioneer ante with THX Select approval and incorporates Marantz's favoured HDAM output amps to improve sound quality on all formats. Its key

KEY FEATURES

DD, DTS, HDCD & MP3 DECODERS THX SELECT

RGB SCART & COMPONENT VIDEO **OUTPUTS**

BURR-BROWN 24-BIT/192KHZ DACS 12-BIT/108MHZ VIDEO DAC

attribute for the audiophile is the ability to play both SACD and DVD-A high-resolution discs in stereo or multichannel, so there's no longer a risk of ending up with 'a Betamax!'

In common with many Marantz products, timing sounds spot on - pick any format and you'll appreciate the ability to reproduce complex rhythms. Notes stop and start precisely, letting the decay ebb away in an entirely natural fashion. Imaging is good too, its full scale soundscapes revealing remarkable high-frequency extension and genuine 'air' in the recording.

Unlike many DVD-based machines the Marantz is pretty snappy with CD as well as the newer DVD-A/SACD music formats, serving the hushed tones of Lambchop and the kickin' beats of Missy Elliott equally well.

CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD

Video playback is likewise excellent, its picture resolution nudging ahead of many decent dedicated DVD players. All-in-all, a strong all-round AV solution with serious sonic credentials. Reviewed in HFC 233





£400 ☎ 01753 680868 ⊜ www.marantz.co.uk

MARANTZ DR6000 CD RECORDER

Having exhaustively tested all the best digital recorders available we established that this Marantz CD-R/RW machine cannot be beaten when it comes to quality of build, recording and playback. MP3 and hard drives may be in the ascendant but if it's results you're after, CD-R is the format to beat.

Comprehensively equipped and well-built, this superb recorder offers a full range of features via remote control or its solid, smartly-appointed front panel.

KEY FEATURES

CD TEXT RECORD AND EDIT

SAMPLE CONVERSION UP TO 96KHZ

HDAM OUTPUT BUFFER DOUBLE SPEED

FINALISING HEADPHONE LEVEL CONTROL

BUILT OF THE

result), it's also a fine CD player - a rarity among the breed where dubbing quality usually takes precedence over playback performance. Being a single decker you need another player to dub your discs but the results are worth it. Recordings are clean, accurate and perform equally well played back on the Marantz or on a dedicated CD player. It tracks bass, midband, imag-

ing and dynamics with remarkable

Besides being the best CD recorder

on the market this year (you could pay

more put it won't guarantee a better

fidelity to the source, so much so that it's hard to identify any limitations.

It works at a more fundamental level too, touching all the right musical buttons, reproducing the integrity of the original to make the results just as compelling. Recordings from analogue sources like vinyl also fare well, remaining airy, spacious and controlled, easily the best result in its test group. The bottom line is that this recorder eschews gimmickry in favour of doing its job very, very well. Reviewed in HFC 233



PROJECT RPM 6 TURNTABLE & TONEARM

The Project RPM 6 turned up at the eleventh hour and the full review is printed in this issue, but the result it delivers is so impressive that we just had to squeeze it into our Awards as the best 'affordable' record player of the year.

The RPM 6 is a great looking turntable and one that concentrates on the basics in order to deliver the best sound for the money. It's a solid, unsprung design with a large but not heavy platter made from vinyl-topped MDF. It has three cone feet that can be adjusted for level and speed change is accomplished Rega-style by lifting the platter and changing belt pulley. The tonearm is Project's model 9, a highly adjustable design that you'll find in much of the brand's range.

Put diamond into vinyl on the RPM 6 and you'll hear why it made the grade. It's wonderfully articulate and lucid, allowing studio style transparency while producing

holographic imagery alongside bouncy KEY FEATURES vet not overt rhythmic timing. It copes AC MOTOR WITH POWER SWITCH ON UNDERSIDE OF DECK ably with all manner of music, both light and fluffy and down and dirty. POWDER-COATED BRASS RECORD PUCK with a remarkable degree of TONEARM BEARINGS TO ABEC7 QUALITY confidence and no sense of aggression. Such qualities are a real VTA ADJUSTABLE ARM

achievement at the price and this deck

is worthy of top-notch ancillaries – we reviewed it with a £300 MC cartridge and didn't feel that results were compromised. Its speed and deftness allows the needle to follow the groove precisely and produce music with energy and solidity in full effect. Reviewed in HFC 236





£2,248 🕿 Rega 01702 333071 🏶 www.rega.co.uk

REGA P9

Rega may be best known for the quality of its budget kit, but the P9 is a simply stunning turntable combining some unusual features with radical thinking.

Featuring the ultimate incarnation of Rega's classic cast aluminium tonearm, the RB1000, this natural finish unit has all-metal parts in

place of the usual plastic, allows arm height adjustment and has the tightest tolerances that the company can produce. The P9 turntable is a two-piece solid plinth design which needs a well isolated shelf to give of its best but looks very sweet with its hardwood 'picture frame' surround. Motor vibration is minimised by a

KEY FEATURES

ELECTRONIC SPEED CHANGE ALUMINIUM OXIDE PLATTER OLITROARD HARDWOOD PLINTH SURROUND RB1000 TONEARM

large and elaborate outboard power supply which uses careful phase adjustment to tune out spurious energy in the motor. Drive is via twin belts to a metal subplatter which supports the aluminium oxide ceramic platter, topped with a felt mat.

The P9 delivers sound that is notably different from the vinyl norm - less mechanical sounding than many decks with superior sweetness and control. Surface noise seems more detached than usual, which means that the music shines through. Stereo images are fully formed with fine depth and precision, while vocals sound clean and coherent. There's also no lack of bass power, the Prodigy's awesome Poison showing considerable bass weight, depth and dexterity. If you are after a romantic sound don't choose this deck, but if you want precision, accuracy and great powers of seduction you'll be charmed by the P9. Reviewed in HFC 228



£3,500 ☎ Avid 01832 710370 **⊕** www.avidhifi.co.uk

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 110

KEY FEATURES

FULLY SPRUNG

OUTBOARD POWER SUPPLY

ELECTRONIC

SPEED SWITCHING

HIGH TORQUE MOTOR

A cross between the company's flagship Acutus and its base model the Volvere, this is a heavyweight suspended turntable that means business from the outset. The three silver posts contain the suspension springs while the external power supply allows electronic speed selection. It's a simple but heavily engineered design that has all the ingredients to turn its users into vinyl junkies.

Put a favourite LP on the platter, screw down the fine threaded clamp and let the needle into the groove and you'll hear things you never expected vinyl to deliver. Killer bass that goes all the way down and shakes the furniture, the most transparent of midranges that lets everything through, and the sweetest highs imaginable. Absolute results depend on the arm, cartridge and phono stage used but if these are half decent you'll be revelling in analogue audio heaven.

Its transparency means that not all your records will sound great - there is plenty of variation in record quality and the Volvere Sequel lets you know it. On the other hand it will make the most of whatever you give it, and most recordings are much better than

you might imagine. The degree of precision available means that you will hear every detail within the context of a fluent musical whole that cannot be ignored, such is the coherence and integration of the performance. Reviewed in HFC 229





PURE DRX-701ES DAB DIGITAL RADIO TUNER

The digital radio market really started to get going this year with the first portable models and increasingly more affordable new full-width designs like this Pure. Previously known as VideoLogic, Pure has been instrumental in lowering the entry price for DAB and this is its most competitive model to date. The DRX-701 ES is a third generation design engineered by Pure's parent company Imagination Technologies, incorporating new integrated DAB technology to create a slimmer unit at a lower price. There are plenty of facilities on board too,

KEY FEATURES

REMOTE CONTROL FULL BAND III RECEPTION USB CONNECTOR FOR **SOFTWARE UPGRADES**

DYNAMIC RANGE CONTROL HEADPHONE SOCKET

STATE TO F THE

including 'Dynamic Range Control' (DRC). With DAB, broadcasters have the option to leave off dynamic range compression at source and instead allow it to be compressed by in the tuner once the signal has been received. The advantage of DRC to serious listeners is that this internal compression may be switched off, thus improving sound quality. At present, only Radio 3 takes full advantage of this by broadcasting an uncompressed signal, but hopefully others will follow.

The Pure offers faster tuning than most and its display can be dimmed or

defeated. Its sound is characterised by a 'psycho-acoustic compensation system' designed to make DAB more ear friendly by slightly 'sweetening' the tonal balance.

This tuner takes advantage of DAB's inherent strengths – freedom from interference alongside an expanding range of exclusive stations – as well as most, at a highly tempting price to boot. If you're seeking a little more variety from your 'wireless' this is a great introduction to the digital delights of DAB.

Reviewed in HFC 234



£600 🕿 Lenbrook UK 01908 319360 🗯 www.nadelectronics.com

NAD S400

Despite the growth in digital radio, FM is still going strong and the results available with a good tuner and aerial can be excellent, not to mention more widely available geographically-speaking than with DAB. Choosing our FM tuner this year was complicated by the fact that two very similar models from NAD and Primare (T21) were launched simultaneously, but in the end the NAD's extra features just clinched it.

The S400 is an FM-only model, clad in NAD's classy Silverline

casework and equipped with RDS, which displays station and programme name. It also offers remote control and 30 station presets alongside various reception-enhancing features.

But as with any other of our Award winners the features and looks come second place to the functionality and sound quality, and it's on these grounds that this NAD scores. Give it a decent signal and it gets out of the way and lets the music flow through. Even with less than fantastic transmissions where the broadcaster

KEY FEATURES

REMOTE CONTROL 30 PRESETS

SIGNAL STRENGTH METER WIDE/NARROW IF BANDWIDTH

TWIN AERIAL SOCKETS

has over-egged the compression pudding the S400 will do a better job than most, creating a semblance of high fidelity sound, minimising the negatives and bigging up the bandwidth. It manages the neat trick of sounding both strong and forthright in the bass, yet also light and airy in the treble. In fact this is due to its good detail retrieval which overrides tonal balance to give you music first and foremost. It's a wonder wireless that sounds as good as it looks. Reviewed in HFC 230



marantz



Combine a Receiver with a Multi-format Player and get a Dynamic Duo!

Marantz offers magnificent products, amongst them a perfect Dynamic Duo. The SR9200 THX Ultra Digital Surround Sound Receiver sets the highest standards for audiophiles and home theatre enthusiasts. It incorporates the latest generation of digital surround sound decoding technology and is software upgradeable. The DV8300 Multi-Channel SACD, DVD Audio & Video player, the European Player of the Year 2002-2003, received its merit as "an advanced AV component that not only does justice to audio material in CD, CD-R/RW, SACD and DVD-A media, but provides masterful reproduction of video signals as well, using for example progressive scan". Unleash your passions with this winning team!



THE DYNAMIC DUO

Telephone: 01753 680868 Internet: www.marantz.com



£349 🕿 B&W 01903 750750 🏶 www.rotel.com

ROTEL RA-02 INTEGRATED STEREO AMP

Stereo amplifiers are finding themselves under attack from surround sound receivers, gallantly defying these lumbering beasts with their ever increasing lists of features. However, features and channels do not necessarily have any bearing on sound, and as the hi-fi world has known for some time, less is more. If you want a great stereo sound you can't beat a great stereo amp and one of the very best below £500 is this stunning new Rotel.

The RA-02 has a good selection of

KEY FEATURES
4 LINE INPUTS, 1 TAPE
LOOP
MM PHONO INPUT
REMOTE CONTROL
40 WATTS / 8 OHMS
TWIN SPEAKER

TERMINALS

HI-FI

features and a remarkably sleek design for the price. It has defeatable tone controls, switchable speaker outputs and separate source and tape monitoring. The back panel has various sockets to enhance multiroom integration while the remote will operate a complete Rotel system.

In action the RA-02 sounds like it will just keep on getting better and better the more you use it. Its subtle, clean sound has a good sense of timing and some real punch. Voices are crisp and clear with excellent

articulation thanks to the natural treble quality, while bass is solid and swift. Midrange is its forte, producing a three dimensional soundstage populated with vibrant and rich sounds from our chamber music disc. Even vinyl sounds good through the onboard phono stage. While it doesn't look like its popular predecessors, this Rotel has all of their charm, and if you are after a decent yet affordable amplifier that knows what music is all about it's very hard to beat. Reviewed in HFC 232



£800 🕿 Arcam 01223 203200 🏶 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM DIVA A85 INTEGRATED STEREO AMP

While there have been some impressive new contenders in the sub-£1,000 amplifier market nothing we have seen quite matches Arcam's stalwart A85 when it comes to the combination of sound quality and features.

The A85 is uncommonly well equipped for any amplifier, let alone one that's almost affordable for most of us. Its software basis allows volume levels to be normalised between inputs, and you can vary the style of volume display and

KEY FEATURES
5 LINE INPLITS 2 TAPE

LOOPS

85 WATTS/8 OHMS

PROCESSOR BYPASS

MODE REMOTE CONTROL

TWIN SPEAKER TERMINALS



defeatable tone controls. Other handy features include the ability to expand to 5.1 channel operation with an optional module and the possibility of fixing input gain for use as part of a home cinema system. It also delivered over 100 watts per channel in the lab so there's no shortage of grunt.

In listening tests the A85 delivered a brighter, bolder and leaner sound than previous Arcams, with a quick and controlled sound that has plenty of grip in the bass. It made our test discs glow with natural acoustic energy,

producing strong imagery and palpable physicality. It is also extremely transparent, revealing details that its competitors failed to expose. Add to this its vivid and lively nature and you end up with a consistently musical and engaging amplifier.

A clear break with Arcam tradition, this is a leaner, fitter and more modern amp than its predecessors, which makes it clearly more in tune with the times. An unequivocal Best Buy, it's simply the best amp at its price point. Reviewed in HFC 214





ARCAM FMJ A32/P35 INTEGRATED STEREO + POWER AMP

In a highly competitive sector Arcam has produced an integrated/power amp combo that not only sounds stunning but outguns its peers when it comes to features as well. Top stereo dog in the brand's substantial range, the FMJ A32/P35 packs a serious 100-watts-per-channel punch in some very slick packaging.

The purpose of adding a power amp to an integrated is that while you don't increase watts you do up the current on tap and thus create a 'stiffer' and more powerful amplifier.

Fully remote controlled with two pairs of speaker outputs, the A32 is a remarkably flexible beast. Besides the usual tone and balance controls is the facility to alter the style of volume

KEY FEATURES

5 LINE INPUTS, 2 TAPE LOOPS

100 WATTS/8 OHMS
PHONO INPUT
VARIABLE INPUT
SENSITIVITY
NUMERICAL VOLUME
LEVEL DISPLAY level display and the option to adjust input sensitivity. It can also be easily integrated into a multichannel system thanks to its Processor Mode.

But it's when playing back music that the real reason for this combo's selection becomes clear, the relaxed yet detailed nature of its sound making for highly convincing listening whatever the material, the extra power allowing the sound to 'breathe'. Orchestral recordings are reproduced with more passion and flow, while stereo imaging is more focused than you get with the A32 alone (itself an excellent amp at £1,150). Chamber recordings sound larger in scale and even solo singers are more tangible, while more contemporary material sounds purposeful and engaging.

The A32/P35 combines sonic and functional finesse to a degree that is rare, which makes it excellent value in the two-box stereo amp stakes.

Reviewed in HFC 227



ATC SIA2-150 STEREO INTEGRATED STEREO AMP

Good stereo amps are more common than they used to be but truly great ones are still a scarce commodity, which makes this rugged ATC integrated even more of a find. From a company that specialises in active or powered loudspeakers this is a no-nonsense powerhouse with the minimum of features and

substantial yet elegant construction. With extremely low and consistent distortion measurements the SIA2-150 is an exceptionally transparent and revealing design with buckets of power on tap.

It's what we call a 'warts and all' design because you hear everything, the sweet and the sour depending on

KEY FEATURES
150 WATTS/8 OHMS
4 LINE INPUTS, 1 TAPE
LOOP
WBT SPEAKER
TERMINALS

REMOTE CONTROL

WEIGHT: 24KG

what's in the incoming signal. If a recording is great then the sound it produces is the same – fortunately most recordings are better than you might imagine and this amp will always make the most of what it's given. We found it to be highly sensitive to the nuances and variety in the music - it is more than capable of slamming down the bass when it's called for but that doesn't mean it won't do justice to a delicate female vocal or the acoustics of a hall. It maintains musical tension in an engaging and dramatic fashion, reproducing the drama and energy of the performance with rare fidelity.

It also has tremendous musical integrity, convincing you that its style of presentation is as honest and revealing as you are likely to hear. And when it comes to integrated designs that's certainly the case – you simply won't find a more precise or revealing design for less. Reviewed in HFC 228





£3.898 🕿 Musical Fidelity 020 8900 2866 🏶 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR STEREO PRE/POWER AMP

To get the best from your CDs and LPs there's no doubt that a preamp and power amp combo is the way to go. There are a lot to choose from but this year one stood out from the crowd. Musical Fidelity's A308CR is a big shiny amplifier combo which offers bags of power and a good selection of features.

The CR stands for choke regulation which is a classic technique for providing clean, stiff power in valve amps, and which MF considers is equally relevant to transistor designs. Both pre and power are dual mono designs for maximum stereo separation, and the power amp has a useful switch to allow two sets of inputs for easy incorporation into a surround system.

Our original reviewer claimed that it's one of the least 'sounding' amplifier combinations you can get. In other words it has very little character that you can identify - a

KEY FEATURES real talent for a hi-fi amp - and you'll hear the source, the cables and the 4 LINE INPUTS, 1 TAPE speakers' character before you can get 250 WATTS / 8 OHMS a handle on the amp's sonic signature. MM/MC PHONO STAGE It seems to work with just about

everything you throw at it - hip-hop, classical, rock or whatever, it all gets the same non-treatment. Its accurate, honest and spacious nature brings you closer to the music - excellent value in a sector dominated by larger and more



£6.000 🕿 Linn 0141 307 7777 🏶 www.linn.co.uk

NN KLIMAX TWIN STEREO POWER

REMOTE CONTROL

Power amps come in all shapes and at virtually all prices, but few are as stunning sonically as they are visually. Yet by using some distinctly high technology, Linn has managed to pull off this trick to create a stunning new power amplifier for 2002.

A 125-watts-per-channel, ultraslimline stereo design (the chassis is only an inch thick), the secret of the Klimax Twin's diminutive stature lies in the use of 4G switch-mode power supplies in place of the monster transformers and capacitors of most expensive amps. This supply has

KEY FEATURES

BALANCED SE INPLITS 125 WATTS / 8 OHMS OPTIONAL NEUTRIK OR BINDING POST SPEAKER CONNECTIONS

SILENT POWER OUTPUT

AUTO-ON SIGNAL SENSING

been specially designed for hi-fi applications and its super-fast current delivery is used to power the combination of MOSFET-based ICs and bipolar devices in the output stage. The power supply's calibre is revealed by the fact that this amp doubles its output with a halving of impedance a rare trick for any amp to turn.

It is equally unusual for an amplifier to have both speed and power in equal measure but the Klimax Twin manages to deliver as much with no little aplomb. It conveys scale and pace so well that it seems to disappear from the chain events

leaving only the music, something that should be the aim of all hi-fi kit. It's dangerously honest - don't expect a less than superb source or preamp to have its limitations smoothed over, the Linn is ruthlessly transparent. It's also quicksilver-fast and has seemingly titanic reserves of power. Don't let the elegance of the case fool you, this is a killer amp and it takes no prisoners. Reviewed in HFC 230









£11,750 🕿 Naim 01722 332266 🏶 www.naim-audio.com

NAIM NAC 552 STEREO PREAMP

Preamps are easy to build but notoriously difficult to perfect. With its most ambitious design yet Naim Audio seems to have cracked this toughest of hi-fi nuts, putting it firmly in Award-winning territory.

Building on the existing NAC 52, Naim pulled out all the stops in the quest for the absolute preamp. The NAC 552 is equipped with a separate power supply which provides no less than 18 separate feeds via two chunky cables. The remote has an LCD screen to stop you having to squint at the tiny legends on the unit itself while two inputs can be configured for use with outboard processors, multichannel being the most likely application.

In use (particularly with Naim's matching NAP 500 power amp) the result is impressive on every count and significantly better than its predecessor. The top end is sweeter, more open and more extended, the

midband is more neutral and transparent while the bass is deeper and more confident. The 552 has exceptional resolution and dynamic range which shows up previously masked low-level details with uncanny ease. Like other serious components, this preamp's neutrality lets it get out of the way of the music, leaving you

KEY FEATURES

SIX LINE INPUTS – DIN AND RCA PHONO DECOUPLED PCBS UNITY GAIN PROCESSOR INPUTS INPUT 'MAPPING' LCD REMOTE HANDSET with a wide-open window onto the sound. Despite its awesome credentials this is a genuine 'fit-and-forget' preamp that is so characterless that you'll be hard pressed to hear it – ironically, the best compliment we can bestow. It gets our Award for best disappearing act from a preamp. Reviewed in HFC 233



PIONEER VSX-D2011 MULTICHANNEL AV RECEIVER

We were struggling to find a sub-£1,000 multichannel amp with the qualities demanded of an Award winner, then at the last minute Pioneer came up with the goods in the shape of the brand new VSX-D2011. Our search was over.

Its specs alone would be enough to put it on many an enthusiast's wish

list, but the fact that it backs them up with serious sound quality makes it impossible to beat at the price. Like its big brother, the VSA-AX10, it features an auto set-up routine that not only configures each channel for level and delay but tonal balance as well. Using a five-band equaliser on every channel you can set the system up flat or

KEY FEATURES

7X100 WATTS/8 OHMS (DIN) 7.1 CHANNEL ANALOGUE INPUT DOLBY DIGITAL EX, DPLII DTS ES, NEO:6, 96/24 FM/AM PRESETTUNER match it to the front L/R channels. It can also upsample your CDs and DVD-Videos to 24-bit/192kHz. A 7.1 channel design, it includes all manner of DTS and Dolby processors including the latest DTS 96/24 and DPLII, Dolby's new music-oriented algorithm.

Unlike many sub-£1,000 AV receivers the VSX-D2011 sounds great – superb with movie surround soundtracks and enjoyable with music, both stereo and multichannel varieties. What's more, its set-up facilities ensures a level of consistency from system to system and room to room that other models can't match.

This is an AV receiver with power and finesse that wouldn't embarrass a much more expensive design and features that you won't find without spending considerably more. At the price, it's a great solution for systems where stereo and surround material are both important considerations – a winner every way you look, and listen. Reviewed in HFC 235





£1.100 ☎ Cyrus Electronics 01480 435577 ⊜ www.cyrus.co.uk

CYRUS AV8 MULTICHANNEL AV PROCESSOR

DOLBY DIGITAL/ DTS/DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II

AUTOMATIC LEVEL

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL

2 OPTICAL, 4

INPUTS

Cyrus has created a high quality AV processor at half the price of the competition - and if that doesn't warrant an award, then what does?

The AV8 pares down the processor to its bare essentials in order to produce the best sound for the price. What you get is 5.1 channel Dolby and DTS processing alongside Dolby Pro-Logic II. If you want to connect your DVD-Audio or SACD player you'll need an upgrade (£200), ditto if you need video switching (£500). But if you want to appreciate music and movies at home, with an unusually strong performance when listening in stereo, this is high-end AV on the cheap. It has some useful features too, notably automatic setup via the supplied microphone.

The AV8 sounds both smoother and more refined than its predecessor, the AV5, and is one of the most subtle and listenable AV

KEY FEATURES processors available, more or less regardless of price. It can do power and energy too of course, scenes from Lord Of The Rings proving as much in SETTINGUSING MICROPHONE CONTROL no uncertain terms. But unlike much home cinema kit it can articulate MC-BUS CONNECTIONS speech beautifully, with layers of fine detail. You can play Terminator II back to back with Room With A View and

have no worries about getting the best out of both, while a spot of music from CD sounds clear and detailed you can even apply DPLII and listen in surround. The AV8 is one of the easiest and most effective ways to make the jump from two to five channels. And it won't break the bank. Reviewed in HFC 235



£2.000 🕿 Marantz UK 01753 680868 🏶 www.marantz.co.uk

MARANTZ SR9200

If you're looking for a state of the art AV receiver but the budget won't stretch much further than two big ones we have the answer to your multichannel prayers. Marantz's range-topping response to the big guns from Denon and Pioneer is a 7.1 channel THX Ultra approved design with all the ES and EX bells that the home movie enthusiast could wish for.

Unusual features include RGB SCART in and outputs for video switching with component socketry provided on the front panel behind a flap. It has a well specced tuner with LW alongside the usual MW and RDS FM. The SR9200 is powerful but cool under pressure with a relaxed and smooth sound that is strong on subtlety and detail. A balance of qualities that favours music sources, be they stereo or multichannel varieties, its performance proves particularly impressive with SACD and DVD-Audio. It delivers an

expressive and agile sound that responds equally well with Mahler and Marc Cohn, displaying a level of consistency and sense of warmth that's extremely unusual in an integrated AV receiver.

Home cinema material is handled with equal aplomb, the receiver having enough resolving power to illustrate

7X140 WATTS/8 OHMS DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II **6 ANALOGUE INPUTS** COMPOSITE, S-VIDEO, SCART AND RGB VIDEO THX ULTRA

KEY FEATURES

the inherent differences between Dolby Digital and DTS - both reproduce an enveloping soundfield, with smooth steering and good image focus, but on the whole DTS sounds more organic and reveals more image depth. Particularly worthy for any AV fan with a penchant for music., this is an impressive receiver at a competitive price.





£3.000 🕿 Denon UK 01234 741200 @ www.denon.co.uk

DENON AVC-A1SR MULTICHANNEL AV AMP

Two superb new models have taken the integrated AV amp to new heights this year, both combining complete home entertainment solutions with genuine hi-fi credentials. One is Pioneer's VSA-AX10i and the other Denon's new AVC-A1SR. Both have a digital interface for high-res formats, but the Denon takes the garland for its marginally better sound quality.

KEY FEATURES 7X170 WATTS / 8 OHMS

TOUCH SCREEN REMOTE 8 CHANNELS DOLBY HEADPHONE OLITPLIT VIDEO STANDARDS CONVERTER

It is an incredible piece of audio engineering, packing in seven channels of amplification alongside the latest versions of all the important surround sound technologies, including Dolby PLII and THX Ultra 2, systems designed to give more musical results than their cinematic siblings.

In stereo it's the match of good hi-fi amps with a characteristically open,

vivid and lively quality and its amplifiers are also extremely powerful in both stereo and multichannel modes, coping admirably with challenging high-end speakers. Bypass the bass management with the Pure Analogue Path and you get a genuinely seamless and transparent sound that is particularly impressive. Its DACs are also good enough to upgrade your old CD player, provided it's got a digital output.

Multichannel soundfields have an uncontrived feel that gives a credibility to soundtracks that is outstanding. Even with a stereo source it provides an exceptionally consistent wrap and smooth image steering, while DTS and Dolby Digital processing is everything it should be - first class.

It's an amazing amount of hardware for the money and its sound quality cannot be beaten at the price – what are you waiting for? Reviewed in HFC 232



£5.498 ☎ Arcam 01223 203200 ⊕ www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM AV8/P7

The most impressive new high-end multichannel amp of 2002 has undoubtedly been the long-awaited AV8/P7 combination from one of the UK's favourite electronics brands.

The company has pulled out all the stops with this processor/ multichannel power amp pairing. Claiming to have invested a million pounds in R&D, this is no mere badging of far eastern technology but a ground-up creation of remarkable ability. The AV8 processor is inevitably the centre of attention, featuring virtually every surround soundenhancing technology that the combined might of Dolby, DTS and THX can muster. It will play every cinematic and hi-fi format out there and should a new one come along, as they

have a tendency to do, its software is ready for a suitable upgrade. The power amp consists of seven separate power modules based on the currentfeedback topology used in the A85 stereo amp and according to our lab tests it will drive seven of the toughest speakers with relative ease.

This power availability is abundantly

KEY FEATURES INPUT

7X175 WATTS/8 OHMS 8 DIGITAL INPUTS

8 CHANNEL ANALOGUE

COMPOSITE S-VIDEO COMPONENT AND RGB VIDEO INPUTS THX ULTRA 2

clear, the combo lifting the roof with THX spectaculars like the T2 Special Edition and pod race sequence from Phantom Menace. The sound swings from extravagant to introspective as the occasion demands, but it's never less than entertaining. High-res music formats deliver a clear and vibrant

> picture of the atmosphere in recordings, voices sending shivers down the spine. Broadcast quality video technology ensures that the picture is as slick as the sound. while up to 220msec of global delay means that lips and voices are never out of sync. This is a simply stunning multichannel amp and a new benchmark for AV technology. Reviewed in HFC 235





£180 ☎ Acoustic Energy 01285 654432 @ www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO ONE STEREO SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy built its reputation by reintroducing metal diaphragm main drivers back in the mid-1980s with its first product, the upmarket AE1. The technology has now 'trickled down' to a genuine mass market level. and features in this £180 Evo version of the Aegis One. For a budget speaker, it has an impressively high level of serious engineering content, thanks no doubt to Malaysian manufacture. It also looks good, with vinyl woodprint finish all over, and a nicely bevelled front panel edge.

It's about half as big again as most speakers using a single 130mm main driver, and the 6.6kg total weight is a testament to the solidity of a build which includes a 25mm thick front panel. Moreover, not only does the main driver have a metal alloy cone, it also has an extremely classy cast

HIFICATIONS

The second state of the second st

alloy chassis, while the tweeter features a 25mm soft dome with metal faceplate.

In-room measurement indicates free space siting here, whereupon the Evo One delivers a rich and warm sound that's noticeably 'bigger' and more solid than the budget speaker norm. The tonal balance might be a little laid-back for some, but colorations are impressively low, the dynamic range is wide, and the sound shows an exceptional freedom from any boxiness effects.

Stereo imaging is particularly impressive, with good depth, fine focus and coherence. The top end is clean and clear, if arguably a little obvious (especially with low-cost components). Happier with delicate acoustic material than hammering out the block rocking beats, the Evo One offers a level of refinement that's rare for something so inexpensive.

£300 🕿 Bowers & Wilkins 01903 750750 🏶 www.bwspeakers.com

B&W 602 S3 STEREO SPEAKERS

The 600-series has been B&W's bedrock budget range for many years, the latest Series 3s featuring a Light Oak Sorrento finish option which is much closer to current British tastes, combining a light grev front baffle and main driver surround with pale vinyl woodprint. With a twenty year heritage behind it, this £300 per pair 602 S3 is a bulky 20-litre two-way standmount, based on a main driver with a seven-inch cast frame and 140mm diameter Kevlar cone, used alongside B&W's tube-loaded 25mm metal dome tweeter. Not surprisingly, room measurements indicate free space siting, on high quality stands which should be a little lower than usual (eg 450mm) for maximum effect.

The effect of the relatively large bass/mid driver is immediately obvious in the listening experience. This speaker simply brings superior dynamic grip and authority to the KEY FEATURES

TUBE-LOADED METAL
DOME TWEETER
LARGE 175MM CAST
FRAME MAIN DRIVER
23.5X49X29CM
ENCLOSURE
KEVLARCONE
BASS/ MID DRIVER

ENCLOSURE



party, creating the sort of dynamic tension that grips and focuses the attention and adds genuine magic to the business of reproducing music. There's a commendable lack of strain here too, with better than average headroom, and particularly impressive bass which is capable of going deep while remaining crisp and even, providing a firm and propulsive foundation. The top end might be a shade obvious, though it's also notably clean and clear.

The midband is essentially neutral, if a tad 'pinched' through the presence region, and maybe a little laid back for some tastes. And although some might prefer a punchier projection, this speaker has the sort of restraint that should suit budget electronics rather well. One of the great all-rounders of this or any other year, the 602 continues to become increasingly refined with each successive generation. Reviewed in issue 234



JMLAB CHORUS 715 STEREO SPEAKERS

The leading French hi-fi speaker brand, JMlab's Chorus models represent the company's entry-level range (which sit comfortably above the 'budget' price points found elsewhere). This £529 per pair Chorus 715 is a compact vinyl-woodprint-covered floorstander, based on the company's high-class Focal drive units, including a version of the famous 'inverted dome' titanium diaphragm tweeter, plus two main drivers with 'Polyglass' damped paper cones in cast chassis.

The latter operate in a two-and-a-half-way configuration, the upper one as a bass/mid unit, the lower one covering just the bass region, with further port assistance. Room measurements suggest that some close-to-wall reinforcement might prove beneficial here.

The sound demonstrates a thoroughly impressive combination of qualities. It has fine basic overall

neutrality with accurate tonal colours and balance. It also possesses a fair measure of authority, which is rare in such a cost-effective speaker. Even rarer, it develops real dynamic drive and tension that puts the listener on the edge of his or her seat, as the music builds to or from climaxes.

Although it doesn't set new records in any one area, this speaker is a solidly superior performer right across the board, with no obvious weak spots. Some thickening of upper bass textures adds a little 'honk' to cellos and 'chestiness' to male voices, so do take plenty of time and trouble experimenting with precise placement, for the cleanest bass reproduction.

But the bottom line is that the Chorus 715 has a whole lot going for it, delivering a fine combination of high sensitivity, wide bandwidth and good neutrality at an exceedingly realistic price.

Reviewed in HFC 227



£1,460 ☎ Dynaudio 01732 451938 **⊕** www.dynaudio.com

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 82 STEREO SPEAKERS





Top model among the vinyl woodprint Audiences, the £1,460 per pair 82 is a substantial floorstander weighing 27kg, with over 50 litres of internal volume, and standing over a metre tall. Styling is conventional, though a chunky plinth is fitted to accommodate the substantial 8mm spikes.

It's a full three-way design, with two

200mm drivers plus a generous port supplying the bass, crossing over at around 430Hz to a 150mm midrange, and thence, at around 2kHz, to a 28mm fabric dome tweeter – all the filters operate at a very gentle 6dB/octave. The enclosure has

KEY FEATURES

TWIN 200MM PORT-LOADED BASS DRIVERS 150MM CONE/DOME MIDBAND UNIT 28MM FABRIC DOME TWEETER 22X105X36CM bracing and bituminous damping pads, and the speaker has just one terminal pair. The in-room response is well balanced, provided the speakers are kept well clear of walls.

Sonically the Audience 82 provides a very impressive combination of good neutrality with considerable weight and authority. The bass is clean, deep and even, free from any hangover effects, and with no tendency to thump or thicken the textures. Dynamic range is wide, and notably good at resolving low level detail.

It's a difficult speaker to criticise, because a basic lack of character is its most obvious, er, characteristic. Neutrality is exceptional, and the effectiveness of its enclosure is evident in a remarkable lack of boxy effects.

Despite its apparent complexity, the 82 sounds impressively coherent, with absolutely magnificent power handling and loudness capabilities. In the final analysis it could perhaps be a little more romantic, but the bottom line is that this is just about the most cost-effective way of putting the loud back into loudspeaker. Reviewed in HFC 229

SibaCub



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Home Cinema Choice, Nov/Dec 2002







£1.600

 □ Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670

 □ www.infinitysystems.com

INFINITY INTERMEZZO 2.6 STEREO SPEAKERS

Infinity's distinctive looking two-way which is uniquely different in several ways. It has a cast metal enclosure, silver cracklefinished with simulated wood trim, a built-in 250-watt power amp for bass, plus various other electronic bits, including a RABOS (Room Adaptive Bass Optimisation System) system for 'tuning' the loudspeaker to reduce bass room mode excitation.

Building in the bass amplifier not only converts the bass to active drive, but also makes life much easier for the system amplifier, which now only has to drive a tweeter. The main driver here has a 6.5-inch frame and 120mm cone, the tweeter a 25mm dome, and both diaphragms are aluminium stiffened by anodised oxide ceramic 'skins'.

It's reckoned that the untrained can set up RABOS using the supplied test CD and sound level meter in about half an hour, and although the

'before' and 'after' room measurements look virtually identical to each other, there is no denying the sound quality improvements which are introduced by the treatment. Even without RABOS this is still a very good loudspeaker, a little on the laid-back side of neutral perhaps, but certainly delivering very impressive weight, scale and drive for something so compact.

Adding RABOS simply opens up the soundstage, somehow making the speakers sound larger still, and significantly less boxy

The lasting impression is the quite delightful way that this speaker seems to 'disappear' - acoustically speaking – and allow the music KEY FEATURES

BUILT-IN 250W BASS AMP

SYSTEM

FULL METAL JACKET RABOS BASS TUNING

DEEP-ANODISED CMMD DIAPHRAGMS

to fill the room without apparent assistance or coloration. All told this is a hugely entertaining and highly enjoyable loudspeaker, that looks every bit as good as it sounds. Reviewed in HFC 233



B&W SIGNATURE 805 STEREO SPEAKERS

B&W's new £2,250 Signature 805 is essentially a luxury version of the established Nautilus 805 (HFC 199). It's the smallest model, and the only standmount in

KEY FEATURES

ADVANCED CROSSOVER

24X41.5X34.5CM CURVED MATRIX **ENCLOSURE**

with a curved back, matrix-braced enclosure, and external tube-loaded tweeter. The Signature's price premium might be a hefty £850, but the new model includes a considerable number of changes, some more obvious than others.

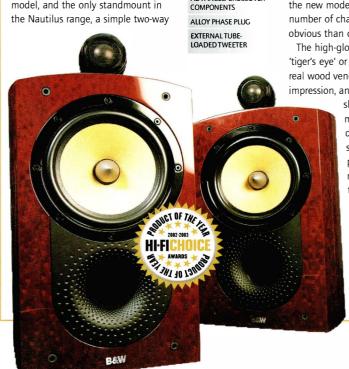
The high-gloss, highly figured, grey 'tiger's eye' or red 'bird's eye' luxury real wood veneer certainly makes an impression, and under this gorgeous

> skin are hidden major modifications to both the drive units, including silver and copper-plated pole pieces, and even more dramatic changes to the crossover network, in both design and components. A distortion reduction of 60 per cent is the claimed net effect. Such a small

loudspeaker naturally makes no attempt to

delve too deeply into the low bass regions, but instead majors on the extraordinary transparency afforded by the very classy tweeter and considerable main driver control. It delivers a tremendous sense of space, opening up recordings so you hear the boundaries of the venue, and the differences between recording venues and techniques are clearly delineated. At the top end, cymbals sound particularly realistic, but the bass too is impressively articulate and powerful, despite lacking the very deepest grunt.

It likes to play loud - all B&Ws do and has no problems handling complex material, balancing the relationships between different instruments with considerable dexterity and poise. The main point to watch is that this very revealing speaker requires the very best source components, and powerful amplification to go with it. Reviewed in HFC 232





TANNOY DIMENSION TD12 STEREO SPEAKERS

A thoroughly modern reworking of a classic format with roots in the 1940s, the TD12 is the largest of three Dimension models. It has a 12-inch dualconcentric paper cone main driver, in which a horn-loaded tweeter is mounted co-axially and fires through the centre of the main cone. This is topped off by an additional super-tweeter, in a necessarily bulky (130 litre) enclosure with stylish Art Deco overtones. Sensitivity is a generous 92dB, the amplifier load benign, and the overall balance is warm and rich but essentially flat.

KEY FEATURES

300MMDUAL-CONCENTRIC MAIN

SHIPER.TWEETER **EXTENDS INTO** LISTRASONICS

IRREGULAR 42X126X41CM **ENCLOSURE**

This speaker has a lovely open neutrality, especially with speech, maintaining full intelligibility even at whisper-quiet



levels. Direct sound is richer than most speakers, and room-reflected sound is a bit weaker giving a more accurate and detailed 'window' onto the recording session, but less tendency to give the impression that the musicians have joined you in the room.

This is very much a 'sit down and listen' speaker. Settle down in the sweet spot, and be rewarded by a beautifully constructed image with generous weight, scale, and dynamic range. Bass is authoritative and free from colour and overhang, showing seriously impressive powers of analysis.

Treble sounds quite distinct from the typical dome, its superb headroom and freedom from strain particularly obvious on brass. The super-tweeter too opens up the top in its own seductive way. Exceptionally accurate, neutral, transparent and involving, the TD12 has the all-round magnificence of a genuine high-end contender. Reviewed in HFC 225

£20.000 ☎ Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670 **⊕** www.jbl.com

JBL K2 S9800 STEREO SPEAKERS

At 90kg each and £20,000 per pair, JBL's K2 S9800 is something of a monster, primarily developed for the Japanese home market, but with roots that go right back to the company's highly successful 4320 Studio Monitor from the mid-sixties.

Essentially a giant two-way (with an additional super-tweeter above 10kHz), the bass and lower mid (up to 800Hz) is handled by a '15-incher' with 'classic' paper cone, foam surround and Alnico magnet. A 90x50 degree bi-radial horn, driven from a three-inch (76mm) beryllium dome, runs from 800Hz up to 10kHz. These are mounted in an unfashionably wide and irregularly shaped floorstanding enclosure, finished in high-gloss dark charcoal grey with black highlights. A unique crossover uses a 9V battery to pre-bias twinned capacitors, and pre-sets allow very subtle balance adjustments.

KEY FEATURES COMPRESSION MID AND TREBLE HORNS

380MM PAPER CONE

BASS DRIVER ALNICO MAGNET POWERS BASS MOTOR

BATTERY POLARISES CROSSOVER CAPACITORS

The finest pair of loudspeakers we've heard, when you add up the pluses and subtract the minuses you'll find this speaker massively in credit. Exceptionally neutral

and well halanced overall, the bass is full warm and rich, yet also beautifully agile, free from overhang, and essentially unflappable. This

speaker's best tricks. however. reproduction of micro-dynamics - the tiny lowlevel details that convey the subtle texture of massed orchestral strings, for example – and a degree of transparency

which can sound

creepily realistic. It has a relatively narrow distribution which increases the direct to reflected sound ratio, and this contributes to very precise stereo imaging. It can also go immensely loud when required,

> and with gripping dvnamic tension, though there are

slightly aggressive

tendencies at high levels. Reviewed in HFC 235

BOUCT OF THE KE



£900 ☎ Bowers & Wilkins 01903 750750 ∰ www.bwspeakers.com

B&W 600 S3 MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGE FRONT: 602/REAR: 601/CENTRE: LCR 600

All five speakers in B&W's budget priced surround system are nominal standmounts, and deserve good quality stands. All use the same tube-loaded 25mm metal dome tweeter and all feature Kevlar-coned, cast-frame main drivers. so there ought to be plenty of sonic commonality, even though the latter vary slightly in size and configurations. The 602 is a two-way with 20-litre enclosure and 175mm main driver, while the 601 uses a 165mm unit in a 14-litre box, and the LCR has two 165mm drivers operating as a two-and-a-half-way in a 28-litre enclosure. Finish is vinyl,

175MM KEVLAR-CONE MAIN DRIVERS (602)

23.5X49X29CM ENCLOSURE (602)

CENTRE SPEAKER USES TWO 165MM KEVLAR

either in KEY FEATURES traditional black or the new lighter sorrento. The sound quality with stereo material is

described in the



separate entry for B&W's DM602 S3. Perhaps predictably this high-class behaviour carries through into the multichannel performance, where the combination of all three B&W models creates a thoroughly convincing all-round coherence. These deliver the warm and cuddly envelopment of the whole musical or cinematic event, and the experience itself provides a strong justification for the benefits of surround sound music.

The good-size centre and surround speakers clearly make a worthwhile contribution towards building up the complete wraparound soundfield, while the meaty 602s at the front deliver weight and drama with little obvious contribution from additional box colorations. Large standmount speakers might not be the most fashionable format, but this B&W combo delivers the sonic goods in both stereo and multichannel modes. Reviewed in HFC 224

KEF Q AV7 MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGE FRONT: Q7/REAR: Q1/CENTRE: Q9C

A very distinctive looking system, KEF's new Q-series combines the company's latest Uni-Q co-axial drive units, which now feature metal dome tweeters nestling within the centre of their bass/mid polymer cones, with vinyl woodprint enclosures that have curved sides which taper towards narrow rear panels. The system here comprises a pair of Q7 floorstanders (£800) for main front left/right channels, a pair of compact two-way Q1 stand-mounts (£250) for surrounds, plus a £250 two-way O9C for centre-front. The bonus with the Uni-Q drivers is that the off-axis balance always remains consistent, in every direction, while the curved cabinets should offer both increased stiffness and some de-focusing of internal standing waves.

Sonically this system has a



firm, open and explicit midband, a sharp and articulate treble, and a deep and informative bass, showing an ability to generate a deep, wide and consistent soundstage that's available throughout an impressively large listening zone. The Q7s alone are star stereo performers in their own right, but the system really comes into its own in their multichannel incarnation, where it's best suited to small and medium size rooms and moderate listening levels.

This is a highly articulate system, with all the discipline and transparency that are needed to cope with the best of today's film soundtracks and multichannel music. The only criticism is minor and concerns a slight mismatch in 'colour' through the lower registers between the small Q1 and Q9C and the large Q7s. In every other respect this is a very impressive all-round package at a thoroughly competitive price. Reviewed in HFC 232



£3.000 🕿 API UK 01787 249656 🏶 www.miragespeakers.com

MIRAGE OMNI 2 MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGE FRONT: OM-7/REAR: OM-72/CENTRE: OM-72/CENTR

Defiantly American in styling and presentation, the three different elements in this multichannel system are very different from each another, though all feature an element of omnidirectionality - known here as Omnipolar - in the way they distribute sound into the room. This will ultimately increase the ratio of room-reflected to direct sound reaching the listener.

Each of the large front left/right OM-7s, for example, has twin mid and treble drivers mounted on the front and back of a slim but tall and wide box section that sits above a generous bass area. The much smaller OM-C2 centre and OM-R2 models also claim a degree of Omnipolarity, and feature drive units on two and three faces respectively.

Voicing differences between various models are evident enough



in practice, but the crucial match between front and centre is close enough, and the latter has useful dynamic strength and bass weight too. The surround speakers are excellent in their spaciousness and wide dispersion, though a little more bass muscle might be preferable here.

