

# HI-FI CHOICE

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See page 22



THE BEST NEW HI-FI RATED INSIDE



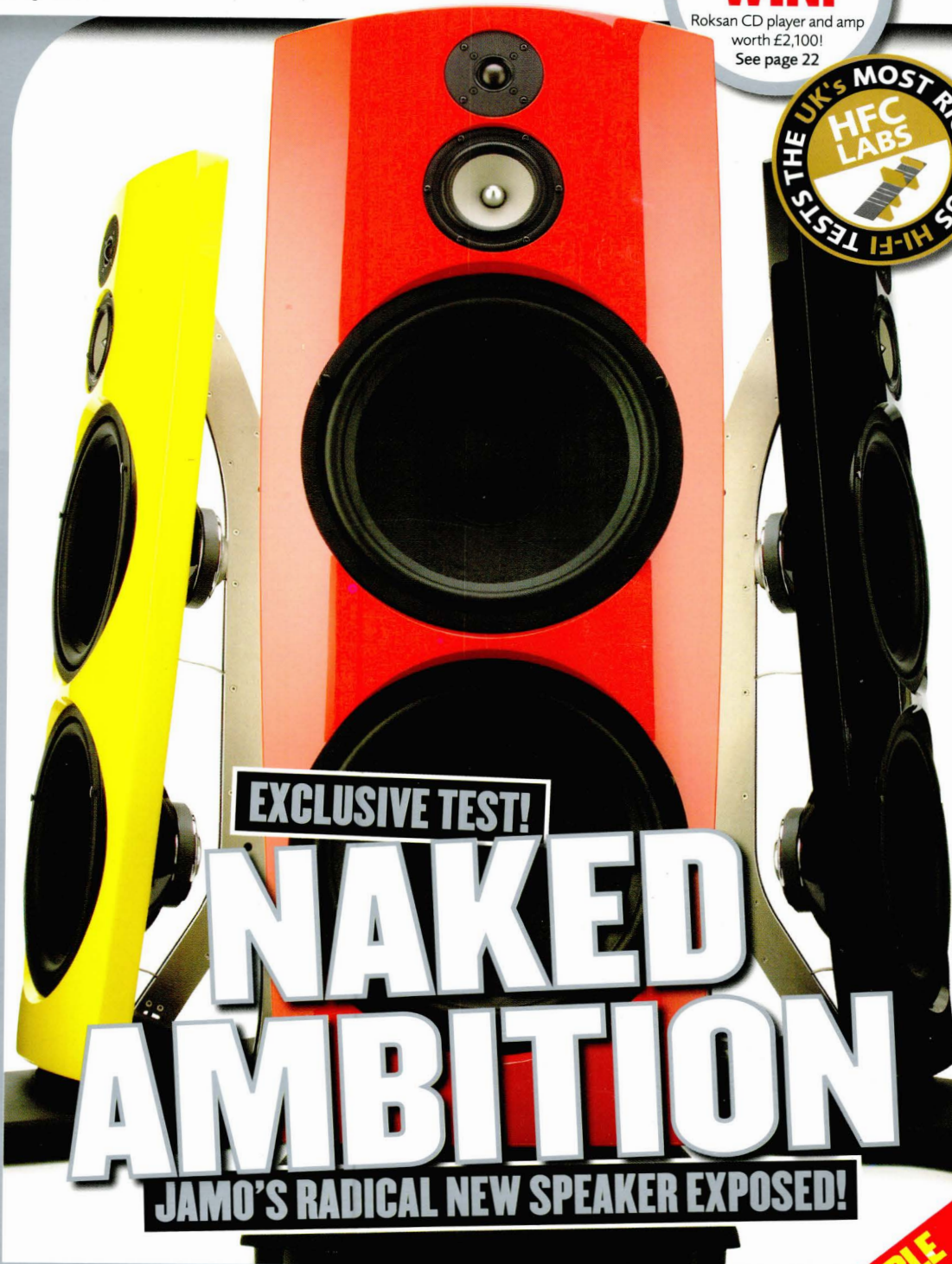
**AUDIA** Italian amplifier delivers music with passion



**AVI** New Duo speakers are dynamic performers



**MARANTZ** Best universal disc player yet?



JUNE 2006 £3.95 06 >



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2nd hand hi-fi mini-mag!



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>  
**CD PLAYERS**

- FEATURING**
- > Arcam FMJ CD36
  - > Copland CDA823
  - > Creek Destiny
  - > Exposure 3010
  - > Naim CD5x
  - > T+A CD 1230R

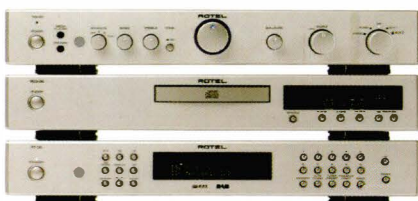
**BUYER'S BIBLE**  
The world's best hi-fi rated





**Rotel 06 Series** Take a look. Imagine that it looked a bit more extravagant. You know: LEDs to light up the room. Knobs, buttons and sockets in abundance. If we gave the 06 Series looks like that on top of its sublime sound, you would have to pay maybe four times as much for it. The thing is, we don't think you should pay exceptional sums for exceptional sound. And thanks to our policy of spending every penny maximising the performance of our separates, it just means there isn't much left for unnecessary design flourishes. We think it's all about the music. Take a listen and judge for yourself. [www.rotel.com](http://www.rotel.com)

## Exceptional sound No exceptions



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Welcome to the issue...

## HI-FI CHOICE JUNE 2006 ISSUE 280

Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW ☎ +44 (0)20 7042 4000



The Apple iPod. Scourge of the hi-fi industry and the enemy of real music fans everywhere, right? Wrong, actually. I love the iPod – in fact, I'm one of the zillions that uses one every day. I love the fact that I can carry so much music with me wherever I go: my daily commute, holidays, business trips abroad. As befits a glorious love affair, my music and I need never be parted. Ah, bliss...

Of course, when I get home the iPod comes off and the hi-fi goes on, 'old fashioned' discs 'n' all. Like most people reading this magazine, I have a large and cherished music collection, and it's my hi-fi system that makes these treasures come alive.

In a way, the iPod is doing hi-fi a favour: it's making music cool again. When we were growing up, music defined who we were, but now there are so many distractions – video games, the internet, a quick-fix culture in which music is consumed, but not always adored. But with iPod *et al*, listening to music has regained its place at the cutting edge of youth culture. The challenge for the hi-fi industry is to capture the imagination of these new, energised music fans as their income rises and their tastes mature – real hi-fi will take their experience to exhilarating new levels.

This issue's hardware reviews take in an eclectic mix, from a high-class music server and a brace of universal disc players to the latest in purist two-channel audio gear. It's all hi-fi. And it's all about the music. Enjoy!

Tim Bown

Tim Bown Editor

## WHY WE'RE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- We now publish 13 issues a year, including two special editions: *The Collection*, an issue dedicated to the finest high-end components, and *The Hi-Fi Awards* – the most important annual awards in the hi-fi calendar.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, interviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers from the UK and around the world.
- We only review the most interesting and worthy new hi-fi components – high-performance audio products across a wide range of price points. We obtain more genuine hi-fi exclusives than any other magazine – if it's worthy of your attention, you'll read about it first in *Hi-Fi Choice*.
- Our tests are the most rigorous in the business, conducted by the UK's most experienced team of hi-fi reviewers.
- Alongside in-depth component reviews and accessory round-ups, every regular issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* features an *Ultimate Group Test* on a core hi-fi product category – from source components to amps and speakers.
- Each *Ultimate Group Test* is conducted using a uniquely thorough three-step test regime. This consists of carefully controlled 'blind' and sighted listening sessions, a full set of laboratory tests and extended 'hands on' testing by the primary reviewer. No other magazine goes to such lengths to ensure accurate comparative reviews.
- Components that best meet our exacting standards are listed in the *Buyer's Bible* section – the world's most reliable reference guide for the hi-fi buyer.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...  
The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home

Beautiful in-house photography, so you see the product in all its glory

Cherry-picked kit – only the most worthy components make it into *Hi-Fi Choice*

Comprehensive in-depth reviews – we give you the full story

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

Carefully considered verdict scores, so you really know what we think of a product



## THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT WRITERS AND REVIEWERS INCLUDE...



**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 scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



**DAN GEORGE**  
Dan is a 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 interesting products make it into *HFC*.



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



**ALAN SIRCOM**  
Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear... and beyond.



**ALVIN GOLD**  
Alvin 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.



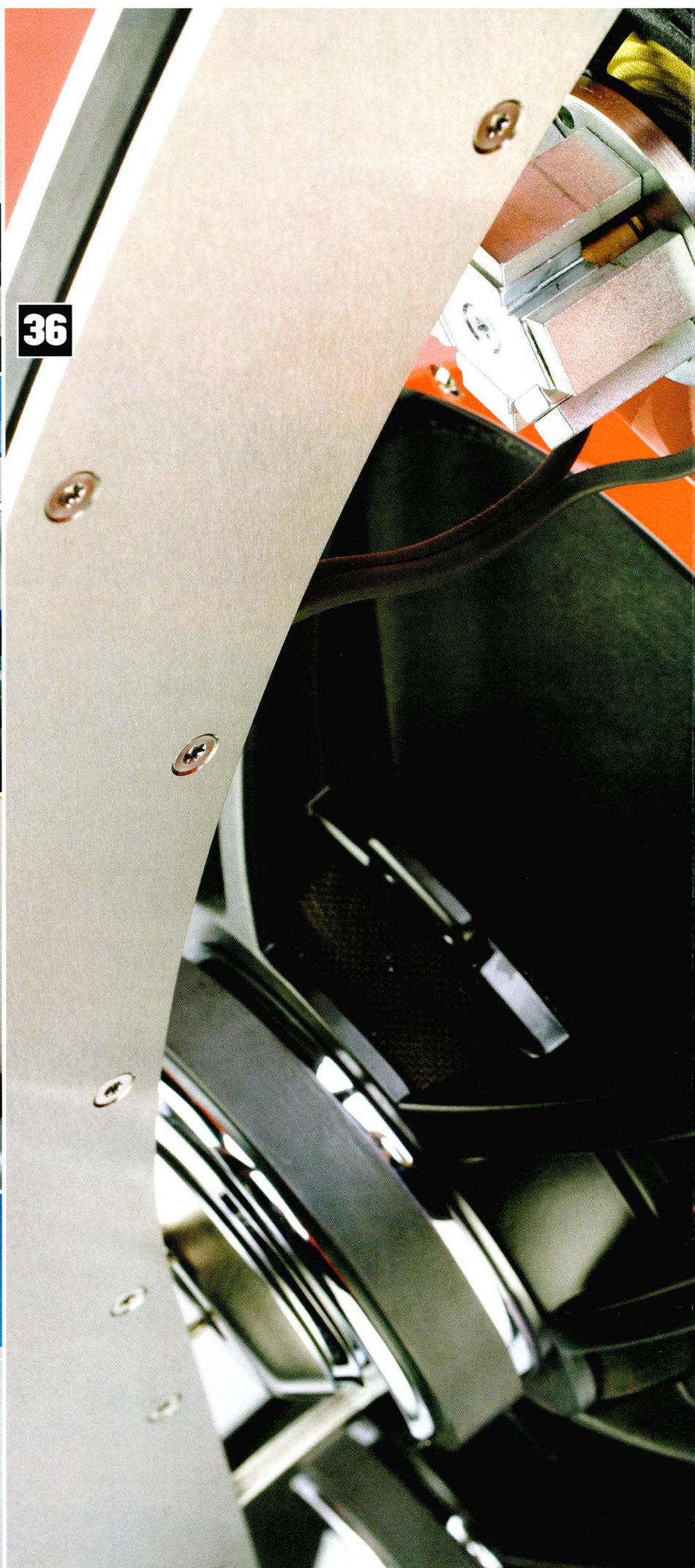
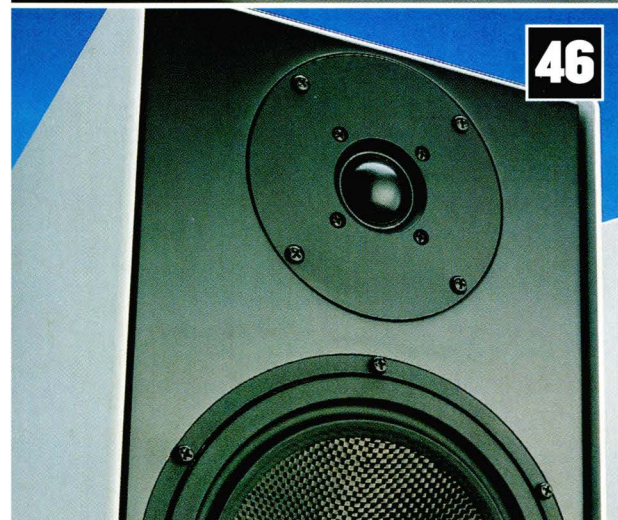
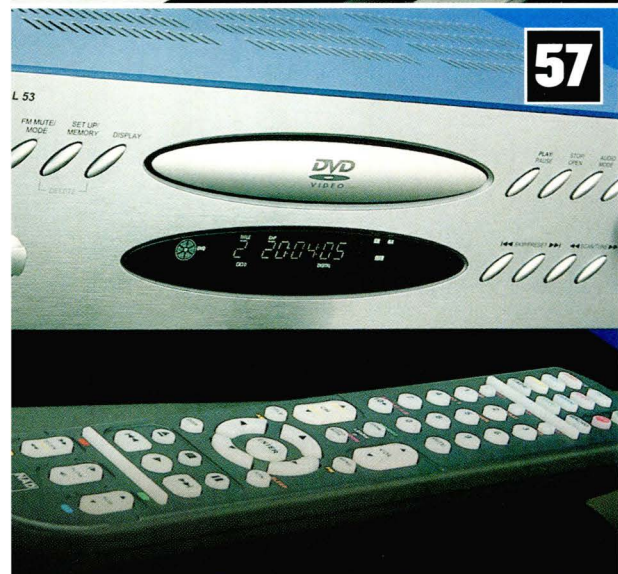
**JASON KENNEDY**  
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



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

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.







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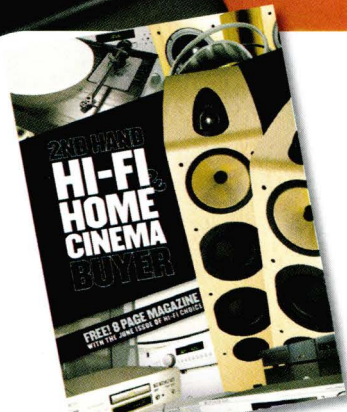
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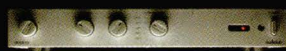
3 Trading Pages

7 Reader Classified





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[www.audiolab.co.uk](http://www.audiolab.co.uk)





## TANNOY PRESTIGE AUTOGRAPH MINI LOUDSPEAKER

Tannoy has just signed off the new Autograph Mini loudspeaker from the Prestige range and *Hi-Fi Choice* has bagged an exclusive review. This exciting newcomer is a massively scaled-down version of the famous Autograph, popular some 50 years ago. Although small, it has been reproduced authentically and brought up-to-date with a modern, dual-concentric drive unit. In the centre of the 100mm paper bass/mid cone sits a 19mm titanium dome tweeter, which is connected with silver wire to a simple

audiophile crossover. The tweeter is said to extend to 54kHz, while the main driver sports a cast alloy frame.

The 'retro-modern' cabinet has been fashioned from high-density birch ply with hardwood veneers and solid hardwood mouldings and is hand-finished, with an authentic oatmeal grille. Tannoy claims an 88dB sensitivity and an impedance of eight ohms for the 3.5 litre, ported design.

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

**PRODUCT** Tannoy Prestige Autograph Mini

**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker

**PRICE** £1,250 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Scaled-down version of 1950's classic • Modern dual-concentric driver • 19mm titanium tweeter with 54kHz extension • 100mm paper bass/mid cone • High density birch ply cabinet • 88db sensitivity • 8 ohm impedance

**CONTACT** ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 [www.tannoy.com](http://www.tannoy.com)



# Not Just Another CD Player

from the company that knows  
a thing or two about digital....

## The Lyngdorf CD-1 player/transport

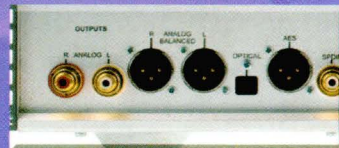
Expectations were high when the company that delivered the world's first true digital amplifier, the ground-breaking Millennium, announced a CD player/transport launch.

Using their extensive knowledge of digital circuits, clocks, sampling rates, jitter and noise control, the designers were meticulous in their approach. The philosophy is simple. Less distortion means more music. Delicious, flowing music.

**"You can drop this into a system with a price tag in excess of £50,000, and it will not let it down.**

**Good grief, what a debut!"**

**Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News March 2006.**



- + Digital signal upsampled to 96khz for optimal analogue conversion
- + User-selectable 24 bit sampling rate for digital output (44.1, 48, 96 & 192khz)
- + To optimize performance when used as a dedicated transport, the DAC is powered down
- + High precision clock resamples signal close to output stage, further reducing jitter and noise
- + Low noise linear (non-switching) power supply

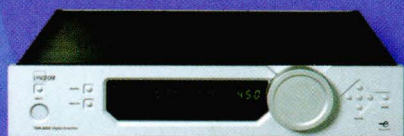
The high-spec'd CD-1 is also loaded with features to maximize musical performance.

### As a CD Player

Connect to our matching integrated amplifier (or any other integrated or pre/power) using balanced or single-ended cables, and enjoy a truly musical performance from a low-noise, upsampling CD player.

### As a Transport

Connect to our own True Digital Amplifier (or any other DAC) for an even purer performance. Select the upsampling frequency that delivers the optimal sound for your system, music and taste.



**Lyngdorf Audio UK distribute the ground-breaking Lyngdorf digital products, together with ExactPower conditioners, Stillpoints and AudioDeskSysteme CD enhancers.**

We also compliment these products by offering/dealing with a very few, select components such as the award winning DALI speakers, Vertex AQ accessories and the new range of JAS audio speakers and Final electrostatic panels.



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Stillpoints Isolation



Vertex AQ



ExactPower Conditioners



JAS Audio



Final Electrostatics



Lyngdorf Audio





# CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 840A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

▶ Cambridge Audio's ground-breaking new amplifier takes the Azur range distinctly upmarket. It's an entirely new class of amplifier using Cambridge's proprietary Class XD (crossover displacement) technology. XD feeds a controlled current into the output stage in a new way, and is said to offer the quality of Class A, the power of Class B, and less of Class AB's inherent distortion. The 840A uses a massive toroidal transformer for the power stage with a

separate transformer for the preamp section, effectively making it a pre/power in one.

Its bespoke design offers a number of connection options to include Cambridge Audio's new Incognito multiroom system, a pre-out and twin sets of speaker terminals. The new 840A serves up a claimed 120 watts per channel, boasts seven line-level inputs and features bypassable tone controls.

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

**PRODUCT** Cambridge Audio 840A

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

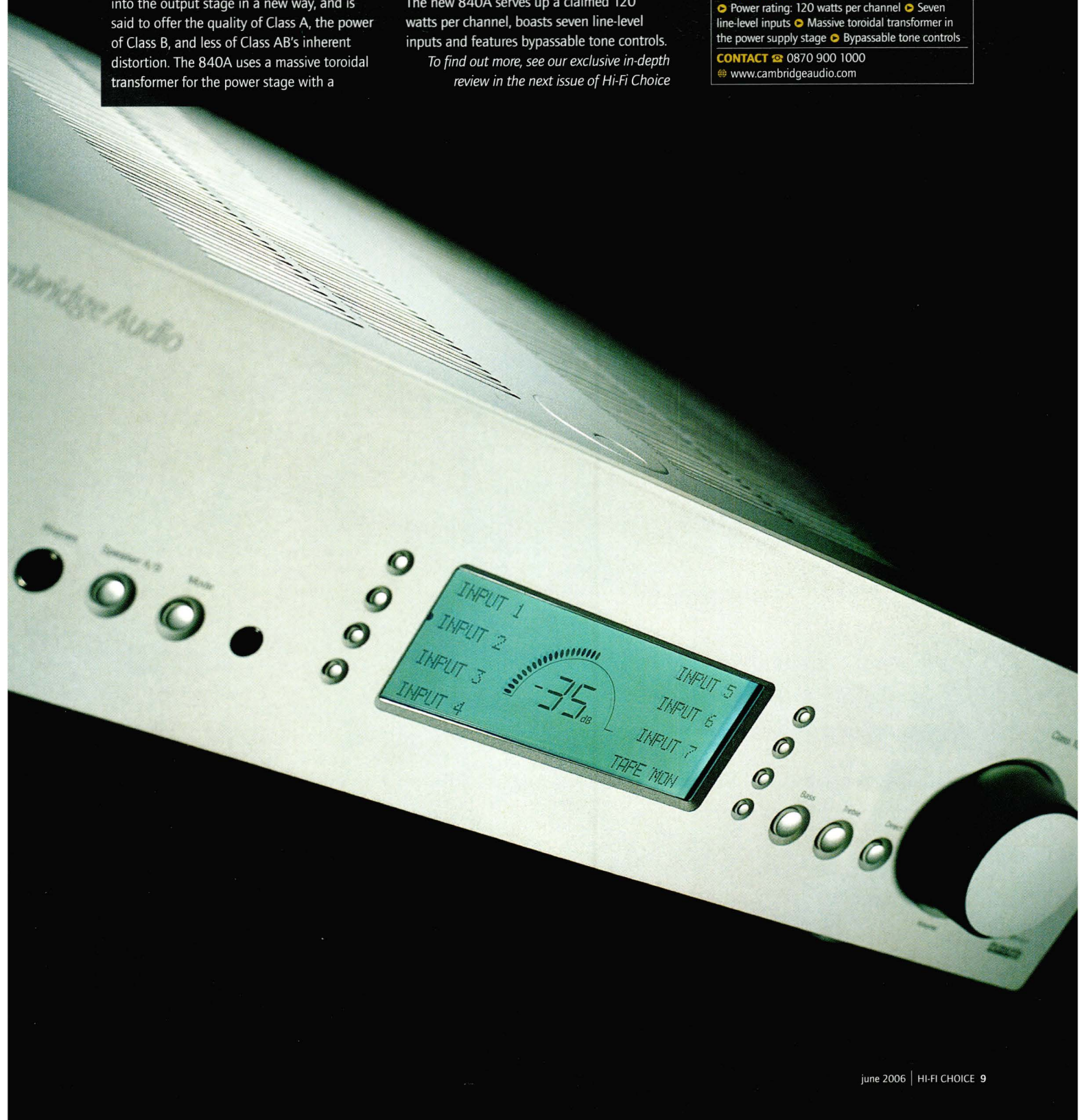
**PRICE** £750

**KEY FEATURES** Proprietary Class XD architecture

▶ Power rating: 120 watts per channel ▶ Seven line-level inputs ▶ Massive toroidal transformer in the power supply stage ▶ Bypassable tone controls

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 [www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)





## NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

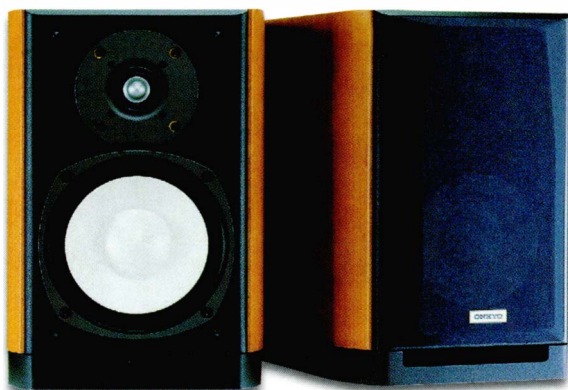


### LINN MAJIK

Linn's long-awaited new hi-fi components – launched at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show 2006 – are just Majik. The three-strong stereo line-up represents Linn's entry-level hi-fi system and comprises CD player, preamp and power amp. Linn's Majik CD replaces the Ikemi player and the Majik Kontrol preamp and Majik 2100 power amp will replace Linn's LK amplifier range. Both the CD player and preamp feature trickle-down technology from the flagship products – the CD derives from the Sondek CD12, while the Majik 2100 power amp boasts Chakra high-efficiency amp technology.

All components share the specialist's proprietary Switch Mode Power Supply, which is said to offer a quieter, more efficient operation without detracting from the music. Majik is a modular system that can be upgraded over time and can also be configured in Aktiv mode or integrated into a multiroom system – the units are fully Knekt-enabled. Expect an exclusive review on all three soon.

**Price** Majik CD £1,950; Majik Kontrol £1,750; Majik 2100 £1,400 **Due** April/May  
 ☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk



### ONKYO D-312E

Designed as the perfect partner to Onkyo's powerful A-9755 digital amplifier unveiled last month (*HFC 279*), the new D-312E standmount loudspeaker uses advanced drive unit technology that's claimed to deliver

speed, detail and low coloration. The speaker's 40cm Ring Drive Tweeter is claimed to achieve piston-like operation to 100kHz, giving it the reach of a super-tweeter. The partnering proprietary Micro Fibre bass/mid unit features a three-layer construction of cotton weave, aramid and polythene. This makes it thin, yet light and rigid for accurate transient reproduction, according to Onkyo.

**Price** £1,300 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01494 681515 🌐 www.onkyo.co.uk

### MARTINLOGAN VISTA

Vista is MartinLogan's latest electrostatic speaker – a more affordable panel featuring new technology, a dramatically downsized cabinet, plus greater levels of efficiency. The speaker includes ML's proprietary XStat transducer panel housed in an aluminium composite frame, plus a 200mm aluminium cone bass driver

for the low stuff. It's claimed Vista's crossover uses new in-house technology to create "seamless driver integration"

**Price** £3,000 per pair

**Due** now

☎ 020 8971 3909

🌐 www.martinlogan.com



### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO INCOGNITO

Incognito is Cambridge Audio's new low cost multiroom system. The package uses standard CAT-5 cabling to send audio (and optionally video) to four main zones and four sub-zones per unit. The main hub, which can be situated close to a hi-fi system, has inputs for six source components, four of which can be played simultaneously. The system is operated by in-wall keypads (pictured below) and remote controls, plus there's an active speaker option (using a Class D digital amp) that requires just a remote. Incognito is said to be compatible with virtually all hi-fi brands, but is designed to match closely with Cambridge Audio's own electronics.

**Price** £1,690 (four zone system with speakers) **Due** now

☎ 0870 900 1000 🌐 www.cambridge-audio.com







## PRIMARE CDI 10

Integrated hi-fi from Primare has arrived! The compact, all-in-one CDI 10 is a CD/receiver offering 75 watts per channel, a DAB/FM tuner and cutting-edge Class-D digital amplification. It shares the same CD transport as the CD31, with 24-bit/196kHz upconversion for CD and DAB sources. All audio signals are balanced to remove noise before the amplification stage and the unit is fully RS232 controllable. There's also a graphic display and fascia-mounted headphone/audio input connection for personal audio players.

**Price** £1,495 **Due** now ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.net

## TANNOY GLENAIR

Tannoy's Prestige range has a new addition called the Glenair. Despite its more "modern" styling, the trapezoidal cabinet retains the plywood construction and hardwood mouldings common to the



range. It also shares Tannoy's dual-concentric driver array in a whopping 380mm configuration, comprising a paper cone and a 33mm aluminium tweeter. The sizeable 15-litre box sports a claimed sensitivity of 95dB and a useful frequency response ranging from 32Hz to 25kHz.

**Price** £4,000 per pair

**Due** now

☎ 01236 420199

🌐 www.tannoy.com

## Q ACOUSTICS 1000 SERIES

A brand new British speaker brand called Q Acoustics has been launched by Armour Home Electronics. AHE's design team – with the help of renowned speaker designer Karl Heinz Fink – has created a completely new, six-strong line-up. Called the 100 Series, the sextet comprises two standmounts, two floorstanders, a centre speaker and subwoofer. Every component is optimised for each model, with common features including a micro polyester weave tweeter and Linkwitz-Riley crossovers. The speakers are available in black, cherry and beech.

Expect a review soon.

**Price** from £100 to £330 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111

🌐 www.armourhe.co.uk



## Soundbites



**DENON's** new £800 AVR-2807 multichannel receiver is capable of converting all incoming signals to HDMI output and features proprietary Audyssey MULEQ XT room correction technology. The 7.1-channel, 110-watt receiver replaces the AVR-2805 and includes 1080p switching, an iPod bus socket, three user-mode presets plus full HDMI upconversion.

☎ 01234 741200

**OMNI MOUNT** is a new name in the UK for speaker stands and equipment supports.

One of the first products to launch is the £150 SAT3 speaker stand, which weighs in at a hefty 40KG when filled. Features include cable management, a tri-spiked base and a cast metal design that's available in two height options. Omni Mount's furniture range starts at £220.

☎ 01442 233853

**NANOTECH SYSTEMS** of Japan has a new disc 'finaliser' available in the UK through Audio Atmosphere. The £399 disc finaliser is said to work by applying light energy to the pits of the disc to improve tolerances set during production. The Nanotech unit can be used with SACD, DVD-A, CD and DVD-V discs and is said to improve sound and vision. Expect a review soon.

☎ 01785 711232

**AUDIO ACOUSTICS** manufactures a small range of high-end speakers and has just unveiled the £41,250 Sapphire Ti-C SE floorstander. It's said to include the world's first resonance-controlled composite enclosure, plus a triple float-mounted sapphire tweeter and float-mounted sapphire bass/mid unit. Start saving – a review's on the way!

☎ 07968 388118



**ECLIPSE** has launched a replacement for its compact TD508 loudspeaker. The new TD508II enjoys improvements to the magnet structure and internal components, providing better transient response, efficiency and frequency response, it is claimed. The speaker is available with optional floor stands or wall/ceiling brackets. Expect to pay £600 per pair.

☎ 020 7328 4499



## MARANTZ SA7001

Could this be the new CD-6311 KI Signature? It's the latest disc spinner from Marantz: a two-channel, SACD-compatible player featuring technology from the company's flagship machine, the £2,500 SA-11. The newcomer shares the same 24-bit Cirrus Logic DAC, with both PCM and DCD decoding for SACD playback. Inside, there's a host of audiophile-grade components, including Marantz's proprietary HDAM op-amp modules, bespoke capacitors and independent power supplies for the analogue and digital sections.

The player is also available in Ken Ishiwata-tuned form (SA7001KI), with the familiar copper shielding and hand-picked components. The KI version is the first SACD player to be breathed on by 'brand ambassador' Ken.

**Price** SA7001 £430; SA7001KI £600 **Due** now ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com



### The Insider

#### THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

**MICHAEL CREEK**  
Job Title: Founder/MD  
Company: Creek Audio, Epos



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

We're developing a Destiny power amp that will extend the performance of the Destiny range.

#### What's the future of hi-fi?

Hi-fi is seeing a resurgence and interest in audio products is greater now than for some time.

#### What's the most innovative product you've encountered recently?

Wireless music servers. I would market one as well, if I could.

#### DVD-Audio or SACD – and why?

I prefer SACD – it offers an increase in resolution over CD and is backwards compatible with CD players if required.

#### Is the universal player the future of CD?

I question the accuracy of a single decoder to produce the best results from all formats.

#### CD or vinyl – and why?

After many years of vinyl addiction I now have a larger library of CD, mainly due to the easier availability of new releases and portability. I still enjoy experimenting to find the buried wealth of information that exists within vinyl.

#### Who is the hi-fi designer right now?

Without doubt Bob Stuart and his team at Meridian Audio.

### Hi-Fi Diary

#### MAY

25-28 High End 2006  
The MOC, Munich, Germany  
+49 202 02022  
*A chance to dream at the world's finest hi-fi*

#### SEPTEMBER

1-6 IFA 2006  
Messe Berlin, Germany  
*Europe's biggest consumer electronics show returns to Berlin for 2006*

23-24 The Hi-Fi & Home Entertainment Show  
Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow, London  
020 8726 8000  
*London's longest-running hi-fi show*

## SHOW REPORT

### Bristol Sound & Vision 2006



February 2006: Paul Messenger goes West in search of the UK's best hi-fi show

Now in its 19th year, Bristol Sound & Vision, organised with admirable efficiency in late February by dealers Audio Excellence and Audio T, is now unquestionably Britain's leading annual hi-fi event. This year's show was as successful and busy as its predecessors, with more than 100 stands and nearly 200 different brands on show. New products were plentiful, but there was also an interesting debate on future technologies during a packed Friday evening press conference.

The question of whether Blu-ray or HD-DVD will succeed DVD might not seem particularly relevant to the hi-fi stereo scene, but these future 'high definition' formats have just as much potential to deliver 'high-band' digital audio as the audio-only SACD or DVD-A formats. Since SACD and DVD-A have both failed to become significant forces on the software scene, Blu-ray or HD-DVD could potentially fill the hi-fi gap. But again, the mere existence of two rival formats risks that each could kill the other before either gets established. As Meridian's Bob Stuart sagely commented: "In the battle between DVD-A and SACD, the iPod won".

### "The most extreme demonstration was in the Living Voice room, where the system was entirely powered by industrial-looking gel batteries."

Meridian is busily hedging its bets with whatever format the future may bring. The company has recently improved its high-end video capabilities by teaming up with video processing brand Faroudja. However, the launch of a new £1,695 GO6 standalone CD player (replacing the GO7) shows that it's not ignoring regular stereo CD.

Stereo hi-fi, especially of the more upmarket variety, remains alive, well, and worth taking seriously. Linn Products has a brand new Majik stereo music system, comprising CD player, Kontrol preamplifier and 2100 power amplifier, all using Linn's switch-mode power supplies and facilitating future upgrade to active drive. And traditionally budget-oriented NAD has moved upmarket with its delicious-looking Master series.

Less familiar high-end electronics were seen from New Zealand brand Plinius and French brand Cairn. Audio Reference has added the Aesthetix range alongside its Gamut components, and Ruark is bringing in a number of systems from Chinese brand Vincent.



Nostalgia is now a significant hi-fi force, long led by Tannoy. Its minuscule Autograph Mini loudspeaker borrows styling from the gigantic 1950s GRF. From a more recent era, Acoustic Energy has an AE1 Classic, reproducing the Pro-oriented nearfield monitor that launched the brand in 1985. And it was good to see the Rogers LS3/5a at a hi-fi show again.

We were impressed by KEF's new KHT3000 series, which are considerably beefed AV packages inspired by the very successful KHT2000-series 'eggs', with slightly larger satellites and a 'flying saucer' subwoofer.

But the prettiest newcomer award must surely go to Vivid Audio, for its two-way 'bookshelf' V1, alongside its slightly larger standmount V1.5 stablemate. And for those seeking maximum discretion, the trend towards high-performance 'hang-on-the-wall' speakers continues with new models like Spendor's Aero and Totem's Tribe.

The most extreme demonstration was in the Living Voice room, where the system was entirely powered, via two large inverters, by several square feet of very industrial-looking gel batteries.

As a measure of success, the show now stretches across nine floors and even had separate hi-fi and home cinema zones. In fact, the Marriott hotel's exhibition space was over-booked to such an extent that the possibility of using a second hotel next year is under discussion. Roll on 2007! HFC



## ⊕ New Music

### IN THE STUDIO

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

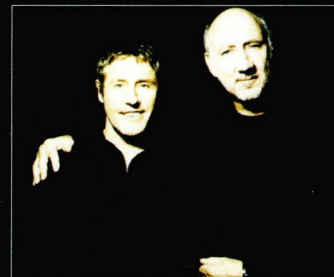


#### SCISSOR SISTERS

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** summer 2006

After winning three international awards at this year's Brits, the eagerly-awaited second album from New York gay icons the Scissor Sisters will combine glam rock, 1960s psychedelia and disco, according to lead singer Jake Spears. Elton John guests on a song called *I Don't Feel Like Dancing* and *Celebrity Big Brother* star Pete Burns is also said to be collaborating on one track.



#### BOB DYLAN

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** autumn 2006

After a week rehearsing the new material with his regular touring band in an opera house in Poughkeepsie, New York, Bob Dylan reportedly entered a Manhattan studio in the second week of February this year to record the follow-up to 2001's *Love & Theft*. "It was experimental, all kinds of different licks," according to Chris Silva, the director of the opera house, who watched the rehearsals.

time I have committed because I have about enough music for a new CD, and I'm still producing," he has announced on his official website.

#### THE KILLERS

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** late 2006

*Hot Fuss*, the acclaimed debut album from the Killers, was so steeped in classic British rock influences that many were surprised to discover the band actually hailed from New York. Frontman Brandon Flowers now says he's sick of being called "the best British band from America" and promises the follow-up is steeped in such all-American influences as Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty. Lovers of apple pie should be pleased.

#### ALSO COMING SOON...

##### JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

**The Sixteen/ Harry Christophers** Ikon (Apr); **Cleveland Quartet** Mozart String Quartets (Apr); **Erich Kunzel/ Cincinnati Pops** Hollywood's Greatest Hits (Apr); **Ramsey Lewis** The Very Best (Apr)

##### SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

**Moody Blues** Box Set (five-disc SACD, Apr); **Depeche Mode** Speak And Spell (SACD/ DVD, Apr); **LAGQ** Spin (SACD, Apr); **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** Mozart: Wind Concertos (SACD, Apr); **Ricordo Schmelzer** (SACD, May)

#### ZERO 7

**Title:** *The Garden*

**Release date:** late May

The third album from Mercury Prize shortlisted chill-out champions Zero 7 – aka Sam Hardaker and Henry Binns – is said to mark a change of direction. "It's more upbeat, a real soundtrack for the summer," says an insider. Vocalists include regular Zero 7 collaborator Sia, Jose Gonzalez, and Binns making his own singing debut.

**THE WHO**  
**Title:** tbc  
**Release date:** summer 2006  
Pete Townshend has confirmed that The Who – these days down to him and Roger Daltrey – have almost completed the band's first album of new material in more than 20 years. "I've cried wolf a few times, but this



1.



2.



3.



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6.



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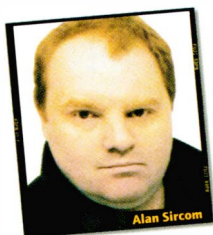
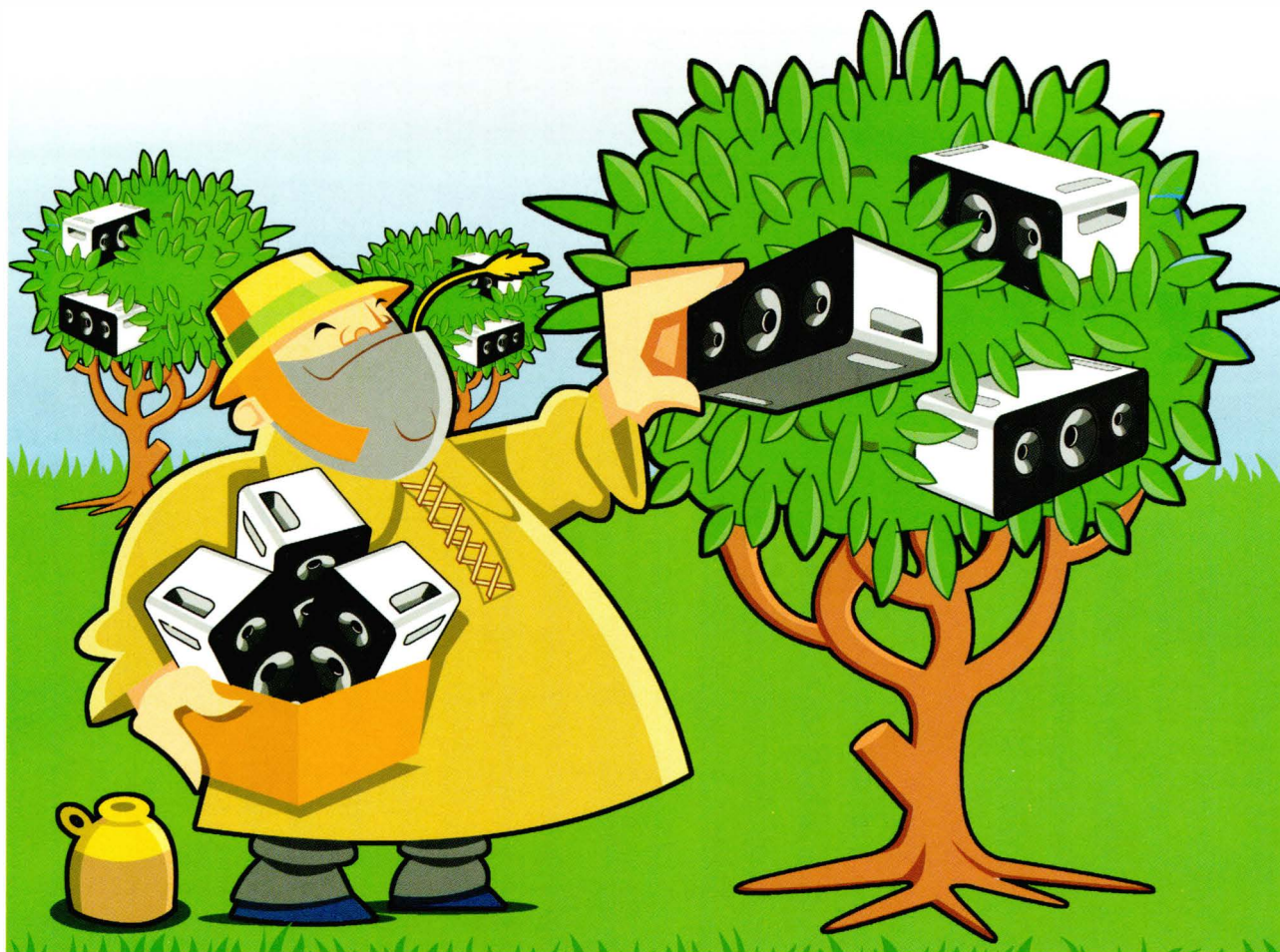
7.



8.

1. Living Voice 'battery-powered' system
2. Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic speaker
3. Plinius CD-101 CD player
4. Vivid Audio V1 'bookshelf' speaker
5. Vincent valve monoblock power amps
6. Linn Majik hi-fi system
7. Tannoy Autograph Mini speaker
8. Meridian/Faroudja FDP-DILA projector





Alan Sircom

## Podnessabounds

*What will become of the iPod mini system?*

**T**here are many hi-fi companies that have bolstered their finances by riding on the coat-tails of the Apple iPod. Apple makes the recording device that sells by the crate-load, other companies deliver the speaker systems to bring that portable audio to the home. Who cares that you might be cheapening the name of the brand by turning out mid-fi performance? If it's white plastic and called 'i-Something', it's a sure-fire hit.

Until now that is. Apple has launched its own iPod Hi-Fi, a £250 slab of speaker that the Cupertino-based computer meisters claim brings music at home into the 21st Century.

**“They will still sell in internet and non-Apple high street stores, but the days of making sweet cider in the Apple Store are over.”**

'What Apple did for portable audio' goes the logic, 'Apple will do at home, too.' It's surprisingly bulky for an Apple product, but will likely sell in droves.

Here's why. Many of the previous competing models – such as designs from Bose, Tivoli, JBL and Altec-Lancing – have been pushed aside in Apple Stores around the world to make space for the iPod Hi-Fi. The cheaper equipment will still be demonstrated, until a mini-version of the iPod Hi-Fi launches. This is not good news for any company competing with Apple: suddenly, your product is being demonstrated on an unfair playing field, as the increasing number of Apple Stores fast become the key place to listen to these things.

Worse, Apple changes the form factor of the iPod on a regular basis. Pin locations and the physical dimensions of the iPod all change subtly from iteration to iteration.

Manufacturers of iPod docks are given relatively short notice on these changes to new iPods, but now – with an in-house manufacturer producing docking products – you can guarantee one manufacturer will have a dock ready for new products as they launch – the Apple Hi-Fi. Another issue: betting the audio farm on so capricious a company as Apple was always likely to be problematic. “We're not making a video iPod” says Steve Jobs time and time again... until it's time to launch a video iPod. Same with hi-fi.

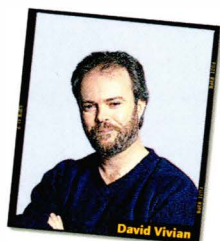
But, Apple isn't just taking on rival products, it's challenging the hi-fi industry in its entirety. Throw out all that dull ol' hi-fi system and engage with the whiteness of the Apple future. Okay, it looks like a white plastic centre channel speaker with some grab handles gauged out of the sides, but it's got an Apple logo, so who cares!



Pull off the grille and the driver complement comprises two 80mm 'wide-range' drivers and a single 130mm bass unit in a ported, resin cabinet. It can run off the mains or a sextet of D-cell batteries and the sound is nowhere near the potential of the iPod itself. Apple's specs place the upper limit of the iPod Hi-Fi at 16kHz, but it will struggle to replace anything larger than a decent clock radio in reality.

It's not the hi-fi manufacturers who need be worried, though. It's the people making iPod systems. They will still sell in internet and non-Apple high street stores, but the days of making sweet cider in the Apple Store are over.

*Alan Sircom began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He has since become one of the hi-fi and AV industry's most respected scribes*



David Vivian

## iProd

*David's no longer poking fun at the iPod*

Suppose it had to happen sooner or later. An Apple iPod has left distant orbit, speared through the atmosphere and landed on my desk. I thought I could ignore it, count myself one of the lucky ones who hadn't succumbed to its time-wasting charms. After all, why would I need one? My house is so full of hi-fi systems, there isn't the room to shake a stick at them. And I hate headphones. I mean, I might look at it, prod it, marvel at the ease with which it slips into my pocket. But use it as the great Apple in the sky intended? Not a chance.

First, I unwrapped my 2GB black Nano. Nice. Then I binned the headphones, which must be worth all of several pence. Next I downloaded some lossless music files from iTunes onto my Apple Mac laptop and, from there, to the Nano. Then I plugged it into a very expensive Naim system occupying my listening room for a *Beautiful Systems* feature (see next issue). Why, exactly? Just to see what would happen.

And... it's the future. Vast amounts of music are already being purchased and downloaded online. Broadcasters, including the BBC, are producing Podcasts. And storing CDs in a computer instead of on shelves is an increasingly popular activity. And several respected British hi-fi manufacturers have started to recommend incorporating your

# R

## RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

PHILIPS DCC730  
DCC RECORDER



The epithet for DCC was written almost before the format was launched. It seemed like a great idea at the time: Philips' Digital

Compact Cassette used tapes that were similar in form factor to compact cassette, except that the vulnerable tape path was protected by a sliding cover. Best of all, though, it featured the word 'digital' in the title. At the time, 'digital' still meant something fresh, new and very hi-tech. Just like those new digital mobile phone networks that were fast replacing the analogue early adopter formats at the time.

The time was 1992, by which time CD was in full swing, and the world was looking for a viable replacement for compact cassette, which by then was practically ubiquitous. Sony had just launched its pre-emptive strike in the form of MiniDisc, but it just didn't take in Europe, and was even less favoured in the key US market for a variety of reasons. One advantage of DCC was its backwards compatibility, as DCC recorders could play all your old cassettes. This was a real stroke of genius. Or so it seemed at the time.

On a technology level, the real beauty of DCC was its simplicity. Where other formats like DAT needed high-precision, fast-rotating head drums with the heads embedded on the periphery to achieve the necessary write speeds, DCC used stationary heads, achieving the necessary bandwidth by recording nine tracks in parallel – eight for audio data, the final track for housekeeping purposes. This included basic information such as track titles. The multitrack heads were similar in principle to those in common use in recording studios, but based on then state of the art thin-film magneto-resistive technology.

The other key to DCC was PASC, a lossy audio compression codec similar in principle to the codecs at the core of MP3, AAC and indeed ATRAC, which powers Sony's MiniDisc. The whole DCC package was designed to give CD level performance, which from memory was something of an exaggeration, though it did record at 18-bit resolution, and it didn't sound bad. The format worked in a similar way to autoreverse compact cassette, though the tape



**“DCC's contribution to audio was to legitimise the lossy codecs that we now take for granted.”**

could only be inserted one way, with the label side facing towards the user. Both sides were played without audible interruption, giving a total play time of 90 minutes.

Philips performed double blind tests to demonstrate PASC sounded functionally identical to CD. And that's DCC's legacy. From an historical perspective, DCC's contribution to the future of audio was to legitimise the lossy codecs that we now take for granted in downloaded music, and which ensure that each succeeding generation of audio hardware sounds a little worse than the one that came before. But that, as they say, is progress.

The model featured here, the Philips DCC730, was one of the most 'popular' DCC models and from memory cost about £500. The format lasted around four years, but DCC was on the slide almost from the outset. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the technology, which as so often with Philips was elegant, affordable and effective. But it wasn't long before the ubiquitous nature of CD itself, and the promise of cheap recordable CD, made DCC and the compact cassette on which it was based look *passé*. A shame, really, as DCC holds an enviable record as marking one of the very few times in history where a recording format didn't require the user to junk his existing collection of recordings. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



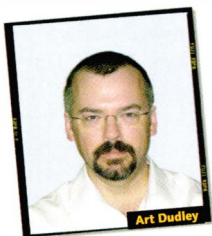
computer into your hi-fi system. With Apple Lossless or .WAV files, they claim, you won't be disappointed. Stroud-based AVI even says that, at the higher bit rates and played through a good hi-fi system, an iPod can sound better than many so-called High-End CD players, never mind the cheaper ones!

Apple seems to be driving the revolution, and not just with the iPod. Its Mac Mini is tiny, the mouse and keyboard are linked by radio and can be stowed when not in use and there is even an IR handset to select your music so you can do without much of the time. Already installation companies are using them with huge monitor screens because they do so much and occupy so little space.

What has discouraged many from making the computer-hi-fi connection are the low bit rates quoted for downloadable MP3s or the AAC equivalent. With some music (I'd nominate James Blunt) it doesn't matter. Where is does, you can record at higher bit rates or, of course, buy the CD. Point is, there's flexibility, ease of access to a wider selection of music and entertainment, and a dramatic reduction in the space required for everything.

So, how does Nano Naim sound? Uh, quite stupidly, ridiculously good with the Apple Lossless files and more than listenable with anything 128kbps or above. Is it as good as a Naim CDX2 CD player? Don't be daft. The crazy thing is, it is better than my two-year old, £350 Sony CD player. And, even if you don't wear it to work, it makes a great server. What do I think about that? Come to daddy, Nano.

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



## Requiem for an ear

*It's time to mourn the death of listening*

The grim reaper's at the door again, but this time he won't be satisfied just carting away our SACDs – now he wants the whole damn hobby. He can have it. He can have all the battery-powered cables and the huge robot speakers with their little heads. I hate all that stuff anyway.

It may sound like a Johnny Cash lyric, but I'll be sad and I'll wear black and I'll cry all the right tears. But I'll show up at the right funeral, too... because, while everyone else is ready to bury the audio industry, I'll know that it's the

art of listening itself that's dead. Listening has been dead so long it's starting to really stink up the place.

No one noticed, because the art of music and the technology of reproducing it are so intertwined. Hundreds of years ago, before there was a music industry, people couldn't get enough of the stuff. Concerts were rare, and unimaginably long. Composers added repeats to their works for that reason – and still, as recently as the 19th century, encores of entire movements were routinely demanded.

And as recently as 60 years ago, people still knew how to listen. They sat in silence before their radio sets, and when television took over they watched Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra broadcasting from Studio 8-H. Concert halls were full and audiences showed up on time. In England, schoolchildren learned Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, while every American child listened for the hoofbeats in Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*.

But when music became more and more available, more and more of a commodity, something bad happened. Everyone was assaulted with the stuff from morning until night: a constant wash of attractive sounds under every film, every television show, every commercial. We were inundated with music at the gas station, the supermarket, the

department store, the book store, the hotel lobby. Just this month, they've started blasting horrid Monkees and Beach Boys songs every morning in the lobby of my daughter's school – it makes someone feel special, no doubt – and the garbage they play in every fast-food restaurant, and the level at which they play it, makes me want to dump hot coffee in my lap just for the pleasure of visiting a nice, quiet burn-treatment centre.

As a culture, we've gone from trying to hear as much music as we can to developing strategies to avoid it. And in a world that needs less music, why should anyone be surprised that replay gear, even very good replay gear, strikes the average consumer as an answer to a question they haven't asked?

Call every business that shoots music at you and tell them to stop. Write a letter to the local broadcast stations, and tell them why you won't tune in anymore. Join the school board and offer to do everything in your power to institute a music appreciation curriculum, even if it means you'll have to teach it yourself.

It'll take a lot of silence to make this corpse get up and dance again, but we still have a chance if we take a stand now.

*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*

## “It may sound like a Johnny Cash lyric, but I'll wear black and I'll cry all the right tears.”







## Digital disciple


DVD-Audio wins another convert

It was refreshing to see Alvin taking a positive stand for high-resolution formats in the May issue. The market for high quality versions of a product is always going to be small, but that does not mean it's dead or dying. You might as well say that separates hi-fi is dead if the rate of sales is the biggest arbiter. Fortunately, it's not and both decent stereo systems and high-resolution formats are ticking over.

As a reviewer of music for *HFC*, I have to find three good titles a month to write about. With heavyweight vinyl, the emphasis is on reissues of classic albums because new albums pressed on 180gram slabs of the black stuff are rarer than hens teeth – Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* is the last one that I can recall. With SACD, however, there is a good mix of reissues and new releases, which suggests there is interest from the pro audio world in getting a better end result. Great new albums are still uncommon, but that's true of any medium... whatever the mainstream reviewers and music press might tell you.

With most high-resolution material, you do at least have the option of hearing a multichannel version – assuming you have a surround system to play it on. But, even in stereo, the extra resolution means that you get to hear a more detailed, less distorted and thus more real version of events than you would with the CD. And that, after all, is why you got into hi-fi in the first place.

One thing I have noticed ever since a pair of B&W 802Ds took up residence in my listening room is the variation in quality between recordings on these formats and the advantages that DVD-Audio often seems to have over SACD. While the latter has appealed to the hi-fi fraternity because of its apparent simplicity on paper and its lack of any unnecessary fripperies such as video or still images, the emergence of transducers such as the Diamond 800 series has revealed that the apparent 'Betamax' of these two formats may well be DVD-Audio.

Lately, I have been playing some of the Hi-Res label albums (that came out shortly after the introduction of the format) and the sound is uncanny in its sense of relaxation and realism. Wayne Horvitz's *Forever* delivers 

# M

## MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

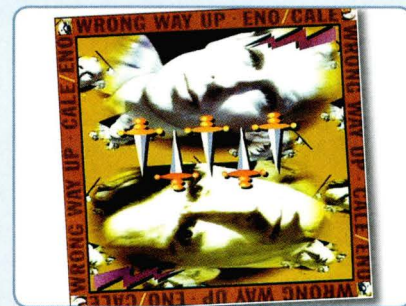
BRIAN ENO/JOHN CALE  
WRONG WAY UP



On paper, it looked like a great idea: Brian Eno and John Cale together in 1990 to make a 'pop' record. There were fine antecedents. Eno, always a Velvet Underground fan, had performed with John Cale and fellow VU legend Nico on the album *June 1st 1974*. He had produced the Cale classic, *Fear*, the same year, and Cale popped up on subsequent Eno ambiences *Another Green World* and *Music For Films*. And during the summer of 1989, Eno accompanied Cale to Moscow to record a song cycle inspired by Dylan Thomas (*The Falkland Suite*) with an orchestra. Their paths seemed intrinsically linked, at least in theory.

Yet the seeds of disaffection were planted early. During the Moscow sojourn, Cale said 'yes' to an Anglo/Irish crew following him around for Channel Four TV. Eno hated the idea and felt it paralysed his creative juices. Despite this upset, both felt that working in Eno's rustic 24-track studio in Suffolk might afford them the opportunity to create a great record. Work started in March of 1990 with Eno laying down drum tracks, while Cale finished off a fraught but highly successful collaboration with Lou Reed in America. This culminated with the release of the album *Songs For Drella*, a tribute to Andy Warhol and a presage of the reforming of the Velvets.

In April, Cale arrived on a lengthy stay-over and they started belting ideas off each other. Eno, keen on doo-wop and country music, wanted to get back to singing again and Cale was impressed by Eno's painstaking painting of lyrics onto tape. One of Eno's most successful results was the slow countryesque *The River*, but the most thrilling song on the album was *Spinning Away*, an Eno classic of dunking percussion, marvellous Robert Ahwai rhythm guitar, and luminous arcing vocals which recall his greatest 1970s vocal work. According to Eno, Ahwai, whose tight guitar play dominates *One Word*, only came down for one day. An afternoon and evening was all it took to get the drum and bass parts, courtesy Ronald Jones and Daryl Johnson (Daniel Lanois Band).



**“One day, Cale came back to find Eno had erased some of his work, which caused a huge argument.”**

Though it says “recorded between April and July 1990” on the sleeve, Cale remembers it only taking ten days in all. On a fitness hike at the time, Cale spent at least an hour a day playing squash. One day, he came back to find that Eno had erased some of his work, which caused a huge argument. Cale even admitted, “at one stage Brian lost his temper and charged at me as if to stab me!”

After this incident, all goodwill vanished from the proceedings. Eno fiddled at his mixing desk while Cale recorded what he could with little interest. Cale wanted a “life-after-record” on the road, but then Eno issued a press statement which included the statement: “No way will I work with John Cale again!” Diagnosed with extreme hypertension, Cale left in high dudgeon for a family holiday in the Caribbean.

Of course, none of this came out in subsequent Eno interviews about the album that autumn. Eno praised Cale for his “reckless courage” in the studio and critics raved about Eno's return to pop. The album contains some great songs, including Cale's atmospheric *In The Backroom* and the impressionistic *Cordoba*, and now the original Land CD/LP has been remastered and re-issued with new artwork and bonus tracks. *Wrong Way Up* is a maverick styled oddity, no less. **HFC**

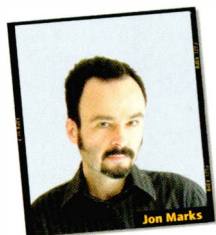
Mark Prendergast



soundstages of extensive and shimmering depth that I've not encountered with SACD; the sound overall is cleaner and more open at the high frequencies, which the 802Ds deliver so well. The same is true of Daniel Barenboim's rendition of Beethoven's *Sixth Symphony* on Teldec, which allows the orchestra to expand in the room. Comparing this with the best sounding of my SACDs on Townshend's TA 565 CD universal player reveals smoother and cleaner highs on DVD-A. The difference is not unlike that encountered when comparing 48kHz with 96kHz when Pioneer launched the first DAT recorder capable of that oversampling rate, a product which pre-empted DVD-Audio and provided its impetus.

Ultimately, the recording has the greatest impact on the end result, as one would expect, and there are both good and less good examples of both formats. What's more important is that those of us that appreciate good sound support these formats as strongly as possible, because if we don't nobody else will – they're all happy with their iPods. And, as lovely as they are, you wouldn't want to be limited to digital downloads for your future listening pleasure, would you?

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



## Make mine a large one

*Small isn't beautiful... it's just not big enough*

I wonder where hi-fi is going for the non-audiophile. For all too many listeners these days, music seems to mean maximum miniaturisation – tiny players, tiny file sizes and, most depressingly, an acceptance that the resulting sound quality is as realistic as it needs to get.

I suspect the rise in the dark side of portable music began with the sadist who designed the first digital watch with a built-in calculator. Things took a turn for the better with cassette personals, which made perfect sense as portable audio and complemented a full-size system – small format, stylish equipment and buttons you could actually see to use. Some of the better ones even sounded decent. Then came CD on the go – and once again, time



## “Are they large enough to have buttons bigger than a grain of rice? Not if your player was modelled on a large stock cube.”

spent shopping around for the best of the bunch should pay-off big time – remember the budget portable Optimus CD that a high-end US mag discovered had jitter as low as Krell's top transport and sounded almost as impressive? MiniDisc brought with it the extra bonus of recordability with real quality, as I found out a few years ago at the house of a friend who is sufficiently musical to have invested in a Steinway, a selection of microphones and a stack of home recordings, both on DAT and MD. A 'quick and dirty' test of the calibre of his MD recorder consisted of me plugging in a cheap and cheerful Sony ECM-99 stereo mic, setting the level and hitting the record button – the results were surprisingly life-like.

For a number of years now, though, the spectre of the digital watch calculator has been stalking the world of mass-market audio. Many MP3 machines fail a couple of fundamental acid tests – are they small enough to slip into a pocket but large enough to have buttons bigger than grains of rice? Not if your player happens to have been modelled on a large stock cube, a day-glow kidney bean or a stick of chewing gum (and even if it has a footprint like a playing card, there are more menus than a chefs' conference). Second, does it actually sound any good? Unfortunately, the answer is 'no' in too many cases to give me hope for a high-resolution future for

mass-market audio, as SACD and DVD-Audio remain unnoticed by music 'consumers'. But perhaps I'm just being small-minded; maybe all I need to do is Fast Forward to a future of a library of 24/192 recordings in a stereo the size of a match box. So where is the FF button on this thing anyway?

*Jon Marks has been happily addicted to hi-fi for 20 years, especially since becoming a member of the hi-fi press in the mid-1990s*



## Clash of the iTans

*Can Amazon steal iTunes' download crown?*

Only a couple of years ago, there were no legal sites from which music could be purchased. Peer-to-peer sites such as Napster and Kazaa ruled and the record industry was woefully slow in providing music-hungry consumers with a legal way to get hold of music on the internet. Things have changed a



lot since then. This February, the rise of legal online music reached a tipping point of sorts when *The Independent* ran with a front-page story declaring: "Music landmark as billionth download is sold." The headline refers, of course, to iTunes – Apple's pioneering download service. iTunes is still by far the largest player in town, and in the UK, it claims to hold 80 per cent of the entire legal music download market.

Is iTunes' overwhelming dominance set to continue? For the moment, at least, the company's lead is unassailable. New players are preparing to enter the market, however, who could make Apple's offering look tired and inflexible. Apple already has competition, but no competitor has yet wielded the clout to make a real dent on the UK market. The expected arrival of Amazon into the online music sector could change all this, however. Not only does Amazon have serious brand power, but it seems the company is armed with well-thought-out ideas that will make its offering really appealing.

The principal reason for iTunes' huge market lead is that its Apple's iPod digital music player has to date been easily the most sought-after of those on the market. The iPod's sexiness remains undiminished, yet it also has some serious drawbacks. Its battery life is massively inferior to some of its competitors and it is also incompatible with many types of music files. Not only that, but each and every track downloaded from iTunes will cost you 79p. This is where Amazon comes in.

Amazon plans to offer a subscription service where customers will have unlimited access to music for a flat, monthly or annual rate. This idea is not new in itself; companies such as Napster and Virgin Digital already offer subscription services. Amazon's key difference is that it will offer subscribers a large discount on its digital music players, likely to be produced by Samsung. Music industry rumours also suggest that Amazon will also offer to pre-load customers' own choice of music onto the players before delivering them. What does this mean? To put it simply, customers will get a cheap but high-quality music player, with their choice of music already loaded onto it. This means hours saved in downloading, while the overall cost of the music will be lower than that offered by Apple.

Amazon will launch its service in America this summer. UK consumers may have to wait, but the prospects are genuinely exciting for those of us who would like to see new ideas, and better prices than those currently offered by Apple. Could Amazon provide the next tipping point for online music?

*David Balfour started in the music business doing PR for artists including the Spice Girls and The Verve. He is now editor of music trade bible [www.recordoftheday.com](http://www.recordoftheday.com)*

# TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

DIGITAL FILTERING



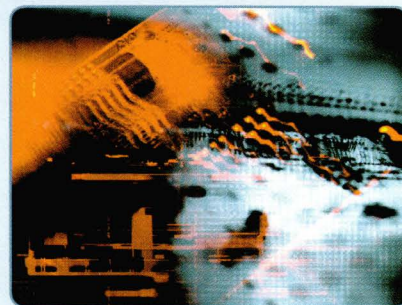
Be it analogue or digital, some form of filter is essential in the workings of a digital audio player to ensure that the output consists of only audio frequencies. True, some oddball players dispense with this entirely and rely on the following amp, speakers and human ears to do the filtering, but in so doing they inevitably produce very high levels (tens of per cent) of distortion at the output, with unpredictable results. In general, any intermodulation in the following amp or speaker will cause audible alias-intermodulation, a pernicious distortion that's audible at very low levels.

The filter is necessary because the digits do not unambiguously represent one signal. If you just convert them directly to analogue you will get either a series of momentary spikes or a 'staircase' sort of waveform, either of which does in fact include the audio but also versions of it translated to higher frequencies, and that's the distortion which needs to be removed. The filter required has as its ideal specification a flat passband from DC to 20kHz and near-infinite attenuation from 22kHz upwards.

That's an exceptionally tall order for an analogue filter but easy enough for a digital one, and that's why practically all recent CD players use 'oversampling' or 'upsampling' to do the first filtering stage in the digital domain. Analogue filtering will usually still be required, but with a less extreme specification.

There are many different ways of making a digital filter, using various kinds of mathematical operation, but basically they all look at the nearest few samples and perform some sort of averaging to calculate the 'missing' values between the existing samples. The more samples you look at, the more accurate the calculations will be: generally about 20-50 samples do the trick. In fact – and this is pretty intuitive when you think about it for a bit – the sharper you want the filter to be, the more samples you need to look at in order to do the calculations.

From that it inevitably follows that the before- and/or after-effects of the filter will extend for longer either side of a musical



**"The filter is necessary because the digits do not unambiguously represent one signal."**

'event'. This is the origin of the infamous 'pre-ringing' from which these filters are supposed to suffer. It's actually a non-problem, for two reasons: first, there isn't enough ultra high-frequency energy to set it ringing in the first place, and second, the ringing frequency is inaudible. I've tried every way I can think of to provoke audible ringing and failed utterly.

When manufacturers go on about filters that have no (or very little) pre- or post-ringing they generally mean filters with shorter response and thus, inevitably, slower roll-off, allowing more of the distortion (commonly called 'aliasing') through. In addition, such filters usually end up cutting the high treble by a potentially audible amount, so given on the one hand the increased alias-intermodulation distortion that will result and on the other the roll-off, it's no surprise that differences are often audible.

One surprising result is that filters can give rise to momentary output levels higher than the digital maximum. This means the instantaneous output halfway between two samples can exceed 'peak bit', as long as the analogue electronics allows it. In practice, this may give a bare 1dB of extra 'headroom'. Anyone care to guess at the theoretical maximum? Answers via the HFC online forum please! (Log on at: [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)) **HFC**

*Richard Black*



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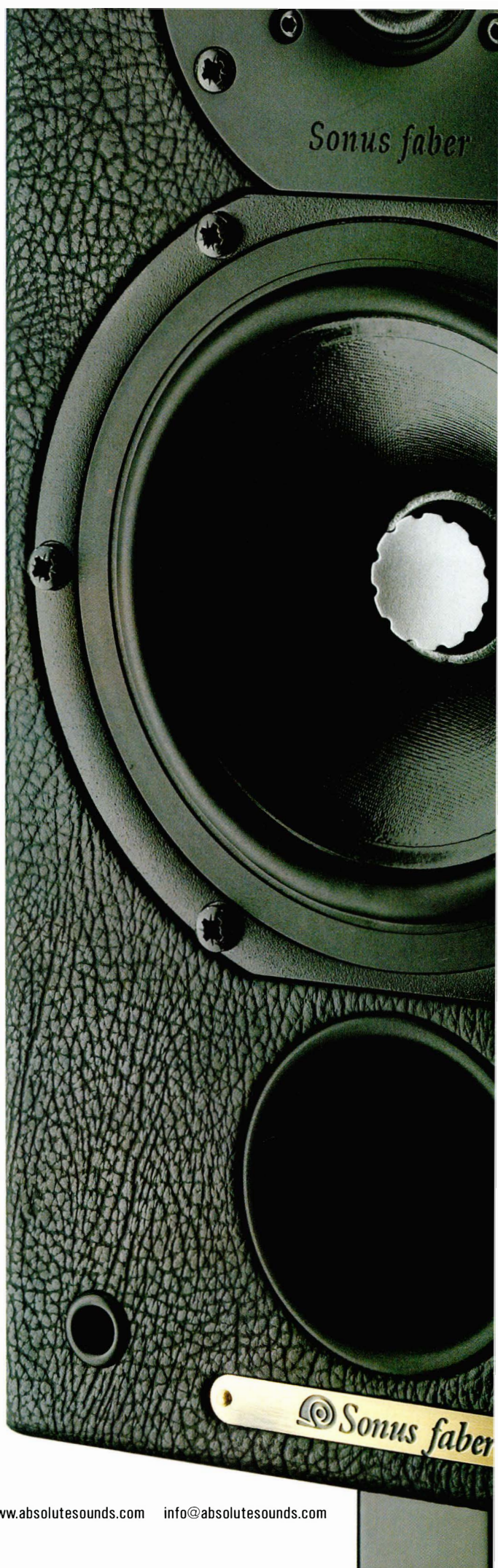
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# Italian seasoning

*Guitarist Antonio Forcione has been a fixture on the international jazz scene for twenty years, and his albums on the Naim Label have made him a fixture on many record decks and CD players, too*

There's definitely something of the romantic about acoustic guitar virtuoso Antonio Forcione. He began his international music career in 1983, when he left Italy in pursuit of a lost lover and ended up busking for change in London's Covent Garden, playing mostly flamenco guitar. Since then, he's become an international star, has been around the world several times and has recorded a total of nine albums for the audiophile Naim Label.

His latest, *Tears Of Joy* finds him with his regular quartet, which includes percussion, cello and accordion, and with which he blends elements of jazz with Spanish, African and Brazilian music to startlingly emotional effect. Whether he's tearing up a tune with what sounds like a four-handed guitar technique, or adding sparse, atmospheric notes to the mood-perfect work of the band, he's a musician who never lets technique get in the way of his emotional message. He's recorded 13 albums over the years, nine of them for Naim, and each very different in their approach and theme, with different collaborators, but all with a sense that anything is possible from the "Jimi Hendrix of the acoustic guitar".

"The theme of *Tears Of Joy* is an emotional trip," says Forcione. "It's like going on a panoramic emotional journey. Because some of the emotions it describes are pretty much internalised and others are happy and from the outside in. Sometimes you have tears in your eyes but they're for joy, not sadness. I've experienced that. And it can happen for all sorts of reasons – the birth of a child, or perhaps you just see a very emotional movie.

The themes are really quite intimate and I wanted to capture that in music.

"It's also to do with the music that I've absorbed over the years, meeting people from different parts of the globe. I'm like a sponge. It's pretty autobiographical this album, and includes music and influences that I've

technique, and also, when the mood takes him, drawing on his teenage mime training as a clown of the guitar to lighten the mood and create some memorable performances. But it wasn't always so.

"I actually started off as a drummer, then I played acoustic for a bit and then went straight to electric guitar, trying out my Jimi Hendrix and Santana licks. When you're a young man you just want to shout out loud all the time.

"I might go back to electric sometime but in a completely different way. I tried already in my twenties, here in London – I tried some jazz-rock, but I didn't think that I was building my own voice. I think you need to spend a fair amount of time building your sound, so that it becomes a sort of a trademark. From your sound, to your playing, to the scales you're using, to the tendency you want to go. I certainly spent a helluva lot more time doing that on acoustic guitar than with electric.

"At the moment I'm using Yamaha L series guitars, but I'm also very fond of a fretless guitar that was built for me by Bill Pablov,



**"I think you need to spend a fair amount of time building your sound, so that it becomes a sort of trademark."**

absorbed over the years: African music, Spanish, Brazilian, and of course Italian."

Forcione's now known as a maestro of the nylon-strung acoustic guitar, comfortable in a range of styles and appearing live both in the guise of serious 'jazz' musician, drawing tears or sparks from his instrument with his formidable

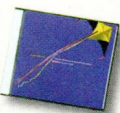
which I play on *Tears Of Joy*. He took a normal nylon string guitar and he added eight more strings as drones. I call it the 'oudan' – 'oud' from the Moroccan lute, which also has some drone strings. And the 'an'? Well, that's just for Antonio!" **HFC**

Dave Oliver

## ESSENTIAL ANTONIO FORCIONE

### Vento Del Sud (2000)

Forcione teams up with his singing homeboy Benito Madonia for an album of songs that the pair grew up with from their old stomping ground of southern Italy.



### Antonio Forcione Live! (2000)

Recorded in London, with just a percussive backing of drums and percussion. Forcione says it offers "food for thought without any additives, sugar or preservatives."



### Tears Of Joy (2005)

Recorded with his regular quartet as well as a host of contributors on vocals, piano, bass and bansuri (Indian flute), it's a feast of a stunning range of influences.





# WIN! ROKSAN CASPIAN

## M SERIES-1 CD PLAYER AND AMP WORTH £2,100!



**R**oksan's latest incarnation of the much loved Caspian M Series-1 CD player and amplifier skilfully engaged our senses back in the April issue (*HFC 278*), leading to a well-deserved Best Buy badge. We found this cracking combination to be a truly entertaining listen, enjoying the improvements that Roksan's engineers have made over their predecessors. The CD player is now graced with a newly sourced, dedicated Sanyo CD transport mechanism and Burr-Brown 24-bit DAC, while the amp has seen revisions to the power supply and power amp sections and even the control software.

We tested the combo against the older versions, welcoming the improvements to resolution, detail and transient speed. Vocal projection is a real strong point and the tweaks have done wonders for the bass

output. With the Roksan Caspian combination, you can simply forget about the hi-fi and get on with enjoying the music.

For your chance to win this dynamic duo, simply correctly answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random.



### CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winners, Mr. P. Swan of Sheffield and Mrs. D. Sinfield of London, each of whom win a fantastic pair of PMC Wafer speakers!

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**What is the CD player graced with?**

- A:** A dedicated Sanyo CD mechanism?
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- C:** CD-XY compatibility?

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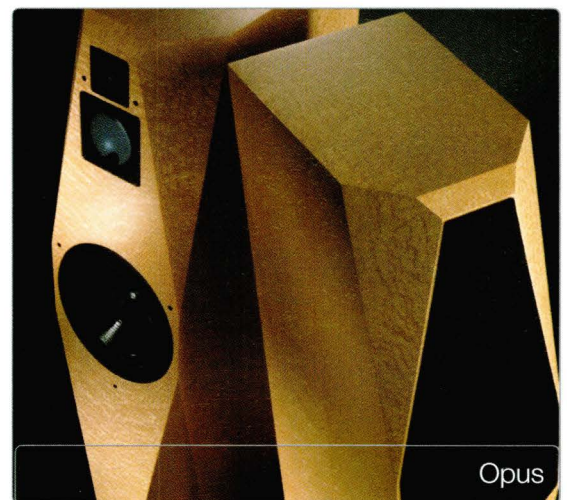
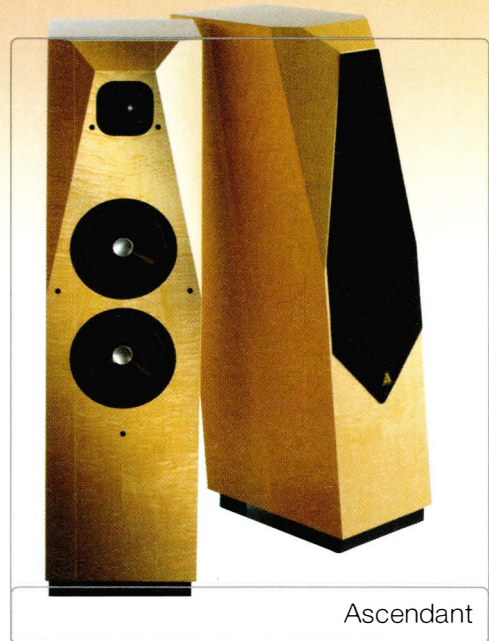
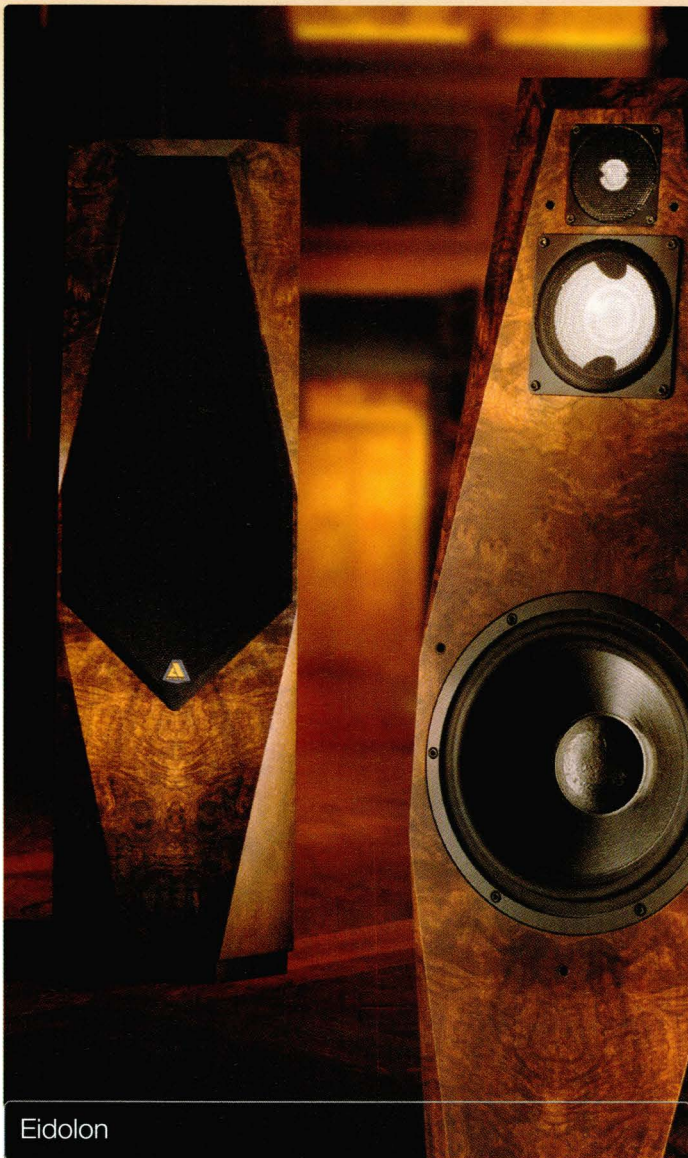
**By Text:** Simply send the text message **ROKSAN** (followed by a space) with the answer A, B or C to **80889**. For example, if you think the answer is B: Miniature monster trucks inside, then kindly text ROKSAN B to 80889.

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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

### OTIS SPANN

Otis Spann Is The Blues

Candid/Pure Pleasure

180g vinyl

Music: Pure Pleasure released a very different Otis Spann album last year (*The Biggest Thing Since Colossus*), but this album finds the long-time Muddy Waters ivory tickler in more familiar surroundings. Here he

is accompanied by Robert Lockwood Junior on guitar and plays ten tunes penned by one or other musician. Recorded in 1960, this sounds entirely authentic; Lockwood is the stepson of the immortal Robert Johnson and learned his chops from that seminal source. Both players were clearly at the top of their game, each sings their own compositions and the resulting music has a depth and power that only those who had been there in the day could hope to deliver. ★★★★★

Sound: Remastered from the original analogue tapes by Ray Staff at Alchemy, Soho, this recording shows its age but not so much that it gets in the way. As with other Candid originals, there is a depth and tonality that lets you hear into the music. ★★★ JK

### BOB DYLAN

The Times They Are A-Changin'

Columbia/Sundazed

180g vinyl

Music: Dylan's third album found him at the peak of his acoustic, protest-singing powers – musical storytelling at its finest. Just listen to *North Country Blues*: there is no barrier between the

listener and the heart and soul of the singer, he is totally exposed – a state of affairs that no-one else who became this popular could sustain for any length of time. There are few, if any, weak tracks on here, with the title track joined by *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, *With God on Our Side* and (relative) light entertainment, like *Boots of Spanish Leather*. Powerful stuff indeed. ★★★★★

Sound: Sundazed has taken the bold step of reissuing this in its original mono format, an approach that yields dividends in revealing the tonal quality of both voice and guitar. It also makes the lyrical content as clear as day. But a lyric sheet is also included for maximum accessibility. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Sundazed and Pure Pleasure.

020 8723 7297

www.purepleasurerecords.com

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL



### GENO WASHINGTON AND THE RAM JAM BAND

Foot Stompin' Soul: Best of 1966-1972

Castle

Music: Geno was one of those American frontmen who had to come to these shores first to get their big break. His charismatic yet raw, raunchy voice, backed by the best blue-eyed British soul band of their day, gave us the best onstage recordings since James Brown's *Live At The Apollo*. It easy to see why Kevin Rowland's Dexys recorded their *Geno* number one tribute single. Some 40 other Washington and Ram Jam tracks – 28 of them from Pye's then state-of-the-art studios – make *Foot Stompin' Soul* pretty much the definitive Geno collection. Don't fight it. ★★★★★

Sound: Although some of these early gems have been improved by digital wizardry, others sounded far better on vinyl (and just as good on earlier CD versions). ★★★ PS



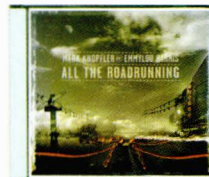
### THE DURUTTI COLUMN

Keep Breathing

Fullfill/Universal

Music: For his 22nd outing, Vini Reilly has not only matched his best Factory work, but has made one of the best British guitar albums ever. Bursting with a master's control of Les Paul feedback and an acoustic sense of folk on a par with Jefferson Airplane and Davy Graham, Reilly's skill is embellished by an intense sense of rock and roll rebellion which sees him sing against superficial TV pop shows, militarism and US globalisation. The best track, *Nina* is a rare homage to Bob Marley! If only today's young bands could match such genius. ★★★★★

Sound: Though a complex production by Reilly and Ben Roberts, the album features all kinds of guitar sounds to keep those speakers sizzling, from classical to the glorious Hendrix-style of old. ★★★★★ MP



### MARK KNOPFLER AND EMMYLOU HARRIS

All The Roadrunning

Mercury

Music: Mark Knopfler's laid-back collection of alt-country duets with Nashville queen Emmylou Harris could hardly be more different from his Dire Straits days. Fans of MK's burnished guitar solos will still find satisfaction, particularly on *This Is U* and *Right Now*. But elsewhere, it's accordion-driven country hoedowns (*Red Staggerwing*), mournful rustic ballads (*Love And Happiness*) and honky-tonk lullabies (*Belle Star*). The album's values are simple ones – rootsy, crafted songs, beautifully played and sympathetically produced. ★★★★★

Sound: There's no better harmony singer in the world than Harris and ultimately it's her crystalline contributions as much as anything that make this album special. ★★★★★ NW



### FLAMING LIPS

At War With The Mystics

Warner Brothers

Music: Flaming Lips may be unique in pop music in that after more than 20 years in the game, Wayne Coyne's band of rabbit-suited oddballs are now making the most inspired and audacious music of their career. Think of *At War With The Mystics* as the final part of a majestic trilogy that began with 1999's *The Soft Bulletin* and continued with 2002's *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots*. You can hear traces of West Coast sunshine, psych-punk and bubblegum candy. But it's the way they put them together that's unique, for nobody else is capable of layering and texturing such diverse influences into quite such a delirious, swirling, pop nirvana rhapsody. Simply magnificent. ★★★★★

Sound: The imagination of Brian Wilson meets the ambition of Phil Spector (hopefully without the nervous breakdown or the murder trial). Need we say more? *Yoshimi...* was a minor masterpiece in modern recording, and *At War With The Mystics* shows no signs of Flaming Lips letting the side down. ★★★★★ NW



### FELIX HELL: GUILMANT, RHEINBERGER, VIERNE, LISZT

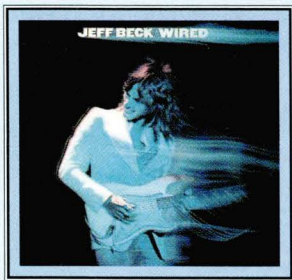
Sonata No.1 in D minor, Abendfriede, Symphony No.1 finale, Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H, Fantasy and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undem' Felix Hell (organ)

Reference Recordings RR-101CD (HDCD)

Music: This broad collection of excellent organ works includes an ending which makes a steam engine at close quarters sound limp, though many of the great moments on this exceptional discs are more intimate. Recorded when Hell was just 16, this is a stunning achievement, irrespective of age. ★★★★★

Sound: Warm and clear, yet powerful through the lower octaves, this HDCD recording is brilliantly engineered. It covers a tremendous dynamic range, and on a good system, preferably HDCD-equipped, it will leave you breathless. Guaranteed. ★★★★★ AG





## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "The title sums it up, the man was electric."

**JEFF BECK** *Wired* CBS

**Music:** Recorded in 1976, this George Martin-produced album contains some of the most intense guitar ever laid down on vinyl. Beck had a formidable backing band, which included Jan Hammer on keyboards, Narada Michael Walden's explosive drumming and the rock solid bass of Wilbur Bascomb. None of the tracks are Beck's own, rather they came largely from members of the group, except for Charles Mingus' *Goodbye Park Pie Hat*, of which there is a

stunning rendition. Beck's playing covers the gamut from sophisticated and subtle to scorching. The title sums it up: the man was electric. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This album tends to split systems down the middle. Some make it sound compressed, others reveal an open expansiveness. It's typical of CBS rock albums of the period, but this does nothing to dull the intensity of sound or the compulsion of the material. ★★★★★ JK



### OJOS DE BRUJO

**Techari**

Diquea

**Music:** The latest album from Barcelona's premier flamenco/hip-hop/funk/reggae/latin/bhangra collective is a stirring mix of influences, clashing and assimilating cultures with gleeful abandon, fusing its 'world' influences with punk intensity in an irresistible wave of rhythm. It opens with an awesome burst of confrontational flamenco rabble-rousing with *Color* and builds from there, sometimes with the eight core members led by force-of-nature singer Marina, sometimes with the aid of guests Cyber (Asian Dub Foundation) on dhol drum, Senegalese rapper Faada Freddy and the UK's own global music polymath Nitin Sawhney on electronics. ★★★★★

**Sound:** There's a lot to pack in. The recording occasionally sounds as though there's almost too much going on in the mix, with percussively strummed guitars, ringing tablas, pounding palmas (handclaps) and drums all fighting for dominance. However, it all lends itself to the barely suppressed global anarchy inherent in the music. ★★ DO



## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

### DAVID WILCZEWSKI

**Room In The Clouds**

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Opus3

**Music:** David Wilczewski is a saxophone player and composer who has previously worked with Steve Smith's Vital Information, but who has now gathered some very fine musicians to make a high-resolution recording for Sweden's Opus3 audiophile label. Having three guitar players in the seven-strong group, one at a time, means there is a mix of styles that reminds one of John McLaughlin on one track and John Scofield on another. Wilczewski himself plays as part of the band, rather than being its obvious leader. There are no lengthy, indulgent solos here – just excellent ensemble playing and a set of cracking tunes. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This may be musically akin to an ECM album, but its sound is rather warmer than you get with that label – the emphasis here is on naturalness of tone rather than pristine reverb. Full details of the mics and recording gear are supplied and the surround mix is in 4.1 channels. ★★★★★ JK



### HAYDN

**The Creation (Oratorio)**

Andreas Spering (conductor), VokalEnsemble Köhn, Capella Augustina,

SACD two-disc set (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Naxos 6.110073-74

**Music:** This is not the first time this masterwork from Haydn's top drawer, which depicts the seven days of creation, has been covered here, but this version is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is an SACD surround sound recording. Second it is a thoroughly idiomatic performance, sung in German, and performed on original instruments, with the kind of slightly raw tonality and textures that you would expect from such forces – and some gloriously assured solo singing. Finally, of course, being on a budget label, it is cheap. The work is as compelling as it should be, thanks in large part to excellent vocal and instrumental work, solo and ensemble. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The recording is supplied here in a full 5.1-channel mix of some grace and passion, and allowing for a little toning down of the rear channels, it is as good a recording as it is a performance. ★★★★★ AG



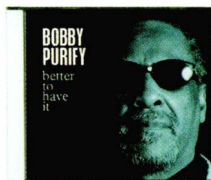
### ARGENTO

**Casa Guidi, Capriccio for Clarinet and Orchestra, In Praise of Music**

Frederica von Stade, Burt Hara, Eiji Oue (conductor), Minnesota Orchestra Reference Recordings RR-100CD (HDCD)

**Music:** A *pot pourri* of short works from the Minnesota's orchestra's Composer Laureate. The music is on the cusp between romantic and contemporary, but is instantly approachable, and of considerable stature, variety and often beauty, with some surprising changes of gear when you least expect it. The vocal quality of von Stade's honied velvet voice is an added bonus. ★★★★★

**Sound:** As with many of Prof Johnson's HDCD recordings for Reference, there is a startling realism about the sound, bar an occasional hint of colour, typically on cymbals. On HDCD, even this suddenly disappears, and the sound opens out with exquisite subtlety. ★★★★★ AG



### BOBBY PURIFY

**Better To Have It**

Proper

**Music:** He's not the first Bobby Purify (as in James & Bobby Purify) but Ben Moore was a face on the gospel scene, until he retired in 1998 after going blind. Encouraged out of retirement for this secular soul album, he teams his molasses-rich baritone up with legendary songwriter Dan Penn (*I'm Your Puppet, Dark End Of The Street*) and the cream of surviving Muscle Shoals musicians, including Spooner Oldham on keyboards and guitarist Jimmie Johnson. A defiantly old-school southern soul album, with gems aplenty, especially the title track and the stirring *I'm Qualified*. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Purify and Penn rehear a sound that may not sound like it came from 2005, but will never go out of fashion – warm, earthy and real. ★★★★★ DO

### DONALD FAGEN

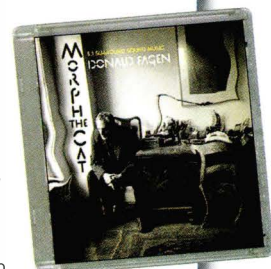
**Morph The Cat**

DVD-Audio and CD two-disc set

Warner Brothers

**Music:** The voice of Steely Dan's third solo album fits in very neatly with The Dan's hi-fi show-pleasing sounds and both his earlier solo efforts. He says they roughly equate to youth, middle age and approaching mortality, and each shares similar elements of retro sci-fi, off-hand hipster cool and that seemingly effortless, easy-yet-complex sound that exudes intelligence. Like most Steely Dan albums, it takes a little bit of digging to get to the humour and bite beneath the gloss, but it's a dig worth doing. Standout tunes include the title track, concerning a huge feline feelgood creature threatening New York, and an imagined conversation between the young Fagen and the ghost of Ray Charles, *It's What I Do*. ★★★★★

**Sound:** As with all of Fagen's records, they don't come much smoother, with every note laboured and sweated over to remove any roughness – the cutting edge comes from the lyrics. Clear and beautifully prepared, this music was made for hi-res and comes up a treat on DVD-Audio. ★★★★★ DO





# Polished Performance

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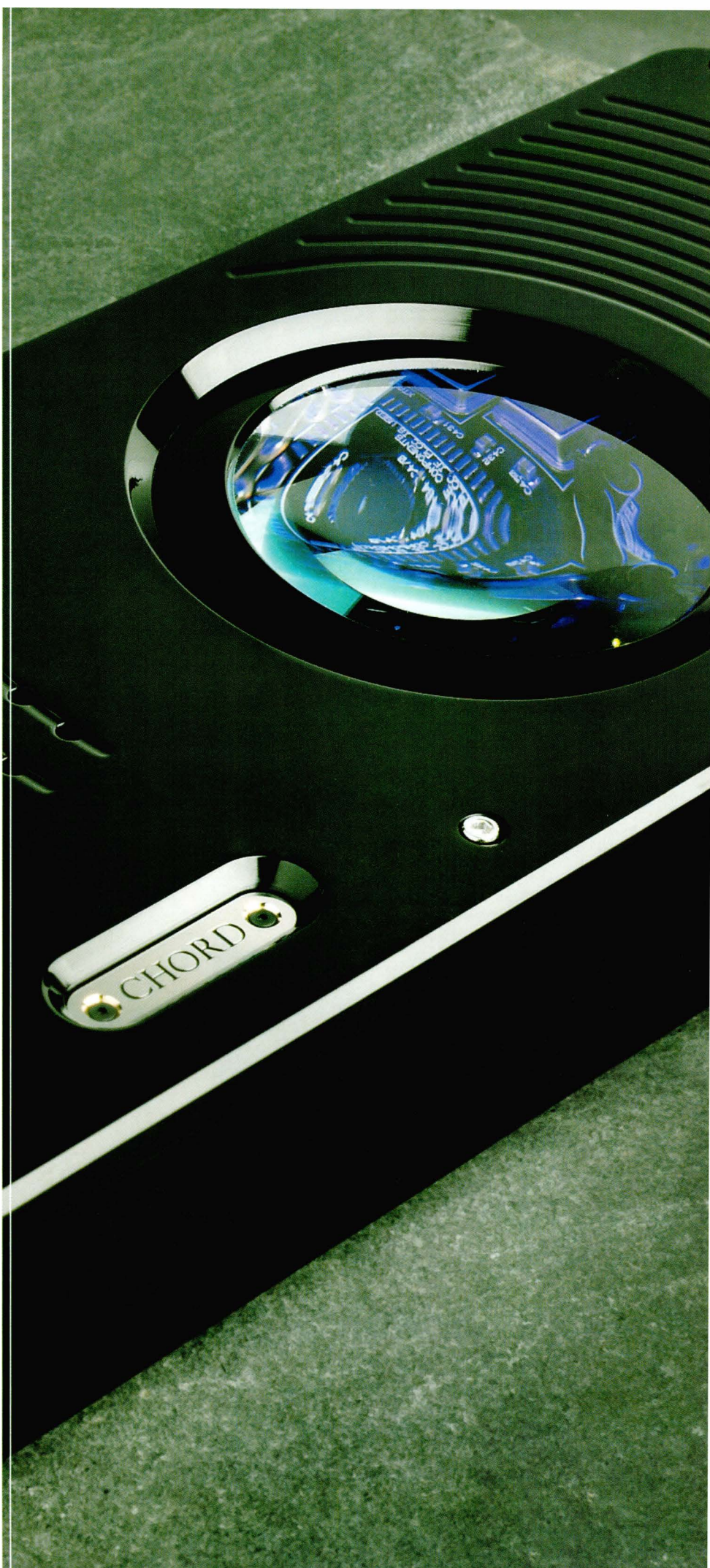
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# ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

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## DAC'S ENTERTAINMENT

I buy your magazine regularly and wondered why don't you have more *Ultimate Group Tests* for DACs? With many cheap DVD players on the market, often with great transport mechanisms from the likes of Pioneer and Sony, surely adding a good DAC would outclass CD players costing the same or even more money?

The magazine used to test DACs and there are several great DACs available at a range of different prices and I would really like to see them tested in your *Ultimate Group Test*.

**Igor Koprivsek** Slovenia

**HFC** Today, DACs are relevant only for a minority of readers. D-to-A chipsets have evolved fast, making contemporary CD players so good that aftermarket DACs have limited merit. We're not sure we agree that DVD-ROM drives with DACs would outclass similarly priced CD players as you suggest. Some manufacturers, such as Roksan, go to great lengths to source CD drives for their players. However, we will continue to review DACs (especially in combination) and recommend the excellent Cyrus DAC X reviewed last month (*HFC* 279).



Above: Cyrus DAC X D/A converter (and friend)

## “With many good DVD transports, surely adding a DAC would outperform CD?”

### COLD SHOULDER

In response to Andy Giles' *Dispatches* piece on the Arctic Monkeys (*HFC* 279), I would like to say what a load of rubbish! By the look of Andy's photo, both he and I are rapidly heading into old fart territory. I find the Arctic Monkeys to be lyrically clever, melodic and musically exciting. Not since I ran home with my Talking Heads 77 album shoved under my arm have I enjoyed an album as much on first hearing, my only disappointment being the quality of the recording: definitely mid-fi. However, what it does prove is that the enjoyment of music is totally subjective – what Andy needs is an injection of anti-cynicism elixir. Thanks for a great mag.

**Peter Hodgkinson** via email

### BUDGET BEWILDERMENT

I was interested to read Paul Messenger's review on the Rega Apollo CD player as I'm in the market for a new CD player. But can you explain why Paul put it through thousands ▶

## Letter of the month

### WHAT THE FUNK?

Flicking through *Hi-Fi Choice* over the past few years, it would almost appear that there are more new sub-£500 turntables than CD players. You've had models from NAD, Goldring, Rega, Pro-Ject and Funk to name but a few. Are you advocating vinyl over CD for someone spending £500 on a source, or are you moving towards universal players and away from CD? Some of the scores for these decks make me think I'm missing something sticking with the silver disc?

**Mark Robinson** via email

**HFC** Many manufacturers tell us CD player sales are down a bit, so those controlling the purse strings move away from CD R&D. Conversely, some UK companies are having a ball selling high-quality CD players at all prices. Plus, there's the new-wave of Japanese two-channel kit, so there really are some mixed messages out there. It's no coincidence that vinyl's resurgence continues to gather pace and we've had some cracking decks arrive at *HFC* recently. But rest assured that as new CD players arrive, we'll be testing 'em pronto!



### WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a one-metre pair of Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo interconnects worth £260, featuring a silver/gold conductor with Kapton insulation, plus a transparent Teflon jacket. So get writing! (150 words max please...)





Above: Rega Apollo CD player

£ of pounds worth of Naim gear with B&W800D speakers? People buying a player in this price bracket will have partnering equipment of a similar value and would presumably like to know how it sounds with price-matched gear.

H. Shearwood West Midlands

HFC We're very proud of our comprehensive test regime at Hi-Fi Choice and we will always listen to kit with a variety of partnering gear to emulate real-world scenarios. However, it's also essential for every reviewer to run a 'reference' system that they know intimately. This allows us to accurately analyse performance and identify subtle nuances in a listening environment that is controlled.

In Paul's review, he explained that serious listening began with the Naim gear after he had completed some A/B testing with the Apollo's upmarket predecessor, the Jupiter. With source components in particular, it's essential to provide a familiar 'window' that will enable us to 'see' exactly what's going on at source level.

DOWN UNDER DEMO

I recently purchased a pair of KEF Reference 203 floorstanders and need to buy a new CD player and amp. It's difficult to audition suitable gear with the KEFs as there is only one

KEF Reference dealer in my area of Australia. Do you have any suggestions?

Kevin Sweeney Australia

HFC We spoke to KEF UK. A spokesperson said: "KEF doesn't normally recommend specific brands, but we contacted our Australian distributor who suggested Denon or Bryston for amplification and Denon for the CD player. If budget allows, a Meridian G51 receiver or G01/G56 pre/power with a G06 or G08 CD player would also be an excellent choice. In general terms, we have found that KEF Reference performs best with amps able to deliver high current cleanly."

"People buying a player want to know how it sounds with price-matched gear."

THERE'S NO LIMIT?

What's the limit of hi-fi reproduction? With developing technology and new formats emerging, the question of limits must arise. Are we there yet? Or is there further info deep in the grooves of an LP still to be extracted?

Surely, the level of information on a disc must be related to the recording equipment used?

However, can a 1960s recording be presented in such a way with modern equipment that it is actually perceived as sounding 'better' than the live performance it was recorded from?

Euan McDade via email

HFC There's still a long way to go to reach the limits of reproducing a recording. Anyone lucky enough to hear the original (unamplified) performance, a recording of the same performance at the mastering stage and the same thing reproduced in the home will hear a drop in quality at each stage. Each year, developments in engineering, materials science and technology mean there's a scintilla more information capable of being pulled from a vinyl or polycarbonate disc. Improvements to hi-fi aim to get the listener in the home as close as possible to the original performance via that recording studio... but no further.

CREATURE COMFORTS

We break up the entire hi-fi chain into separate components, only to attempt to put it all back together again. Then comes along the Meridian 808i Reference CD player, which plugged into Meridian's active speakers, produces a 'system'. So, are we strange creatures or merely conforming to earn our badge as an audiophile?

Eugene Tan via email

HFC We love the diversity of hi-fi and enjoy in equal measure the multi-box routes as well as the elegant simplicity of solutions such as Meridian's. This month, on p46 we take an exclusive look at Meridian's new M3100 active speakers, which are also available in DSP form for the ultimate in simplicity when used with a suitable source.

Onlineforum

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



I had a glance at Linn's website and found to my surprise that the only CD players mentioned were the Unidisk models (apart from the Classik)...

Still Tones

...Linn does have a new CD player in the wings called the Majik, which is going to be launched in mid-2006. There is also a

new preamp and power amp with the same name.

Artikulat

For not much more than a decent mains lead or two I could get an electrician to fit a completely separate mains ring just for my system. Have any of you lot 'dabbled' with mains conditioning..?

Opusover21

...My kit is on separate spurs which does help, but changing room acoustics is the way to go for me – and offered the biggest change.

Adam

Do I need a power conditioner for my mains supply and, if so, any recommendations..?

Starmist

...Why do you want one? Is it because you have 'pops' through your hi-fi? If so, a mains conditioner will not help. You will need to suppress the plug on the offending appliance. Try the noise-reducing gizmos from Russ Andrews or Hififorsale.com, these usually cost about £30.

Mikehit

A strange thing happened yesterday. While one of my TAG McLaren P60s is being repaired, I reverted back to a single P60 and PA20 preamp. I purchased Neil Diamond's new CD, 12 Songs and what a surprise – my system has never sounded so good. What happens when the TAG comes back?

Dougan



# The New Gold Standard



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The radiating surface of Monitor Audio's innovative RST<sup>®</sup>2 drivers, used exclusively by the new Gold Signature speakers, is patterned with hundreds of concentric dimples, meticulously fashioned to preserve cone geometry at all volume levels. This means you'll enjoy smoother, distortion-free sound however hard you play music and film.

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or call free on: 0800 0352032





ARCAM FMJ CD36 CD PLAYER | ARCAM FMJ A32 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
CANTON VENTO 809 DC LOUDSPEAKERS | £4,400



# Stealth fighter

*Some hi-fi comes dressed to kill, some looks deceptively ordinary. This combo from Arcam and Canton falls into the latter category*

Let's go over the ground rules. Actually, there's only one. A *Beautiful System* can be exquisite to look at, as exotic as the rarest orchid, more expensive than a Brighton beach hut and less compromised than Fernando Alonso's Formula One car. But, the point is, it doesn't have to be. It can just as easily be modest and unassuming, as mainstream as Kellogg's Corn Flakes, the very epitome of square, safe conservatism and as affordable as a KFC Family Bucket. As well as being in the eye of the beholder, the 'beautiful' bit, at a fundamental level, refers to the way the system sounds. Naturally, aesthetics do matter – you'll never see a system in these pages that remotely resembles a bag of spanners – but sonic beauty will always come first.

So, if your initial response to a stereo that brings together two big name, middle-of-the-road brands (one British, one German) that clearly employ designers equipped almost exclusively with rulers and set squares, is to stifle a yawn, so be it. But let me share a hunch with you. Sometimes good things come in the plainest of wrappers.

Whatever shortfall of megalomaniac, world-dominating ambition the industrial designers at Arcam and Canton might have, it isn't shared by the respective companies' engineers. The smart but low-thrill appearance of this CD player, integrated amp, floorstanding speaker combo won't leave any passing goose fearful of imminent nervous shock, but as anyone familiar with the reputations of these companies will tell you, system performance promises to be wondrously potent. And that, in itself, is kind of beautiful. Look at it this way: no supercar is safe when there's an Audi RS4 on the prowl. The best predators are often masters of stealth.

**"It can just as easily be modest and unassuming, as mainstream as Kellogg's Corn Flakes and as affordable as a KFC Family Bucket."**

Over its first 30 years, Arcam has undoubtedly become a Brit-fi institution. The Cambridge-based company's mission statement today is the same as it's always been: to provide high performance solutions for people who demand the best from movies and music. To utilise the latest innovative, ground-breaking technology yet maintain a sophisticated simplicity of design. To make hi-fi that lasts – Arcam is still able to repair most of the products it made over twenty years ago.

## ICONIC PRAISE

There have been numerous iconic products since its first, the A60 integrated amp of 1976 (before A&R Cambridge was shortened to Arcam), but none that has attracted quite as much universal praise as its current FMJ flagship line up that provides the electronics for this system. And right at the front is arguably Arcam's greatest hi-fi source component to date, the £1,400 FMJ CD36 CD player. Arcam calls it "the pinnacle of CD reproduction at a real-world price" and claims that its sound quality outperforms that of players many times more expensive. Forget the pinch of salt, Arcam has made so many impressive CD spinners over the years, this is no idle boast.

Key performance areas include upsampling the 44.1 kHz digital data stream to 192kHz, which allows the use of a very high frequency analogue output filter for improved phase and frequency response. The DAC circuit board has a total of four two-channel Wolfson 8740 DACs – these multi-bit Delta-Sigma devices are claimed to be the very best performing DAC chips available. Using several in parallel is said to further reduce noise and distortion, as well as improving linearity. ▣



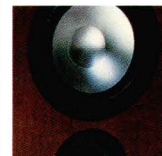
**Arcam FMJ CD36 CD player**  
£1,400

The loftiest CD player Arcam has produced to date. Resolving power and honesty are in the premier league, regardless of price. Very well built and a dream to use, too. World class.



**Arcam FMJ A32 integrated amplifier**  
£1,200

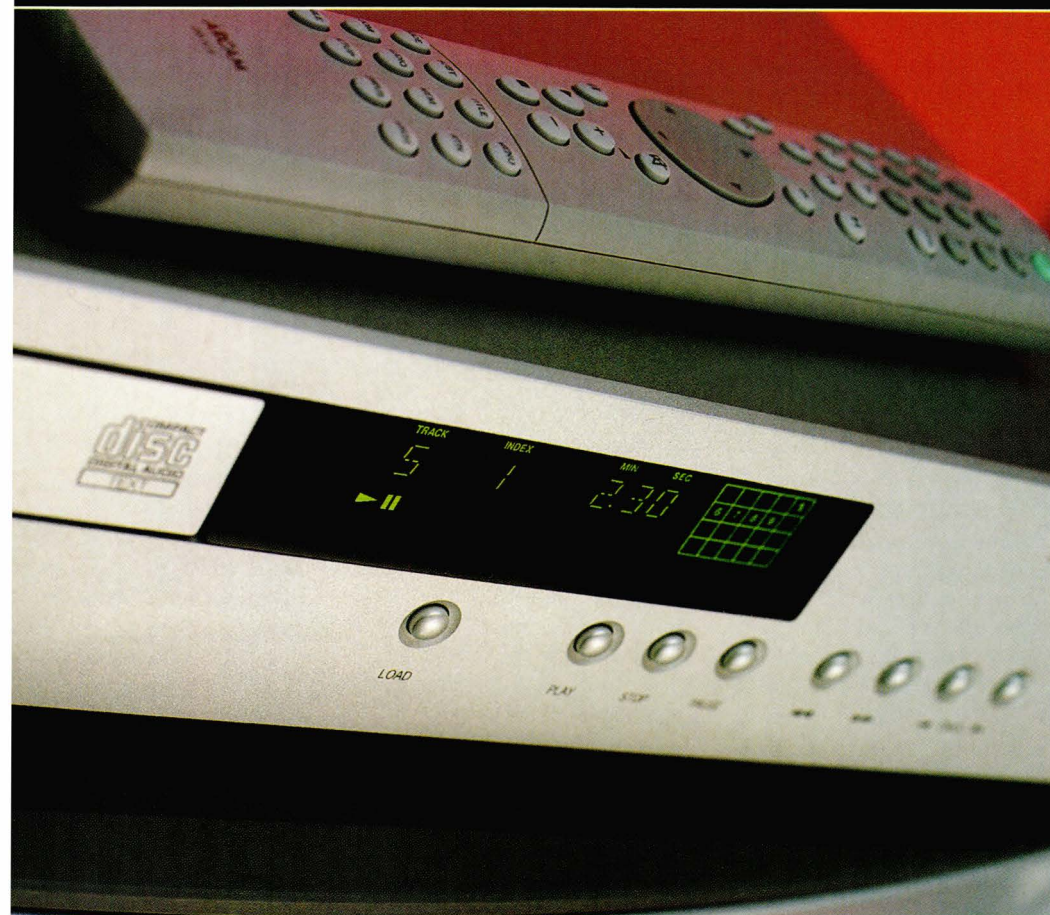
The A32 is a formidable performer. Powerful enough to drive a wide range of speakers, its transparency and precision are even more impressive. Microprocessor operation, too.



**Canton Vento 809 DC loudspeaker**  
£1,800 per pair

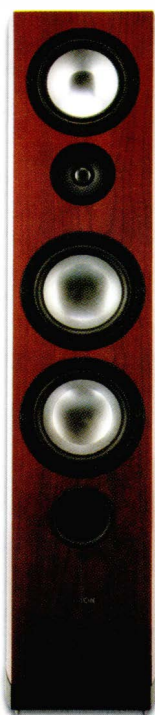
Large, three-way, four-driver floorstander is a true wide bandwidth design with remarkable dynamic freedom. A serious pair of speakers that handle everything.





▣ The CD36 also benefits from an entirely new power supply and mother board, and the application of a new material in its construction called Stealth Mat (originally developed for use in stealth fighters) that is claimed to absorb and redirect RF and EMI. Controlling mechanical vibration was also a priority, while the use of four-layer PCBs allows shorter signal paths and the delicate audio signals to be separated from the power supply and other noisy signals. If that's not enough for you, drift over to p66 of this issue, where the same player is put through its paces with five of its most pertinent peers.

Just as the CD36 is arguably the best Arcam CD player ever, so the FMJ A32 represents the company's current high water mark for integrated amps. Rated at 100 watts per channel, the circuit design is optimised for ultra short signal paths and the chassis is laminated to minimise vibration. The A32 has six line inputs – CD, tuner, AV, DVD, VCR and tape – plus an MM/MC phono stage, all under sophisticated microprocessor control. The multi-turn, high-resolution switchable volume and balance control, intelligent internal bus and dot matrix display are just that, as well as being a joy to use and look at. It all enhances the classy image already established by the chunky extruded aluminium fascia.



Both FMJ components feel even more expensive than they are, especially with regard to damping. Rap the casework with a knuckle and there's just a dull thud. And Arcam remotes have improved in recent years – still bristling with buttons, but more ergonomic in layout and upmarket in feel.

#### ECHOES OF THE PAST

Canton's beginnings In 1972 – four hi-fi enthusiasts join together with a common goal, the rest is history, etc – have echoes of Arcam's past, though on a slightly larger scale. Canton started officially with 35 employees on 1 January 1973, assembling speaker enclosures. The development work was done in the living room – Canton reasoned that speakers belong in the living room and must therefore be tailored to fit this environment and the people in it.

Looking at the Vento 809 DC, it's obvious that the early philosophy survives. This, by any standards, is a strapping loudspeaker standing some 112cm tall. It's deep one too, at nearly 36cm. But, measuring just 25cm across, the Vento presents a pleasingly slim aspect head on. A three-way, four-driver, front-ported design, its slender and curved monocoque cabinet is made from six layers of laminate. The midrange

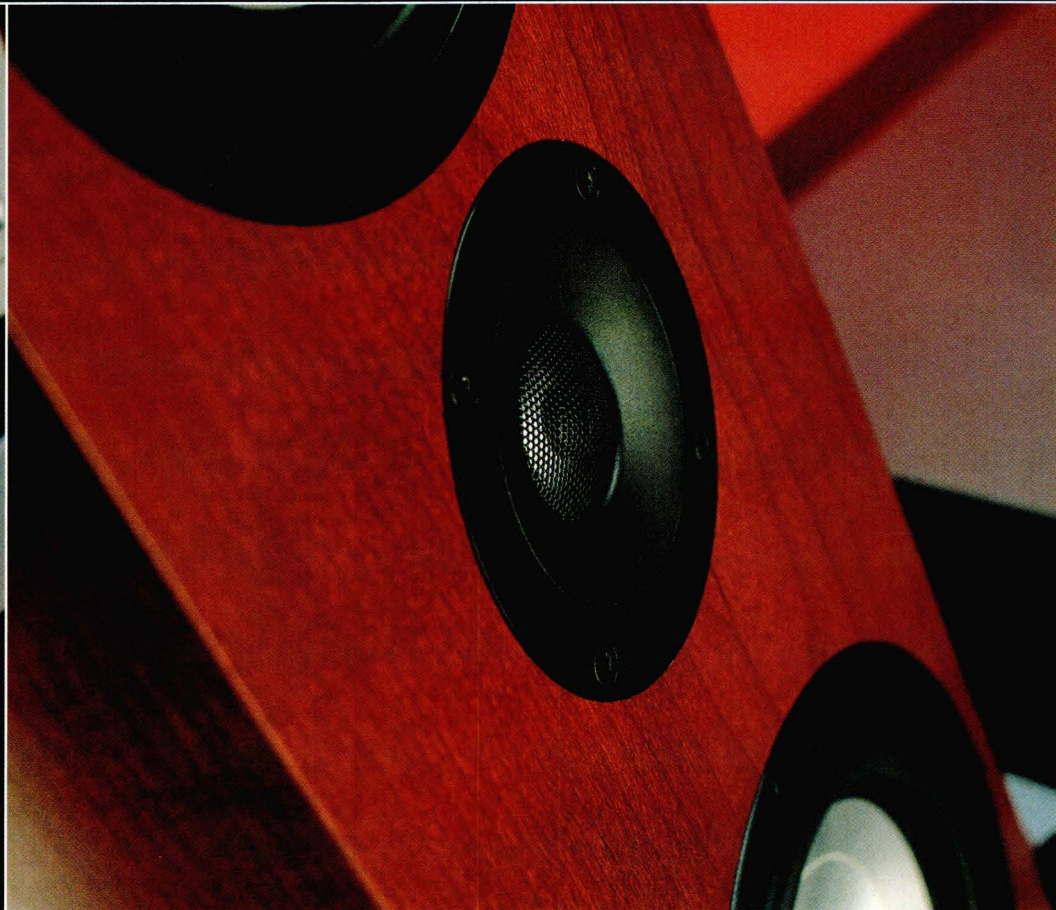
driver is mounted above the tweeter, which, in turn, is above the twin woofers.

The 'DC' part of the nomenclature stands for Displacement Control technology, which is claimed to prevent a speaker's bass driver(s) from responding to signals that approach the drivers' natural resonance frequencies – in this case "below 20Hz". What Canton describes as "significant driver motion with no audible output at the signal frequency, but with very high output at multiple harmonics of the signal" is a waste of energy and creates distortion. DC is essentially a high-pass filter that controls those excursions. No more waffling woofers.

Another neat touch is the "shock absorbing isolation base", a wooden plinth decoupled from the speaker's cabinet by four silicone dampers and designed to isolate the cabinet from the floor. As for the enclosure itself, each sheet of the six-layer laminate is individually pressure-molded to take the shape of the speaker's 'hull'. Exceptional stiffness is said to result.

The drive units are an interesting bunch, too. Starting from the bottom, the two 200mm aluminum woofers feature double-ferrite motors that are said to improve excursion linearity. In other words, they go louder with lower distortion. Taking care of the midrange is





**“It’s hard to pinpoint any significant weaknesses in the system’s performance. Its ability to time is just as impressive as its confidence at the frequency extremes and its open midrange.”**

a 178mm aluminium cone with a concave dustcap and a beefy magnet system, a spider weave cone shape and – like the bass drivers – a long-throw sinusoidal (double-curved) surround. Finally, there’s a 25mm tweeter with an aluminium-manganese dome, which combines the dome and coil former in a single structure.

Sensitivity is quoted at 88.5dB, which is reasonable enough if not exactly an open invitation to use single-ended tube amplification. With 100 watts of Arcam muscle, though, window rattling is definitely on the agenda.

#### HIGHER POWER

Straight out of the blocks, it’s clear this combo does ‘hi-fi’ in its sleep. It has clarity and grip, high powers of resolution, analysis and organisation, knockout dynamics and bags of musical insight. Although not immediately obvious, it also delivers the most extraordinarily powerful lower registers, helped in its task by the absence of an upper-bass ‘hump’.

The Ventos are heavy hitters. Bass addicts need look no further for visceral thrills, slam and extension. The thwack of Steve Gadd’s drumkit on Steely Dan’s *Aja* CD is palpable. The bass is also alluringly fast, taut and tuneful. Once you’ve become accustomed to its power, you begin to appreciate its intelligibility. But the long, tall Cantons are also subtle resolvers of detail through the mid and treble, which brings benefits to all kinds of music, but is especially seductive with female vocals which are handled with tremendous finesse and refinement. Likewise the swoony string arrangements on Joni Mitchell’s *Both Sides Now*. Real delicacy, real power, real poise.

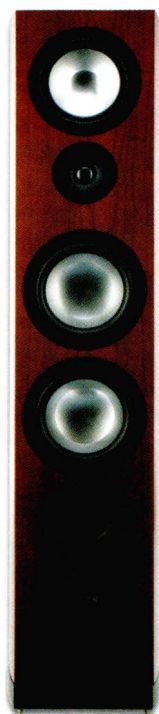
It’s hard to pinpoint any significant weaknesses in the system’s performance. Its ability to time is just as impressive as its confidence at the frequency extremes and its open midrange. It combines drive, power and a wide dynamic range with body and tonal subtlety. And it will start and stop on the proverbial dime.

The way this system lets the music flow in a natural, unforced fashion is

immediately captivating and unflagging over extended listening. Sting’s live set *All This Time* is a fine sounding CD, but this system’s impressive clarity, focus and retrieval of low-level detail makes the recording simply seem more ‘live’ than it does on many set ups. The rich double bass and subtle piano accompaniment to Sting’s rasping vocal on *Moon Over Bourbon Street* is particularly majestic.

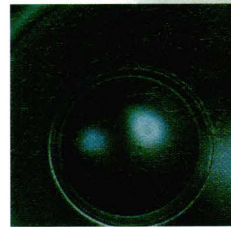
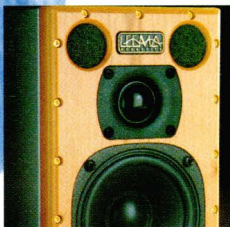
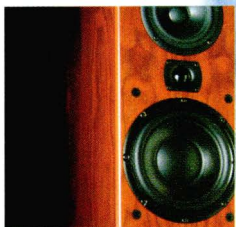
Ultimately, this system delivers its musical message with full force. It is lushly detailed and insightful, yet effortlessly easy and musical. It’s beautifully voiced and images precisely within a huge soundstage. It goes loud effortlessly yet stays smooth and refined. It’s fast and it rocks. It does what every *Beautiful System* should do and creates the almost tangible presence of real musicians in the room. Some might wish for a more exclusive badge – something shiny from high-end hi-fi’s lofty aristocracy. But, believe us, with your eyes closed, you’d be hard pushed to tell the difference. **HFC**

David Vivian

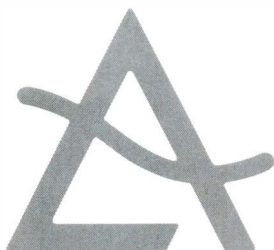




# True beauty, revealed



At Leema Acoustics, we are passionate about sound. Years of research and endless testing are reflected in every Leema product. Perfection is a standard requirement. When you listen with Leema, the true beauty of your music is revealed.



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# REVIEWS

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



## EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 36** Jamo Reference R909 loudspeaker
- 40** Marantz DV9600 universal disc player
- 44** Audia Flight TWO integrated amplifier
- 46** Meridian M3100 active loudspeaker
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- 60** Goldring DR100/DR150 headphones
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## ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

### LOUDSPEAKERS £1,200-£1,800

- 66** Arcam FMJ CD36
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- 71** Exposure 3010
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- 75** T+A CD 1230 R



## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

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

Our overall conclusion

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

**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 83%**

**FEATURES >> 85%**

**BUILD >> 85%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

**CONCLUSION**

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%**

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



### Best Buy

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



### Editor's Choice

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

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







# Naked ambition

*Jamo's been thinking 'outside the box'... and the result is this stunning new flagship speaker*

**PRODUCT** Jamo Reference R 909

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £7,500 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 48.8x127.6x54.1cm

- ◉ Weight: 63.1kg
- ◉ 25mm fabric dome tweeter
- ◉ 150mm midrange driver with magnesium cone
- ◉ Twin bass drivers with 380mm air-dried paper cones
- ◉ Sensitivity: 89dB
- ◉ Impedance: 4 ohms (nominal)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 205605 # www.jamo.com

Jamo's sales pitch for its new high-end speaker begins like this: "Loudspeakers are inherently compromised – because they are based on boxes". The company can comfortably make that claim because there's no sign of a box anywhere on the Reference R 909. It is not an especially tall speaker, but it is very wide, and it houses not one but two massive 380mm drivers. The next surprise is the shallow depth of the enclosure. In fact, it doesn't have an enclosure. It is a flat(ish) baffle loudspeaker, and the bass and midrange section is dipolar (the tweeter is a sealed unit).

So why a dipole? And why feature moving coil drivers when virtually all full-range dipoles use planar diaphragms, such as electrostatics? One answer to the first question is that boxes have problems, namely delayed resonances as the energy is fed into, and then re-radiated after a time delay from the whole of the enclosure. There is also a hysteresis effect resulting from the air inside the enclosure being wound up like a spring by the energy imparted from the back of the drive unit cones. An open baffle arrangement is inherently free, or largely free of these issues. It is still

**“Jamo can comfortably make that claim because there's no sign of a box anywhere on the R 909.”**

energised by the reaction force from the moving diaphragms, but most of the time delays, the hysteresis effects, do not apply. Jamo claims that dipoles can offer better dynamics, attack and precision – given a properly sorted design. But dipoles couple to the listening room in a quite different way (see *Set-Up* information overleaf).

The reason for moving coil units is that planar diaphragms are physically incapable of covering low frequencies. This is why most

electrostatics are either very large, or hand over the bass to a dedicated moving coil section. Electrostatic or other large area planar drive units also have an intrinsically low voltage sensitivity, and a low load impedance. This means they require a lot of very high quality amplifier horsepower.

A moving coil bass section with stiff, light cones (to minimise delayed resonances) provides a workable solution, but there are still issues to address. The main one is the progressive loss of bass as the high pressure air in front of a forward moving bass cone rushes around the rear of the panel (and vice versa), effectively short circuiting the bass. Nature – as we know – abhors a vacuum. This can be counteracted by a larger baffle, but this would be undesirable for cosmetic reasons. A more promising alternative is to engineer a 6dB/octave bass boost below 200Hz, which is precisely what Jamo has done by including the enormous bass radiating area of two 380mm drivers, a species of drive unit you are otherwise likely to encounter domestically only in a handful of very large subwoofers.

The bass drivers of the R909 are optimised for their role, with lightweight air-cured paper cones with a rubber suspension, for maximum responsiveness, and an open air resonance of 27Hz. This gives the system a LF coverage extending to around 25Hz. The midrange driver is a high-tech SEAS

135mm unit with a magnesium cone and a fixed pole piece to minimise moving mass, to cover the all-important 250Hz-2kHz region. The 25mm tweeter is a customised version of the celebrated Scan-Speak Revelator, but with a smaller face plate so that it can be placed closer to the midrange driver. The crossover is a fairly simple design with 2nd

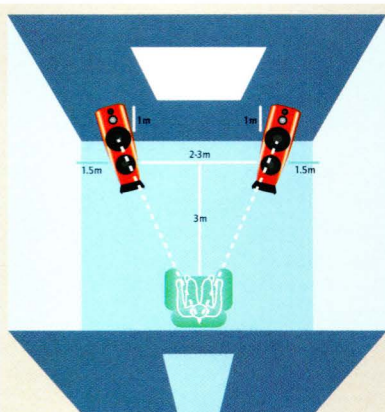
order (12dB/octave) slopes throughout, with quality components including Solen foil caps and air core inductors.

The real killer here, however, is the structure of the speaker. Stability is ensured by a massive and heavyweight base, which extends well forward and behind the baffle. That flat panel is actually a seven-layer, 43mm-thick MDF sandwich, curved back towards the side edges for increased stiffness and to reduce diffraction, and braced by a cleverly designed 5x60mm stainless steel reinforcing brace/damper, which runs from the back of the plinth to the top of the baffle. We were truly amazed at how stiff this speaker is. We expected some flexure near the tweeter, which would have had a critical impact on sound quality. In fact, we've rarely encountered a full box-type speaker that moved less when provoked. Or, for that matter, one ▶





## SET-UP



### POSITIONING

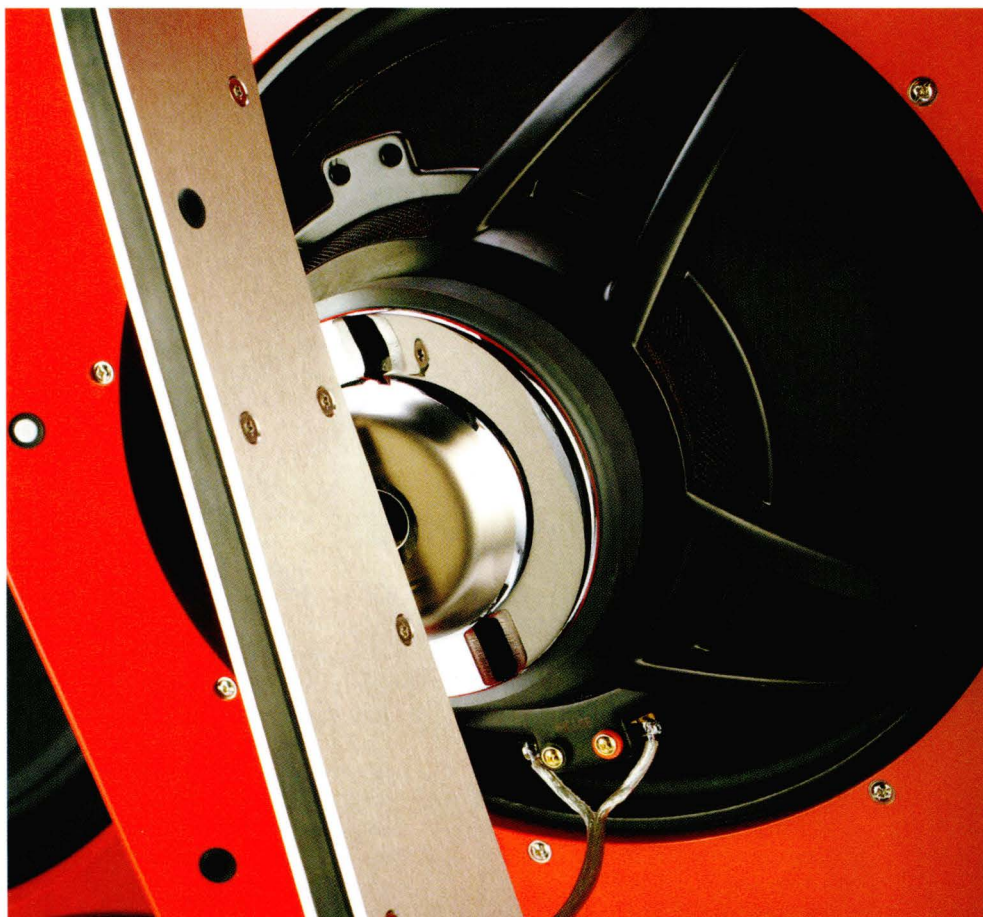
As Jamo makes clear, it is difficult to find a position for a conventional loudspeaker in a room that minimises the influence of reflections and room modes, but dipoles are different. With a broad but not unlimited lateral spread – the plane of the panel is an output null – you need not worry much about reflections from side walls. Leave about a metre or so of free space behind the panel to the back wall, and the out of phase radiation from the back of the speaker will be returned delayed with respect to the front output. This is especially true if placed near a corner, which means an increased path length for reflections if the speakers are toed inwards, and this means stereo imaging is not impeded. More generally, Jamo claims that based on their own research, dipoles interact with rooms less than most conventional loudspeakers.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

The rules that apply to other planar speakers simply don't apply here. In fact, the Jamo's electrical requirements are closer to what you'd expect of a large box-type loudspeaker. The R 909 has a nominal impedance of four ohms with just a brief excursion to three ohms in the octave above 50Hz from the information we have seen. Power handling is 800 watts peak, prodigious by any standards, and which it was not possible to even approach for this test, but with a sensitivity of 89dB/W, the 400 watts into four ohms from a Krell KAV-400xi amp was enough for most domestic needs.

We noticed variability in sound quality with changes in amplification. