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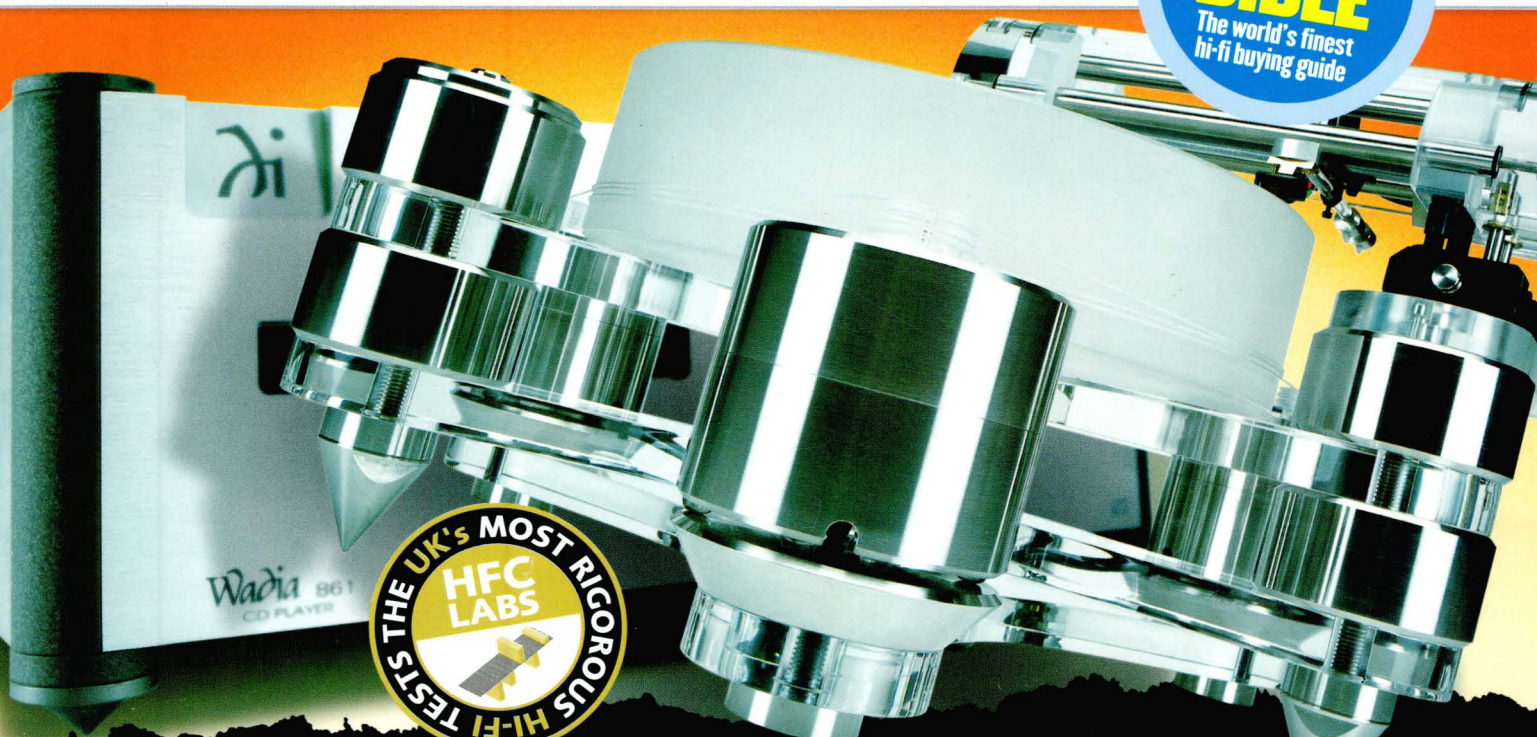
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SPENDOR TESTED < S9e – first ever review

HI-FI CHOICE

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WORLD'S FIRST TEST!
This CD player looks a million dollars – but it costs just £600!

MAGNIFICENT SPEAKERS

IN-DEPTH TEST The R9 is Rega's most ambitious speaker ever. Full review inside...

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >> AMPLIFIERS

FEATURING...

- > Arcam C30/P35
- > Exposure 3010 Int/Power
- > NAD C162/C272
- > Primare PRE30/A30.2
- > Quad 99 Pre/909
- > Roksan Caspian M Pre/Power



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HI-FI CHOICE

AUGUST 2004 ISSUE 256

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best advice, *Hi-Fi Choice*
employs the most
talented and experienced
writers in the business.



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



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.



DAVID VIVIAN

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

Totting up the reasons to get into hi-fi, there's only
one that really matters: an inescapable passion
for music. You can play it on a cheap 'stereo' you
bought at your local electrical emporium, or on that
off-the-shelf DVD player of unfamiliar name you picked
up while you were shopping for the Sunday roast. But
while it may just hum a passable tune, it sure as hell
don't tell it like it is.

Philosophically-speaking, coffee's much the same. A
cup of instant will give you a caffeine buzz, sure as
beans is beans, but the smell, the taste, the whole
experience simply doesn't compare to the unadulterated
joy of a lovingly made and presented cappuccino or
espresso. Visit a good purveyor, choose the right beans,
add the right ingredients and mix according to taste –
likewise, a good specialist hi-fi dealer will ensure the
sonic flavour is one you can savour...

Music digs deep into our emotional core like no other
art form. It touches the soul and makes grown men
weep. Hi-fi is simply a means to a musical end – it
provides the conduit for its energy and detail, delivers
scale and space, ensures you get closer to the tone and
impact of the original performance. It makes music seem
more real and hence achieve its emotional goal. Quite
simply, the music that moves you moves you more.

Here at *Hi-Fi Choice*, we aim to keep you abreast of this
passion that we share, cherry picking the finest kit and
fusing news, views and unequivocal
reviews, 13 times a year. To this end,
we continue to evolve. Our next
issue, on sale 8 July, sees the start of
a sparkling new *AudioFile* section,
and there'll be plenty more in the
months to come – see you then!



Tim Bownen **editor**

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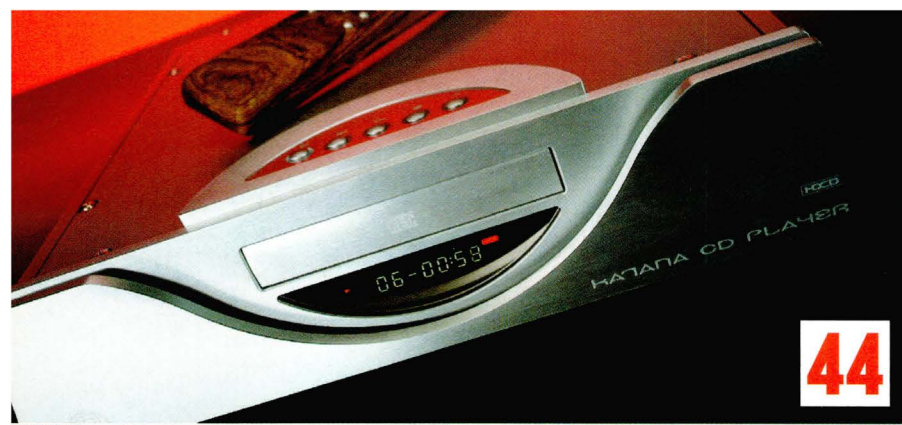
HI-FI CHOICE

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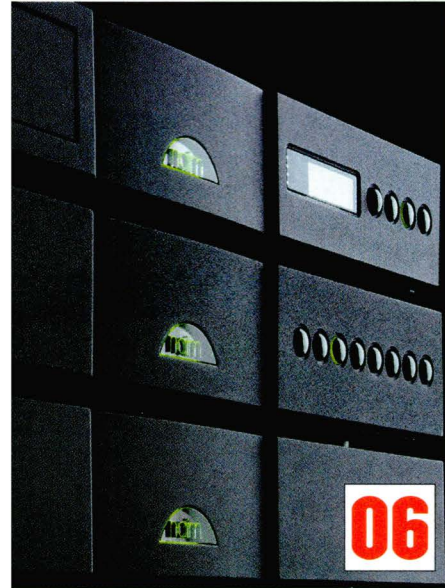
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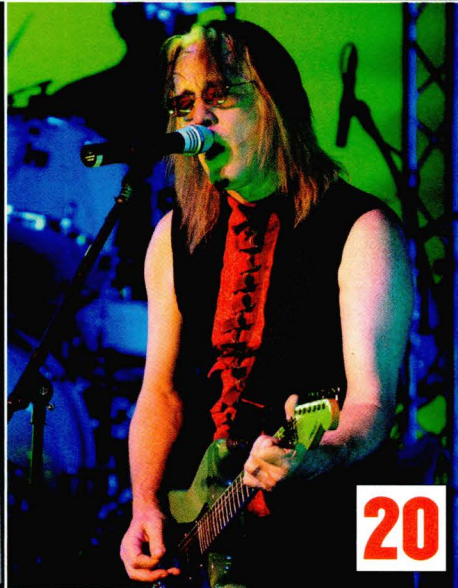
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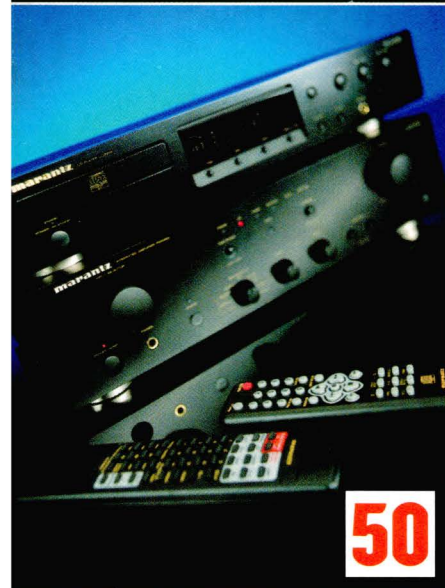
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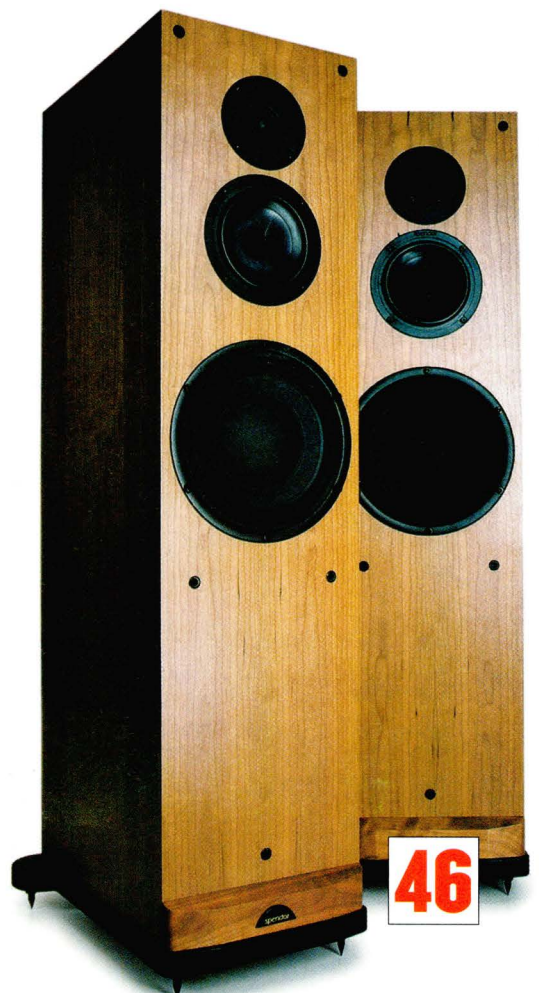
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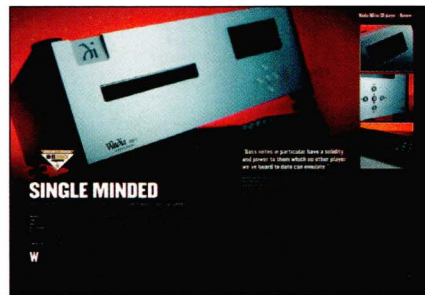
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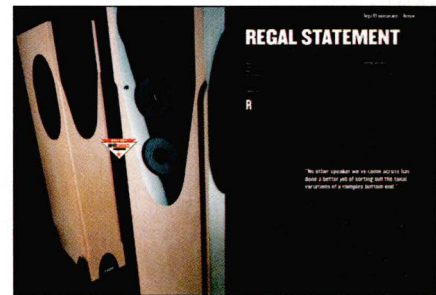
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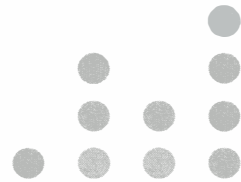
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EST. 1975

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 29 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi journal around. And our mix of rigorous group tests and in-depth solo reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the *smarter* hi-fi read...



X-RATED PLEASURE

NEW IMPROVED NAIM HI-FI

▶ Hot on the heels of the 5i amp and CD player, Naim has upgraded three key components a little further up the range. The new gear will brandish an 'x' suffix and comprise the CD5x (£1,450), NAC112x preamp (£680) and NAP150x power amp (£795). Improvements to the CD player include a better transport, 24-bit Burr-Brown DACs (as used in the CDX2 and CDS3) and CD-RW compatibility. The NAC112x benefits from a new main board design, switchable DIN or phono inputs and a low-noise display PCB. They're available this month.

☎ 01722 332266

🌐 www.naim-audio.com

X-CELLENT CYRUS

NEW DAC AND PREAMP

▶ This summer Cyrus will be launching two new products serving very different audiophile needs. The Cyrus DAC X, which allows any CD player to benefit from 192kHz sampling (see our Bristol Show report in HFC 250), has been developed to allow the optional inclusion of a preamp card. The preamp version is dubbed the DAC XP, extending amenities to include a dual mono, fully balanced preamp facility for several source components. The standard DAC X costs £1,000, with the fully loaded XP version weighing in at £2,000.

Flipping to the analogue side of the audiophile coin, Cyrus is also launching an MM/MC phono stage called the Phono X (£750, pictured below). An exact launch date is still to be confirmed.

☎ 01480 435577 🌐 www.cyrusaudio.com

TALISMAN RETURNS

RUARK RELAUNCHES CLASSIC SPEAKERS

▶ Ruark is launching new versions of the classic Talisman and Sabre loudspeakers under the Heritage Series banner. The new models will be highly evolved versions of the originals, with newly designed drive units and high-density cabinets flanked with high-quality real-wood veneers.

Ruark has chosen an SEAS fabric dome tweeter and a pulped fibre cone for the main drivers across the entire Heritage product range. Both the Sabre III (£900) and the Talisman (£1,500, pictured right) are available now in a choice of either light oak or walnut veneers.

☎ 01702 601410

🌐 www.ruark.net



FRENCH FANCY

LIMITED EDITION ELECTRA BE SPEAKERS

Focal-JMLab has produced three new limited edition Electra speakers in celebration of its 25th anniversary. The special Electra Be models will run alongside the conventional range and include a standmount and two floorstanders. Each boasts a choice of two unique finishes and a new version of Focal's highly-regarded beryllium tweeter. The new TCE Be tweeter is similar to the one used throughout the flagship Utopia Be range, but with a new magnet assembly offering extension down to 850Hz (said to optimise integration with the midband).

Numbers will be limited to 1,000 for the standmount Electra 907 Be (£1,750), 500 for the floorstanding 927 Be (£2,800), and 300 for the 937 Be (pricing TBC). The range is expected this month.

☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-fr.com



audiofile
PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites



DENON has unveiled more details about its hotly anticipated new network server, the NS-S100 (above). The fully integrated server can process audio, video and photos and features two 120GB hard drives. Denon claims the server is the first product to offer PVR (Personal Video Recorder) and PAR (Personal Audio Recorder) facilities, along with data back-up and multi-zone distribution. The unit is expected in Europe in early 2005 with pricing yet to be confirmed.
☎ 01234 741 200



BLOCK ROCKIN' BEATS SERIOUS MONOBLOCK FROM DENMARK

Densen's high-end Beat B-350 monoblock power amplifier is now available. The Danish specialist's new flagship design replaces the B-320 and offers 250 watts of power. Features include a back panel switch to adjust the gain, for use with a preamp or CD players with variable outputs, and new casework that integrates the heat sinks as part of the structure. The Beat B-350 is on sale now, priced at £2,500 each.

☎ 0045 7518 1214 🌐 www.densen.com

IN THE BUFF

MUSICAL FIDELITY'S
X-10 TUBE BUFFER
RETURNS

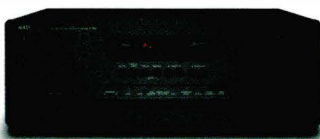
The original product that launched Musical Fidelity's X-Series, effectively saving the company in the 1990s, is back. The X-10^{v3} upgrades the original X-10D with a military-spec 6112 mu-Vista valve. The buffer is designed to integrate into virtually any hi-fi system to provide a more valve-like sound like that associated with hybrid CD players and amplifiers. It can be used between CD and amp, or preamp and power amp, or in the tape loop of an integrated amplifier. Consequently, the product is said to be particularly easy to drive - with a high input impedance and low output impedance. The X-10^{v3} is on sale now at £300 and is limited to 4,850 units.

☎ 020 8900 2866
🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com



NEW NADS GIVE MUCH PLEASURE

NEW NAD RECEIVERS LAUNCHED



Brit stalwart NAD has released two new receivers sporting the latest DSPs and audio decoding formats. The T743 (£400) will replace the T742, delivering 5x50 watts of continuous power and a host of new features, including a new volume control circuit, more

digital inputs, speaker switching and an illuminated learning remote. The same benefits are offered on the larger T753 (£600, pictured), which replaces the T752 and offers 6x70 watts plus a huge raft of facilities, including NAD's proprietary music surround mode called EARS - a type of pseudo surround. Both products are ready now in grey or titanium.

☎ 01908 319360
🌐 www.nadelectronics.com



GARDEN SOUND & LIGHT is the latest company to produce discreet outdoor speakers for the garden. It has two new full range stone cast speakers in mushroom (above) and column shapes that offer 360-degree dispersion and 100 watts power handling. The designs start at £250 and come complete with ten metres of cable.
☎ 01795 843168

MONSTER has produced a range of cables and accessories for Apple's iPod. These include an in-car cable for playing the iPod through car hi-fi systems, a splitter for sharing sound with a special friend, and a high quality interconnect for attachment to conventional hi-fi amplifiers. Prices start at £10.
☎ 01923 431 634

PANASONIC has launched two new low-cost DVD-Audio compatible DVD players. The DVD-S47EBS is priced at just £120 with support for two-channel DVD-Audio, and for another £10, the DVD-S75EBS offers multichannel DVD-A support as well as a strong range of features. Both players are available now.
☎ 08705 357357

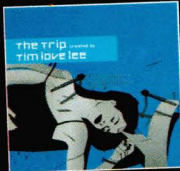
ONE FOR ALL has introduced a modular support range for hi-fi and AV gear. Included are wall brackets for full-width components and supports for screens and speakers. www.oneforall-int.com

ISOL-8 is a new hi-fi mains accessories specialist formed by ex-Isotek stalwart Nic Poulson. Its product range includes the familiar MainLine and CleanLine purifiers, and the MiniSub and SubStation filtration systems. Isol-8 says it will also offer support and servicing for all previously-released Isotek equipment. ☎ 020 8404 4104

WIREWORLD has launched a new HDMI/DVI cable called the Starlight 5. Designed for high performance digital audio/video transmission, it sports silver-clad OFC copper cores with gold-plated silver connections. Prices start at £200 for a one-metre length. ☎ 020 8991 9200

CD GIVEAWAY!

We're giving away the latest double CD from the superb The Trip series - a collection of albums mixed by guest DJs. The third Trip has been skilfully mixed by Tim Love Lee and is the series' most diverse and eclectic mix to date. For your chance to win, write in to: I Love What Tim Love Lee Loves Too, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP. Closing date is 8 July.



Hi-Fi diary

SEPTEMBER

24-26 The Hi-Fi Show and AV Expo
 Heathrow, London
 020 8774 0847
 London's established hi-fi show

OCTOBER

23-24 Home Entertainment Show
 Manchester
 01524 36991
 Premier AV show in the northwest

NOVEMBER

5-7 What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision Show
 Novotel London West Hotel
 020 8267 8378
 Second year for this new home cinema and hi-fi show

7 Audio Jumble
 Leatherhead
 07730 134973
 Go for a rumble in the Audio Jumble



AZUR IN LIMBO

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO'S AZUR GETS DOWN

Hi-fi on a budget remains a reality with Cambridge Audio's latest Azur electronics. The new 340C CD player and 340A stereo integrated amp are priced at just £150 each, yet both boast key features taken from more expensive Azur models, such as a low-resonance chassis, aluminium faceplate and remote control. The 340C CD player also uses the

same Crystal 24-bit/192kHz DAC and Sony transport found in the more upmarket Azur models, while the 40-watt 340A amp shares the same oversized transformer and low-noise preamp stage as its bigger brothers. Both products are available now. ☎ 0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com



UP THE CREEK

TURN IT UP WITH CREEK'S PASSIVE PREAMP

The latest addition to Creek's mini-sized OBH product range is a £300 passive preamp called the OBH-22. The new product will replace the OBH-12 and 22 models and will offer a motorised volume pot, three input relays and a tape output. Creek says the passive preamp will not introduce any gain or distortion into the signal path, making it suitable for use as a control preamp in a source-driven system. The unit comes with a remote control and power supply and is priced at £300. ☎ 01442 260146 www.creekaudio.com

THREE WAY PLEASURE

NEW FLAGSHIP EPOS M-SERIES SPEAKER

The new flagship Epos M22 is an extremely impressive looking floorstanding loudspeaker with a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter, a 150mm polymer cone for the midrange plus a 150mm version for the bass.

The three-way speaker is also tri-wireable, featuring three pairs of binding posts to provide separate feeds to each driver if required. Further features include a two-section cabinet isolating the driver sections, an optional plinth and a choice of three wood-veneer finishes. The M22 is available now at a cost of £950 per pair. ☎ 01442 260146 www.epos-acoustics.com





Authorised Stockists

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Product of the Year 2002-2003

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (11L Loudspeakers)

Product of the Year 2003-2004

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (11L Loudspeakers)

Separates System of the Year 2003-2004

Hi-Fi News (99Series and 11L Loudspeakers)

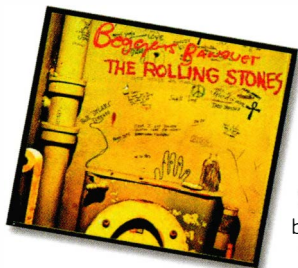


QUAD

Quad Electroacoustics Ltd, IAG House, Sovereign Court,
Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, PE29 6XU
Download brochures and reviews from www.quad-hifi.co.uk,
Tel :- 0845 4580011, Fax :- 01480 431767

SACD STORMS AHEAD

SACD shipments are exceeding those for DVD-Audio by a factor of three to one, according to a new RIAA (Record Industry Association of America) report. Last year 1.3 million SACDs were shipped compared to 0.4 million DVD-Audio titles. However, in a phone survey by the same organisation, DVD-A came out second after CD and before singles, downloads and SACD. This apparent contradiction would suggest there is still some confusion about the difference between DVD-A and its significantly more popular movie-oriented forebear, DVD-Video.



The report also notes that SACD is likely to catch up with vinyl sales by the end of the year. The BPI (British Phonographic Industry) has yet to include SACD/DVD-A in its reports but intends to for 2004.

The 2,000th SACD pressed was Jamie Cullum's surprise 'dinner jazz' success *Twentysomething* on the Universal label (see review p19). Over half of current titles offer multichannel tracks, success stories including Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon* and the Rolling Stones Remastered series with sales exceeding two million units in the US.

TOUCHY FEELY SONY

Sony's new high-end Qualia line is designed to build products with "emotional values". This project was conceived in early 2001 and this spring saw the launch of the first products in Japan and the USA. Each is designed to have high functionality and specification but is also said to have the ability to "truly touch Sony customers".

The range includes a camera, personal MD player, projector and 36in TV alongside an SACD system and "the ultimate high definition" headphones. Available in the US for \$2,600, Qualia 010 headphones have claimed high frequency extension up to 100kHz and are

built on a lightweight frame with natural sheepskin pads - luxury is clearly considered to be the way to a customer's heart. There are no plans yet to introduce Qualia in Europe.

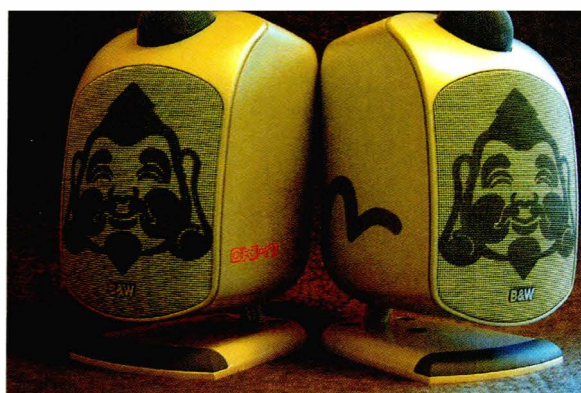


DIGITAL VERSATILITY

Independent Danish record label Inzect Productions has released a DVD-Audio title that brings new meaning to the word versatile. *Normality Killed The Cat* by Brimstone Butterfly includes PDF image files of both lyrics and chords, MP3 versions of each song and a video to accompany each of the 11 tracks. The latter are produced by a variety of contributors including a Hungarian video artist,



students from the Scandinavian School of Design and a 1971 film by Teddy Sørensen. Alongside these are the usual stereo and 5.1-channel 24/96 high-resolution mixes and a Dolby Digital version. For newcomers to the medium there is a speaker set-up guide and Brimstone Butterfly fans have the option to view still images of the band. Musically the album stretches from "self-ironic pop-boom" to "electronic wall of sound".



DESIGNER CACHE

Design collaborator extraordinaire Oki-Ni has combined B&W's LM1 loudspeakers with the high-fashion branding of Japan's Evisu label to create a distinctive version of the compact speaker. Priced 50 per cent higher than the standard LM1, it doesn't differ technically but garners a healthy dollop of street cred thanks to the tie-up. They will be sold through Oki-Ni's retail outlets and online at www.oki-ni.com.

DAB DATA

DAB is set to broaden its appeal with the introduction of data services alongside digital radio. Digital One, the country's largest commercial DAB multiplex has formed a venture with the backing of BT Wholesale to create services such as broadcast and downloadable music and video clips alongside text and interactive information services. A benefit for the traditional DAB user will be improvements to the transmission network and a boost in signal strength. We are told that this new service will not affect the bit rates of Digital One's commercial stations.



DECIBELS FOR DB9

Linn has created three new bespoke audio systems for Aston Martin's DB9 luxury sports car. There are 128-watt and 260-watt systems, but the ultimate 950-watt system offers Dolby Pro Logic II and features Chakra amplification and ten channels, one of which is a servo-controlled subwoofer, sorry, "bass reinforcement speaker".

Linn's managing director Ivor Tiefenbrun said: "The Linn sound systems offered with this vehicle are precision engineered to complement this superb vehicle and complete its sublime transportation experience."

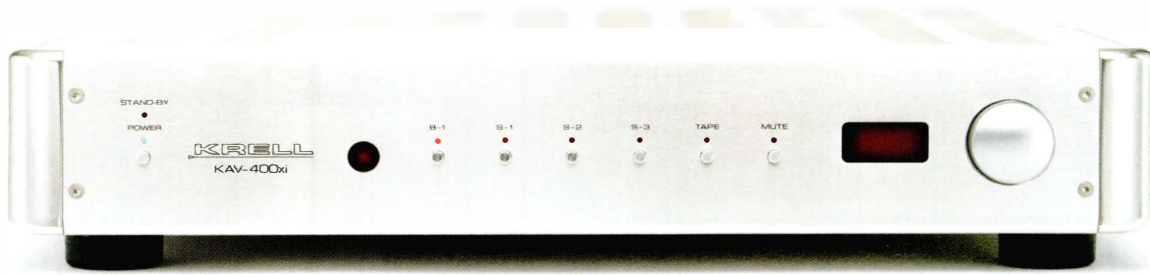
"This amplifier can blow your house over but loses nothing from the music"

Your Guide to Hi-Fi and Home Cinema, January 2004, Stan Curtis



"Combining clarity with control is virtually a three word encapsulation of the KAV400xi"

Hi Fi Choice, November 2003, Alvin Gold



KAV400xi

"The new player not just delights with the still quite rare SACDs, it also knows how to please with CDs"

Audio, Germany, September 2003

"If I had to choose one SACD player, (regardless of price), I'd go for the Krell."

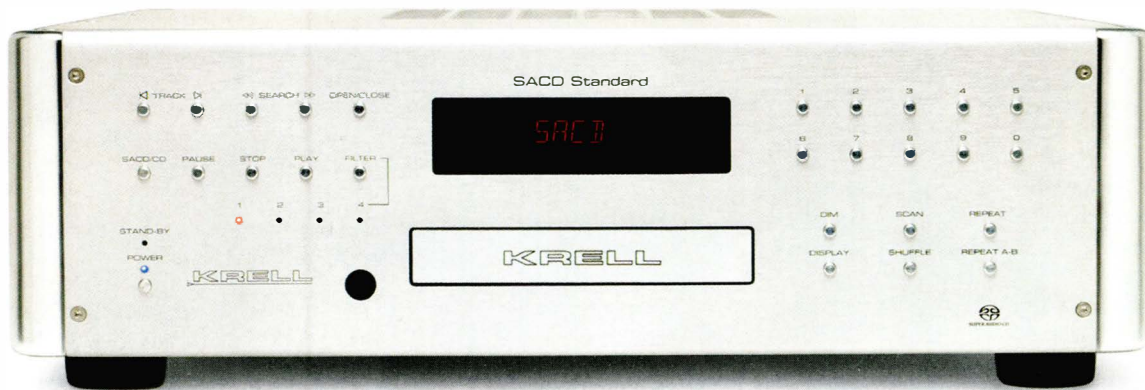
Stereophile, December 2003, Michael Fremer

"A unit capable of delivering performance at the very top in the reproduction of CD and SACD"

Audio Review, Italy, November 2003, Franco Guida

"The 'Standard' is a player with...guts"

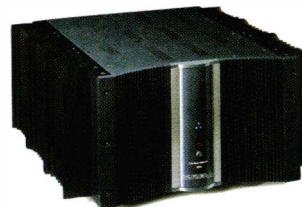
Diario de Noticias, Portugal, September 2003, JVH



SACD

KRELL'S ANGELS THE NEXT CHAPTER

From its arrival with a single power amplifier in 1980, Krell's exclusive product range has evolved into a total system concept. Because it is now recognised as the premier high-end audio and home theatre brand, Krell has been compelled to create the ultimate in audio-only and audio-video systems from front to back. Its range of amplification devices have been augmented over the years by CD transports, digital converters and audio/video processors. In 2004, the concept reaches fruition with the ascendancy of both definitive source components – the SACD Standard and the DVD Standard – and a range of loudspeakers suitable for pure music or multi-channel cinematic pleasure.



Krell FPB 700cx

"There's a timeless quality to all-round excellence, and the FPB 700cx has just that"

Hi Fi News, June 2003, Martin Colloms

Krell has also expanded its catalogue vertically, with the KAV and Showcase ranges for entry-level and mid-level systems, and the rare and exotic Reference Series for systems without limit. Regardless of the model, however, a component must attain the highest standards of sonic performance, ergonomic excellence, superior build quality and long-term dependability before its front panel is graced with the Krell badge.

Krell - a premier high-end company by excellence.



absolutesounds ltd.

TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

July/August 1999

Do you remember David Vivian's statement that Ikea's Lack table made a great, and very cheap hi-fi rack? His



claims were the subject of much debate in hi-fi circles – Ikea's £18 wooden 'Lack' tables were super-light and not too dissimilar to Russ Andrews'

Torlyte products in terms of composition. David's claims saved him, and perhaps some of you, a small fortune. Elsewhere in our lab, kick-ass cables of the moment were Kimber's fantastic 4PR and the legendary QED Qudos silver. Hot cartridges reviewed were Sumiko's Blue Point Special and Ortofon's MC 10 Supreme.

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

August 1994

Editor Simon Davies handed over the reigns to the young Stan Vincent – a passionate hi-fi aficionado who continued to keep HFC at

the cutting edge. Wadia hit the news with its £7,375 CD player, the 17 ADC – and you thought today's range was pricey! Two-box



CD systems got the lab treatment with Arcam's Delta 250/BB50 wowing the white coats. We also took a look at digital recorders, comparing the ill-fated DCC format against more lasting solutions such as CD-R and MiniDisc. Marantz's CDR610 came top, shame about the £3,800 price tag – ouch!

SYSTEM BUILDER

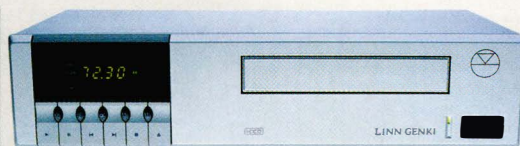
EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



LENNY KRAVITZ

Are You Gonna Go My Way? Virgin

Lenny Kravitz is an awkward fit into any preconceived pigeonhole. He may be seen as a retro rocker, but his style is as close to original as any artist can be when recording in the wake of so many previous greats and varied influences. The self-taught, California-raised musician has always specialised in variations on his core Prince/Sly Stone/Hendrix fixations but he never produced a better blend of them all than on his third album. *Are You Gonna Go My Way?* will complement a multitude of appetites – it has a spicy blend of funk-ed-up, big beat tunes, beautiful acoustic ballads and revitalising rock numbers. On the wrong system this disc can sound bloated – the engineer has imposed a warm and lush balance, and that's putting it politely! Persevere however, and with a more exciting system you can enjoy the infectious Kravitz appeal that's a mistake to overlook.



CD PLAYER

LINN GENKI £995

Linn's Genki is on the lively side of neutral and won't shy away from pulling out the detail and cutting through the mist on our Kravitz disc.



AMPLIFIER

THULE IA60B SE £895

One of the year's best sub-£1,000 amps, the IA60B tells it like it is, never straying from the path of sonic truth. It may be a newcomer to the UK scene, but for the money it's hard to fault.

LOUDSPEAKERS

TRIANGLE ANTAL 202

£925

Like Pavarotti, it's not much to look at but sounds fantastic. France is knocking out some great speakers right now – the midband especially on this baby is to die for.

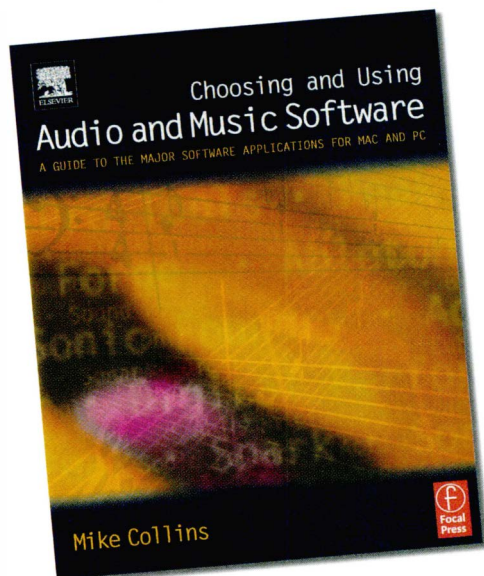


BOOK OF THE MONTH

CHOOSING AND USING AUDIO AND MUSIC SOFTWARE

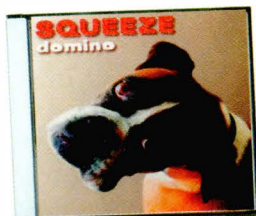
A guide to the major software applications for Mac and PC
Focal Press £35

For audiophiles who love to make music as well as listen to it, the PC has revolutionised the recording process, making it easy to record, edit and create music without the need for a professional studio. This accessible guide to all the major audio software available for home computers is illustrated throughout with full colour screenshots from the various software packages covered. If you want to get up to speed fast with Pro Tools and Cubase, this book is an invaluable reference.



READERS' DEMO DISC

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



SQUEEZE

Domino Quixotic Records

"In 1998 Squeeze pushed out their last album, and as a big fan, I felt they'd put something special into the mix. Squeeze were one of the tightest and most musical bands in the UK. They may be yesterday's news, but for demos of hi-fi, their

musicianship is timeless. With multiple instrumental layers, and a beat-driven blend of piano, guitar and organ, *Domino* will give your ears the chance to evaluate neutrality, speed and musicality. I came away with Naim gear last time I took this album out with me, and from that day to this, I've never looked back."

George Whitebread 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 #22

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



Take care of your ears (1)

Suppose you're about to visit a hi-fi dealer in order to audition some equipment, and you're travelling by car. It makes very good sense to arrive early, if possible, in order to allow your ears time to adjust. Cars can be quite noisy. So a journey lasting an hour or more can noticeably affect your hearing. The effect is soon over, but

even so, it's likely to be at least half an hour before your ears recover their sensitivity and bandwidth.

Exposure to high-ish levels of noise tends to mute the ear's high frequency response, making it difficult to listen critically. Sometimes, when your ears are still recovering from a bout of noise pollution, listening to hi-fi can actually be painful and unpleasant – particularly if you play things too loudly to compensate for the ear's temporary loss of sensitivity. So give your ears time to adjust and settle down.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Felix Da Housecat Devin Dazzle
And The Neon Fever
Morrissey You Are The Quarry
Sonic Youth Nurse
Bugge Wesseltoft Film Ing
Franz Ferdinand Franz Ferdinand
The Church Heyday
Curve The Way Of Curve
Soulive Turn It Out
Ella Guru Ella Guru
Mister David Viner This Boy Don't Care
The Streets A Grand Don't Come For Free



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

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



TOM WAITS

Title: *Real Gone*

Release date: autumn

Waits has taken up residency in an old schoolhouse in Mississippi to record the follow-up to 2002's *Alice and Blood Money*. "There are songs about politics, rats, war, hangings, dancing, automobiles, pirates, farms, the carnival and sinning, mama, liquor, trains and death," he says. "In other words, the same old dirty business."

ELLIOTT SMITH

Title: *From A Basement On The Hill*

Release date: September

Sadly Elliott himself isn't in the studio, following his tragic death last year, at the age of 33. But his father Gary is mixing the tapes that the cult American singer-songwriter left behind for his sixth and final album.

McFLY

Title: *Room On The Third Floor*

Release date: July

McFly are pure pop but they've at least put a bit of fizz back into the charts with their number one single, *Five Colours In Her Hair* and established themselves as the band most likely to give label mates Busted a run for their money among youthful fans. But advance tracks from their debut album suggest they're more influenced by the Beatles than the Bay City Rollers.

THE ROOTS

Title: *The Tipping Point*

Release date: July

Widely regarded as the most inventive crew in contemporary hip-hop, Philadelphia's The Roots follow up their Grammy-nominated *Phrenology*



with a set that is already being hailed as their best yet. "We feel as though this album is our biggest step, hence the title," says the band's Ahmir Thompson. Surprises include a 'virtual' duet with Sly Stone and an appearance by comedian Dave Chappelle.

BILLY CORGAN

Title: tbc

Release date: late 2004

The former Smashing Pumpkins frontman has begun work on his first solo album. "For the first time in my life it will be my tunes with no compromises to anyone or anything. It's going to be loud and beautiful and poetic and dumb. Just the way I like it," quoth the bald one.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/POP

Brian Wilson Getting' In Over My Head (Jul), **Mull Historical Society** This Is Hope (Jul), **Shaznay Lewis** Open (Jul), **Gorillaz** tbc (Aug), **Kings of Leon** tbc (Sep), **Green Day** American Idiot (Sep)

JAZZ/CLASSICAL

Al Jarreau Accentuate The Positive (Aug), **Vanessa Mae** Choreography (Sep), **Elvis Costello** Il Sogno (ballet) (Sep), **Anne-Sophie Mutter** Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto (Oct)

pictures can say more than words,
then our music will leave you speechless.



Stello: CDA 200 CD Player
DP 200 DAC/Preamplifier,
S200 Power amplifier

Accoustic Arts



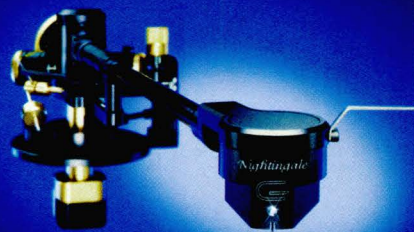
GamuT



HALCRO™



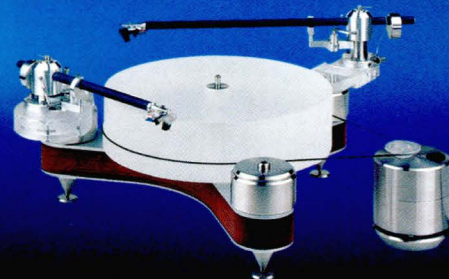
Acapella



Graham



Cabasse



Clearaudio



Headroom Bithead amp £113 (\$199)

▶ This is a real beauty of an accessory for anyone who likes to listen to their music on the move – a dinky headphone amplifier that runs off batteries. Why? Basically, it claims higher quality than the built-in headphone amps of many portables. More than that, though, it can be connected via USB to a computer and function as a D-to-A converter. Bingo! Greatly enhanced audio for anyone enjoying audio via a laptop computer.

No empty claims for quality here, either. There's a little background hiss, but the basic sound is cleaner, meatier and generally nicer in every way than that from any portable device we compared it with. Headroom provides a comprehensive set of accessories too, including various feet so that you can, if you wish, Velcro your Bithead to the lid of your laptop. All very well thought through, a genuine upgrade, great value and overall, both a duty and a pleasure to recommend.

☎ www.headphone.com



Furutech FI-11 Silver IEC socket £65

▶ If the asking price seems a bit steep for a mains connector, the amount of trouble Furutech goes to in the making of it should offer some explanation. For a start, this is a monster-sized connector that can happily accept the fattest and weirdest mains cables on the market. It has silver-plated contacts and thoughtfully colour-coded terminal screws. And all metal parts are subject to cryogenic treatment (to the exceptionally low temperature of liquid helium, 4K) followed by demagnetisation, in order to relieve molecular stress.

You don't have to buy into all that stuff – the practicalities will sell it to anyone who wants to experiment with mains cable. But although the sonic benefits were not clear in the regular 'Essentials' review system a spell in a more stable system did indeed seem to indicate benefits, minute maybe, but just a little more detail and polish. Perhaps best to think of it as audiophile jewellery.

☎ Choice Bits 0870 240 7228 ☎ www.furutech.com



Eichmann Bayonet Plug £40 for four

▶ An intelligent new take on the popular 4mm 'banana' plug as commonly used to connect speaker cables. Various features distinguish this version. For a start, the metal contact area is semicircular rather than fully round, with the remainder (and the centre) occupied by a plastic insert. The plastic has a certain amount of 'give' and provides the spring force when the plug is inserted in a socket, and in case it's a little loose (it wasn't in any we tried, quite the reverse) Eichmann even provides alternative, larger inserts.

Connection to the wires is by soldering and the plastic can be completely removed when this is done, avoiding messy melting. Fat cables are easily accommodated, though flat ones less so. And sound? It seemed a little better defined than with standard plugs, perhaps not enough to warrant upgrading but if you happen to need some 4mm plugs these are very good and fairly priced.

☎ Choice Bits 0870 240 7228 ☎ www.eichmanncables.com



Servisol Super 10 contact cleaner and lubricant £3

▶ Servisol as a brand has been around for aeons. This particular product is a general purpose switch and contact cleaner and lubricant which you simply spray on. The solvent evaporates quickly and the residue is practically invisible but evidently does something because crackly switches miraculously stop their noise and contacts and connectors seem to pass a purer audio signal.

Many modern switches are sealed and hence untreatable (but also much less likely to need it) but this product can be a lifesaver with elderly equipment, restoring peace and quiet and reducing microphony due to marginal contacts. The effect on connectors is perhaps less marked than with Caig's solution but it's better than nothing and if you want a single all-round spray, this is as good as any.

☎ Maplin 0870 429 6000 ☎ www.servisol.co.uk

rescuing music from technology

SugdenAudio



"the sound is superb, natural
and organic but with
real power"

*Andy Grove
Hi-Fi World*



"in essence, the Sugdens
handled our program material
with such proficiency as to
transcend its existence"

Ernie Fisher - The Inner Ear Report

"the Masterclass AA Pre/power
is one of the most organic and
dynamic transistor amplifiers
you can buy"

Jason Kennedy - Hi-Fi Choice



SugdenAudio

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www.sugdenaudio.com

e: enquiries@sugdenaudio.com t: 01924 404088

J E Sugden & Co Ltd, Valley Works, Station Lane, Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire WF16 0NF

COMPETITION



WIN Marantz's stunning audiophile DV-12S2 universal DVD player worth £2,000!

In last month's test, we reported that the Marantz DV-12S2 was a universal DVD player worthy of the audiophile, with top-notch video performance and a refined, full-bodied sound across all formats, from the humble CD to SACD and DVD-Audio. Plucked from Marantz's Premium range, this gorgeous, top-end, THX-certified player costs a tidy £2,000, and is good enough to have picked up our coveted Editor's Choice award, setting a truly high standard which few multi-format machines can hope to match.

Both inside and out, the DV-12S2 is an immaculately turned out player. External build quality is excellent, while under the lid it's treated to a host of high-spec circuitry. Crystal 24-bit/192kHz DACs, sophisticated power supplies and extensive copper screening all help to ensure this is no ordinary universal DVD player – it's a play-it-all *tour de force* worthy of our discerning readers! For your chance to take this high-end multi-format player home, simply give us the correct answer the question below – a winner will be pulled out of the hat. Good Luck!

HOW TO ENTER:

Answer the question by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number below. Please also take the time to fill in our small questionnaire – we want to make *Hi-Fi Choice* as good as you deserve, dear reader.

QUESTION

What is the DV-12S2 player treated to?

- a) A night on the town with a meal and a West End show
- b) A host of high-spec circuitry, including Crystal DACs
- c) A Ferrero Rocher from the ambassador's reception

YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Date of Birth _____ Daytime tel number _____

What type of hi-fi product you intend to buy next? _____

Which brands would you most like to read about? _____

Would you like to see more expensive or less expensive kit reviewed? _____

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice*? _____

Please tell us if there's anything you don't like. _____

COMPETITION RULES

The closing date for this competition is 8 July 2004. Winners of the Marantz competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the closing date. Winners will be notified by post. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The Marantz competition is not open to employees of Marantz, Future Publishing Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates. We regret this competition is only open to UK residents. No cash alternatives will be offered. By entering the competition you will be bound by the rules. We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equivalent value to those shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable. All entries must be on this official coupon, but photocopies are acceptable. Only one entry per household.

Send your entry to:

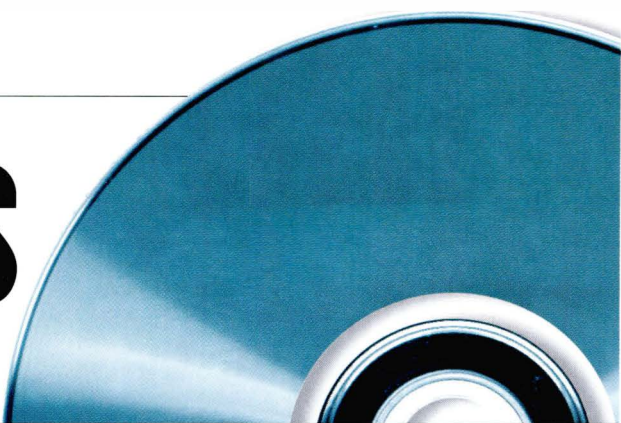
**Marantz Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing,
99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6PP.**

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Dan George, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman, Nigel Williamson



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Rage Against The Machine

Epic/Simply Vinyl 160g vinyl

Music: 1992's eponymous debut from LA's punk metallists is an incendiary work that they could never quite repeat. Featuring the monster bass riffs of Timmy C and the unconventional guitar of Tom Morello with the angst-ridden voice of Zack

De La Rocha, RATM play with a conviction and precision rarely encountered. Not exactly metal but clearly influenced by it, RATM's sound is essentially ass-kicking, the ass in question being the American Way and all its works. This is clean, precise hard rock from the same roots as Soundgarden and Pearl Jam but with considerably more bite.

★★★★

Sound: A full bandwidth albeit compressed recording, this is worth playing loud for the bass alone, with its girth and good variety of tempo. Remember: if ears bleeding, reduce volume! ★★★★★ JK

JEFF BUCKLEY

Grace

Columbia/Simply Vinyl 180g vinyl

Music: Ten years ago Jeff Buckley produced his first and only fully formed studio album. Five years later

it's acknowledged as a masterpiece. Its appeal can be put down to a number of factors: an incredible voice, inspired composition, but at the root it's emotional communication that makes the difference. Buckley makes

suffering such a beautiful thing that it almost seems like a good idea. Musically it owes something to Led Zeppelin, classical Indian and his folk/jazz singer father Tim, but as a whole each of the ten tracks on *Grace* is a work of art that transcends its influences. There is a reason why everything and anything Buckley ever committed to tape gets released. Basically, this is it. ★★★★★

Sound: A good if not outstanding pressing with plenty of bandwidth and power but not quite as much space as it could have. ★★★★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Simply Vinyl: ☎ 0208 545 8580 @ www.simplyvinyl.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



WILEY

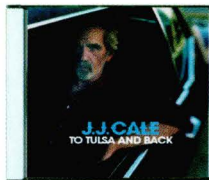
Treddin' On Thin Ice

XL

Music: One-time Roll Deep Crew member with Mercury Prize winner Dizzee Rascal, Wiley is the latest name to emerge from the post-garage scene. Shying away from Dizzee's definition of his music as 'grhyme', Wiley prefers the term 'eskibeat' – something to do with urban chill, apparently. The music is anything but cold though, with high-speed but relaxed rhymes promoting self-motivation, rubbishing MC braggadocio and no small amount of humour. "Oi mate, do you think I'm a waffler? Well you do go on a bit..."

★★★★

Sound: Ah, here's the eskibeat bit. All electronic bar the voices, the beats are wintry and bare, if less aggressive than you'll find on much of Dizzee's album, and the glacial production is crisp as new snow. ★★★ DO



JJ CALE

To Tulsa And Back

Virgin

Music: JJ Cale reckons he tries to make every album sound different. Happily for his fans, he's spent 30 years failing. *To Tulsa And Back* sounds like it could be the follow-up to his classic 1972 debut, *Naturally*. Recorded in his home town with the good ol' boys he's known for 40 years, together they recreate the effortless blues-meets-country *After Midnight* shuffle that so inspired Eric Clapton. Understated horns, fiddles, guitar solos of the kind Mark Knopfler still dreams about and Cale's laid-back croak are set to that famous Tulsa heartbeat that never misses. Not so much a record. More like a master class. ★★★★★

Sound: Exactly as you'd want Cale to sound – spare and uncluttered, with enough Oklahoma dirt beneath the fingernails to keep it funky. ★★★ NW



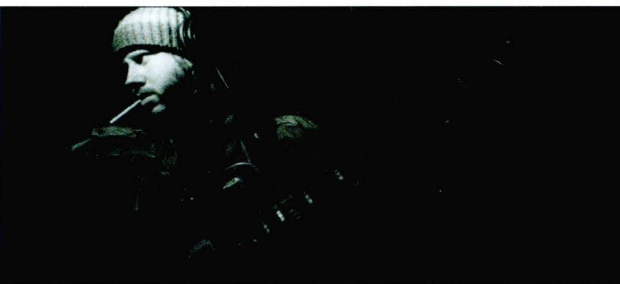
THE ORB

Bicycles & Tricycles

Cooking Vinyl

Music: After years as kingpins of ambient techno, Alex Paterson and co have consolidated their brand with vast light and sound displays in Japan, Australia and the US. Here Paterson, with key original member Jimmy Cauty and German technician Thomas Fehlmann return to the lush textures of old, updated with hip-hop nous. *Gee Strings* is superior techno dub but the album as a whole never really seems to gel. Perhaps the lack of the 'ambient linear' technique deployed on earlier recordings is the main culprit. ★★★★★

Sound: If the Orb could be qualified on sound alone they would always get a distinction. There are huge atmospheres here including the outstanding analogue gongs and bells towards the end. ★★★★★ MP



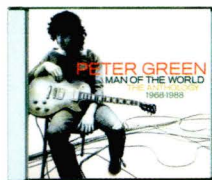
BADLY DRAWN BOY

One Plus One Is One

Twisted Nerve

Music: Returning to the damp fleshpots of Stockport after the sun of LA where he recorded his last album, *Have You Fed The Fish?*, Damon Gough's poorly sketched alter ego seems in more pastoral and relaxed mode on this gently lulling, intermittently uplifting album. There are shades of Nick Drake, Brian Wilson and Pepper-era Beatles but to his credit it's not a retro-sounding album – more timeless pop. His gift for melody hasn't left him and there are some lovely moments on here, not least the gently plucked guitar and aching violin of *This Is That New Song* and the piano and flute-led instrumental *The Blossoms*. ★★★★★

Sound: Warm and comforting, this is not an album with many awkward edges, but instead it seems to come wrapped a cosy patina of cotton wool, as comfortable as a pair of slippers, or even a favourite woolly hat. ★★★ DO



PETER GREEN

Man Of The World Anthology

Sanctuary Midline

Music: Peter G was one of the prime movers behind seventies superstars Fleetwood Mac and their strong live performances – the spaced-out blues guitar-man had a life after Mac, of course, and this 36-track collection from the years 1968-1988 captures the best of both his group and solo pieces. *Born On The Wild Side* rocks the hardest, *A Fool No More's* got the most Green blues, *Touch My Spirit* suits his casually yearning voice best while the funky *Loser Two Times* and poignant *Apostle* are probably two of the best platforms for the mad axe-man's startling string work. ★★★★★

Sound: Clearly recorded guitar and vocals throughout – even the compressed live stuff cuts through remarkably well. ★★★★★ PS



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Simply oozes with a very rare class."

YELLO *Flag* Mercury 120g Vinyl

Music: Electro individualists Yello were one of the most influential 'bands' of the eighties, the Swiss duo's penchant for recreating film noir soundtracks over pulsating latin rhythms having an effect on the DJ scene of the nineties that has yet to tail off. *Flag*, though not their finest work, (that would be 1985's *Stella*), was the album that put Yello on the audiophile map thanks to the track *The Race*. There was a time in the mid-nineties when no hi-fi show could

expect to be taken seriously without its weighty bass line pulsating down the corridors. Yello's appeal can be put down to the luxurious sound they managed to create, the cost-no-object production, and the way that tunes like *Of Course I'm Lying* simply ooze with a very rare class. ★★★★★
Sound: If you like a rich, well-rounded sound this is a fine album. Its soundstages stretch far and wide making almost any system sound expansive. ★★★★★ JK



BEBEL GILBERTO

Bebel Gilberto

EastWest/Crammed

Music: If ever there was the sound of a world music artist heading for the pop mainstream, this is it. Bebel Gilberto's elegant debut *Tanto Tempo* sold a million copies world-wide. Aided by the fact that Brazil has now replaced Cuba as the planet's hippest musical destination and that she sings half a dozen songs in English for the first time, the follow-up should top that with ease. The new girl from Ipanema has made a record of such utterly seductive beauty and dreamy luxury that you can almost smell the expensive fragrance wafting out of the hi-fi. Set to become the must-have summer soundtrack and the biggest world music crossover phenomenon since Buena Vista. ★★★★★
Sound: Rich, warm, seductive and reassuringly expensive, it's the aural equivalent of an up-market spa treatment as producers Marius de Vries (*Massive Attack*) and Guy Sigsworth (*Madonna*) give Gilberto a perfectly manicured makeover. ★★★★★ NW



FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

The String Symphonies

Roy Goodman (cond), Hanover Band
RCA Red Seal 82876 60427 2 (3 disc set)

Music: These precocious works are surprisingly mature and stylish examples from 'the Mozart of the 19th century'. Stylistically, however, these intimate works, which are of short duration and scored entirely for small string orchestras, are much closer in style to CPE Bach (born 95 years earlier) than Mozart (53 years). But Mendelssohn lived only 38 years, and his talent even at a very young age was prodigious. Some of these works were written in his early teens. ★★★★★
Sound: Lively, clean, and well judged performances played with real verve by a very accomplished band and a sound that is detailed, spacious and refined. ★★★★★ AG



BACH, VARGA, BARTOK, STRAVINSKY, YSAYE

Mirijam Contzen Solo

Mirijam Contzen (violin)
Arte Nova 82876 57741 2

Music: This German-Japanese violinist is not widely known in the UK, but she is renowned in continental Europe. This recording neatly showcases her talents, which stretch from the classical to the contemporary. Being the solo player with no accompanist in works like these, which present real technical challenges, means there is nowhere to hide. Contzen's technical mastery is such that her intonation never falters, and there is never the slightest sense of strain. ★★★★★
Sound: There is nothing acid or sterile about the recording, which complements the tonally rich, singing quality of her Carlo Bergonzi instrument. ★★★★★ AG

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

JS BACH

Complete Orchestral Suites

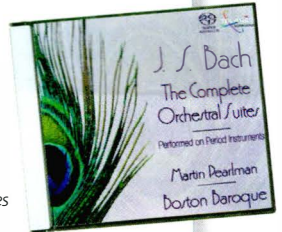
Martin Pearlman (cond), Boston Baroque

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Telarc SACD-60619

Music: The four orchestral suites were not written as a set in the same way as the *Brandenburgs*, where the contrasting personalities of the works is intrinsic and intentional. The only real relationship between the *Suites* is that they are normally packaged together; indeed the combined playing time of just over 73 minutes could not be more convenient for record companies today. But they do work well together, and the music is wonderful. If you don't think you know the *Orchestral Suites*, think *Air On A G String* (Suite No. 3, 2nd movement), but the music is strong from first to last. ★★★★★

Sound: Some of the tempi feel slightly rushed, and there are occasional signs of ragged ensemble, but the performances on period instruments are beautifully captured, the multichannel mix adding weight and substance to the generally lively and committed performances. ★★★★★ AG



JOE HENRY

Scar

DVD-Audio (24/96 surround, 24/192 stereo, Dolby Digital)

Hi-Res Music

Music: *Scar* was originally released on Mammoth but has now been remastered by one of the more interesting labels on the high-resolution scene. Musically it bears a striking resemblance to Tom Waits – his voice isn't so gravelly but the accompaniment has many similarities. This may well be because it features Marc Ribot who has appeared on many Waits albums, Brad Mehldau and, unexpectedly, none other than free jazz saxophonist extreme, Ornette Coleman. Unfortunately the mix is unusually dense with the voice taking precedent over the clearly interesting work behind it. A deep, rich and well-constructed album, *Scar* requires a bit of work to get to grips with but repays the investment. ★★★★★
Sound: This pressing includes 96 and 192kHz versions for music that appears to have little in the way of high frequencies. However, the format's strengths show in the relaxed, almost analogue nature of the sound. ★★★★★ JK



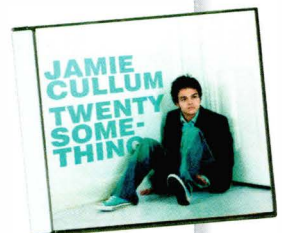
JAMIE CULLUM

Twentysomething

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Universal

Music: Jamie Cullum's propulsion to the mainstream ear may seem like part of a cynical modern movement (attractive young people – Jones, Krall *et al* – playing music likely to appeal to older, possibly less attractive music fans) but there's no doubt that the lad can play the piano. His smooth, easy style may not light many fireworks, but he knows how to handle a tune, treating standards such as *Old Devil Moon* and *Singin' In The Rain* as modern pop songs rather than giving them the reverential treatment that might be expected of some of his contemporaries. ★★★★★
Sound: The album was recorded entirely in the analogue domain, which gives it a warmth that's often lost in creating a digital 5.1 mix. The high resolution however, reveals the flaws in Cullum's occasionally immature vocal – nasality and a grating croak does nothing for combating fatigue! This minor flaw apart, this is one of the better SACDs from the 2,000 now on offer. ★★★★★ DG



The voice of Todd

Rock's most cerebral maverick, Todd Rundgren has been championing music downloads for years. Now he's made an 'old-fashioned' CD. But why? Interview: Dave Oliver

“From the standpoint of technology, CDs are now approaching their obsolescence. All CDs are possibly destined to be chopped up and downloaded. This is why on my CD, the songs sort of segue into each other. You could recreate the CD as it is, but it would have to be one big 74-minute MP3 file.”

Polymathic sonic adventurer, cult musician and multi-million selling producer Todd Rundgren is, as ever, thinking ahead. He's been at the forefront of technology in pop music (though generally pretty far from the forefront of the charts) for over 30 years, and in that time he's learned a thing or two. One of which is, you can't stop the future.

“The audience has already spoken. They've voted with their feet or in this case with their mice. They've

basically said 'we want to be able to get any song in the world, 24 hours a day, instantly.' And at this point in time that's not an unreasonable demand.”

Philadelphia-born, now Hawaii-based, Todd Rundgren released his first critically lauded album, *Something Anything*, in 1972. But rather than play the numbers game, he followed his muse and interests, recording increasingly bizarre concept albums and saving his pop sense for production on other people's records, most famously Meatloaf's 1977 behemoth *Bat Out Of Hell*. From that time on he became increasingly interested in technology, creating the first ever interactive TV concert (the home audience voted using a two-way operating system) in 1978. In 1980 he created the first colour graphics tablet, which he licensed to Apple, and in 1992 he

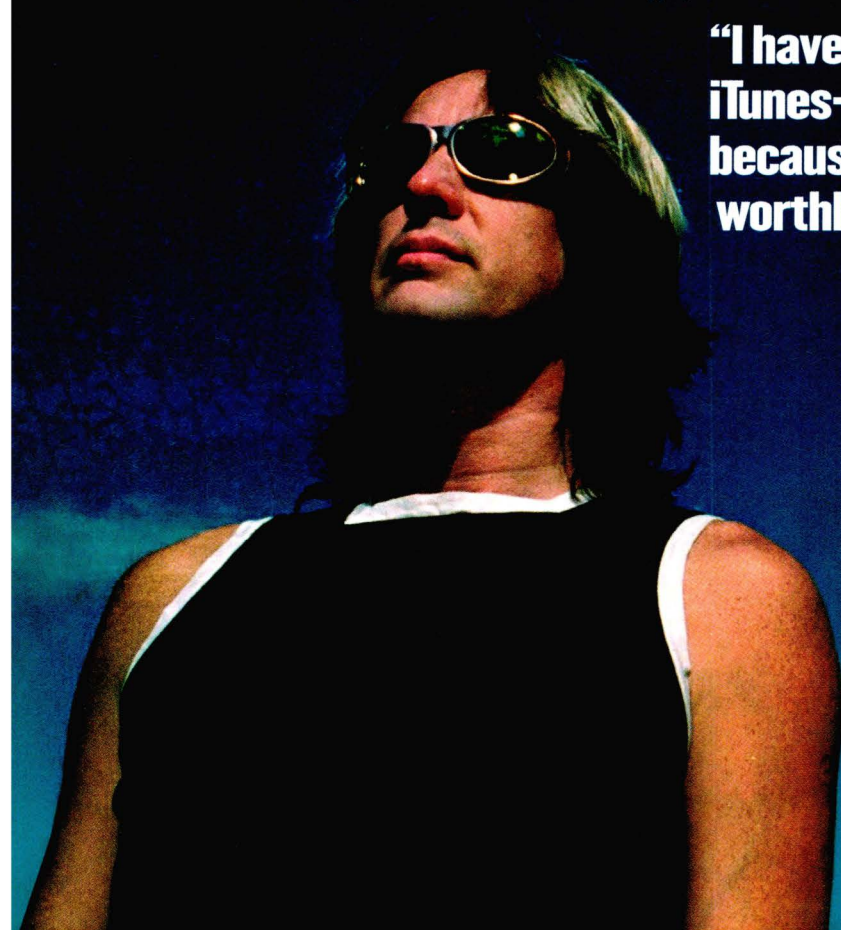
released the first interactive album – a collection of snippets which the listener could arrange as they wished. Then in 1998 he launched PatroNet, which facilitates direct artist-to-consumer subscription downloads. There's no doubt that he has an abiding interest in technology, but in recent times there was the strong suspicion that it was overshadowing the music. Fortunately *Liars*, his first album of original material for a decade, puts him back on track. To help focus his mind on completing the album, he adopted a rough concept of sorts, “the paucity of truth”, and each of the songs vents his anger/disgust/bewilderment at some form of lies, whether they come from government, family, lovers, religion or the media. Not that it always sounds like an angry album. In typical Rundgren fashion, the influences are broad and the styles he

“I have a problem with the whole iTunes-style 99 cents per song thing, because basically, some songs are worthless, and some are priceless.”

employs equally wide-ranging, from Ibiza-style techno (but with a great tune) on *Truth*, through Philly soul on *Sweet*, metal guitar licks on *Mammon*, eighties electro funk on *Stood Up* and many, many points in-between. It's both a surprisingly strong pop rock album and a timely reminder of just what he's capable of when he puts his mind to it.

Most of Rundgren's recent output has been available solely as downloads from his website, www.tr-i.com. He thought it was the most direct and efficient way for his fans to access his music, but ironically, the return to CD album format actually accelerated the process for him.

“It was taking too long doing one song at a time so I decided I just had





Left: Todd's interactive live shows have yet to include the option to change his outfits

to knuckle down and finish it in six months. You can only work on a single piece of music for so long before you lose your objectivity, and you have to stop. But if you're doing a dozen songs at once you're sort of multitasking and you can get much more done."

MUSIC LIKE CABLE

But despite his apparent re-embracing of the CD, he still insists that before too long, downloads are where it will be at, and he has little sympathy for record companies' cries of foul when it comes to downloading music. "I'm not trying to solve their problems. (Albums like this) work for me but I don't think every artist can artistically afford to do concept albums with segues in-between the songs just to save the CD format. People are still gonna have favourite songs and eventually skip over a bunch and go to number five or whatever.

"But I personally don't think that music should be measured on a per-song basis. I have a philosophical problem with the whole iTunes-style 99 cents per song thing. Because it's an arbitrary number, it means nothing. Now we're in the ephemeral world. You could say that singles might have cost around a dollar say, but some of that money was going into the materials involved in the actual manufacture of the record and some of that amount went into the mechanical distribution of it. But it costs nothing, pretty much, to deliver electronically.

"So I think eventually record companies will say, yeah, electronic delivery is the way to go, because if we can charge people 99 cents per song, we have no manufacturing or distribution costs, it's all gravy. But the problem is that some songs are worthless, and some songs are priceless. And by that regard, if your allowance was a dollar a

week, you'd only be able to hear four songs a month – that's pretty slim pickins musically. So I think everybody would want something that's a little more like cable or satellite television, where you pay a monthly fee and you download all you can consume. And at the same time that realises guaranteed income to the various entities involved, to the various record labels and artists and songwriters and everyone.

"It wouldn't even matter if people copied it. What you want is the convenience of it. The whole point is that you can download it into your portable listening device and take it wherever you want. For the same reason that nobody steals cable any more – people used to try and splice into the boxes, they'd go to their neighbour's house and try and put a splitter on the cable coming into the house, and sneak a wire over the fence. Eventually that just becomes too much trouble. Just paying the \$20 a month or whatever is much easier."

DOWNLOAD UTOPIA?

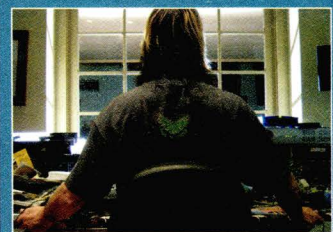
Utopian visions of the future such as his concept of universal access to cheap music via the internet are lampooned on one of his new songs, *Future*. "I'm supposed to drive a flying car. I'm supposed to have a home on Mars. I'm supposed to live 200 years. I'm supposed to live in the future." And sure enough, there is a fly in the ointment – high fidelity sound. Though digital compression techniques are improving steadily, by their nature they still inevitably lead to a loss of sound quality. But Rundgren doubts that this will halt the majority's quest for convenience. "I don't think sound quality's ever made much difference, really. It hasn't been that long that we've enjoyed the so-called fidelity of

CDs and even when they came out a lot of people were bitching about what they thought was a degradation of sound quality because it was digital instead of analogue.

"I've always maintained from the standpoint of my production priorities that the number one most important thing is the song. I mean, what's the point of a fabulous performance of a horrible song? Quite honestly, the audience doesn't give a shit about sound quality, they just want to hear a rockin' song. And the sound quality they'll just accept as part of the artist's vision. Sometimes you depend on compromises in fidelity to make things sound the way they're supposed to, and then there's the fact that almost every record has some sort of ambience added into it that's not natural to the place it was recorded. So as far as MP3s are concerned, I don't think there's anything that's significantly lost. The point is the music part of it – the message that's in the music is what people really want." **HFC**

*Todd Rundgren is on tour in July: Bristol 12, Birmingham 14, London 15, Glasgow 17, Manchester 18. Book online at www.ticketline.co.uk. The CD *Liars* is out now on Sanctuary.*

Todd on surround



"There's already a surround sound version of *Liars* (due for release later this year), which was easy – I just spread it all out into three dimensions. And there's been some standing orders for me to remix some of my past albums for surround. The only thing that's been preventing *Something Anything* (his first, some say best, solo album from 1972) from being finished is that we can't find a couple of the tracks, the original masters, so we've had to re-synthesise the surround part.

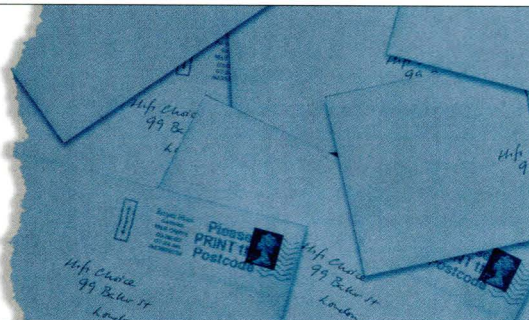
"With surround though, I think most people probably have their systems set up wrong. Most people have a hard time setting two speakers up right, let alone six. Things getting out of phase, too much messing around with all of those fancy buttons that create artificial other environments, and too much bass and all this other stuff, make it hard to tell if what you intended ever actually happens."

ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP
Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



"I have discovered a whole new world of US audiophile exotica."

NAIM BEST CABLES

I recently upgraded my system to high-end Naim kit – CDX2 with the NAC202/NAP200 amplifier combination. I'm using KEF Reference 1.2 speakers and Kimber Silver streak between the CD and preamp and Kimber 8VS speaker cable running from the power amp. Am I getting the best I can from the hardware? I believe Naim equipment is pretty particular about cables?

David Hart via email

HFC: Naim amps are certainly less fussy than they used to be about cables – once upon a time they would get upset and practically quit working! Since yours haven't (presumably), that would imply that



Apple Naim CDX2 CD player and separate XPS power supply

they're happy! However, Kimber is not a choice generally favoured by long-term Naimophiles, but as an alternative to Naim's own purpose-built models, most van den Hul cables (both speaker and interconnect) should be a reasonable electrical match and well worth a try sonically.

NIGHTMARE!

My wife has recently thrown out a large volume of *Hi-Fi Choice* issues that I had accumulated over many years. Is it possible to get copies of the *The Collection* or old review reprints? I'm still in shock.

Steve Bowron Australia

HFC: We're so very sorry – and hope you can slowly come to terms with your loss. However, you can order reprints of past reviews if you know which issue the review appeared in. This service costs £5 per review and you can find further instructions at the bottom of p129. As for *The Collection*, we don't even have copies of previous editions in the office, but the good news is it's set to return! Look out for a brand new 2004 edition, out in the UK on 4 August.

TAKE AWAY WIRES

I remember that Richer Sounds used to offer a home demo service with its Cambridge Audio interconnect range. Customers could leave a deposit, (I think £100) and take away a small flight case holding a number of cables of varying price. It gave people the chance to audition cables in a familiar environment and decide if they considered a £100 cable to be of better value than basic wires. I always thought that this was a great idea, but perhaps one that benefits the consumer more than the manufacturer? It's a shame that a similar service isn't available with other brands – especially when some ask as much as four figures for lengths of wire.

Jim Thomson via email

MIGHTY APHRODITE OR ALL LINN ONE?

I'm based in Ireland and have limited dealer choice and even less demo ability. I've seen a Linn Classik locally for

LETTER OF THE MONTH

MILK AND HONEY

For many a year I understood high-end British audio to be the best there was. I bought a Linn system and stood proud of my achievement. Now since reading *Hi-Fi Choice* and using the internet my horizons seem to have broadened – I have discovered a whole new world of US audiophile exotica.

How do you rate American products like Krell, Wadia, and Cary against our own Naim, Linn etc? It is my understanding

that countries favour their own produce gear from elsewhere – in sonic terms, has the balance of power shifted to the US?

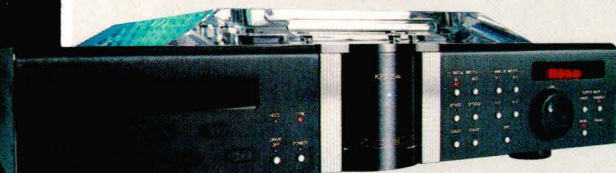
Ross via email

HFC: Many will agree with your opening comments – after all, hi-fi was born here and it's one industry in which Britain is still a world player. US hi-fi is also very capable, fielding some exceptional high-end brands, albeit at a price (like the £25K Krell KPS 25Sc CD player, left). Comparing like for like would make interesting reading, though import costs would give Brit-fi the upper hand if comparing kit at equal prices. If big, bold, top-dollar hi-fi appeals then the US has some impressive treats in store, but the UK can still mix it with the best of 'em.



WIN IXOS INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of Ixos XHA606 interconnects worth £60, featuring Gamma Geometry and silver plated OFC conductors for superior sound. So get writing! (250 words max please...)



a good price, and more recently an ex-demo TAG McLaren Aphrodite for an excellent price, albeit around twice as much. Is the Aphrodite twice as good as the Linn? What do you think I should choose?

Steve via email

HFC: Tag McLaren's Aphrodite is a high-end audio solution in a box (CD, amp and tuner). At £3,000 new, it's a real feat of engineering, combining enough style and substance to gain a five-star rating in *Hi-Fi Choice*. Crucially though, Tag McLaren today is a shadow of its former self. The company has now been sold to IAG (Quad/Wharfedale) who will

ONLINE FORUM

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at www.hifichoice.co.uk



For those of you who think vinyl beats CD into a cocked hat, what about a CD-R of a vinyl LP? In my experience it makes a very close copy – there is no change in tonal balance, no added harshness etc which means that the CD-R you buy in a shop should make a very close copy of the analogue master tape. **Pioneer31**

I'm quite confused as to whether I should use the tone defeat selector or not? If it's selected, music seems thinner but the vocals prevail. What do you think? **TkYong1**
HFC: We'd bypass tone controls as a rule, unless you are experiencing room-induced problems or variations in recording quality that can be manipulated for the better.

What are the worst albums in your collection? Mine are Milli Vanilli, bought many years ago, and Robson And Jerome bought for the missus. If anyone can beat those two then I would like to see it! **Tomo13**

For any fan of Björk, *Vespertine* is the SACD to get. The multichannel version has fully utilised the possibilities of orchestral works and electronic mixes. Definitely a must-have disc – even if you are not big into Björk, but intend to show off your system. **Monotone**

phono amp input, and by far the most likely fix is to use ferrite sleeves (as sold by Maplin and others), fitted over the phono leads as close as possible to the amp. If one almost suffices, use two or three – they're cheap, easy to fit and reusable if you change equipment. You can also try them on line-level interconnects, speaker cables and mains leads, but the phono input is your likely culprit.

CLASS OF '72

I have a favourite test disc that I'd like to share with all your readers. It's called *The Fisher Fidelity Standard Reference* (FIG-51072). The record was designed for Fisher Radio back in 1972 and features a commentary, instruments and popular music encoded in SQ Matrix. I find it useful as a test for stereo and multichannel music, for both my own and my friends' systems. It would make a great 180g vinyl release for audiophiles, or even as a remastered CD. Sadly, I think second-hand copies are all that's available these days, if you're lucky!

Mr Bourne Berks

"I'm suffering from radio interference on my Michell turntable!"

Below: Very rare Michell Orbe SE turntable/tuner!

continue to offer product support – so you won't be buying a lemon, but you should understand the situation before committing a four-figure sum. Linn's Classik system is a superb product with sound build quality and solid performance. We feel it would offer better value for money than the TAG system, which, in answer to your question, certainly isn't twice as good as the Classik.

VIOLATED BY RADIO

I'm suffering from an unusual intrusion – I'm picking up radio interference on my Michell turntable! It is most noticeable when switched on, without actually playing a record and with the volume control at a moderate level. I can hear two or more stations, and although drowned out when playing a record, it surely isn't an ideal situation. Could you suggest the cause of the problem and how I might solve it?

Paul Rowland London

HFC: Borderline-audible interference like that does subtly affect quality for the worse. It's almost certainly getting in at the

Above: Linn Classik system with matching Unik speakers





AUDIO AERO CAPITOLE 24/192 CD PLAYER | ECS EA-1 MONOBLOCK POWER AMPS
TRIANGLE VOLANTE LOUDSPEAKERS | £14,700

Can Buy A Thrill

Imagine a system that sounds so good, you'd sell your soul to own it. Get ready to make a devilish pact with your hi-fi demon...

Does your hi-fi thrill you? I'm not talking about its ability to play tunes, go loud or bomb da neighbourhood with bass. Nor am I talking about its dynamic range, tonal neutrality or imaging prowess. Did I mention resolution of fine detail? No. Not going to, either. Drive unit integration? Don't care. Transparency? Not listening.

Let me ask the question again: does your hi-fi *thrill* you? Make you wake up early at the weekend with a knot of anticipation in your stomach? Create a sense of occasion when you switch it on? Send shivers down your spine? Raise and lower your pulse rate with equal facility? Make time melt away? Propel you to your feet and dare you not to dance? Transport you magically to a better, brighter, groovier place? Impact on your mind, heart and soul with the force of revelation? You know, that kind of thrill.

Chances are that sadly (and contrary to what you might actually believe), the answer is no. Many carefully matched systems deliver amply on the emotional expression and musical satisfaction fronts – engage and sustain the listener's interest in a way off-the-peg kit could never hope to. Some even achieve near-perfect scores for technical merit and artistic impression. Life enhancers without a doubt.

Very, very few, however, possess the 'X' factor. "What's the 'X' factor?", I hear you ask. I haven't the faintest idea. But I do know that you'll know it the instant you hear it. It's a sense of absolute 'rightness' that most hi-fi – even the expensive stuff – gets agonisingly close to capturing but seldom nails. A system that scythes straight to the core of musical

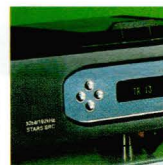
communication without affectation, deviation or decoration, though, truly does have the power to thrill. And it is a beautiful thing.

SHOCK AND AWE

Why mention this now? Because, to be honest, I'm shocked. A dozen combos into this series of *Beautiful Systems* and I was beginning to believe I'd heard it all in the 'as good as it gets' zone. But the system you're about to read about is the first one that's made me rethink the whole notion of 'as good as it gets'. I think I can pin it down to a couple of things. One, it's fronted by comfortably the best CD player I've ever heard. And two, the components aren't involved in some precarious balancing act but pulling powerfully in the same direction. The weave that meshes them all together is bullet-proof. This is conviction hi-fi to die for. Oh, and if it doesn't look that great (it doesn't), turn the other way for a second while I bend the rules. No way should hi-fi that sounds this good be booted out of the party for not rivalling Brad Pitt in the high cheekbones department.

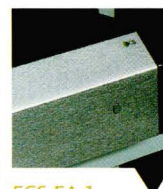
Least of all that CD player. It's French, it's idiosyncratic (top loader, quirky fascia layout, retro styling, beefy build), it costs £4,500 and, well, it's just extraordinary. The Capitole 24/192 has been designed by its maker, Audio Aero, with the serious aim of extracting the sonic potential of high-resolution SACD and DVD-Audio from the humble CD. It uses Philips' high-end CDPRO2 laser mechanism – noted for its precise data reading, durability and low playback noise – suspended in an aluminium and rubber sub-chassis. Audio Aero's particular flavour of digital processing goes by the catchy acronym **Q**

“No way should hi-fi that sounds this good be booted out of the party for not rivalling Brad Pitt in the high cheekbones department.”



Audio Aero Capitole 24/192 CD player
£4,500

As idiosyncratic as a Citroën DS, this French-made CD spinner sounds more like a top turntable than a high-end digital spinner. Truly superb.



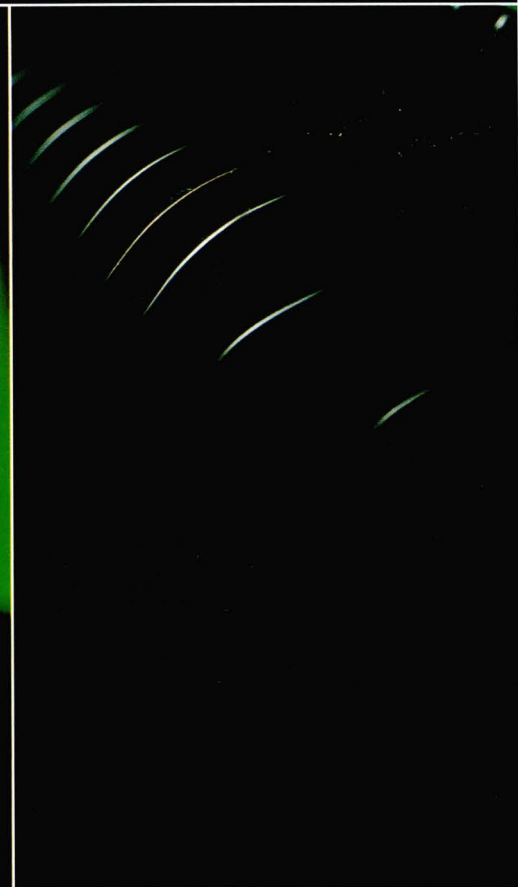
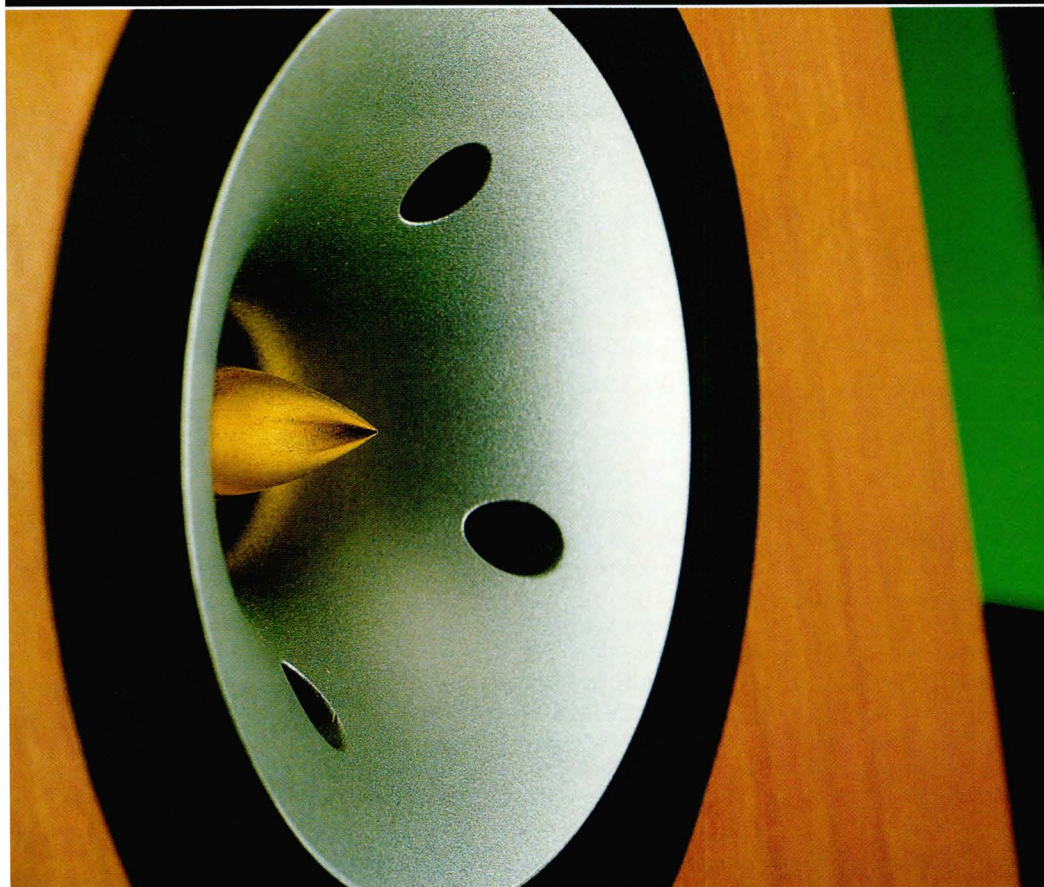
ECS EA-1 monoblock power amp
£6,000 per pair

Rather dour appearance gives completely the wrong impression. If you want to hear music's energy and passion, these are the business.



Triangle Volante speaker
£4,200 per pair

With seven drive units, two rear-firing, the Volante is both large and ambitious. Yet it sounds as fast and coherent as a good two-way standmount.



❏ STARS (Solution for Time Abstraction Re Sampling). It was developed for Audio Aero by Swiss company Anagram Technologies SA. At the core of the system is a 32-bit SHARC DSP which rebuilds a high-precision 24-bit/192kHz signal independent from the input clock. After 1,024 times upsampling on demand, digital-to-analogue conversion is performed at 6.144MHz by a high-performance 24-bit/192 kHz DAC. The analogue output stage features sub-miniature valves and a high precision buffer with built-in volume control, providing a simple preamp function so that the Capitole 24/192 can drive power amps directly.

Which is precisely what it does here. Oxford Audio, who concocted and supplied this system, is one of the select band of dealers selling ECS amplification in the UK and spotted a natural partner for the Audio Aero. The West London-based company's £6,000 EA-1 monoblocks are big, brutally functional (and that's even when they're sporting the optional silver finish) and shift 200 watts into eight ohms from four bi-polar output transistors. The ultra-low-noise FET input stage has its own power supply and high-purity copper PCB track. ECS's main business is making custom PCBs for a wide variety of applications, so it's

no surprise that considerable effort has been ploughed into this part of the design which, naturally, features a dedicated earthing arrangement. Much of the 22-kilo weight is accounted for by the monster 1,500VA transformer, a deliberate slice of overkill to ensure that all voltages are maintained precisely, whatever the demands placed on the supply as a whole.

IRON FIST

Zero inductance components are used in the EA-1's critical circuit paths with ultra-low tolerance/inductance parts elsewhere. More painstaking attention to detail: the output transistors are hand-selected with eight individual parameter tests being applied to each, the ability to dissipate heat being deemed one of the more important for sound quality. Round the back there are high-quality single-ended phono and balanced XLR sockets with a switch to select between them. Twin sets of WBT speaker terminals allow easy bi-wiring.

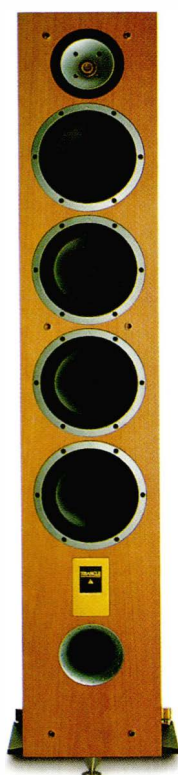
A quick word about the advantages of using separate amps for each channel. There are two good ideas behind monoblocks. One, by separating everything out for each channel, you remove the potential for any interaction between the channels. Sonically, this should mean better stereo and lower

distortion. Two, each monoblock can be sited close to the speaker it drives so that short speaker cable runs can be used, giving the amps their best chance to control the speakers. In the event, we went for three-metre lengths of Wireworld Equinox B bi-wire speaker cable (£1,125) and one-metre Wireworld Gold Eclipse balanced interconnects (£1,600).

Finally, it's back to France for the speakers. And they're big. Just one down from its remarkable Magellan flagship, the Volante is Triangle's best real-world design and, besides, shares much of the Magellan's advanced technology. Like the Magellan, it uses both a rear-firing midrange drive unit and a tweeter in Triangle's DPS configuration to broaden and deepen the size of the sound stage.

Not that projecting the bigger sonic picture is likely to be a problem for the Volante. It's a true full-range three-way design with no fewer than seven (count 'em!) drive units – made in-house – that stands some 52 inches high. Triangle claims high sensitivity (93dB) married to high power handling (240 watts).

As for sound quality, the word 'stunning' barely does it justice. Let's deal with the hi-fi parameters first. The first thing that hits you is how fast,





“If you want performers in your room you feel you could touch, a soundstage so wide you could take a stroll around it, and dynamics hard-wired to the hairs on the back of your neck, look no further.”

precise, open and articulate the presentation is. And the astonishing quality of the bass which never, (repeat *never*) sounds flabby, leaden or overhung. This would be easier to understand if it didn't go particularly low. But it does. Moreover, it does so effortlessly, without the slightest hint of hype or exaggeration.

Indeed, reconciling apparently conflicting interests is one of the things this system does supremely well. Treble is smooth to the point of silkiness but has fine inner detail and transient precision. Usually, if you value clarity, subtlety and coherence you have to forego monster scale and flesh-pummelling volume. But not here. This combo does killer dubs and subtle acoustic ambient cues with equal skill, while slickly recorded jazz has a shimmering, palpable presence.

The result is unerringly tuneful and musical. But there's more – so much more. Essentially, this is one system that knows how to let rip, mixing serious power with taut, confident authority. Heavy rock has, well, weight. And large,

loud orchestral climaxes never sound held back, being reproduced with a compelling sense of might and impetus.

VELVET GLOVE

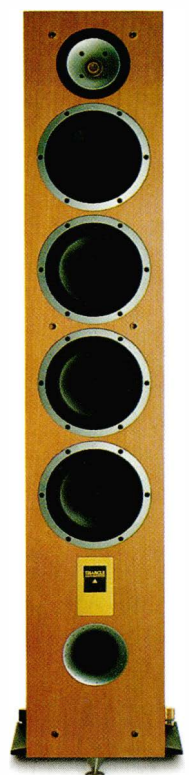
At the other end of the scale, small ensemble acoustic pieces are wonderfully focused and natural. Pace and timing, usually the undoing of big, multi-driver boxes, are quite simply nailed. The monoblocks exert phenomenal grip on the speakers and present music in such a tangible, coherent and energetic way, it's impossible not to be transfixed by their abilities. The sound is expansive, authoritative and naturally dynamic, but it isn't a case of musical literacy displacing hi-fi minutiae. The tonal balance may not be strictly BBC, but it is neutral enough and avoids over-emphasised sibilance with some closely-miked vocals.

If you crave smoothness, neutrality and a uniformly easy listen above all else, this system won't disappoint. But you will be missing the point. It wasn't

conceived to sound safe. If, however, you want instruments and performers in your room you feel you could reach out and touch, a soundstage so wide and deep you'll feel like taking a stroll around it, and dynamics hard-wired directly to the hairs on the back of your neck, look no further. I don't think I've heard a system make more convincing music, irrespective of its genre.

The bottom line is that this Anglo-French combo blitzes most circa £15K systems for sheer sound quality. It has speed, refinement, clarity, grip, dynamics and huge musical insight. It brings life, energy and structure to CDs like little else I've heard, whether they're soulful and seductive or raw and raucous. In the end, all I can really do is warn you. Listen to this system and your attention will be grabbed and held captive. You will be thrilled, make no mistake. And, if you don't already have the readies on standby, you will probably remortgage your house to get them. Yes, that good. **HFC**

David Vivian



AUDUSA

AUDUSA EUPEN CSA 2.5 AUDIO AC MAINS CABLE

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. 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 audio ac mains cable on the market.**

Fitted with IEC (Martin Kayser) and MK Tough plug 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 – OOM Silverlink OCC balanced speaker cable – stranded, silver on OFHC plus three strands of OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting - single crystal copper) for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI. conductor of 3mm diameter (approx 8 gauge). Cable Overall Dimension: 14.72 mm.

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.

Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5)
shown with Marınca IEC 320
will be fitted at extra cost.

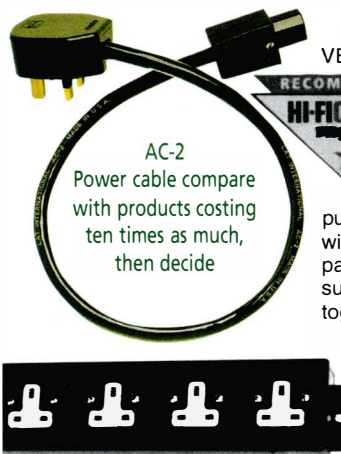
GNLM 05/04
£58 for 1.0m, £72 for 1.5m,
£86 for 2.0m. Also available
of the reel.

Both GNLM cables are avail-
able for export.

SILVER SILVER - upgrade the cable with silver plated contacts on IEC and and MK plug for £6. AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC (for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Marınca/Wattgate IEC 320, Figure of eight, Bulgin, Hubble, European Schuko, French, Australian, Swiss, Danish, Neutrik and other plugs see our web site for IEC's, MK plugs RCA and Banana connectors with silver plate contacts and other audio and ac mains connectors

LAT International AC-2 AUDIO AC MAINS CABLE

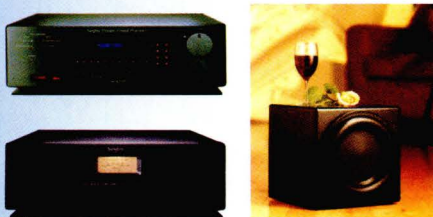
We have developed a cabling (weaving) pattern along with an unusual shielding/filtering system that gets rid of the garbage that contaminates your components. The difference you hear with our cord is astounding. Our power cord takes advantage of silver in its design through use of our proprietary Silverfuse 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, 6 way, £229 for 8 way.



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SUNFIRE CORPORATION - Snohomish USA

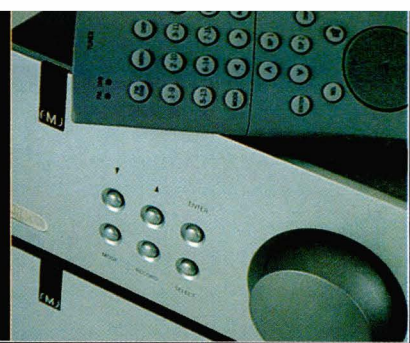


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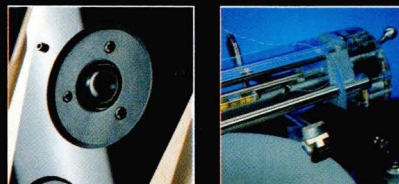
REVIEWS



Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high performance hi-fi in the world.

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked point here is... to the job of... recommend you... pare this with Marantz's £800 player, the 17 MkII M, which has excellent build and... a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a... ng all-rounder in a compact case. ...ter trying the Heart with the standard... s we switched over to the Siemens... grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by... e fact that it was a cold for hot swap – the... laser had been on for several days with the... after a livelier... w tubes shone... through. The Siemens equipped player has an... n snappier sound with better timing that... es with dense material with remarkable... fidence and ease. It even seems to be

You can find... civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC** Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy


A component receiving the coveted Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



Editor's Choice

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...

A close-up, angled photograph of a white Wadia 861 CD player. The player is the central focus, with its disc tray open. The Wadia logo, a stylized 'W' with a dot, is visible on a small grey tab above the tray. The text 'Wadia 861 CD PLAYER' is printed on the front panel. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden cabinet, with a red light source creating a glow on the left side.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



SINGLE MINDED

Wadia's new flagship single-box machine only plays CDs. Can it really be worth ten grand?

PRODUCT Wadia 861se

TYPE CD player

PRICE £9,999

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x18x42cm

• Weight: 21.8kg • Digital preamp with volume control • Digital inputs/outputs: ST glass, BNC coaxial, Toslink optical, AES/EBU XLR • Analogue outputs: balanced XLR, single-ended RCA phono

CONTACT ☎ 01992 573030 🌐 www.wadia.com

Wadia's big integrated CD player has a long and illustrious heritage. The very first high-end, cost no object one-box player was a Wadia – the Wadia 6, created at a time when no self-respecting audiophile would be seen dead with a single-box player. These were the days when

all the most fashionable brands made their own transports and DACs, and the rest of the world made DACs alone because of the prohibitive licensing fees associated with the disc driving element. This made the 6 seem outrageous in both technological and price terms – after all, it was priced at £4,500 back in 1992. Yet, as the twelve Wadia integrated players that followed have proved, the one-box approach has a lot going for it, and no shortage of advantages over separate transports and DACs.

The main drawback with separating these two intrinsically linked functions is that digital bitstreams have proved a lot more sensitive to their environment than was initially realised.

When CD came along, most people thought that so long as the ones and noughts remained intact and in the right order then the digital signal would be perfect. But early CD players did not sound very perfect and it took around ten years to get them sounding half-decent in hi-fi terms. Eventually, it was discovered that timing errors could affect the quality of the resulting sound. When it became possible to measure these errors they were termed 'jitter' and it was discovered that jitter was increased when a bitstream was passed from a transport to a DAC because each unit was running off its own clock. Since this discovery, high-end brands like Wadia have added a clocklink connection to their two-box players, which

“Bass notes in particular have a solidity and power to them which no other player we’ve heard to date can emulate.”

synchronises the data transfer and reduces jitter. The other way round the problem is to keep both transport and DAC in the same box, which is what Wadia started and the rest of the high-end world followed.

The new, ‘special edition’ 861se is the ultimate incarnation of a Wadia single-box CD player – you can tell as much by looking at the price, which puts it in pretty rarefied territory by anyone’s standards. You can get the ‘basic’ 861b version of this player for a ‘meagre’ £6,395, but if you want the digital in and outputs of the 861 Standard you’ll have to find another two grand.

The ‘se’ version adds about £1,600 to the Standard’s price tag, for which you get an upgraded version of the TEAC VRDS transport mechanism that Wadia favours. It uses a combination of aluminium and brass to create a ‘turntable’ for the disc that “provides significant sound reduction during disc rotation” and has been stained green to absorb stray laser light in much the same way that we used to mark the edge of our discs with a green pen – well some of us at least! In addition, the bridge that forms an integral element of the transport is built out

of 20mm machined aluminium and has a 5mm ‘carbon tool steel’ plate topping it off. This is said to improve resolution of imaging and reduce noise overall.

These upgrades to the critical transport region are the only significant reasons for the ‘se’ suffix, but in other respects this is a bang-up-to-date 861 with all the high-end CD wizardry that such status implies.

For a start, it’s a high-mass CD player built inside 20mm thick aluminium slabs joined by Wadia’s trademark round corner pillars. It’s an attractive, eminently solid case design, if a little slower than most to get into – something you might find needs doing if you connect the player directly to your power amplifier and use it as a digital preamplifier. Its onboard 24-bit digital volume control has a wide 50dB range (divided into half dB increments) but if you run the output below an indicated 65 you are compromising sound quality because you are cutting into the 16 bits that describe the signal. To get around this it’s possible to adjust maximum output between 0.3 and 4.25 Volts, the higher level being provided by the balanced outputs.



The Digimaster 2.4 filter system offers three digital algorithms, which replicate the data by 32x and offer alternative time and frequency domain characteristics which you can select according to personal taste and system-matching criteria. Unlike the filters offered by more mainstream manufacturers, the differences between these are quite distinct, even if switching between them is a slow process as a result of the reluctant rubber buttons on the jumpier remote.

Elsewhere in this player you’ll find Wadia’s Swift Current current-to-voltage conversion which avoids negative feedback, the ClockLink system which locates the master clock at the DAC chips rather than at the transport to minimise internal jitter, and for disc clamping on the transport mechanism to reduce the amount of jitter produced by the laser in the first place.

Separate digital components like DAB radios or the stereo digital output of a DVD-Audio player (up to the maximum 96kHz oversampling rate that conventional S/PDIF connections can handle) can be connected to one of four socket types including ST glass fibre optic, alongside



Q & A

John Schaffer, Wadia's VP sales and marketing, told us about the reasoning that has gone into the 861 Special Edition



HFC: What's the deal with the new transport mechanism?

JS: The TEAC 3.2 mechanism that we use in the standard 861 is truly a world-class mechanism. The CD format inherently has fairly sophisticated error correction but it doesn't have the ability to go back and check the data in the way that DVD players do, so to make a better CD mechanism you have to improve the mechanical rather than electronic engineering.

We've always been happy with the 3.2 mechanism and its performance is almost unsurpassed. However, TEAC had a legendary product called the P Zero which was the closest thing to a perfect mechanism ever produced. The problem was that TEAC didn't want to sell it to anyone and used it exclusively in its own products. For the SE we borrowed some of the technology employed in the P Zero and combined it with the 3.2 mechanism, the resulting mechanism has the ability to deliver the next level of performance.

What benefits have the change in transport mechanism brought about?

Low-frequency energy is presented in such a way that it has more extension, it's tauter and there's just more drive. One of the other qualities that people notice is an ability to resolve low-level detail so that the layer you've uncovered is resolving the cues of the recording environment. It does all this without going more to the analytical side of things – a lot of people liken it to vinyl.

Why has the price jumped so significantly?

Although the cost has increased we're actually running a thinner margin on this product than our other players, because we have to pay so much more for the mechanism. It's a mechanical *tour de force* – we're paying as much for it as most people would consider spending on a decent CD player.

How is Wadia's take on a high-resolution format player coming along?

We're expecting to launch a three-piece DAC in June that's capable of processing DSD (SACD's coding system) and high bit rate PCM for DVD-Audio, with a matching transport follow.



❑ Toslink optical, BNC coaxial and AES/EBU (XLR) electrical sockets. Thus, the benefits of Wadia's D/A conversion may be exploited, without the need for an analogue preamp.

SOUND QUALITY

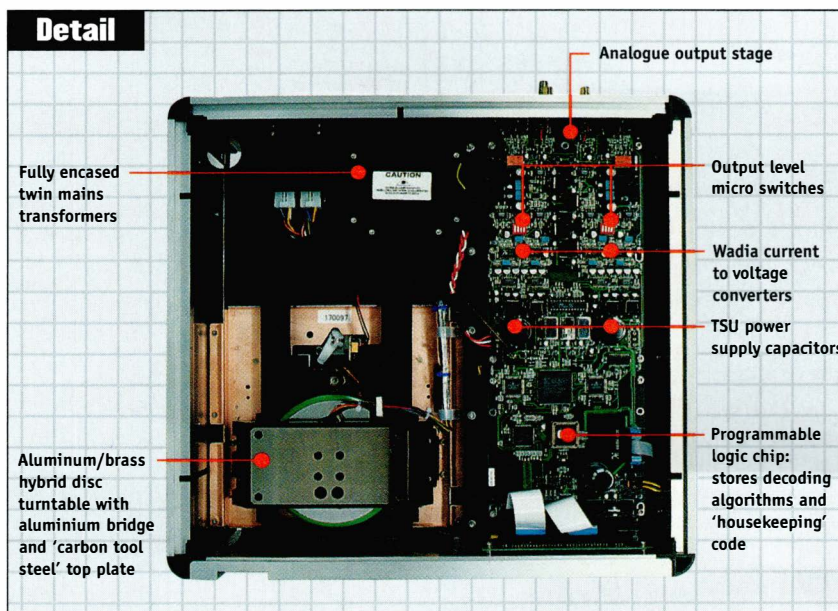
Big Wadias have always been solid, muscular sounding players and this model is no exception. Bass notes have a solidity and power to them which no other player we've heard can emulate. So distinctive is this that one is occasionally tempted to wonder whether it might be a characteristic or coloration of the player itself, but the degree of articulation and three-dimensionality of bass notes would suggest that what you are hearing is simply a true reproduction of what's on the disc. The result is not quite as 'nimble'

as that of some high-end alternatives, but this is perhaps because they don't deliver the full weight of bass notes and therefore make life easier for themselves. A heavier balance will always tend to sound slower than a lighter one – that's the nature of genuine bass.

What this aspect means for instruments like piano is a tremendous sense of solidity; it delivers fully grounded, three-dimensional notes that have a palpable sense of presence in the room. We used the 861se with three sets of speakers: Spondor S9e, Living Voice Avatar OBX-R and ATC SCM150A and each revealed this quality quite effectively, though inevitably the 15-inch bass driver of the latter was more successful than the alternatives.

At the other end of the audio band the treble is also unusually full-bodied, with high





“Radiohead’s *Hail To The Thief* revealed layer upon layer of sounds and noises which were suddenly easy to distinguish, as were the treatments used to makes those sounds.”

notes proving to have as much depth and realism as low ones. This is an area where few CD players are truly successful and represents one of the reasons that SACD and DVD-Audio were developed in the first place, but the Wadia proves to a great extent that you *can* produce convincing highs with CD’s limited data rate of 16 bits at 44.1 kHz.

Certainly, the treble is slightly smoother or darker than some alternatives – the excellent Resolution Audio Opus 21 for instance has a more open treble that reveals more about leading edges and upper harmonics. But depending on the nature of ancillary components and cabling, some would undoubtedly prefer the marginally less challenging nature of the Wadia’s top end. And if you want to play long and hard it’s more forgiving of less than clean recordings. Listening to an old Zappa album, *Apostrophe*, on the Wadia, it seemed a little flat comparatively albeit extremely coherent and replete with fine detail. Moving over to the Resolution Audio things perked up further, but so did a rather rough-edged treble which, though undoubtedly on the disc, made for a somewhat more forward listening experience.

This balance issue may well be one of taste and small but important things like choice of cable. We would imagine that if you prefer the sound of Nordost cable then the Wadia balance will be perfect, but on the other hand, if Electrofluidics/Townshend speaker cables are your bag the Resolution Audio approach would be a better bet.

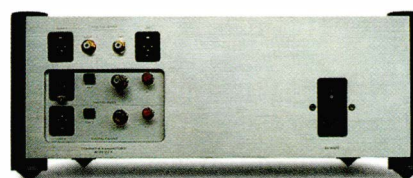
Another strongpoint of the Wadia is its resolving power – whatever you put in its comfortably solid disc drawer you are guaranteed to hear stuff that other players skim over. For instance, Radiohead’s *Hail To The Thief* revealed all of the minutiae that make up its rock concrète riches. Layer upon layer of sounds and noises could be distinguished with ease, as could the treatments used to makes those sounds. This means that dense passages become intelligible and the songs seem more interesting – on lesser players it’s easy to dismiss the album as being colourless and lacking in the creative talents previously revealed by the band, but on the 861se its full scope is gratifyingly exposed. Track four, *Backdrifts*, for example, has a second tier of soundscaping behind the main theme of the tune that is normally unclear, but with the Wadia’s ability to present material so coherently it becomes rich and vivid.

The various filtering algorithms give pretty much the results that Wadia suggests. All of them retain the muscularity of sound but ‘B’ opens up the top end a little which suits some material rather well. Yet the extra sense of image solidity of the standard ‘A’ setting makes it hard to stay with either the open highs of ‘B’ or the relaxed, spacious feel of ‘C’.

Without having the next-best 861 to hand it’s hard to hear precisely what improvements the ‘se’ mods have brought about. What’s certain is that this is a brilliantly accomplished player, capable of some of the best sounds the

humble CD is ever likely to deliver. Whether it makes sense to spend this sort of dosh on a single format machine in this day and age pretty much depends on how many CDs you own. Given that the Wadia far exceeds the capability of any multi-format player currently devised, its talents should not be ignored by any music lover who can afford the ticket. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 96%

FEATURES >> 96%

BUILD >> 97%

VALUE >> 82%

CONCLUSION
A stunning player with a wealth of useful features and the sort of sound that’ll keep you up all night. You’ll be amazed how good the humble CD can sound – but whether it’s worth £10K really depends on how much you value your CD collection.

PRO
Phenomenal transparency and resolution mixed with stunning bass muscularity and uncanny solidity of imaging.

CON
Some alternatives offer a lighter, more open balance and the remote handset is a wee bit clunky.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 93%



POWER OF THREE

Clearaudio's tri-motored statement of vinyl adulation takes the acrylic biscuit

PRODUCT Clearaudio Master Reference, Master TQ-I and Accurate

TYPE Turntable, arm and cartridge

PRICE £8,750 (turntable) £3,860 (arm) £2,860 (cartridge)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 50x24x40cm
● Weight: 50kg ● Hardened-steel, bronze-plated, inverted bearing ● Parallel tracking tonearm
● Adjustable speeds: 33.3 and 45rpm

CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.clearaudio.de

It is a truth not quite universally acknowledged, that the Germans are crazy about vinyl. If you need proof, just look at this turntable and arm from one of the country's most enthusiastic analogue brands, Clearaudio. And if you think it looks over the top, just visit any German high-end show – platter players get significantly more out of hand in the domestic Deutsch market! Turntables do encourage excess and when

you combine this with a love of shiny metal and Perspex, the possibilities are endless.

The Clearaudio turntable range includes ten models from the £655 Emotion upwards, all of which share materials and concepts that find their ultimate form in the huge Master Reference, quite simply the heaviest turntable we've had the pleasure of reviewing. Put it this way – it's a two-man lift once everything has been assembled and it won't fit on

conventional equipment supports because it's nearly as deep (40cm) as it is wide (50cm).

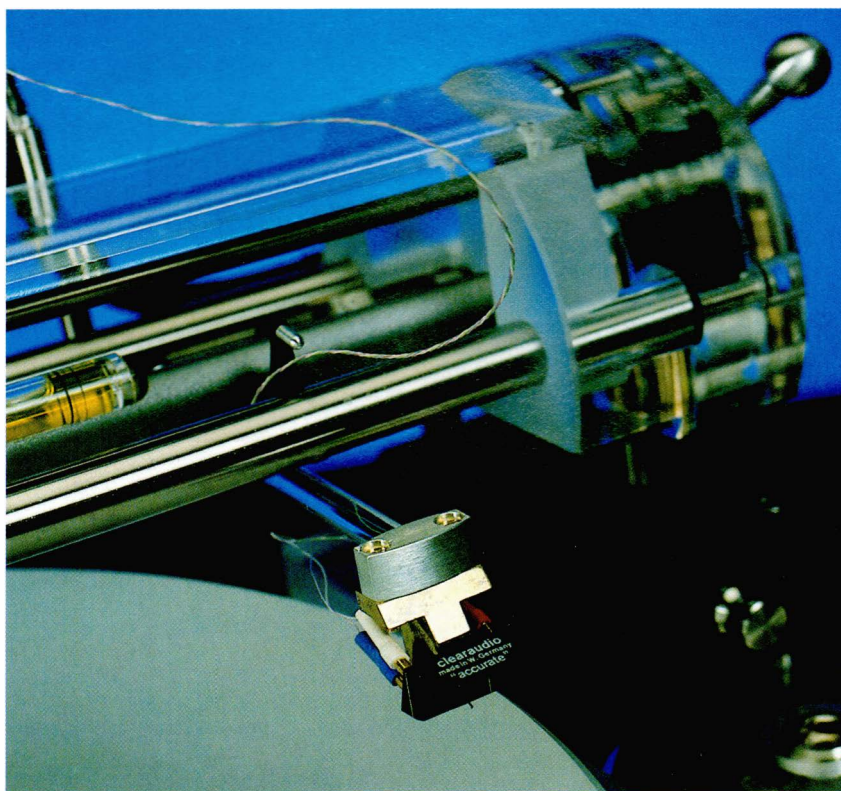
You'll notice a number of unusual aspects to this turntable apart from its size. For a start, there are three motors where one might be expected. Clearaudio considers that the side force created by a single motor and drive belt design means that unwanted energy is fed into the platter. By using three motors and soft silicone belts it has sought to balance out the forces produced by the motors.

Each of the 5kg motors sits on rubber feet and has a cable that takes a slightly tortuous route through the centre of the base spider and out to the Clearaudio APG (Accurate Power Generator) power supply, a hefty unit with three outlets and a single inlet. Running the cables through the spider centre keeps them reasonably tidy, though one imagines that a neater arrangement might be possible with different shaped or coloured cables. The APG unit "works like a small energy plant" and offers adjustment for the two usual speeds, as well as providing the on/off switch required every time you change a disc.

The Master Reference is devoid of anything that could be described as a suspension, using tristar-shaped Perspex plates to decouple the arm and platter-supporting elements from the base which supports the motors. The success of this approach will be affected by the nature of the surface used to support the turntable. If the stand is able to drain energy away from the motors it will be less likely to make its way into the part of the system that reads the groove – the platter, arm and cartridge.

The platter on this turntable is not a dainty item, measuring 80mm deep and sitting on a hand-polished, inverted bearing, the mass being supported on a diamond-polished bearing for "friction-free" movement. The bearing itself is supported by two acrylic spiders held aloft on scary aluminium cones, with stainless steel spacers. The top spacer forms a base point for a tonearm and you could, if the urge was strong enough, equip this turntable with three separate arms, though the Master TQ-I featured here should suffice.

This really is quite an arm, a parallel/linear tracking design made with Perspex and stainless steel. This is the ultimate incarnation of the Souther design that forms the basis of all Clearaudio parallel arms. Rather than the air bearings used elsewhere, Clearaudio uses a three-wheeled carriage that runs on quartz rails and supports a short quartz tonearm. The latter has a fixed position headshell at the front and compact counterweights at the back, the weights coming in various sizes to suit different cartridges. Set-up is completely different to pivoting arms and in this case considerably more fiddly, so much so that the manual suggests you leave the job to your dealer. This might seem like a lame option but it will save you a lot of grief!



"The finest variations in tempo are tracked so well that you get a heightened sense of anticipation with climaxes."

SOUND QUALITY

As noted, we found setting this beautifully constructed arm up to be a bit of a performance. In theory it should be easier than a pivoted arm – a parallel tracker requires the simplest of alignment gauges and has the great advantage that it tracks the groove tangentially, much like a head on a lacquer cutting lathe. But getting the stylus to follow the alignment gauge gave us something of a headache. We attempted to use our reference van den Hul Grasshopper cartridge in the TQ-I but it proved to have too high a compliance to work well, so Clearaudio's rather fine Accurate cartridge was employed in its place – which was no great hardship.

The first thing you notice when needle meets vinyl is the condition of that groove – if it's in the slightest bit worn you can hear as much. If you're a fastidious user of brand new vinyl this won't be an issue; if not, a record cleaner is more of a necessity than an accessory with this turntable.

We're pleased to report, however, that the results are well worth the effort – this record player produces a phenomenally vivid and dynamic sound. The result of course depends on the standard of the recording, but put a good one on, Richard Thompson's *Old Kit Bag* for instance, and the degree of presence and

realism that's produced is stunning. The vibrancy of the guitar, double bass and voice is quite uncanny, as if the turntable is investing them with energy that you just don't normally get with hi-fi systems. It can seem somehow 'super-real'. By comparison with more sober sounding decks like our reference SME Model 20A, there is a sense of mild

Below: Clearaudio's APG (Accurate Power Generator) is an AC regenerating power supply with variable speed adjustment



Q & A

Hi-Fi Choice spoke to Patrick Suchy, Clearaudio's production manager, about the theories and implementation behind the Master Reference



HFC: What has changed in the belt composition and why?

PS: According to our investigations, all rubber belts are inclined to produce disturbing vibrational energy which transmits itself into the platter. For our 'silent belts' therefore we use a proprietary silicone composition that we have established as being the best material for the job.

Why use three motors/belts instead of one?

The greatest advantage of using three belts is that there is no side force applied to the bearing and therefore a constant bearing friction is guaranteed. Friction is very low as a result, which reduces wear on the bearing and therefore ensures that it will have a long life. We also use three belts because this arrangement gives very high torque and a very short start-up time.

What type of motors do you use?

We use AC-synchronous 50Hz/240V motors that are manufactured precisely according to Clearaudio specifications.

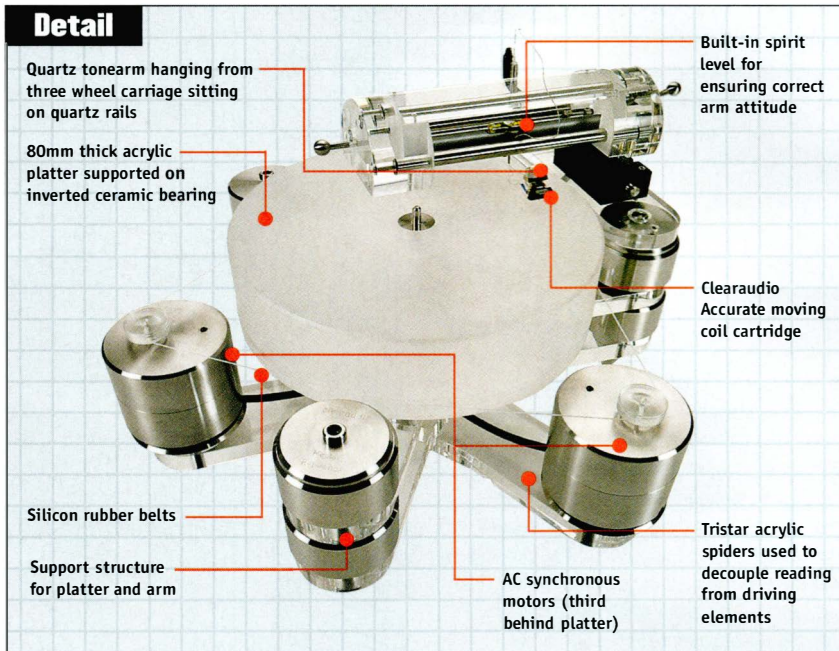
Is it not the case that resonances produced by the motors could travel through the supporting surface and reach the bearing?

With the construction principle of the Master Reference we tried everything we could to prevent such an occurrence. For example, the three motors are twice decoupled by layers of acrylic from the chassis that supports the arm and the bearing. And of course there is no direct contact between the motor platform and the main chassis.

What is the secret, if any, to setting up the TQ-1 tonearm?

The most important thing is to make sure that the tip of the cartridge sits precisely at all points along a line that is tangential to the centre spindle – this is very easy to do with the Clearaudio tangential alignment gauge. The azimuth adjustment is very important too (this is the angle of the cartridge/stylus when viewed from in front and should be vertical). We recommend you use a small bar so that the azimuth can be established by comparing the angle of the bar when placed on the headshell with the angle of the main arm carriage. The height of the arm should be adjusted so that the quartz rod of the tonearm is parallel to the record surface.

If done correctly, accurately setting up a Clearaudio tangential tonearm should be much easier than setting up a pivoted tonearm!

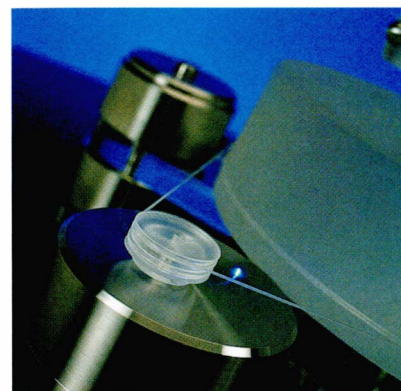


hype, albeit one that is highly revealing and informative about the playing and the recording style that has gone into the making of any given album.

It is entirely sensitive to the quality of recording – for example, the White Stripes' *White Blood Cells* album was a little disappointing in its lack of dynamics and generally small sound. But given the band's predilection for the sound of the sixties this makes sense, and it's likely that this was the result the recording's engineer and producer intended. And as one listener pointed out, it's still a lot more vibrant than your average CD.

One reason for the sound's supreme openness is the excellent high-frequency performance, Hariprasad Chaurasia's flute soaring over Zakir Hussain's multilayered tabla beats like nothing else on the latter's *Making Music* LP. This is largely what makes the Clearaudio sound so alive – that and its exquisite sense of timing. Not only do all rhythms sound spot-on, but the finest variations in tempo are tracked so well that you get a heightened sense of anticipation with climaxes. The turntable seemed to be able to track the build-up of energy in the music with uncanny sensibility; it does this largely by resolving micro dynamics – the absolute level of each note – to a greater extent than usual. This ability to bring out the thrill power is no doubt aided by the big ATC SCM150A speakers that it is lucky enough to be sharing system space with, but the turntable has to be able to produce the detail for the speaker to give it to you, so it's not exactly cheating.

This is clearly (excuse the pun) a highly capable and engaging record player and it makes a very good case for the parallel tracking tonearm, even if it takes a bit of setting up. For those more used to CD listening than wringing the last ounce of life



and energy from their vinyl! it will be a revelation – it won't be long before going back to CD will seem like a rather dull alternative and you'll end up spending any money you have left over on as much pristine vinyl as your floor will take. It's that kind of problem – approach with caution! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 94% [Progress bar]	PRO Extraordinary dynamics and timing with impressive high-frequency resolve, plus the low distortion of a linear tracking arm.
FEATURES >> 90% [Progress bar]	CON You'll need plenty of room and it's not as strong in the bass as some, while the arm is quite tricky to set up for the uninitiated. Vinyl condition is critical to enjoyment.
BUILD >> 95% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 81% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION This monstrously priced and specified record player is a revealing and exciting machine that positively revels in the fine details while at the same time presenting the bigger picture with considerable enthusiasm.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%	

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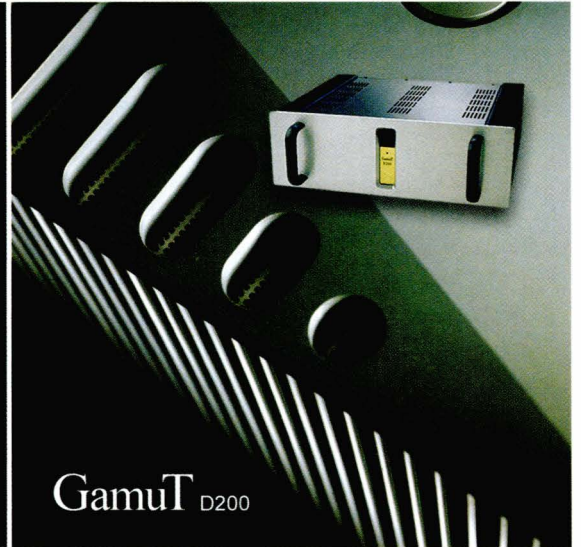
006 CD Player



032 Integrated



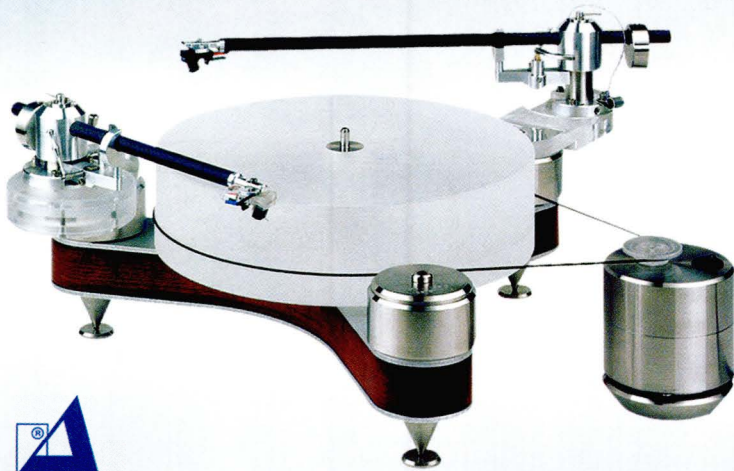
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rega

REGAL STATEMENT

Rega's most ambitious speaker to date, the R9 is crammed with interesting ideas

PRODUCT Rega R9

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £2,498 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 17x103x39cm

• Weight: 19kg • Unusual 'two-and-two-halves-way' design • 200mm side-mounted bass driver • 130mm bass/mid unit • 27mm fabric tweeter plus additional 19mm unit • Sensitivity/impedance: 87dB/8 ohms

CONTACT ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

Rega has been a champion of affordable 'real' hi-fi for more than thirty years, starting out initially with turntables, but subsequently adding speakers, amplifiers and other electronics, all adding up to what is now a complete system component line-up.

Rega's loudspeaker designs actually go back to the company's very earliest days, though the real activity began in the 1980s with the introduction of the ELA. This was an unusual design in that it featured a small 130mm main driver loaded by a full-length transmission line, but it was also very influential as one of the first examples of the compact floorstander, a genre which has subsequently gone on to become such an important part of the marketplace.

Rega likes simplicity, and the majority of its loudspeakers have been simple two-way designs, though the mid-1990s did see a large two-and-a-half-way called the EXL, and this earlier model might well be seen as a distant ancestor of this new R9. But the R9 is really a clean slate affair, with several original and probably unique features.

It's by no means inexpensive, but you do get plenty for your money. It's certainly a stylish speaker, beautifully finished in good quality real-wood veneer, though in typical Rega fashion the style is distinctively different from the norm. The front view is exceptionally slim, the more so because sections of the hardwood front edges have been scalloped away, while it's also unusually deep by way of compensation. Front-to-back stability is therefore inherently excellent, while Rega has fitted neat cast-alloy outriggers to improve the lateral stability and also provide a genuinely secure foundation for the spikes. An unusual fabric grille is held in place magnetically, and covers most of a decorative black Perspex strip which in turn covers the mounting hardware for the three front-facing drivers, and whose shape is echoed in a large badge down at the foot.

The R9 is an interesting combination of simplicity and complexity. It has four drive

units, which doesn't sound particularly simple, but these are actually configured as a 'two-and-two-halves-way' – the bass-only driver operating alongside the bass/mid driver, while the smaller of the two tweeters comes in 'on top' of the larger one. The only true crossover network here is that between the bass/mid driver and the larger tweeter, at around 3kHz.

To keep the front view slim, the 200mm frame bass driver is mounted on the side, and the speakers are mirror imaged so you can choose to point the bass unit in or outwards. The driver has been specifically engineered so as to avoid the need for additional crossover components – by using an eight layer high-inductance voice coil, a natural roll-off occurs above 400Hz. The bass driver is loaded by a folded quarter-wave transmission line, tuned to 45-50Hz and terminating quite high up the back panel. Great attention has been paid to smoothing the flow of air in this line, even to the extent of mounting the crossover network externally and using flat internal cables bonded to the enclosure.

Above the line exit is a small port, indicating that there's a small port-loaded sub-enclosure behind the small (130mm) bass/mid driver –

“No other speaker we've come across has done a better job of sorting out the tonal variations of a complex bottom end.”

a paper-cone device similar to that used in the ELA, for example – that sits at the top of the speaker. The horizontal internal partition further stiffens the sides.

Keeping the internal airflow clean might be one reason for the external crossover, but removing it from the internal vibrations and pressure changes is also a bonus. And Rega has gone one step further by incorporating no fewer than seven terminals. Two pairs merely provide the usual bi-wire/amp wiring option; the other three, by means of a supplied jump lead, are used to make a small attenuation in the bass output, to assist in getting a good room match.

The twin tweeters are mounted underneath the bass/mid driver, with the main 27mm soft fabric dome situated just below seated ear level. The smaller 19mm unit is immediately below that, its main purpose being to improve the all-round distribution of the highest frequencies.

SOUND QUALITY

The R9 is by no means your typical speaker, sonically speaking, but it's a very interesting one, succeeding more through subtlety and restraint than assertiveness and drama.

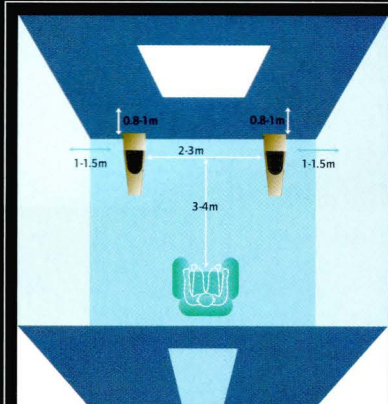
The first step was to connect them up to a system consisting of Naim CDS-3 CD player, NAC 552 preamp and NAP 500 power amp, plus Burmester 001 CD player, Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner and a Linn/Rega hybrid record player. Connecting cables and supports were a mixture of kit from Vertex AQ, The Chord Company, Naim and Mana.

The R9 followed the Audio Note AN-E into the listening room, and although these two models are not dissimilar in price or size, the contrast in terms of both style and sound quality is nothing short of dramatic. In some ways, there are similarities with B&O's Beolab 5 (reviewed in *HFC* 244). Although the two models are dissimilar in a great many respects, both share a beautifully laid-back neutrality across the broad midband that is always remarkably easy on the ears, with perspectives that always sound natural and unforced.

Another element that these two designs have in common is that both companies have

identified bass frequency room interaction as a key problem area. Each has gone to some lengths, in very different ways, to try and minimise the unevenness that normally results, though it has to be said that neither has been entirely successful in this regard. We spent a considerable amount of time moving the R9s around from one location to another, but never really managed to achieve a truly smooth and even bottom end in the 4.3x2.6x5.5m room used for this test, though it's impossible to say how different things would be in another room. Bass/room interaction is a very complex issue, especially when the speaker concerned has, as here, four different bass sources (two drivers, one port and the transmission line exit) with various geometric and phase relationships to one another. Under our conditions, best results were obtained with the bass level set high, the speakers sited well clear of walls, and the bass-only drivers pointing inwards. ▣

SET-UP



POSITIONING

Even though the crossover includes an effective bass attenuation option, deciding just where best to place the R9s proved a little tricky. The attenuation, which is worth roughly 2dB for all frequencies below 120Hz, provides some useful flexibility to help compensate for the effects of close-to-wall bass reinforcement, and both the 'full' and 'attenuated' settings seem to be very well chosen.

The difficulty came in finding a position where the bass was not just well balanced overall, but smooth and even with it too. Bass evenness is a function of the interaction of speakers and room, and is essentially unpredictable – a different room will likely give a different result.

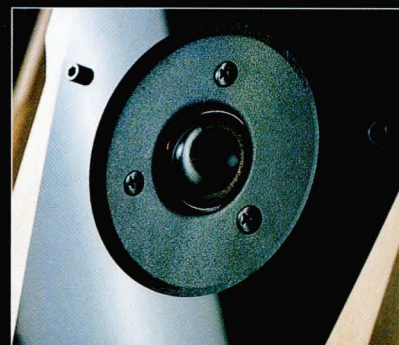
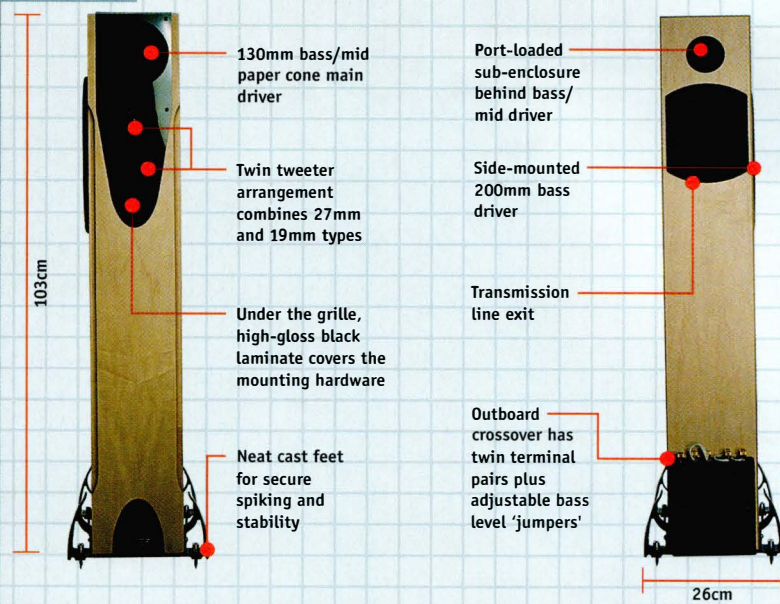
In our listening room, and under far-field averaged conditions, the best results were found with the speakers well clear of the wall behind, and with the mirror-imaged bass drivers facing towards each other, on the inner sides. Under these 'best case' conditions there was some excess at 45-80Hz and again at 230-300Hz, with a modest suck-out centred on 120Hz – not a great result, but not a bad one either. Above the bass region the balance is very flat and quite smooth, interrupted by modest dips at 2.2kHz and 4.8kHz, while relative output through the treble region is a little stronger than average.

SYSTEM MATCHING

Rega publishes no technical specifications, but the R9 registers 87dB sensitivity on our measure, which is a respectable enough figure in context. Although 87dB is just a shade below today's average, the amp load is relatively even and easy to drive, hovering close to six ohms through the bass region and 7-10 ohms higher up. The bass extension is very respectable too, recording -7dB at 20Hz under far-field in-room conditions.

Basic compatibility with all likely amplifiers is therefore assured, though loudness will be limited with low-powered single-ended valve amps. The relatively strong treble here does, however, place something of a premium on the quality of the amplifier, the sources and the ancillaries – sweetness will obviously be an asset here, and hardness is definitely better avoided. Indeed, a good quality push-pull valve amp could well make a particularly happy combination.

Detail



▣ Apart from that unevenness – which is neither unusual nor particularly serious – the bass here is terrific. It's exceptionally clean, fast and agile, has a notably wide dynamic range, and the quantity is expertly judged to give the right amount of weight, without ever becoming unpleasantly thick and heavy. Perhaps a little more drive and punch might be welcome, but the ability to convey subtle tonal and instrumental distinctions is always a delight. An album like Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* has a dense and complex bottom end, yet no other speaker we've come across has done a better job of sorting out the interwoven strands and tonal variations. The slight adjustment in relative bass level available via the crossover network proved most effective in compensating for room boundary reinforcement.

Although there is some coloration – voices are slightly thickened and do possess a little nasality – it's not the usual boxiness. Indeed, freedom from any significant boxiness is one of the R9's major strengths. The speakers themselves seem to 'disappear' acoustically, so that a beautifully natural and precisely focused image spreads out between and behind them. Partly because the top end is strong and assertive, it doesn't sound all that sweet, but fine detail is very clear and explicit.

Its other major strength is superb overall coherence, matching the capabilities of a regular two-way design, but adding the extra weight and openness of a multi-way without compromise. One might wish that the R9 had a little more vim, vigour and authority, but the secret of its success lies in superior delicacy, neutrality and subtlety, alongside an exceptionally wide dynamic range. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 86%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 90%



PRO

Stylish in appearance with clever detailing, this ultra-slim floorstander sounds beautifully open and clear, with great dynamic range and freedom from boxiness.

CON

Bass end could be more even and authoritative, and sound might be a little too laid back for some. Dynamics are a little on the restrained side.

CONCLUSION

Tastily styled, the R9 is a subtle and laid-back performer with a very superior dynamic range, especially through the bass region. Fine neutrality and freedom from boxiness, colorations are well controlled though dynamics might be more vigorous.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **90%**
OVERALL SCORE

Not for conservatives



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STELLAR RECEIVER

Denon's latest is the best multichannel amp component £1,000 will currently buy

PRODUCT Denon AVR-3805

TYPE Multichannel AV receiver

PRICE £1,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x17x43cm

• Weight: 17kg • 7.1 channels (each main channel rated at 120W) • SACD-compatible Denon Link • Full auto set-up with microphone • three-zone operation

CONTACT ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

The whispers have been gathering about this new mid-market Denon multichannel receiver for some time. Now that we've got our hands on a sample, it's obvious that what we heard on the grapevine was no mere hype, and that the change in model designation from AVR-3803 to the current AVR-3805 is an almost laughably understated indication of the development that has taken place under the skin. Some of the changes are at a truly fundamental level – this is no mere revamp.

Key features first. This is the first Denon model with auto room set-up and speaker calibration, and it's a good implementation (more on this later). The range of surround modes now includes Dolby Pro Logic IIx and the newly enhanced DTS Neo:6. It also has the latest iteration of the Denon Link multichannel full bandwidth high-res digital signal interface, which adds SACD data transfer to DVD-Audio and CD. Denon's DVD-A1 and DVD-A11 players are in the frame as Link-equipped sources right now, once the company receives the green light from the relevant SACD steering group (expected imminently), and further players are promised. Multi-room capabilities now include three-source, three-zone functionality, with some restrictions in the second and third zones, by assigning the sixth and seventh channel power amplifiers to one of the extra zones. An RS232 interface is available for external controllers and there are

two 12-volt triggers, for lighting or screen control for example. Video up-conversion is now available from composite/S-Video to component, and the latter is fully HDTV (100MHz) compatible. A fat load of good this will do us in Europe, though.

There are more key changes to the user interface. This year's fashion colour is brushed silver (yawn), so you don't get Denon's customary champagne gold. There are still too many identikit tiny buttons behind the front flap, and there are lots of on-screen menus, but no help system, and the graphics are blocky and ugly, rather like the old CGA PC standard for those with really long memories. If only Denon had copied Pioneer's colourful and attractive generic menu system.

Hold on though! Denon did look to Pioneer for inspiration – not for AVR-3805's menus, but for its automated system set-up. Pioneer got there first with its flagship VSA-AX10 amp,

and has been refining its design for some time. But while Denon's implementation here doesn't break entirely new ground, it does at least as much, and apparently does it as well as Pioneer's top-end amp – though at a third of the price. It automatically detects the number of speakers, phase, size, sets levels, distances, and if asked nicely it will adjust the speaker frequency response using an eight-band equaliser, too. It also includes adjustable sound delay for different sources, and there are a wide range of subwoofer crossover settings and bass redistribution modes (but we challenge anyone to read the boxed out notes on bass redirection on page 22 of the instruction manual and make head or tail of it)

And there's more! The AVR-3805's remote comes with an excellent touch screen using electroluminescent technology which switches on when touched, and goes into standby when put down. It does everything you can think of and more, and the displays are bright and legible, as well as changing dynamically according to the conditions of use. Compared to most touch-screen remotes it's a delight.

But the AVR-3805 is not just about new features and a (partially) improved interface. It's also about delivery. Internal chipper has been improved with the latest 2004 edition SHARC 32 FPU processor, DDSC-D (Dynamic Discrete Decoder – Digital) circuitry, HDCD decoding, 16 Burr-Brown PCM-1792 24-bit/192kHz DACs – a differential pair for each channel – and Burr-Brown PCM-1804 24-bit/192kHz ADCs (analogue-to-digital convertors) on the stereo analogue inputs.

SOUND QUALITY

First a few notes about user issues. The remote control is very good, if a tad heavy on its batteries. The auto set-up, which of course can be bypassed, is consistent, with a maximum spread of settings of the order of 1dB or 10cm, depending on what's being measured, but we did encounter a small systematic error in the main left/right speaker distance measurement, which is probably room acoustics related. Denon is careful to point out that subwoofer measurements under auto set-up can go awry for reasons outside its control.



“A few words of praise are due for Denon's excellent Pure Direct mode, which has a striking effect on the sound.”

There are so many ways to use this receiver, but it met or exceeded expectations at its price point in every key area. Real world power output is as good as any for the money, perhaps around the 100 watts per channel level with five channels running (Denon claims 120 watts for two channels running, so this may be optimistic). If the Denon lacks the blood and thunder of a really big amp, it was consistently capable of driving some pretty mean speakers (including a B&W Nautilus system based around the 800), without ever seeming power-shy, and without noticeable change in sound at high volumes. In general, it sounds sharper and more on its toes, as well as sweeter and more detailed than its predecessor. But the receiver was more in its element with a Tannoy Eyriss DC (Dual Concentric) multichannel speaker system, which suited its dynamic aspirations.

A few words of praise are due for the Denon's excellent Pure Direct mode, which does what its name suggests, and which has a striking effect on the sound – clearer, more open and better separated. Used this way as a straight line amp and driving good speakers, with Denon's DVD-A11 as a source, sound is comparable to some very respectable systems based on component CD players and stereo amps.

But the AVR-3805 really comes to life in multichannel mode playing DVD-Audio and SACD discs. It worked well on test through the 7.1-channel analogue input, but using the Denon Link the sound was significantly sharper and more transparent. We could hear deeper into the mix, and follow details that were indistinct through the analogue signal path. It's not that the multichannel sound was necessarily better than stereo, but something

more subtle – good multichannel soundtracks take up an almost physical residence in a room in a way that is rare with stereo. The Dolby and DTS algorithms appear to have been improved with this model, and sound quality from good movies using these surround formats offered a really open, vivid and very definite sense of soundstage presence, of the musicians being anchored in the listening room. Of course, these DVD-Video audio formats still play second audiophile fiddle to high-resolution multichannel music, but they are far from being disgraced. Add Dolby Pro Logic IIx, which delivers serious surround potential to Dolby Surround or even plain stereo sources, and this well-specified receiver is a great-sounding multichannel bargain. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >>> 86%
 >> SUB RATINGS STEREO 82% MULTICHANNEL 90%

FEATURES >>> 95%

BUILD >>> 83%

VALUE >>> 94%

CONCLUSION
 A great all-round performer – the Pure Direct mode (using dual differential DACs per channel) helps make this the most transparent and musical receiver around the £1,000 mark. A class act, and a hard one to follow.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 90%

PRO
 Excellent value for money and great all-round performance, though it's clearly best via the Denon Link with one of Denon's own players.

CON
 There's no i.Link, and the controls and on-screen menus are a little messy. Frustratingly impenetrable instruction manual.

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



TRIBAL RHYTHMS

Inca Design's first product looks like it costs at least twice the asking price, so what's the catch?



PRODUCT Inca Design Katana

TYPE CD player

PRICE £600

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 38x11x37cm

- Weight: 11kg
- Low resonance aluminium chassis
- Electrical/optical digital outputs
- Balanced/single-ended analogue outputs
- Burr-Brown 24/96 DAC

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Those of you with long memories will remember a British electronics company called Inca Tech which produced a popular if inconsistently built amplifier called the Claymore in the eighties. The similarity in name between that brand and this new one is not entirely coincidental. When the idea behind Inca Design was hatched the plan was to call it Inca Tech and launch it with a brand new Claymore for the 21st century, with design input from Colin Wonfor, the original founder of the brand. As things panned out, other designers were brought in to work on different products and the decision was taken to change the name to Inca Design – not a bad idea given Inca

Tech's less than enviable reputation for reliability, or lack thereof. The first Inca Design product to reach fruition turned out to be this, the Katana CD player, a product that looks far more expensive than it is.

This quality of external build is rare at twice the asking price here so we had to ask how parent company Activ Distribution had achieved this extraordinary result. They claim that it is simply a matter of honesty – by designing the player in the UK and manufacturing it in China they say that costs can be kept low enough to maintain the price point. The fact that other brands who use the same approach have not achieved as much is, they suggest, because products are priced in order to maximise margins. Another reason could be that there is no export margin built into this price and should the Katana prove a success overseas, don't be shocked if the price rises to cover this necessary evil.

The Katana's build quality is, according to the spec, more than skin deep. The chassis is built to allow the transport to operate in a resonance-free environment and uses

profiling on the aluminium panelling to break up vibration. The side cheeks are 4mm thick while the top plate is a millimetre thinner and heavily damped. The baseplate, meanwhile, is a composite of aluminium and copper, a fact that is clear if you turn the player over. What you'll also notice is the unusual chequerboard pattern printed onto it, described as both a faraday cage to keep out RFI (radio frequency interference) and as a means of further breaking up resonance. Presumably there is more than the ink in the pattern to achieve the former but quite how it achieves the latter is not clear. The other, more straightforward, element you'll see on the base is an on/off switch which can be reached from the front of the player – if you know where to look!

Inside the case, a Philips VAM 1202 transport sits on a slab of 10mm thick copper, this having been machined to cancel resonances and has the effect of mass loading the mechanism – effectively giving it a base into which to sink its own resonances. A single Burr-Brown chip contains an upsampler to 24-bit/96kHz, a DAC and an HDCD filter selected for its performance rather than to help the limited range of HDCD-encoded discs on the market, but it does this nonetheless.

The combination of balanced and single-ended output sockets on offer means that even the back panel on the Katana looks like it's from a more expensive player. The fact that Inca Design supplies both single-ended analogue and optical digital cables to hook the player up is another bonus.

Something you can't miss with this player is the remote. This is the first time we've seen a remote that's made of teak and crafted so attractively as well. The laser-cut legends and rounded ergonomic form mean it's great to use as well as look at and it earns the highest 'fondleability' rating of any handset we've had the pleasure of rubbing.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the company of considerably more expensive ancillary components the Katana proved itself as accomplished sonically as it is physically, displaying both beauty and brains when it comes to the fine art of music reproduction. Its character is relaxed and smooth but not to the extent that detail is masked – in fact this is a pleasingly transparent player for the price and reveals a great deal about any disc you care to place in it. Doing so requires access to a button on the top, so tight shelf mounting isn't a cunning plan, but then a player that looks as good as this one warrants being put on display.

Playing Outkast's remarkable *The Love Below CD* on the Katana, we could immediately appreciate the use of reverb and phase-related effects in the studio. The beat, the words and the instruments were all clear



“The Katana’s mix of sonic skills and superb build quality should make it something of a giant slayer in the sub-£1,000 arena.”

enough, but it was the three-dimensional stereo aspects that really stood out. Bass lines were tuneful and weighty, and this player clearly has no shortage of range. The midrange is just a touch relaxed, however – you can hear what's going on but there's a degree of smoothing which may frankly be a blessing with many systems.

The complex rhythms of jazz groovers EST were not handled quite so slickly. Interaction between piano, double bass and drums was easy to follow but didn't have quite the synchronicity that can sometimes be heard. But by the standards of its price the Katana is no slouch and there are few players for any money which combine stereo imaging with great timing, let alone for less than a grand. Image depth with this acoustic three-piece was as strong as ever, each instrument sitting in its own acoustic environment and claiming its place in the mix.

Resolution of detail is also very strong – it has to be to produce the stereo image but there is also a sense of richness to the overall sound that makes other players seem a little 'simplistic'. It bettered a less than youthful Sony SCD-XA555ES SACD player in nearly all respects, unless you gave the latter a head start with an SACD disc. Even then the Katana put in a sterling performance with the CD layer, Norah Jones sounding open and clear yet warm and personal.

Eminem's *Stan* gave the player a chance to show off its weighty bottom end, the thunder and rain sounding remarkably convincing behind Dido's telephone-effect vocals. This player seems to thrive on studio effects and reveals each producer's tricks with ease thanks to its sensitivity to spatial cues. The *Shostakovich Jazz Suites* revealed another side to its abilities, namely the resolution of tonal colour. The bells on this disc rang out with clarity and strength – many CD players struggle to produce fully formed high frequencies but that certainly isn't the case here. Another rather entertaining element to this piece is the banjo playing, the short solo

seeming almost to parody the style of twenties jazz – an effect which the Katana had little difficulty revealing.

Four Tet's rhythmically dense *Rounds* album presented a greater challenge to the player's timing skills, but it remained relaxed and enjoyable nonetheless. This disc can be rather bombastic, the sampled nature of most of the sounds making them less than sweet with some players but this is not an issue here, long-term listenability being a by-product of its relaxed presentation.

The Katana is an accomplished CD player with considerable poise for one so affordable. It may not be all things to all men but then such players do not, unfortunately, exist at this price point, and its enjoyable mix of sonic skills and superb build quality should make it something of a giant slayer in the sub-£1,000 arena. Inca Design intends to hold its price until the end of the year, but don't be shocked if it fails – this is a bargain! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 83%	<p>PRO Excellent build quality that should really cost twice as much combined with a smooth, detailed and three-dimensional sonic presentation.</p> <p>CON Timing is not in the first league and the high feet look a little odd.</p>
FEATURES >> 85%	
BUILD >> 89%	
VALUE >> 92%	
<p>CONCLUSION Stylish design combined with stunning build are what really make this the genuine bargain that it is. The fact that it also sounds enjoyably relaxed and spacious is just the icing on a very attractive cake.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%</p>	



HEY BIG SPENDOR

Spendor has revamped its 'S' Series speakers with some bold new thinking

PRODUCT Spendor S9e

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £2,895 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 24x101x38cm

⦿ Weight: 36.5kg ⦿ 220mm Kevlar/paper cone bass driver ⦿ 140mm polymer cone mid driver ⦿ 27mm soft dome tweeter ⦿ Sensitivity/impedance: 90dB/8 ohms

CONTACT ☎ 01323 843474

🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

There was a time when a Spendor range would stay in production for a decade or more. Indeed, the company still makes one of its earliest models for certain markets (the legendary BC1), but the most up-to-date range, the 'S' Series, has been revamped after just over two years. This may have something to do with the brand's still fairly new owner and one-time Audiolab founder Phil Swift – he clearly appreciates that in the current market it pays to keep your product up-to-the-minute.

There are five stereo pairs in the new 'Se' range, four floorstanders and a standmount, plus two and three-way centre channels and a wall-mounted surround speaker. There are even plans to release a subwoofer, which will be a first for the company.

Although this speaker looks superficially similar to its S9 predecessor, there are so many changes that the relationship between the two is limited to the shape and size of the cabinet and little else. The S9e is a ground-up design featuring new materials, drive units and design features. The cabinet is made out of much thicker MDF, the highly damped thin wall approach of the earlier series having been ditched in favour of a 25mm thick cabinet with extensive bracing. The latter doubles as bracing for the drive units as well, each having a thrust pad and structure behind it to inhibit resonance.

At the cabinet's base, an integrated plinth has replaced a bolt-on version and this forms part of the '3D linear flow port', a slot-shaped port which connects to a tapered 'waveguide' which has a much larger area than tube reflex ports. This reduces the velocity of airflow which Spendor claims makes the output less audible, but it was harder to test their ability to produce a consistent quality of bass regardless of proximity to walls because the sheer extension and quantity of bass produced required plenty of space to work in our room.

A three-way design, the S9e has a 27mm SEAS soft dome tweeter backed by a damped and vented chamber, which covers the audio range from 4.8kHz to 20kHz plus. Midrange is managed by what looks like a classic Spendor polymer cone but which in this case uses a new polymer dubbed 'EP38', its claim to fame being a high stiffness-to-weight ratio with excellent damping characteristics. Its 140mm, phase-plugged chassis has its own enclosure within the main box and like all the 'Se' range, the drive units feature full shielding.

At 500Hz the midrange unit hands over to the bass driver, an all-new design with a hefty 22cm chassis housing a Kevlar/paper composite cone, which is located by twin suspension spiders and features a large vented voice coil. The chassis and magnet are painted black for maximum heat radiation – reducing heat build-up also reduces distortion at higher levels. Meanwhile, a substantial dust dome achieves two goals: it stiffens the bass driver and prevents having a horn-shaped indent in the baffle so close to the midrange driver. This, according to Spendor, can actually colour the midband even though it applies to many three-ways that have been made in the past.

In terms of drive, the decent sensitivity (90dB) combined with an impedance that

doesn't drop below four ohms makes this a relatively easy load. However, it makes sense to arm yourself with an amp carrying at least 50 stiff watts under the bonnet, if only to keep the bass in line.

SOUND QUALITY

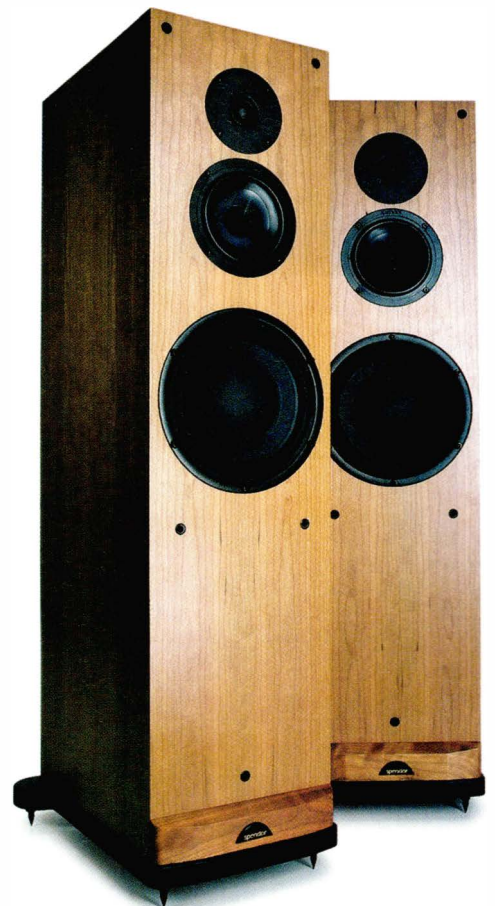
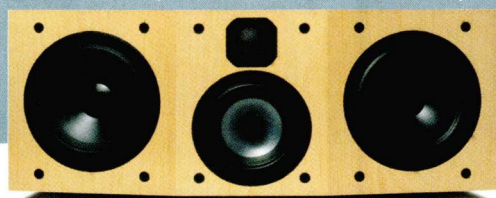
It is easy to appreciate the quality and extension of low frequencies on offer with the S9e – it has more oomph than most and we mean that in the nicest possible way. You hear loads of bass detail that usually remains at a much lower level, the thump of a musician's foot on the studio floor being a classic example on Terry Callier's vintage *New Folk Sound* album. (At least, we think it's a musician's foot – it isn't exactly an audiophile recording!) Another murky mix was found on Jeff Beck's *Truth*, where Rod Stewart sings *Shape Of Things To Come*. Yet with a speaker that has this much midrange transparency the quality of the music shines through and lets you enjoy a classic performance from a great band that could've been.

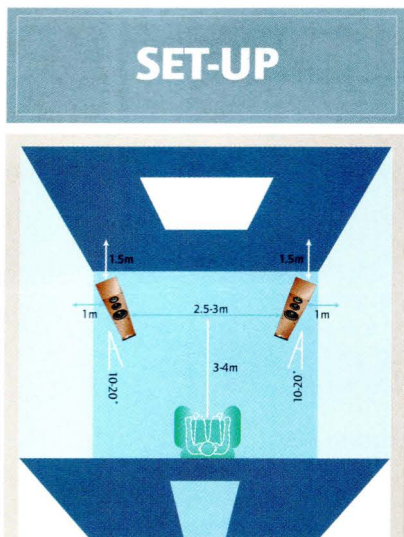
The more precise tones of Brand X's *Disco Suicide* served to reveal the potential for ▶

MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

Spendor makes a centre channel speaker specifically to match the S9e called the C9e, and while its driver complement may not be exactly the same as the floorstander, it matches it in the most important area – the midrange. The C9e is a horizontal, three-way design with the same 27mm fabric-domed tweeter and 140mm polymer-coned midrange driver as the S9e – where it differs is in the use of twinned 168mm polymer-coned bass drivers. In bandwidth terms it covers the same spectrum, extending to 40Hz in the bass, but rather than use a 3D linear flow port Spendor has made this a sealed box, presumably to give greater flexibility of siting. As a result, sensitivity is lower at 88dB but the load is actually easier with a minimum of five ohms.

These speakers will sound as similar as such dissimilar cabinets can. The ideal for multichannel music would be to buy five S9es, but the C9e is a practical solution for big, powerful, Spendor-based surround.





POSITIONING

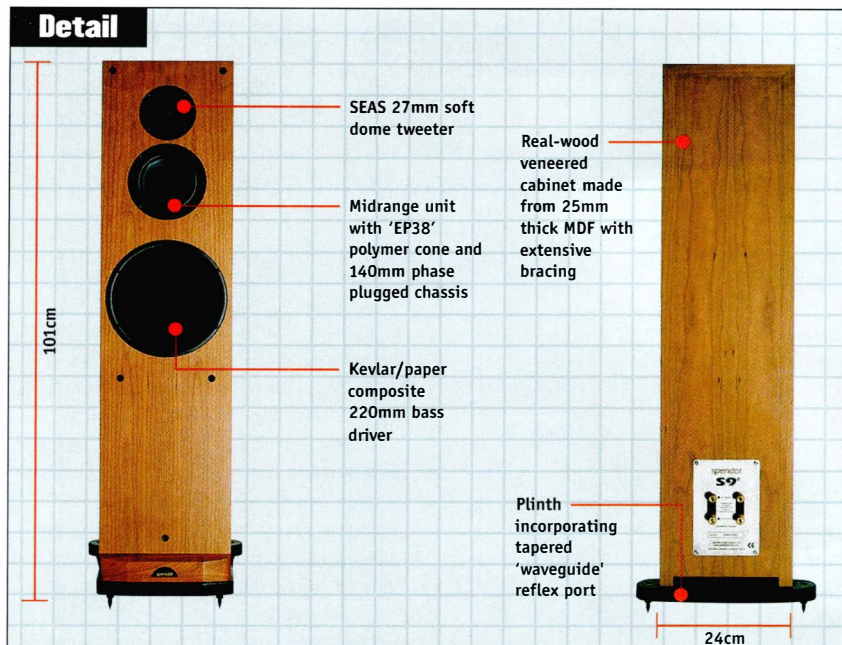
Spendor says that siting a pair of these speakers near to side and rear walls will not affect bass quality, since the port system is placed so close to the floor. However, you can't get around the fact that boundaries always have a reinforcing effect on the bass and we found that they actually needed plenty of space to breathe. We had to leave at least a metre between the speakers and side/rear walls, though Spendor recommends that you avoid having a similar distance to these boundaries as this will increase bass reinforcement.

Because the S9e has a good, even on-axis balance, best results are achieved if you toe both speakers in so that they face the listening position and place them as wide apart as your listening room will practically allow, albeit not so wide that you lose the central image. Use the hefty spikes and lock rings provided to anchor the speakers to the floor, and avoid suspension bases such as the Townshend Seismic plinths because the extra height affects the way the port works.

SYSTEM MATCHING

While the S9e has high sensitivity and offers a pretty manageable load (with a minimum impedance of 4 ohms), its prodigious bottom end does require a bit of grunt if it's to remain tight and tuneful. As a starting point we'd recommend the Rotel RA-1062 (£595), a very fine amp for the money. It has bags of power – we measured 95 watts per channel – and combines this with a full-scale sound that should help counter the S9e's inclination to keep things to itself. This, mixed with its unmistakably powerful, purposeful and crisp sound should make it a great choice.

If the budget will stretch further, AVI's Laboratory Series Type S21 MI (£1,399) is a powerful integrated with real finesse, but one which produces a full scale sound in all respects. Sonically it's extremely clean, which is a good idea with this degree of transparency, and it has a fabulous turn of speed which should help inject a bit more spring into the Spendor's step. Other more costly recommendations include ATC's SIA2-150 (£2,375), Krell's KAV0400xi (£2,698) and the Exposure, Primare and Quad pre/power amps in this issue's *Ultimate Group Test*.