But this is nit-picking in the context of the large scale stable image created here, almost irrespective of where one sits, either as a complete system or

with just the OM-7s operating stereophonically. The tonal balance is a shade dark but attractively rich with well differentiated tone colours and a proper sense of weight. As such it's capable of genuinely visceral results and tangible 'in-the-room' presence. Do note that these large speakers need plenty of room to breathe, so don't even consider them for small, cluttered rooms.

Reviewed in HFC 232

£900 🕿 REL Acoustics 01656 768777 🏶 www.rel.net

REL STORM III SUBWOOFER

KEY FEATURES

40-LITRE BOX IS MADE

MOSFET AMP HAS 150W

FROM 30MM MDF

POWER RATING

42X52X33CM

DRIVER

250MM VOLT BASS

Britain's own subwoofer specialist, REL, has almost single-handedly rehabilitated subwoofers here in the UK, for music as well as movie reproduction. The £900 Storm III is a large and heavy device, using a 40-litre black vinylcovered enclosure built from 30mm MDF. The business bits include a 150-watt MOSFET amp driving a 300mm cast chassis driver.

The input and control side is particularly well thought out, enabling simultaneous separate connection and alignment for both stereo music and 5.1 home cinema sources. The input filtering is also exceptionally flexible, with calibrated switched attenuators that provide a very accurate and precise handover to the main system loudspeakers.

During testing, bass delivery with Kraftwerk's We Are The Robots was deep and throbbing, fruity and full, certainly very powerful with plenty of depth and weight, and tuneful

enough to follow the constantly shifting deep synth notes on this track. Autobahn was also deep and powerful, adding much weight to the sound of the vehicle accelerating away, not to mention the accompanying music.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the addition of the REL can also aid a system's midrange, improving the sense of naturalness and dynamics. Eurythmics' When Tomorrow Comes highlighted excellent integration with smaller main speakers – the stadium sound was clear and the bass meaty and tuneful, enhancing realism.

> hooves in the Gladiator soundtrack sounded suitably deep and powerful. REL deserves its position as a premier subwoofer margue, and the £900 Storm III ought to be on anyone's short list. Reviewed in HFC 225









"This system rocks. From the moment you fire it up, you're taken on a thrill ride that'll have you grinning from ear to ear. If you care about movies, you'll love this system."

★★★★★ EMPIRE MAGAZINE



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VAN DEN HUL THE BAY C5

The entry level interconnect market is a hard-fought arena with a lot of very good models to choose from, but choose you must and our favourite is this lovely red vdH.

From top to bottom of the range it's an impressive performer with good detail, giving insight into familiar recordings and

making listening compulsive. Stereo imaging is excellent with great depth information and a cohesive all-round sound through the full dynamic range. It serves all types of music equally well and should be compatible with all manner of kit. The Bay is excellent value for money. Reviewed in HFC 224



VAN DEN HUL D102 MKIII

This year's best mid-price model is an old favourite at Hi-Fi Choice. The van den Hul D102, now in its MkIII form, is a seemingly unbeatable analogue design that's suitable for anything from a phono stage to an SACD player and all points

We found it hard to criticise

this cable - detail is very good and tonality is neutral across the board. Treble extension is exemplary which might explain how it manages to create such impressive image depth and width. All things considered, this is a first-rate performer and a bargain to boot.







TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT 300 ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT CABLE

DCT or Deep Cryogenic Treatment is the key to the success of the best interconnect of the year, a process involving temperature extremes that is said to improve the lattice structure of the copper conductors.

Whatever the reasons, Isolda DCT has performance that more than justifies its price. Bass is superb in terms of both extension and control with no shortage of detail and power. Treble and midrange are exceptionally clean, creating broad, detailed imaging and climaxes that remain clear with full dynamics. If you have a decent system then this interconnect will take it to the next level, it's one of the best there is at any price. Reviewed in HFC 234

£50 (1m) ☎ QED 01483 747474 ⊕ www.qed.co.uk

QED QUNEX SR75 DIGITAL INTERCONNECT CABLE

Digital cables are increasingly useful now that digital recording and home cinema processors are so popular, and despite what some may think, quality counts just as much with digital as it does with analogue. Our vote goes to the British specialist QED which has been making good cable for longer than most.

Its Qunex SR75 is not only

pretty, it is also extremely difficult to fault. Construction is first class combining high-quality copper and superb plugs. Bass is tuneful and well controlled while midrange and treble are both very clear and open with no sense of constraint. Images are solid and real, and it performs well above expectations for the price.

Reviewed in HFC 234





£5/m 🕿 QED 01483 747474 🏶 www.qed.co.uk

QED SILVER ANNIVERSARYSPEAKER CABLE

There has been no better new entry level speaker cable this year than this unassuming but tremendously effective design from QED.

Incorporating 79 silver-plated copper strands in a figure-8 design, the large conductor area means that it is well suited to longer than average runs. In a system it does everything

passably and most of it well – no colorations leap out and no strange imaging effects intrude. Midrange detail is good, arguably better than many more expensive cables while dynamics are natural. Silver Anniversary turns in a more than credible performance that is exceptional at this price point. Reviewed in HFC 192



KIMBER 8VS SPEAKER CABLE

The link between amplifier and speaker is a critical one and you need a serious connection whatever your system. There are plenty of good alternatives out there but the Kimber 8VS is the year's best.

A variant on the brand's proven braided construction, this is a large-ish but flexible cable. Tonal balance is finely judged with clear, extended treble and full yet tuneful bass, while the midband is well defined and rich. It is also very good at imaging, with assured depth and satisfyingly wide dynamics that create tremendous climaxes. It has an all-round creamy effortlessness which puts it among the front runners in its price range. Reviewed in HFC 227



QED XT300 SPEAKER CABLE

Our favourite £10 per metre cable this year is a newcomer from QED that takes a radical approach to an old problem called 'skin effect'. This means that the signal tends to travel along the outside of the cable rather than its core, and QED's solution has been to remove the core and create a tubular cable.

It uses stranded copper in a figure-8 configuration to produce XT300, which has strong bass and impressive stereo imaging. Overall it has a natural and well-controlled sound and with QED's high-quality banana plugs it is a practical and cost effective upgrade for almost any system.

Reviewed in HFC 234



£45
Hi-Fi For Sale 0870 241 2469
www.hififorsale.com

DISCO ANTISTAT RECORD CLEANER

The best vinyl enthusiasts' accessory of 2002 has to be this bargain of a platter cleaner. Not only is it remarkably good at cleaning your LPs but it's quick and easy to use and there's none of the noise and palaver associated with more elaborate alternatives. It's by far the cheapest wet cleaner on the market and to be frank, it's as effective as any other.

Just fit the label clamp, lower the record into the bath, rotate it between the brushes a few times, take it out, remove the clamp and put it in the drying rack for 20 minutes or so

until dry and sparkling clean. Then Bob, as they say, is your mother's new gentleman friend.





£30
Reflex Labs 020 7079 2047
www.reflexlabs.com

REFLEX LABS CARA COMPUTER AIDED ROOM ACOUSTICS C

Room sound is a notoriously tricky thing and anything that helps us get a grip on it is to be welcomed, which is why this software warrants our commendation.

If you want to get genuinely scientific about speaker placement, stick CARA 2.1 Plus in the PC and fill in the blanks that refer to your specific room

and speakers and discover where to set up the system for best results. It even works for multichannel speakers which, as any enthusiast knows, take an age to set up manually. This comprehensive software offers tremendous value for those who want to get the best from their hi-fi systems.

Reviewed in HFC 231



£110 ☎ Veda Products 01279 501111 @ www.gradolabs.com

GRADO SR80

Headphones still offer the most intimate relationship with music, not to Reviewed in HFC 230 mention the only way we can listen at proper levels without being interrupted by neighbourly wall-banging. This

year's favourite is not a new model but a classic that keeps us comina back for more. The Grado SR80 is a simple design with compact, open back capsules that sit up against the ear, rather

than around it.

They combine a sense of spaciousness with plenty of power when it's required. Fine timing and a relaxed balance

£90 🕿 Partington 01474 709299

PARTINGTON ANSA 60

make them highly engaging - a classic that will run and run.



£525 (plus shelves) ☎ Naim 01722 332266 ∰ www.naim-audio.com

NAIM FRAIM EQUIPMENT SUPPORT

A modular design from a well-established brand, this was the shelf to beat in 2002. Construction is elaborate with a spike-supported wooden platform providing the foundation for any number of wood and glass shelves. All the spike

interfaces have metal cups so that load bearing isn't an issue. and each glass platform is decoupled using steel balls secured in alloy cups.

The Fraim allows a notably wide dynamic range including an attractively sparkling top end with deep, clean, authoritative bass. And despite the glass

there's no sense of hardness to the sound. It's not cheap - you'll need an extra £325 per shelf on top of the base price, but if you've got a serious system you need a serious and flexible rack. Reviewed in HFC 232

Speaker stands are crucial to the performance of so-called bookshelf speakers and Partington's elegant ANSAs are the best we've heard all year. They make the difference between merely good and totally great results.

> It is a bolt-together design built around a cast base with a generous 'footprint'.

What impresses is the stand's ability to disappear sonically, delivering a sound which is notably restrained and laid back - the last thing you want is a stand that joins in with the music. It deftly avoids the colorations of alternatives and simply lets the music do its thing.

Some might call it lightweight, but it's also extremely coherent and musical.

Reviewed in HFC 232







Once you've got your state of the art loudspeakers where do you go next?
Super-tweeters offer a new route to enhancing existing systems which makes them the year's top speaker accessory.

With high frequency extension up to 50kHz the ST50 is designed to make the most of new formats such as DVD-A and SACD and its effect is very strange, to say the least. Treble does become more airy but it also seems to extend bass and tighten up the midband, creating a sharper, more controlled sound that avoids brashness and lets more detail through. An effective way to make good speakers better. Reviewed in HFC 231

£4 🕿 TDK 01737 773773 🐞 www.tdk-europe.com

TDK CD-R AUDIO PRO CD-R DISC

It may surprise some to read that blank CD-Rs vary in sound quality and that even length has a bearing, but they do and this is as good as they get. When we tested eight quality discs TDK's range-topper beat the rest by a comfortable margin, possibly because of its polyolefin substrate that's said to increase read/write accuracy.

Recordings sound extremely

stable and more together than much of the competition, with no audible dissociation between bass and treble. The latter is smooth and highly detailed while bass is extremely solid and extended, the midband in-between being expressive and pure. If you want the best recordings this is the software for the job.

Reviewed in HFC 233



TOM EVANS MICROGROOVE PHONO STAGE

Fact one: if you want to get the most out of your record player you need a great phono stage. Fact two: the Microgroove is the best of the year – stick it between cartridge and amplifier and revel in the glory of vinyl.

Base model in a range of three, the Microgroove can be specified for any cartridge be it MM or MC. The key to its appeal is energy, the dynamics of anything you play through it come to life in a way that few phono stages match. It also has prodigious bass that's deep and subtle, not to mention an exquisite midrange. If you've got a decent cartridge you absolutely *need* one of these. Reviewed in HFC 234

Tom Evans Audio Design

£699 ☎ Tannoy 01236 420199 ⊕ www.vandenhul.com

VAN DEN HUL MC ONE SPECIAL PHONO CARTRIDGE

Less an accessory, more a necessity, a good cartridge makes vinyl the format of choice, and this is the year's best.

The MC One Special is indeed very special. A hand-made moving coil design, it has a sound that could turn anyone into a vinyl junkie – rich, vibrant and above all dynamic, it gets

straight to the heart of the music. If you think you know your LP collection think again, there's colour, space and energy in there that few needles will reveal. It may seem expensive but when you realise what it can do for your record collection its value becomes extraordinary. Reviewed in HFC 235





Pioneer DV-757Ai universal' DVD player £799

Pioneer's do-it-all disc master has a range of tricks to keep it at the head of the pack

Few DVD players are without an onboard 5.1-channel decoder these days just as, in the days ahead, these same machines will also need to find room for DVD-Audio and SACD if only to remain competitive. Pioneer threw down the gauntlet with its DV-747 universal CD/ DVD/SACD player last year, only to follow it with the spectacular DV-656, a cheaper, higher performance alternative. While its competition is reeling (we hear that Onkyo and Yamaha have universal players on the way), Pioneer has delivered a further body blow with the launch of its £799 DV-757Ai.

This player has it all, offering compatibility with multichannel DVD-A and SACD, Dolby

Digital and DTS together with DVD-Video (including CPRM-encrypted DVD-RW) and CD (including -R and -RW variants plus multi-session MP3 recordings). Basically, if you have disc-shaped software, the DV-757Ai will play it. Also, with component, S-Type and composite video outputs plus multichannel analogue and S/PDIF digital outputs, the player will hook into any existing system. Future systems are accommodated too, because Pioneer has yet another trick up its corporate sleeve.

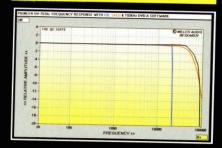
TECHNOLOGY

'Ai' does not stand for Artificial Intelligence but refers to Pioneer's adoption of an i-Link

interface, Sony's trade name for the IEEE1394 FireWire connection. Now approval has been granted for use of this interface with copy-protected data, Pioneer is able to stream multichannel 96kHz DVD-A and SACD plus two-channel DVD-A and SACD directly into a partnering processor or amplifier, like the companion VSA-AX10i (reviewed in HFC 229). Compressed audio, including Dolby Digital and DTS, can also be streamed across, allowing enhanced off-board processing that's unavailable in the DV-757Ai itself (including 7.1 channel EX and ES) to be enjoyed nonetheless.

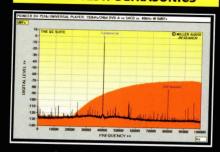
Designed for digital networking, this interface facilitates 'handshaking' between the attached components so that the DV-757Ai, for example, will recognise and display a list of its partnering separates on

AUDIO TEST: RESPONSE



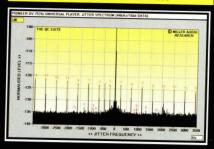
While CD (blue trace) clearly has a more limited response than either SACD (red trace) or 192kHz DVD-A (black trace), it's SACD - free from digital filtering - that exhibits the gentlest roll-off.

AUDIO TEST: ULTRASONICS



Ultrasonic signals (in this case 40kHz) evidently enjoy a far greater dynamic range with 96kHz and 192kHz DVD-A (black trace), although the extra noise accompanying SACD (red trace) does hide any other distortions.

AUDIO TEST: JITTER



Now that the DV-757Ai is finally in production, its performance is even better than that experienced with pre-production prototypes. Jitter, for example, is now lower than ever at just 115psec.



"The sense of space experienced with CD is developed still further with multichannel DVD-A, which achieves a broad, deep and immersive sound without any hint of force."

a GUI. Provided the interface is adopted on a broader level, this sort of built-in intelligence will make system-wide set-up that much easier. Pioneer includes two such i-Links on the player, for daisy-chaining between groups of products. However, at this stage, there's no quarantee of matching components arriving thick and fast...

Otherwise, the universal 'engine' inside the DV-757Ai represents Pioneer's second generation technology and includes a new MPEG2 decoder from Mitsubishi that caters for DVD-Audio and Video (including progressive scan) plus DTS. An additional Motorola processor provides extra horsepower for speaker configuration modes, including a fuller range of 'large' and 'small' settings with interchannel delays and volume control. SACD data, incidentally, takes a more direct path by avoiding the MPEG2 decoder and audio DSP and plunging directly into its own DSD decoder from Sony. Multichannel digital bitstreams from either DVD-A or SACD only converge again when they meet the six channels of DACs, prior to conversion back into recognisable analogue music!

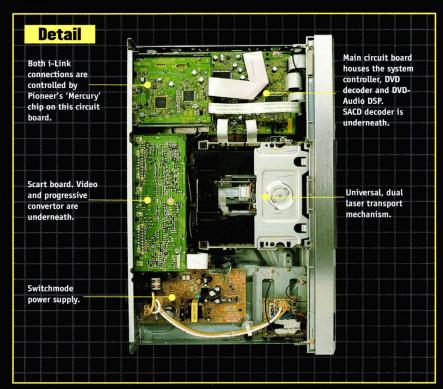
KEY FEATURES

The DV-757Ai looks little different from its predecessors, aside from the bright blue i-Link LED. Nevertheless, it does enjoy a progressive video output, superior video and audio DAC technology, optional Legato Link digital filtering, Hi-Bit processing (which scales 16-bit to 24-bit data) and more

versatile bass management configuration (DVD-A only). Pioneer's i-Link really only becomes a 'key feature' when the DV-757Ai is used in conjunction with the partnering VSA-AX10i amplifier - a combination we'll be reviewing later in the year.

Otherwise, Pioneer's on-screen set-up menu allows you to define the aspect ratio of the TV, specify either interlaced or

progressive component video output (NTSC only) and whether the Scart is configured for composite, S-Video or RGB video. Still pictures are determined by frame or field while the default DVD playback mode may be assigned as either DVD-V or DVD-A. Similarly, the default SACD playback modes are defined by the two-channel, multichannel or CD layers.



0

The speaker configuration menu is equally comprehensive, and colourful thanks to Pioneer's in-house OSD chip, offering adjustment of speaker size, distance and channel level. The latter operates in 0.5dB steps from -6dB to +6.0dB, though it's not sufficient to permit the DV-757Ai to be hooked directly into a multichannel power amp. Furthermore, if only to avoid the side effects of bass management, we'd recommend leaving the speaker configuration as 'large' with the subwoofer 'on', regardless of the size or complement of your boxes.

PERFORMANCE

We had the pleasure of listening to Pioneer's universal player, in all its guises, with both DPA100S and Arcam P7 power amplifiers (two and multichannel) feeding a combination of B&W 802 (front) and 804 (centre/surround) loudspeakers. With the DV-656 for reference, itself an improvement on the original DV-747, the DV-757Ai took the system another step forward. This certainly makes for a smoother sounding CD player than the DV-656, achieving better balance between the cut and thrust of metal-stringed guitars, percussion and bass

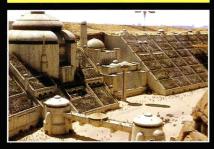
SCREEN TEST: COLOUR



Colours are richly saturated and pure, bringing a decent sense of depth, solidity and realism to real life, as opposed to computer-generated sequences.

EXAMPLE CLIP: The Blue Planet (BBCTV) - Episode 3, The Open Ocean

SCREEN TEST: FLARE



Bright, crisply detailed images are suited to the big screen, but you should keep sharpness levels low to avoid flaring between highly contrasting areas of

EXAMPLE CLIP: Star Wars - Episode 1, The Phantom Menace (menu screen)





"In practical terms, it's the sort of sound that can be enjoyed loud without becoming oppressive or requiring the services of a 'Cinema EQ' filter on your AV amp."

and any underlying, subtle detail.

Two-channel it may be, but the new Cantus release, Let Your Voice Be Heard sounded enthralling via the DV-757Ai, the voices a perfect counterpoint to the percussion, itself sparkling in what seemed a grand acoustic. This is one of those very easy-going players, delivering its lines with a relaxed confidence that inspires extended listening. Could it be one of the very best CD players to emerge from Pioneer? Quite possibly, but CD marks the jumping off point for this universal player, for both SACD and DVD-Audio software typically sound grander still.

The sense of space experienced with CD is developed still further with multichannel DVD-A, which achieves a broad, deep and immersive sound without any hint of force. Natalie Merchant's Beloved Wife swept through the room with such conviction that even guitars behind the listening position seemed plausible. Sure, there's a hint of extra warmth, even some plumminess with the richest of recordings, but the overwhelming impression is of an enticing, believable sound.

Wideband two-channel material, rare though it still is, brings out the best from the player. Billy Cobham and the London Jazz Orchestra (a 24-bit/192kHz DVD-A) soars from the DV-757Ai, his fluid percussion revealed in intricate detail from speakers that virtually melt from the scene. Again, there's the easiness of CD but with the extra depth, detail and atmosphere possible with extended sample rates and the wider dynamic range of 24-bit recording. In similar fashion, Barb Jungr's two-channel SACD The Space In Between sounds so open, transparent and alive that

it's difficult to imagine a multichannel recording doing very much better.

Typically, any multichannel product that makes a good fist of music will also tackle movie soundtracks with comparative ease, and so it is with Pioneer's DV-757Ai. This player delivers action without earache, whether you are caught in a firefight with Predator or taking on The Matrix with Keanu and his cohorts. In practical terms, it's the sort of sound that can be enjoyed loud without becoming oppressive or needing the services of a 'Cinema EQ' filter on your AV amp. Video, too, is crisp, clear and detailed without the obvious 'ringing' or fringing effects seen with over-ambitious video enhancement regimes. This player is equipped with a 'bit-shuffling' technology developed by Analog Devices and used in the 108MHz video DAC. It's not dissimilar to the noise-shaping used in audio DACs, pushing video noise out of band where it's conveniently removed by an analogue filter. Whether this is responsible for the solid imagery enjoyed via the DV-757's component video outputs is impossible to say, but its pictures are certainly a match for any DVD player under £1,000.

VERDICT

This is one half of Pioneer's dynamic duo, but even without a partnering VSA-AX10i, the DV-757Ai represents tremendous value as an all-in-one solution to the various CD. DVD and SACD standards. Improved audio quality, bass management, a progressive video output and the i-Link feature mark this universal disc player as a worthy upgrade over the budget DV-656A.

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EXCLUSIVE

CD supremo

Krell's KPS 25 has led the way in high-end CD replay – the latest sc version proves it still does

he Krell KPS 25sc consists of three basic components housed in a single box: a top-loading CD transport, a D/A converter with 24-bit/ 96kHz capability, and finally a full scale digital and analogue preamplifier. The unit is more than just reassuringly heavy at nearly 20kg, and the design is like nothing you have ever seen before. A true one-off, it bears some resemblance to a turntable, with its hinged lid and puck that is placed on top of the disc, but the comparison can't be pushed too far. The lid for example is a heavy acrylic fabrication with a transparent window that can be programmed to initiate play as it drops on its hydraulically damped hinge. Its internal LCD shutter is said to go opaque as it does so. In reality it takes on a frosty appearance, scattering incident light rather than blocking it, and any acoustic advantage this confers is lost in the noise. Yes, of course it's a gimmick, but it's a real show-stopper.

The phrase often used to describe products like this is 'reference grade'. The original KPS 25 was launched in February 1998 with 20-bit DACs and

TECHNOLOGY

The Cast II interface is a significant element in the sound quality equation and was discussed in detail in our review of the FPB 700cx power amp (*HFC* 234) – it's certainly one reason why this CD player and amp find special synergy together. Much of the rest of the KPS 25sc's design is exclusive, or heavily customised. The transport is unique, powered by a heavy-duty direct drive motor with a belt-driven laser assembly. And the multibit DACs are custom-programmed Motorola DSPs, operating in dual differential mode with custom filter designs.

The preamp is configured as a miniature Class A power amp – a key reason why it runs so hot – which runs from three mains transformers and 13 regulated power supplies. The unit is fully software driven, and its operating defaults can be extensively customised by the user, including a theatre mode which assigns volume control to an external processor, naming of inputs, operation of the lid (audio play, LCD shutter), input level trim, volume control law and more.

VERDI

Krell KPS 25sc CD player/ preamplifier £24,998

- ⚠ This is the player that defines the state of the art in CD replay.
- Cost, very demanding of partnering equipment.

