

HI-FI CHOICE

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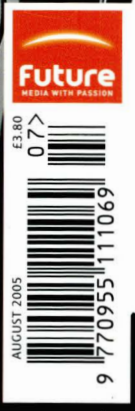
WIN!

Ruarik's superb Sabre III speakers worth £900
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EXCLUSIVE TESTS

PRECIOUS METAL

Superior sound and design – meet the latest treasures from Chord and Elac



SIZZLING CD

Super-exciting sonics from Italian brand Audia



TOP TUNER

Arcam's DT91 makes the most of both DAB and FM

FREE!
2nd hand hi-fi mini-mag!



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>> SPEAKERS

FEATURING

- > Audiovector K1 Super
- > Epos M5
- > Rega R1
- > Tannoy Sensys 2
- > Titan T2SR/e
- > Triangle Titus ES

BUYER'S BIBLE
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sales@roberttaussig.co.uk

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+353 (0) 1288 9449
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CLASSE

HI-FI CHOICE

AUGUST 2005 ISSUE 269

Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP
Tel: +44 (0)20 7317 2600 Fax: +44 (0)20 7317 2686

EDITORIAL

Tim Bower **editor**
tim.bower@futurenet.co.uk
Dan George **reviews editor**
dan.george@futurenet.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Black, Anna Burton, Art Dudley,
Colette Fahy, Alvin Gold, Stuart Harrison,
Jimmy Hughes, Jason Kennedy, Shaun Mann,
Paul Messenger, Dave Oliver,
Mark Prendergast, Stuart M Robinson,
Alan Sircorn, Phil Strongman,
Dominic Todd, David Vivian, Nigel Williamson

PHOTOGRAPHY

Adrian Lyon

ADVERTISING

Fiona Beech **advertising manager**
020 7317 2693 fiona.beech@futurenet.co.uk
Brad Francis **senior sales executive**
020 7317 2415 brad.francis@futurenet.co.uk
Simon Abbott **senior sales executive**
020 7317 2656 simon.abbott@futurenet.co.uk
Mark Cowan **senior sales executive**
020 7317 2684 mark.cowan@futurenet.co.uk
Bevan Walsh **classified sales executive**
01225 442244 bevan.walsh@futurenet.co.uk

HFC ONLINE

www.hifichoice.co.uk
Mike Cooper **online editor**
mike.cooper@futurenet.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tel: +44 (0)870 837 4722
Email: hifichoice@subscriptions.co.uk
Prices (13 issues): UK £31.65 (or £7.91 quarterly
Direct Debit), Europe £45.39, North America £52.77,
rest of the world £65.44

BACK ISSUES

Tel: +44 (0)870 837 4722
Prices: UK £4 per issue, overseas £6.95 per issue

MARKETING & LICENSING

Philippa Montgomery **marketing manager**
philippa.montgomery@futurenet.co.uk
Simon Wear **licensing director**
simon.wear@futurenet.co.uk

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Paul Burden **circulation manager**
Claire Tovey **production manager**
Katty Pigott **production controller**
Helen Ramjuttan **ad coordinator**

PUBLISHING & MANAGEMENT

Simon Maxwell **publisher**
simon.maxwell@futurenet.co.uk
Nick Merritt **group senior editor**
David Fernando **advertising director**
Dom Beaven **publishing director**
Robert Price **managing director**

Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th floor, Low Rise
Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London
SE1 9LS. Tel: 020 7633 3300

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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.



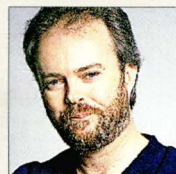
DAN GEORGE

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).



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?



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*.



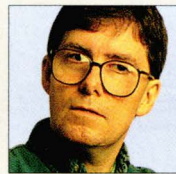
ART DUDLEY

One of the most respected commentators on the American hi-fi scene, Art has written for numerous titles including *Hi-Fi Heretic*, *Sounds Like and Listener*. Among other things, he is currently 'editor-at-large' of US journal *Stereophile*.



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.



JIMMY HUGHES

Jimmy got 'into' hi-fi in the 1960s and after ten years in retail, his first article was published in 1979. He's an avid tweaker and his 'firsts' include solid-core cables and, er, listening to your speakers back to front – well, you can't win 'em all...

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 >>

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

Six top speakers priced from £250 to £500 are put before the *HFC* Courts Martial. Which gets promoted, which gets the firing squad?

CHORD'S CHORAL CLASS

Small size and excellent looks are a given, but is the pre-/power combo's beauty skin deep?

ARCAM RULES THE WAVES

Arcam's new tuner covers all the bases with DAB and FM reception. Future-proofed hi-fi!

THE JOY OF 'X'

'X' marks the spot with the X-JET speakers from Elac and the new Phono X from Cyrus

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

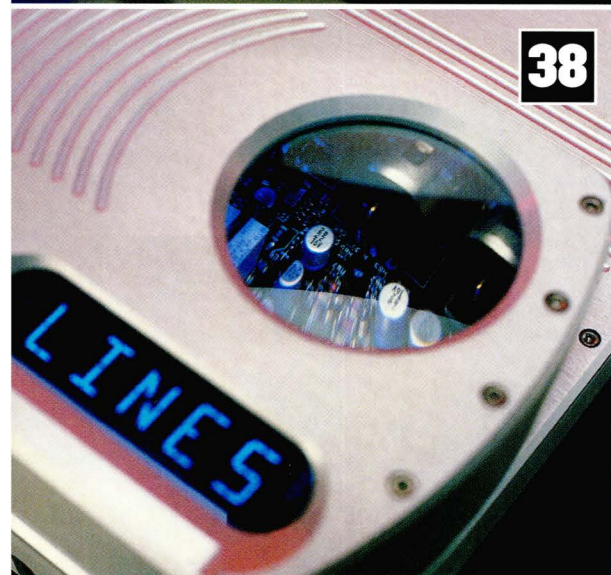
The next issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* is on sale 30 June. Don't miss a thing – see p74 for our latest great subscription offer



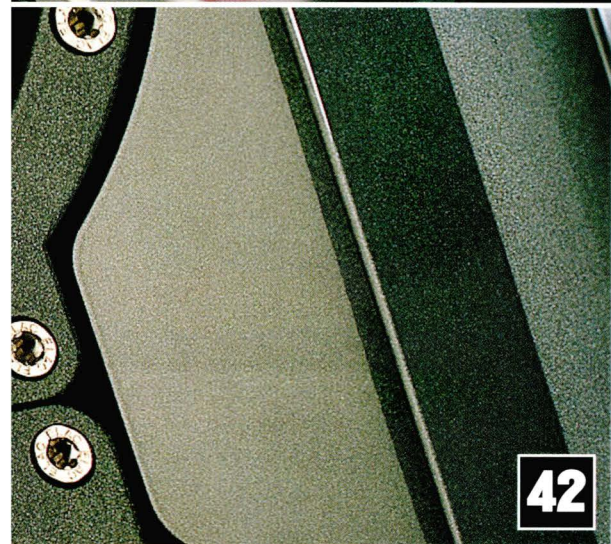
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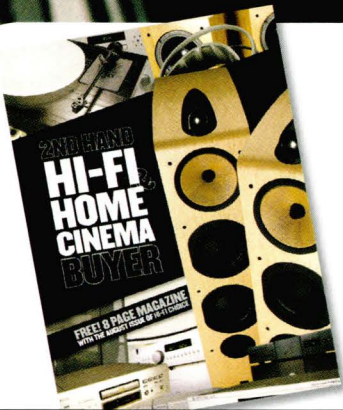
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- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified



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PATHOS CINEMA-X HYBRID MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER

The words 'purist' and 'multichannel' aren't often seen together, especially in the pages of a hi-fi magazine. But this new five-channel Cinema-X amplifier from Italian brand Pathos certainly warrants the 'purist multichannel' label.

For starters, there's none of the surround sound or video processing associated with even the most high-end integrated home cinema amps and receivers. Instead, this is a no-compromise audiophile product that can operate as either an integrated stereo amplifier or as a power amplifier and volume control for a surround sound system.

The Cinema-X offers an amazing 450 watts per channel into eight-ohms in stereo mode, but connect a DVD player with an internal decoder – or else via an external processor – and it can be used as a surround sound amplifier providing five channels of 110 watts apiece into eight-ohms.

Oh, and have we mentioned that it looks simply stunning – like a grown up's X-Box but with more chrome, wood and glowing glass bottles, which in some ways, we suppose, is exactly what it is.

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

PRODUCT Pathos Cinema-X

TYPE Integrated stereo/multichannel amplifier

PRICE £4,750

KEY FEATURES Valve/solid state hybrid design

• Balanced XLR inputs • Rated power output: 450W per channel (two-channel mode) • 110W per channel (five-channel mode)

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669

🌐 www.pathosacoustics.com

Vivid Loudspeakers



These new high-end loudspeaker systems from South Africa feature innovative drivers built entirely in-house. Designed by UK-based audio research engineer Laurence Dickie, these all-metal units are partnered with smoothly contoured cast composite enclosures to deliver an exceptional transparency of reproduction. Since their launch last year, Vivid Audio loudspeakers have received critical acclaim from a range of qualified sources including a recent award for new product of the year.

Available as standard in the following colours: Oyster Grey, Graphite, Metallic White, Sahara Beige and Copper.

Custom finishes available, it's your choice.....



B1
£7,750



K1
£10,750



VIVID audio

UK Authorised Distributor:

Rowles Music Limited. 3 Marlborough Road. Lancing Business Park. Lancing. Sussex. BN15 8UF. Tel 01903 530005 Mob 07950 274224

ray@rowlesmusic.co.uk

www.vividspeakers.com

PHONOSOPHIE IMPULS 1.5 CD PLAYER

▶ This is the middle product in a trio of new CD players from German brand Phonosophie, which is perhaps best known for its P3 turntable. The Impuls 1.5 is based around a Philips mechanism and a one-bit D-to-A converter. Phonosophie has done a lot of work on the power supply, with a specially designed toroidal transformer on board. This, says its maker, facilitates excellent sonic 'timing'.

Connection options are straight out of the Naim school of thought, with lockable DIN sockets supplied as standard, although gold-plated RCA ones are also available as an option. The case is made from specially treated 4mm thick aluminium; according to Phonosophie, this makes the Impuls 1.5 more likely to be free from the vibration effects that can occur with some more bulky players.

Finally, the Impuls 1.5 can also be upgraded to the same specification as the more upmarket Impuls 2, if and when funds become available.

To find out more see our exclusive, in-depth review in the next edition of HI-FI CHOICE

PRODUCT Phonosophie Impuls 1.5

TYPE CD player

PRICE £3,675

KEY FEATURES Upgradeable to Impuls 2 performance
 ● One-bit DAC ● Aluminium casework ● Lockable DIN sockets ● Remote control

CONTACT ☎ 01730 261924

🌐 www.phonosophie.co.uk

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



DENON AVC-A11XV

Denon has launched a new stripped down version of its flagship AVC-A1XV with HDMI upconversion from all sources – meaning no matter what form of video input the amplifier receives, just one cable is required from amplifier to display. The new AVC-A11XV also boasts a Denon Link 3 input (now SACD compatible) enabling hi-res multichannel digital audio transfer from compatible disc players. The seven-channel THX Ultra2-certified amp shares much with the flagship, including room-correction software and the same Analog Devices and Burr Brown chipsets. It delivers 140 watts into each of the seven channels and has audio and video processing capabilities.

Price £2,500 **Due** now

☎ 01234 741 200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

JBL PROJECT ARRAY

JBL is to launch a new range of high-end loudspeakers called Project Array at this year's IFA show in August. The five new models are aimed at serious hi-fi and AV users and include technology passed down from the flagship K2 Series. The range comprises two standmounts, a floorstander, a dedicated centre speaker for multichannel systems and a powered subwoofer with a built-in 1,000-watt amplifier.

The three main speakers – 800 Array, 1000 Array and 1400 Array (pictured) – feature new bi-radial horn compression drivers that incorporate midrange and high-frequency transducers into a single horn assembly. This is claimed to optimise dispersion and tonal accuracy both on and off-axis. In



addition to the compression drivers, JBL's conventional pulp cone woofer provides the bottom end reinforcement. All feature a wood finish with a rubberised black effect for the top surfaces.

Price From £5,000 per pair

Due September

☎ 020 8731 4670

🌐 www.jbl.com

NBIEN NX-6

Pacific Rim loudspeaker newcomer Nbien is now distributing products in the UK from its new premises in Cardiff. The first speaker available will be the NX-6 standmount – a 'retro-modern' design featuring a 165mm paper bass/mid driver and a silk dome tweeter. The speaker is available with a dedicated stand and comes in a choice of real-wood veneers, plus piano black and silver. Nbien products will be available through selected Audio Excellence stores initially, with others expected to follow, and an *HFC* review is scheduled soon.

Price £900 **Due** now

☎ 029 2064 1005 🌐 www.nbien.com



PURE EVOKE-1XT

Leading DAB specialist PURE has released a Tri-band version of its popular Evoke portable DAB radio. The special Evoke-1XT 'international edition' includes Band III and L-band DAB reception, FM with RDS and support for a number of European languages. The radio also has an alarm functionality, a clock and scrolling text display.

Pure has also launched a pocket-sized Tri-band DAB/FM portable with MP3 playback via SD (Secure Digital) card. The PocketDAB 2000 allows users to record DAB radio to the memory card. The unit also features Pure's ReVu pause and rewind technology for DAB plus the ability to record scrolling DAB text messages that are broadcast by many stations.

Price Evoke-1XT: £120 PocketDAB 2000: £tbc **Due** Summer

☎ 01923 260511 🌐 www.pure.com



NAD C555

NAD has announced a new budget turntable to rival the likes of Rega, Pro-Ject and Goldring. The new C555 uses a rigid plinth design said to maximise dynamics and detail. NAD has chosen a sizeable non-resonant MDF platter driven by an AC synchronous motor with a cast aluminium tonearm that's supplied pre-mounted with a Goldring Elektra cartridge. Its design incorporates a linear magnetic anti-skate compensator to provide accurate tracking characteristics. The C555 weighs in at a respectable 5.25kg and is supplied with a Perspex dust cover. Expect the definitive *HFC* review in two issues' time.

Price £250 **Due** now

☎ 01908 319360 # www.nadelectronics.com

Soundbites



ONKYO has released an innovative iPod docking station that acts as an interface between the portable device and Onkyo's AV equipment. The DS-A1 (£60) allows users to control basic iPod functions via the Onkyo system remote. The dock also recharges the iPod and enables photos to be shown on a home cinema display from an iPod photo.

☎ 01494 681515

SONY has launched its first micro system with DAB functionality. The CMT-GPX9DAB boasts DAB, FM and Band III tuning, ensuring radio reception regardless of location in Europe. It also features a slot-in type CD mechanism that supports CD-R/RW and is available for around £200.

☎ 08705 111999

NAD's latest stereo receiver, the C720BEE, uses the same amp design as the popular C320BEE, but with an AM/FM tuner and multiroom capabilities for custom install applications. The £400 receiver boasts seven line inputs and a preamp output for future expansion. It also features several proprietary technologies such as the 'PowerDrive' topology for maximising power into difficult loads and 'Soft Clipping' circuitry to minimise risk to loudspeakers during high power operation.

☎ 01908 319360

SENNHEISER has unveiled two new flagship pairs of wireless headphones, both using the FM transmission band. The new RS 130 (£100) and RS 140 (£150) feature automatic tuning for the best possible reception and have a claimed range of up to 150 metres. The RS 130 is open backed, perfect for domestic hi-fi applications, while the RS 140 is closed backed, which makes it more practical in noisy environments.

☎ 0800 652 5002



PIONEER DV-585A

Universal disc player innovator Pioneer has announced details of a new model at a groundbreaking price point. The DV-585A delivers hi-res SACD/DVD-Audio multichannel sound for just £120. The player is equipped with DivX technology for downloaded compressed video, 12-bit/108MHz video DACs and full compatibility with WMA and MP3 audio encoded CD-R/RWs. Further features include progressive scan on component connections plus 5.1 and digital coaxial outputs. Pioneer also announced two DVD-Video-only players, priced from £80.

Price £120 **Due** July

☎ 01753 789789 # www.pioneer.co.uk



TIVOLI MODEL DAB

Analogue radio expert Tivoli Audio has added a DAB/FM model to its range of desktop radios. The new Model DAB offers both digital and analogue reception in a compact package, yet also retains Tivoli's trademark 5:1 ratio tuning dial. Features include an alarm function with sleep and snooze controls and connections that enable stereo sound if using the optional Companion speaker. A CD player and subwoofer are also available to form a complete Tivoli system.

Price £230 **Due** July

☎ 01702 601410 # www.ruark.co.uk



HARMAN KARDON AVR RECEIVERS

US giant Harman Kardon has launched five new feature-bound AV receivers to replace the majority of its current range. Topping the new line-up are the AVR 635 and AVR 435, both of which share Harman's EzSet/EQ automated system calibration and room equalization functionality. They also include HDTV-compatible video switching, automatic digital input recognition and comprehensive bass-management software. The new models including the AVR135, 235 and 335 join the current flagship AVR7300 to complete the Harman receiver range.

Price From £350 to £1,000 **Due** now

☎ 020 8731 4670 # www.harmankardon.com

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ROB FOLLIS

Job Title: Hi-Fi PR Guru

Company: Represents various leading hi-fi brands



What's the future of hi-fi?

Hi-fi will stay in stereo with lots of vinyl, everything else will move to compressed formats, servers and computer-based sound. The saving grace will be companies like Arcam, which has developed the first audiophile server and Apple with its Lossless Compression.

DVD-Audio or SACD – and why?

Neither, thanks – too much hassle. Whirly surround music turns me off, so I stick with CD in stereo for music, and concert DVDs and movies in surround.

Name a really great album that you've heard recently...

Pink Martini *Symphatique*. I just saw them live and this CD captures their sound brilliantly.

Is the universal disc player the future of CD playback?

A great CD player is better than any universal, but I use my high-end DVD player for CD and it's pretty damn good, so maybe...

Who do you think is the leading hi-fi designer right now?

Hiroshi Kowaki of Eclipse TD is designing radically different, stunning sounding speakers, as far from 'herd' mentality as you can get. There needs to be room for new thinking.

Hi-Fi Diary

JUNE

27-30 Cedia Expo
ICC, Birmingham
www.cedia.co.uk
Annual custom installation showcase

SEPTEMBER

23-25 Hi-Fi and Home Entertainment Show
The Renaissance and Park Inn hotels,
Heathrow, London
020 8515 2151
London's best-established hi-fi show

OCTOBER

29-30 Home Entertainment Show
Renaissance Hotel, Manchester
01206 391001
A hi-fi and home cinema show
for Manchester

Show report – High End 2005

Alvin Gold goes in search of the finest high-end audio in the land of the rising bratwurst

Place: Munich Operating Centre, Germany **Time:** 5-8 May, 2005
Event: High End 2005

For the best part of the last 20 years, the High End Show used to be held in standard hotel show format at the Hotel Kempinski, Frankfurt, but last year it switched to a modern, dedicated show venue in Munich. This year, the show attracted a considerably larger number of exhibitors, a broader remit (which now includes custom install and a smattering of home cinema) and 25% extra floor area. It also saw significantly greater attendance.

As last year, the biggest exhibitor was the B&W group, which this year included Classé. The Canadian brand showed four new models, including the 1080p-capable, HDMI-equipped CDP-300 DVD player, which should be available by August with a target price of just under £5,000. Slightly further down the road were the SSP-300 and SSP-600 multichannel processors and the CA-5200 five channel power amplifier. There will be a three-channel version of the latter too, and additional variants of the DVD player, including a transport. These are high-end products intended to be the best in their class, and use the new Delta series user interface, which in all cases (bar the power amplifiers) includes a TFT touch screen.

For those who lost contact with turntable manufacturer Thorens in the 1970s, the company was showing a vast range of models, including record players with acrylic chassis, a valve preamplifier called the TEP-3800, the TE-23 MM/MC phono stage and a hybrid valve/MOSFET monoblock power amp, the 230-watt TEM-3200.

Primare had a number of new models at prototype stage, including a digital amplifier "with heart", using new power amplifier modules of Scandinavian design. Could be good, but unfortunately someone managed to blow up the test sample before I arrived. More immediately impressive was a working prototype of an innovative, vertically oriented compact subwoofer from Wilson Benesch.

Lindemann's very serious Model 820 CD/SACD player, which received glowing praise in HFC 262, was proudly shown on native soil for the first time. This is a type of player that carries some favour in Germany – witness also the T+A D10 disc player, a



“The High End Show is now firmly established as the best European audio event.”

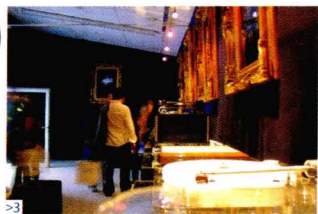
particularly striking piece of audio sculpture, which was also first shown at the High End Show.

Big news from Cambridge Audio was the first showing of prototypes of the new Azur 740A amp (£600) and Azur 740C CD player (£600). These are easily the most ambitious products from Cambridge Audio since the brand was relaunched, and include a proprietary new (and patented) power amp topology.

Clearaudio was a prominent absentee in 2004, but this year came out all guns blazing with a bewildering array of turntables, arms and record cleaners. And there was a fair sprinkling of big names too, including Fujitsu, Panasonic and Sony. The latter chose the show to launch the upmarket Qualia range in Europe, which until recently was limited to the US and the Far East only. Unfortunately at present, Sony intends that only a very tiny selection of the models will be sold in the UK, including the Qualia 004 LCD projector, which for my money truly embodies the concept of 'high-fidelity video', but not the superb Qualia 010 headphones. A write-in campaign is clearly in order!

Asking around, the consensus seems to be that the High End Show is now firmly established as the best of the European specialist audio events, as well as being the largest primarily high-end show. From my observations, it lacks the rather parochial feel of some of the UK shows and, because there are open communal areas and the event isn't constricted by narrow hotel corridors, the whole feel of the event is more open and relaxed. The large and reasonably

- 1] Sony's excellent Qualia headphones – why should Euro ears miss out?
- 2] Wilson Benesch's prototype subwoofer does the rounds
- 3] Turntables abound from Clearaudio and more
- 4] T+A's striking new D10 valve-based disc player
- 5] Cambridge Audio's new upmarket CD player and stereo amp



well-insulated demonstration rooms available on the upper two floors meant better sound than most other shows, a superior choice of programme material and generally better set-up than is usually experienced at other recent shows, even including Alexis Park, the specialist hi-fi arena at CES in Las Vegas. **HFC**



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



FRANZ FERDINAND

Title: tbc

Release date: autumn 2005

Having made the debut album of last year and scooped the Mercury Music Prize, Scottish art rockers Franz Ferdinand are already into the recording of their second album. The new songs so far unveiled include *Your Diary*, *This Boy*, *Wee Andy* and *Evil Heathen*.



THE DARKNESS

Title: tbc

Release date: autumn 2005

The Darkness have booked into the same studio where their heroes Queen recorded *Bohemian Rhapsody* to work on the highly anticipated follow-up to *Permission To Land*. "It's going well," reports frontman Justin Hawkins. "It's got the biggest drum sound you'll ever hear on a rock record and I'm using Freddie Mercury's piano and stuff. All of it's sounding very, very good."

ALANIS MORISSETTE

Title: *Jagged Little Pill Revisited*

Release date: 25 July

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of her 30-million selling classic, Alanis Morissette has recorded intimate all-acoustic versions of the songs on *Jagged Little Pill*. The new version retains the original running order and is again produced by Glen Ballard, who helmed the landmark 1995 release. "The way I approach the songs emotionally is different and I bring ten years of life experience to them," Morissette says.

quite different from the Pixies' roaring brand of alternative rock, the album has a strong Americana feel with legendary session names like Steve Cropper, Reggie Young, David Hood and Spooner Oldham on a mix of covers and new compositions.

SINEAD O'CONNOR

Title: tbc

Release date: summer 2005

After announcing her retirement last year, it turns out O'Connor is in Jamaica recording a reggae album with some of the island's leading musicians. The album will include covers of songs, such as Bob Marley's *War*, Peter Tosh's *Downpressor Man* and Burning Spear's *Marcus Garvey*.

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

James Gilchrist *Oh Fair To See* (Jun);

Keith Jarrett *Radiance* (Jun); **Wayne**

Shorter *Beyond The Sound Barrier* (Jun);

Beady Belle *Closer* (Jun)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Alexander Lazarev *Geminiani Concertos*

(SACD, Jun); **John Mayer** *Room for*

Squares (DualDisc, Jun); **Seal** *Seal*

(DVD-A, Jun); **Roger Kofmann**

Shostakovich: Complete Symphonies

(SACD, Jun); **Dire Straits** *Brothers In Arms*

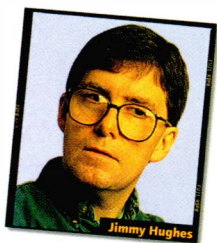
(DVD-A, Jul)

FRANK BLACK

Title: *Honeycomb*

Release date: 18 July

Hot on the heels of the Pixies' triumphant reunion comes the first solo effort from the band's guitarist since 1996's *The Cult Of Ray*. Recorded in Nashville and reportedly



Jimmy Hughes

A question of balance

Sometimes the middle way is the right road

There are many ways to evaluate a hi-fi system. Some base their judgement on how loud it plays. Others on how deep and powerful the bass is, or whether the stereo soundstaging is three-dimensional. A few choose according to looks, poor souls. Whatever – it's a personal subjective choice...

For me, it's simple: my 'perfect' system is one that produces clear and detailed, wholly natural sound, allowing the listener to enjoy

“The big question is how do you get a hi-fi system with ‘balance’, one that aims to be all things to all people?”

the widest range of music. Impressive sonics are important. But of far greater value is the diversity of music and types of recording that can be convincingly portrayed.

It's foolish to underestimate the breadth of people's musical sympathies. Many listeners have eclectic tastes and musical tastes change over a listening life, hence the need for a system that sounds convincing on all types of music and recordings.

In fact, hi-fi systems know nothing about music – they're only reproducing vibrations. Nevertheless, what's needed to reproduce (say) a full orchestra, or solo voice with piano, is very different to the requirements necessary for heavy rock or synthesiser pop.

The big question is how do you get a hi-fi system with 'balance', one that aims to be all things to all people? I think it starts when you achieve natural tonal qualities allied to excellent dynamic range and transient attack. When unamplified acoustic instruments and voices sound real and believable, you're virtually home – the rest usually takes care of itself. If, however, you don't have a natural sound to start with, nothing will help.

If every vocal recording you play makes voices sound like they're coming through a raucous PA system, something's wrong. If a Concert Grand piano recorded in a large hall sounds like an electric piano, your hi-fi system's not doing its job. The sound may be exciting

and impressive – you might think it's great – but it's not accurate or authentic!

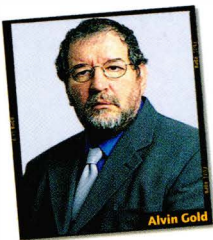
For example, a loudspeaker that produces a bright 'forward' sort of tonal balance, emphasising impact and immediacy, might be great with loud heavy rock. But play a delicate piece of classical chamber music with strings, or female voice accompanied by piano, and you'd quickly realise things were not right.

Fundamentally it boils down to finding a balance between various extremes – between brilliance and dynamics on the one hand, and smoothness and refinement on the other.

These requirements are contradictory. Audition a hi-fi system at high volume levels, by all means. But play something quiet too.

The way a hi-fi system copes with conflicting extremes determines its ability to convincingly portray vastly different types of music. The more varied the extremes that can be handled, the harder it will be to find music that catches the system out. When you finally achieve this 'balance', almost every recording sounds right! Not flawless or perfect necessarily – recording quality varies considerably – but convincing and authentic, and absolutely enjoyable musically. Good, eh?

Jimmy Hughes is one of Britain's best known hi-fi writers. His knowledge of tweaking and his record collection know no bounds



Why-fi choice?

I use DAB and MP3. So is hi-fi still for me?

What is hi-fi for? Specifically, is there much of a need for high-quality equipment? Heresy of heresies, I find myself beginning to conclude that often what differences exist may not be worth a hill of beans.

This has been coming for quite a while. For example, the dynamic range of radio has long been manipulated with compressors and limiters to ensure that the message is loud and clear, even in areas suffused with noise. This is unavoidable on AM, but now it is happening on DAB radio. But the problems don't end with broadcast radio, or MP3 for that matter. It affects even the material we listen to.

Just as the technical standards for music replay have been shifting down from FM to ▶

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

KEF 105
LOUDSPEAKER



The brainchild of Raymond Cooke (physicist, chemist and marketer) and Laurie Fincham (engineer), the 105 and the smaller 104

were the first of the important KEF Reference series. Before the likes of ATC, B&W and the Professional Music Company cleaned up in the studio world, the KEF 105 was the benchmark for accuracy, far exceeding the wonderful but sometimes metallic and dynamically limited Quad ESL57 electrostatic.

The KEF 105 was a full-size three-way, vaguely Dalek-like design, with each of the drivers inhabiting its own low diffraction enclosure, forming a stepped and time-aligned compound baffle from the front. The crossover was set at 400Hz and 2.5kHz, and the frequency response was specified with typical KEF thoroughness as 30Hz-25kHz, or 38Hz-22kHz +/-2dB on the design measuring axis. The company at the time was attempting to raise the profile of good, solid measurement in audio, so perhaps this thoroughness comes as no real surprise.

Back in the 1970s, the standard of goodness of a loudspeaker was almost totally bound up in the accuracy of its axial frequency response, and by its coloration levels, which were addressed with heavy cones to avoid high Q resonances. Ultimately, this was a simplistic idea that would be given short shrift these days, and which tended to lead to rather dull, heavy-sounding speakers without a great deal of life but with low coloration – just as advertised. In fact, the Bextrene cone of the 105 was so heavy that every now and again, it was often suggested that the mounting screws be loosened off, and the bass unit rotated to counteract sag. The 105 was also a glutton for power, with a rated sensitivity of just 86dB/Watt at one metre – low for such a large design. Realistically, though, this was a speaker designed to be used with the high-power transistorised power amps of the time.

The 105 excelled at imagery though, which by most accounts, was rock solid and stable. It even maintained its focus when listened to from off to one side, thanks to the smoothly rounded enclosures for each driver.



“Before the likes of ATC, B&W and PMC cleaned up in the studio world, the KEF 105 was the benchmark.”

Underlying its professional status, KEF 105s were once famously used in a performance of the Berlioz *Te Deum* conducted by Claudio Abbado, during the opening event of the Edinburgh Festival. The organ was played by Gillian Weir in a remote Cathedral location, and reproduced by a bank of the speakers driven by Quad 405s ranged in front of the stage of the Usher Hall because its own organ was out of commission. It was a great trick and, in fairness, could probably have been equalled by several other speakers, but the point is that it wasn't. KEF got there first, and the benefit from publicity was by all accounts tremendous... and hugely important for KEF.

The 105 was later displaced by the 105.2, which although not the last in the line, was easily the most significant. It introduced some key new technologies, including the coupled cavity design. This consisted of two internal units, physically linked and operating in mutual opposition to reduce distortion arising from excitation of the enclosure. In addition, the 105.2 first saw the Kube loading module, which adjusted the bass turnover frequency and roll-off. These innovations proved hard to implement, though; coupled cavity eventually became a victim of its own complexity, and the Kube was difficult to set up in different rooms and eventually bit the dust. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



“No need for a stylus, the ELP decodes a vinyl record by using a total of five lasers.”

❑ DAB, and from CD to MP3, so music has been remodeling itself to fit the means of reproduction. Music now doesn't stretch the capabilities of the replay equipment, and so it sounds half decent when heard via a personal stereo. But this is only part of a larger and more fundamental transition. An early change was when music became more accessible, to the point where it is now something to be actively avoided. Muzak is all around us, in restaurants, shops and other public places, and in my view at least, has become a menace.

More recently, we have started to be presented with what can only be described as functional music – dance, house, trance and so on – types of musical expression that are there to do a specific job, and which don't even pretend to have much to do with the organic two-way process that is involved in traditional music appreciation. In films and on TV, music has a long and only sometimes honourable tradition of being used to manipulate the emotions of the audience. Think of the scene-setting music from *Jaws* for a particularly striking example. Now that music is being composed to fit the low-resolution, cartoon-like capabilities of data-reduced formats like MP3, music has become so pervasive, so much part of the furniture, that any sense of occasion, of surprise or of human emotion is diluted, often to vanishing point.

If what has been described here is a Darwinian example of the message adapting and downgrading itself to fit the limitations of the medium, there are some positive signs on the horizon, at least in the specific area of

personal stereo. The developments I have in mind are the introduction of lossless compression algorithms (like Apple Lossless) and the progressive paring away of the costs of data storage. Put the two together, and perhaps it will soon be possible to store a substantial collection of technically demanding music on a pocket size player with a minimum loss of sound quality.

Alvin Gold began writing about music and hi-fi more than 20 years ago and has since become one of the UK's most internationally renowned reviewers



Dudley discovers a dud

Not all high-end turntables are wonderful

It has finally happened. I found an expensive, brilliantly engineered record player that I don't wish to own.

Among the exhibitors at Primedia's Home Entertainment 2005 show in New York City was a company doing business under the name Audioturntable Ltd, offering the ELP (née Fial) laser turntable at a ten per cent 'show special' discount. Like other enthusiasts,

I'd followed the story of this touchless table ever since 1985, when its inventors exhibited a non-functioning sample at America's Consumer Electronics Show – following which, the patent appears to have passed through more hands than the shroud of Turin.

Now I've finally heard one, and the good news is – It works!

First, a bit of technical background. No need for a stylus, the ELP decodes a vinyl record by using a total of five lasers – two for finding the shoulders of the groove, two for the groove modulations themselves, and one to account for warps or varying record thicknesses – the reflected output of which is converted to electricity by a photovoltaic semiconductor. The output is a continuous complex analogue wave (the designers stress that the ELP is not a digital audio product in any sense) and,

in fact, it requires the same RIAA correction EQ as any other record player.

This approach has a couple of drawbacks, chief among which is the lasers' very understandable inability to distinguish between groove modulations and contaminants. As with normal replay, the best results can only be had with records that are made clean and kept that way, scrupulously; to that end, a wet-wash record-cleaning machine is included in the price of every ELP laser turntable. (Audioturntable Ltd lets the buyer choose between a VPI and a Nitty Gritty.)

Speaking of price, there's the other drawback. The suggested retail for the base model, which plays LPs and 45s but not 78s, is \$14,999. And don't forget the manufacturer's observation that an 'overhaul' may be required after every five years or so, for which the 20kg player must be shipped to Japan.

Then there's the sound, which is at turns both astonishing and pedestrian. On the plus side of the column is the fact that the thing works at all, and that it plays certain kinds of old or damaged records with remarkably little noise. On the minus side, at least based on my limited audition, the ELP has a consistently soft presentation, and seems to give less than it should to the attack components of notes. I found it pleasant, listenable, and smooth, but never as captivating as any good £2,000 turntable/tonearm/cartridge combination.

Bringing this product to market was a remarkable feat, and I admire its creators for having done so. The ELP may be a Godsend for the archivist, but as far as the average record lover is concerned, it's an answer to a question that remains unasked.

Art Dudley has written for Hi-Fi Heretic, Sounds Like and Listener. He lives in the US and works as Stereophile's editor-at-large



Stuart M. Robinson

Multichannel misery

Were doom-mongers right about SACD?

The future of SACD has been a hotly debated topic recently, and for good reason. A number of factors have been interpreted by observers as being signs of impending doom, and in many cases rightly so.

SACD is the product of two major organisations, Sony and Philips, and unlike the rival DVD-Audio format, the benefits of their combined marketing skill and deep pockets did much to put SACD players into the homes of many audiophiles thanks to masterstrokes of consumer manipulation such as the release of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. At industry shows, key personnel, usually Dr. Andrew Demery and David Kawakami from a dedicated group known as the SACD Project, would often be present to front impressive demonstrations and answer questions. Behind-the-scenes, the hugely expensive hardware required to produce DSD recordings was loaned to independent labels and disc replication funded by Sony/Philips, adding greatly to the number of titles available from the majors and giving the impression that the format was being widely adopted.

However, this is no longer the case. The SACD Project was disbanded and at shows, such as the recent Home Entertainment event in New York, Sony's SACD promoters are nowhere to be seen. Rumours have been circulating that Sony Music has ceased all SACD production, and to make matters worse, their latest headline title, Bruce Springsteen's *Devils and Dust*, which sold 220,000 copies in its first week and shot straight to the top of the Billboard chart, was released as a (low-resolution) DualDisc and currently there are no plans for an SACD version. In Europe, the classic Dire Straits album *Brothers in Arms*, a 1984 all-digital 16-bit/44.1kHz PCM recording, has been 'converted' to DSD and is scheduled for imminent release, yet in the US market it will be released as a DVD-Audio title or even as a DualDisc, depending on whether Mark Knopfler approves of the new format.

