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# HI-FI CHOICE

FEBRUARY 2003 ISSUE 238

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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 KENNEDY**

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 sensational (trust us) and his love of music knows no bounds.



**PAUL MESSENGER**

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



**PAUL MILLER**

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



**ALVIN GOLD**

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



**RICHARD BLACK**

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

**W**oke up this mornin', pain in mah bead,  
chilled to the bone, wanna slip back to  
bed... sing with me friends, it's time  
for the Bonechillin' Winter Blues...

As I write, the winds are howling, the snow is falling, the beautiful chaos of Christmas has faded like the winter sun. Yet *HFC* has the perfect remedy – pour yourself a large one, stretch out on the sofa and warm your soul with our patent recipe of piping hot kit and moist, molten music.

Of course, we don't suggest you do anything as mundane as read a magazine while listening to these glorious sounds, but if you fancy a break you'll find plenty to peruse inside this issue. For musos, maintaining a dedicated CD player remains highly recommended to wring maximum music from the original digital disc. This month sees a mass of new machines tried and tested, including a group test at hi-fi's 'affordable high end' (ie circa £1,000) and an exclusive review of Naim's awesome CDX2.

Mind you, these days even audiophiles want video playback too, and perhaps hi-fi standard multichannel sound, for which we offer our group of specialist AV amp systems. Then there's Arcam's DV88 Plus, the first DVD player (just) to boast PAL progressive scan for true 'high fidelity' video. Add our usual concoction of news, reviews and features and it's no wonder we're knackered. Time to hit the sofa – mine's a JD and Coke...



Tim Bower **editor**

## Star products in this issue



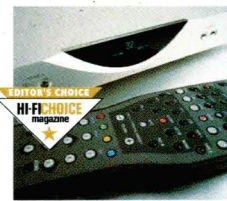
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## STAR RATINGS

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

## AWARD BADGES



### Best Buy

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



### Recommended

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



### Editor's Choice

Products in the *Statements* 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 28 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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# audiofile



## NAD'S ENTERTAINMENT

### BUDGET-FRIENDLY DISC-SPINNER WITH A NEW FINISH

➤ NAD's latest solution for high quality disc-spinning on a budget is the T512 DVD player. Officially described as a DVD/CD player, the new £250 machine is well specified, with equal attention said to be paid to audio and video playback. NAD claims that the T512 makes an excellent CD player, with CD-R/RW and MP3-CD compatibility.

On the video side, familiar hi-fi engineering techniques have been used, like short signal paths for minimum interference. NAD traditionalists may raise an eyebrow at the new titanium finish option for the T512 and the equally silver new receiver, the T742.

☎ Lenbrook UK 01908 319360  
 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

#### KEY FEATURES

- Dolby Digital/PCM/DTS digital out
- S-Video and Composite video outputs
- Component Video output (120V version only)
- SCART with RGB
- PAL/NTSC compatible
- 4 x 10-bit video DAC
- Coaxial and optical digital outputs
- Plays DVD-Video, CD, CD-R/RW, MP3-CD

## WHAT A LARK

### MEADOWLARK SPEAKERS FLY IN

➤ A range of loudspeakers from US brand Meadowlark will be flying into the UK from New York, distributed by turntable manufacturer Avid. Meadowlark has been making speakers since 1987, with its origins in the custom build market.

Avid will initially bring across three models - the £800 Swallow stand-mount speaker, the £1,000 Swift floorstander and a centre channel speaker called the Swan priced at £600, with more to follow later in the year. All models are transmission line designs with solid wood cabinets and bought-in Danish drivers. Expect a review of the Swift in next month's HFC.

☎ Avid 01832 710370



## TEAC FOR TWO

### CD SPINNING ESOTERICA

➤ A new super high-end two-box CD transport and DAC combo from TEAC will soon be available to the UK. The P-70 CD transport (£7,000) and D-70 DAC (£6,000) both contain sophisticated electronics and are described as "peerless". The P-70 transport incorporates TEAC's VRDS (Vibration-free Rigid Disc-clamping System) which clamps CDs against a solid turntable to minimise disc errors. It also features a 24-bit/88.2/176.4 kHz upsampler operating and outputting in the digital domain using a standard XLR output.

The D-70 accepts sampling frequencies from 32 to 192kHz and bit lengths from 16 to 24 bits, and uses upsampling techniques to further enhance audio reproduction. Apparently "prepared" for outputting IEEE 1394 (FireWire) high-resolution encrypted multichannel audio, the D-70 is therefore future-proofed for use with DVD-Audio and SACD sources. Expect an exclusive and comprehensive review of this clever pair in next month's issue.

☎ TEAC 01923 819630  
 🌐 www.teac.co.uk

**Soundbites**



# NOW AYRE THIS

## US ELECTRONICS HIT BLIGHTY

Audiophiles will be pleased to learn that US brand AYRE is now being distributed in the UK by the Path Group. Consequently, a rather interesting new CD player and a matching integrated amplifier, first unveiled at the Heathrow Hi-Fi and AV Expo last year, are now finally available from dealers across the UK.

The CX-7 CD player uses a multi-stage digital filter to upsample to 24-bit/176.4 kHz and then oversample to 24-bit/1.41 MHz, allowing the use of a much simpler analogue filter. Further technology in the player's Burr-Brown DAC allows the upper six bits of any sample

to be converted via multibit PCM, with the lower 18 bits converted with Sigma-Delta architecture – a technique said to bring the low level linearity and good noise performance of the two operations together.

The matching amp is the AX-7, a fully balanced model featuring 60 watts of power and eight high-power output devices per channel. Under the lid the AX-7 boasts zero feedback circuitry and a proprietary balanced volume control with 66 one-decibel increments. Both models are in the shops now, priced at £2,950 each.

Path Group 01844 219000

KEF has released a high-end dipole rear speaker to partner its Reference Series loudspeakers. The new 206DS incorporates two Uni-Q arrays partnered with twin 19mm titanium dome hypertweeters that extend to 55 kHz and twin 165mm bass drivers. Available in a matching range of finishes and priced at an equally reference £3,500 per pair, the 206DS is available now.

01622 672261



SUPRA has a new interconnect called the Dual (above), an analogue cable designed to offer high noise immunity. Available in stereo and multichannel packs it's made from multistrand OFC copper in polythene insulation. Prices start at £40 for a 0.75m pair.

01622 644 070

# LINN FOR ALL

## LINN'S UNIVERSAL PLAYER REVEALED

Is this the multi-format disc player we've been waiting for? In a sneak preview of Linn's latest gear we can reveal that its forthcoming DVD-Audio/SACD compatible Unidisk 1.1 'universal' disc player is claimed to be the "best sounding multichannel source component available". Few details have so far been released, but the player's unique mix of Linn and Sony technology operating on ESS Technology's Vibrato DVD chipset will be offered as a kit to licensee manufacturers who wish to make their own 'universal' machine. More on this as we hear it.

Linn 0141 307 7777

www.linn.co.uk



# PS OFF ANALOGUE

## NEW HYBRID DIGITAL AMP

Canadian brand PS Audio's new hybrid digital power amp is now in the UK. The 150-watt HCA-2 power amp is a highly efficient hybrid analogue/digital design that employs a fully balanced analogue input stage and a digital output stage developed by PS Audio. The new output stage uses the brands' Super Digital Amplifier Technology (SDAT) to provide a 95 per cent level of efficiency claimed to drive any speaker.

PS audio claims the amp offers "unparalleled mid-bass and subterranean low end", all for a mere £1,550. See next month for a review.

Ultimate Sonics 020 7435 1222



# BOX OF DELIGHTS

## FEATURE-LOADED HARMAN AMPS

Two multichannel receivers from Harman Kardon are set to bring a host of benefits to a lower price level. The 7.1 channel AVR4550 and 5550 receivers boast proprietary technologies including Vmax Virtual Theater processing and Logic 7.1./5.1, a decoding method said to deliver improved audio reproduction. Both models use Crystal DSPs and 24-bit/192 kHz audio DACs; the AVR5550 has HDCD decoding.

A key feature of both models is Harman's A-Bus Ready system, which allows for multiroom use. We'll have an exclusive review in next month's HFC.

Harman Consumer UK  
 020 8731 4670

www.harmankardon.com

WARNER Vision International releases four DVD-Audio titles this month, including Neil Young's *Harvest*, *Fragile* by Yes and Faith Hill's *Cry*. REM's classic *Automatic For The People* is due in May, along with Donald Fagan's *The Nightfly*.

## TDK GIVEAWAY!



To celebrate the success of TDK's CD-R Audio Pro disc, voted best 'blank' CD-R at the recent *Hi-Fi Choice Awards*, we're giving away five sets of ten discs worth £40 to lucky readers. For your chance to win simply send your name and address to: TDK Competition, *Hi-Fi Choice*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP by 28 February, when five winners will be drawn out of the hat.

Choice Awards, we're giving away five sets of ten discs worth £40 to lucky readers. For your chance to win simply send your name and address to: TDK Competition, *Hi-Fi Choice*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP by 28 February, when five winners will be drawn out of the hat.

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### FEBRUARY

16 AudioJumble 2003, Tonbridge  
 01892 540022  
 www.audiojumble.co.uk  
 21-23 Sound & Vision show,  
 Bristol 01242 239 839

### MAY

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 Communications Fair  
 Birmingham NEC 01392 411565  
 29-1 High End Society, Frankfurt  
 +49 202 702022 or email  
 paxa@highendsociety.de

## LICENSED TO LISTEN

Just where does all the TV licence-payers' money go? Is it Jeremy Paxman's late lunches, the EastEnders' benders, or merely more gravy for the train?

All that and more no doubt, but at least the "more" now includes top-of-the-range monitoring for the BBC's latest outside broadcast vehicle. Pro and home loudspeaker specialist PMC has installed a pair of MB monitors into the new Sound 1 OB vehicle. Covering live music events for Radios 1, 2 and 3, future dates include performances from Ms Dynamite and The Manic Street Preachers among others.

These heavyweight monitors cost £17,000 and utilise a 300mm bass driver, 75mm soft dome midrange unit and 34mm tweeter driven by a total of 800 watts via a 10B active crossover. The amps and crossover are housed outside the speaker cabinets. It's good to see that some of the millions we donate every year to Auntie go to a worthy cause.



Inside the BBC's Sound 1 OB vehicle.

## LICENSED TO LICENSE

**Dolby Labs has created a subsidiary to do for the electronics industry what Dolby does so successfully for itself: licensing. Via Licensing will "help unify the consumer electronics, PC, entertainment, telecoms and broadcasting industries around technically sophisticated technologies and standards from a wide range of sources," said Labs president Bill Jasper. This approach could speed up the formalisation and adoption of standards and formats for the consumer electronics industry.**

**In many respects it's surprising that Dolby has taken so long to launch this initiative as its success in this arena has been the key to its growth since the introduction of Dolby Noise Reduction in the 1960s.**

## WIDE RANGE CHIPS

Texas Instruments has developed a DAC that will maximise the dynamic range of SACD and DVD-Audio. The wider the range, the more low level detail will be reproduced, or the more audible very quiet sounds become. The PCM1792 uses what TI calls Advanced Segment Technology to achieve a maximum dynamic range of 132dB when in mono mode. This is claimed to be 9-12dB better than Delta-Sigma DACs and 2dB better than the best competition.

The chip is designed for all current digital audio formats, but one version, DSD1792, will soon be available that "significantly exceeds" the dynamic range of the SACD format, "making it possible to more accurately reproduce recorded material. Prior to this, there was no integrated circuit DAC with a dynamic range exceeding 130dB." The chips will be released in early Spring.



One of Abbey Road's multichannel suites, complete with B&W Nautilii and now DTS surround hardware.

## DTS TAKES ABBEY ROAD

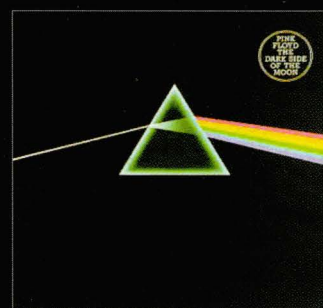


One of the world's best-known recording studios, Abbey Road in London, has purchased DTS surround sound hardware for use in its multichannel mastering suites. The kit, specifically a CAE-4 encoder and CAD-4 decoder, will be used to produce both 5.1 and 6.1 mixes for music and movies.

Post Production Manager at Abbey Road, Lucy Launder, said: "To date we have been hiring in DTS equipment as and when required. Due to the ever-increasing demand it made sense that at least two of our surround mastering suites are upgraded to permanently incorporate the latest encoding equipment."

Abbey Road has invested heavily in surround technology and launched a digital video studio in 1996 to cater for the other side of the increasingly audio-visual music market. Deep Purple's recent *Concerto For Group And Orchestra* DVD was produced at the studio.

## DARK SIDE OF SURROUND



Despite denials from EMI it would seem that one of the best selling albums of all time, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*, is being mixed in 5.1 surround for a release at some point this year. Confirmation of the project came from the original album producer Alan Parsons, who created

a four-channel (quadraphonic) mix of the album in the 1970s.

Whether this 'early' announcement was provoked by Parsons not being chosen to produce the new mix is open to debate. But he says: "I was never approached... To say that I am angered by that would be an understatement." While it seems like a wasted opportunity not to release the four-track version of the album, the commercial potential of the title make it understandable that the record company is taking a cautious line.

Breaking news as *Hi-Fi Choice* went to press is that Sony has persuaded Pink Floyd to release the new version of the album in its SACD format, with a release date to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the original - 3 March 2003.



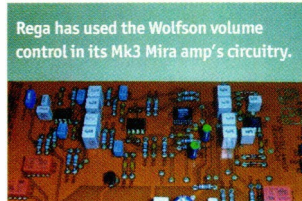


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MACHINED, MIL-SPEC ALUMINIUM FRONT PANEL.  
PLATINUM PLATED FITTINGS. REMOTE CONTROLLED. PHONO STAGE.  
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## ELECTRONIC VOLUME CONTROLS

Your old knobs may have served you well thus far, but times are changing, and recent technological developments mean we're likely to see many more chip-based noise cranksers

For decades, volume controls have nearly always been implemented by a potentiometer, or 'pot' for short – other aliases include rheostat and variable resistor. These are simple mechanical devices in which a contact point wipes around a resistor track, and work well enough. But we're now in a remote control era, and implementing the remote control of mechanical devices is not that straightforward. Motorised pots are widely used, but they're also quite costly, and the prospect of using solid state alternatives is attractive, on both cost, convenience and long term reliability grounds.

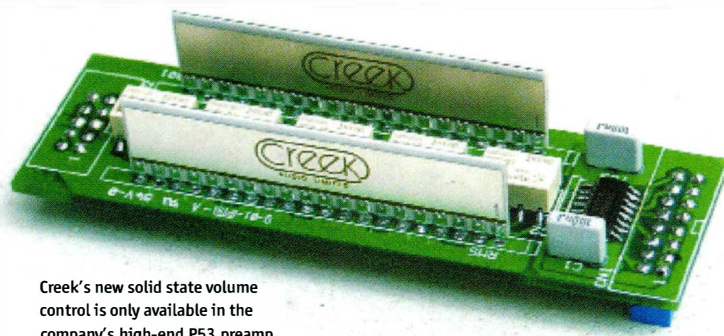


Rega has used the Wolfson volume control in its Mk3 Mira amp's circuitry.

For example, Naim's 'entry-level' 5-series allows input sensitivities to be individually pre-set, because its preamps use a resistor-ladder volume control. However, the company's delectable top-of-the-line NAC 552 (HFC 233) had no such facility. That's because it uses a traditional motorised pot, which Naim believes is still the best sound quality option.

Rega also used a motorised pot in the Mk2 versions of its Mira amp and Cursa preamp, but the Mk3 versions have replaced this with a new 'resistor matrix' approach from Scottish chipmaker Wolfson. The WM8816 chip has hundreds of resistors in an analogue switched network, controlled via a microprocessor that's driven either by a digital-encoding front panel volume knob, or remote handset.

It has 80 steps of 1 dB each, and a 20x LED display around the front panel knob, calibrated in 4dB steps. Left and right channels are matched



Creek's new solid state volume control is only available in the company's high-end P53 preamp.

within 0.2dB. The resistive networks are placed in the feedback and input circuits of the preamp's line amplifier, to optimise the gain for best signal-to-noise ratio. The network is also configured to supply a constant input impedance at all volumes, ensuring that sources always see a constant load and thereby avoiding variations in sound quality at different volumes.

### COMPARISONS

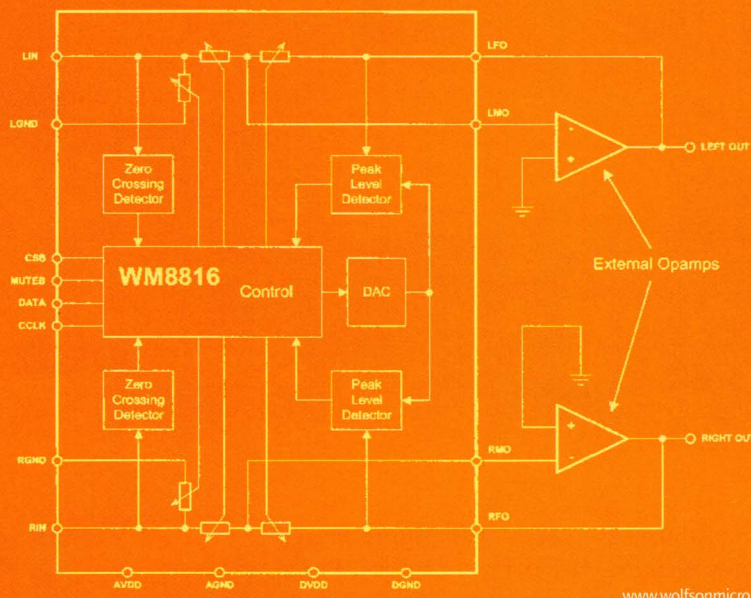
We had the opportunity to hear a direct comparison between the

Cursa 3 and the Cursa 2, whose only difference is the change from motorised pot to chip-based volume control. The newer model showed a quite startling improvement, sounding noticeably more 'out of the box', with more top-end projection, better textures, apparent wider dynamic range, and better propulsion and drive. More obvious with vinyl than CD sources, it simply sounded 'more real'.

Creek too has a brand new volume control, code-named V-80D, using a quite separate technology based on microprocessor-controlling and relay-switching seven series and seven parallel precision laser-trimmed printed-film resistors, giving 79 steps of 1dB each. Currently only used in Creek's top-quality P53 preamp, it achieves superior quality through the use of the very best quality materials, mounting the films on a ceramic substrate with a silver-plated back-plate. According to Creek, this device is not only less costly than a motorised pot, but also a lot more accurate, especially at low levels.

Although the implementation is probably more important than the specific technology, there are now many ways of remotely controlling volume. And it does now seem that a solid state 'no moving parts' approach might well be a realistic high quality alternative to the motorised pot. ⊕

### Wolfson solid state volume control - circuit diagram



www.wolfsonmicro.com

## ProAc RESPONSE HEXA SYSTEM



Big room or small room, it's all the same to the Hexa System

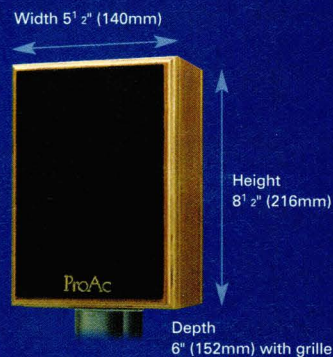
Small loudspeakers don't have to mean a small sound

ProAc, the company that has been bringing high quality audio to the world for more than twenty years, now gives you the astonishing Hexa system. Whatever size your listening room, these tiny loudspeakers are powerful enough to fill it with sumptuous sounds.

A runaway winner when demonstrated at the Heathrow Hi-Fi show, the Hexa system defines a new benchmark for 5.1 sound quality. All our design expertise and production experience has been brought to bear on a system that will delight on either home cinema or pure music appreciation.

Chunky craftsman-built cabinets, finished in real wood veneers, house sophisticated drive units and circuitry as good as anything we use in our audiophile mini-monitors. The sub-woofer too is very special; this dedicated unit integrates perfectly through its own powerful high quality amplifier and substantial bass driver.

However much room you need to fill, if you are serious about good sound check out the Hexa system at your nearest ProAc dealer, or contact us for more details.



Highpoint House. Riding Road.  
Buckingham Road Industrial Estate,  
Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7BE  
Telephone 01280 700147  
Fax 01280 700148  
Website [www.proac-loudspeakers.com](http://www.proac-loudspeakers.com)

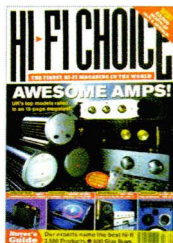
 **ProAc**  
perfectly natural



## TIME MACHINE

### FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,  
February 1998



Exciting times ahead was the promise at the beginning of 1998 as a host of new technologies emerged to reignite audiophile fires.

The merits of DSD mastering and Sony's SACD format were heralded as the future of CD as we examined the technology behind the process. DAB radio was anticipated for the spring – however, the first electronics available to receive DAB were car head units and these were prohibitively expensive. The continuing tumbling prices of CD recorders was music to the ears of home recording enthusiasts.

### TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,  
February 1993

Sadly, most of the British brands in our CD systems



test are either no more or have dropped two-channel R&D for multichannel expansion. Hi-fi really got

motoring with our review of an in-car JBL speaker system and interview with veteran racing legend Sir Stirling Moss. His newly refurbished London pad had just been kitted out with a Nakamichi system running throughout the house, complete with discreet B&W ceiling-mounted loudspeakers. Life in the fast lane, eh?

## SYSTEM BUILDER

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



### MISSY ELLIOTT

**Miss E... So Addictive** (DVD-Audio surround) Elektra  
Missy Elliott's dominance of the hip-hop scene is something to celebrate – her music is always edgy and entertaining with fresh, spicy breakbeats, and her unique style is perfectly captured in this super-fly collection of rap overlaid on sampled funk/soul beats. The DVD-A version makes the most of the hires multichannel format and has become something of a reference disc here at *Choice Towers*. Dynamic and diverse, it's a vital slice of contemporary hip-hop for anyone wanting to modernise their music and engage their multichannel rig for lift-off. You may want to swap your slippers for Adidas before spinning this gem – as the lady says, work it!



### DVD-AUDIO PLAYER

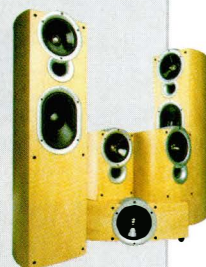
**Marantz DV8300** £1,400

Marantz's DVD-Audio-compatible 'universal' disc player has serious sonic credentials, with keen timing and detail. It's also a fine machine for video, but in sonic terms the Marantz thrills, capturing the fast beats and punchy lines of Missy's hip-hop blend.

### SPEAKER PACKAGE

**KEF Q AV7** £1,300

KEF's latest Uni-Q driver array has been a real success, delivering open and detailed music from a range of stereo and multichannel speaker systems. The AV7 package is not just pretty – it also delivers a deep, wide and consistent soundstage with an explicit-sounding midband.

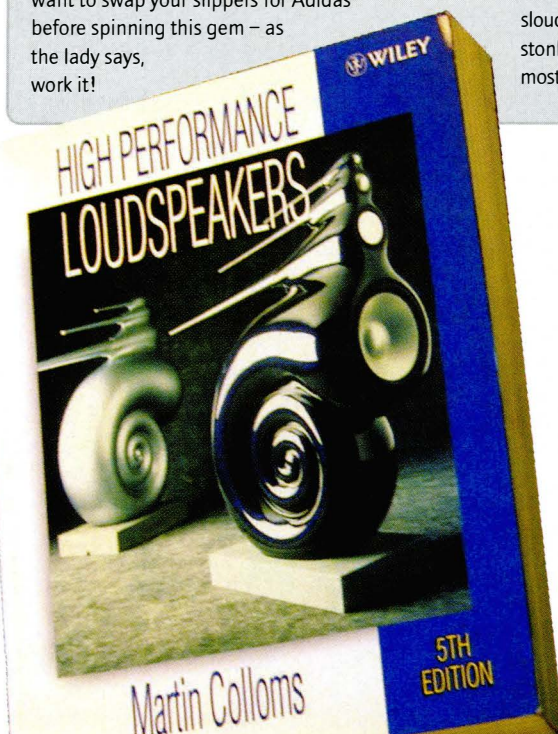


### AV AMPLIFIER

**Pioneer VSX-D2011** £900

This is currently the best sub-£1,000 AV receiver for

music and movies. It's a lively and detailed performer with multichannel music as well as film soundtracks, and no slouch with stereo sources to boot. Complete with a stonking features list, it's a cost-effective way to get the most from Missy's multichannel-stylee.



## BOOK OF THE MONTH

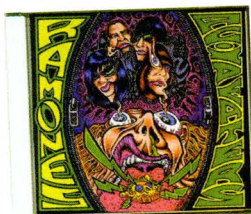
### High Performance Loudspeakers (5th edition)

By Martin Colloms  
Wiley £40

First launched more than 20 years ago, *High Performance Loudspeakers* is more comprehensive than any enthusiast could imagine. Helpfully split into a number of subject areas, the book begins with speaker fundamentals and progresses into more comprehensive text, complete with mathematical equations for (would-be) boffins. It can become heavy reading in places should you delve too deep, but it is generously illustrated and always well written. This is a superb guide for enthusiasts and engineers alike, skillfully explaining speaker technologies without the marketing hype.

## CLASSIC DEMO DISCS

GREAT MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



### RAMONES

Acid Eaters

"Hi-fi isn't about third harmonics and Ringo's squeaky drum pedal. It's about reproducing the effect the artists were trying for in the studio or the concert hall. Maybe the system you're trying can do imaging, authority, and the rest. But can

it do mindless? So select the no-prisoners cover of Ted Nugent's *Journey To The Centre Of Your Mind*, and if your brain isn't dead after 2'52", it's Gabba Gabba Noy, Mr Salesman..." **David Lockwood**, 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 #5

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES - BI-WIRED SPEAKERS



Most loudspeakers make provision for bi or tri-wiring, giving the user the option of employing multiple runs of cable between speaker and amplifier. But not everyone wants (or can afford) bi-wiring. Many use a single set of cables, with the speaker connection terminals linked together. Such an arrangement works fine, but it's vital to

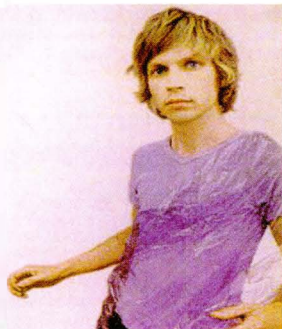
ensure the linking wires make a firm solid connection. Otherwise you'll suffer loss of bass (or treble) and/or crackling and break-up. Sometimes the linking connections look clean and tight, but probe a little deeper and it soon becomes apparent that the wire (or plate) is less secure than at first appears to be the case. This is especially true when using spade connectors or bare wires - trying to tighten down on two wires at once is harder than it looks! Also remember that screw terminals have a tendency to loosen-off with time. So check regularly.

## ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

- Beck** Mutations
- Point** Cornelius
- Sigur Ros** ()
- Badly Drawn Boy** Have You Fed The fish?
- Ben Harper** Diamonds On The Inside
- Scarface** The Fix
- Massive Attack** 100th Window
- The Roots** Phrenology

BECK MUTATIONS



## NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



Zwan



### ZWAN

**Mary Star Of The Sea** 27 Jan

Former Smashing Pumpkins mainman Billy Corgan returns with a new band which also includes former Pumpkins' drummer Jimmy Chamberlin. "A stirring combination of early Damned, The Germs, The Rolling Stones and even The Beatles played by metalhead prodigies who are skipping school," Rolling Stone said of a recent live gig. If the album lives up to the promise, it could be very special indeed.

### ANNIE LENNOX

**Title: tbc** May

The former Eurythmics singer is currently putting the finishing touches to her first solo album since 1995's *Medusa*. "Sometimes the muse abandons you and it's what you call the fallow period. And it could be a long time," she explains. Now she's writing again - and given that *Medusa* was a collection of covers, the as-yet-untitled new record will be the first solo album to feature her own songs since 1992's *Diva*.

### THE BANGLES

**Doll Revolution** 3 March

The Bangles split at the end of the 1980s after selling more than 20 million records and enjoying hits such as *Manic Monday* and *Walk Like An Egyptian*. With interest revived by Atomic Kitten's cover of their final number one, *Eternal Flame*, their reunion is perfectly timed and *Doll Revolution* is full of bright melodic rock songs making them sound like they've never been away.

### JOHNNY MARR & THE HEALERS

**Boomslang** 3 Feb

The Smiths were recently voted by NME as 'the greatest band of all

time'. Now former guitarist Marr returns with a new group and an album recorded at his Clear Studio in Manchester. "It sometimes sounds like the Smiths but it's a move forward, hopefully," he says. "I wanted to make something that had a heaviness yet was beautiful at the same time."

### ED HARCOURT

**From Every Sphere** 17 Feb

Ed Harcourt's debut *Here Be Monsters* earned a Mercury Music Prize nomination and a spate of four star reviews. Two years on, the follow-up should firmly establish him as Britain's answer to cult American singer-songwriter Elliott Smith. Titles

include *Bittersweetheart*, *The Birds Will Sing For Us* and *Ghostwriter*.

### ALSO COMING SOON...

#### ROCK/POP

**Melanie C** Reason (Virgin) Mar, **Turin Brakes** Ether Song (Virgin) Mar, **White Stripes** Elephant (Beggars' Banquet) Apr, **Joe Strummer** tbc (Hellcat) May

#### JAZZ/CLASSICAL

**John Taylor** Rosslyn (ECM) Feb, **Mark O'Connor** In Full Swing (Sony) Mar, **Ute Lemper** Sings Kurt Weill & Michael Nyman (Universal) Mar, **Wayne Shorter** Alegría (Universal) Mar

#### DVD

**The Miles Davis Story** Feb, **Herbie Hancock - Future To Future** Feb, **xx** Mar, **Mystery Train** Mar

# Incoming

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

★★★★★

## Sony RCD-W3 dual-deck CD recorder £250

Ten years ago Sony hit the headlines with its MiniDisc format and the hi-fi press went wild – after all, MD was an exciting new compact digital recording format set to seduce consumers away from the compromises of analogue cassette. But impressive though it was (and in some respects still is), once direct CD duplication became an affordable prospect for consumers MD was never likely to establish itself as the dominant digital audio recording format.

Now, after years of ignoring recordable CD hardware in favour of pushing MD, Sony at last has its own CD-RW offering, the RCD-W3 – a dual-deck CD recorder with an “expected” price tag of just £250. It seems Sony has finally conceded that if you can't beat 'em, you might as well join 'em – after all, it's been marketing the 'blank' discs for years...

So is it worth the wait? Well, the RCD-W3 is a simple machine, boasting solid Sony build quality and the company's usual expertise in making its products easy to use. From the two-touch synchronised CD recording mode to the

### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Dual-deck for one-box CD-to-CD recording
- ▶ CD-R/RW compatible
- ▶ 4x recording speed
- ▶ Synchro-start record
- ▶ Optical digital input and output
- ▶ Headphone socket
- ▶ Remote control
- ▶ Available in black or silver finish

typically neat and logical remote, this recorder ensures that making your own CDs is an absolute doddle. To speed things up there's a 4x speed recording option, meaning an hours' worth of music can be transferred in a mere 15 minutes, although we'd stick to normal speed for optimum sound quality. As usual, discs must be finalised once recording has finished – a simple button push and it's done.

All the facilities you'd expect from a well-featured CD recorder are present and correct. There's automatic sample rate conversion if you're recording from a digital source that differs from CD's 44.1kHz standard, and recording level is adjustable if you're recording from an analogue source like vinyl. Both the fascia and display are clear and well

laid out, while rear-mounted connections include analogue inputs and outputs, plus optical ins and outs for digital connection.

CD playback performance is decent for a dual-deck CD recorder – often sound quality suffers with this kind of product as playback is neglected in favour of recording competence and features. Yet CDs played through the RCD-W3 are generously detailed with crisp recovery of musical information, due in part to the high quality 24-bit D/A conversion used by Sony. On test, Fleetwood Mac's *Never Going Back Again* was captured with all its guitar-picking detail intact and with impressive speed and attack. On the flipside, there is perhaps a lack of warmth that can make some tracks

**“Sony has had plenty of time to get the RCD-W3 right. It's simple to use, ergonomically sound and build quality is good to boot.”**





sound a bit hard-edged. But at the price it's churlish to complain.

Another potential leveller for CD recorders is the quality of recordings made from analogue sources. One would expect recordings dubbed direct from CDs to sound very close to the originals, and indeed they do – quality is as good as those made on any other recorder at a comparable price point. But material converted from analogue to digital is well catered for too – we made several recordings from FM radio, including BBC Radios 1, 2 and 3, and were very impressed with the results. Recordings sounded a little harder edged than the original broadcasts, but also clearer and crisper. Especially notable was the quality of recordings

made from classical music broadcasts – the scale and depth of orchestral work is recovered well and there is pleasing dynamic impact.

Sony has had plenty of time to get this machine right. We're not sure how long it's been in R&D, but the results are very impressive. It's simple to use, ergonomically sound and, unlike some of the competition, its build quality is good to boot. What's more, its outright performance is at least as good as any other dual-deck recorder below £300. It's a one-box CD playback and recording solution, priced aggressively and executed with flair. And if you shop around, you may find it even cheaper...

☎ Sony UK 08705 111999  
 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

### WHITHER MINIDISC?

With recent sales figures confirming CD-R/ RW as the consumer's preferred digital recording format, Sony had to act. The RCD-W3 has been available in MiniDisc-shy America since early 2001, and Sony could no longer ignore demand amongst hi-fi separates buyers in Europe.

However, Sony is keen to point out that MD is far from dead. Though third-party MD separates products are now non-existent, it's still popular in mini system circles, while Sony has been re-inventing its cute little digital recording format as a portable, hard-wearing multimedia storage solution for audio files (including MP3) and other forms of data.



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

## Energy Connoisseur C-3 speaker £300

➤ The UK market is saturated with speakers from homespun brands, which you might think would make it difficult for a Canadian import to make its mark. But on performance, Energy's Connoisseur C-3 has no such worries – it's a very accomplished speaker, and is set to challenge famous home-grown names.

This bookshelf two-way front-ported speaker is every inch the clever design, from its modular 'Spherex' front baffle to its magnetic silver grilles. Single-wired using extremely high-quality plastic-encapsulated speaker terminals, the driver complement is more straightforward: a 25mm aluminium tweeter allied to a single 165mm silvery 'homopolymer' woofer. This gives a speaker with rated sensitivity of 92dB and eight ohm impedance. With a mix of silvery cone and baffle, semi-opaque blue plastic tweeter surround and a neat maple finish, it's also on the attractive side of distinctive. There's a black ash vinyl option too, but given the speaker's origin maple seems more fitting.

This is a good, honest, no-nonsense design. Bass goes deep, but not cavernously so, and does it without the hindrance of substantial bass hump or suck-out. The treble is extended without falling into brashness, thinness or suffering from tizzy aluminium tweeter disease. What's in-between is rich and coherent, too. At a stroke it can pass the audiophile prettiness test and not get daunted by the White Stripes/Datsuns graunch-o-meter.

In all, the C-3 is a surprisingly accurate, musical and enjoyable speaker that you have to spend a lot more to significantly improve upon.

☎ API 01787 249656  
 🌐 www.energy-speakers.com

### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Front-ported two-way bookshelf speaker
- ▶ Magnetically shielded
- ▶ Nominal impedance: 8 ohms
- ▶ Minimum impedance: 4 ohms
- ▶ 125W maximum power rating
- ▶ Crossover point 2kHz
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 19.7x39.3x29.1cm



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

## Yamaha DVD-S830 DVD-Audio/Video player £400

Yamaha currently has five DVD players in its line-up; this one is smack in the middle of the group and is going for the slimline vote. The silver fronted player stands barely two inches high and is a model of refined, understated elegance.

It's an MP3-supporting DVD-Audio/Video player. There is no second Scart socket or component video trio of phono sockets, nor does it double up its composite, S-Video or digital audio outputs. Usefully for hi-fi users, though, it includes separate stereo and multichannel audio phono outputs, so you can wire the stereo outputs for playing CDs and use the six-channel output for DVD-Audio or Video replay.

### CONNECTIONS

The lack of component video and a second Scart socket does hamper the Yamaha DVD-S830 somewhat in today's video market. ColorStream component video outputs – the three-coloured phono sockets on the back of many recent DVD players – are designed to connect to the latest projectors and plasma screens to divide the picture up into the components stored on the disc, so the picture seems less processed than would normally be the case. A second Scart socket does not improve the picture, but means you can route video signals through the player. With all the video sources currently available, this is useful.

Similarly, the player features a handy 'video off' setting on the remote handset. This not only helps eliminate the distraction of video for music use, it also makes the S830 sound slightly better in CD mode. The handset itself looks a bit old-fashioned with its white text on black background, but at least it is clear to read and reasonably easy to operate. Add to this a decent set of onscreen menu pages and the Yamaha player is yet another easy-to-use, very flexible DVD player.

Picture performance is sharp and detailed, aided by a useful raft of picture controls to gently shift the player's picture to match your own tastes. It may not have the deepest

### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Compatible with both DVD-Audio and Video
- ▶ Supports DVD+R/RW, DVD-R/RW, CD-R/RW and MP3 encoded discs
- ▶ 10-bit/54MHz video DAC
- ▶ 24-bit/192kHz audio DAC
- ▶ Dolby Digital/DTS decoders
- ▶ Coaxial, optical digital output
- ▶ Stereo and six-channel audio output
- ▶ Scart, composite video, S-Video

the sounds from the two are practically identical, with only a hint of smearing and midrange blurring when playing Dolby Digital or DTS soundtracks through the built-in decoder.

Underworld's *Everything, Everything* DVD sounded just as upbeat and concert-like, regardless of the output. DVD-Audio fares well too. Those almost-pretentious tone-poems on the *Awaken* disc come across as detailed and coherent, although the seagulls at the opening of DJ Motives' *Energy* track have sounded more distant and surrounding on other players.

Finally, this player doesn't treat CD as an afterthought; it has that typical Yamaha laid-back approach to CD

***"DVD-Audio fares well too. Those almost pretentious tone-poems on the Awaken disc sound detailed and coherent, although the seagulls at the opening of DJ Motives' Energy have sounded more surrounding."***

black levels or such detail to produce cinematic layering details, but neither is it a dullard and at the price is pretty much as good as you can expect.