CONCLUSION

Literally one of a kind, the KPS 25sc has evolved into a well rounded true heavyweight in every

KEYFEATURES

- Combined CD transport, digital and analogue preamplifier
- ▶ Balanced in/out
- HDCD compatible
- CAST II preamplifier
- Acrylic damped cover with LCD light shutter
- 24-bit/96kHz in/out
- Current mode preamplifier
- Open architecture allows upgrading
- ➤ Extensive range of programmable software defaults
- Supplied with table top and handset remote controls
- Programmable 'theatre' facility



The KPS 25sc's top-loading CD cover goes from clear when open to frosty when closed in an attempt to reduce the intrusion of incident light. Gimmick or no, it certainly looks impressive.

16-bit resolution using dual Motorola 560009 DSPs. The KPS 25s introduced a Cast interface in May 1999, and the sc version reviewed here began shipping about a year ago with Cast II and 24-bit/96kHz processing. There have been other improvements since, none of which has justified a change in designation. The motherboard/daughterboard architecture of the design specifically allows for further upgrades, and there are some exciting ones in the pipeline, but they're being kept under wraps for now.

The unit can be controlled by tabletop and handset controllers (both are supplied), using an RC5/Philipscompliant handset or via an external remote input or integrated into a complete Krell system. A wide range of operational settings can be entered using the front panel level control in conjunction with the 'menu' key. It all looks rather fearsome at first, but it doesn't take long to get the hang of it.

The preamplifier section includes a wide range of optical, single-ended and balanced connections, and the main outputs include a pair of proprietary CAST II sockets.

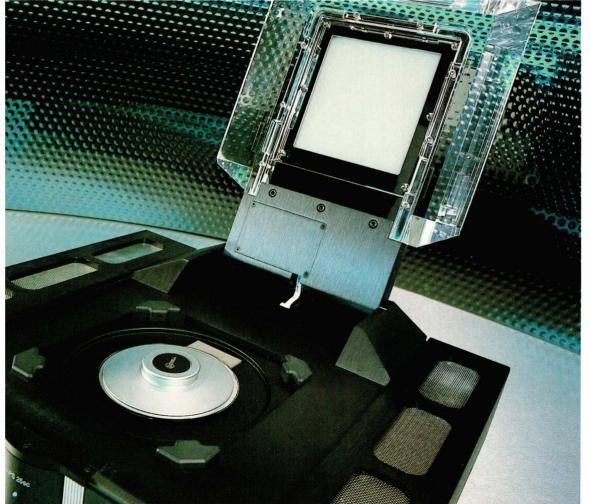
PERFORMANCE

Apart from its initially disconcerting, but apparently harmless propensity for getting hotter than any other disc player, the KPS 25sc ran as sweetly as the proverbial nut. The short version is that it sounds magnificent at power-up, and from that point it gets steadily better, levelling out when its temperature stabilises after about an hour.

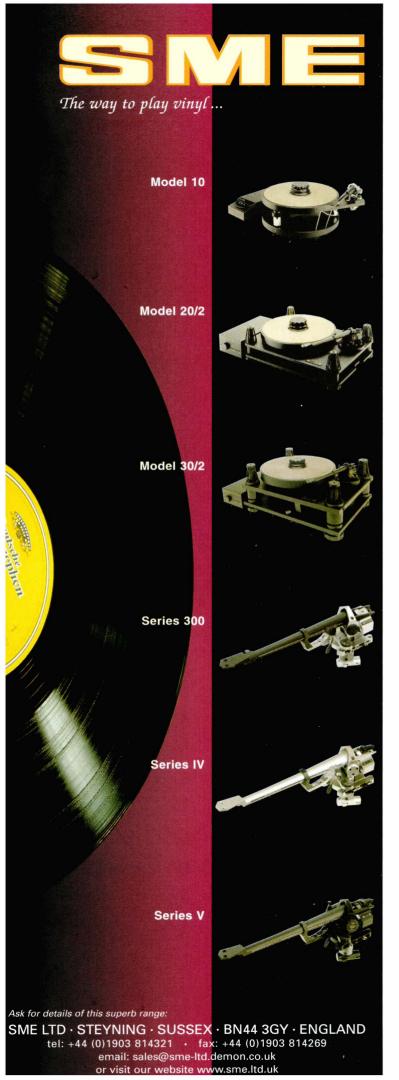
How to describe the sound of the Krell, which was used almost exclusively as a player for the duration of the test, using tools as crude as words on paper? The KPS 25 has been in and out of my system three times in the last year, twice in this latest and greatest iteration. CD player sound quality tends to reveal itself slowly and progressively, and often in subtle ways, but the KPS 25sc breaks the rules here as it does in almost every other respect. Its character bursts on the listener in a way that recalls other Krell components. It is in this sense a typical Krell product.

The KPS 25sc makes a real impression, but curiously it is often more apparent in retrospect, when it is pulled out of the system, and you realise that the





"It isn't value for money in the traditional sense. But people buy Rolls Royces and Britling watches for less valid reasons, and hi-fi doesn't get much better than this."



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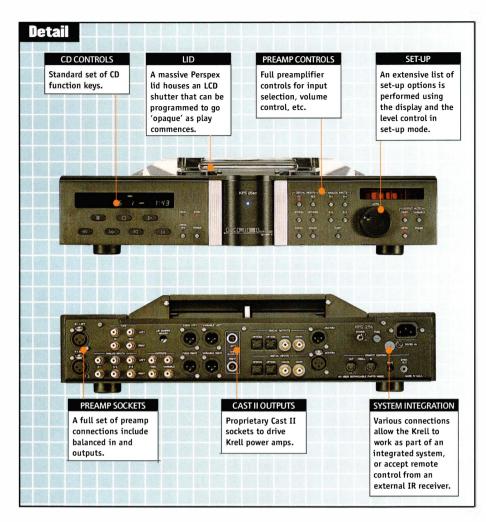


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replacement just doesn't have the same all-round stature. Stature really is the word, as this is a giant among players. The Krell works with unusual ease and panache at high volumes, as though born to the task. It is free of the slight clouding up and flattening of perspectives that other players suffer from, probably due to the insidious but often ignored effects of acoustic feedback, and which usually goes all but unnoticed until you hear a player that doesn't suffer from the problem.

But don't run away with the notion that the Krell can be pigeonholed for this quality alone. Even with the volume rolled down, it showed an uncommon ability to sustain a sense of presence and detail. In both cases, at almost any volume level, the Krell has a masterful ability to portray musical architecture while extracting exquisitely fine detail.

There is nothing weak-kneed about this product. The Krell coexisted in systems that also included SACD and DVD-Audio sources of varying quality levels. The Classé Omega in particular is an exceedingly stylish £12,000 stereo-only

SACD player, which made an interesting comparison when playing hybrid discs from their SACD layer through the Classé, and CD layer via the Krell. In every case, the SACD sound had all the expected advantages. The sound was simply more detailed, refined and organic, making CD sound vaguely inarticulate and cartoonish. But there was something about the Krell that continued to hold the attention - it produced a more strongly projected, more forceful and more physical kind of sound altogether.

In part at least, this is attributable to a very objective strength, namely, the bass. All CD players have a strong, tuneful and extended bass; it is the nature of the beast. But for all its strengths, CD can and often does lack a visceral quality that you hear every time in the presence of live music making, and which is sometimes suggested rather better by good analogue source components. The KPS 25sc however has the measure of this kind of bass architecture, to a greater extent than almost any other, and it brings this quality to bear with virtually

"At almost any volume level. the Krell has a masterful ability to portray musical architecture while extracting exquisitely fine detail."

any disc, no matter how inadequate in other respects. There is a rough and tumble, a real physicality in the KPS 25sc's presentation, and even if the CD sound lacks some of the resolving power of SACD, the Krell somehow often manages to speak more directly, and communicate better.

It is almost redundant to give examples, as these qualities are apparent almost irrespective of what is being played, but it's worth mentioning Max Bruch's melancholy Kol Nidre (Pieter Wispelwey etc on Channel Classics) which definitely sounds rougher and less refined in its CD incarnation, but which still communicates in exactly the way described. In general, this Krell probably gets closer to exploring the ultimate potential of CD than the Classé Omega does for SACD, and the Classé is by far the best SACD player I've ever heard, bar none.

So the KPS 25sc is always compelling, always completely musical, but somehow it seems most comfortable and capable of displaying its strengths with its own kind, namely the Krell 700cx and presumably others in the range. The combination is simply in a class of its own, a heavyweight system whose limits are difficult to define, still less exceed. Yes it's a lot of money, and no, it isn't value for money in the traditional sense. But people buy Rolls Royces or Britling watches for less valid reasons, and hi-fi doesn't get much better than this.

ALSO CONSIDER

MUSICAL FIDELITY CD-PRE £2,000 A fraction of the price of the Krell, but similar functionality plus upsampling and still excellent sound quality.

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EXCLUSIVE

Special K

This strictly minimalist Yugoslavian powerhouse wins with exquisite timing and superb clarity

here is in fact a very limited number of truly worthwhile integrated amplifiers, above the normal £1,000-£1,200 limit of most integrated amplifiers, and below the pre/power combinations which generally cost much more. Karan however, is an exception to that rule.

Karan Acoustics' home is Novi Sad in Yugoslavia, and the company was founded in 1986. Insofar as it is known in the West at all, it is for this integrated amplifier, though the website lists other components, including pre and power amps, a loudspeaker and an upsampling DAC. The KA-i180 is a substantially built integrated amplifier, rated at 180 watts/channel into eight ohms, rising to 300 watts into four ohms. A single XLR balanced line input is fitted, along with three unbalanced line inputs. A volume control, a line output and an attractive status/input display completes the onboard features list, but the amp comes with a remote control for the volume setting only

The impressively turned out amplifier carcass is fabricated exclusively from thick alloy extrusions, with convection cooling via the heat sinks strapped to each side. The amplifier is DC coupled to the load, and has a very high damping factor. Unusually there is no inductive Zobel network which is normally included

TECHNOLOGY

The exactingly designed and meticulously constructed Karan KA-i180 stakes its own technological ground. The amplifier is a differential mode (balanced) design from input to output. The negative loudspeaker terminals are not tied to ground, and mirror image amplifying circuitry is used in the positive and negative signal paths

The two channels are dual mono, sharing only the main 680VA custom-made power toroidal transformer and 80,000uF reservoir bank which employs Roederstein capacitors. Karan has turned its back on overall feedback to help avoid transient distortion that arises when a long feedback loop can't keep up with rapidly changing voltage swings on the input. Instead, local feedback is used sparingly around individual stages.

Karan KA-i180 integrated stereo amplifier

£3.900

Discreet packaging, highly detailed with enormous power reserves and consistency.

Unstinting transparency can appear rather cold.

CONCLUSION Heavyweight integrated amplifier for those who value precision and detail above warmth and excess

KEY FEATURES

- 2x180 watts per channel (8 ohms)
- 3 singe-ended line inputs
- 1 XLR balanced input
- WBT terminals
- Minimalist interface
- Remote control of volume



The austere styling of the KA i180's body mirrors its sound - solid, powerful and accurate. It's not exactly warm and cosy, but its definition and clarity are exemplary.

for stability, and the amplifier isn't rated for sub three-ohm loads. Presumably it makes use of cable inductance for stability, but if so, there is no advice to this effect in the instructions, or minimum recommended cable length runs. In any event it was quite happy driving B&W Nautilus 800s, a quite reactive load, via eight metre Nordost Valhalla cables. Component quality throughout appears to be about as good as it gets, and by all accounts the internal resistor matching is much closer than is normally required.

PERFORMANCE

This is an amplifier that needs extensive running in before it settles down. Decanted fresh from the box, the amp can sound rather edgy and raw, and it needs a few days for this quality to wear off. Sometimes running-in changes are simply a psychological trick, which provides time to adapt to a particular kind of sound, but not so here. A favourite test disc for assessing this is Toru Takemitsu's superb Quotation Of Dream (Oliver Knussen/London Sinfonietta) whose opening brass track, Day Signal, is guaranteed to bite the

head off if not handled properly. The disc was indeed difficult to listen to at the start, but after a few days of the amplifier settling in, the intrinsically sharp and precise sound was fully house trained, with a pungency and control way out of the mainstream.

If you're looking for an amplifier with a nice, comfortable, relaxed style this may not be the one for you. If on the other had you want to hear into and behind every nook and crevice of the sound, then you need look no further. The KA-i180 is characteristically fast, lean and true. It has more power than most will ever find use for, and there is no detectable change in performance at different volume levels, an important distinguishing feature between amplifiers, and one that is frequently overlooked in review.

All in all, the Karan offers a very grown-up performance. It has razor-sharp reflexes and exquisite timing, and it is also massively detailed. The bass is extended and extremely powerful, but there is no slack or excess. The Karan tends to make its point by understatement, and this makes it even more telling than the kind of amplifiers





The KA-i180 is a traditionally minimalist stereo amp, but it does offer the convenience of remote volume control and a good complement of inputs and outputs around the back.

that lay it on the line.

In many ways the KA-i180 sounds less like a typical big amplifier – large-scale and bloated - than a really fine smaller one writ large. The quick reflexes, the delicate detailing and the lean balance all point this way. There is always a sense that the dominant sound in a mix does not obscure the others, and it is here that the Karan's innate clarity comes from, rather than any tonal imbalance favouring the treble. The Karan offers a very particular kind of sound, but if you want to know what's on your recordings, its discipline and its superb definition give it star qualities. (

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www.karanacoustics.com

ALSO CONSIDER

ELECTROCOMPANIET EC4.7/1200MB £3,448

Pre/power amp from Norway has solid architecture and transparency – big in every sense of the word.

BRYSTON BP-20/4B-SST £3,375

Solid and expansive sounding pre/power amp

with strong sense of authority and control.

A30.1/A30.2 £2,700

Accomplished Swede combo, consists of high grade integrated with additional bi-ampable power amp and a very polished sound.

TAG MCLAREN DPS32R/250MR £4,950

An extremely sophisticated and capable pre/power combo which includes a digital/analogue preamp. Exploding with power and oozing finesse.



EXCLUSIVE

Euphonification

Dali's prestige Euphonia features several innovations, including a special treble module which combines a soft dome tweeter and ribbon super-tweeter

he letters of the Dali name actually spell out something to do with Danish audiophile loudspeakers, which is appropriate enough for this luxury speaker from Denmark, though in fact the company makes a great many models across all price points, including both AV and hi-fi types. It also has close ties to Scandinavia's leading specialist hi-fi retail chain, and boss man Peter Lyngdorf is the main force behind the TacT Millennium digital amplification and room correction project.

Based on lessons learned and techniques developed for the earlier Grand range and the Megaline flagship model, the MS4 is the smaller of two main floorstanding stereo pairs in a fivestrong Euphonia range. A pair will set you back at least £4,200, for which you're entitled to expect something



Dali Euphonia MS4 loudspeaker £4,200

- A clean and very open-sounding speaker, with very low cabinet coloration and a wide dynamic range. Handsome
- Has a rather thin and forward balance, lacking the warmth and rich tonality to do full justice to cellos and pianos

CONCLUSION

An elegant loudspeaker with great dynamic range and weight, but its slightly thin and forward tonal balance lacks warmth and

KEY FEATURES

- Weight: 35kg
- Size (WxHxD): 22x102x42cm
- Finishes: Maple and cherry veneer (yew £200 extra)
- Front panel is a sandwich of 22mm and 16mm MDF layers
- Treble module combines a 29mm soft fabric dome tweeter with 10x55mm ribbon supertweeter
- Description Both treble units are mounted on a single chassis to maximise mechanical integrity
- Two identical 6.5-inch main drivers operate in 'two-and-ahalf-way' mode

pretty special. It's certainly a very solid affair, weighing a considerable 35kg, and it's a very pretty loudspeaker too with its high class real wood veneer finish. Maple and cherry are the standard options, though our samples had yew veneer - an extra £200.

The shape is a little unusual: slim and deep, tapering somewhat towards a rear panel which is much narrower than the front, with attractively curved sides. The curves are created by slicing thin fillets out of the MDF substrate beneath the veneer to allow the panels to be bent, and then packing the gaps with adhesive to maintain the fundamental solidity while introducing a measure of damping.

The front panel on which the drive units are mounted is exceptionally tough, consisting of a sandwich construction with a 22mm MDF base layer superimposed with a 16mm MDF top layer, the former shaped and chamfered to allow the rear output of the drivers plenty of room to breathe.

Both the top and bottom surfaces are slightly tilted, while the whole speaker is mounted on a very substantial polymer/granite plinth, accommodating chunky but blunt spikes, which are only rather feebly locked by thumbwheels presumably to avoid any risk of damaging the socket fixing by over-tightening

The enclosure and plinth only tell part of the technology story here, and the drive units have several interesting features too. The most obvious of these is the 'treble module', a combination of 29mm soft fabric dome tweeter with a 10x55mm ribbon supertweeter, both mounted on a single chassis in order to preserve maximum mechanical integrity. Of the two, the dome does most of the work, since the ribbon only comes in at a nominal 17kHz, which is right at the acknowledged limit of human hearing. Whether we actually need supertweeters is still a debatable point, though the consensus would seem to be that they do have a small but worthwhile effect

The two identical 165mm main drivers actually operate in 'two-and-a-half-way'

MEASUREMENTS

Dali claims a sensitivity of 88dB, alongside a 4 ohm impedance, which is, if anything, a little conservative - we measured it at 89dB, while agreeing with an impedance that stays above 3.3 ohms throughout, but not by very much. Translating those figures into a meaningful reality, the sensitivity is around average while the load is quite demanding, in current terms, so a reasonably powerful and load-tolerant amplifier is to be preferred.

Compensation for the sensitivity and impedance ratings comes in a very good deep bass extension, registering OdB at 25Hz (ref the midband datum) under inroom far-field conditions, and -5dB at 20Hz, the ports here being tuned to around 32Hz. The overall balance is impressively smooth and even across most of the audio band, though not without some character within that trend.

The mid-bass output is a little too enthusiastic here, especially around 50Hz. The lower midband - the 'warmth' region is a little too lean, and the upper midband, presence and treble are all distinctly stronger and more forward than the marketplace average. While the roomaveraged far-field trace looks impressively flat above 500Hz, the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of speakers adopt a rather more restrained and laid-back approach here, presumably because that's what the market demands.

mode, the lower one just being used to augment the bass portion of the spectrum, while the upper one continues up to the point where the crossover brings in the treble module - around 2.2kHz acoustically, or 3.8kHz electrically. The drivers have cast frames and the cones, made from a paper and wood fibre composite, have a slight purplish tinge. The rear panel carries classy bi-wire/amp WBT locking terminal pairs, plus two ports fabricated in metal alloy all very classy stuff.

PERFORMANCE

The Euphonia MS4 is a very cool customer indeed - perhaps a little too cool for its own good, it might be said.





IT IS.

When the first AV8, Arcam's ultimate home cinema processor, finally rolled off the production line, it had cost Arcam over one million dollars in R&D, tooling, licensing fees and coffee.

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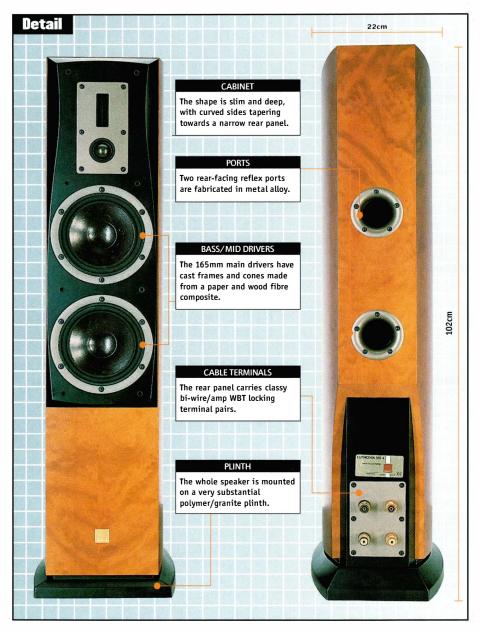




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There are some very obvious strong points throughout this design, but the basic presentation and tonal balance is definitely less warm than the norm, imparting a rather clinical overall character to the sound

Part of that is, I suspect, down to the exceptionally clean box 'signature'. Touching the sides of the enclosure while playing material with a heavy bass content reveales very little evidence of vibration coming through the side walls, and markedly less than that usually found with more conventional loudspeakers. This fact alone ensures that this speaker has a very wide dynamic range, and considerable clarity through the lower registers.

At the same time, there's no avoiding



Both the top and bottom surfaces are slightly tilted.

the repercussions of the rather forward balance here. This certainly gives a very open character to voices, with only a hint of nasality, but also tends to impart a rather thin and undernourished character to many musical instruments. And it's definitely not particularly kind or forgiving of poor recording quality or mic technique, or of inadequate source or amplification components.

However, provided the rest of the system is up to the task, this squeakyclean forwardness does have its own charm. And there's no denying that the top end here is very smooth and open, and happy to deliver oodles of fine detail, with precise imaging and coherent perspectives.

That said, as the days I spent listening

"The rather forward balance gives a very open character to voices. but also tends to impart a rather thin character to many musical instruments."

to this speaker passed, the lack of tonal warmth continued to rankle. While it's totally true that the MS4 steers well clear of 'classic' cabinet coloration effects, such as male voice 'chestiness', cellos and pianos in particular seem to lack proper body and richness.

At the same time, put on some heavyweight material, such as the classic trip hop albums from Massive Attack and Leftfield, and it's difficult to avoid the impression that the bottom end is a little too strong, and threatening to overwhelm things. There's rather too much tendency to 'thump', which might initially sound quite impressive, but it does tend to leave the bottom end sounding a little 'detached'. Although the timing here is actually very good, emphasising the low bass at the expense of its higher harmonics does tend to reduce its impact and give the impression of slowing things down.

There's much to like about this speaker, most obviously in its most impressive suppression of cabinet colorations, but also in the high-class drive unit technology it employs. The net result sounds very clean with an impressively wide dynamic range and solid, deep bass, but the tonal balance also sounds a little cooler and thinner than the market norm, and the lack of warmth certainly won't suit every taste.

www.dali.dk

ALSO CONSIDER

TANNOY DIMENSION TD10 £5,000

Good value Art Deco contender, ten-inch dual-concentric plus super-tweeter delivers convincingly rhythmic, highly detailed sound.

LIVING VOICE AVATAR OBX-R £4,000

External crossover adds refinement to a dynamic design, with a relaxed balance and an affinity for great amps.

B&W NAUTILUS 803 £3.500

Essentially neutral if a tad laid back, this speaker has excellent dynamic range, driving bass, no obvious boxiness and spacious stereo.

LUMLEY LAMPROS 200 £4,000

A great looking speaker with very clean and open-sounding ribbon drivers, but low sensitivity and some mid-bass heaviness.

EXCLUSIVE

Valve va va voom

Gunter Steinhart's idiosyncratic amp gives the strengths of valves without the weaknesses

n a world of clones and stereotypes, it makes a refreshing change to find a brand that dares to adopt its own very individual and different approach to styling. That's certainly true for this Steinhart pre/power valve amp combo, where chunky billets of rich red rosewood account for around 80 per cent of the front panels, flanking small central sections in brushed silver. A tad quirky for some tastes perhaps, it's slightly reminiscent of the very classy Luxman kit from the 1970s, and looks good amongst the soft furnishings.

These Austrian amps made their UK debut at the Bristol Show in February 2002, where they made very nice music indeed, and then followed this up with another appearance at the Heathrow show in September. Apart from the controls and socketry, the two units look identical and feel incredibly solid. Even the preamp turns the scales at a hefty 15kg, while the power amp doubles that to a dauntingly difficult to manoeuvre 30kq. A contributing factor is that both units are 'double skinned', with an internal subchassis arrangement decoupled on rubber grommets to reduce the susceptibility to vibration.

There may not be many switches here just two toggles on each unit - but they

TECHNOLOGY: VALVE OUTPUT COUPLING

The problem with valve amps is that output valves tend to have a relatively high source impedance, which makes it difficult to transfer decent quantities of power into the relatively low impedance of the loudspeaker voice coil. Most valve amps use output transformers to achieve a better power match between the two, though the occasional design (Croft for example) uses relatively low impedance valves in direct-coupled mode

The Steinhart Fidelio sits roughly half-way between those extremes. Its six Pi45c output valves have a source impedance of just 270 ohms (against, say, 5,000 ohms for a KT88), so while it still uses output transformers, these have a transfer ratio of just 1:4, minimising factors like leakage inductance and capacitance which are detrimental to sound quality.

Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD stereo pre/power amp £7,440

(£2,995+£4,445)

- A sonic and musical treat, with wide bandwidth and dynamic range. Has the strenaths of valves without their characteristic weaknesses.
- Power amp chucks out a lot of heat, switch labelling is very irritating/ illogical, and inputs are not remote switchable.

CONCLUSION

This brilliant allround musical experience makes even difficult material enjoyable, though it gets hot and has irritating control foibles

KEY FEATURES

- Plastic remote handset only operates mute and volume, but has four-device learning function
- Weight: preamp 15kg, power amp 30kg
- Rubber-decoupled subchassis
- Signal path is extensively hard-wired
- Preamp has seven phono input pairs plus tape and variable outputs
- Power output: 80W/100W continuous/peak



couldn't be much more confusing, lacking either labelling or intuitiveness. Even the labelling on the rotary input selector didn't quite correspond with the legends on the back panel.

On the plus side, the preamp comes with a full-feature learning remote handset, though the catch here is that the preamp itself only responds to the volume up/down and mute buttons. Although the input switching is relayoperated, it's not remotely accessible. which would seem like a lost opportunity.

A key feature of both components is that the signal path is extensively hardwired - 100 per cent in the power amp, and 90 per cent in the preamp. The latter has seven phono input pairs, plus fixed tape and variable pre outputs, and uses no feedback. The power amp has just 4dB of feedback, and relatively low impedance output valves, so the output transformers have a primary/secondary ratio much lower than usual at just 4:1. Power output is quoted at 80W/100W continuous/peak, the amp delivering 50 per cent full rated power in pure class A.

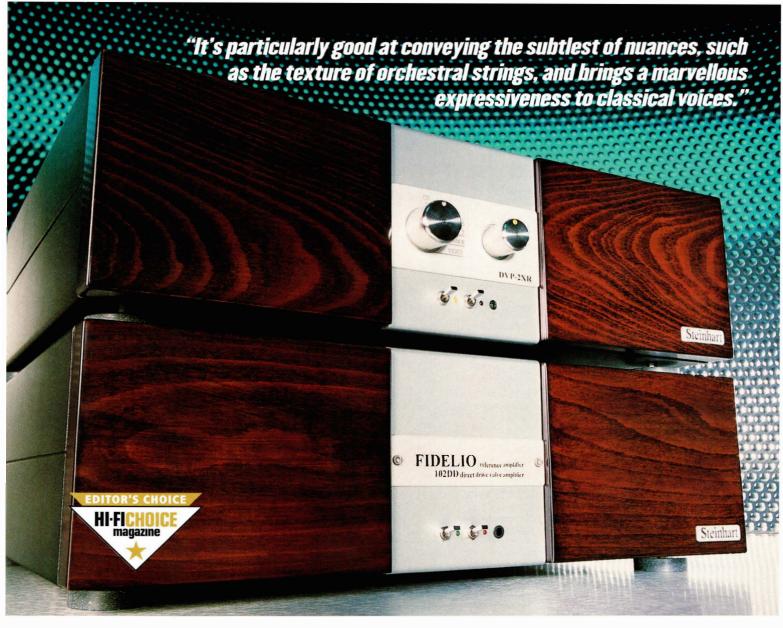
PERFORMANCE

Hearing something that sounds good at a show is most certainly no guarantee that it will perform as impressively once

you get it home. All too often things just don't meet up to expectations, but that wasn't at all the case with this Steinhart combo, which sounded very special right from the off. And my respect for it continued to grow throughout the two weeks that it took centre stage in my system. It's particularly good at conveying the subtlest of nuances, such as the texture of orchestral strings, and brings a marvellous expressiveness to classical singing voices.

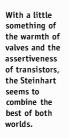
Perhaps the best recommendation of this amplifier's abilities is simply to state that it defied all the usual stereotypes. It doesn't sound 'valve-like' in the classic sense at all. There's no evidence here of the sort of romantic 'rose-tinted' character often associated with valve amplifiers – if anything the Steinhart has more of the aggressive, or at least assertive nature which is to be found with many transistorised devices. The bass end too is notably firm, agile, and capable of plumbing the subterranean low-end depths with the very best, delivering wonderful richness and scale without in any way over-egging the pudding.

Yet it also has that glorious midband transparency, delicacy and freedom from congestion that is a traditional valve





Don't be fooled by the retro look. Steinhart's amp combo sounds band up to date.



strength, and which no solid state amp ever seems able to emulate. I normally reach for the mute when Radio 3 gets operatic, but found myself genuinely enjoying Don Giovanni through an amplifier which, in a very real sense, somehow manages to combine the best of both worlds.

There's ample power available here for all normal purposes, and the Steinharts spent most of their time driving the very fine B&W Nautilus 800s, which are by no means an easy load. The amp did threaten to disgrace itself one evening however, which I initially put down to the temperamental nature of valve amps in general, but the problem never resurfaced after I'd disconnected and reconnected everything, so I suspect a dodgy connection elsewhere in the system was probably to blame.

There are some down sides, of a more practical and prosaic nature. The power amp in particular chucks out quite a lot of waste heat - typically 250 watts at modest listening levels, which could be a bit of a problem in summer perhaps, if

you're not air-conditioned. I also noticed a trace of mechanical hum, though not enough to intrude, and then there's the odd switching and the sheer inconvenience of being unable to change inputs remotely.

Those points are essentially peripheral, however. In sound and musical terms this amplifier is a truly wonderful experience. that defies the market stereotyping and cuts straight to the heart of the things that really matter. (

ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIONET PRE G2/AMP II MAX £13,800 Fine all-round powerhouse with great drive and drama, but top end lacks some sparkle.

AUDIO RESEARCH LS25/VT100 £12,199 Not so much a fine valve amplifier as a fine amplifier full stop - now in MkII form.

MARK LEVINSON NOS380/344 £9,490 Preamp has precision and warmth plus unusual configurability, power has authority

and transparency to spare. NAIM NAC552/NAP500 £22,745 Extravagantly priced and idiosyncratically connected, but the delightfully delicate sound

is musically very informative.

EXCLUSIVE

Multichannel tubes

Can an all-analogue multichannel preamp really improve the very latest digital formats?

ven though the new high-resolution music formats DVD-Audio and SACD appeared nearly two years ago it has taken until now for an established brand to bring an analogue multichannel preamp to the UK market. There have been plenty of home cinema-oriented amps and processors with six-channel bypass but none of these have been dedicated to getting the most out of six uncompressed channels rather it is a facility among many that they offer. Copland has not only built a dedicated pure analogue, six-channel preamplifier but it has used valves to drive it. Which is pretty ironic when you consider that it is using 1950s technology for a 21st century format.

There are some pretty good reasons for using a purely analogue preamp with SACD and DVD-A. Primarily the presence of digital processing in an amplifier always seems to have a negative effect on analogue signals that have to pass through it. we've tried a variety of highly regarded processor/preamps and while some of them sound damn good, few compete with pure analogue stereo alternatives at a far lower price. There are a variety of likely reasons for this. Highest on the list comes the high-frequency (RF) noise created by DSP

ANALOGUE HOME CINEMA

In many ways the analogue approach is just as relevant for combined music and movie purposes as it is for the dedicated music lover. All good DVD players feature onboard processing and six-channel socketry. So there's no fundamental need for outboard processing unless you want the latest 7.1 channel or THX processors.

One of the reasons for the demise of the low-cost outboard DAC was that the digital link introduced almost as many problems as the DAC solved. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to wonder if the same RCA phono terminated digital connection between DVD players and processors/receivers might have the same shortcomings. The superb results with movie soundtracks through the Copland would suggest that analogue preamplification can be a more economical route to high quality results for both camps.

VERDICT

Copland CVA306/ CVA535 multichannel pre/power amplifier £3,748

(£1,499+£2,249)

- ♠ Transparency, dynamics and imaging that processor-based designs can only dream about. Excellent build quality.
- Remote control of individual channels would be nice.

CONCLUSION

Arguably transforms multichannel audio from a novelty to a genuine advance for the state of the high fidelity art. Combining tube delicacy with transistor grunt in a highly transparent fashion at a very fair price.

KEY FEATURES

CVA306

- Remote control
- Five line inputs, single tape out
- Stereo output
- Six-channel in and outputs with variable level controls
- Two 12volt triggers

CVA535

- Five separate amplification modules producing 125watts per channel
- Single-ended inputs
- Balanced inputs
- 12volt trigger receiver



which analogue preamps don't have to deal with. Another factor is costing – every processing technology that an AV component utilises for fear of being behind the times has to be licensed from its creators, be they Dolby, DTS or THX. And then there's the video switching – another source of noise and cost. The list goes on and it's amazing that processors sound musical at all when you consider the problems their designers face.

The Copland CVA306 keeps things very straightforward, so much so that the manual is about the same as you get for a stereo preamp. There are no suggestions about set-up and all but the six-channel in and outputs on the rear will be familiar to anyone that's gazed at the back of their stereo. The multiple level adjusters on the front cannot unfortunately be adjusted with the remote but it's not the sort of thing you're likely to want to change very often - in fact if you have a DVD-A player you're not likely to touch them at all. DVD players tend to have reasonable speaker set-up facilities with which you can set channel levels and even basic bass management. Dedicated SACD

players tend to be less flexible and this is where the CVA-306's little knobs will come in handy.

The CVA535 is a five-channel transistor power amp in the brute style (ie it weighs 30kg) that is rated at 125 watts per channel and based on independent power modules. Each has its own regulated power supply so that current drawn on one channel does not impinge on the power available to the others. Both single-ended phono and balanced XLR connections can be made.

PERFORMANCE

We kicked off using the CVA306 as a preamp in a stereo system, a situation it seemed very comfortable with. It has an organic, earthy sound with good dynamics and a highly convincing musical perspective. This manifests itself in the degree of authenticity with which instruments and voices are reproduced, each rendered with its acoustic environment or treatment in full effect and its tonal colouring strong and clear. It's perhaps a shade mannered when compared with transistor alternatives but the extra life and presence is a worthy





"The Copland pairing brings multichannel reproduction in line with the transparency expected of serious stereo kit."





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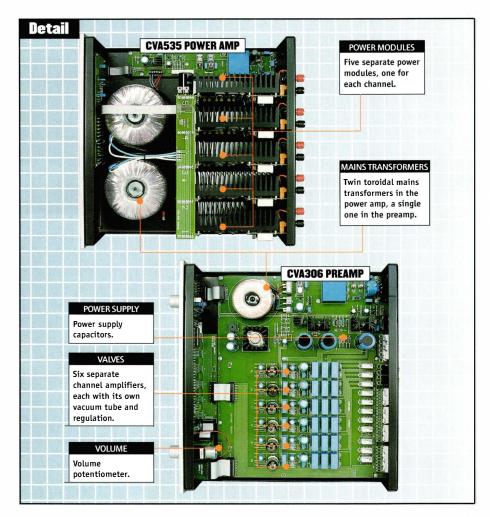
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exchange. Low-level detail is also well served with several discs revealing nuances hitherto unheard.

It is clearly a good preamp in a conventional set-up but switching to the Copland pairing from a conventional AV amp revealed its startling transformative powers. Here it was nothing short of extraordinary, capable, indeed, of turning the most cynical of stereo-loving hacks into a multichannel champion. The Riding With The King DVD-A suddenly woke up and started sounding like music, the atmosphere of the recording and the tone of Eric Clapton and BB King's guitars gaining a previously unimagined energy and realism.

Transparency is the Copland pairing's key asset in the multichannel scene none of the six-channel bypassable amps I've used have come close to the resolve on offer with these relatively affordable Coplands. Its musical accomplishment is enough to make discs that had originally sounded boring become highly entertaining and engaging.

One early DVD-A classic is Joni Mitchell's Both Sides Now, a disc that can sound excellent given the right conditions but rarely does because of system limitations. With the Danish pairing the space and character fully reflected the large scale orchestral recording effortlessly, with Joni's smoky voice standing clear and true above the occasionally syrupy strings.

Even King Crimson's Deja Vroom DVD-V, which fortunately has a DTS track, sounds more powerful and engaging than it does through outboard processors (some form of processing being a necessity with the disc). The tension and grunt is there in full effect making the hi-fi nut in me cry out for an uncompressed version though the music lover in me had to admit that the fun factor would not necessarily increase as a result.

SACD is likewise extremely well served. Here the individual channel pots come into play big time - level settings on dedicated SA players are crude to say the least and having this extra degree of control is a boon. I guess a perfectionist would need to place the speakers equidistant from the listening position



"The Copland's extraordinary transformative powers are capable of turning even the most cynical stereo-loving hack into a multichannel champion."

because there is no delay facility, but practicality nearly always discourages this and the results are so stunning that you're unlikely to feel that you're missing anything anyway.

The degree to which the speakers disappear with good SACD recordings, such as Exceptional Masterpieces (Bona Nova), is quite remarkable. The music is in the room but not apparently emanating from the various wooden boxes around you. It's almost like a rebirth of the 'source is king' ethic that launched a thousand LP12 turntables. With an amp that offers this degree of transparency the absolute quality of the speakers is significantly less of a restriction than you might expect. This effect was apparent with a variety of discs including the excellent Omnibus Wind Ensemble Plays The Music Of Frank Zappa and that justly acknowledged reference for the medium, Sacred Feast by the Guadeamus choral ensemble.

The Copland pairing brings multichannel reproduction in line with the transparency expected of serious stereo kit, something that has not been achieved by many and not to our knowledge at this price.

www.copland.dk

ALSO CONSIDER

MCCORMACK MAP-1 £2,500

The only other multichannel analogue preamp distributed in the UK accepts two six-channel inputs and offers ambience enhancement for stereo signals.

EMM LABS SWITCHMAN-2 \$3,200 (£2,045) The unit that Sony US uses to demonstrate the qualities of SACD accepts four six-channel inputs via balanced or single-ended

ORPHEUS LABS MODEL TWO

connections. Wired remote

\$6,720 (£4,300)

Highly flexible stereo or multichannel preamp capable of accepting two six-channel inputs, pro-style 1U case and menu-style operating system. Both balanced and SE socketry.

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LECSON QUATTRA INTEGRATED STERED AMPLIFIER



Occasionally new products burst on an unsuspecting world, introducing new ideas and thinking. Some strike a chord and take on a momentum all their own. Others are blind alleys, which may attract some interest at first, but which ultimately fall by the wayside.

Take the Lecson Quattra. It started life as the Incatec Quattro which was designed by Colin Wonfor, one-time designer of the dramatic sounding Claymore MOSFET amp. Incatec folded in 1989, following which Colin was employed by John Ogden and Russell Kauffman of distribution company Studio Power. The amp's design was the brainchild of Colin and Russell. In 1990 Studio Power too ceased trading and Advanced Assembly Services took up the baton, with Russell selling and marketing, and Paul Bulling taking on responsibility for manufacturing the amplifier which for legal reasons became the Lecson Quattra.

The amplifier looked conventional enough. A low, slimline design, there was little at first sight to distinguish it from a dozen or more integrated amplifiers that have appeared and just as quickly disappeared over the years. Look around the back though and you'll see immediately that it doesn't play by the usual rules. The clue is the unusual matrix of loudspeaker terminals, grouped into two banks of four, with one group labelled treble, the other bass.

POWER OF FOUR

In case you haven't worked it out, the Quattra was unique because it was equipped with four internal power amplifier sections. The four power amps were bipolar, two driven conventionally from the output of the preamp, the second pair taking a feed from the feedback loop prior to the output stage. Running the second pair of amps indirectly in this way introduced an asymmetry which could be described as a slight cheat, but the damage was probably small, and minimised by allocating the cleaner direct feed to the tweeters.

So what's it all about? Simply, each drive unit in a bi-ampable

two-way system can be driven by its own dedicated power amplifier. Better damping and improved sound quality are the benefits. The tradeoff is less power, but in the context of average sized living rooms and moderately sensitive loudspeakers, this is probably not a decisive issue. Each power amp module is rated at 19 watts, but by reorganising the speaker connections - no switching or other configuration is required – the power amps can be bridged, which increases power output to 50 watts per channel. It is a fact that 19 watts is enough to drive many typical speakers to useful levels. Bridging the output provides a degree of extra headroom, but not as much as you might think. And sound quality is clearly worse in bridge mode, which was only included as a sop for those foolish enough to choose amplifiers by the numbers. Certainly the extra power is not enough to overturn the gains from operating in bi-amp mode.

RI-AMP I FGACY

The Quattro/Quattra enjoyed considerable success, particularly in the Far East and much of Europe. But in its home market it was less successful, and production finally ceased around 1993. Perhaps it's not surprising that the Quattro/Quattra fell between the cracks of high fidelity history. It's not a powerful amp, and even in its heyday 19 watts per channel wasn't much to shout about when most of the competition delivered 30-50 watts.

In the end though Lecson had the last laugh, even if it wasn't ultimately the one to profit from the enterprise. The idea of bi-amplification was a slow burner, but has now become standard practice at the high end. Mainstream producers like Arcam and Primare are also producing outboard power amps to match some of their integrated models for precisely this reason, and there are now even integrated home cinema amplifiers that provide the option of driving the main speakers this way. Perhaps the Quattra was not a definitive influence on what was to come, but without question it was ahead of its time. Alvin Gold



A3.2 Series.

Machined, Mil-spec aluminium front panel.

Platinum plated fittings. Remote controlled. Phono stage.

Powerful, robust, built.







When Miles Davis assembled a band for the sessions that would become *Kind Of Blue*, he was already well on his way to becoming a jazz legend. After an apprenticeship served with bop icons

Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, he had made his name with a whole new brand of accessible bebop-inspired music, catalogued on his *Birth Of The Cool* album. He'd also embarked on several big band experiments with arranger Gil Evans which were breaking down the barriers of what could be described as 'jazz'.

Now he was ready to change music again. He did it by going back to basics, with a small band, but also by incorporating composer George Russell's theories on modal jazz – music based around particular scales (modes) rather than chord progressions or song structures. With a stripped back harmonic structure, he hoped to coerce his musicians into concentrating on melody, mood and tone, without the crutch of playing standard changes.

It seems strange that the single most famous album in jazz, which more than any other typifies the wee hours mood of the jazz nightfly, was actually recorded in a couple of afternoons in March and April, 1959, the majority of it conceived just a few hours before the first session. None of the musicians had heard the themes before, and Miles only sketched them out shortly beforehand. He was after total improvisation, with a minimum amount of contrivance or pre-planning.

Though this approach offered the musicians almost unprecedented space to experiment, the music is of course, never completely free – it offers freedom, but always in context. As pianist Bill Evans states in his original Zen-inspired sleeve notes: "As the painter needs his framework of parchment, the improvising musical group needs its framework in time". And that's exactly what these sparse outlines provided for some of the most gifted musicians of their day, including tenor giant John Coltrane, bluesy alto Cannonball Adderley and quietly impressionistic pianist Bill Evans, all inspired by and in turn inspiring Miles's haunted, often muted trumpet.

In each case, the musicians had a couple of run-throughs of each

"The original three-track analogue tapes revealed that some tracks had been recorded on a tape machine which was running slightly slow."

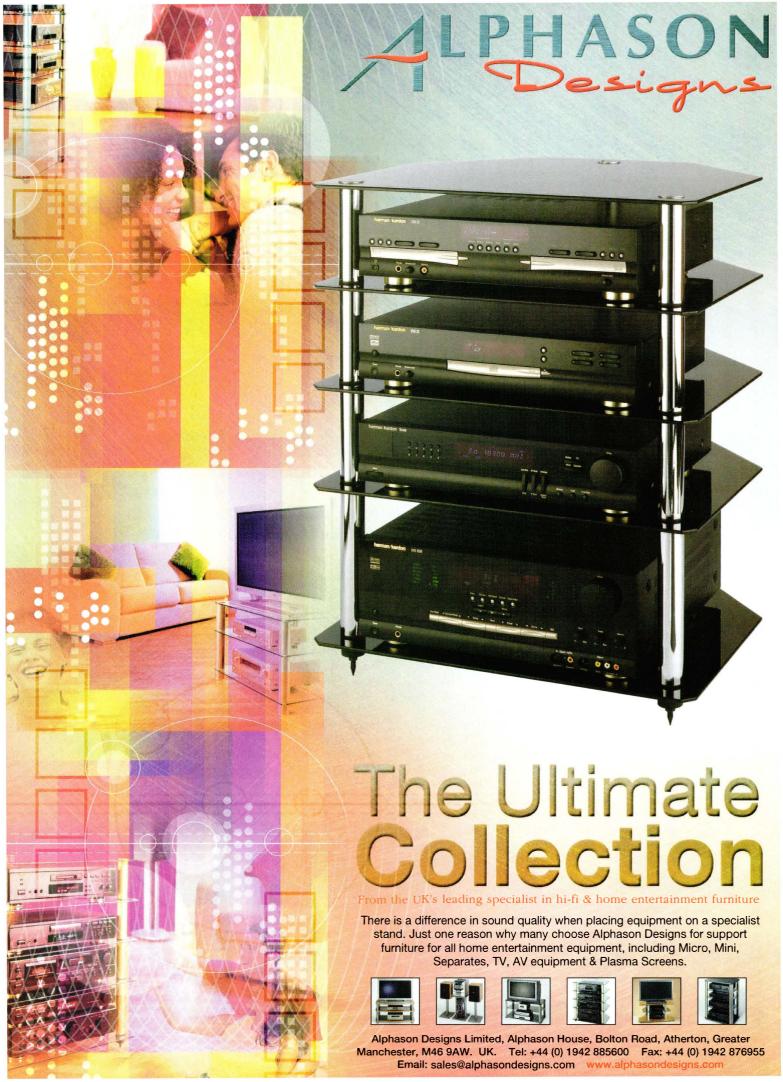
tune before playing it with the tape running. With all but one, the first complete take was the one that made it onto the album.

For many years, the original Columbia 'six-eye' pressing was the one to own, subsequent reissues being of inferior quality. Early CD transfers in the eighties were also regarded as poor cousins to the original vinyl, and there were suspicions that they were reproduced from a back-up LP rather than the original master tapes. Remastering in the late eighties made an attempt to improve the sound, but suffered from an intrusive noise reduction technique.

The album finally got a worthy re-release for Columbia's CD 'Mastersound' edition in 1995. The original three-track analogue tapes were digitally remastered using Sony's SBM (super bit mapping) encoding technology, revealing in the process that the three tracks from the first session had been recorded on a slow-running tape machine. As a result, the tracks played back slightly fast and sounded 'sharp' – at a slightly higher pitch than they had been played in. At least one frustration of trying to play along with *Kind Of Blue* had been resolved. Just two years later, Columbia reissued the album again with the only complete alternative take from the sessions (the first run of Flamenco Sketches), and finally, an SACD version crept out in February this year – perhaps the ultimate digital version of this seminal set.

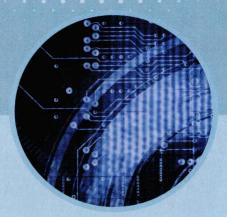
Over four decades *Kind Of Blue* has become the best-selling jazz album ever. It has managed this feat by appealing to the casual listener, the jazz buff and admiring musicians in equal measure. With a combination of planning and inspiration, Miles and his band created an album with almost unlimited layers of experience – no matter how many times you play it, you'll never reach the bottom of this treasure chest of musical riches.

Dave Oliver



DIGITALIA

DIRECT DIGITAL TRANSFER



Direct digital transfer of audio data from one unit to another, typically from disc player to processor, has many benefits. The DAC and ADC stages required by analogue interfaces are avoided as are the legions of analogue interconnects hanging between different boxes. Frankly, a direct digital link is both cheaper to implement and, from the purist's perspective, less invasive. And yet even the most advanced of today's AV systems still require analogue links between the multichannel output of DVD-A or SACD players as well as a parallel digital conduit for Dolby and DTS bitstreams.

This ridiculous state of affairs boils down to one issue – copy protection. Once some bright spark introduces an insecure digital output format on a DVD-Audio player, then the prospect of another bright spark ripping off this data becomes, as they say, a clear and present danger. Content providers won't stand for it.

Meridian was the first to tackle this issue with its proprietary MHR or Meridian High Resolution interface. This is essentially three S/PDIF links, each capable of transmitting two channels of 24-bit data sampled at 96kHz. With Meridian's own encryption, this permits six decoded DVD-A channels to be transmitted in the digital domain. However, because the transmission bandwidth is limited, 24-bit/192kHz data must be downsampled to 24-bit/96kHz, regardless of the number of channels.

Denon came next with its proprietary serial link, a balanced low-voltage connection with good immunity from interference and a transfer rate over 1.2Gbps. However, up until very recently, this link was only authorised for the transmission of non-copy protected DVD-A data. In practice, this meant a handful of demonstration discs. But with the approval of the 4C licensing group (known anomalously as the 4C Entity and including the likes of IBM, Intel, Panasonic and Toshiba), Denon's serial link is now validated for the secure transmission of CPPM (Content Protection for Pre-recorded Media) encrypted DVD-A software.

Denon plans to enable the link, by way of upgrade, to current owners of the DVD-A1 player and AVC-A1SR amplifier. This will facilitate the direct streaming of LPCM CD and DVD-A data up to 24-bit/192kHz, in addition to compressed Dolby and DTS bitstreams, to the processor within the AVC-A1SR. By taking advantage of the substantially enhanced processing power and configuration options available to the AVC-A1SR, this simple 'upgrade' should result in a wholesale improvement in multichannel audio quality. However, until Denon embraces SACD, its hardware will not be offering a fully inclusive solution.

The only company able to make that claim is Pioneer. It received its 4C licence just before Denon and in enough time for its DV-757Ai universal player (p58) and VSA-AX10i amp (*HFC* 229) to include fully enabled IEEE1394 interfaces. Known by Sony's trademarked 'i-Link', this bi-directional interface supports transmission rates up to 400Mbps – less than Denon's serial link but sufficient to carry uncompressed 2x192kHz and 6x96kHz DVD-A. Dual connectors on both player and amp permit an entire system to be 'daisy-chained' through a single i-Link.

Having plumped for IEEE1394, Pioneer has since developed (with Texas Instruments) its own LSI (Large Scale Integrated circuit) that uses the A&M (Audio and Music Data transmission) standard to securely transfer PCM data, compressed Dolby Digital and DTS bitstreams in addition to 'one-bit' audio. Ostensibly, this means SACD. This so-called Mercury chip also includes networking functions, bringing a new level of communication between receivers and hosts on the i-Link bus.

But why stop at 400Mbps? Next year, we can expect i-Link to be either joined or replaced wholesale by the HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface). HDMI's huge 5Gbps data rate makes digital video streaming and eight channels of audio (up to 24-bit/192kHz) a practical proposition. When the standard is fully ratified, HDMI should encompass the DVI (Digital Video Interface) standard with HDCP encryption and the EIA/CEA-861 standard for adapting DVI to DTV formats. HD-STB's (High Definition Set-Top Box) and DVD-A players will share a common interface while video will remain in digital form until it hits the screen. Fully networked AV is on the way...

Paul Miller

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FOR SALE

ROTHWELL INDUS

passive preamp. 7 inputs, 2 outputs. Record a source, play other. Boxed instructions. £350. Creek P42 power amp boxed. £150. MJ Rodway 01202 481386 (Dorset).

ROTEL CD PLAYER RCD 991 audiophile edition, excellent sounding player in mint condition, boxed, remote, manual, cost (£825) £550. Anthony Stead 01708 471099/ 07939 512098 (Essex).

KIMBER XL speaker cable 8ft £490. Kimber select 1010 interconnect £180.

Kimber Orchid balanced interconnect £160, torlyte base unit 3 £300, Kimber 8TC mains lead £85.01772 314151/07751 475062 (Lancs)

CD'S AND VINYL for sale. Americana/alt.country/power pop etc. Call for list. Alan 01379 687648 (Norfolk)

DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 2.8

floorstanding loudspeakers. Gorgeous rosewood finish, captivating sound, mint condition, boxed originally (£3,200). Roger 01256 355808 (Hampshire).

CYRUS III amp plus Chord solid gold leads £200; Mission 752 floorstanding speakers (black) with OED Oudos cables £200, 07810 374202 or e-mail andrew.trist@njw.co.uk (Kent).

VAN DEN HUL CS 122 hybrid

speaker cable 2 X 8 metres £80 ono. Call Mike 01904 708117 (York). QED QUDOS speaker cable, 34 metres, in four almost equal lengths. Used once only £30 ono. Mike 01904 708117 (York)



PMC FB1 £750

PMC FB1 Speakers (£1,410) £750 Musical Fidelity A.3.2 upsampling player (£1,000) £600. Aura PA200 power amp x2 250 watts Mono (£1,000) £250 each, All mint, boxed, 2 months old. 01904 708382 (York)

MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200R, 5 months old. Excellent condition, boxed as new with instructions, still under warranty £499. 07866 561557

NAD SILVERLINE CD player and amp. Jamo concert 8 speakers +

stands. Russ Andrews 4TC speaker cable Silverstreak XLR interconnect and more. £3,000 ono. 07929 343714 (Gwent).

(Lancashire).

MICROMEGA SOLO CD player top loader £475 ono, Yamaha DSP-E580 processor mint boxed £120 ono. 0121 707 7316 (Birmingham).

RECORDS AND CDS for sale, all genres and collectables. Terry 020 8466 9736 (Kent).

AUDIOQUEST ruby/turquoise interconnects, monster gold banana phono plugs. Gold spade connectors. banana plugs, £120 sell separately. 01229 580862 (Cumbria)

LEAK SANDWICH speakers, good condition, offers. 01303 256545

TECHNICS SL10 LP-sized linear tracking automatic record deck mc. Cartridge, instructions. £450. MJ Rodway 01202 481386 (Dorset) MARANTZ CD63 MKII KI Signature and PM66SE KI Sig amp both boxed, as new including interconnects and a pair of Nordost speaker cables £400

ono. 01252 310025 (Surrey).

LEAK TROUGHLINE 3 stereo valve tuner, excellent condition, £100. Luxman CO2 MO2 pre/power £600. 01708 457691 (Essex).

AIWA AAB700 amplifier £150. Aiwa AD6900 cassette deck £170. Armstrong 524 tuner £20. No offers. 020 8281 0029 (Essex).

LAVARDIN IT amp (£3,200) £1,950 Quad ESL 61 and De Luxe stands, late model £1.250. Both items mint and boxed. 020 8527 5882 (Essex)

PRO-AC RESPONSE CC1 centre speaker in mahagony veneer, brand new £450 for details. Andy 01484 563833 (Hull).

ARCAM ALPHA 9 amp £200, Alpha 8 SE CD £250, Alpha 8 tuner £100. All three for £560 (pristine). 07779 905072 (London)

JMLAB ELECTRA 905s, quality standmount speakers, very good condition boxed Stands and cables available. Offers, Mark 07768 278332 (N.Yorks)

AUDIOSYNTHESIS SILVERBLUE

SO interconnects 2x 0.5 metres £75 each, 1x 0.75 metres £90, WBT phonos. Terry 020 8482 0363 (Middx).

ROKSAN CASPIAN MKII CD £550, caspian power amp x2 £350 or £650

WANTED

QUADRAPHONIC hi-fi equipment. Only Sansui, JVC or Sony. Also quadraphonic records, 8 tracks, tapes, 020 8281 0029 (Essex).

the pair. Rotel Michi preamp (RHA10) with remote £500. JVC three-head cassette deck TO V662 £100. 07815 861746 or 020 8404 7610 (Surrey).

YAMAHA DSP-E800 DD/DTS processor, Current model, Awardwinning. Nine months old. Mint. Boxed. £350 new. Accept £210 ono. 07733 126265 or patmarcus@hotmail.com (Birmingham).

CYRUS 2 & PSX. Last edition. Recent Cyrus service and gold upgrade. VGC. Wonderful sound, £600 new, Accept £300 ono. 077331 26265 or patmarcus@hotmail.com (Birmingham).

MERIDIAN 603 preamp with moving coil board and DAC. Recently factory overhauled. £350. 01908 222094 evenings (Milton Keynes) SONUS FABER Electa Amator II speakers, stand mount design, Atacama Stands, solid walnut, perfect

condition, £1650. Call 07789

@hotmail.com (Essex).

742402 or email david_painter12

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

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RED ROSE 'SPIRIT' PLAYBACK SYSTEM



THE SPIRIT PLAYBACK SYSTEM

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Similar in size and form to Spirit, the latest Series 2 version of this famous system uses the latest technology and premium quality parts and construction to deliver an altogether more sophisticated system.

Greater dynamic range and higher resolution contribute to a much higher level of musical performance such that Baby Reference is one of the finest compact systems available at any price.

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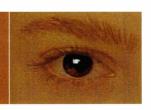
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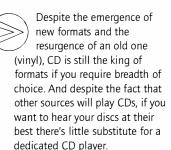
where you can audition these components

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132 **DEALER DIRECTORY**

CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as litter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

0.8.0

WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output - and most do.

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

SUPER AUDIO CD

SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has the potential for uncompressed six-channel surround, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio - these are listed in our DVD section.



NAD C451i £330

Dynamic, tonally varied and confident sound combines with class-leading detail resolution. Excellent value and highly entertaining.



Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

An affordable high-end machine, this very impressive player has it all: brawn, finesse and class. Not to mention the full range of features.

			GROUP TEST BEST BUY ☐ GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED ☐ EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW	SPECIFICATIONS								
	D PLA			SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE		BAL ANAL OGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSI
Auc	lio only CD and SA(CD pl	ayers	MPATI	G OUT	G OUT	OMPAT	CD TEXT	OGUE	IE SOC	E OUT	SSUE NUMBER
	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	BLE	PLI	PUT	BLE	목	OUT	南	PUT	贸
UP T	£1,000									200		0.1
8	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing		0	0	-	0				21
88	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use		0	0			-			20
8	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness		0	0			-			21
8	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks		0				-			21
R	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque		0	9	0	0				23
В	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal									21
B8	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		•		<u> </u>	0		0	9	21
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		0	9	0	9		0	0	23
R	Marantz CD-17 Mkll	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step		0	0		0	0	0		20
BB	NAD C 541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		0		0					23
В	NAD Silverline S500	1,000	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear		0	0		0				19
R	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		0							23
8	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, if a little lacking in excitement or involvement		0							22
В	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability		9							21
88	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance.	0	0		0					23
В	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast and the availability of a complete upgrade path makes this a good long-term proposition									19
ABOV	E£1,000											
В	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,200	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility		0	0						22
EC	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!									23
R	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well-built player - balanced outputs too		0	0		9				22
88	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	This refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range builds on the qualities of the lesser models		0							22
8	Marantz CD17 Mkll Kl Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)		0							22
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		0	0	0		0		0	23
>	Meridian 507	1,195	Much of the refinement and subtlety of the brand's costlier equipment at an 'entry-level' price									23
EC	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE ²⁴	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities									22
В	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition — a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses									21
EC	Naim NACDSII/XPS	6,265	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results									18
88	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality						0			22
EC	Sony SCD-333ES		High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround	0	9			0				22
EC	Sony SCD-XA777ES	-	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch					0	0			22
EC	Wadia 301		Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect		0				0			22

SACD COMPATIBLE Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. CD-RW COMPATIBLE Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. CD TEXT Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. BAL ANALOGUE OUT Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. HEADPHONE SOCKET Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. VARIABLE OUTPUT Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Primare D30.2 £1,499

A top-class player with a characteristically powerful and authoritative, but also a subtle and engaging sound. It works best in high-grade, high-resolution systems.



Wadia 301 £3,650

Revelatory player that gives new insight into everything it plays, can be used directly into a power amp to good effect and has an optional digital preamp function.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video

DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players - you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are remarkably good - often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD, apart from being the first digital video format for the home, is that it offers discrete multi-channel sound. In the case of plain DVD video discs, this music is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit onto the disc alongside the video data. You



can use a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround benefits that the format specialises in.

DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A

discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player. While

offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for

information - lyrics, images and so on. To save you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, and this would seem to be the best route if you want to enjoy high-resolution digital audio. If you're after a high-end model, look for one with a 'high bandwidth' digital audio output as well as 5.1 analogue outputs.

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS **GIVE THE BEST OUALITY?**

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

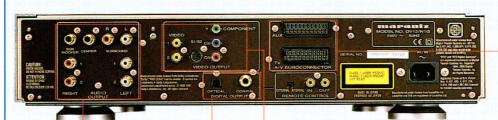
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear the benefits of surround sound. DVD players can be used with stereo amps to great effect, but you won't be able to decode the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks on movies.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

Not unless you have a progressive scan/NTSC compatible monitor or TV - as yet there is no PAL version.

CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

SCART CONNECTIONS:

These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

			ROUP TEST BEST BLY : GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW	SPECIFICATIONS							
	VD PL		YERS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE		
	io/Video disc play	ers		MPATIE	MPATIE	3 ОИТРИТ	OUTF	SOCH	NUMBER		
	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	E	E	ij	ğ	白	Ħ		
	£1,000	1.000									
R	Arcam DiVA DV88	1,000	Video player built with non-obsolescence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	_		0	0		213		
BB	Denon DVD-3800	1,000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station.			0	0		234		
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	350	Reasonable video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good choice for buyers who put music first			0	0		228		
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	0		0	0		220		
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player that is an extremely attractive all-rounder			0	0		221		
88	Pioneer DV-656A	400	'Universal' SACD/DVD/Audio/Video player does everything moderately well or better, and is an excellent buy	0	0	0	0	0	234		
38	Sony DVP-NS905V	£400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance			0		0	234		
88	Toshiba SD-510E	320	Great all-rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba	0		0	0		228		
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting, DVD-A performance round off a good, if costly, player					0	228		
BOV	£1,000										
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	*		0	0		230		
EC	Marantz DV8300	1,400	Universal machine with a great sense of timing and comprehensive features	0	0	0			233		
EC	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode				0		229		
EC	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player			0			218		
c	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs			0			230		
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Near state-of-the-art video and attractive, easy-on-the-ear music-making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike			0		0	213		
18	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player — in this context, pricing is competitive			0	0		213		
EC	Townshend DV-747A	2.899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners	0	0		0		232		

SPECS KEY DVD-A COMPATIBLE Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. SACD COMPATIBLE Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. HEADPHONE SOCKET Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.



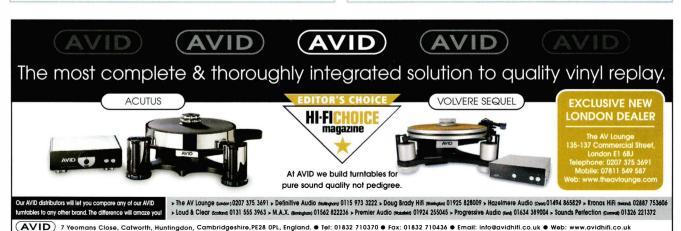


Sonv DVP-NS905V £400

SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



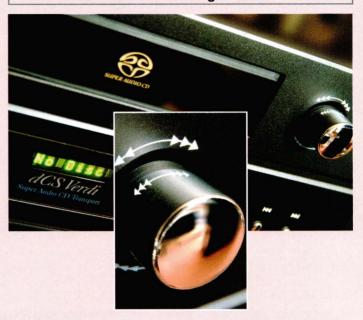




dCS Verdi Transport

For many years dCS users all over the world have been asking us to make a disc transport to go with their dCS DACs. Well here it is - the dCS Verdi. The Verdi is two products in one - a CD transport and a SACD transport. Every effort has been made to obtain the best possible playback fidelity from both media. Compromising one to favour the other was not an option. We have achieved this by paying attention to the transport as a system, rather than concentrate on one or two specific features. The Verdi's low jitter on-board clock ensures that it will give excellent CD playback with non – dCS DACs, but it really comes into its own when used with either the dCS Elgar plus or dCS Delius D/A converters, where the ability to synchronise the Verdi to precision clocks built into the Elgar and Delius takes CD playback to another level. We firmly believe that the quality of playback possible from the DSD layer of SACD's when using the Verdi, is the closest to the original master recording so far achieved with audiophile equipment.

www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk



Mark Levinson 434/436

The single most important feature of the new amplifiers and the one that alone justifies their price is their performance. Initially intended to match the sonic quality of our popular 300 Series models, these pure mono designs actually eclipse that lofty goal.

Since the No.434 and No.436 share circuit topologies and materials with the 300 Series amplifiers, their sonic character is of the same family. The benefit to this approach is that owners of a 300 Series

amplifier may add one or several channels to their system using the No.434 and No.436, without sonic compromise. But the dedication of a single chassis and careful selection of component parts has allowed our design team to further refine their performance.

The mono amplifiers share some of the sonic attributes of the No.33 and No.33H, including higher resolution and dynamics, and a greater sense of effortlessness. They are as well suited to a top quality two-channel music system as they are to a world-class multi-channel music and theatre system.



NAGRA MPA MOSFET solid state amplifier

In many amplifier power supply designs, AC power feeds a transformer with a diode bridge which rectifies the voltage of the transformer's secondary. This voltage is then filtered by a series of capacitors.

Alternatively, a rectifier bridge with a DC/DC converter is used to supply the necessary peak power.

In both cases, the power draw from the AC power outlet is heavily pulsed, with peak current spikes potentially reaching plus and minus 50 Amperes in places where 110 VAC is used!

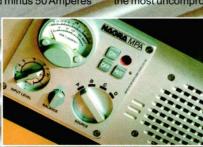
These current spikes pass through the sockets, plugs, connections and cables feeding the amplifier. In addition to creating a potential electrical hazard for other equipment, the highly spiked currents also generate undesirable harmonics that can significantly degrade the purity and integrity of other equipment such as digital and

analogue source components.

The Nagra MPAuses a PFC power supply, a highly specialised DC/DC converter configuration which is designed to draw only sinusoidal current without spikes and deliver 2 x 250 Watts into 8 Ohms with AC supplies between 94 VAC to 264 VAC.

The result is an abundance of pure, natural, uncontaminated power for the most uncompromised reproduction of music, caring for each

pianissimo with apropos refinement and delivering every crescendo with supreme gusto. No less than what nature would have prescribed itself.



hy & Design: Tom Foxall – 01952 727866

MAX Midiand Audio X-change

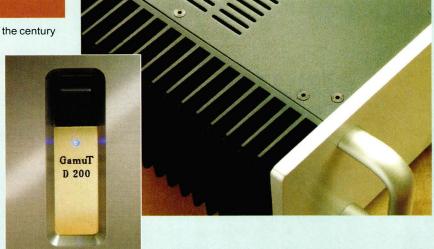
Midland Audio X-change MAX

Gamut D200 Power Amplifier

Awesome dynamics, speed and delivery from this bargain of the century 2x200 Watts in 8 Ohms load

2x400 Watts in 4 Ohms load

- THD is below 0.05%.
- Noise is at least 100 dBA below 100 Watts in 8 Ohms.
- Input impedance is 10 kOhms, balanced and single ended inputs can be chosen.
- Sensitivity can be selected internally to be 0.77V, 1,55V, 3,1V or 3,9V for full power.
- The output for a loudspeaker is binding posts taking 4 mm banana plugs and spade termination.
- Available in black or Silver, or Chrome at extra cost



Audio Research

What sets the CD3 apart from the so-called "combination" players on the market - whether DVD or SACD based - is that the CD3 is designed to do one thing superbly: that is, to play back normal "redbook" music CDs, CD-R and CD-RW discs with maximum fidelity and full musical expression. The CD3 will not play back DVD video, DVD audio or SACD-only discs

sacrifices sonic performance in the CD format. The engineering focus of the CD3 is to maximise performance with the prevailing music format by keeping the overall player design simple, reliable and optimised for the one task it must accomplish.

Class A J-FET analogue output stage. Massive regulated power supplies - using industry-leading capacitors for both bulk supplies and bypass components and damping techniques of a proprietary nature have been used to extend to the CD3's remarkable range of performance characteristics



Spectral - DMC-15 Preamplifier

Spectral's latest addition to their superb range of electronics will be available from late July as a replacement for the DMC12. A line level remote controlled preamplifier with topology taken from the DMC30s Reference preamplifier, we are very excited about this product please call John Roberts to discuss the possibilities with any Spectral component.



Suppliers and installers of High Quality Audio Systems 47 Laboratory Accuphase ATC Audio Physic Audio Research Avalon Accoustics Avid bel canto Benz Micro Cardas Clearaudio Conrad Johnson dCS Densen DNM/Reson Electrocompaniet Finite Elemente

JMLabs Krell Kuzma Lavardin Mark Levinsor Martin Logan Michell Nagra Primare ProAc Rega Siltech Sonus Faber Spectral Nordost Sugden Transparent Audio Verity Audio

www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk

call John Roberts Tel 01562 822236

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Fax 01562 750246 Mobile 07721 605966

VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages

Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce.

Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.