So what's going on? Sources once close to the SACD Project revealed that Sony is still supporting the format, but without dedicating large amounts of money to it, the consensus being that SACD should now be left to survive (or die) based upon its own merits and ▶

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

JOY DIVISION
CLOSER



By 1980, Manchester's Joy Division were pretty much the most lauded group in Britain.

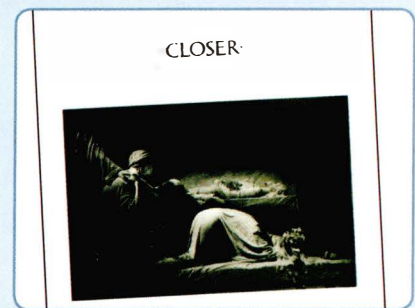
The previous year's *Unknown Pleasures*, had received the kind of fawning press attention that might have been more appropriate for the Second Coming. NME journalist Danny Baker even famously remarked that "Joy Division deserve a backlash, but I'm not the man to do it".

Which made it all the more ironic that less than two months after recording had been completed on *Closer*, their second album, and on the eve of an American tour, lead singer and lyricist Ian Curtis hanged himself. Reasons have generally been cited as depression caused by his escalating epilepsy and disintegrating marriage, and many have looked for clues in what had become the band's final album.

And they're there aplenty. Never a band likely to be accused of a happy-go-lucky image, Joy Division preferred dour dress sense and icily precise, driving rock music. The cover, which featured a monochrome photo of an Italian tomb by Bernard Pierre Wolff, gave the clearest indication that death may have been on Curtis's mind. However, designer Peter Saville says this was entirely coincidence – he just liked the picture, and all of the band were keen to use it, before Curtis's death.

Most of the songs for *Closer* had been written some time before and many were already being featured in their live shows when the band booked themselves into Islington's Britannia Studios from 18 March, 1980. The tracks were laid down quickly and efficiently, with the final session closing on 30 March. Their regular producer Martin 'Zero' Hannett was in attendance and succeeded in achieving a finely polished, minimalist gem of an album, its nine sparse tracks setting a standard for intelligent, melancholic rock music that would rarely be equalled, let alone bettered.

Musically and sonically, it was several steps ahead of their debut, making much use of synthesisers (later to be used even more comprehensively when the surviving three band members subsequently emerged as New Order). *Closer* saw Joy Division refining their



"Joy Division's music was never comfortable, but it was possessed of a simplicity and power."

sound still further, so that the entire album stands up as a coherent whole, rather than a collection of songs.

Despite the prominence of Pete Hook's bass, Steve Morris's metronomic, tom-tom heavy drumming and Curtis's baritone voice, there is little bottom end throughout the record. Joy Division's cerebral *stürm und drang* is all concentrated in the mid and treble, creating an effect that is at once enticing and repelling, familiar yet distancing, and icily compelling. Its chilly claustrophobia was also far removed from their punky live sound thanks to Hannett's perfectionism in the studio. He once said of the band, "They were a gift to a producer, because they didn't have a clue".

Joy Division's music was never comfortable, but it was possessed of a simplicity and power that was unique in its day, and stands out even now. Some choose to see *Closer* as Ian Curtis's suicide note, and with lines like "Gotta find my destiny, before it gets too late", and "I'm ashamed of the things I've been put through, I'm ashamed of the person I am", it's not hard to see why. But amid the pain Curtis was clearly feeling, there were also three musicians and songwriters who knew they were on the cusp of great things. That positivism, that drive, is inherent to *Closer's*, and indeed Joy Division's long-lasting appeal. **HFC**

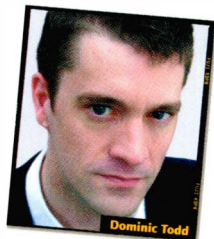
Dave Oliver

market penetration. I asked David Kawakami, who is now with the SACD Center – an organisation formed to provide SACD production services and equipment rentals – for a quote on the current status of SACD promotion, but he failed to comment before we went to press.

Disconcertingly, it was a similar story when I approached John McKay, spokesman for Sony/BMG Music Entertainment. While he was quick to confirm an ongoing release schedule during our brief telephone chat, when it came to asking about the long-term survival of SACD (a question he is apparently asked “all the time”), he too failed to provide any form of on-the-record statement regarding the label's future releases or commitment to the format.

Despite the (on average) 60 or so new SACD titles released each month by minor labels across the world, the sudden and quite obvious lack of support from the format's major players is of great concern.

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

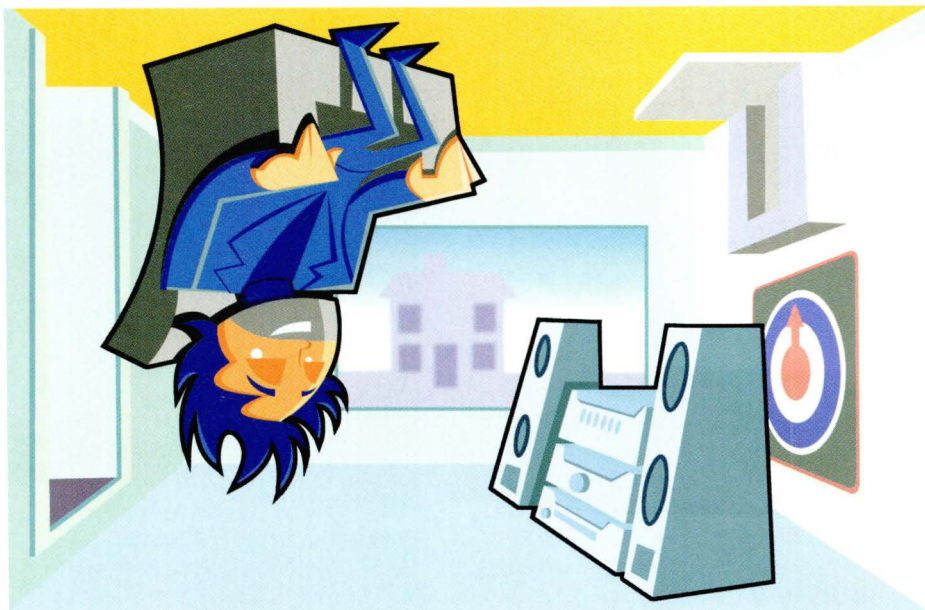


Back to the future

Modern speakers – traditional values

A recent move of house has reminded me just how different individual rooms can sound. Over the past 20 years or so, speaker design has evolved to a point whereby they have become more flexible than ever. Once, you needed space to get the best from your loudspeaker, but the rise of the super-mini meant that true hi-fi could be had in even the smallest spaces. Of course, spiked stands and sophisticated CAD that could replicate real living environments played their part, but it was generally the shift away from mass that helped room compatibility.

Ten years ago, the floorstander began to make something of a comeback. Rather than being shallow and wide, they were, commonly, deep and thin. They also came with a built-in rigidity that made many of their 1970s counterparts look distinctly wobbly. Drive units were also a good deal smaller and sounded tauter, too. This, combined with the new look, generally made for cohesive room matching.



“I’m going to relish turning my room upside down to accommodate the hi-fi properly.”

It has long since been an ambition of many a manufacturer to get rid of the dreaded ‘hot spot’, with panels being one answer (although the famous Quad ELS range doesn’t always gel with a room in other respects), multi-firing arrays another (Bose 901) and even upward firing, reflected high frequencies (JR) yet another. Shahinian owners may disagree, but in many ways the culmination of all this came with the Canon S-series of the early 1990s that used a single drive unit firing down across a mirrored dome. In terms of even soundstaging they worked – what a shame that they didn’t sound that good in any other respect!

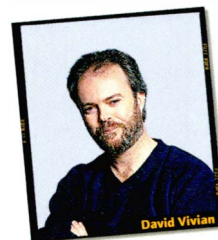
Coming back to my new room and recent speaker trials... after a succession of placid, flexible designs, I can’t help but notice a new crop of more bloody-minded transducers. No, it’s not a widespread return to the dark days, but a definite focusing upon the importance of room positioning. You wouldn’t be terribly surprised to find the likes of specialist designs such as Living Voice’s Auditorium being a bit tricky, but what about Mission’s outwardly more ‘mainstream’ e82/e83?

I have to say that I welcome this return to inflexibility, slight as it may be. We all know that two-channel sales have slowed and, with a decreasing market, so many of the style police have left to buy shiny new 5.1 sub/sat systems instead. Not that I’m knocking these – for the typical purchaser they perform well, and the better models even get close to proper hi-fi standards. Yet, with a more focused and demanding market, the two-channel

manufacturers can now get on with pleasing the real enthusiasts – people like you and me, who are prepared to make sacrifices to our homes for the sake of our music.

In the meantime, I’m going to relish turning my new sitting room upside down in order to accommodate the hi-fi properly. Once done, then I’ll think about the blocked guttering and missing tiles!

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



Dave vs Dave

It’s valves at 10 paces as the two Daves duel

The Editor forwarded the following email, just after the publication of HFC 268. It’s about the Copland/Prima Luna/Sonus Faber *Beautiful System* featured in that issue:

“Think it’s time you got rid of David Vivian. If you’re going to let him carry on doing reviews, will you at least get him new glasses. In his review of the Prima Luna Prologue One Amplifier on page 36 he says ‘The tube

complement comprises four big EL34s! Bloody idiot, they are KT 88s. Right next to the item is a big picture of the valves.

"We pay our £3.80 for a high-quality magazine, not something the second year at the local high school could put together. Regards, Dave."

And I thought us Daves were meant to stick together! Fair point, though. Just what was going on? As any tube aficionado will tell you, KT88s don't look anything like EL34s, being somewhat fatter and squatter. And these weren't any old KT88s, either, but rather gorgeous Diamond examples at £100 a pop, lovingly made made in the Czech Republic by Euro Audio Team. How did this happen? Here's how I replied to Dave:

"The Prologue One as supplied off the shelf for £800 runs EL34s as stated. If you look closely, you'll see 'EL34' printed just in front of the valve sockets. Ricardo Franassovici at Absolute Sounds decided to supply the test sample with some very expensive KT88s (the £100 more expensive Prologue Two runs KT88s as standard). Fortunately, a friend owns a One with EL34s so, to avoid confusion, we substituted the valves from his amp for the listening. I must admit, it escaped my mind that the amp would be photographed with the valve grille removed.

For your info, the amp sounds rather different with the KT88s – a little brighter and more detailed."

A subsequent phone call from Ricardo explained why his Prologue One had a £400 complement of output valves. In his words he'd "turbocharged" it, effectively creating a Prologue Two... and a Half. The bad news, from Ricardo's viewpoint, was that his souped-up Prima Luna was reverse-tweaked for the system feature. The good news is that it sounded wonderful with the more humble EL34s in situ and... er, now it can be revealed, almost heart-stoppingly good with the EAT KT88s – tauter, faster, more transparent and, subjectively, about twice as powerful (the rated increase is a mere five watts). Control of the bass, in particular, is of a different order, making the Prima Luna a much more versatile amp for partnering with 'interesting' speakers.

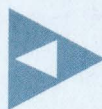
With hindsight, I should have mentioned the huge upgrade the EAT KT88s represent, but in fairness, I only started listening to the EAT-tweaked Prologue One in earnest once the feature copy had been submitted. Only then did the scale of the improvement become fully apparent. Let's just say my mate with the standard Prima Luna Prologue One now knows exactly where his next spare £400 is heading.

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

AMP AND SPEAKER MATCHING



Probably the most widely misunderstood area in hi-fi concerns amplifier/loudspeaker matching. It's largely the industry's fault, due to the confusing and inconsistent way in which specifications are presented, but there are some complications...

Amplifier power is always specified in watts, a linear measure. Loudspeaker sensitivity is usually specified in decibels (dB) a logarithmic measure. Given that logarithms aren't exactly a part of everyday life for most folks, it's no wonder people are bewildered by them. What's worse, the dB value should be given with respect to a reference point, but in terms of sound pressure level (loudness) the reference is generally taken as read, which makes the dB look like an absolute figure, which it ain't. Zero watts is no power at all, but zero dB really just means a ratio of 1:1, or equal to reference level. It seems only THX-trained dealers understand this.

Speaker sensitivity figures are typically quoted as dB for 1W input at 1m, and the important thing about this is that doubling the input power increases the sound level by 3dB. So, suppose you own a speaker with a sensitivity figure of 85dB and a 40-watt amplifier, and you feel you need the sound just a little louder before distortion makes it unlistenable. In theory at least (manufacturers abilities to tweak specifications makes it hard to make golden rules), you could change the amp for one with 80-watt output, or you could change the speaker for one with an 88dB sensitivity; both would have about the same effect.

Most loudspeakers come with a power rating, which is probably the most misleading statistic in hi-fi. A speaker is a passive device which can only consume power, so the 'rating' is merely the greatest amount of power it can consume without falling apart or bursting into flames. There's nothing intrinsically good about a high rating: however, a speaker with a low sensitivity and a low power rating won't be able to play very loud without risk of damage. It can still be a very high-quality loudspeaker – just look at the famous LS3/5a. Within its loudness limits, it remains one of the best speakers ever made.



"If you like high-power rock, LS3/5a's with a 10-watt valve amp will do nothing for you."

A large part of matching amps to speakers consists of balancing power output with sensitivity, bearing in mind tastes in music loudness and the size of the room. If you like high-power rock, then LS3/5a's with a 10-watt valve amp in a big room will do nothing for you. Conversely, high sensitivity horn speakers playing a diet based on classical chamber music, will seldom demand more than a watt or two.

But matching also concerns the even more obscure question of 'impedance' – basically, how much current a loudspeaker swallows for a given applied voltage. Low impedance equals high current, and not all amps are equally adept at supplying it. This leads to compatibility issues even when there appears to be no problem with loudness levels: the amp may be running out of grunt before its notional 'clip point' is in sight. And speaker impedance varies with frequency, which means that with amps with a low damping factor may end up exhibiting a non-flat frequency response with the speaker, causing tonality problems quite independent of whether current is available.

In the end, very few amp/speaker combinations are truly 'incompatible', but good compatibility is best assured by listening, reading reviews and canvassing the opinions of an experienced dealer. **HFC**

Richard Black



⊖ ESSENTIALS



HIDIAMOND WHITE + ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £120 (1M PAIR)

⊖ From the middle of HiDiamond's range of seven interconnects, White + offers good quality but not exotic materials – copper plus polythene dielectric – and a high density screen. It also comes with some rather nice locking phono plugs which offer excellent contact thanks also to their split centre pin. Its sound matches the energy of the Power + speaker cable but adds generously to the bass definition and solidity. It seems to confer more precise stereo images too. For some reason, we seemed to get better results with digital sources than with analogue ones, the latter being merely good, the former most impressive. Practical and sensibly priced too.

☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.hidiamond.it

KEMP ELECTRONIKS KE-POWER STRIP MAINS DISTRIBUTION BOARD £375

⊖ The price is high for a mains distribution board, but the Kemp (a Dutch audiophile mains specialist) Ke-Power Strip includes star-wiring, plus a parallel-impedance filter to give a degree of mains cleansing. The sockets are of good quality and the unit is solid and robust. It comes with a detachable lead, available in non-standard lengths to order. The strip did seem to clear up a degree of 'hash' and make details clearer and images more precise, improving the overall 'musicality' of the sound. Ironically, it had its greatest effect on components of less than high-end status, some costing less than the Strip itself. Realistically, its natural home would be in well-tuned systems, where it can add a useful edge.

☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.kempelektroniks.nl



SRMTECH TURNTABLE SPIRIT LEVEL £15

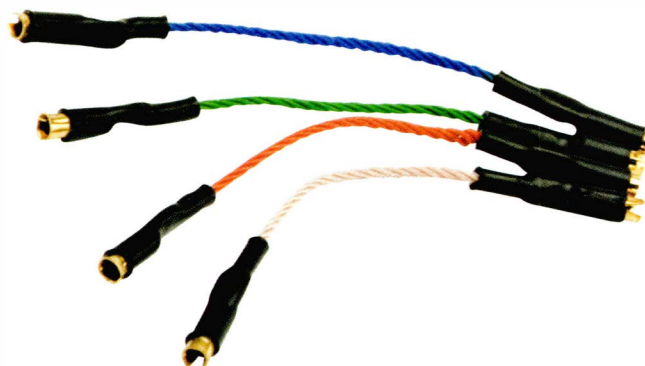
⊖ Last issue, we flooded *Essentials* with turntable accessories. Here's yet another, but a very nice one in every way. You can use a regular domestic spirit level to set up a turntable, of course, but it's heavy, awkward, never to hand when you want it and frequently dirty. This one's smart, accurate, and very well designed for its purpose. It pops over the spindle – ideally over a disc – and weighs little enough that it won't upset the suspension by being there. It can be left in place while the platter rotates, which should confirm that the spindle is true and tight in the bearing. And don't for a moment doubt that accurate levelling is important – it can make a big difference to pitch stability.

☎ 01234 741152 🌐 www.britishaudio.co.uk

EXTREME PHONO CARTRIDGE LEADS £25 (SET OF FOUR)

⊖ The true vinyl lover will want the best of everything, and even two inches of headshell lead can make a difference. We'd be lying if we said that difference was night and day, though. But, with silk-insulated multistrand conductors and very well fitted, grippy connectors on the ends, these leads are as good as it gets and bode well for long-term contact reliability. Apart from anything else, they are much more robust than the usual ones fitted on so many arms, and if you swap cartridges on a semi-regular basis, that will make your life much more pleasant.

☎ 01785 711232 🌐 www.extremephono.com





ONZOW LP RAISER RECORD CLEANER £45

⊕ No vinyl zombies here – what is being raised, apparently, is the signal-to-noise ratio of LPs cleaned with this stuff. Inside the kit is a blue glass bottle containing a fruity-smelling liquid, used with the included polishing cloths to clean LPs. The instructions are in Japanese, but the photos make it clear enough. Evidently this banishes static and can be used on CDs and DVDs, too. It's no better than its many rivals, but the top-quality microfibre cleaning cloths are the best we've seen and a suitable grade for the finest optical – and by implication audio – work. They're washable, should last well and if you want something that won't scratch your treasured discs with them, use these.

☎ 01785 711232 🌐 www.audioatmosphere.com

KRYSTAL KABLES MERCURY MAINS CABLE £85 (1M)

⊕ Mercury uses solid silver conductors, which sounds like good value at this price. It's Krystal's top model, for which bold and confident claims are made. It's certainly of high-end breeding as far as convenience is concerned; it's hideously inflexible and strenuously resists any attempt to route it neatly. Screened construction is alleged to give it useful noise-reducing properties, and while we couldn't entirely concur with Krystal's claims that system noise practically vanishes when the cable is used, we did come to favourable conclusions regarding general sonic incisiveness and detail. A competitive upgrade for the keen audiophile.

☎ 01579 349295 🌐 www.krystal-kables.com



HIDIAMOND POWER + LOUDSPEAKER CABLE £100 (3M TERMINATED PAIR)

⊕ Amid loony cables, HiDiamond delivers sane designs with simple construction, executed neatly. This puts Power + ostensibly on a par with the likes of Kimber and The Chord Co, but it has its own character – a slightly light tonality, not actually lacking bass (the low frequencies are all there) but somehow seeming to emphasise the midrange and treble in a lively and not unpleasant way. As such, Power + has considerable energy and drive, making up for a lack in the detail department. It's a question of taste, and if you prefer lush textures, this may not suit you. It could be the perfect foil to very slightly over-ripe speakers, though, and we enjoyed listening to it, especially with 'high energy' musical styles.

☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.hidiamond.it



CAIG OPTICALL ANTI-STATIC TREATMENT £14

⊕ Here's a product which has no effect on the sound of your gear, but you may still need it. With the standards of hi-fi appearance improving (on average) with every passing year it seems a shame to let dust, fingerprints and general grime spoil that showroom shine, especially on items like acrylic-based turntables. OpticALL claims both to remove dirt and to reduce the build-up of static electricity (which attracts more dirt), and we found both claims entirely justified. Apply it with a soft cloth, polish dry, and admire the full visual glory of your equipment. Highly recommended for plastic front panels, displays and so on.

☎ 0870 241 2469 🌐 www.hififorsale.com



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ISSUE 37 / HI FI PLUS / CD3MKII / ALAN SIRCOM

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ISSUE 35 / HI FI PLUS / PH5 / JIMMY HUGHES



AUDIO RESEARCH VM220

Audio Research has studiously applied the technology gained from their Reference series amplifiers to every model in their range, right down to the entry-level designs.

The SP16 preamplifier, VS55, VS110 and VM220 power amplifiers, the state-of-the-art CD3 Mk II CD player, the multi-channel amplifier and the VS155 integrated amplifier are not only packed with knowledge gained from the company's legendary flagship models, but they herald a change in the way reasonably-priced high-end equipment is perceived. The astonishing PH5 brings Reference Phono performance to a remarkably affordable price point. The LS25 Mk II Pre-amp clearly shares parentage with the Reference pre-amplifiers. And the VT100 Mk III boasts DNA derived from the Reference 300 and 600 power amps.

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Ambient archive

Brian Eno and mastering engineer Simon Heyworth have been busy transferring Eno's back catalogue from the old analogue masters to DSD. It's a labour of love, as Simon explains...

Brian Eno's prodigious and significant back catalogue is enjoying something of a renaissance. In Devon's Super Audio Mastering studio, mastering engineer Simon Heyworth is in charge of transferring all of Eno's old master tapes from analogue to DSD (the coding technology used for SACD) for use in future reissues. "We basically called up all the master tapes, sat in his office on the floor and looked at them to try and work out what they were. Brian's got a terrific memory, though, and it was no problem for him to remember which were the past masters and so on."

"Eno's masters are beautifully labelled and are real works of art. They were created by Rhett Davies, a wonderfully conscientious and careful engineer of the time. I created DSD masters for Eno (as stereo archives), then made a PCM master out of that. The finished tapes we felt were so good, that there was no necessity to re-EQ anything. These original masters contain amazing sounds and are absolutely fabulous recordings. And some of the crossfades go right down into hiss and right up to the edit of the next track!"

Brian Eno recalls the original concept behind what became the first of his ambient series: "I realised that what the studio was really good for was making pictures, creating new landscapes and time and space contexts. *Music For Films* was a really important record for me. It was a limited edition at first, which I pressed up just to send to filmmakers. My secret hope was that people would actually want to listen to it. But, it seemed like those little lost snippets were very unaggressive and unattacking, which was so contrary to what was going on in the cinema, especially at that time. This was 1978, after all!"

For Simon Heyworth, *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks* (1983) was the most memorable recording. "A wonderful album with all that old country, high-lonesome stuff on there."

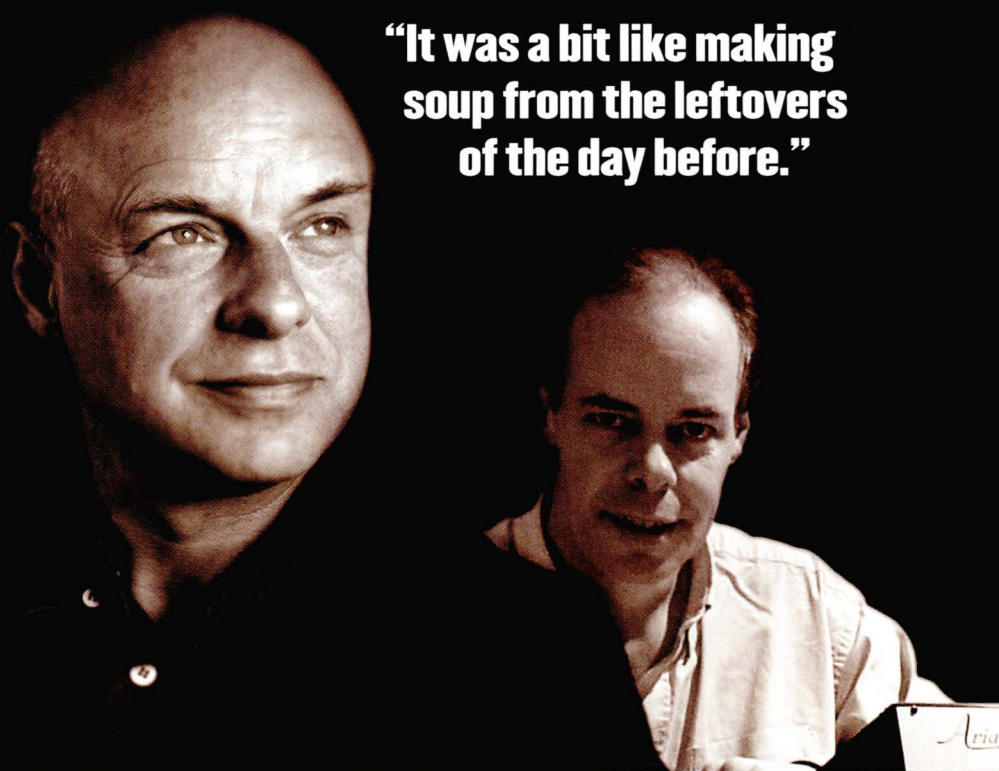
Basically cut from jamming sessions in Ontario with Daniel Lanois on pedal steel guitar and Eno's keyboardist brother Roger, *Apollo* was an album of experiment with tape loops, desk treatments and huge washes of sound created by an AMS harmoniser and Eno on the Yamaha CS80 polyphonic synth. Eno remembers it as a lot of processing. "So many re-processings. It was a bit like making soup from the leftovers of the day before, which in turn was made from leftovers. But, what impressed me most about country music was that it was very concerned with space, a mythical American

frontier kind of space. And so it was appropriate for a soundtrack for the Apollo space programme, with its pioneering connotations and the idea of the brave individual."

The third album, *Thursday Afternoon* (1985), marks the culmination of Eno's ambient music. Says Eno: "It was one of the purest expressions of what I thought ambient music could be. You see, what I liked about painting was that it persists and I wanted my music to aspire to this condition. So this music constantly changes, but never really goes anywhere. It was made by allowing several tape loops to constantly run out of synch and these new synchronisation patterns mean that the music never repeats itself." **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

"It was a bit like making soup from the leftovers of the day before."



Eno's classic ambient albums

1. *Music For Films* (1978)

Beautiful electro/acoustic miniatures. Bowie used bits of *Slow Water* on *Heroes*.



2. *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks* (1983)

Daniel Lanois and country ambience in Canada. Used in *Trainspotting*.



3. *Thursday Afternoon* (1985)

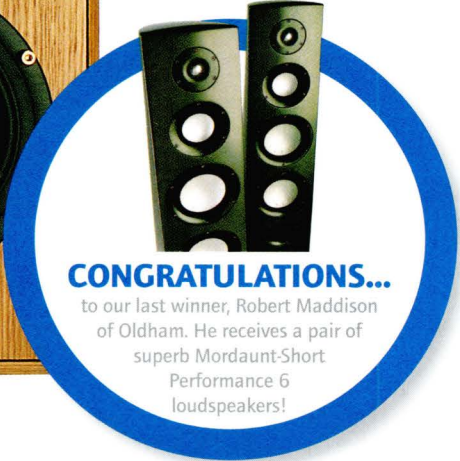
Using music made by Eno for Sony in 1984, this was one of the first CD-specific recordings.



4. *More Music For Films* (2005)

Using unreleased tracks, Eno has made a new 21 track album that will delight many.





WIN! A PAIR OF SUPERB RUARK SABRE III LOUDSPEAKERS WORTH £900!

Ruark's new-for-2005 Sabre III is impressive. So impressive, in fact, that we awarded it a Best Buy badge in *HFC* 268. The speaker uses SEAS drivers, specially customised to Ruark's specifications – a 27mm proprietary fabric tweeter and a 150mm bass/mid unit, featuring the Sabre's favoured paper cone. The compact enclosure is wrapped in a real wood veneer and the cabinet has been modernised to encompass the

sleek lines of the 1986 original, but with a contemporary acoustic design. We loved the speaker's open and detailed sound and were equally impressed with the bass considering the compact design. It's a lively performer that's capable of presenting music in a fresh and exciting way. For your chance to win a pair, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date (29 June).

QUESTION:

What is the Sabre III's compact enclosure wrapped in?

- A:** Real wood veneer
- B:** The centre spread from this month's edition of *Playboy*
- C:** The Turin Shroud

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 message **HFC COMP1** with the answer A, B, or C to **83070**. For example, if you think the answer is B: The centre spread from this month's edition of *Playboy* then text HFC COMP1 B to 83070

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ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson.



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

Lick My Decals Off Baby

Straight/Rhino 180g vinyl

Music: Released the year after the epic *Trout Mask Replica*, this single album has plenty in common with its popular predecessor. At root, this is blues music, stretched and twisted into contorted shapes. The 16 tracks on *Lick My Decals* rarely stretch beyond two minutes and in many ways outpunch the music that followed six or seven years after its 1970 release. The combination of guitar, bass, drums and vibes with van Vliet's voice is never less than interesting and often totally engaging, if you can cope with the rhythmic density and frankly opaque melody. If you like *Trout Mask*, you'll enjoy this for sure. ★★★★★

Sound: Rhino's 180g pressing makes a nice change from the usually worn 1970s pressings of this hard to come by album. The sound is a little band limited and warm, but you wouldn't want stuff this dense sounding much harder. ★★★ JK

THE WHO

Live At Leeds

Polydor/Universal 180g vinyl

Music: Another release from 1970, The Who's first and best live album features only six songs, but packs them with energy. *Live At Leeds* kicks off with the atypical *Young Man Blues* by Mose Allison, a tune which they deliver so well that you have to revise your idea of what this band is all about.

There is only one original track on this side, the stunning *Substitute*, the other tracks being *Summertime Blues* and *Shakin' All Over* – songs which the lads clearly loved. The second side is pure Who, with *My Generation* and *Magic Bus* considerably revised, especially when Townshend wigs out to tremendous effect. ★★★★★

Sound: Pressed in Germany, this heavyweight cut delivers the band's power and finesse with ease, but it doesn't include the extra tracks found on the CD – but, this being an analogue recording, needs an analogue format. ★★★★★ JK

These LPs are available from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 ● www.vivante.co.uk and Simply Vinyl: ☎ 020 8545 8580 ● www.simplyvinyl.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



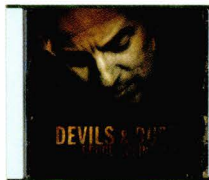
ANTONIO FORCIONE

Tears Of Joy

Naim CD

Music: Ten years ago, 'hi-fi CDs' were praised for delivering real music, well recorded. Five years ago, they were almost universally panned, for not being Robbie or Kylie... But though fashions come and go, Forcione remains one of Europe's guitar heroes; quick, powerful, positive, melodic and – most of important of all – he swings. Here, the African touches on *Sahara Rain*, the ethno-ambient feel on *Long Winter*, the Latin frills of *Spanish Breeze* and Alex Wilson's evocative piano are all expertly blended into an atmospheric and laid-back album. But, at 49 minutes, it's not long enough. ★★★★★

Sound: C'mon, guys what do you expect from Naim? It was never gonna be hissy mono was it? But Antonio – with a bit of help from Martin Levan – has done a great job. True hi-fi. ★★★★★ PS



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Devils And Dust

Columbia

Music: After 2002's *The Rising*, global apocalypse takes a backseat on *Devils And Dust*, to make way for more familiar everyman themes of faith, trust, dreams, hopes and fears. The exception is the title track, classic Springsteen blue collar wisdom from the perspective of a soldier in Iraq. For the rest, the songs are all character-based and strongly narrative, from the controversial *Reno* to the brilliant *Hitter*. There's simply nobody else around who writes about the myriad crises of everyday life with such warmth and humanity. ★★★★★

Sound: Stripped-down and rootsy, it's the third in the once-a-decade series of acoustic-based albums that began in the eighties with *Nebraska*, and comes a decade after the similarly-styled *Ghost Of Tom Joad*. ★★★★★ NW



SAINS-SAENS, BRAHMS ETC.

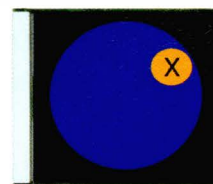
Various Pieces for Violin & Orchestra

Nicola Benedetti (violin), London Symphony Orchestra, Daniel Harding (conductor)

DGG 987 057-7

Music: Still a teenager, the Scottish-born Nicola Benedetti won the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2004, and for her DGG debut, she has chosen an eclectic mixture of mostly short works, though the comparatively uncommon Szymanowski concerto, with its hints of Debussy and Stravinsky, is a full half-hour piece of stature for orchestra and soloist alike. The other pieces round out the picture of a player of real virtuosity and maturity. ★★★★★

Sound: The recording is clear, but places the soloist too far forward in the mix for the reviewer's particular tastes. Nevertheless, this is a powerful and effective debut which is sure to sell by the bucket load. ★★★★★ AG



PETE NAMLOOK/ KLAUS SCHULZE

The Dark Side Of The Moog X

FAX Records

Music: This is the final part of a collaboration that began in 1993 in Schulze's studio in Moldau, in the Czech Republic. A veritable shrine to the Moog synthesizer, *Dark Side Of The Moog X* is a perfect meeting of 21st Century production sound and classic analogue synthesizers. These sonic landscapes begin in Ligeti territory circa *Lux Aeterna* and progress through the dunk and drizzle of acid house to highbrow chill out music. The disc ends with an original Moog solo, which is nothing like Schulze's usual work! ★★★★★

Sound: The merging of Apple computers with vintage synthesizers certainly tweaks the ear on this one. A disc full of sounds you've never heard before. ★★★★★ MP

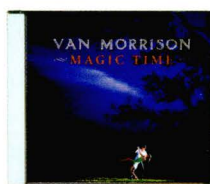
VAN MORRISON

Magic Time

Polydor

Music: Van Morrison makes music with such a deceptive ease that his effortlessness is sometimes mistaken by critics for laziness. *Magic Time* is a case in point. From the simple, laid-back swing of the opener *Stranded*, through the chugging R&B of *Evening Train* to the big-band jazz of *This Love Of Mine* and the simmering, late-night groove of *Gypsy In My Soul*, you might imagine he's doing it all by numbers. In fact, it's the sound of a consummate musician doing not only what comes naturally, but the only thing he really knows how to do... and he does it with a rare mastery that few will ever even aspire to. These days Morrison may not rock too much. But he sure knows how to roll. ★★★★★

Sound: Deceptive and brilliant simplicity rules with every parping horn, brushed drum, piano stroke and vocal inflection perfectly balanced in masterful proportion. ★★★★★ NW





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Few rock albums of the era better it."

