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UK VISION



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WORLD'S BEST CD PLAYER?

IN-DEPTH REVIEW

Meridian celebrates its CD anniversary with this brilliant new flagship player



LIFE AND SOUL
 An amp with passion from Italy's Unison Research



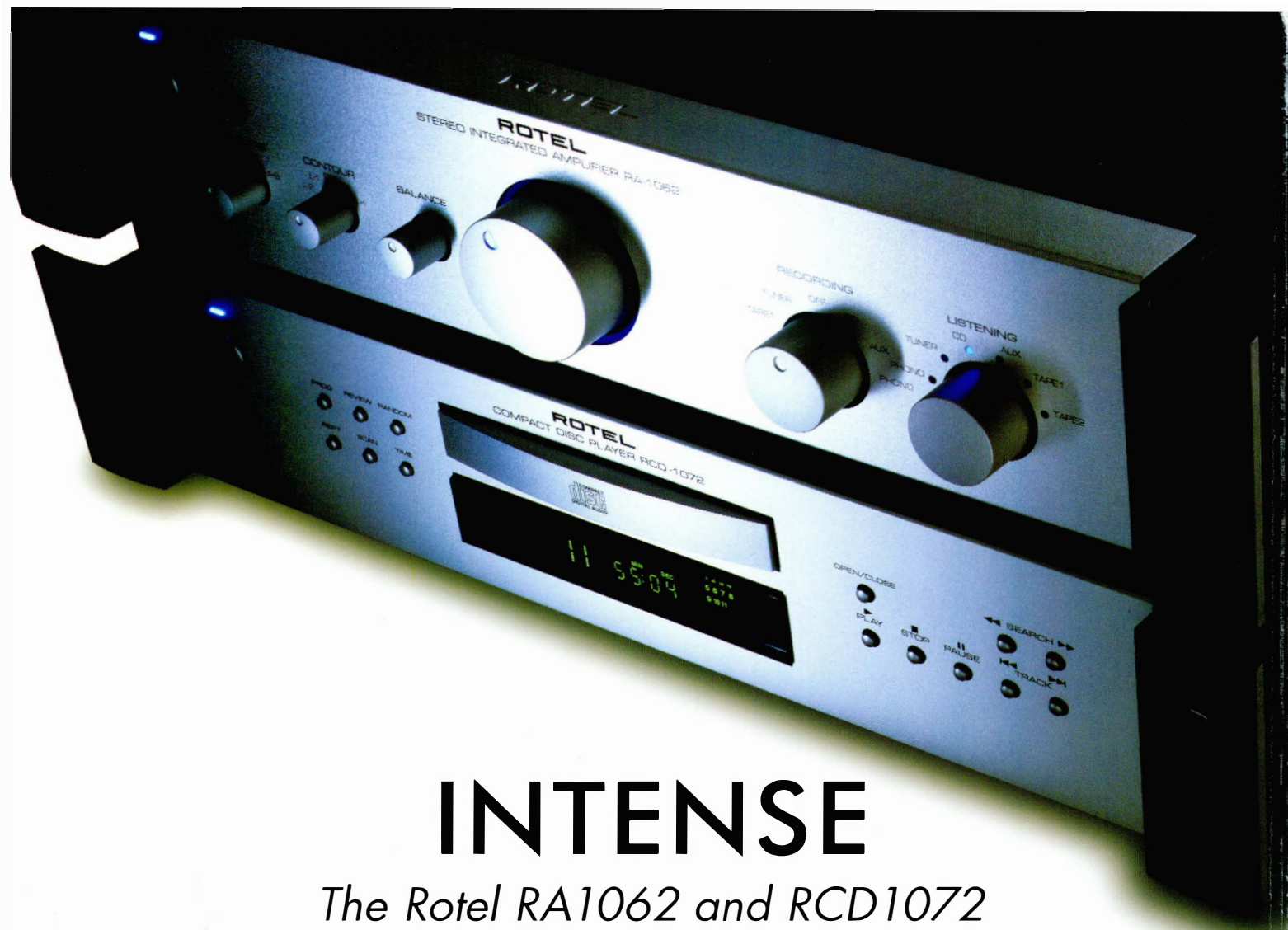
MUSICAL SCALE
 Big sound and fine detail from KEF's latest top-end speaker

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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>
LOUDSPEAKERS

- FEATURING**
- > Aurum Cantus Leisure 3 SE
 - > Crane Audio Oceana 5f
 - > Harbeth NRG2
 - > Quad 21L
 - > Spondor S3e
 - > Triangle Antal ES



INTENSE

The Rotel RA1062 and RCD1072

Individually, Rotel's latest CD player and amplifier will make a striking difference to the way you hear music. When they hook up with each other, though, it's a match made in hifi heaven. The chemistry is instant, thanks to a shared pedigree of meticulous component selection, painstaking refinement and balanced design by Rotel's award-winning team of engineers. It's an intense relationship, and a powerful listening experience. Get them connected.

To find out more about this perfect partnership, call B&W Loudspeakers UK on 01903 221500.



HI-FI CHOICE

FEBRUARY 2005 ISSUE 263

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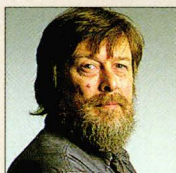
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To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice*
employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business...



"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." Tim Bower, Editor



PAUL MESSENGER

A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



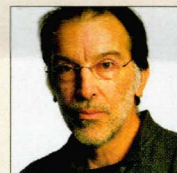
DAN GEORGE

Dan is a huge hi-fi nut whose dream came true when he became *HFC*'s reviews editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only the most interesting products make it into *HFC*.



ALVIN GOLD

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



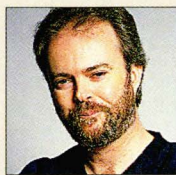
CHRIS FOSTER

Chris Foster has been providing *HFC*'s stunning photography for almost 10 years. Now, he's off to the Eastern Seaboard of the United States for a spot of fishing and a well-earned break. So long, Chris, and thanks for all the f-stops.



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is a professional musician, an experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a particular knack for writing about complicated subjects in a comprehensible way – and he only writes for *HFC*.



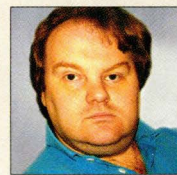
DAVID VIVIAN

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



JASON KENNEDY

Jason previously edited *HFC*, 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.



ALAN SIRCOM

After a stint selling hi-fi, Alan began his journalistic career at *HFC* some 12 years ago. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear.

ESTABLISHED 1975

HI-FI CHOICE is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 30 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi journal around. And our mix of cherry-picked kit, rigorous group tests and in-depth equipment reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the smarter hi-fi read...



HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE >>

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Six of the best new loudspeakers, priced from £500 to £1,200, are placed under the *Hi-Fi Choice* microscope

DVD FIT FOR AUDIOPHILES

Sonically superior DVD players from Brit-fi stalwarts Arcam and Naim, tested in-depth

MIGHTY MERIDIAN

To celebrate 20 years at the top of the CD tree, Meridian delivers its best player ever

AMPS OF DISTINCTION

New stereo models from Denon and Unison Research – tested as only *HFC* knows how

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

The next issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* is on sale 17 January. Don't miss a thing – see p72 for our latest great subscription offer



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- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified

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NAIM CD5x CD PLAYER

▶ Naim has been busy reworking the brilliant CD5 to produce an exciting new CD player that pushes the performance envelope. Running concurrently with the entry-level CD5i, the new CD5x is offered at a premium due to the raft of modifications made. Key improvements include an uprated Philips mechanism and CD tray circuit board, plus a new analogue output stage.

In common with other recent Naim products, standard phono sockets reside alongside the company's preferred DIN

connections, making it easier to hook up with other-brand components. DAC duties, meanwhile, are performed by Burr-Brown's 24-bit dual mono chipset as used in the upmarket CDX2 and CDS3. With optional performance upgrades via the FlatCap 2 and HiCap power supplies, Salisbury's latest middleweight player could well be the perfect match for Naim's rather lovely 112x/150x pre/power amp we reviewed last month.

To find out more, see our in-depth review in the next edition of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT	Naim CD5x
TYPE	CD player
PRICE	£1,450
KEY FEATURES	Burr-Brown 24-bit dual mono DAC ▶ HDCD and CD-R/RW compatible ▶ RCA and DIN analogue outputs ▶ Upgraded CD transport mechanism and analogue output stage
CONTACT	☎ 01722 332266 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

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BECAUSE MUSIC MATTERS

MORDAUNT-SHORT PERFORMANCE 6 LOUDSPEAKER

▶ This stunning speaker is the new flagship floorstander from Mordaunt-Short – a result of three years R&D, culminating in a number of progressive technologies. The Performance 6 uses a radical proprietary polymer-resin cabinet, which M-S claims is blessed with inherent mechanical strength. The driver compliment is equally impressive – it features a vented tweeter that's isolated and suspended from the cabinet, plus a 100mm midrange unit using M-S's latest-generation aluminium drivers. Both the midrange and woofer units boast a chassis made from Sound Deadening Steel for further sonic gain. Mordaunt-Short uses a computer to model the high-order crossover, which is also completely isolated from the cabinet to prevent distortion. Value for money? We just can't wait to bring you the full story...

To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next edition of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Mordaunt-Short Performance 6

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £3,500 per pair

KEY FEATURES Proprietary polymer-resin cabinet

- ▶ Aspirated, suspended tweeter
- ▶ Latest generation CPC bass and midrange drivers with aluminium cones
- ▶ Isolated high-order crossover

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868

🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



DENON DVD-A1XV

Japanese giant Denon has just announced details of what it claims is the best DVD player in the world. Its new reference DVD-A1XV universal disc player is unique in boasting sophisticated video processing technology, which is said to deliver High Definition-level pictures from standard DVD. The Realta HQV (Hollywood Quality Video) processing technology the player employs is widely used in the film industry to create broadcast-quality HDTV video from standard material and for remastering aging footage. This 10-Bit processing works on a pixel-by-pixel basis, reducing noise and enhancing detail.

The THX Ultra certified machine plays all formats, including SACD and DVD-Audio. It also boasts the full gamut of output connections including HDMI, DVI, FireWire and progressive scan on component video. Inside the whopping 18kg chassis, the player is laid out in a three-box design to isolate the analogue, digital and video circuits. You can see the machine for yourself at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show in February (see *Hi-Fi Diary*, p12), where it will be shown for the first time.

Price £2,000-£2,500 (subject to confirmation) **Due** March 2005 ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk



MANA AUDIO STAINLESS STEEL

Mana Audio has developed a new range of equipment supports. Made to order and with pricing to match, the new racks are fashioned from non-magnetic stainless steel – Mana's regular supports use bright steel. The essential construction remains consistent, however, with 10mm glass shelves and L-section frames. A striking silver finish is available too, alongside the traditional black.

Price Priced to order **Due** Now ☎ 01248 490820 🌐 www.mana.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO RADIUS

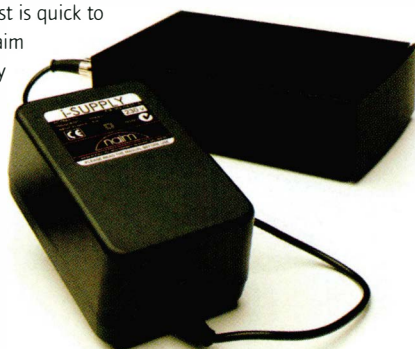
Loudspeaker specialist Monitor Audio has updated its Radius multichannel speaker systems with a whole new range. There are now four systems available, each comprising five shielded satellites plus an active subwoofer. All benefit from the brand's proprietary C-CAM 25mm gold tweeter, plus a 100mm metal matrix polymer cone. Finish options include beech and rosemah real wood veneers, as well as silver, white and black. Each satellite is supplied with a wall bracket, but optional floor stands are available.

Price From £1,000 to £1,300 **Due** Now ☎ 01268 740580 🌐 www.monitoraudio.co.uk

NAIM I-SUPPLY

Naim's i-Supply is described as a regulated, low-noise power supply designed to compliment Naim's Stageline phono preamp, bringing the cost of a Naim phono amp solution to a new low price point. It can also be specified to power Naim's Headline headphone amplifier. The Salisbury specialist is quick to point out that the i-Supply is not just for Naim users – a version has been made specifically for the Apple iPod, too. You can even buy adaptors to convert the i-Supply to switch from one device to another.

Price £85 **Due** Now ☎ 01722 332266 🌐 www.naim-audio.co.uk





PRIMARE I30/CD31

Here's the first teasing glimpse of Primare's new 30 Series products, which form part of a complete new range for 2005. Early details reveal a new CD player and integrated stereo amplifier from the Swedish marque. Its new 100-watt per channel I30 amplifier has been developed from the A30.1 (Best Buy, *HFC* 214) and offers six line inputs and an optional phono stage. Features include a low-noise rotary control for the input selector and volume control, and balanced inputs. Primare's new matching CD player, the CD31, has also been developed from its predecessor – the D30.2 – and includes a new precision transport, 24-bit Burr-Brown DACs and high-speed output stage. It also uses low-noise power supplies to exploit the full benefit of balanced operation. Both products feature heavy steel casework, which gives Primare's 30 Series its distinctive visuals.

Price £1,500 each **Due** January 2005 ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.net



ROTEL RA-03

The latest product to join Rotel's line up is a new stereo integrated amplifier, the RA-03. The amp is rated at 70 watts continuous, with a preamp section based on the RA-02 integrated and an amp stage deriving from the RB-03 power amp. Inside the case are newly sourced low-noise resistors, Burr-Brown components and electronic protection circuits on the output stage. The RA-03 also boasts a custom-made toroidal transformer, British built capacitors and an O2 Series system remote. For more details, see our exclusive review next month.

Price £500 **Due** Now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.europe.rotel.com



ONKYO TX-SR702E

THX-certified multichannel receivers are now more affordable, thanks to Onkyo's new TX-SR702E seven channel THX Select model. The receiver boasts microphone-based auto set-up, seven 24-Bit/192kHz DACs, dual 32-Bit Crystal processors and a moving magnet phono stage. It also features a backlit learning remote, a separate powered output for small multiroom applications and the full gamut of audio decoding capability.

Price £700 **Due** Now
☎ 01494 681515 🌐 www.onkyo.co.uk



GAMUT D3

Styled to match Gamut's excellent D200 and M200/M250 power amps, the new D3 preamp offers five line-level inputs including one with balanced XLR connections, plus both balanced and single-ended outputs. A motor-driven ALPS pot governs level control and input selection is relay driven. The D3's bypass function also allows CD players with level control to drive power amps directly without shifting cables. An exclusive review will follow in the April issue of *HFC*.

Price £3,430 **Due** January
☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

Soundbites



GOLDRING has released details of a new budget turntable to replace its budget GR1 deck. The price of the new GR1.2 remains unchanged at £140 and the deck comes supplied with a Goldring Elektra cartridge pre-fitted and aligned.
☎ 01279 501111

AUDIO T – the nationwide specialist hi-fi retailer – has unveiled a new website which gives users the chance to buy online. Visitors to the site can select their choice of gear from a range of hi-fi and home cinema products, or make their decisions from the packages on show. Items can then be bought online from a local store and delivered to customers' homes with a 'comprehensive' plug-and-play instruction manual.
🌐 www.audio-t.co.uk

CASTLE has introduced a new dipole speaker for its Compact Series. Designed for side or rear use in a multichannel speaker system, the Compact Dipole is fitted with similar drivers to Castle's satellites to ensure accurate timbre, with an optimised crossover for the two separate cabinets within. The two-way sealed box uses two 10mm glass fibre main drivers plus two 20mm soft-dome tweeters, with pricing at £500 per pair.
☎ 01756 795333

CHORD has designed a new link cable specifically for portable music players. Its new i-Chord has been developed to optimise the playback performance from portables when connected to hi-fi equipment. It's available as standard in one metre lengths (£50) with a minijack plug and either phono plugs or a silver-plated DIN connection.
☎ 01980 625700

MISSION is the latest big-name speaker brand to market a stylish multichannel subwoofer/satellite speaker system. Its £1,200 M-Cube package comprises five cuboid satellites with interchangeable 'wraps' and a compact subwoofer. The satellites sport flat panel speaker technology, while the subwoofer features a conventional 200mm drive unit with 250 watts of on-board power.
☎ 01480 423700

The Insider

THIS MONTH HFC TALKS TO...

CONRAD MAS

Job title: Proprietor and designer
Company: Avid



What's your most exciting product in development at the moment?

We are currently developing our own pick-up arm design, ready early next year. It will have the same design philosophy as our turntables and some unique ideas not seen on pick-up designs previously.

What's the future of hi-fi?

Grim. Let's remind ourselves, hi-fi means high fidelity. In a world where many consider Tivoli and iPod as hi-fi, soon most brands you know now will disappear and traditional retailers will cease. Unless the audio industry inspires people to the value of high fidelity rather than settling for low-fidelity downloads.

CD or vinyl and why?

"Do they still make records?" is a question I'm constantly asked. I listen to CD more than vinyl because it's more convenient and portable. But, I've always taken CD as a replacement for cassette. The fact that vinyl still gives the best digital sources a bloody nose does not say much for the 'perfect' silver disc. Instead of getting into an argument about which is better, the formats need to live next to each other as alternatives. I can see a time approaching when the question will be: "Do they still make CDs?"

Hi-Fi Diary

JANUARY

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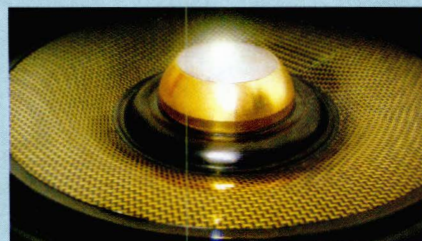
13 Audiojumble 2005
Tonbridge, Kent
01892 540022
Find a home for that valve amp
25-27 Sound & Vision 2005
Mariott Hotel, Bristol
www.bristolshow.co.uk
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MAY

5-8 High End 2005
Munich, Germany
Glosovic@HighEndSociety.de
Indulge your senses - but remember to raise the limit on your credit card!

Not bass... infrasonics

Wilson Benesch has shaken up thinking on subwoofers with its Precision Bass Infrasonic Generator (PB). Rather than a conventional drive unit with a basket frame, the PB uses two motor systems (magnet/coil assemblies) to drive a 375mm carbon Kevlar diaphragm with a cylindrical enclosure acting as supporting structure. The motor assemblies are mounted either side of the diaphragm in a push-pull arrangement and supported by a gold plated central core. The latter weighs 10kg and is "earthed to ground" via a steel baseplate. The PB is driven by modular digital electronics housed in an external enclosure to remove the effects of vibration.



Audiolab revival?

Rumours that IAG will be re-launching the Audiolab brand have been bolstered by the appearance of a complete rack of Audiolab components at the CEDIA Expo in Indianapolis. The company acquired the Audiolab name when purchasing the assets of TAG McLaren Audio. IAG's Huntingdon HQ remains silent on the subject, but did hint there will be a major launch at the CES show in Las Vegas in early January 2005. It is understood that IAG found stocks of part-assembled Audiolab components when it went to empty TMA's warehouse, so this might explain the finished looking components at CEDIA. For now, it looks like you'll have to watch this space for the official announcement - if it comes!



DualDisc bulk beef

It's been a lively month for DualDisc.

The fact that the new double sided CD/DVD hybrid format is slightly thicker than a regular CD has prompted numerous hardware manufacturers to issue warnings about possible incompatibilities. Mark Levinson, Marantz and Sony Europe have joined Toshiba, Sony Electronics, Pioneer and Onkyo by recommending that consumers don't try DualDiscs in their players - just in case.

On the software side, Warner had to recall *Gold Medal* by the Donnas, one of its first DualDiscs in the US, because of manufacturing faults. Customers are being offered a CD version as a replacement.

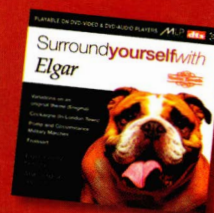
There is some small good news for DualDisc, though. Dolby is collaborating with 5.1 Entertainment/Silverline Records to put Dolby Headphone options onto DualDiscs in order to offer a surround effect with ordinary headphones.



Ambisonics replay

Nimbus Records is to issue highlights of its catalogue of Ambisonic surround recordings on the DVD-Audio format.

Ambisonics uses a single point microphone and a proprietary encoding system to capture a 360° soundfield. Nimbus has been making Ambisonic recordings since the early 1970s because "it produces the most natural recordings", according to Crac Downes, Nimbus' head of recording. For the DVD-A release, these will be encoded in DTS because it provides technical compatibility with the original Ambisonic recordings. The first titles to be issued will contain music by Elgar, Beethoven, Schubert and Rachmaninov alongside a compilation of works by Barber, Copland and Sousa.





All change at Arcam: managers buy out

Current managing director Charlie Brennan, operations manager Michael Sheridan and former financial director of Tannoy, Alan Wylie, have bought Arcam from its founder and chairman, John Dawson, and his business partner Jacky Cross. Both benefactors of this amicable management buy-out will remain as shareholders and employees. Charlie Brennan has been Arcam's MD for nearly four years and "wants to re-energise the business" by "preserving the musical and audiophile values, while developing the AV side with pictures that are brilliant and sound that is like real music". Former Chairman John Dawson is "delighted" with the deal as it effectively leaves him free to investigate new technologies and continue his passion for music, sound reproduction and audio engineering.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #29

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



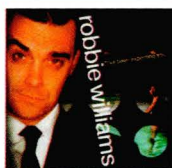
Making hi-fi and home cinema meet
If you try to slot home cinema into a hi-fi system, it's wise to remember that sticking a conventional cathode ray tube TV between your speakers can ruin the sound. It destroys the central image and, worse still, those internal speakers inside the TV act as passive radiators.

The sound is slightly improved by swapping the CRT set for a wall-mounted plasma or LCD monitor, but the internal fans and speakers (if fitted) do your hi-fi no favours.

Even a dedicated centre speaker will undermine stereo, even when not in use. Unless it's a must-have, consider switching to 'phantom' and let the main speakers take over the centre speaker role. You could also do without a subwoofer, for the same reason.

TOP 10 UK MUSIC HALL OF FAME HI-FI ALBUMS

1. **Elvis** No 1s (DVD-Audio)
2. **Cliff Richard** Me And My Shadows
3. **Beatles** Revolver (classic Mobile Fidelity vinyl release)
4. **Rolling Stones** Let It Bleed (SACD)
5. **Bob Marley** The Best Of The Early Years (DVD-Audio)
6. **Queen** A Night At The Opera
7. **Michael Jackson** Thriller (SACD)
8. **Madonna** Music
9. **U2** The Joshua Tree
10. **Robbie Williams** I've Been Expecting You



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



TORI AMOS

Title: *The Beekeeper*

Release date: 22 Feb

Amos's eighth album is something of a musical departure, prominently featuring an organ alongside her trademark piano. "I have been changed by the relationship between these two beautiful creatures, the Bösendorfer piano and the B3 Hammond organ," she says. Amos will also publish her autobiography around the same time.

ERASURE

Title: *Nightbird*

Release date: 24 Jan

Andy Bell and Vince Clarke – aka Erasure – will release their first album of original material since 2000's *Loveboat* in the new year. The album will be preceded by the single *Breathe*, which will come with a new software package, Digimpro, which allows fans to remix the track on their PC.

LIMP BIZKIT

Title: *tbc*

Release date: spring 2005

The new Limp Bizkit album should be finished before Christmas, Fred Durst reports on the band's website. He also reveals they've left town to make it. "LA is too comfortable for us, so we have to leave our everyday lives behind. This music is hungry for our blood, and we have to feed it what it wants," he says.

SCISSOR SISTERS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: autumn 2005

The hottest new band of 2004 has announced their second album will be with us before the end of 2005. "The new material is similar, but a little more styled," says Scissor Sisters' guitarist Del Marquis. Their million-selling debut was recorded in band member Babydaddy's New York



apartment, but this time they're transferring to a proper studio and looking for a big name outside producer.

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

Title: *Lullabies To Paralyze*

Release date: 21 March

Desert-rockers QOTSA have spent the last three months in Joshua Tree, California finishing their third album. Says guitarist David Catching: "The tone is somewhere we haven't gone before. Each album goes further down a dark road." Guests include members of ZZ Top, Ween, the Distillers and Garbage and among the song titles are *Tangled Up In Plaid* and *The Fun Machine Took a Shit And Died*.

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Peter Sincotti On The Moon (Feb), **Anne Sofie von Otter** Music For A While (Feb), **Madeleine Peyroux** Careless Love (Feb), **Anne-Sophie Mutter** Mozart: Violin Concertos (Sep)

DVD-AUDIO/ SACD

Thomas Quasthoff Bach Cantatas (SACD, Jan), **The Blasters Live** Going Home (DVD-A, Jan), **Gergiev, Kirov Orchestra** Shostakovich: Symphony No4 (SACD, Jan), **David Bowie** David Bowie (DVD-A, Feb), **David Bowie** David Live (DVD-A, Feb)



Dry your eyes, mate...

Why listen to music through a cinema?

I assume you're interested in hi-fi. Well, you must be, or you wouldn't be reading *Hi-Fi Choice*, would you? Okay, having established that, I've a question for you. Why? Are you an anorak who likes reading about styli, cartridges, tonearms, turntables, stereo amplifiers, loudspeakers (just the two, if you please) or even, and this almost hurts, CD players? Or do you just like music and think that the writers for *HFC* know more than those on *NME* or *Q*? They probably do, actually, but I'm desperately trying not to digress. Whatever your reason for being a hi-fi fan, let's accept that you are. So, do you own – I hesitate to

“I know she cries – but I also know that they made her cry by inserting stuff into her gorgeous Erin eyes to deliver the tears.”

write this – a home cinema system? You do? Well, what the bloody hell does it do for you? Fill your room with zappy sounds from ghastly film horrors like *Lord of the Rings* or, even worse, that unspeakable yet desparately successful bespectacled child Potter and his Quidditch game thingy. Yes, go on, spoil yourself with surround sound then – how natural and authentic is that?

Well, it's not. It's good for the kids – but, hey, you said you like hi-fi, remember. And if you're interested in high fidelity, then you know home cinema generally isn't. Recently, I listened to Sinéad O'Connor's beautiful *Nothing Compares to You* on a rare 12-inch heavy vinyl recording I picked up in Dublin, played on my Linn Sondek with a Linn cartridge and tonearm – with amplification and loudspeakers from two British companies I can't mention, because I work for both of them as a consultant. As a

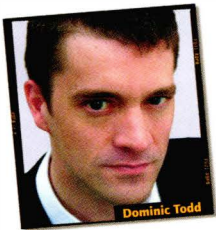
measure of comparison, I went into my AV room and dug out the DVD I have of Sinéad singing the same song. It's the famous cut used so often on MTV and VH1. I know she cries – but I also know that they made her cry by inserting stuff into her gorgeous Erin eyes to deliver the tears. I have a pretty impressive AV set-up so it was going to sound – not to mention look – good. Again, I can't detail the system for professional reasons. Anyway, I watched Sinéad in full flight, tears and all. And it was as nothing.

You see, the mind just can't be in two places at once. It's either visual or sonic. Listen to your music or watch your TV. Home cinema is enormously entertaining and very cool for some people. They like all that awful, tiresome multichannel stuff. But I can't imagine Cream, Led Zeppelin, The Beatles or The Rolling Stones liking it much. Call me an old fart by all means,

but the progress we are meant to have made in sonic quality just isn't borne out by the rubbish sound delivered from most – but not all – of the visual media.

It makes me cry – without stuff in my eyes.

Andy Giles is one of British hi-fi's biggest personalities. A former journalist, he has strong industry ties and a long-standing PR business




East and West

Where does Award-winning hi-fi come from?

Reading through the *Hi-Fi Choice Awards* issue (HFC 261) the other day, I was reminded of just what a fine year 2004 has been for hi-fi. Alongside the sad demise of some hi-fi manufacturers, and the hard times of others, it's all too easy to forget the truly great hi-fi products of last year. It may be tough for manufacturers and retailers but, as consumers (to slightly misquote politicians from both sides of the Atlantic), we've never had it so good.

Back to that *HFC Awards* issue, and what struck me about the list of the industry's finest was not so much the products, but the country of origin. Interestingly, turntables haven't changed a bit. The budget favourite was the Czech-built Pro-Ject 1 Xpression. The rest were, by and large, entirely British. Rewind twenty or so years and you'd have found the best budget turntable to probably be the Czech-built NAD 5120, with the rest being – you've guessed it – British built.

In the electronics and speaker business, things are very different. Many of those classic British brands such as Mission, Cambridge, KEF, Mordaunt-Short, and Celestion now build in the Far East. Of course, companies such as NAD have always built in the Far East, but we've never seen quite such a shift on this scale before. Even those who don't build directly in the Far East frequently rely more and more upon components that have been imported from there.

Whatever your political views about the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to the Far East, the benefits to the consumer can't be denied. Take a look at the beautifully finished and superb-sounding Cambridge Azur 640c, 

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

REVOX B77 OPEN REEL TAPE RECORDER



Revox, a Swiss company, was founded by Willi Studer in 1948. Within a year, it had developed its first open reel tape recorder,

which was marketed under the Dynavox label, later changing to Revox. Over succeeding years, it spawned a professional version, the Studer 27, and a range of other models. Initially valve powered, by the mid-60s, the range had made the switch to transistor power. The transistorised B77 was a quarter-inch tape unit introduced in 1967, as a domestic version of the professional A77. The B77 remained in production until its ultimate demise (in Mk II form) a full 30 years later. By then, the home recording market had long since switched to cassettes and then to digital in various flavours. Creative recording in the traditional sense, for which the B77 was so well adapted, had all but gone out of fashion.

The B77 was available in various versions, including quarter-track with a maximum tape speed of 7.5ips (inches per second – we are talking pre-metric, here), but serious users went for the half-track, high speed 15ips version, which was quieter (around 65dB) and offered a wider operating bandwidth (22kHz). These numbers may sound pretty pedestrian in today's terms, but they really don't tell the whole story. The B77 was capable of fully professional results, with superb stability and transparency. In its heyday, nothing could touch the sound of a good master recording made on and replayed by the B77, which effectively became the benchmark for pristine master tape quality.

The hardware was impressive and solidly built. It had superb controls and tape handling. Essentially a three head recorder (a fourth head could be added for synchronisation purposes), the B77 had two reel motors and a high precision capstan drive motor assembly, with a photoelectric end of tape cut-off trigger. Revox built its own motors, and also heads, which gave the company a degree of control over the design that few tape manufacturers could equal.

Given adequate routine maintenance and alignment, the serviceability of their decks was



“It was a thing of beauty in a way that can only be said of a tiny proportion of hi-fi components.”

legendary. Three heads opened the possibility of real-time off tape monitoring to confirm the integrity of recordings before it was too late to do something about it. This also facilitated some then-novel special effects, such as sound on sound, in which recordings were 'bounced' from one track to another previously recorded track. This allowed simple multi-part recordings to be built up in successive passes, if the generational noise build-up could be forgiven. The final version, the B77 Mk II, offered only minor changes, like allowing some variation in tape speed and improvements aimed at improving ease of tape editing, which was a largely mechanical task involving physically cutting and splicing the tape.

The B77 was more than just a fine collection of electronics and mechanics. It was a thing of beauty in a way that can only be said of a tiny proportion of hi-fi components. More to the point, many fine recordings were made on B77s taken to music venues and set up with microphones, sometimes through a simple mixer. In many cases, by audiophiles making recordings for their own use or to help launch a musical (or recording engineering) career. These players still command a good price, even today. Without doubt, the B77 one of the most iconic and aspirational products associated with the great boom in high fidelity. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



“Several nervous blind listeners were risking their reputations at the same time.”

recipient of a Gold Award, to see just how much CD player £250 can buy you these days. Perhaps even more tellingly, sneak a peak at the Bronze-winning budget amp – the Cambridge Azur 540a. At £200, it offers solid build quality, plenty of features and a revealing sound quality.

Go back to 1987 and a Best Buy Cambridge P40 integrated amplifier also cost £200. At 40 watts per channel it was less powerful than its distant offspring and, barring the standard phono stage, certainly had fewer features. Even though awarded a *HFC* Best Buy, it was also noted within these pages that it was “still a little wet behind the ears”. Clearly you get far more for your money these days. Further up the price scale we have the likes of Vincent. Now here’s an interesting prospect – Vincent isn’t simply a Western hi-fi company building in the Far East, but a Far Eastern company full stop. You might not have seen them amongst the Award-winners this time, but it can only be a matter of time before they catch up with the best from the West. And it isn’t just Vincent – names such as CAV, Shanling and Stello may have been new to 2004, but you can be sure to hear a great deal more from them soon.

Like I say, being a Western hi-fi manufacturer is far from being an easy life at the moment, but being a Western consumer means more bang for your buck than ever before.

Dominic Todd began his hi-fi career in the retail business and has been a freelance hi-fi reviewer and columnist since 1993



Testing times

JK undergoes his GCSE in blind listening

Having been head gopher for Paul Messenger’s blind listening tests back in the 1990s, I had often dreamt of ways to improve the organisation the mechanics of speaker listening tests, or at least ways that would be easier on my back. In 2004, when I went out to Los Angeles to visit Revel Loudspeakers, I found an organisation that had grasped this particular problem by the scruff of the speaker terminals and done something about it. Revel is part of the Harman International hi-fi giant and has access to that corporation’s enviable facilities. As well as a team of engineers who work on all aspects of speaker design and technology for brands such as JBL and Infinity, they also have a dedicated listening ‘room’ for evaluating their own and competitors’ loudspeakers.

When I say ‘room’, I really mean ‘a box within a warehouse that has been constructed with

the sole purpose of blind testing loudspeakers’, so it’s nothing like a room as you and I would expect. The ‘walls’ are curtained and two rows of chairs face one acoustically-transparent curtain (akin to the one used in *HFC* blind listening speaker tests) behind which is a pneumatic speaker-shifting device that is operated by computer. The computer can randomly play the same piece of music through any of the speakers and keeps a log of that order, so it’s possible for an individual to audition several speakers with a few clicks of a mouse button. The guys in charge of this facility have also discovered something quite surprising about speaker evaluation – listening to just one speaker is more revealing than having a pair playing. I tried this at home and it works alarmingly well; the speaker’s shortcomings are significantly more obvious and cabinet resonance is blindingly clear. I’d be inclined to say ‘don’t do this at home’ if you want to continue enjoying your speakers.

Inevitably, I was encouraged to listen to some speakers in this facility. Fortunately, I was not alone. Several nervous visitors were risking their reputations at the same time. After all, we had to make notes on the results and hand them in at the end of what was effectively a test. Imagine a GCSE in blind listening. Luckily, we didn’t know at the time that the results would be printed up for all to see after the event – that would have made it truly terrifying!

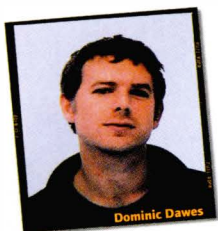
As it turned out, it proved relatively easy to identify individual speakers from the three that we heard and most of us seemed to like the same model. Not surprisingly, that model turned out to be an Infinity; they would have looked pretty stupid if we had all come out and said that a competing product sounded best in their own listening facility!

To be fair, it seemed like a pretty flat playing field. Okay, the environment was unlike any room you’re actually likely to find in a home and some speakers might prefer a bit more rear wall reinforcement than the five or six feet applied here, but that wouldn’t affect mid and high frequencies, and the models used were all free space designs.

The actual effect of this truly blind and repeatable approach was to remove any element of expectation or prejudice, thus providing a lesson for all of us to listen with our ears not our eyes.

How did I do? Since you’re asking, not bad thanks. Second out of 12 was good enough for me – after all, reviewers are all deaf, aren’t they?

Jason Kennedy began working on Hi-Fi Choice over 15 years ago, eventually rising to the position of editor. He’s currently indulging his passion as a freelance hi-fi writer



Dominic Dawes

Lo-Fi Choice

Distortion – hated by hi-fi, but not musicians

We in the world of hi-fi have always been in a slightly odd position vis-à-vis the whole business of music. On the one hand, it should be taken as read that anyone who goes out of their way to acquire a high-quality system loves music. But I've noticed a distinct difference between the views I hear from 'hi-fi people' and those more intimately connected with the business of writing and recording music.

Take distortion. Everyone interested in hi-fi knows that distortion equals bad sound. Simple. And in hi-fi, it's true: the original signal should be reproduced with the most transparent, cleanest transfer we can achieve. But look at the history of 20th Century music and we see something different.

The electric guitar rose to prominence as the central instrument in rock precisely because, from the mid-50s onwards, guitarists discovered that when you turn a valve amplifier up loud enough, the amp distorts – and it sounds superb.

Newer, bigger amplifiers with greater scope for overdrive were manufactured and in just a few short years, music had been transformed. By the late 1960s, Jimi Hendrix was weaving sonic magic with a guitar sound dripping with distortion; a primal, beautiful sound filled with scratches, screams and haunting wails of harmonic feedback. Generations of hairy guitarists followed suit.

Or take Tom Waits – an artist who has, for years, carved out a unique musical personality based on primitive recording techniques. It's all screeching guitars, clanky percussion and squeaky piano stools. And, when his recent one-off London show was announced, 90,000 people tried to get tickets in the first hour. I guess he's doing something right.

Of course, we need transparency and clarity in our hi-fi systems to reproduce these (or any) recordings at home. But we should never let our enthusiasm for hi-fi blur our vision of what music really is. Music – and rock music in particular – is noisy, chaotic, and messy. At times it's simply loud and obnoxious. And that's just the really good stuff.

The only time the recording business went head over heels for 'hi-fi values' and tried to create the cleanest, slickest sound possible was in the 1980s – otherwise known as ▶

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

ABC

THE LEXICON OF LOVE



The red curtain on the inner sleeve of 1982's *The Lexicon Of Love* marked the beginning of ABC's career. It was also the

album that launched Trevor Horn's career as producer, a man who perhaps best defined the sound of the 1980s with his work for Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Godley & Creme and more.

Listen carefully to the latest Deluxe Edition reissue on Universal and Horn is trying out elements that would resurface later in the decade. Those huge, echo-laden drums of *The Look Of Love* would soon become an eighties chart staple, while that pounding bass would later define Frankie Goes To Hollywood's sound. Meanwhile, the reverb-laden sax lines and, of course, the sweeping, archly romantic synthesised strings (courtesy of future film score composer Anne Dudley), perfectly articulate *Lexicon's* beautifully realised ideal. This is all starry-eyed glamour looking heavenward from the grey reality of early eighties Britain.

Heavily layered, but nicely judged, the album's production reflects Horn's fascination with the fast-developing synthesiser and recording technology of the time. It's a testament to his abilities that it doesn't sound stuck in its era. Listen to it now and it's clearly not made yesterday, but has beautifully-judged elements in place, keeping excellent time down the years, like a Swiss watch.

Much like the band's sharply suited image of the time, the album seems perfectly realised, with not a hair, chord or emotion out of place. Like *Pet Sounds* or *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*, it's a pop masterpiece lovingly buffed to a perfect sheen. With every song a reflection on a different aspect of romantic love, it's like a grand concept album, with all the magnificent pretension and ambition that that phrase implies. From the overture-style opening to the closing string and horn coda, it seems complete, with a thousand heart-stopping moments in-between.

The Look Of Love, *Poison Arrow*, *Tears Are Not Enough*, and *All Of My Heart* were all UK hits, though to be honest almost any of the ten



“In singer Martin Fry, they had a front man who was part Billy Fury, part Bryan Ferry.”

tracks on the album could have charted, such was the standard and coherence of their sound. Despite their obvious ambition, there was something rootsy about the first incarnation of ABC. In singer Martin Fry they had a front man who was part Billy Fury, part Bryan Ferry, a mix of British earthiness and impossible Hollywood glamour. His gold lamé suit offered achievable Saturday night invincibility to every small town boy and girl in 1982. Fry also made heartache seem appealing two years before Morrissey took over the franchise.

ABC never really came close to replicating the perfection of *Lexicon*. Its original vinyl release was augmented by a CD issue – one of the first – and it was digitally remastered for CD in 1999, though it's arguable that the production was so spot-on the first time, that this added little to it. Its latest incarnation comes as a double CD with a wealth of bonus material, including demos which illustrate just how great an effect the production had on the material. The songs, scope and widescreen ambition all came from Fry's men, but it was Horn's technique that put the album into a different league and produced the first, and one of the very few, true classics of the eighties. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

❏ The Decade Music Forgot. You see my point; when Douglas Coupland dedicated a novel to REM for being “the only cool thing to come out of the 80s”, he had a good point.

I love my hi-fi. I've got a great system, but the truth of this is borne out by a quick (but by no means exhaustive) selection of what I've been playing on it lately. Bonnie Prince Billy, Pavement, Tom Waits: all artists who at some time have had their music described as 'lo-fi'.

So remember, hi-fi is just a means to end, a way to enjoy what to many people is just about the most important thing in the world – great music. And on that note, I'm off to test my hi-fi with some very loud Stooges albums...

Dominic Dawes is a freelance writer and musician with a deep love of music and a corresponding passion for hi-fi



“In today’s litigious American society, companies have to cover every eventuality.”

“potentially” won't play in Sony hardware. And we wonder why there is so much in-fighting inside the corporate giant!

Marantz, Onkyo and Pioneer have also issued similar warnings (see *Happenings*, p12), the latter much to the surprise and dismay of Pioneer GB's John Bamford. He has long been a prominent supporter of the DVD-Audio format. Although DualDisc won't officially exist in Europe until patent issues with rival hybrid format DVD Plus have been resolved, John believes DualDisc has a bright future despite the US arm of Pioneer's legal paranoia.

In reality, the launch of DualDisc in the United States has been a huge success. With the unfortunate exception of a mastering error (not a compatibility problem) that resulted in the recall of the Donnas' new album, the format has enjoyed overwhelmingly positive customer feedback and the wholehearted support of the retail chain, including the 9,000 members of industry body NAMM (the International Music Products Association)

The majority of the currently-available DualDisc titles hail from 5.1 Entertainment, so I asked its chairman and chief executive officer John Trickett, what steps were being taken to address compatibility issues. “Our discs go through extensive testing,” Trickett told me. “The physical specifications have to be precise, and each disc undergoes two independent evaluations using AudioDev test equipment – one at the replication plant, the other here at 5.1 Entertainment.”

The AudioDev quality control analysers for optical media ensure discs meet performance tolerances far beyond simple factors such as minimum thickness (1.5mm), which is all too often cited as a manufacturing stumbling

block. “The DVD side is always 100% compatible,” Trickett added. “Any problems will be limited to the CD side, and they're highly unlikely.” 5.1 Entertainment use the services of IntelliQ, an independent consultancy who test their DualDiscs using a matrix of more than 370 CD players from esoteric high-end transports to lowly 1980s clock radios. “The figure of 95% playability is often exceeded.”

Stuart M Robinson is editor and publisher of HighFidelityReview.com, a website dedicated to high-resolution digital sound



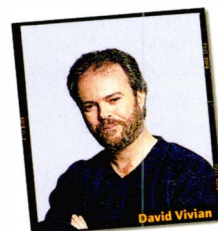
Crisis? What crisis?

Will DualDisc survive Sony's panic?

Stan Glasgow, head of consumer product sales at Sony Electronics of America, recently issued a bulletin. It stated that the company would be placing stickers on some of the company's products alerting consumers to “potential compatibility issues” with the new DualDisc format. It came as no surprise.

In today's litigious American society, companies have to cover every eventuality, including the unlikely event of a DualDisc failing to play in Joe Sixpack's shiny new machine. Pessimistic commentators will no doubt believe that Sony are also acting as format saboteurs. But, things are never quite what they seem as the company's primary hope is that DualDisc succeeds...

Sony Electronics is responsible for DVD, CD and SACD players, but for purely political reasons, nothing DVD-Audio compatible. Sony Music on the other hand, is the label primarily responsible for the DualDisc format. The DualDisc output is expected to be so considerable that, instead of choosing the Cinram replication option of Warner and others, Sony Digital Audio Disc Corporation, a third Sony Division, has been tooled up in readiness. Glasgow is putting his foot in his mouth and basically saying that Sony Music discs replicated at Sony's own pressing plants



Dyson does it

Good hi-fi should clean up its act

A few months ago, Dyson gave me a DC14 upright vacuum cleaner with 'root cyclone technology'. This wasn't because of my services to floor cleaning in the UK over the years but because, in another magazine, I'd said I didn't like Dyson vacuum cleaners. I was trying to make a point. British sportscar manufacturer TVR had just been sold to a Russian adolescent for a remarkably modest £15 million. Wrong bloke, I complained. I think it should be James Dyson; the man behind bagless vacuums would be ideal to front a car marque named after a guy called Trevor.

My fleeting experience with my girlfriend's Dyson had suggested that it did indeed suck in all sorts of ways. I thought it was a garish, wilfully over-complex piece of design that, in reality, offered no worthwhile performance advantage over my plain, dead simple Miele. If Mr Dyson could convince the world that his vacuum cleaner wiped the floor with the competition, I argued, he was exactly the right man to put that other manufacturer of powerful, extravagantly-styled plastic products, TVR, back on track.

It had occurred to me I might get a response from Dyson, but a free cleaner wasn't the one I was expecting. Unfortunately, between writing the article and the cleaner arriving, I'd ripped out all the carpets and laid hard floors. The basic DC14 despatched to me didn't do hard floors, just carpets. For a DC14 that would do carpets and floors, I needed the DC14 All Floors. But how could I be angry about that? I was a Dyson up and (truthfully) the envy of all my friends.

Curiously, it didn't really matter, either. The important thing was that the Dyson was in the house (or, rather, flat). And that's when the attitude adjustment began. I'd find myself staring at it for minutes on end. At the plastic mouldings, the yellow bits, the transparent amber trimmings. Then I'd go in close and read the small print, study the little diagrams with their swirling arrows. "The cleaner that doesn't lose suction", it said just above the cyclone chamber. There was even a Helpline number. I felt like phoning it and asking "what the hell's happening to me?"

How could a rational adult be taken in by the Dyson spin? Root cyclone technology is all very well, not having a bag to empty is fine and dandy. But it's not enough. Dyson sells because sooner or later (later in my case) it transports us all back to the bliss of sitting on the floor as a child and playing with brightly coloured objects with interesting, tactile shapes. Use a Dyson and you're back in that carpet/plaything loop. It ducks under the 'sensible' radar and hits us in a place over which we have little conscious control.

So James, if you're reading (thanks for the vacuum cleaner, by the way), here's your mission. Hi-fi's taking a bit of a hammering from home cinema, the internet and video gaming right now. What can be done to make people as excited about listening to music on a high-quality stereo as they are about vacuuming their carpets? Nope, afraid there's already an amplifier called a Cyclone. Yellow casework with transparent amber handles? Well, it's a start.

David Vivian has been wallowing in gorgeous hi-fi and then describing its virtues and vices in Hi-Fi Choice since 1990

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

ACE OF BASS



We all like a nice hefty whack about the ears now and then, and it's the bass that does it. Take the bass away and sound is quacky and lifeless. It loses little in intelligibility but it sure loses plenty of fun factor, communication, involvement – not to mention danceability.

Bass is a funny thing. It's routine these days for CD players, for instance, to feature bass response that extends way below the 20Hz cut-off of normal hearing, and yet they're by no means all equal when it comes to subjective bass performance. And can bass be 'fast'? If bass means low frequency, then surely that's synonymous with slow!

We perceive bass quality in terms of its harmonics as well as the fundamental. In real music you just don't hear pure low-frequency tones – even a vast organ pipe puts out some higher frequency harmonics. Thus, if a hi-fi component has near-flawless low frequency response, that's far from the whole story. Two particular parameters come into play: phase response and midband coloration.

The ear's sensitivity to phase is a hotly contested subject. Digital signal processing software has made it much easier to simulate and test the effects of phase distortion, independently of amplitude response. It's quite clear from even the simplest experiments that the phase shifts associated with bass cut at subsonic frequencies (which gives the minutest amount of amplitude error within the audio band) can have a modest but clearly audible effect on the tightness and impact of bass. In effect, the fundamental arrives a few milliseconds out of step with the harmonics and bass ends up sounding 'lazy'.

Midband effects have the greatest significance, though. Amplifiers generally have a very flat frequency response in the midband, but speakers don't. In fact, speakers are notorious for having little resonances in their response, which prolong brief bursts of sound at or near their natural frequency. A 'bass transient' (a brief bass note or percussive thwack) can excite those resonances, causing a



"We're not nearly as sensitive to low frequency distortion as we are to midrange frequencies."

major difference in harmonic content, especially just after the initial event. This means bass can sound very different through speakers with notionally the same roll-off point for low frequencies.

Distortion is also a contributor, both in speakers and amps. We're not nearly as sensitive to low frequency distortion as we are to midrange frequencies, and amps can put out at least as much of the latter as speakers because of the high harmonics in their distortion spectrum. Amazingly small amounts of distortion (apparently round the 0.01% sort of level) can be clearly audible, again as a form of coloration, which makes bass seem different between models. It even seems that CD player jitter can affect bass, indirectly, though its effect on high frequencies. The way the ear 'knits' the sound together makes the brain think the bass is at fault, while the real cause is several octaves away.

And 'fast' bass? Fact is, it's quite often the result of a flaw – either a slight lift in response in the midrange, or a little added resonance. Nice, perhaps, but not always accurate. The moral of this tale: with bass particularly, don't make snap judgements. Listen carefully for naturalness above all else. Real bass, as a speaker designer once said, should be felt and not heard! **HFC**

Richard Black



ESSENTIALS



ACS ELCEA ER20 EAR PROTECTORS £14 (PAIR)

There's always a temptation not to bother looking after one's hearing, because it seems to recover after getting a beating from loud sounds. But every time you suffer the slightest post-noise ringing in the ears, you have just lost a tiny bit of hearing acuity. Protection is really a very good idea and worth the inconvenience. In many situations, you just need a bit of attenuation. These earplugs are made for musicians and have constant attenuation across the frequency range, giving excellent intelligibility and even the ability to enjoy over-loud music at sensible levels. Next time you go to a concert that might be too loud, take a pair. In thirty years' time, you may be glad you did!

☎ 01582 767007 🌐 www.hearingprotection.co.uk

TCI SUPER CONSTRICTOR MAINS CABLE £180 (1M)

This cable's inflexible bulk includes a single earth insulator, plus eight silver-plated cores for live and neutral wires, all separately insulated with PTFE. Even the solid toughplug and the Wattgate 320 IEC connector are in danger of being dislodged by the cable's solidity. This makes installation a royal pain, but if you persevere, you will indeed win something in terms of sound. We managed to wring a touch more detail and a subjectively quieter background from a variety of high-grade source and amplifier components using this lead, even when compared to some already quite tweaky mains cables. Worthwhile for the single-minded.

☎ 07710 196949 🌐 www.true-colours.com



ATLAS TITAN ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £325 (1M PAIR)

Atlas offers a broad range of cables incorporating several key technologies. This one includes Ohno Continuous Casting – a method of making copper wires with truly enormous crystals and hence less crystal boundaries. Insulation is Teflon, construction is coaxial and the whole thing is rounded off with good quality phono plugs. It's moderately flexible, too. It is a 75ohm design and, although Atlas doesn't promote it as a digital cable, it works well in that role. In conventional analogue audio, it offers warm sound with good detail and fussy extension at the frequency extremes. Ideal, we'd say, for those seeking fit-and-forget excellence from a hi-fi; thrills-seekers may be better off elsewhere. Expensive but justifiable.

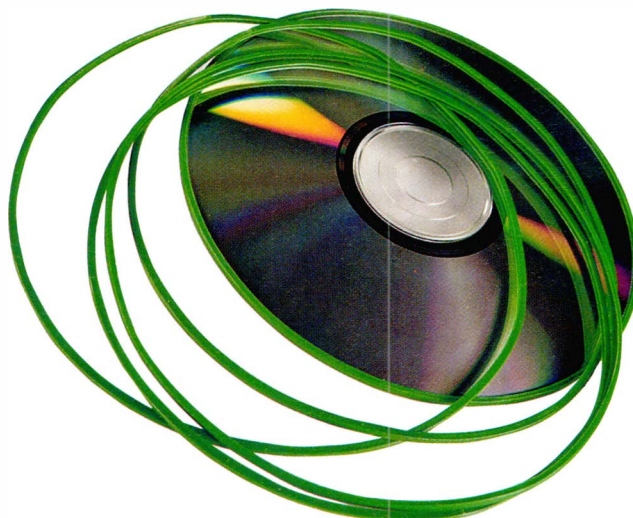
☎ 01563 572666 🌐 www.hifi.org.uk



DISCWASHER SONIC CIRCLES CD DAMPERS £12 (PACK OF 10)

These are the classic green CD rings that have been around for ages. The idea is that they both damp disc vibrations and absorb stray laser light, in turn helping to reduce jitter. While we wouldn't say the results are earth-shattering, we found a small subjective improvement with various budget CD players and a range of discs. There's little or no effect on the mechanical noise made by many players, but the overall sound seems to firm up a little. They're terribly fiddly to fit, though, even with practice.

☎ 0845 634 0340 🌐 www.recoton.com



CUSTOM DESIGN SIGNATURE 404 SPEAKER STAND £280 (60CM PAIR)

➤ Having discovered the delights of constrained layer damping, Custom Design is applying it to all areas, including the top plate and the U-section pillars of this speaker stand. The simple act of gluing two pieces of steel together is amazingly effective, but there are limits. These pillars are not as dead as some designs. As a result, the sound may seem warmed-up compared to the very best stands around. The overall performance is good, though, and as usual with Custom Design the build quality is excellent and the looks smartly businesslike.

☎ 0191 262 4646 # www.customdesign.co.uk



ATLAS ELEKTRA ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £450 (1M PAIR)

➤ Unlike Titan, this Elektra cable is a pseudo-balanced design. It has different basic electrical parameters and will be directional in at least some systems. It still uses Teflon insulation, but the addition of a cotton filler (for low microphony) has an electrical effect, increasing dielectric loss. We found a slightly different sound to Titan and indeed didn't always prefer the sound of Elektra. It's still tonally warm but sometimes lacks Titan's level of insight. Treble can seem a little dry on occasions too. A good cable nonetheless, but do try Titan alongside it.

☎ 01563 572666 # www.hifi.org.uk



DECCA 2+2 RECORD BRUSH £13

➤ There's more to this classic little gadget than meets the eye. It includes brushes of two different materials, carbon and polyamide fibre, and of two different lengths – slide off the metal handle and the brush part is reversible. While lightly dusty records are cleaned perfectly adequately by the long fibres, the short ones dig in far better to heavily soiled discs and remove far more muck. Ultimately it won't substitute for a wet cleaner when there's real gunge to shift, but it's uniquely effective as brushes go and we'd recommend it unhesitatingly for everyday use.

☎ 01234 741152 # www.britishaudio.co.uk



CUSTOM DESIGN ICON SIGNATURE ACOUSTIC 400 EQUIPMENT SUPPORT £600 (FOUR SHELVES)

➤ We'll let the picture tell a thousand words. But, those pillars are solid hardwood and the whole assembly weighs about 33kg. Glass shelves tend to have their own acoustic signature, but Custom Design has provided an 'Acoustic Steel' supershelf (an 'iRAP' or 'Isolation Resonance Absorbing Platform') for each, which is most effectively placed direct on the glass, ignoring the supplied ball-and-cup feet. Trouble is, iRAP tends to slide around on the shelf. Double-sided adhesive tape should sort that one fairly painlessly. This stand has very little sound of its own and is a very worthy partner to the finest hi-fi separates. As usual, turntables will benefit from decoupling but the stand is rigid enough for that to work well. Excellent build, performance and value.

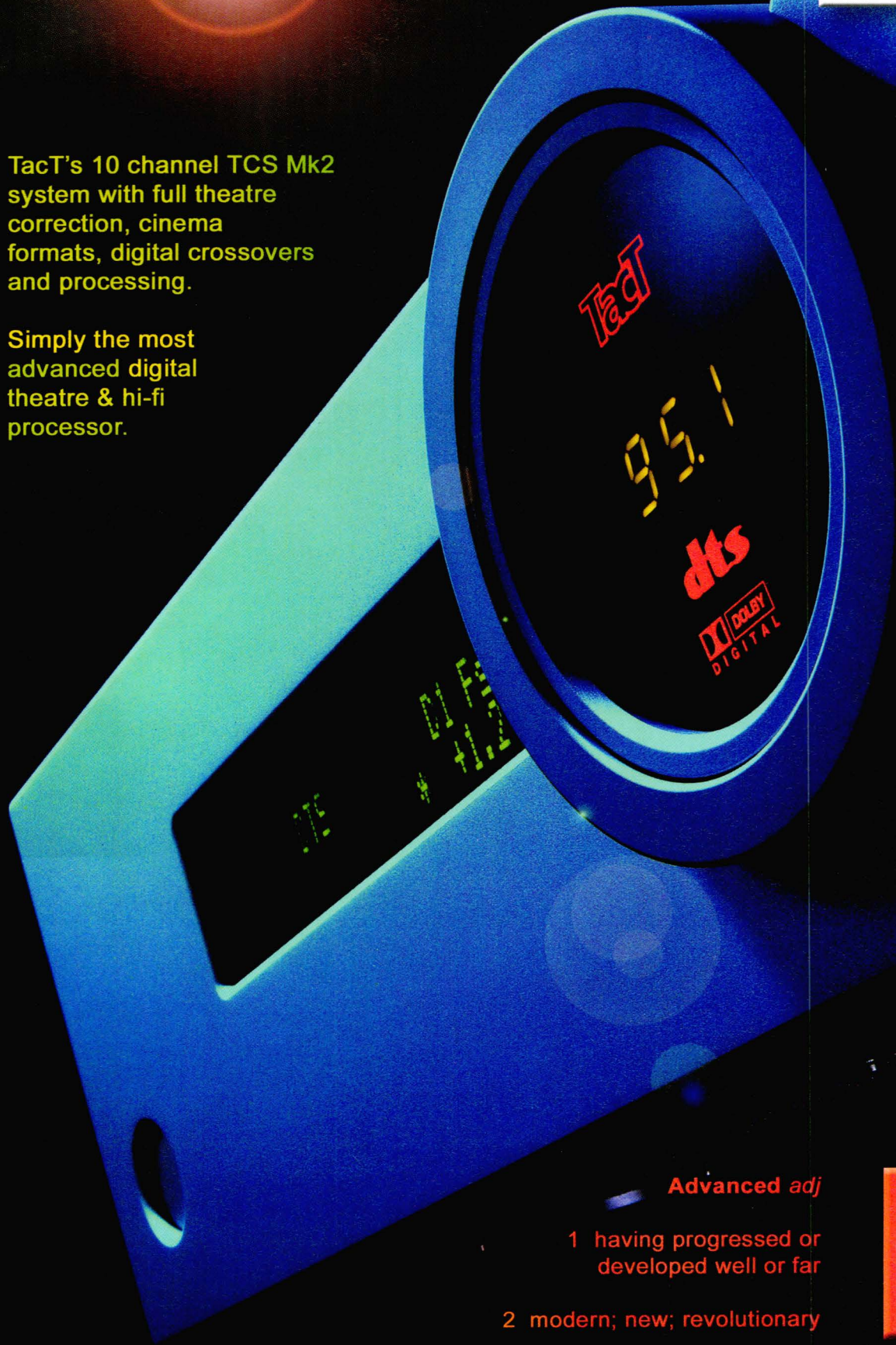
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Simply the most advanced digital theatre & hi-fi processor.



Advanced *adj*

1 having progressed or developed well or far

2 modern; new; revolutionary



Renaissance man

One of the prime movers in electronic pop and now a highly respected soundtrack and orchestral composer, **Ryuichi Sakamoto** explains the thinking behind *Chasm* – his latest audio adventure

With over 100 titles in a discography that stretches back to the 1970s, a new album from Japanese composer, bandleader and electronic innovator Ryuichi Sakamoto is nothing unexpected. What is startling is that he can still surprise. A lifelong believer in merging traditional instruments with electronic devices, Sakamoto has made certain sounds his own. Whether it be with his pioneering synth group Yellow Magic Orchestra or former pretty boy pop star David Sylvian, on the conductor's podium or working on his Apple Mac in New York, Sakamoto is always in search of new sounds.

"Recently I worked with David Sylvian again. Our relationship is more like that of two brothers. Since we were both upset by events in the world, David sent me a demo of a song he had been working on called *World Citizen*. We brought together some musicians in New York, where I live, and developed two versions of the song in my studio. I can do almost anything there except record piano – I have to go to a larger studio for piano sessions. For me, the most important items are Macs and ProTools, though I also have many keyboards, but mainly use a Yamaha Motif ES7 and Motif 8."

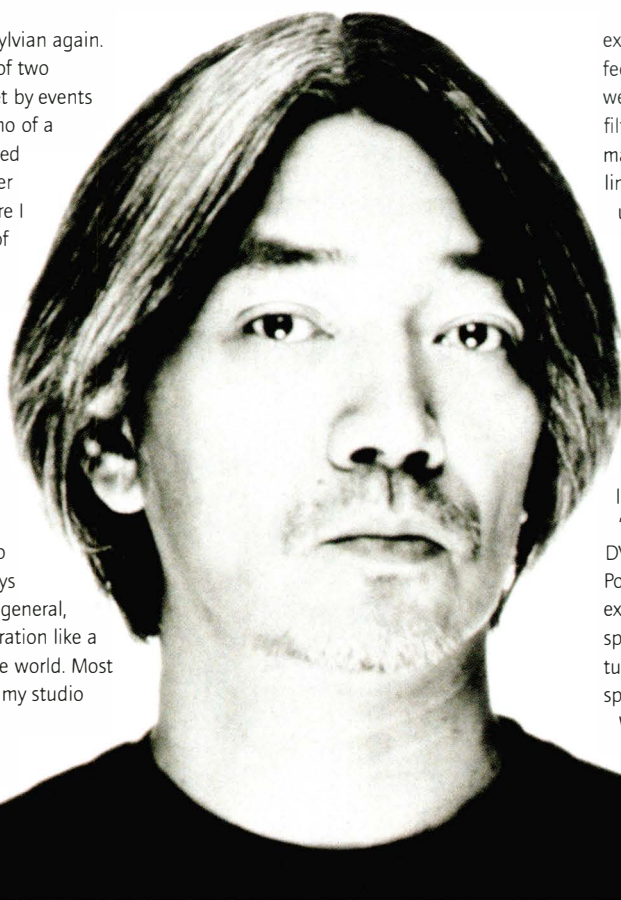
Since Sakamoto is always producing music, it's interesting to hear how he gets started. "It always depends on the type of record. In general, there's usually one source of inspiration like a picture, a film or some event in the world. Most of my writing/demos are done in my studio and the recording in my space or another studio."

By making sound itself the most important

aspect of any project, his results are always innovative and quintessentially Ryuichi. "When I worked on *Chasm*, my approach to sound was to treat it like making a collage by attaching things to a blank canvas or using subconscious symbols and shapes like Miró or Klee or

Jackson Pollock. I achieve this by directly manipulating audio files or the source materials of the sound. I always dreamt about making music that is not bound by metric structure and I think I've achieved this somewhat with *Chasm*. The sound involved

"I have various set-ups, including SACD, DVD-Audio and such, but I use my Apple PowerBook and iPod the most."



experimenting with many types of filters. The feeling any sound generated and its depth were altered depending on how the sound was filtered. The different combinations of source material and filtering presented me with limitless possibilities, so I kept experimenting until I found the sound that gave me the 'that's it!' feeling."

Sakamoto cites Björk's new album *Medulla* as "the most exciting and interesting new music in terms of sound" but confesses that his often hectic recording schedule prevents him from listening to large quantities of music. But when he does, what sort of kit does the man known as 'the professor' choose to listen to his music on?

"I have various set-ups, including SACD, DVD-Audio and such, but I use my Apple PowerBook and iPod the most. I'm enjoying experimenting with all the new accessories like speakers and microphones. I also have an iPal tuner that was made to work with the iPod. My speakers are constant – Genelecs and Yamahas.

Would you believe it, I've actually been captivated by the sound of old radios in the studio recently..." **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

Essential Sakamoto

1. Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence (1983)

Sakamoto not only starred in this classic film but also wrote its haunting electro-acoustic score.



2. The Sheltering Sky (1990)

Six months went into producing this wonderfully melancholic orchestral score.



3. Heartbeat (1992)

International pop Ryuichi style with guest DJs, the resurrected guitar of Jimi Hendrix and David Sylvian on vocals.



4. Chasm (2004)

Innovative, accessible, startling. From dirty hip-hop to beautiful ambient, this is his best ever album.



Hello





WIN! DENON'S STUNNING DVD-3910 UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER WORTH £900

Denon has been going from strength to strength with its superb universal disc players, which marry superb high-resolution audio to market-leading video reproduction. The DVD-3910 is without doubt an audio/videophile machine for the connoisseur. It was the first DVD player to boast a v1.1 HDMI output – the next generation digital audio/video interface – and delivers value for money that was unheard of only a few years ago. Packed with features and a comprehensive set of

cutting-edge audio and video DACs, the player easily merited a Best Buy badge when we put it through its paces in the November issue (*HFC 260*), followed by a Gold Award in the recent *Hi-Fi Choice Awards*. Audio quality is excellent with both SACD and DVD-Audio discs, and CD is impressive too. What surprised us most, however, was the outstanding fidelity of its video playback, which is truly top-notch. For your chance to experience this for yourself, simply answer the question below...

QUESTION:

What surprised us most about the Denon DVD-3910?

- A:** The outstanding fidelity of its video playback
- B:** A substantial power supply modelled on a Krispy Kreme doughnut
- C:** The video installation menu screen image featuring Gérard Depardieu

TO ENTER:

By Phone: Simply call **0905 053 3352** and follow the instructions (your call will cost 50p per minute and last no longer than 90 seconds).

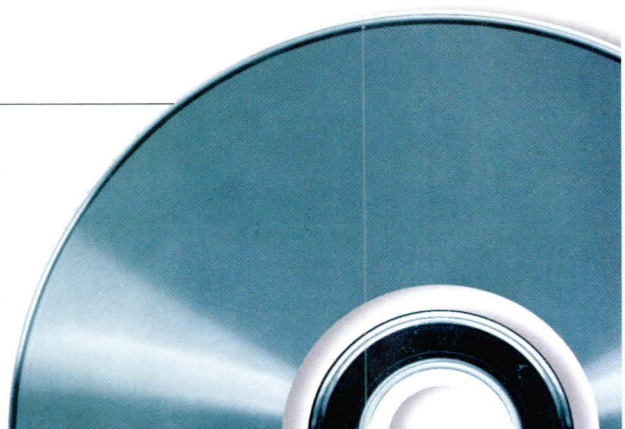
By Text: Send the text message **HFC COMP1** with the answer A, B or C to **83070**. For example, if you think the answer is B: A substantial power supply modelled on a Krispy Kreme doughnut then text HFC COMP1 B to 83070.

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Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. Closing date for entries is 16 January 2005. The entries will be judged after the closing date and the winners will be notified by telephone within ten days of that date. Prizes will be sent out within 28 days of notification by the companies involved, not Hi-Fi Choice or Future Publishing. Entering costs – BY TEXT: 1 x 50p (including VAT) for each entry plus your usual text message cost. This service is available to T-Mobile, Orange, Vodafone and O2 customers only. BY PHONELINE: Each call costs 50p per minute and last approximately 90 seconds. Please remember to get permission from the person who pays the bill before you enter. No purchase necessary. Alternatively, please send your name, address and telephone number with the correct answer to: Hi-Fi Choice, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. Technical problems? Contact the service provider: Opera Telecom (Future), PO Box 9107, Birmingham B7 4TT.

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

NITIN SAWHNEY
 All Mixed Up

COMPACT DISC & VINYL





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC *"This is a lesson in sub-bass supremacy."*

MISSY MISDEMEANOR ELLIOTT Da Real World Gold Mind/EastWest

Music: Missy Elliott went to see *The Matrix* and this follow up to the poppy *Supa Dupa Fly* is the result. It's a dark and sultry affair, with plenty of 'parental advisory explicit content' and the hardest beats that her partner Timbaland has yet put down. Featuring the MCing talents of Redman, Lil Kim, Aaliyah and Eminem, this 1999 set is Missy's finest to date. What makes it great is the production and Timbaland's remarkable ability to create killer beats and

then tattoo them with sound effects that enhance matters. The slimline Missy may sell more albums but she don't make them like this no more. ★★★★★
Sound: This album sounds remarkably good on anything but it rewards increases in bandwidth and resolution in no uncertain terms. The production is sharp and the bass full – if your system/neighbours can take it, this is a lesson in sub-bass supremacy. ★★★★★ JK

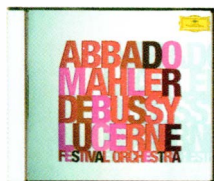
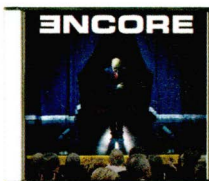


EMINEM Encore

Interscope

Music: The titles of Eminem's records are revealing. 2002's *The Eminem Show* found him playing to the gallery. The follow-up is not merely an encore, but ought to be subtitled 'more of the same'. Four albums in, the shock value has gone and he sounds about as threatening as Robbie Williams. The schoolboy humour of *Big Weenie* and *Puke* is pathetic – this man is now 32, remember. The whinging raps about the difficulty of being the multi-millionaire, Vanity Fair cover star he has become are risible. The insults hurled at the likes of Madonna and Michael Jackson are cheap. He was always toying with us, which was fine, the problem is he's now become tedious with it. The most dangerous threat to American children since polio? Not any more. ★★

Sound: A typical Dr Dre production, full of bubblegum-pop hooks, melodies of nursery-rhyme simplicity and increasingly anodyne grooves that provide an unremarkable backdrop to his still impressive trademark rapping. ★★ NW



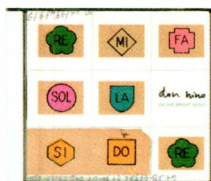
DEBUSSY/ MAHLER

Debussy: La Mer, **Mahler:** Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection"

Claudio Abbado (conductor), Lucerne Festival Orchestra, Eteri Gvazava (soprano), Anna Larsson (contralto) DGG 00289 477 5082

Music: The debut recordings from an orchestra whose players are the best of the best. Abbado is a renowned Mahlerian, and no mean conductor of Debussy either, and the result is everything it should be and more. The Debussy is a fine recording, but the Mahler is without doubt one of the greatest versions yet of this much-recorded work. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded live at the Lucerne Festival in 2003, there is nothing that gives this fact away apart from the life and spontaneity of the playing and the applause at the end of the works. A first class recording. ★★★★★ AG



DON NINO

On The Bright Scale

Prohibited

Music: Folktronica – it's the new rock 'n' roll, apparently. But when it's as good a prospect as Don Nino's second album, it's easy to be a believer. The Frenchman formerly known as Nicolas Laureau uses electronic beats as a backdrop to his contributions on guitars, pianos (including toy and thumb varieties), harmonium, banjo and glockenspiel as well as his rather frail voice, singing in English. The songs are vaguely Nick Drake/Pink Floyd psychedelic in content, and are for the most part spare and intimate. ★★★★★

Sound: Modern recording technology means that an album like this can be recorded just as easily at home (or living room) as in a studio. Close miking adds to the intimacy of this beautiful record. ★★ DO

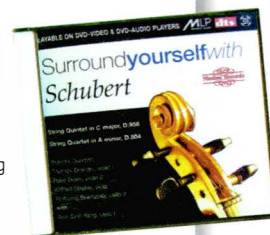
DVD-AUDIO & SACD

SCHUBERT

Surround Yourself With Schubert: String Quintet in C major D. 956, String Quartet in A major D. 804 Brandis Quartett, Wen-Sinn Yang (first cello)

DVD-Audio (four-channel 24/88.2 surround, 24/48 stereo, DTS) Nimbus Records N19005

Music: The *D.956 Quintet* is the major work here, among the last works Schubert composed while he was at his creative peak. It was completed just two months before his demise in 1829, aged just 31. The *D.804 Quartet* is also a fine work dating from about four years earlier, and incidentally a contemporary of *Death And The Maiden*. The performances are bold, rhythmically masterful and supremely well phrased. It's performed with the air of a group thoroughly comfortable with Schubert's musical idiom. ★★★★★
Sound: Part of a new DVD-Audio series made from older recordings – in this case dating from the early 1990s – which were recorded with the Ambisonics microphone and software, and released here in a 4.0-channel form – L, R, RL, RR (no centre channel). The multichannel mix is much bolder and more physical, and overall much more satisfying than the two-channel version. ★★★★★ AG



THE CRYSTAL METHOD

Legion Of Boom

DVD-Audio (24/48 surround, 16/48 stereo, DTS) V2

Music: *Legion Of Boom* takes Vegas-based electronica duo Ken Jordan and Scott Kirkland into the multichannel domain for the first time. As America's sonic equivalent of The Prodigy, the lads have injected their hard-hitting style into a fresh mix that includes guest contributions from Limp Bizkit's Wes Borland and Kyuss hard man, John Garcia. The rock borrowings are superbly complementary and give the album an edge and aggression that blends hard rock and driving electronica together with aplomb. A busy mix with a multi-layered soundstage provides an exciting an entertaining surround experience, with all the drama of Underworld's *Born Slippy* and the impact of The Prodigy's *Breathe*. ★★★★★

Sound: While you're not getting maximum resolution from DVD-A in either multichannel or stereo, the quality is nevertheless gratifying. The engineers have made clever use of all 5.1 speakers and the output is punchy, dynamic, rich and weighty. At full resolution, this disc could've been magic. ★★★★★ DG



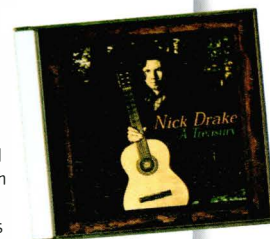
NICK DRAKE

A Treasury

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer) Island/Universal

Music: Despite dying of a (possibly accidental) overdose of antidepressants 31 years ago, Nick Drake's stock is definitely on the rise. This latest compilation is rumoured to precede a reissue of his complete works on SACD, with multichannel mixes for each. *A Treasury* features 15 songs largely taken from the three albums released in his lifetime, alongside two 'new' tracks, *Magic* and *Black Eyed Dog*, which were released after his death. Drake's fragile voice and accomplished guitar picking have an emotional power that is rare in any field, and while the simple approach of *Pink Moon* revealed his finest music, there's a range and variety in his work with band and orchestration that has a broader appeal. *Treasury* is a fine title – this music truly shimmers. ★★★★★

Sound: This SACD has a warm, almost analogue balance that perfectly suits the material well. The tracks taken from the *Bryter Later* album set still have some tape hiss, but less than early CD reissues and the overall effect is rich and enveloping. ★★★★★ JK

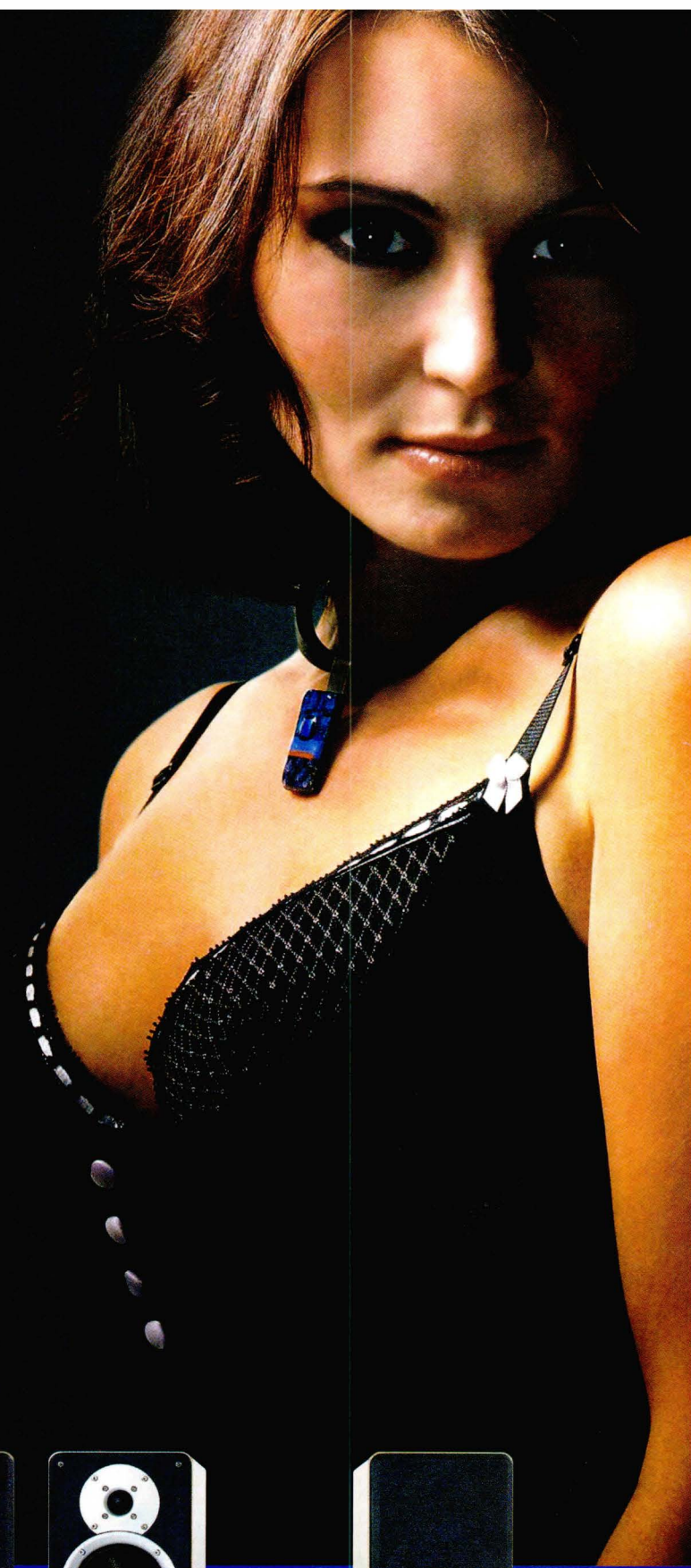


A Point of Reference

Introducing the new Reference Series 250 System and Reference 300 Mk. II. Following the stunning success of the original award winning Reference Series, TEAC is proud to announce these brand new products. Both feature DAB tuner, beautiful silver finish and offer high quality hi-fi performance in a micro/mini sized package. Ease of use comes naturally with a full function remote control.