“Its sense of bass grip and revealing, natural midrange are what make the S9e special.”

girth exhibited by the Spendors, the weight and control of bass guitar, drum and synth balanced perfectly by a clean and extended treble, with cymbals particularly well served. As well as being tonally impressive, this is also a very composed speaker – Brand X's jazz/rock can get a little dense at times but the S9e keeps things flowing smoothly and coherently, however intense the playing.

However, it could be a tad faster – timing is a bit on the relaxed side and transients don't have quite the attack they might. This was more obvious on some tracks than others though, with the Cinematic Orchestra's *Man With A Movie Camera* revealing all its majesty. This often sounds a bit bass-heavy and thick – here we got full bass depth and power from the big kick drum and synth, yet it was also open and expansive, letting the snare snap along nicely while the rest of the instrumentation built the bigger sonic picture.

HIM, the experimental, as opposed to the goth rock band, likewise seemed at home with the easy, relaxed yet revealing nature of this speaker, the bass and guitar lines revealing a fluidity and weight that other speakers struggle to imitate. Richard Thompson's less than dulcet tones were not disguised but neither was his sparkling acoustic guitar, both having considerable presence and palpability, with the kick drum shifting some genuine air in the act of underpinning his efforts.

These big cabinets have a bit more difficulty than their more fashionable competitors when it comes to creating a big image and there are times when the sound doesn't fully escape the box. Still, they produce high levels of

detail across the band and are extremely neutral, which means that whatever you play gets a chance to sound as it should. They are particularly adept with voices, with everyone from Slim Shady to Norah Jones revealing their full range, be that in terms of fluency of delivery with the former or dynamic range with the latter. In both cases there was a lot of subtlety revealed, with extra depth of tone and thus realism in the room.

The sense of grip in the bass combined with a revealing and very natural midrange make this a special speaker at a reasonable price. It may be a little bulky for some but the rewards produced by the impressive bass driver are worth any potential spouse hassle required to get them into the living room! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

EASE OF DRIVE >> 84%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 83%

CONCLUSION
Spendor has managed to produce a more capable and enjoyable speaker than the previous S9. Very entertaining at high levels, it has fabulously open and weighty bass, but watch out for those room modes!

PRO
A combination of transparent midrange and treble with open, extended bass that is uncommon. Works equally well at high or low levels.

CON
The relaxed nature of this speaker means that it doesn't have the speed that others can produce, while the cabinets are a little big and square to image perfectly.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%

Kandy

It's not all
black and white.



Roksan, for those with a little more grey matter.



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

BUDGET BEAUTIES

The high-value, tweaked-up Marantz OSE range goes from strength to strength

PRODUCT Marantz CD5400 OSE and PM4400 OSE

TYPE CD player and stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE £200 (CD player) £250 (amplifier)

KEY FEATURES (CD player) Size (WxHxD): 44x9x32cm

- Weight: 3.7kg • Optical/electrical digital outputs
- Pitch control • Variable headphone output
- (Amp) Size (WxHxD): 44x12x34cm • Weight: 6kg
- Power (into 8 ohms, RMS): 2x50W • Inputs: five line, phono • Outs: two line, two sets speakers, headphone

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

Marantz has stated its determination to stick by stereo, and with new stereo models appearing at a rate of knots it looks like no empty promise. These are actually upgrades to existing models, as is denoted by Marantz's familiar 'Original Special Edition' badge. After everyone jumped on the 'Special Edition' bandwagon, Marantz put the 'Original' in to emphasise that it was the first major manufacturer to produce SE versions of popular

separates – the idea's still the same though, which is to upgrade a few components which will be appreciated by the audiophile, if not strictly cost-effective in the budget market. So far, it's been a successful policy.

Basic specifications are the same in standard and OSE form, and these are two handsomely equipped units. Basic playback programming has been standard on CD players pretty much since day one, but Marantz makes sure its units



“This is an amp that is really very well behaved. And that’s a good thing.”

are as flexible as any, even offering features tailored to making compilations on cassette! It’s not a great surprise to find that CD text is supported, and CD-RW discs can be played, as long as they’ve been finalised. Yes, some CD players will play unfinalised discs, but since they use what are basically CD-R(W) mechanisms, they take forever to load and read a disc – this deck’s pretty swift.

Less common is the pitch control, in one per cent steps up to ±12 per cent (two semitones). Not for everyday use perhaps, but musicians and collectors of historic reissues, many of which are transferred at incorrect speeds, will appreciate it.

Another rare feature is a headphone output with its own volume control – a nice touch. At the rear you’ll find both flavours of digital output and remote control bus in/out connections for all-Marantz systems and installations. That’s about it, rounded off with a smart and user-friendly interface. The OSE factor in this case includes a Crystal Semiconductor DAC chip, a high-spec part for this kind of application.

The amplifier is rated at a very conservative 30 watts (our measurements suggest more like 50 watts continuous, more on peaks), with five line inputs plus phono, full copying and monitoring to and from two recorder outputs, tone controls (bypassable), balance control, two sets of speaker terminals, a headphone socket and remote control. Internal circuit design is interesting in that it uses an integrated circuit for most of the amplifying function, aided by high-power output transistors. On the whole, discrete transistors have more street cred than integrated circuits but this particular IC has an impressive spec which we confirmed in the lab. The same is true of the electronic switches which control input selection (relays being very much more expensive), so let’s not pre-judge.

As for details of the OSE changes, Marantz is not overly forthcoming, merely stating that the power supply and some capacitors have been upgraded. Well, never mind – the proof is in the listening, as we’ll find out...

SOUND QUALITY

One of the most gratifying things about hi-fi over the last few years has been the rise in quality of good budget separates. Midrange and high-end equipment has improved too, for sure, but not as markedly as budget kit. All right, there’s cheaper stuff around than these two units so they’re hardly super-budget – they are however pretty super value.

Let’s be more specific, starting with the amp. It easily passes the first impressions tests. Noise is next to non-existent, there’s nothing obviously wrong with the tonal balance, there’s detail and imaging there – yup, sounds pretty much like music. Listen more carefully however and there are a few giveaways that it didn’t cost thousands. Most obvious is the bass, especially when it’s loud – it’s a little loose and flabby, and not quite as extended as it might be. But on the other hand it never loses focus, nor does it recess in the disconcerting way that happens with some badly under-specified amps, and it retains tunefulness. Rhythmically, if you’re sensitive to this kind of thing, you might find that it becomes a little slack.

Maybe you’ll find an amp costing this much or just a little more that does better in that department. What we’re pretty sure of though, is that you’ll have to make a significant trade in all-round good manners. For this is an amp that is really very well behaved. And that’s a good thing. Look, if you really want massive, granite-like, seismically extended bass and super-clean ‘all-the-way-to-daylight’ treble, you just know you aren’t in the market for a £250 amp. The PM4400 OSE doesn’t do those, but what it does is to keep enough of a rein on things so that musical enjoyment, across the broadest possible range of tastes, is not significantly impaired. The treble occasionally has the hint of an edge to it, but it’s absolutely never harsh, grainy or congested. Stereo imaging is not as finely delineated, nor as deep, as you might hear from more expensive amps, but it never collapses in an ungainly heap in the middle, nor does its depth vary wildly with tonal complexity and volume level.

So is the CD5400 OSE as good? Hard to answer, since CD players tend to deviate from the straight and narrow in different ways from amps. Overall, we’d say it’s slightly less of a star, though it’s admirable in many ways. Its bass is very fine, outclassing the PM4400 OSE by some distance and worthy to be heard in quite upmarket company. There’s depth and there’s solidity, and again there’s tunefulness, as well as a more driving rhythmic quality. Treble is also fine, somewhat coarser with demanding material (bright sounds like violins and saxophone) than the best you’ll find, but very good for the price. Stereo imaging is good, tonality very neutral, dynamics confident and reasonably unconstrained. And yet... there’s just a little veiling over everything, a slight sense of emotional distance from the music that the best players, even at this price, can avoid. Then again, not all of them manage the bass extension and treble clarity of this player. It’s more something to watch out for (see how it affects you) than a reason to steer clear – this is certainly a player that you should audition.

More alarming was the high level of mechanical noise emanating from the review sample, a hissy whistle which was at first barely noticeable but with some music (most seriously classical, with its low average level) became positively annoying after a few minutes. That’s one to listen for carefully in an audition – this kind of defect can really spoil the fun.

Overall then, a fine pair of units. The amp’s probably the bigger bargain overall and will prove a good friend to all but the most power-mad rockers and party animals. The CD player is less impressive perhaps, but still very good and definitely one to hear. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT – CD5400 OSE CD player

SOUND >> 75%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 90%



CONCLUSION
The mechanical noise of our sample apart, this is a well thought-out player that’s nice to use and can deliver real musical detail.

**HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 83%**

VERDICT – PM4400 OSE amplifier

SOUND >> 78%



FEATURES >> 86%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 93%



CONCLUSION
Highly competent and well specified, this amp may not be high end, but it’s more informative than you might expect at the price.

**HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 86%**

pure quality

ECS EA-1 mono power amplifier



These power amps are very impressive devices. They seem to be extremely neutral, responding to every nuance of the music in a clear, coherent and swift fashion that lets the sound breathe - in truth, they are highly capable in all respects.

Jason Kennedy, Hi-Fi Choice

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Galloway
AUDIO

AVID CONNECTOR

Best known for its LP spinners, Avid now turns to cables. An obvious step?

PRODUCT Avid Black Reference SCT

TYPE Interconnect and loudspeaker cables

PRICE Interconnect: £700 (1m stereo pair)
Speaker cable: £850 (3m stereo set)

CONTACT ☎ 01480 457300 🌐 www.avidhifi.co.uk

Avid explains that in attempting to assess the neutrality of its turntables it was hampered by the lack of objectivity introduced by commercially available cables. Undaunted, it developed its own, then logically decided that it might as well make the fruits of its researches available to all.

Which is great. Well, it's great if you're not short of a bob or two, as these cables don't come cheap. Two interconnects and a speaker cable are available, the cheapest interconnect costing £350 for a standard 1m pair: in this review we examine the more expensive version, the 'Black Reference', a snip at £700 for the same length. Joining it is the speaker cable at £850 for a 3m set (£1,240 for 5m). So just how do they justify that?

The answer lies mainly in the materials used. SCT stands for 'Superconducting Technology'. Now, superconductors work at very low temperatures. The conductor in the SCT interconnect isn't a superconductor at room temperature, but Avid claims that the tantalum alloy used retains some useful properties which help it conduct tiny audio signals unusually well. The interconnect geometry is a perfectly standard coaxial, with the screen being a high-quality

copper tape and braid with 100 per cent coverage. The insulation is semi-air-spaced polythene.

The speaker cable, meanwhile, uses gold-plated copper conductors. Unusually, not only is it screened, but each conductor is screened separately. All four conductors have their screens linked in a little module fixed close to the amplifier, which in turn links to the mains earth via a supplied lead and adaptor plug. The idea is to provide the highest level of screening against the myriad sources of interference that plague our electronic world. Connectors on all cables are excellent quality locking types from WBT.

SOUND QUALITY

Auditioning over a grand's-worth of cables demands some fairly serious kit, and most of the listening was carried out in a well-tweaked EAR-based system with a Chord DAC64 and ATC speakers. Avid thoughtfully supplied some long interconnects for pre-to-power duty, which helped make things clearer. Even so, what's not entirely obvious is how the interconnect and speaker cables marry sonically, as they seem to have perplexingly differing characteristics.

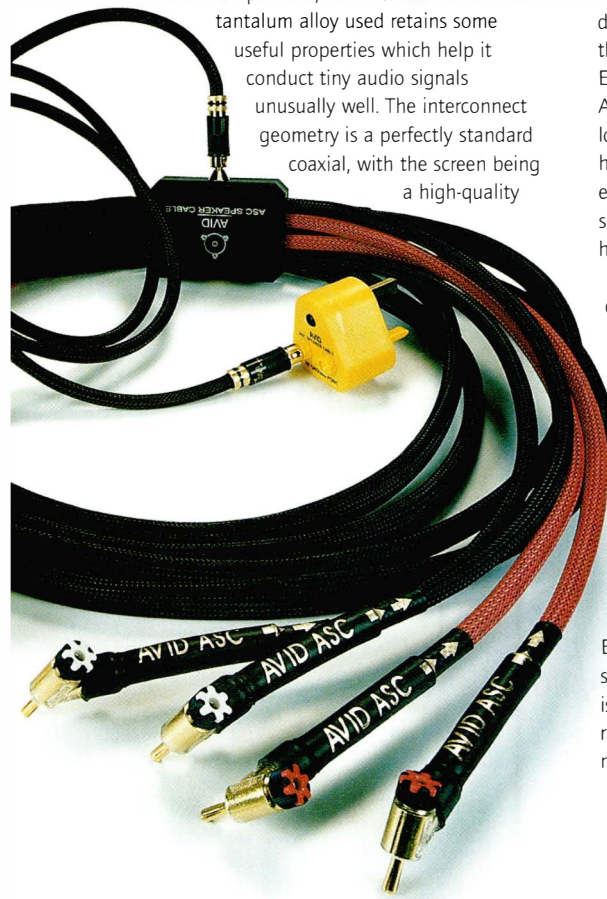
The interconnects are clearly superbly detailed and give a fantastically 'black' background out of which the music can grow. Or perhaps one might better say that it's a 'midnight blue' background because there seems to be a subtle emphasis of the bass, somewhere around the register of a low male voice, compared to available 'reference' cables. It doesn't seem to be quite as simple as a tonal aberration but there's a sense that the frequencies in that region have been slightly enhanced in some way. More detail? Euphonic coloration? After a lot of cable-swapping, it seemed to be the former – which is clearly an excellent result. The rest of the range is also highly detailed and notably mellow without being in the least rolled off,

just free of grain and grunge.

The speaker cables are certainly detailed, but their balance seems if anything a touch bass-shy. In addition, they seem slightly less open and precise spatially than several references, not all of which are even half as expensive. Where they excel, though, is with lively rhythmic music, where they really seem to keep things in tempo. They repeated this trick in a couple of other systems, proving that it's no fluke, and it's fine quality.

Cables at this price are not something anyone is likely to buy unheard, and we'd strongly recommend some careful auditioning. Nevertheless, there are definitely qualities in both these cables which are unusual and worth seeking out. If you're listening to expensive wires, hear these. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT – Interconnect

SOUND >> 94%

PRACTICALITY >> 85%

BUILD >> 87%

VALUE >> 80%

CONCLUSION

Pricey it may be, but this cable sounds beguilingly rich and informative. Definitely one to audition for high-end applications.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 87%

VERDICT – Speaker cable

SOUND >> 89%

PRACTICALITY >> 75%

BUILD >> 89%

VALUE >> 75%

CONCLUSION

Informative in most senses, but lacks a little imaging precision. Great coherence and rhythmic drive will endear it to many.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 82%



THE RIGHT NOTE

It looks like a seventies throwback, but the Audio Note Type-E is still with us for good sonic reasons

PRODUCT Audio Note AN-E/LX

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE From £2,650 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size: (WxHxD): 36x79x27cm

• Weight: 23kg • Very high sensitivity: 94dB/W

• 200mm paper cone bass/mid driver • 25mm fabric dome tweeter • Audio Note LEXUS LX copper internal speaker cable • 14 real-wood veneer options

CONTACT ☎ 01273 220511 # www.audionote.co.uk

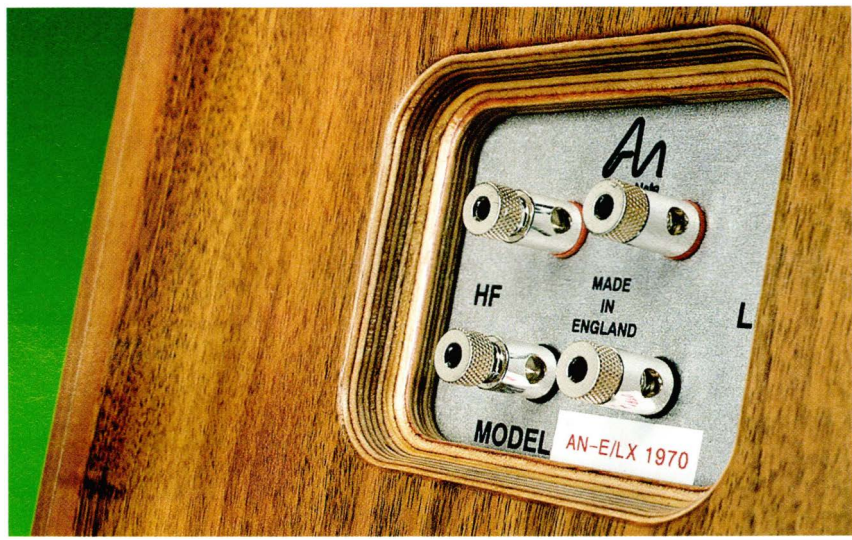
As its appearance suggests, the history of this speaker goes back some decades. It actually started out as a US design by the late Peter Snell in the early 1980s. Following his untimely death the company introduced new and more fashionably styled models, but a European distributor liked the

original range so much that he decided to start manufacturing them for himself.

The result is a range of speakers under the Audio Note brand. From the outside, they may look as though they've been around for 25 years, but the ingredients inside have undergone continuous refinement. *Hi-Fi Choice* has already very favourably reviewed versions of the AN-E in 1992 and 2000, but the latest AN-E is available in a quite bewildering range of options. The LX-suffixed version tested here is now actually the base model, but there's a ten-rung hierarchy of others with improved components that stretches onwards and upwards to the stratospherically priced SOGON at £69,500 per pair! A degree of upgrading is possible, up the various rungs of the ladder.

All follow the same pattern of a very large two-way standmount, with a 200mm bass/mid driver plus a 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter with short horn flare, both mounted on an unusually wide and nicely veneered front panel. Contradicting the modern view that a narrow baffle is a good thing per se, this 36cm width is considered important in optimising the directivity. Many floorstanders stand as tall as this 79cm speaker, though the use of a low 30cm stand is considered essential. AN's partnering stand is a steel pillar finished in crackle-black. It costs £299 and looks even less attractive than the speakers, but it ensures excellent stability, and is entirely functional.

The veneered enclosure is available in something like 14 different real-wood finishes.



“The AN-E/LX is particularly convincing in the way it reproduces subtle dynamic shading and vivid contrasts with great realism.”

There's no grille provision so the flush-mounted drivers are left exposed. Twin silver-plated bi-wire terminals and a large port are fitted on the rear, and the main driver has a 200mm cast frame, a 150mm paper cone and a foam surround. The box substrate consists of an MDF wrap fronted and backed by Russian birch ply. It's quite lightly constructed and damped, with strategic bracing, the intention being to control and harness the inevitable panel vibrations as part of the total sound output.

Speakers are only a small part of Audio Note's business, as it has major interests in valve-equipped electronics. These by definition include low-powered, single-ended amps, like the Oto SE which received a Best Buy rating in our recent valve amp group test (*HFC* 254), but only recorded 4.2 low distortion watts per channel. In order to provide suitable partners for such modest power availability, AN speakers are designed to have a much higher sensitivity than average, as well as a fairly amp-friendly load. This AN-E is rated at 94dB/W, an unusually high figure for a direct-radiating (rather than horn-loaded) speaker. Higher sensitivity HE versions with more powerful magnets are also available at higher cost.

According to Audio Note, the AN-E should be sited close to a wall, or if possible a corner. This is perhaps surprising in view of its size and healthy port output, and doesn't necessarily tie in too well with our findings, so as always, it's best to experiment in any given room.

SOUND QUALITY

In its current incarnation the AN-E is different from its predecessors, as the company's drive to increase efficiency and sensitivity has clearly borne fruit, albeit at some expense in terms of

evenness and smoothness. The claim for 94dB sensitivity is just about met, and represents a worthwhile increase over the 92dB recorded under the same conditions in 2000, and the 90.5dB registered by our 1992 versions.

The accompanying unevenness is quite significant, especially in the bass region where the balance is as much a function of the room as the speaker, and so tends to be somewhat unpredictable. Under our conditions, whether the speakers were close to a wall or spaced a metre clear, there was plenty of low bass but some lack of mid and upper-bass output. The midband proper is a shade strong through the two octaves of 200-800Hz, while the presence zone (2-4kHz) is slightly restrained, but above 800Hz the balance is about as good as it gets.

It isn't the easiest of amp loads – our lab work shows impedance dropping to four ohms on two occasions. The dip at the port tuning frequency of 30Hz shouldn't be problematic, but it is also close to four ohms throughout the upper bass/lower mid octave of 150-300Hz, where program energy will be relatively high.

First listening impressions were mixed: there's sufficient coloration to offer a distraction, and also be a little off-putting at first. It is also probably responsible for some curtailment of stereo depth and a slight lack of transparency. This boxiness doesn't go away, and might well remain a source of irritation for some listeners, but there are considerable compensating strengths here too. Like all speakers, the AN-E is a collection of compromises, and if its coloration is less than ideal, its dynamic performance is exceptionally strong. It's particularly convincing in the way it reproduces subtle dynamic shading and vivid contrasts with great realism, tension and coherence.

The result is immensely entertaining, bringing an unusual harmonic richness to the party, and somehow managing to give the impression that more musicians are playing than one had previously suspected. This in turn simply makes the music sound more interesting, and the whole experience consequently becomes that much more engrossing.

Strange and unfamiliar material somehow becomes more interesting and involving. I can't say I've ever really come to terms with the vocal pyrotechnics of Luciano Berio's music, but encountering a Radio 3 broadcast of his material by chance, I found myself quickly sucked in, simply because of the sheer realism of the singers' voices. Speech is also imbued with a healthy dose of realism, so that although voices are quite laid back, even slightly shut-in, they remain very expressive, and individual accents are particularly clear.

Another memorably magical moment again came courtesy of the BBC, and a live concert performance of a band called Toolshed. I was immediately transfixed by the marvellous tension and realism that a genuinely live analogue FM broadcast can deliver. The music itself was full of interesting and unusual sounds, and was further enhanced by the rich and coherent hall acoustic. Out of interest I tuned to the same programme's digital-via-satellite transmission, and was genuinely shocked at how much of the excitement and tension was lost when using this bland alternative that the authorities plan to foist upon us all, as well as powerful evidence of the AN-E's ability to cut to the heart of the matter. If CAMRA can successfully rescue our ale, maybe we should start up a CAMRR to save real radio from digital blandness!

This is clearly not a speaker for everyone, though the upgradeability and compatibility with valve amps are both bonuses. Purposeful is a more appropriate adjective than pretty to describe either the appearance or the sound, but the real bottom line lies in its very superior ability to engage and involve the listener. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 89% [Progress bar]	PRO Well suited to valve amps with high sensitivity, with plenty of deep bass and good upgrade options. Brilliant dynamics bring great involvement and fine communication.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 91% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON Not a pretty sight and not the most even sound. Midband boxiness adds coloration, inhibits transparency and stereo depth.
VALUE >> 87% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION An engrossing and entertaining speaker with great dynamic subtlety and integrity, though it's not the prettiest, has some boxy colorations and is not particularly transparent either. Great fun though, because it's so expressive and involving.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%	

ELECTRONICS

Acophase, Audio Analogue, Audio Research, Belcanto, Conrad Johnson, Copland, Creek, Densen, dCS, Electrocompaniet, Krell, Lavarin, Magnum Dynalab, Nagra, Orpheus, Patros, Primare, PS Audio, Reson/Resolution Audio, Spectral, Sugden, Tichord, Unison Research, Wadia, 47 Laboratory.

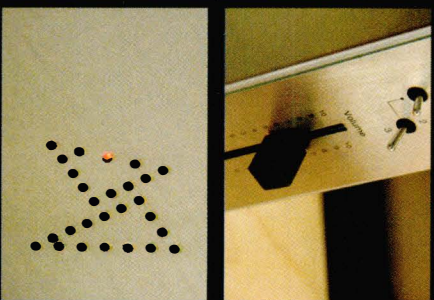
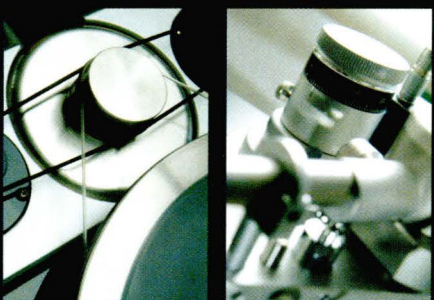
LOUDSPEAKERS
Audio Physic, ATC, Avalon, JM Labs, Konus Audio, Pen Audio, Proac, Peak Consult, Martin Logan, FLEL, Sonus Faber, Velodyne, Verity Audio.

TURNTABLES / CARTRIDGES

Cardas, Clearaudio, Eichtam, Finte Elemente, Futech, Grand Prix Racing, Nordost, Quadraspire, Siltech, Shakti, Shun Mook, Transparent, Van de Hul.

CABLES / SUPPORTS / ACCESSORIES

The included JMW 12.5 is bolted to the aluminium portion of the chassis with a double base mounting, providing the ultimate in rigidity and adjustability. The SDS power supply (included) rounds out the package and provides a pure AC signal to the drive system.



VPI TNT HRX

The TNT HR-X is the TNT concept taken to the next level. The HR-X features a triple laminated chassis (Acrylic-Aluminum-Acrylic), integral air suspension (which rejects up to 98% of acoustic feedback) and an inverted main bearing incorporating a hardened steel ball running on Teflon.

An outer periphery record clamp centers on the platter, not the record, to provide vacuum-like hold down without the problems inherent in a vacuum system. The drive system uses two low-powered 24-pole motors driving a 7 pound flywheel, and the flywheel spins at 500 RPM and has 62 times the inertia of a 28 pound platter. The drive system and the periphery clamp result in wow, flutter, and rumble that are all below measurability.

47 LABORATORY

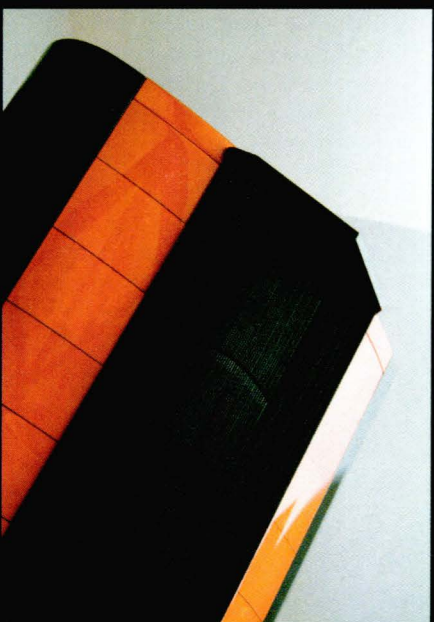
For some it's Zen. For others, radical.

Call it what you will, but at the end of the track, it's all about trusting your ears. About letting the simplicity of design, the energy and flow of the music carry you away. Small in size, big on sound, and more music than mere audio jewels, 47 Lab distills technology down to its simplest, purest form. And when you listen you'll know that this path - your path - is the one to follow.

Why?

Because designer Junji Kimura preserves the life of the music. There are no compromises. No unnecessary flash. No B.S. Just dynamic, unadulterated music.

Radical? Maybe.



SONUS FABER

Stradivari. A 3 way elliptical design, virtual 2π radiation symbiotic tuning system.

Acoustic enclosure-multilayer, constrained-mode damping, elliptically shaped enclosure formed using hand selected wood layers, quality-graded and oriented for carefully optimized resonance control, substructural ribs are strategically placed for absolute rejection of spurious vibrations.

Available in graphite and Stradivari's crimson.

dCS

dCS Verona Masterclock. The ultimate clocking solution for multibox dCS applications. Calibrated to better than 1 part per million accuracy, synchronise up to 5 units with [BNC] word clock interfaces. Standard clocking frequencies: 44.1 or 48kHz Works with all dCS consumer products fitted with word clock input.

dCS Verdi LaScala is the latest solution to costly 2 box scenarios in the dCS family, it uses the same High quality dual laser mechanism as the Verdi. Low jitter on-board clock Clock sync function with dCS Elgar Plus and dCS Dellius D/A converters DSD digital output via IEEE1394 Interface using CD or Super Audio CD material 16 bit 44.1Ks/s output via AES interface. Demonstration essential call now to book your appointment.



RUSS RAVES ON

Great acronym – but can the sound from this miniature amp and speaker system measure up?

PRODUCT Russ Andrews RAVE

TYPE Amp/speaker system

PRICE £300

CONTACT ☎ 0800 373467

🌐 www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews Accessories is the kind of outfit that will sell you a cable for a thousand quid without skipping a beat. It was thus with more than a mere raised eyebrow that we received news of the latest RA scheme – a complete amp and speaker set-up for £300. You can buy the amp alone for £200, but for the extra ton they throw in not only a pair of basic two-way speakers but also speaker, mains and interconnect cables from Kimber, making the apparent value very high indeed.

RAVE stands for Russ Andrews Value Engineering and the basic premise is simple: to make available good quality sound for such environments as the PC, the kitchen or even the car or caravan, since the amp can be powered via a standard cigar lighter socket (you get a lead for that too, though it's not by Kimber!). Russ has always preached that the quality of ancillaries and internal components is of paramount importance in any application, so it should be no surprise that this little system features relatively expensive cables, and indeed the company's press release makes it very clear that the RAVE kit specifically aims to improve sonic standards in its target market through the inclusion as standard of what many manufacturers would regard merely as 'tweaks'.

Obviously not everything about this is upmarket. The amp features standard nickel-plated connectors, for instance, and the speakers – like the amp, plastic-cased – have spring clip terminals. Facilities are basic but thoughtful, with four inputs on the amp plus tape output. The amp's dimensions mean that it can be put on its side on a bookshelf, and since it uses digital amplifying techniques to produce its 20-watt maximum output (into four ohms) it doesn't generate worrying amounts of heat.

SOUND QUALITY

In the case of a system like this, with 'fun factor' written all over it, it would clearly be

unfair to judge sound in terms of the usual hi-fi niceties like resolution, neutrality and the rest. Or rather, it would be unfair to demand them. The fact is, though, that you get more of all those than any sober commentator would dare to expect.

Unusually excited by the arrival of this kit, we slapped it down on the nearest horizontal surface, connected it up hastily (using a Panasonic portable CD as source), turned on, and then proceeded to enjoy what our American colleagues might call a 'paradigm shift'.

There's little doubt that you can get a more tonally neutral system than this for the money. However, once you get used to the fact that the frequency response is not all that flat (in fact in the treble the amp rolls off quite significantly, depending on load, some 6dB down at 10kHz with the supplied speakers), you start hearing some remarkable levels of musical insight. Across a range of musical styles, this little system dug extraordinarily deep into the mix and repeatedly came up with lively, fresh, enjoyable and informative sounds which invited prolonged listening.

Frequency response oddities are after all about the easiest of hi-fi failings to live with, while obscured detail is much harder to recover and soon becomes tiring. But the RAVE components present detail easily and naturally, within their limits (the most obvious limit being absolute loudness – the sound thickens up considerably if one tries to achieve headbanging levels), and on the way manage some pretty impressive

imaging and rhythmic impulse too. Bass, by the way, is also commendable – not truly extended but tuneful and lifelike as far as it goes. And that fun factor? Guaranteed to have you grinning from ear to ear! **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 76%



FEATURES >> 81%



BUILD >> 76%



VALUE >> 93%



PRO

Versatile amp/speaker solution with a fun and communicative sound, plenty of detail and good imaging. Unfussy about installation and positioning.

CON

Limited loudness, somewhat off-balance frequency response, supplied speaker cables a bit short.

CONCLUSION

A lively and very versatile little amp/speaker combo offering a neat alternative to the majority of run of the mill budget gear. For applications like PC sound it delivers a big improvement over most alternatives – lateral hi-fi thinking at its best.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **85%**
OVERALL SCORE



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

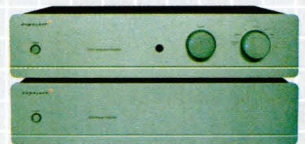
PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

One box good, two boxes better – or are they? Just what do pre/power and bi-amp combinations offer that integrated amps don't?

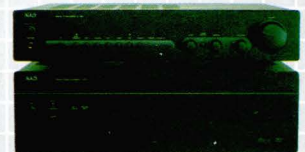
ON TEST



ARCAM FMJ C30/P35
£2,050



EXPOSURE 3010 INTEGRATED/3010 POWER
£1,800



NAD C162/C272
£880



PRIMARE PRE30/A30.2
£2,400



QUAD 99 PRE/909
£1,650



ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES PRE/POWER
£2,050

It used to be so simple. Integrated amplifiers belonged to starter systems, separate preamps and power amps to anything remotely audiophile. Then the phono stage started to wither and die, and people realised that a line-level-only integrated was hardly more than a power amp with a volume control and selector switch. Integrated amps moved upmarket, and the two-box solution started to look as if it was being cornered in the big-money domain.

Nevertheless, there are still quite a few sensibly priced two-box amp solutions on offer. Some include a phono stage, which means they necessarily have some relatively complicated and highly sensitive small-signal electronics on board, which tend to benefit quite noticeably from being physically separated from power stages. Even line stages can suffer from proximity to power outputs and their associated large and non-linear current demands – and then there's the question of aesthetics. Power amps are necessarily quite big, but preamps can be smaller and more svelte, better suited to display while the power amp is tucked neatly away. Quad at least understands that!

There's also the matter of upgrading. All these combinations are from single manufacturers, but there's nothing to stop you mixing and matching makes, either at the time of initial purchase or subsequently. If you're happy with your preamp but just want more power, simply buy a bigger power amp.

Bi-amping is a slightly different proposition but an attractive one when one considers it closely. If an integrated amp has a 'preamp' output (that is, a line-level output downstream of the volume control) it can feed a separate power amp which tracks the internal one. Using separate speaker cables and

separated woofer and tweeter sections at the speaker's crossover, one can easily use one pair of channels to drive the bass and the other to drive the treble of a two-way speaker. Power is barely increased in real terms by this trick but quite often the sound is markedly improved as each amp and cable handles a relatively limited frequency range. It's also a useful upgrade path from a well-loved integrated.

The following two-box amp combinations, cherry-picked for their makers' competence, are representative of good solid-state practice. None is particularly outlandish in any way, each is technically capable and power is plentiful in each case. So what distinguishes them? Read on... **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

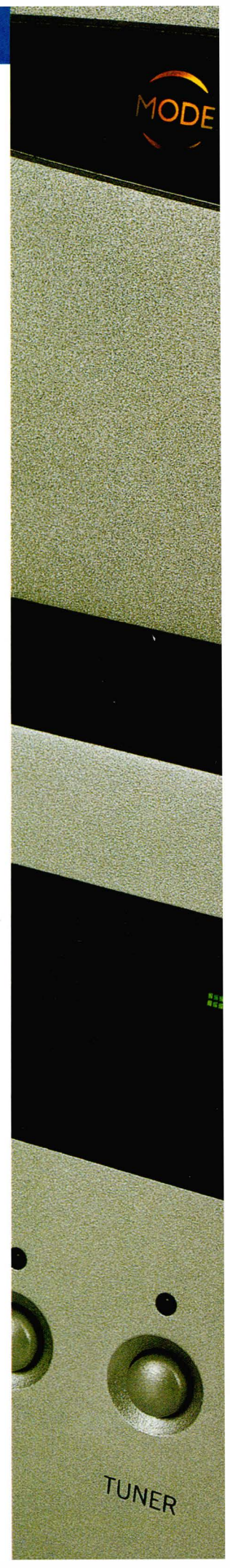
- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Rotel RCD-971 CD player
- ⊕ Chord Electronics DAC64 digital-to-analogue converter
- ⊕ Kimber, Chord Company and Avid cables
- ⊕ Pink Triangle PT TOO turntable with SME 309 arm and Highphonic MC-A3 cartridge

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ⊕ Penguin Cafe Orchestra *Concert Programme*
- ⊕ Dvorak *Carnival*
- ⊕ Guzmán *Ambrosio*
- ⊕ Ian Dury *The Bus Driver's Prayer*
- ⊕ Little Feat *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*

EARS USED

- We are immeasurably grateful to the following for lending their ears in our unsighted panel listening tests:
- ⊕ Ed Selley (Cambridge Audio)
 - ⊕ Keith Martin (hififorsale.com)
 - ⊕ Andy Whittle (Exposure Electronics)



CD TUNER VIDEO LINE IN

ROKSAN

65.48 DVD

AV

STRUCTURED LAB & LISTENING TESTS

Each amplifier was tested on its own and as part of its appropriate pair with a variety of lab equipment including custom-made and modified audio gear, a Hameg distortion analyser, Tektronix oscilloscope and the inevitable PC. Much of the testing was to ensure the absence of bad behaviour (instability, catching fire and the like) and as such is not noted when there's nothing to report. Beyond that, checks were made on bandwidth, stereo separation (not mentioned individually as it was perfectly adequate on all the units), output impedance, continuous output power and peak output. The latter is often more important than continuous power as music typically requires full output for tens of milliseconds at a time. Distortion and noise were checked carefully at a range of frequencies and levels, these having probably the most impact on sonic performance.

Besides the 'blind' listening panel, each amp was auditioned informally in isolation over a longer period, with a wider range of material, both before and after measuring.

No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five parameters are:

1] Dynamic power output: To be taken in conjunction with the continuous rated power, this indicates how well the amp deals with real-world peak power requirements.

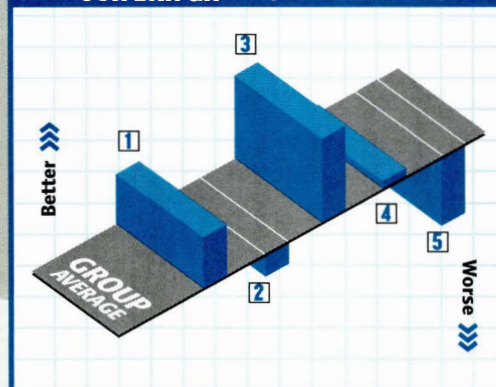
2] Speaker load tolerance: This indicates not only how well the amplifier deals with 'difficult' low-impedance loudspeakers (dependent on current delivery) but also how well it controls speakers and how much or how little its frequency response changes into real speaker loads, a function of output impedance.

3] Audible distortion: A condensation of a range of tests at different frequencies and power levels, reflecting not only the amount of distortion but also its spectrum.

4] Noise: Again, this reflects several tests at various volume control settings, taking into account noise generated by both the preamp and power amp.

5] Overall compatibility: A summary of each amp's ability with a wide range of source components and speakers, taking into account distortion, output impedance, bandwidth, noise and load tolerance.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





£2,050 (£1,200 + £850) ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM C30/P35

Highly featured – but too sophisticated for its own good?

Previously seen in *HFC*, though not as a pair, these two amps are from Arcam's high-end 'Full Metal Jacket' range – in other words, the front panel is metal, like the rest of the case. Silly name apart, the appearance is really very smart and the operational feel is good too, though there's some wobble in the multi-purpose rotary knob.

Multi-purpose, because like many other manufacturers Arcam uses an electronic volume control for ease of integration with the remote. In normal operation the knob controls volume but the control software for the C30 preamp is pretty sophisticated and you can set a host of other things, including the sensitivity of each input, balance, size of volume step and even the text that appears on start-up. Oh, and tone controls – globally or per input – plus other nice touches such as selection of bargraph or numerical display of volume setting, the latter making exact replication of favoured conditions very easy.

Internally the construction of both units is beyond reproach and there's evidence of some careful parts selection. A phono stage is fitted as standard, catering for both MM and MC cartridges. The power amp includes outputs to chain to further amps and can optionally be upgraded to three channels for home cinema applications. It still won't make the tea, though!

SOUND QUALITY

Given how thoughtfully designed and well made these amps are, it's a shame they didn't score more of a hit with our listening panel. That said, there was praise for specific performance aspects but overall the feeling seemed to be that the music just wasn't all that gripping. On the positive side, bass was described as "full if a little soft", while detail was generally admired. Imaging seemed to be inconsistent, one panellist in particular liking



the opera track a lot in this regard, while in the Penguin Cafe Orchestra tune there were some complaints that instruments were hard to separate spatially.

It's possible that the electronic sophistication of these amps is just a little too much for their own good, because despite the previously mentioned virtues of extended bass and good detail, there's a slight but persistent sense of veiling that just slightly takes the immediacy off the music, in both the short and the long term. Sustained listening showed that one's attention can wander in a way that the best equipment simply doesn't allow, at any rate with good recordings. However, the basic manners of these amps are exemplary and there's no denying that all the essential features of whatever music one chooses are presented clearly and neutrally.

It's worth mentioning that Arcam also sent – too late for the panel listening – another pair of amps, the A90 integrated and P90 power amp, the two making a bi-amping combination just like the Exposure units in this group. Since the P90 is in every important respect identical to the P35 and the A90 includes a similar power output stage and shares the C30's preamp section (phono stage an added-cost option), though lacking balanced output and the C30's more advanced power supply arrangements, it's no surprise that informal listening found it a near match to the more expensive versions. Indeed, in bi-amping mode they were arguably superior in the general clarity stakes. At a markedly lower price of £1,400 the pair, this looks like a very worthy combination. **HFC**

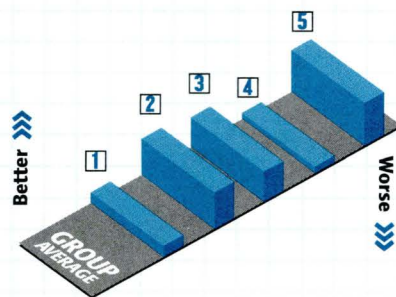


LAB REPORT

The rated power of 2x100W into 8 ohms is just exceeded at a level of 2x105W continuous, 2x140W peak. Peak power rises to 2x240W (4 ohms) and 2x440W (2 ohms), indicating a fearless attitude towards tricky speakers – helped somewhat by the low output impedance. Bandwidth of pre and power units is very wide, a good two octaves beyond audio at each end. The preamp has a maximum gain of 1, making it unsuited for use with some other power amps of low gain.

Distortion is low throughout though not vanishing, with a spectrum that includes mainly second and third harmonics (around the 0.01% level at low and mid frequencies) but also a few higher harmonics at medium and high power, perhaps accounting for the slight loss of immediacy. Hum modulation is practically undetectable, which is praiseworthy. The noise floor however is middling by the standards of the group at around -98dB.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output ➤ +10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance ➤ +30%
- 3] Distortion ➤ +25%
- 4] Noise ➤ +5%
- 5] Compatibility ➤ +35%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	100W	105W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohm)	0.005%	0.006%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	800mV	800mV

VERDICT

SOUND ➤➤ 81%

FEATURES ➤➤ 92%

BUILD ➤➤ 90%

VALUE ➤➤ 84%

While the C30/P35 combination may not be the stuff of audiophile dreams it makes a very capable and well-equipped basis for any system. However, it does appear that its value could be undermined by the A90/P90.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE ➤➤ **83%**



£1,800 (£1,000 + £800) ☎ 01273 423877 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

EXPOSURE 3010

Integrated/power amp combo makes a strong case for bi-amping

This might need a little explaining. Here we have two similar-looking units with the same model number (though distinguished by the nomenclature Integrated and Power), which on internal inspection turn out to contain the same power amplifier board with the same components, same mains transformer and same heatsink. One, however, has merely a single pair of inputs and no front panel controls, while the other includes half a dozen inputs – tape and two preamp outputs, and volume and source selector controls, plus the relevant extra circuitry to handle it all. The point is what?

Perhaps not that many people would buy such a set-up straight off. However, the Integrated can be easily upgraded by adding the Power, with various configuration options. First, one can retire the power output stage of the Integrated and use it just as a preamp to drive the Power. Alternatively, one can keep using the Integrated's power section to drive one half of the speakers (bass or treble) with the Power driving the other half in classic bi-amping mode. Since the Power can be operated in parallel (not bridged) mono you can even add another Power later to drive awkward speakers with more assurance.

The 3010 range is a recent addition to the Exposure catalogue and includes a matching CD player. Both these units are smartly and neatly assembled, with good quality input and output socketry and components. The Integrated is remote controllable, using both a motorised volume control and a motorised selector switch for least sonic intrusion.

SOUND QUALITY

The listening panel definitely liked this. It was found to have very good bass weight and solidity, which helped it maintain a strong rhythmic impulse. The improved bass was particularly noticeable in orchestral material



where it was possible to distinguish and follow the lower instrumental lines much more easily than with some of the other amps. Interestingly, on a second presentation the extension of the bass was felt to be slightly less, though its detail was again praised. At the same time, the midrange was very open and detailed, helping the articulation of voices and melody instruments.

One characteristic of these amps that emerges when re-reading our listening notes is their chameleon-like ability to adapt to the style of music being played. They made the most of the sound effects and rhythmic bass on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, with lots of get-up-and-go, while in the more mellifluous strains of Dvorak they gave a good sense of the natural recorded acoustic and an excellent balance between the instruments. Just occasionally there was a dissenting comment along the lines that the amps failed to engage to some extent with the music – or is it just that they lack euphonic colorations?

As the panel heard the amps, the Integrated functioned purely as a preamp. Later experiments in bi-amping mode showed that there is indeed something to be gained from this. In fact, contrary to common practice, using the Integrated to drive the bass and the Power for treble gave the most noticeable lift in clarity and precision – but without substantially changing the character (or lack of it!) of the amps. This connection also seemed to make a little more slam available for the most energetic musical styles. Bi-amped or no, this is clearly fine amplification with good upgrade potential. **HFC**

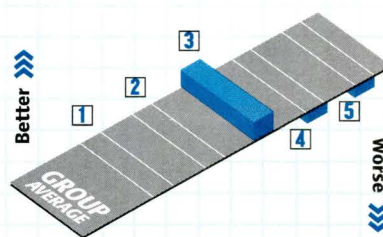


LAB REPORT

Continuous output power exceeds specification by nearly 1dB (2x116W) with peak output nearer 2x150W (8 ohms), 2x250W (4 ohms) and 2x420W (2 ohms), all of which suggests no fear of problem loudspeakers. Residual noise is a little higher than some amps in this group at about -97dB, but hardly worrying, and hum is very low. Distortion is comparatively low too, staying below 0.01% (-80dB) under most conditions and rising to a still modest 0.03% or so at high frequencies.

Frequency response appears to have been deliberately limited, though still within less than 0.5dB across the audio band (-3dB at about 50kHz and 4Hz) – just enough to sweeten bright-sounding CDs in direct comparison with truly flat response amps. The Integrated's preamp section seems to suffer from slightly worsened HF distortion when a speaker is connected to the power outputs, which may explain why bi-amping worked better with the Integrated handling the bass.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> 0%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> 0%
- 3] Distortion >> +15%
- 4] Noise >> -10%
- 5] Compatibility >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	100W	116W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.015%	0.005%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	250mV	240mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%

FEATURES >> 86%

BUILD >> 89%

VALUE >> 90%

In bi-amp or pre/power mode, this combination offers good, honest performance with little to carp over. As a matter of taste some may prefer more character, but in truth all hi-fi virtues are here in plenty and sound is very fine all round.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **89%**

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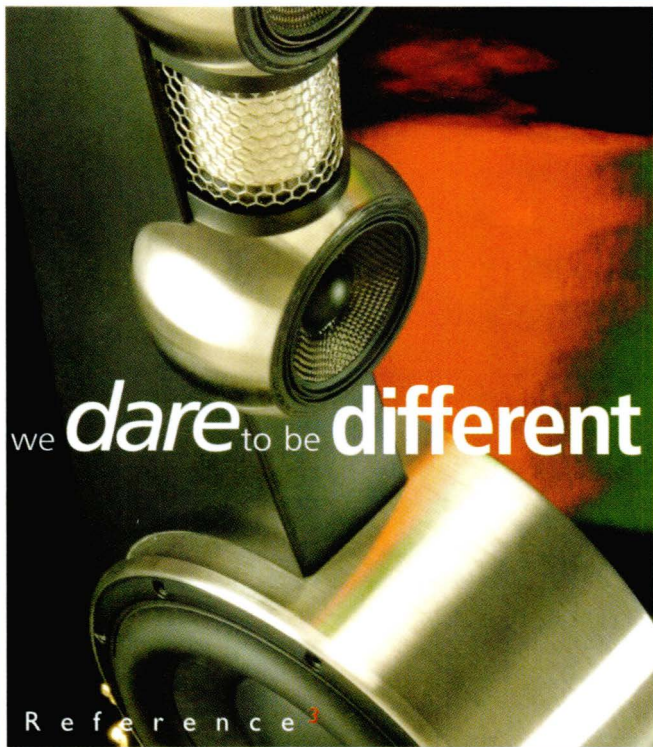
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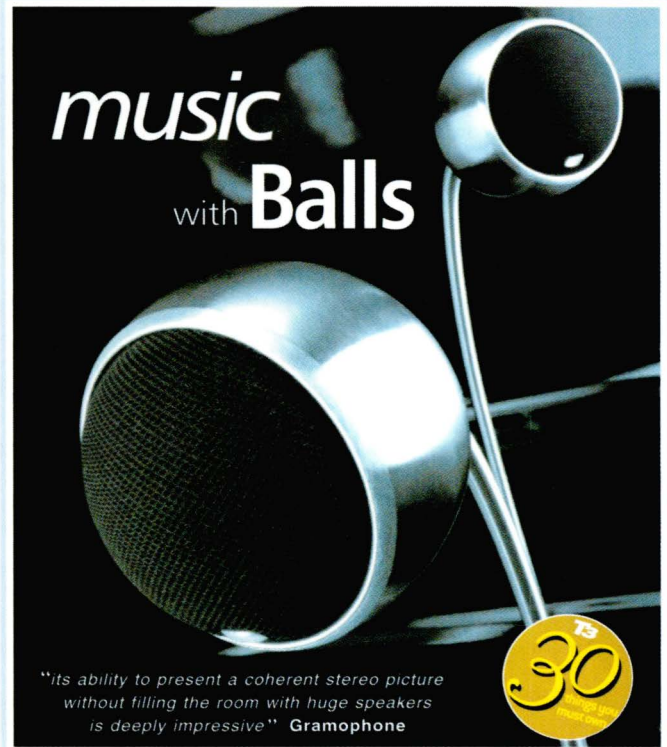
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NAD C162/C272

Can a low-cost pre/power pairing outperform a good integrated?

Brands new from NAD, though descended in evolutionary line from previous products, these units considerably undercut the other pairings in this group for price. Built in the Far East and with obvious cost savings in the cosmetics department – plastic knobs, paper-thin casework – they could still plausibly contain some pretty serious circuitry. The feature count is high, with phono inputs (both types), gain control presets on both units, two tape loops and defeatable tone controls.

Inside the units, there are plenty of commercial-grade components but also some more upmarket touches, not least the relays used for signal switching in the C162. Solid-state switches would have been cheaper, but relays have advantages, and the motorised volume control is another nice touch. There are also six enclosed amplifier modules, NAD appearing to take a leaf out of Marantz's book here. A couple of the same modules turn up in the power amp, in the company of a large number of power transistors and a toroidal transformer slightly smaller than one might expect to see in a more upmarket amp of similar rating.

It's no surprise that the preamp can be operated via a remote, but the power amp also has a few control features. It can be switched to and from standby via a wired remote link, and can also be set to wake up when it detects an audio signal, switching off again in environmentally-friendly fashion after five minutes. It includes NAD's trademark 'soft clipping' and is bridgeable, that is if you've really got a use for around 1kW of peak power!

SOUND QUALITY

Heard blind in the company of amps costing twice (and more) as much as this, the NADs were found slightly underwhelming. All the



same, their performance was thought not without merit. The midrange scored best, being described as "sweet" and "detailed" on some occasions, though also a little prominent at times. The main weaknesses were felt to be a lack of bass weight and impact, and some confusion in complex musical passages which gave a sense of dynamic compression at big climaxes.

Ultimately, much of this seems to come down to the question of control. Simple music fares well and benefits from a pleasingly natural decay and good detail, so if your tastes run to voice and guitar ballads, for instance, you'll hear them clearly and involuntarily through these units. Larger canvases, however, find the amps slightly losing their grip on things and the sound becomes a touch 'splasy' and less clearly defined. Hence the lack of bass, for instance – actually, solo double bass is just fine but most often low bass is an accompaniment to other instruments and in such circumstances it seems to duck out and lose clarity and rhythmic impetus.

Separating the units suggested that they must share responsibility for this. Still, their basic sonic character is neutral and if they are less revealing than the best integrated amps at the price, bear in mind that the C272 is considerably more powerful than most of those. With its thoughtful inclusion of a level control, it could be a very useful amp for driving the bass in a bi-amped (or even active) system, given careful set-up, partnering an upmarket integrated amp. It's a lot of watts per pound, and they're not bad watts! **HFC**

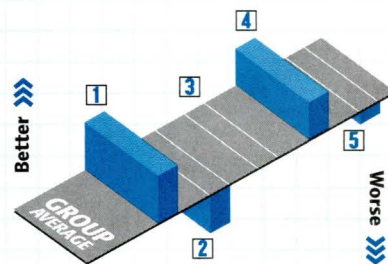


LAB REPORT

The power output really is quite impressive, far exceeding the rating and offering up to 2x300W (8 ohms), 2x550W (4 ohms) and 2x840W (2 ohms) on very short peaks, though sustained power into low impedances falls some way short due to the limitations of the power transformer – which, by the way, buzzes alarmingly under high power conditions. Distortion is kept very low, barely exceeding 0.01% even at high frequencies, but harmonics of the 50Hz frequency rise rapidly with output level, reaching potentially audible levels at middling outputs.

Noise is exceptionally low, broadband levels being well below the CD background at around -106dB, though this is somewhat undermined by some mild hum. The phono stage is also quiet, especially on the MC setting, though its subjective performance disappointed. Bandwidth is fine, with -1dB at around 6Hz and 70kHz, and output impedance low and even across the band.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> +40%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> -30%
- 3] Distortion >> 0%
- 4] Noise >> +30%
- 5] Compatibility >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	150W	210W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.02%	0.007%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	400mV	300mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 75%

FEATURES >> 88%

BUILD >> 78%

VALUE >> 87%

These amps are great for anyone who wants to listen really, really loud a lot of the time. For those who value subtler qualities, performance can be bettered by a good upmarket integrated amp. Well featured and practical, though.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **81%**



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PRIMARE PRE30/A30.2

A Swedish pre/power pairing that sounds as good as it looks

Like it or loathe it, there's no denying the Scandinavian sense of style. But the most superficial examination of these super-smart Swedish units will soon show that their beauty is more than skin deep. The thick front panels and unusually substantial casework enclose similarly generous transformers and, in the case of the power amp, heatsinks. In fact the whole fit and finish suggests a higher price than that asked, with commensurate luxury in the operating feel too – solid and well-balanced controls. The remote control, included in the basic price, might seem a bit of a let-down but Primare offers an added-cost (£120) remote whose metal body and high-quality switches match up to the basic units.

The specifications are good too. The preamp has seven inputs, all line level, of which two are balanced, and outputs are also available as balanced or unbalanced. Level control is achieved electronically, in slightly uneven but quite fine (around 0.5dB) steps, and with a few extra remote button pushes you can also adjust balance. Additionally, sensitivity is adjustable for each input to compensate for source components with non-standard levels.

The power amp also has balanced and unbalanced inputs, plus a trigger input for remote on/off switching. Internally it is fully dual-mono, channels sharing nothing beyond the mains switch – this hidden under a front corner, since the amps are expected to be left in standby rather than switched off. Its 120-watt rating is achieved via two pairs of output transistors and one large toroidal transformer per channel, with output appearing on large multiway binding posts.

SOUND QUALITY

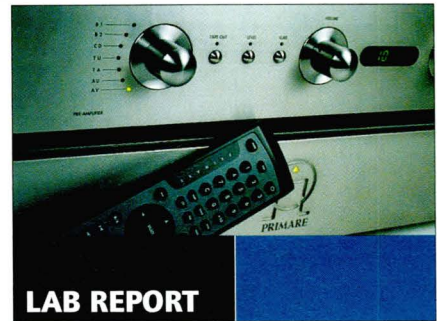
Sighted, one might readily feel well-disposed to such an attractively presented pair before listening begins, but our blind listening panel



had no such predisposition – and still voted it the star of the day. In the company of several talented models it didn't quite blow the others into the weeds, nor indeed render any of them unlistenable by comparison, but it still came at least equal first in each listener's estimation.

Specifically, it was praised for its bass (weighty and solid but not overemphasised), image depth, detail, atmosphere, coherence and separation of instrumental lines. At all times, it seems, and across a broad spectrum of musical styles, this Primare combination achieves a highly natural sound that's full of both life and information, which makes it exceptionally listenable in the long and the short term and makes for plenty of those 'Hey, I didn't know that sound was on that recording!' moments.

Perhaps the most extreme hard-partying enthusiasts of contemporary club sounds might find it a bit tame, though even they would have to concede that there's plenty of ass-kickin' bass around – lovers of almost any other genre, from rock through to classical, will love its ability to bring a recording to life and coax the most information from it. In absolute terms, the sound may be just a touch on the cuddly side of neutral, but surely that is preferable to the sterility that too often accompanies strict tonal accuracy, at least in affordable amps. Only models considerably higher in price than these can exceed their combination of fluidity, detail and naturalness. That, plus superb build and looks, and plentiful power, make recommendation a real pleasure. **HFC**

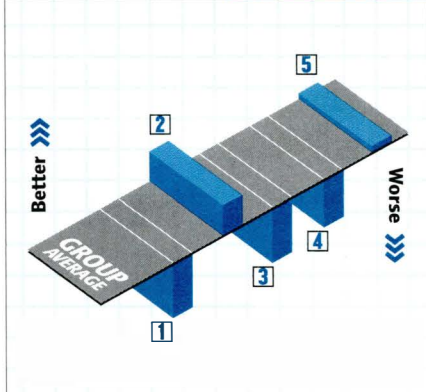


LAB REPORT

Rated power of 2x120W is comfortably achieved (2x128W) but unusually there's essentially no dynamic headroom at all, peak power being the same as continuous. The same is true into 4 ohms, with 2x256W available: into 2 ohms there's a very small drop to 2x480W peak (less continuous). This excellent power reserve, coupled with a low output impedance (high damping factor) means that few conventional speakers will ever cause the A30.2 any stress.

The PRE30 has plenty of spare gain and, like the A30.2 power amp, a very wide bandwidth, less than 1dB down a good two octaves either side of the basic audio band. However, there's a little distortion, just above 0.1% at typical peak levels, and low harmonics but perhaps just enough to colour the sound, not unpleasantly. Noise is on the high side by the standards of the group, at about -93dB just above the noise floor of a good CD. It's an intriguing thought that improving this area could better the already very fine sound.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> -45%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> +25%
- 3] Distortion >> -45%
- 4] Noise >> -40%
- 5] Compatibility >> +5%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	120W	128W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.08%	0.14%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	150mV	100mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%

FEATURES >> 87%

BUILD >> 92%

VALUE >> 90%

Beautifully made and with sound to match, this seems to offer an unbeatable mix of performance and features. Two caveats: the unusual depth needs suitably large shelves, and the resonant casework can benefit from some damping.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **90%**



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QUAD 99 PRE/909

Distinctive Quad pre/power proves an engaging combination

It's quite an achievement for a manufacturer to keep a distinct evolutionary line through more than three decades of amplifiers, but Quad has arguably done just that. Most certainly, these amps retain some classic Quad characteristics, not least their refusal to adopt industry norms for size and shape. And after all, why bother? Form follows function here quite naturally, and the units are big enough to do their job and no bigger. Few users would choose to try stacking them and if the power amp's to be sited out of the way it might as well be a compact shape like this.

Construction of both units is based on metal castings, the preamp being an 'upside down' construction as used by Cyrus where the 'lid' is actually the base and the circuit board is fixed to the top surface. The power amp case is a clever clamshell, held together by heatsink brackets so that the whole case becomes the heatsink, avoiding at a stroke the need for ventilation slots and keeping dust at bay most effectively.

In addition to the usual phono connections, both units feature Quad's 'Amp-bus' connection system which uses a ribbon cable attached to computer-style D-connectors to link pre and power amps with Quad's own tuner and CD player. Neat and sensible, though cable fetishists will no doubt prefer to give it a wide berth.

Quad is one of the few manufacturers which is still including a phono stage as standard on its preamp, switchable (via the remote, even!) between MC and MM sensitivity. You also get tone controls, following the classic Quad 'tilt' alignment but now adjusted by using the pushbuttons on the fascia or the remote. It's fiddlier than old-fashioned rotary controls but still useful. The only real criticism of its operation is that the volume steps are a bit on the coarse side.



SOUND QUALITY

Quad's 'current dumping' circuits haven't always had a good press. However, it seems clear that the circuit, while the same in essence as of old, has been refined and improved over the years and the result is a good, strong, meaty sound. All our panellists liked the bass, praising its extension, weight, presence and tunefulness, although there were a couple of warning notes about its speed (bass 'speed' is a bit of a contradiction in terms but the way the bass integrates with the rest of the range can make it seem to lag at higher frequencies). The amps' "sense of occasion" was also a strong point, one listener commented, and indeed the sound is at its best with forthright, upfront music.

There's subtlety too, when needed, but there's a slight lack of finer details at times compared with the best of this group. This manifests as a less clearly defined separation – spatially and tonally – of different instruments and ensembles and less of that hear-through quality that some of the very best hi-fi can offer. Nevertheless, it's perfectly possible to follow the various lines in counterpoint and imaging, while a little less clear front-to-back than some, is solid and (importantly) stable.

In longer-term listening these amps scored particularly well for absence of listener fatigue and lack of superimposed character, and they also made quite an impression with 'powerhouse' music where the plentiful watts on tap were delivered cleanly and with authority. Memories of slightly lacklustre Quads of some years past have been well laid to rest! **HFC**

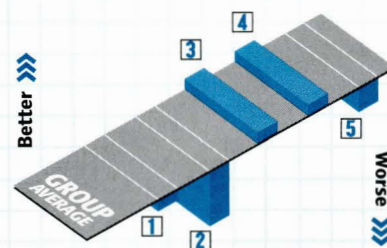


LAB REPORT

Quad's rated output power (2x140W) is met almost exactly, while peak power into 8 ohms is fairly generous at 2x170W and into 4 ohms impressive at 2x300W. However, limited current delivery cuts the 2 ohm figure to 250W, suggesting that really awkward speakers may not match ideally, at least for loud listening. Bandwidth has been deliberately mildly curtailed and the 909's -1dB limits of 7Hz and 28kHz may just be audible in direct comparisons with wideband amps. A low output impedance should however ensure good control of speakers.

The preamp has a slightly wider bandwidth via line inputs, narrower (though still good) via phono – the phono stage is quiet and generally open-sounding too. Distortion peaks at about 0.03% at high frequencies and high power, but is generally below 0.01%. At medium power there are some higher harmonics present which may just have a hand in the slight lack of detail noted.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> -10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> -45%
- 3] Distortion >> +10%
- 4] Noise >> +10%
- 5] Compatibility >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	140W	136W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.01%	0.008%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	775mV	750mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 89%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 89%



Quad hi-fi has never been about showing off. Instead, it claims to offer good, clear and dependable musical performance. This combination can be said to succeed in those terms and is moreover very good value for money.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **87%**

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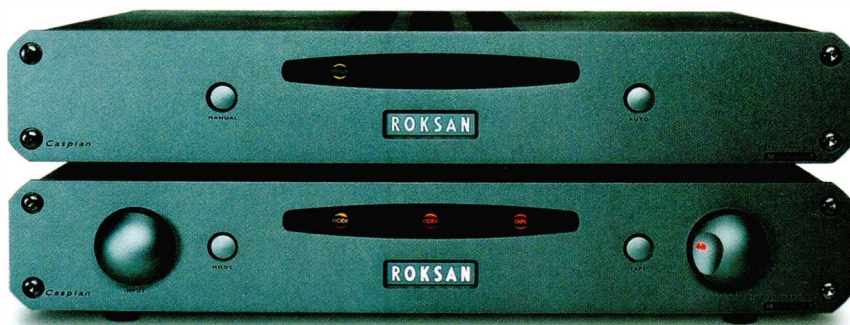


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ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES

We love the £1,000 integrated, so how does the pre/power fair?

These similar-looking units – not quite identical, there being a few minor differences in casework – share quite a few internal components too. In fact, the preamp caused a serious double-take once its lid was removed: huge mains transformer, big heatsink, power transistors – is this an integrated amp? No, it's a preamp all right and those 'power transistors' are actually regulators. It's abundantly clear, then, that power starvation is not going to be an issue with this small-signal device, not by a factor of several hundred...

The actual amplifying is done by discrete transistors, with input switching handled by relays, while the volume control is a motorised device. There are six inputs, tape output and a generous three main outputs to allow, presumably, for gung-ho tri-amping. An unusual button marked 'Mode' serves to bring the preamp out of standby and also to cut output level by 20dB, a useful feature for dealing with momentary interruptions.

Like the pre, the power amp is a very nicely built unit, sharing the same mains transformer and heatsink. It is rendered suitable for multi-room installations by the inclusion of an auto-standby function, switching off when no music is playing and on again when it detects a signal – 'chain out' sockets carry the audio signal to the next amp in line.

SOUND QUALITY

This amp pairing divided the panel's opinion more than any other. Reading the listening notes, however, the overriding impression that comes across is that something subtle and hard to pin down is coming between the music and the listener – there's a lack of communication. Thus during one track one listener complains of slightly lightweight and underpowered bass, while another mentions



nothing about the bass but comments that the scale of the music seems reduced compared with the other amps. Later, the first listener misses some crispness and precision in the sound of a harpsichord while the second this time wonders if bass hasn't been slightly curtailed.

Stereo imaging seemed inconsistent, often a warning sign. Our operatic test track is singularly revealing of imaging, but two panel members felt that these amps noticeably closed down images, especially at climactic moments where many different instrumental and vocal lines combine. By contrast, smaller-scale recordings were felt to be quite open and spacious.

In fact, overall scores from each listener rated this pair quite highly, placing it equal third of the group. Clearly then, such transgressions as it commits are minor, but they are a drawback. Longer term listening undertaken after the panel sessions confirmed that the sound is not always the most involving or musically pellucid.

On the other hand, excitement scores well, with a good many favourable comments on the amps' sense of rhythm and drive. In addition, there's a very confident mood in loud passages which suggests that this could be the combination of choice for rock lovers – despite the apparently lower power ratings of these amps they can deliver a real kick with conviction to match any of the others here. Perhaps not the best all-rounder of the group, but depending on your tastes probably a combination that should at least be carefully auditioned. **HFC**

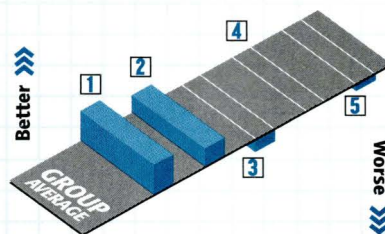


LAB REPORT

Roksan's power rating was not quite met on continuous output, clip being reached at 2x78W (less than half a dB shy), but peak power is considerably more generous at 2x120W (8 ohms), very nearly doubled into 4 ohms and reaching 2x300W into 2 ohms. Taken with the low output impedance and wide bandwidth, within 1dB to over 60kHz and below 5Hz, compatibility with different speakers seems assured.

Distortion is very low if not quite vanishing at lower frequencies (hovering around 0.005% at medium power up to the midband) and rises to about 0.03% at high frequencies, mostly third order. Some higher order distortion which occurs at medium power and midband frequencies may just be significant and could perhaps account for the slight intangibility of the sound. Noise is low at around -99dB, though the noise floor showed evidence of some very high mains hum harmonics, up to the kHz region.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> +25%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> +15%
- 3] Distortion >> -10%
- 4] Noise >> 0%
- 5] Compatibility >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	85W	78W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.003%	0.007%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	250mV	250mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 91%

VALUE >> 85%

This amp pairing is likely to split listeners more than any other here. Lovers of lively sounds may find it their dream combo, while others may be left with the nagging feeling that something's missing. Well worth an audition, though...

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **85%**

CONCLUSIONS

A fine range of contenders prove the continued worth of the two-box approach for the audiophile

This group was both pleasant and awkward to review. Pleasant, because the general standard of the equipment was high and, well, the chance of listening to good music via great kit is what attracted us hi-fi scribes to the job in the first place. Awkward, because the nature of a group test means that in a case like this some really very satisfactory equipment risks being sidelined by other gear that is only a shade better. Note particularly that all the amps turned in a measured performance

that only a decade ago would have been quite remarkable. All the same, it's a tough market and the purchaser prepared to part with a couple of grand for amplification deserves to know that the resulting equipment will be truly top-notch, not merely competent. With that in mind, here's the bottom line: taking everything into consideration, Primare's amps win the race by a nose, offering not just excellent sound but also great looks, convenience, pride of ownership, in short the real high-end

experience, for what in this context looks like a very reasonable £2,400. Exposure's 3010 pair scored very nearly as highly for sound and indeed it's possible that in some systems, with speakers that particularly appreciate bi-amping, they may even outperform the Primares (though there's undeniably a taste element in the comparison too). A significant £600 less expensive, they make a highly commendable alternative. But don't overlook the others. The Quad and Roksan amps were

also well liked both by the panel and in later, sighted listening, while the Arcam combination offers greater sophistication of control and also a notably fine phono stage as compensation (and recall also the hint regarding the cheaper but very similar A90/P90 pairing as an alternative). Finally, NAD's amps may seem a little out of their depth in this company but they still manage to show that there is merit in the idea of separate pre and power amps, even in the budget domain. **HFC**

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MERIDIAN 507 £1,195
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HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ Two-box amps give more cabling options, and many users feel that short speaker cables and long interconnects are the way to go.

⊕ In general, stacking pre and power amps is not a great idea – it somewhat defeats the object of removing signal stages from power

stages and can cause heat problems too.

⊕ Switching equipment on and off frequently should be avoided if at all possible, but it's best to put power amps off (or to standby) at night and when you go out for long periods of time.

PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Arcam FMJ C35/ P30	Exposure 3010 Integrated/ Power	NAD C162/ C272	Primare PRE30/ A30.2	Quad 99 Pre/ 909	Roksan Caspian M Series
PRICE	£2,050	£1,800	£880	£2,400	£1,650	£2,050
SOUND	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
FEATURES	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
BUILD	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
VALUE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
CONCLUSION	Beautifully made and comprehensively featured, but lacks a little in musical communication.	Simple units with various connection options which give highly satisfying sound in all areas.	Lots of power for your money and features aplenty too: good value, if not a real audiophile star performer.	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound, and a really musical performer too.	Well thought out and well executed pre/power with a robust and engaging sound, and just a little veiling.	Confident and thoroughly enjoyable sound with lively music, but perhaps a little less sure with subtler scores.
KEY FEATURES						
LINE INPUTS	7	6	6	7	5	6
TAPE LOOPS	2	1	2	1	1	1
PHONO STAGE	Yes (MM/MC)	Optional	Yes (MM/MC)	No	Yes (MM/MC)	No
REMOTE CONTROL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BALANCED CONNECTION	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
POWER	105W G	116W G	210W E	128W G	136W G	78W G
DYNAMIC POWER	140W G	150W G	300W E	128W G	170W G	120W G
CURRENT	25A G	26A G	41A E	28A E	17A G	22A G
DISTORTION	0.006-0.01% E	0.005-0.02% G	0.007-0.014% E	0.14-0.17% A	0.008-0.012% E	0.005-0.03% G
NOISE	-98dB G	-97dB G	-106dB E	-93dB G	-101dB E	-99dB G

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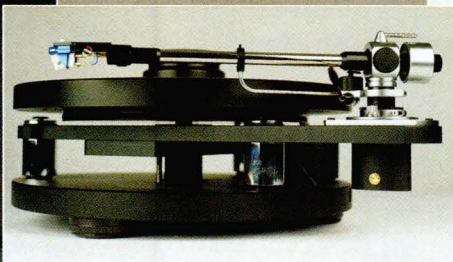
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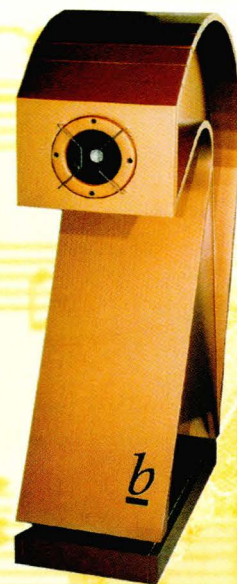
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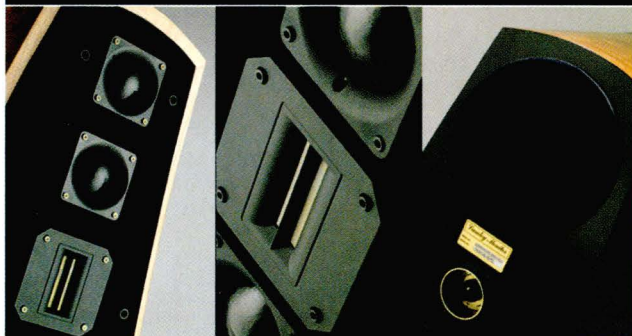


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RETRO

THORENS TD125 TURNTABLE



The history of turntables is hotly contested, but speak to some and you might think that the quality end of the market was invented in Glasgow or Southend. In fact, the folk at Garrard in Swindon

had much more to do with popularising stand-alone turntables with designs like the 301/401 and the once ubiquitous SP-25. But probably the most influential quality antecedent came from a Swiss light engineering company by the name of Thorens. When launched in 1968, the company's TD125 was one of the first recognisably modern turntables to incorporate most of the features of the generation of turntables to come, including the Linn Sondek LP12 which was introduced five years later.

Although the flagship of the Thorens range, the TD125 was a based on key components of a much simpler, lower cost model, the TD150. Both were three-point, freely floating suspended designs using coil spring suspension units, with the massive (3kg) die-cast outer platter driven by flat belt drive to a flat surface around the rim of the inner platter. In its early incarnations, the TD125 used the same inner and outer platters and bearing shaft as the cheaper TD150. Later production switched to a 10mm solid steel bearing with a conical tip which ran on a thrust pad at the bottom of the bearing well – an arrangement subsequently perpetuated in the Linn player. There were changes in the design of the bearing housing, and the materials from which it was made. These points aside, the TD125 was a much a much better engineered and more solidly constructed unit than the TD150. Fitted with the TP25 arm, the Thorens was a purist design, completely manual in operation and available in various guises. It could be purchased as a chassis without or with arm, in which case it was sometimes matched to the SME 2000 plinth system.

The TD125 always felt a little special to handle, thanks in part to its luxury build and the sliding rectangular controls. It featured its own onboard power supply and a mains independent speed control powered by a Wien bridge. This oscillator defined the three running speeds of the 16-pole synchronous motor, which included 16rpm, and a fine speed adjustment facility. A visual

“If it hadn’t been for the Linn LP12, the Thorens would probably have been the prototype for the turntable boom.”

speed readout from a neon lit stroboscope was reflected to a small observation window from under the inner platter.

In 1972, the model designation was incremented to MkII, and the player acquired a new more sophisticated arm, the TP16, which is the one you will normally see these days. A well engineered design with four-point gimbal bearing, it had magnetic anti-skating and a detachable magnesium headshell. Shure V15s and various Ortofons were common partners at the time, but the player has been coupled to Linn, SME and many others arms, and just about every cartridge under the sun.

Being well specified and built, the players usually remain reliable. Although arm bearings are more likely to have suffered over time than the platter, common spares like drive belts are not difficult to obtain – there are plenty of links on the web – and a used TD125 is potentially a really good buy for anyone in search of a high performance turntable and unwilling to pay the current prices. Like all players with free-floating suspensions, the TD125 is highly prone to footfall interference, and this needs to be considered when finding a place for it to live. The only practical problem aside from this is adjusting the suspension, which was always more of a scramble with the Thorens than with later turntables like the LP12. The TD125 was eventually displaced by the semi-automatic TD126 in the late seventies, with the 16rpm facility re-engineered in favour of 78rpm.

If it hadn't been for the LP12, the Thorens would probably have been the prototype for the turntable boom that followed, though Thorens never had anyone with the marketing zeal and an ability to communicate and enthuse comparable to Linn's Ivor Tiefenbrum. But if it wasn't for the TD125, perhaps the LP12 would never have happened. **HFC**

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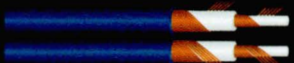
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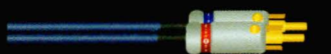


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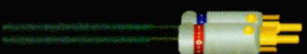


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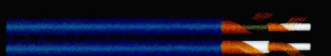


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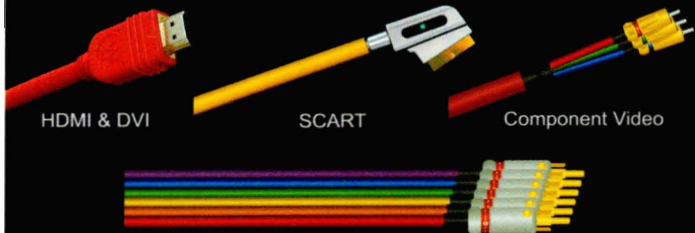


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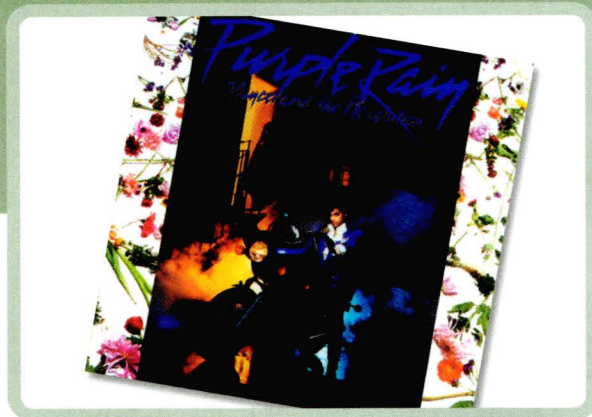


Prince had just turned 26 when *Purple Rain* was released in the US in June 1984. A million copies were sold in two days in America alone, and a staggering 15 million copies world-wide. It reigned for over six months at the top of the American charts. The album's hottest single, *When Doves Cry* sold two million in the blink of an eye and was Warners' fastest selling ever!

An amalgam of pop, rock, country, soul, blues and funk, *Purple Rain* was defined by three vital ingredients. Chief among them was Prince's extraordinary guitar technique, played on his customised Schecter 'Cloud' (the one with the facsimile treble clef on top) which covered all the bases: fuzz-tone, hammer-on Zeppelin riffs, Hendrix feedback control, Santana-like endless sustains and more. As grandstanding as his fretwork was, it was framed magnificently by his intelligent and imaginative use of Linn drum machines and other synthesizers and topped off by the keyboard and string arranging skills of Lisa Coleman and Wendy Melvoin, better known as Wendy & Lisa.

Conceived on the 1982-83 *1999* tour as a film/music concept, *Purple Rain* was begun in spring 1983 as a working script entitled *Dreams*. That summer he began assembling the band (The Revolution) that would record the album. He hired a warehouse and a new design team, which came up with the psychedelic/new romantic Hendrix-dandy style that would define his image for the oncoming assault on megastardom.

Wendy debuted on guitar with Prince at an August 1983 Minnesota benefit gig, still rated as one of his greatest ever concerts, and produced three album tracks – *Purple Rain*, *Baby I'm A Star* and *I Would Die 4 U*. Only days later, the controversial ode to public masturbation and kinky sex *Darling Nikki* was recorded by Prince at home. (This is the song that made Tipper Gore campaign for those Parental Advisory stickers on albums deemed salacious or immoral). Then it was into Studio 3 at LA's Sunset Sound to overdub the live tracks. Prince demanded that two 24-track machines were put together so that *Purple Rain* could accommodate a new string section which he, plus Wendy & Lisa, worked up to perfection. The rock/funk workout



“He lost patience with the bass track and angrily erased it. Thus, the bass-free ballad *When Doves Cry* was born.”

Computer Blue was based on one of Prince's jazz musician father's pieces, while the romantic *The Beautiful Ones* was inspired by Wendy's sister Susannah.

So focused was Prince at the time that in October 1983 he insisted on moving his home studio to his rehearsal warehouse and flying in an audience to record the album's opener, *Let's Go Crazy*, live in a single day. Early acetates of the album contain two tracks, *Wednesday* and *Father's Song* which didn't make the final cut. Still working periodically on the soundtrack, Prince worked through to January 1984 filming *Purple Rain* the movie. Vaguely autobiographical, the film's plot charted Prince's struggle to achieve spiritual redemption through his music against the backdrop of a divided and often violent family.

But on 1 March came the epiphany. Prince was in a downer mood because of a protracted break-up with an old girlfriend. In Sunset Sound he put on his Linn LM-1 drum machine, added some bass and synths and a fuzzed-up electric guitar. But then, no doubt unwittingly making a decision that would influence both his own subsequent sound and that of a thousand imitators since, he lost patience with the bass track and angrily erased it. Thus, the bass-free ballad *When Doves Cry* was born. Its single release in May 1984 proved Prince's instincts were on the money as it spent five weeks as the US number one.

Purple Rain came out in June/July in the US/UK to universal acclaim. While critics praised its breadth, imagination and accessibility, the album stayed an astounding 86 weeks in the UK chart. By 1985 he had earned three Grammys for the album but though he would later produce such classics as *Parade* and *Sign 'O' The Times*, Prince would never again scale the genre-defining heights he would reach with this masterpiece. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

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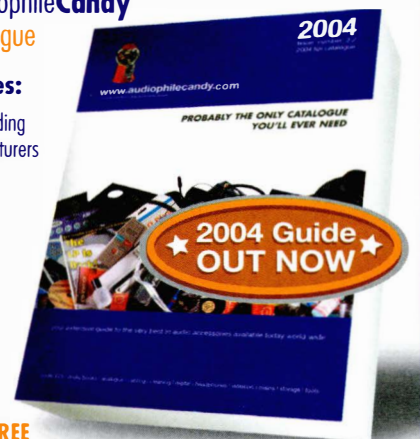
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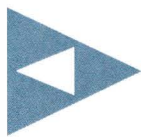
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DIGITALIA

MAKING TIME



Last month's *Digitalia* considered time in the context of jitter. This month we follow that up with a look at a couple of other time-related aspects of digital audio. They aren't obviously related, but they are both frequently-heard and unjust criticisms of digital systems.

First, time resolution. It's often said that in a system like CD which samples the audio every 22 μ s (microseconds), the time resolution is limited to 22 μ s. It's not always clear exactly what is meant by that, though it's intuitively pretty clear what the accusation is getting at – a sonic event that should have started 11 μ s after some sampling point is constrained to start either 11 μ s early or 11 μ s late.

In fact, the time resolution of any digital system is in principle infinite, limited in practice by jitter which is typically several orders of magnitude smaller than the sampling interval. Consider a simple 'click' signal, one single sample which has a large value, surrounded by samples of value 0. It's obvious that this can be easily delayed by exact multiples of the sampling interval, but what's not so obvious is that it can be delayed by a fraction of a sample and still sound exactly the same.

However, that narrow click isn't exactly what comes out of the CD player. As an essential part of turning it to analogue it is filtered so that its spectrum contains no frequencies above half the sampling frequency (i.e. above 22.05kHz). In graphic terms, that rounds off the corners and causes some pre and/or post-ringing. And in fact the identical resulting waveform can be created by an infinite variety of possible arrangements of samples, each one representing a different time offset of the click's position relative to the sampling points.

This brings up the second issue: 'time smearing'. Given the existence of this ringing, can we really speak with any meaning about the 'position' of a click, or any other sonic event?

The honest answer is we can't. What may be more surprising is that we can't really talk about time with true precision even in the analogue domain unless we have an infinite frequency range available. As soon as you restrict the frequency range at all you



“We can't really talk about time with true precision unless we have an infinite frequency range available.”

inevitably introduce ringing and effectively extend, or smear, the duration of the event. A truly perfect filter would have an infinite extent of ringing and thus make the whole concept of 'when' an event happens ultimately meaningless.

What's more important, of course, is whether this matters in practice. That's rather a hard point to address directly, so let's go round the houses a little. First, if you take a signal that is already band-limited and pass it through a perfect filter (let's assume for the moment that our filters don't introduce incidental distortions, noise and so on) with the same or greater passband, you won't alter it at all. In other words, signals inside the passband are *not* time smeared. This is easily demonstrable by computer simulation. The implication of that is that it's only the first time you band-limit a signal – i.e. when you record it – that time smearing may be an issue. And then?

Well, given what we just said about time smearing not being an issue within the passband, any smearing must occur at higher frequencies. And if you want to argue that that is audible you must first accept that we can hear higher than 22kHz. Some researchers believe that we can, albeit in a rather limited kind of way. Now if a low-pass filter has a cut-off frequency of, say, 20kHz, its ringing occurs at 20kHz and can be provoked by any transient with energy above that frequency. But real music doesn't have that much energy at that sort of frequency, so the ringing will be at a very low level – and it doesn't seem very likely that it is audible.

Cut-off frequencies within the audio band can produce horribly audible ringing. But in terms of digital audio with sampling rates above 40kHz it doesn't seem very credible that ringing and smearing are very worrying issues. **HFC**

Richard Black

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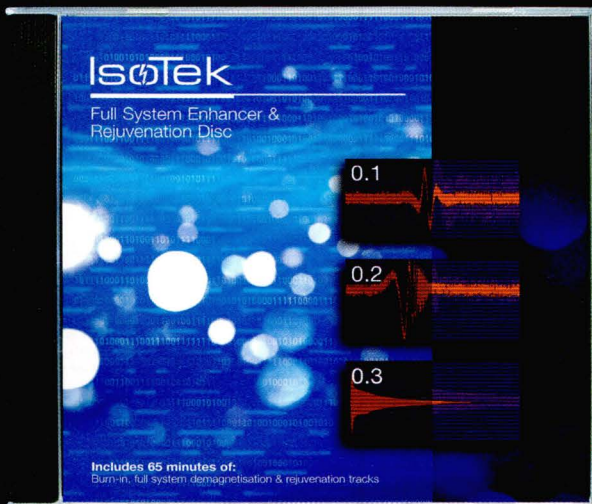
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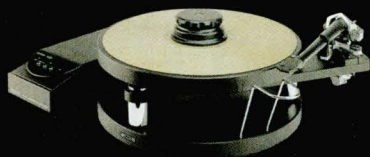
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The ultimate expression of musical realisation. This unique and beautiful Homage creation by Franco Serblin delivers the most thrilling rendition of music we have experienced, and Pinewood is one of the very few dealers in the UK to have a pair on permanent demonstration. An instrument in its own right, the Stradivari Homage makes you a part of the music - and, as one new owner declared: 'It has such a human quality.'

JADIS

A marriage of melody and energy. With their gold, brass and stainless steel finish reflecting their exposed glowing tubes, few amplifiers are more beautiful than Jadis. With their legendary performance and a devoted following, the Jadis line-up now includes the DPL2 preamplifier and DA8 power amplifier, which represent superb value for money.

KRELL

When it comes to solid state amplification, no one does it better than Krell. Take their entry-level KAV-400xi integrated amplifier: slim, neat and rackable, you hardly know it's there - until it starts to perform, and then it has the power to shake the walls, but never loses that wonderful poise and musicality.

SONUS FABER

With its graceful lute shape and swan-neck stand, the Cremona Auditor has won accolades for its appearance and riveting performance. It is our best-selling speaker. If you prefer a floorstander, then it has to be the Cremona, which is capable of effortless scale and dynamics.

UNISON RESEARCH

If you value the immediacy and presence of a beautifully illuminated midrange allied to speed, detail and dynamics, then you should experience the Unison Research S6 integrated amplifier. With 30 Watts of single-ended power, this lovely Italian design will give great insight into your music without costing a fortune.

MARTIN LOGAN

The Clarity is well-named: if you value transparency and the feeling that there is nothing between you and the music, this could be the one you're looking for. Beautifully designed and priced at under £2500, the Clarity is a magical speaker.

The PINEWOOD MUSIC COMPANY

Brian Rivas and Alison Holmes can be contacted at :

Winchester: 01962 776808

Taunton: 01460 54322

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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.

Products that score more than 80 per cent overall are automatically featured in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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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 surround sound using up to six channels, 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



Marantz CD7300 £350

The latest in a long line of highly successful sub-£500 CD players from Marantz is an absolute beauty. Engaging and sonically refined, there's little to touch it at the price.



Arcam DiVA CD93T £950

Few CD players under a grand can match the accomplishment of Arcam's latest beauty. Its sound is neutral but always musical – delicate or vigorous, whatever the disc requires.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000												
BB	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems	●	●	●	●					247
BB	Arcam DIVA CD93T	950	The CD33 may technically be Arcam's ultimate CD player, but it's the little brother that really won our hearts	●	●	●	●					252
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	This elegant little player can hold its own in very elevated company – a budget system will barely do it justice	●	●	●						249
BB	Cyrus CD8	1,000	A truly cracking player, particularly when partnered with the optional PSX-R off-board power supply (£350)	●	●	●						252
	Exposure 2010	600	A smooth and substantial-sounding player, a little lacking in refinement but musical all the same	●	●	●	●					231
	Heart CD6000 OSE LE	750	Valved-up Marantz makes an entertaining and colourful player that will inspire you to listen longer	●	●	●	●		●	●		245
BB	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages	●	●	●	●		●			250
BB	Musical Fidelity X-Ray ³	900	Think of this as an A3.2 CD player in a smaller, cheaper box. Great, earthy CD sound for the money	●	●	●						255
EC	Naim CD5i	825	Taut and rhythmic, Naim's starter CD player will win many fans. A particularly fine partner for the Nait 5i amp				●					252
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, this Rotel generally holds up well		●	●						231
BB	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●		●			248
ABOVE £1,000												
EC	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!	●			●					231
EC	Ayre CX-7 CD player	2,950	Superbly built and natural sounding player that will win you over with its range of capabilities and transparency	●			●		●			251
EC	BAT VK-D5SE CD Player	5,495	Superb valve CD player that is smooth and refined but with real guts that doesn't conform to valve stereotypes	●	●	●			●			251
EC	Copland CDA 822	1,598	Well built and carefully thought out, if you go for the more sophisticated musical forms it is superb value	●	●	●			●			241
	Exposure 3010	1,195	What this player lacks in immediacy and punch is offset by its sparkling sense of occasion and musical tension	●	●	●	●					246
	Exposure XXII	1,395	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening	●	●	●						238
	Hegel CDP2A	1,500	A technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing	●		●			●			252
EC	Krell SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SACD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price	●	●	●	●		●			251
EC	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
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound	●	●	●			●		●	231
EC	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer	●	●	●						238
EC	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●		●			237
	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb	●	●	●			●			238
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
EC	Orelle CD100evo	1,500	Very superior timing, a wide dynamic range, natural sweetness and fine transparency				●					248
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●			226
BB	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed 0and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●		●	244
	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,100	An enjoyably dynamic-sounding player featuring a positively unique choice of digital components		●		●					252
EC	Sony SCD-XA9000ES	2,400	State-of-the-art CD and SACD player with full SACD bass management and i.Link-encrypted digital output	●	●	●	●		●		●	253
EC	Wadia 302	3,995	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits		●	●	●		●		●	253

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **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.



Cyrus CD8/PSX-R £1,350

Taken on its own, Cyrus's CD8 is a highly articulate £1,000 CD player. Add a PSX-R power supply and it really takes off – detailed and dynamic, with musical poise and panache.



Naim CDX2 £2,650

A superb player that mixes rhythm and timing with precision and poise. Add the £2,300 XPS power supply (pictured) to make one of the best CD players in the world.

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 very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio 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 sound benefits that the format specialises in.

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, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



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.

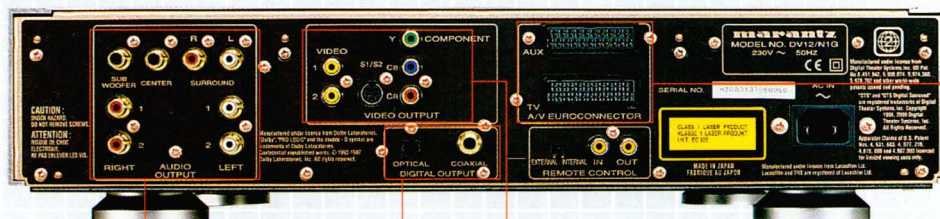
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

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

BEST BUY
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money			●	●		254
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with decent picture quality to match			●	●		237
BEST BUY	Denon DVD-1400	400	Denon's entry point to universal disc playback and a remarkably good one too. Excellent CD replay for a universal player	●	●	●	●		249
BEST BUY	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price	●	●	●	●		248
	Marantz DV6400	500	Good starter universal player with decent CD replay quality, but slightly disappointing SACD performance	●	●	●	●		254
BEST BUY	Pioneer DV-565A	250	Do-it-all 'universal' player is a decent performer with all disc types, and superb value for money considering its range	●	●	●	●		248
BEST BUY	Pioneer DV-668AV	600	HDMI-equipped universal player without i.Link audio output, but still absurdly well equipped and highly capable for the price	●	●	●	●		252
BEST BUY	Pioneer DV-868AVi	1,000	State of the art universal player with next-gen digital outputs – HDMI for video and i.Link for high-resolution audio	●	●	●	●		252
	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs			●	●		237
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA DV89	1,300	No SACD playback, but CD sounds strong, DVD-Audio is highly engaging and video performance is excellent too	●		●	●		248
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Arcam FMJ DV27A	1,900	Very accomplished, clean sounding player with CD, DVD and DVD-Audio alike. Picture quality is equally top-notch	●		●	●		246
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs			●	●		238
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Denon DVD-A11	1,700	Refinement and clarity are hallmarks of this player, which is also as close to being future-proof as they come	●		●	●		250
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●		●	●		230
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Marantz DV-12S2	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles, with top-notch video playback too. Sonically refined and enjoyably understated	●		●	●		255
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●		●	●	●	230
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Primare DVD30	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles – no wideband digital outputs but masterful with music and a good picture too	●	●	●	●		253

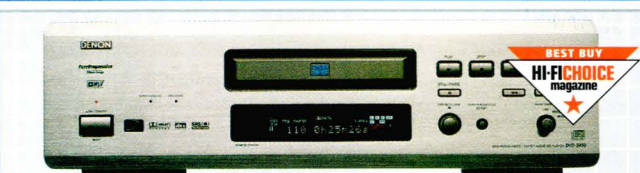
SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes.
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL 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



Pioneer DV-565A £250

A universal player with respectable performance across all formats, at a remarkable price.



Denon DVD-2900 £850

A universal player that's good with CD and great with DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD alike.



Pioneer DV-868AVi £1,000

Pioneer's HDMI/i.Link-equipped universal flagship packs an amazing hi-tech punch.



Denon DVD-A11 £1,700

A superb universal player, made even better with i.Link/Denon Link/DVI digital outputs.

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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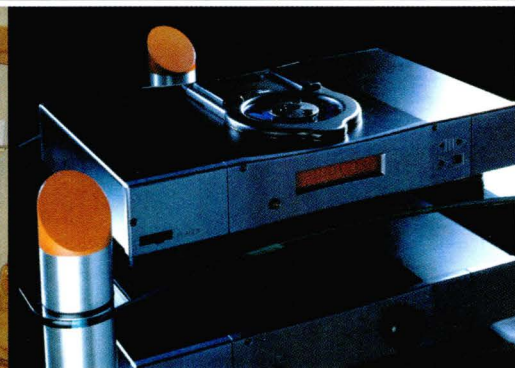
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"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see 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".

One 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, you'll be living with your new system

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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.

OUR 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 2043

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High St. 01233 624441
Chemsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245
East Grinstead
AUDIO DESIGNS
26 High St. 01342 314569
Horsham AUDIO DESIGNS
7-9 Park Place
01403 252255

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick
020 8943 3530
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
Southampton PHASE 3 HI-FI
37 Bedford Place
023 8022 8434
Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI
213-217 Tarring Road
01903 708810

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
3 Church Lane
01295 272158
Birmingham SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499
Coventry Frank Harvey
163 Spon Street
024 7652 5200
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
429-431 Lisburn 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



Pro-Ject
 1 Xpression £210

The latest model from Czech turntable specialist Pro-Ject is remarkable value for money – an Ortofon OM10 cartridge and carbon fibre arm are included in the price.



Roksan
 Radius 5 £850

A beautiful mid-price turntable with an impressively well-sorted sound from low bass to high treble. Price includes matching Nima tonearm.



Avid
 Diva £1,100

Superbly well engineered for the money, Avid's entry-level deck spins a highly involving musical message – solid, powerful and detailed.



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.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45				247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
	Clearaudio Emotion	655	An engaging turntable offering plenty of audiophile credibility for the money (price includes arm and cartridge)	33/45				251
	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45				223
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Goldring GR1	140	The best value 'Rega' yet and a new benchmark for budget turntables. Vinyl nirvana on a shoestring	33/45				252
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45				239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham Analogue Horizon	529	A fluid midrange and nimble but rich bass are two of the many attributes of this bargain deck (price inc RB250 arm)	33/45				253
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45				248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45				214
	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45				239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1 000 tonearm	33/45				228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation	33/45				248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45				246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45				195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78				186

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms				235
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss				235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape				242
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality				215
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it				223
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300				192
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage				244
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money				253

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
	Musical Fidelity X-LPSV3	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved					248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money					245
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!					234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.

SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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Home cinema
Pioneer, Sony,
Yamaha, Denon,
Marantz, NAD
and more

NAD C521BEE CD player

Brilliant, budget, audiophile CD player by hi-fi guru, Byorn Erik Edvardson. Black or silver finish.

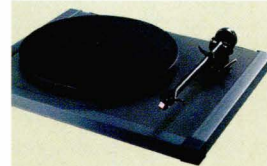
£169.95 (Was £199.95, Save £30)



Acoustic Energy Aego 2 2.1 speaker system

Compact, high quality stereo system. Ideal for terrific computer sound or use with portable audio players.

£99.95 (Was £299.95, Save £200)



Goldring GR1 turntable

'Best Buy' HiFi Choice, 'Five Stars' What HiFi. Quality vinyl performance at a bargain price, including delivery.

£129.95

Project Debut II turntable

Top-selling turntable range. Supplied with Ortofon cartridge. Many finishes. Available from

£119.95



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Sennheiser HD600 Avantgarde headphones

Classic reference headphones. Superior comfort and fit with outstanding resolution – the headphone listeners' headphones.

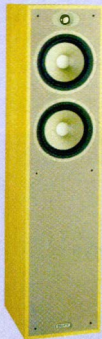
£149.95 (Was £249.95, Save £100)



Tannoy Sensys 2 speakers

Wideband frequency response. Choice of three real-wood finishes. Matching centre and rear speakers also reduced.

£319.95 (Was £499.95, Save £180)



Sony RCDW100 CD copier

Twin CD trays, one-touch 4x speed copies. Headphone monitor socket with volume control. Black or silver.

£189.95 (Was £249.95, Save £60)



Technics STGT350L tuner

FM, MW and LW reception. Presets. Manual tune controls

£54.95 (Was £129.95, Save £75)



Speakers
Acoustic Energy, Kef, Wharfedale, Mission, Tannoy and more

Pure DRX701ES DAB tuner

Black or silver. Remote control. Multi-award winner.

£184.95 (Was £249.95, Save £65)



Sennheiser HD570 Symphony headphones

Comfortable fit, dynamic open-back design.

£54.95 (Was £79.95, Save £25)



Products
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Extensive product specs, useful product guides and full order tracking. Free delivery on all orders to the UK mainland (excluding the Scottish Highlands)

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Superfi

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 for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget AM/FM tuners, with great sound and features.



Cambridge DAB500 £150

A low-cost DAB radio that gets very close to much more expensive digital models.



Rega Radio 3 £374

An excellent sound-first FM/MW tuner – low on features but big on sound.



Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

If you're serious about radio this superb FM tuner is about as good as it gets.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	SCSI NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Cambridge Audio T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,ML	128	●	●	●	●	251
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
	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
	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		●	●	●	221
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
	Pure Digital DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99		●	●	●	234
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	242
	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 disk 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.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Combining hard disk with CD-R makes CD recording a whole lot more flexible.



Imerge S2000 £1,599

Impressively flexible hard disk music server for multi-room applications.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
BEST BUY	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		● ●	243
BEST BUY	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ●	233
BEST BUY	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	205
BEST BUY	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		● ●	243
	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
MD RECORDERS							
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
HDD RECORDERS							
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	● ●	243
BEST BUY	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	● ●	243

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stocks a wide range of Hi-Fi separates, DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma screens, LCD 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 stores 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 store 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.



CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Are you looking to neatly and seamlessly integrate a Home Cinema or Hi-Fi System into your home? Our Custom Installation experts are fully trained in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for lighting control systems, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has the solution.

SAVE UP TO **50%**
OFF ORIGINAL SELLING PRICE

SPECTACULAR OFFERS ONLY ON THE SEVENOAKS WEBSITE

HUNDREDS OF BARGAINS AVAILABLE
FROM OUR 49 STORES NATIONWIDE

SPECIAL BUYS • OVERSTOCKS • EX-DISPLAY • END OF LINE
AND MUCH MORE - ALL FULLY GUARANTEED

log on to www.ssav.com
and click on **Special Offers**

WHY RISK VIRTUAL SHOPPING WHEN
THERE'S A **REAL STORE** NEARBY?



ARCAM EXTENDS DiVA RANGE

Arcam has added two exciting new products to its highly successful DiVA range.

The British designed and manufactured DV79 is an affordable enthusiast level DVD-Audio Player that delivers one of the best pictures in the world along with Arcam's legendary sound quality. It is equipped with an HDMI digital video output for the latest plasmas and projectors plus interlaced and progressive analogue audio (both NTSC and

PAL) for existing displays. Whether playing movies or listening to music, the DV79 will not disappoint.

The 7.1 channel AVR300 home cinema and music receiver will impress even the most discerning listener. This audio performance is matched by a feature set that meets the requirements of today's most demanding A/V enthusiasts

CALL YOUR LOCAL SEVENOAKS STORE FOR A DEMONSTRATION.



Denon AVR3805 7.1 A/V Receiver

The AVR3805 is the replacement for the highly acclaimed '3803. This is a major model change - every element has been examined and upgraded. The '3805 is supplied with a radical new handset - the

RC970. This advanced remote control is fully backlit and features full learning capability and is pre-programmed for most major brands.

FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90

WITH THE AVR3805 DURING JUNE*



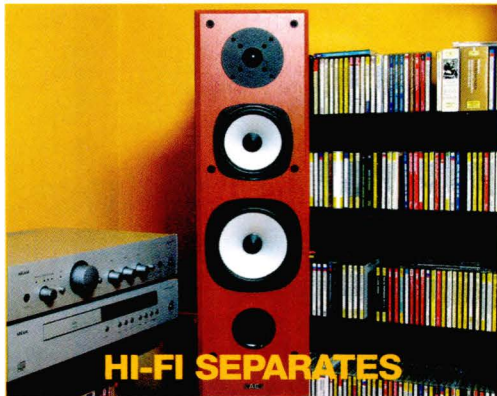
- BEDFORD
- BIRMINGHAM
- BRIGHTON
- BRISTOL
- BROMLEY
- CAMBRIDGE
- CARDIFF
- CHELSEA
- CHELtenham
- CRAWLEY
- CROYDON
- EALING (OPENING SOON)
- EDINBURGH
- EPSOM
- EXETER
- GLASGOW
- GUILDFORD
- HOLBORN
- HULL
- IPSWICH
- KINGSTON
- LEICESTER
- LEEDS
- LINCOLN
- LIVERPOOL
- MAIDSTONE
- MANCHESTER
- NEWCASTLE
- NORWICH
- NOTTINGHAM
- OXFORD
- PETERBOROUGH
- PLYMOUTH
- POOLE
- PRESTON
- READING
- SEVENOAKS
- SHEFFIELD
- SOLIHULL
- SOUTHAMPTON
- SOUTHGATE
- STAINES
- SWINDON
- SWISS COTTAGE
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS
- WATFORD
- WEYBRIDGE
- WITHAM (ESSEX)
- WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

Sevenoaks

SOUND & VISION



HI-FI SEPARATES

Michell Gyro SE Turntable / RB300 Tonearm £1049.95



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
BEST BUY
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES

"The Gyrodec SE sounds great, combining the best sonic characteristics of rivals... Quite simply, the Michell Gyrodec SE is terrific. Nothing compares at this price point - it's well deserving another Best Buy."

CLAIM £50

TOWARDS THE GOLDRING CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*



Pro-ject 1 Xpression Turntable (Black) £209.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy 2003
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES

"Compared with a £200 CD player this deck sounds remarkable: dig out your vinyl and give the Xpression a spin."

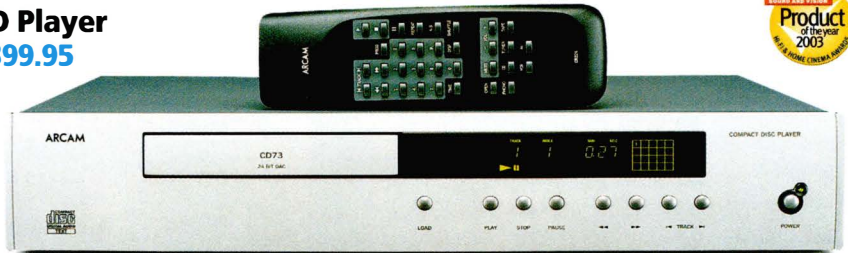
Pro-ject 1 Debut II Turntable (Black) £119.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy 2002
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES
TURNTABLES
UNDER £150



THE PROJECT RANGE
STARTS AT ONLY £119.95

Arcam DiVA CD73T CD Player £399.95



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES

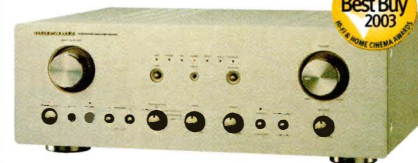
FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN*

NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



Marantz CD5400 CD Player £119.95

SAVE
£30



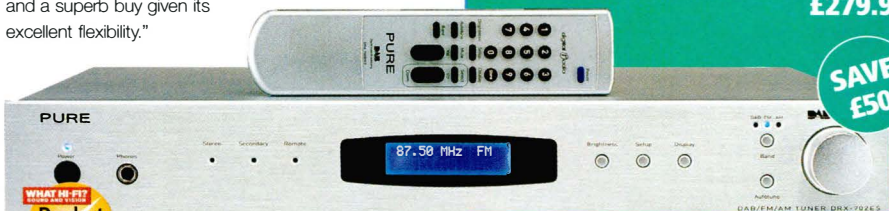
Marantz PM7200 Amplifier £249.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy 2003
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES

SAVE
£80

"This is one of the most powerful amps in its class, at 95w per channel, and it sounds it with anything from dance to a big orchestral work, offering a delicious combination of poise and impact. Stick with fast, dynamic speakers such as B&W DM601 S3s or KEF's equally capable Q1s and the results will amaze."

"So do you buy a digital tuner? Or an analogue one? Now you don't have to pick: just buy Pure Digital's DRX-702ES! Whether on FM or DAB, this tuner sounds superb... The overall balance is powerful, clean and crisp, making this a fine tuner by any standards, and a superb buy given its excellent flexibility."



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES

SAVE
£50

DIGITAL RECORDERS



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW/HD Recorder £449.95

SAVE
£80

"No more wasted CD-Rs: in a stroke of genius, Yamaha had the idea of combining a CD recorder with a hard drive, enabling you to edit your music before burning it to disc. The result was the excellent CDR-HD1000, and the CDR-HD1300E is its younger, cheaper and vastly superior sibling. It's the best home-recording solution currently available."

Pioneer PDR-609 CD-RW Recorder £169.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2002
WITH SOME CENNA PRIZES
RECORDERS
Pioneer PDR 609



DAB RADIO

Pure Digital DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB Tuner £279.95

experience more

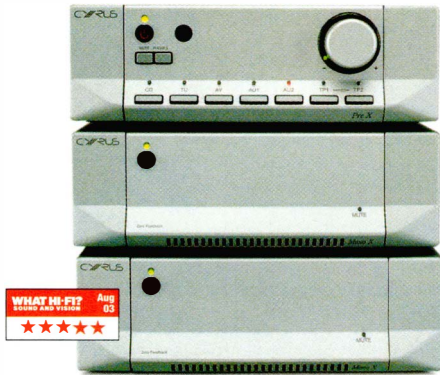
experience more
experience more



Cyrus

Pre X Pre Amplifier £999.95
Mono X Power Amplifier (Each) £1199.95

"This Cyrus pairing isn't cheap but listen to a well-run-in sample and its array of talents is hard to beat. Load your favourite CD into a capable player, turn up the Pre X and the sonic magic will be worth every penny."



WHAT HI-FI? **Aug 03**
★★★★★

NEW

KEF Q4 Speakers £399.95

The Q4 is one of the latest additions to KEF's acclaimed Q Series. At the heart of this floorstander lies the Uni-Q driver array - a 130mm die-cast chassis housing a long throw cone and coincident mounted 19mm aluminium dome HF unit. This driver arrangement makes the speaker much easier to place in the room and alleviates the 'sweet spot' found on 'ordinary' speakers. This has been combined with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet.



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

FREE QED

SPEAKER CABLE
WITH ALL HI-FI SPEAKER PAIRS OVER £299*

WORTH

£60 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £299
£80 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £499
£120 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £999

Mission

780 SE Speakers £349.95

"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable; anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."

WHAT HI-FI? **May 03**
★★★★★



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

B&W

DM602 S3 Speakers £299.95

"These solidly made standmounters perform well across the whole range of musical styles... Add these speakers to your hi-fi system and you're guaranteed magnificent integration between the drivers and an even tonal balance."



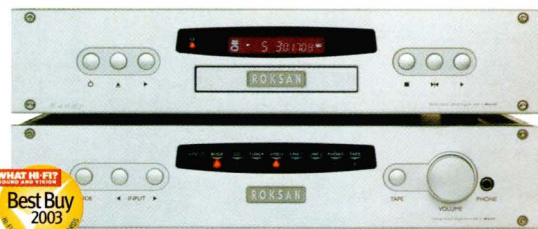
WHAT HI-FI? **Best Buy 2002**
SPEAKERS £701-£950

Roksan Kandy

KD1/III CD Player £594.95

KA1/III Amplifier £594.95

"Timing and rhythm are excellent. DJ Shadow is delivered with clarity and a tight bass, while at the other extreme the treble is sweet and detailed, getting the most from Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The result is a breathtaking Best Buy amplifier that betters its competition with ease." KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER - AWARDS 2003



WHAT HI-FI? **Best Buy 2003**
AMPLIFIERS £400-£600

"The Kandy KD1/III CD player offers a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

WHAT HI-FI? **Disc 03**
★★★★★

MJ Acoustics Reference 100

Subwoofer (Black) £349.95

"You get a high level of detail and the kind of impact most sub-£1000 floorstanders would struggle to match. The verdict's simple: buy with confidence."



WHAT HI-FI? **Best Buy 2003**
SUBWOOFERS £100-£500

FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

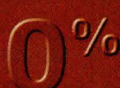
FREE

GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN* NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



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.



FINANCE OPTION*

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock.

*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.

*ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 08/07/04, E&OE.

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



NEW

MUSICAL FIDELITY



Musical Fidelity has unveiled two integrated amplifiers and a CD player as part of its revamped X-series. The 40 wpc, **X-80 (£599.95)** and the 80wpc **X-150**

(£799.95) amplifiers feature a dual-gang analogue volume control and high-output transistors for each channel. The X-150 also includes a high quality phono stage.

The **X-Ray³** CD player (**£899.95**), is the replacement for the legendary X-Ray and uses the same DAC and upsampling principles as the acclaimed Tri-Vista SACD player. From a technical standpoint, the X-Ray³ is equal to some of the most expensive players on the market.

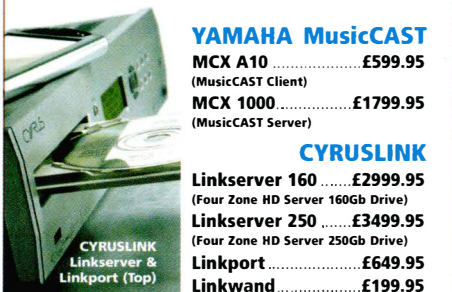


MUSIC ALL AROUND THE HOME

You've heard of hi-fi – now welcome to the world of wi-fi! Wi-fi devices allow you to network a range of devices together – from your music system to your PC – without the wires. For example, a multiroom server like Yamaha's MusicCAST can wirelessly send music to up to five 'client' playback systems dotted around your home. That music could be stored on the MusicCAST server device or other sources – existing hi-fi kit, maybe, or an internet radio station or MP3 files from your PC: plug-in adapters make it easy to wi-fi-enable products.



**YAMAHA'S MusicCAST
MCX-1000 DIGITAL SERVER
& MCX-A10 CLIENT**



YAMAHA MusicCAST
MCX A10£599.95
 (MusicCAST Client)
MCX 1000£1799.95
 (MusicCAST Server)

CYRUSLINK

Linkserver 160£2999.95
 (Four Zone HD Server 160Gb Drive)
Linkserver 250£3499.95
 (Four Zone HD Server 250Gb Drive)
Linkport£649.95
Linkwand£199.95



AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION STORES



COMPACT HI-FI SYSTEMS



Systems Best Buy £1000 plus



Linn Classik Music System (Ex Speakers)

£749.95 When purchased with speakers over £299*
 When purchased on its own £799.95

**SAVE
£100**

"The Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



Denon DM31 UD-M31 CD Receiver

£189.95 When purchased with speakers over £99*
 When purchased on its own £199.95

**SAVE
£40**

"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

OPTIONAL RECORDERS:

DMD-M31 MINIDISC RECORDER • DRR-M31 CASSETTE DECK
 NB - PRICE EXCLUDES SPEAKERS

B&W 704 Speakers

£1399.95

The 704 speakers are part of B&W's new 700 series. These floorstanding, two-and-a-half-way, vented box speakers and are available in a variety of attractive finishes. In a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test the 704 offered "Remarkable openness and clarity that is unrivalled at this price."

FREE QED CABLE WORTH £120*

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION Mar 04 ★★★★★

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.
 *ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER.
 ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 08/07/04, E&OE.

experience more

experience more
experience more



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

Rotel
RCD-02 CD Player
RA-02 Amplifier



Monitor Audio
Bronze B2 Speakers

For this recommended Hi-Fi System we have combined Rotel's highly rated RCD-02 CD player and RA-02 amplifier with Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced Bronze B2 speakers. This package gives a powerful, fresh and vibrant sound. The compact 'B2' speakers, available in a variety of finishes, were awarded 'Best Buy' by What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, with the sound being described as "Superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2's".



The RA-02 amplifier features remote control and a phono input. The RCD-02 (★★★★ - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision - August 2003) is HDCD compatible and includes a digital output for connecting to a digital recorder.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£799.95 | **£129**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 1 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



Arcam
CD73T CD Player
A65 Plus Amplifier

KEF
Q4 Speakers

Arcam and KEF both have an enviable reputation for producing great sounding kit without breaking the bank. This system shows why with a well balanced sound that's both musically involving and enjoyable.

At the front of this package is Arcam's upgradeable CD73T CD player - a What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision 'Product of the Year 2003'. We've coupled this with Arcam's complementary A65 Plus integrated amplifier and KEF's new Q4 floostanding speakers featuring KEF's unique Uni-Q technology for easier room placement.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£999.95 | **£149**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 2 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

Roksan Kandy
KD1/III CD Player
KA1/III Amplifier



Monitor Audio
Silver S6 Speakers



The combination of Roksan's Kandy MK3 CD and amplifier is, according to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, "Something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination" (December 2003). We have partnered these with the Silver S6 floostanding speakers from British

speaker specialists, Monitor Audio. The combination of Roksan's excellent rhythm and timing, with its tight bass and sweet detailed treble coupled with the 'S6's' ability to stay unruffled even when the music is at its most complex, makes this a remarkable system.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£1789.95 | **£300**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS



HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

Sevenoaks

SOUND & VISION



PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores.

However, some products may not be available at all stores. Please call to check availability before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Goldring GR1	£139.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 £50 GOLDRING CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TecnoDec	£599.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut II (Black)	£119.95
Project Debut II (Colours)	£134.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95

TUNERS

Arcam DIVA T61	£199.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII	£99.95
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/AM/FM	£299.95
Marantz ST4000	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£279.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DIVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD82T	£599.95
Arcam DIVA CD93T	£499.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1299.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8	£999.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikemi	£2199.95
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Musical Fidelity X-Ray 99	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308 ^{PM}	£ CALL
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£594.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£169.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW	£449.95

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£ CALL
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1149.95
Cyrus 6	£599.95
Cyrus 8	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X Pre	£999.95
Cyrus Mono X Power	(Each) £1199.95
Denon PMA355	£179.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£574.95
Linn LK85 Power	£544.95

Marantz PM4400	£149.95
Marantz PM7200	£249.95
Musical Fidelity X-80	£599.95
Musical Fidelity X-150	£799.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308	£ CALL
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£594.95
Roksan Caspian M	£999.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£129.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£249.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII (From)	£1699.95
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
B&W 704	£1399.95
B&W 705	£899.95
KEF Q1	£249.95
KEF Q4	£399.95
KEF XQ1	£999.95
Linn Katan	£649.95
Mission m31	£119.95
Mission 780SE	£349.95
Mission 782SE	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£299.95
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£599.95
Monitor Audio Silver S8	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£1499.95
Quad 11L	£379.95
Quad 12L	£499.95
Quad 22L	£894.95
Ruark Epilogue II	£344.95
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£649.95

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£499.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Linn Klassik Music Ex Speakers	£799.95
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Reference 300 Ex Speakers	£449.95
Teac Reference 500 Ex Speakers	£569.95

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Inc SC-M51 Speakers	£499.95
Denon DVD-770SD/AVR-770SD Ex Speakers	£599.95
Jamo DVR50/A305PDD Inc Speakers	£549.95
Jamo DVR50/A355PDD Inc Speakers	£699.95
KEF KIT1000 Inc Speakers	£1199.95
Linn Klassik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£2199.95
Teac Legacy 700/LS-L800 Inc Speakers	£799.95

DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	£599.95	£599.95
Arcam DIVA DV78	£699.95	£699.95
Arcam DIVA DV89	£799.95	£799.95
Arcam DIVA DV79	£999.95	£999.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-1400 Universal	£299.95	£329.95
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A1	£1649.95	£1699.95
Harman Kardon DVD22	£299.95	£299.95
Harman Kardon DVD31	£399.95	£399.95
Pioneer DV360	£69.95	£79.95
Pioneer DV464	£89.95	£99.95
Pioneer DV565A Universal	£149.95	£ CALL
Pioneer DV668Av Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868Avi Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Samsung DVD-HD935	£149.95	£149.95
Toshiba SD330E	£69.95	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S540	£119.95	£119.95

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E55 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E65 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E85 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR3100S DVD-R/RW	£379.95	£399.95
Pioneer DVR5100HS DVD-R/RW	£499.95	£529.95
Toshiba RD-XS30 DVD Recorder	£449.95	£ TBA

AV AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 AV Receiver	£599.95
Arcam AVR300 AV Receiver	£1299.95
Arcam AV8/P7 AV Pre-Processor/Power	£5499.95
Cyrus AV8 AV Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A1SR AV Amplifier	£2199.95
Denon AVR1604 AV Receiver	£229.95
Denon AVR1804 AV Receiver	£299.95
Denon AVR2803 AV Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR3805 AV Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR330 AV Receiver	£599.95
Harman Kardon AVR630 AV Receiver	£999.95
Marantz SR4400 AV Receiver	£269.95
Marantz SR5400 AV Receiver	£349.95
Onkyo TX-SR601E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-NR801E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-C501 AV Receiver	£329.95
Pioneer VSX-D812 AV Receiver	£319.95
Pioneer VSX-AX3i AV Receiver	£649.95
Pioneer VSX-AX5i AV Receiver	£929.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10i AV Amplifier	£2199.95
Rotel RSX1065 AV Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 AV Pre/Power	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 AV Processor	£2294.95
Yamaha DSP-AX640SE AV Amplifier	£299.95
Yamaha DSP-Z9 AV Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V440RDS AV Receiver	£219.95
Yamaha RX-V640RDS AV Receiver	£349.95
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS AV Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2400RDS AV Receiver	£ CALL

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£699.95
Artcooustic Range	£ CALL
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W DM300 AV	£899.95
Castle Compact CC3	£999.95
Energy Take 5.1	£399.95
Energy Encore	£999.95
Infinity TSS750	£499.95
KEF KHT1005 £100 FREE QED CABLE*	£499.95
KEF KHT2005.2 £150 FREE QED CABLE*	£799.95
KEF KHT5005 £200 FREE QED CABLE*	£1199.95
KEF Q7 AV £300 FREE QED CABLE*	£2199.95
M&K K5 £250 FREE QED CABLE*	£1699.95
M&K K3	£1894.95
M&K Xenon 25	£2249.95
M&K 850/CS35/VB50	£3899.95
Mission M30 AV Pack	£449.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 AV	£799.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B4 AV	£949.95
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Sim 2 HT300 Plus DLP (ED)	£5699.95
Sim 2 HT300 Xtra DLP	£7999.95
Sim 2 HT500 Link DLP	£24999.95
ThemeScene H30 Cinema DLP	£1199.95
ThemeScene H50 Cinema DLP (ED)	£1499.95
ThemeScene H56 Cinema DLP	£2299.95
Yamaha DPX-1000 DLP (ED)	£5699.95

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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



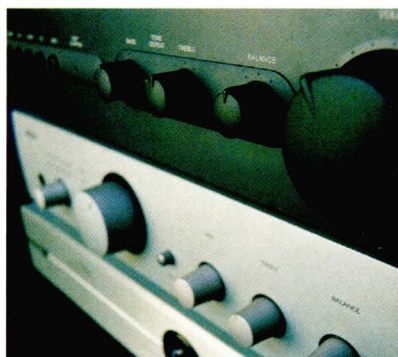
Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so 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 transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; 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



Marantz
PM7200 £330

A true budget belter from Marantz – power and finesse in equal measure, plus the ability to switch between Class A and Class AB operation. Giant killing amps are back!



Rotel
RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is an affordable taste of the high end, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and embarrass a good many more costly amps.



AVI
Lab Series £1,399

This AVI's full name is Lab Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI – a lengthy moniker for such a neat little amp with a hugely accomplished sound.



Exposure
XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

A beautifully natural and dynamic sounding pre/power amp combo – a transistor design with a touch of the valve amp sound.

Our favourite EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	
UP TO £1,000									
EB	Arcam DiVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
EB	Arcam DiVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
	Arcam DiVA A80	600	Arcam's most successful mid-range amp to date – sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6	●	●	●	90	251
EB	Arcam DiVA A90	850	Enhanced replacement for A85, convertible to 7.1 sound with the addition of an add-on module and extra P90 power amps	6	opt	●	●	90	250
EB	Audio Analogue Primo	475	Small, stylish amp with a smooth and beguiling sound. Makes a fine partner for AA's equally compact Primo CD player	5	opt	●		70	255
EB	Cambridge Audio Azur 540A	200	A well built and fully featured amplifier that costs this little should not sound this revealing	6	opt	●	●	50	255
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640A	250	Cambridge has a powerful weapon in the battle for budget amp supremacy, it's a lot of musical entertainment for the money	5	opt	●		65	250
	Cyrus 8	800	Impressive at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
EB	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
	Icon Audio Stereo 40i	900	Stylish and very sharply priced valve amp is a good all-rounder	4				37	254
EB	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features, and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
EC	Marantz PM7200KI	500	Even more refined version of basic amp, with notably improved bass purity	6	●	●	●	95	254
EB	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4		●		55	255
EB	NAD C352	350	Dynamic and musical sounding update on what was already a star product	7		●	●	80	253
EB	Naim Nait 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner	4		●		50	252
EB	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
EB	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,000	Improved mid-range model from Roksan is a fine, expressive amplifier – right at the top of its class	6		●		85	248
EB	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
EB	Rotel RA-1062	595	The pick of this season's crop. Fabulous sound with the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	●	●		95	251
EB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
EB	Thule IA60B SE	895	An amp that's so faithful to the spirit and detail of the source material and costs less than £1,000 is hard to fault	5		●		75	253
ABOVE £1,000									
EB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
EB	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
EB	Audio Note Oto Line SE	1,599	Single-ended valve amp lacks power but sounds remarkably delicate and coherent	5	opt			10	254
EB	Audio Research VSI55	2,895	Superb all-rounder provides the delights of valve amplification without sacrificing convenience	5		●		50	254
EC	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution – effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
EC	Burmester 032	9,100	Bulky, powerful amp sounds delightfully delicate with a lovely natural warmth and superb imaging	5		●		170	252
EB	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85	255
	Hegel H1	1,500	a rich and responsive amp that revels in great music with a warmth that encourages non-stop listening	6		●		120	254
EC	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
EC	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
EC	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	3,999	If you audition one, you will want to be one of the handful of Tri-Vista owners	5	●	●	●	350	239
EB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

Our favourite EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		
UP TO £2,000										
EB	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
EB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●		30	216
	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
ABOVE £2,000										
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●				20	231
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	●	300	241
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
	Conrad-Johnson PV10BL/MV60SE	4,290	Gorgeous valve combo – preamp may seem a bit dated by today's standards, but both still rate as hi-fi classics	●	●	5			55	250

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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ESSE NUMBER
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●		50	254
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●				180	253
	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	●	70	241
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
EC	Halcro dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	●	225	243
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250
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	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4		●		238
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●				125	230
	Naim NAC202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
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
EC	Quad QC-24/II-40	4,007	Big, muscular valve sound that's smooth and easy on the ears, plus solid engineering with good power delivery	●	●	7			40	254
	Russ Andrews SJA1/SJA2	6,250	Timing and detail levels to die for but a tad hard-edged for some. Superb design and build quality	●	●	6		●	50	254
EC	Sugden Masterclass AA	5,600	Yorkshire's finest class A kit. Dynamic and tonally rich, this gives even valve amps a run for their money	●	●	7		●	35	246
EC	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3	●	●	150	242

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies

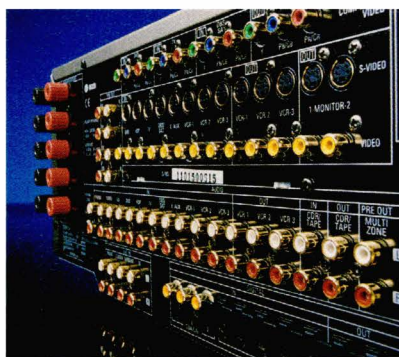


The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or 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



Sony
STR-DB790 £300
It used to be the rule that you had to spend close to a grand to get an AV amp that shines with music. Not any more.



Pioneer
VSA-AX5i £1,200
Trickle-down version of the VSA-AX10i is a superb performer at the price, good with both music and film soundtracks, with the added bonus of i.Link digital connection.



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 top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
	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 AVR-2803	650	Merely 'average' sound but it's impossible to argue against the flexibility and value of its engineering	●	9	●	130	251
	Denon AVC-A1SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11	●	125	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 5550	900	The upgrade to the AVR 5500 comes with features that are actually of some use to the audiophile and a meaty sound to boot	●	9	●	85	240
	Marantz SR9300	2,000	Not a high flyer, just a thoroughly enjoyable, warm and attractive sounding receiver with music and film soundtracks alike	●	8	●	105	252
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	●	3	●	160	255
BB	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	●	100	248
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10i	2,700	Seven channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and eq, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD		11	●	150	229
BB	Sony STR-DB790	300	No six channel amplifier has any right to be able to sound this good at such a ridiculously affordable price	●	7	●	112	251
EC	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs	●	10	●	200	253
	Yamaha RX-V1400	800	Equipped for every occasion, this is a capable receiver with stereo music and better yet with DVD-A/SACD and movie sources	●	9	●	175	251
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
BB	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
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	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 AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
EC	EAD TheaterMaster 8000 Pro	5,200	Arguably the most 'musical' sounding AV procoessor to date – tested with the PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp		9	●		242
BB	Marantz PS-17/2x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	●	60	238
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	8,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
BB	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

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.

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"I have owned a Mark 1 Mini Sub as part of one of my systems since I reviewed it because I felt it made a significant improvement to the sound of a Hi-Fi when compared to that of direct mains. I feel that the GII brings even greater improvements. **Tony Bolton, Hi-Fi News, June 2004**

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- DOLBY PRO LOGIC DPL / DPL II MOVIE, MUSIC
- CUSTOMIZE
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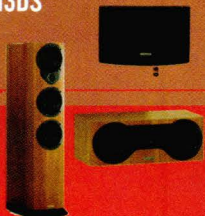
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- AUDIO 2W (MONO) • DIMENSIONS 280W X 85H X 280D MM
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- COLOUR BALANCE ADJUSTMENT
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- HTP PC PLATFORM • DIGITAL TUNER WITH RGB AND PRESETS



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PANA	TX-42PT12	PANA	NV-VP30EBS	PANA	NV-SV12DEBS
PANA	TX-32PS1	PANA	DVD-S75EBS	PANA	DMC-LC40B
PANA	TX-28PS5	PANA	DVD-S35EBS	PANA	NV-HV60EBS
PANA	TX-28DKZ	PANA	DVD-LV65EBS	PANA	NV-HS80
PANA	TX-28DK2	PANA		PANA	DMC-LC5B
PANA	TX-24PS1				

Panasonic

TH-42PW6

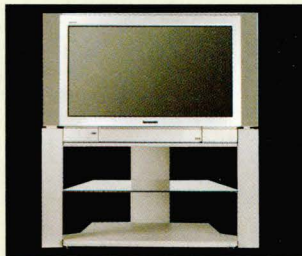
- 42" (106CM) PLASMA DISPLAY • RESOLUTION: 852 X 480 PIXELS • PROGRESSIVE SCAN • PIXEL PITCH: 1.08MM
- COLOURS: 16.7 MILLION COLOURS
- LUMINANCE: 650 CD/M2 • VIEWING ANGLE: 160 DEGREES HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL
- CONTRAST RATIO: 4000:1 • 2 X 8 WATTS
- SCART INPUT • REMOTE CONTROL
- INPUT BOARD • SILVER FINISH
- OPTIONAL PEDESTAL STAND AND WALL BRACKET



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- AUTOMATIC DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION • DOLBY DIGITAL / DOLBY PRO LOGIC / SIMULATED DOLBY NICAM DIGITAL STEREO
- LEFT & RIGHT 10Wx2 • LEFT & RIGHT TWEETERS 10Wx2 • SUBWOOFER 12W • QLINK



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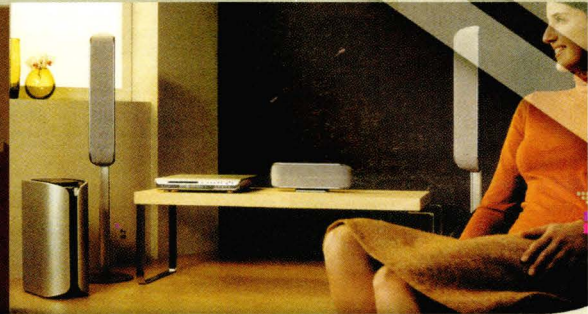
SONY KV-32LS36

- 32" (72CM) VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN • WIDESCREEN 16:9
- VIRTUAL DOLBY • NICAM STEREO SOUND
- AUTO VOLUME ADJUSTMENT
- SMART/ZOOM/4:3/WIDE/14:9 MODE
- AUTO TUNING/AUTO START UP/ONE BUTTON TUNING • AUTO LABELLING/AUTO SORTING
- SMARTLINK FASTEXT • 2 X SCART • 1 X FRONT AV INPUT • CABINET SUPPLIED SILVER COLOUR



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- TOTAL 635W: 100W X 5 + 135W RMS (10% THD)
- DOLBY DIGITAL/DOLBY PROLOGIC 2/DTS 5.1CH RECEIVER!
- RDS TUNER • MP3 CD-R PLAYBACK • COMPONENT VIDEO OUT • SUPER AUDIO CD MULTI-CHANNEL PLAYBACK
- S-MASTER FULL DIGITAL AMPLIFIER
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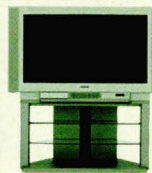
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SONY KV-36F576

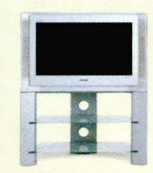
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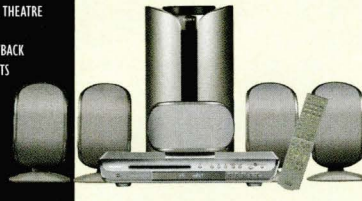


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SONY PRODUCT LISTINGS

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SONY	KV-28LS36	SONY	KE-32TS2E	SONY	OSC-VI
SONY	KP-44PX2	SONY	SLV-D950GS	SONY	OSC-U50
SONY	KLV-17HR	SONY	RDR-GX3	SONY	OSC-U30
SONY	KF-60SX300	SONY	HTP3100		
SONY	KE-50MRI	SONY	DVP-NS999ESM		



DSC-P72



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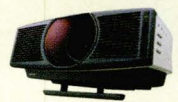
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STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

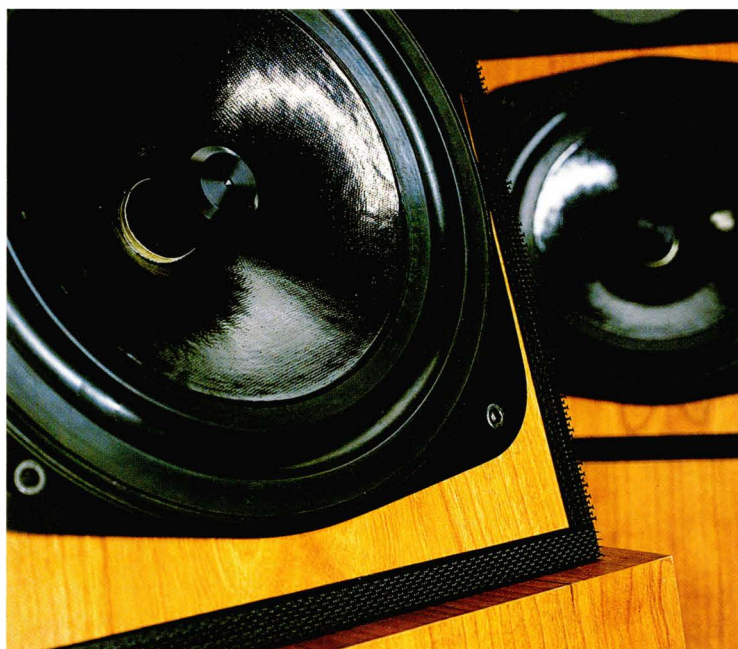
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



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



Tannoy
Sensys DC1 £449
A new dual-concentric main driver plus super-tweeter in a solid standmount box results in a neutral yet expressive speaker at a very tempting price.



Focal-JMLab
Cobalt 816 Sig S £999
One of the best all-round performers around £1,000, combining a lively and dynamic character with an unusually smooth and neutral balance.



B&W
703 £2,000
A hi-tech, three-way floorstander sporting a 'surroundless' midrange driver. Delivers a thoroughly engaging sound with great bass and an expressive midrange.



Living Voice
Avatar OBX-R2 £4,000
Revised in 2003, the top model in Living Voice's Auditorium range is capable of delivering both the music's spirit and also its finest detail.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

■ BEST BUY ■ EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
■	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24	A	30	●		226	
■	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26	A-	55		●	253	
	Avance Dana 670 AV	760	Very pretty slim floorstander is impressively neutral and well balanced, if less than dynamic	15,95,27	●	A	30	●	253	
■	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	
■	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	
	B&W DM309	330	Much of the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●	235	
■	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	
■	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35	●	●	253	
	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	
	Castle Durham 3	399	A ve y attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●	227	
■	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	
■	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	
■	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	
	Dynaudio Audience 52	557	Brilliant neutrality, though a little understated dynamically (wood veneered version, as tested – £647)	20,33,26	A-	30	●		250	
	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	
■	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●		241	
■	Focal-JMLab Chorus 707 S	350	The size and shape might be unfashionable, but this is an outstanding all-round performer at a very sharp price	24,49,30	A	25	●	●	251	
■	Focal-JMLab Chorus 716 S	550	Not the smoothest around, but combines coherent voicing with fine dynamic expression and real authority	22,95,30	●	A	20	●	250	
	Focal-JMLab Chorus 726 S	780	Big generous sound with good dynamic freedom, hampered by some voice-band congestion	22,100,32	●	A+	55	●	253	
■	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816 S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●	242	
	Infinity Kappa 200	600	Notably artful styling. Some coloration, but good punch and drive with real dynamic propulsion and expression	22,37,36	A	25	●		250	
	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	
	KEF Q4	400	Beautiful, bijou three-way floorstander lacks some bass weight but has a lovely midband with low coloration	18,82,25	●	A	38	●	255	
	Mission m35	400	Very good material value – a big speaker with ample bass and a notably open yet also rather bright top end	26,103,37	●	A	23	●	255	
	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	19,35,25	A	42		●	238	
■	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●	255	
	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	
	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	
	Monitor Audio Silver S10	1,000	Timing might be less than the best, but the full balance and fine dynamic range deliver plenty of detail	20,100,27	●	A+	20	●	242	
■	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906	350	Capable and engaging, this neat design will complement the majority of sub-£500-per-component systems	18,85,27	●	A	45	●	254	
	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	
■	PMC DB1	555	Lacks a little weight and authority, but beautifully balanced, free from boxiness, and loads of fun for a tiny	16,29,24	A	50		●	240	

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).

HI-FI CHOICE

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HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers				SPECIFICATIONS						
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Rega Ela	749	Might have more grunt, but few can match its impressive agility, delicacy, and superior musical communication	23,89,30	●	A	28		●	250
	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
	Spendor SR5	1,000	This wall-mount very cleverly avoids the usual colorations, delivering a very dynamic if rather dry sound	31,31,18		A+	50		●	240
	Tannoy Fusion 4	350	This big d'Appolito twin two-way has fine coherence and dynamics. A neutral and even all-rounder	21,97,29	●	A	20	●		255
	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29		A	40		●	245
	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute standmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26		A+			●	227
	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	Has impressive scale and weight with fine stereo imaging, but is also rather laid back, lacking easy agility	21,97,29	●	A	20	●		250
	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	A	20	●		231
	Triangle Antal 202	925	Ugly duckling with the voice of a lark, thanks to its magical midband with plenty of dynamic brio	22,108,30	●	A+	30	●		253
ABOVE £1,000										
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkII	1,690	Luxury miniature has a laid-back but bouncy sound, a marvellous dynamic range and very superior imaging	19,31,25		A-	30	●		251
	Acoustic Energy AE3 MkII	4,490	A beautifully neutral speaker with very wide dynamic range and superior imaging, plus lovely Art Deco styling	19,99,29	●	A	20	●		251
	ATC Active 10	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		act	45	●		221
	ATC SCM35	1,999	If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory, this is a speaker to treasure	23,88,30	●	A-	48	●		250
	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36		act	45	●		240
	ATC SCM50 ASL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		act	38	●		218
	B&O Beolab 5	10,000	Radical, environmentally independent active speaker has exceptional bass, neutrality, and imaging	49,97,49	●	act	<20	●	●	244
	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
	B&W 704	1,400	Sleek and stylish two-and-a-half-way with deep, lively bass, sweet treble, and rather laid-back presence	22,96,32	●	A-	20	●		248
	B&W 703	2,000	Elegant floorstander with excellent bass drive and mid dynamic range, but slightly strong and obvious top end	23,101,36	●	A-	20	●		247
	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Gorgeous standmount sounds delicately transparent and laid back with very superior resolution and imaging	24,42,34		A	30		●	247
	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
	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
	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●		231
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75		A+	80		●	244
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricy compared to some though	21,99,32	●	A+	38	●		229
	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
	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
	Eclipse TD Lulét 307/316	1,250	Extraordinary satellite plus sub solution sounds a cut above other sub/sats. Can be expanded to multichannel	12,16,16		act	40	●		247
	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80	●	A+	180		●	242
	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be	3,500	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		A	50	●		245
	Focal-JMLab Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	●	A+	30	●		255
	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	●	A-	20	●		248
	Graves Audio Korongray	1,999	Fast and very time-coherent, but rather bass-light and aggressive higher up – valve amps preferred	25,109,36		A+	45		●	247
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●		233
	KEF Reference Model 205	4,000	Great looking speaker with a smooth, neutral and slightly 'cool' sound that could be tauter and more exciting	29,116,43	●	A-	20	●		245
	Leema Xen	1,000	A true micro-mini-monitor with remarkable powers of analysis and great musical insight, if a touch forward	14,22,23		A-	50		●	245
	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though the top end is restrained and bass was uneven in our room	22,86,28	●	A-	30	●		247

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Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	CASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	40	●		218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	●	A+	35	●		244
BB	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
	Mirage OM7	2,000	Warm, full and laid back Omni has weak stereo focus but brings the musicians into your room	30,115,16-39	●	A-	25	●		247
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
EC	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
EC	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative, if a little bright	22,38,37		A+	25	●		241
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●		226
	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	18,53,26		A-	40	●		199
BB	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
	PMC OB1	2,450	Genuinely deep bass and lovely overall neutrality, though mid could have more tension and bass more punch	20,103,33	●	A	20	●		243
EC	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
EC	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●		254
	Russ Andrews Quave LS1	2,550	A radical approach to reproducing music that does timing and resolution superbly but is a little unusual tonally	41,93,28	●	A+	60		●	254
EC	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48	●		246
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●		240
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●		215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality - a tour de force	42,126,41	●	A-	23	●		225
EC	Tannoy Yorkminster	9,000	Deliciously delicate and expressive at low listening levels, it still has massive headroom when your in the mood	62x102x45	●	A+	20	●		255
BB	Totem Forest	2,390	Low sensitivity but wonderfully open neutrality, at heart a beautifully communicative and musical loudspeaker	20,90,27	●	A	25	●		247
	Triangle Zays 222	1,295	Wonderful freedom from time-smear gives invigorating and realistic dynamics, but colorations are also obvious	26,116,32	●	A	22	●		242
	Triangle Naia	1,900	Exciting, vivid and communicative, but also a bit untidy and uneven, the Naia is a whole lot of fun	23,119,32	●	A-	25	●		247
	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
EC	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23, 91, 37	Y	A	28	Y	N	254
EC	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
EC	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,37	●	A	20	●		252
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	●	A-	20	●		234

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 floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



KEF
Q AV7 £1,300
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE-OF-DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		●	224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●		241
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		●	210
	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	20		●	210
	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	A	5	25		●	210

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (HZ)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
	REL Strata III	700	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence, this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42, 52, 33	100	20	210
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59, 56, 39	200	16	217
	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	300	30	225
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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

BB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER	
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable		●	●			255
BB	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
BB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●			211
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
BB	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
BB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
	PM Dragon Tails	600	Targeted at valve equipment, but its virtues, including superb imaging, apply to solid-state duties too	●			●		249
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●			211
BB	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
BB	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
BB	van den Hul The Well	65	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
BB	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced				●	E	207
BB	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
BB	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
BB	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●			241
	Chord Company Signature	699	Dynamic, solid sounding cable, but it's bulky and not very tractable	●		●			255
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●			227
EC	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
BB	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
BB	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
BB	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
BB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
BB	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
	QED X-Tube XT400	20	A practical cable with a liking for lively music, but slightly less assured with subtle classical grooves	●		●			248
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	9	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●			203
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
BB	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248

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.

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

□ BEST BUY □ EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
BB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
EC	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250		194
BB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
BB	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
BB	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
BB	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
EC	Sennheiser HD650	299	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
EC	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205

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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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

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	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
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab appearance, but good sound and efficient use of space	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Isoblu 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48,40		4	MDF	247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim Frain	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	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
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Seismic Stand II	1,140	multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	240

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14,5,18	●		3	202
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17,15	●	●	5	220
	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.

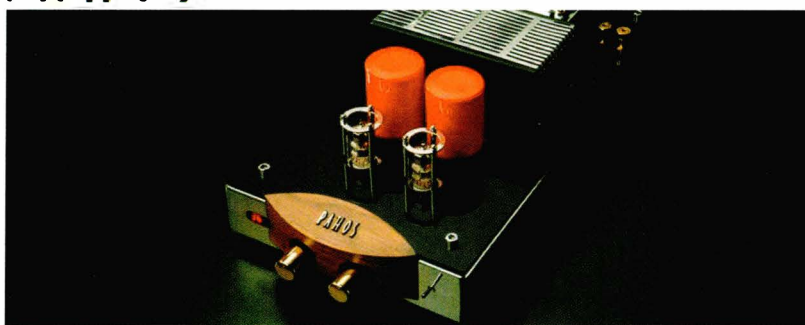
WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

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

PATHOS

'The Classic One is one of the finest amps I have ever heard, of any era, from anywhere. . . ' Sam Tellig, Stereophile



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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

S.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 driver 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 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-AUDIO 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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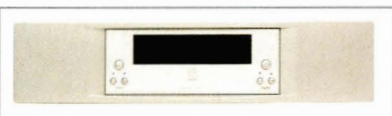
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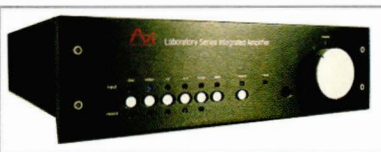
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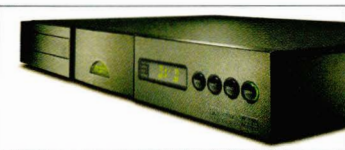


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Arcam FMJ CD33 CD Player	£1299.00
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Linn Kairn Line Preamp S/H (new 1400)	£599.00
Linn Trikan Centre Spkrs (was 549.00)	£349.00
Loewe 24" TV 16:9 High Def (was 999)	£549.00
Loewe Aconda Flat 32" W/S (was 1800)	£899.00
Naim CDS2/XPS S/H (new 6265)	£3690.00
Naim Nait 5 Amplifier (was 845)	£595.00
Naim NAC112 Preamp (was 660)	£495.00
Naim NAP150 Power Amp (was 795)	£625.00
Naim NAPV175 3ch P/Amp (was 1225)	£895.00
Naim NBL Speaker - Beech (was 7700)	£4995.00
Pioneer DV454 Multiplayer (was 149)	£89.00
Pioneer DV656 Multiplayer (was 349)	£239.00
Rega Cursa Preamp S/H (new 459)	£260.00
Rega Maia Power Amp S/H (new 498)	£285.00
Yamaha DVD 530 DVD Player (was 149)	£89.00
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ARCAM 8 amplifier and Arcam 8P power amp, mint cond, £80 each. Also Tannoy M2 speakers, £50. 020 8411 6711 or 020 8352 0653 (London).

ARCAM ALPHA 6 CD player £200. Audiolab 8000A £200. Mission 780 speakers £100. 01227 750821 or 07801 763111 (Kent)

ARCAM CD82 CD player (black) £350. Arcam A85 amp (black) £450. KEF Reference model 1.2 (cherry) £700. All mint cond. Jason 07941 074878 (Maidstone).

ATC SIA-150 amplifier boxed includes manual and remote (see *HFC Buyer's Bible*) gift at £995. Mark Smith 01282 70590 (Lancs)

AUDIOLAB 8000 digital/analogue converter with matching Audiolab 8000 compact disc transport. Mint cond, boxed £800. Charles 01603 891564 (Norwich)

BRYSTON 3BSST power amp. New, boxed, 150W, 20-year transferable warranty. (£1,750) accept £1,450 ono. Steve 020 8360 6606 (London)

BRYSTON 4B SST, 350-watt amplifier £1,490. One year old. Comes with a 20-year parts/labour warranty. 01923 267434 (Watford)

CASTLE HARLECH floorstanders, yew, boxed, vgc. £425. Final isolation support feet (3) £50. 01903 717826 (Sussex)

CASTLE Richmond II teak speakers, full recon by manufacturer £175. Goodmans Module 90 tuner/amp £30. Sony

cassette deck TC1865D £30. Eddie Byrnes 07970 842529 (Chester)

FARADAY TOWER floorstanding speakers with ABR bass units. Low-density concrete cabinets: www.faradaysound.co.uk, £745. 01603 766668 (Norwich) JBL solid wood four-way floorstanders XFI 80. 200 watts, (£1,000) £430. 020 8374 0592 (London).

KEF REFERENCE speakers, 05/3 (mahogany) £900. 104/2 £500. Plus 100 centre speaker £150. Boxed, mint cond. Herbie 01522 808141 (Lincoln)

LINN MAGIK 1, excellent cond, hardly used. Linn interconnects £200. 02392 693686 (Hants)

M&K S85 stereo satellite speakers, built-in optional high-pass filter, £300. M&K MX-70B dual driver active (125W) subwoofer. Black bead finish, £400. Excellent for both stereo and home cinema. Bob 020 8640 2093 (Surrey).

MARANTZ CD63SE CD player, boxed, £75. Blues CDs varied selection £4 each. All items in mint cond. 01278 782622 (Somerset).

MARANTZ CD67SE, PM57 amp, Tannoy Mercury M2 cherry, Apollo Olympus stands. All boxed, unmarked, as new cond £250. Chris 01766 781211 (N Wales)

MINT cond direct cut records original issue. Sheffield Lab, Mobile Fidelity etc. Dennis 01282 813878 (Lancs)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A220 £225. E600 £175. A1 £150. E50

£100. X-cans £75. X-10D £40 Andrew 020 7663 1264 (Romford).

MUSICAL FIDELITY Tri-Vista 21 DAC (No 1236) new, boxed (£1,200) £995. 07879 816151 (Yorkshire).

NAD C320 amplifier, remote, as new, boxed, £140. Yamaha KX-393 tape deck, boxed, black with Dolby NR (S, B/C) bias control, auto tape tuning, timer record/play. As new £95. Mathew 020 8814 1139 (London)

NAKAMICHI DR-1 cassette deck. Semi-Pro, three head, Azimuth tuning control. Perfect working cond. Never used £300. Steve 07973 334623 (W Mids)

QUAD 44 grey phono, mint £250. Quad 405-2 £200. Mike 01758 613790 (N Wales)

ROTEL RA1060 amplifier. Black. One year old. Boxed vgc €500. Matt +0035386 8899111 or email Matt_Hoyle20@hotmail.com (Dublin)

RUARK CLIO speakers, under one year old (£900) £395. Musical Fidelity XLPS phono stage, unused, £85. Audiolab

WANTED

MISSION 773E speakers in cherry. Must be mint cond, South East only. 01323 487640 (Sussex).

8000A amplifier £160. 01661 871010 (North East)

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SONY separates: MDS-JA555ES MiniDisc £400. TCKA6ES tape £300. ST-SA3ES £150. Celestion A3BL speakers £700. Tannoy ST100 tweeters £500. Shaun 01903 266599 (W Sussex)

TANNOY 615 speakers (£750) Albarry PP1 amp (£500). No sensible offer refused. 01706 854176 (Manchester).

TEAC V-6030S Dolby S cassette deck in excellent cond, with remote and manual (£550) £200. Phil 01142 586785 (Sheffield)

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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Wilson Watt / Puppy 3's	£14k	£3500	Hales Revelation 3s	£2500	£1200
Michell Orb	£2350	£1250	Eggleston Works Rosas	£9000	£3500
Michell Gryodec SE / RB300	£1100	£750	Burmester Rondo CD Player	£2000	£900
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Reference 3a I, integrall.	£6000	£2000	Hovland HP100 MC (xdem)	£5750	£3800
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Bose 321 DVD AV System	£1000	£400	Sugden Bijou System (1mth old)	£2850	£2200
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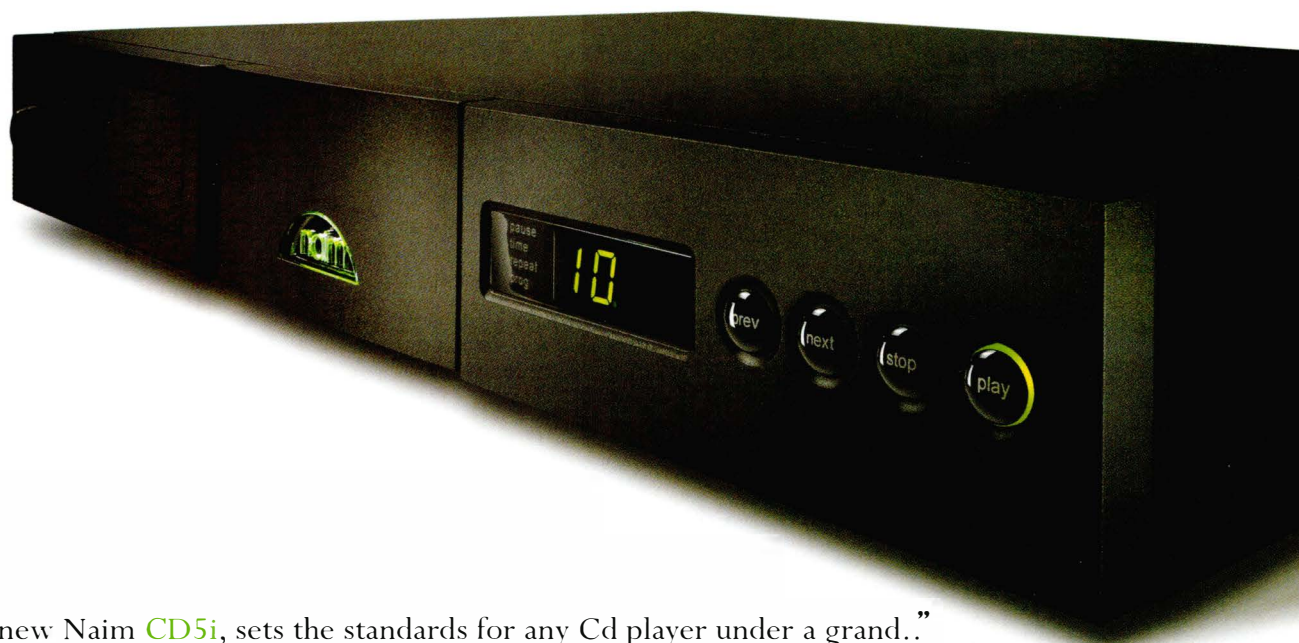
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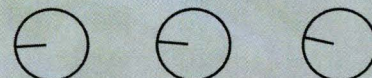
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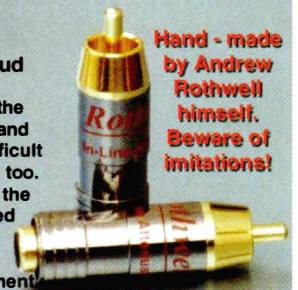
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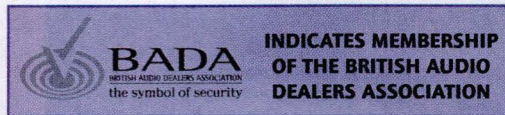
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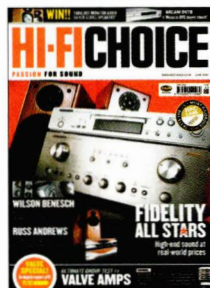
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“Its bean hod is the size of an Illinois grain silo and it grinds like a Bangkok lapdancer.”

with coffee grinders, espresso machines or any other such irrelevant paraphernalia.

Quite a contrast to how up-market business is conducted today. Take London's excellent Cornflake Shop, which has had the good sense to invest in a weapons-grade espresso machine. None of your pastel-foiled, pod-omatic nonsense for the highly caffeinated staff and customers who work here. Its bean hod alone is the size of an Illinois grain silo and grinds with the slow deliberation of a Bangkok lapdancer. What's more, this chrome-clad, coffee-lathering leviathan has more pressure dials than a Hollywood mock-up of a breached U-boat. The coffee it makes with such theatrical drama isn't merely strong, you need a prescription just to smell it.

But then this is hi-fi hedonism at its most concentrated. The closest you can get to mainlining caffeine isn't a modish affectation but a way of life. If you don't do enough of it, you won't be sufficiently wired to appreciate the things shops like this are most famous for – the best hi-fi on the planet. What about the bloke who wants his speaker cables plugged in a hurry? They just tell him to sit down and listen. Glug, glug, pischhhhh...

This, I have to say, is more like it. When I did my stint as a pretend hi-fi sales person, the lousy coffee was symptomatic of a deeper malaise. My abiding impression was that, for all its good advice, friendly service and solid long-term values, buying hi-fi from me on that day would have been a rather stifling, choice-starved business. The set-up was a slave to 'British is best' idealism and just a little too po-faced about the whole deal.

Selling hi-fi over the ensuing decades didn't get any easier. Fortunately, the enlightened tried to make it sexy and fun. But for their efforts, the enthusiasm for real hi-fi might have been snuffed out for good. So make mine a double espresso and hold the cables. **HFC**

Bean there, done that

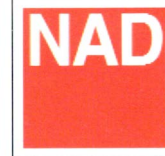
David Vivian savours a cup of the black stuff and considers the effect of coffee on British hi-fi mores

Think of a warm liquid that's almost undrinkable. Nescafe. I'm talking about the economy jar powdered stuff here, mind, not the marginally less acrid granules which are merely offensive as opposed to muddy, scummy and vile. I need a doctor.

Many, many years ago, just before Christmas, I spent most of the working day making mug after mug of the odious beverage in a hardcore hi-fi emporium near the south coast. What I'd imagined to be true, was. Closet caffeine addicts who'd been tipped off by audiophile friends about the 'free fix' if you asked for a 'demo' turned up *en masse*. This probably wasn't the most valuable introduction to the world of high-end hi-fi retailing I could have experienced, but it was revealing.

Rattling half a dozen Arabica beans in my right hand, I served the steaming brew in the basement. The captives took one reckless sip, said "Mmmmm, lovely" and put it down to go cold. An hour later they would leave the shop empty-handed, but under their own steam.

Then again, if it was an exquisite espresso they were anticipating, they'd clearly come to the wrong place. Twenty years ago, truly lousy coffee was as much part of the hair-shirt charm of Brit-fi retailing as luxuriant facial hair, 'I use mine every night' sweatshirts, lovingly cared for second-hand Naim preamps and little squares of lime green stylus paper on the edges of perfectly levelled equipment stands. The reason, of course, is that the die-hard hi-fi buff of the eighties didn't have time to mess around



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