Rega P3 £298

Latest version of a hi-fi classic is a very capable deck for a very modest price, with very little serious competition from other makes. A great turntable for the money and a very safe buy.



TT1/ARM1 £594

Simple, unpretentious and relatively inexpensive, Audio Note's TT1 delivers a real taste of high-end performance at a realistically affordable price.



Michell Orbe SE £1,825

A fine example of the turntable art, the stripped down SE version of Michell's flagship now features a DC motor. Does iustice to the best arms and cartridges.



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

A beautifully made turntable that delivers a high-end vinyl experience without costing the earth, Neutral, even-handed. detailed and frankly spellbinding.

Ou	r favourite	GROU	P TEST BEST BUY ☐ GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED ☐ EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW						
T	URNT	\B	LES		S		SUPPLIED	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSI
Record players			SPEEDS	SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	WITH ARM	WITH CA	ISSUE NUMBER	
	PRODUCT	ξ	COMMENTS	-		-		4	
88	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	*	0	0		203
EC	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	0	0			229
EC	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	0				194
R	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			0		223
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	0				103
R	Michell Gyro SE	829	Stripped-down version of classic GyroDec, offering strong and lively sound	33/45	0				223
EC	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor.	33/45					235
88	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			0		214
88	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	33/45		0			203
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45			*		228
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	0	8	0		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	0	0	0		186
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	33/45	0		0		203
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	33/45	0	8	0		205

Our favourit	e			DEOLE	1047	ONC
PHONO	PHONO CARTRIDGES		5	PECIF	REPLACEABLE	ISSUE
MM and MC cartridge	es		_	_	SITE STYLUS	JE NUMBER
PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	M M	MC	SU	Ä
Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		0		203
Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	6		0	214
Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	0			223
Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		0		235
Dynavector DV-20X L	350	Articulate-sounding with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm		0		192
Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		0		235
Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	0		0	214
Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss			0	235
Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	0			215
Reson Reca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	0		0	192
Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		0		223
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than £300		0		192
Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		0		235

Our favourit				SPE	CIFIC	ATION	IS
PHONO Phono stages	12	IAGES	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	ADJ. (ADJ. IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIN	SIN	GAIN	NCE	BER
Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	0				223
Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price.	0	0	0		234
Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	0			0	201
Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	0	0			201
Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension alongside good tonal colour this is the one to beat, excellent value for the money.		۰			234
Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs		0			223
Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP		0			201
Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility.	0	0	0	0	234

TURNITABLE SPEEDS KEY SPEEDS Speeds offered in rpm. SUSP SUBCHASSIS Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. SUPPLIED WITH ARM Deck is supplied complete with tonearm - some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY MM Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. MC Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality

RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is said to be available to 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

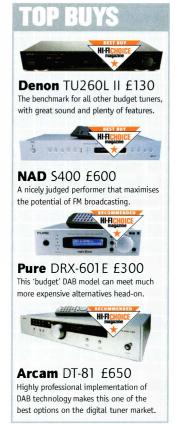
Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddied by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.



			GROUP TEST BEST BUY ☐ GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED 📧 EDITOR'S CHOICE 🔁 NEW GEAR REVIEW	SPECIFICATIONS								
	ΓUNERS			WAL			REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING	ISSUE NUMBER		
	M & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES		WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	B	ONTR	HE HE	IG KNOB	NUMB			
	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	S	SI	RDS	٩	田	80	田		
FM TU	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			0	0	193		
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		0	0	0	193		
8	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			0	9	211		
88	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	0			0	193		
88	Harman Kardon TU940	180	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30			0	0	221		
88	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	•		0		211		
R	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		0	0		193		
88	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30		0	0		230		
BB	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	0		0		230		
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good, honest, budget tuner – loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	0		0	0	221		
DAB TU	JNERS											
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		0	0	0	221		
>	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99		0	0	0	234		
R	Pure DRX-601ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue	DAB	90		0	0	0	230		
88	Pure DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB separate to date, and concedes little if anything to more expensive models	DAB	9			0		211		
R	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB, and a joy to own and use	DAB,FM,M,L	99	0	0	0	0	230		

SPECSIGY WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M - medium wave, L - long wave, DAB - digital audio broadcasting. PRESETS How many stations can be stored in memory. RDS Radio Data System - station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). REMOTE CONTROL For the couch potato. SIGNAL STRENGTH METER Useful for setting up an aerial. ROTARY TUNING KNOB An ergonomic alternative to buttons.











Panasonic











Wileon benesch

































Are you someone who is not easily satisfied? Someone who demands the very best, the latest or perhaps the purest? Then you are going to love seeing what Unilet have in store.

Whether you are looking for a turntable or a state-of-the-art home cinema set up, or perhaps that elusive speaker cable that you read about in an American hi-fi magazine, you are likely to find it at Unilet. For years Unilet has been the place for the serious audiophile.

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The Hidden Hi-Fi Store

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard disc recorders

MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/ CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette - clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them ad infinitum.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher - if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard disc

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HD (hard disc) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with those of MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format - flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues - and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HD recorder in fidelity terms.

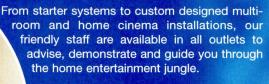


Ou	ır favourit	e 🗆	SROUP TEST BEST BUY 🗔 GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED 🧧 EDITOR'S CHOICE 🔁 NEW GEAR REVIEW					
	DIGITAL RECORDERS							S
Ц	IGHA		KECUKDEK2		HD CAP	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN	ISSUE
CD-	R/RW, MD and HD	recor	ders	DE	CAPACITY (GB)	WOUTP	IN/OUTPUTS	E NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	GB)	STU	STU	BER .
CD-R/	RW RECORDERS							100
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		0	0	218
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		0	0	233
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1		0	0	205
88	Philips CDR802	299	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound recorder at a good price	2		0	0	233
88	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		0	0	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well-equipped, well-priced CD-R/RW deck	1		0	0	218
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single-deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good, if characterful, player	1			0	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		0	0	218
MD R	CORDERS	Q CAR						
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		0	0	205
R	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		0		233
	CORDERS	700			00			000
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD-R and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit, then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	20	0	0	223

SPECS KEY DECKS Amount of drive mechanisms on board - twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records, HD CAPACITY Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. ELEC IN/OUTPUTS Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision

Stocks a comprehensive range of DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma monitors, televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.



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0% interest free option* is available on most products. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.



MUSICAL FIDELITY Tri-Vista 300

In celebration of the company's twentieth anniversary, Musical Fidelity have introduced the limited edition (500 only) Tri-Vista 300 'super'



integrated amplifier. Delivering an enormous 340W per channel, the 300 uses Tri-Vista mini-tubes similar to the Nu-Vista tubes previously used in Musical Fidelity's highly acclaimed, limited edition, Nu-Vista series of products. During October, the Tri-Vista

Series will complimented with the addition of 800 Tri-Vista CD/SACD Players with 300 Tri-Vista Pre-Amplifiers and Power Amplifiers following soon.

Tri-Vista 300 Integrated Amplifier £3994.95 • CD/SACD Player £3994.95



By combining technologies from their Reference and Q Series, KEF have introduced the new XQ speaker range. Featuring KEF Uni-Q® 'point source' arrays for unrivalled off-axis performance and 'super audio' Hypertweeters™, the XQ range fully exploits the wide bandwidth of digital formats like SACD and DVD-A. The range comprises the XQ one and three stand mounters, the XQ five floorstanders and XQ two c centre speaker. All XQ models are available in a variety of finishes.

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experience

New at Sevenoaks





New Outlets in Poole, Shirley (Solihull), Swindon, Wolverhampton & Wilmslow

We are delighted to announce that, subject to legal completion, we have new stores opening in the following locations. Please telephone to confirm before travelling. Poole 01202 671677 (now open) • Wolverhampton 01902 312225 (mid-November) Shirley (Solihull) (next few weeks) 0121 733 3727 • Swindon 01793 610992 (next few weeks) . Wilmslow (date to be confirmed).



PRO-JECT

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

Arcam DiVA T61 Tuner	£249.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner	£109.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner	£119.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono SB Turntable	£159.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours)	£129.95
Project RPM4 Turntable	£324.95
Sony ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner	£549.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner	£249.95

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."

★★★★★ Awards 2000

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



T HE-FT?

£369.95



RCD-02 CD Player £379.95 ROTEL RA-02 Amplifier £349.95

RCD-02 CD Player "Whether it's the raw, and sometimes just plain barking vocals of Tom Waits, or the stinging guitar stabs of Pete Townsend on some old Who tracks, the Rotel is one of those players that can't help but bring a smile to the face - it's a breath of fresh air."

**** September 2002

RA-02 Amplifier "The amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full

Century set without losing sight of the fine

presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's Goodbye

details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on Kissing Time with real relish. Add in decent levels of equipment - and the convenience of remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands."



Arcam DiVA CD62T

Up to £150

Marantz PM4200 • £149.95

AEGIS WALL Evo One Speakers £179.95

"The original Aegis Ones were great speakers, to the extent that they were category winners in our 1998 awards. Since then a host of new models have raised the standards in the sub-£200 category, and the Aegis Ones soon went from stunner to also ran. AE's response to that is an EVO version.

through our test room's extensive CD library we couldn't find a



The Aegis Ones genes are clearly evident. The original's refinement and bass weight are preserved and backed up with better openness and more free-flowing dynamic

ability. The old speakers would have delivered a cool and calm version of Pink's Missundaztood set - they'd be enjoyable, but would lack a little drive and excitement. The new speakers, however, address those limitations... Add authority and good stereo imaging to the list of plus points and it comes as no surprise to find these speakers at home with classical, too, Indeed, running

genre that these AE's weren't happy playing." ★★★★★ July 2002



Arcam DiVA CD72T.... £449.95 Arcam DiVA CD92T,...., £899.95 Arcam FMJ CD23T.... £1199.95 Cyrus CD7,..... £799.95 Denon DCD485 £139.95 Linn Genki..... £994.95 Linn Ikemi... £1949.95 Marantz CD4000... £99.95 Marantz CD6000Ki Signature,.... £399.95 Meridian 507.... £1194.95 Meridian 588 ... £2099.95 Musical Fidelity A308^{CR}.. £1999.95 Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD...... Rotel RCD1070 ... £494.95 £109.95 Sony CDPXE570

CD Players

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Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£369.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£469.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1149.95
Cyrus 5 Amplifier	£449.95
Cyrus 6 Amplifier	£599.95
Cyrus 8 Amplifier	£799.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£229.95
Linn Kolector Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£149.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier	£3994.95
Sony TA-FE570 Amplifier	£149.95



Also Available NEW Arca FMJ AV8 & P7 £5,499.95



DiVA CD82T CD Player **DiVA A85** Integrated Amplifier

£599.95 £799.95

DIVA CD82T "Arcam's lastest sounds like a more mature version of its little brother. On an initial listen the increased solidity and refinement are obvious, but over time the subtler dynamic shading and more assured handling of transients come to the fore... The Arcam CD82T is one of the best CD players available at this price point." *** * September 2002

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."



B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM602S3 Speakers £299.95

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners. They're big and not particularly beautiful, yet if it were our money they're what we would buy. No rival can match the wide ranging dynamics or low frequency performance of these not so compact standmounters. Add all-round sonic excellence and the choice is easy. Give them sufficient space to breathe, then sit back and enjoy the music."

*** Supertest Winner August 2002

Also Available (Pictured Right)
B&W CDM NT Series • Prices start from £749.95



PURE DRX-701ES Digital Tuner £249.95

This new tuner from the recently renamed Pure is based on the 2001 Award-winning Videologic DRX-601ES, but under the lid is an allnew third-generation digital radio engine, in the form of Frontier Silicon's Chorus FS1010. Its biggest advantages are lower energy consumption and above all cost - it's the major reason why the

DRX-701ES is £100 less than last year's model.

The tuner uses 24-bit/192kHz conversion with 4x upsampling and data interpolation, and is powered by a low-noise toroidal transformer such attention to sonic detail pays off. Digital outputs are provided



on electrical and optical feed, but most people will use the

analogue out, and these sound very good indeed. As usual the tuner is subject to the signal quality off-air, but when it's fed from a high-quality outdoor aerial and a good signal it's capable of a crisp, powerful and detailed presentation. Even more populist music stations like Radio 6 benefit from the mix of a neutral balance and fine weight, while speech is also neutral and easy

to follow... If you want a quality home tuner for digital radio, you need look no further." 🚾 *** * October 2002



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision





CD7Q CD Player £1149.95 7 Integrated Amplifier £649.95

Cyrus 7Q CD "How it compares directly (with the competition) is a matter for a group test, but I can tell you now that it'll be a close one, because the CD7Q is a fantastic CD Player, offering all you'd expect from a disc spinner at this price, and more... The CD7Q's a major upgrade from the

class-leading CD7. Its weighty, detailed sound puts it at the pinnacle of CD players at this price.

Cvrus 7 CD

£799.95

Cyrus 7 Amplifier "This is a fabulous amplifier. It's fast, punchy and has bags of power on tap but crucially delivers huge sackfuls of subtlety when the music requires. Some of the other amplifiers in this group may be better with particular genres of music but as an all-rounder it takes some beating." **** November 1999

ROKSAN Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier £544.95

"When we last reviewed Roksan's Kandy integrated amp in February it fought off serious competition to come top in a Supertest. This is its replacement, the MkIII Internal changes include an uprated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also

claims 50 pecent lower distortion on line-level inputs and a whopping 150 percent less on the phono input. The rated power output is an impressive 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and this amp has a confident, muscular way with music that bears this out. But don't be fooled into thinking this amp is raw but unrefined. With Van Morrison's Down the Road the Kandy has the guts to render the performance exciting and dynamic, but also the guile to deliver subtle details.

Best Buy



Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier • £3994.95

The upgraded Kandy MkIII is an excellent amp; the MkII version was

impressive, but MkIII is a stunner. It betters all the amps here in the timing department, and has a wonderfully robust character that works well with all types of music. It manages to retain the good points of the Mkll while adding extra resolution and subtlety. All the amps here have a place in the market. It's just that at £550 the Kandy really does set the pace."

**** October 2002

11L Speakers £379.95

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

The final surprise? Well, saving the best for the last, the sound quality of the 11Ls is phenomenally good. These are



Mission 780 • £269.95



tall, but the scale and authority of their performance is terrific. The laws of physics dictate bass extension limitations, but thanks to a clever dual rear firing port arrangement the 11Ls plumb the depths with the determination of a rottweiler. even when placed in free space.

If you're in the market for a pair of top quality standmounters these Quads are a must listen. Quite simply, they're good enough to scare the competition *** August 2002 bia time."

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 DM601 S3	£249.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black)	£799.95
KEF Q1	£249.95
KEF Q3	£399.95
Linn Katan (Maple)	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple)	£894.95
Mission 780	£269.95
Mission 782	£629.95
Mission m71i	£129.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II	£344.95
Wharfedale 8.1	£99.95

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MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player A3.2 Amplifier

£999.95 £979.95

Replacing the WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION 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.









MONITOR AUDIO Silver S6 Speakers £599.95

British loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio has introduced a replacement series for its acclaimed and award winning Silver Series speakers. "The aim has been to offer real advances in performance

and value", says technical director Dean Hartley. Every single aspect of the existing range was analysed, every user comment studied. We could have improved what we had, but instead we decided to design a whole new range of speakers from the ground up." New models include the S1 and S2 standmounters, the S6, S8 and S10 floorstanders.

"With a close-miked track such as James Taylor's Line 'Em Up from SACD they really deliver the character of the singer's voice and they're just as expressive with the cultured rhythms of Groove Armada's latest outing, having just the right mix of rhythmic control and fluidity... But amazingly the best is yet to come: these are simply beautiful speakers for classical music, once a few days' thrashing has tamed their initial rawness. With the latest release of Holst's The Planets on DVD-Audio, they thunder out Mars with true conviction.



These are rather magical speakers, with a poise and grace that belies their ability to turn on the power when required. Pair them with a good CD player and suitably accomplished amp, and you won't go **** October 2002 far wrong."

Pioneer

PDR609 CD-RW Recorder £199.95



"While it looks simple, the Pioneer has an impressive array of features, including the handy double-speed disc finalization and CD-Text compatibility. Internally, the PDR609 is a big step up from the Award-winning PDR-509 it replaced; the DAC is now a 24-bit/96kHz number, aided and abetted by Pioneer's Legato Link conversion technology, and it has 24-bit A-to-D conversion, which is ideal for copying your vinyl onto CD. If this is your plan, you'll appreciate that the Pioneer makes it easy to create first-rate copies from any source, helped by the manual recording-level controls. It was hard to tell our copy of Jim White's No Such Place from the original

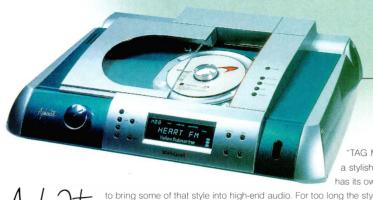
While the Pioneer's replay quality can't match the Marantz, it costs £120 less, which would buy you a lot of blank discs. If you've already

got a dedicated CD player, we'd go with this recorder." ★★★★ August 2001

Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW	£299.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc	
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck	
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck	£199.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW	£599.95







Aphrodite Music System £2994.95

"TAG McLaren, by the company's nature, have always had it in their blood to produce a stylish product. After all, they are tightly linked to Formula 1 racing which very much has its own charisma. The alluring shape of the Aphrodite, reviewed here, is their attempt

to bring some of that style into high-end audio. For too long the stylish one-box system has looked the business but more often than not failed to deliver the goods when it comes to sound and TAG wanted to put an end to that.

Firstly, there's the look and build of this beauty. The minute you lay your hands on the cold metal you know this is one very, very serious attempt to bring a one-box system up into the echelons of the real high-end. It weighs a fairly substantial 10 kilos and is housed in a classy, ergonomically rounded, brushed metallic chassis that's available in a variety of carefully judged colours. The case houses a CD Player, FM tuner and amplifier that delivers 50W per channel into 8ohms - enough muscle to run most modern speakers comfortably...

This system is a serious proposition for those in the market for a high-end sound from user friendly equipment. Few separates systems can deliver such quality, plus style, for the same cost... Although expensive, the Aphrodite offers good value for those in the market for a sophisticated product - and it's miles ahead of certain 'lifestyle' systems that offer poorer build quality and sound, for little less cost." Hi-Fi World November 2002



TAG McLaren • Callione Speakers £1994.95

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

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound." **** Awards 2001

includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm





LINN Linn Classik Music System £999.95

Classik • Movie System

£1999.95

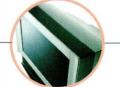
The Classik Music System is an alternative to the sound and looks of mass market compact systems. Designed to be useful throughout the home, the Classik is simple and stylish with all the

advanced features needed to satisfy the most

"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." ★★★★★ Awards 2001

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Watford 478 St Albans Road 01923 213533 Open Sunday

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.

new outlets

We are delighted to announce that, subject to legal completion*, we have new stores opening in the following locations. Please telephone to confirm before travelling.

Poole 01202 671677 (now open) • Wolverhampton 01902 312225 (mid-November) Shirley (Solihull) (next few weeks) 0121 733 3727 • Swindon 01793 610992 (next few weeks) • Wilmslow (date to be confirmed).

leeds store relocates

From mid-November our Leeds outlet is moving to 62 North Street, Leeds. The new store has 3 dedicated demonstration rooms and an improved product range. The old store, at 112 Vicar Lane, will remain open until mid-January with a range of clearance and discontinued items. The telephone number remains unchanged.

staff wanted

We are currently recruiting staff at several locations. If you are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, have good customer service skills and would like a career within the audio/visual industry, call Janys Ness on 01732 466214 for more information.

sevenoaks online

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 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.

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps

Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON **ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?**

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE **SO LITTLE POWER?**

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms - at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo

amps tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.



RA-02 £349

A terrific budget integrated from Rotel's latest line-up. Offers pace, guts and finesse, wrapped up in a prettier package than one might traditionally expect from the marque.



A75 DiVA Plus £470

One of the latest in Arcam's long amplifier lineage, and a sub-£500 star. Bass is more propulsive than Arcams of old, coupled with subtle attention to sonic detail.



Sugden A21a £899

Build quality is not very slick and it runs uncomfortably hot. But don't worry about the low power specification - sound is in the very top class.



A85/P85 £1,330

Bi-amp combo featuring Arcam's £800 integrated and matching power amp. The resulting sound is both robust and finely detailed across myryad music types.

STEREO AMPS BUYER'S BIBLE

	T favourite ☐ GROUP TEST BEST BLY ② GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED 🚾 EDITOR'S CHOICE D NEW GEAR REVIEW		SPECIFICATIONS							
	grated amplifiers	J L	AMPLIFIERS	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SING	IPUT	TROL	S	8	ABER.	
UP TO	£1,000									
98	Arcam A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	0	0	0	40	232	
88	Arcam DiVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	0	0	0	50	224	
88	Arcam DiVA A85	800	Much enhanced design topology gives a more hard-hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7		0	0	85	214	
R	Cyrus 5	500	An enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7		0	0	45	205	
R	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best-sounding audio brick around	6		0	0	60	196	
86	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			0	30	208	
R	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		49		50	214	
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	200	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass, but excellent mid and treble	5		0	0	50	217	
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5		0	0	60	224	
R	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6				75	208	
R	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	0	0	0	50	232	
R	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		0	0	50	232	
58	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail and a strong power yield	7		49	0	60	208	
88	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		0	0	120	217	
R	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		0		30	214	
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		0		50	208	
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6		0	0	120	205	
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6		0		70	201	
BB	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4				35	208	
35	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	0	0	0	40	232	
88	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224	
ABOV	£1,000							180		
38	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	0	0	0	100	228	
88	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		0		150	228	
R	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	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	
R	Marantz PM-14 Mkll Kl	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7		0	0	100	228	
B8	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6				100	214	
R	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6		0		50	214	

Ou	Our favourite Group test best buy [] group test recommended [60] editor's choice Denew Gear review									SPECIFICATIONS								
	ATEREA ABARI IFIERA			SPECIFICATIONS														
2	IEKEU	Ar	MPLIFIERS	PRI	POWER AMPLIFIER		P	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER (ISSUE								
Pre	Pre/power amplifiers STATUS PRODUCT & COMMENTS					LINE IN	PHONO INPUT	CON	OUTPUT (M)	JE NU								
STATUS	PRODUCT	3	COMMENTS	田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田田	景	INPUTS	NPUT	TROL	(W)	NUMBER								
UP TO	£2,000			70			3%											
20	Arcam A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	0	0	7		0	85	225								
EC	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	0	0	7		0	100	227								
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value			5		0		221								
88	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	0	0	6		0	140	212								
äB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	0	0	3			30	216								
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	0	0	7			60	212								
R	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	0	0	6	OPT	OPT	100	216								
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and with a little fruitiness	0		6	0	0		200								
EC	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after Nuvista	0	0	4	0	0	250	231								
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	0	0	6		0	120	212								
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	0	0	7		0	200	200								
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	0	0	6		0	50	213								
88	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	0	0	6			10	216								

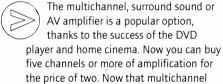
SPECS KISY LINE INPUTS Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. PHONO INPUT Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. REMOTE CONTROL A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. HEADPHONE SOCKET To drive your cans with. POWER OUTPUT Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

YER'S BIBLE STEREO/AV AMPS

	TERES					SPE	CIFIC	ICATIONS			
2	IEKEU	AI	MPLIFIERS continued	PR	POWER AMPLIFIER		P	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (M)	ISS	
Pre/	power amplifiers			PREAMPLIFIER	R AMPL	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	E CON	OUTPU	ISSUE NUMBER	
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	R	FIR	PUTS	NPUT	TROL	W)	MBER	
ABOV	E £2,000			8,13							
R	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	0	0	4	0		18	216	
EC	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	0	0	6	0	0	100	216	
EC	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	0	0	5		0	150	221	
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	0	0				20	231	
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	0	0	8		0	120	212	
88	Bryston BP-20/4BST	3,375	Quick, articulate and powerful, this is an excellent all-round amp which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly	0	0	8			250	230	
88	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	•	0	6		0	120	216	
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		0				700	234	
EC	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	٥	*	6		0	125	195	
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		0				140	208	
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	0		6		0		233	
R	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,700	Powerful, smooth, though slightly uneven with some speakers, but excellent control and separation in others	0	0	6		0	100	225	
R	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extendibility and it's tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	0	0	6		0	250	230	
R	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp that has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	0	0	8			260	230	

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up - they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats - Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power - five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE **BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?**

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap - building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking

with stereo. There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.



Pioneer VSX-D2011 £900

TAG McLaren AV32R EX

2,994

A feature-packed receiver, and a great sounding one to boot. Currently the best AV amp below £1,000 for music and video.



Marantz SR9200 £2,000

Few AV receivers manage to sound as musical as this one. A top all-rounder and an excellent multichannel solution.



Denon AVC-A1SR £3.000

Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand - an AV processor and seven-channel power amp par excellence.

Our favourite of group test best buy of group test recommended by editor's choice in New Gear review **AV AMPLIFIERS** 5-CHANNEL POWER (M ISSUE NUMBER Multichannel amplifiers STATUS PRODUCT COMMENTS INTEGRATED AV AMPS Arcam AVR200 Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel 6 70 Denon AVC-A11SR 11 235 R 1 800 Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality 0 6 EC Denon AVC-A1SR 3.000 An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link 8 0 170 232 R 8 85 Harman Kardon AVR 5500 749 Powerful-sounding receiver with come clever features, such as an automatic set-up, but a bit hard-edged Marantz SR-5000 5 105 198 430 6 Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package Marantz SR9200 2.000 Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike 0 9 (0) 0 235 88 NAD T761 9 80 650 First-rate home cinema amp that sounds more powerful than its specs imply, and competes with specialist stereo amps 223 R Onkyo TX-DS989 2,850 q db 160 210 0 Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle \supset Pioneer VSX-D2011 db 900 Outstanding sonic performance for the price and a remarkable features list to boot 10 140 235 EC 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 0 150 229 R Sony VA-777ES 1,500 Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder 9 100 210 AV P CESSORS AND POWER AMPS Arcam AV8/P7 5,498 State-of-the-art processor (£2,999) and seven-channel power amp (£2,499). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound 7 0 180 235 EC Bryston SP1/9B THX 7,100 6 OPT 120 219 Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights 1,100 9 Cyrus AV8 A refined and listenable processor that will integrate into an existing hi-fi system with ease 235 EC Meridian 861 9,833 Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration 6 230 Myryad MDP500/MA240/360 3,799 Superb three-box, five-channel AV amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music 9 OPT 120 215 80 210 4 Roksan DSP/5 champ/VSU 2.440 Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels

SPECS KEY RECEIVER Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner, LINE INPUTS Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. 7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification.

Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form



6 0 215



Five Stars for Value

Does the best price always mean the best deal? Ask the UK's top twenty specialist hi-fi dealers.

"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see the same product names cropping up regularly and I figured the writers' experience and guidance would steer me straight to the system of my dreams. The trouble is I've ended up more confused than when I started".

ne reviewer said a product I fancied was absolutely brilliant but another said it was nothing special at all. How can that be? Surely one CD player is pretty much the same as another? And how can a loudspeaker that's one magazine's top recommendation not get so much as a mention in any of the others? I don't mind admitting it, I'm completely lost."

Plan B - I'm going for a deal

"So, I've decided to adopt plan B. I'm sure there can't be any really dramatic differences between all this gear and it's all bound to work together properly, so I'm going to check the price lists and the adverts and shop around for the best deal. I know getting the right hi-fi is important hey, I'm as mad about music as anyone but if I can get close to the mark and save a few quid, I'm sure I'll end up with a good system and be happy. I know there are specialist shops out there that do demonstrations and reckon they've got all the solutions but, to be honest, I'm a bit scared of going to one. I'd really welcome some advice and guidance but I don't know all the technical jargon and I'd feel daft sitting there trying to 'hear the differences' if I couldn't. Anyway, a friend told me that these shops only sell the really expensive gear and that they're not interested if you don't have loads of money to spend."

And so another hi-fi buyer starts his journey down the road to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a permanent overdraft.

There is only one way to buy a hi-fi system that will prove satisfying, reliable and

deliver true value for money, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Let's face it, you wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details and a photograph. Even if you're spending far less, say buying a jacket or a pair of shoes, you want to try them on to make sure they fit you.

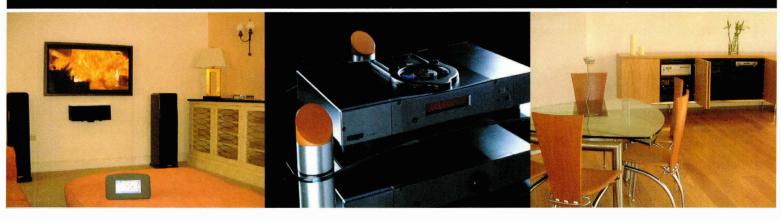
Buying a hi-fi system is no different. It doesn't matter what the specifications say or what the 'experts' think: if it doesn't measure up to what you want from a system, then it's not the right choice. Knowing that you've bought a room full of five-star favourites or best-buys is no consolation when you can't bear to listen to them for more than five minutes. Even that ten per cent discount on the price won't make them sound any better.

Buying or being sold to?

Mind you, most of us are easily suckered when it comes to buying hi-fi. Given the choice of venturing into the unknown territory of a specialist dealer's shop and exerting some influence over what we buy, or taking what looks like the easy route having adverts and magazine reviews push us along a path sweetened with discounts and special offers - we opt for the latter. We don't buy a system, we allow ourselves to be sold one. We side-line our own ideas about quality and personal satisfaction and buy someone else's opinion of what's good for us and good value for our money.

Take control!

Now there's a group of long-established, independent specialist dealers who are



66 You wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details. 77

totally committed to putting the customer back in the driving seat. They're encouraging the buyer to take control with a little help and guidance provided where required. They know how difficult it can be to establish the true quality and worth of hifi and home cinema systems. They know that without experiencing the performance of the systems they offer, you can't possibly assess the value of them. That's why their idea of 'selling' is to play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. With the dealer's help and advice you will be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problems you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand into your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure that you're entirely happy with the way it works.

Why bother?

There is, of course, one question that hasn't been answered: why should you and these dealers go to all this trouble? Well, from your point of view maybe it's because a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. unless you've got money to burn,

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	*	*	*	*	*
SERVICE	*	*	*	*	*
FACILITIES	*	*	*	*	*
VERDICT	*	*	*	*	*

you'll be living with your new system for years - years during which most of those five star products will probably stop shining quite so brightly. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are 20 of the best hi-fi shops in the country. They all have lots of stars. You'll find them on the shop floor: they're the people waiting to guide customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

LONDON N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI 190a New North Road 020 7226 5500

ORANGES & LEMONS 61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea 020 7924 2040 W4 MARTIN-KLEISER

109 Chiswick High Road 020 8400 5555

SOUTH

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STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound

While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi - turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes - great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST **FOR BIG ROOMS?**

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS **MY STEREO SPEAKERS?**

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.



Tannoy Mercury MX3-M £230

Could be more dynamic, but beautifully balanced and voiced floorstander that offers low midband coloration and good transparency at a very modest price



Audience 42 £400

It might be expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but it's an aristocrat among the breed, and we'd be surprised if there's a better small speaker around for the price.



PMC FB1 £1,410

A well-built floorstander that delivers the goods sonically, with the sort of subtlety and delicacy that's likely to have strong audiophile appeal.



B&W

Signature 805 £2,250

You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near the price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them.

Our favourite 🖻 group test best bly 🖹 group test recommended 🙉 editor's choice 🝃 New gear review SPECIFICATIONS STEREO SPEAKERS BASS FROM (HZ) EASE ISSUE NUMBER WXHXD (CM OF DRIVE Stereo speakers STATUS PRODUC COMMENTS UP TO £1,000 Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1 180 An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too 19.36.24 Α 30 226 R AR S20 20,37,28 Α 28 215 Might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator 215 Audio Note AZ One Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration 23.83.29 Α R AVI Biggatron Red Spot 599 Α 30 211 Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste 19.5.37.30 B&W DM303 180 Α 23 226 Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end 20, 33, 23 B&W DM602 S3 300 Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom 24.49.29 Α 25 234 > B&W DM309 330 All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 - a suberb floorstander for the money 20x91x30 Α 60 235 88 B&W DM603 S3 A-600 Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined 20.91.29 25 231 B&W CDM-1NT 750 An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with 22,40,29 Α 30 0 208 R 249 Α 50 225 Blueroom Minipod Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail 18.34.17 833 Α Castle Durham 3 399 A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition - lots of fun 19.37.22 45 227 0 0 8 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 A-45 193 88 Dynaudio Audience 42 400 An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price 17,29,24 Α 40 0 215 R Dynaudio Audience 62 Α 0 729 Pricey but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically - lightweight, but clean and dextrous 20,86,26 30 Elac JET 205 650 20,33,29 Α 40 6 231 Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall R Energy e:XL 25 400 15 87 31 A-25 0 201 Neat slimline design delivers a fine all-round performance for the price, but could sound smoother 60 Fnos M12 499 Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act 20.38.26 Α 40 65 215 Heybrook Optima 259 A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well 22.88.29 Α+ 30 193 вв Heybrook Heylios 269 Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneel 24,36,27 25 db 201 A+ R 750 Heybrook Duet Looks slightly old-fashioned and sounds a bit coloured, but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well 23.43.30 Α+ 27 199 Infinity Alpha 30 300 Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression 22 86 29 Α 30 215 Jamo E 850 400 A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price 18.87.34 0 A-30 224 88 JBI Xti40 430 Α 210 23 82 31 60: 40 0 Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass and a restrained overall balance 85 JMI ab Chorus 715 529 A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip 20.94.28 0 A-227 60 R JMlab Cobalt 816 899 A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills 22,99,29 Α 224 R KEF Q1 250 Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall 22.35.30 Α 234 R Mission m71 129 17,29,28 Α Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement 61 226 ВВ Mission m73 199 Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money Α 25 215 20.88.31 0 > Mission m51 300 Distinctive and dynamic - not the last world in subtlety but enjoyable with both music and video sources 21,32,34 A+ 58 228 R Mission 782 699 Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills 17.82.28 Α 25 0 199 88 Monitor Audio Bronze 2 Α 30 0 180 A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all-round sonic performance 19,35,27 207 R Α 0 Monitor Audio Bronze 3 270 Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk 19.87.24 30 215 Mordaunt Short MS914 300 An even and open loudspeaker that is both detailed and precise. A budget gem 21.90.27 Α 50 234

SPECSILEY SIZE WXHXD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. FLOORSTANDER Speakers that don't require stands. EASE OF DRIVE How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. A+ 25 watts plus A 50 watts plus A- 100 watts plus ACT Active — the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. BASS FROM How low the speaker goes — the smaller the number the deeper the bass. FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). CLOSE TO WALL The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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A	TERE			SPECIFICATIONS						
Ste	reo speakers		SPEAKERS continued	SIZE WXHXD (CM	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS		3	COMMENTS		Ħ			Ŕ		
R	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		А	30		9	211
R	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		А	50		0	225
88	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		А	30	0		21
R	Sonus Faber Concerto Home		Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		А	40		0	233
R	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30		0	224
66	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	19,33,25		А	45	9		20
88	Tannoy Revolution R2	400	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	0	A-	20	0		193
R	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricey but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26		A+			0	227
R	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	0	А	20	0		23
88	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	0	A+	45	0		234
BB	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	0	A-	40	0		219
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,37,25		A-	30		0	226
ABOV	£1,000				N/S					
R	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	0	A-	25	0		211
R	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		A-	65		0	219
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		А	45	0		22
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		А	38	0		218
R	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		A+	20	0		204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		Α	38	0		219
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		А	28	0		199
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	0	A-	34	0		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	0	A-	34	0		186
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	0	A-	<20	0		231
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,250	Staggering transparency and resolution for the money, one of the best standmounts money can buy	24,42,34		A-	42	0		232
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	0	A-	40	0		204
88	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	0	А	50	0		219
R	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricey compared to some though	21, 99, 32	0	A+	38	0		229
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	0	Α	41		0	225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	25,106,36	0	A-	20	0		204
88	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22, 106, 36	0	Α	30	0		229
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 Mkll	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	0		219
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in the BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid back	15,21.5,36		ACT	-	0		214
R	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		А	30	0		233
88	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29		A+	27	0		233
EC	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42		Α	45	0		230
88	JMlab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	0	A-	35	0		219
EC	JMlab Micro Utopia	3,349	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		A-	50	0		220
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		ACT	-		0	214
65										





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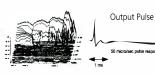


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BUYER'S BIBLE STEREO/AV SPEAKERS

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		J	SPEAKERS continued	SIZE WXHXD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE	BASS FROM (HZ)	#	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE
Ster	reo speakers			OXH)	RSTANI	EASE OF DRIVE	ROM	FREE SPACE	TO W	ISSUE NUMBER
TATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CM)	ER.	N.	B	ACE	Æ	88
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet, but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	22,104,27	0	A+	45	0		19
BB	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		ACT	45		0	21
R	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	0	Α	40	0		22
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	0	A-	20	0		20
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	0	A-	20		0	23
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40		A-	20	0		22
R	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17.5,53,26		A-	40	0		19
88	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	0	А	20	0		20
R	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude, 'in yer face' balance and great dynamics	20,40,32		А	25	0		21
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	0	A-	20	0		22
R	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22.5,96,24	0	A+	40		0	22
R	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	0	А	38	0		21
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109.30	0	А	20	0		21
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		Α+	50	0		21
R	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	0	Α+	40		0	22
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99.8,38	0	Α+	37	0		22
EC	TAG McLaren F1	17,995	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48		A-	25	0		20
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	0	A-	38	0		21
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	0	A-	23	0		22
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10.5,6	0	Α+	N/A	0		20
R	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super-slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver marvellous musical results with superb imaging	15,130,17	0	А	30	9		22
R	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41, 109, 26	0	A-	30		0	22
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	0	Α+	50			19
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid back, but also very charming and musical	17,97,30	0	A-	25	0		19
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way	21,100,21	0	А	45	0		22
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	0	A-	20	0		23
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	9	A-	45	0		21

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound

Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.



B&W 600 S3 package £750 Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.

Tannov mXAV4

Wharfedale Pacific

R



O AV7 £1,300 With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



JMlab Cobalt package £1,797 There's no avoiding this package's fine underlying sound quality - both stereo and multichannel are reproduced with aplomb.



Mirage Omni 2 £2,650 Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite Group test best buy 🖹 group test recommended 📴 editor's choice 🝃 New Gear review **AV SPEAKER PACKAGES** BASS FROM (HZ) CL OSE EASE OF DRIVE FREE SPACE Multichannel speakers TO WALL STATUS PRODUCT 5 Acoustic Energy Aegis 650 High-value package with deep bass and smooth neutrality Α+ 22 198 B&W 600 S3 package 22 900 Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front) Α-224 Castle CAV Sterling 1,250 Α 5 28 Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard. 224 JBL Xti-series 980 Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all-round tension Α 5 40 60 210 JMLab Cobalt 22 1.797 A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills Α 224 JMlab Electra system 3,017 Α 5 50 0 232 Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer KEE O AV7 1.300 0 With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value Α+ 5 35 232 Mirage Omni 2 2,650 Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice Α 5 30 232 Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500 1.600 Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected Α 5 25 210 PMC FR1/TR2 Α 5 2 485 Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight 20 210 Rega Jura/Ara/Senta 938 Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight Α 210 Spendor S-Series 1,650 Α 5 Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness 30 0 224

Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value

Plenty of speaker package for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward, but unquestionably entertaining

EXECUTE: EASE OF DRIVE How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: A+ 25 watts plus A 50 watts plus A- 100 watts plus. NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. BASS FROM How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass. FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s), CLOSE TO WALL The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)

500

700

Ou	r favourite	GROUP TE	ST BEST BUY ☐ GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED 📴 EDITOR'S CHOICE ≥ NEW GEAR REVIEW					
SUBWOOFERS					IFICA	FICATIONS		
	SUBWU s speakers	Uŀ	FK2	SIZE WXHXD	POWE	BASS FROM	ISSUE NU	
	PRODUCT	3	COMMENTS	(CM)	POWER (M)	(ZH)	NUMBER	
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225	
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225	
R	REL Strata III	700	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	100	20	210	
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225	
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	200	16	217	
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	300	30	225	

SPECS KEY SIZE WXHXD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. POWER (W) How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass

Α

5 20

5 25 210

224

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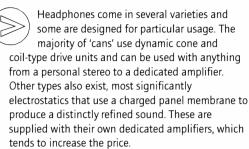
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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals

enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

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. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite specifications										
HEADP	H	ONES	ELEC	SUP					3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSI
STEREO HEADPHONES		ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	ADAPT	ISSUE NUMBER	
PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	TIC TIC	Ą	Ã	Š	S	(g)	SR	Ħ
AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			0		0	190	0	219
AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		0		0		190	0	205
AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			9		0	270		230
Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			0		0	250		194
Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		0		9		200	0	194
Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise.		0		0		200	0	230
Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			0	0		330		219
Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low coloration and great comfort			0			270	0	205
Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			0	9		250	0	219
Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics		0			0	160	0	205
Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	0		0	0		295	0	205
Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates		0		9		250	9	219

SPECS KEY ELECTROSTATIC Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. SUPRA-AURAL Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. CIRCUMAURAL Earpads rest on the head around the ears OPEN BACK Vented capsules let sound in and out. CLOSED BACK Sealed capsules. WEIGHT in grams. 3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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CABLES

Wires to hook your system together

Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables. Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

Our favou	rite
CABL	
UADL	LJ
Interconnects and	d speak
PRODUCT	5
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS	

nterconnects and speaker cables		STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COI	2	IGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER	
PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	da da	200	COPPER	SILVER	JAK.	/BER
AMALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
Acoustic Research Master	50	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	0		0			224
Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble			0			211
Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	•		0			211
Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)						211
Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	•					224
Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	•					211
Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound			0			224
Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension	•		•		- 1	211
Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price			0			211
QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables			0			211
Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire						234
van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	•				- 1	224
van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail			0			234
Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round, with just a hint of bass congestion. Very good value					1	224
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS				23.3	V (*)			
Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			0		E 2	207
QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			0		E 2	207
QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price			0		E 2	234
Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value					0 2	207
van den Hul Optocoupler Mkll	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					0 2	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE	77,00							
Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed			0		2	227
Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life					2	227
Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round		•	0		2	203
lxos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent			0		2	203
Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	8		0		-	192
Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair			0		2	227
Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair			0		2	203
QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price			0		1	192
QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems			0		2	234
QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	•		0		2	215
Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	•		0		2	203
Tara Labs Prism Nexa	10	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	•		0		2	215
Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor		•	0		2	203
van den Hul The Snowline	5	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance			0			215

SPECSKEY STRANDED Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. SOLID CORE Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. COPPER Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. SILVER Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. DIGITAL CABLE TYPE E - electrical, 0 - optical Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated



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ES 2.3

"...make no mistake ES 2.3/CS 2.15 is superb" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★

"a fine audiophile sound that is clean as a whistle" HI-FI WORLD 2002



MS 2.3

..they communicate a room-filling sound that few cables at this price - or any price manage" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★



The PRODUCER

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The

latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite

					SPECIFICATIONS							
EQUIP	MI	ENT SUPPORTS		TOP PLATE		NUMBER OF	Š	ISSI				
Equipment supports			HEIGHT	SIZE (C	WELDED	SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER				
PRODUCT	3	COMMENTS	当	(CM)	ē	ES	PE	Ħ				
Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193				
Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	0	4	Glass	217				
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193				
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				
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217				
Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	0	4	Glass	206				
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49	0	4	Glass	193				
Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45x34		5	Glass	232				
Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		4	MDF	206				
Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217				
Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217				
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	0	4	Glass	193				
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				

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

		IOIANDO		LATE SIZE	E	WE	JMBER OF	ISSUE NU
Speaker stands			HEIGH	(CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	LEGS	NUMBER
PRODUCT	3	COMMENTS	7			0	S	
Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	0		3	202
Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19			1	220
Custom Design R/S300 Mkll	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18			2	202
hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20	0		1	220
Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	0		1	220
Partington ANSA	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18X15	0		4	232
Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15	0	0	5	220
Partington Dreadnought Ultimate	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	0		1	202
Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	0		4	220
Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48				202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on. SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPEES KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.





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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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 The 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 have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting), Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

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 digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eq. 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used

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

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eq bass driver, tweeter DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

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 41 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.

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.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3. DAB etc. The higher the amount. the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono car tridges) 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 are 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 psychoacoustical 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.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue wave forms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used - CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND 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 (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

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 (dR/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, ie above 3kHz. TWEETER Treble driver.

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

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

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed. ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances. **BRIGHT** A sound that emphasises the

upper midrange/lower treble. DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

Opposite of bright.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as finegrained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse. GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward. aggressive sound with a metallic

HARSH Grating, abrasive. IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound

NATURALNESS Realism. **OPAQUE** Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm. a strong sense of timing and beat. PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the

listenina room PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing. STURDY Solid powerful robust

sound THICK A lack of articulation and

clarity in the bass. THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent, A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail. TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep. controlled bass.









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AUDUSA - Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Marinco IEC 320

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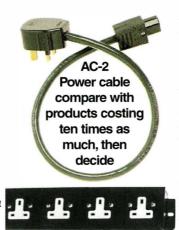
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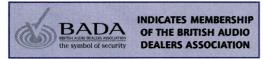
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IN-DEPTH TEST - ARCAM DV88

Arcam's new DVD is something special, therefore it gets special treatment – a whole three page In-Depth test with lab reports and a full hi-fi MOT.

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UP TEST – FLOORSTANDING SPEAKE

A definitive guide to some of the best floorstanders between £750-£1,500. Read how Polk, Epos, Dali and Castle fare against the competition.

DUP TEST: BIG NAME DVD PLAYE

We rigorously test the audio/video performance of new players from major hi-fi specialists, featuring Primare, Cyrus, Roksan and Denon.

Fancy a look at PMC's factory and studio installations? So did we and while we were there we nabbed a pair of the mighty new IB2 speakers for review when the staff were on their tea break.

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