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the new reference point for
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Reference CR-H250 System

Reference 250
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Reference 300 System
The Award Winner



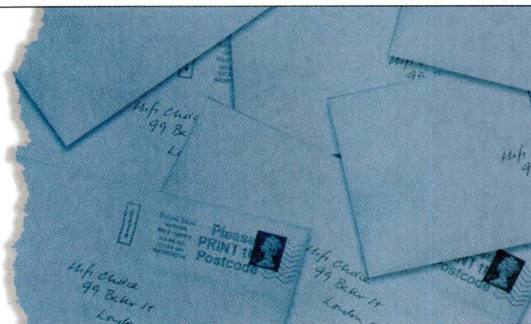
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★ LETTER OF THE MONTH

DISC DILEMMA

I have a few hybrid SACD recordings that I play on my Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player. I feel that SACD (CD layer) sound offers a marked improvement over normal CDs. I therefore did an experiment; I bought two copies of the London Symphony Orchestra's recording of Brahms' *Symphony 3* – one an SACD hybrid, the other a normal CD. To my amazement, the sound was different. With the SACD, the recording was tighter, more relaxed and more natural. Perhaps I should indulge in more hybrid discs?

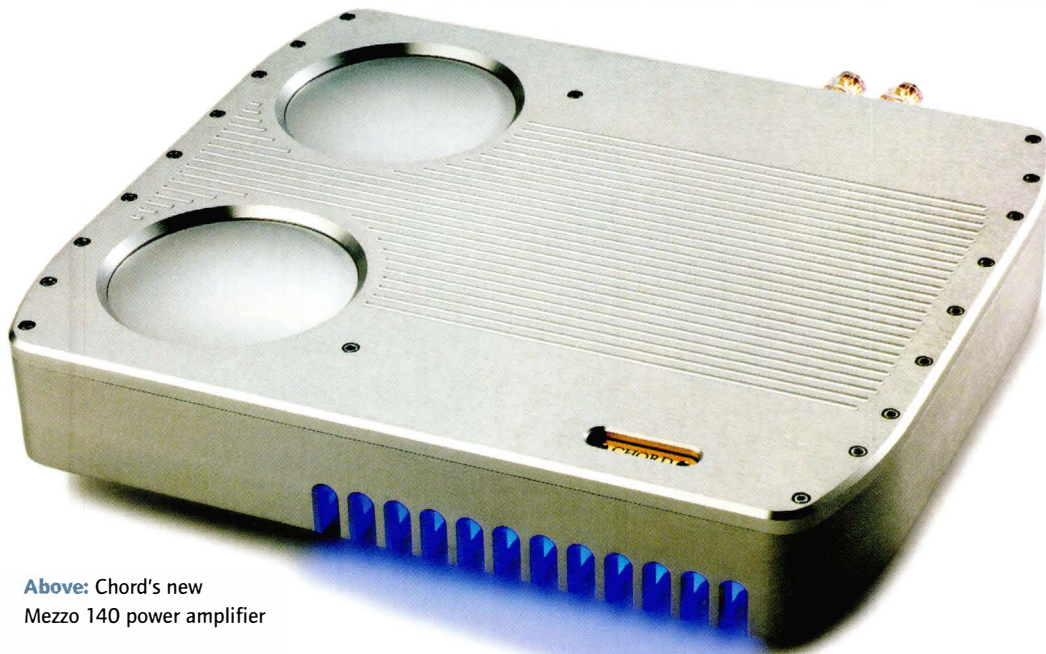
Peter Walker via email

HFC There is a noticeable difference between discs in general. This is largely due to uncontrollable variables involved in production. Of course, many SACD discs are often new recordings or new remasters which may well sound better than some of the existing discs on the market.



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...)



Above: Chord's new Mezzo 140 power amplifier

ALL WE ARE SAYING...

How about you give Chord amps a chance? For all the years I have been reading the hi-fi press, I can't recall ever seeing a review. I believe that pound for pound, Chord amps are as good, if not better than, the Krell and Naim equivalents – two companies for whom your mag seems to have an unhealthy love affair. And while I'm on my soapbox, how come the Chord DAC/Blu is not in your Buyer's Bible despite it getting a Bronze medal in the *Hi-Fi Choice Awards* issue? Is this proof of a conspiracy?

Dean Marshall via email

HFC There's no conspiracy. We're big fans of Chord's sumptuous kit, but as with many highly specialist companies, it has very limited stock for magazines to review. Plus, Chord products are all hand-made to order so, unlike more mainstream brands, they can't just despatch one from the warehouse. We have spoken to Chord recently and it's in the process of building one of the new Mezzo amplifiers from the Choral range for us. The Chord DAC/Blu was reviewed in our special *The Collection* edition and was democratically elected for an Award by our most respected reviewers, who have been impressed by the combination over the last 12 months.

DUMB AND DUMBER

In November's *Choice Mail* (HFC 260) you printed a letter from an individual called CJM, who was complaining about the reference quality and cost of

"I believe that pound for pound, Chord amps are as good, if not better than, the Krell and Naim equivalents."

the products in *Hi-Fi Choice*. CJM wants you to dumb down. Don't do it, please! There are already publications catering for mass-market products, its just horses for courses.

Paul Metson Yorkshire

HFC We've no intention of dumbing down and hope that all of our readers enjoy the dynamic mix of reviews and spread of prices reflected in the mag. We're not afraid of showcasing aspirational and sensational hi-fi, but we're also enthusiastic in revealing the very best of the entry-level kit. So be it Classé or Cambridge Audio, if it's sonically blessed, we'll bring you the most reliable reviews.

EAR OF THE BEHOLDER

I recently attended the Home Entertainment Show in Manchester. After moving from room to room, chatting to various industry people and listening ▶



Above: Linn's Classik system

to their kit, I concluded that they are all mildly obsessed. They all believe their kit will take you closer to hi-fi heaven, but one common thing that they didn't agree on was what constitutes high fidelity. One camp centered on resolution and focus, others favoured rhythm and passion. I found their collective differences reflective of our opposing tastes as individuals (as one might expect), which once again drives home the message that sound quality is in the ear of the beholder.

Karl Todd Lancashire

THE WALL

I live in a new-ish semi and wish to soundproof the party wall between my neighbour and myself. The house is five years old with stud wall construction and the room measures 6x2.5m. What would be the best way to do this? I've heard about a rubber fabric composite and acoustic wadding – are these sufficient? I'll be using a builder.

James Gilgannon Glasgow

HFC Most new builds should already be well insulated against both sound and heat, so it may be worth checking your NHBC guarantee (assuming you have one) if you're concerned about noise leakage. The established method for soundproofing party walls involves building a timber frame the length and height of the wall, then screwing it to the floor, ceiling and adjacent walls. Do not fix it to the length of the wall itself. Line the frame with high-mass loft insulation and then face it with plasterboard. Tape the joints and

Below: Last issue's room acoustics feature



"I love the CD performance, but I'm not even using the tuner at the moment, as the reception is so poor."

skim plaster the wall. There are also specialist acoustics companies that will advise further and sell you tailor-made products if you can meet the extra costs. For more information, read our Changing Rooms feature on the art of room acoustics in the January issue (HFC 262).

FISHY TUNER

I bought a Linn Classik for my living room a few months ago. I love the CD performance, but I'm not even using the tuner at the moment, as the reception is so poor. I tend to use radio as background music rather than serious listening, so I am not considering a dedicated outside FM aerial at this stage.

Can you recommend a good indoor FM aerial – is there such a thing? So far, I've tried the ribbon aerial supplied with the Classik and one of those external TV/FM aerials (for portable TVs), but both gave very poor results. What makes it more frustrating is that I get perfect FM reception using my Tivoli Model One and the flimsy bit of wire that acts as an aerial. Why does this work, but not the Linn?

Ray70 via email

HFC You've half guessed it already. Ribbon aerials aren't up to much in most cases, and the majority of indoor aerials aren't that great (an exception is the Magnum Dynalab ST-2FM omni-directional indoor/outdoor aerial). The performance does depend on what floor you are on and whether dirty great big buildings introduce nasty multipath distortion – you'd certainly be better using an external FM aerial if at all possible.

But before you buy a new aerial, try the dodge that makes the Tivoli work – switch to mono. Interference is always worse in stereo and for background listening, mono may do perfectly well.

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Fresh off the press, the August issue of HI-FI CHOICE is packed full of exclusive in-depth tests of the latest high-performance kit, including...

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- Digital versus analogue: Helping players from Marantz CD and Clearaudio (vinyl) demonstrate the state of the art

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If amps and speakers break in then shouldn't cables? I am hoping my expensive cables will sound better than the cheap ones I had been using. As of now, I think the cheaper cables sound better...

Websurfer

...I think they do need time to burn in, but use your kit as normal and it will sort itself out.

Davewhit2

Where can I get copper screws? I was thinking of going all DIY and replacing the case screws on my equipment with copper ones, like the Marantz KI stuff...

Miller-8

...My first thought was your local Police Station.

Mikehit

I am very interested in the sonic characteristics of Linn hi-fi. What options are there that offer similar style but perhaps don't cost so much...?

Drumon

...Just buy a Linn Classik and Katan speakers. Then you can add a power amp (LK85 or LK140) or try some Ninkas if you want floorstanders.

long-time-dead

You all really should experiment with subwoofer placement. I used to have my sub about 30cm from the rear wall, but now it's about seven centimetres away and the bass impact is so much better. Cheap tweaks rule.

Dean Fernando

Not for conservatives



The comprehensive range of turntables by **Pro-ject**, design is perhaps a little less conservative than the norm and yes, products are available in blue, and red, and yellow, and green.

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AVID ACUTUS TURNTABLE (WITH DYNAVECTOR ARM AND EMT CARTRIDGE) | TALK HURRICANE 3.1
PREAMP/TORNADO 3.1B POWER AMPS (X2) | MEADOWLARK BLUE HERON 2 SPEAKERS | £25,495

The next level

Vinyl makes a strong audiophile statement in itself, but as a part of a £25,000 system... cor!

The high end is a strange, perspective-distorting place. But what do you do if you want to go higher? You read on, that's what.

Seems we're all looking for something. For PlayStation junkies, it's a residents' parking permit in 'the third place'. Where fine music and hi-fi are the drugs of choice, the quest is more abstract still: to hitch a ride in the lift that takes us to 'the next level'.

Let's try to picture what this means. Say we average out the quality and value of all the *Beautiful Systems* featured in *Hi-Fi Choice* to date. What level does this put us on? Which floor have we reached on the journey to the audio nirvana penthouse? Over half way, surely; I mean, these combos seldom dip below £3,000 and some have cost three times as much.

All right, look down. Yeah, that's a long way, but at least you can see the ground. As for working out how far there is to go to the top, well, hard to tell, isn't it? You lost sight of the building as it disappeared through the cloud base. Safe to assume it isn't close. Strangest thing, though. There isn't much headroom on this floor, is there? It gets worse. The higher you go, the shallower the floors become until, several hundred miles up, you'd hardly be able to slide a box of cornflakes between ceiling and carpet. And even there, if you looked up, you wouldn't be able to see the roof.

There is no roof, of course. Returns will continue to diminish in ever smaller increments the higher you go, however much money you spend. Pretty much forever and ever. Bummer.

Just getting to the next level is no easy feat. American speaker designer Pat McGinty puts the problem rather neatly. "What makes a really great speaker?" he asks. Is it fabulous extension? Great soundstaging and focus? Killer dynamics? Resolution in spades?

Impeccable tonality? Openness? McGinty suggests that the answer isn't clear cut. A speaker can do everything right, he says, yet somehow disappoint. The sin is one of omission. He describes the missing component as "that tears and goose-bumps thing, that trembling, swept away thing, that dance around the room thing".

That heart and soul thing? Absolutely. Mr McGinty is a heart and soul kinda guy. That's why he started Meadowlark, a speaker manufacturer for people who don't like hi-fi checklists but who do want to experience those "priceless private thrills that sweep you away when you listen to music". In short, to get to the next level.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Good news in itself. But it gets better. McGinty knows Conrad Mas. Mas is the man behind Avid, the company from Cambridgeshire that makes the mighty Acutus turntable. They met at a hi-fi show and started to collaborate at subsequent events, especially in the USA. Their products meshed beautifully, and so did their philosophies. Now Avid has started importing Meadowlark speakers to the UK. Fittingly, since Meadowlark's flagship speakers are hand made to customer order, the first pair recently arrived on Conrad's own doorstep. And with something of a thud. In exchange for £10,000, McGinty shipped over the top of the range Blue Heron 2s. They're big. They weigh 50 kilos each. McGinty calls them "devastating". Mas describes them as "staggering". And they're in my listening room right now. Someone hit the 'close door' button, I think we're on our way.

I mentioned meshing philosophies. It's that same instinct for nailing the elusive 'X factor' that drives Mas and, indeed, shaped his design for the Acutus, Avid's first and, to date, most ambitious

"A speaker to experience those 'priceless private thrills that sweep you away when you listen to music'. In short, to get to the next level."



Avid Acutus turntable
£10,795 (inc. arm/cartridge)

Killer vinyl combo that blows any CD player out of the water. Stunning looks, a dream to use, even better sound. Analogue at its best.



Talk Hurricane 3.1B preamp
£1,900

With multichannel audio connections, you might think two-channel sound would be limited. Guess again – this preamp rocks!



Talk Tornado 3.1B mono power amplifier
£2,800 per pair

This 200-watt monoblock delivers awesome dynamics that verge on the scary. Better than that, though, it makes music.



Meadowlark Blue Heron 2 loudspeaker
£10,000 per pair

One of the most expensive speakers to have appeared in *Beautiful Systems* and undoubtedly one of the best. Hard to return to ordinary hi-fi after this.



turntable. Unconvinced by conventional turntable design theory, Mas sat down with a clean sheet of paper and started again, thinking particularly about vibration paths.

The Acutus conforms in as much as it has belt drive and a sprung sub-chassis. But the way it deals with vibration caused by the stylus during playback is very different, transmitting it to the sub-chassis directly through the main bearing and not allowing it to be absorbed into the platter itself. According to Mas, this is key to a turntable's performance. Contributing to the desired result are a special polymer matting material and substantial, high-torque two-piece record clamp.

External vibrations are isolated by a unique suspension system which combines very strong vertical springs with 'O' rings positioned to discourage any lateral movement. Which they do most effectively. Tap the platter with a finger and it moves only in the vertical plane, like a piston. A purpose designed power supply coupled to a unique hand made motor – 10 times more powerful than a typical unit – drives the massive 10kg platter. And what a platter. Like the three massive suspension pillars at each extremity of the sub chassis, it's finished in polished chrome (add £2k to the basic £6,000 price if you'd prefer gold plate, and another £3k for the beefier

power supply). Big numbers, but the truly majestic Acutus is wide, tall, heavy and very, very shiny. It looks worth every penny, even without the gold finish.

HEAVY HELICOPTERS

The Avid Acutus has a helicopter landing pad of an arm base, which can house even the heaviest designs. And they don't come much heavier than the supplied arm from Dynavector – the £2,995 DV507 Mk2 bi-axis arm is the latest incarnation of one of the more remarkable tone arms from the past 25 years, effectively two arms in one which operate independently in the horizontal and vertical planes. Unlike conventional gimbal-type tonearms, where inertia is the same in both planes, the '507 has a large effective mass in the horizontal plane to provide a stable platform for the cartridge. At the same time, the shorter, lightweight vertical sub-arm at the end of the horizontal main arm, gives a small effective mass in the vertical plane for superior tracking.

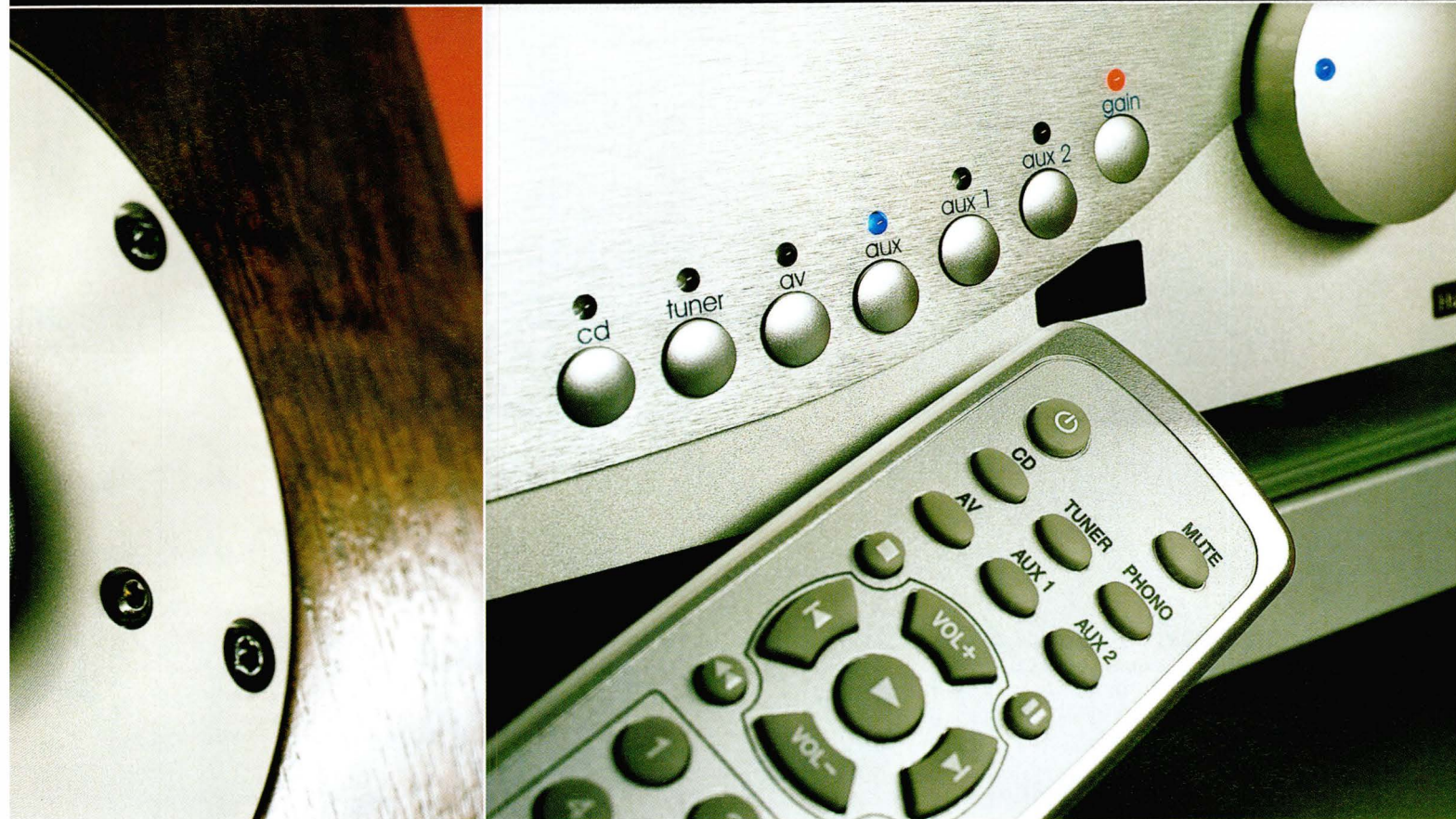
It's unusual in other ways, too. A curved rod attached to the rear of the arm is mounted in a magnetic field supplied by two powerful neodymium magnets. Any minute movement of the rod, due to an undamped arm resonance, causes an eddy current to be induced in the rod, which in turn interacts with the magnetic field to

return the system to its 'rest state'. Undeniably clever stuff. As is the design of the £1,800 EMT TU-3 phono cartridge, which is based on a nude version of the classic Ortofon SPU. This red cartridge, with its hand-wound coils, a soft iron magnet wound with copper wire and a Geyger S stylus, is one of the hottest properties in needles, with claims of a deep, accurate bass and excellent stereo separation. And, we rather hope, oodles of heart and soul.

Let me put it this way: it's the heart and soul way or the highway for the amplification, too. Problem? Not for Kevin Edwards. He founded Talk Electronics in 1996 and set up shop in Surrey. This is his take on what hi-fi should be: "The traditional 'hi-fi' virtues of clarity and detail, soundstaging and depth, to name a few, are undeniably very important and certainly contribute to convincing reproduction of music. Even more vital, though, is the reproduction of music and musicians – passion, soul, involvement, a belief in real music-making." Bingo, team player.

It isn't that the Meadowlark Blue Heaven 2s, with their 91.5 dB sensitivity, require an awful lot of driving. But here it is anyway: Talk Hurricane 3.1 balanced preamp (£1,900 and billed as Talk's best ever stereo preamp, despite having an all analogue six-channel input and output) feeds two Tornado 3.1 balanced





“This isn’t to say it doesn’t impress on first listen – you know it’s special from the first few bars – it’s more about its ability to hold you in its thrall for hours on end. It must be getting a lot right.”

monoblock power amplifiers (each capable of delivering a constant 200 watts into eight ohms and one kilowatt into one ohm for a 10 millisecond burst, £2,800 the pair). Headroom? Westminster Cathedral. Aesthetic compatibility? A gig of contrasts: real dark wood meets mirror-finish chrome meets a three-tier wall of matt silver. Works for me. As does the immensely secure, fumble-free operation of the Avid/Dynavector combo and the slick ergonomics of the Talk preamp.

FATIGUE FREE

It ties in perfectly with the idea that here is a beautiful system you can live with. This isn’t to say it doesn’t impress on first listen – you know it’s special from the first few bars – it’s more about its ability to hold you in its thrall for hours on end without any residual fatigue. It must be getting an awful lot right.

In purely objective hi-fi terms, the Avid/Talk/Meadowlark combo is hardly text book. It isn’t, for instance, quite as satiny through the treble as maybe some would expect a high-end system to be.

But its vibrancy and definition give it a sense of presence and life that, in my experience, is simply unmatched. Yes, there’s subtlety, often with an astonishingly deft musical touch, but it’s the weight and authority in the lower registers that’s downright naughty. It gives the system a real musical span.

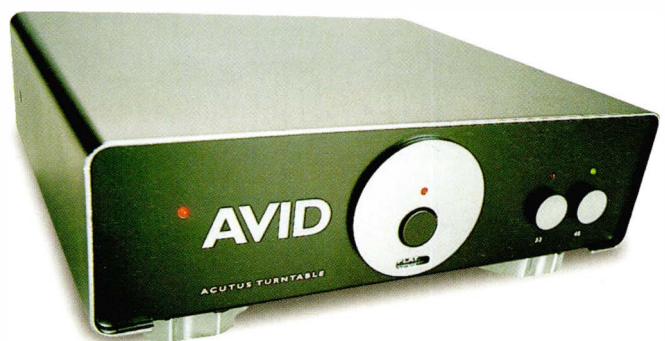
The thwack of Steve Gadd’s drumkit on Steely Dan’s *Aja* album is experienced on a physical level yet the syrupy string arrangements that form the backdrop to Joni Mitchell’s *Both Sides Now* are achingly delicate. Muscle and poise go hand in hand. The monoblocks clearly have power to burn and control in spades. But the desire to thrill is never far below the surface. Should you really want to go for it, you can use Metallica to wake up the entire neighbourhood. Excitement gets out of bed all right.

With classical and jazz, the well rounded warmth and solidity of the sound is hugely appealing. But it’s this system’s ability to deliver the whole event – the music, the performance, the acoustic, the buzz – that makes it so enduringly satisfying. It makes music

lifelike, emotionally replete. Complex tunes are delivered so lucidly they sound simple, simple ones with effortless fluency. The system draws its strength from outstanding synergy. Not just a technical compatibility – finessed by Avid interconnects and speaker cable – but a unity of design and purpose. It possesses a musicality that can show a clean pair of heels to any digitally-based system, regardless of price.

And that swishing sound? It’s the doors opening onto the next level. We’ve arrived. **HFC**

David Vivian





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Hi-fi & Home Cinema show

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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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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

You can find more 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...

Open

BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN®



CD: the last word?

Meridian has been redefining digital expectations for many years – but what's left to do with CD?

PRODUCT Meridian 808i Signature

TYPE CD player/DAC/preamp

PRICE £8,250

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 48x17.5x41.1cm
 ⦿ Weight: 14kg ⦿ Preamp facility plus DAC/ADC for external sources ⦿ Outputs: analogue balanced and unbalanced, digital x2 ⦿ Inputs: analogue x6, digital x3 (electrical x3, optical x2) Output level (fixed mode): 2.35V

CONTACT ☎ 01480 445678

🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

Since the late 1970s, Meridian has been associated with smart, high-technology products. In the early years, the company limited itself to amplifiers and active speakers, but in 1984, Meridian produced the first 'audiophile' CD players. The MCD and MCD-Pro were heavily modified Philips players which stood as a benchmark for quite some time. The company's subsequent history has been suffused with digital landmarks, remarkable for features, originality and, of course, sound.

Fast-forward to the tail end of 2004 – to celebrate 20 years of Meridian-flavoured CD replay, the company has launched the £8,250 808i Signature. It may raise an eyebrow or two that Meridian – whose product range has included DVD-Audio for quite some time – has made this a CD-only machine, but with sales of DVD-Audio software at their present level, the company can hardly be said to be cutting its own throat. But the 808i is not about huge sales volumes – this is a statement. A statement, indeed, that says 'we know as much about this CD thing as anyone on the planet'. Given Meridian's impressive list of Audio Engineering Society papers and other industry-standard references, it might be rash to argue.

So, expectations high, we opened the gigantic box in which this came. It's a big beast, for sure, but it's smart, too. In fact, it's gorgeous. Like many other companies that take design seriously, Meridian maintains links with its heritage while keeping looks right up to the minute. The front panel is neat and efficient, with extra controls hidden behind a drop-down panel, the display is large and legible, and those tasteful curves do a lot to diminish the impact of the size.

And then there's the remote control. This is not a flimsy plastic thing like most of them, and it makes no attempt to be one-handed. It's an unapologetic component in its own right, which can sit proudly on the smartest coffee tables in the land and is (in our experience) uniquely well laid out and easy to read and use. It operates a complete Meridian system and a

vast range of other kit, and if that's not enough, it can 'learn' control sequences from other remote controls. It's gently backlit and comes with alternative keycaps to suit your naming preferences. Despite its size, it sits nicely in the hand and all in all it's a top bit of kit.

Now, that remote also gives a clue to some of the 808i's added features. Significantly, there is a row of buttons labelled Radio, DVD and so on. Yes, this CD player is also a preamp. Oh, and a DAC and, an ADC for good measure, meaning analogue inputs are first converted to digital. The selector is digital, the volume and balance controls are digital, outputs are both digital and analogue. These days, D-to-A and A-to-D conversion are pretty transparent processes and although it's hard to deny that anything in the signal path is a potential cause of contamination, experience suggests that there will be less of it than one might at first expect. And then there's the rather important point that many users will be connecting to Meridian's digital loudspeakers.

The overall feature count runs to CD replay plus six analogue and five digital inputs, balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs and two digital outputs, plus Meridian communications and RS232 connections. Volume is adjustable in 1dB steps, balance and absolute phase are controllable too and inputs can be adjusted for sensitivity. And in a fine sublime-to-ridiculous touch, the 808i can also play MP3 tracks stored on CD-R discs, although we wonder who would use such an option – it's rather like delivering pizza on a Harley.

Meridian's construction is nifty. The top and sides of the player form a removable 'skin', covering a decidedly industrial case made from flat metal panels. Remove the top cover of that and the internal construction is like a personal computer, with input and output electronics on cards which plug into a backplane. A-D and D-A modules are screened with soldered-on cans, so we're none the wiser as to what goes on inside, not that a couple of part numbers tell one very much anyway. To the right of the transport a small switch-mode power supply converts AC to DC.

SOUND QUALITY

It's hard to fault the assembly, and external fit and finish are superb. But does the sound come up to expectations? It does. In style. Now, don't anyone even mention the law of diminishing returns. At this level, that's taken as read. It applies just the same in any field of human endeavour, from jewellery to computers to athletics. The best is always rare and, where cost is an issue, dearer than the merely good. So, by value for money alone, maybe this isn't 'the best' CD player in the world. But, if you rate performance over value, the 808i deserves to be hailed as one of the best players ever made.

You'll not be surprised to read that it has an even tonal balance. You would naturally expect to hear that it has a silent background. You'll yawn at the news that its lab performance is quite beyond reproach, with exceptionally low noise and unusually well judged digital filtering. All that is just the starting point, ▶

“If you rate performance over value for money, the 808i Signature deserves to be hailed as one of the best players ever made.”



Q & A

Bob Stuart, Meridian's chairman and chief designer, tells us what went into developing a new CD player after 20 years of leading edge digits



HFC: Meridian was one of the original backers of high-resolution digital. Why, in 2004, launch a CD-only player as a flagship?

BS: We have been surprised and pleased by the increasing interest in our CD players. Some users believe that modern DVD or 'universal' players cannot get the best from CD because of the additional circuitry and compromises involved and, to a large extent, this is true. Before the 808i, our finest CD player was the Reference 800 (a DVD machine). It is still absolutely superb at CD, but the 808i has no video circuits and that allows us to take one more step. The 808i, which includes the system preamp function, very accurately matches this need.

How does Meridian's original research on digital audio relate to the design of CD players?

It allowed us to build up a very deep understanding of this area. In designing CD players, we consider everything – the accurate recovery of data on the disc, good error-handling strategies, smoothing the data flow for clearer, cleaner sound and employing DSP to improve the resolution attainable from the DACs.

You mention triple measures against jitter – can you be more specific?

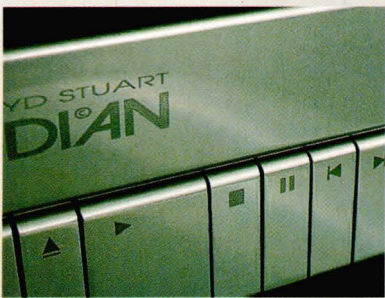
There are three separate buffers. The data from the disc passes through three separate re-timing operations. In addition, the output oscillators are exceptionally low in jitter and are immediately adjacent to the converters.

For the D-to-A and A-to-D conversion, have you found existing integrated circuits satisfactory or do you prefer to roll your own?

The conversion system is a synthesis of off-the-shelf components with analogue and DSP operations that complement their properties. We believe that the conversion in the 808i is state of the art.

Where do you see the bottleneck in the sound chain over the next few years?

The weakest link is the loudspeaker, which we are addressing via DSP. Even low-quality loudspeakers can reveal differences in the source, though. The extent to which the consumer is persuaded that 'Download equals CD quality' is very disappointing. We must educate and oppose mediocrity.



Detail

Plug-in cards carrying analogue inputs and digital inputs and outputs

Digital audio motherboard (beneath crossbar)

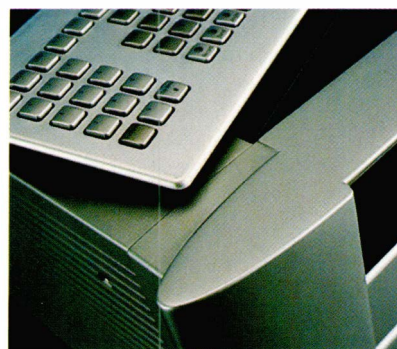
CD/DVD-ROM type transport mechanism

Top quality components in the audio path

Screening cans protect sensitive analogue stages from noise

Additional power supply regulation

Switch-mode power supply – small, efficient, low noise and self adjusting for different input voltages



though. What's truly ear-catching is the way it draws you into the music and the degree of involvement it brings.