SUPERTRAMP *Crime Of The Century* A&M Records

Music: Supertramp may have made their name (and their money) with 1979's *Breakfast In America*, but five years earlier they produced this, their finest album. Each song has enough musical drama to fill an entire album and the quality of composition is remarkable thanks to the skills of Richard Davies (vocals, keyboards, harmonica) and Roger Hodgson (vocals, guitars, piano). The hits included *Dreamer* and *Bloody Well Right*, but the tracks that have

best stood the test of time are *Rudy* and *School* with the title track and *Hide In Your Shell* close behind. If you've only ever heard *Take The Long Way Home* you will be pleasantly surprised. ★★★★★
Sound: The contrasts in dynamic range make it a modern sounding recording and few rock albums of the era better it. Recently remastered for CD, it sounds great on vinyl if you can find a mint copy. ★★★★★ JK



ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS *I Am A Bird Now*

Secretly Canadian

Music: You may have heard talk of the cross-dressing giant of uncertain gender with a unique vocal style, who has won praise from Lou Reed, Boy George and Rufus Wainwright (all of whom contribute guest spots here). But nothing can prepare you for the voice. He really does sound like a more showy Nina Simone, with hints of Marc Almond's faux operatic drama. The songs owe a lot to the Velvet Underground's quieter moments (he/she/it's performed *Candy Says* with Lou Reed), but these tales of bruised souls and defiantly razored hearts are all Antony's own. If you are going to buy one decidedly different album from a towering transvestite this year, make it this one. ★★★★★

Sound: Great echoing piano chords counterpointed by string stabs, with occasional saxophone and woodwind, all pushing that incredible voice ever higher, create a widescreen drama means that this will never be a background album, and nor should it ever be treated as such. ★★★★★ DO



DVD-AUDIO & SACD

BARTOK

**The Miraculous Mandarin (complete ballet),
Dance Suite, Hungarian Pictures**
Marin Alsop (conductor), Bournemouth
Symphony Orchestra

DVD-Audio (DVD-Audio, Dolby Digital and DTS audio tracks, all 5.1-channel)

Naxos 5.110088

Music: Bartok's final work for stage is a performed in its full ballet scoring and receives a first rate performance, full of vitality and commitment. The orchestra has the density and intensesness required to make Bartok work, with some atmospheric clarinet solos to introduce the so-called seduction scenes. *The Dance Suite* and the *Hungarian Pictures* are fillers, but they are never less than beautifully played. ★★★★★

Sound: The busy, intricate recording makes severe demands on the engineers, and the recording has a strong sense of immediacy and complexity, but as with previous Naxos DVD-Audio releases, this one is recorded at 44.1kHz (i.e. a 20kHz audio bandwidth) which may account for a loss of sparkle and air. ★★★ AG



MOTÖRHEAD

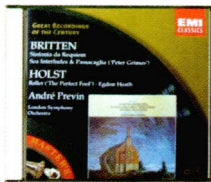
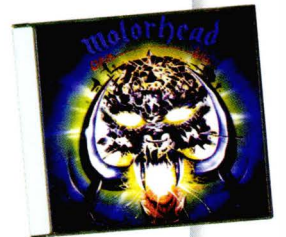
Overkill

DualDisc (one side CD stereo, the other multichannel DVD-Audio)

Silverline

Music: Their first self-titled album was a statement of intent, but it was Motörhead's 1979 second album that spawned their first hits and established the sound that would launch a thousand wannabes. One-time Rolling Stones producer Jimmy (Exile On Main Street) Miller helped shape the twin bass drums of Phil (thy animal) Taylor, 'Fast' Eddie Clarke's full-on guitar riffing and Lemmy's growling bass and voice into a rock storm that found favour with punks and metalheads alike. Could there have been a Metallica – or even a Nirvana – if Motörhead hadn't laid down the blueprint for fast, no-frills rock? A seminal band still making friends and influencing people in 2005. ★★★★★

Sound: Equal parts metal, punk and good old-fashioned rock n roll, the album's energy is arguably dissipated slightly by the transfer to 5.1, but cascading drum intros that ricochet around the room and string-shredding guitar solos bursting from unexpected points are their own reward. ★★★★★ DO



BRITTEN/ HOLST

Britten: *Sinfonia da Requiem* etc.
Holst: *Ballet The Perfect Fool* etc.
LSO, Andre Previn (conductor)

EMI Classics 7243 5 62615 2 5

Music: This is a reissue of one of the finest EMI recordings of the 1970s. Previn was on top form, and the LSO responded with warmth and passion in these works, which have rarely received better readings. *The Sea Interludes* in particular has long been an audiophile favourite; it was used incessantly by Farad Azima as a test piece when developing speakers for Mission. The *Sinfonia da Requiem* is also nothing short of electric, too. ★★★★★

Sound: Some of the works were recorded in the Kingsway Hall, and others at Abbey Road Studio, but despite their antiquity, the engineering still shines through as it has for many years on vinyl. ★★★★★ AG



POLAR BEAR

Held On The Tips Of Fingers

Babel Label

Music: Drummer Sebastian Rochford's Polar Bear collective is a British jazz group, mixing acoustic and electronic instruments that tips its collective hat to the past, but has plenty of interest in the future. In a similar vein to the Cinematic Orchestra, but with a freer approach to their sound, it's jazz with a punk heart and a turntablist's ear for odd juxtapositions, which balances dreamlike sax lines with clattering drum 'n' bass percussion, rip-roaring improv and melodic reveries. ★★★★★

Sound: There's a closed-in feeling to the production, which seems more in keeping with indie rock than the lush spaciousness more commonly found in modern jazz settings. In this context though, that only adds to the edginess of the music. ★★★ DO

BOB DYLAN

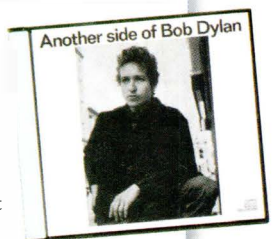
Another Side Of Bob Dylan

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Columbia

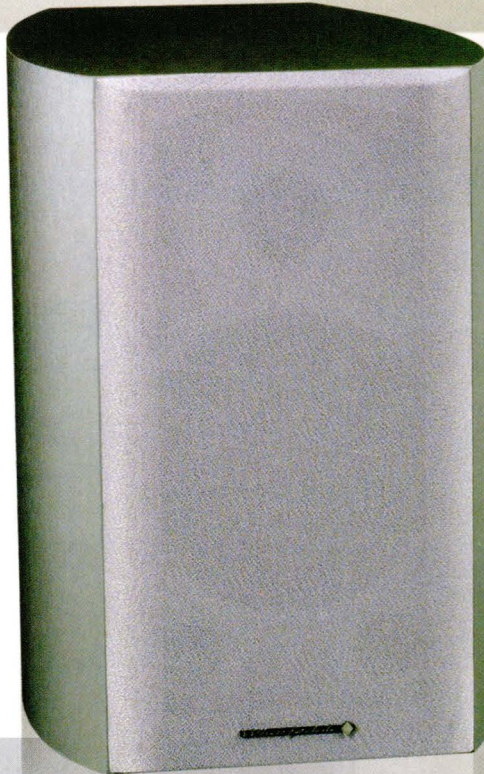
Music: Released in 1964 shortly after the hardcore folk album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, this eleven-track set finds His Bobness in more melodic and adventurous form. While earnest, poetic songs are indeed evidence, as expected, there are other great tunes here where he's just having fun – the opener *All I Really Want To Do* is a great example of a young Bob enjoying himself. The album contains numerous songs that have become standards of the Dylan oeuvre, *Chimes Of Freedom*, *It Ain't Me Babe* and *I Don't Believe You* among them. If you can cope with his sometimes raucous and less than melodious singing, this is one of the most engaging and enjoyable albums in Dylan's extensive back catalogue. ★★★★★

Sound: While this recording shows its age in the raw, seemingly basic production, it is also revealing and open in this SACD remastering, which lets you hear a good deal of what went down on that original and classic five-hour session. ★★ JK



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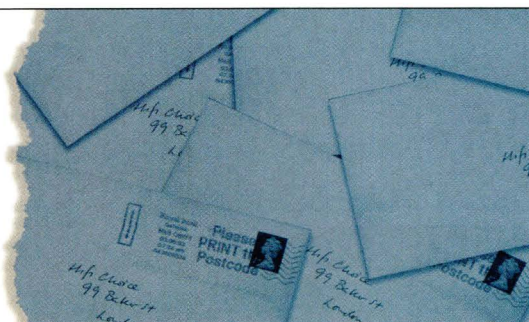
Wharfedale

ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

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



★ LETTER OF THE MONTH

FEELING USED?

The price of used CDs is plummeting. I can only attribute this to the low price of many new CDs online, for example CD-Wow! and Play.com sell new albums for around eight pounds delivered. So why should second-hand discs fetch a premium? It'll be a shame to see record fair and second-hand music shops decline further, but if the trend continues, I can see only vinyl keeping these rare breeds afloat. There's never been a better time to buy used CDs, so keep your eyes open online and fill a few gaps in your collections.

Steve Kemp via email

HFC CD-Wow! doesn't have a wide selection of titles, but it's very cheap. However, if you don't mind buying blind and giving discs a quick polish, buying used online can be a great way to broaden your musical horizons.



WIN KIMBER TIMBRE INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of 0.5m-long Kimber Timbre interconnects worth £72, featuring a trio of hyper-pure copper conductors and Teflon insulation. So get writing! (250 words max please...)



Above: Pioneer's DV-565 'universal' DVD player

VOTE STEREO

With all the ballyhoo about various combinations of channels, encoding systems, availability of media and all the other paraphernalia needed in order to make sense of multichannel and home cinema, are we not in danger of forgetting just how good stereo can be? We fell into the technology marketing trap before and have consequently had to 'rediscover' analogue – albeit at an inflated price. Let us not forget that Alan Blumlein's beautifully elegant conception of stereo can provide all the space, depth and location information needed to reproduce music convincingly in the home. When properly recorded, stereo can still be magical. I've nothing against multichannel *per se*, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water just yet.

Chip via email

HFC Stereo is magical, there's no doubt about it Chip. But remember Blumlein originally specified three-speaker sound, not two. A good multichannel audio set-up can also impress when done well and offer superb entertainment if you've the inclination, room and funds to pursue 5.1 channels. That said, we've witnessed an analogue resurgence over the last five years or so, and with a new crop of two-channel kit now emerging from all corners of the world, including Japan, it looks like stereo's here to stay – just like we've always said!

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

With the multiplicity of formats now available, is there such a thing as a 'universal' player? I have established two audio systems – one is a traditional stereo system, and the other a combined audio/video set-up in a separate room. Why? Because they do different things well, and the mood in which I wish to listen to multichannel is different to the mood in which I listen to stereo.

However, in recent months I have acquired three DVD-Audio discs, including two of the latest REM releases that will not produce a sound in my Pioneer DV-565 player, although they appear to be playing according to the display. Have other people experienced an incompatibility between the latest DVD-Audio releases and players such as the DV-565?

Professor Alan Gillies via email

"I have two systems – one is a traditional stereo system, the other a combined audio/video set-up."

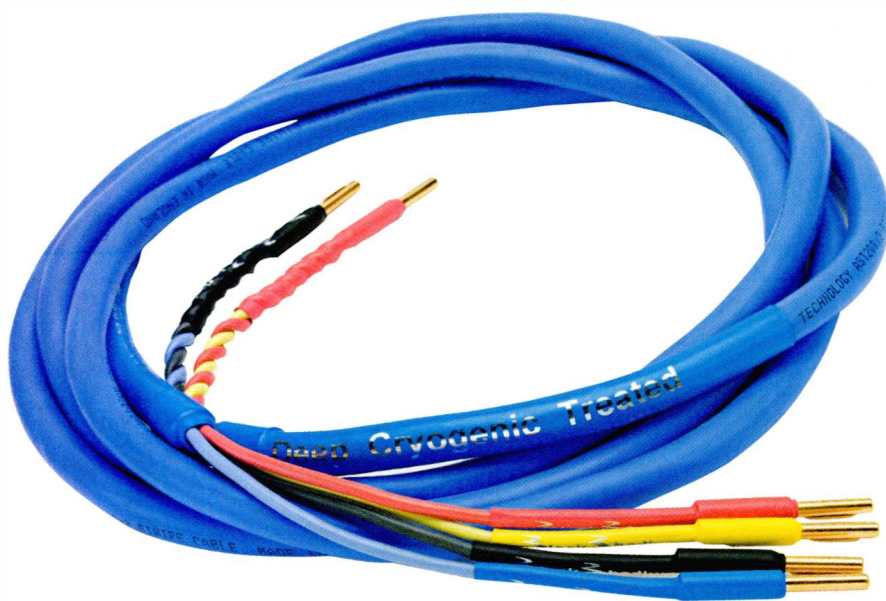
HFC We've not yet heard of any problems with Pioneer's long-serving DV-565, which also forms the basis of the £3,000 Townshend Audio TA-565 universal disc player – an *HFC* Editor's Choice award winner. Sadly, this leads us to believe that your Pioneer player is beginning to go 'on the blink'. You should get it checked out, potentially before it starts to reject more and more discs. You raise a valid point about universal players, however, as the challenge to provide a truly play-all machine is becoming increasingly complicated.

CHALLENGE TO A DUAL

I read Stuart M Robinson's DualDisc Dispatches column (*HFC* 267) with interest. I received my first DualDisc today – Avril Lavigne's *Under My Skin*, and played the DVD side in my Meridian G98 DVD-Audio transport. The first track sounded okay, but nowhere near the quality of the Eagles' *Hotel California* DVD-Audio disc. When I investigated further on the G98, I saw a sample rate of just 48kHz! The album case gives no mention of sample data but simply, "DVD side: entire album in enhanced stereo".

I think it is unfair to describe 48kHz as enhanced audio – the definition should be 24-bit/96kHz as a minimum. I then tried the CD side in my Arcam CD player and noticed a horrible whirring/slipping noise that led to constant skipping. This made me think twice about playing the DualDisc again for fear of damage. If Mr Robinson's worst fears are confirmed and DualDisc is seen as the replacement for DVD-Audio and SACD, it looks like audiophiles could be left with no high-resolution audio disc format whatsoever. Back to vinyl (again)?

Mark Tebbutt via email



Above: Black Rhodium's cryogenically treated cable

❑ **HFC** It's early days for the format and your letter is the first piece of DualDisc feedback we have received at **HFC**. Sorry to learn about your experience, we hope for improved compatibility and a DVD layer that offers a real improvement over the CD side. We look forward to hearing how DualDisc is received by audiophiles over the coming months, so please keep your reports coming in.

STEREO FILE

If you play a sound through two speakers, it will appear to be coming from in between them, right? That's really not a sure thing – the reason has to do with the head's transfer function – the ear is designed to identify the source of individual sounds. To avoid that, you have to trick it. In the 1980s, Bob Carver produced a device to do just that; the Sonic Hologram I think he called it. It placed in each channel's sound path a reversed, delayed and attenuated version of the other channel that attempted to cancel the sound leaking around the head and it worked.

Many speakers today achieve the same 'disappearing act', like my new MonoPulse speakers, simply by physical design. It is certainly an art, I think phase-correct crossovers and controlled dispersion help and I am pretty sure each successful designer keeps it to himself. Clever stuff indeed.

Ali Elam New York, USA

HFC The phase-tangling concept is not new, in fact it predates even Bob Carver's clever Sonic Hologram system. Many feel the best way of cheating head-related transfer functions is to use a Hafler box, dating back to the late 1960s. This feeds a phase-inverted, delayed and attenuated sound into two small rear speakers. Curiously, this doesn't necessarily just make for surround sound as you'd expect, but also tightens, widens and locks the stereo image in the front.

"It is all very well using fancy cryogenically treated copper, but these cables are often soldered with lead."

WIRED AND BEWILDERED

I am surprised at the continued reliance at any level on third-party wires and interconnects. Surely the ideal situation is to have source, amplifier, speakers and cables all made by the same company? In this way all the inconsistencies that are the subject of constant comment, approval or criticism could be ironed out and the customer would have a 'sound' base (pun intended) to start with. Does a £1,000 set of cables actually sound better than a £50 set? Or just different? It is all very well using fancy cryogenically treated copper, but from what I have seen, these cables are often clamped or soldered with lead or silver solder onto a basic plug. So, the effect of using expensive copper flex or wire is nullified by a penny blob of solder to a greater or lesser degree.

Richard Bond via email

HFC We've tested many one-make systems and despite many successes, it's often the cherry-picked components from a pedigree pool of brands that give the best overall performance. The same applies throughout commerce; many people wear Calvin Klein boxer shorts under their Armani jeans, for example. Just because a company makes a great source component, it doesn't mean its amplifiers are the best on the market and that's where our rigorous testing regime becomes invaluable. We've also found a noticeable difference when testing various cables in a range of systems and will continue to separate the wheat from the chaff.

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@ ONLINE FORUM

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

Last night my wife decided to dig out some of her parents old 45s. I was forced to listen to *My Old Man's A Dustman* and *My Boy Lollipop* etc. My wife proceeded to comment on how good it sounded and even got some CDs out to make comparisons. This is not why I bought an LP12, what do I do...? **PaulH**

...You're going to have to find a hobby for her, or get her a job that takes her out at nights. **DaveWhit2**

Is it a crime to make a profit in audio? I feel we expect everything to be supplied at cost. I don't want to pay obscene prices, but I personally see no problem with a small profit in any market so why is the audio industry different...? **Adam**

...I think it is perfectly honest to make a profit. Without it there would be no development or after sales service. A good product is not for the moment and is worth paying for. **Artikulat**

Can you still buy a new Rega P25 and if so where? Has anyone compared the P25 and new P5? I get the impression that the P25 is the better deck... **BarryK**

...Word from my local dealer is that P5 is quite different from the P25, and many people prefer the now superseded P25. **Woody**

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BLADELIUS FREJA MULTIFORMAT AUDIO DISC PLAYER | BLADELIUS THOR INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
KHARMA CERAMIQUE 3.1 LOUDSPEAKERS | £11,150

Stairway to heaven

It's not often that eleven grand is the first step in hi-fi system building, but that's what you get with this heavenly Swedish/Dutch combo

It isn't often we have to make do with 'entry level' here at *Beautiful Systems*. As you may have noticed, that's not the general idea; this is all about extraordinary, ear-bending experiences and that usually means trawling through the stratosphere of most companies' product ranges. But, just occasionally, out of the blue, we're jolted by a blinding flash as our own elevated sensibilities snag the underbelly of something altogether more highly-charged and exotic. A place where what we regard as 'high end' is merely the first step on the stairway to hi-fi heaven. There can be no superimposition of philosophies when this happens, just a small degree of overlap and a substantial bit of getting used to such lofty heights and the rarified air.

And it's here, in this narrow shaft of dazzling light, that we find the *Ceramique 3.1*, a slim and sensationally elegant two-way floorstander that resides at the very bottom of Dutch hi-fi manufacturer *Kharma's* loudspeaker range. It's around this that we've planted this month's collection of covetable components. Brief perspective check – at the very top of *Kharma's* range is the *Grand Exquisite Reference 1A*. It costs a cool £53,000, weighs a healthy 400kg and, unless you sleep in the *Royal Albert Hall*, it won't fit in your bedroom.

So, although the *Ceramique 3.1's* £5,750 might seem reassuringly 'steep' for our purposes, by *Kharma's* admittedly loony standards, it's actually something of a giveaway. The great thing about this, of course, is trickle down. *Kharma's* founder and chief designer *Charles van Oosterum* knows that while he can indulge millionaire audiophiles' wildest fantasies with a cost-no-object brief,

commercial success depends on how well he can incorporate his unfettered ideas into a product more people can afford. The 3.1 is that product.

ONE SMALL STEP FOR SPEAKERS...

Mounted solidly on lunar landing module-style feet, the backward leaning, smooth-cornered cabinets are assembled in Holland, shipped to Italy for finishing (if you think the piano black lacquer looks good, you should see the *Lapis Lazuli Blue*...) before returning to Holland for finishing. Described by one of the world's foremost speaker designers to create the best two-way system available today", the 3.1's finish has instant, take-me-home desirability. CNC machined out of High Density Fiberboard, the 3.1's cabinets sport internal surfaces coated with a expensive anti-vibration polymer. And so, come to that, are the cryogenically-treated internal wiring and crossover coils.

The driver complement comprises a 180mm concave ceramic bass/mid driver sourced from *Thiel* and a 38mm cloth dome tweeter, both of which receive further fettling and tweaking at the *Kharma* factory. The distinctive splayed-feet (SDSS) stands give the slim but heavy cabinets terrific stability and are made from aircraft-quality aluminium; the spikes at each corner are heavy-duty, too. Round the back, the top-of-the-line *WBT OFC* binding posts positively gleam and, before sign off, the whole assembly is checked for susceptibility to resonances. If it's anything more than zero, the ink stays in the pen. Claimed frequency response is 35Hz to 25kHz, though the top end skyrockets to 100kHz if you go for the

"Although £5,750 might seem reassuringly 'steep' for our purposes, by *Kharma's* loony standards, it's something of a giveaway."



Bladelius Freja
CD/SACD/
DVD-Audio
player

£2,750

Don't be fooled by the odd name or plain appearance. This multiformat stereo audio player performs brilliantly with all disc types.



Bladelius Thor
integrated amp

£2,650

The god of thunder sums up one side of this amp – it has power to burn. But it's also fast, very sweet-natured and highly transparent. Something of a killer combination.



Kharma
Ceramique 3.1
loudspeaker

£5,750 per pair

The 'entry-level' baby of the *Ceramique* range combines stunning aesthetics with an equally stunning sonic performance. Hugely desirable.



▶ extremely expensive (but unilaterally considered worth the extra money) diamond tweeter upgrade. Pure silver internal and crossover wiring, hewn from the Exquisite line, is also available. Nominal impedance is eight ohms and sensitivity is 89dB – nothing too demanding for any amp worth its salt.

ADVANTAGE - BLADELIUS

Luckily, *Beautiful Systems'* old friend John Jefferies (of Metropolis Music and Sounds of Music fame), as well as distributing Kharma in the UK, makes a point of stocking many of the world's tastier amps. He suggested we entrust the not so weighty but nevertheless exacting task of driving the Ceramiques with the Bladelius Thor. Bladelius is the new name for the Swedish hi-fi brand formerly known in the UK as Advantage – a kind of signature range from the same Mr Bladelius who operates as technical guru for Primare. Our review kit came with Advantage branded fascias still in place (see pictures), but these will soon be altered. Aside from the name change, however, the products will remain identical.

The Thor (previously the Advantage S101) is a highly impressive exemplar of bomb-proof engineering and carries the promise of delivering lots of current to control the speakers during musical peaks, on top of its already generous 150 watts per channel into eight ohms.

Apart from the rather brutal simplicity of its design, The Thor attempts to justify the power-laden inference of its name with a huge 1800 VA custom designed toroidal transformer and 16 high-power, beta-matched MOSFET output devices. Design goals included virtually unconditional load tolerance and an extremely low noise floor. The DC-coupled design is fully balanced throughout the entire signal path with separate amplification circuits for positive and negative phase signals. There are seven analogue inputs – two balanced (XLR) and five single-ended (RCA) – plus a pair of preamp outputs. The volume control is of the shunt to ground type.

Input sensitivity can be adjusted for each input while the Home Theatre input allows the Thor to be incorporated into a multichannel set-up with the minimum of hassle, a sentiment that applies equally to the general operation of its starkly simple front panel with its neat dot matrix display and the well designed, feel-good aluminium remote.

The same goes for the matching Bladelius Freja disc player that completes the combo. This is a new departure for Advantage/Bladelius, as prior players have been primarily CD based. The design philosophy follows through from the amp, though, with a large toroidal transformer at its heart and the clean, minimalist external symmetry mirroring

the fully balanced circuit design front to back. Strictly speaking, it isn't a 'universal' player as it lacks DVD-Video playback, but then this is an überaudiophile design – CD, SACD and DVD-Audio are all delivered resolutely in glorious stereo.

It should be glorious, too. As well as upsampling to 192kHz and the extensive measures taken to eliminate jitter, the Burr-Brown DAC is said to give an extremely high signal-to-noise ratio. The well-stocked back panel offers one balanced and two unbalanced outputs and both RCA and optical digital outputs. The perfect foil for the Thor.

FALL IN LOVE - ALL OVER AGAIN

A few questions. Has music played on your system ever sounded mundane? Have you found your attention drifting, the previously metronomic tapping of your foot slowing to a nervy twitch? Have you sometimes kicked the hi-fi into life, believing it's what you should do, only to wonder why you bothered?

If you answered 'yes' to any or all of the above, you need this system badly. Not only is it extremely good hi-fi, it will make you fall in love with the very idea of hi-fi all over again. Its clarity and grip, its powers of resolution, analysis and organisation, the fundamentally truthful and revealing presentation that lifts the listening experience from pleasant to life enhancing. Rarer still is this combo's





“Smoother and more glamorous sounding hardware has graced these pages, some of it benignly manipulative. But few systems have sounded as clean, uncolored, fast and dynamic.”

unerring ability to imbue the everyday business of playing a silver disc (even a humble CD) with a real sense of occasion. This thing holds the listener's interest like a velvet-lined vice.

True, smoother and more glamorous sounding hardware has graced the pages of *Beautiful Systems*, some of it benignly manipulative. But very few systems have sounded as clean, uncolored, fast and dynamic. And none has imaged more convincingly. Those heavily radiussed corners don't just look good – their diffraction banishing properties free the sound from the speakers and set out the musical event in three dimensions in front, behind and beyond the sides of the speakers. Hearing is believing, the proof of the pudding is in the eating... the clichés fit.

Take a jazz set from Eighties funketeers Steps Ahead. It sounds terrific; dynamic and beautifully integrated, with an unforced sense of pace, yet no undue emphasis given to any part of the audio band. Sax has great attack and presence, the upper octaves are superbly detailed and transparent. Shifting genre to the

blues and John Hammond, the system again impresses for its immediacy, attack and sheer balls. Mouth organ (much underrated) has breathtaking presence and tangibility, guitar a beautifully warm and natural timbre. There's great depth and subtlety, too, and a neck-tingling sense of musicianship. Exactly what you'd expect from this recording, but without the seemingly inevitable gift-wrapping and softened transients that often come with high-end listening.

Next up is the (perhaps inevitable) *Everything Must Go* from Steely Dan on DVD-A and, for something that's often accused of having dry, sterile production, it's reproduced with startling life and authority. On the title track, the fluent, tuneful bass, effortless volume, well judged midrange presence and sparkling intelligibility are particularly satisfying. Even the treble has an alluring sheen.

Fact is, the tweeter is a honey, easily resolving the usually conflicting interests of crisp definition and tonal smoothness. The results are classy and controlled, even with brightly recorded massed voices. A spin with female gospel choir

demonstrated how well the Ceramiques keeps things separated but nicely rounded with no artificial harshness.

No lack of bass weight or extension, either. In addition to being taut, articulate and rhythmically coherent, the lower registers combine low distortion and high resolution with amazing drive. Goldfrapp's *Tiptoe* has never sounded more propulsive and tactile.

And so the pattern for this system was established. It succeeds on many levels, both as pristine hi-fi and a musical communicator of the highest order. Fast, rhythmic and musically involving, it can also resolve spatial information like little else we've experienced in *Beautiful Systems*. It goes loud and plays big but is just as at home with Oscar Peterson and friends in a small, smokey club. Complex tunes are delivered without fluster or muddle, simple ones with pace and conviction. Its all-round prowess is quite exceptional. Most importantly, it provides unhindered access to the emotional power of music. In the end, that's the thing that matters most of all. **HFC**

David Vivian



The colouration's in the finish



Not in the music



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.

EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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- 62 Audiovector K1 Super
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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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

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%	PRO Well built and fully featured, with a snappy, open and dynamic sound.
FEATURES >> 85%	CON Externally it's a £300 Marantz – no bad thing in itself, but it's better than it looks!
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 85%	
CONCLUSION This is a really entertaining and useful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature list strong – it's not the most subtle of hi-fi players but if you're looking for a player to improve your sound given a budget.	
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...

The right chord

Who says high-quality hi-fi has to look as ugly as a sack of hammers?

PRODUCT Chord Electronics Prima and Mezzo 140

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE (Prima) £2,850, (Mezzo 140) £3,250

KEY FEATURES (Prima) Size (WxHxD): 33x6.5x15cm

• Weight: 7kg • Four single-ended inputs • One balanced input • Balanced only output • UHF Switch mode power supply • (Mezzo 140) Size (WxHxD): 33x6.5x28cm • Weight: 12kg • Balanced and single-ended inputs • UHF Switch Mode Power Supplies • 120W RMS output into eight ohms

CONTACT ☎ 01622 721444

🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

There was a time when stylish, finely honed design was regarded with suspicion by purist audiophiles. With 'real' audiophile products, all the costs went on sound quality. So, it had to look ugly and rough to be taken seriously. Thankfully, things have moved on. We now – rightly – expect good sound quality to be matched by attractive styling and flawless build quality. Certainly, anyone encountering products from Chord Electronics for the first time could not fail to be impressed on these two counts.

Chord's Prima line-level preamp and new Mezzo 140 power amp – from the brand's Choral series – represent the face of modern hi-fi at its best. With casework machined from solid billets of aluminium, and superb finish, the immediate impression is one of understated class and solidity. Many cheaper amplifiers look equally luxurious – at a distance. But lift one up, and the lack of weight points to the use of thin aluminium skins to create a façade. Not so with Chord products; what you see is what you get.



Controls have been kept to a minimum, ensuring clean, uncluttered lines. As with many modern amplifiers, there are no tone controls or filters. Both mains on/off switches are situated at the rear, leaving only volume, left-right stereo balance, and input selection, accessible from the preamp. Each of the preamp's five line inputs (one balanced and four unbalanced) is individually adjustable for gain. An illuminated display indicates input selected and volume level.

While the Mezzo power amp offers a choice of balanced or unbalanced inputs, the Prima has balanced outputs only. This means you need a proper balanced interconnect cable terminated in XLR plugs.

Despite its compact dimensions, the Mezzo 140 is extremely powerful, delivering 120 watts RMS into eight ohms. Into four ohms, power output increases to 200 watts. For those wanting more, it's possible to buy a second

Mezzo 140 and use the amps in 'bridged' mode. This increases output power to 220 watts and improves sound quality. During use at average volume levels, the Mezzo 140 runs quite cool.

Should the Mezzo 140 really be pushed hard, there's a built-in cooling fan to lower the temperature. This runs at maximum for a few seconds when the power amp is first switched on, and is fairly audible. However, it runs at a whisper during actual use. Close to the amplifier, a faint barely-audible fan-whirr can just be detected. But you have to put your ear right up to the casework to hear anything – otherwise the amp is virtually silent. The maximum setting is there as a safety device, to protect the amplifier from abuse even though it is essentially bomb-proof.

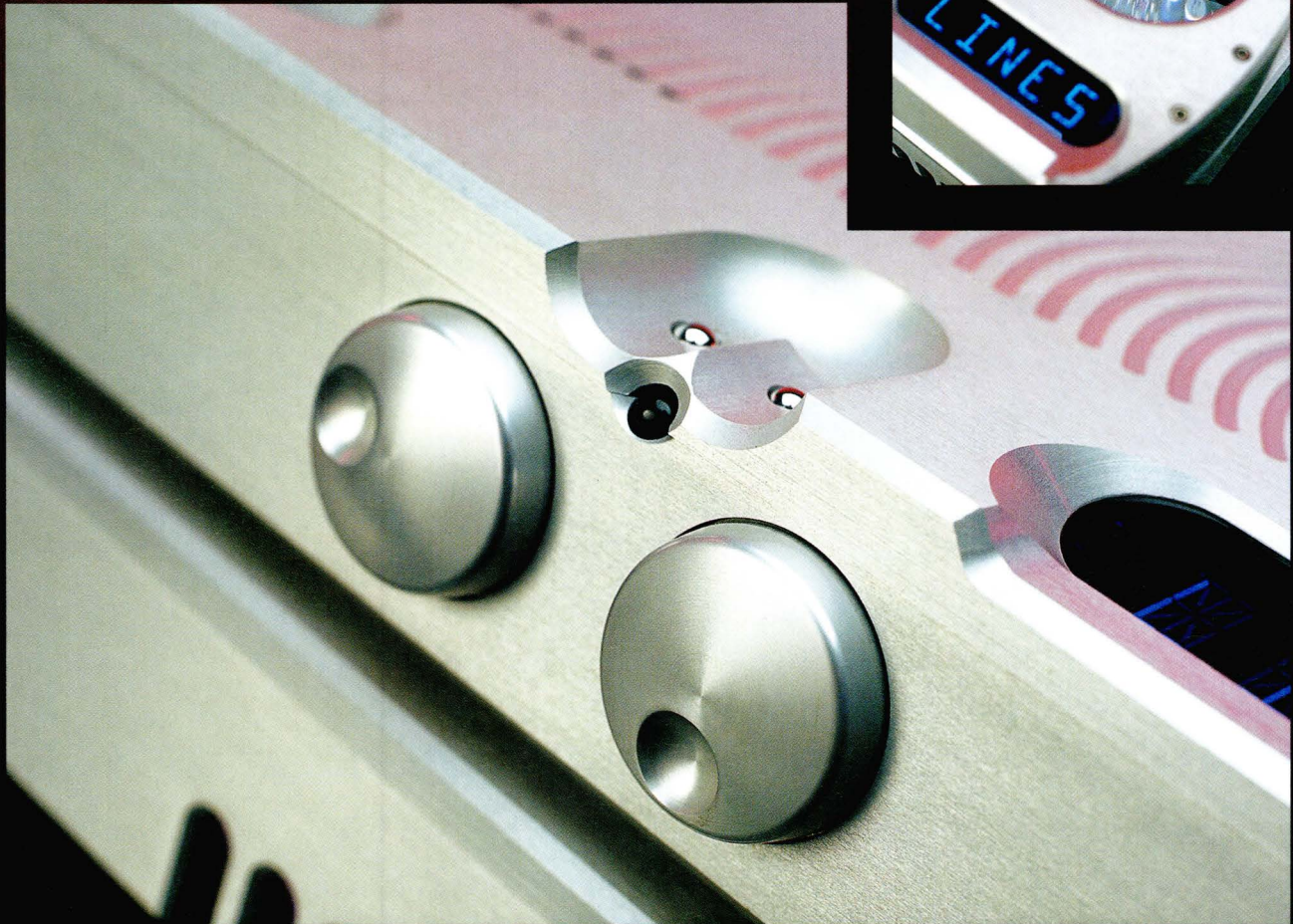
Part of Chord's design signature is that each of their components is lit from within – a nice touch that gives each product a distinctive look. The Mezzo 140 has an attractive

magenta glow that emanates from the heat sinks. It looks gorgeous, although to many, it clashes with the saturated turquoise blue of the Prima's display and its deep royal blue internal illumination. Part of the Prima's internal circuit board is visible through a porthole, creating an eye-catching effect.

For those wanting to set volume levels precisely and consistently, the Prima's display gives a numerical readout from 0 to 95. There are six gain settings on each input, allowing you to tailor the preamp for differences in the output voltage of your source components. This avoids having one source louder than the others when played at the same volume. We found Chord's default gain setting to be fine, and left it at that.

None of the input or output sockets are labelled, nor is there any hint as to which button or knob does what. This is definitely a product where you need the instruction ▶

“With casework machined from solid billets of aluminium, and superb finish, the impression is one of understated class.”



Q & A

We spoke to designer and Chord Electronics founder John Franks about the sophisticated circuitry that nestles within Chord's stylish casework



HFC: Why do you use high-frequency power supplies in all Chord products?

JF: These supplies greatly improve efficiency, making possible a small but very powerful amplifier. For example, the power amp has four high-frequency power supplies running at about 200kHz. Another bonus is almost complete insensitivity to variations in mains voltage – basically, the amp will work with anything from about 30V up to 270V! This is especially useful in Japan, where the mains voltage can drop as low as 70V in some areas at certain times of the day.

HFC: Doesn't this small size of the Mezzo 140 limit power delivery, especially under duress?

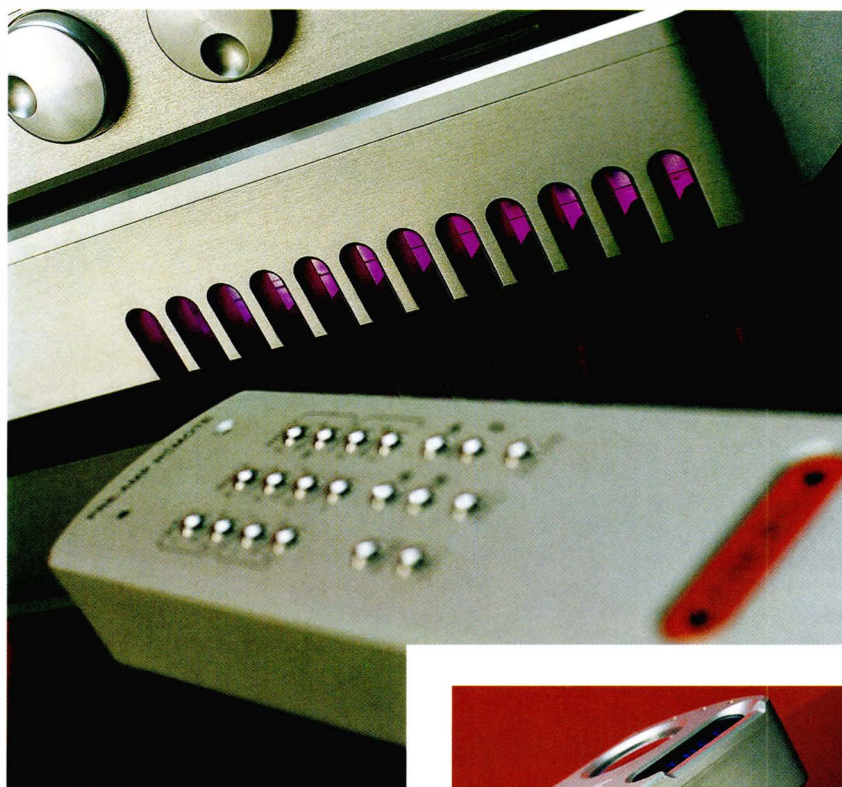
JF: There's a vast energy store within the power amp, quite out of proportion to its relatively modest size. And this is why we've been able to achieve such incredibly high power output in a fairly small chassis. A built-in fan is provided to cool the amplifier down, but this normally runs at a whisper setting – even with your ear against the case you can barely hear it.

The way the Mezzo 140 has been designed, the power supplies will immediately detect any abnormal calls for power, and take the necessary steps to protect the output stage. But should the temperature rise excessively, the fan will switch to higher speed to cool things down.

The amplifiers are DC coupled and, of course, unconditionally stable. The bridging arrangement occurs automatically when the two output phase switches on the back of the Mezzo 140 are set in opposition to one-another.

HFC: What problems did you face when designing the Prima preamplifier?

JF: The main technical problem with the Prima preamplifier was the avoidance of signal breakthrough – or crosstalk. You can take things like the exceptional linearity of the circuitry, its low distortion and remarkable neutrality, almost for granted – in many ways, that was the 'easy' bit to get right! The 'hard' bit was maintaining a high degree of separation between inputs and the two stereo channels.

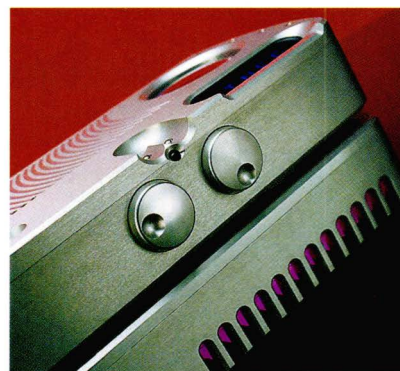


sheet, at least at first. We found this out the hard way. Not realising there was only a balanced preamp output, we connected an unbalanced phono-to-phono cable, and couldn't get a squeak out of the thing!

Of course, the absence of labelling keeps everything looking clean and uncluttered, but it can make installation tricky – particularly when you have a combination of balanced and single-ended sources, which has the potential to amplify (no pun intended) the confusion. Chord's connection diagrams help. But, with the items facing you in situ, you've got to remember that everything's reversed and upside-down – a bit like reading a map when you're heading south...

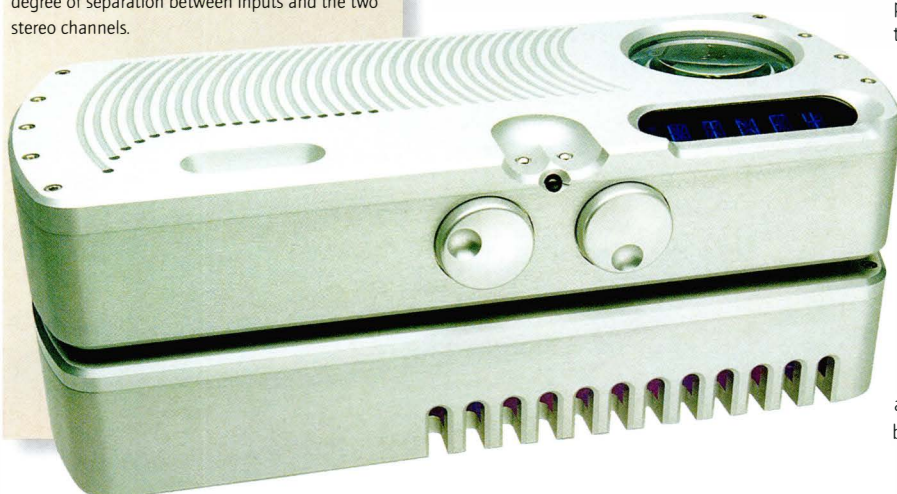
SOUND QUALITY

To partner the Prima/Mezzo 140, we used Chord's outstanding Blu CD transport and DAC 64 as main source component. So – an all



Chord system, no less! Initial subjective reactions to a new piece of hi-fi depend very heavily on what has been used immediately before. In this case, we came to the Chord amps from a very pleasurable sojourn with the Consonance Cyber 222 preamp and 800 monoblock power amps. These tube designs produce a sumptuously full and rich sound, luxuriously weighty and warm. If the Cyber combination was lushness personified, the Chord sounded significantly leaner and cooler, and gave a crisp, lucid presentation that was precise and detailed. The initial reactions to the Chord were of the differences; not intrinsically better or worse than what went before, just very, very different.

The Chord combo gives exceptional control – the way it makes music, every note appears to be precisely shaped and weighted. The tonal balance is cool but open, giving the music a taut and honed quality. Yet one shouldn't infer from this that the sound is dry and sterile. Agreed, by tube standards, the presentation isn't especially rich or voluminous. But instead, these Chord amps maximise the refinement and clean nature of whatever performance is being amplified.



Clarity is excellent, and definition – even in complex ‘busy’ music – never falters. It’s as though the amp has a vice-like grip on the speakers – able to control even the slightest nuance and the most delicate of fine detail – yet paradoxically the overall effect remains surprisingly fluid and relaxed. The musical presentation has an excitingly brisk, no-nonsense feel, without seeming over-damped or excessively regimented.

The overall effect is like changing seats in a concert hall. With the Prima/Mezzo 140, you’re sat close-up in the first few rows – many other systems move you further back. There’s no ‘right’ place, though; it all depends on what you like. Certainly, if you like your music to sound tactile and exciting, the Chord delivers. Its performance is direct and honest, crisp and sharply defined, in a nothing to hide kind of way. Yet the sheer cleanness and purity avoids thinness; the sound is bright and airy, rather than brash and edgy.

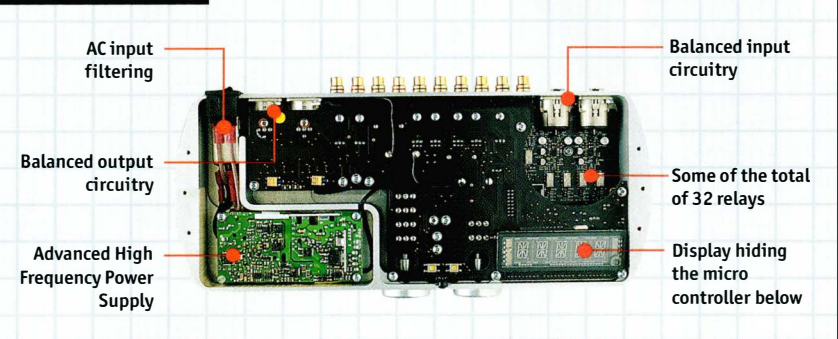
Chord’s Prima/Mezzo 140 combination is not what could be classed as a ‘forgiving’ amplifier. It sounds lucid and truthful, rather than mellow or euphonic. Yet the fact that it’s so exceptionally clean and neutral means that faults are much less exaggerated than one might predict. Playing Herbert von Karajan’s DG recordings of the last three Tchaikovsky symphonies from the 1960s, it was interesting to hear the way the Chord was able to reveal detail and dynamics without emphasising tape noise or tonal hardness/thinness.

By audiophile standards, DG’s sonics are good, but hardly outstanding – even by the standards of the time. We were both surprised and impressed to hear these vintage recordings sounding so clear and detailed – a tribute to the amps, but also the outstanding lucidity and separation of the Chord Blu CD transport and DAC 64 DAC. Bass quality was taut and very controlled – just a shade dry and lean, but very tight and defined. It’s pure muscle; not an ounce of excess flesh anywhere.

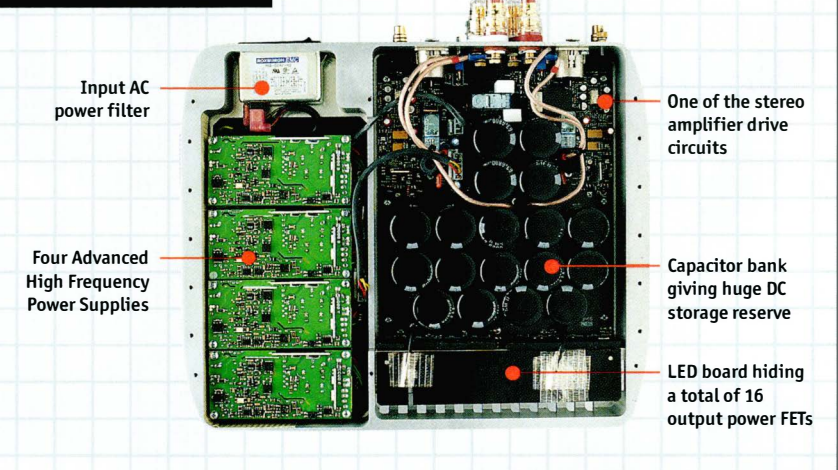
Power output is considerable – both on paper, and subjectively. Put simply, this is an amplifier that doesn’t flinch when you turn it up. As noted earlier, power output virtually doubles to 200 watts at four ohms. But if this isn’t enough, and your pockets are deep, you could add a second Mezzo 140 and use each amp bridged. This increases the output to 220 watts at eight ohms, but – more importantly – improves sound quality. So, it’s not just louder, it’s better. Played at normal domestic volumes, the amplifier creates a big, powerful soundstage.

Accuracy and neutrality are the Chord’s key qualities. It’s a very truthful amplifier combo; it gives you the music straight. There’s no added euphonic warmth, no excessive romantic richness or no false cloying sweetness. Of course, these qualities may well be evident. But – and this is the important bit – it won’t be the amplifier creating them. It’ll be there in the original recording.

Detail – Prima



Detail – Mezzo 140



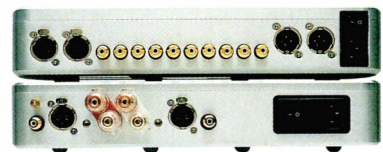
“Accuracy and neutrality are the Chord’s key qualities. It’s a very truthful amplifier combo; it gives you the music straight.”

Play simply-recorded acoustic music with natural, unamplified voices and instruments and one can’t help but notice the way the Chord pairing presents things very honestly; nothing added, nothing taken away. This is not an understated effect – the Chord combination sounds too vivid for that – but there is nevertheless a neutral unexaggerated truthfulness that is very refreshing.

For all its positive attributes – the crisp attack, keen dynamics and lucid detailed presentation – the Prima/Mezzo 140 combination is a surprisingly easy amp pairing to listen to. The musical presentation remains wonderfully relaxed and effortless despite the exceptional clarity and detail.

We think this comes down to the amplifier’s outstanding neutrality and its ability to deliver power and dynamics without sounding strained. There’s never any sense that the amplifier is flustered or having difficulties – quite the opposite in fact. It’s unflappable hi-fi at its very best. If you want all the subtlety, charm and detail of full-sized hi-fi in a small, elegant and cool case, look no further. **HFC**

Jimmy Hughes



VERDICT – Prima

SOUND >> 90%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 95%



VALUE >> 80%



CONCLUSION

A minimalist design, the Prima sticks to the basics, but it does offer a few hidden extras like variable gain on each input. A highly transparent, detailed preamp.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 86%

VERDICT – Mezzo 140

SOUND >> 92%



FEATURES >> 88%



BUILD >> 95%



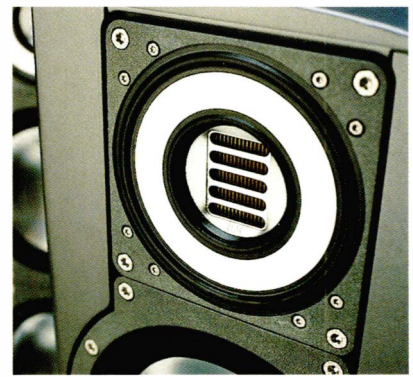
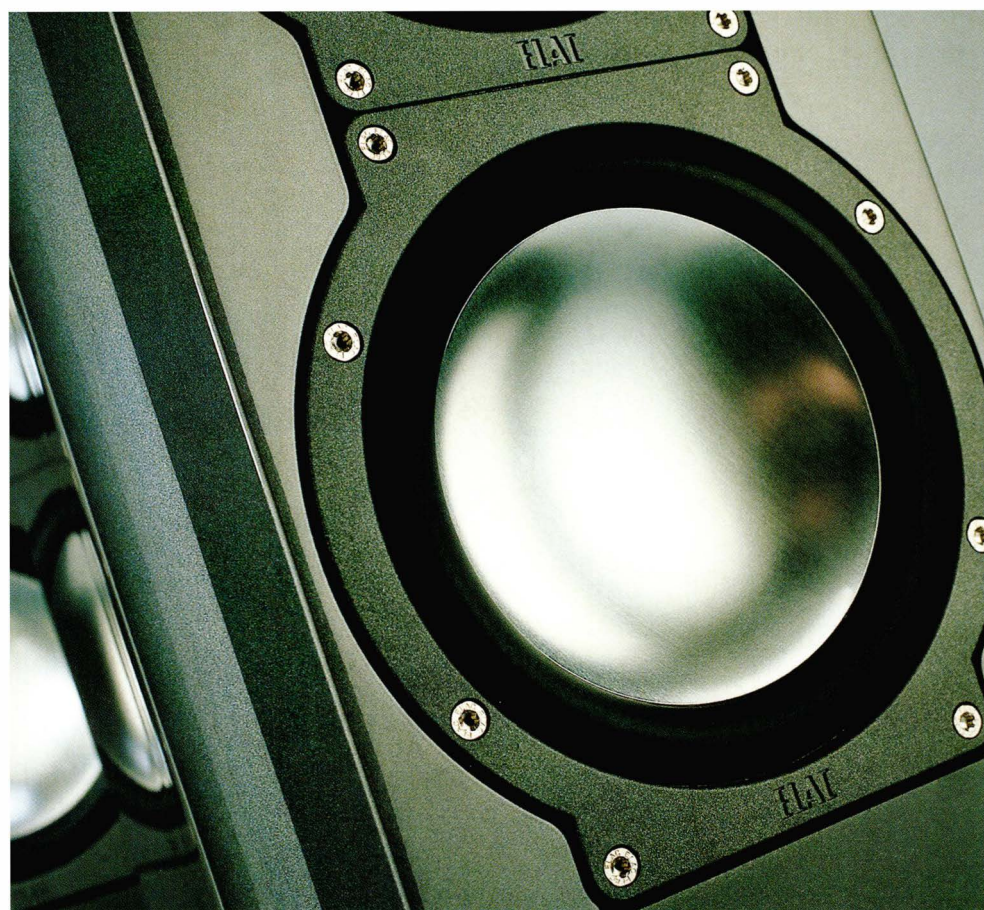
VALUE >> 85%



CONCLUSION

A compact power amp with real muscle – the perfect partner for the Prima. And with 140 watts on tap, it’s an amp that looks and feels like it’s built to last a lifetime.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 90%



Metal guru

Elac's latest is packed with metallic audio tech, from its aluminium cabinet to its funky X-JET driver

PRODUCT Elac FS 607 X-JET

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £5,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 29x108x32.5cm

Weight: 32.9kg Sensitivity: 89dB/2.83V/1m

X-JET coaxial ribbon/planar tweeter/midrange unit

Two 180mm aluminium sandwich bass units

Extruded aluminium and MDF cabinet

CONTACT 0800 652 5002

www.sennheiser.co.uk

Elac is a well-known brand, but its reputation was built on drive units, used by other speaker brands since the German company was formed in 1981. That's all changing – thanks in part to the distribution powers of Sennheiser UK, Elac is increasing its profile as a loudspeaker brand in its own right. We listened to the standmount 203.2 in HFC 261 and now we have a brand new three-and-a-half-way floorstander with the same tweeter but a rather different approach to midrange reproduction.

The FS 607 X-JET sits near the top of Elac's premium 600 range, just a step down from the top two models with their 4Pi tweeters. It's clearly an elegant and supremely well finished product. Build quality is of Porsche standards

and like that classic car, it's sculpted from aluminium. You won't find a rosenut veneered 607 – there are two powder-coated variants of which this is 'titan shadow'; presumably 'silver shadow' is a bit lighter. Either way, it looks stunning thanks to the large alloy extrusions that make up its flanks and the stainless steel fixings on cast aluminium driver baskets that are revealed when you remove the metal grilles. The latter are the most child proof I've come across in recent times – something all parents will appreciate!

Underneath the aluminium, there is MDF bracing that acts to dampen the cabinet, as well as tension rods that are designed to eliminate vibration. This is a highly inert cabinet and a good example of what can be achieved with a composite construction box.

Its drive unit complement consists of a pair of 180mm TT180AS woofers and a coaxial unit called an X-JET. This last combines a ribbon tweeter with an 'O' shaped planar midrange driver built around it. The two woofers are constructed around a 120mm aluminium sandwich cone with a large roll surround that can cope with the near 30mm throw of the 37mm voice coil. This is claimed to deliver bass down to 28Hz.

The funky X-JET driver uses Elac's JET III ribbon tweeter, which is based on the Heil Air Motion Transformer and uses a large area ribbon combined with neodymium magnets to produce a bandwidth that's claimed to extend up to 50kHz. The 'X' factor is the flat aluminium honeycomb midrange driver that is driven by a 78mm edge-wound coil and encircles the JET to produce a point source from 410Hz upwards. The X hands over to the JET at 2.35kHz and the combined drivers form a point source, which means the speaker should have significant imaging advantages. This is extremely useful for multichannel enthusiasts, although they will have to wait a while longer for the matching centre and rear models to become available.

It's the fine details in this speaker's make-up that really make it stand out. The base plate, for instance, matches the main body of the speaker with its contrasting paintwork and cast alloy central section, while the feet that screw into it have plug-in spike or rubber ends to suit different floor types. Perhaps you could argue that the spikes are just a little too short to get through most carpets, but it's impressive attention to detail nonetheless. The cable terminals are gold-plated WBT types with two pairs for easy bi-wiring; unusually, Elac supplies

both standard gold plated links and van den Hul the Wind speaker cable jumpers that emulate the wiring used inside the cabinet.

SOUND QUALITY

Despite the 607 having a nominal four-ohm impedance and sensitivity of 89dB, a 40-watt hybrid valve/transistor power amp from Euphonic Technologies struggled to produce bass. However, the Gamut D200 with its 200 watts a side had little trouble getting the 607s jumping and, when combined with a Cyrus DAC XP and Townshend DCT cable, it formed a fine partnership with the 607.

Setting up took a little longer than usual (see box overleaf), but once sorted, this proved to be a revealing and entertaining speaker with capabilities beyond our expectations. With this quality of cabinet and drivers it would have been a shock if the imaging had not been pinpoint, which it certainly is. The vibes on McCoy Tyner's *Land of Giants* SACD are a good example – close your eyes and you can hear the notes progressing right to left across the soundstage as they increase in pitch. This means the instrument sounds nearly as wide as your speakers, but that's a recording engineer's choice, not Elac's.

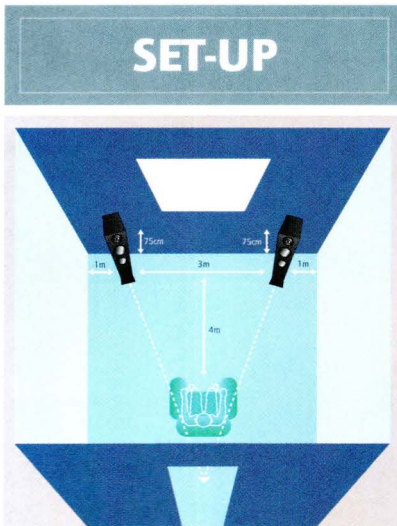
During our test period, there were numerous examples of the 607's imaging skills. Fontella Bass' voice provided a central anchor in the Cinematic Orchestra's *All That You Give* track that remained constant and solid whatever the activities of the orchestra itself. The speaker's tonal capabilities helped to reveal the quality of the voice, which retained much of its earthiness and soul.

Another way in which the Elac revealed its imaging skills was the reproduction of reverberation, which it does extremely well. You hear spatial depth behind instruments and voices on recordings that have not revealed as much in the past. Outkast's *Love Below*, for instance, has a lot of acoustic guitar on it and the 607 highlighted the way that reverb has been used heavily to provide a haze of electronically enhanced airiness, an effect that comes to a head when the player slides his fingers along the strings.

This sound emphasised the analytical nature of the Elac's treble and midrange; though not out of kilter with the bass, these frequencies do seem to grab the limelight. This can be because you hear more of the subtle clues in each recording – John Fahey's *Let Go*, for example, clearly sounded like a guitar duet, rather than fancy solo picking as heard on other speakers.

This is a revealing speaker and it tells you all about both the recordings and the hardware it is working with. So, it's easy to determine that the Cyrus Phono X phono stage (reviewed on p59) is less dynamically capable than the ▶





POSITIONING

Like most rear ported reflex designs of a reasonable size, the FS 607 can sound a bit thick in the bass if placed too close to rear or side walls. We found it gave the best tonal balance with a 75cm gap to the rear and a little more to the sides. Elac goes even further; the company recommends placing the speakers a metre or more from the walls, which would certainly improve imaging but would offer little in the way of bass reinforcement.

Finding the best angle at which to set them proved quite a challenge. Toed in to face the listener in our usual arrangement resulted in a balance that was slightly too bright for comfort when we turned the level up. So we experimented with greater degrees of toe-in and ended up with the speakers' axis crossing about a metre in front of the listener. This gave a good sense of stereo depth to the soundstage and enhanced the solidity of that stereo image, which the speakers are so adept at reproducing.

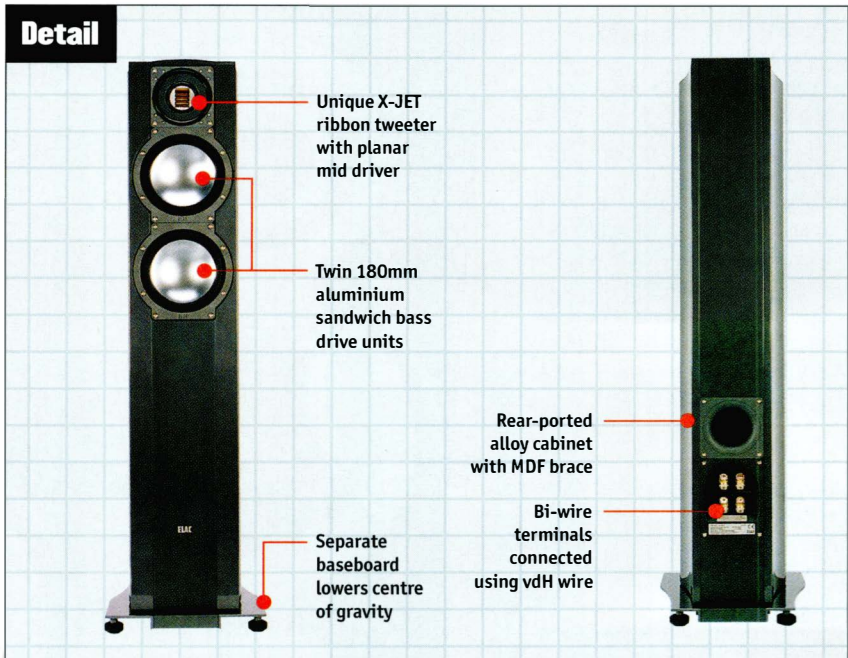
Late in the day, Elac's instructions turned up which suggested aiming the axis so that they cross a metre behind the listener. This improved energy and gave a much wider soundstage, at the expense of a slight tendency for the location of the speakers to be exposed with some recordings. Certain instruments remained anchored to the speaker, rather than standing out from them, which occurred with the axis in front of the listener.

SYSTEM MATCHING

This is both a demanding and a revealing loudspeaker that requires decent power delivery and low distortion ancillaries. A well-designed 100-watt amplifier would probably be sufficient but 200 watts is comfortable and delivers the bass grunt that we need.

In terms of character, this is a very neutral speaker that would benefit from a little warmth from a source or amplifier. A good, clean-sounding valve preamplifier would certainly help, as would a smooth, natural and rhythmic sort of CD player – nothing too cold or analytical.

Avoid bright or hard components and rooms unless you want a bright or hard end result. In terms of cables, a natural, wide-bandwidth sound is key. There's something to said for continuing Elac's choice of van den Hul The Wind right back to the amplifier for maximum coherency. If not, think about changing the supplied bi-wire jumpers accordingly.



“The 607 has the dynamic capability and control to be played at a decent volume level without any apparent distortion.”

❑ Trichord Dino Plus, which makes more subtle tracks like Miles Davis' *So What* sound generally more interesting.

The 607 has the dynamic capability and control to be played at a decent volume level without any apparent distortion, and while the treble is not bright, it is rather more apparent than you find with speakers such as B&W's Nautilus range or active ATCs. Whether this is an issue will depend on factors like the degree of damping in the room and the tonal balance of partnering equipment. We were pretty impressed with its composure at higher levels. It also has a degree of resolve across the band which is impressive; this extends to imaging and micro-dynamics and means that you hear an awful lot of what's on the recording. The only thing you don't hear is the full girth of the bass – the speaker goes deep enough but lacks the scale and weight of bigger designs.

To an extent, the analytical side of this speaker slightly undermines its ability to charm. I am tempted to suggest that there must be a law of hi-fi which states the wider the bandwidth, the less musical a component. This is because midrange-focused systems tend to have a beguiling character that's dependent on what is technically a limitation. The 607 is a resolute and powerful loudspeaker with characteristics that appeal

slightly more to the head than the heart, perhaps because it doesn't possess as strong a sense of timing as some at the price. Also, like many speakers in the digital age, its balance is well suited to CD replay but less so to vinyl, especially anything that's other than pristine – not a failing *per se* but a consideration if you are an analogue enthusiast.

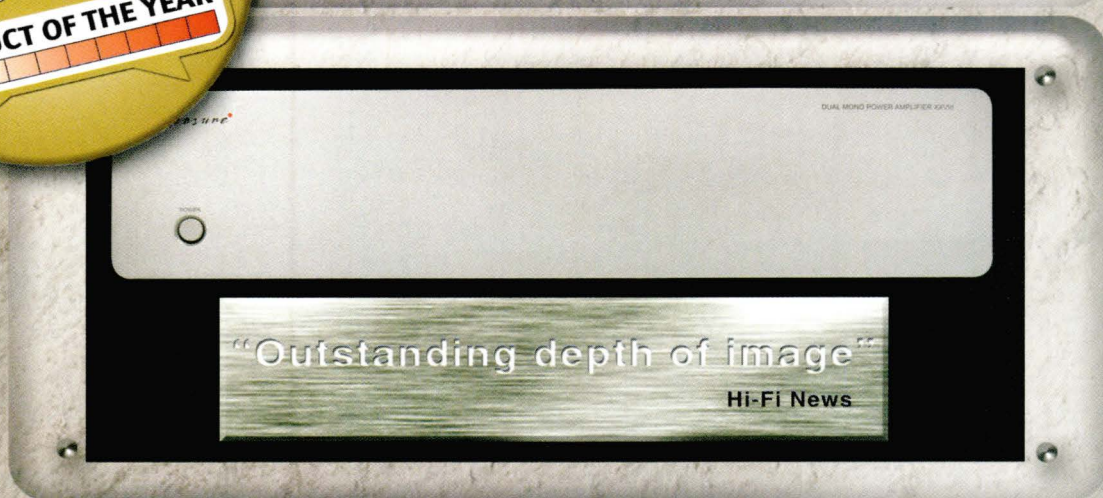
This is ultimately a low coloration speaker and one which requires more run-in time than most. We're told that after 200 hours its sound relaxes palpably, which may ameliorate some of our concerns and make its performance more inviting. If you crave detail and wide bandwidth this is a hard speaker to beat, especially if you're a fan of arresting contemporary design. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar]	PRO Impressive high frequency extension and very good detail resolution across the band combine with a fabulously made, styled and finished box.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 62% [Progress bar]	CON The high frequency resolve needs an injection of some warmth into the balance. Needs decent power if you want serious bass.
BUILD >> 95% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 81% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Elac's new floorstander is a highly revealing and capable loudspeaker. Its coaxial mid/tweeter provides impressive levels of detail and depth of soundstage, although its cool balance will not appeal to everyone.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%	

Winners Breed Winners



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Flight deck

Can this classy chunk of Italian hardware put the cat among the high-end pigeons?

PRODUCT Audia Flight CD One

TYPE CD player

PRICE £4,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x11.3x42x38cm

- Weight: 20kg • RCA phono electrical digital output
- BNC and RCA phono electrical digital inputs
- Single-ended and balanced analogue outputs • High quality mains lead supplied as standard

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166

🌐 www.henleydesigns.co.uk

As the high style of this component might indicate, Audia is an Italian company and an electronics specialist. New to the UK, the company was actually founded in 1996 by two electronics engineers, Massimiliano Marzi and Andrea Nardini. The latest component in Audia's small but elegantly formed range marks a new branch for this previously amplification-only brand. The Flight CD One joins the Flight Pre, Flight 50 and 100 power amps and the Flight One integrated amplifier.

Build quality throughout the range is exemplary and the CD One is obviously an expensive player from the moment you see it. The quality of finish, the top loading disc bay and the Flight tri-star cut-out all ooze class. The

tri-star oozes blue light too, which is always mighty hard for the eyes to resist.

Things look just as good underneath the lid, albeit without the lovely matt finishes of the contrasting casework. This is another in an expanding field of upsampling players that wind the signal up to 24-bit/192kHz directly as it comes off the laser, sending it to a Crystal CS43122 digital-to-analogue converter. The transport is that rare thing today – a dedicated CD mechanism, in this instance a Philips Pro 2 with die-cast body.

Maybe this is why it's one of the few players in the listening room that will play the CD side of a DualDisc. Audia has mounted the transport on a high-mass machined base to maximise rigidity and thus reduce reading errors that can lead to jitter induced distortion. The cabinet as a whole features extensive use of damping materials for the purpose of keeping resonance under control – after all, what we want to hear is the resonance recorded on the disc rather than anything extra from the player or other components.

Elsewhere under the lid you'll find a fully balanced, Class A analogue output stage using current rather than voltage feedback in its initial stage. This is the approach that you'll

find in the company's amplifiers and one which Audia claims gives a significantly better transient response. The output stage is built from high-quality discrete components, which, all other things being equal, is 'a good thing'.

The power supply gets off to a good start, with no fewer than three toroidal mains transformers – for analogue, digital and transport mechanism sections respectively. Multiple regulators are employed to eliminate instability and minimise noise.

Because it's a top loader, the transport has the advantage of not having a drawer sled with the potential for introducing its own resonances. Instead, it just needs a cover which in this case is a sliding door that runs on Teflon runners for maximum smoothness, and opens with a whirr of the motor that moves it.

This approach makes for slightly slower disc changing than the average drawer loader, partly because you can't put a disc in and press 'play' – you need to press 'open' to close it and then 'play', and there's no 'open' (or for that matter 'close') button on the sumptuous remote. It's an approach that will appeal to the methodically minded who like a precise routine, so that's hi-fi reviewers out of the running, then!

If you think the CD One's casework is nice, you should check out the remote handset. It's a work of art and an even greater indication of the player's price. Milled out of a solid aluminium lump, it has sprung steel ball switches and rather tiny and subtle legends. In fact, the writing on both player and remote is arguably a touch too subtle, especially if the lights are low. But hey, they look great!

SOUND QUALITY

The high-class expectations that this player's looks inspire are not undermined when you clamp in a disc with the magnetic puck. It responds to a great recording in suitably full effect, projecting voices with precision and giving them a strong sense of solidity and presence in the room, so that singers as diverse as David Thomas and Tori Amos appear in front of you with a visceral sense of realism. The former's *Meadville* album is a gritty live recording featuring guitar and trumpet alongside the Pere Ubu frontman's vocal and harmonium; the CD One gets under the skin of the performance, bringing the energy of the event into the listening room with aplomb.

The player's response to more sophisticated studio recordings is not quite so gripping. It plays the tunes extremely well and bass lines in particular are picked out very cleanly. Yet the player seems to need the energy of a powerful recording to really come alive; less exciting and dynamic discs fail to realise their full potential in the Audia's hands.

This seems to be due to a tendency to emphasise certain aspects of the sound. You can hear an awful lot through this player, but its tonal and dynamic proclivities introduce a degree of masking by the standards one expects at this price level. With an orchestral piece, for instance, you hear the shine of bells but you don't hear the full body of the instrument, and while a spinet sounds like a keyboard instrument, it's not clear exactly which type.

It appears there's a slight extra edge added to everything. With solo voices, the player adds a sense of definition, but this is in fact a coloration of sorts, albeit quite a subtle one. You only notice it because of what it covers up – it often sounds like precision, as the images created are incisive and clear. Neither is it an added glare or brightness to notes; this is a smooth and relaxed sounding player, just not a romantic one as is often the Italian way.



“The CD One gets under the skin of the performance, bringing the energy of the event into the listening room with aplomb.”

In theory, what you don't hear you shouldn't miss, but the effect also makes more relaxed recordings seem slightly bland and uninteresting. It doesn't add an edge to the sound generally, but if you have an electric guitar which is essentially a distorted sound in the first place, it emphasises the leading edge of notes slightly.

In other respects, this is an extremely agile and responsive player. Give it a disc like Yo Miles' DSD recording *Upriver* and the slam it can deliver is nothing short of awesome. One track starts quietly and builds up dramatically, at which point the CD One's transient abilities ensure that this attack is taken full advantage of. It's completely arresting. If the amplifier and speakers can cope this dynamic leap, it is projected with staggering intensity; if they can't, be ready to catch your speaker cones!

This is a robust sounding player, but not in the muscular style of a Wadia, for instance. Quite possibly, the CD One was inspired by those American power houses, but its style is all its own. The bass, for instance, is lighter and possibly more nimble as a result. In fact, it's

pretty hot on timing across the band – it really appreciates the swing of a good tune, which will win it friends in the rhythm and timing brigade. When you combine this with the strong sense of transient response, it becomes clear that this is the angle that Audia has gone for. The CD One emphasises the energy and excitement of lively material as well as most of the competition, which in many musical minds is more important than absolute resolution. An interesting and in many respects highly capable player, then – Audia is clearly a brand to watch. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar]	PRO This player's great sense of timing and impressive build quality, not to mention two digital inputs, makes it a welcome contender in the high-end CD player arena.
FEATURES >> 84% [Progress bar]	CON Better suited to high-energy recordings than more subtle works, there is a degree of character that will not suit all tastes. It's also slow to use.
BUILD >> 96% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 73% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
Audia is a brand with high standards. This looks and feels fabulous and its abilities with good live recordings overshadow its tendencies to lean on the leading edge. If you want real world dynamics and your system can take it, check this out.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 83%



Two for the top?

Part of a vast range of Chinese-built, Euro-designed electronics, can these two strike the right notes?

PRODUCT Consonance CD-120 and A-120
TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE £795 each
KEY FEATURES (CD-120) Size (WxHxD): 43x8x29cm
 • Weight: 8kg • Unbalanced (RCA) and balanced (XLR) outputs • Electrical digital output • (A-120) Size (WxHxD): 43x8x32cm • Weight: 13kg • Power output: 90W per channel • 3x unbalanced inputs • 1x balanced input • Two preamp outputs • Single speaker outputs
CONTACT ☎ 01273 325901 • www.aliumaudio.com

The Consonance brand is not really a brand – it's a product name that has been promoted to keep the peace. The real name of the Chinese parent company (only found on the website) is Opera, but the Italian loudspeaker brand may not be happy about calling this unrelated product range Opera. So, 'Consonance' seems a safer bet. The Consonance family is a numerous brood, covering a wide range of types, prices and

styles. Some of the upmarket models are decidedly esoteric, such as the Cyber-845, complete with monster output triode. Between that and the A-120 are over 30 amplifier models, with CD, SACD, LP and FM source components, loudspeakers and cables completing a major line-up by any standards. They're made in China, but there's clearly a European link, because the CD player's circuit boards bear the legend, 'Designed by Bent Holter', Mr Holter being the man behind Norwegian manufacturer Hegel. The amplifier also seems to have Holter fingerprints, too.

This kit is aimed at the traditional hi-fi enthusiast with a relatively small number of source components; the amplifier has just three unbalanced and one balanced inputs. There are two preamp outputs, though, so you could evidently tri-amp without much difficulty. The CD player also features balanced outputs alongside unbalanced.

Internal construction is good. The CD player is particularly well made, with a large toroidal transformer aided by more power supply capacitance than you'll find in many amplifiers, well-respected op-amp types (OPA2604), and a real audio CD – as opposed to CD-ROM – mechanism, the Philips CDM12, which is responsible for the player's impressively fast disc loading. The DAC chip is a Crystal CS4396, which is a high performance part but which doesn't 'sample' at 192kHz as is suggested on the front panel – like all modern DACs it oversamples to a MHz or three and in doing so adds next to no noise to well-recorded CDs, exactly as one would hope.

The surprise feature in the amplifier is a valve, a lone 6N30 double triode which lies flat and presumably adds a bit of valve flavour to the sound. Everything else is resolutely transistorised, though, and mostly discrete apart from the Analog Devices chips that

convert the balanced input to single-ended operation, mirroring the output configuration of the CD player. A single pair of output transistors per channel very nearly meet the 90-watt specification (77 watts, both channels driven, by our measurements) with the help of a large internal heatsink. Input switching is done by relays, while the volume control is a motorised potentiometer – spin the front panel knob and the volume control shifts, with level shown digitally (in arbitrary units). The trouble is that it takes about 12 seconds to go from zero to full volume. What's more, the amplifier automatically resets to zero volume every time you switch it on.

The volume display switches off after a few seconds, except at very low settings where you presumably won't be listening critically. Sensibly, volume steps are coarse at low levels but less than 1 dB further up.

We found good agreement with the published specs for the A-120, including exceptionally flat frequency response and low distortion, hovering around 0.03% or lower. However, there's a high degree of hum, a spiky signal with lots of harmonics, which can become audible at typical listening levels. The CD-120 gives almost textbook performance except for a bit of aliasing at high frequencies.

SOUND QUALITY

We tested the two products in combination and separately, and were glad we did, as they aren't such an obvious match. Actually, when

we looked closely we realised that they don't even match visually, with front and top panels in slightly different shades of silver-grey aluminium. But the sonic mismatch is odd.

You see, the CD-120 is a very clean, very neutral performer and in practically every way we liked it a lot. It has bags of detail, great bass and treble extension, excellent manners, and in fact the only hint of character that we could pin down is a touch of harshness on very bright instruments like close-miked violin, an affliction that strikes most of the sensible-price CD players we've heard.

The A-120 is by no means a bad amplifier, but it has both more character and more obvious limitations than its CD-spinning sibling. Listening to it, one is not immediately aware of anything missing from the music and indeed the frequency extremes are there, the dynamic range from loudest to softest is apparent and images fill the space between the speakers, even a little beyond. However, it just doesn't seem to involve the listener in the way of the best amplifiers.

That's easy to say, but we can be more specific. First, while side-to-side imaging is good, image depth is definitely short of what

we've heard from familiar recordings. It doesn't take much to start encroaching on the fragile illusion of performers behind the back wall, and some subtle effect is clearly doing it here. In addition, while dynamics are believable, the moment-to-moment changes in level seem less clear-cut and as a result music tends towards the monotonous.

Thus, when the two units are auditioned together it is the sound of the amplifier which dominates. Even so there's plenty to enjoy, for example a nice forthright, no-nonsense approach to lively music, a beguiling way with dinner jazz and suchlike, and some really exciting bass when there's something seismic to reproduce. But even that bass has its limitations, as when it's less spectacular it seems a good deal less tuneful than it can be. Subtle plucked double bass at the back of a small ensemble is less clear and easy to follow than we've heard, and quiet, low piano loses some of its definition.

In terms of compatibility we had good results, the A-120 seeming perfectly happy driving speakers of varying sensitivity and ease of drive, including original Quad electrostatics. That's to say that its basic nature doesn't ▣

“There's plenty to enjoy, for example a nice forthright, no-nonsense approach to lively music and a beguiling way with dinner jazz.”



Q & A

We spoke to Ian Large of UK distributor Alium Audio about the Opera and Consonance products, and why valves are still high fashion in the high-fidelity world



HFC: How do these units fit in with the more upmarket models from Opera?

IL: This series is now the only solid-state range, completely separate from the valve-based ranges, such as the 'Reference', 'Cyber', 'Cyber Signature', and 'Droplet'. However, the provision of preamp output sockets on the A-120 means that there is a gradual upgrade path to valve-based models, using for instance the built-in (solid state) power amp for bass and a valve amp for treble.

That lone valve – does it just give a taste of 'valve-ness' or does it really offer performance that transistors can't replicate practicably? Many people for years have combined the two technologies, using the transparency of a valve preamp, and the power of solid-state for the power amp. This is a one-box solution to that theory. Since becoming the distributor for Consonance we have had our awakening to valves, so to speak. The transparency and soundstaging from a single-ended triode amp has turned my previously stubborn solid-state viewpoint completely around.

In the end, though, I am still agnostic about it, and would be the first to affirm that solid-state can sound very good. Triodes also have fans at loggerheads, one person preferring the 300B, another the 211, others the 2A3... With Consonance we have amps from three watts per channel up to 150 watts per channel, which I hope should provide something for just about everyone.

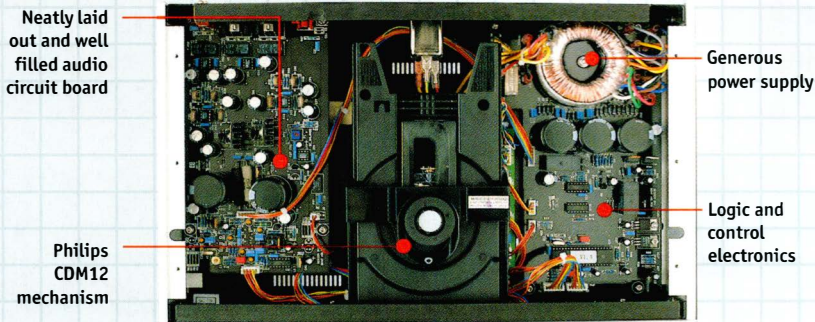
Do you have any general recommendations for speaker matching to get the best from the A-120 amplifier?

It is a constant problem finding the right speaker to match up with low-powered triode amps. It's not quite so difficult when using more powerful pentode designs, but the 90 watts per channel shouldn't present a problem for the majority of average sensitivity speakers on the market. We have used this at home and at dealers' premises with ribbon tweeters with no difficulties.

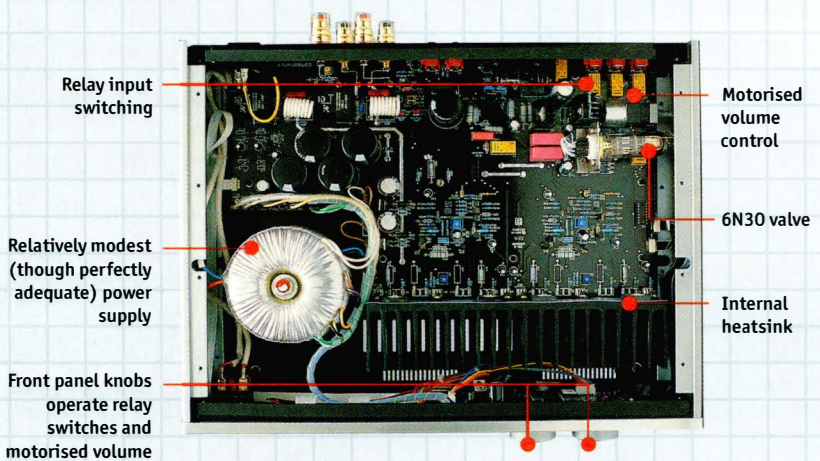
Are the units particularly sensitive to cabling, like many high-end devices?

No, they are designed to work with pretty much anything. However, we only use our own (Opera) cables now. Indeed, I have sold my collection of various cables that have been acquired over the years, and now prefer these copper cables!

Detail – CD-120



Detail – A-120



vary much between speakers. It's not really as if one can 'tune out' its characteristics by careful partnering, either, since unlike tonal aberrations and so on, any reduction in image depth and micro-dynamics is a one-way street.

All the same, we can heartily recommend the CD-120. Having exhausted options for getting the A-120 to 'sing' convincingly, we spent a few happy sessions with the CD-120 in partnership with familiar amplifiers, enjoying its multi-faceted talents. It is completely impartial in its approach to musical styles, giving just as convincing a rendition of the Sex Pistols as it did of Mozart string quintets, the former suitably raw and aggressive, the latter very naturally and sympathetically portrayed. No question of short-changing in image depth here, either. By the way, don't automatically assume that the balanced connection will work

best – we had very slightly better results from the unbalanced, though that may vary with cables and environment.

Both units face stiff competition. The A-120 amplifier is worth a listen, but it doesn't really stand out from the sub-£1,000 crowd. By contrast, the CD-120 is very good. Seek it out! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT – CD-120

SOUND >> 88%

FEATURES >> 80%

BUILD >> 91%

VALUE >> 89%

CONCLUSION

By any standards, a polished, confident and detailed performer, and by £800 standards very good value. More versatile than its amplifier cousin.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 88%

VERDICT – A-120

SOUND >> 76%

FEATURES >> 72%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 74%

CONCLUSION

A decent enough amplifier in many ways, yet it never really seems to let the music catch fire – communication suffers accordingly. Volume control takes too many turns.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 75%

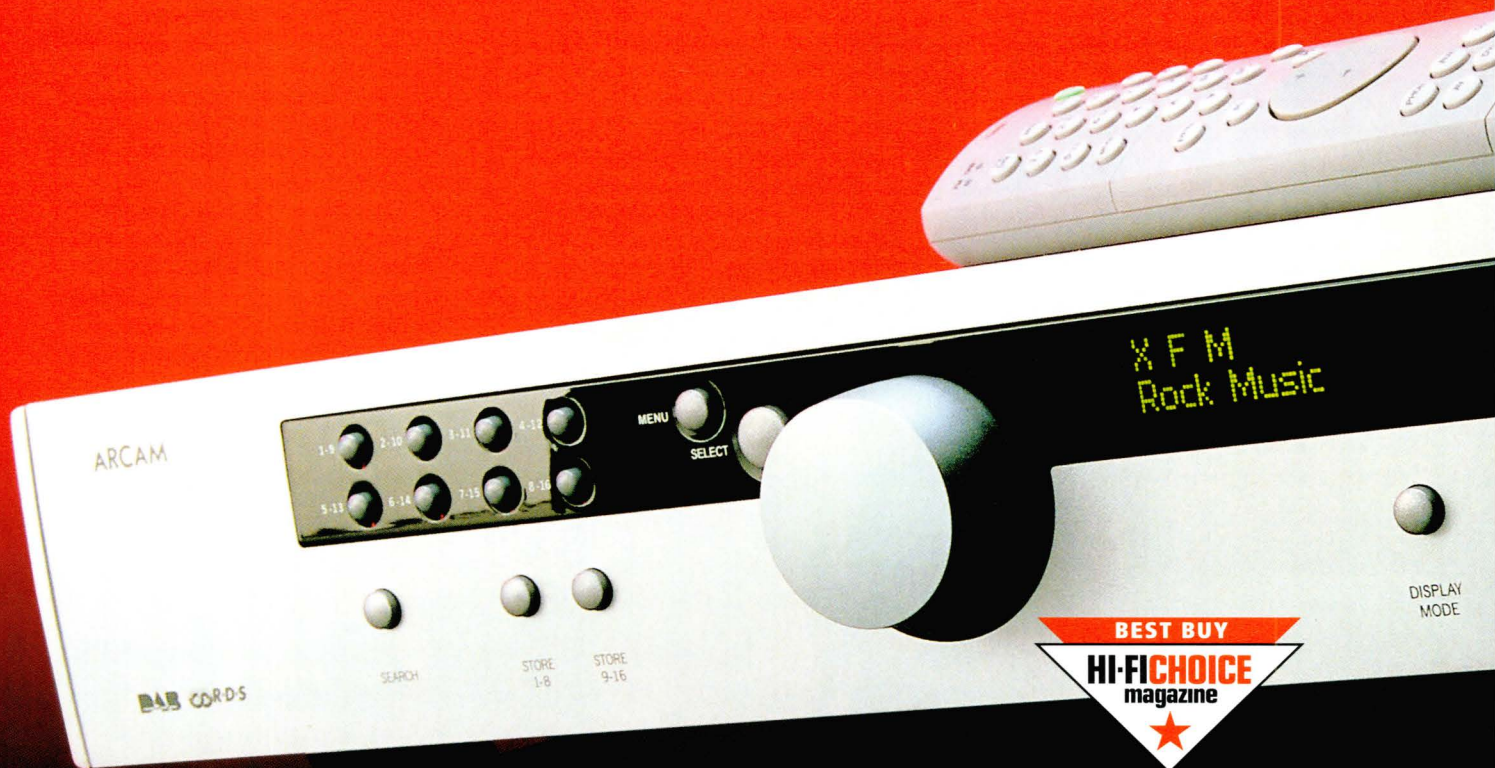




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DAB hand at radio

Two radios into one do go – but is it necessarily the right way to get the best tuner sound?

PRODUCT Arcam DiVA DT91

TYPE DAB/FM radio tuner

PRICE £450

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.5x8.5x32cm

• Weight: 3.6kg • DAB Band III and L-Band, FM bands

• 16 presets • Analogue (x2), S/PDIF, Toslink outputs

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

Arcam was one of the very earliest adopters of DAB, and it's over six years now since we reviewed the brand's Alpha 10 DAB tuner. In the time since, DAB has slowly crept into the mass market and prices for digital radios have dropped from the initial take-it-or-leave-it £1,000 to as little as £60 for some portables. In addition, loads more stations have appeared on the DAB dial and, disappointingly, data rates have been cut on a good number of stations, which (all else being equal) can only be a bad thing.

One thing that hasn't changed though – the way DAB tuners are built. Very few manufacturers could justify designing their own RF, downconversion and digital decoding electronics and so most use pre-assembled tuner modules – much as has been done for a couple of decades by the majority of FM tuner makers. DAB modules, however, go practically all the way, with an S/PDIF or similar digital

output. This simply needs conversion to analogue... and some even output analogue audio that can go straight to the sockets.

Arcam's latest tuner uses one of these, a neat little module from Radioscape that we've seen in a few other models. It's based on RF and digital signal processing parts from Texas Instruments and, recognising that FM is going to be around for a while yet (many listeners still have need of it) the DT91 receives FM as well as DAB. In a complete break with traditional FM practice, it does a good deal of the demodulation and demultiplexing digitally. Analogue purists effectively lose nothing here, since almost every FM station in the world now plays out digital sources through a digital distribution network, although it's likely the die-hards who even reject FM synthesis as being too digital may disagree. Is there an advantage in the digitisation process, though?

Potentially there is, since accurate filtering plays an important part in converting the radio-frequency FM input into audio and digital filters can easily be made with vastly superior performance to analogue ones. In practice, the design process is far from trivial and there are all the usual digital/analogue worries, such as jitter and aliasing to worry about, plus some particularly interesting issues

with mixing RF, AF and digital on one physical bit of silicon. Mobile phones, those well-known hi-fi devices, have led the way in this, of course.

Not wishing to add unnecessary complexity, Arcam has limited its involvement on the audio side to providing a Wolfson DAC and a high-quality output op-amp, both devices that should be able to better the intrinsic performance of the DAB signal by a comfortable margin. Then there's the power supply – nothing fancy but well regulated with chips from Linear Technology, plus enough 'glue' logic to make it all work together with the front panel display and microprocessor.

Round the back, you'll find doubled output sockets, both flavours of digital and a single RF input for both DAB and FM – not truly ideal since they operate at very different frequencies and are normally connected with cables of different impedance. Arcam's supplied indoor wire 'T' aerial will receive DAB perfectly in many locations, but in case of doubt we'd make the usual 'ideal' recommendation of a roof-mount FM aerial which will most often pick up DAB too. Arcam's bargraph signal-strength display seems pretty reliable for DAB reception, 50% of scale corresponding to a respectable margin for reliable reception.



High-power hybrid

This massive new integrated amp from Unison Research offers switchable power settings

PRODUCT Unison Research Unico 200

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £3,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x26.5x55cm

● Weight: 55kg ● Valve/bipolar/MOSFET hybrid
 ● Five line inputs (inc. tape) ● Switchable power output modes (nominally 50W or 200W per channel)

CONTACT ☎ 01234 741200

🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

In the past, the exotic regions of brute-force hi-fi amplification were dominated by the Americans. If you bought a big amp until recently, chances are it would have been from the USA, or possibly Canada. Things are changing and this mighty integrated amplifier delivers the sort of power many a Krell would be proud of, but delivers it with a distinct Italian accent.

The Unico 200 is a new high-end integrated amplifier of truly heroic proportions. A hybrid design, it tips the scales at 55kg net, which makes it a two-man lift. In due course, there will be a further developed version of the existing top of the range CD player that will act as a natural partner for this new beast.

Operationally, the Unico 200 is a straightforward remote controllable unit, with

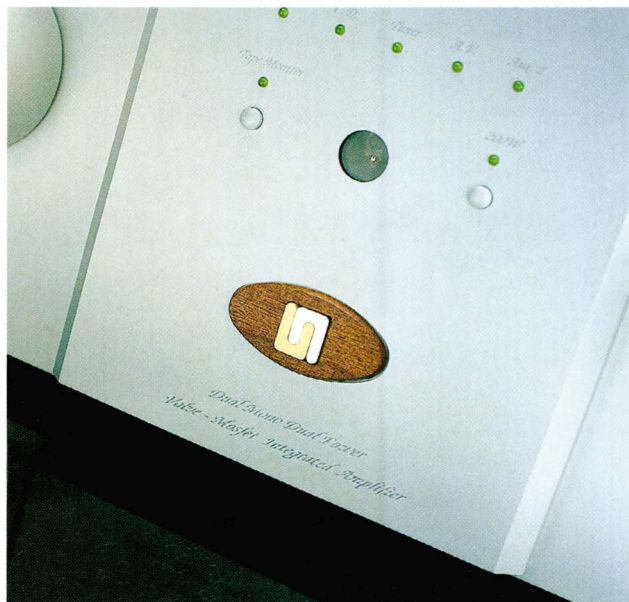
four line inputs, a tape circuit with tape monitoring, and a volume control. The main power switch is on the back and standby/operational switching takes the form of a large, backlit pad whose illumination levels track the warmup phase of the little glowing bottles inside – the only external indication that there is a thermionic valve content to the design. Theoretically, one of the inputs can be adapted to be used as a phono input by adding a plug-in PC board, but in practice most users with turntables have taken the external step-up option. However, we did discover from the manufacturer that there will be a development of this amp at some point with two balanced inputs. This would be useful, if only to increase the range of inputs, but as the Unico 200 lacks a true balanced-mode internal architecture, there is unlikely to be a significant sonic improvement with normal length cable runs.

Initially, it seemed this was to be an amplifier with switchable low-output Class A and high-power Class AB operating modes, but it turns out that when you hit the high power switch, something more subtle happens. This involves reconfiguring of the power supply regulation. In lower power mode, output is reduced to a nominal 50-watt output, though

the actual figure is closer to 85 watts per channel into eight ohms. In high-power mode, output is increased to a nominal 200 watts (actually more like 350 watts per channel), but it's the lower power mode that is designed to offer the highest current delivery, and also the best sound quality – see later.

The input section, where the audio signal is at its most susceptible to noise and distortion, consists of a triode cascade in common cathode configuration and one triode cathode follower. This stage is direct-coupled to a current feedback, solid state Class A gain stage, which in turn is followed by a complementary MOSFET sliding bias output stage with a theoretical 60 amp peak rating before current limiting is applied. The 50-watt mode uses a lower rail voltage, and the amp engages either series or parallel connection of the bridge rectifiers in the power supply, depending on operating mode. With continuous automatic rebiasing of each circuit stage, stability is guaranteed under a broad range of abnormal conditions, and the power mode can be safely and transparently switched on the fly.

Other circuit features include the use of 10 parallel-connected reservoir capacitors to minimise output impedance and to improve



“Unless the extra power is strictly required, the lower power mode yields a quality of sound that is more organic and expressive.”

reaction time. The amp also uses servo regulation, which avoids the need for blocking capacitors in the signal path. Warm-up and other operating parameters are monitored by what is claimed to be a non-intrusive microprocessor based protection system, with fuses providing a belt and braces safety factor.

SOUND QUALITY

As a benchmark for this test, we used another large and even more costly but lower power amplifier, namely the new Denon PMA-SA1, which will be reviewed in *HFC* in the near future. In many ways, the Unison Research is the more immediately likeable amplifier. It sounds more relaxed and distant, though conversely it lacks the Denon's remarkable combination of resolving power and presence. The character of the bass from the two amps also helps underpin the differences – the Denon firm and integrated, the Unico more relaxed and softer. But this is not altogether a matter of better and worse, more one of character. The valve powered front end is perhaps partly responsible for an overall performance from the Unico 200 that is smoother, more relaxed and in some ways more amiable, but which tells a slightly more selective, smoothed-over view of the music. It is perhaps a matter of what the respective designers regard as key to the reproduction of music. The Denon ultimately sounds more unforgiving, while the softer Unico is more consistent with a wider range of recordings.

The differences between the higher and lower power output settings were not always as obvious as we had expected when we first

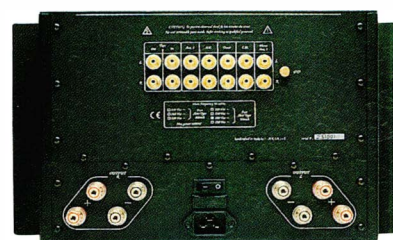
assumed, wrongly, that the change was between Class A and Class AB operation. The differences are fairly subtle, and at low volume levels were not always immediately obvious at all. Changing the setting while the music is playing is usually inaudible, as the effect appears to turn itself on over a period of seconds rather than immediately, perhaps because of the time constants built in to the power supply reservoir.

In the end, however, Unison Research's belief in the ability to switch this way is justified by the greater ability to roll with the punches in high-power mode. This was particularly obvious with uncompressed orchestral recordings played at high volume through insensitive speakers, where the Unison's high-power mode was responsible for a much more seamless and consistent performance through orchestral crescendi. It just sounds like a bigger, more powerful amplifier, which should come as no surprise. But overall, unless the extra power is strictly required, the lower power mode yields a quality of sound that is simply more organic and expressive, and which for some reason is slightly but unmistakably less grainy. The sound appears to settle down, and given that something close to 85 watts is available even when switched to the nominally 50-watt setting, this mode was able to cover the vast majority of musical situations that arose during the test.

The Unico 200 is a curious concoction, a massively powerful integrated amplifier of considerable refinement with a built-in 'low-power' mode of even greater refinement and subtlety. There is perhaps a touch of

euphony with this design, which hints at its hybrid valve internal architecture. But overall, we found it virtually impossible to catch out irrespective of music genre, chosen replay level or the character of the speakers, whose sensitivity figures ranged from 82-90dB/Watt at 1 metre. At the same time, there are no obvious shortcomings of the kind sometimes associated with valve amps – microphony for example – and power delivery is definitely in the prodigious category. The only small fly in the ointment for some will be the lack of built-in phono provision (unusual for Unison Research), and the knowledge of a forthcoming revision that will include two extra (balanced) inputs, but may not be retrofittable. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 89%	PRO Realistically priced, with a tank-like build, enormous power yield and refined sound quality which improves further in low-power mode.
FEATURES >> 80%	CON Basic equipment levels (but more inputs promised for the future), and no internal phono stage, though most typical users will not be adversely affected.
BUILD >> 93%	
VALUE >> 86%	

CONCLUSION
A marvellous mix of valve and solid-state technology in a single box, this is a 'can do' amplifier that shines in virtually all surroundings, but a truly ideal amplifier would surely combine the virtues of the two operating modes into one.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%



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Densen products are in a minimalist Scandinavian design, which are made of 100% non-magnetic aluminium, making the casing slim and sexy like none other. No visible screws make the cabinet look like one slab of aluminium.

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Having taken so much care in designing and producing our products, we naturally back it up with a decent warranty, so we give a lifelong warranty to the first owner. As we believe audio equipment should be a worthwhile investment, we try to design our products so that they can easily be upgraded in the future.



Densen products are ready for the future. For example you can upgrade the CD players and add external power supplies to pre-amps and the tuner. Upgrade your system from being a dedicated stereo system to a high-end surround system. Upgrade the power and integrated amplifiers with electronic crossovers for active systems. Our own Denlink system provides multiroom capability, and even the possibility to dim the lights in your room.

"One can analyse hi-fi specifics till the cows come home but it's something intangible, difficult to put into words, but to which the ear and brain subliminally react. So, do I like this Densen amp? No, I love it."

Review of the B-300 by Hi-Fi Choice



Enter the Arena

After all the hype, can Tannoy's first serious sub/sat system sound as good as it looks?

PRODUCT Tannoy Arena

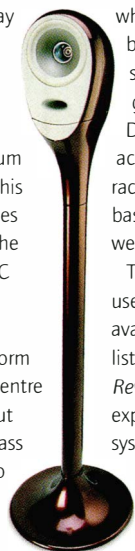
TYPE Multichannel sub/sat speaker system

PRICE £1,200

CONTACT ☎ 01236 420 199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

The Arena isn't Tannoy's debut sub/sat package, but it is without doubt one of the most eagerly awaited multichannel speaker systems yet. Beyond the fact that Tannoy has a rich history of producing top-notch speakers, it ran an eye-catching ad campaign well in advance of launch, and Arena made numerous special guest appearances at hi-fi shows up and down the country.

Against a wealth of 'me too' speakers, Tannoy has built one of the most original looking systems around. That's not to say that the technology has been ignored. The system comprises four identical satellites, which feature a brand new 100mm version of Tannoy's Dual Concentric driver, where a 19mm titanium dome is mounted inside a bass driver. This makes it appear as though all frequencies come from a single source, expanding the sweet spot. The highlight of this new DC implementation is the addition of a super-tweeter, which extends the bandwidth, allowing the system to perform better with high-resolution audio. The centre unit features the same configuration, but with the addition of an extra 100mm bass driver to help give weight and impact to movie dialogue.



The rectangular subwoofer boasts a 300-watt BASH amplifier driving a side-firing 250mm paper cone woofer. Our review samples were finished in stunning bronze – we also had the elegant matching stands for the front satellites, which adds £250 to the price.

SOUND QUALITY

These speakers are no shrinking violets when it comes to making their presence known, and that goes for the sound quality as well as the sizeable, distinctive cabinets.

The overwhelming feeling the Arena leaves you with is of passion and solidity of sound. There's bags of detail on offer with DVD soundtracks, and the system images very well when positioned correctly, but the sense of being enveloped by an exciting, articulate sound is what really wins us over – and that goes for music and well as movies. The DVD-Audio disc of Ryan Adams *Gold* comes across with enough guts to start a retro tennis racket factory, and the centre speaker's bonus bass driver pays real dividends – the extra weight helps localise vocals to dramatic effect.

The satellites also perform pretty well when used in 2.1 mode with CD (although not available to buy in this configuration). Okay, so listening to the Eels' *Blinking Lights and Other Revelations* set isn't quite the exhilarating experience it is on a dedicated two-channel system, but there's plenty on offer in terms of richness and detail – something that can't be said for most style-led sub/sat packages.

If there is a downside, it's the subwoofer. It offers trouser-flapping bass for the movie viewer, but lacks the agility required of a music bass bin. It's very happy with the fire and brimstone rampage that is the DVD-Audio disc of Led Zeppelin's *How The West Was One*, but is less impressive with Donald Runnicles/Atlanta Symphony and Chorus' belting rendition of Orff's *Carmina Burana* on SACD.

Tannoy's Arena system is another step in the right sonic direction for the compact and stylish sub/sat breed. Although not all things to all people, it shows Tannoy is thinking about those whose passionate love of music and movies is only constrained by room size. **HFC**

Shaun Marin

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 70% [Progress bar]	PRO Strikingly good looking, this well-constructed surround system doesn't disappoint with multichannel audio or movies. An impressively revealing performance.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON While better than most of the competition, there are still compromises. Full-size speakers will serve you better sonically, if not visually.
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 85% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION The Arena combines fantastic looks and very decent sound in one hard to miss package. However, treading the thin line between style and sound may have resulted in a system that appeals to neither space-conscious fashionistas or audiophiles.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 83%	

21-30,000 Hz

all present and correct



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Gamesmaster

The latest X-box is not a games console... but you can play (your records) with it!

PRODUCT Cyrus Phono X

TYPE MM/MC phono stage

PRICE £700

CONTACT ☎ 01480 435577 🌐 www.cyrusaudio.com

It's an encouraging sign that nearly 25 years after the introduction of digital audio, Cyrus – one of hi-fi's most forward-thinking manufacturers – has begun making components dedicated to analogue.

What differentiates the Phono X from a host of alternatives goes beyond its ability to deal with both MM and MC cartridges; it accepts both types of cartridge simultaneously, with input switching on the front panel.

The performance of MC cartridges depends on the impedance loading that you place on its output. This is because the output is vanishingly small and often in the region of half a millivolt. The Phono X offers three alternative impedances – 10 ohms, 100 ohms and 1k ohm – with the option of adding 1nF of shunt capacitance to any of these. This offers some damping of HF resonance to cartridges that require it.

The Phono X has one function we've not seen before – IEC equalisation. This is an alternative to the standard RIAA equalisation curve used when making LPs. The IEC setting appears to be designed as a high-pass filter that removes very low frequencies from the signal and thus undermines the effects of rumble or feedback. If your turntable exhibits either you'd best get

it sorted before buying a phono stage, but the IEC setting also helps reduce the cone-flapping effects that can occur with warped records.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening commenced with a van den Hul Condor MC cartridge on an SME V arm on a Model 20A turntable. This particular Condor specifies a 500-ohm to 47k-ohm loading and was found to be most at home with the Cyrus set at 1k ohm. This gave the best sound and the most gain, but this phono stage may not be suitable for very low output cartridges.

However, it proved an adept partner for the Condor, producing an articulate and often visceral sound that is highly sensitive to the style of recording being played. With Tom Waits' *Swordfishtrombones*, you get all the energy and emotional charge with plenty of air and space. The bass is also rather gratifying thanks to an ability to plumb the depths and retain a good sense of articulation.

With a Music Maker MkIII MM cartridge the result is equally impressive, the dynamic range and low-level resolution putting paid any notion that CD is a worthy competitor in absolute terms. Another area where LP rules is timing, and as ever with Cyrus components, this is well served. Keith Jarrett's piano improvisations don't always keep your attention, but with the Phono X's quality of timing, it is very difficult to ignore.

Being picky, it's possible to detect a slight sense of softness to high frequencies. These

are extended and clean, but some top-notch phono stages give you more extension and solidity of treble. Both Trichord's Dino Plus and Graham Slee's Era Gold V deliver a hint more transparency than the Cyrus in ultimate terms, albeit only for MMs in the latter case.

The Phono X is a well built, easy to use phono stage that offers seriously gratifying sound if your front end is up to the job. Its flexibility will be useful to those who like to change cartridges or need to get the best out of what they have, and it's easily upgradeable with a PSX-R power supply. If you fancy embarrassing your CD player, it's got what it takes to give your turntable an unfair advantage. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



FEATURES >> 88%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 70%



CONCLUSION

If you want to hear what great vinyl replay is all about, and have a decent turntable, this will let you know. But even better performance can be had for less (albeit in less attractive cases), which undermines the value side of the equation.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **82%**

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

Keep it cheap, keep it real... lower-priced loudspeakers need not be a compromise

Our *Ultimate Group Test* this month looks at the more affordable end of the speaker market – our least expensive pair weighs in a little below £300 and even the most costly are just under £500 per pair. No surprise then that the overwhelming majority are standmounts, and relatively small ones at that, which makes it all the more impressive that Tannoy can sell a tall three-driver floorstander for £399.

Because of the small sizes, of both the enclosures and the main drivers, the majority of the group benefit from close-to-wall siting. And, because the speaker is working into a 'half-space' rather than 'full space', the mid-bass is boosted by a good chunk – around 6dB across the octave from 50Hz to 100Hz. The downside is that wall reflections usually cause unevenness and hence a measure of coloration up in the midband. But, if there are sonic implications of close-to-wall siting, there's also an undoubted aesthetic bonus for those who like their speakers to be as discreet as possible in the room.

Another factor worth mentioning is 'room gain', where the bass end is boosted by the standing waves of the listening room. Medium-to-large rooms, such as the 4.3x2.6x5.5m room used for our listening tests, tend to boost mainly the low bass, say below 60Hz. Small rooms will boost things further up into the mid-bass, say up to 120Hz, so are naturally a better match for smaller speakers, domestically as well as sonically. Huge speakers are seldom welcome in a box room.

It's interesting to note the considerable variations in surface finish among our six models. Although it seems an anachronism in this day and age, tradition has it that loudspeakers are made of wood, and two of our six do indeed have a thin film of attractive hardwood decorating the outside of their enclosures. Two others – the largest two – come wrapped in vinyl woodprint, presumably for cost rather than aesthetic reasons. The final two bravely break with tradition by painting their outsides – which works rather well. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

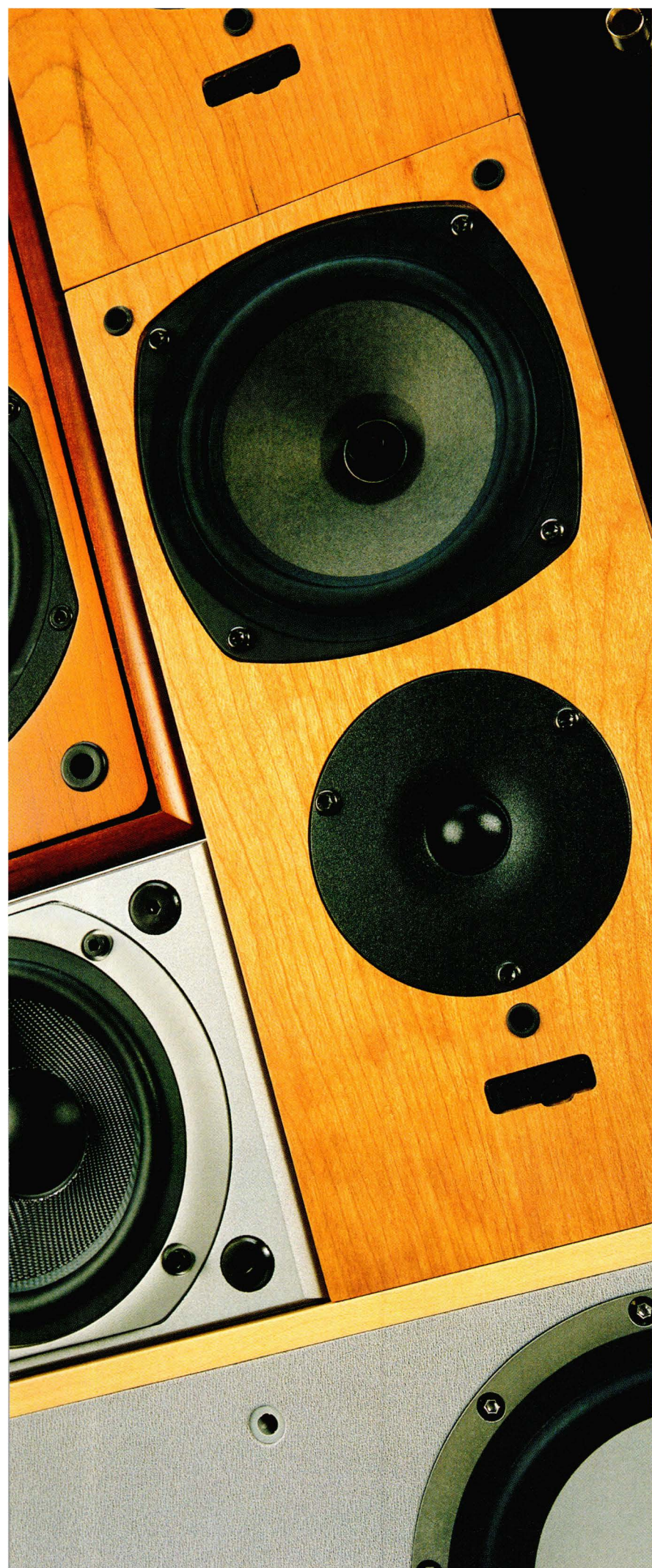
- ⊕ Naim CDS 3 CD player
- ⊕ Burmester 001 CD player
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ⊕ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ⊕ Linn Akiva cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
- ⊕ Naim NAC552 preamp
- ⊕ Naim NAP500 power amp
- ⊕ Yamaha MX-D1 power amp
- ⊕ Leak Stereo 20 power amp
- ⊕ Cables from Vertex AQ, Chord Company, Naim Audio and Harmonic Technology

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Alabama 3 *Le Peste*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Strange Angels*
- ⊕ Nitin Sawhney *Beyond Skin*
- ⊕ Lambchop *Is a Woman*
- ⊕ LSO Rostropovich *Shostakovich: Symphony No. 11*
- ⊕ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test

ON TEST





LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening poses 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 strong tendency to judge each example according to how its balance differs from the model that preceded it. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted for this group, giving scope to adjust to the changes in balance and to experiment with positioning.

LAB TESTS

The speakers were tested under in-room conditions, to best represent real-world conditions. The test equipment used included a Neutrik Audiograph analogue signal generator with synchronised pen recorder, 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 of power 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 amplifier than higher-impedance ones.

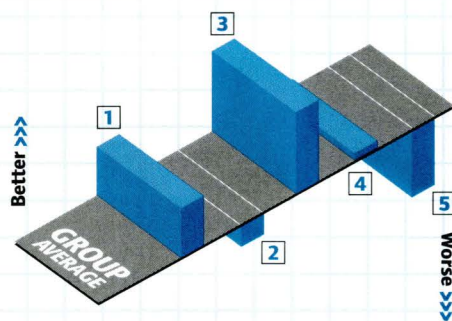
2) Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB with reference to the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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



£420 per pair ☎ 01732 451938 🌐 www.audiovector.com

AUDIOVECTOR K1 SUPER

Audiovector has given birth to a tiny and very cute new baby

One of Denmark's smaller specialist speaker brands, Audiovector is a long established operation, which has only recently started making its mark on the UK scene. Although the brand has been sold in the UK for some time, it seems like new life has been breathed into Audiovector of late. In the last few months, we've tested two variations of the floorstanding Mi 3 model, which highlights that this company is unusual in enabling customers of its base models to upgrade them step by step to the top versions of the model in question.

More affordable than the impressive Mi-series, the K-series is a brand new replacement for the earlier C-series, featuring higher efficiency main drivers than the predecessors. These drivers have a new diaphragm material made from mineral-loaded woven carbon fibres, to give a superior combination of high stiffness, low mass and good self-damping.

Among several AV-oriented designs, the K-series consists of two basic stereo models, a K3 floorstander with quarter-wave bass loading, and this tiny reflex-ported K1 standmount. The latter comes in two versions, and our test is checking out the Super variation that sells for £420 per pair. Besides a £100 price premium, the key difference between this and the base model is that an extra baffle layer is laminated onto the front panel, providing a stiffer and more stable 'working environment' for the drive units. There are also minor changes to the crossover network and the internal damping.

At just 4kg each, it's a relatively lightweight affair, and our samples came in a very natty metallic silver painted finish – the better to match today's TVs and plasmas perhaps. The range of alternatives includes white or a selection of real wood veneers, including Maple, Cherry, Rosewood or Black Ash. The 130mm main driver has a 95mm diameter composite cone, while the 25mm tweeter dome is a blend of cotton and carbon fibres. A simple crossover network is fed from two pairs of very high-quality terminals.

SOUND QUALITY

Not surprisingly, this little speaker should be placed close to the wall to provide some bass reinforcement. For much of the time the K1 Super gave a very good account of itself when placed close to the wall, with fine openness and attractively lively dynamic expression, albeit with some tendency to emphasise the top end.

Although what bass there is sounds lively and coherent, even with wall assistance there's not a lot on offer here, quantitatively speaking. Furthermore, the brightness at the top end of the audio band has a regrettable tendency to make one more aware of what's missing down at the bottom.

With some material it matters little. Speech, for example, is particularly impressive, and is delivered with fine expression and probably the least midband coloration of all the models included in this group test. Male speech remains unencumbered by chestiness, but the top-end adds the right degree of

emphasis to consonants and sibilants, making it easy to distinguish between individual voices.

With music material, the lack of weight varies according to the material being played. Acoustic music like Eva Cassidy and Alison Krauss, or indeed chamber music of all kinds, can sound very nice indeed, but fans of Basement Jaxx or Massive Attack should maybe be looking elsewhere. This speaker is best used in smaller rooms, or with the assistance of some sort of subwoofer. **HFC**



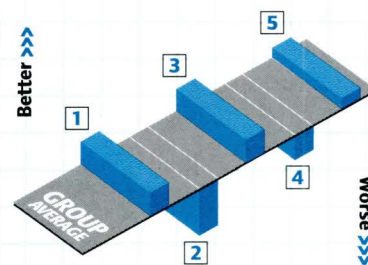
LAB REPORT

Even by the standards of miniatures, the quantity of bass available from the K1 Super is very modest indeed. The surprise here is that output is only fully maintained under in-room conditions down to 100Hz, even with close-to-wall reinforcement, leaving the 50-100Hz octave around 6dB shy. The K1 Super will sound bass-light, in most rooms.

One contributing factor is that the port is tuned to a relatively high 75Hz, and its output seems well damped. Another is that the sensitivity is quite high for such a small speaker – on our measure it's closer to 88dB than the 87dB claimed. A third factor is that the impedance is not too demanding, staying above 5 ohms through the bass region.

The in-room far-field frequency balance (wall-loaded) is rather good, slightly lacking 300-500Hz, a little prominent 800Hz-2kHz, and peaking up a little again at 13kHz, but generally very smooth and well behaved.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	-/-	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	90Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%

PRACTICALITY >> 87%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 78%

This very pretty miniature has a superior midband with low coloration and fine dynamic range. However, the bass output is very limited, so it's best used in small rooms or alongside an active subwoofer.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 83%



£349 per pair ☎ 01442 260146 🌐 www.epos-acoustics.com

EPOS M5

An exceptionally pretty miniature from a classic marque

Epos the company has been through more than its fair share of changes over the past couple of decades, but Epos speakers have remained remarkably true to their original design precepts throughout. Originally founded by Robin Marshall, Epos spent a number of years operating alongside Mordaunt-Short, and when that brand was purchased by Audio Partnership, Epos was bought by amplifier specialist Creek Audio – a natural partnership, as the two product lines have always worked well together, and shared distributors in several overseas markets even before Creek bought Epos.

Splitting the price difference between the 'budget' ELS-3 and the 'classic' M12 compact, this little M5 might be somewhat smaller than the models on which the company built its fine reputation, but it still looks very much an Epos. It has the same proportions and styling cues, plus all the classic ingredients, just scaled down so that each dimension is about 12 per cent smaller than the M12.2 we rated a Best Buy in HFC 265, and the cabinet encloses around two-thirds the volume.

Very much a 'global' product, all the design work and much of the quality control is done in Britain, and Epos owns its own tooling, but the actual toolmaking and production is carried out by subcontractors in China. The end result is a particularly pretty little miniature, with a very attractive polished finish in a choice of three real wood veneers, and nicely post-formed edges.



Fully shielded, the M5 has a 25mm diameter, 40 micron thick, anodised metal dome tweeter, protected by a magnetically held mesh grille. The bass/mid driver has a die-cast alloy chassis and a 100mm diameter mineral-loaded moulded plastic cone, operating around a central phase plug. The enclosure is ported and twin terminals are used to enable bi-wiring or even bi-amping.

SOUND QUALITY

Small size means limited bass output, and that in turn indicates close-to-wall siting will offer worthwhile tonal balance benefits. This certainly proved to be the case, and while 'bottom octave' bass isn't within its capabilities, the rest is handled with aplomb, delivering all the important stuff with life and some brio.

This isn't a particularly smooth loudspeaker, and does fall short of the M12.2 in this regard, but the overall balance is very satisfactory. The whole has a lively disposition with good communication skills, despite a measure of midband coloration. Voices, and speech in particular, has a degree of nasal emphasis that can be a little distracting, though this is most obvious immediately after the speaker is connected up, and is not serious enough to remain a long-term irritant.

While it doesn't match larger Epos models in this regard, the M5 is dynamically livelier than most tiny loudspeaker designs, bringing surprising vigour as well as a good impression of solidity to the proceedings. Imaging is pretty good, if somewhat hampered by the seemingly necessary evil of back wall reflections, and the same is sadly true for the midband, which is almost certainly less even and more coloured as a consequence.

The top end is a shade obvious and tends to stand out a little, helping to bring out fine detail, but the presence band is notably restrained. While this does nothing for low level voice articulation, it does allow the volume to be pumped up without much tendency to sound aggressive. Ultimately, the M5 is a speaker for anyone who wants a small box capable of genuine musical excitement – it sure knows how to rock 'n' roll. **HFC**

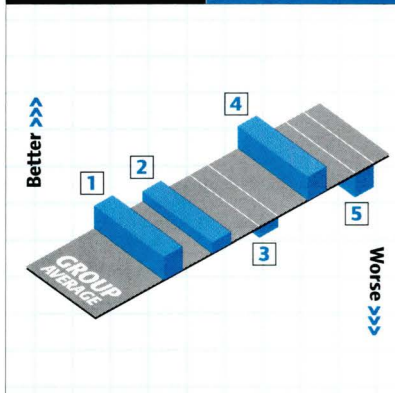


LAB REPORT

The manufacturer's claim of 88dB sensitivity is confirmed, though it is mildly compromised by an impedance characteristic that drops down to 4 ohms around 250Hz and again at 6-7kHz. Although it does introduce extra reflection-induced unevenness (for example, around 300-500Hz), the overall balance is certainly improved by close-to-wall siting, as this delivers an in-room far-field response that holds well down top around 40Hz. The tuning of the reflex port to 55Hz undoubtedly makes a positive contribution here.

Despite some up-and-down unevenness, most notably in a presence dip, 2.5-4.5kHz, the overall frequency balance holds within impressively tight ± 3 dB limits from 40Hz up to and beyond 10kHz – exceptionally good for a measurement made under in-room conditions – though there is some isolated mid emphasis around 1kHz, and in the treble region around 5-7kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> +10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4/- ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 82%



PRACTICALITY >> 86%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 87%



An unusually pretty miniature that works well close to a wall. It's not smooth or sweet, but it does communicate with good authority and dynamic expression, and responds to power with enthusiasm.

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

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REGA R1

Can Rega's new entry-level speaker match its bigger brothers?

Rega might still be best known for its vinyl spinning turntables, but the new R-series range of speakers has been making quite an impact on the marketplace, giving credence to the claim that British manufacture is still very feasible and it's not necessary to go overseas to source a highly competitive range of speakers.

The R1 is the smallest and most conventional model in the R-series, and the only standmount. Unlike the larger floorstanders, there's no room for Rega's radical extra bass driver here, and this simple two-way can be seen as a direct descendant of the earlier Kyte and Ara models.

At £298 per pair it's not exactly a budget contender, but it is the least costly in this test group, and also comes with real wood veneer covering all six faces. Okay, it's not the classiest veneerwork around – there's no fancy 'book-matching' between the pair, and the edges look a bit flaky – but it's still real wood, and the speaker looks very pretty with its drivers neatly rebated and the grille removed.

The front view is particularly slim, made possible by the very small diameter of Rega's well established RR125 main driver, used for both bass and midrange duties here. This 135mm driver has a solid cast alloy chassis, a central phase plug, and a 90mm paper cone driven from a 19mm voice coil. The tweeter is a

soft fabric dome device, again 19mm in diameter, with a short horn flare. Though slim, the enclosure is quite deep, and is loaded by a rear port tuned to 70Hz. Just a single pair of terminals is fitted, to feed a deliberately minimalist crossover network.

SOUND QUALITY

Like its Kyte and Ara predecessors, the R1 is definitely best positioned close to a wall, in order to give the bass enough boost to match the top end. This is a busy sounding speaker – lively, coherent and informative, yet also a little thin in tonal balance terms, as the midband, and the lower midband in particular, sounds just a little undernourished. While there's bags of detail to keep listener interest and involvement high, voices lack a little warmth and body, and larger instruments likewise seem to be a little weak on fundamentals, and strong on harmonics.

The top end here is notably sweet and delicate, and that slight upper range forwardness alongside the fine upper range coherence delivers great clarity and voice articulation, even when the system is playing at very low levels. The downside corollary is that poor-quality recordings with heavy upper range compression (anything by Oasis springs to mind!) can get unpleasantly aggressive if the volume is turned up high.

Dynamics are vigorous and lively though, which somehow seems to make up for the lack of warmth, and the bass is frankly surprising for its impressive evenness and good sense of drive and purpose, even though it obviously lacks serious extension.

Those with a taste for heavyweight techno music should maybe look elsewhere, as the R1 doesn't have the most muscular sound around. But, given a little close-to-wall assistance, it does show fine agility right across the range. And if the top end does sound a shade obvious, the speaker as a whole shows fine coherence, good timing and a superior dynamic range, which is exceptionally rare in so small a speaker cabinet. **HFC**



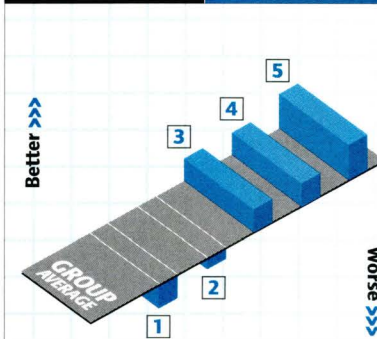
LAB REPORT

Rega's claim for "approximately 90dB" sensitivity should not be taken too literally. While 87dB looks on the cards through the bass region, 86dB looks closer to reality overall, with 85dB nearer the mark in the central midband.

This is not too surprising in view of the very easy-to-drive impedance load that stays above 6 ohms throughout, and indeed above 8 ohms throughout the bass and midband, dipping down to 6 ohms through the 5-10kHz treble region.

With close-to-wall assistance, and a port that's tuned to 70Hz, bass extension is well maintained down to 50Hz under our in-room far-field conditions. While low frequencies are more even than most up to 300Hz, output is a couple of dB too light through the broad two-octave midband, 300Hz to 1.5KHz. Above that, output recovers somewhat and is notably smooth and even right through the presence and treble.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	48Hz

VERDICT

- SOUND >> 83%**
- PRACTICALITY >> 86%**
- BUILD >> 87%**
- VALUE >> 90%**

This cute little veneered standmount likes near-wall siting and sounds busy, coherent and involving. The overall balance does sound a little thin, but the top end is sweet and delicate and the bass even and lively.

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

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Epos M5 Speaker
Supertest Winner

★★★★★ May 2005 - Stereophile USA
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TANNOY SENSYS 2

A three-driver floorstander for under £400 is obviously good value

Tannoy's budget range of Sensys models made its debut a couple of years ago, and was unusual in being split into two distinct strata. The standard Sensys models with conventional driver line-ups have, until now, evaded our scrutiny, while two more costly DC variations of the theme were reviewed in *HFC 245* and *HFC 250*.

This Sensys 2 is the conventionally driven equivalent to the Sensys DC2, and costs just £399 per pair rather than £650. The basic enclosure and dimensions – and presumably the bass-only driver – look much the same, but in place of one of Tannoy's exclusive dual-concentric bass/mid/treble drivers and a top-mounted super-tweeter, you just get a conventional bass/mid driver with separate box-mounted tweeter.

Our samples came finished in a rather bland but entirely acceptable maple vinyl woodprint wrap, with rosewood and black as the alternative options. The front panel is covered in a flocked silver-grey laminate, attractively matching the colour of the driver cones. The 36 litre enclosure feels tough and solid, as



additional bracing is used to stiffen the basic 15mm MDF carcass.

The rear panel carries a terminal block with two pairs of terminals, for bi-wiring or even bi-amping, plus a reflex loading port. Port-blocking foam bungs are supplied; these are likely to be most useful if the speakers have to be placed close to a wall, and experiment with them if the speaker's proximity to walls makes the Sensys 2 sound too bass-heavy.

Both 175mm cone drivers look identical, and very smart too. They're fixed by no fewer than ten woodscrews, use moulded plastic frames, are magnetically shielded, and fitted with 115mm paper cones. Both are loaded by the complete continuous enclosure, and operate in a two-and-a-half-way configuration, the lower one rolling off above the bass region, while the upper one continues up to the crossover with the 25-micron thick, 25mm diameter titanium dome tweeter.

SOUND QUALITY

The floorstanding Sensys 2 is a much larger speaker than all the other models included in this test group, so it's no surprise to find that it offers significantly greater bass extension and weight, which is obviously a worthwhile bonus. At the same time, there's also a down side. For example, with discs like Nitin Sawhney's *Beyond Skin*, which has several tracks that feature complex figures on large percussion instruments, the extra weight and scale was very audible, but there was also some lack of crispness that made it less than easy to distinguish the interplay between the musicians, and the dynamic contrasts of the instruments themselves.

This is unquestionably a well-balanced speaker, and also a relatively smooth sounding one, especially in the context of modestly priced speakers in general. But it's also arguably a little too smooth, with a tendency to smooth over the dynamic contrasts that lie at the very heart of a musical performance. This is a speaker that's very easy on the ears, but shows less inclination to stir the passions.

Partly because the bass alignment suits free space siting, midband coloration is impressively low and stereo images are notably spacious and well formed. This speaker does just about everything very competently, and while it does much more than simply go through the motions, and is unquestionably relaxing and easy to listen to, the problem is somehow it lacks the ability to inspire excitement and enthusiasm. **HFC**

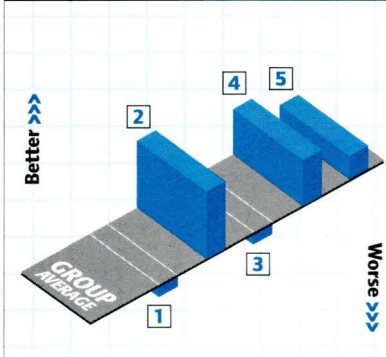


LAB REPORT

Tannoy's 89dB sensitivity claim does seem mildly optimistic, as under our 'real world' far field conditions the Sensys 2 only just manages an overall figure of 87dB. That figure is further compromised by an impedance trace that dips fractionally below 4 ohms at a power-hungry 110Hz. However, the ultimate bass extension is quite remarkable for a low cost speaker, achieving a staggering -1 dB at 20Hz. Curiously, despite the reflex port, the typical 'double-hump' of a ported enclosure is not visible here, so either the port output is very heavily damped, or it occurs below our 20Hz measurement limit.

With the speakers clear of walls and ports open, the tonal balance is a little warm and rich through the broad bass region (sub-150Hz), then a trifle lean 150-700Hz, and a little forward around 800Hz. The balance is impressively smooth and well ordered throughout the presence and treble.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >> +60%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	39Hz	20Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 75%



PRACTICALITY >> 75%



BUILD >> 77%



VALUE >> 83%



A lot of speaker for the money, this floorstander delivers exceptional bass extension and a smooth overall sound, but ultimately lacks vigour and incisiveness, so that the end result is slightly undynamic.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **78%**

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ART Loudspeakers
Audio Analogue
Aurum Cantus
Audio Physic
Audionet
AVI
Bel Canto
Black Rhodium

Blue Note
Border Patrol
Custom Design
Croft
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Soundstyle
Stello
TacT Audio

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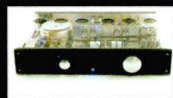
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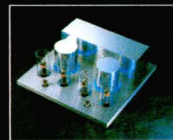
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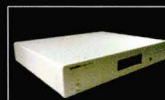
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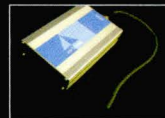


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TITAN T2SR/E

This intriguing design sports a ribbon tweeter yet costs under £500

Esex-based Titan is not a completely new name to *Hi-Fi Choice* – back in 2003, we reviewed the company's large Saturn subwoofer, with reasonably positive results, and the company has a history that goes back many more years, as a supplier of enclosures to other manufacturers.

This is the first time we've sampled a regular stereo pair of speakers from the company, and this £499 per pair T2SR/e standmount is just one example amongst a quite large selection of different models that the company makes. A number of these are unconventional in appearance, and that includes this example, which is not only unusual in its pyramidal enclosure shape, but also features drive units that differ significantly from the market norm.

It's not a true pyramid, as the top is truncated and both the front and back panels are vertical, leaving just the sides sloping inwards as they connect a 30cm wide base to an 18cm wide top. But the shape is certainly attractively distinctive, the more so perhaps because our samples came painted in a rather fetching 'Ford Focus' blue. And the shape has several other potential benefits too.

Most significant perhaps is that it allows the use of a relatively large bass/mid driver, without making the speaker too bulky in consequence. Another bonus is that it avoids parallel sides, so lateral internal standing waves and reflections are well dispersed. And the relatively narrow, tapering top part of the enclosure should help the ribbon tweeter deliver wide dispersion into the room.

Both drivers are sourced from German brand Visaton. The bass/mid driver has a shiny metal cone a full 150mm in diameter, and a cast alloy chassis, while the 'twin ribbon' tweeter, with a claimed bandwidth that extends up to 40kHz, is 60mm long, and each ribbon is 5mm wide. The whole thing is very solidly built, with a total weight of 9kg, and is rear-ported. There's no grille, nor any provision for fitting one, and just a single pair of terminals is used for amplifier connection.

SOUND QUALITY

This Titan proved to be rather a mixed bag, sonically speaking. The Lab Report describes the very real measured balance anomalies, and these translate directly into the perceived tonal balance. There's therefore no avoiding the observation that this speaker is extremely mid-dominant, has very limited bass output and extension even when placed close to a wall and suffers from a distinct lack of output in the presence zone.

These characteristics were immediately obvious as soon as the speakers were connected up, and while they don't go away, the ear/brain does adjust and can compensate to a degree. From a philosophical standing, having to compensate 'in head' for the idiosyncrasies 'in speaker' may not suit everyone, but this is not a fatal flaw in the design. Over and beyond the balance, the T2SR/e actually sounds rather good. The broad midband is smooth, even and sounds both clean and notably free from strain, and if the presence is altogether too laid back for best voice and speech intelligibility, the way that ribbon tweeter delivers the top end with sweetness and delicacy seems pretty fair compensation.

The up-side to all this is that the Titan will never sound aggressive, and has the headroom reserves to be driven hard without complaint or unpleasantness. There are no significant boxy effects and imaging is well handled. Ultimately, we find the Titan T2SR/e an interesting, if decidedly idiosyncratic, performer. If you want something different, in looks and sound, the Titan could be just the trick. **HFC**



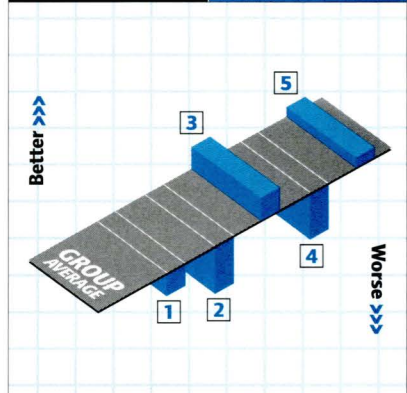
LAB REPORT

Only very sketchy specifications were available for this speaker, and these did not include sensitivity. On our measure, the value comes out at around 87dB, though this is only across a rather restricted midrange decade, 100Hz-1kHz, and therefore will not be truly representative of the perceived loudness. The impedance, happily, is a very easy 8+ ohms up to 5kHz.

The problems with the T2SR/e are twofold. First there's not a lot of bass – the port is exceptionally heavily damped, so even with close-to-wall reinforcement, output 40-100Hz is around 6dB too light. Then there's a quite dramatic down-tilt between the broad midband and the treble, output falling some 7dB between 1kHz and 2.2kHz.

On the positive side, both the midband and the treble look impressively smooth, and even the transition between them is not too uneven. It's just rather dramatic.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	-	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	48Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 72%



PRACTICALITY >> 80%



BUILD >> 86%



VALUE >> 73%



With its pyramidal shape, this speaker is attractively different, and if the measured performance is rather wayward, it sounds better – smooth and sweet, if very laid back – than the measurements suggest.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 77%

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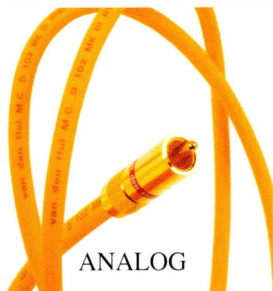
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TRIANGLE TITUS ES

Musical energy is Triangle's forte – this little speaker is no exception

The smallest model in Triangle's least costly Esprit range of speakers, the £370 per pair Titus ES shares many of the same individualistic – indeed somewhat idiosyncratic – characteristics of its fellow range-mates, several of which have already performed with distinction in previous *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews.

In a very real sense, the Titus ES is a smaller variation on the successful theme established by the other standmount in the range, the rather more costly Comete ES, which received a Best Buy rating in *HFC* 265. The two share the same unusual horn-loaded tweeter, the same distinctive and slightly indecorous styling, and really only differ in the size of enclosure and main driver. Indeed, one could easily be mistaken for the other across a crowded room.

The Titus ES is around 13 per cent shorter and shallower, and about 10 per cent narrower than the Comete ES, which actually translates into an internal volume of around two-thirds its larger brother. Weight is 24 per cent less, and price down 26 per cent, while it uses a 130mm rather than a 160mm diameter bass/mid driver. The really important question, of course, is whether it gives anything much away in sound quality terms. The spec indicates 1dB less sensitivity and just 5Hz less bass extension for the smaller model, which doesn't seem like much of a sacrifice.

'Prosaic' is a generous adjective to describe the design, which is not at all *le style Anglais*, featuring as it does a front panel painted a

dark charcoal grey. The rest of the speaker is covered in fairly unconvincing vinyl woodprint, in a choice of Champagne, Cognac or Bordeaux (light, medium or dark, for the uninitiated). But you don't buy a Triangle principally for its appearance – it's the company's unique driver technology that really sets it apart from the herd.

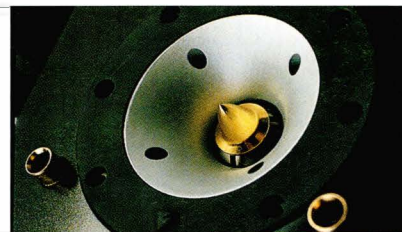
The small 130mm bass/midrange drive has an 85mm paper cone, held within an unusual low hysteresis 'double-S' fabric surround. This crosses over at around 4kHz to a cast alloy horn-loaded tweeter, chosen to give better consistency through the crossover region, and ample headroom. There are twin terminal pairs, and a front port.

SOUND QUALITY

As with all speakers, the Titus ES has its pluses and minuses, and while it does suffer from significant midband coloration, there are strengths elsewhere that provide more than ample compensation. Prominent among these is a lively and dynamic agility that somehow makes even relatively unpromising material sound engrossing and entertaining, which seems to be a pretty general trait with Triangle's speakers.

Then there's an overall tonal balance that's broadly well balanced, especially when the speakers are sited within 20cm of a wall, so as to provide some worthwhile mid-bass boost. The Titus ES is neither a smooth nor a sweet sounding speaker, nor a low-bass excavator, but it does deliver the music with a worthwhile measure of authority, and fine top-to-bottom coherence. What's more, place the speaker close to the rear wall and the bass is more than respectable, given the small speaker volume.

A disc like Nitin Sawhney's *Beyond Skin* is a stern task for any speaker, partly because it's exceptionally well recorded, but also because of the complexity of percussion that extends well down into the bass region. But this didn't faze the Titus ES at all, its clean and agile bottom end powering the music along with fine enthusiasm and dexterity, even if the ultimate weight and scale is beyond its capabilities. This speaker fights above its weight, but still manages to sound good. **HFC**



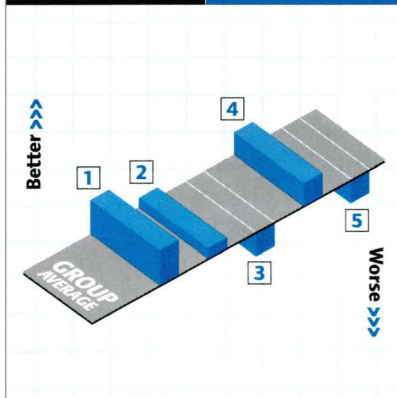
LAB REPORT

Triangle claims a 90dB sensitivity for the Titus ES, and we'll go along with at least 89 of those quoted decibels. While that figure is generous for such a small loudspeaker, limited bass extension and a demanding amplifier load are both contributing factors. Close-to-wall siting helps prop up the bass somewhat, the 52Hz-tuned port ensuring decent output down to around 40Hz.

The impedance just about qualifies as 4 ohms nominal, though it stays close to 3 ohms across the majority of the midband.

It's worth taking time to find the best siting here, as this can significantly influence the midband smoothness as well as the bass alignment. At its best, the balance will hold within impressively tight limits right across the audio band, though there is some midband unevenness around 800Hz-1kHz. Above 1kHz the trace is smoother and flatter than most, albeit with a mild 7kHz notch.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +30%
- 2] Bass extension >> +10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -20%

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	4/3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	60Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%

PRACTICALITY >> 81%

BUILD >> 77%

VALUE >> 88%

Not the prettiest of loudspeakers, but a good size box and radical main driver mean the Titus ES has vim and vigour to spare. It's a very well balanced speaker, if a little lacking in smoothness and sweetness.

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



CONCLUSIONS

Size isn't everything, you know – at this end of the speaker market, smaller is often better

Of late, loudspeaker group tests at *Hi-Fi Choice* have tended to look at more upmarket models than this month's selection. While this group, priced between £298 and £499 per pair, doesn't represent the very cheapest speakers out there, it does serve to show what performance limitations a speaker's price will impose as one moves towards the lower end of the market. What's more, these models represent the real descendents of the classic £99 bookshelf speaker of the 1980s; although you can still buy £99 speakers today, inflation has meant

those very low-budget models are so constrained by the price tag, they cannot replicate past glories.

Coping with cost constraints can take a number of forms, the most popular response here clearly being to shrink the speaker to 'miniature' dimensions. Three of our six – the Audiovector, Epos and Rega – have taken this route, producing models with top quality real wood veneered, port-loaded cabinets of about seven litres enclosed volume, loading 130mm bass/mid drivers.

The smallest of these, from Audiovector, was clearly a little too

tiny for our room, but might well work better in a small room, or alongside a subwoofer. While the much larger floorstanding Tannoy obviously provides a lot more speaker for the money than any of the others assembled here, and delivers considerably greater bass extension to boot, its all round sonic performance proved less than inspirational. Perhaps this indicates that the engineering content has been spread a little too thinly. Meanwhile, while the Titan both looks and sounds interesting in its determinedly idiosyncratic way, it must be down to the individual

purchaser to decide whether its unusual approach appeals.

Neither the Rega nor the Epos – two of our Best Buys – handle the bottom octave, but both work well down to 50Hz, provided they're sited close to a wall. While it makes for a very discreet installation, the down side is that wall proximity also usually increases midband coloration. Our third Best Buy, from Triangle, opts for a larger enclosure and generates more sonic authority in consequence, but the compromise here is the speaker's rather uninspired vinyl woodprint. Great sonics though! **HFC**

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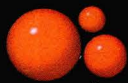
» Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.
 » Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take the time and trouble to experiment with positioning.

» 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	Audiovector K1 Super	Epos M5	Rega R1	Tannoy Sensys 2	Titan T2SR/e	Triangle Titus ES
PRICE	£420	£349	£298	£399	£499	£370
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Very superior midband with low coloration and fine dynamic expression, but the size means bass output is very limited.	Pretty miniature is neither smooth nor sweet, but it communicates with pleasing authority and dynamic expression.	Sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin, but its top end is sweet and the bass lively. Impressive at the price.	Exceptional bass extension and a smooth overall sound, but ultimately lacks vigour and dynamic incisiveness.	Looks different, and gives odd measured performance, but sounds smooth and sweet, if very laid back.	Odd driver configuration delivers fine, if colored sound, that makes up for the basic finish.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	14x26x22cm	17x33x21cm	15x32x24cm	21x91x29cm	18-30x40x18cm	18x37x30cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	2-way	2-way	2.5-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x130mm	1x130mm	1x130mm	2x175mm	1x200mm	1x130mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Stand	Stand	Floor	Stand	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Real wood/paint	Real wood	Real wood	Vinyl	Painted	Vinyl
BI-WIRE?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	88dB G	88dB G	86dB P	87dB A	87dB A	89dB G
EST. BASS EXTENSION	90Hz P	40Hz A	47Hz A	<20Hz E	90Hz P	40Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	7/5 ohms A	6/4 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	6/4 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	4/3 ohms P
OVERALL FREQ BALANCE	-20% P	+20% G	+20% G	+40% E	-40% P	+20% G
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+10% A	-20% P	+30% G	+20% G	+10% A	-20% P

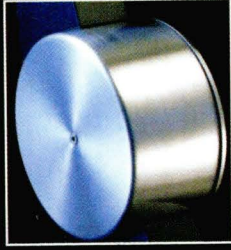


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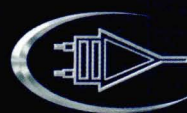
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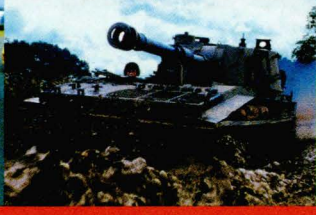
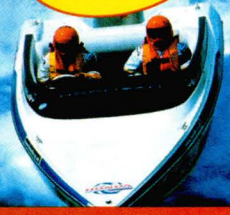
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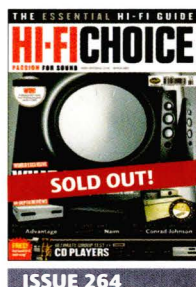
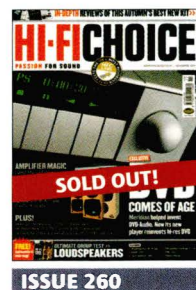
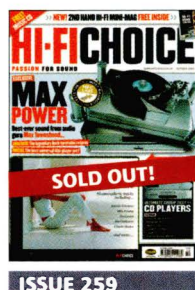
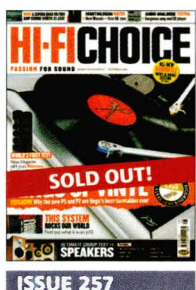


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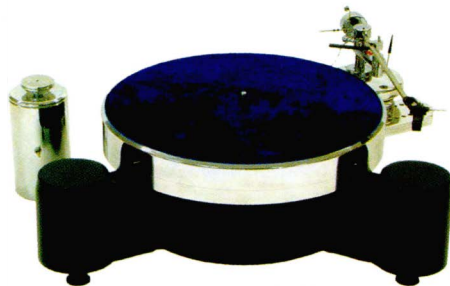
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AUDUSA



Acoustic Solid
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HiFi Choice
April 2005

HiFi News and Record Review May 2005.....*The sound is extraordinary in its overall balance. The VC7's are capable of exceptionally fine detail and dimensionality. In terms of the sensible compromises, the sheer musicality and sense of being there, the VC7 is masterpiece. The Bosendorfer VC7 is for me a dream come true*

Best Loudspeaker 2004 - Wallpaper Magazine

Le Festival Son et Image de Montréal 2004..... *It was also perfectly obvious that the Bösendorfer loudspeakers had the finest reproduction of piano music that I have ever heard. Seeing the quality of the piano in the same room as the loudspeakers, I was impressed, but not surprised. They obviously knew what they were doing when they built these beauties.....*

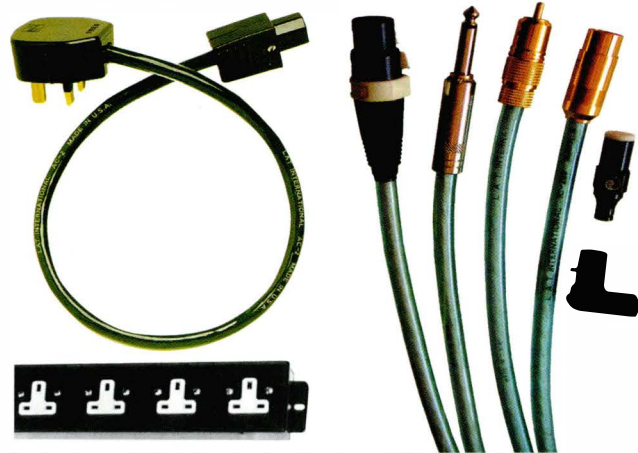
AUDUSA EUPEN

The world's only true Ferrite technology cables - a high quality ferrite is extruded over the conductor strands. Power Cords - GNLM 5/2.5 (CSA 2.5) and GNLM 05/04. From 48 for a 1m cord terminated with an IEC and MK tough plug. Also available are the CMS Analog, Digital and Video Interconnects with RCA, XLR or BNC connectors



LAT AC-2 MKII
Power cord compare with products costing ten times as much, then decide

IC-200 MKII
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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 multichannel gear you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, plus 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 stringent 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.



Cyrus CD8x £1,000

The latest diminutive CD spinner from Cyrus is an absolute stunner. Highly detailed and supremely musical, it's more than a match for many more outwardly exotic machines.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

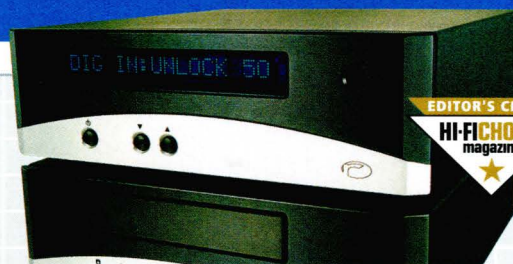
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	
UP TO £1,000										
BB	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems	●	●	●	●			247
BB	Arcam DIVA CD192	850	Beautifully built, well featured player with clear, open and involving sound		●	●	●	●		264
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	This elegant little player can hold its own in very elevated company – a budget system will barely do it justice	●	●	●				249
BB	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)	●	●	●				264
BB	Exposure 2010 S	599	Highly communicative sounds with good bass, though not always the most analytical		●	●	●			264
BB	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages	●	●	●	●	●		250
BB	Musical Fidelity X-Ray ^{V3}	900	Think of this as an A3.2 CD player in a smaller, cheaper box. Great, earthy CD sound for the money	●	●	●				255
BB	Naim CD5i	825	As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price				●			259
BB	Quad 99 CD-P	1,000	Good but not outstanding player that also doubles as a preamp, with digital inputs and volume controls			●	●			259
BB	Roksan Kandy MkIIID	650	Clean, tidy and expressive player – a more than worthwhile improvement on previous versions		●	●	●	●		259
BB	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	248
ABOVE £1,000										
BB	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,650	The new Maestro 192/24 delivers a sound that's slightly rosy yet always musical and thoroughly enjoyable	●			●			257
EC	Ayre CX-7 CD Player	2,950	Superbly built and natural sounding player that will win you over with its range of capabilities and transparency	●			●		●	251
EC	BAT VK-D5SE CD Player	5,495	Superb valve CD player that is smooth and refined but with real guts that doesn't conform to valve stereotypes	●	●	●			●	251
BB	Copland CDA823	1,750	Its ability to resolve micro dynamics and acoustic space is second to none.	●					●	267
BB	Exposure XXII	1,395	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening	●	●	●				238
BB	Hegel CDP2A	1,500	A technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing	●			●		●	252
EC	Krell SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SACD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price	●	●	●	●	●		251
EC	Lindemann 820	6,999	Stereo SACD player with sumptuous build and sound, onboard analogue volume control and multiple digital inputs	●	●	●	●	●	●	262
BB	Marantz SA-11S1	2,000	A stereo player for audiophiles – lack of DVD and multichannel SACD lead to subtle, highly focussed sound	●	●	●	●	●		265
BB	Meridian G07	1,595	Immaculately conceived and executed player with a softly-spoken voice. Needs careful system matching	●	●	●	●	●		259
EC	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful	●	●	●	●	●	●	263
BB	Naim CD5x	1,450	A genuinely engaging CD player with remarkable musical grip and coherence							264
EC	Naim CDX2	2,700	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●			238
BB	Orelle CD100evo2	1,299	Relaxed, but strong on refinement and detail. An intelligent choice, particularly strong with acoustic music	●	●	●				259
BB	Primare CD31	1,500	Fresh clean sounding player, with well designed control system and support for custom installation.	●	●	●			●	267
EC	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
BB	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,100	An enjoyably dynamic-sounding player featuring a positively unique choice of digital components	●			●			252
EC	Sony SCD-XA9000ES	2,400	State-of-the-art CD and SACD player with full SACD bass management and i.Link-encrypted digital output	●	●		●	●	●	253
EC	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits	●	●	●			●	253
EC	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.