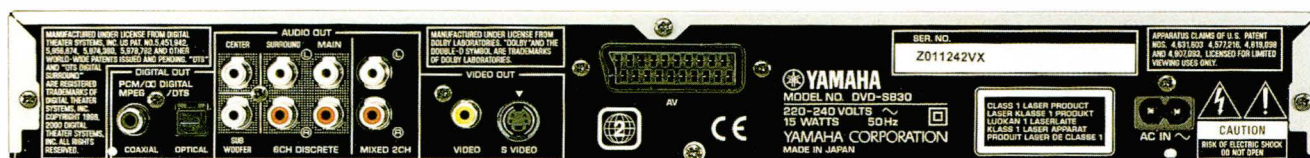
Sonically, the S830 is nicely controlled, if a bit light on its feet. The bass is slightly less keen and dynamic than some players can muster, and the sound is a bit bright because of this. The on-board decoder fares extremely well compared with the digital output;

sound, but at the same time is extremely listenable and detailed.

The DVD-S830 is a useful addition to the DVD-Audio/Video canon, as much for the elegant lines as for the performance. It won't woo newcomers to the Yamaha stable, but all those Yamaha AV owners can now have a decent DVD-Audio/Video player to match.

☎ Yamaha 01923 233166

🌐 www.yamaha-audio.co.uk





EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

# Monitor Audio Bronze B2 speaker £200

Monitor Audio has revamped its entry-level Bronze range with a dynamic new name, New Bronze, and some fancy features both in and outside of the four models – three stereo pairs and a centre channel. Each is now fully wrapped in vinyl woodprint so that looks are maintained if you remove the grilles, and the front edges are curved to reduce diffraction (the prismatic effect that sharp edges have on soundwaves travelling across them).

The new B2 is a two-way stand-mount with a 165mm version of the Mk2 MMP main driver (see box for details) and a 25mm C-CAM metal dome tweeter. The latter has also been refined since the first series with a re-profiling of the surround and front plate design aiding the response and improving dispersion. The reflex port borrows from the brand's developments



**“You’d be hard pressed to find imaging of this quality combined with deeper bass at this price.”**

in subwoofer technology, its soft rubberised coating designed to reduce air turbulence and give more precise bass. The cabinet is constructed from 18mm MDF and is “extensively braced”. It certainly feels pretty chunky, and the unusual horizontal bi-wire terminals mean you can run two sets of speaker cables for maximum driver control. The sensitivity rating would suggest that 50 watts would be sufficient to get a decent result from the B2s, but with watts it's quality, not quantity, that counts.

Listening commenced with a turbo-charged but still essentially low powered (c35W) Pioneer A300R Precision integrated amp doing the driving. David Thomas and the Two Pale Boys provided the material in the form of their *Surf's Up* disc, the B2s projecting the sound very effectively. Thomas' distinctive voice sounded clear and present, the speakers managing to ‘disappear’ such that the music seemed to exist almost independently. This is a



#### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Frequency response: 42Hz-22KHz
- ▶ Sensitivity: 90dB
- ▶ Nominal impedance: 6 ohms
- ▶ Bass/midrange: 6.5 inch
- ▶ Tweeter: 25mm gold dome
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 18.5x35x25cm
- ▶ Finishes: Black ash or beech vinyl

tribute to the cabinet design, which keeps resonance at bay and allows more of the music into the room. This speaker treats reverb well too, the guitar on this disc sounding open and spacious with plenty of subtle detail.

Inevitably with a driver and box of this size there are bass limitations, but only compared with bigger designs. You'd be hard pressed to find imaging of this quality combined with deeper bass at or near the same price. There will always be a pretty clear trade-off with these factors as it's almost impossible to build a bigger box that's as 'quiet' or low in resonance for the same kind of money.

Timing is good too, if there's a beat as convoluted as the one Bugge Wesseltoft lays down on *Change* (from *Moving*) the B2s will give it to you in full effect. The double bass may not deliver its full weight but nimbleness is a worthy price to pay when musical engagement is the goal.

The B2's balance is, if anything, mid-forward – it projects voices and instruments well, but alternatives at the price have a more relaxed balance that encourages higher-level listening. A strong midrange is a good thing for listening at low or sensible levels, but it won't turn you into a headbanger. (Which many

might feel is a desirable thing!) Putting them closer to the wall helps in this respect but undermines the intrinsic openness that we found so appealing in the first place.

This new B2 is a lively and entertaining speaker with tight, controlled bass, agile and enthusiastic midrange and remarkably smooth treble. It is definitely a strong new contender in the budget box stakes.

☎ Monitor Audio 01268 740580  
 🌐 [www.monitoraudio.co.uk](http://www.monitoraudio.co.uk)

#### DRIVE UNIT TECHNOLOGY

Monitor Audio's latest Bronze range uses a revised version of the brand's MMP metal matrix polymer cone technology. This is a polypropylene material loaded with metallic particles in an attempt to create a more rigid, uniform structure. MMP is designed to preserve microdynamics while simultaneously damping unwanted resonance. The material is said to have similar characteristics to a metal cone, but with the advantage of being compatible with simple first-order crossover designs.

The Mk2 MMP uses a high-pressure injection moulding process to achieve different thicknesses at critical points in the cone geometry. This is claimed to provide greater stiffness and consistency with tighter production tolerances.

★★★★★

## Cyrus DVD8 DVD-Video player £1,200

➤ You wait an age for an audiophile quality DVD-Video player to come along, and then a whole bunch of them arrive together. Last month we tested four of the best DVD-Video players on the market when it comes to stereo performance with CDs alongside DVDs, including Cyrus's DVD7+, the slightly more affordable sibling to this new £1,200 machine.

The players may look identical, but the company's developers were apparently given *carte blanche* with the DVD8 – they were given no price point to hit, and were told to indulge themselves, and make the best product possible. It's interesting then that this no-holds-barred player costs only £200 more than the DVD7+.

The DVD8 is constructed from Cyrus's half-size inverted die-cast chassis, with a front-loading transport mechanism below a clear display, and is available in

black or silver. The only obvious outer difference between this machine and the DVD7+ is at the back, where in addition to the Scart socket, S-Video output, optical and coaxial digital plugs, Cyrus MC-Bus sockets (for connecting to other Cyrus products), analogue audio outputs and PSX-R socket, the DVD8 benefits from a set of component video outputs. This is, after all, Cyrus's 'high-end' DVD player, designed to partner projectors and plasma monitors, where this super-high-quality video connection really pays off. Along with improved video capability and tweaked-up audio, the most obvious difference between the players is Cyrus's new System Navigator remote control – designed to control any of the company's components.

And it was from its other components that Cyrus's engineers took their cue for the DVD8, and set about fine-tuning

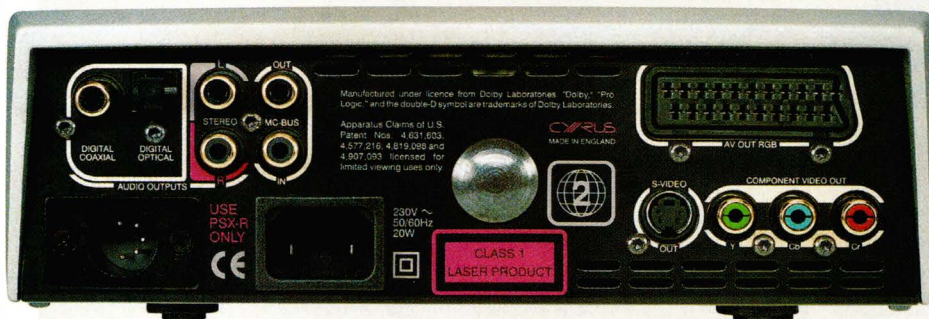
### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Component video output
- ▶ RGB-capable Scart
- ▶ System Navigator remote control
- ▶ DVD7, 7+ owners can upgrade
- ▶ Ten highly regulated power supplies
- ▶ New zoom feature
- ▶ PSX-R upgrade path
- ▶ Non-magnetic, light-weight die-cast chassis
- ▶ Dual Beam DVD/CD laser assembly

the original DVD player's video circuits in the same way the company would approach the design of one of its amplifiers. However, in striving for video excellence, Cyrus hasn't ignored its audio heritage, and the DVD8 is a very capable CD player. Its output is reminiscent of the brand's own CD players, and it shares much of the sonic characteristics of these well-respected machines. It can sound even more like them with the optional 'Qdac' upgrade, but it's still highly impressive. It has a solidity and honesty to its sound that really draws you into the music played on it. Unlike many DVD players, you feel that you're getting to the musical truth with this machine.

This is partly thanks to an impressive midrange performance, particularly effective with voices which are presented in an effortlessly realistic manner. Roy Gains' drawl on *I Got The T-Bone Walker Blues* is focused and breathy enough to convince you he's in the room. Instruments are equally well resolved, and there's a sense of space around them that would impress in a dedicated CD player at this price.

The frequency extremes are also well served, particularly the top end, which benefits from a similar precision and airiness as the midrange. Cymbals crash with verve and sparkle, but never sound



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

## Polk LSi7 speaker £600

➤ Polk is a big player in the US, and although it has been less visible in the UK recently, it's looking to change that with its LSi speakers. The LSi7 is the baby of the four-speaker range – a diminutive standmounter designed with the space-challenged audiophile in mind.

This is a good-looking little box – at least with its grille on and before you get too close. On closer inspection, it looks a little bit brutish, with its ring radiator tweeter and front port. And what at first appears to be a solidly

### KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 25mm ring radiator tweeter
- ▶ 133mm aerated polypropylene-coned mid/bass driver
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 21.9x36.2x26cm
- ▶ Power Port
- ▶ Bi-wire option
- ▶ Magnetically shielded
- ▶ Real wood side panels available in ebony or cherry finish

constructed box turns out to have a few rough edges – nothing too serious but a little aesthetically challenged.

Performance is less open to criticism: this is an entertaining pair of loudspeakers. Our test pair offered an insightful and impressively detailed reproduction of whatever we through at them, and the tweeter does a particularly good job of keeping the higher end of the tonal range interesting and alive.

Turn up the wick and the little Polk proves punchy and powerful, with a

bottom end edging towards the lean. It copes equally well with The Stooges re-mastered *Raw Power* and the final movement of *Beethoven's 9th*. Each is delivered with impressive dynamics, and the symphony benefits from a fine out-of-the-box performance.

The LSi7i comes in mirror-imaged pairs – left and right is marked on the serial number on the back – and this driver array certainly pays dividends in the stereo image stakes: they form a suitably solid and well focused soundstage. Voices are natural and



***“Bass is agile and punchy, with enough pace to nail down a rhythm and keep rock and dance tracks jumping – few DVD players boast such deftness.”***

harsh, even with the volume set high. Bass is a little lightweight but also agile and punchy, with enough pace to nail down a rhythm and keep rock and dance tracks jumping – few DVD players boast such deftness.

But such musical excellence is not at the expense of video quality. Whether via the RGB-capable Scart socket or preferably using the component video output, it does a very good job of delivering fast-moving action, with a three dimensional quality that works

particularly well with the expansive backdrops in the helicopter-filmed scenes from *Lord Of The Rings*. Colour reproduction is also first rate, and the DVD8 does well with the rich tones of movies such as *Amelie*, where the unnaturally vivid hues are presented with the richness they deserve.

Sonically it's also a movie winner, and we've no qualms about the output from either the optical or coaxial connection.

Finally, we couldn't resist giving the player a quick spin with a PSX-R, and

the results are even more impressive. Its stereo performance ramps up a notch, with a tighter bass output and better grasp on the complex rhythms of the Flaming Lips' *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots*. Picture quality also improves, particularly when it comes to rendering those small details – the patterns in clouds, flecks of loose hair, an actor's breath on a cold day – that makes DVD such a great movie medium.

☎ Cyrus 01480 435577

🌐 www.cyrus.co.uk

lifelike, with Solomon Burke standing firmly centre stage on his excellent *Don't Give Up On Me* CD.

Indeed, this standmount speaker offers many of the attributes an audiophile demands, though some may find its sound a little too lean and bright. It's immediately engaging, but its balance could prove fatiguing in the long term and given the strength of competition it's perhaps a little pricey too.

☎ Polk UK 020 8863 9117

🌐 www.polkaudio.com



# Instant upgrades

*Some quick fixes to give your system a boost*



## Caig ProGold £13.95 (20ml)

▶ For surfaces plated with gold or other precious metals, Caig recommends this product, preceded if necessary by a spray of DeoxIT to remove any tarnish. It is claimed to work just as well between similar and dissimilar contact materials, and to protect scratched surfaces, while a high-temperature version, ProGold GxL, is also recommended for valve pins – but hififorsale.com doesn't stock it (hint).

On surfaces newly treated with DeoxIT, ProGold made no noticeable difference – it's impossible to vouch for effects months or years hence! On fresh phono plugs, though, it did indeed have a small effect, similar to that of DeoxIT, though less pronounced. I also recall an occasion some time ago when it had near-magical results on several multi-way connectors in a professional tape recorder, bringing the sound into focus quite remarkably. Even in its tiny can, ProGold lasts for ages and is an essential accessory (with DeoxIT) for any hi-fi.

☎ hififorsale 0870 241 2469 🌐 www.audiophilecandy.com



## Philex Select speaker cable £0.55/m

▶ You want cheap? This is hardly more expensive than the nastiest bell wire you'll find in DIY stores, but it seems to have hi-fi credentials if only in the marking for directionality! Don't bet on that being checked by ear for every reel... A practical wire, a little over 1mm thick, this could go under carpet without too much trouble, and its flexibility makes it handy for awkward routing. There's a surprising amount of stranded copper in the conductors, but even so, runs over about 5m might be ambitious for all but the least critical rear speakers.

The good news is that it passes a music signal. The bad news: well, that music's pretty constricted in both detail and dynamics by the time it gets out. Mind you, there's a fair semblance of tonal neutrality, lacking some bass weight but otherwise OK, and stereo images, though slightly squeezed, are generally solid. But if you care you'll spend a *little* more!

☎ hififorsale 020 8202 1919 🌐 www.philex.com



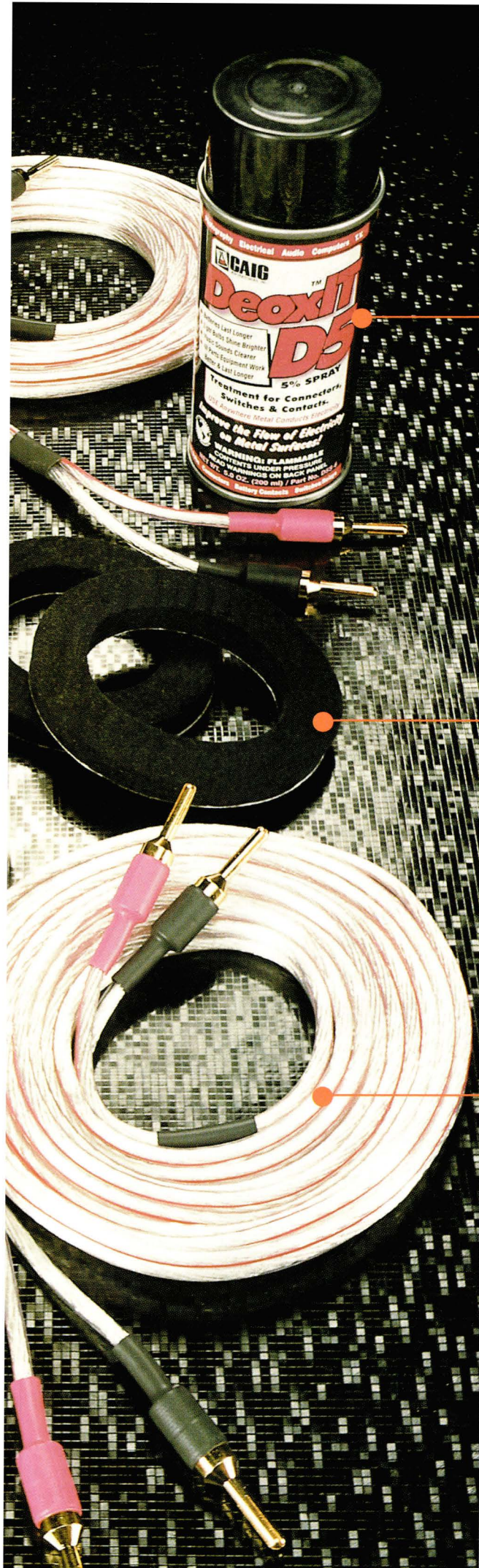
## Russ Andrews Shorties £19.95 (six pairs)

▶ Unless your system is fully loaded, you'll probably find the odd unused input on your amplifier. Shorties are short-circuit phono plugs which fit into these unused inputs to prevent interference from getting in. Such inputs are supposedly out of circuit when not selected, but stray capacitance between inputs means that isn't strictly true, especially at high frequencies. Noise and signals from within the amp can also couple to, and via, unused inputs, and Shorties help reduce that too.

Some high-end amps automatically short-circuit unused inputs, but most don't, and the couple used for this review did seem to benefit slightly from Shorties. It was among the more subtle tweaks we've heard, but there was just a shade more clarity to the sound and with a couple of tracks the bass seemed a touch firmer too. Worth a try, if only so you can feel that you've really dotted every 'i' and crossed each 't'!

☎ Russ Andrews 0800 373467 🌐 www.russandrews.com





### Caig DeoxIT £13.95 (200ml)



Caig makes quite a range of contact treatments, aimed at general industry as much as audio. The company's website gives some impressive-looking data on the effects of these treatments in reducing long-term resistance increase on contacts due to corrosion, and testimonials from electronics service professionals as to the product's effectiveness. DeoxIT is intended for use on contacts that have been in use for some time and have already suffered some corrosion, including audio connectors and mains plugs. For gold-plated contacts, Caig recommends a subsequent treatment of ProGold (see left).

Even so, just applying DeoxIT to some tarnished-looking phono leads made a noticeable difference to the clarity of the audio signal passed through them. Background noise was not actually reduced but one seemed less aware of it, as if it had been pushed back while the audio was brought a little forward with more detail and sparkle. Quite an odd effect, but consistent and gratifying. It worked a treat in reviving my Maglite torch too!

☎ Hififorsale 0870 241 2469 🌐 [www.audiophilecandy.com](http://www.audiophilecandy.com)



### Russ Andrews Focus Rings £9.95 (pair)



Looking like a pair of earpads for Grado headphones, these rings are made of acoustically absorbent foam and are intended to sit around the tweeter on the baffle of a speaker. Sound from a dome tweeter spreads out in all directions, including sideways, and some of it travels across the baffle and is then reflected back from the discontinuity at the edge, which causes time-smearing at very high frequencies. Focus Rings aim to absorb some of this sideways-travelling sound and reduce the smearing.

Given their size they won't have much effect below about 10kHz but even so there is a perceptible tidying of treble generally and a subtle but worthwhile improvement in stereo image accuracy and precision. Effects will vary between speakers and can sometimes be disconcerting at first, but this very cheap tweak is beneficial far more often than not. If in doubt, fix the rings with Blu-tak before committing to the strong self-adhesive backing.

☎ Russ Andrews 0800 373467 🌐 [www.russandrews.com](http://www.russandrews.com)



### Vivanco SILS 22523 speaker cable £69.99 (3m pair with banana plugs)



Part of Vivanco's 'Sound and Image' range, this cable is quite smart and has a fair amount of copper in it, apparently silver-plated too. There's not quite as much copper as there first appears since the transparent insulation has some magnifying effect, but resistance is low enough that one could safely use a longish run. Basic banana plugs are fitted which don't have all that much grip, but at least they don't fall out.

Sound is bright and immediate, but it also has quite a marked tendency to become splashy and uncontrolled when there's a lot going on in the music. For instance, a well-recorded drum kit, instead of being precisely located and stable, seems to spread out all over the rear of the stereo image – and the rear isn't as far behind the front as it might be either. Detail generally is moderate, but overall this cable falls behind the standard of current budget-class leaders.

☎ Vivanco 01442 403020 🌐 [www.vivanco.com](http://www.vivanco.com)



## THE COMPONENTS



### CEC TL-1X CD transport £5,000

This top-loading CD transport is one of the very few belt-driven CD transport designs available. Extremely well built with a stabilising puck to minimise vibration, this massive deck is one of the quietest CD spinners around.



### CEC DX71 digital converter £2,045

CEC's top-of-the-range DAC sports a 24-bit/96kHz upsampling converter, all manner of digital and analogue connections, a built-in analogue volume control driven by a Class A preamp stage and a natty VU meter in the middle of the front panel.



### Edge Signature One preamplifier £8,950

Massive switchable battery/mains powered preamp which is highly respected among the US high-end cognoscenti. Extremely solidly built, the five line-input preamp may not even sport a tape monitor, but is designed to be sonically a cut above. It looks the part, too!



### Edge NL10 power amplifier £10,800

This compact but extremely neutral 220W dual mono design is a secret star in American high-end circles. It features a special optical laser biasing system for optimal calibration, but no details of this concept are available as yet.



### Silverline Sonata II loudspeakers £5,400

Tall, swept-back five way with 25mm soft dome tweeter, 50mm soft dome midrange and three bass units; one 150mm plastic cone and two 250mm designs. This all adds up to a speaker said to reach from 25Hz to 28kHz, but with a sensitivity of 95dB.

CEC CD TRANSPORT/DAC | EDGE PRE/POWER AMP | SILVERLINE SPEAKERS | £32,195 + CABLES/SUPPORTS

# SYSTEM ADDICT

*Detail, super-fine resolution and power – but at a price*

Some systems are so well constructed that every last aspect of the system must be considered, no matter how off-the-wall some of the components in that system might be. Normally, System Addict concentrates on the Big Three – the CD, amplifier and speakers – alone. Any ancillaries (such as cables, tables and the like) are seldom included. This system is an exception – and an expensive one to boot.

This is a true flagship system, one of the most expensive yet seen in the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*. It comprises a £5,000 CEC TL-1X belt-driven CD transport and a £2,045 upsampling CEC DX71 digital-to-analogue converter, wired together using an £870 Synergistic Research Designer's Reference Digital interconnect cable.

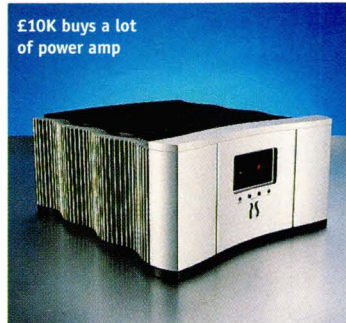
Amplification hails from the US, with the high-end Edge product range: an £8,950 Signature One battery-or-mains powered preamplifier matched to a 'laser biased' 220-watt £10,800 NL10 power amplifier, again wired using £1,750 worth of Synergistic Research Designers Reference interconnect cables. The power amplifier is connected – via £3,499 worth of three metre pairs of Synergistic Research's Designers Reference speaker cables – to Silverline Sonata speakers, themselves worth £5,400.

But the more than £38,000 worth of hi-fi system is only the beginning. The system sits upon the fantastically named Rack of Silence from Solid Tech – which costs £810 – and the CD transport further rests on an extra £200-worth of Solid Tech Feet of Silence.

Finally, there's the power supply to address. There's £1,200 worth of huge PS Audio Ultimate Lab mains cable feeding £4,800 worth of equally vast PS Audio P1200 Power Plant. This supplies carefully controlled mains to all the components in the system, using four £240 A/C Master Coupler leads from Synergistic Research. Add that lot together and you have just spent £46,284. Put another way, that's a BMW M3 Convertible – plus change.

It's a system with all the typical attributes of high-end audio. It has

£10K buys a lot of power amp



staggering amounts of detail on tap, three-dimensional imagery and bold, powerful dynamics. This really comes into its own on those wonderfully recorded audiophile-approved recordings, like the soundtrack to *Dead Man Walking*. It makes the lo-fi sounds of The White Stripes a bit too garish, however, so maybe there is such a thing as too much information!

For such a full-range system (the speakers are suggested to have a frequency response down to 25Hz), the kit is bouncy and rhythmic. Not quite in the rhythmic mastery of top-notch British audio, but better than many a wallowy

slice of high-end Americana. The neutrality of the system does make it a friend of the classical and jazz end of the spectrum, but it is no sluggard at doing music written after 1960, too. Ultimately, it can handle practically everything, but that musical beauty it instils sounds best on beautiful music.

There was a problem, but not one that relates to the machinery. The room the system was situated in was extremely bright, with a large reverberation time. This undermines some of the subtlest details of the system, at least until the listener acclimatises to the reverb time. This meant that the slight woodiness of the lower midrange could be attributable to the room as much as the system. Ultimately, though, this woodiness is somewhat inherent to the system, but is being amplified by the room itself. This is a likely blemish in the speaker design, but – as you might expect from a £46,000+ system – it's an extremely mild blemish.

If, for you, audio is all about refinement, this system is one of the most refined around. Why not give this a go – after all, who needs *another* Beemer? ☺

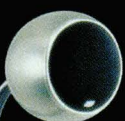


## CONTACT

This system was recommended and supplied for review by: Ultimate Sonics, 392 Finchley Road, London NW2 2HR ☎ 020 7435 1222 🌐 www.ultimate-sonics.com

n u c l e u s : m i c r o

# for those with eyes as well as ears



## The Nucleus Micro is different.

A 4" diameter, all metal sphere, available in a choice of eight colours, Nucleus Micro's are capable of producing a level of audio performance that defies their physical dimensions.

When coupled with dedicated subwoofers, their unsurpassed dynamics and realism take movies and music to another dimension.

The Nucleus Micro is available through our network of approved retailers, a full dealer list can be found at [www.anthonygallo.co.uk](http://www.anthonygallo.co.uk) or call us on 01555 666 444 to find your nearest stockist.

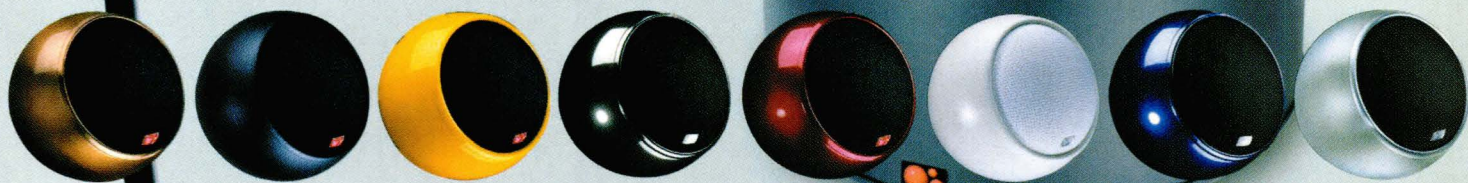


*If you have need of a system that is at once discrete and musically engaging, majoring on communication, clarity and transparency, then look no further. Indeed, if it's the latter qualities that you prize then the Gallo Micros could be your speaker of choice regardless of type. Don't confuse these with the six in a box toys that everybody and their wife seems to be offering these days. This is a genuine hi-fi speaker.*

Roy Gregory, Hi-Fi+ Nov/Dec 2002



## Discover why black speaker boxes are yesterday's news



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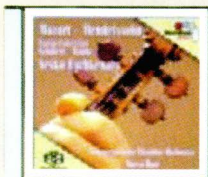
# ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Tim Bowern, Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver

## NEW MUSIC FORMATS



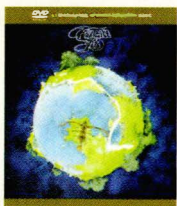
### MOZART: VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 5 IN A, SCHUBERT: RONDO IN A, MENDELSSOHN: VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MINOR

Vesko Eschkenazy (violin), Marco Boni (cond)  
Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra

SACD (multichannel/stereo; CD/SACD hybrid)  
Pentatone Classics PTC 5186 001

**Music:** The link between the three pieces on this disc is that they are precocious examples of their respective composers' output. The Schubert was composed in his 19th year – he died at 31 – and Mendelssohn was just 13 when he penned the D minor concerto. These are all fine works, lovingly played by the Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra, which is formed from Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra players, and supported by a youthful Vesko Eschkenazy on a magnificently mellow sounding Guareri instrument dating from 1738. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Made under the aegis of the Polyhymnia International group, which specialises in audiophile-quality multichannel recordings (SACD and DVD-A), this is an unusually fine example of the breed. The multichannel mix is three-dimensional yet front-focused, transparent and detailed. ★★★★★ AG



### YES Fragile

DVD-Audio (Advanced Resolution Surround/Dolby Digital)  
Elektra/Rhino

**Music:** Prog-tastic! At long last we have a serious remastering of this phenomenal album, if you don't own a copy yet there are no more excuses. The first Yes album to feature the keyboards of Rick Wakeman and the designs of Roger Dean is also arguably the finest. The standout tracks tend not to be the ones produced by individual members but rather those with full collaboration such as *South Side of the Sky*, *Roundabout* and the sublime *Heart of the Sunrise*. Only Anderson's *Long Distance Runaround* proves the exception to this rule. Features include lyrics, photos and background info as well as a bonus track, *America*. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Given the limited scope of the stereo originals, the surround mix is quite successful, with a good sound-spread – albeit with a touch of 'hall'-style signal processing about it. But stereo version is excellent. ★★★★★ JK

## CINEMA SELECTION

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



### SPIDER-MAN

Columbia TriStar

**Film:** Sam Raimi was a brave man to put Marvel's much-loved mutant on the big screen, risking the ire of obsessive comic-covers the world over. Fortunately, Spider-Man is largely a case of daring and winning. Tobey Maguire plays hapless nerd Peter Parker, who becomes the titular web-weaver after an encounter with a genetically modified arachnid. Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin is the obligatory nemesis and Kirsten Dunst the love interest in an effects-fest

that sits about halfway between Superman's primary-coloured wholesomeness and the dark vengefulness of Batman. Good, fast-paced fun. ★★★★★

**Disc:** While not quite up the standards set by *Star Wars* and *Lord Of The Rings: Fellowship Of The Ring*, this disc does a tidy job in all departments. There is a slight suspicion of grain now and again, but on the whole, both picture and soundtrack are bright, breezy and suitably involving. ★★★★★ JF

## CD/VINYL



### MASSIVE ATTACK 100th Window

Virgin

**Music:** Massive Attack have never been a happy band, but their fourth album is their bleakest excursion yet into the deeper regions of moody dub electronica. Leaving their trip-hop roots well behind, they create an insidiously ominous paranoid atmosphere from a sparse but intense blend of brooding synth swashes, subterranean bass and Arabesque strings. Sinead O'Connor joins MA regular Horace Andy on vocals taking a chilling, ethereal razor to the black velvet ambience. Feelgood music it ain't. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The production is dense and but not opaque, contributing to an oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere which remains intensely rich through repeated listenings. ★★★★★ DO



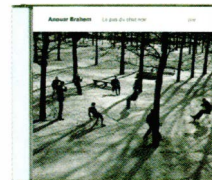
### BEETHOVEN: PIANO SONATAS VOL. 1 (SONATAS NO. 3, 5, 8 "PATHÉTIQUE" AND 20)

Bruno-Leonardo Gelber

Denon CO-2203 (CD)

**Music:** Gelber is a young Argentinian pianist of Austrian and Franco-Italian descent. Although his stock may not be as high in the UK as some of the big names, he is a supremely musical Beethoven interpreter, with the skill and the self-confidence to allow the music to speak for itself. The music is from Beethoven's early and middle periods, the *Pathétique* being the best known. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Recorded in the Nôtre-Dame, and played on a Steinway, the instrument is clearly not festooned with microphones in the way that spoils so many recordings, and as a result breathes and sounds like a real piano. ★★★★★ AG



### ANOUAR BRAHEM Le Pas Du Chat Noir

ECM

**Music:** Anouar Brahem is a master of the oud – a sort of Tunisian lute – and plays jazz in the sense that much of his music is improvised but structurally it owes little to the traditions of jazz. His trio of piano and accordion concoct an atmospheric soundscape that relies almost as much on what isn't played as what is. Part Parisian café ambience, part Bedhouin chamber music, it's an accessible and bewitching combination with clearly defined melodies and a gloriously understated sense of space. ★★★★★

**Sound:** With minimal instrumentation such as this, evocation is all. The surrounding silence is black and spacious, leaving room for the nuances of the acoustic instruments and their unique timbres to breathe. ★★★★★ DO



### SIGUR RÓS ( )

Fatcat

**Music:** Perhaps it is no coincidence that so much beautiful music currently emanates from Iceland's youthful music scene; it is after all a land of organic, frozen beauty. Equally bleak and graceful is the music of Sigur Rós, this latest opus an elegiac work that glides on a bed of glacial chords and controlled distortion. Officially it has no name, though it's generally known as *()* – add your own title, goes the story, and paint your own picture to these rarefied post-rock atmospheres. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This disc is recommended for the beauty of its music, not its sound quality, yet the distant and unfussy production style succeeds in enhancing its fragile, free-floating ambience. ★★★★★ TB



# Arcam DV88 Plus DVD player **£1,000**

The latest version of Arcam's DiVA DVD player is the first to boast PAL progressive scan



It would be a mistake to dismiss Arcam's DV88 as the 'grey man' of home cinema. In its Plus guise, this renowned DVD player has a technological edge. Progressive scan is the buzzword, if one of limited value to UK enthusiasts – all current machines have been permitted to act only on Region 1 NTSC software. But now Macrovision, which polices the video output standards, has given Arcam the green light to offer progressive PAL.

Visually, there's little to distinguish this model, save for a discrete 'Motion Adaptive Progressive Scan' logo stamped on its matt fascia and an RC5 remote 3.5mm jack at

the back. This is very high quality, single-minded engineering with little fanfare.

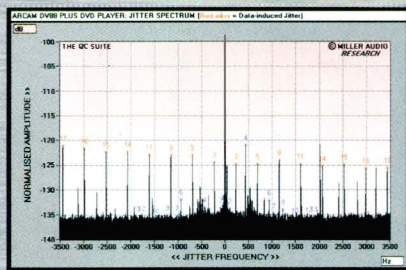
Naturally, as with progressive NTSC video outputs, the benefits of progressive PAL are only realised on very up-to-date systems. DLP and DILA projectors are particularly suitable because the image isn't 'scanned' but mapped across a matrix of pixels that are individually addressed. We've covered the differences between conventional interlaced and progressive video signals in the *Digitalia* column (p73). For now it's enough to appreciate that the £1,000 DV88 Plus is singularly future-proofed against your next upgrade, be it plasma screen or projector.

## KEY FEATURES

Like its predecessor, the DV88 Plus does not include a 5.1 channel decoder, but offers a Dolby two-channel downmix from its analogue outputs. The optical and coaxial digital outputs may be configured for 48kHz or 96kHz operation, depending on DVD type, while in 'bitstream' mode it will support Dolby, DTS and MPEG multichannel streams. Used as a digital transport, the DV88 is ideally partnered with Arcam's AV8 processor, which supports all formats except DTS 24/96 up to 7.1 channels.

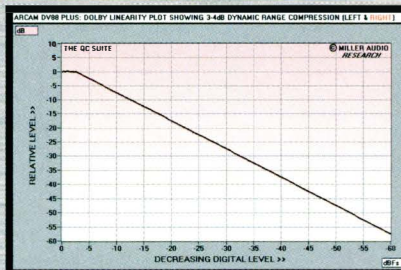
Furthermore, while the DV88 Plus is not currently compatible with DVD-Audio or single-layer SACD discs, its transport will detect and play the CD layer of hybrid SACDs. Arcam's onscreen set-up remains simple, though the video page (see pic, below right) has been expanded to include the progressive option which is output via the player's three-phono component and SCART terminals. S-Video and composite video outputs are defeated if progressive is selected, but the player does support both component and RGB video outputs types,

### AUDIO TEST: JITTER



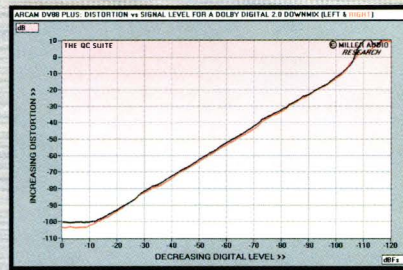
Jitter, highlighted here by pairs of red markers, amounts to a mere 118psec of data-induced distortions. This is the lowest level ever recorded for a DVD or CD player.

### AUDIO TEST: DOLBY LINEARITY PLOT



Arcam's fixed compression mode is clearly revealed in this Dolby linearity plot at the top 3-4dB of its dynamic range.

### AUDIO TEST: DISTORTION VS LEVEL



Distortion remains below 0.001% over the top 10dB of its dynamic range. As expected, distortion then increases as the digital signal level increases.



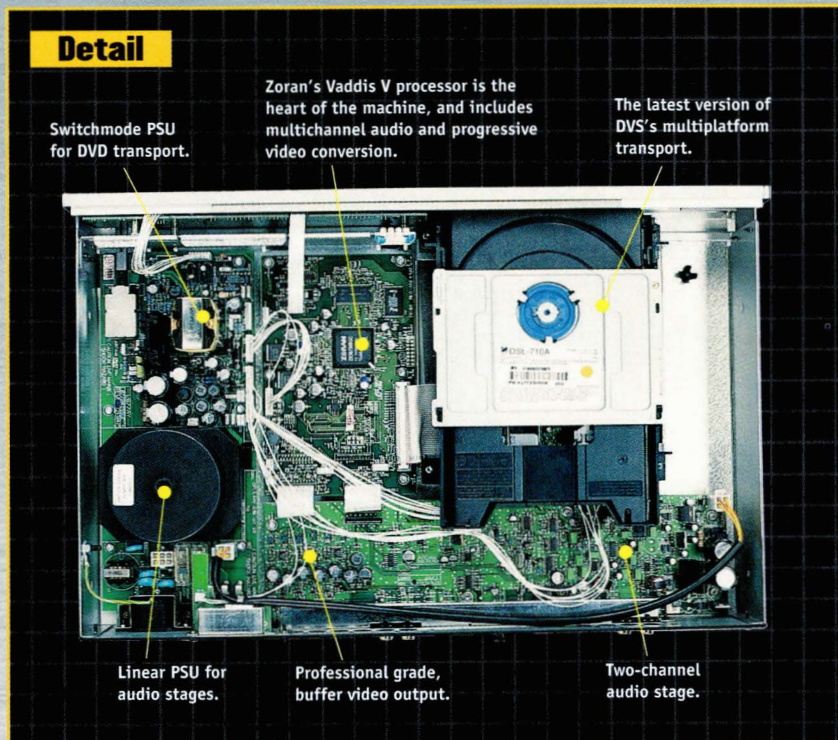
the latter deriving its fourth (sync) connection from the composite terminal.

The improved display system now offers onscreen navigation for MP3 playback, while regular users of the original DV88 will be delighted by the new splash screen (see screenshot). The old splash deliberately faded to black at the screen edges, which had some users thinking that there was something up with their TV or projector.

**TECHNOLOGY**

Although its appearance and remote control are broadly unchanged, there's been plenty of activity inside. The player is fitted with a new DVD mechanism from the same source as before, which provides compatibility with DVD+/-R and +/-RW discs, plus MP3-encoded CD-R and CD-RW software.

The audio board is improved too, with a separate linear (rather than switchmode) power supply, a master clock that's isolated from the video MPEG clock, and a pair of new WM8740 DACs capable of running at a notional 24-bit/192kHz. As these DACs each carry two channels, they're configured



**SCREEN TEST: PROGRESSIVE SCAN**



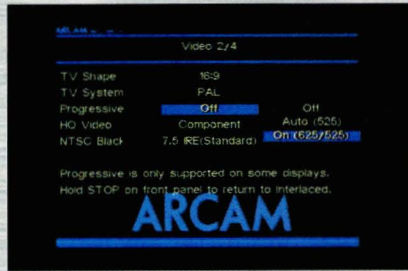
Progressive scan brings a film-like smoothness to fine but quickly moving details, like the bullet cases tumbling from the helicopter in *The Matrix*.

**SCREEN TEST: IMAGE BLENDING**

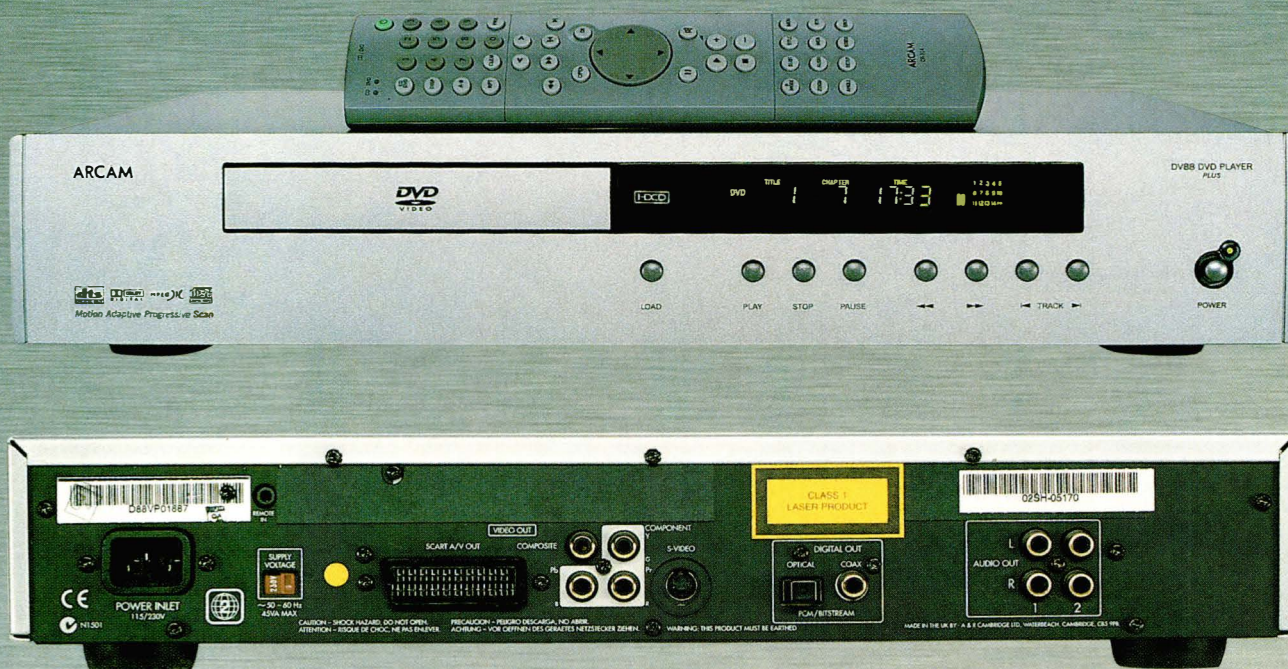


Arcam's player employs the minimum extra 'sharpness' so scenes already loaded with 'edge enhancement' still exhibit smooth contrasts and colourful, engaging detail.

**ONSCREEN MENU SYSTEM**



Page two of four in Arcam's menu system covers video settings, now including progressive scan. It's a simple system, but effective enough.



- in a dual-differential mode to gain 3dB extra S/N over the WM8716 chips used in the original DV88 while reducing low-level distortion and improving low-level linearity.

DVD will never require more than 24-bit/96kHz, but 24-bit/192kHz performance facilitates the DVD-Audio upgrade Arcam has planned for both the DV88 and DV27 later this year. It's the migration to Zoran's Vaddis V MPEG2 decoder that lets Arcam offer a progressive video output from the DV88 chassis. Previously, this was achieved via a Silicon Images solution provided as an add-on upgrade to the DV88. The current DV88 uses no less than six ten-bit/54MHz video DACs and broadcast specification video op-amps, but the Silicon Images chip still has the edge in picture performance over the Zoran, which is why the former is retained in Arcam's top FMJ DV27 model.

The planned evolution of the DV88 chassis includes compatibility with Kodak Picture CDs. Software will be made available on CD-R discs that the player reads to update its Flash memory chip directly. This way, the DV88 Plus may be 'upgraded' without a factory visit.

## PERFORMANCE

Arcam's engineering team has developed apace over the past few years, a fact which is reflected in its launch of very advanced audio/video products including the DV27 DVD player and fabulous AV8 processor. In this period, Arcam's house 'sound' has also witnessed an evolution, or at least a shift in perspective. These products, the P7 power amp and A85 integrated amp also offer a warmer and richer overview of the music than earlier products.

***"The deep saturation of reds and blues is immediately impressive, followed by a more gradual appreciation of how slickly the most complex images are dealt with."***

The revised DV88 Plus falls into line with its companions in providing a very detailed but gloriously warm and attractive sound. Large orchestral works can lack the massive acoustic possible from a multichannel DVD-Audio player, but the depth of its stereo presentation remains mightily impressive. There's a tangible, grumbling weight to the sound of timpani and low wind instruments that brings gravitas, impetus and scale to a performance. We were less convinced of its ability to grasp the energy of rock tracks like Ryan Adams' *New York, New York*. There's power and weight behind the music and plenty of edgy string and percussive detail, but not quite the transparent clarity that's possible from more incisive players.

That's not to say that the DV88 Plus is excessively rose-tinted; however, it does lend less emphasis to airy high treble detail than to the harder-hitting mid-treble impact of guitars, sax and brassy percussion. We wouldn't want to forego the DV88's earthy weight, but a little extra spontaneity and flighty top-end detail wouldn't go amiss. Now, having said this, if you feed the DV88 Plus a bluesy ballad like Maria Muldaur's *Get Up, Get Ready*, the atmosphere that's generated is difficult to dismiss – as is the deeply extended bass line, which will test the mettle of many a loudspeaker.

Its video quality is far more neutral and without any correction at source for colour temperature, gamma or sharpness. Replayed

through Marantz's impressive VP12S2 DLP projector, which will accept video inputs to 1080i/720p, it's the deep saturation of reds and blues that's immediately impressive. This is followed by a more gradual appreciation of just how slickly the most rapidly changing and complex images are dealt with. This is partly the domain of the projector with its on-board scaling and exceptionally versatile video digital signal processor (DSP), but the DV88 Plus never let the side down as the source of these images.

Diagonal edges like rooftops, particularly when set against a bright sky, typically have a serrated appearance with interlaced video. 'Jaggies' are smoothed out in a progressive image, which delivers finer detail in a more realistic fashion. That can have drawbacks, however, as the Pod Race from *Phantom Menace*, despite looking fabulously colourful and energetic, is clearly 'dissected' into its component layers. You might not 'see the strings', but DVD video mastering is sorely tested by players of this quality.

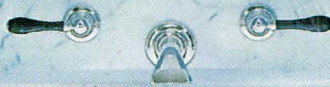
## VERDICT

By tickling-up both its audio and video DVD technology, Arcam has extended the lifetime of an existing and highly favoured player. DVD-Audio must wait a little longer, but for its video quality alone, the DV88 Plus represents a benchmark at £1,000. ☺

☎ Arcam 01223 203200

🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

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REVIEWS – Jason Kennedy

# CD PLAYERS

*If CDs are important to you, a dedicated player will wring out their best. We test the latest at hi-fi's 'affordable high end' and find they're better than ever*

## ON TEST



CLASSÉ CDP-10  
£1,599



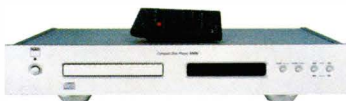
CYRUS CD7Q  
£1,150



EXPOSURE XXII  
£1,175



MERIDIAN 507  
£1,195



NAD S500i  
£1,200



VAN MEDEVOORT CD230  
£900

The home entertainment world has already started to refer to CD as a legacy medium, inferring that it is a thing of the past. But you try finding anything like the vast range of material available on CD on any other format and you'll realise that it remains the music lover's primary source. SACD and DVD-Audio may potentially offer better sound, but that only goes so far – if your preferred music isn't available on the medium it's as useful as the proverbial chocolate teapot.

What's more, even though any old disc player will spin your CDs, if sound quality is the priority then you will always get value out of a dedicated machine. Here we've gathered half a dozen new players from the classier end of the market – not 'arm and a leg' stuff, just beautifully made machines with the latest digital technology ticking over inside.

If you've been wondering whether this technology has really progressed in recent times, you'll be pleasantly surprised. The circa-£1,000 player is a spectacular beast compared with the average disc-spinner.

The higher resolution mediums mentioned above have pushed digital technology's limits way beyond that required for CD, but in the process they have given CD player designers better parts to use. The high-bit DACs found in several of these players are merely ticking over at the sort of data rates coming off compact discs, and

this overcapacity means that the system will never be stressed.

This is the price point at which the designer brands compete head-on with the flagship products from bigger names. NAD takes on Classé – and looking at the casework, there's not a lot to choose between them, but put them in a system and it's another story. They're both great players but each has its own character and will give you a subtly different rendering of the music on a disc. And while these differences can initially seem insubstantial, further listening reveals significant traits. So even though all these players are very good, the truly great ones shine through and have the potential to revitalise your entire disc collection. ☺

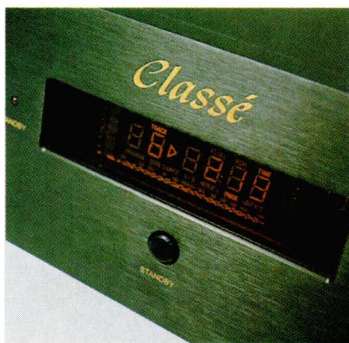
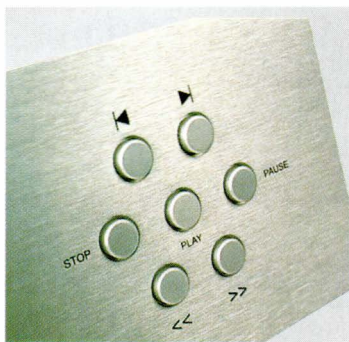
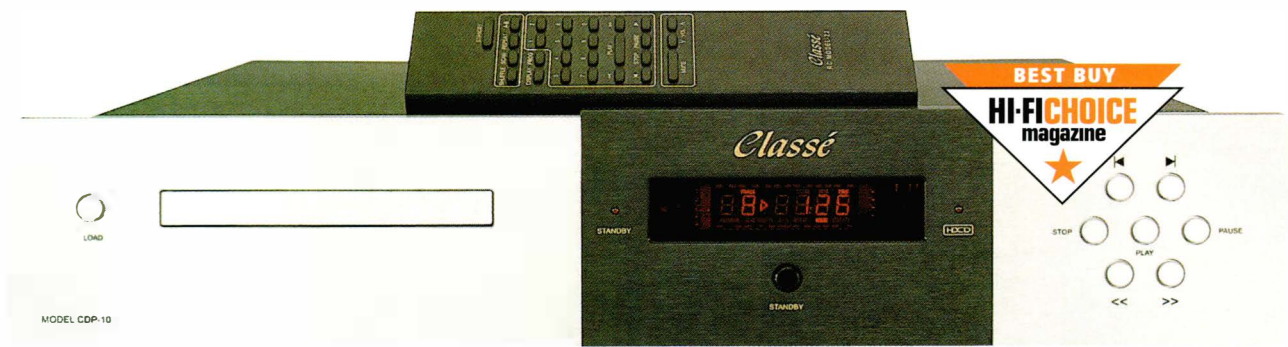
## EQUIPMENT USED

Sony SCD-XA555ES SACD player  
Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player  
Bryston BP25 preamplifier  
ATC SCM50A active loudspeakers  
Townshend Seismic stands and supports  
Townshend and Living Voice cables

## DISCS USED

Tori Amos *Under The Pink*  
Anouar Brahem *Thimar*  
Eminem *The Marshall Mathers LP*  
Missy Elliott *Under Construction*  
Guadeamus *Sacred Feast*  
Mark Levinson *Recordings At Red Rose Music*  
EST *Strange Place For Snow*  
Keith Jarrett *Paris Concert*





£1,599 ☎ 01903 750750 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

# CLASSÉ CDP-10

Revealing, heavyweight player excels in all areas – a bargain at the price

**C**lassé is a Canadian variant on the Krell/Mark Levinson theme in that it produces high-mass, high-ticket-price audio electronics. It may not produce as wide a range as those brands but it certainly has the same aspirations. Classé started out in 1980 and builds a comprehensive range of stereo and multichannel components in Quebec. The brand is distributed in the UK by loudspeaker specialist B&W whose products grace its literature.

The Classé CDP-10 is one of its entry-level components alongside a matching integrated, a preamp and two power amps. It inhabits a full-size chassis with a 19-inch fascia that wouldn't fit into our 17-inch Townshend rack, so it had to displace the preamp from the top shelf – perhaps they have more space in Quebec.

Inside the box you will find a Philips transport mechanism, a low-jitter clock and PCM1738 Burr-Brown D/A converters running at 24-bit/192kHz, a differential stereo version being used for each channel. Filtering is provided by second-order Bessel devices chosen for their gentle roll-off characteristics. Power is smoothed by 11 stages of regulation with critical parts benefiting from cascaded regulators for maximum 'inky blackness'.

Despite its bulk, this is a most elegant player, the contrasting black and silver anodised face and the hexagonal array of control buttons make a pleasing change from the norm. You have to pay a bit more for it of course, but given the manufacturing origin and the quality of metalwork it is an impressive bit of casework for the money.

The value for money is not let down where it really counts either – this is a superb CD player with a midrange to die for. It reveals this whatever you put



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

Very natural, yet still capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner. If you want to spend more time listening to your CDs, this is the way to do it.

CHECKLIST	
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE	✗
RS232 INTERFACE	✗
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT	✓

on, but the Red Rose disc is better made than most and the voices and instruments upon it have layers that keep on coming. For instance, the gongs resonate for ages longer than most players reveal, while the double bass has more weight and presence than one usually hears.

On Anouar Brahem's *Thimar* the Classé revealed another string to its impressive bow in the way that it allows you to follow each instrument in the midst of a busy passage of music. None of the competition here managed this degree of coherence and engagement coupled with such strong focus on the different elements of the music. The voices on Eminem offered up new layers of character – the more subtle they are the more the Classé seems to dig out of the mix. Its skill with low-level detail means that you hear the whole voice rather than its fundamental elements. It's almost uncanny.

EST came across as relaxed yet precise, the timing spot-on and the performance highly convincing. Again it's the notes which reside lower down in the mix that the player brings to light, which means that every disc you're 'familiar' with becomes a voyage of sonic discovery.

Micro dynamics are well-handled, too – the weight with which Tori Amos plays each key in the quiet opening of *Pretty Good Year* varies considerably. The raucous outburst in the middle of the track remains strangely calm and coherent, but this is probably because the player isn't phased by the sudden onslaught of energy.

The CDP-10 is a superb CD player, the sort that usually costs twice this price. You'll be hard pressed to find a more fluid and engaging sound from CDs without really battering the plastic. 🎧

**CONTROLS**  
The attractive front panel has the 'drawer open' button in a very sensible location – by the drawer. The display is the usual track and time variety, but the chunky aluminium remote brings a real touch of class(é) and can be used to control the volume of matching amps.

**CONNECTIONS**  
The lack of RS232 connection is offset by infrared in- and outputs and a 12-volt trigger socket. Analogue output can be had via balanced XLR or RCA phono sockets, while digital streams come via the usual RCA phono route.





£1,150 ☎ 01480 435577 🌐 www.cyrus.co.uk

## CYRUS CD7Q

*A neat and musical player – but the competition is hotting up...*

The first and last time we reviewed this most ambitious of the Cyrus CD players (HFC 226), it was the most expensive electronic component to be found in the brand's trademark half-width casing. The subsequent blossoming of the Cyrus range has meant that it's been joined by the range-topping DVD8 DVD player (see p18) and a processor/preamp called the AV8 (see p42). What with the '8' effect having spread into the integrated amp range as well, are the days numbered for the 7Q? Cyrus says not – not in the immediate future at any rate.

Under the cast alloy casework the CD7Q employs Burr-Brown PCM1728 DACs which run at 24-bit/96kHz in full differential balanced mode. The latter reduces distortion in general and noise in particular to give the filters and analogue stage that follows an easier time and, as one might hope, a better sonic result.

Being a Cyrus, the option exists to upgrade the player at a later stage, or immediately if funds permit, with a PSX-R external power supply which supplies more scrupulously regulated DC to the audio circuitry.

Within the system, the Cyrus puts in a strong if not spectacular performance that will keep you listening, even if it doesn't quite match up to the latest and best of its competitors in this impressive group. The CD7Q's strengths include timing, which it displays to good effect with beat-driven tracks like

***“Absolute transparency isn't worth much if the sound lacks coherence, and the Cyrus is certainly not remiss in this department.”***

### VERDICT

#### SOUND



#### FEATURES



#### BUILD



#### VALUE



Warm and musical player which is very difficult to criticise yet finds itself playing catch-up with the latest offerings from a particularly competitive market sector.

### CHECKLIST

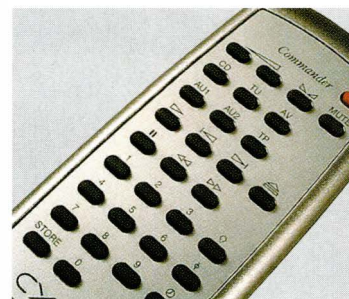
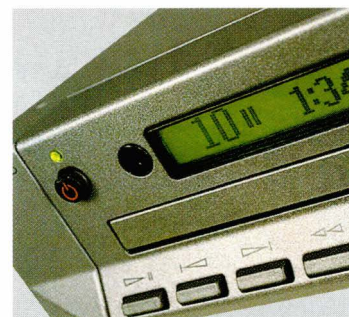
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE	✓
RS232 INTERFACE	✗
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT	✗

the Missy Elliott, which bounces along in nimble – although relatively bass-light – fashion. Upper bass levels seem a mite warm while lower bass, although well extended, is not as rock-like as it can be, tracks such as Guadearmus' *Sacred Feast* revealing a low frequency 'floor' that tells you something about the construction and scale of the recording venue.

Vocals are better served. Tori Amos sounds warm, breathy and tidy, while Missy Elliott and her cohorts make more sense than usual – albeit without revealing the full plot of the convoluted lyrics. The choir on Guadearmus has a three-dimensionality and warmth that is particularly alluring, but next to the finest at the price sounds a shade coloured. The NAD, for instance, has better bass which seems to give the sound greater integrity. The Cyrus has a slightly fuller than neutral midrange which will suit many loudspeakers, and is always smooth.

The acoustic material on Thimar works well for instance, the instruments sounding rich and vibrant, swelling around the speakers and drawing the listener into the music. Timing is key here – absolute transparency isn't worth much if the sound lacks coherence, and the Cyrus is certainly not remiss in this department.

All-in-all, we're left with what might appear a controversial result. The CD7Q was the outstanding product the last time it featured in an HFC group test, and subsequently won a *Product of the Year* gong in our recent Awards. Good players don't become bad overnight, and the Cyrus remains a strong contender, but there are newer players group tested here for the first time that perform even better, pushing the Cyrus a little down the rankings. This really is a remarkably strong group... 📍



### CONTROLS

The compact front panel means that there's a slight learning curve to remember which button is where and the supplemented 'play' graphic is initially unclear. The display is an unusually backlit LCD which reads better by night than day but does offer a broader vocabulary to the player. The remote would be easier to use if it had a few graphics, but is fine as system types go.

### CONNECTIONS

The back panel has a spare pair of single-ended outputs which helps to make up for its paucity of multiroom aids, and the compact size makes it very living room-friendly. Cyrustink sockets aid integration.



#### CONTROLS

One of the more plainly-equipped machines in the group, the buttons on the Exposure are straightforward and backed up by a system remote which is attractive but hard to read and which would benefit from a few symbols. The display is a regular track and time teller.

#### CONNECTIONS

The BNC digital out is good in theory but hard to make the most of due to the lack of matching inputs on DACs and recorders. Analogue and digital connection is also made by the standard RCA phono route.

£1,175 ☎ 01273 423877 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

## EXPOSURE XXII

*An old name is back with an entertaining new box of tricks*

**X**II is a name that will be familiar to those who knew Exposure in its former incarnation, an era when silver front panels were considered a bit nancy. Back then it was an amplifier, and given the way the brand is using the same name for different components it could well be one again. But for now, Exposure's XXII is a range-topping CD player.

This is the second player to appear from the new Exposure brand. The entry-level 2010, at around half this price, looks ostensibly similar, but on closer inspection reveals a variety of styling variations that are significant enough to mark it out.

The differences under the bonnet are considerably greater, however. For a start, it has two multibit DACs feeding separate I/V converters (current to voltage) in place of the 2010's single delta/sigma device. The combined filter and output stage is based entirely on discrete transistors instead of ICs (integrated circuits).

The latter is an unusual feature in these days of the all-encompassing IC player-on-a-chip systems which offer an inexpensive and reliable solution, but one with which there is no way of tailoring the sound.

Building up a discrete circuit to do the job gives you tremendous potential for customising the player. There is also a view that discrete circuits sound better than integrated ones, but since

***"This player made a positive impression from the start with its appealing sense of poise and clarity."***

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

A more natural sounding player than usual, the XXII has something of the vacuum tube about its sound which does big favours for voices and acoustic instruments and makes for very engaging listening.

CHECKLIST	
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE	X
RS232 INTERFACE	X
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT	X

all other factors are rarely identical that's a difficult one to assess.

The XXII comes with a system remote that relies entirely on words rather than symbols, and finding the relevant keys is a little less straightforward as a result. But once you remember that they reside at the bottom of the array, things become easier.

In our system this player made a positive impression from the start with its full-scale rendition of Tori Amos, the emphasis being on her voice, which sounds more breathy than usual and suggests a hint of mid-forwardness to the balance. EST's subtle groove revealed the player's appealing sense of poise – it doesn't rush anything but lets the beat roll out effortlessly. It also picks up on the atmosphere of the piece well, delving into the nimble playing but laid-back feel with clarity. There is a sense of wanting to push up the volume however, suggesting that dynamics might be a little restrained.

The choral piece *Sacred Feast* also sounds very natural and full in scale and depth of image, albeit a little soft at high frequencies, yet conceding little (if anything) in venue sound to the best in this test.

The Exposure could be more transparent and can sound soft, but this may have a positive side in the sense of naturalness you get from discs, the way instruments are more tonally convincing than usual. You can certainly hear what's going on in the midband with little difficulty – for instance, it reveals what Missy Elliott and her cohorts are on about with ease, something that few of the alternatives manage. It's a distinctive-sounding newcomer that many will love, and hence deserves Recommendation. 🗣️



£1,195 ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridianaudio.com

## MERIDIAN 507

*Respected UK brand's winning player is engaging and precise*

The digital electronics wizard at Meridian – his friends call him Bob – has been pushing the state of the CD player art for longer than most. Some may remember the Meridian MCD, which rapidly followed the arrival of the format in 1984. The 507 therefore has plenty of 'form', even if it is the most affordable player in the brand's extensive range.

The 507 is based, not surprisingly, on the 508 at about twice the price, but looks and functions in much the same way. The latter, however, offers a degree of customisation that the newcomer eschews in favour of more competitive pricing. It has everything you might want of a player including a substantial system remote, but doesn't go in for the Mercedes-style options list available on more expensive models.

What you get is a CD-ROM transport mechanism driving a double buffering technique that's designed to minimise jitter. This is combined with a DVD-Audio-style 24-bit/192kHz digital to analogue convertor. You can't play DVDs of any form, of course, but the extra capacity in the DAC should ensure that you get the very best out of the 16-bit/44.1kHz signal on a CD. The stereo output is produced by a direct coupled (DC) output stage, while the digital feed is precision re-clocked before it's allowed out into the world of recorders and outboard DACs.

Styling is distinctly Meridian, but we're happy to say that operation is no longer as idiosyncratic as it used to be. Earlier Meridians had an operating style that was something of a challenge to those used to 'normal' CD players.

The remote is festooned with buttons because it will drive anything Meridian, from DVD players to processors. The

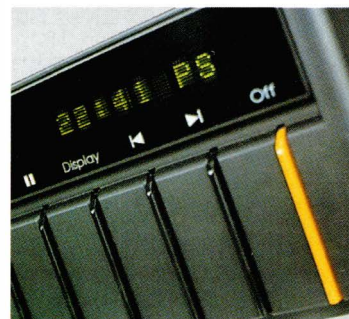
<b>VERDICT</b>
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★
Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer. You can find more exciting players but few which sound quite as plausible and engaging.
<b>CHECKLIST</b>
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE ✓
RS232 INTERFACE ✓
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK ✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT ✓

only omission is an 'open' button, but that's hardly a disastrous oversight.

In operation, the 507 produces a precise sound. It's not a hard or bright sound, which 'precise' can sometimes indicate; it's more of a measured and exacting reproduction of notes that suggests that there is very little blurring of the signal going on. This makes it seem more sensitive to the material being played than usual with variations in recordings proving highly distinctive.

The player is particularly acute at a micro dynamic level, the variations in level and tone of different notes is very clear. Imaging is likewise precise with the placement of instruments and voices varying considerably – Tori Amos stands out a mile from the speakers, while Eminem seems relatively constrained. The atmosphere and tension produced by both performers is fully intact, however – it's just the differences in production and mastering that are emphasised.

With discs like the Keith Jarrett there seems to be some damping of the hall ambience, but the performance is no less engaging for it – it's positively gripping, which ain't bad for a familiar piece. On the EST the interplay between double bass and drums is handled beautifully, the precision of timing allowed to the instruments enhancing the performance and producing energy that on other occasions seemed a little reluctant. In some respects this could be a more exuberant player, but it is one of the most convincing machines in this group in terms of fidelity to the material, and that, of course, is the name of the game. Fear not: this transparency lets the passion and vitality of the music through as well as the low bass – this is no cold calculator. Ⓛ

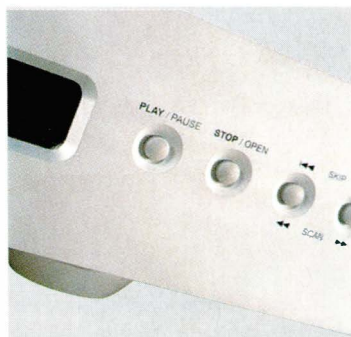


### CONTROLS

The front panel offers a basic but logical selection of controls and is backed up by the comprehensively-equipped system remote. Operation is like the sound, precise and considered, although track-changing is slower than usual because of the digital buffer. The dot matrix display can be defeated and has alternative ways of showing what's going on.

### CONNECTIONS

Multiroom installation is aided by an RS232 communications port and system integration is possible with Meridian amplifiers via the link sockets. RCA phons provide analogue and digital outputs.



#### CONTROLS

Front panel controls could be better labelled but can be easily remembered. The blue display is very fetching but the remote looks and handles like it was made for NAD's budget players and lets the side down rather. But at least it means you get a lovely box at a nice price.

#### CONNECTIONS

While there's no RS232 port, custom install operation can be achieved with codes found on the company's website and the NAD system link sockets. RCA phono outputs are backed up by balanced XLRs.

£1,200 ☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.lenbrook.co.uk

## NAD S500i

*A splendidly engineered player to add dynamics to your CD collection*

**N**AD's latest Silver Series CD player replaces a three-year-old model that kicked off the brand's first foray into the affordable edge of the so-called high-end market. The casework is as fine as you'll find on players costing two or three times as much, and NAD could have done far worse than adopt Skoda's "it can't really be one of *those*, can it?" marketing technique when it launched the range.

The differences between the S500i and its S500 predecessor don't appear to be all that dramatic, and mainly concern the digital-to-analogue conversion and filtering stages – the elements of any disc player which are likely to be changed by the chip makers as technology changes over time.

The S500i uses a 24-bit Crystal DAC and combines it with a 384x oversampling filter before handing the signal over to the class A output stage. The latter drives both RCA phono single-ended outputs and genuine balanced XLR connectors which produce a substantial 4.4 volt output, so longer than average interconnects should not be a problem.

The digital output is available on an AES/EBU standard balanced socket or a coaxial BNC socket, which means that the output impedance always adheres to the preferred 75-ohm impedance for electrical digital transmission.

The only drawback with these admirable interfaces is that few digital recorders and only the dearer DACs have socketry to match, and some form of adapter will need to be used. The adapter will undermine the impedance match, but in most situations this is not a particularly serious problem.

Put the S500i into a decent system and its performance is as slick as its

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

A beautifully built machine, the S500i will fit into a lot of systems with ease and produce a rich and entertaining sound, treading the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb.

CHECKLIST	
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE	✓
RS232 INTERFACE	✗
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT	✓

looks – particularly in the timing department, where it is guaranteed to get even the most beat-weary boot tapping away within a few bars of the right piece of music.

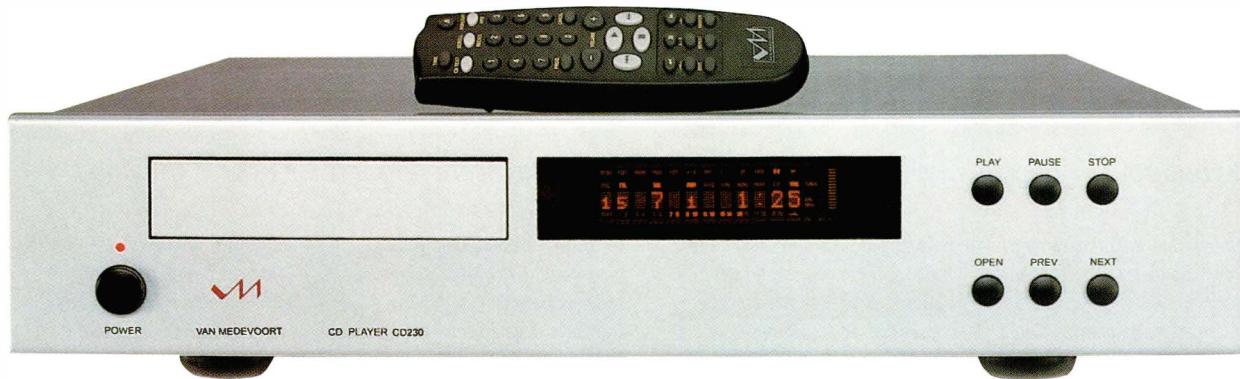
Only a few players produce a more precise and analytical view of the material, but fewer still pick up the energy and vitality of the music as well. It likes a groove too, which should make it friends in more than a few places these days.

While it isn't by any means the most transparent player in the group, the S500i doesn't do badly, and in fact extracts more ambient information, such as reverb, than most. It has a warm and expansive sound that works well with tracks like Tori Amos' *God*, throwing up the voice X-large style and backing it up with wall-to-wall energy from the band.

The underpinning that is produced by dint of serious bass grunt clearly helps whatever you play – the double bass on EST and the highly developed drum sounds on Missy Elliott all benefit, for example. The sense of space with acoustic recordings also improves – good bass does an awful lot for hall ambience and scale.

The NAD is a generous and involving player which makes up for what it concedes in precision with a good sense of enthusiasm and dynamics. This is increased when you use the balanced outputs, which add solidity to the bass and reveal a greater level of detail in the mid and top range, yet deliver a more relaxed sound at the same time.

This may be affected by the way in which the amp deals with standard SE and balanced connections, so the difference may not always be so marked. But if you can try it, do.



£900 ☎ 01482 212213 🌐 www.vanmedevoort.com

## VAN MEDEVOORT CD230

*The new Dutch contender almost measures up to the competition*

**V**an Meadevoort (vM) is a new brand to these shores but in relative terms it has not come very far. It hails from the Audioart company in Maarsse, Holland, which has been in operation since the late eighties. The company makes the full gamut of audio components in both two- and multichannel form, though at present the brand's UK distributor is concentrating on the electronics. Trying to sell obscure foreign loudspeakers in the UK brings new meaning to the phrase "coals to Newcastle"!

The CD230 is currently the only vM CD player, but there is a DVD player, a DAC and an SACD player in the pipeline. It's a larger than average but otherwise standard box with the traditional thick fascia and steel carcass covering the operational gubbins. Apparently these include a suspended transport mechanism, with rubber mountings being used to achieve a degree of isolation from energy that gets into the chassis.

Not a great deal is given away about the workings of the vM save that it uses a one-bit DAC and, judging from the badged remote control, a Philips-sourced logic board, if not transport as well. I guess the brand's Dutch origins would make this almost inevitable. The choice of DAC seems a little odd – there was a time when so called bitstream DACs were all the rage but nowadays you're more likely to find multibit delta/sigma converters in high-end players.

Connection options are pretty standard for this price point, with single-ended and balanced XLR sockets to choose from. The spec sheet suggests that the XLR connections will give the best results.

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

Heavyweight player with a tight, slightly dry sound that has a decent enough sense of musical perspective but not quite as much dynamic energy and colour as the group competition.

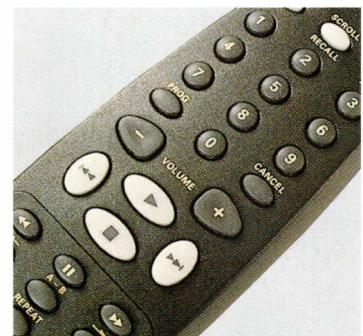
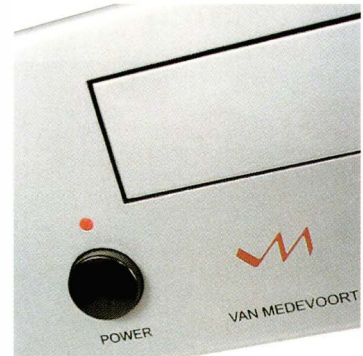
CHECKLIST	
SYSTEMLINK INTERFACE	✗
RS232 INTERFACE	✗
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
BALANCED ANALOGUE OUTPUT	✓

However as it's necessary to keep the playing field as even as possible from a reviewing perspective listening, as with all the other players in this group, was done via the single-ended socketry. Under these circumstances the CD230 turned in a decent if not totally inspiring performance. Bass is a strong point in terms of depth and power which underpins everything it plays. The Tori Amos track *Pretty Good Year* is strong on presence, but without decent bass weight the heavily projected voice can seem a bit out of touch – with the vM there is plenty of presence and depth to proceedings. The better players in the group paint a fuller and richer picture, however, and there is a slightly dry aspect to the vM sound.

Timing is good if not striking, the Missy Elliott track lacking some of its verve and snap albeit rendering the voice of guest MC Ludacris with a bit more clarity than usual. It's a tight and deep sound that suits the piano of EST, making other players seem slightly blowsy, and staying with the groove to the last beat.

A slight hardness can rear its head with high notes, as exemplified on the Guadeamus track, but it's rare to notice such shortcomings. On the whole this is a coherent and tight player which, while not pushing the boundaries of CD player sound, puts in a plausible performance with all sorts of material.

In a less impressive group this model might have fared better, but there's nothing like peer competition to sort out the merely good from the great and against this line-up the vM has its work cut out. The differences aren't gross, and with a lot of music it's an impressive machine, but at this price you can aim a little higher. 🟡



### CONTROLS

The remote has a number of irrelevant buttons including volume but is clearly marked and easy to use, not to say handily compact. Front panel controls are less than beautiful but fine to use and read. The display, unusually, gives total track readout.

### CONNECTIONS

RCA-style remote connectors are unusual, even unconventional, but offer a good degree of multiroom potential for the experienced installer. Balanced outputs combine with RCA phons for analogue out.

# CONCLUSIONS

*New budget CD players may be thin on the ground, but the scene around £1,000 is thriving*

**P**hew, what a scorching bunch of CD players! This has been a great review group and a tough one at the same time. On the one hand there wasn't a single duff machine in the selection – all of the players made CDs sound entertaining and musical, which made the listening most enjoyable, even after playing the same tracks several dozen times over.

On the other hand, some tough decisions had to be made about which players had the upper hand and how to express this with a mere five stars! This is one of those tests where it really helps to look


beyond the stars and into the text, because there you should get a better idea of the finer points of these excellent machines.

The overall conclusion is that CD players are just getting better and better. There was a time not so long ago when you would have had to spend two or three times as much to match the best in this bunch. As we suggested in the introduction, it would seem that the higher-powered processors being developed for the new high-resolution formats are benefiting the granddaddy of domestic digital audio. This isn't the only over-spec

factor that has affected things, however: the two best players in this test both use CD-ROM style transport mechanisms that are capable of spinning discs at far higher speeds than those required. This means that at the required speed the motor and associated servos are barely ticking over, which could lead to more precision in their operation.

Whatever the reasons, those of you prepared to spend a grand or more on a source component are spoiled for choice. If you can stretch to it go to the Classé – it may be a pain to type the name, but it's a joy

to listen to. We discovered as much in our *Incoming* review in *HFC* 236, and this showdown with its peers just confirms what a fluid, dynamic and downright classy machine it is – just make sure that you've got the rack space, because it's a wide one.

Following hard on the Classé's heels is the stunning Meridian 507, which at £400 less, is a precise and transparent player that uses a digital reservoir or buffer to eke out the last nuance of the music. These players will revolutionise your music collection – if you don't believe it, get an audition. Now! 

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### AMPS

**ARCAM FMJ A32** £1,150  
Remarkably flexible and well featured, and offers excellent sound quality for the price.

**SUGDEN A21A** £899  
Single-ended, class A transistor design with exquisite resolving power and presence.

**ATC SIA2-150** £2,375  
Starkly revealing powerhouse that could eat most integrated amps for breakfast.

**SPEAKERS**  
**DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 82** £1,460  
Outstanding neutrality, bass extension and power handling from a larger than average vinyl wrap box.

**B&W SIGNATURE 80S** £2,250  
A really beautiful standmount speaker that has staggering transparency and resolution – arguably the best small speaker on the planet.

**PMC TB2** £700  
Standmount that sets a high standard for neutrality and transparency in a compact and elegantly finished cabinet.

## HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ To get the best out of your CD player, place it on a dedicated equipment rack, preferably one that offers genuine mechanical isolation.
- ⊕ Use the best interconnects that you can afford and make sure you follow any indications for signal direction. If there are none, compare them both ways round.
- ⊕ Use a good quality mains cable and place a ferrite clamp around the cable at the player's end.
- ⊕ Leave the player permanently switched on or on standby if that's possible – digital electronics benefit from plenty of warm-up.
- ⊕ Keep your discs clean with an optical cleaning fluid and cloth.
- ⊕ Buy loads of music!

## STAR PERFORMER

### CLASSÉ CDP-10

For outright performance the rosette has to go to the simply gorgeous Classé. Not only does the CDP-10 look like a superb player, it also does a very good job of sounding like one, revealing its high-end heritage from the first musical phrase. It costs a bit more than the competition here but having heard plenty of more expensive players, we can confidently recommend this machine for its subtlety, resolution of fine detail and natural balance.

It manages to sound more transparent while at the same time less mechanical or 'digital' than most, which lets the music flow through it in a manner that is both technically impressive and viscerally engaging.



## CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

MAKE	Classé	Cyrus	Exposure	Meridian	NAD	Van Medevoort
MODEL	CDP-10	CD7Q	XXII	507	S500i	CD230
PRICE	£1,599	£1,150	£1,175	£1,195	£1,200	£900
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Very natural, yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner.	Warm and musical player which, while still highly capable, is now being overtaken by competitors.	A natural sounding player which does particularly big favours for voices and acoustic instruments.	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer.	A beautifully built machine that treats the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb.	Decent sense of musical perspective doesn't quite offset the lack of dynamic energy and colour.

call 0114 2852656 or e mail [info@wilson-benesch.com](mailto:info@wilson-benesch.com) for more information



A photograph of the Wilson Benesch Arcs speaker system. On the left is a large, dark green, textured speaker cabinet with a circular logo that reads "Wilson Benesch Arcs" and "MODEL NO. CO1R410-A CE". Below the logo are four gold-colored terminals. In the center is a tall, silver, cylindrical speaker on a matching stand. To the right is another similar speaker on a stand. In front of the speakers are two stacked silver components: a CD player (ART) and an amplifier (SAM). The background is a solid purple color.

"Perhaps some day, all CD players will be built as well and sound as fantastic as this. An ARTful choice!" Alan Sircom HI-FI CHOICE

"The very best of Wilson Benesch speaker magic in a pint pot: the Arcs are a truly stunning achievement"

WHAT HI\*FI? SOUND & VISION

# Beauhorn<sup>TM</sup>

*The Beauhorn Virtuosos simply manage to make music of all kinds more interesting and involving than conventional speakers.*

*Paul Messenger Hi-Fi+*

*Once you get the location and toe-in right the B2 is very definitely a Beauhorn. It has the same tactile immediacy and directness that its more sophisticated elder brother possesses.*

*Roy Gregory Hi-Fi+*

**get that Beauhorn sensation -  
the feeling that you are there**



REVIEWS – Alvin Gold

# AV AMP SYSTEMS

Some excellent reasons not to keep all your multichannel eggs in one box

## ON TEST



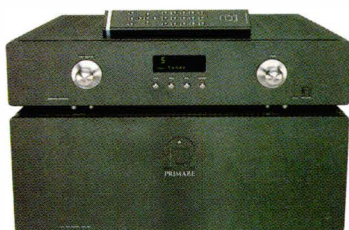
CYRUS AV8 + SMARTPOWER X3  
£2,900



MARANTZ PS-17 + SM-17 X2  
£3,400



NAIM AV2 + NAPV 175 + NAP 150  
£4,175




PRIMARE SP31.7 + A30.5  
£4,200

Check the prices and you'll see we're not talking entry-level here, but we're not at the screaming high end either. These products are designed to appeal to those used to classy high fidelity of the kind they expect from manufacturers with established hi-fi credentials like these.

There are some differences between what we have here and other, more conventional multichannel solutions, and at first sight the comparison doesn't favour the hardware under this month's microscope. On the whole, these models lack inputs and some of the sound processing algorithms and other facilities expected from top-of-the-line one-box home cinema amps, virtually all of which cost less. Even power output is barely competitive on paper, and the range of incidental features, especially DSP modes and the flexibility of the set-up software, trails behind the standards set by the leading dedicated home cinema brands – Pioneer, Denon, Harman/Kardon, Yamaha, Marantz and others.

Which begs the question: why bother? Very simply, you should bother because these are true high fidelity designs. While there may be no such thing as no-compromise, they certainly are very low compromise by home cinema standards. These, and a few like them, are the ones to choose if you want to add multichannel operation to a quality home stereo system. Most do so with an admirable simplicity, and two of the four make no direct provision for video switching, though both of the manufacturers concerned, Naim and Cyrus, are in the process of designing external switchers which will be controlled by the host processor/preamp. The Cyrus even lacks a six-channel input – a potentially serious omission since one of the very obvious reasons why audiophiles might consider

a multichannel system is for high-res multichannel audio discs. Here too though, there is an add-on in the works. One thing that each of the four models do offer is simple operation, not through fancy high-tech set-up algorithms, but simply because they are relatively uncomplicated designs.

Each is open-ended, with different power amplifier options. Some offer more power, some offer bridging and balanced operation (the Primare two-channel A30.2 was tried during the test with good results). Where the processors allow, the extra power amplification can be used to drive 6.1 and 7.1 systems, from Dolby Digital EX and DTS ES sources. Flexibility is very much on the menu here... 

## EQUIPMENT USED

### SOURCE COMPONENTS

Sony DVP-NS900V DVD/SACD player  
Arcam DV88 Plus DVD-Video player  
Marantz DV9200 DVD-A/SACD player

### LOUDSPEAKERS

Stereo – B&W Nautilus 800, Mission m53. Multichannel – B&W Nautilus 800, B&W HTM1, B&W SCM1

### CABLES

Nordost Valhalla speaker cables, interconnects and digilink  
TAG McLaren interconnects and digilink

## DISCS USED

### STEREO CD

Norah Jones *Come Away With Me*  
Allison Krauss *New Favorite*  
Tracy Chapman *Tracy Chapman*  
Respighi *Symphonic Poems*

### SACD MULTICHANNEL

Mahler *Symphony No. 6* Benjamin Zander/Philharmonia

### DVD-AUDIO

Bach *St Matthew Passion* Harnoncourt, Concentus Musicus Wien etc

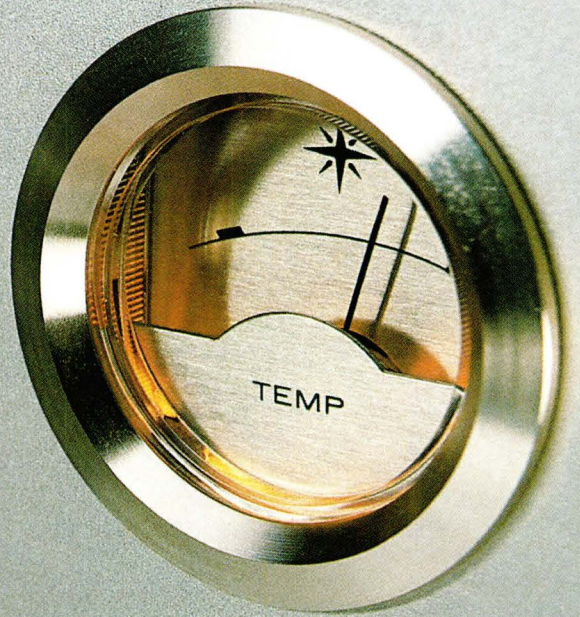
### DVD-VIDEO

*Star Wars II: Attack Of The Clones*  
*Magnolia*  
*Terminator 2*  
Rabih Abou Khalil: *Cactus Of Knowledge*

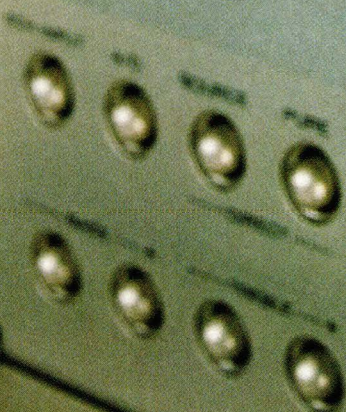


marantz

AV AMPLIFIER PS-17



● TV  
● CD/MD  
● TAPE/  
TUNER  
● CD  
● MP3





£2,900 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com

## CYRUS AV8/SMARTPOWER x3

*Clean and tidy appearance mirrors neat audio performance*

The proposition here is a simple one. There are already plenty of complex and difficult-to-use multichannel solutions that seem aimed primarily at the gadget freak, yet which often fail to satisfy when asked to perform the simple chore of playing a tune. Why not address the problem from the other end, by designing the simplest possible hardware that has legs in a multichannel universe, using elements with a proven track record of playing music in stereo? This is the central proposition for the whole group of course, but the Cyrus solution is a particularly direct and elegant one.

The key component is the £1,100 AV8, an audio processor which doubles as a preamplifier with a range of analogue and digital inputs, and a basic Dolby/DTS decoder – 5.1-channel only, that is, with no ES or EX. Dolby Pro Logic II with the usual range of adjustable parameters, is included, but not DTS Neo:6.

There is no video circuitry, which would certainly have impacted on sound quality, but there is an automatic microphone-driven set-up assisted by a graphic front panel display which measures and sets speaker distances and relative levels in a single, seamless operation. The Smartpower (there are three of them here at a cost of £600 each) is a stereo power amplifier, rated at 60 watts per channel, though it can be switched to mono. This is not the same as bridging, in which form it delivers 105 watts.

Facilities are fairly basic, but sufficient for most purposes. The auto set-up is easy and effective, though the system will respond to additional fine-tuning.

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
Cyrus's magic singing shoeboxes score again, almost seamlessly adapting themselves to the world of home cinema as seen through the sometimes myopic eye of the audiophile.	
CHECKLIST	
INPUTS – ANALOGUE	3
INPUTS – DIGITAL	6
VIDEO SWITCHING	OPT
HEADPHONE SOCKET	X
SET-UP	AUTO
POWER RATING	5x60W

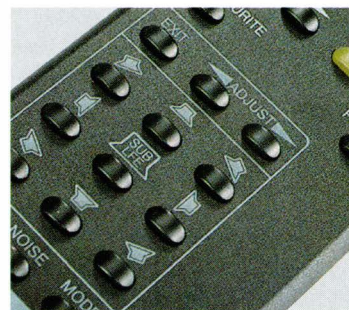
The all-important bass/LFE settings are well handled, with a wide range of crossover frequencies available, and the Cyrus does include a stereo-plus-subwoofer mode which is omitted from some of its rivals.

As it stands, the AV8 doesn't accept multichannel analogue sources (DVD-Audio and SACD), but a combined software/hardware upgrade for the purpose will be available shortly. Surprisingly, it won't involve the loss of any existing inputs. A video switcher is also in development.

As tested, the system consists of four boxes which together take up no more room than a single average-size AV amp. They even co-operate thanks to rear-panel D-bus control links. The tidiness and user-friendly nature of this set-up turns out to be a surprisingly good metaphor for system performance, which is clean, open and vivid, with strong detail and a slightly rounded quality at the frequency extremes that if anything adds to its overall appeal, though it has to be said it sometimes takes the edge off more extreme musical material.

Vocal and small instrumental material however is handled particularly well. It's worth noting that routing video directly to the TV or other display device will itself improve video quality, which is as much at the mercy of extra cable runs, switching and buffer amplifiers as the audio signal chain.

The system is less exciting in multichannel guise. There is enough resolving power in the processing to show the usual superiority of DTS over its Dolby counterpart, but steering sounds more mechanical, less fluid than



### CONTROLS

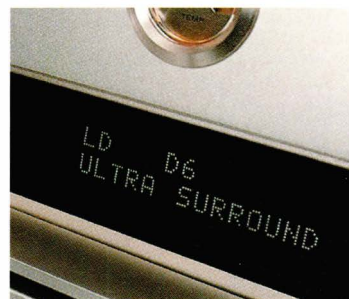
Minimal front panel controls and a basic handset design, but the backlit LCD display panel is a minor masterpiece, easily hand-holding the user through the set-up.

### CONNECTIONS

No multichannel analogue input means there's no DVD-A or SACD until the upgrade is released. But there is a satisfactory number of digital inputs, and the AV7 interacts with Cyrus integrated amps and pre/power amps to provide as many inputs as you can reasonably need.

with others in the group. There's a persistent slight granularity in the high frequency region too. The flexible bass management helped with the test speaker system however, which benefits from a low 60Hz crossover frequency, and the system's balance remains open and vivid, without the build-up of upper bass congestion that often mars the performance of some otherwise very good amp systems.

Set all of this against good stereo sound and relatively low pricing, and the Cyrus combo has real appeal.



£3,400 ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

# MARANTZ PS-17/SM-17 x2

Feature-packed, beautifully built and excellent value for money

**H**ere is a system that is more than a little unusual. Rather than the standard mix of processor and power amps modelled after the classic pre/power amp combination, this system consists of the £2,000 PS-17 processor/power amp and two stereo power maps. A more instructive way to look at the PS-17 is to take it as a PM-17 integrated amp to which a multichannel processor has been added, and which can be used to drive external power amps for the centre and rear speakers. The processor section supports up to 7.1 speakers, and applies a proprietary matrix for surround back speakers, which is not quite the same as Dolby Digital EX or DTS ES, but is as near as makes no real difference. The multichannel input however caters for just 5.1 channels, enough for most purposes, but perhaps a limitation in the long term. The PS-17 is supplied with an attractive learning LCD remote with macro (multistep) programming function.

The SM-17 power amps (two at £700 each) can be used in balanced transformerless (BTL) mode – a fancy name for bridging – which brings power up from 60 to 200 watts/channel. In standard mode, the amp delivers only modest volts, but plenty of current, so challenging systems like the one used for this test are handled with almost contemptuous ease.

The PS-17 has some great toys, in

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND</b>	
★★★★☆	
<b>FEATURES</b>	
★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b>	
★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b>	
★★★★☆	
This is a truly excellent package, which lacks for little in features, and which delivers in spades with films and music alike. It is also remarkably well priced.	
<b>CHECKLIST</b>	
INPUTS – ANALOGUE 10	
INPUTS – DIGITAL 6	
VIDEO SWITCHING 7	
HEADPHONE SOCKET ✓	
SET-UP MANUAL	
POWER RATING 5x60W	

quality if not always in depth. One is Dolby Headphone, for which this is the launch product. Quality touches include current feedback, HDAM discrete output op-amps, WBT speaker terminals, a smattering of audiophile-grade passive components, a low resonance structure and power supplies based on a massive toroidal transformer. Oh, and a warm-up meter.

In home cinema trim, this amp system sounds bold and outgoing. Bass and lower mid are particularly impressive, while treble is somewhat at the mercy of the surround sound processing, which is better in DTS than Dolby mode (now there's a surprise). But image steering is very strong in both cases, and the amp has a solid, even slightly fruity feel, full of musical architecture and scale. It makes a real event out of big scale films, the latest *Star Wars* for example, and music recordings like the Rabih Abou-Khalil (Dolby Digital) disc. There is a warmth and grace to this system, with just an occasional hint of coldness in the mid-treble area.

One particularly excellent toy is Pure Direct, which is designed for optimum sound quality with analogue sources (two channels or six). As usual this bypasses all unnecessary circuit elements, and it also powers down all video processing completely. This is of course the way to the Marantz's best side, and the difference is not subtle. The sound becomes sweeter and purer,

### CONTROLS

Substantially turned out, the front panel offers full access to the flexibility of the design through well appointed controls.

### CONNECTIONS

The only notable absentee from the back of the PS-17 is the paraphernalia that most makers include for system control – notably an RS232 interface, though remote control commands can be wire-linked to other Marantz components. Preamp outputs are available for all channels.

useful resolution increases, and imagery is more solidly three-dimensional. The detail in the sound simply makes more sense, and therefore so does the music.

Dolby Headphone isn't all it's cracked up to be, and is only partially successful in decoupling the soundstage from the headphones, but it is worth trying. Overall, an impressive act with plenty of tricks and equally admirable stereo and surround sound performance. Ⓞ



£4,175 ☎ 01722 332266 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

## NAIM AV2/NAPV 175/NAP 150

*A direct and engaging performer, as you might expect...*

About a year ago, Naim took a decisive step into the world of multichannel audio by introducing its first true surround processor, the £2,200 AV2, and two new power amplifiers, the two-channel NAP 150 (£780) and three-channel NAPV 175 (£1,195). The NAP150 doubles as a hi-fi stereo power amp, and both use the same circuit and power supply configurations.

The designs of the three components are based on the same priorities that have always informed Naim equipment. This is true by definition in the case of the power amps, which were derived directly from the prestigious NAP 500, according to the horse's mouth. And the AV2 shows all the signs: the continued use of DIN sockets alongside a clutch of phonos for the coaxial digital and some of the analogue inputs. The display is one of Naim's minimalist designs, consistent with previous practice. The remote control probably has fewer buttons than any other AV processor, and this is certainly true of the front panel control set, which numbers three. An abbreviated control set naturally means that the control system, which makes extensive use of multi-function buttons, is extremely terse. User friendly? Not in the conventional sense.

But you do get a product that is literally stripped for action, which has all the usual AV facilities, up to and including Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS-ES and DTS Neo:6. There is an eight-channel analogue input, a

### VERDICT

#### SOUND



#### FEATURES



#### BUILD



#### VALUE



This amp system is a natural choice for those attuned to the Naim way, as it seamlessly combines good quality contemporary surround sound (unlike the original AV1) with the classic Naim virtues, the lack of video switching enhancing its audio quality.

### CHECKLIST

INPUTS - ANALOGUE 6/5

INPUTS - DIGITAL 4

VIDEO SWITCHING OPT

HEADPHONE SOCKET X

SET-UP MANUAL

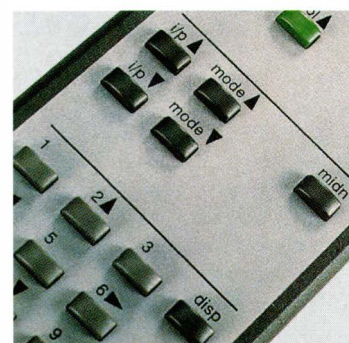
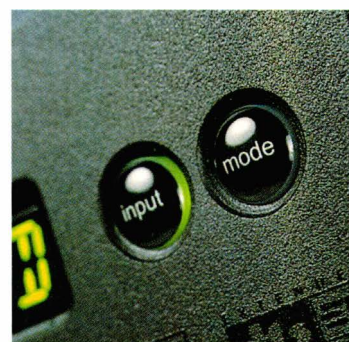
POWER RATING 5x50W

combination of two DIN inputs, but power output and the number of input options, and some of the internal configuration possibilities, are fairly basic – there's no stereo-plus-subwoofer mode for example. The system does not handle video, but a video switcher, the VS1, is under development.

Switching noise from the resistive ladder volume control as it is adjusted detracts slightly from the operational feel, but there are no performance-related consequences, and the only other issue is the use of DINs – but Naim dealers are geared up for this.

Probably the best thing that anyone could say about a Naim AV system is that it sounds in character with a Naim stereo system. This must have been the designer's intention, and this is exactly how it is. So far as can be judged from the very non-Naim-like speaker system used in this test, the system has all the traditional Naim virtues. It is solid and propulsive, dynamics are handled boldly; resolving power is unexaggerated, yet incidental and background detail is present in greater profusion than you might expect from an AV system. Surround sound steering is good, if not state of the art, and as usual DTS sounds better than Dolby Digital, while conversely Dolby PLII sounds better than DTS Neo:6, which is the natural order of things. A slight tendency to excessive sharpness with film soundtracks can be addressed with the Cinema EQ feature.

As usual with Naim, the bass is particularly sure-footed, and yet never



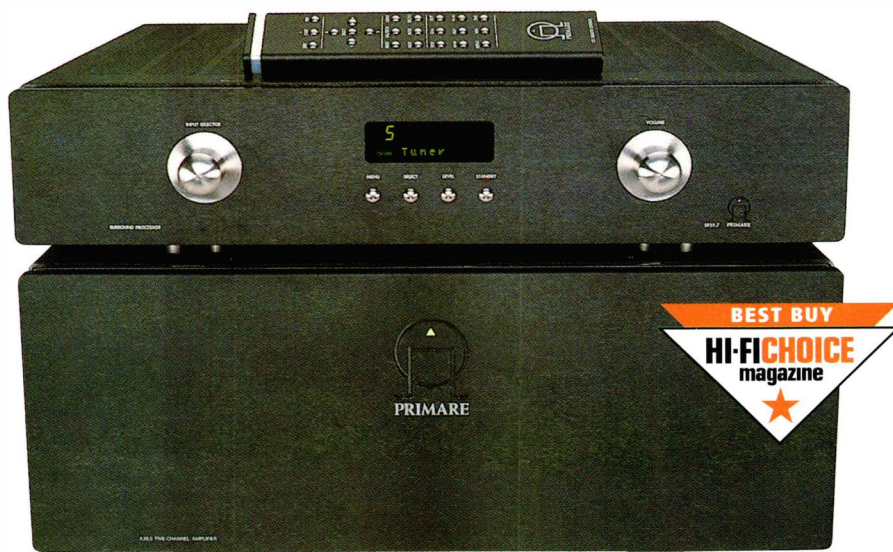
### CONTROLS

Terse in the extreme, for those who learn its hieroglyphics, the front panel display will eventually yield up some useful information about what's going on inside.

### CONNECTIONS

Curious hybrid mixture of DIN and phono sockets is an inevitable part of going Naim. The DIN interface has certain technical advantages over phono, and it also allows a neat rear panel arrangement in the limited space available without sacrificing too much in the way of flexibility.

exaggerated. Of course, a system like this with a subwoofer allows the user to reinvent the overall balance in any way that suits. But this is one amp system where it is possible to achieve a seamless blend of sub to the main speakers. This said, the best sound is obtained from stereo sources in bypass mode, which doesn't use any subwoofer that is plumbed into the system.



£4,200 ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.nu

# PRIMARE SP31.7/A30.5

*A superb all-rounder from a master of understated design*

**U**nderstated as always, the SP31.7 is the latest AV processor from Primare. It caters for the extended Dolby Digital EX and DTS-ES, as well as Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS Neo:6 using software developed in-house which is said to offer advantages over off-the-shelf solutions. One of these is the flexible handling of bass and LFE signals in a range of speaker set-ups, and another concerns the quality of the algorithms that derive the extra surround rear channels from their 5.1-channel source – true ES or EX material is predetermined by what's on the disc. A useful range of custom-install features have been included to cope with motorised screens, room lighting, external controllers and the like.

The remote control is a solid metal design, pleasing on the hand and not overburdened with control buttons. The set-up procedure is straightforward and intuitive on the whole, though there are some confusing elements not properly documented in the book of words. An auto-level set-up regime is available, but no microphone is supplied.

The A30.5 is the matching five-channel amplifier, a single-ended design rated at 120 watts per channel into eight ohms, and 200 watts into four, implying a healthy current yield. Primare also offers a two-channel version of this amplifier, the A30.2, which differs in having a balanced input, and in being bridgeable. Added to the A30.5, the extra two-channel can be used to implement Dolby ES or DTS

<b>VERDICT</b>
<b>SOUND</b>
★★★★★
<b>FEATURES</b>
★★★★☆
<b>BUILD</b>
★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b>
★★★★★

Arguably the most complete audio performance of the four models on test. The system fulfils the key requirement of delivering excellent multichannel performance while being essentially uncompromised as a music system.

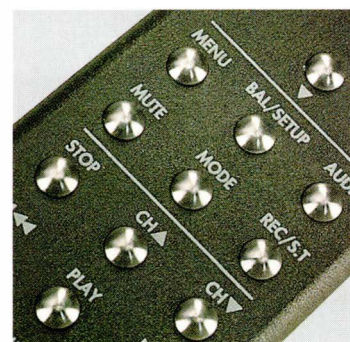
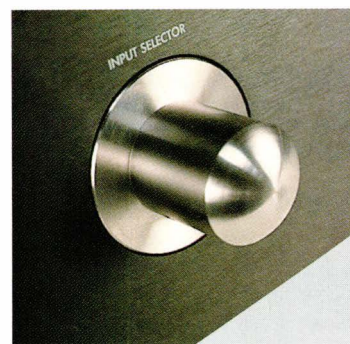
<b>CHECKLIST</b>
INPUTS-ANALOGUE 8/5
INPUTS-DIGITAL 8
VIDEO SWITCHING 8
HEADPHONE SOCKET X
SET-UP MANUAL
POWER RATING 5x120W

ES, though the A30.2 is best used to drive the front channels as it offers slightly higher performance. This was tried with good results, but we did not attempt the other obvious option, of bridging the A30.2 and using it to drive the centre channel.

Switching noise when the volume is adjusted is reminiscent of the Naim, but again it doesn't impact on sound quality. A direct mode is available to bypass the DSP for stereo or multichannel analogue sources, and true to form this gave the best performance. The Primare acquires itself extremely well with DVD-Audio and SACD discs (using the Marantz DV9200 universal player), with a typically clean, elegant and full bodied delivery, which insofar as Primare has a distinctive voice, is very much that of the brand. Overall, in bypass mode, this is a high-class system fully compatible with existing Primare hi-fi systems.

Switching to Dolby Digital, the sound flattens out, but the Primare at least keeps track of recent improvements in processing Dolby soundtracks by giving a very credible performance, with images placed accurately within the sound field and smooth tracking of moving images. As usual, DTS sounds a little more three dimensional and less 'manipulated', but the differences are useful rather than dramatic.

Good film soundtracks really came to life. *Star Wars II*, which has a very good Dolby soundtrack in a THX transfer, sounds a little calmer and more



**CONTROLS**  
The remote control is a tactile delight, and is clearly built to outlast the usual careless handling, complementing a remarkably fuss-free overall design.

**CONNECTIONS**  
Notable features include the RJ45-type data socket in addition to the usual RS232C, two component inputs and a smattering of XLR balanced ins and outs – a stereo line and a digital input and line outputs for the front channel, the latter in parallel with standard single-ended sockets.

collected than with some of the other combinations, but the film is still explosive – tiresomely so *in extremis*, but this is the film's fault, not the sound system. The bass comes across with real vim and power, and the Primare power amplifiers are excellent, used in stereo or multichannel.

# CONCLUSIONS


Mostly superb results from this distinguished clutch of AV amp systems

**W**ith four intriguing systems from four major, high-quality brand names, it's no surprise that there isn't a dud among them. There are differences in sound quality arising from the quality of the electronics and the performance of the processing, but they are more matters of personality than of good and bad design. In practice, the choice facing potential

owners of equipment such as this is most likely to be dictated by other matters. Those already attuned to Naim electronics are likely to opt for their solution and ditto in the case of the other brands, to maintain the qualities they already enjoy in stereo. For those people making a decision on this basis, the results of the test show there is no reason to reject any one of the four. They all

do what you would reasonably expect of them based on stereo equipment in their respective ranges. Put another way, they all broadly uphold the standards that each brand sets itself.

This doesn't mean there weren't some disappointments. Based on experience with dedicated home cinema equipment, it was obvious that the spatial processing is not

always in the top class. This is true of the Naim and the Cyrus, although they are extremely transparent in pass-through mode, and their basic sound quality deteriorates only modestly through the Dolby/DTS decoders. The Primare and Marantz don't necessarily sound much better, but their spatial processing is in some respects more sophisticated. This is one key area where further improvements are needed. 

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

**DVD PLAYERS**  
**ARCAM DSV88 PLUS** £1,000

Excellent all-round DVD player with PAL Progressive video makes this a great choice for plasma/projector users.

**MARANTZ DV8300** £1,400

'Universal' DVD-Audio/Video and SACD player is well turned out and works superbly, especially when playing in high resolution mode.

**DENON DVD-3800** £1,000

Classy Silicon Graphics video processing and good sound to match, including DVD-Audio.

## MULTICHANNEL LOUDSPEAKER PACKAGES

**B&W 602/601 S3 PACKAGE** £900

A quality system based on identical compact speakers all round – just add a subwoofer to taste.

**JMLAB COBALT PACKAGE** £1,797

Well engineered and well priced, the tonal brightness is manageable with decent electronics.

**PMC FB1/TB2 PACKAGE** £2,485

The professionals' brand, popular with many a studio. Bulky, but has good transparency, articulation and weight.


## STAR PERFORMER


### PRIMARE SP31.7/AV30.5


Top class, and quite full-featured multichannel AV amplification from Primare continues the classic simplicity of their stereo components line. This package has the same smooth, elegant voicing we have now come to expect from this brand, and is great for audiophiles who would like to broaden their horizons without lowering their expectations.





## HINTS AND TIPS

 US Region 1 NTSC DVDs are sometimes better mastered than their UK PAL counterparts, but remember that you'll need a player converted to play R1 discs.

 When processing two-channel or Dolby Surround material, Dolby Pro Logic II invariably does a better job than DTS Neo:6.

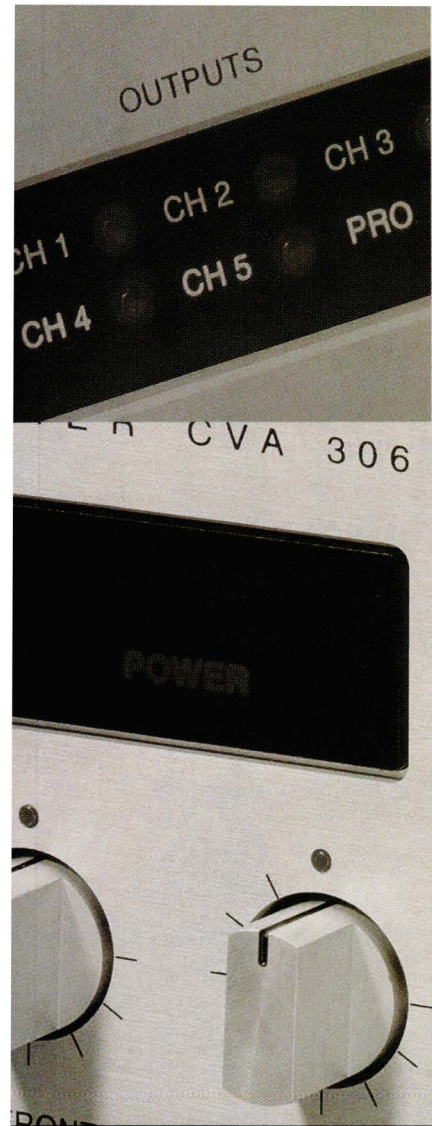
 Switching off the video circuits with audio material (where that's possible) is often very worthwhile.

 With most encoded material, in most rooms, the extra channels associated by Dolby Digital EX and DTS ES are a waste of time.

 Setting the system to produce equal loudness from all channels may be recommended, but is not necessarily appropriate. A lower setting of the rear channels often works better, so tune to taste.

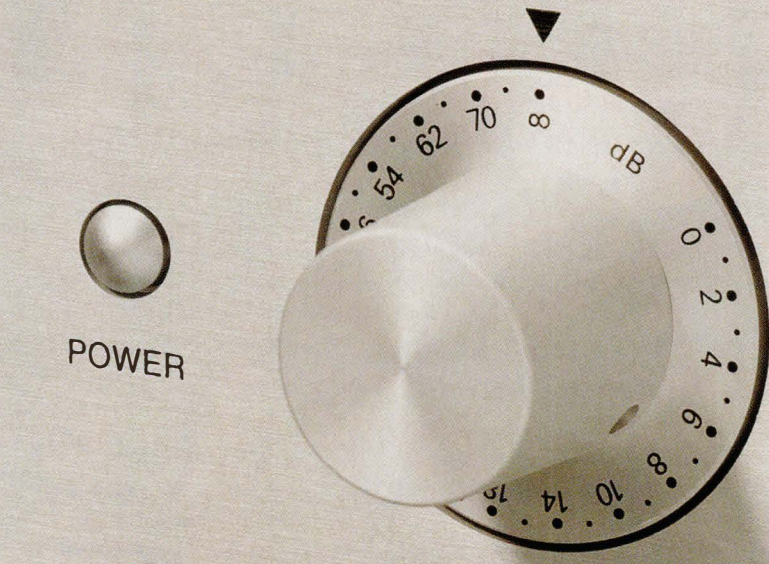
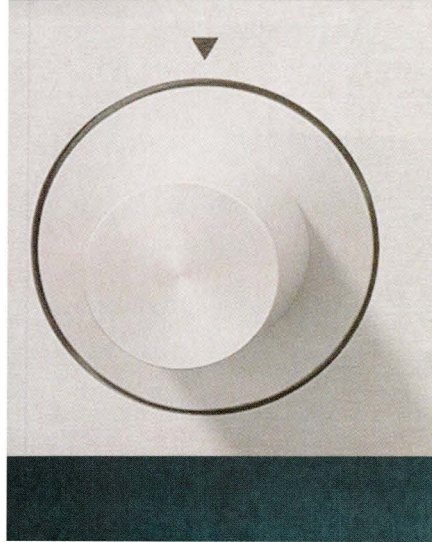
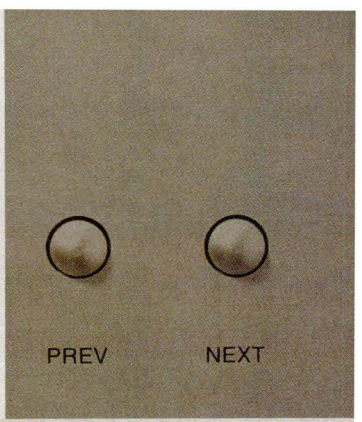
## MULTICHANNEL AV AMP SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE

MAKE	Cyrus	Marantz	Naim	Primare
MODEL	AV8/ SmartPower x3	PS-17/ SM-17 x2	AV2/NAPV 175/ NAP 150	SP31.7/ A30.5
PRICE	£2,900	£3,400	£4,175	£4,200
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Painless to set up, if slightly limited system, sounds like classic Cyrus in two-channel guise, and almost as good in multichannel.	A high-class stereo system known as an excellent performer with the necessary multichannel add-ons, executed with real flair.	A studied approach from the Salisbury crew brings high quality multichannel audio to their range without overturning classic Naim virtues.	A complete hi-fi and multichannel AV product that manages to steer clear of the usual compromises.



# COPLAND

Copland Audio Products:  
**Scandinavian Cool.**



Copland's design team believes that its greatest challenge is to use a scientific approach to create a product which conveys art. Although music has its basis in mathematics, its raison d'etre is to communicate emotion.. Soul. Spirit.

To achieve this end, Copland has chosen to blend the best of proven technologies - the valve - with the most sophisticated of modern methodologies. Because of this, you will find a compact disc player in a range which also reveres the vinyl LP. You will find stereo playback, which has served pure music for a half-century, alongside multi-channel amplification, designed to recreate the cinematic event in the home.

All of this reaches you, the music lover and cineaste, through components which reflect the most striking of Scandinavian virtues: minimalism, simplicity, clarity.



CDA822 - High resolution CD player



CTA305 - High Performance valve preamplifier



CTA520 - Power amplifier ( stereo or mono)



CVA306 - Multi Channel Valve preamplifier



CVA535 - 5 channel Audio Video amplifier



**absolutesounds ltd.**

58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW T: +44 (0)20 89 71 3909 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62  
 info@absolutesounds.com www.absolutesounds.com

# THE SCIENCE

**T**o most people in the more prosperous nations, mains electricity is something one takes completely for granted. You turn on the switch and there it is – 230 volts (or 110, or whatever your local is) of reliable AC power, as much current as you care to draw within the limits of your fuses. It lights lamps, operates cooking and heating appliances – and kicks your hi-fi into life.

Occasionally, one becomes aware that all is not perfect with the mains. Apart from obvious events like power cuts due to emergencies or labour strikes, many audio components suffer from the odd click due to a fridge or heater switching off. Clearly, something other than pure 230V 50Hz is coming down the cable to cause such interference. But can you do anything about this?

The answer is generally yes, and what is perhaps more surprising is that even when there is no directly audible interference present, 'treating' the mains with filters of various kinds can have a consistently audible effect on sound quality. This discovery has, over the last few years, encouraged the growth of a small but

thriving industry supplying specialist versions of mains cables, filters and even regenerators to keen audiophiles.

In fact, the mains is much more complex than a simple supply of constant frequency at a constant voltage. For one thing, there are three wires, live, neutral and earth, and although in theory neutral and earth are at the same potential voltage, this is only an approximation.

In practice, in addition to the desired 50Hz at 230V there exists an infinite spectrum of frequencies between any pair of those two wires. Even though mains current in theory is symmetrically smooth, it rarely, if ever, is, and is prone to distortion from a variety sources (see diagram, below). And it's not just the low level stuff – it takes little imagination, and can in fact easily be shown, that the distortion frequencies extend upwards to MHz and GHz frequencies. Between neutral and earth wires one finds similar signals, of course without the 230V, and generally at a slightly lower level.

**SONIC DIRT**

When the mains leaves the generating station it

is pretty clean. Unfortunately, almost every kind of device attached to it draws a current which is not a perfect sinusoid and this, along with the finite resistance of current-carrying cables at every stage of the chain, starts to corrupt the purity of the voltage waveform. The power supplies in most hi-fi equipment are among the worst polluters, ironically. The same causes apply to the voltage between neutral and earth.

In addition, extraneous signals are quite deliberately added to the mains. Devices from baby alarms to electricity meters use the mains wiring as a handy communications backbone, sending out high frequency (typically 100kHz or so) signals which of course travel a lot further than the intended recipient since there's little to stop them. Add to that the fact that any piece of wire will pick up radio signals from the myriad transmitters, from time signals at 60kHz to mobile phones at 1.8GHz and beyond, and you'll soon realise that a mains outlet is a potent source of interference. Obviously, all of these noise sources vary depending on how close you live to the generator and to your local substation, local population density, nearby

**WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOUR MAINS SUPPLY**



**GENERATING STATION**

Nice clean electricity from your friendly local supplier.

**NATIONAL GRID**

Open air cables can pick up radio from all kinds of sources.

**SUBSTATION**

Transformers throughout the system are run close to saturation – distortion occurs.



# OF MAINS

*Your mains electricity supply could be getting in the way of your music. Read on to find out how, why, and what you can do about it*

**“When the mains leaves the generating station it’s pretty clean. Unfortunately, every device attached to it draws a current which starts to corrupt the purity of the voltage waveform.”**

industries and radio masts, and so on. Many of them vary with time of day too.

Various ways exist of dealing with all this. Noisy switches and thermostats are best dealt with at source (by a qualified electrician!) but that’s not always possible, and in general some kind of filtering can be beneficial to an audio mains supply. Capacitors between live, neutral and earth, non-linear ‘transient absorbers’ of various kinds and inductors in one or more leads can all help remove high-frequency noise, and various upmarket cables also claim to help in a similar manner. In all probability (and there’s not a great deal of available

experimental data on this) noise between live and neutral is less important than between either of those and ground, since shielding and grounding of equipment is never perfect and the so-called ‘ground’ is the most efficient way for interference to enter.

#### MORE MESS

There are further reasons why mains cables and conditioners can affect audio quality. When one looks closely, one finds that a mains transformer, plus the rectifier diodes and capacitors that follow it, make a complicated electrical circuit which is significantly influenced by anything connected to either side of it, including the cable. A surprisingly large amount of interference is generated by a standard ‘linear’ (ha ha – in reality it’s anything but) power supply, not all of which is filtered out later, and it’s not so surprising that altering the characteristics of a mains cable, or adding a filter, can affect this, even if only subtly.

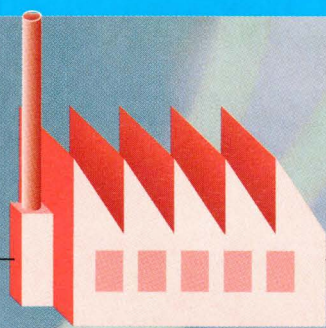
Finally, there are claimed effects such as contact rectification, which allegedly produces interference due to imperfect conduction at

contacts between plugs and sockets, hence such luxuries as rhodium-plated mains plugs. Again, not much hard proof around but a very large amount of anecdotal evidence.

If you’ve read this far you may no longer be quite so amazed – if you weren’t already a convert to the cause – to hear that many audiophiles are delighted with their expenditure of a hundred pounds or more on a mains cable or filter. Benefits may not be immediately obvious, but if you’ve got a decent system that you are familiar with it’s probable that adding decent mains cables, maybe a filter, and a good quality distribution board will lift its sound noticeably. And note that many brands offer a money-back period if you’re not convinced. Do you really need any more reasons to try? ☺

#### MAINS CABLES, BLOCKS AND FILTERS TEST

You’ve read about why the quality of your electricity supply has a direct influence on the sound of your hi-fi. Now turn the page to see our verdicts on six products designed to improve mains quality, tested on a system containing Marantz and Rotel CD players, an EAR amp and ATC speakers.



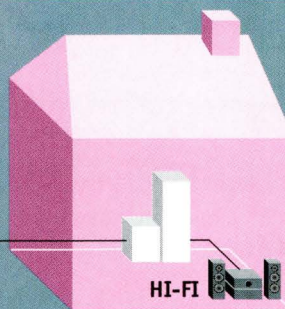
#### INDUSTRIAL LOADS

Large electric motors like those used in factory machinery induce more distortion.



#### TELEMETRY

Systems like those used for remote meter reading inject high frequency data signals on to the mains.



#### YOUR HOME

Thermostats and other switches on domestic appliances (e.g. fridges) generate clicks.



#### GROUND

Can introduce more electrical disturbances than it cures.

£255 (0.8m) ★★★★★ ☎ 0141 353 0509 🌐 www.ecosseables.com

## ECOSSE REFERENCE BIG RED POWERCHORD

This is Ecosse's top-of-the-line mains cable, and although it stops short of some of the ultra-fancy componentry used in the most costly cables, it sports an impressive bill of materials. For a start, 'monocrystal' 6N copper is quite a luxury in a mains cable, and the IEC connector from Furutech is one of the best we've seen. The mains plug is an industrial type from MK, chosen perhaps as much for its fat cable handling as for its high electrical standard. Within the cable, stranded conductors of generous cross-section carry the current, shielded

with a braid and aluminised Mylar. It's surprisingly flexible.

With the various hi-fi devices tried, this cable gave a consistent improvement over standard flex. There was more clarity and detail in the bass and on occasion more treble detail too, though that was variable with component and with music.

However, the gain in low frequency precision was quite marked and apparent in any programme with any bass to it, making this cable a recommendable upgrade to any high-quality IEC-inlet component. 🎧



£255 (2m) ★★★★★ ☎ 0131 555 3922 🌐 www.eichmannables.com

## EICHMANN EXPRESS POWER CABLE

This cable is claimed to be "AC enhancing", which seems bold. Apparently, it provides "an enhanced voltage and current flow", although all it appears to contain to achieve such a thing is a substantial chunk of aluminium extrusion, which takes the part of the 'live' conductor for a few inches. The rest of the live, and the whole run of neutral and earth, is carried in very heavy-gauge, stranded conductors. And Eichmann states explicitly that there are no filters or spike protectors in the cable, so don't expect any magic effects on clicks.

Whatever effects there are on AC voltage and current defied standard measurements, but judged as a regular upgrade cable this isn't without success. Similarly to the other cables in this group, it seems to improve the clarity of bass reproduction most of all, with subtler effects further up the scale.

For some reason it had very little effect on the valve preamp, but a CD player and a high-power transistor power amp both advanced a notch or two. However, at a rather high price it appears less cost-effective than the other cables in this group. 🎧



£295 ★★★★★ ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.isoteksystems.com

## ISOTEK CLEANLINE MAINS DISTRIBUTION UNIT

There's an awful lot of fresh air in this box. Isotek does indeed make some very complex mains treatment units, but this is a fairly simple filter unit with half a dozen good quality sockets and a thoughtfully added earthing post, all housed in a smart case. That's nice, but there's no denying that you're paying a lot for the case compared with similarly specified but smaller units from, for example, Russ Andrews.

Said filter features high quality capacitors between live, neutral and earth, plus spike suppressors, and

Isotek is keen to point out there are no series components, only parallel.

Fed with a standard mains cable, the Cleanline had a small beneficial effect on the CD player and preamp, generally removing some grain and veiling from the music. Its effect on the power amp was less marked, nor did it match the best mains cables in improving the bass. Using it with Isotek's 'Elite' cable (£75) was better, but at a rather steep overall price. Yes, it does reduce clicks, but so does Isotek's Isoplug at a tenth of the price. A qualified success. 🎧



£140 (3ft) ★★★★★ ☎ 020 7435 1222 🌐 www.psaudio.com

## PS AUDIO MINI LAB MAINS CABLE

It may be as thick as a man's thumb, but this is Mini next to the full Lab cable which, however, is cringingly expensive. This is nearer to the real world, still employing plenty of copper and a triple shield. It's pretty stiff and will challenge the mechanical integrity of some IEC inlets, and needs about six inches clearance behind equipment. The IEC end uses a good quality Marinc connector, with an MK plug slightly overstretched at the other end.

Although this mains cable brought benefits to each of the components with which it was tested, its precise

effect was not consistent. To the CD player it brought a small but still worthwhile improvement in overall clarity which gave a sharper focus to imaging, while tonally there was no perceptible change. With the power amp, however, bass was improved not only in detail but also, it seemed, in extension, with a definite feeling that more weight had been added. The preamp gained a little bass too, although not so obviously. Still, that it had benefits in each case confirms its recommendable status and in context the price looks good too. 🟡



£385 ★★★★★ ☎ 020 7435 1222 🌐 www.psaudio.com

## PS AUDIO ULTIMATE OUTLET (HIGH CURRENT)

Even more expensive than the Isotek filter and offering only two sockets, this smart and very ruggedly assembled unit contains a couple of capacitors and what PS Audio refers to as a 'balun' – otherwise known as a common-mode choke.

Looking a lot like a potted toroidal transformer, this component is intended to block interference coming down the live and neutral lines together, while presenting little additional impedance to the mains itself. That's a perfectly reasonable idea, implemented in crude form in many hi-fi components already.

Carelessly, PS has swapped live and neutral wires inside. That swap alone can change things, so auditioning was carried out with the wires swapped back, and revealed that this unit is pretty effective as claimed. While it doesn't quite eliminate the most troublesome clicks it certainly reduces them a lot, and seems to have a consistent knack of removing some haze and smearing from the sound. Stereo images sharpen up and voices come into focus better, most noticeably with the CD player. Bass is very slightly improved in quality though little altered in quantity. A good upgrade for a good system. 🟡



£245 (inc. cable) ★★★★★ ☎ 0800 373467 🌐 www.russandrews.com

## RUSS ANDREWS SILENCER BLOCK

It looks like a perfectly ordinary industrial distribution board, but this is actually quite a tweaky unit. Those six sockets (you could also have four or eight) are robustly made with nickel-plated contacts which should give more reliable service in the long term than the standard plain brass of commercial units. A 'Silencer' filter board is added which uses a combination of capacitors and transient absorbers to reduce incoming spikes and noise between all three wires. The input socket is not a standard IEC but a higher current version: Russ Andrews

offers various cables to suit, the one here being a mid-range 'Classic PowerKord' (£50 on its own).

On the whole, this seems slightly more successful than the Isotek filter, although not as good all-round as the PS. As with both those units, background hash is reduced, improving general detail, and spike noise cut back considerably – there's also a slight improvement in bass quality. This may be only partly due to the cable, but at any rate, as a pair these items make a practical and effective upgrade at what in context is a very fair price. 🟡



# 10 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING ROOM

*For better or worse, for richer or poorer, most of us are stuck with our listening environment – aka the living room. Room size, shape, and construction all influence sound quality. All rooms have their quirks and idiosyncrasies, their pluses and minuses. The trick is to get your system to work at its best in your particular room. To do this it must work in harmony with its surroundings...*



## 01

### Experiment with alternative positions

Conventional wisdom says you place stereo speakers two or three metres apart, with the listener sat two or three metres back in-between. This works well, but it's not the only way. A more homogeneous sound may be obtained by not sitting directly in the line of fire. Placing speakers up high can give interesting results too.

Ideally, the surfaces either side of the speakers should not be reflective or damped, but diffuse. This means reflections are broken up but not absorbed (which can deaden the sound) and can be achieved with slightly uneven surfaces like bookshelves. Glass is highly reflective, so if you have windows on one side use curtains or blinds to damp reflections and calm the balance. This should also improve imaging.



# 02

## Isolate your speakers

◊ Smearing and boomy bass frequencies often occur when hi-fi is used in a room with suspended wooden flooring. Speaker vibration transmits to the floor which resonates in sympathy, causing muddy bass that lacks clarity and definition.

By sitting your speakers on isolation supports, such as Townshend's Seismic Sinks, you can make sure this harmful energy is not channelled into the floor. Even if you've got solid concrete flooring, isolation platforms under your speakers is still highly beneficial, creating a cleaner, more relaxed and natural presentation.

# 03

## Know your room's acoustic characteristics

Does your hi-fi system sound boomy, thick, dull, and unexciting? Consider replacing your living room carpet with a laminated wooden floor. If things sound too lively and bright afterwards, however, try adding a few rugs.

A harsh/bright sound can be tempered by well-upholstered chairs and sofas, heavy curtains or drapes, and deep-pile carpets. But only up to a point – because most of us sit fairly close to directional loudspeakers, such things have a limited effect on tonal balance and if you overdo it you could up with a lifeless sound.



# 04

## Clean up the mains quality

◊ All kinds of system problems seem to disappear when the mains supply is clean. It's worth investing in specialist mains cables and purification devices such as those made by Russ Andrews. For the ultimate in clean mains check out the range of PS Audio devices that completely reconstitutes the mains supply.

# 05

## Tidy up!

◊ Don't ask why, but music sounds better when the listening room is clean and tidy. Maybe it's psychological, but a tidy room creates a sense of well-being. So put away the kids' toys and clear up the dirty dishes before you listen seriously! Hi-fi widows love this one...



# THE SALE CONTINUES!



THE UK'S BIGGEST HI-FI & HOME CINEMA RETAILER

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TYPICAL SELLING PRICE

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"Through either the RGB Scart or S-video output colour fidelity is excellent, with images vibrant and well defined." *What Video and TV magazine.*

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Region 2 Stocks limited

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**£99.95**  
MULTI-REGION  
**£119.95**  
BRAND NEW BOXED

### ALSO TOSHIBA SD120E TSP £159.95 WERE £99.95



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MULTI-REGION  
**£99.95**  
BRAND NEW BOXED



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★

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BOURNEMOUTH	01202 720 380
BRIGHTON	01273 673 333
BRISTOL	0117 973 4397
CAMBRIDGE	01223 304 848
CARDIFF	029 2039 9988
CHELTENHAM	01242 572 572
CHESTER	01244 400 102
COLCHESTER	NEW 01206 563 131
COVENTRY	NEW 024 7655 5959
EDINBURGH	RELOCATED 0131 226 3544
EXETER	01392 272 772
GLASGOW	0141 226 5551
GUILDFORD	01483 449 222
HULL	01482 329 289
LEEDS	0113 245 5717
LEICESTER	0116 255 4656
LIVERPOOL	0151 708 7484

LONDON	
BROMLEY	020 8466 6565
CHELSEA	020 7352 8496
CITY	020 7626 8006
CROYDON	020 8667 1100
EALING	020 8566 4422
FARRINGDON	NEW 020 7329 7374
KINGSTON	020 8549 9999
LONDON BRIDGE	020 7402 1201
SWISS COTTAGE	020 7722 3359
WEST END	020 7831 2888

MAIDSTONE	01622 677 067
MANCHESTER NORTH	0161 773 0333
MANCHESTER SOUTH	0161 480 1700
MIDDLESBROUGH	NEW 01642 211 115
MILTON KEYNES	01908 608 908
NEWCASTLE	0191 230 1392
NORWICH	01603 620 860
NOTTINGHAM	0115 924 1551
OXFORD	01865 243 444
PLYMOUTH	01752 222 256
PRESTON	NEW 01772 888 757
READING	0118 959 1111
ROMFORD	01708 747 727
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# 06

## Make sure the room is well ventilated

▶ Concentration improves when air quality is clean and fresh, making you more alert and responsive. Cigarette smoke dulls sound quality, eroding subtle detail and fine nuances of tone colour and dynamics. Yet another thing the cigarette companies never told you...

# 07

## Take steps to minimise ambient noise levels

Many listeners find their hi-fi sounds best around midnight or later. Cleaner mains supply (as people switch off their TV sets and go to bed) is one reason.

Reduced levels of ambient noise is another. A steady hubbub of background noise masks fine low-level detail, and this sometimes makes it necessary to play the music at high levels in order to ensure that everything can be heard.

Traffic rumble is probably the worst problem for the city-dweller – for those who live close to a busy main road the noise can be considerable. One solution is double-glazing. But if this is out of the question, try sealing possible noise entry points by using sticky tape or foam rubber. The quieter your room is, the better your hi-fi will sound. You'll be able to play music at reduced volume levels for what will subjectively sound like the same overall level of loudness, reducing strain on amplifiers and speakers, while lowering the risk of annoying your neighbours.

# 08

## Reduce electronic smog

▶ Try to minimise the number of extraneous electronic gadgets and gizmos in the room. Of course it's difficult in today's gadget-infested world. But if possible, make your listening room smog-free; no computers, mobile phones, TV sets, video machines, cameras, camcorders, etc. AV? Internet? Satellite broadcasting? All invented by the hi-fi antichrist to spoil your sound.



# 09

## Use different approaches for various parts of a room

▶ Favourable sound quality often occurs when the area immediately around the speakers is kept fairly lively and undamped, while the listening area itself has a greater degree of damping.

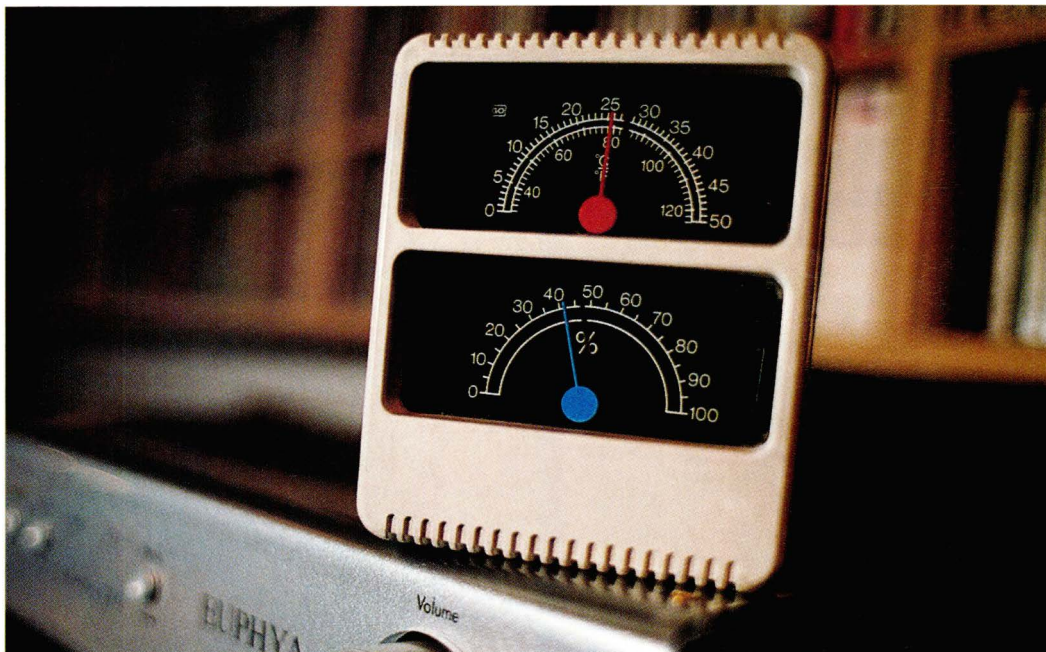
You'll also find that the system sounds surprisingly different depending on where you put the speakers. Try them up against different walls until you find the optimum arrangement.



# 10

## Check humidity and temperature

▶ Tonal balance is affected by temperature and humidity. A warm, dry, stuffy room tends to make the music sound slow, thick, and heavy. A cool room creates a brighter, more forward balance, with greater immediacy and attack. Relative humidity (RH) levels should be around 60 per cent. Because the speed of sound is affected by humidity, the higher the RH level, the faster it travels.



# One box or two?

**EXCLUSIVE** *When is a two-box CD player not a two-box player? When it's a Naim CDX2, operable with or without an external power supply*

**T**radition has it that a two-box CD player consists of a so-called 'CD transport' mechanism in one unit, used alongside a DAC, or digital-to-analogue converter, in the other. While the term 'transport' (derived from tape mechanisms which carry the tape from one spool to another) is a much less appropriate term than 'disc drive', such an arrangement seems logical enough, one section extracting the digital data from the disc, then the other turning it into audible form. Furthermore, it's positively encouraged by the standard – indeed, standardised – digital serial electrical and optical connection links.

But that's not the Naim way of doing things. You won't find any digital socketry, electrical or optical, on any of the company's several CD players. Indeed, Naim reckons that avoiding the serial data interface entirely brings substantial sonic benefits, so even its single-box players are devoid of any digital output, and the company has

## MIX AND MATCH

Back in 1992 Naim launched its first CD player, the CDs. It surprised everyone because it came packaged as two separate units, but rather than following tradition by separating the disc drive and the DAC, it put all the player bits in one box, and all the power supplies in the other. But there were precedents: Naim's NAC52 preamplifier had adopted a similar configuration several years earlier, and it has long been company practice to add extra power supplies to upgrade performance. The company's Prefix and Stageline phono stages may also be used with various 'levels' of power supply, and great care goes into ensuring proper 'retro-compatibility'.

The owner of an original CDX or CDS2 can also therefore achieve a substantial performance improvement by adding (in the CDX's case) or replacing (for a CDS2) an existing power supply unit with the latest XPS supply.

At some later date, when funds permit, the CDX itself may be replaced by a CDX2, or the CDS2 by a CDS3.

never attempted to make a DAC.

That's the background to this brand new CDX2 CD player, which is available as a standalone unit but may also be used alongside an additional XPS power supply. Given the substantial price differential, operating in two-box mode can be expected to produce a similarly substantial upgrade in sound quality.

Both units are part of Naim's new Classic range, which means you get the company's latest 'trioptich' fascia styling, along with exceptionally sturdy and hefty all-alloy (non-magnetic) build. This isn't Naim's top-of-the-line 'flagship' CD player: that distinction is reserved for a top-loading CDS3 with much more elaborate spring-decoupling techniques that will become available later in 2003, probably priced between £4,500 and £5,000. But this CDX2/XPS combo will probably get quite close to this impending flagship, since an XPS power supply is a common ingredient in the CDS2 and '3 packages too.

There's nothing flash about either unit – that isn't the Naim way – but there's plenty of evidence of serious and solid engineering practice. The CDX2 places a strong emphasis on maintaining the stability and integrity of the radio frequency signals read off the disc by the laser. Under the skin it features improved internal shielding, and shortened, simplified signal paths, with a number of separately regulated power supplies.

The whole disc-drive mechanism – now using a Philips VAM1250, which permits CD-R/RW disc replay – is fitted into a non-resonant tray that offers a measure of controlled mechanical decoupling from vibration by being hinged at one point. To play discs, this front-loading drawer is simply swung out manually, the disc placed in position and then held firmly by a lightweight magnetic puck.

The new player supports HDCD and offers greater operational flexibility too, supplying a pair of phono socket outputs as a configurable alternative to Naim's traditional five-pin DIN socket (and supplied lead), plus RC5 and RS232

## VERDICT

**Naim CDX2  
CD player  
£2,650  
Naim XPS  
power supply  
£2,300**

▶ Brilliant advance in CD replay performance – thanks largely to the new XPS power supply.

▶ Like most Naim kit, high quality doesn't come cheap, and you don't get many frills either.

▶ **CONCLUSION**  
Naim's new two-box CD player marks a substantial improvement in CD replay performance, along with useful upgrade potential.

## KEY FEATURES

▶ CDX2 can operate as standalone CD player, or be upgraded with XPS power supply

▶ Sturdy all-alloy (non-magnetic) casework

▶ CD-RW and HDCD compatible

▶ Five-pin DIN and standard RCA phono analogue outputs

▶ RC5 and RS232 control sockets aid integration in multiroom packages

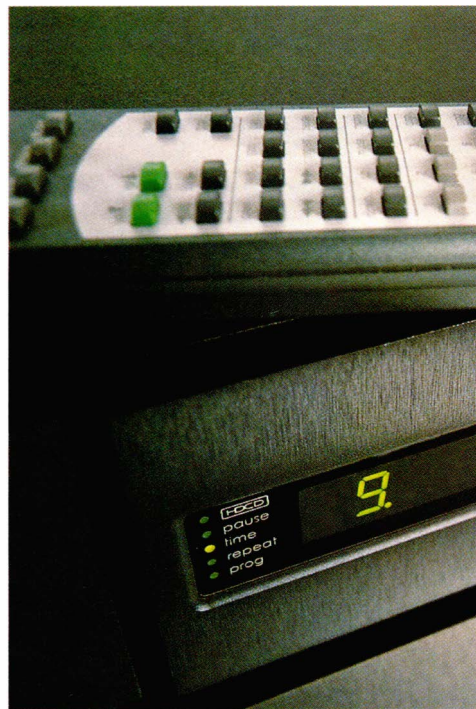
control sockets to aid integration in multiroom packages. A relatively simple display provides basic timing information plus function telltales (such as pause and repeat), while just four buttons cover play, pause and skip.

A low-cost handset is supplied, a nicely shaped and lightweight device that's easy enough to hold and use. However, because it operates preamplifiers and tuners as well as CD players, the layout is rather overburdened by some 34 buttons.

## PERFORMANCE

For the past four years, a Naim CDS2 has provided consistent, top quality CD replay in the system used for most of *HFC's* loudspeaker reviews. Only recently has it seemed to be starting to show its age, when a much simpler and less costly Rega Jupiter ran it surprisingly close.

After leaving the CDX2/XPS combo running in for a few days to get well warmed up and burned in, Lambchop's live *Pet Sounds Sucks* was inserted, and





EDITOR'S CHOICE

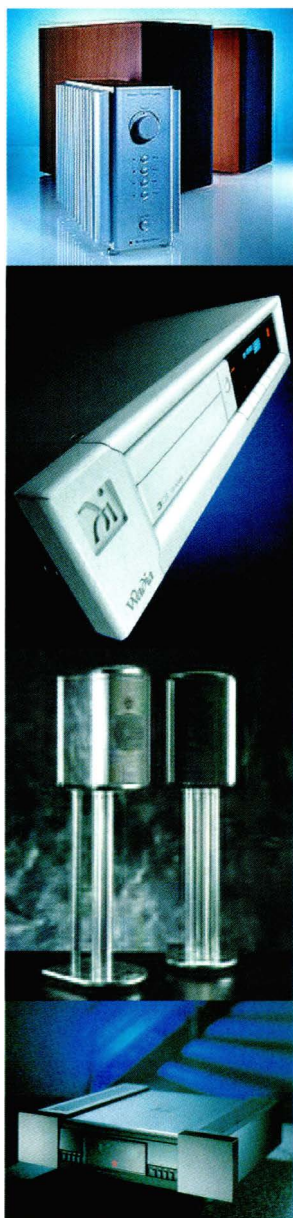
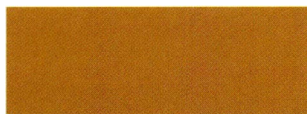
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***“There’s nothing flash about either unit – that isn’t the Naim way – but there’s plenty of evidence of serious engineering practice.”***

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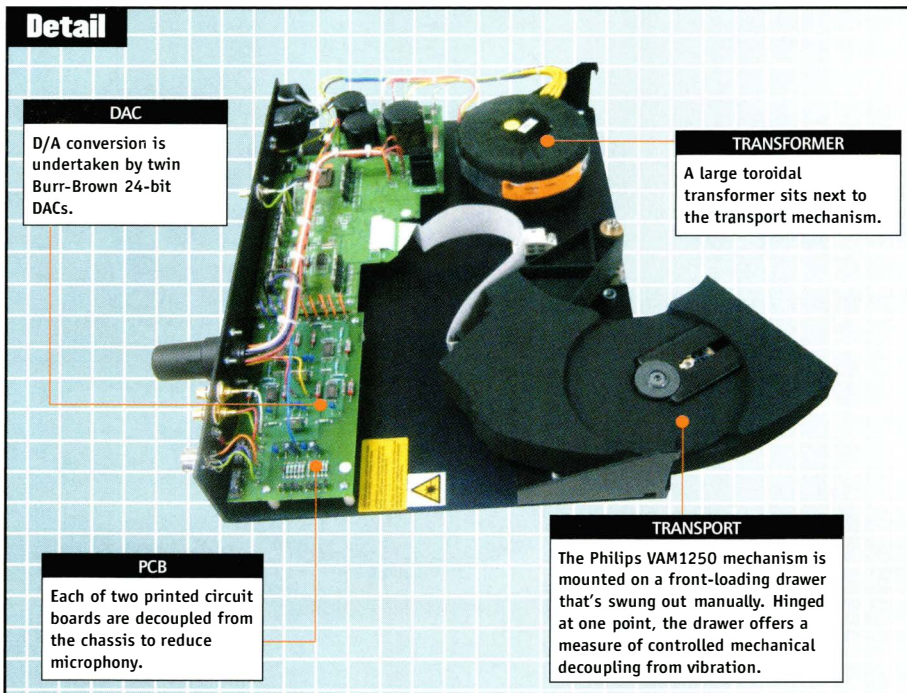
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**Detail**

**DAC**  
D/A conversion is undertaken by twin Burr-Brown 24-bit DACs.

**TRANSFORMER**  
A large toroidal transformer sits next to the transport mechanism.

**PCB**  
Each of two printed circuit boards are decoupled from the chassis to reduce microphony.

**TRANSPORT**  
The Philips VAM1250 mechanism is mounted on a front-loading drawer that's swung out manually. Hinged at one point, the drawer offers a measure of controlled mechanical decoupling from vibration.

**“The sound has greater dynamic range with a much lower ‘mush’ floor, and is altogether less congested.”**

the two-boxer was finally given a chance to strut its stuff, feeding Naim NAC552/NAP500 amplification and a pair of JBL K2 S9800 speakers.

And what stuff! Some improvement over the CDS2 had been expected, but nothing like the major step forward that was immediately obvious. The coherent musical drive and flow that has always been a feature of Naim CD players is still well in evidence, keeping the whole musical ensemble working and moving properly together. Only now the individual instruments are better separated and defined, and the space around them is larger, and more believably contextual. The sound has


greater dynamic range with a much lower ‘mush’ floor, and is altogether less congested.



Moving on to playing the CDX2 without its external supply, much of the sparkle and separation enjoyed with the two-box combo went away. While satisfactory as far as it went, the sound now had much more of a ‘musical soup’ effect, holding everything together very well, but lacking the brilliant dynamic range, separation and dynamic precision of the two-boxer.

While the CDX2 does a perfectly good job of replaying CDs, and is thoroughly well mannered and coherent, there’s no escaping the fact that it represents a

slight disappointment when you come to it after either of the two-boxers. In hierarchy terms, the CDX2 alone sits as far below the older CDS2 as that two-boxer sits below the CDX2/XPS.

Out of interest, I also tried using the earlier CDS2 player unit alongside the new XPS power supply. This proved to be the best of the lot so far, with a natural and relaxed musicality that was probably best described as ‘vinyl-like’, when spinning the familiar Grateful Dead *Reckoning* CD, and which was obviously more delicate and relaxed than the CDX2/XPS combo. This has two implications: first that the power supplies have rather more influence over the sound than the disc-drive and DAC; and secondly, the CDS3 looks likely to be something very exciting indeed.

Traditionally, Naim components work best in Naim systems, and while the CDS2 went a long way towards breaking through to the high-end mainstream, these new components – especially the XPS power supply – will take that process a long way further down the road. Assessing value for money for such costly components is difficult, though the bottom line is that this combo is capable of truly outstanding results, and the new XPS power supply seems capable of taking CD replay to new heights. 

 Naim Audio 01722 332266  
 [www.naim-audio.com](http://www.naim-audio.com)

**ALSO CONSIDER**

**AUDIONET ART V2 £2,300**  
Built to last forever, this CD player has a dark but natural sound with excellent bass.

**MARK LEVINSON NO3905 £6,495**  
Superbly built and comprehensively equipped, this player has a sound with genuinely high detail resolution.

**WADIA 301 £3,650**  
An insightful player which incorporates digital preamp functions, including volume, for direct power amp drive.



# Klimactic foreplay

*Linn has finally delivered a preamplifier to match its flagship Klimax power amps*

**T**he Klimax range is complete. With the launch of the Kontrol stereo preamplifier Linn has delivered the final part of its most ambitious system to date. Combined with Sondek LP12 and CD12 sources, Klimax Twin or Solo power amps and the Komri semi-active loudspeakers, the Kontrol rounds off the best system that Scotland's finest hi-fi brand can produce – and, naturally, it's its most expensive one.

At six grand, the preamp is one of the most affordable elements of this system. The speakers will set you back significantly more, and the CD12 disc player comes in at twice the price, so by Linn's high standards it's far from outrageous. The quality of casework alone is almost enough to justify the tag: it's simply stunning. Attention to detail is extraordinary, the machined aluminium sections looking more like elegant aerospace engineering than domestic hi-fi.

Yet it's not all about looks; mechanical integrity is more important in audio than many appreciate. Any form of resonance equals distortion, and a solid clamshell like this is about as far as you can go to eliminate it without resorting to air suspension systems and the like.

It's a tremendously slim container too, measuring only 4cm plus 2cm of foot height, with the feet set back, giving an

## TECHNOLOGY

If you're wondering how Linn can make a state-of-the-art preamp that's only 4cm thick, the explanation lies in its switch mode power supply. Preamps normally need mains transformers that are more than 4cm alone. Linn's 4G or so-called 'Brilliant' supply uses a tiny transformer that's only 4cm in diameter, yet due to its switching nature can deliver more than enough current in an extremely responsive fashion.

Switching power supplies are usually found in situations where their high efficiency and compact nature are a bonus, but Linn has refined the technology to the point where it believes that switching supplies not only equal the conventional direct variety but actually outperform them.

## VERDICT

**Linn Klimax Kontrol preamplifier**  
**£6,000**

▶ Inky black background gives the music more room to express itself in all its emotional and technical glory.

▶ At the end of the day, a regular old volume knob is preferable to buttons, and accessing the socketry is a beeeeaatch.

## CONCLUSION

A beautifully executed example of sleek audio art, the Kontrol sounds as clean as it looks, and is a lot more transparent than most.

## KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Precision machined casework
- ▶ Three single-ended RCA phono inputs, 1 balanced XLR
- ▶ Single-ended RCA phono output, balanced XLR
- ▶ Gain range: -95dB to +9.5dB in 0.5dB steps
- ▶ Dimensions WxHxD: 35x6x35.5cm
- ▶ Weight: 9kg
- ▶ Control socketry: RS232 in/outputs, RC5 in/outputs, Knekt in/outputs
- ▶ Variable input gain



impression that the unit is floating. The front-to-back depth is misleading because there is a considerable overhang where the top shell extends over the socketry. Presumably this is done to keep things tidy and not merely to make reviewers' lives more difficult – the overhang makes getting cables in and out of the Kontrol a bit of a fiddle, to put it mildly.

Despite its discreet appearance, the Kontrol is a fully-fledged stereo preamp with both balanced and single-ended in and outputs, socketry to integrate with Linn's Knekt multi-room system and RS232 ports for operation via touch screen or computer interfaces. It appears to have it all, unless you have more than three single-ended sources or more than one balanced one.

The Kontrol's basic front panel controls are bolstered by a substantial remote control that looks a little out of place next to the preamp. It's nicely made and appealingly tactile, but as it will run all manner of kit, both Linn and third party,

there are numerous buttons and the thing looks a little like a paddle for the as yet unlaunched Linn Kanoe.

Still, it helps you assign names to inputs and adjust the gain of each, as well as enabling access to a wide selection of variables such as start up volume and source. You can also access max volume and even something called key rate, which changes the speed at which functions activate when you press the + or - volume buttons. They appear to have thought of everything.

## PERFORMANCE

Reviewers have on occasion been known to use the bizarre phrase 'inky black' to describe the lack of background noise from an audio component, and this is the sort of machine that encourages it. Let's just say it's absurdly quiet. Now, not many preamps produce audible noise, so to clarify that statement, it basically comes down to dynamic range – the gap between the lowest and highest signal

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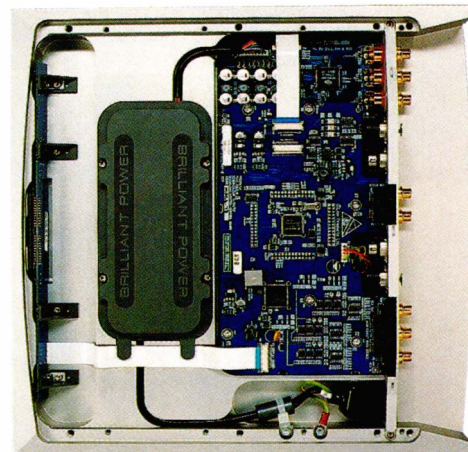
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L I N N K L I M A X K O N T R O L

*"Its strengths cover all aspects from imaging to dynamics, and from timing to transparency."*



levels that the system will produce. By reducing a component's noise floor you extend the lower limit and thus increase the overall range, and the perceived effect is a quieter background. It's a rare and beautiful thing, but once heard it's not easily forgotten.

It forms a kind of blank canvas on which the preamp describes both the finest and most obvious elements of music. And it does this with finesse, precision and a total absence of distortion – in fact, it makes lesser designs sound positively coarse, such is the purity of the signal delivered to the power amp(s).

On this occasion, the amps are integrated into a pair of ATC SCMS0A active loudspeakers, with the Kontrol driving a longish pair of balanced leads. The combination works a treat, the ATCs translating the high-resolution output of the Kontrol into one of the finest incarnations of music that we've had the pleasure to hear.

Its strengths cover all aspects from imaging to dynamics, and from timing to transparency. But it's that last area in which it stands proud. Play familiar – very familiar – material, and you'll hear the finest details fully resolved while the fundamentals take on a life and solidity that brings a broad grin to the reviewer's weary visage. (It's a hard life!)

Instrumental tone is also well served, to a degree one rarely gets with solid state preamps. Saxophones, double bass, electric guitar: you name it, the Kontrol will extract more character than most. It reproduces the good bits – scale, dynamics, great acoustics – and the bad bits – compression, limited bandwidth and poor recording in general – not forgetting less than delightful characteristics in the source. But if you want a wide-open window, you have to expect everything to come in. And fortunately most of it's good, solid music. Like Lambchop, Stone Temple Pilots (remember them?), Bugge Wesseltoft,

**The Kontrol's beautifully sleek, 4mm high casing doesn't prevent an impressive complement of connection options round the back.**

Him, Frank Zappa and Coldcut. I played them all and more, and only my deadline made me stop.

Linn's completion of the Klimax range is possibly its pinnacle – the Kontrol is an extremely fine piece of audio engineering wrapped up in one of the most elegant boxes in the business. All that and it sounds fantastic too. It doesn't get much better than this.

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#### ALSO CONSIDER

**CHAPTER AUDIO PREFACE £4,300**

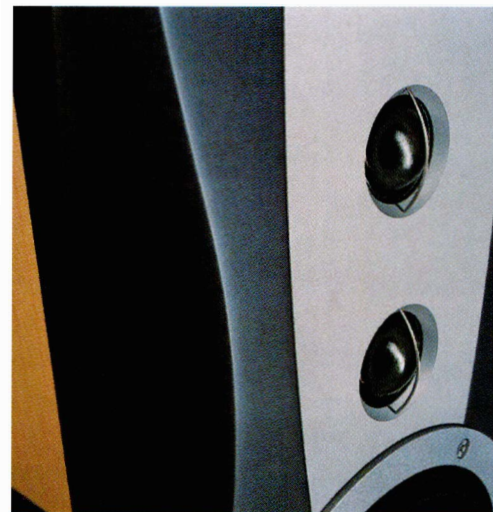
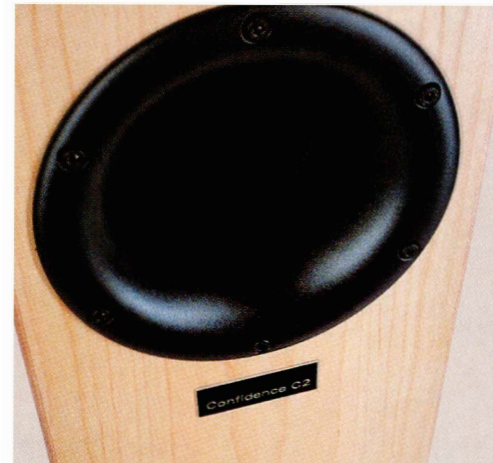
Another deathly quiet background design with similar sonic aspirations, albeit not quite such elegant casework.

**NAIM NAC552 £11,750**

Top dog from Linn's one-time ally delivers magnificent sound with flexibility and convenience.

**NAGRA PL-L £4,395**

Jewel-like valve preamp from Switzerland with overkill engineering on an almost miniature scale with exquisite sound.



***“Just place a hand  
anywhere on the  
speaker and spin  
something loud and  
heavy – the lack of  
any significant  
vibration is  
obvious.”***

EXCLUSIVE

# Confidence brick

*Dynaudio's new upmarket Confidence C2 combines contemporary styling with radical thinking*

The Confidence C2's striking styling will stop you in your tracks. Love it or loathe it, it's a style statement, although one to sit much more happily amid contemporary minimalism than the more cluttered and traditional decor that surrounded the pair during this review.

Unusual it might be, but the appearance of this C2 has its own form-follows-function logic, which has interesting implications. Dynaudio has always been an upmarket brand, and Confidence is one of its more upmarket ranges, just one notch down from the Evidence 'flagships'. This C2 is the least costly of three Confidence models, yet still costs a considerable £5,500 the pair, which might seem a lot in view of the modest driver array, but is at least partly justified by the elaborate, beautifully built and hefty 40kg cabinetwork.

Few, if any, of comparable performance can match the C2's fashionable super-slim front view, though few are as deep or stand more than a metre and a half tall either. In fact it all makes sense, creating a speaker that's visually discreet, yet still provides a decent enclosure volume to load the bass drive units.

## LAB MEASUREMENTS

The Confidence C2 just about reaches its specified sensitivity of 88dB for 2.83V, although the impedance dips down to around four ohms through the upper bass, and at the port-tuned frequency, close to the 30Hz mark.

Because the port is tuned to such a low frequency, there's plenty of deep bass output, but that may also help explain why the upper bass is decidedly lean. On our far-field in-room response traces, deep bass holds up well, registering -3dB at 20Hz. Above that point, output averaged +3dB from 25-55Hz ref the midband datum, while 55-200Hz averaged -2dB. Such a substantial 5dB transition between adjacent parts of the spectrum is bound to have significant subjective consequences.

Above 200Hz it all looks impressively smooth and very well ordered, with output falling very gently above 700Hz. The crossover transition is very well handled, with just slight rippling, while the treble shows a mild, broad peak 6-9kHz.

## VERDICT

**Dynaudio Confidence C2 loudspeaker**  
£5,500 (per pair)

▲ Very clear and coherent performer with wide dynamic range and precise imaging. Strikingly contemporary styling.

▼ Balance is a little too 'cool' and lacking in upper bass drive and punch. Looks you'll love or loathe.

◎ **CONCLUSION**  
Clear and coherent with wide dynamic range and precise imaging, though a little 'cool' overall, and lacking in punch.

## KEY FEATURES

- Elaborate, beautifully built and hefty 40kg cabinetwork
- Fashionably super-slim front view
- Innovative design separates the roles of the baffle and the enclosure
- Twinned drive units help reduce vertical room reflections
- Cunningly shaped matt black baffle is 40mm thick HDF (high density fibreboard)
- Speaker is built on a massive plinth, ensuring fine stability

The key break with tradition comes in Dynaudio's decision to separate the roles – and the physical reality – of the baffle and the enclosure. 'Baffle' is hi-fi jargon for the panel on which the drive units are mounted, and in the majority of cases it forms the front panel of the enclosure. That makes good sense, acoustically at least, as both baffle and enclosure have the joint responsibility of keeping the front of the driver away from its rear.

However, Dynaudio would seem to be implying that combining the baffle with the front panel of the enclosure is not ideal from a mechanical viewpoint.

Instead we have a separate, massive matt black baffle cunningly shaped from 40mm thick HDF (high density fibreboard). This in turn is fixed to the enclosure proper via a thinner 'gasket' of a different grade board to provide damping, while shaped fillets of smoked glass reinforce the enclosure sides just behind the two main drivers. Separated by a 50mm spacer, which presumably houses the crossover network, the enclosure proper appears to 'float' 50mm above a very substantial matt black plinth, ensuring fine stability.

A single terminal pair confirms Dynaudio's rejection of bi-wiring, and the network has gentle 6dB/octave slopes.

The driver arrangements look simple but are rather unusual, with twin 170mm bass/mid drivers mounted above and below twin 28mm tweeters, in an array which is slightly asymmetric about its horizontal axis. Reminiscent of the original THX-spec home cinema speakers in the early

1990s, doubling the drivers in such a way effectively creates something closer to a line-source rather than a point-source speaker. This in turn means that its output will tend to be cylindrical rather than spherical, so the sound will tend to spread out horizontally, with a smaller vertical component than with single 'point-source' drivers.

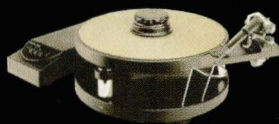
As a result, the speaker should have a greater ratio of direct to reflected sound



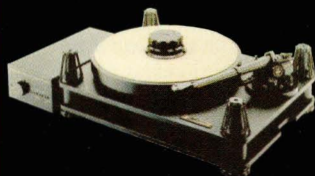
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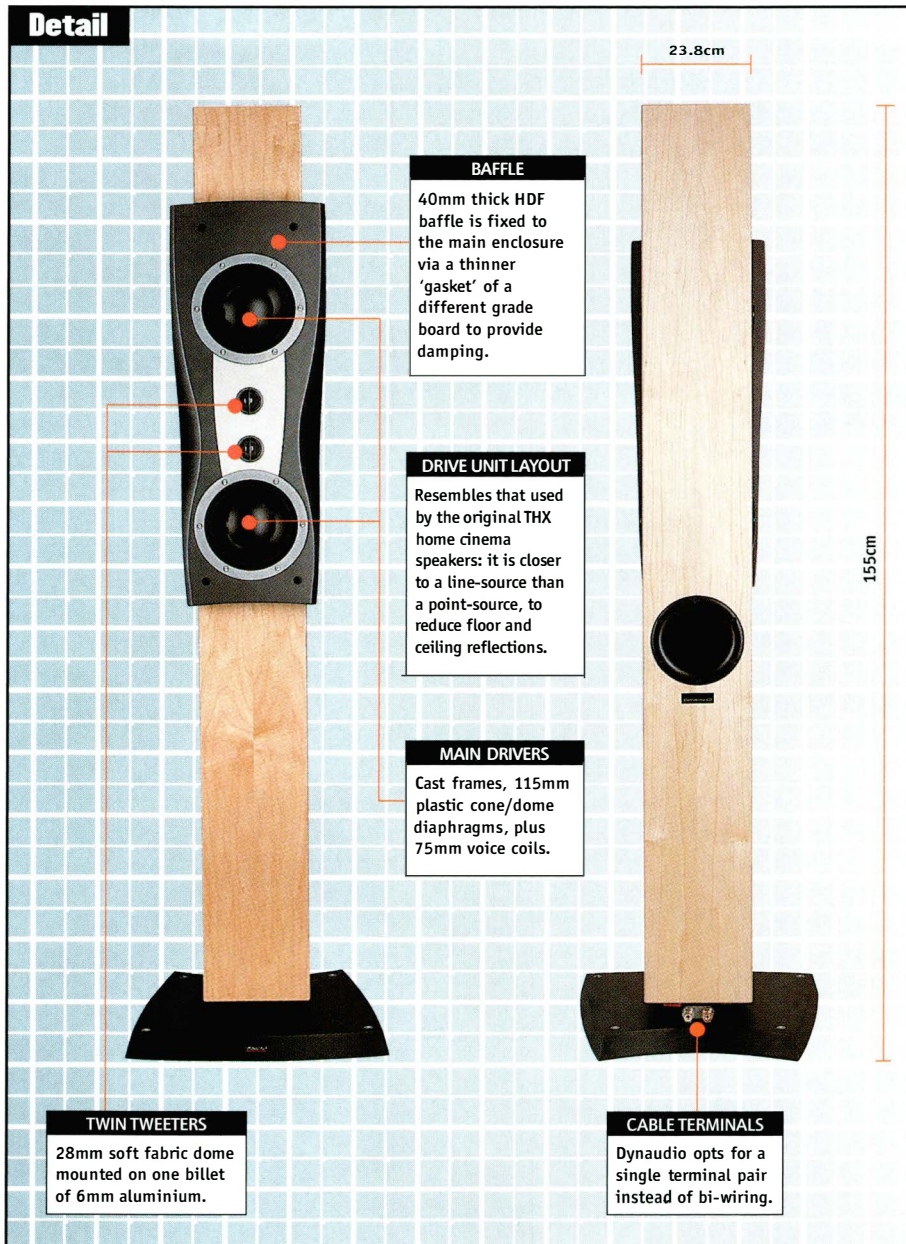
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something very loud and heavy – the lack of any significant vibration from the enclosure is very obvious.

Experimenting with positioning suggested that the C2 should be kept well clear of walls, as this tended to make the lack of warmth a little less severe, although it always remained an essential part of this speaker's character in our largish listening room.

Another essential ingredient in the total performance is the fact that the drive units are placed quite high off the ground, the mid-point between the two main drivers being slightly above normal seated ear height. This places the image up higher than most, giving an enhanced impression of scale, and probably also contributing towards the freedom from heaviness and thickening.

And while there may be some lack of mid and upper bass, low bass is most definitely on the agenda here, adding due weight and gravitas as and when the programme demands. Yet it never draws unwanted attention to itself when not needed, so the net result is clean, clear and full of authority. The twin-driver arrangement seems to work as promised. Imaging is notably precise and always well focused, and there was no evidence of any high frequency 'phishiness', whatever theory might predict.

There's no gainsaying the fundamental lack of sonic 'warmth' here – a feature which the C2 shares with a number of upmarket designs *Choice* has reviewed recently, including B&W's Nautilus 800, Neat's Ultimatum MF9, and Wilson Benesch's Chimera. The radical styling will probably be as controversial as it is creative, but the great strength of this speaker lies in the way it combines the clarity and coherence of an essentially simple design, with the sort of solid unflappability that is the hallmark of thorough and high-class engineering.

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◀ than more conventional designs, and in particular reduce the proportion of sound reflected off the ceiling and floor, which should improve imaging, especially in larger rooms. The downside may be some phasey interference between the two tweeters, depending on the spacing and (unspecified) crossover arrangements.

All the drivers are made by Dynaudio, and are familiar in their distinctive ways. The main drivers have cast frames and 115mm plastic cone/dome diaphragms driven from a large (75mm) voice coil. The tweeters are the latest version of Dynaudio's 28mm soft fabric dome, with short horn loading and ferrofluid damping, both mounted on a single billet of 6mm aluminium.

**PERFORMANCE**

First impressions – always important – were of an exceptionally clean sound, precisely focused with a notably wide dynamic range and a very attractive (and unusual) freedom from any 'chesty' or 'thickening' effects.

Second impressions – which are equally vital – were of a slightly cold and clinical balance, which correlates closely with the measured in-room responses. This serves to highlight midband detail, but it also leaves the sound rather lacking in warmth, richness and bass 'punch'.

One contributing factor is certainly that cabinet coloration is exceptionally low here. Just place a hand against the box (anywhere on the box) and spin

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**LIVING VOICE AVATAR OBX-R £4,000**

External crossover adds refinement to a dynamic and high-resolution design, with a relaxed balance.

**B&W NAUTILUS 803 £3,500**

Essentially neutral if a touch laid-back, with good dynamic range and fine, driving bass.



This chunky stereo amp doesn't sully its well-built casing with anything as mundane as a volume control knob. That's all taken care of through a flexible and comprehensive electronic switching system.

EXCLUSIVE

# BAT swings

A new arrival from a young high-end brand gives great bass, but does that justify its price tag?

From a range which mixes valve and solid-state designs with unusually cheerful abandon comes this chunky beast of an integrated amp. As reviewed here it is an all-solid-state design, but BAT also offers a valve input stage as an option – no, two valve input stages with different valves and at different prices. Add also the options of remote control and phono input and you have a range of VK-300x models up to £5,350.

The guts remain unchanged, however, and it's got plenty of them in the shape of 150 watt-rated output into eight ohms (300 watts into four ohms for those ohmically challenged speakers). That's delivered from three pairs of high quality Toshiba output transistors per channel, backed up by a large toroidal transformer and plenty of power supply capacitance. BAT clearly regards circuit simplicity as important, and disregarding the copious quantities of housekeeping and protection circuitry in the VK-300's case, this is indeed quite a straightforward circuit.

User convenience has been exceptionally well attended to. You'll notice the absence of a volume knob: control is achieved by electronic switching. This has its pros and cons, but really scores in the flexibility it can add. Describing the possibilities of volume control and programming takes up several pages of the well-written manual, but just about every combination of power-up state, default volume levels and balance can be preset. Phase can be switched, mono

## BALANCED AUDIO WHO?

One of the younger names in the US high-end scene, BAT was founded in 1994. In the true spirit of post-Iron Curtain friendship, one of the founders was American, one Russian: maybe it's no coincidence then that the company's first amplifier, the VK60 power amp, uses the famous Russian 6C33 valve!

The range now runs to a variety of amplifiers plus a rather impressive CD player, many of the products using unusual circuit configurations including mixes of valves and transistors, priced at what one might call the 'sane high end'. 'Balanced' refers not only to balanced connections but also, the company assures us, to design choices generally. A relative newcomer to Britain, BAT has already made quite an impact in the States.

## PERFORMANCE

Expectations of an amp at this price are naturally high, and the VK-300 gets off to a good start in meeting them with a strong, bold, forthright sound which immediately grabs the attention and proclaims its intentions as a no-nonsense customer. There's plenty of bass, well-defined midrange and no shortage of treble extension, and the whole is very well controlled – controlled in the sense of never being allowed to get out of hand, rather than in any way subdued.

All the same, some doubts can creep in after a few minutes' listening. One of these concerns the electronic volume control, which introduces little clicks as it operates, even when no music is playing.

**“The whole is very well controlled – controlled in the sense of never being allowed to get out of hand, rather than in any way subdued.”**

operation selected, and inputs (listed on the metalwork only by number) assigned names – in Russian, if you like. Nice.

There are five inputs in all, of which two are balanced (XLR input sockets) and three conventional unbalanced RCA phonos. Tape output is provided on phonos and preamp output on XLRs. Single pairs of 4mm terminals/binding posts carry the output. Construction overall is extremely good.

It's a small point, but one BAT might usefully attend to. More seriously, there's some brashness in the treble which can reduce detail and, with already bright recordings, become irritating over time. In some circumstances this can help revive the vigour of tired-sounding discs, but more often it's a drawback.

Listening to familiar CDs and LPs highlighted the contrasting characteristics of the VK-300. *Ambrosio* (an opera by

## VERDICT

**Balanced Audio Technology VK-300x stereo amplifier**  
£3,550

⊕ Terrific authority and control at lower frequencies, which separates and defines musical strands as befits a truly high-end amplifier.

⊖ Treble frequently suffers from a brash, even harsh, edginess which mars detail and can irritate.

## CONCLUSION

A frustrating mix of admirable qualities and annoying drawbacks that's too limited in its musical tastes for all-round recommendation.

## KEY FEATURES

- ⊕ 150W into 8 ohms
- ⊕ 5 line inputs inc. 2 balanced
- ⊕ Phono input optional
- ⊕ Preamp output (balanced)
- ⊕ Remote control optional
- ⊕ Weight: 23kg

Mexican composer Guzmán) really didn't benefit from that brashness, although its excellent bass detail was highlighted nicely. It also showed up a slight lack of stereo image depth. On the other hand, a couple of 1960s live classical recordings seemed refreshed and played with new authority. On the rock front, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* strutted its stuff with gusto, though lacking a little of the subtlety of which it is a rare exemplar. More recent releases from Feeder and The Cannibals were admirably clear, the BAT amplifier making unusually confident progress through the dense undergrowth of heavy studio processing.

A brief foray into the lab showed that the VK-300 suffers quite noticeably from distortion (probably classic crossover) with plenty of high harmonics, probably accounting for the brashness and occasional loss of depth and HF detail. Its high sensitivity ensures compatibility with any source component (although if you do ever need to turn the volume up to full throttle you will suffer noticeable treble loss), while residual noise is a little on the high side and may become audible with very sensitive speakers.

There can be no denying that in many ways this amplifier is more than merely competent. All the same, for this high price one has a right to expect not only excellence in some areas but also (at least) freedom from obvious defects in others. The promise is there in the lower octaves, but until the shortcomings in the treble are sorted out this amplifier will remain a tantalising glimpse of the high end rather than the major audio indulgence it promises to be. ⊕

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**ATC SIA2-150** £2,375

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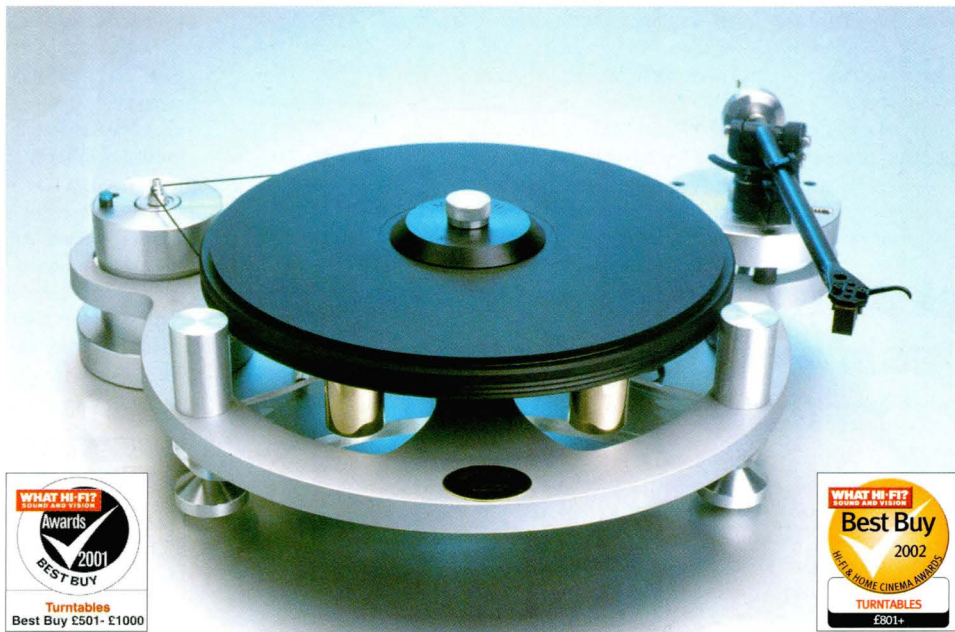
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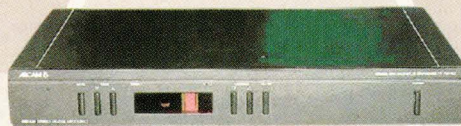
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# RETRO

## ARCAM DELTA 150 NICAM TUNER



We're sure you don't need reminding that Arcam – A&R Cambridge then – first made its name with the worthy, reliable but boring-as-baked-beans A60 integrated amplifier. But while the main act may not have been especially exciting, there was another side to the Arcam operation. It has long had a radical sideline developing – expensively in some cases – niche products that realistically can have had little prospect of any real commercial payoff.

Perhaps the most infamous (and costly) of these products was the ill-starred Arcam cassette deck, which made it on sale just as the puff was going out of the high-end cassette deck market. But the prototype for this kind of exercise was an earlier product, the Arcam Delta 150, a standalone NICAM TV tuner – a product category of which it was one of the first and final exponents.

Arcam's big idea was simply to add another signal source to their portfolio, but this time dedicated to TV sound. When the Delta 150 was introduced in 1990, the elegant NICAM system had just been successfully launched as a means of adding stereo sound to monaural TV sound transmissions, without loss of compatibility. There was certainly some public interest in channelling stereo TV sound through audio systems, and indeed there were some relatively inexpensive, though not always very satisfactory, solutions from lesser-known manufacturers designed for this purpose. But the Delta 150 was a different kettle of fish.

Typically, Arcam took on the project the hard way, eschewing off-the-shelf solutions in favour of a design co-developed with a TV technology solutions company called Eldon Technologies, staffed at the time mainly by ex-Ferguson engineers.


Although this was the first Arcam product to acknowledge the significance of TV sound, it was not a true precursor to the home cinema market. It was very much a product of its time that could only work in the narrow interregnum between the introduction of stereo broadcasts and the widespread use of VCR technology. VCRs were around when the Delta 150 was launched, of course, but they were rarely considered suitable for high quality audio.

***“The Delta 150 might have done better, but there was a marked reluctance by some of Arcam’s retailers to the idea of having TV sets in their showrooms.”***

But ironically, it was the widespread adoption of VCRs that led directly to the use of Dolby Surround in the home, and the multichannel home cinema market that opened out later.

Arcam's baby was not concerned only with TV sound: it was a full-on TV video tuner with RF video in- and outputs, and a composite video output on BNC and Scart sockets – S-video and RGB lay in the future. Stereo audio was channelled through the Scart, and also through two pairs of phono sockets. It was a more than respectable video performer, and its sound quality was a lot better than the built-in NICAM stages of TV sets, and most of the other standalone NICAM implementations of the day. Even now it remains a credible performer, and has become something of a collector's item via the internet auction sites.

The Delta 150 was put on sale at £350, a substantial sum at the time, and it eventually sold about 1,500 samples in the UK, the final batch at reduced price. It might have done even better, but there was a marked reluctance by some of Arcam's retailers to the idea of having TV sets in their showrooms. A separate version was later developed with balanced audio outputs, which was sold in significant numbers to the BBC. Another 1,500 were sold through distributors in Hong Kong, where the NICAM system was also adopted.

All in, Arcam may have just about managed to recoup its costs, but the Delta 150 certainly didn't make the company's fortune. It exemplifies that kind of exercise that swallows up research and development resources, and which the bean-counters really hate. But it was an authentic contribution to the market, which for its fans provided stunning TV sound for the very first time. 

*Alvin Gold*

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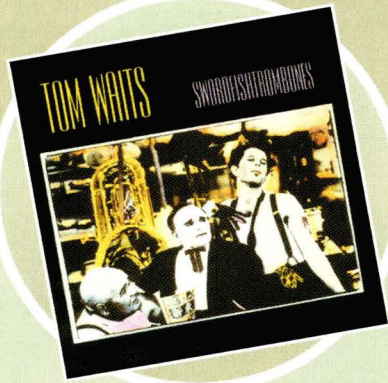
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# MUSO

TOM WAITS  
SWORDFISHTROMBONES



It seems a long time ago, but Tom Waits wasn't always the world's favourite boho iconoclast and junkyard troubadour. In the seventies, he was set on a path that could have made him a Jackson

Browne or a James Taylor. His bitter-sweet jazzy chronicles of LA lush life were arranged for piano and saxophone, sometimes with orchestra, and were covered by the likes of the Eagles and Bette Midler. The switchblade-sharp wordplay was there, the tunes were often eminently hummable, but there was always that voice, that raw liver, four-packs-a-day rasp, which tended to keep him away from radio playlists if not out of the bars.

Released in 1983, *Swordfish Trombones* marked the point at which Tom Waits at last stopped striving for widespread public acceptance, and in the process created his most famous and successful work, as well as carving out a whole new direction – not just for himself, but for music.

The album followed a series of changes for Waits. He left his record label, ditched his manager, and got married. Kathleen Brennan has been a feature of his work ever since, as manager, inspiration for many of his songs and also musical collaborator. "My life was getting more settled," he said later. "I was staying out of the bars. But my work was becoming more scary."


This was also the first of his albums in which Waits also took responsibility for the production. His long-time mixing desk partner, Bones Howe, who had supervised most of his earlier albums, was let go, since Waits reckoned he needed a clean break from the past. This time he would go it alone, or at least with a whole new bag of collaborators. And it wasn't just the personnel that changed. Waits' instrumental staples, such as saxophone and piano, also took a back seat, making way for a ragbag of percussion and effects which included marimba, metal aunglons, bass drum with rice, harmonium, freedom bell, parade drum, bagpipes, glass harmonica and – of course – trombones (the swordfish may be there, but you can't hear it). "The problem is that most instruments are square and music is always round," he commented shortly after the album's release.

***"Not since Dylan assaulted delicate folky sensibilities with his electric direction on Bringing It All Back Home had an artist made such a profound about-face."***

Despite all this (meticulously sculpted) cacophony, the least accessible sound on the album is still Waits' voice, which growls and barks, hisses and wails throughout.

Any prior nods towards easy listening were gleefully abandoned in his search for new sounds, new feelings. Not since Dylan assaulted delicate folky sensibilities with his new electric direction on *Bringing It All Back Home* had an artist made such a profound about-face. Influences on Waits' new sound included the atonal freakery of Captain Beefheart and the sonic junkyard inventions of American original Harry Partsch. Never quite popular during the thirties and forties, Partsch devised his own scale of 43 individual notes and composed and played on instruments he 'invented' using junk he found on his travels, giving them names like the Ptolemy and the Chromelodeon.

However, the experiment worked because Waits played to his strengths. Lyrically, it's untouchable, with emotional pay-offs ranging from the almost unbearably poignant *Soldier's Things*, about a war hero reduced to a few dollar-apiece artefacts in a second-hand store, to the twisted humour of *Frank's Wild Years*, which casts Waits in his oft-repeated demented cabaret raconteur persona. The melodies too, although not as overt as previously, are still intact, particularly on the instrumentals, *Just Another Sucker On The Vine* and *Rainbirds*.

But Waits' new direction proved a hit with the critics, and the plaudits have rained down on his work ever since. The inspired change of direction was just the shot in the arm he needed, and offered a rich new creative seam which he has continued to mine. Though he's uncovered many gems along the way, none shine brighter than *Swordfish Trombones*. 

Dave Oliver



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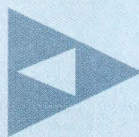
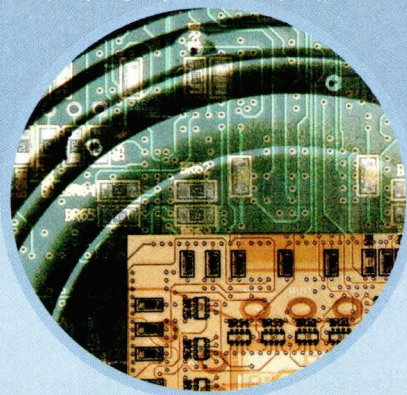


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# DIGITALIA

## PROGRESSIVE SCAN



Arcam's DV88 Plus (review p26) might be the first DVD player to output progressive images with both NTSC and PAL systems, but what does this really mean for 'high fidelity' video? In short, quite a bit, because progressive or progressively-scanned video avoids a raft of the visible distortions commonly associated with the interlaced scanning method of even the most modern TVs. Some bang-up-to-date TVs will accept a progressive video input, sharing much of their technology with PC monitors that are optimised for progressive rather than interlaced images. Plasma screens and projection systems based on LCD, DLP or DILA panels address each of their display elements (pixels) directly and so are purpose-designed for a progressive video signal.

Compared with a standard interlaced TV picture, a progressively-scanned image reduces the visibility of a TV's line structure, improves the perceived resolution of vertical detail and diagonals (such as rooftops), reduces visible flickering and moire effects. A progressively-scanned image can even improve the *efficiency* of the TV, making for pictures that are over twenty per cent brighter. So, while there's no doubt that progressive video is the future, why have we waited until now to realise its benefits?

Information bandwidth is key. In 1983, squeezing 70 minutes of data onto a CD with a sample rate of 44.1kHz and 16 bits of resolution was the practical limit. Now we have DVD-A. Same sized disc but containing up to five channels of data sampled at 96kHz and with 24 bits of resolution. Meanwhile, the Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) that forms the heart of every conventional TV was invented a century ago. And yet, decades later, as national broadcast systems were being developed there was still not the technology to implement progressive scanning which requires twice the bandwidth of an interlaced signal.

A flickering picture, in its crudest form, is caused by successive images or frames not appearing in rapid enough succession. If successive frames are updated swiftly enough then our persistence of vision provides the illusion of an uninterrupted moving picture. The fact that the CRT's phosphor coating also

glows for a finite period assists in this ruse. Either way, a frame rate of 50Hz was agreed upon in the UK because it allowed the signal to be synchronised with the mains frequency while also delivering flicker-free pictures. Unfortunately, the broadcast network had insufficient bandwidth to accommodate 625 lines per video frame every 1/50th of a second.

Interlaced scanning is the compromise and we live with its legacy to this day. Here each frame is split into two fields that are traced, from left to right and top to bottom, across the phosphor-coated surface of the CRT. The first field traces out all the odd-numbered lines, reaches the bottom of the screen and flies back to the top before tracing out all the even-numbered lines between. So, although the frame rate is just 1/25th of a second, by updating each *field* at 1/50th of a second and relying on the persistence of the phosphor, the subjective benefits of true 50Hz scanning are very nearly achieved.

Nearly, that is, until big screen TVs and CRT projection systems made the line structure of the interlaced image very much more obvious. DVD too, with its improved resolution over VHS and even LaserDisc, only serves to illuminate the limitations of our crusty TV system. Using a progressively-scanned (or non-interlaced) video output provides a neat solution because here each of the 625 lines per video frame are updated in one pass every 1/50th of a second.

The video line structure is less obvious because the persistence of the phosphor is normalised across the surface of the CRT. With an interlaced image, the lines of the first field are fading as those of the second field are written. This also creates a comb-like distortion with quickly moving images where an object shifts position between fields. Because progressive video writes each frame intact, its resolution of fast-moving images is crisper.

Much depends on the quality of interlaced-to-progressive conversion which is performed in the digital domain via a technique similar to the upsampling of audio data in a CD or DVD player. Keep reading *HFC* for more on high fidelity video.

*Paul Miller*

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## FOR SALE

**FREE TO COLLECTORS**, back issues of *Hi-Fi Choice* from 1980 to 1995.

Mick 02476 849270 (Coventry).

**ATC SCA2** preamp (£3,000), black ash ATC SCM20 TASL active floorstanding speakers (£4,000), £5,000 together or available separately. Marantz CD17 KI

Signature (£1,400) £600. Audiolab 8000T tuner £1,200 if you must.

Expensive interconnects available at no extra cost. Audition and delivery arranged. Genuine reason for sale.

01531 631018 (Herefordshire)

**SONUS FABER CONCERTINO**

speakers, superb condition with matching stands, boxed £500. Audio Analogue Puccini SE silver. £250. Can demo. 01732 461561 (Kent).

**AUDIOLAB 8000CD** £400, 8000C preamp £200, vdH Teatrack bi-wire 2x5m £120, boxed with manuals. 020 8769 9868 (London).

**KEF Q75** floorstanding speakers, as new, boxed. (£1,000) £650. 01823 252604 evenings (Somerset).

**MONITOR AUDIO 852MD** speakers with stands, offers. JVC QL-Y5F DD turntable. Piano gloss rosewood £275 ono. 01708 457691 (Essex)

**CYRUS/ MISSION** system original preamp, original power amps x2, Mission 752 freedom speakers. Total for system £1,000. Dave 0151 283 7039 (Liverpool).

**VDH CS122 HYBRID** cable, 2x 8 metres, £80. Also QED Qudos Cable, 34 Metres, £35. Mike 01904 708117 (York)

**MERIDIAN 508** 20-bit CD player, immaculate condition, boxed with Meridian system remote and balanced interconnects. (£2,000) £875 ovno. 07753 625783 after 7pm (S London).

**MORDAUNT-SHORT MS815** floorstanding loudspeakers (£450).

Black ash with cherry baffle. Boxed and in excellent condition. £250.

Leigh 01248 353401 (North Wales).

**NAKAMICHI DR3** two-head stereo tape deck. Mint, bargain at £150. No offers. 01326 572099 (Cornwall).

**ROKSAN CASPIAN** amp, (£900) £495, JBL4312MK2 three-way standmount, (£1,000) £575 both mint, boxed and very highly reviewed. 07786 964335 (S London).

**ORELLE SA100RX** amp. *HFC* Best Buy with mm phono and R/C £350 Rega Planet with R/C £250 both boxed. Will accept £475 for both. 020 88070160 (North London)

**MARANTZ CD6000** OSE CD player. As new cond with box, instructions £125 01494 717850 (Bucks)

**REGA BRIO** amplifier. As new condition. Complete with box, instructions and sales receipt. (£298) £190. 01494 717850 (Bucks)

**DENON DCD 1290** CD Player £120, Sony FA3ES integrated amp £120, both boxed and in excellent condition. SonicLink AST 200 bi-wire speaker cable four-metre terminated pair £50. 01162 238926 (Leicester).

**LUXMAN SQ503** amp c.1972 sumptuous sounds, regretful sale, offers, demo no problem. email: [marcus.nash@port.ac.uk](mailto:marcus.nash@port.ac.uk).

**CREEK OBH-11** headphone amplifier for sale, 1 year old. £75 or nearest offer. 07751 974598 or email [alexsmith@enterprise.net](mailto:alexsmith@enterprise.net).

**MARANTZ** CD player CD-52 special edition with remote control, cassette deck SD-52, tuner SD-50L, amplifier PM-52, all user guides, £195. Tel.0191 5814143 (Co Durham)

**VIDEOLOGIC DRX-601E** DAB tuner, absolutely brand new, in original packaging (still sealed and stapled), unwanted competition prize, £275+

p&p 01202 462837 atom2001@ntlworld.com (Bournemouth)

**LINN SONDECK LP12 PLUS K9.**

Excellent condition. Amazing sound from an original spec turntable, £295. Naim nap 90, mint £195. Marantz CD63 (Special Edition) mint (£85). 01926 775134 (Warks)

**SPENDOR SPEAKERS S9, S3, SC3** cherry. John 07771 773001 (Sussex).

**RA KCAG** mini jack with ultraplate phonos 0.5m £140, JVC HA-DX3 headphone (*HFC* REC) £140 both little used 07812 728201 (Salterton).

**ARCAM FMJ 23** CD player two months old (£1,150) £750, Arcam A85 Amplifier four months old (£750) £550, Mission 754 floorstanding spkrs, oak, bi-wire (£1,400) £550. All boxed mint. 0115 960 3934 (Nottingham).

**MORDAUNT SHORT MS815**, 821 centre, 823 rears £250. Also Quad 11L b/e maple, new, boxed £250. 020 7724 9945 (London)

**ARCAM ALPHA 9** CD player, 24-bit ring DAC, boxed, remote control and manual, mint condition, £550. 020 8311 0691/07769 541327 (London).

**STANDS UNIQUE** sound support 10 (natural ash) four-shelf hi-fi stand, mint, £175. 01633 281436 (S Wales).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1000** amp

## WANTED

**B&W MATRIX 802 SERIES 3** (late Series 2 also considered). Must be in excellent condition. Cash waiting. Call Alan, 020-8422 1195.

**AMITY HPA2** headphone amplifier, or Musical Fidelity X-Cans V2. 01257 273342 after 6pm. (Lancs).

(£1,500) £625, Naim Nait 5 amp, three months old £600. 0121 246 0486 (Birmingham).

**SONY SACD 555ES** gold, weeks old. £850. 07713 258836 (Kent).

**KEF Q55** two speakers, Arcam Alpha 7 tuner, Yamaha DSPC800 processor, KEF Q95.2 centre. Mint, £600. Can separate. 01902 835297 (W Mids).

**AUDIOLAB 8000A** amp, nine years old but still holds its own. Good condition, boxed, £100 ono Mark 07786 234855 (Norwich) or [markwenham@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:markwenham@yahoo.co.uk).

**ARCAM CD92** £500, Alpha 6 CD (new laser) £120, Alpha 5 tuner £60. Boxed in excellent condition. Hugh 020 7633 9695 (London)

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGO2** (£300) £150 fantastic sound. Alphason RS10 & Atacama SE24 stands (£130) £65 mint. Complete kit £200. 07976 820637 (Surrey).

## 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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**Arms:** Rega 300/600/900; SME Series IV and V; Kuzma Stogi; Triplanar.  
**Cartridges:** VanDenHul Grasshopper and Colibri; Kuzma KC Ref; EMT; Reson Recla and Elite; Cartridge Man Musicmaker; Benz-Micro including Ruby Open Air; Kondo Io J.  
**Amplifiers:** Border Patrol; Canary; Sugden; Art Audio; Monarchy; Western Electric; Icon; Tom Evans Audio Designs; SJS.  
**CD Players:** Wadia; Sugden; Primare; Resolution.  
**Loudspeakers:** Living Voice; Vitavox; Lowther.  
**Cables and Tables** by Living Voice.

#### Sale of Part Exchange and Ex-dem Items

	Sale	New
Dynaudio Confidence 3. Rosewood, perfect, boxed, giveaway.	£2750	£4800
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn, mahogany	£1500	£3400
Gamma Reference 5 speakers - gloss black - giveaway	£1000	£4500
Mirage 890i - fine condition - give away.	£200	
Linn Kelidh - fine condition - give away.	£200	
Art Audio Symphony (full chrome) 300 B SE 10 w. int.	£2250	£4000
Art Audio Vinyl 1 mm phono stage. Chrome	£1000	£1550
Art Audio VP1 line pre. Chrome	£1000	£2000
Tube Technology MAC mm and mc phono - as new	£900	£1400
Audio Innovations L2 line pre	£350	£750
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 15A integrated amp - remote control.	£700	£1400
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 20A stereo power amp.	£700	£1400
AudioNote Soro Phono integrated. Serviced, new valves	£700	£1900
Cary 2A3, 8 watt stereo with Cary pre amp. New valves.	£500	
Unison Research Feather One line pre-amp.	£800	£1400
Mark Levinson 334 Power amp. April '02 boxed perfect	£4000	£6000
Red Rose Rosette 1 integrated, perfect, boxed.	£1000	£2000
Trichord Dino phono stage and power supply. June '02	£450	£650
Audio Research LS2 B line pre	£1250	
Pro Ac Tablette cherry	£300	
Kinshaw Perception 2 box pre-amp - Give Away	£100	
Voyd standard black - perfect - collectable joy.	£1500	
Ortofon Rohman - June '02 <10hrs use	£600	£1000
Origin Live Silver 250 " "	£500	£600

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# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and AV gear you can buy. Here you'll find all our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, together with useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

#### Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most thorough techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

#### How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

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# CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

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 jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

## 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.

## Q&A

### 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.

## TOP BUYS



### 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.

## Our favourite CD PLAYERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY 
  GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED 
  EDITOR'S CHOICE 
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### Audio only CD and SACD players

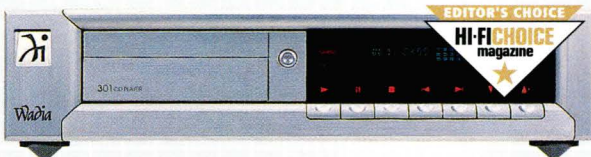
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing		●	●	●				212
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness		●	●					217
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks		●						212
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque		●	●	●	●			231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal							●	212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		●	●		●	●	●	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		●	●	●	●	●	●	231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step		●	●		●	●	●	206
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C 541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●				231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●		●				231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, if a little lacking in excitement or involvement		●						226
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability		●						212
<input type="checkbox"/>	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast and the availability of a complete upgrade path makes this a good long-term proposition								195
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,200	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility		●	●	●	●			226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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!		●						231
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Extravagantly detailed yet fluid sounding Canadian contender. A must-audition at the price		●		●		●		236
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well-built player – balanced outputs too		●	●		●			226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	This refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range builds on the qualities of the lesser models		●						226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell KPS 25sc	24,998	One of the finest CD players available, this is also a state of the art preamplifier with Cast interface technology		●	●	●		●	●	236
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz CD17 MkII KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)		●	●					226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●	●	●	●	231
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Meridian 507	1,195	Much of the refinement and subtlety of the brand's costlier equipment at an 'entry-level' price		●	●	●				234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE <sup>24</sup>	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●				●	229
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made		●	●	●	●	●		237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD S500i	1,200	Beautifully built, the S500i will fit into a lot of systems with ease and produce a rich and entertaining sound		●	●	●		●		237
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses								212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality			●			●		226
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sony SCD-XA333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround		●	●	●		●		224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch		●	●	●		●	●	223
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect		●	●			●	●	228

**SPECS KEY** **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.

## Q&A

### 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 QUALITY?

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.

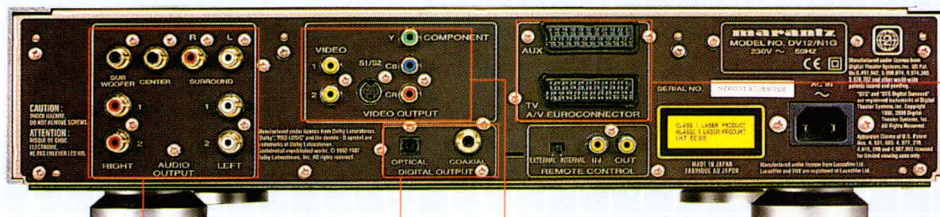
## DVD-AUDIO

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.



## 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.



## Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
EDITOR'S CHOICE
NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Audio/Video disc players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
<span>GROUP TEST BEST BUY</span>	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	Video player built with non-obsolescence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player						213
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
<span>GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED</span>	Denon DVD2800 MkII	750	Excellent Silicon Graphics processing, a wide range of features and sharp pricing make this a winner						237
<span>GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED</span>	Denon DVD-3800	1,000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station						234
<span>GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED</span>	Pioneer DV-656A	400	'Universal' SACD/DVD-Audio/Video player does everything moderately well or better, and is an excellent buy						234
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	Superb second generation 'universal' player equipped with next gen FireWire digital output – cutting edge disc replay						236
	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs						237
<span>GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED</span>	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance						234
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse						230
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Marantz DV8300	1,400	'Universal' machine with a great sense of timing and comprehensive features						233
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode						229
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player						218
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs						230
	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						213
	Roksan Caspian DVD	1,195	A good all-rounder – a solid and propulsive sounding DVD player which is also a surprisingly capable picture-making machine						237
<span>GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED</span>	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player – in this context, pricing is competitive						213
<span>EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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						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.

## TOP BUYS



### Sony DVP-NS905V £400

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



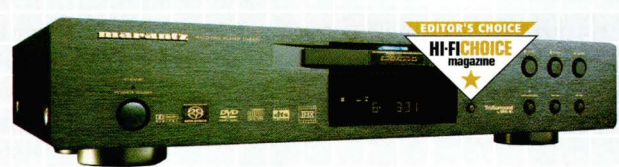
### Denon DVD-3800 £1,000

This DVD-Audio compatible player is excellent with music and equally sharp with video.



### Pioneer DV-757Ai £800

Pioneer's latest 'universal' disc player – strong with CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A alike.



### Marantz DV8300 £1,400

A superb machine compatible with virtually all formats including DVD-Audio and SACD.

AVID

AVID

AVID

AVID

AVID

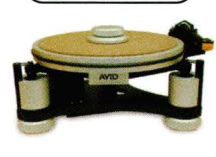
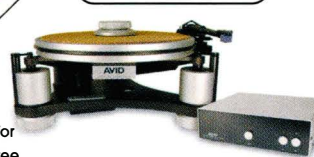
The most complete & thoroughly integrated solution to quality vinyl replay.

ACUTUS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

VOLVERE SEQUEL

VOLVERE



At AVID we build turntables for pure sound quality not pedigree.

Our AVID distributors will let you compare any of our AVID turntables to any other brand. The difference will amaze you!
   
 > The AV Lounge (London) 0207 375 3691 > Definitive Audio (Birmingham) 0115 973 3222 > Doug Brady Hifi (Manchester) 01925 828009 > Hazelmere Audio (Cwm) 01494 865829 > Kronos Hifi (Welsh) 02887 753606
   
 > Loud & Clear (Scotland) 0131 555 3963 > M.A.X. (Birmingham) 01562 822236 > Premier Audio (Wales) 01924 255045 > Progressive Audio (Wales) 01634 389004 > Sounds Perfection (Cornwall) 01326 221372

**AVID** 7 Yeomans Close, Catworth, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE28 0PL, England. • Tel: 01832 710370 • Fax: 01832 710436 • Email: info@avidhifi.co.uk • Web: www.avidhifi.co.uk



# 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".

**O**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



“ 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. ”

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 hi-fi 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

#### SW11

#### ORANGES & LEMONS

61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea  
020 7924 2040

#### W4 MARTIN-KLEISER

109 Chiswick High Road  
020 8400 5555

### SOUTH

#### Ashford, Kent

#### SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI

40 High St. 01233 624441

#### Beaconsfield MARTIN-KLEISER

9 London End  
01494 681300

#### Chelmsford

#### RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street  
01245 265245

### East Grinstead

#### AUDIO DESIGNS

26 High St. 01342 314569

#### Kingston-upon-Thames

#### INFIDELITY

9 High Street Hampton Wick  
020 8943 3530

#### Lakeside Retail Park

#### RAYLEIGH HI-FI

Dansk International  
Furniture World  
01708 680551

#### Rayleigh, Essex

#### RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High St. 01268 779762

#### Ringwood, Hampshire

#### PHONOGRAPHY

Star Lane 01425 461230

#### Southend-on-Sea

#### RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road  
01702 435255

### Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road  
01903 245577

### MIDLANDS

#### Banbury OVERTURE

3 Church Lane  
01295 272158

#### Birmingham

#### SOUND ACADEMY

152a High Street, Bloxwich  
01922 493499

#### Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

#### Northampton LISTEN INN

32 Gold St. 01604 637871

#### Shrewsbury

#### CREATIVE AUDIO

9 Dogpole 01743 241924

### NORTH

#### Cheadle THE AUDIO WORKS

14 Stockport Road  
0161 428 7887

### Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL

12/14 Shaw Road  
0161 633 2602

### Sheffield

#### MOORGATE ACOUSTICS

184 Fitzwilliam St  
0114 275 6048

#### York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate 01904 627108

### SCOTLAND

#### Edinburgh

#### RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI

34 Northumberland Street  
0131 557 1672

#### Glasgow STEREO STEREO

260 St. Vincent Street  
0141 248 4079

### N. IRELAND

#### Belfast LYRIC HI-FI

161 Stranmillis Road  
028 90 381296

# 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.



## TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by 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.

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.

## TOP BUYS



### 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.



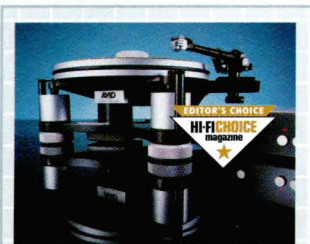
### Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

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 justice 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.

## Our favourite **TURNTABLES**

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
EDITOR'S CHOICE
NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Record players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
BT	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●	203
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	●	●	●	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	●	●	●	194
BT	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	223
BT	Linn LP12 Bask	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		●	103
BT	Michell Gyro SE	829	Stripped-down version of classic GyroDec, offering strong and lively sound	33/45	●			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
NGR	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain!	33/45			●	236
BT	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
BT	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
BT	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	33/45		●		203
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●	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	●	●	●	186
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in clean, clear reproduction	33/45	●	●	●	205

## Our favourite **PHONO CARTRIDGES**

### MM and MC cartridges

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
			MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		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	●		●	214
Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		●		235
Dynavector DV-20X L	350	Articulate-sounding with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm		●		192
Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		●		235
Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		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		●		235

## Our favourite **PHONO STAGES**

### Phono stages

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
			MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	●				223
Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price	●	●	●	●	234
Pass Labs X0no	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	●	●		●	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	●	●			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		●			234
Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs		●			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		●			201
Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

**TURNTABLE SPECS 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.

**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.

# SOUND & VISION

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C28WF540N  
C32WF540N

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AV28CT1  
AV32S26R  
AV32P10  
AV28T25  
AV32T25  
AV28R25  
AV32R25  
AV28X25  
AV32X25

#### LOEWE

ACCONDA 9381 ZW  
PLANUS 4781 ZP  
XELOS 5381 ZW  
VITROS 6381 ZW

#### Panasonic

TX-36PB50  
TX-32PB50  
TX-28PB50  
TX-36PL30  
TX-32PH40  
TX-32PL10  
TX-28PL10  
TX-32PL4  
TX-28PL4  
TX-32PL1  
TX-32DK2  
TX-28DK2  
TX-24DX1

#### PHILIPS

28DW9625  
32DW9625  
28DW6577  
32DW6577  
28DW6557  
32DW6557  
32PW9586  
32PW9595  
32PW9596  
32PW9594  
32PW9607  
32PW9527  
32PW9617  
32PW6826  
28PW6816  
32PW6515  
32PW9526  
32PW6006  
28PW6006  
24PW6006

Panasonic TX-32PL10



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#### YAMAHA

DPX-1

#### SELECO

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HT250  
HT300

#### TOSHIBA

MT3 MT7

#### SONY

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Screens available

### Pioneer AUTHORIZED DEALER

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Pioneer VSX-D810



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■ DD/DTS/7.1

■ DTS-ES ■ 6x100w  
■ DOLBY DIGITAL - EX COMP

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#### AV AMP/RECEIVER

VSA-E07  
M-10X  
VSX D810  
VSX D710  
VSX D510  
VSX C300

#### MULTIPLAY CD

PD-F1007  
PD-F1009

#### CD RECORDER

PDR-W839  
PDR-609

### marantz AUTHORIZED DEALER

SR-14MKII



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- E6 SUR
- E4 SUR
- D7 SUR
- D6 SUR
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- DVD-2800
- DVD-800
- DVD-300MK2
- ADV-700

**HIFI COMPONENTS**

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- DCD-S1

**CD RECORDERS**

- CDR-W1500
- CDR-1000

**CD PLAYERS**

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- DCD-685
- DCD-485
- DCM-270

**TAPES & TUNERS**

- DRM-555
- DRW-585
- TU-1500RD
- TU-260 II

**SPEAKERS**

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- SC-M10
- SCAV-F100
- SC-M201
- SC-50HTB

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**DENON AVR3802**

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- TU-201SA
- DCD-201SA
- DMD-201SA
- DRR-201SA
- DRA-F100
- DCD-F100
- DRR-F100
- DMD-F100
- DVD-F100
- AVR-F100
- POA-F100
- UD-M30
- UD-M50
- DRR-M30
- DMD-M30

**DENON AVR2802**

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TA-N1  
TA-FE230  
TA-FE370  
TA-FE570  
TA-FB740

## MINI DISC

MDS-JE330  
MDS-JE470  
MDS-JE770  
MDS-JB940  
MDS-JA333ES  
MDS-JA555ES  
MXD-D40  
MXD-D5C  
MDS-PC3  
MDS-550

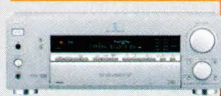
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STR-DE870  
STR-DB1070  
STR-VA555ES  
STR-DE375  
STR-DE475  
TAP 9000ES  
TAE 9000ES  
TAN 9000

## CD PLAYERS

CDP-M305  
CDP-XE270  
CDP-XE370  
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CDP-XE270  
CDP-XE370  
CDP-XE570  
CDP-XB740E  
CDP-XB930E  
CDP-CX235  
CDP-CX450  
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SA-VE705  
SA-VE815

## SACD

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SCD-XE 670  
SCD-XE 770  
SCD-XA333ES  
SCD-XA777ES  
SCD-555ES

# DVD PLAYERS

## JVC

XV-N5  
XV-S302  
XV-300  
XV-SA72  
XV-FA92  
XV-E112

## TOSHIBA

SD120E  
SD220E  
SD510E  
SD520E  
SD420E  
SD900E  
SD9500E

## Panasonic

DVD-RA61EBS  
DVD-XV10EBS  
DVD-RV32EBS  
DVD-LA95EBS  
DVD-LV60EBS  
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## JVC

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DVP-NS400  
DVP-NS305  
DVP-NS405  
DVP-NS700  
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DVP-FX1  
DVP-CX860  
DVP-9000ES

## ACRAM

DIVA88

## PHILIPS

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Q50  
Q40  
DVD870P  
DVD910SA  
DVD962SA  
DVD763SA  
DVD723  
DVD623

## Pioneer

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DV545  
DV646A  
DV747  
PDV-20  
PDV-LC20

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RX-V630RDS  
RX-530RDS  
RX-430RDS  
RX-V420RDS

## REMOTE CONTROLS

RAV-2000

## SUBWOOFERS

YST-SW005

## CINEMA PACKAGES

HTiB 45  
HTiB 60  
HTiB 65  
DVX-S100  
VS-10  
DVX-S80

## CD RECIEVER

TSX-20  
TSX-15  
TSX-15  
TSX-10

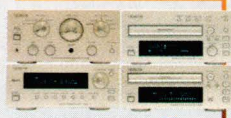
## RXV730RDS



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DV-H550  
A-H500  
T-H500  
R-H500  
PD-H500  
AG-H500  
MD-H500  
RW-H500  
L-5500  
AGH-350  
DV-H350  
A-H300  
AG-H300  
T-H300  
R-H300  
PD-H300  
PD-303  
MD-H300  
RW-H300  
L-S300U  
L-S303U

# DVD SYSTEMS

## DVD-HD RECORDERS

### JVC

HM-VDR10  
HR-XV10

### Panasonic

DMR-E30  
NV-VHD1BS

### Pioneer

DVR-7000

### PHILIPS

DVDR1000  
DVDR980  
DVDR985  
HDR1000

## JVC

HM-VDR10



DVD-R CD-R/RW  
DVD-AUDIO DVD-RAM

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## DVD SYSTEMS

### HITACHI

HTK160

### JVC

TH-V70R  
TH-A5R  
TH-A9R  
TH-A10R

### Panasonic

SC-DT300  
SC-DT100  
SC-HT70

## Pioneer

NS-DV77  
NS-DV88

## SONY

DAV-S400  
DAV-S500  
DAV-S550  
DAV-S800  
DAV-S880

## SONY

DAV-S800

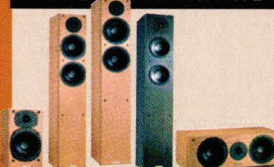
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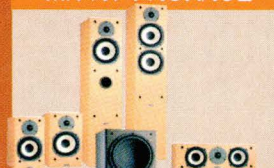
# TANNOY AUTHORIZED DEALER

## REVOLUTION-AV PACKAGE



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## MX-AV PACKAGE



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## TANNOY SPEAKERS

R1 R2 R3  
MX1 MX2 MX3  
MX4 RC MXC  
MXR MXSUB

## D SERIES

SATURN 56  
SATURN 510  
SATURN 58  
SATURN SUB15  
D500 D700 D750  
EYRIS 1 EYRIS 2  
EYRIS 3 EYRIS C  
EYRIS RR-SUB15

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## ARCAM

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DIVA A75  
DIVA A85  
DIVA AR100  
DIVA CD 72  
DIVA CD 92  
DIVA P-75  
DIVA P-85  
DIVA PT-51



# 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 muddled 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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio) for details.

### TOP BUYS



#### Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget tuners, with great sound and plenty of features.



#### NAD S400 £600

A nicely judged performer that maximises the potential of FM broadcasting.



#### Pure DRX-701ES £250

This 'budget' DAB model can meet much more expensive alternatives head-on.



#### Arcam DT-81 £650

Highly professional implementation of DAB technology makes this one of the best options on the digital tuner market.

## Our favourite TUNERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
EDITOR'S CHOICE
NEW GEAR REVIEW

### FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROTI TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>FM TUNERS</b>										
	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64					193
	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64					193
	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7					211
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40					193
	Harman Kardon TU940	180	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30					221
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90					211
	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29					193
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30					230
	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good, honest, budget tuner – loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30					221
<b>DAB TUNERS</b>										
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16					221
	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99					234
	Pure DRX-601ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue	DAB	90					230
	Pure DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB separate available at the time of review – concedes little if anything to more expensive models	DAB	9					211
	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					230

**SPECS KEY** **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.

# DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive 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 drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD 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. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with 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 HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



**Philips CDR802** £300  
Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



**Marantz DR6000** £400  
Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



**Sony MDS-JE480** £130  
Entry-level MD recorder that does exactly what it says on the tin, at a bargain price.



**Yamaha CDR-HD1300** £600  
Impressive implementation of hard drive technology for home audio applications.

Our favourite RT GROUP TEST BEST BUY TR GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EC EDITOR'S CHOICE NR NEW GEAR REVIEW

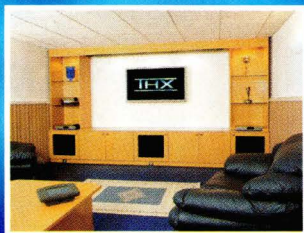
## DIGITAL RECORDERS

### CD-R/RW, MD and HD recorders

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
<b>CD-R/RW RECORDERS</b>							
RT	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
NR	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	233
RT	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1		● ●	205
NR	Philips CDR802	299	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound recorder at a good price	2		● ●	233
NR	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	205
RT	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well-equipped, well-priced CD-R/RW deck	1		● ●	218
NR	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single-deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good, if characterful, player	1		● ●	218
RT	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		● ●	218
<b>MD RECORDERS</b>							
RT	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
RT	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
<b>HDD RECORDERS</b>							
	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	CD-R/RW and hard drive in one – a flexible beast, one of the best of its ilk thus far though just short of formal Recommendation	2	80	● ●	237

**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.

# The Sevenoaks Sale Finishes 15.02.03

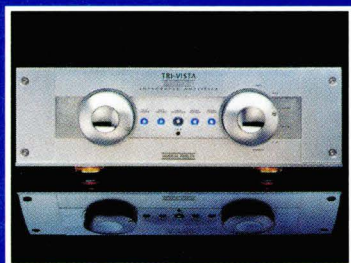


## Sevenoaks Sound & Vision

We stock a comprehensive range of DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma monitors, televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers. From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all outlets to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle. If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet and experience more. 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 Series

Designed to celebrate Musical Fidelity's twentieth anniversary, the new limited edition Tri-Vista series offers both audio excellence and value for money. The first products released



are the Tri-Vista 300 Integrated Amplifier and the Tri-Vista CD/SACD Player, with the Tri-Vista Pre and Power Amplifiers following in 2003. According to Musical Fidelity the Tri-Vista "Produces stupendous performance... No stone has been left unturned in our efforts to make the Tri-Vista series absolutely the best it can be in circuitry and physical layout, build quality and aesthetics."



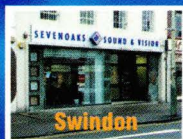
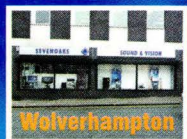
### KEF XQ series

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.



### 48 Outlets Nationwide

Aberdeen • Bedford • Birmingham • Brighton • Bristol • Bromley • Cambridge • Cardiff • Chelsea • Cheltenham • Crawley • Croydon • Edinburgh • Epsom • Exeter • Glasgow • Guildford • Holborn • Hull • Ipswich • Kingston • Leicester • Leeds • Lincoln • Liverpool • Maidstone • Manchester • Newcastle • Norwich • Nottingham • Oxford • Peterborough • Plymouth • Poole • Preston • Reading • Sevenoaks • Sheffield • Solihull • Southampton • Southgate • Swansea • Swindon • Swiss Cottage • Tunbridge Wells • Watford • Witham (Essex) • Wolverhampton



### New Outlets Now Open

We are delighted to announce that we have opened new stores in the following locations. **Poole** 01202 671677 • **Solihull** 0121 733 3727 • **Swindon** 01793 610992 and **Wolverhampton** 01902 312225. See Page 7 for full address details.



www.sevenoaksoundandvision.co.uk

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# Sale



**Claim Free**  
**Goldring Ex-Static**  
**Cleaner Worth £12**  
With ALL Pro-ject Turntables

## 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

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."



Also Available  
**Michell Gyro SE • £999.95**

### Turntables & Tuners

<b>Arcam</b> DIVA T61 Tuner .....	<b>£249.95</b>
<b>Denon</b> TU260L MKII Tuner.....	<b>£99.95</b>
<b>Marantz</b> ST4000 Tuner.....	<b>£109.95</b>
<b>Michell</b> Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable .....	<b>£999.95</b>
<b>Project</b> Debut Phono SB Turntable.....	<b>£159.95</b>
<b>Project</b> Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	<b>£129.95</b>
<b>Project</b> RPM4 Turntable.....	<b>£324.95</b>
<b>Sony</b> ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner.....	<b>£499.95</b>
<b>Videologic</b> DRX-601E DAB Tuner.....	<b>£229.95</b>



\*\*\*\*\* Awards 2002

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



### RCD-02 CD Player **£379.95** RA-02 Amplifier **£349.95**

**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £80**  
When Any Rotel CD & Rotel Amplifier Purchased Together

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 presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove

Armada's *Goodbye Century* set without losing sight of the fine 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."



Also Available  
**Marantz PM4200 • £139.95**



\*\*\*\*\* August 2002

### CD Players

<b>Arcam</b> DIVA CD62T.....	<b>£369.95</b>
<b>Arcam</b> DIVA CD72T.....	<b>£449.95</b>
<b>Arcam</b> FMJ CD23T.....	<b>£1199.95</b>
<b>Cyrus</b> CD7.....	<b>£799.95</b>
<b>Denon</b> DCD485.....	<b>£129.95</b>
<b>Linn</b> Genki.....	<b>£994.95</b>
<b>Linn</b> Ikemi.....	<b>£1949.95</b>
<b>Marantz</b> CD4000.....	<b>£99.95</b>
<b>Marantz</b> CD6000Ki Signature.....	<b>£399.95</b>
<b>Meridian</b> 507.....	<b>£1194.95</b>
<b>Musical Fidelity</b> A308 <sup>SR</sup> .....	<b>£1999.95</b>
<b>Musical Fidelity</b> Tri-Vista SACD.....	<b>£3994.95</b>
<b>Quad</b> 99 CD-P.....	<b>£999.95</b>
<b>Roksan</b> Caspian.....	<b>£994.95</b>
<b>Rotel</b> RCD1070.....	<b>£494.95</b>
<b>Sony</b> CDPXE570.....	<b>£99.95</b>

**Free**  
**Speaker Cable\***  
 worth £30 with **ALL**  
**Speakers over £170**

### (((AE))) Aegis Evo One Acoustic Energy 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.



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



Also Available  
**KEF Q1 • £249.95**

through our test room's extensive CD library we couldn't find a genre that these AE's weren't happy playing."

\*\*\*\*\* July 2002

**Free Interconnect Cable\* worth £60**  
 with **ALL** CD Players over £300

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 12th February 2003, E&OE. \*From our selection available in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer.

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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 6 Amplifier .....	£599.95
Cyrus 8 Amplifier .....	£799.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier .....	£199.95
Linn Kollector Pre Amplifier .....	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier .....	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier .....	£139.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier .....	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier .....	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier .....	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier .....	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power Amplifier .....	£549.95
Roksan Caspian Amplifier .....	£894.95
Rotel RA-01 Amplifier .....	£249.95



## ARCAM SOUND & VISION

**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £120**  
When Any Arcam CD & Arcam Amplifier Purchased Together

### DiVA CD82T CD Player DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

**£599.95  
£799.95**

DiVA CD82T "Arcam's latest 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." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ 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." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ March 2001



Also Available **NEW Arcam**  
FMJ AV8 & P7  
£5,499.95



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**Best Buy**  
2002  
HIFI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS  
SPEAKERS  
£201-£350

## B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM602S3 Speakers £299.95

**Free**  
Speaker Cable\*  
worth £50 with **ALL**  
Speakers over £280

"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." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ Supertest Winner August 2002

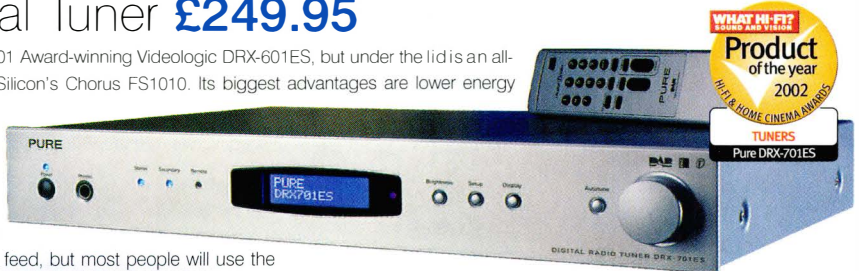


Also Available (Pictured Right)  
B&W CDM NT Series • Prices start from **£749.95**

## PURE DIGITAL 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 all-new 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



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**Product of the year**  
2002  
HIFI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS  
TUNERS  
Pure DRX-701ES



Also Available  
Denon TU260L/II • **£99.95**

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 of 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." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ October 2002

# Sale



**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £150**  
When Any Cyrus CD & Cyrus Amplifier Purchased Together

## CYRUS

**CD7Q CD Player £1149.95**  
**8 Integrated Amplifier £799.95**

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." **★★★★★ July 2002**



**Cyrus 8 Amplifier**

"The 8 is a large step forward from older generations of Cyrus amplifiers, and takes the company back into the leading pack in the sub-£1000 integrated amp sector... The Cyrus 8 is a must-audition product." **★★★★★ January 2003**



Also Available  
**Cyrus 7 CD**  
**£799.95**

## 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 updated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also claims 50 percent 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.

**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £100**  
When Any Roksan CD & Roksan Amplifier Purchased Together



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 MkII 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**



Also Available  
**Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300**  
**Amplifier • £3994.95**



## QUAD

"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 small speakers at just 33cm tall, but the scale and authority of

**Free Speaker Cable\* worth £50**  
with **ALL** Speakers over £280

**11L Speakers £379.95**



Also Available  
**Mission 780 • £249.95**

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 big time."

**★★★★★ August 2002**

### Speaker Selection

<b>Acoustic Energy</b> Aegis Evo Three.....	<b>£349.95</b>
<b>B&amp;W</b> CDM 1NT.....	<b>£749.95</b>
<b>B&amp;W</b> CDM 7NT.....	<b>£1249.95</b>
<b>B&amp;W</b> DM303.....	<b>£179.95</b>
<b>B&amp;W</b> DM601 S3.....	<b>£249.95</b>
<b>Cyrus</b> CLS70 (Black).....	<b>£799.95</b>
<b>KEF</b> Q1.....	<b>£249.95</b>
<b>KEF</b> Q3.....	<b>£399.95</b>
<b>Linn</b> Katan (Maple).....	<b>£634.95</b>
<b>Linn</b> Ninka (Maple).....	<b>£894.95</b>
<b>Mission</b> 780.....	<b>£249.95</b>
<b>Mission</b> 782.....	<b>£599.95</b>
<b>Mission</b> m71i.....	<b>£119.95</b>
<b>Monitor Audio</b> Gold Reference 10.....	<b>£799.95</b>
<b>Monitor Audio</b> Gold Reference 20.....	<b>£1499.95</b>
<b>Ruark</b> Epilogue II.....	<b>£344.95</b>
<b>Wharfedale</b> 8.1.....	<b>£99.95</b>

**Please Note:** Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 12th February 2003, E&OE.

\*From our selection available in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer.



Also Available  
**Quad 11L**



experience **more**



### MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

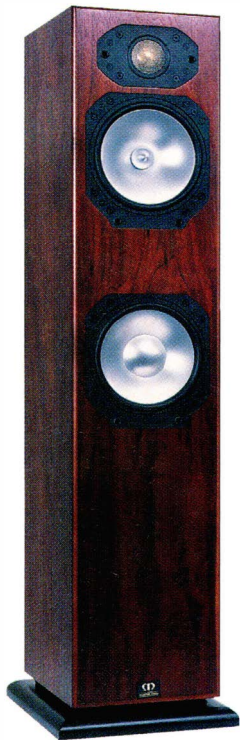
**A3.2 CD Player £999.95**  
**A3.2 Amplifier £979.95**

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



**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £150**

When Any Musical Fidelity CD & Musical Fidelity Amplifier Purchased together



### MONITOR AUDIO Silver S6 Speakers £599.95

**Free Speaker Cable\* worth £70 with ALL Speakers over £500**

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. "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.



Also Available Gold Reference GR10 & GR20

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 far wrong."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002

### 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.



Also Available Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder • £299.95

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." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2001**

### Recorder Selection

- Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....£299.95
- Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....£219.95
- Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....£109.95
- Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....£179.95
- Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW.....£549.95



### pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

# Sale

**Free Interconnect Cable\* Worth £150**  
When TAG AV30R & TAG 100x5R Purchased Together

## TAG McLaren



**AV30R AV Processor £1799.95**  
**100x5R Power Amplifier £2994.95**

TAG McLaren's AV30R AV Processor is aimed at the home cinema enthusiast who is concerned with keeping up-to-date with the latest surround formats. When partnered with TAG's 100x5R Power Amplifier it makes an exceptional combination.

According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine in their October 2002 issue: "In use, the AV30R, connected to TAG's 100x5R power amp, is superb. True, it can't quite match the clarity and power of the latest-specification TAG flagship, the AV32Rbp-192, but by any AV standard this is a very high-end piece of kit, with excellent impact and fine detail across a range of movie soundtracks from Once Upon A Time In America to the explosive actionfests. Channel steering is immaculate, and the sense of a soundfield wrapped around you - even in 5.1-channel mode - entrancing, with spine-tingling rear-channel effects. The fine Pro Logic II implementation serves music as well as it does non-discrete AV soundtracks, and with an SACD machine hooked up via the 5.1 channel inputs, the lack of coloration and sheer bass oomph is extraordinary." **★★★★★ October 2002**



## ACOUSTICS

**Pro 50 Subwoofer (Black) £299.95**  
**Pro 100 Subwoofer (Black) £599.95**

MJ Acoustics is a new company based in Cambridgeshire. During the past year, they have received favourable reviews across their product range. The Pro 50 was awarded 'Best Buy' by What Hi-Fi Sound and Vision in their 2002 awards. "This is a black satin finished miniature sub that nevertheless packs in a 20cm long-throw driver and a 50w MOSFET amp designed for good power reserves even at high levels... And it sounds great: whether with the floorshaking basslines of dance music, the slam of rock or an orchestral swell, when correctly set-up, the Pro 50 provides a subtle underpinning even of big loudspeakers. The bass it delivers is well extended and tightly controlled with both music and movies, giving a subjective impression of greater clarity across the frequency range, the added low-end complemented by better midband focus. It's truly thrilling stuff."

**★★★★★ Awards 2002**



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**Best Buy**  
2002  
Home Cinema Awards  
**SUBWOOFERS**  
Up to £300

**Claim £120 Off** The Speakers\* of your choice when purchased at the same time as the Linn Klassik Music System - Minimum Value £200

**Claim £250 Off** • The Speakers\* of your choice when purchased at the same time as the Linn Klassik Movie System - Minimum Value £500



LINN

**Linn Klassik**  
**Music System £999.95**

The Klassik Music System is an alternative to the sound and looks of mass market compact systems. Designed to be useful throughout the home, the Klassik is simple and stylish with all the advanced features needed to satisfy the most demanding hi-fi enthusiast or discriminating music lover.



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**Awards**  
2001  
**BEST BUY**

**Systems**  
**Best Buy £1000 plus**

"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 Klassik 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 Klassik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product." **★★★★★ Awards 2001**

**Please Note:** Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 12th February 2003, E&OE. \*From our selection available in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer



**Klassik • Movie System**  
**£1999.95**



experience **more**





## outlets nationwide

- Aberdeen** 491 Union Street **01224 587070**
- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
- Birmingham** Arch 12, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
- Brighton** 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
- Bristol** 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
- Cambridge** 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
- Cardiff** 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
- Cheltenham** 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
- Crawley** 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
- Edinburgh** 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 2727**
- Exeter** 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
- Glasgow** 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655**
- Guildford** 73b North Street **01483 536666**
- Hull** 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
- Ipswich** 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
- MOVED Leeds** 62 North Street **0113 245 2775** Open Sunday
- Leicester** 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
- Lincoln** 20-22 Corporation Street **01522 527397**
- Liverpool** 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
- Maidstone** 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
- Manchester** 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
- Newcastle** 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
- Norwich** 29-29a St Giles Street **01603 767605**
- Nottingham** 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
- Oxford** 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
- Peterborough** 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday
- Plymouth** 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
- NEW Poole** Latimer House, 44-46 High Street **01202 671677**
- Preston** 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
- Reading** 3-4 Kings Walk Shopping Centre **0118 959 7768**
- Sevenoaks** 109-113 London Road **01732 459555**
- Sheffield** 635 Queens Road, Heeley **0114 255 5861** Open Sunday
- NEW Solihull** 149-151 Stratford Road **0121 733 3727**
- Southampton** 33 London Road **023 8033 7770**
- Swansea** 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday
- NEW Swindon** 8-9 Commercial Road **01793 610992**
- Tunbridge Wells** 28-30 St Johns Road **01892 531543**
- Witham (Essex)** 1 The Grove Centre **01376 501733**
- NEW Wolverhampton** Burdett House, 29-30 Cleveland St. **01902 312225**

## 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 now open

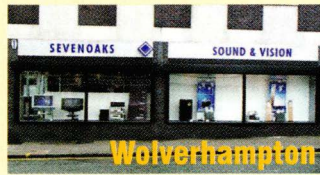
We are delighted to announce that we have opened new stores in the following locations **Poole** 01202 671677 • **Solihull** 0121 733 3727 • **Swindon** 01793 610992 and **Wolverhampton** 01902 312225. Also our **Leeds** store has re-located to larger premises



Leeds



Swindon



Wolverhampton



Poole

## 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 48 outlets nationwide. The website is designed to provide you with answers to the questions you may have when buying new equipment.

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](http://sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk)

## stock clearance

With 48 outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As 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.

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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.

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- Holborn** 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
- Kingston** 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
- Southgate** 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777** Open Sunday
- Swiss Cottage** 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
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# 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.

## Q&A

### 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-AMPLING?

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.

## TOP BUYS



**Rotel**  
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.



**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.



**Arcam**  
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 myriad music types.



**Classé**  
CP-35/CA-101 £2,797

This very classy pre/power combo from the Canadian high-enders is blessed with a particularly natural, open and no-nonsense sound.

## Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY 
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  EDITOR'S CHOICE 
  NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Integrated amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Much enhanced design topology gives a more hard-hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7		●	●	85	214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus 8	800	The best-yet stereo amplifier from Cyrus is extremely good in standard guise, but can be upgraded too!	5		●	●	70	237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		●		50	214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5		●	●	60	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail and a strong power yield	7		●	●	60	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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		●		30	214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6		●	●	120	205
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6		●		70	201
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4			●	35	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-01	250	Take a Best Buy amplifier and rip out the remote control to save £100. No wonder we love it!	4	●		●	40	237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Karan KA-1180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM-14 MkII Kl	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6		●		50	214

## Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

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  NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		85	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	100	227
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5			221
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		140	212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●	30	216
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	●	●	7		60	212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	●	●	6	OPT OPT	100	216
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	250	231
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	●	●	6		120	212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		200	200
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		50	213
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	●	●	6		10	216
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●	18	216

**SPECS KEY** **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

Our favourite GT GROUP TEST BEST BUY TR GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EC EDITOR'S CHOICE NG NEW GEAR REVIEW

# STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

## Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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)	●	●	6	●	●	100	216
EC	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		●	150	221
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●				20	231
TR	Bryston BP-20/4B-ST	3,375	Quick, articulate and powerful, this is an excellent all-round amp which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly	●	●	8			250	230
EC	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4	N	●	100	237
TR	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		●	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		●				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	●	●	6		●	125	195
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6		●		233
TR	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,700	Powerful, smooth, though slightly uneven with some speakers, but excellent control and separation in others	●	●	6		●	100	225
EC	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7	●	●	100	236
TR	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	●	●	6		●	250	230
TR	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp that has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	●	●	8			260	230

# AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel 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.

## Q&A

### 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.

## TOP BUYS



**Pioneer**  
VSX-D2011 £900  
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.



**Arcam**  
AV8/P7 £5,498  
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – an AV processor and seven-channel power amp *par excellence*.

## Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY | GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED | EDITOR'S CHOICE | NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Multichannel amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>INTEGRATED AV AMPS</b>								
	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6	70	229	
	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11	●	235	
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	●	170	232
	Harman Kardon AVR 5500	749	Powerful-sounding receiver with some clever features, such as an automatic set-up, but a bit hard-edged	●	8	●	85	229
	Marantz SR-5000	430	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	●	5	●	105	198
	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9	●	235	
	NAD T761	650	First-rate home cinema amp that sounds more powerful than its specs imply, and competes with specialist stereo amps	●	9	●	80	223
	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,850	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle	●	9	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSX-D2011	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	●	150	229
	Sony VA-777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder		9	●	100	210
<b>AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS</b>								
EC	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	●	180	235
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Cyrus AV8	1,100	A refined and listenable processor that will integrate into an existing hi-fi system with ease		9			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
	Roksan DSP/5 champ/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels		4		80	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form		6	●		215

**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. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

**OLSON** Sound Fantastic

Olsons new *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

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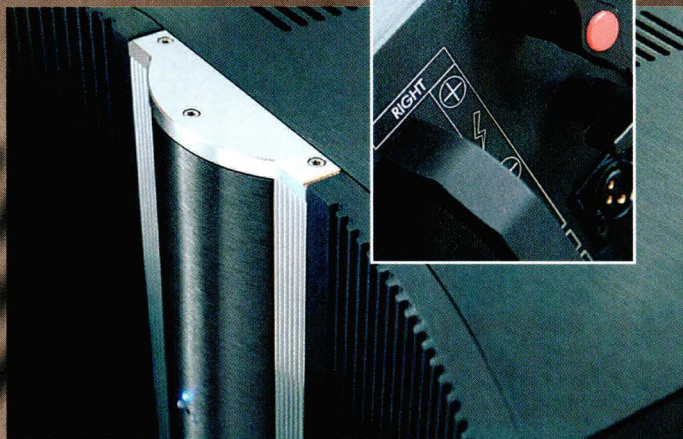
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## Krell FPB400cx/700cx

The Full Power Balanced X Series Stereo Amplifiers offer the greatest performance possible from a stereo amplifier. All X Series amplifiers share the same circuit topology, from the 300 Watt Full Power Balanced 300cx and the mid-level FPB 400cx at 400 Watts, to the awesome 700 Watt FPB 700cx – the most powerful stereo amplifier ever offered by Krell. While the amplifiers have much in common, there are also some important reasons for investing in the additional power. Each amplifier houses a massive power supply, doubling in size with each step. When the power increases from 300 Watts to 400 Watts and 700 Watts, the power supplies increase from 2000 Watts to 4000 Watts to 8000 Watts, respectively. More power delivers more authority on the low end, greater ease through the critical midrange frequencies, and effortless highs. In short, with every significant increase in power, there is a palpable increase in the believability of the sonic presentation. We are pleased to announce that Midland Audio X-Change is the exclusive Krell dealer for the Midlands, and will be hosting a Krell musical evening within the next few months. To hear how good these amplifiers really are – call John Roberts for an appointment



## Krell KCT Preamplifier

The Krell Current Tunnel (KCT) CAST stereo preamplifier holds the distinction of being the finest sounding, most technologically advanced, and most system friendly stereo preamplifier ever designed by Krell. It derives its name from the way the signal is routed from its input to its output. The signal is brought into the KCT in the current domain from a CAST source such as the Krell KPS 28c Compact Disc Player. The signal stays in the current domain as it travels through the KCT, protected from extraneous noise and unwanted signal interference as if it were in a tunnel. Using CAST technology and power supply regulation that is a direct result of the development of the Master Reference Amplifier, the KCT is able to deliver a usable bandwidth that extends to 1.5 MHz. The result is seamless, transparent musical reproduction of even the most dynamically demanding sources. Ease of operation is also accounted for in equal measure with features that include dual-zone operation, with independent volume controls, Theatre Throughput for integration into home theatre systems, and RS-232 controls for whole house automation. The KCT is a stereo preamplifier that delivers the ultimate stereo performance today and the opportunity for continued growth into the future.



## Krell KPS 28c

The KPS 28c Compact Disc Player reveals the full sonic potential of the compact disc format. The KPS 28c is noted for its ability to resolve the finest musical details—many listeners boast of hearing their compact disc collections “for the first time” upon introducing the player into their systems. CAST, Krell’s proprietary current-audio connection is featured along with Current Mode, Class A, and discrete balanced circuitry. The power supply, featuring several stages of regulation, is modelled after the Krell Current Tunnel preamplifier. The beautiful black anodised chassis is finished to complement the Full Power Balanced X Series Amplifiers, right down to the elegant convex centrepiece. A custom-machined remote control, hand finished and laser engraved, is included

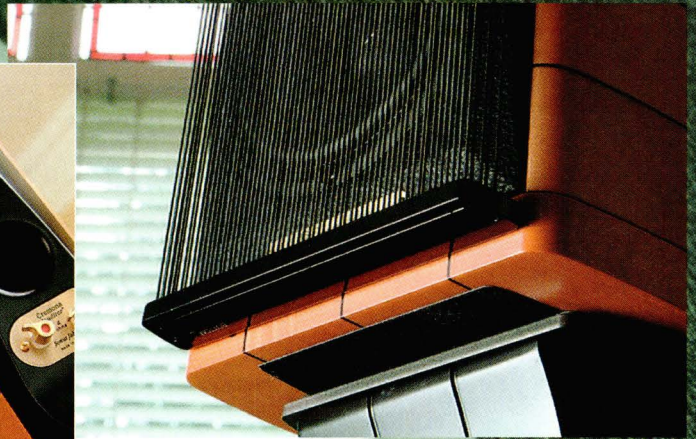


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## Verity Audio Tamino II

Building on the worldwide success of its prestigious products, Verity Audio is pleased to introduce a new high-quality loudspeaker – The Tamino. It sets new standards of sonic excellence at a sensible price of £3999.

The Tamino is a unique reduced-size floor-standing loudspeaker that incorporates the same attention to detail, exquisite lacquer and level of execution, which granted the Verity Audio loudspeakers an enviable notoriety.

The Tamino definitely answers a growing need for a system that offers a fine musical experience to more music lovers while being a luxury piece of furniture. Book now to hear this amazing loudspeaker.



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## Bel Canto eVo2/4

The Bel Canto eVo2 represents the true potential of modern digital amplification — providing a transparent and musical path to the original performance for stereo and multi-channel systems. The eVos present a naturally sweet and extended sound quality that transcends older amplifier technologies in both efficiency and sonic quality. With the advent of new and emerging digital technologies, this is an amplifier design whose time has truly come. Guided by the musicality of Bel Canto design, the eVos mark a remarkable step forward in digital stereo amplification.

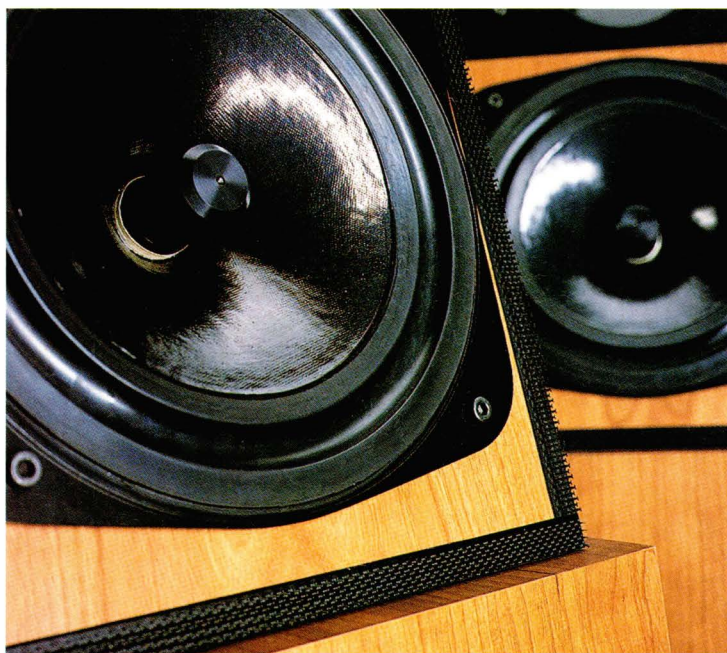
# STEREO SPEAKERS

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.

## 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.

## POWER

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.

## Q&A

### 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.



## TOP BUYS



**Dynaudio**  
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.



**Castle**  
Conway 3 £930  
A great success with its lovely real wood finish and beautifully balanced sound, along with fine dynamics and transients. A kingly sub-£1,000 floorstander.



**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 STEREO SPEAKERS

BT GROUP TEST BEST BUY
 R GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
 E EDITOR'S CHOICE
 G NEW GEAR REVIEW

### Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	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	A	30	●	226	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">R</span>	AR S20	150	Might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28	A	28	●	215	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</span>	ATC SCM12	999	Transparent, engaging and quick – a revealing, high-fidelity performer that's not afraid to bare all	22,39,25	A	62	●	237	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30	●	215
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30	A	30	●	211	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23	●	226	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	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	A	25	●	234	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</span>	B&W DM309	330	All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●	235
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●	231
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29	A	30	●	208	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Blueroom Minipod	249	Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17	A	50	●	225	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">R</span>	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●	227
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●	237
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Dali Royal Tower	750	Cutely compact floorstander has a delightful liveliness and lightness of touch to match its luxury real wood finish	17,85,22	●	A	25	●	237
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24	A	40	●	215	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●	231
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">R</span>	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29	A	40	●	231	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26	A	40	●	215	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	A+	30	●	193
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	24,36,27	A+	25	●	201	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned and sounds a bit coloured, but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30	A+	27	●	199	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Infinity Alpha 30	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression	22,86,29	●	A	30	●	215
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">R</span>	Jamo E 850	400	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	18,87,34	●	A-	30	●	224
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	JBL Xti40	430	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	A	40	●	210
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	A-	22	●	227
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●	224
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30	A	30	●	234	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Mission m71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28	A	40	●	226	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BT</span>	Mission m73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●	215
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</span>	Mission m51	300	Distinctive and dynamic – not the last word in subtlety but enjoyable with both music and video sources	21,32,34	A+	58	●	228	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</span>	Monitor Audio Silver S1	300	Super-quick sonics thanks to the C-CAM metalised drivers. Resolution and speed – a great value box	18,30,24	A	45	●	236	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E</span>	Monitor Audio Silver S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●	237
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">G</span>	Mordaunt Short MS914	300	An even and open loudspeaker that is both detailed and precise. A budget gem	21,90,27	●	A	50	●	234

**SPECS KEY** 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).

# SEASONAL OFFERS

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## Arcam DV88 DVD Player



Last few display units available - Black & Silver

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## Arcam FMJ CD23 Player

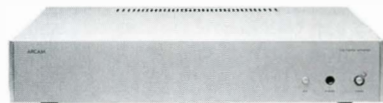


CD23 - Non Text model - Available in Silver only

### What you get!

- Full two year warranty

## Arcam P85 Power Amp



P85 Power Amplifier - Offer available in Silver only

## Arcam CD92 Player



CD92 - Non Text model - Available in Black (few in Silver)

Save an extra £50! Buy a CD92 for £449 when purchased with an AVR200 Receiver. Total price only £1248

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Arcam CD62 player, A65+ amplifier & Mission M72 Speakers

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## Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS continued

### Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
RE	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		A	30	●	211
RE	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50	●	225
RE	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		A	30	●	211
RE	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40	●	233
RE	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30	●	224
RE	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	19,33,25		A	45	●	207
RE	Tannoy Revolution R2	400	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	A-	20	●	193
RE	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricey but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26		A+		●	227
RE	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26		A	20	●	231
RE	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	●	A+	45	●	234
RE	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	A-	40	●	219
RE	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	●	226
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
RE	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	●	A-	25	●	211
RE	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	●	219
RE	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	45	●	221
RE	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		A	38	●	218
RE	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	●	204
RE	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		A	38	●	219
RE	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		A	28	●	199
RE	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	●	A-	34	●	183
RE	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	●	A-	34	●	186
RE	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231
RE	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	●	232
RE	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	A-	40	●	204
RE	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	A	50	●	219
RE	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricey compared to some though	21, 99, 32		A+	38	●	229
RE	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		A	41	●	225
RE	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	25,106,36		A-	20	●	204
RE	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229
RE	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	●	219
RE	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	25	●	214
RE	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233
RE	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	●	233
RE	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42		A	45	●	230
RE	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	A-	35	●	219
RE	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	●	220
RE	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	40	●	214
RE	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	40	●	218

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# AV SPEAKERS

# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE

## TOP BUYS



Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW  
**STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	FASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
ES	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	●	A+	45	●	196
RE	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		ACT	45	●	214
RE	Naim Alae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●	229
ES	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	A-	20	●	200
ES	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20	●	232
ES	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●	226
RE	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	●	199
RE	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	A	20	●	204
RE	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude, 'in yer face' balance and great dynamics	20,40,32		A	25	●	214
ES	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25	●	237
ES	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	A-	20	●	221
RE	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	●	A+	40	●	229
RE	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	A	38	●	219
RE	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	A	20	●	211
RE	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		A+	50	●	219
RE	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	A+	40	●	229
ES	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	A+	37	●	223
ES	TAG McLaren F1	17,995	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	A-	25	●	202
ES	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●	215
ES	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	A-	23	●	225
RE	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super-slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver marvellous musical results with superb imaging	15,130,17	●	A	30	●	225
RE	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30	●	229
ES	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	A+	50	●	191
RE	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid back, but also very charming and musical	17,97,30	●	A-	25	●	199
RE	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way	21,100,21	●	A	45	●	225
ES	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	●	A-	20	●	234
ES	Wilson Benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	A-	45	●	212

# 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.

### SET-UP

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 floor-standing 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

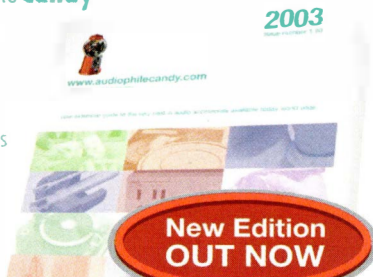
Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

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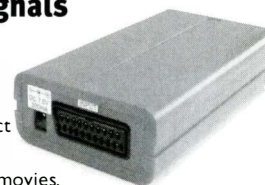
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# HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

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 HEADPHONES

### Stereo headphones

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER		
			ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	
AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●	●	●	190	●	219
AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●		●		190	●	205
AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250	●	194
Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●		●		200	●	194
Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise.		●		●		200	●	230
Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics		●			●	160	●	205
Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205
Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates		●		●		250	●	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 favourite CABLES

### Interconnects and speaker cables

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
			STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>							
Acoustic Research Master	50	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	●	●	●		224
Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●	●	●		211
Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●	●	●		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	●	●	●		224
Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension	●	●	●		211
Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price	●	●	●		211
QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●	●	●		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	●	●	●		224
van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●	●	●		234
Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round, with just a hint of bass congestion. Very good value	●	●	●		224
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>							
Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●	E	207
QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●	E	207
QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●	E	234
Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value				O	207
van den Hul Optocoupler MkII	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types				O	234
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>							
Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed	●	●	●		227
Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●	●	●		227
Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round		●	●		203
Ixos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●	●	●		203
Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●	●	●		192
Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●	●	●		227
Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●	●	●		203
QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●	●	●		192
QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●	●	●		215
Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●	●	●		203
Tara Labs Prism Nexa	10	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●	●	●		215
Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor		●	●		203
van den Hul The Snowline	5	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●	●	●		215

**SPECS KEY** **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, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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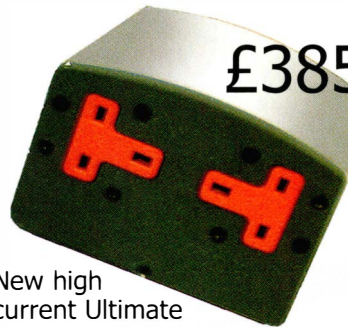
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# STANDS AND SUPPORTS

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 EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

### Equipment supports

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
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	●	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	●	4	Glass	206
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49	●	4	Glass	193
Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		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	●	4	Glass	193
Townshend 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

### Speaker stands

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14,5,18	●		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 MkII	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	●		1	220
Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18, 15	●		4	232
Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15	●	●	5	220
Partington Dreadnought Ultimate	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	●		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	●		4	220
Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48			0	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 SPECS 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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# ON THE SHELVES

## FRIDAY 24 JANUARY

# 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, eg 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, eg 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 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

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

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

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

**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 cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and 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 psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

**MIDRANGE** The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

**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 waveforms 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 (dB/W).

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

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

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

**TREBLE** High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, 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 drive units.

**WATTS** (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

## 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 music.

**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. Opposite of bright.

**DECAY** The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

**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 equipment.

**DRY** A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained 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 valve amps.

**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 tinge.

**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 listening room.

**PRESENCE RANGE** The upper midrange.

**SEISMIC** Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

**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 process.

**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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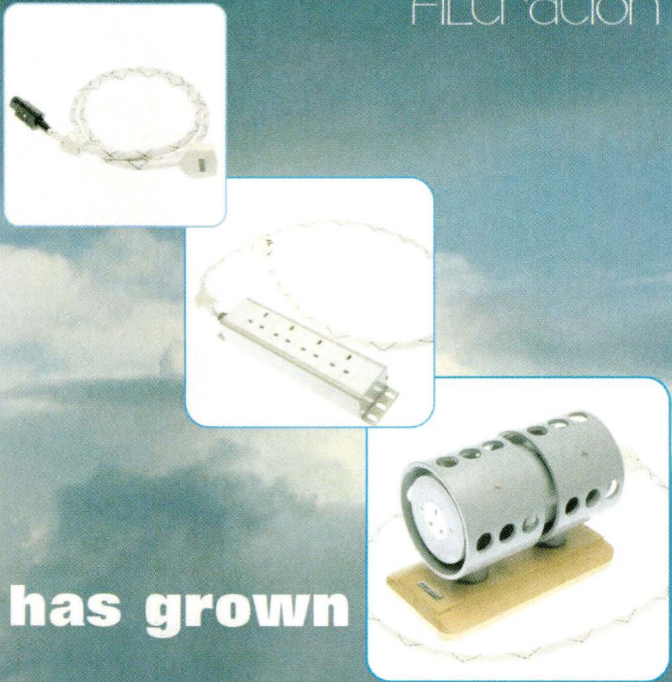
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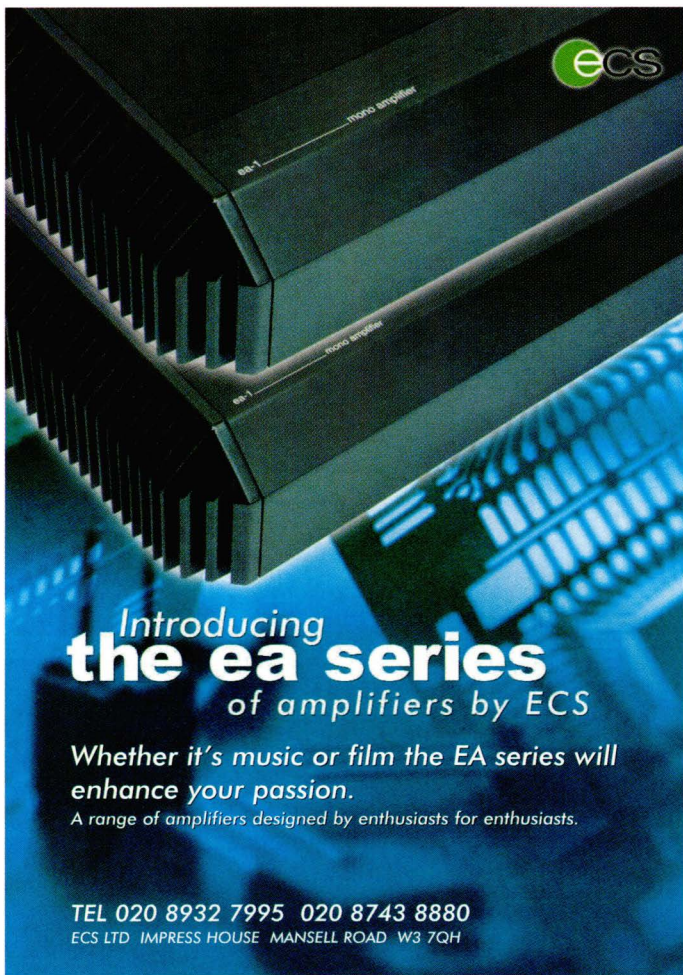
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**AUDUSA - OOM Silverlink Mono Crystal balanced speaker cable - conductor of 3mm diameter (approx 8 gauge), stranded silver on OFHC, plus three strands of Mono Crystal Copper for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI. Cable OD 14.72 mm Priced at £12.95 per meter**



## AUDUSA EUPEN CSA 2.5 MAINS CABLE - HI FI CHOICE SEPT 2001 BEST BUY

**GNLM 05/04 and GNLM 05/2.5 ( CSA 2.5) Cable with FERRITE TECHNOLOGY** - A polymer material mixed with a considerable quantity of homogeneously fine high quality ferrite powder is extruded around the copper conductors. As a ferromagnetic material, it will go through hysteresis loops whenever it is under influence of an alternating magnetic field. Consecutively magnetizing and demagnetizing the material will cause considerable losses of high frequency energy. This energy is absorbed in the ferrite grains and converted into heat. This effect is more or less proportional to the field frequency; high frequencies will be strongly attenuated, because their energy will be absorbed by the ferrite powder. The GNLM cables which in addition to the above described ferrite technology is further protected with a foil shield and a drain wire and **specifically** manufactured for High End audio use. **Said by some to be the most neutral sounding mains cable on the market**



AUDUSA - Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Maringo IEC 320

Fitted with IEC (Martin Kayser) and MK Tough Cable can be supplied fitted to our all steel 4, 6 and 8 way distribution blocks. We can rewire the distribution blocks with Eupen cable as an extra cost option. Refer to our web site for details.



AUDUSA EUPEN GNLM 05/04

GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA2.5) £48 for 1.0m, £58 for 1.5m, £68 for 2.0m, Off the reel £30 for 1st meter, £20 per m thereafter. GNLM 05/04 £58 for 1m, £68 for 1.5m, £78 for 2.0m Also off the reel. Both GNLM cables available for export

**AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC ( for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Maringo 320 IEC, Figure of eight, Bulgin, USA Hubble, European Schuko, Australian, Swiss, Danish, and Neutrik plugs.**

**SILVER SILVER SILVER - Upgrade the cable with silver plated contacts on IEC and MK plug for an extra £6. IEC's and MK plugs with silver plated contacts available separately at £6, £8 and £9**  
**Why Silver plated contacts? Simple, silver is THE BEST conductor of electricity.**

## LAT AC-2 HI-FI CHOICE - SEPT 2001 - RECOMMENDED MAINS CABLE

We have developed a cabling (weaving) pattern along with an unusual shielding/filtering system that gets rid of the garbage that contaminates your components. The difference you hear with our cord is astounding. Our power cord takes advantage of silver in its design through use of our proprietary Silverfuse conductors. The conductors are 10 gauge and with PTFE; the best insulation available. Fitted as standard with IEC / MK Toughplug. . 60cm £62, 90cm £75, 1.2m £88, 1.5m £101, 1.8m £112 etc Other lengths available and off the reel. **4,6 and 8 way all steel mains distribution blocks** fitted with **UK, Schuko or USA sockets**. CE tested & approved mains distribution units manufactured of heavy gauge steel, finished in black and fitted with high quality 13amp sockets. It has no filters, circuit breakers, surge protection, transformers, resistors, capacitors, LED's, on/off switches, chokes, regulators, just fitted with 1m of AC-2 mains cable. From £166 for 4 way, £198 for 6 way, £229 for 8 way.



**SILVERFUSE** is a near alloy of silver and copper. IT IS NOT SILVER PLATED OR SILVER CLAD. Plating (or clad, which is the same thing as plating) causes a dioding effect when signal is passed through resulting in brightness and distortion. The Silverfuse process starts with seven ninies OFHC copper wire with a diameter that is slightly larger than the required size. It is then pulled through a trough of molten silver. The wire with a silver deposit, is then forced through a compacting die where it is subject to tremendous pressure. The silver and the high purity copper are fused together into a near alloy. The compacting fusion also reduces the wire diameter to the desired size. No dioding subsequently occurs with this process. The result provides for the benefits of silver; which are excellent definition and clarity, with the high purity copper benefits of warmth and mellowness.

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We recommend the no compromise Mark Levinson digital equipment, with alternative choices from Ayre Acoustics, Gryphon and Sugden. Valves are very effective with digital sources. Prices start from the Heart Audio CD6000 at only £699, through the sensational Shanling CDT-100 all the way up to valve DAC's from Manley and ART Audio.



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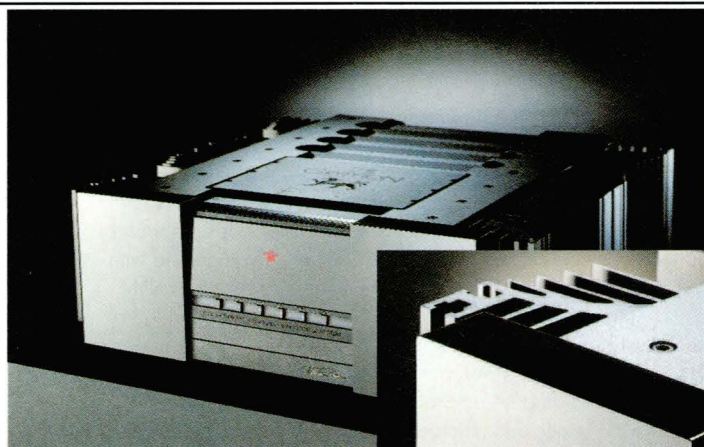
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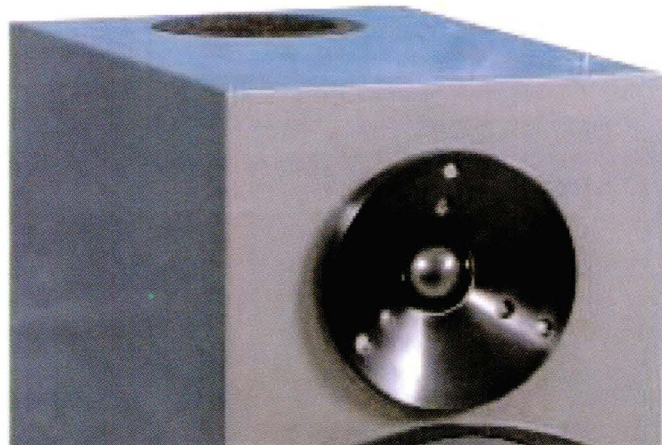
including tonearm. The Audio Salon has tried other turntables, and rests with these three extremely experienced manufacturers' consistency and integrity - vital for this very difficult genre of acoustical-mechanical device which relies on so many skills. The same might be said of pick up cartridges, where our experience of hand-made cartridges commends Sumiko. We have a few remaining of their acclaimed Blue Point Special at the reduced price of £249 (saving £30) and one Pearwood Celebration remaining at £995 (saving £200). Lyra is the best all rounder, and we have two Lyra Beta MC cartridges at the Christmas sale price of £495.

### AMPLIFIERS

Our agencies read as a list of the world's best. Ayre Acoustics, Gryphon, Mark Levinson, Sugden and we invite customers to discuss, debate and listen to the presentation of pre-amps and power amps, new, ex-dem and used at all price points. Discover the merits of integrated amplifiers from these companies and others. Hybrid and valve amplifiers? What about the new Pathos Logos from Italy? Or pure valve designs from ART Audio, Heart Audio and EAR/Yoshino? Don't get your fingers burned - seek expertise. The majority of valve owners are disappointed; but they argue that all solid state owners are!!



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**VINYL**

LFD Mistral MM/MC Phono Stage	£ 299	£ 199
Stainless steel (s/h)		

**DIGITAL**

Burmester 970 DAC	Eu22,900	POA
TAS Class 1 product (Ex-D)		
Gryphon Adagio CD Player (Ex-D)	£4,300	£2,995
2nd level upsampling redefines CD! One only!		

**AMPLIFIERS**

Audio Innovations Series 500 (s/h) as new	-	£ 595
Integrated valve amp with phono input		
Audio Research's classic SP9 III	£2,850	£1,350
Rare and exquisite; silver; mint (s/h)		
Bow Wazoo XL	£2,495	£1,495
Integrated Amplifier 75 wpc, (Ex-Dem)		
"The Wand" silver remote controller (New)	£ 329	£ 249
conrad-johnson PV14L pre-amp (s/h)	£2,200	£1,150
3-hrs use. Plus 12 unused NOS valves for £100. See Hi-Fi+ review		
Gryphon Sonata/ Allegro/ Legato	£10,600	£6,900
State of Heart pre-amp with phono stage		
Dual monaural, ultimate construction (Ex-D)		
Gryphon Callisto 2100 Integrated amplifier	£3,600	£2,750
2 x 100 wpc, (s/h) as new; magnificent sound		
Manley Labs 240/100 Monoblocks (pair)	£8,450	£3,500
Pentode/triode switchable, amazing pro gear		
Current list is for a revised "Neo" model (Ex-D)		

Manley Labs Stingray Integrated amp	£2,225	£1,250
New, but box opened; innovative and distinguished		
Mark Levinson Power Amplifiers		
No 335 (250 wpc) (New, sealed box)	£8,495	£6,995
No 436 (350 wpc into 8 ohms, doubling) (Ex-D)	£12,495	£8,495
Musical Fidelity A100 (s/h)	£1,495	£ 695
Class A, integrated amp, separate PSU		
PassLabs Aleph-5 (s/h)	£3,350	£1,750
60 wpc, s/e RCA and Balanced		
PM Components 211SE monoblocks	£2,800	£1,295
Near Offer Considered; additional set of GE NOS valves		
Schematic included; very impressive		
Selection of unused GE NOS tubes for above	£ 370	£ 200
Sugden MasterClass Pre-amp (s/h)	£2,300	£1,250
Bal and s/e; remote; slimline; Class A		
Tenor Audio 75 Wp (OTL tube monoblocks)	\$20,900	POA
Winner TAS Golden Ear 2002		

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

Audio Physic Virgo 3 (New!) Reduced price	£3,990	£1,990
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ProAc Future Point Five (Cherry)	£3,500	£2,495
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Revel Performa F30 Three-way monitors	£2,995	£1,695
(Cherrywood) Slight dents (Ex-D)		
Wilson Audio 6.1	£20,000	£10,995
Crated, 18 months old, piano black		
Final Price Reduction		

For updated and comprehensive list of equipment and audio cables, please visit [www.audiosalon.co.uk](http://www.audiosalon.co.uk).

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**Poor cables and impure mains are the most common cause of disappointment and expensive upgrading.** Invest in the connections. And here's a tip: use a £14.95 bottle of Kontak cleaner to keep them clean.



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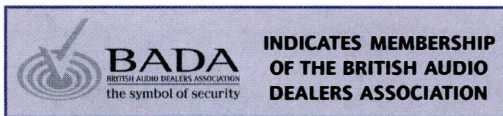
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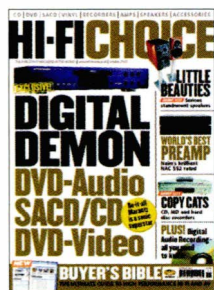
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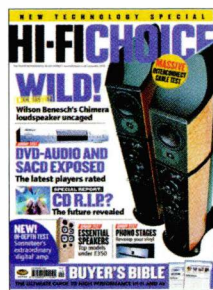
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SEPTEMBER 2002/ISSUE 232  
 ■ Group Test: Stereo amps £200-£450  
 ■ Group Test: Multichannel speakers  
 ■ High end, real-world systems pt 2  
 ■ B&W Signature 805 loudspeaker



OCTOBER 2002/ISSUE 233  
 ■ Digital recording special  
 ■ Group Test: Digital audio recorders  
 ■ Group Test: Standmount speakers  
 ■ Marantz DV8300 universal disc player



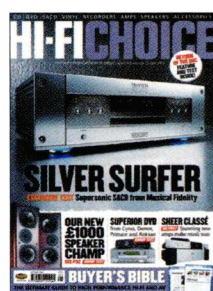
NOVEMBER 2002/ISSUE 234  
 ■ Special new technology issue  
 ■ Group Test: DVD-A/SACD players  
 ■ Group Test: Speakers £230-£350  
 ■ Group Test: Phono stages



DECEMBER 2002/ISSUE 235  
 ■ Group Test: CD separates systems  
 ■ Group Test: AV amps £800-£2,000  
 ■ Group Test: Phono cartridges  
 ■ Arcam AV8/P7 AV processor/amp



AWARDS 2002/ISSUE 236  
 ■ The best gear of the year  
 ■ Copland CVA306/CVA535 AV amp  
 ■ Karan KA180 stereo amplifier  
 ■ Pioneer DV-757Ai 'universal' player



JANUARY 2003/ISSUE 237  
 ■ Group Test: Speakers £750-£1,500  
 ■ Group Test: DVD players £750+  
 ■ Test Feature: DACs  
 ■ Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD player

# NEXT MONTH



Rega P25 turntable

## STATEMENTS

Is TEAC's new super high-end transport and DAC combo the answer to getting the most out of CD? We tell all next month along with the belated review of Living Voice's new Auditorium loudspeaker – a great box made even better. We also plug and play with a high-end cable set from Nordost, the Valhallas, and still find time to examine Musical Fidelity's latest Tri-Vista amplifier.

## IN-DEPTH – PS AUDIO HCA-2 DIGITAL AMP

A digital hybrid power amp with a £1,550 price tag? That'll be the new offering from PS Audio, a 150 watt, 95 per cent efficient, super-cool amp. We just had to take a closer look.

## GROUP TEST – TURNTABLES

We choose four turntables under £1,500 to find out who rocks in 2003. Expect to see decks from Rega, Michell, Pro-ject and Blue Note.

## GROUP TEST – STEREO AMPS

If you're considering a new integrated amp this year, don't miss our review of five of the latest one-box wonders, with contenders from Primare, Cyrus and Roksan doing battle.

## TEST FEATURE – SUBWOOFERS

No longer just for movie lovers, subs have come of age. We're seeing more and more integrated into two-channel systems as well as multichannel, so what should you consider and what's it all about?

## PLUS

The latest hi-fi kit from the Consumer Electronics Show, Las Vegas, and our regular mix of news, reviews and features – don't miss it!

**Hi-Fi Choice 239 on sale 26 February**

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PLEASE PHOTOCOPY

## The hi-fi system from hell

*David Vivian lies back on the couch and tries to remember the source of his nightmares*

**T**hey still talk about it in Maidstone. They probably still talk about it in the outlying villages. The night of 2 September, 1998. The night the hi-fi system from hell shook the town.

My son James was 19 that day. He decided to mark the occasion with an impromptu rave in his rented flat above a camera shop in the High Street – or rather, its small rooftop patio garden. A local DJ friend could supply the twin Technics 1210 decks, mixer and assorted bass-orientated vinyl. All James had to come up with was the necessary sonic firepower. And we're not talking cap guns.

Guess who he turned to? Fortunately, not me. Well, not directly. James and his close circle of hooligans had already acquired a motley yet impressive collection of hardware handed down from dad, the hi-fi-nut-cum-reviewer. In true Dunkirk spirit, it was simply a matter of getting it all in the same place and working with a common purpose.

And so, in the afternoon, the gear that sustained the best part of a decade's listening pleasure *chez Vivian* pitched up at the venue, chaperoned by its new adolescent roadies. Pretty much all of it. Scuffed, scratched but still in rude working order. One last push for mortar-loosening, ear-bleeding glory.

Piled up on the patio, it didn't look pretty but it did look a lot. Amplification was clearly going to be the most important element of the system. So, with the aid of a bucketload of interconnects and some truly inspired patchworking between line inputs and tape monitors, everything in the arsenal was assimilated into a block of Borg proportions. It comprised a Pioneer A400 GTE, a Denon PM350, two 150-watt monoblocks from QED and a monster 500 watts-per-channel Parasound movie power amp. So about 1,500 watts RMS all told.

Naturally, each power stage would drive its own set of speakers and these were no less disparate than the electronics. Taking the



***"I noticed that the system sounded loud when it was barely ticking over. I didn't want to be around when the inevitable volume cranking began."***


brunt of the big power amps were floorstanding KEF Q90s and a scary pair of Missions with roof-to-floor drivers. These were joined by B&W 601s and KEF Coda 8s – both bookshelf classics in their day – and, arguably the masterstroke this – not one, but two REL Q50 subwoofers. And we all know what the advantage of having a brace of subs is: smoother bass response and greater soundstage depth. But possibly not with them both turned up to maximum.

The deck console had a mic and cross-fader, and the mixer would act as the master volume. That was it. Nothing left to do but switch on and hope it didn't instantly melt. It didn't. In fact, it didn't sound bad at all. Just time to reposition a few speakers, crack open some tinnies and await the guests.

I had to be out of town that evening. In truth, I wanted to be out of town that

evening. One thing I noticed was that the system sounded loud with all the amps and speakers barely ticking over. I honestly didn't want to be around when the inevitable cranking of the volume knob began.

Which is why, I guess, people still talk about it. By midnight the noise, apparently, was apocalyptic. Cameras fell off their stands in the shop window below. People looked fearfully to the skies as they did in *Independence Day*. The police got phone calls from Week Street, nearly a mile away.

It was all getting just a little scary when someone, who wasn't the DJ, grabbed the mic and shouted "Oi" into it. The "O" bit was broadcast at 150 dB. The "i" nobody heard. Several people fell over. The system from hell was dead. Next morning, the only thing left working was one channel of one amplifier. The Denon. 





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