We wouldn't want to suggest that anything is being added here, because there's no evidence that that is the case; but something sets this machine apart from other players. In effect, it shows up just how much is being subtracted from the musical experience by far too many other CD players. Perhaps surprisingly, this is obvious from the outset. There's an immediate sense of calm and relaxed authority about the sound which puts the listener in the right frame of mind to be receptive. Then, as each disc progresses, there's a continuing openness and honesty that, coupled with the complete absence of any aggressive artefacts, soothes the ear even while opening it to new levels of musical detail.

The specifics of the sound, taken together, make for an interesting insight into the whole business of 'good sound'. One might summarise by saying that Meridian's strength is in understatement, for at first the bass and general detail seem distinctly ordinary. We've heard bass that appeared more prominent, detail that gave a greater immediate impression of analysis and certainly treble that appeared to extend further. This player's performance is not

about superficial impressions, though. The bass is there all right, simply not over-emphasised and the treble is as extended as may be but never excessively bright. As for detail, it's so well integrated that it succeeds, as it were, much more by stealth than by direct attack.

Let's take a couple of examples. One disc that has given great pleasure recently is of orchestral music by Pizzetti, on Hyperion. This is simply gorgeous stuff, richly scored, from the early 20th century. It's familiar in every detail through repeated listening and studying the scores, and yet playing it via the 808i revealed – at the emotional level – new musical colours in the recording. All the while, at the analytical level, the 808i revels in little details of orchestration that before had been missed or assumed unimportant. This is assisted by the player's quite extraordinary imaging, which is precise without making a big deal of it.

The Penguin Café Orchestra is a million miles from Pizzetti. It's eccentric, lightly scored and rhythmic music, but similarly familiar. Once again, the 808i simply made more of it clear to the listener. It unveiled everything from subtle variations in the minimalist repetitions to little offstage shuffling noises as musicians shift in their seats. But can such an eminently civilised



“The 808i showed a complete willingness to join in the spirit of things and deliver serious acoustic whacks to the listening environment.”

player rock? It certainly can, although if you expect it to add pizzazz to dull discs you'd better think again. All the same, with material from Michael Jackson to Little Feat to Right Said Fred (*Are you serious?* – Ed) it showed a complete willingness to join in the spirit of things and deliver some serious acoustic whacks to the listening environment.

How does performance compare to other top-flight players? The multi-box dCS offering (at an even more eye-watering price) is not vastly removed in character, and Naim's CDS3 is arguably more highly characterised with a performance that majors on rhythm and drive. But, we'd stick our neck out and say that Meridian has the edge in suave assurance. Chord's DAC64 was on hand for comparison and, while superb, was still outclassed in almost every area – quite an astonishing feat!

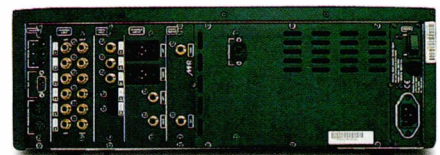
As a DAC and a preamp the same holds true. The best analogue preamps are near transparent, and so is this one. Its presence is just detectable as a hint of veiling, if one listens really carefully against a bypass, but

that's not something to worry about. Indeed, if you are using Meridian's (or other) digital speakers, you can rest assured that this unit is as fine an ADC as any you'll come by.

There is one tiny fly in the ointment, and it affects almost every CD player we've heard recently – mechanical noise. Although this noise is lower than on many other players, it's not always inaudible; a little hiss in the background that, were it to come out of the speakers, no CD player or amp manufacturer would regard as acceptable. Late at night, when all's quiet and listening levels are perhaps subdued, you may just notice it. If all disc-player manufacturers were to take this a touch more seriously, we'd be happy. If it really bugs you, it's easily dealt with by careful player positioning (in a cupboard, for example!).

That apart, we're happy to confirm what we said above: this is one of the finest CD players in the world. It's also one of the best DACs, likewise ADCs, and a great preamp too. Only a lottery win comes between us and a purchase! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 96% [Progress bar]	PRO Fabulously musical and involving sound, with frequency extremes and detail so well integrated you might never even notice how supremely good they are.
FEATURES >> 94% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 96% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 88% [Progress bar]	
CON Tiny amount of mechanical noise. Price. Doesn't make tea in the mornings.	
CONCLUSION It may be possible to improve on this – if so, Meridian will probably be the people to figure how. For the time being, we're happy enough to regard this as pretty much the acme of CD replay. A fine DAC and preamp too!	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 94%	



Music with vision

Holding out for a DVD player that offers real musicality? Naim's first machine has been worth the wait

PRODUCT Naim DVD5

TYPE DVD-Video player (plus optional DVD-Audio board)

PRICE £2,565 (Basic player £2,350, optional six-channel DVD-Audio board £215)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.2x7x29cm

• Weight: 6.6kg • DVI-D HDCP encrypted video output
• Optional board for six-channel DVD-Audio • Future upgrade add-ons planned

CONTACT ☎ 01722 332266

🌐 www.naim-audio.com

Naim Audio has been slow to dip its toes into home cinema. Full multichannel processing (Dolby, DTS and so on) only appeared with the AV2 preamp/processor in 2002 and now here's the brand's first-ever DVD player – the DVD5.

Naim has done a typically thorough job, however, and the player is optionally compatible with hi-res multichannel DVD-Audio music discs. It was designed from the ground up using licenses that have been acquired by the company, following the path set by fellow UK manufacturer Arcam (most recently with the DV29, reviewed on page 50).

The DVD5 looks virtually identical to the CD5 CD player. There's the familiar four digit fluorescent green display and four control buttons on the front; even the back panel doesn't look too out of place, with most of its analogue outputs in Naim's favoured DIN format. Although the DIN sockets match Naim's AV2 processor used for much of this test, the DVD5 can also be interfaced with conventional phono-equipped amps and processors using DIN-to-phono cables (our set was supplied by The Chord Company).

Though externally simple, the designers have done their best to ensure that the player will grow with the user. The DVD5 will not become obsolete overnight – the bane of multichannel audio – and you can expect to see the player evolve. The upgrades are retrofittable, rather than complete replacements. Multichannel DVD-Audio itself is an upgrade option, but stereo 192kHz DVD-Audio can be played even by the basic DVD-Video version of the player (though such discs are rarer than hen's teeth in the field). The concept of upgrade paths has long been Naim's way of keeping faith with its

customers – and Naim's loyal customer base suggests it's extremely successful.

Around the back, the DVD5 is equipped with a DVI (Digital Video Interface) socket, which allows the digital transfer of HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) encrypted video content to a similarly equipped display device. An top-class Faroudja DCDi chip is fitted for deinterlacing the picture, and the player offers interlaced and progressive scan PAL and NTSC video. The player's firmware is fully upgradeable and designed to allow use of an external touch screen system controller. There's even a five-cable RGBHV connection, solely for plasma screens and projectors with professional links. 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs are used for DVD-Audio and CD playback.

Future options include a scalar upgrade card, which will include 720p (720 vertical lines of progressive, frame-by-frame video) and 1080 line interlaced or progressive outputs, the latter being the highest quality high-definition TV standard yet announced. DVD itself is – and will remain – limited to 480p (NTSC) and 576p (PAL) pictures, but the upgrade card is



“Naim claims the DVD5 outperforms its own CD5, which we know to be a fine CD player.”

claimed to include a 1080p input for those with the appropriate satellite receiver. It is also suggested that HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface, the alternative digital video and audio link) will be included as part of this planned upgrade, but this is by no means set in stone, and it could appear as a separate upgrade. Of course, the current DVI output can drive any HDMI-equipped display today using a simple adaptor lead.

Construction mirrors other Naim 5-series components. The same thick-section, anti-resonance casework is employed and there are eight printed circuit boards (PCBs) for electrical and mechanical isolation, and to facilitate economical upgrading. The player can't take advantage of any of Naim's external power supplies as its topology simply won't allow it, but there is a large-capacity toroidal supply with 20 regulated outputs available from six independent secondary taps, and this too has been designed with future upgrades in mind.

Special measures have been adopted to ensure the DVD5 delivers at the highest level when playing CDs, including physically and

electrically isolating the audio decoding board. Additionally, the video processor and outputs can be powered off during CD replay, and the digital signal off disc is relocked prior to conversion, CD3 style. On the video side, the well-endowed menu system includes a number of test screens to optimise black levels, and to make basic colour and picture geometry settings. Lip sync can also be adjusted.

SOUND QUALITY

We used two different replay systems for the test, one featuring a Naim AV2 processor, the other an Arcam AV8, in both cases with TAG McLaren power amplification. In the first instance, a Meadowlark Audio 5.0-channel speaker package was used. This was later changed to a 5.1-channel system based on Focal-JMLab L&R Utopia Be satellites and Sub Utopia Be subwoofer. An Arcam DV29 DVD player was included in some of the comparisons. The two Naim components cooperate when they are linked together (provided the processor has a recent firmware version), so all set-up procedures can be performed once, with



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

DVD-AUDIO	✓	DVD+R/ RW	✓
DVD-VIDEO	✓	DVD-RAM	✗
SACD	✗	MP3 AUDIO	✗
CD	✓	WMA AUDIO	✗
HDCD	✗	AAC AUDIO	✗
CD-R/ RW	✓	VIDEO CD	✗
DVD-R/ RW	✓	JPEG PICTURES	✗

settings assigned transparently to whichever component they belong to.

Some firmware issues had not been completely resolved when this review was put to bed. In particular, bass management was still in the final stages of development, but updated firmware should be available by the time this review appears as a free update.

First task was to ascertain the DVD5's capabilities as a CD player. Naim claims the DVD5 outperforms its own CD5, which from experience in a recent *Ultimate Group Test* we know to be a very fine performer. A brief ▶

Q & A

What goes into making a DVD player from scratch, especially from a music-oriented company like Naim Audio? We asked Steve Sells, Naim's principal engineer, about the genesis of the DVD5



HFC: At one time you suggested the DVD5 might optionally support SACD. What happened?

SS: We simply found that we could not obtain an SACD-compatible mechanism that was capable of doing everything required of it to a standard we were happy with.

What chips are used in the player?

The main DSP chip is the latest Cirrus Logic 98200, which performs video D/A conversion and DVD-Audio processing. It's a very adaptable device, with built in DACs for the Scart output. This provides part of the DVD5's capability of delivering up to five simultaneous video streams, analogue and digital, in various formats.

The Faroudja deinterlacer we use is a version without a built-in video scaler, but with external phase lock loops, which we believe perform better than the internal ones. Audio DACs are Burr-Brown PCM1792 and a PCM1601 for multichannel use.

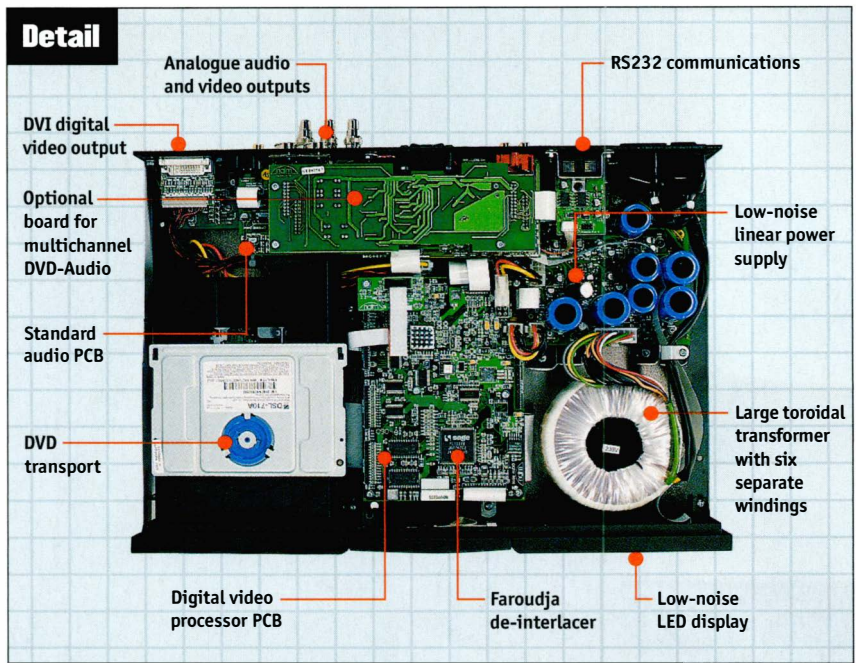
Why didn't you include HDMI, which just now is beginning to appear elsewhere?

DVI is easier to implement than HDMI, and is currently a more cost-effective solution. If we had gone for HDMI at the outset, it would have put the price up.

HDMI will be included as part of a planned upgrade which we expect to be able to introduce in about a year from now. That upgrade will take data from the decoder and upsample the picture to 1080i, and it will also include mosquito and other types of MPEG noise blocking.

Why have you not allowed use of your outboard power supplies as a way of upgrading the player's performance?

We looked at using outboard supplies, but found they didn't work with this player. But the issue hasn't been ignored. A great deal of work has gone into the internal power supply, which is an entirely linear design to avoid switching noise. We use a large toroidal transformer with six separate windings. We found that with of the amount of current required, you really need separate grounding for the mechanism, for the video processing, and also separate supplies for analogue processing and for DVD-Audio. The DVD-A circuit, for example, really behaves as though it is in a separate box.



side-by-side comparison was laid on at a recent visit to Naim's factory – too brief perhaps to form a definitive view, but on that occasion the DVD5 impressed us by being in the same qualitative ballpark as the CD player, albeit rather different in character. It actually seemed more neutral, which from one point of view makes it less distinctive and perhaps less 'Naim-like'.

Following more extensive listening with the Arcam DV29 and some other high-grade players (including a Sony TA-DA9000ES CD/SACD player, and a costly Teac Esoteric universal player currently being prepared for review), the Naim stood out for its solidity and tunefulness. It's got that wonderfully muscular yet tuneful bass, the kind that might be described as having 'better timing', while the mid and top remain refined and detailed. There is more pace and more internal contrast in the bass than with comparable players, and this helps define the DVD5's sonic personality.

Much the same can be heard with DVD-Audio material, including (for example) Porcupine Tree's *The Sound of Muzak* (from *In Absentia*) – and this is 'only' a 24-bit/48kHz recording. There is just more structure from the DVD5, and you can play the Naim noticeably quieter than the competition without loss of musical information because the player's expressiveness and architecture is bolder and better defined.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Impressions of video quality were strikingly positive – it's clear that Naim's engineers have done a great job with digital (DVI) and analogue outputs alike. In comparison, Arcam's DV29 seemed a little more solid and subtle in its handling of colour, but the DVD5's detail reproduction appeared at least as good as that of the Arcam through a high-end DLP projector. Overall, the differences were slight.

General picture quality is sharp and stable, with excellent internal contrast and good shadow detail, but these things are almost routine with any half-decent DVD player. More impressive is the way that video noise has been reduced. There's very little visible churning of large areas of uniform colour, and motion artefacts are well controlled once the settings have been optimised in the menu system. This includes adjustments for optimising film and video sources, edit control and other similar parameters. Some easy access mode selectors, which could be assigned for film or video mode for example (as found on some other high-end DVD players) would have made this part of the player's feature set more useable. No matter...

It took Naim nearly a decade to deliver its first CD player, but it was worth the wait. It seems the DVD5 was worth waiting for, too – a DVD player that *really* plays music, Naim-style.

HFC
Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%
 SUB RATINGS
 DVD-AUDIO 93% CD 87%

VISION >> 88%

FEATURES >> 84%

VALUE >> 84%

PRO
 Particularly good CD/DVD-A performance, essentially uncompromised by its DVD-Video playing role. Strong upgrade potential should allow the DVD5 to retain its technological edge.

CON
 Back panel is idiosyncratic, though it can be wired successfully to phono-based processors. No HDMI – yet...

CONCLUSION
 Naim's first DVD player is expensive, but worth it. The only current limitation is the lack of HDMI, but an upgrade should be available in due course. Video processing is good, and sound quality at the top of its class.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%





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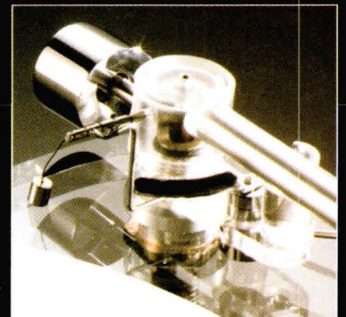
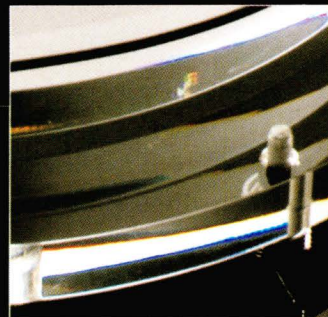
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Life and soul

Unison Research likes hybrids, so why not mix Italian design with plenty of Latin temperament?

PRODUCT Unison Research Unico SE

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £1,325

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.5x13.2x34cm

• Weight: 16.5kg • Four line inputs (inc. tape loop) plus optional phono • Two sets of speaker outputs (for bi-wiring) • Power output: 150W per channel

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669

🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

Unico is more of a range than a model. In HFC 252, we looked at the 'junior' Unico P, and liked what we heard. The new Unico SE is a substantially different animal, if only in output power – 150 watts instead of 50 watts is quite a hike in anyone's book. Apparently the basic design ethos is much the same, though. Both are hybrids using both transistors and valves, the latter a pair of ECC82 small-signal bottles which do their stuff at the earliest stage of the circuit. They're followed by bipolar transistors and then MOSFET output devices – pretty much a group set of amplifying components!

So why the diversity? It's all about sound, of course, and Unison Research waxes lyrical on the subject in a technical discussion of the Unico range. The valves are claimed to banish

the 'metallic' sound of transistors, while a low level of feedback around the circuit allegedly helps keep the amplifier's distortion signature biased towards low-order harmonics. This is more in keeping with valve thinking than transistor, as solid-state amps are more likely to use relatively high feedback, though there are exceptions.

Another area where Unison Research has proved ingenious is the biasing of the output transistors, using a system called 'Dynamic Class A'. Full-on purists will tell you that any word preceding 'Class A' effectively means 'not', but it does depend how you interpret the definition. Although this amp runs at a Class AB-type standing current of around 80mA, it is arranged so that no output transistor ever completely turns off. This arguably justifies a Class A label, while maintaining the low idling dissipation of Class AB.

On a more prosaic level, the Unico SE features just five inputs, one of which is a phono stage (optional, but fitted to the review sample – if you want the line only version, it costs £1,275). The phono stage accommodates both MM and MC cartridges, but you have to get inside the case to adjust it. Once there, you can also tweak overall phono gain by 10dB for

relatively low-output cartridges of either persuasion. With the lid off you can also admire the high standard of construction (except for four precariously-mounted sub-boards), the remarkably butch mains transformer and the enclosed heatsink. You can even, if you like, apply some damping material to the rather resonant lid – something the manufacturer itself might care to consider in the future.

After a recent run of integrated amps at roughly the same price, which mostly offered pretty similar measured performance, we were brought up short by this one and its very distinctive fingerprint. Most obviously, distortion is not banished to the underworld of 0.01% and below; by contrast, it unashamedly hovers around 0.2%, give or take a little, over a wide range of frequency and power levels. What's more, claims of low harmonic order are contradicted by a spectrum that extends to at least 50th order harmonic distortion at almost detectable levels. There's a higher level of both hiss and hum, and at high output power the mains transformer hums like a bee. Output exceeds 150 watts per channel and bandwidth is very wide, at least two octaves more than notional 20Hz-20kHz audio at each end.



“It’s the strong character of this amp that will attract or repel you and that in turn will depend on your musical taste.”

enough to complain of, but a frankly diminutive soprano with a pure and crystalline voice suddenly seemed to have a head about six feet wide and a worrying habit of leaning forward of the speakers, when in fact she had been some way from the microphones.

Other recordings of known

provenance and long familiarity told a similar story, with images frequently diffuse and insecure, and a forward character affecting voices. A particularly familiar opera recording illustrated a variety of symptoms: the chorus was more widely spread across the image (though less deep), a passage for two violins sounded like half a dozen, vocal solos were unusually prominent and big climaxes were truly gigantic, though lacking in insight.

The overall effect can be impressive, with a certain grandeur, and on returning to more ‘conventional’ amplifiers, one often feels that something has been lost. But after a couple of minutes, the realisation creeps in that what was lost is faux excitement, while what is gained with the new amplifier is precision, detail, stability and, in the end, that wonderful sense that the music is working its own way into your system rather than imposing on you.

Although you may be frustrated at its unwillingness to let the music speak for itself, the Unico SE is greatly excitable and loses no opportunity to glam things up a bit. That can work impressively with some music styles, but with almost any acoustic-originated music, it’s a mixed blessing at best. A symphony orchestra or a jazz band, or a small voice-and-instruments combo, is a precision assemblage of finely honed musical technique and feeling, and to have an extra layer of froth imposed over it seems a questionable gain.

We shouldn’t forget to credit this amp’s excellent bass – a true glory, with plenty of depth, drive and colour. Perhaps it’s a little enhanced too, but in the nicest possible way. Treble, especially at low levels, is clearly extended and overall tonality is not a problem. It’s the very strong character of this amp that will attract or repel you and that in turn will depend on your tastes, not least in music. Line and phono sources fare similarly – the phono stage is decent and free of obvious flaws. We’ve no wish to be unduly disparaging of an amp that’s clearly been carefully designed to perform in a particular manner, but if you are seeking musical honesty over sheer excitement, keep looking. **HFC**

Richard Black

SOUND QUALITY

The high measured distortion was not so surprising after our first sonic experience of the amp – it tends to favour excitement over accuracy and analysis. We don’t want to get too judgmental about this and excitement has long been a marketable commodity in audio, but it is important to be clear about exactly what one should look for when evaluating this model.

Perhaps the most dramatic proof of its positive contribution came when played through synth-rich pop. The energetic style of this music was ideally complemented by the Unico SE’s drive and sheer ‘slam’, contributing a punch which subsequently seemed completely lacking with other amps. Michael Jackson also benefited similarly, if not quite so impressively, but there’s no doubt that with a lot of modern sounds, this amp can really deliver some kick.

But – and it’s a big ‘but’ – those ‘modern sounds’ have frequently never seen a microphone. They were generated and processed electronically and, in a very real way, the replay equipment is a part of the original sound generation.

What the SE does with acoustic sounds is a rather different matter. One of the most obvious demonstrations of this was on a brand new recording of solo soprano and piano, recent enough for the live sound to be fresh in the ear. In terms of tonality, there was little



VERDICT

SOUND >> 77%

FEATURES >> 67%

BUILD >> 87%

VALUE >> 74%

CONCLUSION
 For some, this amp will be the answer to a prayer; to others, anathema. It’s an acquired taste, so audition with care – and with your own music collection. Material value is high but if the sound grates that’s cold comfort.

PRO
 Truly larger than life, with a persuasively energetic way of looking at lively pop in particular. Great bass, backed up by plentiful power.

CON
 Ask yourself: do you always want larger than life? Accuracy takes something of a back seat while scale expands, albeit impressively.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 76%



Musical scale

Everything KEF knows about speakers in one big statement. Prepare to be impressed...

PRODUCT KEF Reference 207

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £9,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 40x129x68.5cm
● Weight: 66kg ● Aluminium pod housing 165mm Uni-Q mid/treble unit (inc. 25mm tweeter) ● 19mm super-tweeter ● 250mm lower-mid driver ● Two 250mm bass drivers ● Sensitivity/impedance: 92dB/8 ohms (nom)
CONTACT ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

KEF's Reference 207 floorstanding speaker stands 1.3 meters tall and is 70cm deep. Each one weighs 66kg, has a maximum output of 117dB and can easily reach frequencies exceeding 55kHz. As such, the 207 is not simply the top of KEF's latest Reference range. The speaker represents everything KEF knows, distilled into the mother of all models. And KEF, having been around a while, knows rather a lot.

At the top of this mammoth five-way speaker is a 19mm, titanium-dome 'Hypertweeter', which is KEF's take on the super-tweeter. With SACD and DVD-Audio perceived as playing a greater role in hi-fi these days, some loudspeaker manufacturers are specifically designing units that can cope with the wider frequency ranges of these formats. KEF claims its new super-tweeter measures flat to 50kHz and can reach up to 70kHz. But why use a super-tweeter at all, when the average human's hearing tops out at around 16kHz? We might not be able to hear higher frequencies directly, but we can hear the harmonics of these higher frequencies and their effect on lower, audible frequencies. So, by extending treble detail, a super-tweeter can make the whole speaker sound more natural.

The rather neat Uni-Q driver system will be more familiar to KEF loyalists. This places the treble unit within the throat of a midrange woofer, to produce a single point source. The intended effect is a wider soundstage, tighter

imaging and superior off-axis listening. New to the Uni-Q design is a tweeter made from titanium, rather than silk, to match the super-tweeter. The woofer also features a polypropylene cone with a thermoplastic rubber surround that's produced as one entity and so should give greater uniformity of sound. The Uni-Q assembly is mounted in its own die-cast aluminium enclosure, which, as we will see later, is something of a Reference theme. The combination of a tapered enclosure and open chassis on the woofer minimises reflections.

Most speakers would do well to have just a single 250mm bass unit, but the 207 has three. Well, two and a half, as one driver is really a lower midrange cone. This drive unit sits in its own sealed enclosure and uses a

“The KEF's soundstage is simply vast, but with a level of focus that prevents it from ever sounding vague.”

phase plug to help improve focus and imaging. Taking an idea from Celestion's late 1990s A-Series speaker design, the lower-mid cone uses a Faraday ring around the drive unit's pole, reducing distortion still further.

The two bass-only drive units also feature Faraday rings, only this time they are paired off to help maintain a perfect symmetrical flux profile. Directionality of sound becomes less of an issue at very low frequencies, which is why these two bass cones do not feature a phase plug.

The chassis on all three drivers are beautifully cast and open-backed to minimise reflections from the rear of the cone. Once again, each bass unit sits in its own sealed enclosure with a direct radiator reflex system, employed to reinforce the bass response. Interestingly, as

both drive units sit within separate enclosures, KEF can also get away with a minimum of damping material. This should lead to greater speed and agility of bass, and with drive units this large, such extra agility is useful.

Housing all these drive units is a cabinet that is nothing less than a work of art. The curved sides are fashioned from laminated birch ply, and blend seamlessly with the MDF front panel. As you'd expect, the finish is immaculate and there is a choice of real wood veneers for the exterior and quality oxygen-free copper internal cables, solid brass connectors and high-grade crossover components on the interior. The crossover offers tri-wiring and even an adjustable boundary control to tailor the sound to room positioning.

SOUND QUALITY

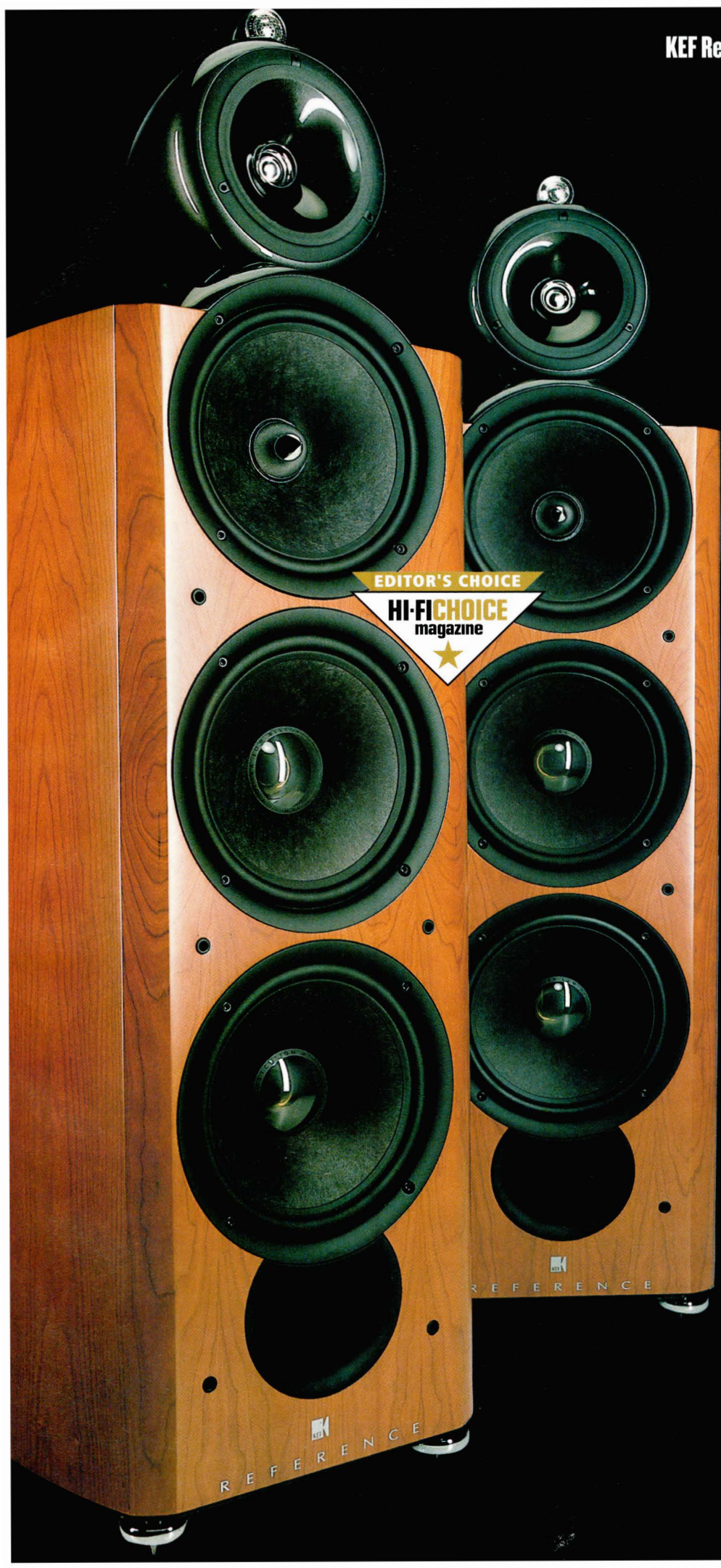
Large speakers such as this usually delight with dance tracks, such as Shapeshifters *Lola's Theme*, and the 207 was no exception – this speaker will reach exceptionally high volume levels with minimal distortion. Throughout the test the soundstage was simply vast, but with a level of focus to prevent it from ever sounding vague. As you might expect, there was huge depth to the stage, excellent projection and near ceiling level height. But, unexpectedly, the bass was not as deep as expected. It was certainly powerful, immensely taut and rhythmic, yet it did not reach the sort of bass depths that can incite nausea. Then again, if you are after seismic bass, KEF would no doubt point you toward the PSW5000 subwoofer (see box). In fact, the 207 was all the better for



MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

KEF has long been involved with surround sound and, not surprisingly, produces a set of multichannel speakers to match the Reference 207. At the centre is the vast Reference 204c (£2,000), with a pair of Reference 206DS dipole surround speakers (£3,500) for the rear. These use the same super-tweeter and Uni-Q arrangement as the 207. The PSW5000 subwoofer (£2,500) mates a 380mm cone to a 1kW amp, and houses it in a cabinet that makes even the 207's feel puny.

All hooked up to a Pathos Cinema-X hybrid amplifier, the multichannel sound is cohesive through the matching high and midrange drive units. There is real consistency around the soundfield, with especially impressive front-end staging. With the PSW5000 engaged, the 207's only significant limitation – a lack of truly deep bass – is obliterated in a wave of floorboard-rippling 'oomph'. Going 5.1 rarely gets better than this.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



not reaching into the deepest bass regions, because it offered a totally uncongested and cohesive sound not normally expected from such a large enclosure.

Natasha Bedingfield's *Size Matters* perfectly demonstrated the Uni-Q's midrange. Freed of the need to reproduce bass, the midrange units granted the vocals an unbounded presence with first-rate texture and articulation. This blends exceptionally well with the rest of the mix. Again, the bass was not as deep as one might expect but, given the multitudinous drive units, the level of transparency was surprisingly able. Blind tested at normal domestic volume levels, the KEF was so coherent, one could easily think that it a smaller design, or even an electrostatic panel. It was possible to hear the high frequencies came from metal tweeters – the best fabric domes might be a touch smoother – but the treble never became edgy or the least bit harsh.

Fans of air guitar would strum thirteen to the dozen to David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* when played through a pair of 207s – the guitar's timbre and intensity were superbly portrayed yet never overplayed. As before, what impressed us most about the KEF was the innate rightness of balance. This was highlighted by the manner in which Bowie's vocals simply leapt from the rest of the mix, never sounding too forward.

Large-scale classical music proved enormously enjoyable too. The speaker demonstrated that rare ability to reproduce dynamic scale with more than just authority, but a complete lack of apparent strain, too. Drama and tension were still conveyed but, somehow, one never felt that it was taxing the 207. Timbre from strings and brass was top notch, although the super-tweeter could make older digital recordings sound a touch glassy – though this isn't really the KEF's fault!

Fleet of foot was not a term of phrase we had been expecting to use here, yet that is exactly what the 207 is – and also darn musical with it. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

VERDICT

SOUND >> 94%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 74%



BUILD >> 94%



VALUE >> 83%



PRO
Build quality and finish to match the price. Scale and vast staging as expected, but transparency, focus and cohesion of sound that may surprise many listeners.

CON
Lacks the bass depth of some big designs. Only really suitable for large rooms of in excess of 30 square meters.

CONCLUSION

KEF has pulled off an impressive balancing act here. Expensive it may be, but no one is going to feel short-changed by either the material value or the musicality of this top-end design – it strikes one of the best sonic compromises around.

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



Arcam advance

When it comes to DVD, can Britain play with the big boys? It seems the answer is an emphatic 'yes!'

PRODUCT Arcam FMJ DV29

TYPE DVD-Audio/Video player

PRICE £1,600

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x8.5x34.5cm

• Weight: 6.7kg • HDMI v1.1 digital audio/video interface • PAL/NTSC progressive scan video

CONTACT ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

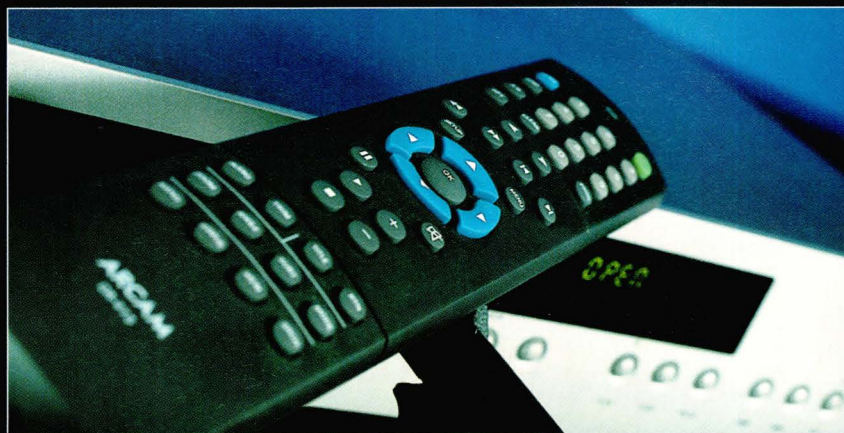
Arcam's range-topping DVD player is the DV29, the newest addition to the brand's FMJ range. It's a DVD-Audio/Video player rather than a universal one (in other words, it doesn't play SACD) and it costs a full £300 less than its predecessor, the DV27A. There are improvements over the previous model, of which the most important is the inclusion of HDMI version 1.1. HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) has been

seen in players for more than a year, but the long-promised v1.1 has only just started to feature on the latest models.

This new HDMI standard not only provides a digital interface for encrypted video (up to 576p), but also does the same for audio. HDMI v1.1 can stream up to two audio channels at 192kHz, or six audio channels at 96kHz (both with 24-bit resolution) alongside the video. This is all delivered along a single wire. This means HDMI 1.1 can support digital multichannel DVD-Audio, where the older HDMI standard was limited to lower bit rate Dolby Digital and DTS compressed audio. HDMI will eventually stream control information to make appropriate amplifier settings according to the signal being transmitted, too.

HDMI also has the advantage of a number of subtle benefits, mostly related to the way it works with certain types of display. In particular, it minimizes a problem under older standards, where video scalars missed line information based on a signal which has already been scaled – effectively trying to second-guess an original guess. HDMI is also fundamentally different from DVI (though the two can interoperate happily enough using adaptor leads), because it can support interlaced as well as progressive video, and because it is based on component video which requires less processing of the video stored on DVD. In contrast, DVI works in RGB and this needs to be converted by the player before being output.

HDMI aside, the player is built around Arcam's favoured technology platform, which



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

DVD-AUDIO	✓	DVD+R/RW	✓
DVD-VIDEO	✓	DVD-RAM	✗
SACD	✗	MP3 AUDIO	✓
CD	✓	WMA AUDIO	✓
HDCD	✓	AAC AUDIO	✗
CD-R/RW	✓	VIDEO CD	✓
DVD-R/RW	✓	JPEG PICTURES	✗



“Arcam challenges the received wisdom that DVD players can’t play compact discs properly. This one can...”

centres on a Zoran Vaddis V MPEG decoder with PAL and NTSC progressive/interlace scan picture and six 12-bit/216MHz Analog Devices video DACs (the DV27A used 10-bit video DACs). Although digital video on DVD is coded at eight bits, which suggests that higher video bit rate processing is simply playing the numbers game, Arcam claims that the new components give cleaner, lower noise pictures.

Audio has changed little from the DV27A. It is handled by a 32-bit Zoran DSP and six discrete 24-bit Wolfson WM8740 DACs, which support HDCD. The biggest change is that the number of masterlocks have been reduced from three to one. There is also new proprietary processing that Arcam is not talking about publicly, which is said to result in equivalent performance from a simpler circuit that is also easier to sat up. This, and a change to a largely single-board layout dictated by HDMI, are the main reasons for the lower cost of this player.

The power supply is based on two substantial toroidal transformers, and the case material is Acousteel (also used in Lexus cars, though we understand it was developed by British Steel in the UK). This consists of a dual layer steel plate with an elastomer central core to enhance damping. In custom installations, the player can be driven by third-party touch screen controllers via an RS232c connector. It's also equipped with internal Dolby Digital, DTS and

Dolby Pro-Logic II decoding, plus some powerful setup features including adjustable lip sync and a more than usually comprehensive internal speaker set-up, delay and bass management system.

The player is capable of simultaneous outputs of interlaced component, RGB (via Scart), S-Video and composite video. A 'navigation button' simplifies finding your way around DVD-Audio when not using a display screen. The on-screen menu is also worthy of comment – it does no more than before, but the screen fonts used make the player seem more purposeful, and the display is more pleasing on the eye than the usual rather blocky menu graphics found on many players.

SOUND QUALITY

From a sonic perspective, the story is much as before, and it would probably be difficult to pick out the DV29 from the DV27A blindfold (though we haven't tried it). The basics remain, though. In the DV29, Arcam challenges the received wisdom that DVD players can't play compact discs properly. This one can, to the standard comparable of a good CD player costing around £700-£900 (and considerably better than some that cost more). The player has a calm unflappability that allows the music to speak for itself; the bass is not only extended, but solid and the mid and top are

expressive and subtle when called for. It also possesses excellent stereo imagery. Perhaps the biggest differences between this player and other DVD players when playing CDs is that the sound remains open and airy, and that it has an unprocessed quality that unconsciously makes it easier on the listener. If you like, it involves less suspension of disbelief.

Much the same can be said of DVD-Audio replay. There is still a dearth of good quality recordings in this format, but finally we have begun to receive some worthwhile material that begins to show what can be achieved from DVD-Audio. Again, the same qualities of space and presence make themselves felt, as does that characteristically solid low frequency delivery (why do so many DVD players fall down here?). Of course, we were unable to assess the capabilities of HDMI audio for DVD-Audio, because of the absence of HDMI-equipped amplification – but we shouldn't have long to wait. Arcam and others are working on amps with HDMI.

The internal Dolby and DTS processing does a better job than most decoders built into players – certainly good enough for use with simplified external amplification that doesn't have its own decoding (like Arcam's own multichannel preamps and power amplifiers). A fully-equipped multichannel processor (such as Arcam's own AV8) remains the preferred long term solution, though, as it provides more scope for the listener.

Whichever method of connectivity is deployed, the user interface is simple and the player easy to drive, in all audio and video modes. The only slight operational flaw concerns the control system, as there is occasional obstructive

Q & A

Geoff Meads, Arcam's brand manager, discusses some of the key thinking behind the DV29, and explains why the future of digital pictures and sound is HDMI-based



HFC: What is the importance of HDMI?

GM: We see HDMI as a major driving force in the development of DVD players specifically, and home cinema in general. It offers a great combination of technical potential, picture quality and high-resolution multichannel audio, as well as security for the movie studios. It is more user-friendly, as the connectors are smaller and a simple push fit, and eventually fewer wires will be needed too. DVI, meanwhile, doesn't handle audio. HDMI also offers control possibilities that will help with setting-up all components at once, handshaking product to product, even to the point of automatically setting display resolution.

Why include a video scaler?

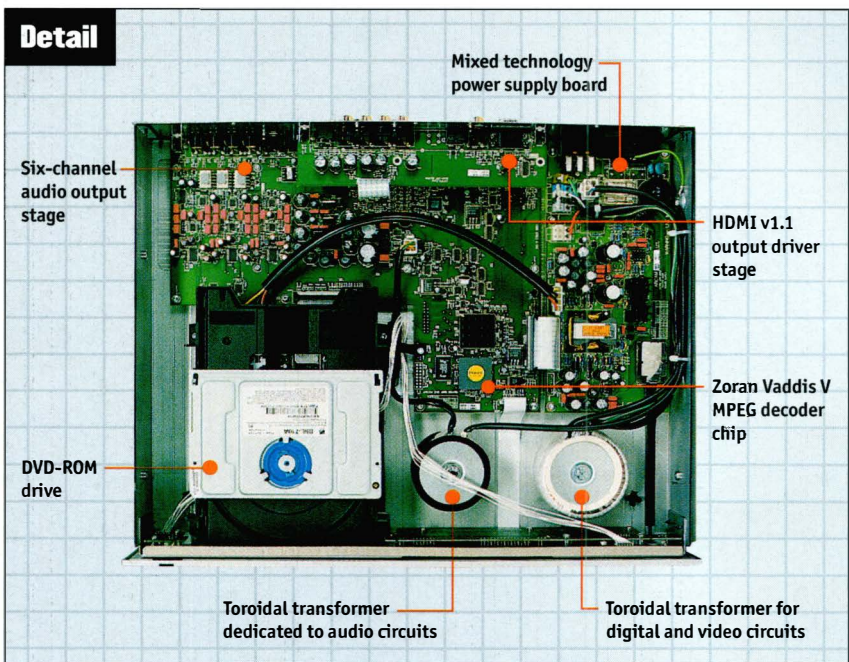
Scalers can be important even with standard plasma screens, some of which have 768 display lines, and need scaling from 720 interlaced or progressive sources. Successful scaling depends on many different things, but I would argue that in a good system, the scaling is usually best done by the display as the scaler can be matched to the properties of the screen, and because it is generally best to keep the signal leads short, and data rates minimised.

What technological developments have been made to introduce the DV29?

A great deal of effort has gone into the power supply, which is a mixed-mode design – part linear, part switch mode – from two separate toroidal transformers. All regulation is very high quality, and tightly controlled. CD playback performance was a major priority, and so was DVD-Audio, which is a better implementation than in the preceding DV27 model. The DV29 delivers what I believe may be the finest CD and DVD-Audio play quality available at the price. With the present level of technology the point has been reached where, though a dedicated CD player may offer faster track access and provide some quality advantages, the DV29 is where the sensible money will go.

How important is upgradeability?

The firmware is upgradeable, but in general we have tried to get it right first time, which over the life of the product means a minimum cost penalty to the end-user.



behaviour (such as the drawer not opening promptly when requested in some modes), which will undoubtedly be ironed out in a future software release.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Arcam has made the DV29 a visual treat, too, with picture quality that's nothing less than exceptional. In common with the DV27A, the overall effect is unusually cinematographic. Using a high-grade HDMI-equipped DPX-1100 DLP projector from Yamaha, the Arcam is sharp, stable and extremely solid on screen. Even from close up, picture detail resists the usual churning and random low-level noise. Although such effects may not be obvious at normal viewing distances, the stability of the picture, combined with an absence of obvious processing by-products, quickly and unequivocally makes itself felt whatever the screen size. This is especially noticeable in the fast action sequences of films like *Seabiscuit* or Jet Li's *Hero*. Boasting an unusual lack of motion artefacts and MPEG blocking, alongside subtle and progressive colour reproduction, the Arcam's improvements are all but palpable.

Analogue picture quality through the component video output, which often comes a poor second to digital video, is all but indistinguishable to the digital picture. Despite the

extra processing involved, analogue pictures look just as clean, vibrant and pristine as the digital feed – a tribute to Arcam's engineers. This is an exceptional player on the eye, a clear improvement on the older model which itself was one of the best in class. It is fully appropriate for the best of today's top of the range single and three-chip DLP projectors, or any other display technology for that matter.

All-in-all, the DV29 is a splendid Arcam achievement. It builds on the DV27A's excellent musical performance – exceptionally fine for a DVD player – and adds even better video performance plus HDMI connectivity to make a player fit for audiophiles and videophiles alike. A special product – and British too! **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 87%	<p>PRO Superb video performance and an thoroughly musical sound with CD and DVD-A discs – a truly impressive audio-visual all-rounder.</p> <p>CON Minor control software glitches, deserves a better remote control, no SACD (unlike 'universal' players).</p>
VISION >> 93%	
FEATURES >> 86%	
VALUE >> 88%	
<p>CONCLUSION This a remarkably well-rounded DVD player. Sound may not be dramatically improved over the DV27A, but picture quality shows great advances and HDMI v1.1 equips the player for the long term.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%</p>	

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Back to stereo

Denon returns to its stereo roots with this powerhouse amp. Can it still cut it in the two-channel world?

PRODUCT Denon PMA-1500R MkII

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.4x13.4x40.7cm
 • Weight: 14.6kg • Measured power output: 105W/ch (8 ohms) • Inputs: 5x line, MM/MC phono • Outputs: 2x tape, preamp, headphone and bi-wire speaker terminals

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

Denon has a great reputation these days for DVD and other such hi-tech marvels of the audio-visual age. But what about stereo? For the most part, only if you have a good memory. There used to be a decent range of stereo amps at the budget end of the market, which (looking back at cobweb-encrusted issues of *HFC*) received a slightly mixed welcome at times, but did pretty well on the sales front. Even older models in the early 1990s, we recall, were very well liked.

Back in issue 181 (from 1998), we reviewed the original PMA-1500. And here it is again, now called the PMA-1500R MkII, with the 'R' denoting the presence of a remote control. This is visually indistinguishable from its predecessor – though we gather things are significantly different inside. What gives? Nothing less than

a return to stereo form for Denon. Evidently, the continuing strength of stereo has given the company motivation to rediscover the joys of two channels. Denon isn't about to abandon multichannel, of course, but this amp is the herald of a new stereo range that will soon include a CD player and more to come.

The PMA-1500R MkII is a notably large and heavy brute, offering at least good material value for money, and it's no surprise to discover that it is powerful, too. The printed specs only rate its output at 70 watts, but we found it good for at least 105 watts continuous, more on peaks, and close to 200 watts into low impedances, with plenty of peak current available. In fact, it makes use of 'Ultra-High Current MOSFET' output devices among an impressive list of technological gizmos, including Schottky rectifier diodes – a seriously deluxe feature at this price, which should help keep mains interference at a low level.

Also contributing to low levels of hum and buzz is the use of two mains transformers, mounted back to back to reduce the radiated hum field. Large internal heatsinks keep temperatures sensible, and in another thoughtful touch, these heatsinks have been

mechanically damped to reduce ringing. This can be a very real problem, quite irrespective of an amp's electrical performance. To the same end, the case is damped – lightly, but enough to make it reasonably dead.

In terms of basic features, you get a relatively small number of inputs by current standards – five line plus phono. The phono section, though, is suitable for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges (as befits Denon's status as the inventor of the MC cartridge). Two tape outputs and a preamp output complete the phono socketry, and there are two sets of speaker terminals. These are not switchable, but used solely for bi-wiring purposes. Tone controls are perhaps less surprising now than six years ago, but usefully they can be bypassed. The remote control only operates volume, mute and power functions.

Denon claims low noise and an exceptionally wide bandwidth for this amplifier, up to the 100kHz notional limit of SACD. We found these claims entirely justified. The phono stage is also unusually wideband, with no bass roll-off, even on the MC setting. Measured distortion is on the high side at higher frequencies, though.



“Speakers that like to be driven hard are a good match, especially if they’re not naturally very forthcoming in the bass.”

SOUND QUALITY

It was clear from the outset that the Denon PMA-1500R MkII is a forthright amplifier that’s not ashamed of being powerful. It does ‘loud’ very well, with plenty of impact and gusto. It does ‘medium’ and ‘quiet’ too, of course, but there are some qualifications to be made. Good stuff first, though. The amp’s bass is really very impressive – extended and tuneful to boot. Treble is also near-limitless and, on the whole, enjoyably sweet.

The bass is not as well controlled as it might be, however. There’s generally something of a trade-off between bass tunefulness, extension and control. But if you want all three, you’ll most likely end up writing a much bigger cheque than £500. Here, the bass quality seems to be at the expense of some grip. It’s not as if it sounds at all blowsy or waffly, but it can seem a bit overblown and doesn’t underpin a rhythmic track quite as securely as one might like.

There is a ‘but’ in the treble too – it can be coarse at times, especially in the critical lower

treble/upper midrange area. On occasion, one could be excused for thinking the tone controls were engaged and the treble turned up a fraction, for there was the faint tang of over-brightness, particularly with treble-rich sounds like cymbals. If you already have slightly bright speakers, that could drive you nuts – fast. Okay, one could arguably just turn the treble down, but then the sound becomes dull quite a lot of the time. Tonal aberrations due to intrinsic circuit characteristics are seldom consistent and impossible to balance out by simply using tone controls.

What of the midrange? It’s clear, unfussy and without any obvious oddities, but detail levels largely fail to match those we have recently enjoyed with some of this amp’s competitors – the Marantz PM7200 KI comes immediately to mind. The Denon’s most obvious symptom is a lack of depth and precision in stereo images, with immaculately-recorded sonic canvasses losing some of their realism. Instruments and voices take a few paces forwards and often appear to waver sideways, too.

We have heard far worse, however. In extreme cases, amplifiers eliminate any sense of image depth and just dump the whole soundstage in a line between the speakers. The PMA-1500R MkII certainly avoids that crime, but it never seems happy with the idea that some performers could be as far as several metres from the microphones.

So, does this amp have a place in the great scheme of things? We think it does, despite the above caveats, because it delivers power with authority and at least a modicum of finesse, in a way that’s differentiated from the above-mentioned Marantz and also NAD’s C372 (see HFC 262 for both). It can sound very satisfying with suitable partnering equipment and music – speakers that like to be driven hard are a good match, especially if they’re not naturally very forthcoming in the bass (the Denon will make them think twice about that). Music that involves tonal and dynamic variation more than imaging effects is very well served.

Well-produced rock music, for instance, can be both exciting and involving. A lot of classical material scores well, too, as long as it’s not recorded too close, when the naturally higher levels of treble can start to get on one’s nerves. We even had good results with some jazz – while it wasn’t the most rhythmic rendition ever, the amp nevertheless preserved a good sense of the musicians’ improvising ebb and flow. Incidentally, we were deeply impressed by the built-in phono stage, which is impressively quiet (even on MC), largely hum-free and of better resolving power than most current integrated models.

While we can’t say, hand on heart, that the Denon PMA-1500R MkII is the amp to blow the others away, it still offers very decent performance, good build and value, and enough musical heart that it should at least be heard. Welcome back to stereo, Denon. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >>> 75%
PRO
 Very good bass extension and plenty of treble, too. Music has plenty of heart and gusto, and decent detail most of the time.

FEATURES >>> 84%

BUILD >>> 84%
CON
 Bass lacks control, treble a little refinement at times, and stereo imaging is less deep and precise than we’ve heard at the price.

VALUE >>> 84%

CONCLUSION
 A thoughtfully designed and well-built amp that offers a usefully different character from its direct competitors. All these make compromises somewhere, but the overall balance here means there’s much in this amp’s favour.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 80%

Much more than a preamplifier...



This is the award-winning Room Correction System (RCS) that has taken the hi-fi market by storm.

The system will measure the response of your room, then correct time and frequency problems without introducing phase anomalies.

The result is a dramatic improvement in bass articulation, soundstage, imaging, clarity, dynamics, scale and musicality.



Functionality

The system starts at £1750 and includes a digital remote controlled preamplifier, upsampler, 12 band parametric equalizer, powerful digital tone/shelf controls, room correction system, microphone and software. Further options include analogue-digital and digital-analogue converters and another two channels with variable digital crossovers for an unmatched 2.2 stereo system.

Flexibility

As stated earlier, the RCS will bring dramatic improvements through neutralising your room. It does not stop there though, as the RCS also allows you to tailor (voice) the sound of your system to your taste. Choose a front row seat where the sound is dynamic and extended, or a more laid-back seat where the music is supremely powerful yet smooth. Tailored settings can be stored and activated according to the music being played or even the hour of night.

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1. Pure Digital. The simplest (and purest) solution is to link a CD transport to the RCS which in turn feeds one of our digital amplifiers. This avoids the need for DACS, preamplifiers, numerous cables, platforms, space etc etc.
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Japanese graphite

Will Audio Tekne's low-output needle and step-up transformer put lead in your pencil?

PRODUCT Audio Tekne MC-6310 and Model 9401

TYPE Moving coil phono cartridge and transformer

PRICE £2,995

CONTACT ☎ 01903 872288 # www.audiotekne.com

Audio Tekne has nothing to do with that other, better-known Japanese cartridge manufacturer, Audio-Technica. Instead, Audio Tekne is one of the many small Japanese cottage industries dedicated to purist hi-fi manufacture. The company was founded by a Mr Imai who spent most of his career working for large electronics companies, but gave up corporate life to form a family business making valve amplifiers. The unusual thing about Audio Tekne valve amps is their liberal use of Super Permalloy transformers (presumably as interstage impedance matching devices) and solid graphite as a resonance damper.

Graphite is used for the body of the company's only phono cartridge. The MC-6310 is an ultra low output moving coil (MC) design that is sold with a step-up transformer, called Model 9401. A larger transformer, the Model 4818, is also available for £2,360 – which may give you some idea of what proportion of the price is committed to the cartridge in this unusual package.

The MC6310 has the lowest output we've come across for a long time – just 0.1 millivolts, which is about a fifth of most MCs and puts it in the same league as the legendary I0 from Audio Note Japan. With this sort of meagre voltage, a step-up transformer is almost mandatory, because an output that low is effectively masked by the noise floor of most MC phono stages. The Model 9401 transformer is a black graphite block with the minimum of information on its socketry; pick between high or low inputs and cross your fingers. In fact, crossing your fingers doesn't

Below: The MC-6310's extremely low output demands a top-notch step-up transformer



help much. What's more effective is to put the transformer as far away from active components (amps, CD players and so on) as possible – if you want to avoid any hum that is.

SOUND QUALITY

We started off using the Audio Tekne cartridge with an SME Model 20A turntable and a Series V arm. The 9401 transformer fed a Trichord Delphini MkII phono stage, the latter set to its 47kOhm moving magnet state because that's the best match for the transformer's output. This cartridge makes a great case for the very low output approach – it is phenomenally relaxed, which means that audible distortion levels are truly miniscule. On test, this proved true even when compared to another extremely refined cartridge, the van den Hul Colibri.

Playing John Fahey's transcendent *Let Go*, the full dynamic range of the guitar was let loose and the strings positively sparkled with life. The instrument sat in a well-defined and impressively deep space with plenty of room to breathe. Moving over to the voice and quiet instruments of Lambchop revealed full if not fully extended bass, alongside a transparency to microdynamics that is outstanding. This is obvious in Kurt Wagner's voice, which seems to have more depth and expression than usual, and also in the nature of all the small sounds that go to make up the sonic collage of songs like *Caterpillar* from the *Is A Woman* album.

Bugge Wesseltoft's track *Heim* was presented with its huge scale fully intact, the soundstage going way back behind the

speakers.

The bass drum was big and the brush on snare sounded very real;

this was a full immersion experience of the glorious variety. The downside, however, is a low frequency delivery that occasionally lacks bite – the midrange is phenomenally refined, but albums like Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* sound a touch weak in the lower registers.

Regardless, this combination of very low output MC cartridge plus step-up transformer proves beautifully natural and often thoroughly beguiling. If you want a relaxed yet revealing vinyl experience, this is a cartridge to covet. **HFC**

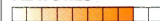
Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 92%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 81%



PRO
Unusually refined and relaxed moving coil cartridge with a wide dynamic range, excellent resolution of detail and a high-quality dedicated step up transformer.

CON
Lacks a little low-frequency bite and may be a too relaxed for some. Transformer is fussy about siting.

CONCLUSION

A cartridge that appreciates great recordings and has such low distortion is a rare thing. It may not have rock-solid bass, but makes up for it with full-scale imaging and a totally fluid sound. It comes with a very tasty transformer too.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 86%

"A little champ of price/quality ratio: available at an affordable price, especially for a tube amplifier of more-than-usual power."

AUDIO REVIEW Italy, July 2004, Claudio Checchi

"PrimaLuna ProLogue One is now my 'affordable reference amplifier'. With apologies to various British and Italian geniuses, this amplifier has to my ears no equals at its retail price."

HI-FI NEWS and record review, July 2004, Ken Kessler

"A refreshing change from the transistor competition with a captivating presentation. Excellent finish and build quality makes for a package strong on value."

HI-FI WORLD, August 2004, Dominic Todd



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DivX and conquer

Sony's new low-cost DVD-Video player features SACD and DivX compatibility

PRODUCT Sony DVP-NS955V

TYPE DVD-Video/SACD player

PRICE £270

CONTACT ☎ 08705 111999 @ www.sony.co.uk

The Sony DVP-NS955V is an unassuming player that supports DVD-Video discs, CD and stereo/multichannel SACD. It is also compatible with the DivX video encoding compressor/decompressor, which does for video what MP3 does for audio. DivX is a lossy codec that can take almost any video content from VHS through to HDTV and compress it to a fraction of its original size, often with a manageable loss of picture quality. Typically, DivX is used to download full length movies from the internet.

The DVP-NS955V is an ultra slimline design standing around 5.5cm tall, which switches itself to standby after a period of inactivity. It has only a handful of front panel controls, including a progressive scan/interlaced video switch. At the rear, the player has stereo and 5.1-channel audio outputs plus a range of video outputs, namely composite, S-Video, RGB (via Scart, with a second loop-through socket), S-Video, and component (the latter in PAL/NTSC progressive or interlace).

Equipped with internal Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, the player also includes a number of virtual surround modes. One of the more impressive features is a menu set-up system that includes a simple Q&A-style 'quick set-up' facility, and better than expected speaker management, with separate settings (where appropriate) for DVD and SACD.

Ticking away in the background is a 12-bit/108MHz video DAC, equipped with progressive scan and a raft of other picture processing functions, like Pixel by Pixel I/P conversion. The player even includes adjustable lip sync – all very impressive at the price.

SOUND QUALITY

The Sony's CD and SACD playback quality is very creditable – it may not stack up to more costly rivals, but given that this is essentially a £270 DVD player it's really rather good. It's always very tidy-sounding, glossing over some of the vitality and life in a recording of the Sibelius *Violin Concerto* (Bournemouth SO on Naxos) on CD, but still sounding well controlled and disciplined. It delivered a creamy orchestral texture, but good image presence and depth, which is mostly expressed forward of the speaker plane. The player was even more impressive with vocal material (such as Rickie Lee Jones or Sabine Sciubba), and really came to life with a rather impressive Naim Audio sampler called *True Stereo*. The way that the Sony brought the opening track *Jump St(u)art* (sic) to life was genuinely thrilling.

As an SACD player, the Sony is limited to analogue outputs, but the flexible bass management gives it an edge compared to previous low-cost players. Discs are generally well presented, with low noise and a clean, well-extended sound, though the difference between CD and SACD stereo recordings (where the discs allowed) was objectively narrow and frequently too close to call. Certainly, spending more on a high-quality dedicated SACD player will deliver a good deal more of this format's sonic potential.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

On the video side, colour depth and fidelity are good, with subtle resolution of low level detail, though colour saturation is a little muted by the best standards. As usual, composite video is best avoided, but the S-Video works well, and component video is still more dynamic and offers better fine detail resolution. In well mastered recordings (several were used for this test, including Zhang Yimou's spectacular *Hero* in a Region 0 high bit-rate version with a DTS

soundtrack, and the final part of *Lord of the Rings*) the only limitations are relatively modest picture detail, which is typical of players at this price, and jerky motion in, for example, scrolling credit sequences.

Ultimately, this is a well-featured DVD player for the money, complete with Sony's customarily slick ergonomics and SACD playback bolted on for good measure. Perhaps its most prominent 'new' feature is DivX, but of far more importance is its tidy all-round performance – both audio and visual. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

DVD-AUDIO	✗	DVD+R	✓
DVD-VIDEO	✓	DVD-RAM	✗
SACD	✓	MP3 AUDIO	✓
CD	✓	WMA AUDIO	✗
HDCD	✗	AAC AUDIO	✗
CD-R/ RW	✓	VIDEO CD	✓
DVD-R/ RW	✓	JPEG PICTURES	✓

VERDICT

SOUND >> 70%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 70% SACD 70%

VISION >> 78%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 70% SACD 70%

FEATURES >> 87%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 70% SACD 70%

VALUE >> 88%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 70% SACD 70%

CONCLUSION

Good, though not stunning all-round performance and an impressive feature set makes this DVD/SACD player a strong contender at the price. It may not have a sound to make audiophiles drool, but for the money it's a tidy all-rounder.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **80%**



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

From compact standmounts to tall floorstanders – this mid-price group has it all

This month's loudspeaker sextet – priced between £500 and £1,200 per pair – is in the middle of the market. The speakers show considerable variety in size and type, as reflects this hotly-contested and important arena.

The Spondor S3e is comfortably the smallest model, but at £795 per pair, by no means the least expensive. Rather, it is one of those perfectly formed near-miniatures, vanishingly discreet yet using top quality ingredients throughout.

Harbeth's NRG2 represents a real departure from this arch-traditionalist. If it lacks some of the Spondor's physical refinement, it offers a more muscular package at a significant cost saving.

Neither of those standmounts can be considered cheap, but both boast British manufacture. This inevitably adds a cost premium, especially when compared to the three Chinese-made models that feature in this test group. That said, our third standmount may come from China, but is also the most costly in the group. However, even a cursory glance at the £1,200 Aurum Cantus Leisure 3SE suggests it's far from expensive,

considering its superb cabinetwork and classy ribbon tweeter.

It's even harder to argue with the perceived value of the other two Chinese made models. Crane Audio's Oceana 5f is unusual in being a three-way design with an entirely metal alloy floorstanding enclosure. The 5f is commonly packaged as part of a home cinema system, but fortunately is also available as a stereo pair, for which the £550 pricetag seems very reasonable.

The lovely lacquered bird's eye maple enclosure that graces Quad's Chinese built £695 21L is bound to tempt many. This speaker's compact, two-way floorstanding recipe might not be overly ambitious, but it does have the virtue of simplicity to add to its undoubted visual charm. Whether it's worth the extra £195 over Quad's equivalent stand-mount might be debatable, but it certainly looks better value than the £895 22L we reviewed in HFC 257.

The largest speaker in the group is Triangle's latest £975 ES variation on the Antal theme (its two predecessors both achieved Best Buy status). This

latest big and solid floorstander might be clad in a rather anonymous vinyl wrap, but it features some serious drive unit technology and a much improved plinth arrangement. **HFC**

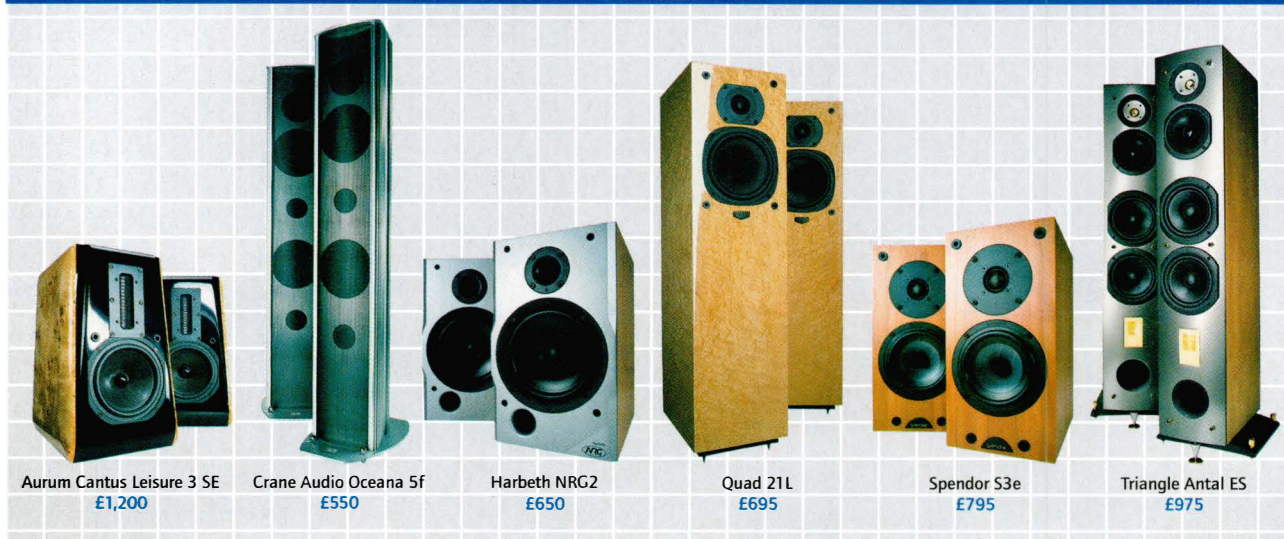
EQUIPMENT USED

- ▶ Naim CDS 3 CD player
- ▶ Burmester 001 CD player
- ▶ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ▶ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ▶ Linn Akiva cartridge
- ▶ Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
- ▶ Naim NAC552 preamp
- ▶ Naim NAP500 power amp
- ▶ Vertex AQ and Naim cables

MUSIC USED

- ▶ Various Artists *Enjoy Every Sandwich – the Songs of Warren Zevon*
- ▶ Fat Boy Slim *Palookaville*
- ▶ Joni Mitchell *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*
- ▶ Mr Scruff *Keeping It Unreal*
- ▶ Robbie Robertson *Robbie Robertson*
- ▶ LSO Rostropovich *Shostakovich: Symphony No. 11*
- ▶ BBC Radios 3 & 4 were also used extensively

ON TEST



Aurum Cantus Leisure 3 SE
£1,200

Crane Audio Oceana 5f
£550

Harbeth NRG2
£650

Quad 21L
£695

Spondor S3e
£795

Triangle Antal ES
£975

LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening tests pose more complex problems than those involved in assessing other components. Speakers vary greatly, and interact strongly and often unpredictably with the room. The difficulty facing sequential unsighted loudspeaker presentations is the tendency to judge each according to how its balance differs from the previous model. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted for this group, giving scope to adjust to the changes in balance and to experiment with the positioning.

LAB TESTS

The speakers were tested under in-room conditions to best represent real-world conditions. The equipment used included a Neutrik Audiograph analogue signal generator with synchronised pen recorder, which was used to plot the far-field in-room averaged response traces and impedance plots. Pair-matching was also checked at one metre.

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 speakers compare across quantitative and qualitative measures. Individual parameters are assessed and shown as better or worse than the group average.

1] Sensitivity: Sensitivity measures how loud a speaker will go for a given voltage from the amp. It's scaled to 2.83V at 1m (one watt for an eight-ohm load). This figure can be misleading, as sensitivity varies significantly and as lower-impedance speakers extract more current and hence power from an amp than higher-impedance ones.

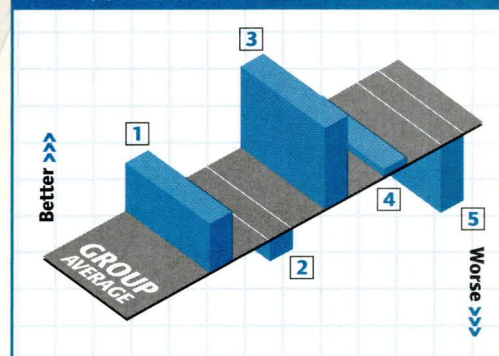
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB with reference to the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

3] Ease of drive: The lower the impedance, the more current it extracts from a driving amp for a given volume. Lower-impedance designs have higher sensitivities, reducing voltage requirements for given loudness levels.

4] Overall frequency balance: Overall broad frequency response trends do much to define the character of a speaker, although true neutrality is the obvious goal.

5] Response smoothness: The small-scale smoothness of a speaker has much to do with the delicacy of the sound, and its ability to deliver subtle harmonic shading.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



£1,200 per pair ☎ 020 8459 8113 🌐 www.aurumcantus.com

AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3 SE

Lacquered veneer and a ribbon tweeter for less than you'd expect

Although Aurum Cantus had its early roots in Europe, the company's website makes it clear that this is a distinctly Chinese operation. It was founded in 1994 and from the outset specialised in making ribbon-type drivers to handle the top end of the audio band. Combine just such a high-class tweeter with some of the finest poplar burl veneered side-cheeks you'll ever see, and the result is a substantial standmount that looks considerably more expensive than its asking price of £1,200 per pair.

Ribbons have long been highly regarded by audiophiles, from the legendary British Kelly/Decca device of the 1950s to the extraordinary full range Apogee models of the 1980s. They seem to be on the increase too, as a lot of them were visible (and audible) at 2004's Heathrow hi-fi show a couple of months back. So what makes a ribbon driver special? Essentially, the ribbon itself is the voice coil, unwound and stretched out into a strip so that actually acts as the diaphragm itself – ensuring very direct communication of the signal.

Besides the 100x8mm G3Si ribbon, which operates above 2.5kHz, there's a rear-ported 165mm bass/mid driver with a cast frame and a 115mm diameter carbon fibre/Kevlar loaded cone. The enclosure is very solid as well as beautiful, those beautifully veneered side-cheeks sandwiching piano gloss black

front, back, top and base. Useful asymmetry should help avoid focusing the internal standing waves, and clever shaping should assist lateral dispersion. High quality crossover components, fed from a pair of big and beautifully solid terminals, complete the overall luxury bookshelf experience.

SOUND QUALITY

Mounting the Leisure 3 SEs on 600mm tall Kudos S100 stands placed the ribbon at just about the right height to deliver optimum upper treble output to seated listeners, ensuring maximum transparency. Slightly shorter stands should work equally well, but it is important to make sure that the speakers are mounted at or slightly below ear height, because – as with all ribbon drivers – the highest frequencies are focused into a relatively narrow vertical 'window'. Laterally, dispersion is smooth and wide.

With that proviso, the top end of this speaker is clearly superior to normal dome tweeters in both smoothness and delicacy – so much so, the first impression was that it might be dull. On this occasion, however, that initial judgement turned out to be misleading. The strength of the ribbon tweeter lies more in the way that it doesn't draw attention to itself, and in the subtlety with which it reproduces the most delicate musical nuances without the slightest exaggeration.

Smoothness and evenness are perhaps this speaker's most endearing characteristics, against which must be set some lack of brio and dynamic excitement. The tonal balance is impressively neutral, and the sound is largely free from any 'boxiness' and cabinet coloration. On the other hand, it might be too laid back for some tastes, and the bass end in particular can sound ponderous and heavy with some material, even with the speaker kept well clear of walls. This is a speaker that will be very easy to live with, aesthetically and sonically, and while it isn't the fastest and most dramatic

communicator around, that ribbon tweeter unquestionably confers a very sweet and seductive top end. **HFC**

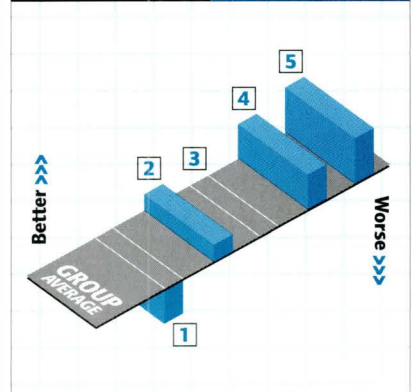


LAB REPORT

The manufacturer's claim for 88dB sensitivity seems a little optimistic here, as our test regime – using a 'real world' far-field in-room averaged arrangement – comes up with a rather more modest, and perhaps more realistic 85-86dB. That is a comfortably below average figure, but it's not unreasonable in the context of the decent bass extension (-6dB at 26Hz under in-room conditions), plus the amp-friendly impedance (a minimum of seven ohms at 48Hz and 170Hz).

The reflex port here is tuned to 48Hz, which explains why there's a mild mid-bass excess in the overall in-room response. There's some general unevenness through the bass and lower midband, though the net balance is quite flat here, and things become very smooth and well ordered above 300Hz. Just a slight excess is seen 700Hz-1kHz, to add a touch of forwardness, but the trend thereafter is exceptionally smooth and well extended through the frequency range.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -30%
- 2] Bass extension >> +15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/6.4 ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	48Hz	26Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



PRACTICALITY >> 83%



BUILD >> 93%



VALUE >> 84%



This substantially built and attractively shaped standmount comes from China, which explains how you get the fabulous lacquered veneer and classy ribbon tweeter at a relatively affordable price.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 86%



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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

£550 per pair ☎ 0870 444 1056 🌐 www.craneaudio.com

CRANE AUDIO OCEANA 5F

Crane Audio's smart alloy floorstander offers strong material value

Southampton-based Crane Audio is a new(ish) company and the Oceana 5f is the first product HFC has tested. The company orients its loudspeakers primarily towards the home cinema and multichannel user, though principal Peter Crane told us these good size floorstanders were equally well suited to two-channel stereo applications.

While acknowledging that its prime role might well lie in replaying movies in surround sound, the Oceana 5f (where 'f' is for 'front') would seem to have all the right ingredients for regular stereo music replay. And because it possesses one decidedly unusual feature, the prospect of reviewing this speaker was particularly tempting.

That feature is the cabinet. Whereas the overwhelming majority of speakers build enclosures out of some sort of compacted sawdust, Crane Audio opts for metal alloy

casework instead. It's not unique in this regard, but most metal-cased speakers tend to be small affairs, and to produce a 105cm tall floorstander that can sell for a very reasonable £550 per pair is an impressive achievement.

Part of the secret undoubtedly lies in manufacturing in China, but the design itself is both simple in concept, neat in execution and also unquestionably elegant in appearance. The flat front and back, and the curved, tapered and ribbed sides are all formed from aluminium alloy extrusions some 4mm thick. This is possibly architectural in origin, with stiffening ribs that add an extra 5mm around the curved corners. Flat oversize top and bottom plates complete the enclosure, each plate secured by three bolts. The much larger base plate provides secure threaded accommodation for three very substantial chrome-plated spikes. A tripod support avoids rocking tendencies completely, at some expense in 'knock-over' stability.

The Oceana 5f is a three-way design, but is unusual in making no attempt to use separate enclosures for the bass and midrange drivers and in using two separate and apparently identical reflex loading ports. Both the bass and the midrange drivers are 133mm units with pressed steel frames, while the treble is handled by a 25mm soft dome. A single terminal pair is mounted on the spine.

SOUND QUALITY

As the in-room measurements predicted, this speaker has a very different tonal balance from the norm, combining a significantly stronger than average top end with rather modest bass extension. This is a somewhat unfortunate pairing, as it's usually best to balance out extremes. The result is a forward and rather lightweight sound, giving plenty of explicit, if somewhat in-yr-face detail, but without enough weight or warmth.

The absence of woodwork might play a part in the lack of warmth, and there's certainly no evidence of 'woody' box colorations here – but this is not to say the enclosure is particularly 'quiet'. In fact, it's livelier than one might have hoped for. Tap the enclosure with a metal object and you'll hear it ring, so some enclosure surface damping would probably be beneficial. There is a metallic 'twang' that is just audible running well below voices, but which occurs at higher frequencies than most wood-based enclosures. The twang is not immediately obvious, but once you become aware of it, it makes its presence felt. **HFC**

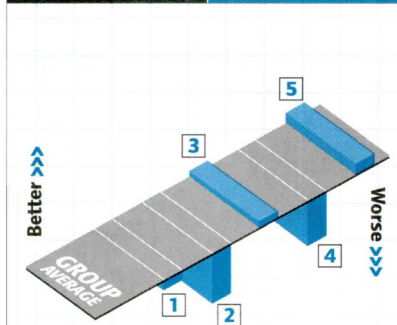


LAB REPORT

The Oceana 5f managed to deliver an impressively well-balanced in-room averaged response, which held within fine ± 3 dB limits from 50Hz right up to 15kHz. However, the treble region above 2kHz is about 3dB stronger than the norm, and this will inevitably give a sound that's significantly brighter than average. A slight notch centred on 2.1kHz should help avoid the sound becoming too aggressive, although we would prefer this to occur in the speaker, rather than using tone controls.

The main limitation with using this speaker as a standalone stereo pair, however, lies in the lack of low bass. The impedance shows that the ports are tuned to a relatively high 60Hz, ensuring that the bottom end rolls off very rapidly below 50Hz. Our 88dB sensitivity rating is close to the 89dB claimed, and is achieved alongside an easy-to-drive impedance that stays above 6 ohms throughout. Slight resonances could be seen at 170Hz and 320Hz, however.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >> -45%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +5%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	55Hz	47Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 65%



PRACTICALITY >> 87%



BUILD >> 84%

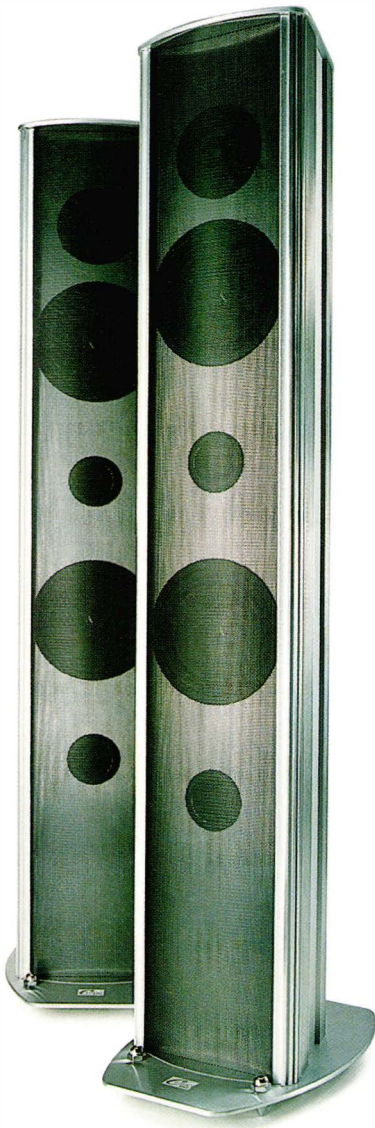


VALUE >> 80%



Elegant all-alloy enclosure avoids boxiness, but adds some sonic character of its own. This China-sourced speaker looks good material value for money, but lack of deep bass indicates it's best suited to a 5.1 system.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **73%**



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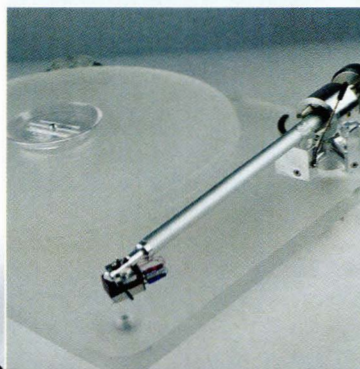
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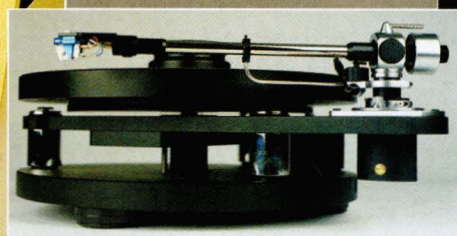
Sugden Masterclass phono amplifier. Very lucid, sonically on a par with some valve phono stages but with noise free high gain £1299.



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QUAD 21L

This compact floorstander has a beautifully finished enclosure

Quad's history goes all the way back to 1936, in which time its various audio exploits have established the brand as one of British hi-fi's best respected names. In fact, Quad is now owned by Chinese interests and operates alongside Wharfedale as part of the International Audio Group (IAG). In addition to its high-quality amplifiers, Quad's reputation owes much to introducing the world's first full-range electrostatic loudspeaker way back in the 1950s.

Quad still makes updated versions of those legendary electrostatic panel speakers today, though in recent years, the company has augmented them with some very attractive and altogether more cost-effective box loudspeakers. These take advantage of the Chinese connection to supply delicious cabinetwork with lovely piano lacquered veneers at relatively affordable prices.

There are four stereo pairs in the current L-series, this 21L sitting on the third rung of the ladder, as a slightly smaller and simpler brother of the 22L we reviewed in *HFC* 257.



The essential difference is this 21L is a straight two-way, with just a single 165mm main driver in a very compact enclosure, whereas the 22L has an extra main driver, a slightly larger box, and operates as a 'two-and-a-half-way'.

Acoustically, the 21L is even smaller than its modest external dimensions suggest. The whole volume would be too large to load properly a single 165mm unit, so the lower section is blanked off with a sharply angled partition (that's one reason why the twin terminal pairs and the port are well off the ground). The enclosure is built from 18mm MDF and encased in high-gloss black, rosewood, maple or birds-eye maple veneer with six layers of lacquer, and looks very classy indeed.

The main driver has a woven 120mm Kevlar cone and 165mm cast alloy chassis, while the tweeter has a 25mm soft fabric dome. The simple crossover circuit has audiophile components, including air-cored chokes and polypropylene capacitors. Inexplicably, an undersized plinth is fitted, which actually reduces the overall stability footprint.

SOUND QUALITY

Interestingly, the 21L has a significantly different tonal balance from its larger 22L brother – and that balance is also considerably closer to the market norm. Instead of a rather bright overall sound, the 21L is just about ideal, combining a hint of forwardness in the upper midband with a nicely restrained treble that supplies sufficient detail without drawing unwelcome attention to itself.

There is a mild lack of warmth here, but no shortage of bottom end weight, even with the speakers well clear of walls. And despite the fact that the drivers are set comfortably below seated ear level, there seemed no obvious lack of space and air. In fact, the sound was notably free from unwanted 'boxiness', and images showed no tendency to cluster around the speakers themselves.

Over several days, this pair of speakers consistently delivered a high standard of performance across a wide range of sources, covering everything from CD to vinyl, via TV and radio. One might argue that it isn't the most exciting sounding speaker around. More vivid dynamics and a faster, more driving sound will be found elsewhere, but usually accompanied by less smoothness and more coloration. In the art of compromise, the 21L is an excellent example of how to get it right – even more so than its bigger but more idiosyncratic brother. **HFC**



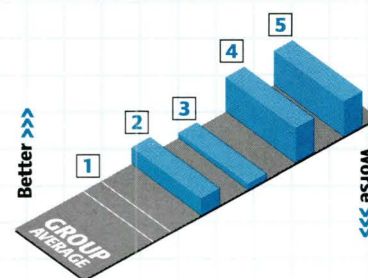
LAB REPORT

The 21L delivers a well-balanced measured performance. It doesn't excel in any particular respect, but there's little to criticise, either. Furthermore, the overall tonal balance is much closer to the norm, and altogether less idiosyncratic, than that encountered when testing Quad's 22L a few months back.

It's not totally neutral – there's a slight upper-mid emphasis, between 800Hz and 1.5kHz, plus a mild lack of energy in the upper bass (60-150Hz) and in the midband (200-400Hz). There's also some mid-bass emphasis around 50Hz, even with the speakers well clear of walls.

But the overall trend holds within fine +/- 4dB limits throughout, and the ultimate bass extension registers a fine 25Hz (-6dB under in-room conditions), thanks to low 35Hz port tuning. Sensitivity is a reasonable 89dB, with load minima of 4.5 ohms, while slight resonances are visible at 140Hz and 750Hz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> +15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +5%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/- ohms	7/4.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	25Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

PRACTICALITY >> 83%

BUILD >> 90%

VALUE >> 92%

The very elegant finish sets this compact floorstander apart. The sound is smooth and well balanced with an even bass delivery, while the slight midband forwardness helps provide good detail projection.

HI-FI CHOICE **88%**
OVERALL SCORE

£795 per pair ☎ 01323 843474 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

SPENDOR S3E

The baby of Spendor's new S-series feels exceptionally solid

Spendor is well-known as a maker of broadcast monitor speakers, used by those who respect its BBC heritage and the accompanying reputation for accuracy and neutrality. For similar reasons, it is also highly regarded by hi-fi enthusiasts, but here there's a greater requirement to take domestic acceptability into account.

Traditional Spendor ranges continue, but today's hi-fi is inexorably fashion-led, and this is reflected in the S-series models. Leaving aside the home cinema 'add-ons', and rejecting the company's longstanding tradition for large standmounts, the five stereo pairs in the range include four floorstanders, plus the S3e – an unusually slim and compact standmount. It's not as small as the classic LS3/5A and its clones (including Spendor's own S3/5se), but it's exactly the same width, so it looks very similar, while grabbing an extra 50 per cent of enclosure volume.

The latest 'suffix-e' S-series models look very similar to their predecessors, but include a number of subtle under-the-skin improvements. The very narrow front panel constrains the main driver size to a small 140mm cast-frame, and the accompanying 85mm diameter cone is made of a new transparent polymer called ep38, alongside a new surround material. A shaped phase plug enhances the top end smoothness of the main driver, while its magnetic motor linearity is improved, and a wholly new type of 27mm fabric dome tweeter is also fitted.



This simple port-loaded two-way is clothed all round in good quality cherry, rosenut, black or maple real wood veneer, and the drivers are neatly flush-mounted into the front panel. The grille should be left in place for both acoustic and styling reasons. A clever port arrangement, in the form of a tapering rectangular slot, exhausts at the bottom of the rear panel. Twin terminal pairs, mounted on a damped stainless steel plate, provide a bi-amping or bi-wiring option. Auto-transformers rather than resistors are used to attenuate the tweeter, and each loudspeaker of a pair is matched to within 1dB, which is uncommon at this price.

SOUND QUALITY

Very much in the Spendor tradition, the little S3e is a smooth and unflinchingly polite performer, exceptionally freed from boxiness and possessed of notably spacious soundstaging. Colorations are well under control but, less happily, so are dynamics, which seem rather weak and lacking in vigour. This is one small loudspeaker that doesn't belie its modest dimensions.

The in-room traces suggest that some close-to-wall reinforcement might be beneficial, though in practice this is probably better avoided, or at least approached with caution, as the sound can become a bit thumpy. In fact, when clear of walls, the dry bass alignment of the S3e balances out well alongside its rather restrained top end. It gives a net sound that favours the speaker's relatively smooth, even and neutral midband.

While this undoubtedly plays to the inevitable strengths of a very small loudspeaker, it does mean that the sound lacks a little ambition and scale, in bandwidth as well as in terms of dynamic heft.

But the small size of this speaker has its own benefits and advantages. It's marvellously discreet, sonically as well as visually – shut your eyes and you'll be quite unable to identify the precise location of the speaker from the sonic cues alone. This makes it particularly easy to ignore the very existence of the speakers, and focus on the music instead – something which is much harder to do when the speakers have a large visual impact. **HFC**



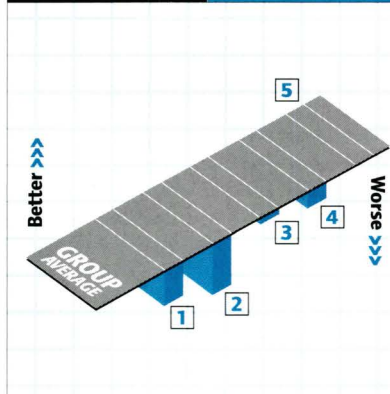
LAB REPORT

A compact speaker with a small main driver is always liable to show modest sensitivity and/or bass extension, and that's precisely the situation with Spendor's little S3e. The sensitivity here is a below average 86dB (akin to classic mini-monitor designs like the LS3/5a, which is rated at 83dB), though that is partly explained because the load it presents to the amplifier is benign, never falling below six ohms throughout.

Sited in free space, the bass is a little lacking below 150Hz, and rolls off rapidly below 50Hz (partly because the port is tuned high, to 60Hz).

In terms of overall sound balance, the notably smooth treble is therefore rather sensibly somewhat restrained above 3kHz. The broad midband is consequently slightly exposed here, but also very well ordered, comfortably holding within impressive +/-3dB limits between 120Hz and 3kHz, even though there's some unevenness between 800Hz and 2kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -30%
- 2] Bass extension >> -45%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -5%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -15%
- 5] Response smoothness >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/6.8 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	48Hz	47Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%

PRACTICALITY >> 81%

BUILD >> 89%

VALUE >> 77%

This small standmount has excellent build and finish throughout. The midband is smooth, even and notably low in coloration, though extreme bass and treble are both a bit lacking, as is dynamic enthusiasm.

HI-CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 78%

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AUDUSA - OOM Silverlink OCC balanced speaker cable stranded, silver on OFHC plus three strands of OCC for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI.

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GNLM 05/04

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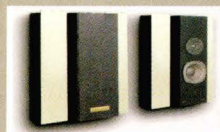
ACOUSTIC SOLID



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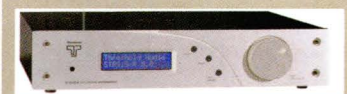
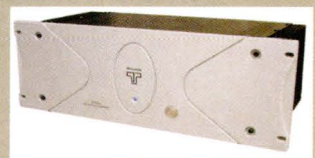
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TRIANGLE ANTAL ES

The new Antal is steered in the right direction thanks to Magellan

Two previous generations of Triangle's Antal floorstander fared very well under HFC scrutiny, both achieving Best Buy status in 2001 and 2004 respectively. This upgraded ES version costs £975 per pair, £50 more than its Antal 202 predecessor, but it incorporates a number of improvements that have arisen as a result of developing the prestige Magellan models.

It isn't perhaps the prettiest of speakers, with a convex front panel in black painted MDF, surrounded and backed by a choice of three rather nondescript vinyl woodprints, codenamed Bordeaux, Champagne and Cognac. While not really a concession to elegance, the new and elaborate damped metal plinth provides a fine combination of stability and spike-coupling, the latter centred on a large central pointed cone that grounds the front panel. It looks good, too.

The Antal ES is a true three-way design, with two port-loaded 165mm bass-only drivers, each with 120mm cones, operating in tandem up to 300Hz. These bass units hand over to a 130mm midrange drive unit with a small

85mm cone, which in turn crosses over to a new and substantial horn-loaded tweeter at around 4kHz. Horn tweeters are controversial, Triangle's justification being that matching the horn mouth diameter to that of the midrange cone gives better energy consistency through the crossover.

Triangle uses cast chassis and paper cone diaphragms throughout, and while the two bass drivers have the normal synthetic rubber surrounds, the midrange driver is unusual in using a pleated surround – an old-fashioned technique which Triangle has long favoured, presumably because it has lower hysteresis (energy storage) than rubber. The rear panel carries twin terminal pairs, and a flared front port reflex-loads the bass enclosure.

SOUND QUALITY

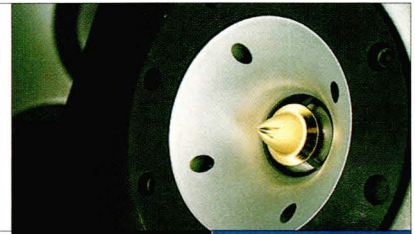
Smooth and sweet are not adjectives that spring to mind here, but in terms of vividness, involvement and excitement, this latest incarnation of the Antal is hard to beat. The key to good results, however, turned out to involve considerable experimentation in moving the speakers to and fro in order to achieve the best possible balance.

Get it wrong and there's no avoiding a measure of tonal balance unevenness and some attendant coloration. But get it right and it's just possible to smooth out the bumps and enjoy the undoubted dynamic benefits this generous floorstander can provide. We found the best position to be exactly half way between the normal 'close-to-wall' and 'free space' locations, though this is something that will vary unpredictably from one room to another.

The twin port-loaded bass drivers supply firm, deep bass with bags of headroom, so the sound always had plenty in hand, and proved effective at distinguishing between different bass instruments playing at the same time.

The midrange and treble are comparatively high off the ground, which enhances the sense of authority and scale. Moreover, although the midband might lack some smoothness, it shows excellent timing and freedom from overhang, alongside impressive dynamic expressiveness. It also seems to integrate beautifully with that horn-loaded tweeter, giving a seamless coherence right through the presence band, and considerable consequent vocal integrity.

This might not be the prettiest speaker around, but if you're looking for maximum musical insight for minimal financial outlay, the Antal ES will take a lot of beating. **HFC**

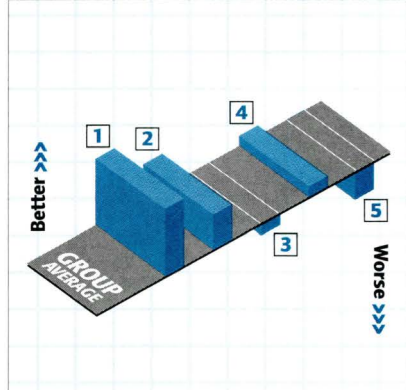


LAB REPORT

It's interesting to compare this latest Antal with its predecessor. The two give very similar test results, despite the very different tweeter in this new model, and some subtle but significant changes seen in the impedance traces. The new tweeter is significantly smoother through most of its range, though it does have a pronounced peak at 17kHz, at the very edge of human hearing.

Alongside fine in-room bass extension (-6dB at 22Hz), sensitivity is an impressively high 91dB, though this is accompanied by a rather demanding impedance trace that falls to 3.3 ohms at 110Hz and 900Hz. The best bass balance was achieved when the speakers were placed about 60cm out from the rear wall, largely in the same position as recommended by Triangle itself. This led to a fine overall balance, notably smooth below 300Hz and above 1.5kHz, but this was tempered by unevenness through the two-plus octaves in between, with a notable 700-800Hz peak.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +60%
- 2] Bass extension >> +30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -25%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91 dB	91 dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	4/3.3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	50Hz	22Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



PRACTICALITY >> 70%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 90%



Though not the smoothest of speakers, this substantial three-way is a highly involving musical communicator. If you want your music delivered with passion and scale, you really ought to hear a pair.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 88%

CONCLUSIONS

Good looks and great sound – what more do you want from a mid-price loudspeaker?

The wide variations between the models provided the recipe for a most interesting group test, the results clearly illustrating the advantages and disadvantages of the various contrasting approaches.

Working up the price ladder, the extruded alloy casework of Crane Audio's £550 per pair Oceana 5f makes it arguably the most unusual model in the test group. In pure performance terms, the Oceana 5f showed genuine promise, though bass extension is limited, and some extra enclosure damping would also help.

Harbeth's new NRG2 is a real departure for the brand, aesthetically and sonically, and if the latter might have been smoother, it's certainly muscular, energetic and involving.

Gorgeous cabinetwork will attract many to Quad's 21 L, which might have a similar driver line-up to the Harbeth, but represents a definite contrast in sound character – altogether smoother, but softer and less vigorous.

Spendor's S3e is a beautifully finished and exceptionally compact near-miniature, with a sound that's smooth and well balanced, but a

little limited dynamically and at the frequency extremes. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Triangle's latest ES version of the Antal has serious dynamic expression, and ample bandwidth, but the finish is altogether less luxurious.

Another dramatic contrast comes with the Aurum Cantus Leisure 3 SE, which even puts the Quad in the shade when it comes to top quality veneerwork and polished lacquer finish. This chunky and beautiful standmount's ribbon tweeter helps create a big, smooth sound, with laid back but wide range dynamics.

Taking the group as a whole, the Triangle Antal ES arguably takes top honours for sound quality. It might not be top-dog for anyone seeking a warm, smooth ride, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a more vital musical communicator on the wallet-friendly side of £1,000. Then again, it trails behind the rest on surface finish and lounge friendliness – similar pros and cons could be applied to any of the models in this or any other group. With loudspeakers, the trick is always to try and find the best compromise to suit your particular preferences and prejudices. **HFC**

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AMPLIFIERS

EXPOSURE 3010 £1,000

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SUGDEN A21A

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CD PLAYERS

ARCAM DIVA CD93T £950

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SONY SCD-XA3000ES

£800

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HINTS AND TIPS

>> Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.

>> Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Make sure you take the time and trouble to experiment.

>> Moving a speaker from a free space location until it's close to a wall will substantially boost the mid-bass.

>> Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.

>> Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to perform at its best.

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Aurum Cantus Leisure 3 SE	Crane Audio Oceana 5f	Harbeth NRG2	Quad 21L	Spendor S3e	Triangle Antal ES
PRICE	£1,200	£550	£650	£695	£795	£975
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Gorgeous standmount has a very smooth and laid-back sound and delivers a fine sense of scale.	Unusual, alloy-encased floorstander is free from boxiness, but bass is light and damping could certainly be improved.	Sound lacks smoothness, but this exciting and vivid performer is lots of fun. Sharp styling too.	Lovely high gloss veneer and an attractively smooth and neutral sound at a very tempting price.	This beautifully finished near-miniature is free from boxiness but lacks some dynamic muscle and weight.	Not the prettiest or smoothest-sounding, but great dynamic enthusiasm delivers fine musical communication.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	25x40x30cm	19x105x20cm	19x34x29cm	21x80x26cm	16.5x34x26cm	20x108x34cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	3-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	3-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x165mm	2x130mm	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x130mm	1x130mm, 2x165mm
STAND/ FLOOR	Stand	Floor	Stand	Floor	Stand	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Lacquered real wood	Aluminium alloy	Real wood	Lacquered real wood	Real wood	Vinyl woodprint
BI-WIRE	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	86dB P	88dB A	90dB G	89dB A	86dB P	91dB E
EST. BASS EXTENSION	26Hz G	47Hz P	40Hz A	25Hz G	47Hz P	22Hz G
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/7 ohms E	8/6 ohms G	6/5 ohms A	7/4.5 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	4/3.3 ohms P
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	+20% G	-10% A	-20% P	+20% G	-10% A	+5% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+30% G	+10% A	-30% P	+20% G	0% A	-15% A

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[HIGH PERFORMANCE AUDIO EQUIPMENT]



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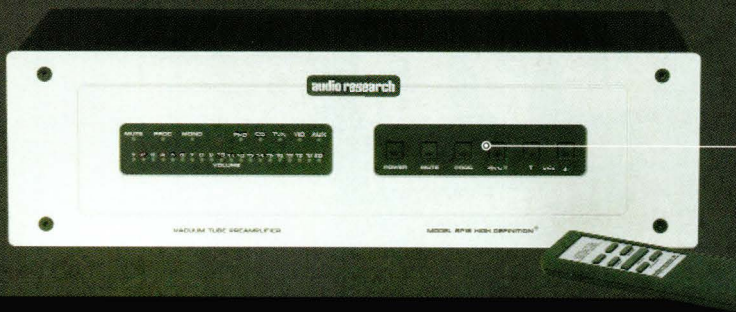
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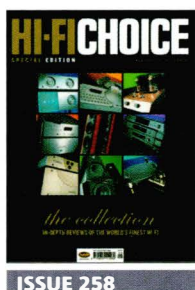
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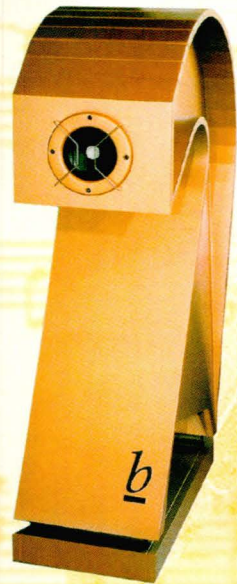
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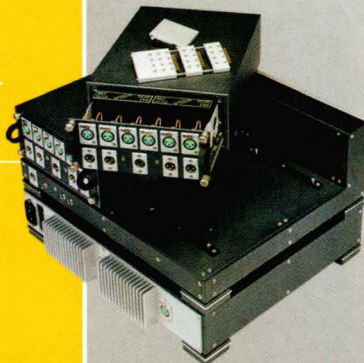
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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 44.1 kHz 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?

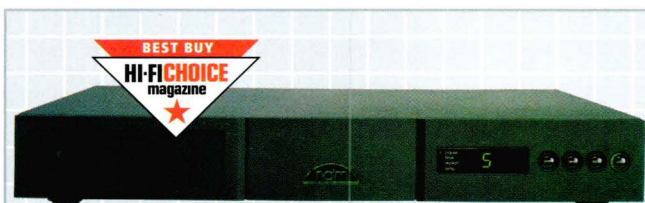
No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

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.



Naim CD5i £825

If you're looking for sub-£1,000 CD player, park your ears here. Naim's entry level beauty combines the brand's traditional rhythm and timing with considerable poise and panache.

Our favourite CD PLAYERS

BEST BUY **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		VARIABLE OUTPUT
UP TO £1,000												
	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems		●	●	●	●				247
	Arcam DIVA CD192	850	Contemporary below the lid upsampling player with articulate, if slightly understated sound quality		●	●	●					260
	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
	Exposure 2010 S	600	Bespoke mechanism makes for a thoroughly involving listen. Not the most rounded, though		●	●	●					261
	Marantz CD5400 OSE	200	Nicely thought out player with useful features and good sound, though some mechanical noise		●	●	●			●		256
	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages		●	●	●	●		●		250
	Musical Fidelity X-Ray ^{v3}	900	Think of this as an A3.2 CD player in a smaller, cheaper box. Great, earthy CD sound for the money		●	●	●					255
	Naim CD5i	825	As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price				●					259
	Roksan Kandy MkIIID	650	Clean, tidy and expressive player – a more than worthwhile improvement on previous versions		●	●	●		●			259
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, this Rotel generally holds up well		●		●					231
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		248
ABOVE £1,000												
	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,650	The new Maestro 192/24 delivers a sound that's slightly rosy yet always musical and thoroughly enjoyable		●		●		●			257
	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
	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
	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
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Strong in terms of timing, imaging and resolution. Adding the £400 PSX-R power supply makes it stronger still		●		●					261
	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
	Krell SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SCD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price	●	●	●	●		●			251
	Lindemann 820	6,999	Stereo SACD player with sumptuous build and sound, onboard analogue volume control and multiple digital inputs	●	●				●	●		262
	Meridian G07	1,595	Immaculately conceived and executed player with a softly-spoken voice. Needs careful system matching		●	●	●					259
	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●				237
	Naim CDX2	2,700	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
	Orelle CD100ev2	1,299	Relaxed, but strong on refinement and detail. An intelligent choice, particularly strong with acoustic music		●		●					259
	Primare D30.2	1,500	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●		●		●			226
	Quad 99 CD-P	1,000	Good but not outstanding player that also doubles as a preamp, with digital inputs and volume controls			●	●					259
	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 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
	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
	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits		●	●	●		●	●		253
	Wadia 861se	9,999	Stunning player with a full digital preamp and an all-revealing sound that'll keep you up all night		●	●	●		●	●		256

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.



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 £1,650
A beautifully crafted CD player that brings many traditional 'analogue' qualities to digital replay. If you want your CDs to sound natural, detailed and dynamic, this is a fine buy.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Resolution Audio Opus 21 £2,850
This player is king of subtlety. Outwardly, the music sounds dynamic and well-scaled, but it's the level of inner detail resolved here that is truly outstanding.

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.

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.

DVD-AUDIO

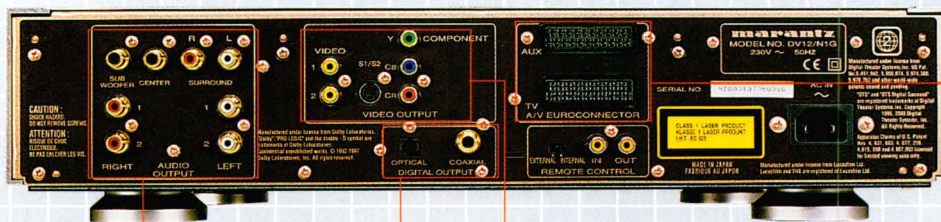
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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.



CONNECTIONS



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

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.

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BB BEST BUY **EC** 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									
	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
	Cambridge Audio Azur 540D	200	Very respectable and well presented DVD-Audio player at a knockdown price	●		●	●		257
BB	Denon DVD-2910	600	Denon's entry-level universal player lives in the shadow of the '3910, especially on CD, but is a fine overall model	●	●	●	●		262
	Denon DVD-3910	900	Exceptionally well-specified universal player with a performance to match. A true class-leader	●	●	●	●		260
	Marantz DV6400	400	Good starter universal player with decent CD replay quality, but slightly disappointing SACD performance	●	●	●	●		254
BB	Pioneer DV-575A	150	A universal player for peanuts! CD ain't great, but it's decent with DVD and allows you to try DVD-ASACD at very little cost	●	●	●	●		261
BB	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
BB	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									
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs			●	●		238
EC	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
EC	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi	●	●	●	●		259
EC	Marantz DV-12S2	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles, with top-notch video playback too. Sonically refined and enjoyably understated	●	●	●	●		255
EC	Meridian G91	3,000	A DVD-A/V player, preamp/processor and tuner combined – great as a two-channel player, or in a complete Meridian rig	●		●	●		260
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●		●		●	230
EC	Primare DVD30	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles – no wideband digital outputs but masterful with music and a good picture too	●	●	●	●		253
EC	Townshend TA 565 Evo II	2,995	If you care more for results than aesthetics it's unbeatable. This is probably the best universal player on the planet	●	●	●	●		259

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



Arcam DiVA DV78 £700

Arcam's entry-level machine combines great video quality with impressive CD sound.



Denon DVD-3910 £900

New-generation Denon is currently the most complete universal player below £1,000.



Pioneer DV-868AVi £1,000

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



Townshend Audio TA 565 Evo II £2,995

This player builds on Pioneer essentials to deliver breathtaking sound across all formats.

Sound Fantastic

Olson's new *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthline choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

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- ✓ 2m x 1.5mm Screened Cable
- ✓ UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- ✓ Colour Black
- ✓ Specials to order

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HF 6	6	557mm	£92.47
HF 8	8	670mm	£98.70

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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.



Rega
 P5 £698

Rega's latest is a non-suspended design with a highly entertaining sound and a great sense of musical 'timing'. The new RB700 arm is 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.



Michell
 Orbe SE £2,015

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 BM BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BM	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	728	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●		203
BM	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●				247
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●			229
EC	Avid Acutus	6,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●			194
EC	Clearaudio Master Reference	12,610	Revealing and exciting turntable that revels in the fine details (reviewed with Master TQ-I arm/Accurate cartridge)	33/45		●	●	●	256
BM	Goldring GR1/RB250	140	The best value 'Rega' yet and a new benchmark for budget turntables. Vinyl nirvana on a shoestring	33/45			●	●	252
BM	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●		239
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●				235
BM	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
BM	Pro-ject Debut III	120	Superb budget deck offering fine build and performance	33/45			●	●	261
BM	Pro-ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			●	●	248
BM	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
BM	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●		214
BM	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			●	opt	257
BM	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			●	opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●		228
BM	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●		●		248
EC	Roksan TMS2/Artemiz	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●			246
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●		186
EC	T+A G10R/PH-G10MC	2,550	Style meets substance in a highly credible complete package, with integral phono step-up	33/45		●	●	●	261
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	8,000	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●		●		259

Our favourite BM BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	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
BM	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
EC	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape		●	●	242
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality		●		215
BM	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
BM	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
EC	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
EC	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 BM BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Musical Fidelity X-LPSY ³	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	●	●			248
BM	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
BM	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
EC	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
BM	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.

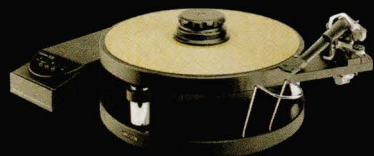
CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

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

SME

The way to play vinyl ...

Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE 2

The more you spend, the harder it is to get right - just like cars, just like houses. Yes, of course it can be done, but if you want music without tears and still have that pride of ownership feeling, then we invite you to treat your ears and eyes to the Prima Luna Prologue 2. Priced at under £1000 (just) and sporting four lovely KT88 tubes, this beautifully built and reliable little integrated amplifier will bring a smile to your face - and maybe your bank manager's as well.

AUDIO RESEARCH VS155

Let's move up the ladder a little to the Audio Research integrated amplifier. If you have a pair of Sonus fabers or the smaller Martin Logans, this will drive them with real force and finesse. Underpowered at 50 Watts? Sounds like it on paper, doesn't sound like it in reality.

KRELL KAV-400xi

All the power you need, and then some. Slim, beautifully formed and built like a Swiss watch that sings, this integrated amplifier has a musicality that some people don't equate with solid state designs. Not for nothing is it an award-winner.

SONUS FABER CREMONA AUDITOR

Did Franco Serblin and his team understand just what they were unleashing a couple of years ago with this little marvel? Maybe. Maybe not. But the fact is that this gorgeous design not only makes your room look better, but the music it produces hits you where it matters: right in your heart.

PATHOS LOGOS

So try this one with your Sonus fabers: a match made in heaven? We think so. Both Sonus faber and Pathos are designed and made in Vicenza, and a more beautiful and musically historic city you could not find. Hear these at Pinewood, and you'll want to see the place itself.

Agents for: Krell, Audio Research, Jadis, Sonus faber, Martin Logan, Koetsu, Copland, Prima Luna, Dreamvision, Pathos, Oracle, Lyra, Unison Research, Transparent, The Chord Company, finite-elemente, BCD Engineering, Futureglass

You are invited to contact Brian Rivas or Alison Holmes for a discussion and demonstration

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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.



Creek T50 £499

A thoroughly accomplished AM/FM tuner with a substantial and detailed sound.



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

FM tuner with valves – 'affordable' for an MD, but still streets ahead of most radios.

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	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	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
	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
	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	398	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 DIVA DT81	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
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
	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
	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60	●	●		●	259

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 capable, 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 multiroom applications.

Our favourite DIGITAL RECORDERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	● ●	218
	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
	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
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	● ●	205
	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
	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



CHRISTMAS OPENING

SUNDAY • 19 DECEMBER
MOST STORES OPEN

CHRISTMAS DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED - HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

BOXING DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED

NEW YEAR'S DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED - HAPPY NEW YEAR!

SUNDAY • 2 JANUARY
MOST STORES OPEN

Due to local variations, please call your local store or visit our website to verify opening hours before travelling.

SUNDAY OPENING

Many of our stores are open on Sundays during December and January.

For up-to-date information, please call your local store or visit our website.

WINTER SALE

STARTS 11 DECEMBER 2004

We have hundreds of unmissable bargains available in our fantastic WINTER SALE.

For information on all the latest offers, call your nearest store or visit our website.

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

NEW STORES



ABERDEEN

We are pleased to announce our new exciting Aberdeen store opened on the 30th October.

Situated on Crown Street, which is only a short walk from Union Street, the store has three fantastic demonstration areas where you can audition the very best in home cinema and hi-fi.

Easy parking available at the rear of the store.

57 CROWN STREET
ABERDEEN
01224 252797



EALING

The long-awaited store in Ealing is now open.

Part of a newly developed parade in the heart of town close to Ealing Broadway tube and on the fringe of the Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre, the store offers an unrivalled experience to shoppers searching for the best in audio and video equipment.



24 THE GREEN
EALING
020 8579 8777



SWINDON



We're back.

The Swindon store has reopened after a short break with an improved range of the best in hi-fi and home cinema. The excellent facilities and quality of service remain the same.

The store is located in Commercial Road, close to the town centre with parking nearby.



8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD
SWINDON
01793 610992

STARTS 11 DECEMBER 2004

"A perfect combination of early Arcam refinement and subtlety, combined with new-found vitality and freshness." DIVA CD192

**Arcam DiVA
CD192 CD Player £849.95
A90 Amplifier £849.95**



WHAT HI-FI? Nov 04
★★★★★

**Project
Debut III Turntable (Black) £ SALE
(Colours) £ SALE**

"Building on the Award-winning design of its predecessors, the new Project Debut III delivers a thrillingly good sound for the money... Products like this should really reinvigorate your interest in hi-fi."



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2004
BEST TURNTABLE UNDER £1000
Project Debut III

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £500-£1000
Cyrus 8vs



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2004
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYER
CYRUS CD8x

**Cyrus
8vs Amplifier £799.95
CD8 X CD Player £999.95**

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for over 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. The new 'VS' preamp circuitry, incorporated in the 6vs and 8vs amplifiers, has dramatically improved their performance while the CD8 X is a heavily revised version of the CD8.

"Here's a machine that advances the ability of its excellent predecessor by an almost absurd degree. The Cyrus 8vs is an absolute superstar."

"The added 'x' factor brings a level of CD playback previously unheard at this price." CBS X

Cyrus 6vs Amplifier £599.95

"A significant upgrade to what was already an impressive amp - Cyrus' new entry-level integrated is a peach"

**Mission m31i
Speakers
£119.95**

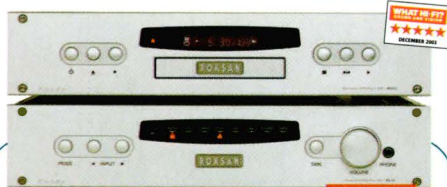
"Overall, the little m31i speakers are great, and the team at Mission should consider this upgrade job well done. The 'i' in the model name stands for 'improved' and these speakers fully deserve the suffix."



**REL Quake
Subwoofer
£349.95 (Brittix Black)**

Bass reinforcement for both your hi-fi and home cinema system.

"It's such a capable subwoofer - it handles both music and movies exceptionally well. The Quake delivers bass with both power and finesse."



**Roksan Kandy
CD Player £649.95
Amplifier £649.95**

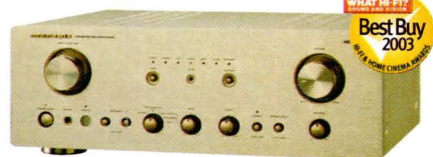
"The Kandy CD player offers a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

"The result is a breathtaking Best Buy amplifier that betters its competition with ease." KANDY AMPLIFIER - AWARDS 2003

**Marantz
CD5400 CD Player £119.95**



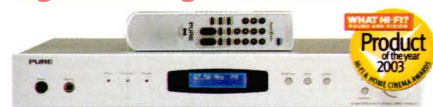
"This is a remarkable player for the money, with superb sound, looks and feel, which give you no clue as to the budget price... A very solid buy - and a lot of fun."



PM7200 Amplifier £239.95

"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."

**Pure Digital DRX702ES
Digital/Analogue Tuner £269.95**



"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."



**Harman Kardon TU970
Digital/Analogue Tuner £249.95**

With Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) capability, this high-quality tuner delivers more stations and offers pure, distortion-free, CD-like sound, while providing useful radio and data services. Combining ease of use with interference-free reception, Harman Kardon's TU970 features the newest digital technologies from one of the oldest hi-fi names.

CLAIM UP TO
25%
ACCESSORIES **FREE**

When you purchase any product from the following brands:-
ARCAM • B&W • CYRUS • ROKSAN • REL • ROTEL
Choose Accessories From **QED • GRADO • SOUNDSTYLE** etc

CLAIM 10%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£250**
CLAIM 15%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£500**
CLAIM 20%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£1000**
CLAIM 25%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£2000**



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KEF
Q4 Speakers £ SALE
Q Compact Speakers £ SALE

The Q4 floorstander, is one of the latest additions to KEF's acclaimed Q Series.

Featuring KEF's Uni-Q driver array - an arrangement that makes the speaker much easier to place in the room. This has been combined with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet.



Musical Fidelity A5 SERIES
A5 Amplifier £ SALE
A5 CD Player £ SALE

Musical Fidelity has introduced the new A5 series CD player and integrated amplifier. The amplifier delivers 250 wpc and is capable of reproducing proper dynamic range into all but the most inefficient loudspeakers. The CD player is, according to Musical Fidelity, "the best player ever made." Visit your nearest store for more more information and a demonstration.

X-SERIES
X-80 Amplifier £ SALE
X-150 Amplifier £ SALE
X-Ray³ CD Player . . . £ SALE

The 40 wpc, **X-80** and the 80wpc **X-150** amplifiers are part of Musical Fidelity's revamped X-Series. Both models 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, replacement for the legendary X-Ray, uses the same DAC and upsampling principles as the acclaimed Tri-Vista SACD player.



Roksan Caspian M Series
CD Player £1099.95 Amplifier £999.95

"A real class-contender, the new M Series-1 is a canny piece of kit and well worth the money." **M SERIES-1 CD PLAYER**

"A fine piece of equipment." **M SERIES-1 AMPLIFIER**



Preamplifier/2 x Monoblocs £3449.95

"This Roksan is an excellent buy that puts most of the opposition to shame when it comes to sonic ability... If you want the most honest-sounding amp you can get for your money, this combo can't be ignored."

Wharfedale Diamond 9.1
Speakers £ SALE

"The overall balance of the speakers is their finest characteristic. Thanks to near-perfect driver integration, music sounds wonderfully natural and transparent... This is a bar-raising effort from Wharfedale: these are ridiculously good speakers at the budget price level."



Quad
99 CD-P CD Pre Amp £ SALE
99 Power Amp £ SALE
11L Speakers £ SALE

This system package includes the multi Award-winning 11L speakers combined with the exceptional 99 CD-P CD player and 99 power amplifier.

"So, we have three talented pieces of kit and the result is...excellent."



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

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***ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 13/01/05, E&OE.**



Rotel 10 Series RA-1062 Amplifier £594.95 RCD-1072 CD Player £594.95

"At the heart of the 60-watt RA-1062 is a toroidal transformer and a power supply, which Rotel claims, helps the amp maintain performance even at high volumes... Crank up the volume and, as promised, the Rotel keeps its composure and balance... If you want a £600 integrated, be sure to audition the RA-1062.

First impressions of the RCD-1072 are excellent. This is the slickest machine in this group: the casework feels solid and the finish exceptional at the price... On its own terms it remains an enjoyable and informative CD player."

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • SEPTEMBER 2003

Monitor Audio

SILVER S6 Speakers £499.95

"These are rather magical speakers, with a poise and grace that belies their ability to turn on the power when required. Pair them with a good CD player and suitably accomplished amp, and you won't go far wrong."



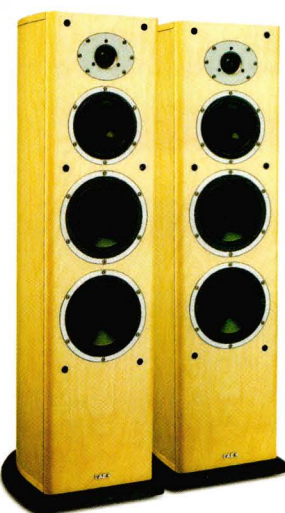
GOLD Reference 20 Speakers £ SALE

"Monitor Audio has made an immensely accomplished pair of speakers in the GR 20s. In sonic and physical terms there is little to criticise; even the price is highly competitive. We have no choice but to recommend them highly."



BRONZE B2 Speakers £179.95

"Monitor Audio's Bronze B2s sound much more expensive than their £200 price tag would suggest. In fact, they sound superb... In the competitive world of budget hi-fi, speakers don't get much better than the B2s."



Acoustic Energy Aelite Three Speakers £ SALE

"Acoustic Energy's new Aelite Threes weigh in at a hefty 18kg a piece, and their curved, real wood finished cabinets both look handsome and make good acoustic sense... So how do they perform... Give them a big room and position them in free space and they'll deliver great things... If you want a big sound for sensible money, don't hesitate to audition the Aelite Threes."



CD RECORDERS



Yamaha CDR-HD1300/II £479.95

New replacement for the Award-winning CDR-HD1300. Now includes a larger hard-disk for extra storage.



Pioneer PDR-609 £199.95 LIMITED STOCK AVAILABLE



"Features include 24-bit/96kHz digital-analogue-conversion plus manual recording level controls, ideal when making compilations to standardise levels. All this means you get great copies from the Pioneer... and remarkable value."



Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII Speakers £ SALE

"The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking third version... The Mk IIIs are worthy of the AE1 name, taking small-speaker performance to another level."

Denon DM31 UD-M31 CD Receiver £189.95

"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."

NB - DENON DM31 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 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."



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

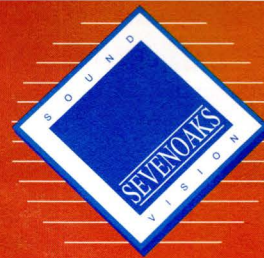
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Choose Accessories From **QED • GRADO • SOUNDSTYLE** etc

CLAIM 10%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£250**
CLAIM 15%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£500**
CLAIM 20%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£1000**
CLAIM 25%* WHEN YOU SPEND OVER **£2000**



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Sevenoaks has carefully chosen four hi-fi separate systems. Selected for their performance, reliability and compatibility, these systems offer superb value for money with massive savings on the individual component prices. Simply add speaker and interconnect cables and other accessories from our extensive range available in-store.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your hi-fi or home cinema system. Our carefully selected range will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.



QED CABLES

- Audio & Video Interconnects • Speaker Cables • HDMI Cables
- Component Video Interconnects
- Comprehensive Custom Cable Service

GRADO HEADPHONES

Range includes the Award-winning SR60 and highly-acclaimed RS1 plus the world-famous Grado Cartridges



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The all-new Soundstyle range of Equipment Supports and Speaker Stands offer the discerning enthusiast an unsurpassed combination of leading-edge styling, outstanding finishes, modular flexibility and class-leading sonic performance



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In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.



Rotel
RCD-02 CD Player
RA-01 Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Bronze B2 Speakers

£649.95 SAVE £££s

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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

7
HI-FI SYSTEM



Arcam
CD73T CD Player
A80 Amplifier
KEF
Q4 Speakers

£1149.95 SAVE £££s

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES

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

2
HI-FI SYSTEM



Roksan
Kandy KD1 MKIII CD Player
Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Silver S6 Speakers

£1499.95 SAVE £££s

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES

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

3
HI-FI SYSTEM



Musical Fidelity
X-Ray^{v3} CD Player
X-150 Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Gold Reference 10 Speakers

£1999.95 SAVE £££s

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 4 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

4
HI-FI SYSTEM

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION

WINTER SALE

STARTS 11 DECEMBER 2004

TURNTABLES

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Goldring GR1	£129.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300	£ SALE
Michell TecnoDec (Ex Arm)	£ SALE
Project Debut Phono SB	£ SALE
Project Debut III (Black)	£ SALE
Project Debut III (Colours)	£ SALE
Project 1 Xpression	£189.95
Roksan Radius 5 (Wood)	£749.95

TUNERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Arcam DIVA T61	£229.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII	£99.95
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/AM/FM	£249.95
Marantz ST4000	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£189.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£269.95
Roksan Kandy KT1 MKIII	£549.95

CD PLAYERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Arcam DIVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD192	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1349.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8 X	£999.95
Cyrus DAC X	£1099.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£ SALE
Linn Ikemi	£ SALE
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz SA11 S1	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity X-Ray™	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£699.95
Musical Fidelity A5	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A308™	£1399.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£ SALE
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

CD RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£199.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300/II	£479.95

AMPLIFIERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£389.95
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1199.95
Cyrus 6vs	£599.95
Cyrus 8vs	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X vs Pre	£1099.95
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£1199.95
Denon PMA355	£169.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£ SALE
Linn LK85 Power	£ SALE
Marantz PM4400	£139.95
Marantz PM7200	£239.95
Marantz PM11 S1	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity X-80	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity X-150	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£699.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£699.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£699.95
Musical Fidelity A5	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A308	£1399.95
Quad 99 Power	£ SALE
Quad 909 Power	£ SALE
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£999.95
Roksan Caspian M Pre	£1249.95
Roksan Caspian M Stereo Power	£749.95
Roksan Caspian M Monobloc Power (Each)	£1099.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

SPEAKERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£129.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£249.95

Acoustic Energy Aelite Two	£ SALE
Acoustic Energy Aelite Three	£ SALE
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII	£ SALE
AVI Neutron IV	£ SALE
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
B&W 704	£1399.95
B&W 705	£899.95
KEF Q Compact	£ SALE
KEF Q4	£ SALE
KEF XQ1	£ SALE
Linn Katan	£ SALE
Mission m31i	£119.95
Mission m34i	£279.95
Mission 780SE	£ SALE
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Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£179.95
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Monitor Audio Silver S8	£799.95
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Monitor Audio Gold Reference 60	£1999.95
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Quad 12L	£ SALE
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Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£ SALE

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Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£189.95
Linn Classic Music Ex Speakers	£ SALE
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Denon DHT-550SD Inc 5.1 Speaker Package	£ SALE
Jamo DVR50/A305PDD Inc Speakers	£ SALE
Jamo DVR50/A355PDD Inc Speakers	£ SALE
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers	£ SALE
Teac Legacy 700/LS-L800 Inc Speakers	£799.95

MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Cyrus Linkserver 160	£2999.95
Cyrus Linkserver 250	£3499.95
Cyrus Linkport	£649.95
Cyrus Linkwand	£199.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX A10	£599.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX 1000	£1799.95

DVD PLAYERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

MAKE & MODEL REGION 2	MULTI REGION	
Arcam DIVA DV78	£699.95	£699.95
Arcam DIVA DV79	£999.95	£999.95
Arcam FMJ DV29	£1599.95	£1599.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-1710	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-1910	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£339.95	£349.95
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£489.95	£499.95
Denon DVD-2910 Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-3910 Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-A11	£ SALE	£ SALE
Harman Kardon DVD22	£199.95	£199.95
Harman Kardon DVD31	£ SALE	£ SALE
Marantz DV4500	£ SALE	£ SALE
Meridian G98	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DV370	£69.95	£79.95
Pioneer DV575A Universal	£119.95	£129.95
Pioneer DV668Av Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DV868Avi Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Toshiba SD240E	£59.95	£69.95
Toshiba SD340E	£69.95	£79.95
Yamaha DVD-S550	£119.95	£119.95
Yamaha DVD-S1500	£ SALE	£ SALE

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL REGION 2	MULTI REGION	
Panasonic DMR-E55 DVD-RAM	£199.95	
Panasonic DMR-E65 DVD-RAM	£ SALE	£ SALE

Panasonic DMR-E75 DVD-RAM	£ SALE	£ SALE
Panasonic DMR-E85 DVD-RAM	£ SALE	£ SALE
Panasonic DMR-E95 DVD-RAM	£ SALE	£ SALE
Panasonic DMR-E500 DVD-RAM	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR-220 DVD-RW	£199.95	£219.95
Pioneer DVR-320 DVD-RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR-420H HDD/DVD-RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR-520H HDD/DVD-RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR-720H HDD/DVD-RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR-920H HDD/DVD-RW	£ SALE	£ SALE

A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

Arcam AVR250 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Arcam AVR300 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Arcam AV8/P7 A/V Pre/Processor/Power	£5749.95
Cyrus AV8 A/V Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A1SRA A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Denon AVC-A1XV A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Denon AVR1705 A/V Receiver	£199.95
Denon AVR1905 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Denon AVR2105 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Denon AVR2805 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Denon AVR3805 A/V Receiver	£799.95
Harman Kardon AVR330 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Harman Kardon AVR630 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Harman Kardon DPR2005 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Marantz SR4500 A/V Receiver	£299.95
Marantz SR5500 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Pioneer VSX-D814 A/V Receiver	£249.95
Pioneer VSX-AX3 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Pioneer VSX-2014i A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Pioneer VSX-AX5i A/V Receiver	£799.95
Pioneer VSX-AX5Ai A/V Receiver	£999.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Rotel RSX1066 A/V Receiver	£1199.95
Rotel RSX1067 A/V Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 A/V Pre/Power	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 A/V Processor	£2294.95
Yamaha DSP-AX750SE A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Yamaha DSP-Z9 A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Yamaha RX-V550 A/V Receiver	£299.95
Yamaha RX-V650 A/V Receiver	£369.95
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS A/V Receiver	£629.95
Yamaha RX-V1500RDS A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Yamaha RX-V2400RDS A/V Receiver	£679.95
Yamaha RX-V2500RDS A/V Receiver	£ SALE

A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

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Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£679.95
Acoustic Energy Ago P5/II	£429.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite 5.1	£ SALE
Artcoustic Diablo	£ SALE
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W DM300 AV	£899.95
KEF KHT1005	£299.95
KEF KHT2005.2	£ SALE
KEF KHT5005	£ SALE
KEF Q7 AV	£ SALE
M&K K5	£ SALE
M&K K3	£ SALE
M&K Xenon 25	£ SALE
M&K 850/CS35/V850	£ SALE
Mission M30 AV Pack	£399.95
Mission Elegante e82 7.1 Package	£ SALE
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 AV	£799.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B4 AV	£949.95
Monitor Audio Radius 270	£499.95
Monitor Audio Radius 5.1	£999.95
Mordaunt Short Genie	£ SALE
Quad L-Series	£ SALE
Wharfedale Diamond 9 HCP	£ SALE

SUBWOOFERS

SEE OFFER AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

B&W PV1	£949.95
MJ Acoustics Pro 50 (Black)	£ SALE
MJ Acoustics Pro 100 (Black)	£ SALE
MJ Acoustics Ref 100 (Black)	£ SALE
MJ Acoustics Ref 200 (Black)	£ SALE
MJ Acoustics Ref 1 MkII (Black)	£ SALE
Quad L Series	£ SALE
REL Q150E MKII (Brittix Black)	£499.95
REL Q201E (Brittix Black)	£724.95
REL Q400E (Brittix Black)	£999.95

REL Quake (Brittix Black)	£349.95
REL Stampede (Black)	£549.95
REL Strata 5 (Brittix Black)	£699.95
Wharfedale Diamond SW150	£ SALE

PLASMA

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Panasonic TH37PW7B 37"	£ SALE
Panasonic TH42PW7B 42"	£ SALE
Panasonic TH37PE30B 37"	£ SALE
Panasonic TH42PE30B 42"	£ SALE
Panasonic TH50PV30B 50"	£ SALE
Pioneer PDP435XDE 43"	£ SALE
Pioneer PDP435FDE 43"	£ SALE
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Yamaha PDM4210 42"	£ SALE

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Sharp Aquos LC-32GA3/GA4 32"	£ SALE
Sharp Aquos LC-32GD1 32"	£ SALE
Sharp Aquos LC-37GD1 37"	£ SALE
Sharp Aquos LC-37GA3/GA4 37"	£ SALE
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PROJECTORS

FREE SCREEN WITH SELECTED PROJECTORS

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Screenplay SP4805 DLP	£1299.95
Screenplay SP5700 DLP	£2199.95
Screenplay SP7205 DLP	£ SALE
Sharp XV-Z91E DLP	£1499.95
Sharp XV-Z200 DLP	£ SALE
Sharp XV-Z201 DLP	£ SALE
Sharp XV-Z2000 DLP	£ SALE
Sharp XV-Z12000 DLP	£ SALE
Sim 2 Domino 18 DLP	£2699.95
Sim 2 Domino 20 DLP	£ SALE
Sim 2 Domino 20-H HDMI DLP	£ SALE
Sim 2 Domino 30-H HDMI DLP	£ SALE
Sim 2 HT300 Xtra HDMI DLP	£ SALE
Sim 2 HT500 Link DLP	£ SALE
ThemeScene H30 Cinema DLP	£ SALE
ThemeScene H57 Cinema DLP	£ SALE
ThemeScene H77 Cinema DLP	£3499.95
Yamaha DPX1100 DLP	£ SALE

REMOTE CONTROLS

Marantz RC5400	£399.95
Marantz RC9200	£799.95
Philips i-Pronto RU1000	£1399.95

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE
FOR OUR UP-TO-DATE PRICES

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SEE OPPOSITE PAGE FOR DETAILS

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE
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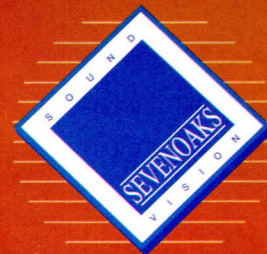
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BRISTOL 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON
• 0117 974 3727

BROMLEY 39A EAST STREET
• 020 8290 1988

CAMBRIDGE 17 BURLEIGH STREET
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• 0131 229 7267

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• 0191 221 2320



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E-MAIL: [insert store location]@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

WHO ARE SEVENOAKS?

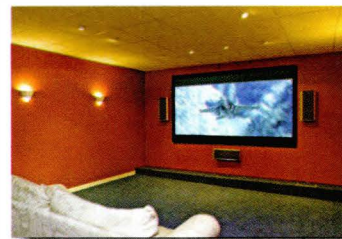
Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is one of the largest and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD players, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems, all at highly competitive prices.

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Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.

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The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store.

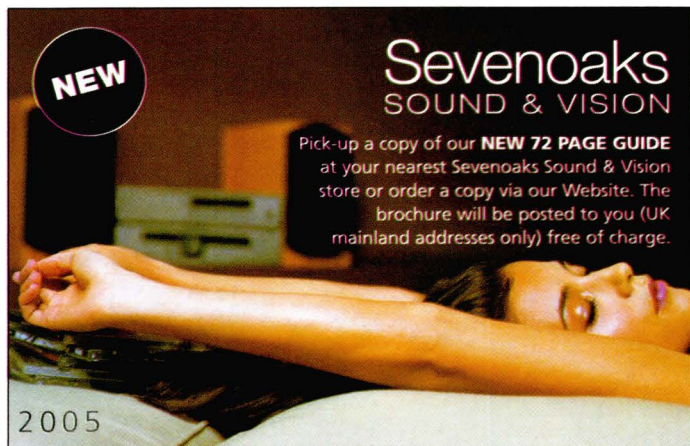
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There are hundreds of special offers and stock clearance items available from our stores nationwide - many with savings of up to 50%. To view our regularly updated product lists, visit www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk and click on **special offers**

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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!



Exposure
2010 S £599

Another cracking integrated from the Exposure stable – admirable musical insight and communication at a thoroughly sensible price. Top stuff.



Naim
NAC 112x/NAP 150x £1,475

Naim's new entry-level pre/power amp is a fabulously engaging combo. As you'd expect, rhythm and timing are to the fore, with a healthy dollop of finesse to boot.



Primare
PRE30/A30.2 £2,400

Beautifully made and with a sound to match, this Scandinavian pre/power combines warmth and body with energy and detail – a truly musical performer.

Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Arcam's most successful mid-range amp to date – sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6	●	●	●	90	251
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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 6vs	600	Best seen in a Cyrus rack but capable of sweet sounds elsewhere too. Upgradeable.	7		●	●	40	262
	Cyrus 8vs	800	Slightly inferior to Cyrus 6vs, but the tables are turned with the add-on PSX-R power supply – in that form it's a real Best Buy	7		●	●	70	261
BB	Electrocompaniet EC13	999	Large and fairly powerful, with individual looks and very refined sound	6		●		70	262
BB	Exposure 2010 S	599	Beneath the unassuming exterior lurks a very capable performer that's passionate about music	6	opt	●		75	262
BB	Marantz PM4400 OSE	250	Highly competent and well specified – a lively performer that makes great music	5	●		●	50	256
BB	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
	Marantz PM7200KI	500	Smart and fully-featured, with sound that's full-bodied and confident at high levels	6	●	●	●	85	262
BB	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4		●		55	255
BB	NAD C352	350	Dynamic and musical sounding update on what was already a star product	7		●	●	80	253
BB	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
BB	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
	Rega Mira 3	598	Lively sound with good timing and frequency extension, if not quite as detailed as some	5	●	●	●	60	262
BB	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
BB	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
BB	Rotel RA-1062	595	A great value amp with a detailed and engaging sound, and the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	●	●		95	251
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
BB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
BB	Audio Note Oto Line SE	1,599	Single-ended valve amp lacks power but sounds remarkably delicate and coherent	5	opt			10	254
BB	Audio Analogue Maestro S.	1,750	The beautifully made Maestro Settanta sounds fast, deep and very smooth, though perhaps not the most dynamic	5	●	●		70	257
BB	Audio Research VS155	2,895	Superb all-rounder provides the delights of valve amplification without sacrificing convenience	5		●		50	254
BB	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution – effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
BB	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85	255
EC	Karan KA-i180	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
BB	Myryad MXI2080	1,100	A sound of great assurance and clarity – perhaps a touch bass-light at times, but otherwise superb for the money	7		●		80	260
EC	T+A V10	4,000	Complex but well engineered, stylish and genuinely innovative high power integrated valve amp	5		●		80	261

Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Up-rated entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication	●	●	6		●	50	262
BB	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with good strong sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	●	136	256
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

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 **STEREO AMPLIFIERS** continued

HR BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		POWER OUTPUT (W)
	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	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	●	225	243
EC	Hovland 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
	Naim NAC 202/NAP 200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6		●		233
HR	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7		●	128	256
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
	Roksan Caspian M Series	2,050	Confident and highly enjoyable sound with lively music, perhaps a little less sure with subtler, complex scores	●	●	6		●	78	256
HR	Stello DP200/S200	2,990	Flexible preamp with purist leanings, plus classic stereo power amp offer great value by high-end standards	●	●	3	●	●	200	259
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

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-DB795 £300
Sony's latest little box of AV tricks is astonishingly good for the money – great with cinema and unusually fine with music.



Denon
AVR-3805 £1,000
Combines admirable sound across all music and movie formats with features like full auto set-up, i.Link and the latest surround formats – a class act at £1,000.



Pioneer
VSA-AX10Ai £3,200
An astoundingly thorough multichannel *tour de force*, stuffed with features and impressive in both stereo and full surround – state of the integrated AV amp art.



Arcam
AV8/P7 £5,750
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – a top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

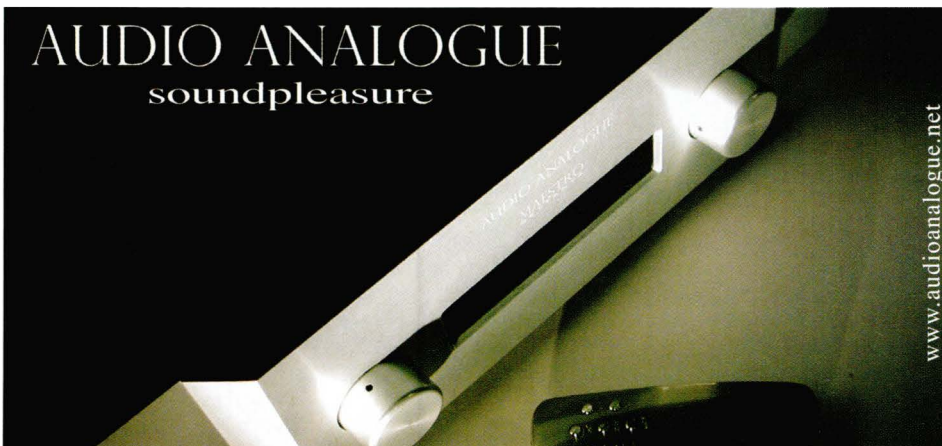
Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

HB 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	
HB	Arcam AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	100	257	
	Denon AVR-2803	650	Merely 'average' sound but it's impossible to argue against the flexibility and value of its engineering	●	9	130	251	
HB	Denon AVR-3805	1,000	Upgraded sound, new processing algorithms and a great remote control make this a superb mid-market multichannel buy	●		120	256	
EC	Denon AVC-A1SRA	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Feature set now upgraded to the AVC-A1SR'A		8	170	232	
	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	
HB	Pioneer VSA-AXSi	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	100	248	
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,200	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	150	260	
HB	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	100	260	
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	
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
HB	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	5,750	State-of-the-art processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). 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 8800	4,500	One of the most 'musical' sounding AV processors to date – great with the matching PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp	9	●		242	
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier	4			260	
HB	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	
HB	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.



"Audio Analogue have done it again" – Primo CD & Settanta, Hi-Fi Choice

The new Primo, Composers and Maestro Series from Audio Analogue offer elegance, classic Italian styling, excellent value and a natural, musical sound. Already gaining plaudits and Best Buy awards throughout the globe, they are simply among the finest audio products available.

For information and dealers contact:

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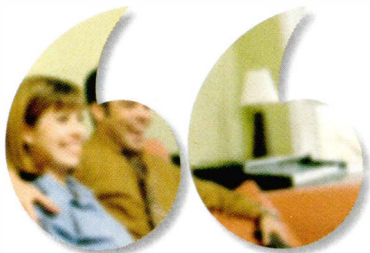
What, How & Where

TO BUY YOUR HOME CINEMA SYSTEM

Get the best system for your money by asking our Top Twenty UK specialist AV dealers.

Isn't it easy to buy a home cinema system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price, you order the system, get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, conventional wide-screen CRT or back-projection TV? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or HD-DVD capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.



...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

great system. But it probably won't be. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system.

Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.



What and Where

So where do you start? Perhaps it's better to say what you don't

start with and that is **WHAT**. Start with **WHERE**. There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths. Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the

Achieving potential

So how do you select a system? You could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that it will be a



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

LONDON

- N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI**
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
- W4 MARTIN-KLEISER**
109 Chiswick High Road. 020 8400 5555
- SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS**
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040

SOUTH

- Ashford, Kent SOUNDRAFT HI-FI**
40 High Street. 01233 624441
- Beaconsfield MARTIN-KLEISER**
9 London End. 01494 681300
- Brighton POWERPLANT**
40 Church Road. 01273 775542
- Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
- Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
- East Grinstead AUDIO DESIGNS**
26 High Street. 01342 314569
- Horsham AUDIO DESIGNS**
7-9 Park Place. 01403 252255
- Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY**
9 High Street Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
- Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire FLAMING BOX**
Perry Farm. 01985 845440
- Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
44a High Street. 01268 779762
- Rickmansworth, Herts**

PRESTIGE AUDIO

- 12 High Street. 01923 711113
- Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
- Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI**
213-217 Tarring Road. 01903 245577

MIDLANDS

- Birmingham SOUND ACADEMY**
152a High Street, Bloxwich, Walsall.
01922 493499
- Coventry**
- FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE**
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
- Leicester CYMBIOSIS**
6 Hotel Street. 0116 262 3754

NORTH

- Congleton HI-FI SHOWROOMS**
12a West Street. 01260 280017
- Doncaster THE HI-FI STUDIOS TWO**
The Long Barn, Wakefield Road.
01302 727274
- Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION**
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
- Sheffield MOORGATE ACOUSTICS**
184 Fitzwilliam Street. 0114 275 6048
- Warrington**
- CHRIS BROOKS AUDIO**
29 Gaskell Street. 01925 261212
- York SOUND ORGANISATION**
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

- Glasgow STEREO STEREO**
260 St. Vincent Street. 0141 248 4079

NORTHERN IRELAND

- Belfast LYRIC HI-FI**
429-431 Lisburn Road.
028 90 381296

Member of the Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association.



best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit *you*.

Buying or being sold to?


There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in 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 performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom

comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "Too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about far more than just price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

 Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

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



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.

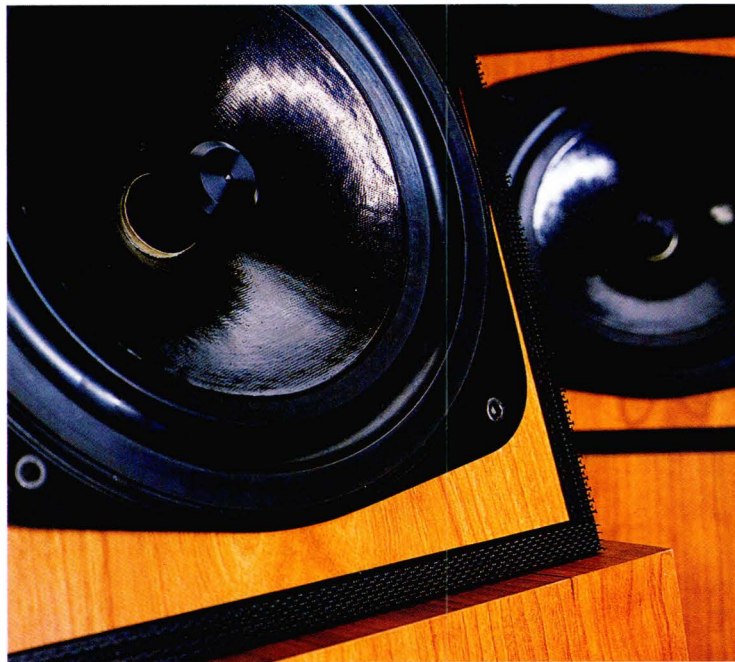
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. 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.



PMC
GB1 £995

An attractively compact floorstander with a beautifully articulate sound and remarkable freedom from boxiness. A great buy if you've just under a grand to spend.



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.



Focal-JMLab
Micro Utopia Be £3,500

The smallest model in the top-end Utopia Be range is a remarkable piece of speaker engineering, complete with beryllium tweeter and a highly revealing sound.

Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS**

BB BEST BUY **EC** 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										
BB	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	
BB	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26	A-	55		●	253	
BB	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65	●		260	
BB	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	
BB	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	
BB	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	
BB	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	
BB	Castle Richmond 3i	320	Does most things well and the most important thing - musical communication - remarkably well for the price	17,33,23	A	60	●		260	
BB	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	
BB	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	
BB	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	
	Elac BS 203.2	599	A fine and finely made speaker - if you want good vocal projection and great grooves it's a serious contender	17,29,22	A-	45	●		262	
BB	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●		241	
BB	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	
BB	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	
BB	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	
	Jamo E 700	150	Superb staging and detail for the price, but needs a sub to deliver real bass	14,24,20	A-	60		●	260	
	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	
	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	
	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 a pronounced midband	19,35,25	A	42		●	238	
BB	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 S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●	237	
BB	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+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24	A	50		●	261	
BB	PMC TB2+	795	This fine allrounder has a lovely laid-back neutrality, fine transparency, low coloration and a sweet treble	20,41,31	A	30	●		261	
BB	PMC GB1	995	Ultra-compact floorstander is beautifully clean, articulate and free from boxiness, with a notably delicate top end	16,92,24	●	A+	30	●	257	

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).

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WHAT HI-FI?
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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORS/STANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (WZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	Quad 22L	895	Lovely lacquer finish over birds-eye maple veneer, with a sound that's more open and forward than usual	21,87,28	● A	25	●	257	
EC	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	
	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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	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	
EC	Anthony Gallo Nucleus Ref	2,400	Occasionally raw, but engaging and capable beyond its physical stature	20,89,41	● A	34	●	257	
	ATC Active 10	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31	act	45	●	221	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	Audio Note AN-E/LX	2,650	Though not very pretty, this is a thoroughly entertaining speaker with great dynamic subtlety and integrity	36,79,27	● A+	22	●	256	
EC	Audiovector Mi 3 Signature	2,320	Smooth and beautifully balanced with superb neutrality, wide dynamic range and a warm, sweet character	20,100,29	● A-	24	●	260	
EC	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32	● A	20	●	257	
EC	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36	● A-	20	●	260	
EC	BC Acoustique ACT-A1	1,195	Exceptional focus, dynamic coherence and expression through the voice band, but bass could be more even	21,90,33	● A+	25	●	257	
	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	
	Dali Helicon 300	1,980	Lively and essentially sweet sound is beautifully free from boxiness, if a little lean and forward overall	21,44,36	A	24	●	260	
EC	Dynaudio Audience B2	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	● A	30	●	229	
	Dynaudio Contour S 1.4	1,850	Sound has fine mid-to-treble coherence and neutrality, though port tuning was ill-suited to our room	19,40,36	A-	28	●	260	
	Eclipse TD Lulé 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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31	A	30	●	233	
	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	
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	
	MartinLogan Mosaic	1,799	Curious hybrid construction marries many panel speaker-like attributes with moving coil simplicity	24,102,30	● A-	46	●	257	
EC	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●	245	
EC	Mission Elegante e83	1,990	Uncommonly clean, agile and refined floorstander, and as elegant as the name	33,111,36	● A-	44	●	257	
	Naim Ariva	1,275	Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter	23,88,31	● A	25	●	259	
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	

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Our favourite  BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

 continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (W x D x H) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	DRESS (FRONT/FW)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative	22,38,37	●	A+	25	●		241
	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
	PMC FB1+	1,625	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	●	A	20	●		260
	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
	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
	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
	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	●	A	20	●		256
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●		259
	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
	Spendor S6e	1,495	Combines deep, powerful bass with an attractively open midband, but perhaps too much restraint up top	30,88,19	●	A+	23	●		257
	Spendor S9e	2,895	An improvement on the original S9 - very entertaining at high levels with a fabulously open and weighty bass	24,101,38	●	A+	40	●		256
	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
	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●		215
	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
	Tannoy Yorkminster	9,000	Deliciously delicate and expressive at low listening levels, it still has massive headroom when your in the mood	62,102,45	●	A+	20	●		255
	Totem Hawk	1,900	Beautifully refined compact floorstander. Smooth and transparent, but dynamics might have more grip	17,91,25	●	A-	20	●		260
	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 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
	Triangle Magellan Concerto	9,995	Scintillating midrange and treble, with tuneful, well-timed bass - a thoroughly engaging musical ride	28,149,34	●	A	35	●		262
	Vandersteen 2Ce Signature	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30	●		229
	Vivid Audio B1	6,590	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●		261
	Waterfall Victoria TWN	2,000	Stunning transparent glass enclosure and a sonic treat too, with great dynamic expression	22,100,22	●	A	28	●		262
	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	●	A	28	●		254
	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
	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
	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	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
BB	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
BB	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
EC	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
BB	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 Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38		●	262
	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
	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, though some may find it a touch bright	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE SUBWOOFERS

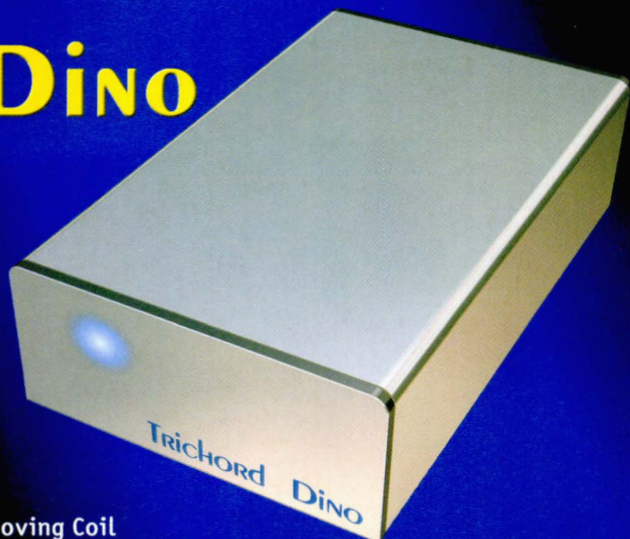
Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
EC	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 performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
BB	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
BB	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
BB	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	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

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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on

the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY 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
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
	AKG K1000	600	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
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●		●		200	●	194
	Grado SR-80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise		●		●		200	●	230
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
	Sennheiser HD650	300	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
	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	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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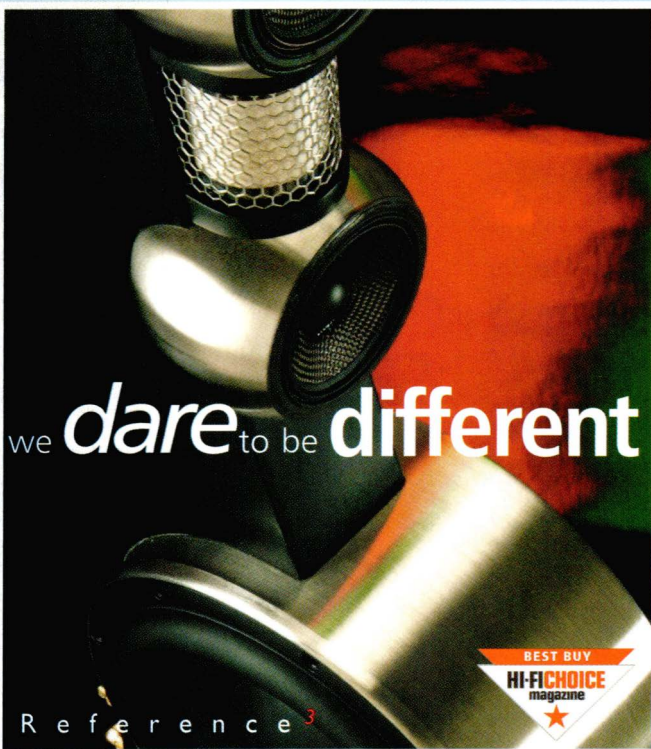
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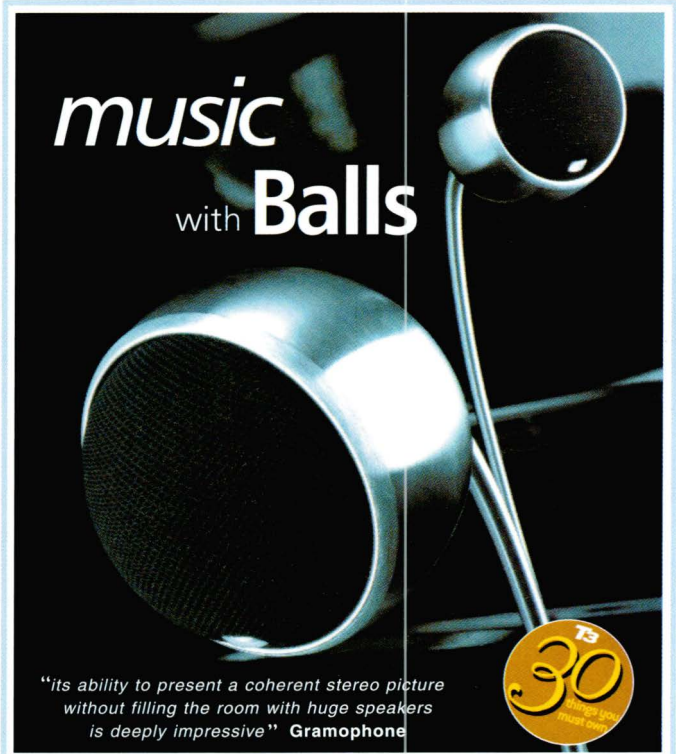
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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing 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, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

HB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	P	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER	
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
EC	Avid Black Reference SCT	700	Rich, slightly dark sound that is beguiling and highly informative		●				256
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
EC	Black Rhodium Opera	297	Very open, clear and detailed sound, with excellent extension at frequency extremes		●		●		260
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable		●	●			255
HB	Chord Company Chorus	200	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
HB	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●			211
	Ecosse The Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●			224
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
HB	Kimber Timbre	83	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
HB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
HB	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
HB	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
HB	van den Hul The Well	85	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
HB	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
HB	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cable with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●		●			259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
EC	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●		E	260
HB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
HB	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price		●	●		E	234
HB	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads					O	259
HB	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	117	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
HB	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
HB	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
HB	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
HB	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
HB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
HB	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
HB	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●			261
HB	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248
HB	Wireworld Oasis 5 Biwire	38	Full-bodied and precise sound across the board – an excellent performer in bi-wire or single-wire mode	●		●			262

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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Apollo, Arcam(Diva/FMJ), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

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Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

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
BB	Audiophile 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
BB	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	600	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
BB	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Isobue 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48,40		4	MDF	247
EC	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
BB	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
BB	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
EC	Townshend Seismic Stand 2/5	1,100	Multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	24

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
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	●		3	202
	Custom Design RS 300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
BB	Kudos S50	159	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
BB	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.

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Arcam CD82T CD Player - New (2Yr G/tee)(599.00)	£449.00	Naim NAC 112/150 Pre-Power S/H (1Yr G/tee)(1455.00)	£985.00
Audiolab 8000A Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)(500.00)	£195.00	Naim NAC 102 Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee)(1210.00)	£695.00
AVI Pro 9 Plus Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee)(799.00)	£569.00	Naim NAP 180 Power Amp S/H - (1Yr G/tee)(1225.00)	£795.00
Denon AVR 2803 AV Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)(649.00)	£399.00	Naim Hi-Cap 2* P/S - old casework (2Yr G/tee)(930.00)	£639.00
Linn Majik Phono Amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)(945.00)	£625.00	Naim XPS2* Power Supply(2369.00)	£1775.00
Linn Kolektor Preamplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)(575.00)	£345.00	Naim Supercap* Power Supply(2775.00)	£2065.00
Linn Movie Klassik DVD/CD System S/H (1Yr G/tee) .(1995.00)	£1295.00	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee)(770.00)	£3795.00
Linn Kaim Pro Line Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee)(1400.00)	£599.00	Pioneer DVD656S Multiplayer (1Yr G/tee)(349.00)	£219.00
Linn Klout Power Amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)(1600.00)	£895.00	Pioneer DVR3100* DVD Recorder/Player (1Yr/Gtee)(349.00)	£219.00
Linn Trikan Centre Spkr - maple (2Yr G/tee)(549.00)	£299.00	PMC DB1 Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee)(555.00)	£399.00
Linn Ekwall Centre - maple (2Yr G/tee)(795.00)	£559.00	PMC TB2 Speakers - Cherry S/H (1Yr G/tee)(695.00)	£459.00
Linn Espek Speakers - maple (2Yr G/tee)(2800.00)	£1985.00	Vibe Zeta SubWoofer (2Yr G/tee)(600.00)	£469.00

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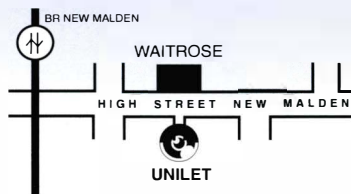
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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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

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

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL 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 41 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.

WOOFER Bass driver.

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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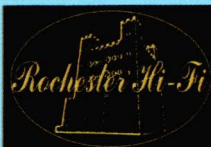
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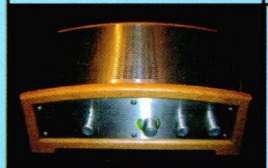
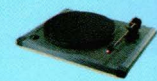
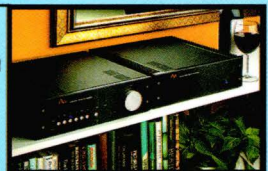
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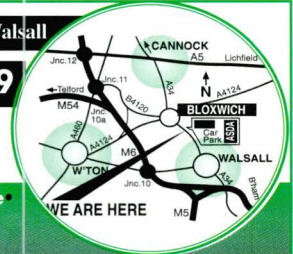
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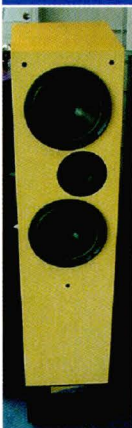
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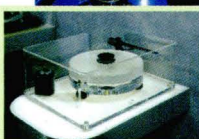
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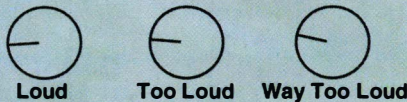
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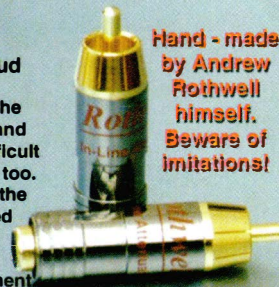
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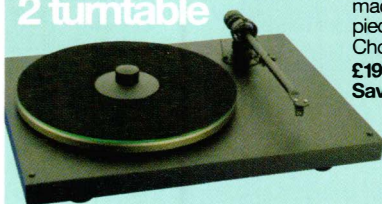
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A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

#05 CREEK

Every cloud has a silver lining. After being made redundant, Mike Creek went on to set up a highly successful hi-fi company. The original CAS 4040 – the name stands for Creek Audio Systems, 40 watts per channel amplifier – was planned to be a 200-unit limited run labour of love that would fill the time. As Mike Creek readily admits, had he known it would go on to sell 25,000, he might have designed it differently!

Second-hand, the 4040 still makes a cracking buy today, although there is plenty to be aware of. The first model ran from 1982 to 1986 and, although there is a great deal that's wonderful about this amp, that doesn't necessarily mean it will suit everyone. The best news is that it sings a wonderfully earthy, full-bodied tune that, even today, still more than passes muster. Although the finish was never great, it is delightfully shallow in proportion, meaning that it is one of a handful of hi-fi separates that really will fit onto a bookshelf. The original 4040 had many audiophile features, such as a single rail power supply, integrated tone controls (rather than being on a separate board) and a gain free preamp section. It was, and indeed is, still very much one for the purists.

Sadly, the power transistors were never the most consistent and mass-manufacture meant a change of design that led to the S2 (1986-1991) and, later, S3 models (1991-1994). What the 4040 gained in

reliability it lost in sound and, while still good, later 4040s do sound 'safe'. Second-hand 4040s range from ridiculously cheap auction specials, which should be approached with care but can be had for as little as £20, to about £90 for an immaculate S3. If looked after, very little goes wrong. Should you fancy

Rather like a car's engine and gearbox, the tuning potentiometer (attached to the tuning knob) is separate from the reduction drive (the part that reduces user input ten fold, to make it easier to tune in). On older models the link between them has a tendency to snap, but it's easy to spot as the knob simply falls off!

“Available from a meagre £20, the T40 is one of the greatest tuner bargains about.”



a complete overhaul, Creek is happy to oblige for between £50-£75, meaning that even a £10, 1982 4040 is still fully serviceable.

Just as famous as the 4040 amp is the T40 tuner. In its 11-year history, it saw off some pretty exclusive – and indeed expensive – competition. Unlike the T43, it's actually an analogue design, but with a digital display. Needless to say, it didn't stay in production for so long and receive such fine reviews for no reason – to this day it's still a sweet little thing. From a meagre £20, it's also one of the greatest tuner bargains about. It does have one weakness, but this is easy enough to spot.

Above: Creek T40 S3 radio tuner

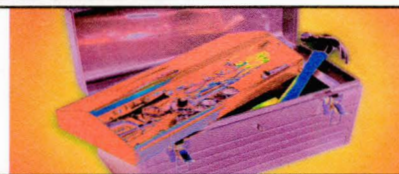
Replacing it with a modern potentiometer with built-in reduction drive is not difficult, but may cost more than the tuner is worth, so be warned.

On a final note, I have seen tatty 4040 and 3140 amplifier/tuner combinations sell for as little as £30. Add a cheap pair of loudspeakers and you surely have to have what is the ultimate garage or kitchen radio about, all for less than £100. Bargains rarely come much sweeter. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd
Next month – Denon*

DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 5 How do crossover networks work?



There are a handful of speakers that don't use crossover networks, because in single-driver systems, no 'crossing over' is required. But, most speaker systems need some means of dividing the full-bandwidth signal into appropriate frequency bands for each of the limited-bandwidth drivers, and this is the role of the crossover network.

Crossovers are simple affairs, though there are layers of subtlety way beyond the scope of this column. Essentially, the network consists of three types of components: inductors (chokes), capacitors (caps) and resistors.

Place an inductor in the signal path and high frequencies will be rolled off (attenuated) above

a point that corresponds to the value of the inductance. Inductors act as 'low-pass' devices. A capacitor in the signal path will allow just the high frequencies to be passed on through to the driver; this is a 'high-pass' device.

Resistors are used merely as attenuators, to balance the relative output of two drivers for example, and are known as 'band-pass' devices.

The simplest crossover network consists of a single capacitor in line with the tweeter. An inductor may be used in line with the bass/mid driver, in order to provide some upper end roll-off, though the driver's voice coil possesses its own inductance, so there's some natural roll-off here in any case.

Single component networks only provide very gentle roll-offs. Steeper slopes may be obtained by combining two or more components... as we shall see next month. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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	Amplifiers	
AMC	2445 - ex, well reviewed weighty poweramp	199
Arcam	C200 - ex, boxed pre	149
Arcam	SA200 - ex, boxed power	199
Arcam	SA200 - ex, boxed pair monos	199
Arcam	Alpha 7R - ex, as above with remote	149
Arcam	Alpha 10 integrated - ex, boxed	299
Arcam	Alpha 10 DAVE integrated - ex, boxed	379
Arcam	A65 - nr mint, boxed, remote, silver	179
Arcam	A65+ - ex display, boxed, remote, silver	199
Arcam	A85 - ex, remote, silver	199
Arcam	P75 - ex display, remote, silver	199
Audiolab	Puccini - nr mint, well reviewed integrated	279
Audiolab	8000A - ex, black	229
Audiolab	8000S - nr mint	329
AVI	S2000MP/S2000Mms - vgc, pre and pair monoblocks, will drive just about anything!	999
Creek	4330 - ex, Stereophile favourite budget component of the Year	199
Cyrus	7 - ex, black, boxed	429
Linn	LK1/Dirak - ex, black, mm/mc exceptional vfm	199
Linn	LK100 - nr mint, boxed	299
Meridian	605s - ex, boxed pair monoblocks	799
Meridian	505s - ex, boxed pair monoblocks	899
Meridian	205s - ex, pair monoblocks	599
Michell	Alecto - ex, Monoblocks	899
Mission	Cyrus One - from	70
Mission	Cyrus Two and 223 - gc, rental finish	229
Musical Fidelity	X-A2 - nr mint, boxed integrated	359
Musical Fidelity	X-P100 - nr mint, boxed remote pre	399
Musical Fidelity	X-A5100 - nr mint, boxed power	399
NAD	352 - ex display, boxed, titanium	249
Primare	A20 - nr mint integrated	379
Rega	Luna - nr mint, black, boxed, better than a Brio or Mira	179
Roksan	Caspian - nr mint, silver, boxed, remote	399
Rotel	RB03 power - ex display, boxed silver	199
Rotel	RB981 - ex, black powerhouse	229
Shearpe	Phase 2 - nr mint, boxed, blue marble styling	279
Sony	STR-DB940 av amp - vgc, DTS 5.1 etc	199
	Speakers	
Acoustic Energy	AE505 - ex display, superb floorstander	249
Acoustic Energy	AE505 - new sealed box, superb floorstander, were £800!!	299
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Gallo	5.1 - ex display, boxed, gorgeous!	999
Impulse	H2	Due in
Linn	Kaleigh - good, black, fully boxed	249
Linn	Kan - ex, black, c/w matching stands	249
Mission	765i - ex, big floorstander, bargain	149
Mission	752 - vgc, rosewood floorstander	229
Mission	763i - ex, black floorstander, boxed	119
Mission	70 centre - ex display, boxed	69
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Mission	780 - ex, black larger bookshelf	99
Mission	781 - ex, black larger bookshelf	299
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Monitor Audio	914 - ex display, boxed	199
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Mordaunt Short	Aria - ex display, boxed mini surrounds	39
Musical Technology	REL	199
REL	Strata - ex, black	299
REL	Storm - ex, black	349
Sequence	200 - ex, cherry and grey, c/w dedicated stands	149
Spendor	SP1 - ex, c/w stone stands	299
Tarnoy	R2 - good, boxed, slim cherry floorstander	199
TDL	RTL2 - ex, black	119
Wharfedale	Pacific P30 - nr mint, boxed, light cherry, excellent	299
	Turners and Tape	
Aiwa	ADF850 - vgc, 3 head	79
Creek	3040 - ex	99
Cyrus	FM7.5 - nr mint, silver, digital, presets, boxed	279
Cyrus	Original Mission tuner - vgc	99
Nakamichi	8X2 - nr mint, black	99
Nakamichi	CR4E - vgc, black	425
Quad	66FM - ex	379
Quad	FM4 - vgc	225
Rotel	RTD2 - ex display, boxed, silver	199
TAG McLaren	T20 - ex display, boxed	699
Teac	TX3000 tuner - ex, digital, presets	69
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Mark Levinson No 360s x-dem	7495	3999
Sudgen CD21 CD Player Black S/H	1099	650
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Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	1195
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Linn Lingo S/H	N/A	599
Linn LVII Tonearm S/H	N/A	479
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Rega Planar 3/Heed PSU/Bias S/H	630	239
Systemdek X II900/RB250/Denon 103	N/A	250

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Naim NAC 92 pre amp. S/NO 161840. Mint. Boxed.....£299	Harmon Kardon HK1400 line amplifier.Mint/boxed.....£199
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Linn LK1 pre-amp and remote. Good condition.....£249	Leak Stereo 20 valve power amplifiers from.....£POA
Quad 11s in various condition and prices.....£POA	Harmon Kardon integrated valve amp.110V. V rare.....£299
Naim Nap 180 power amplifier. Mint. Boxed.....£799	ArcamAlpha 2 amplifier. Mint. Boxed/instr.....£95
Quad 303 power amplifiers from.....£125	Nakamichi PAS 100W/CH power amp. Cost £1300.....£650
	Quad 33 pre amplifiers. From.....£75

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Thorens TD126 MK11 C/W Dynavec MC&arm.....£249	Rega planer 3 with RB300 tone arm and AT cart.....£200

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Pair Quad ELS63 speakers. Serviced by One Thing Audio and with original boxes and packing. Ex condition.....£199	Heybrook Heylios. Black. Boxed. Ex condition.....£700
Quad ESL57 speakers in black. Excellent condition.....£699	Tannoy Chatsworth with 12 inch monitor golds.....£60
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Roksan ROK-ONE speakers. Black. Mint. Boxed.....£295	B&W DM4 speakers. Black finish.....£85
	Rogers LS55 speakers. Rosewood. Boxed. Ex cond.....£199
	Mordant Short MS201 pearl. Brand new. Black.....£169
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OTHER ITEMS

Pair MAF stands for Quad ESL57.Fantastic upgrade.....£175	Cyrus DAD3 Cd player with remote. Ex condition.....£275
Quad FM1 Valve tuner. Various prices from only.....£20	Quad FM2 Valve tuner. Good condition.....£150
Quad FM4 tuner. 5 pin din version. Good condition.....£200	Quad MC phono module for Quad 34 pre amplifier.....£40
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Trio KT880L synthesiser tuner. AM/FM. Black.....£75	SME 3009 tonearms from.....£125
Decca London international tone arm. New. Boxed.....£175	Marantz CD52 Cd player. Ex condition.....£79
Quad 77 RDS FM tuner. Mint. Boxed. Instructions.....£399	Nakamichi CDP 2E CD player. Ex condition.....£250
Marantz SD275 twin cassette deck. Dolby B/C.....£49	Aiwa AD-S750 Dolby B-C-S/HX pro cassette deck.....£75
Linn Tuner. Mint.Boxed. Very unusual. Cost £549.....£249	Quad FM3 tuner in excellent condition.....£99

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It has probably always been true that it is the smaller companies which keep producing new and exciting products, especially in the field of hi-fi.

Alright, in Home Cinema I do handle Harman Kardon, a large company, but to get reasonable value A/V amps etc, you do need size. Our favourite for hi-fi sound has always been AVI, who have always produced great sounding products at great prices, and although their new Laboratory range is more expensive, it looks great and pound/watt is probably cheaper.

Following on from the highly praised integrated and CD player, we now have the pre-amp at £1,399, the stereo amp at £1,299 plus their new 3-way floor-stander, the Trio at £3,250. For smaller wallets the 2-way Pro-Nine+ at £700 goes great with the integrated. For active speakers ATC still has a great line-up in both home cinema and hi-fi, so do ring for a chat.

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FOR SALE



Above: Rotel RA-1062

❑ cherry, excellent condition, £135. 01908 640803 (Milton Keynes).

KEF Q4 loudspeakers. Three-way slim line floorstanders, dark apple finish, absolutely mint. Brand new, boxed, and great sound, £300. Ian 01323 486216 (E Sussex).

KEF REFERENCE 1.2 new, boxed, unwanted gift, £600 ono. Audiolab 8000A, black excellent condition, £220 020 8678 6853 (S.London).

KRELL KAV300i integrated amp, £1,000. Copland CD player CDA266, £650. Both with remote, boxed, hardly used, excellent condition. 01494 439689 (Bucks).

LEAK 2060 floorstanders in teak. Excellent condition. David 01283 517585 (Staffs).

LINN CLASSIK MOVIE DI version, only three months old, warranty until August 2009. Finished in silver, boxed as new. Complete system review forces reluctant sale, £1,700 ono. Please contact Richy on 07940 450045 or e-mail thmpsnsic@aol.com (Newcastle).

LINN UNIDISK 1.1 black, 18 months old, £5,500. Kisto system controller silver, £6,995. 020 8529 2261 (London, E4)

MARANTZ CD67SE, £120. B&W CDM2SE plus eight metres cable, £150. Heybrook HS1 stands, £50. All five years old, new, £800. Boxes, receipts, can demo 01582 867626 (Beds)

MARANTZ CD7300, gold, five months old, boxed, £225. P/ex Sony SACD plus cash (777 etc). Marantz CD67SE, little used, mint unmarked, £109. Soundstyle XS104, red, £135. 01766 781211 (Wales).

MARK LEVINSON 390S CDP, excellent condition. Boxed with remote, manual and transport screw (£6,500) £3,750. Pete (01235) 763433 eves (Oxford).

MISSION MINI 7 system. Amp, tuner, twin tape, CD, 731i speakers. Black with metal cases, 50 watts per channel, remote, mint, (£700) £295. Rod 01706 345418 (Rochdale)

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD reference 20, three months old, as new, little use, quick sale, £1,150. 07967 196873 (Yorks)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A370 MKII power amp, pure class A, 200 watt. Excellent condition, boxed, selling as going balanced, (£2,500) £890 with DNM cables. 07973 220663 (Leicester).

MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA pre, power and CD. Pre and power matching S/N. Power and CD never unwrapped, pre only slightly used, £8,000 ono. Adam 07733 005857 (London)

MUSICAL FIDELITY P172 preamplifier. 1987, good condition, boxed, manual, £100. Also P170 power amp, needs repair to left channel or for spares, £25. Ian 0118 9481605 or 07906 510303 (Reading).

NAIM FLATCAP 2 (£515) £390. Naim NAP150 power amp, (£780) £500. Naim NAC112 preamp, (£660) £390. All excellent, boxed with accessories. Spence 01634 322701 (Kent)

NAIM NAC72, £350. Mission 753 speakers, £350. Arcam Alpha 5, £85. 07841 869330 (Bedworth)

NAIM NAIT 3 amp, very good condition, can demo, £275 ono. Peter 07905 239941 (Guildford).

QUAD TYPE 303 power amplifier. Grey, mint condition, £130. 01590 643701 (Hampshire).

QUAD TYPE 44 control unit, mint condition, £160. 01590 643701 (Hampshire).

REVOX B77 MKII HS. Complete with Perspex cover and spool hubs. Little use, £495 ono. 01340 810687 or email keithnorth@f2s.com (NE Scotland).

ROTEL RA-1062 amplifier, three months old, boxed as new, £400. David 01926 315981 (Warwick).

RUARK EQUINOX speakers with dedicated stands, £750 ono. Micromega tempo 2 amplifier, stage 4 CD player, FM tuner, £750 ono. All mint. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

SME MODEL 10 turntable and SME series IV arm and VDH MCS150 arm wire. Transfiguration spirit MC Mk3 cartridge set-up by SME, five months old. Ten hours use, seven months on warranty, £2,800. 01234 302769 (Bedford).

SONUS FABER CONCERTO Home speakers. Adjustable wood stands, £650, 18 months old. 07941 174804 (Berks).

SONY CDP101 original flagship player complete with remote and handbook. Excellent condition, £70. 01278 782622 (Somerset).

SPEAKER CABLES and interconnects for sale. Chord QED, Ixos, Cable Talk. All mint, bargain prices. 01491 612883 (Oxford).

TECHNICS FM/ AM stereo tuner ST-GS701. Very little used award-winning model, £55. 01308 459445 (Dorset).

WADIA KAI 84 stereo power amps £125 each. Velleman K8011 monoblocks £130 each. Cirkit/Maplin Mosfet monoblocks £90 each. 01344 454504 (Bracknell).



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ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE2A speaker stands, lead filled, the best available (£530) £280 ovno. Mint and boxed Andy 0115 9126424 (Midlands).

ALMOST 600 classical CDs, mostly piano works. £2-£3 each or £1,000 for the lot. Wayne 02920 369052 (Cardiff).

ARCAM A80 integrated amp and Arcam P80 power amp, black, boxed, (£1,000) £500. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

AVI BIGGATRON RED SPOT speakers in cherry, mint, boxed, £320. 01903 247779 (Sussex).

AVI PRO NINE loudspeakers in cherry, excellent condition, boxed, £395. AVI S2000 preamp and monoblock power amps (includes MM/MC phone stage), excellent condition, boxed, £975. *Hi-Fi News* magazines, January 1991 to date, some in binders, offers.

Audio Technica OC9 MC cartridge, needs re-tip, £30. 01942 891741 (Wigan).

AVI S2000 preamp, £975, AVI S2000 CD player, £385. All purchased new, three years ago, mint, with boxes. Julian 07795 671932 (Nuneaton).

AUDIOLAB 8000T AM/FM tuner. Non-working and needs attention. Very good cosmetic condition. New cost £800, sensible offers. Steve 07973 334623 (Solihull, West Mids).

AUDIO SYNTHESIS DAX Discrete variable DAC. Upsamples to 706K, SACD and DVD-A compatible, 18 months old, mint, (£6,000) £3,000. Ian 07941 424322 (Warwickshire).

AVI S200MP MC/ MM preamp £395. TAG McLaren DAC20, as new £495. Acoustat Spectra II, electrostatic hybrids, £400. 01363 83072 (Devon).

B&W P6 in cherry, £300. Chord Odyssey 4 cable, three metre pair, terminated, £100. Plus Meridian 200 CD transport, offers. All good condition. 01438 743807 (Herts).

CASTLE HARLECH floorstanders yew. Great condition, boxed, £350. 01903 717826 (W Sussex).

CUSTOM DESIGN ASPECT 500 AV equipment support stand. Three reinforced glass shelves, steel frame in champagne finish, solid brass caps. Cost £300, perfect condition, £75. 01324 552349 (Central Scotland).

DACMAGIC DAC 3. Latest and the best. Designed by John Westlake, ex-Pink Triangle. Fully damped, mains cable upgrade. Perfect condition. Free digital cable and BNC adaptor, £99. 01903 505609 (W.Sussex).

DENON AVC-A1SR (gold). Onkyo DV-S757. Heybrook 2000 5.1 speakers. Epson EMP-TW100 projector. Alphason AD5/47-SB rack. Sound Fantastic mains protector. £6,000 01929 472196 (Dorchester).

DYNAUDIO SPECIAL 25 (new) in masser birch, £2,000. Dynaudio 1.4s (new), £1,000. Audience 82 (used), £650. Also, new Audience 42s, £250 and 52s, £400. 01732 741883 (Kent).

EPOS ES22 floorstanding speakers, walnut, superb, all original packaging. (£1,200) £475 ono. Stephen 01707 652985 (Hatfield).

HARMAN KARDON AVR 7500 receiver. As stunning with music as it is with full surround. DD, DTS ES, Pro Logic II. Boxed, manuals, excellent condition, (£1,150) £500. Keith 07850 722523 (London).

HEGEL H2 top of the range power amp 150 wpc, (£2,500) £950. American Acoustic Developments three-way floorstanding speakers, (£599) £225. (Dorset).

HEYBROOK DUET standmounts in rosewood veneer. Superb condition, complete with original box and packaging. HFC recommended, (£750) £325. Mr Bonnay 07753 625783 (Kent).

INTEGRA RESEARCH RDV-1 DVD player, RDC-7 AV controller and RDA-7 amp. Recently upgraded to the latest formats, as new £5,000. George 07771 806234 (Gloucestershire).

ISOTEK SUBSTATION 11 months old, as new. 2x600 VA, 2x300, and 2x150 VA. 01524 61903 or email stephen@hennefer.fsworld.co.uk (Lancaster).

JAMO D590 floorstanding speakers. Mint, boxed, can demo, £500 ono. 07977 185216 (Kent).

KEF Q35, Q95c and 60s speakers for sale. Good condition, boxed, sell as set, £350. Also REL Q50, £150 and Rotel RA-972 amp, (£550) £200. Alan 07841 715340 (Staffs).

KEF Q35 speakers, floor standing, 100 watts RMS, ▣

WANTED

PRO AC STUDIO 100 speakers in perfect sonic condition. Good price paid. 01353 659807 or email gjh29@cam.ac.uk (Ely).

A&R T21 tuner and A&R P60 power amp, must both be in good condition. 01873 856499 (Gwent).

AUDIOLAB 8000P. Karl 07743 483571 (Manchester).

B&W HTM 2 centre speaker in red cherry finish. Alan 0121 742 8351 (Birmingham).

MARANTZ CD63MKII Signature, fully functioning, black, made in Japan and in excellent condition. Will pay reasonable price. 07974 274615 (W.Yorks).

NVA Dacon, junior. Alan 01254 705589 (Lancs).

PMC DB1 speakers in oak. Arcam A200/300/CD93 etc or Denon AV3805/DVD-A1/A11 etc in black. 01962 764839 day or 023 80611519 eves. (Hants).

ROTEL RC5000 preamp and RB5000 power amp. 01942 720220 (Cheshire).

DENON AU320 MC transformer. 01942 891741 (Wigan).

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!



Sex machine



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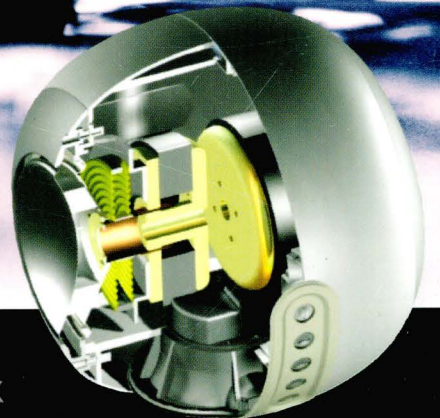
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THE NEW B&W

PV1

SUBWOOFER



Thinking outside the box

Ever seen a square bubble? No, can't say we have, either. And there's a good reason. Flat sides and corners can't cope with air that's under pressure. If bubbles were box-shaped, they'd burst. That's why pounding air pressures trapped inside the average compact subwoofer produce so much extra, unwanted vibration. Instead of equilibrium, you get rattle and hum.

B&W's revolutionary new PV1 compact subwoofer gets around all that by simply mirroring nature. It's a sphere, which means it can make a big sound in a small space. No 'box effects' or standing waves. Pressure and resonances are smoothed around its rigid aluminium shell. Which is just as well, given its 500W amplifier, back-to-back 8-inch drive units and surprising internal volume. (A sphere can accommodate more space than any other form with the same surface area, don't you know).

It looks good, it sounds amazing, and it's as solid as a rock. You could even rest your coffee on it if it wasn't so round.



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