Copland CDA823 £1,750

This distinguished, yet minimalist Scandinavian CD player combines a real ear for detail with full-scale dynamics and an effortless musical style. A genuine hi-fi star.



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.

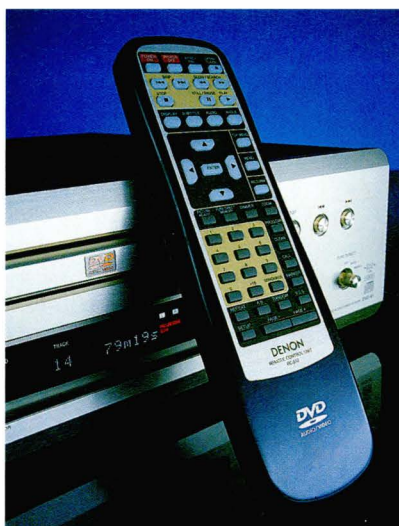
DVD PLAYERS

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 multifunction 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

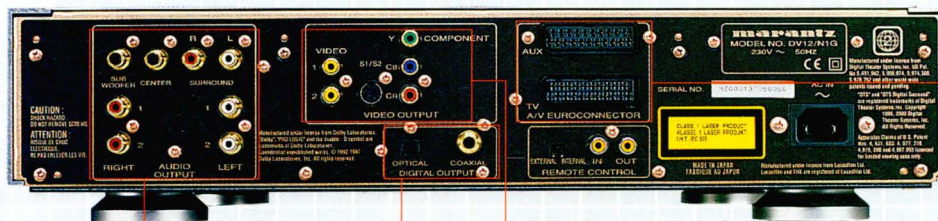
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV8 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
BB	Denon DVD-3910	900	Exceptionally well-specified universal player with a performance to match. A true class-leader						260
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-A/SACD 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
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Advantage S12.3	9,350	Adaptable ultra-high grade player with built-in preamp functionality that can be extended further. Unusually strong with CD						264
BB	Arcam FMJ DV29	1,600	An excellent DVD player, very fine with both CD and DVD-Audio music discs and superb in its video role						263
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs						238
EC	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD						266
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	Meridian G98	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs						230
EC	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio						263
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 2	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



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Pioneer DV-575A £150
DVD-Audio and SACD playback at an astonishing price – and very decent DVD-Video too!



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Denon DVD-3910 £900
New-generation Denon is currently the most complete universal player below £1,000.



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Arcam FMJ DV29 £1,600
Arcam's best DVD player yet – a world-class, HDMI-equipped audio/video feast.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Townshend Audio TA 565 Evo 2 £2,995
This player builds on Pioneer essentials to deliver breathtaking sound across all formats.

audio analogue
audio research
copland
dream vision
ecs
epos
grado
harmonic

hyperion
jadis
koetsu
krell
magnum dynalab
martin logan
goldring
myriad

opera
pathos
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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.



Michell
 Tecnodec £767

A distillation of all the good things from some of Michell's past masters, all knitted together beautifully. Understated looks and a full-bodied sound make this a star.



Clearaudio
 Champion £1,475

Current king of acrylic, the Clearaudio deck, arm and cartridge combination turns in a beautifully well-balanced delivery, but choose your support wisely..



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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	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
BB	Clearaudio Champion	1,475	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	268
BB	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			● ●	266
BB	Micell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
EC	Micell 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
BB	Micell Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
BB	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
BB	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			● ●	248
BB	Pro-Ject RPM9	1,250	Can extract sounds from the vinyl you didn't know were there, and it looks the absolute nuts!	33/45			●	268
BB	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	33/45			●	214
	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm	●			266
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
BB	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	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		●		265
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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	ADJ. GAIN	ADJ. IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound	●	●			268
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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.

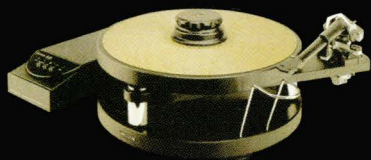
CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

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



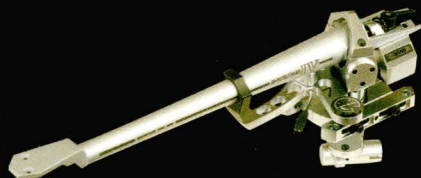
Series M2



Series 300



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Series V



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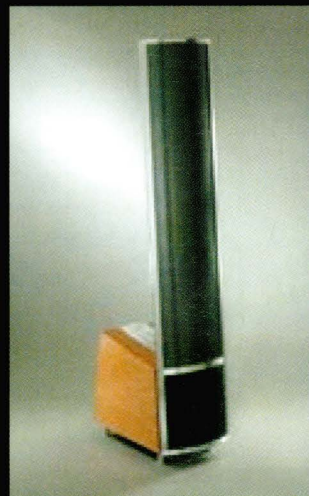
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AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE 3

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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 now said to be available to more than 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital entirely, 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

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever
	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime
	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner
	Rega Radio 3	398	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free

DAB TUNERS

	Arcam DIVA DT81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent
	Pure Digital DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing
	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear

SPECIFICATIONS						
WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
FM,M,L	40	●			●	193
FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
FM	5		●	●	●	241
FM,M	30	●		●		250
FM	30	●	●	●		230
FM	30	●		●		230
FM,M	20		●			242
FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
DAB	16		●	●	●	221
DAB	10		●	●	●	248
DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
DAB	99		●	●	●	234
DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	242
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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	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
BEST BUY	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		●	●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		●	●	243
BEST BUY	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		●	●	233
BEST BUY	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		●	●	205
BEST BUY	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		●	●	243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		●	●	218
MD RECORDERS								
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●		233
HDD RECORDERS								
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	●	●	243
BEST BUY	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	●	●	243

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

SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

Custom Installation

With our custom designed installations, your home entertainment choices become as convenient as they are clever. We can help transform every room and every home, whatever your requirements and budget.

Our installation experts are trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and totally professional service. Rest assured also that our commitment to service doesn't end once your equipment is in place. Sevenoaks staff will continue to support you and your kit long after your initial visit to one of our stores.



NEW B&W Mini Theatre

Bowers & Wilkins has introduced **Mini Theatre**, a high-performance compact home cinema system. The system is available in three different configurations distinguished by three subwoofer options. Common to all is the M-1 satellite speaker, which, although diminutive in size, has been engineered with the same design attributes as B&W's larger ranges. The M-1 is supplied with both a pedestal stand and an adjustable bracket for wall mounting with a floor stand available at an additional £150 per pair.

MINI THEATRE PRICES START FROM £849.95

With over 30 years experience, **SEVENOAKS** Sound & Vision is one of the largest and most respected Audio/Visual 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 recorders, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems.

Our fully trained installation experts can neatly and seamlessly integrate a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.

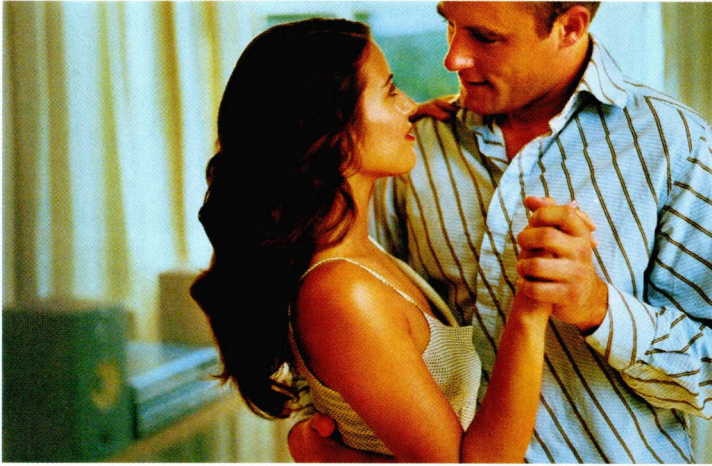
Whatever your requirements, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products and the expertise to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

- **THE BEST PERFORMANCE**
- **THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY**
- **THE WIDEST RANGE**
- **... AND TOTAL PEACE OF MIND**



B&W Mini Theatre MT20 £974.95

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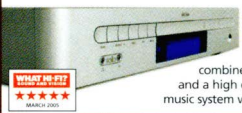


Arcam

Arcam has spent more than a generation building some of the finest high-fidelity products the world has ever seen. Whether you're interested in two-channel or a complete multi-channel AV system, the Arcam DiVA series offers the music and movie lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.



NEW ARCAM SOLO ALL-IN-ONE MUSIC SYSTEM



SOLO: A sleek, easy-to-operate system. Featuring an audiophile CD player, a 50 WPC amplifier combined with a DAB digital radio and a high quality FM tuner, the SOLO music system will captivate all who listen.

DIVA SERIES INCLUDES
A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER
A80 AMPLIFIER
A90 AMPLIFIER
CD73T CD PLAYER
CD192 CD PLAYER

T61 TUNER
DT91 DAB TUNER
DV78 DVD PLAYER
DV79 DVD PLAYER
AVR250 AV RECEIVER
AVR300 AV RECEIVER

Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price. Invest in a Cyrus system and you'll be rewarded with a wealth of sound you wouldn't have thought possible.

RANGE INCLUDES
CD6 & CD8X CD PLAYERS
6VS & 8VS AMPLIFIERS **PRE X VS PREAMPLIFIER**
DAC-X DAC & FM X TUNER

LINKSERVER SOLO

A Cyrus CD Player with built-in 80Gb hard disk drive. Keep all your favourite music instantly accessible in a single, easy to operate component.



WHAT HI-FI? BEST BUY AWARDS 2004
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYER
CYRUS CD6

WHAT HI-FI? BEST BUY AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER
6VS/8VS
CYRUS

Specialist hi-fi

Contemporary hi-fi is constantly setting new standards in sound reproduction and design. Whatever you listen to, be it Robbie Williams or Rachmaninov, Sevenoaks can recommend separate components that will bring your music collection to life and complement your home. We're enthusiasts and experts, passionate about helping you build (or upgrade) a system that will delight for years to come.



Rotel

Rotel is truly unique: a family-owned, specialist Japanese company whose passionate interest in music led them to manufacture audio components of uncompromised quality.

The **02 Series** is Rotel's entry-level range. The RCD-02 CD player combined with either an RA-01, RA-02 or RA-03 integrated amplifier represents true audiophile performance at an affordable price. For increased high-end performance, the RC-03/RB-3 pre/power amplifiers are available. The RT-02 tuner completes the range.

- 02 SERIES**
- RA-01 AMPLIFIER**
- RA-02 AMPLIFIER**
- RA-03 AMPLIFIER**
- RCD-02 CD PLAYER**
- RT-02 TUNER**
- 10 SERIES**
- RA-1062 AMPLIFIER**
- RCD-1072 CD PLAYER**



ROTEL RA-03 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

"The Rotel is simply the best-sounding amp here, and one of the cheapest - if you're after an amp, you must hear it."



Project

Project is currently one of the world's leading suppliers of turntables, with a range of models designed to satisfy all levels of expectation and budget. The range is simple to use, maintenance free and will function for a lifetime.

- DEBUT III TURNTABLE WITH OM5E CARTRIDGE**
- 2 XPERIENCE TURNTABLE (PIC TURED RIGHT)**



WHAT HI-FI? BEST BUY AWARDS 2004
★★★★★
APRIL 2005

B&W

Since the outset, the focus of Bowers and Wilkins Loudspeakers has always been to offer the best possible musical experience. With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

- 600 SERIES INCLUDES**
DM601 S3 & DM602 S3
- 700 SERIES INCLUDES**
705 & 703
- FPM SERIES INCLUDES**
PV1 SUBWOOFER



The Magnificent Seven

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We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including QED, Soundstyle and Grado, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.

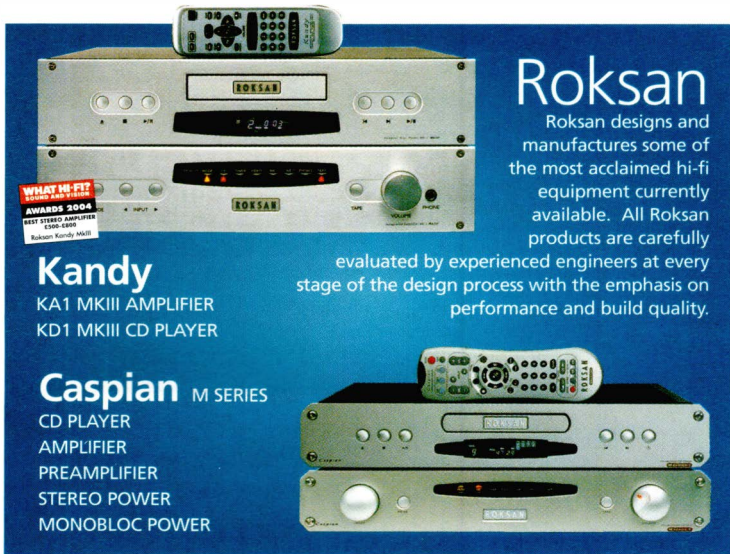
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Roksan

Roksan designs and manufactures some of the most acclaimed hi-fi equipment currently available. All Roksan products are carefully evaluated by experienced engineers at every stage of the design process with the emphasis on performance and build quality.

Kandy
KA1 MKIII AMPLIFIER
KD1 MKIII CD PLAYER

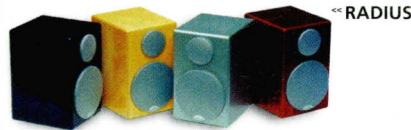
Caspian M SERIES
CD PLAYER
AMPLIFIER
PREAMPLIFIER
STEREO POWER
MONOBLOC POWER

AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER OVER £500
Roksan Kandy MkIII

Monitor Audio

Since 1972 Monitor Audio has been developing and perfecting the implementation of metal drivers, innovative crossovers, and exemplary speaker cabinet construction and finish to further the ideal of achieving sound which is to the original "as close as it gets".

The range includes - Gold, New Silver RS, Bronze and Radius, a seriously compact system bringing true hi-fi performance to both music and movies at home.



MODELS INCLUDE
BRONZE B2, B2 AV, B4 AV
SILVER RS1, RS6, RS8
GOLD REFERENCE 10 & 60



BRONZE B2

"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

Established in 1987, Acoustic Energy is one of Britain's premier loudspeaker manufacturers offering one of the most targeted range of hi-fi and home cinema loudspeaker systems on the market today.



AELITE THREE

"The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking new version... It sets a new standard for small speakers."

AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS OVER £200
Acoustic Energy AE1 MkII

Digital Radio Harman Kardon

TU970 DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER

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.



Pure



DRX702ES DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER

Product of the Year 2003

Wharfedale

DIAMOND 9.1 SPEAKERS

"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." digital technologies from one of the oldest hi-fi names.



AWARDS 2004
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
STEREO SPEAKERS
Wharfedale Diamond 9.1

Essential Accessories

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including QED, SOUNDSTYLE and GRADO, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.

Interconnect & Speaker Cables
Speaker Stands
Headphones
Equipment Supports




Marantz

The Marantz 'Range Series' offers flexible system building options for every lifestyle.

RANGE SERIES INCLUDES

- CD5400 CD PLAYER
- PM4400 AMPLIFIER
- PM7200 AMPLIFIER
- ST4000 TUNER
- SR4500 AV RECEIVER
- SR5500 AV RECEIVER
- DV4500 DVD PLAYER



CD5400 "This is a remarkable CD player for the money, with superb sound, looks and feel - A very solid buy and a lot of fun."

AWARDS 2003
★★★★★
SOUNDTRACK

KEF Q Series

The Latest evolution of the acclaimed Q Series demonstrates how the benefits of KEF technology cascade down from the Reference Series to more affordable ranges. New Q features all the inherent advantages of KEF UNI-Q® technology and are available in a variety of Finishes.



Q SERIES INCLUDES

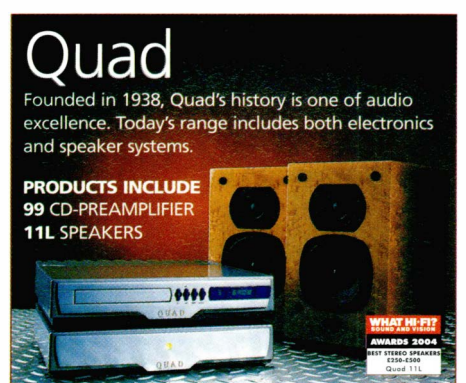
- Q COMPACT BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS
- Q4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS
- Q7 AV SPEAKER PACKAGE

Quad

Founded in 1938, Quad's history is one of audio excellence. Today's range includes both electronics and speaker systems.

PRODUCTS INCLUDE

- 99 CD-PREAMPLIFIER
- 11L SPEAKERS



AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £250-£500
Quad 11L

Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity's X-Series combines exceptional build quality with value for money.

X SERIES X-80 & X150 AMPLIFIER
X-RAY³ CD PLAYER

A5 SERIES A5 AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER





Specialist home cinema

The recent growth of DVD has led to a huge rise in demand for home cinema equipment. The prices of DVD players, AV receivers, projectors and plasma screens continue to fall but, with so many options, it's not easy to know which ones will suit your needs. Indeed, in the face of this quickly evolving and often bemusing array of products, we aim to assist you in assembling a home cinema system to be proud of – one that achieves outstanding picture and sound quality.

DENON DVD-A1XV™
 "An astonishing piece of kit that has no equals. Prepare to be astounded."

HOME CINEMA CHOICE • AWARDS 2005



Denon

Denon, Japan's oldest audio company, has established an enviable reputation for the performance of both its hi-fi and home cinema products, winning numerous awards and accolades over the years. Its stylish systems have succeeded in becoming the benchmark by which all other are judged.

MODELS INCLUDE

A/V RECEIVERS

AVR-1905 • AVR-2105 • AVR-2805 • AVR-3805

A/V AMPLIFIER

AVC-A1XV

DVD PLAYERS

DVD-1710 • DVD-1910

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS

DVD-2910 • DVD-3910 • DVD-A11 • DVD-A1XV

DVD SYSTEMS

DHT-500SD • DHT-550SD



AVR-2805 "Last year's Award-winning AVR-2803 finally meets its match in the shape of this storming successor from Denon."

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER DVD-A1XV Denon AVR-2805

DHT-500SD

"The Denon DHT-500SD is the best home cinema system you can find in one box. If you're not confident that separates are the answer for you - too complex or too expensive - then the Denon provides the ideal solution."



WHAT HI-FI? PRODUCT OF THE YEAR ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEM DENON DHT-500SD AWARDS 2004

Pioneer

MODELS INCLUDE

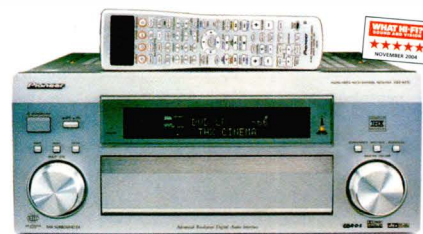
A/V AMPLIFIER VSA-AX10Ai

A/V RECEIVERS VSX-D814 • VSX-2014i • VSX-AX5Ai

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS DV668Av • DV868Avi



DV-575A "For outstanding all-round ability there are few players that can match Pioneer's DV-575A."



VSX-AX5Ai Tweaked version of the Award-winning VSX-AX5i with additional sound-processing modes.

Yamaha

Yamaha is recognised as a world leader in the fields of musical instruments and audio equipment, and in more recent years, home cinema. New models for 2005 include upgraded A/V receivers, amplifiers, and DVD players plus the innovative YSP-1 virtual surround speaker (pictured right).

MODELS INCLUDE

A/V AMPLIFIERS

DSP-AX757SE & DSP-Z9

A/V RECEIVERS

RX-V557 & RX-V1500

DVD PLAYERS

DVD-S557 & DVD-S1500



NEW YSP-1

Digital Sound Projector



Arcam

Whether you're interested in two-channel or a complete multi-channel AV system, Arcam offers the music and movie lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.

DVD PLAYERS DV78, DV79

FMJ DV29

A/V RECEIVERS AVR250, AVR300

A/V PRE-PROCESSOR AV8, AVP700

MULTICHANNEL POWER

P7, P1000



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER DVD-A1XV Arcam AVR250

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 BEST DVD PLAYER DVD-A1XV Arcam DV79

The Magnificent Seven

Visit the special offers page on our website for some fantastic savings on new and ex-demonstration equipment.

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk and click-on **Special Offers**

PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including QED, Soundstyle and Grado, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.

0% FINANCE OPTION*

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.

PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling.

*Added Value Offers - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 30/06/2005. E&OE.

DVD Recorders

Although making digital recordings of TV broadcasts isn't new, the choice, versatility and quality of recorders keep getting better. Our product selection includes both DVD only recorders and hybrid DVD/hard-disk models.

Panasonic

DVD RECORDERS

NEW DMR-ES10 (MULTI-FORMAT)

HARD-DISK MODELS (HDD)

NEW DMR-EH50 80GB (MULTI-FORMAT) • DMR-E500 400GB



"In all, the Pioneer DVR-720H is a fine machine with some nifty features and superb performance... Superb."
WHAT VIDEO AND WIDESCREEN TV • AUGUST 2004

Pioneer

DVD RECORDERS (DVD-RW)
DVR-220 • DVD-320

HARD-DISK MODELS (HDD/DVD-RW)
DVR-420H 80GB • DVR-520H 80GB
DVR-720H 160GB • DVR-920H 250GB



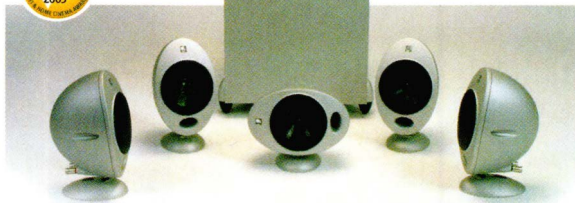
KEF KHT

The Kef Home Theatre (KHT) series brings audiophile sound quality to affordable home entertainment – it's been breaking new ground ever since it was first introduced. As its many awards and 5-star ratings prove, the original outperformed every conventional system in its class.

MODELS INCLUDE

KHT1005 • KHT2005.2

KHT5005 • KHT9000ACE



KHT2005.2 "KEF has done it. This is the new best system in its class.. The KHT2005.2 is the new top surround dog. KEF should be very proud."

KEF KIT100

Home Cinema System

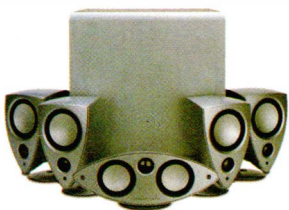
"Why take five speakers into the living room when you can use just two? Creating a virtual surround sound experience has never been simpler or more effective, thanks to this two speakers plus subwoofer concoction from KEF."



Mordaunt Short

Genie

"Distinctive looks, practical to use, first-class sonics from the sats and the sub - it adds up to a winning cinema set-up... For seamless integration of sound, impressive integrity of build and all-round covetability, the Mordaunt-Short Genie package is hard to beat - and it looks rather splendid, too."



Mission Elegante e82

"Performance with style - If you're looking for a speaker package without sonic sacrifices, then look no further than the Elegantes."



M-Cube

"Mission has shaken up this market with an innovative, desirable product of rare ability - audition today."



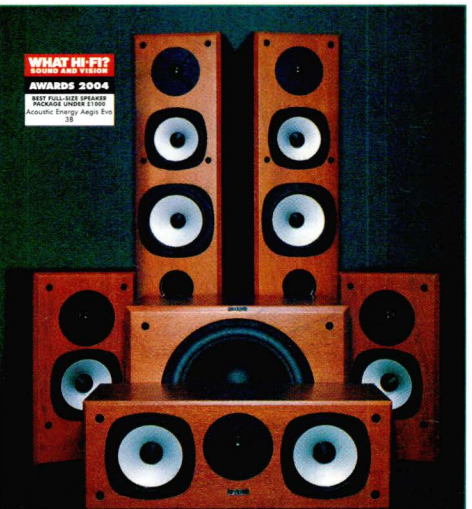
REL Subwoofers

In a market packed with subwoofers claiming to deliver the ultimate bass experience, only one brand of sub-bass system can prove its supremacy. With a record of review success stretching back over a decade and featuring no fewer than nine of the coveted What Hi-Fi? Awards, REL is acknowledged as the leading provider of deep, clean bass frequencies.



"A flawless performance from the REL Stampede leaves little room for criticism."

Q SERIES
Quake • Q150E • Q201E • Q400E
ST SERIES
Stampede • Strata 5 • Storm 5



Acoustic Energy

Established in 1987, Acoustic Energy is one of Britain's premier loudspeaker manufacturers offering arguably the most targeted range of hi-fi and home cinema loudspeaker systems on the market today.

The multi-award winning AEGIS EVO Series is a budget separates range for hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts alike, offering exquisite transparency, detail and clarity, coupled with awesome bass and dynamics.

AEGIS EVO SERIES INCLUDES
EVO One • EVO Three • EVO Centre & Sub
AELITE SERIES INCLUDES
Aelite Two • Aelite Three • Aelite Centre & Sub



Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit www.sevenoakssoundandvision before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Goldring GR1	£139.95
Linn RANGE	£ CALL
Michell Gyro SE/RB300	£1049.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut III (Black)	£129.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95
Project 2 Xperience	£549.95
Roksan Radius 5 (Wood)	£749.95

TUNERS

Arcam DiVA T61	£229.95
Arcam DiVA DT91 DAB/FM	£449.95
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 DAB/FM	£269.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DiVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DiVA CD192	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1349.95
Cyrus CD6	£649.95
Cyrus CD8 X	£999.95
Cyrus DAC X	£1099.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn RANGE	£ CALL
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Meridian RANGE	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity X-Ray	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A5	£1499.95
Quad 99 CD-S	£649.95
Quad 99 CD-P2	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KDT1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

CD RECORDERS

Yamaha CDR-HD1500	£599.95
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AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus	£389.95
Arcam DiVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DiVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1199.95
Cyrus 6vs	£649.95
Cyrus 8vs	£849.95
Cyrus Pre X vs Pre	£999.95
Cyrus SmartPower plus	£699.95
Cyrus X Power	£999.95
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£1199.95
Denon PMA355	£169.95
Linn RANGE	£ CALL
Marantz PM4400	£139.95
Marantz PM7200	£239.95
Meridian RANGE	£ CALL

Musical Fidelity X-80	£399.95
Musical Fidelity X-150	£799.95
Musical Fidelity A5	£1499.95
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Quad 909 Power	£899.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£999.95
Roksan Caspian M Pre/Stereo Power	£1999.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-03	£499.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£129.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£249.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Two	£449.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Three	£749.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII	FROM £1699.95
AVI Neutron IV	£499.95
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
B&W 705	£899.95
B&W 703	£1999.95
KEF Q RANGE	£ CALL
KEF XQ RANGE	£ CALL
Linn RANGE	£ CALL
Meridian RANGE	£ CALL
Mission m311	£129.95
Mission m341	£299.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver RS1	£349.95
Monitor Audio Silver RS6	£599.95
Monitor Audio Silver RS8	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 60	£1999.95
Quad 11L	£379.95
Quad 12L	£499.95
Quad 22L	£894.95
Ruark RANGE	£ CALL
Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	£179.95

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Arcam Solo Ex Speakers	£999.95
Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£479.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£189.95
Denon DM33 Ex Speakers	£229.95
Denon DM35 Ex Speakers	£279.95
Linn Klassik Music Ex Speakers	£ CALL

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon DHT-500SD Inc 5.1 Speaker Package	£ CALL
Denon DHT-550SD Inc 5.1 Speaker Package	£ CALL
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers	£ CALL

MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

Cyrus Link RANGE	£ CALL
Living Control RANGE	£ CALL
Yamaha MusicCast RANGE	£ CALL

DVD PLAYERS

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	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-1910	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2910 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-3910 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A1xv	£ CALL	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DVD22	£ CALL	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DVD31	£ CALL	£ CALL
Marantz DV4500	£ CALL	£ CALL
Meridian RANGE	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV370	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV575A Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV668Av Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868Avi Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD250	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD350	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S557	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S657	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S1500	£ CALL	£ CALL

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E510	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-EH50	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E500	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-220	£199.95	£219.95
Pioneer DVR-320	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-420H	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-520H	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-720H	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-920H	£ CALL	£ CALL

A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR250 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Arcam AVR300 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Arcam AVP700/P1000 A/V Processor/Power	£ TBA
Arcam AV8/P7 A/V Processor/Power	£5749.95
Cyrus AV8 A/V Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A1XV A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Denon AVR1705 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR1905 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR2105 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR2805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR3805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR335 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR635 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DPR2005 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Lexicon RANGE	£ CALL
Marantz SR4500 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Marantz SR5500 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-NR5000E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-SR602E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-D814 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-2014i A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-AX5Ai A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Rotel RSX1056 A/V Receiver	£1199.95
Rotel RSX1067 A/V Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 A/V Processor	£2294.95
Yamaha DSP-AX7575E A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-29 A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V357 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V457 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V557 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V657 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V1500RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2500RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL

A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£799.95
Acoustic Energy Aego P5/II	£449.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite 5.1	£1894.95
Artcoustic RANGE	£ CALL
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W Mini Theatre RANGE	FROM £849.95

KEF KHT1005	£299.95
KEF KHT2005.2	£599.95
KEF KHT5005	£ CALL
KEF Q7 AV	£ CALL
M&K RANGE	£ CALL
Mission M30 AV Package	£ CALL
Mission M3i AV Package	£ CALL
Mission M Cube AV Package (ex stands)	£ CALL
Mission Elegante e82 7.1 Package	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 AV	£799.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B4 AV	£349.95
Monitor Audio Radius	£ CALL
Mordaunt Short Genie	£ CALL
Quad L-Series	£1899.95
Wharfedale Diamond 9 HCP	£499.95
Yamaha YSP-1 Sound Projector	£ CALL

SUBWOOFERS

B&W PV1	£949.95
M&K RANGE	£ CALL
MJ Acoustics RANGE	£ CALL
Monitor Audio RANGE	£ CALL
Quad L Series	£ CALL
REL Q150E MKII (Brittex Black)	£499.95
REL Q201E (Brittex Black)	£724.95
REL Q400E (Brittex Black)	£999.95
REL Quake (Brittex Black)	£349.95
REL Stampede (Black)	£549.95
REL Strata 5 (Brittex Black)	£699.95
REL Storm 5 (Wood Finishes)	£999.95
Wharfedale Diamond SW150	£249.95

PLASMA

Fujitsu RANGE	£ CALL
Hitachi 42PD7200 42"	£ CALL
Hitachi 42PD7500 42"	£ CALL
Hitachi 55PMA550TE 55"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH37PE50 37"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PE50 42"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH37PV500 37"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PV500 42"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH50PV500 50"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP435FDE 43"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP435XDE 43"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP505XDE 50"	£ CALL
Toshiba 42WP46 42"	£ CALL

LCD TV

Hitachi 32LD7200 32"	£ CALL
Loewe RANGE	£ CALL
Panasonic TX26LXD50 26"	£ CALL
Panasonic TX32LXD50 32"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-26GA5 26"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-32GA5 32"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-32GD1 32"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-37GD1 37"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-37GA5 37"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-45GD1 45"	£ CALL
Toshiba RANGE	£ CALL

PROJECTORS

Optoma H27 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP4805 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP5700 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP7205 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP7210 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP777 DLP	£ CALL
Sharp XV-Z91E DLP	£ CALL
Sharp XV-Z200/201 DLP	£ CALL
Sharp XV-Z2000 DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 18 DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 20-H HDMI DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 30-H HDMI DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 HT300E DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 HT500 Link DLP	£ CALL
ThemeScene H30A Cinema DLP	£ CALL
ThemeScene H57 Cinema DLP	£ CALL
ThemeScene H77 Cinema DLP	£ CALL

REMOTE CONTROLS

Marantz RC5400	£399.95
Marantz RC9500	£799.95
Philips i-Pronto RU1000	£1399.95

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0% FINANCE OPTION*

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.

PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling.

*Added Value Offers - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer.

ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 30/06/2005, E8.0E.

Nationwide Store guide



ABERDEEN 01224 252797

• 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

BEDFORD 01234 272779

• 29-31 ST PETERS STREET

BIRMINGHAM 0121 233 2977

• ARCH 12, LIVERY STREET

BRIGHTON 01273 733338

• 57 WESTERN ROAD, HOVE

BRISTOL 0117 974 3727

• 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON

BROMLEY 020 8290 1988

• 39A EAST STREET

CAMBRIDGE 01223 304770

• 17 BURLLEIGH STREET

CARDIFF 029 2047 2899

• 104-106 ALBANY ROAD

CHELSEA 020 7352 9466

• 403 KINGS ROAD

CHELTENHAM 01242 241171

• 14 PITTVILLE STREET

CRAWLEY 01293 510777

• 32 THE BOULEVARD *OPEN SUNDAY*

CROYDON 020 8665 1203

• 369-373 LONDON ROAD

EALING 020 8579 8777

• 24 THE GREEN *OPEN SUNDAY*

EDINBURGH 0131 229 7267

• 5 THE GRASSMARKET

EPSOM 01372 720720

• 12 UPPER HIGH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

EXETER 01392 218895

• 28 COWICK STREET

GLASGOW 0141 332 9655

• 88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD

GUILDFORD 01483 536666

• 73B NORTH STREET

HOLBORN 020 7837 7540

• 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD

HULL 01482 587171

• 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET

IPSWICH 01473 286977

• 12-14 DOGS HEAD STREET

KINGSTON 020 8547 0717

• 43 FIFE ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

LEEDS 0113 245 2775

• 62 NORTH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

LEICESTER 0116 253 6567

• 10 LOSEBY LANE

LINCOLN 01522 527397

• 20-22 CORPORATION STREET (*OFF HIGH STREET*)

MAIDSTONE 01622 686366

• 96 WEEK STREET

MANCHESTER 0161 831 7969

• 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE

NEWCASTLE 0191 221 2320

• 19 NEWGATE STREET

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• 29-29A ST GILES STREET

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• 597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD

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• 36-38 PARK ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

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• LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET

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• 3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE

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• 33 LONDON ROAD

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• 79-81 CHASE SIDE

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• 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD

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• 29-30 CLEVELAND STREET

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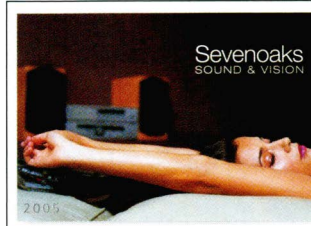
Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily onto one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK, earning a reputation for outstanding service, choice and value for money. In 1995, reflecting our commitment to the emergent new technologies in home cinema, our name was changed to Sevenoaks Sound & Vision. We now have 49 stores across the land stocking a broad range of exceptional equipment and accessories.

How to shop at Sevenoaks

When it comes to making big decisions about what to buy, there's no substitute for actually road-testing your prospective purchases - seeing, hearing and experiencing the products in action, with the benefit of our expert knowledge and guidance to help you choose. To get the most from your Sevenoaks Sound & Vision experience, simply follow this checklist:

- **ESTABLISH YOUR AIMS** - Are you tweaking an existing system to improve sound or picture quality, or are you looking for a more fundamental and comprehensive upgrade?
- **BRING YOUR FAVOURITE DISCS WITH YOU** - To ensure you get the most from the music and movies in your collection, it pays to test equipment using those very same discs or records. That way you can readily compare levels of performance. However, if you prefer, we can supply a selection of demo discs - current mainstream entertainment that serves to highlight the capabilities of the equipment.
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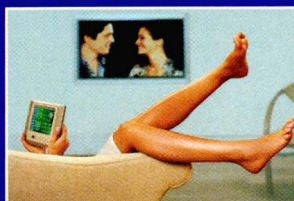
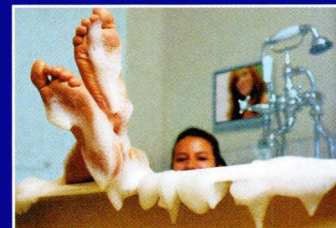
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

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.

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.

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-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

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. Impressively clean and agile but lacking musical grunt	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
EC	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 PM7200 KI	500	Smart and fully-featured, with sound that's full-bodied and confident at high levels	6	●	●	●	85	262
EC	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
	Rega Mira 3	598	Lively sound with good timing and frequency extension, if not quite as detailed as some	5	●	●	●	60	262
BB	Rotel RA-03	499	Gutsy amp that's equally happy belting out anthems and whispering romantic secrets. Good phono stage too	5	●	●		70	265
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	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7	●	●	●	100	266
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	AM 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	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
BB	Marantz PM-11S1	2,500	A good-looking, well-endowed, high-quality amp that's a great match for the impressive SA-11S1 stereo CD/SACD player	6	●	●	●	100	265
BB	Moon i-3	1,595	Powerful Canadian amp whose lively presentation is particularly suited to big-scale music	6		●		100	265
BB	Primare I30	1,500	Definitive at the price, this is a smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer. Less custom install features than CDP however	6		●		100	267
EC	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4		●		40	268

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PREAMPLIFIER	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
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2		●		266
	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	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated	●	●	6		●	75	264
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 push-pull 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

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
ES	Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Prem 350SA	20,000	Valve preamp and solid-state power deliver some of the most transparent and naturally dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	●	350	264
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●	50	254
ES	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
ES	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●		5	opt		265
ES	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●			200	247
ES	Halcro dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	225	243
ES	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	125	250
ES	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
ES	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
ES	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
ES	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6	●		233
ES	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
ES	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

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 is 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 built-in amplification 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. A state of the integrated AV amp



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

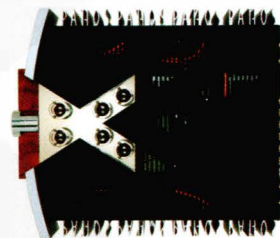
BB BEST BUY ES EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
BB	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
BB	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
ES	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously			●	170	266
ES	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	●	10	●	140	267
	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 gimmicky	●	3	●	160	255
BB	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	●	100	248
ES	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
BB	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
ES	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								
BB	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
ES	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
ES	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
ES	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
BB	Marantz PS-17/2x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	●	60	238
ES	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
ES	Parasound Halo C1/A51	8,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
BB	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

Cinema-X = stereo integrated (450wpc) and 5-channel power amp (130wpc)



PATHOS

For further information on the Pathos Cinema-X or other products :
tel: 01753 652 669 • info@ukd.co.uk • www.ukd.co.uk • www.pathosacoustics.com

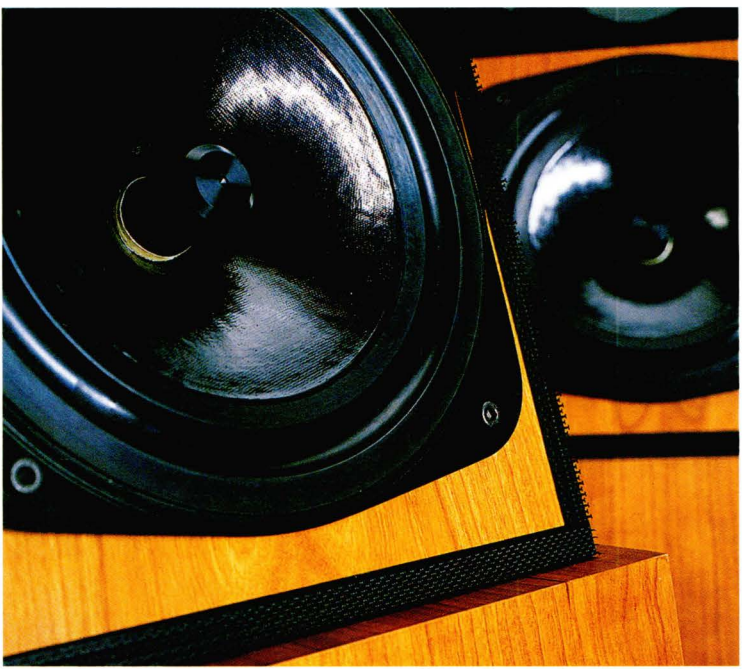
UKD

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
805S £1,600

A superbly well-engineered standmount that's capable of delivering magnificent musical communication, alongside superior subtlety and delicacy.



Mordaunt-Short
Performance 6 £3,500

This extraordinary speaker stands at the pinnacle of Mordaunt-Short's current range. State of the art resolution and imaging are among its many attributes.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS**

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	
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	Epos M12.2	450	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40	●		265	
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	
	Harbeth NRG2	650	Strikingly styled standmount majors on dynamic excitement at some expense in smoothness and coloration	19,34,29	A+	42		●	263	
	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	
	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	
BB	Naim n-SATS	695	Very discreet and informative, if a bit lean and forward. Just add an n-SUB for excellent all round results	20,29,21	A	50		●	268	
	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	

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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CD Players / CD-R Recorders / Hard Disc Recorders

Arcam FMJ Cd33 CD Player (Silver)	1349.90	999.00
Arcam Diva CD93 CD Player (Black & Silver)	979.90	750.00
AVI Lab Series CD CD Player	1400.00	1150.00
Quad 99 CD-P Upsampling CD/DAC	1000.00	749.00
Wadia 301 CD CD Player /Digital Pre (Silver) ...	3650.00	2750.00
Wadia 861 CD CD Player /Digital Pre (Black) ...	7950.00	6350.00

Amplifiers

Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier (Silver)	1199.90	950.00
Classé CAP151 Amplifier	2195.00	1695.00
Classé Ca201 Power Amplifier	3195.00	2500.00
Cyrus Smart Power Power Amplifier (Black)	600.00	480.00
Cyrus Q Power Power Amplifier (Black)	500.00	380.00
Samuel Johnston PPA100 Power Amplifier	2585.00	1450.00
Cyrus PRE & MONO Power Amps (Black)	3400.00	2700.00
Meridian G51 Stereo Receiver	1995.00	1596.00
Quad 99 Pre & Power	1299.98	1000.00

Tuners

Arcam T61 FM /AM Radio(Silver)	229.90	179.00
Arcam T81 DAB Digital Radio (Silver)	649.90	400.00
Cyrus FMX FM Tuner (Black)	500.00	400.00

Loudspeakers

Dynaudio Audience 42W Wall Mount Speakers	500.00	350.00
Cyrus CLS70 & Stands Loudspeakers /Stands	900.00	700.00
Mission 782SE Loudspeakers	899.90	750.00
Quad Quad 12 Loudspeakers (Birdseye Maple) ...	499.95	425.00

DVD Players

Cyrus DVD7 DVD Player (Silver)	1000.00	500.00
Harman Kardon DVD 2550S DVD Player(Silver) ...	350.00	250.00
Harman Kardon DVD 506 LE DVD Player(Silver)	350.00	250.00
Tag McLaren DVD32R DVD Transport (Black)	4595.00	2500.00
Pioneer DVD565 DVD Player (Silver)	249.99	149.00
Pioneer DVD656 DVD/DVD-A/SACD (Silver)	399.00	185.00
Pioneer DVD 747 DVD/DVD-A/SACD (Silver)	950.00	500.00

AV Amplifiers & Receivers

Denon AVC A11SR A/V Amplifier (Gold)	1799.99	999.99
Harman Kardon AVR 4550 A/V Amplifier (Black)	800.00	575.00

Audio Visual Loudspeakers

Mission V6c Centre (Cherry)	199.90	150.00
Quad Quad 11 Centre (Piano Black)	350.00	280.00

Mains Conditioning

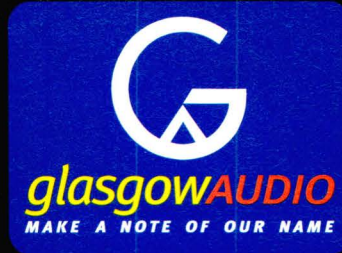
Isotek The Qube 2K 2 Way mains conditioner ...	1495.00	1150.00
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Home Cinema Projectors

Sim2 Ht200 DLP Projector with Iscan Pro Scaler .	4700.00	2500.00
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Secondhand

ATC SCA1 Pre-Amplifier	£3100.00	1900.00
Classe CAP151 Integrated Amp	2195.00	1200.00
Rotel RMB-1075 Five Channel Power Amplifier		375.00



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Quad 99 CD CD Player	650.00	485.00
Quad 99 CD-P Upsampling CD/DAC	1000.00	749.00
Roksan Caspian CD Player	995.00	595.00
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 mk2 CD Recorder HDD	600.00	499.00

Amplifiers

Cyrus Pre X Preamplifier (Silver)	1000.00	745.00
Meridian G51 Stereo Receiver	1995.00	1596.00

Tuners

Arcam DT81 DAB Tuner (Silver)	650.00	299.00
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Loudspeakers

Castle Harlech S2 (Maple) Floorstanding	1000.00	699.00
Castle Howard S3 (Cherry) Floorstanding	1350.00	949.00
Dynaudio Audience 62 Floorstanding(Black Vinyl) .	730.00	499.00
Meridian DSP5000 Mk2 (Rosewood)Digital Active	4540.00	3750.00
Rega Alya Floorstanding Loudspeaker (Cherry) ...	525.00	325.00

Subwoofers

REL Q400 Subwoofer (Maple)	1100.00	749.00
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Turntables

Project RPM 4 Turntable (Black/Silver)	325.00	245.00
Cyrus Classic Turntable (Cherry)	500.00	375.00

Televisions

Loewe Aconda 40 LS + C31 Stand 40" Widescreen	1950.00	
Loewe Aventos 3981ZP P 32" Widescreen CRT ...	1340.00	999.00

DVD Players

Arcam DV 88 DVD Player (Silver)	1000.00	549.00
Arcam DV 89 DVD Audio Player (Silver)	1300.00	649.00
Cyrus DVD 7 Upgradeable DVD Player (Silver) ...	1000.00	649.00
Harman/Kardon DVD 21 DVD Player	250.00	175.00
Harman/Kardon DVD 2550S DVD Player	350.00	249.00
Harman/Kardon DVD 30 DVD Audio	450.00	345.00
Meridian G91DH DVD Audio AV Controller	3895.00	3116.00
Pioneer DV-656A DVD Audio Player (Black)	530.00	400.00

AV Amplifiers & Receivers

Arcam AVR 200 DD/DTS AV Receiver (Black)	800.00	449.00
Cyrus AV8 DD/DTS AV Processor (Silver)	1100.00	850.00
Denon ADV-1000 DD/DTS AV Receiver /DVD	700.00	449.00
Denon AVR 3802 DD/DTS AV Receiver (Black)	850.00	499.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 5500 DD/DTS AV Receiver	750.00	395.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 5550 DD/DTS AV Receiver	900.00	699.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 430 DD/DTS AV Receiver	800.00	639.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 630 DD/DTS AV Receiver	1000.00	749.00
Meridian G68ADV Surround Controller	4995.00	3996.00
Rotel RB 985 Mk 2 5 Channel Power Amplifier	700.00	450.00

Home Cinema Projectors

Sim2 Domino 20 DLP Projector (Black)	3750.00	P.O.A
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Secondhand

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Meridian 208 CD Player	250.00	
Mission 753 Loudspeaker (black)	350.00	

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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

EB BEST BUY **ES** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
EB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
EB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
ES	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
EB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack				●	●	250	●	245
EB	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●				200	●	194
EB	Grado SR-80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise		●				200	●	230
EB	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone				●	●	330	●	219
	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable				●	●	270	●	266
ES	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience				●	●	260	●	252
ES	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
ES	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity	●	●				280	●	268

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** 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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Arcam DV89* DVD-A Player New (2Yr G/tee)	£589.00	Linn Keltik Spkrs - Wal inc Aktive Cards (2Yr G/tee) (6000.00)	£1595.00
Arcam AVR 200 AV Receiver (2Yr G/tee)	£449.00	Naim NAC102 Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee)	£699.00
Arcam A85 Amplifier S/H - Black (1Yr G/tee)	£349.00	Naim NAC 252 Preamp S/H (1 Yr G/tee)	£2890.00
Arcam DT81 DAB Digital Tuner (2 Yr G/tee)	£349.00	Naim CDX CD Player S/H (1Yr G/tee)	£1395.00
Arcam FMJ CD33 CD Player (2Yr G/tee)	£945.00	Naim NAP 180 Power Amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	£695.00
Arcam FMJ AV8 Preamp THX Ultra (2Yr G/tee)	£2190.00	Naim NAP 250 Power Amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	£895.00
Arcam FMJ P7 7 Channel Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)	£1795.00	Naim XPS Power Supply - New casework	£1475.00
AVI S21 Lab Series CD Player (2Yr G/tee)	£989.00	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee)	£3595.00
B&W Nautilus Signature 805 - Tigers Eye (2Yr G/tee)	£1675.00	ProAc Studio 125 Speakers Maple (2Yr G/tee)	£699.00
Denon AVR 2803 AV Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)	£359.00	Sugden Ampmaster Bijou Preamp (1Yr G/tee)	£485.00
Linn Genki CD Player - Black (2Yr G/tee)	£859.00	Sugden CD21 CD Player (1Yr G/tee)	£759.00
Linn 5103 AV Processor - Silver (2Yr G/tee)	£1995.00	Sugden A21a Integrated Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)	£675.00
Linn 5125 Power Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)	£1095.00	Sugden A21p Power Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)	£575.00
Linn 2250 Power Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)	£1195.00	Vibe Zeta Subwoofer (2Yr G/tee)	£399.00

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AUDIA



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

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

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER	
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
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
	Chord Company Chorus	200	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
BB	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
BB	Kimber Timbre	83	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
BB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound at a sensible price	●		●			224
BB	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
BB	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
BB	van den Hul The Well	85	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
BB	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
BB	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
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
EC	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●		E	265
BB	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price		●	●		E	234
BB	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads					O	259
BB	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●			241
	Chord Company Signature	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
BB	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●		●			227
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
BB	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
BB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
BB	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems			●			234
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
-	Wyrewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.		●	●			267
BB	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●			261
BB	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248
BB	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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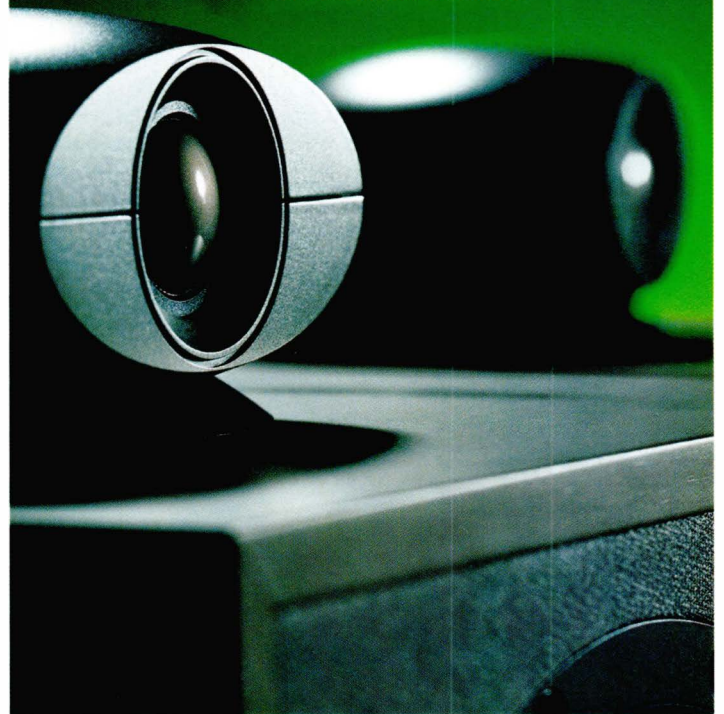
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HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



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
	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
	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
	Custom Design Icon 400	599	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
	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
	Naim Fram	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Isoblu 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48,40		4	MDF	247
	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
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
	Townshend Seismic Stand 2/5	1,100	Multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	240

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	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
	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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Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, April, 2003

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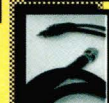
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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

S.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – '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 drive unit 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 177.5-230MHz band. 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 (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

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 complex 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), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard 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 that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

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.

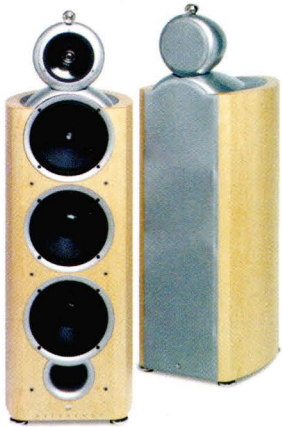
TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

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.

HEAR! HERE!



KEF



Bryston



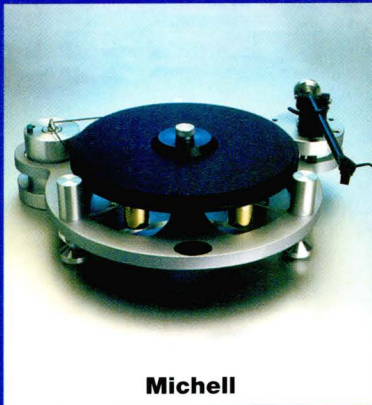
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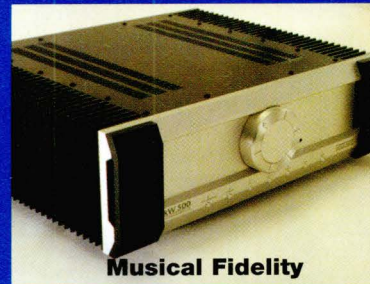
Quad



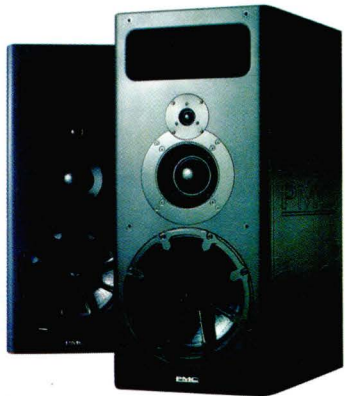
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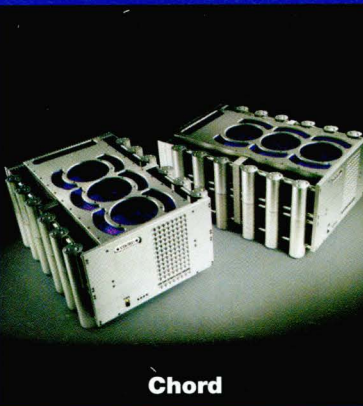
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Choice Bits is the easy way to buy the best audio accessories available today. Simply pick up the phone, order online, drop us an email or fill out the order form below and pop it in the post. It couldn't be simpler!

Mains power is an area of audio that is often overlooked, regarded as a simple 'add-on' after an audio system has been completed. The truth, however, is somewhat different. All audio components are effected by 'dirty' mains, so in order to reach a component's full potential, a clean supply should be provided. This month, we feature Nordost THOR, a fitting solution for this problem.

For our full selection of quality audio accessories please visit our dedicated website, www.choicebits.co.uk

SHOWCASE

Nordost THOR by IsoTek

Ultimate mains power conditioning system for six components

Key Features

- High-quality power conditioner, which eliminates product cross-contamination
- Wired with multi award-winning Valhalla cable



Nordost THOR by IsoTek

The Nordost THOR power conditioner combines the monofilament, multi award-winning Valhalla cable with a special circuit, developed by IsoTek's team of engineers for Nordost. THOR also features the company's

proprietary 'Polaris-X' technology, combined with Quantum QRT.

THOR offers 2300VA of high-quality power distribution for high-end audio and home cinema systems. THOR lowers noise floor and dramatically improves the coherence of all systems, thanks to the 'Polaris-X' technology. This product is also an essential upgrade for owners of all Nordost power cables.

Nordost THOR £1,595.00

Shiva (2.0M) Cable £220.00

Vishnu (2.0M) Cable £450.00

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Clearaudio Clever Record Clamp	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Quadra Record Clamp	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio (RDC) Record Puck	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Michell Engineering Record Clamp	£22.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Ringmat Developments The Ringmat	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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DIGITAL ACCESSORIES

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AVIA Home Theatre Set-Up & Calibration	£34.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
A-Z CD Clips	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bedini Hand Held Clarifier MkII	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compact Dynamics CD Plus	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compact Dynamics CD UpGrade	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Densen DeMagic CD	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digital Video Essentials (PAL) DVD Set-Up Disc	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furutech RD-2 Disc Demagnetizer	£219.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IsoTek System Enhancer, DeMag & Rejuvenation CD	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lasertrack CD2000 Set-Up Disc	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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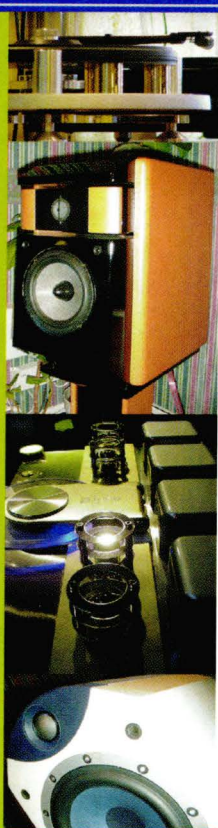


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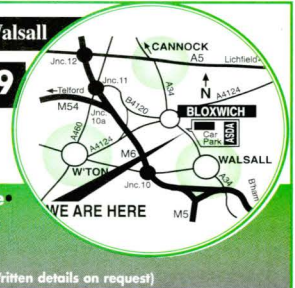
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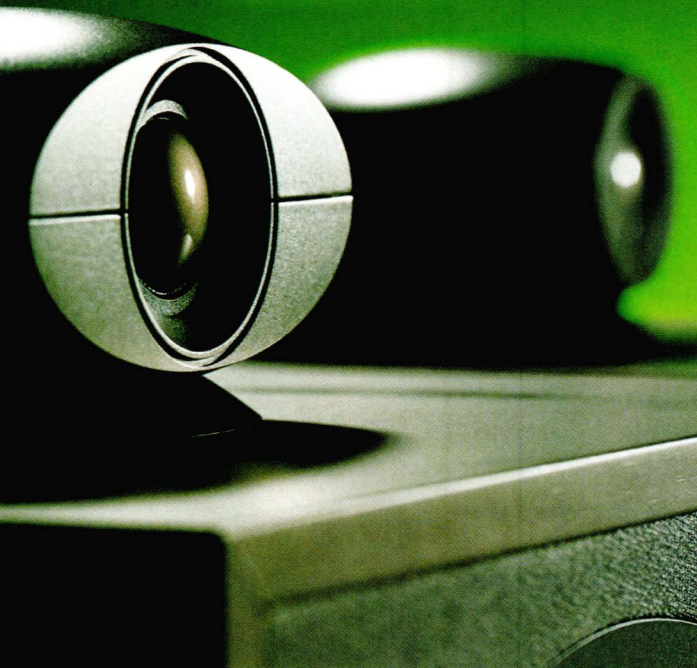
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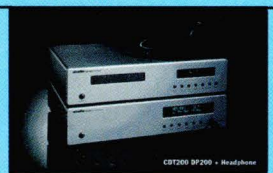
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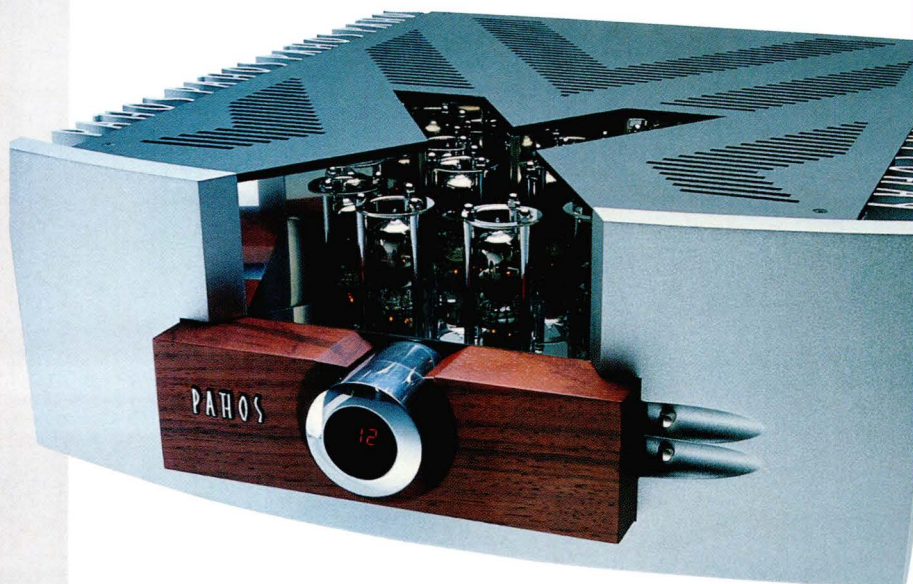
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A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

#11 LINN PRODUCTS

Like it or not, Linn Products is still synonymous, at least on the second-hand market, with the Sondek LP12 turntable. For that reason, although Linn makes some other excellent products, we're devoting this entire article to the stalwart LP12. As an automotive equivalent, think Porsche 911. It's one of those products that has been around for ages, is adored by many, loathed by others, but has evolved to such a point that the modern day equivalent is visually similar but mechanically unrecognisable from the original. Launched in 1972, the Sondek LP12 used the suspended design pioneered by Ariston as its template. Even early models were renowned for their musical, profoundly rhythmic approach, although lacking precision and much in the way of imaging.

Throughout the 1970s, there were a number of mechanical modifications made, but perhaps the most important change came in 1982 with the Valhalla, a crystal driven, electronic power supply. This was made standard from serial number 38,794, but was retrofittable. This gave greater speed accuracy than the original rudimentary power supply and improved detail and timing. Throughout the 1980s, various structural improvements were made to both plinth and armboard and in 1987 (from serial number 70,000), the suspension was updated, too.

The next big upgrade was the 1990 introduction of the Lingo power supply. This is easy to spot as it's contained in its own case.

Moving to the Lingo appreciably sharpens up the sound and will add texture and agility to the previously 'loose' bass response. Changes during the rest of the 1990s were mainly mechanical, with the Cirkus (from serial number 90,582) being the most notable – and last substantial – addition to the Linn LP12. This upgraded the bearing and suspension components and, like many of the other modifications, can be retrofittable. This is good news for second-hand buyers, as it makes it easy to upgrade an older deck. Do be aware, however, that it is not possible to transform a 1970s deck into an exact replica of the current model. Multiple changes to the plinth fixings mean that not all components are retrofittable.

Our advice would be to buy the best model you can afford and then, when you're ready to

upgrade, simply trade your old model in – this usually ends up being a more cost effective approach. Like many good turntables, an LP12 will only give a fraction of its potential if it's not set up properly. Very little goes wrong with the design but if, for example, the mains and arm wires haven't been correctly set, then the sound will suffer. A Linn dealer will usually take about two hours to set a deck up properly and, if you're buying from an unknown source, this is probably the best upgrade you'll get.

Prices start from around £200 for very early 1970s examples, but don't expect much. The better, Valhalla powered, decks start from about £400, with a really nice example complete with Ittok arm being worth around £700. Lingo-equipped versions don't usually fall below £1,000 and, with the Cirkus kit and

“Even early models were renowned for their musical, profoundly rhythmic approach.”



Above: Linn Sondek LP12 turntable

a decent arm you can usually double that. We'd keep it simple and try and find a well set up, mid-80s Valhalla with Ittok for around £500-£600. This isn't a lot for such an influential piece of hi-fi, and will offer ample tuning opportunities. Be warned, though, once you start tuning an LP12 it can become highly infectious, not to mention expensive! **HFC**

Dominic Todd
Next month: Marantz

DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 11 Drive units – diaphragm materials

Last month, we identified the key drive unit characteristics – essentially, lightness, stiffness and self-damping. These are largely determined by the innate qualities of the material used, and any additional surface treatment thereof.

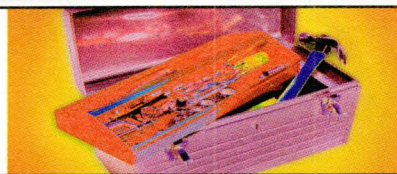
A paper pulp cone is likely to be lighter and have more self-damping than a metal one, even without the surface application of extra damping material, although the metal cone is likely to have superior stiffness. Many diaphragms consist of the same material throughout, as in a moulded plastic, pressed metal or pulp cone. Others are more complex, with woven materials or sandwich construction.

At low and mid frequencies, diaphragms behave as pistons. As frequency rises, the cone starts to bend and its edge starts to lag behind the motion at the centre, reducing the output of the driver. Ultimately the cone will go into break-up, creating sharp peaks and troughs.

The stiffer the cone, the higher its break-up frequency, but the break-up resonance tends to be more severe. The task is to choose the right mix of compromises. While many still believe that traditional doped paper still represents the best all round choice, it could be that the future lies with sandwich construction techniques. Recently, computer modelling and a much greater selection of synthetic materials

is beginning to enable engineers to 'tailor' the combination of woven outer layers with a foamed core in order to achieve an optimal blend of stiffness and damping. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



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NEXT MONTH: More on diaphragms

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Spendor Prelude - good	79
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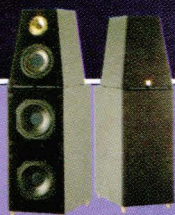
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Audio Analogue Paganini	£475
Audio Analogue Maestro, ex-dem	£950
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DENON D-M31 one year old, includes Mission M70 speakers and cables. Mint condition, £200. Partington Super Dreadnoughts. Mint condition, dark grey colour, £85 ono 01865

243068 after 6pm or 07733 364380 (Oxford).

FREE GRADO SR-60 headphones with Meridian 504 FM tuner, (£795) £400 ono. J Kempster 020 7536 0466 (London).

GRAHAM SLEE GRAM AMP 2 £90. Aura VA100MkII amp, £200. Aura TU80 tuner, £150. All mint and boxed. Pioneer PD-S703 CD player in excellent condition but no box, £425 the lot. Email jonathan.

kenyon@wanadoo.fr (Herts). **IMPULSE H2** floorstanding horn loaded speakers. Awesome dynamics, high sensitivity (94dB), (£2,250) £690. Pair of Robertson 4010 amps, one needs attention, offers. Marantz CD63, £40. 07974 274615 (Yorks).

JOHN BOWERS Active One active monitors. 300 wpc (Swiss amplification). Just serviced, technically and sonically stunning. P/ex Vintage Chapman amplification. Serious offers only. Buyer collects. Scottie 07762 021618 after 4pm (Hove).

JMLAB ELEKTRA 905 speakers three-way standmounts, cherry, bi-wireable, wonderful condition, (£1,250) £550 ovno. 07795 552220 (Birmingham). ▣

WANTED

CYRUS PSX-R silver in good working order. For details call 07977 185216 (Kent).

DENON DRM 790R cassette recorder. Details 01684 573607 (Worcestershire).

KENWOOD DMF-9020S Minidisc deck. Russ 07883 008986 (Mid Glam, South Wales).

KRELL FPB 300/200 or Gamut/Sirius D200. Interconnect and speaker cable from Transparent, Kimber Select or Cardas. 07973 220663 (Leicester).

MARANTZ CD-84, gold, vgc, will pay excellent price. 07745 804320 (Cambs).

MERIDIAN 502 preamp must be in excellent condition, will pay reasonable price. 07715 555214 (London).

MITCHELL GYRODEC or SE. Good condition please. Mr Hartley 01469 540255 (North Lincolnshire).

ROYD MINSTREL loudspeakers, any finish, but must be in perfect working order. Alternatively, new main driver units. John 0161 439 5122 (Stockport).

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!



Above: Rotel RA-1062 integrated amplifier

FOR SALE

❑ **KEF MODEL 40B** powered subwoofer. Excellent condition, (£749) £325. Please call 01245 381810 (Essex).

KIMBER MONOCLE speaker cable, 11 feet, as new condition, superb resolution, natural sounding, brilliant sound staging and detailing, (£650) £400 no timewasters. 07905 303718 evenings (Middlesex).

KEF Q3 loudspeakers, boxed as new, £140. 07976 054660 (Reading).

KRELL KSL preamp. Excellent condition, classic preamp. Can be seen working. Bargain for a Krell at £450. Call Ken on 07917 021328 (Cambridgeshire).

LFD integrated amp. Priced to sell at £200. 01438 743807 (Herts)

LINN KANS and stands, B&W DM601S2 surrounds, B&W CC6 centre, REL Q150 subwoofer, all in black ash finish, and excellent condition, £300. 0161 788 7597 after 6pm (Manchester).

LINN LP12 SONDEK turntable Ion systems power amp, Luxman CD player, Sony cassette, Armstrong tuner. Housed in luxury made to measure mahogany cabinet. Pair 32" Ruark Talisman speakers, £1,250. 01323 729073 (Sussex).

LINN ACTIVE hi-fi system comprising Kairn preamp with power supply, Kaber Activ crossover, 3x LK100 power amps, Ikemi CD player, Pekin tuner, Kaber active speakers, K400 cables, equipment support, and manuals. £2,500 gets you the lot. Call 01371 820182 (Essex)

LINN LP12 turntable. Naim preamp. Naim 250 power amps. Pioneer tuner. BX1 cassette. 0121 353 3019 (Sutton Coldfield).

LINN TROIKA cartridge, £345. Leak Stereo Fetic tuner, £55. Audiotech Tables x2, £55 each. 01344 773465 (Berks).

MARANTZ PM8200 amp (£500), £200. Prestige condition and genuine bargain 07903 6133418 (London).

MERIDIAN 500 transport and Musical Fidelity A324 192k upsampling DAC and Chord Company Prodac cable, £800. 01438 743807 (Herts).

MICHELL TRANSCRIPTOR Hydraulic Reference Turntable, Alphason Opal Arm, new belt, new turntable oil, wonderful condition, priced at £750 ono. Simon 01765 698492 eves (N.Yorks)

MICROMEGA STAGE 2 CD player, near mint but slight skip. (£700), £50. 01672 519358 (Wilts).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A220 class A integrated amplifier, piano black, boxed, instructions, superb condition, £450. 020 7223 8589 (London).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-80 integrated amplifier, brand new, boxed, unused, £260. Also an X-A1 Musical Fidelity integrated amplifier with manual, lovely sound. Please call Rob, 01743 344212 after 6pm (Shrewsbury).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY V3 CD player, £600. Also, Musical Fidelity A3.2CD power amplifier, £550. Please call Terry, 020 8482 0363 (Enfield)

MUSICAL FIDELITY E600 CD player, balanced outputs, piano gloss fascia, oak cone feet, excellent sound quality, £175.

Dali SWA12 subwoofer, unboxed, unused, £225. Rega EL8 floorstanders, black ash, £95. Andrew, office hours 020 7663 1264 (Romford)

NAIM NAIT 3 £300. Quad 77 CD, £100. 01732 741883 (Kent).

NAIM HI-CAP power supply, £595. Epos ES14 speakers, black and stands, £275. All mint, boxed. Can demonstrate. Andy 01527 835769 (Worcs).

NOTTINGHAM ANALOG Hyperspace, white, with new RB250, £949. Townsend Rock with lid/plinth, new RB250, £425. Both good condition and great sound. Can email pics. Phil 020 8991 2911 or email p.hodsman@demcointeriors.com or (Ealing).

PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGIES P1A + P3A with Level 2 Modwright upgrade, Monolithic PSU and inc. Revelation Audio Cryo silver cables, £995. 020 8205 4710 eves (London).

PROJECT TUBEBOX MM/MC phono stage, external power supply, three impedance settings for moving coil. Boxed as new – only six months use, £200 ono. 07867 605552 (Reading).

PROJECT DEBUT turntable, £50. VideoLogic DRX-601ES, £75. Dynaudio Audience 60, black, £175. All ex. condition. Call Vic 01372 454451 (Surrey).

QUAD 11L speakers birds eye maple finish. Immaculate condition. Boxed, genuine reason

for sale, £295 ono. 0115 9101228 (Nottingham).

QUAD 34 amplifier and preamp, Quad FM4 tuner and Quad 67 CD player. Pair Rogers LS6a and TDL sub. Good order, £650. 020 8741 1060 (West London).

REGA PLANET 2000 £329, Jupiter, £719, Mira 3, £389, Maia3 £359, Cursa, £359, Exon, £390. All satin silver and boxed. 07958 239222 (Bucks)

REL STORM III subwoofer, as new boxed, 18 months old, (£800) £375 ono. Jason 07771 690031 (Kent).

REL STORM III as new, still under guarantee. Light oak finish. Nick 07813 994034 (Lytham St Annes).

ROTEL RA-1062 amplifier. Boxed, as new, only used a few times. Amp reviewed with five stars in Hi-Fi Choice, (£595) £430. Sandor 07814 040088 (Central London).

ROTEL RA-01, Arcam CD62, Monitor Audio Silver 1s, Black Rhodium AST cable, QED interconnect, Atacama Nexus 6 custom stand, many CDs, £750 ono or separately (good offers). Sven 0117 9604640 (Bristol).

ROTEL RCD-02 CD player, Denon PMA355 UK amplifier, Denon DRW695 twin cassette deck, Celestion SATS L110, (£835) £400. 0114 2401614 (Sheffield).

ROTEL RCD-1070 CD player, silver, boxed, excellent, £250. Rotel RB 991 power amp, black, boxed, excellent, £200. Call 07887 527397 (Staffs).

SCANDYNA MICROP0D 5.1. Black, white, blue available, all boxed, £400. 07958 239222 (Buckinghamshire).

SHANLING SCD-T200C, valve/solid state CD player, UK model, rave reviews, six months old, mint condition, boxed, £1,520 ono. 07979 903989 (Bristol)

SPENDOR BC1s, professional black respray, £225. Arcam Alpha 10/Dave and Alpha 10 P3 power amp, £850. Sony 100 disc CD jukebox, £110. Sound Organisation five tier rack, £85. Lyn, 02920 711457 (Cardiff)

WHARFEDALE EVOLUTION speakers, Evo 30, 20, centre, maple, boxed, £1,000. Mick 07932 330269 (Lancs).



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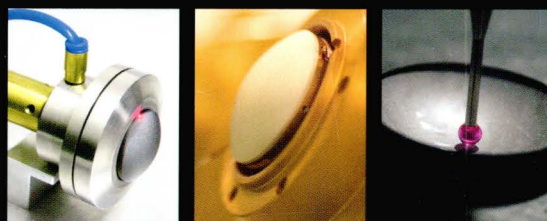


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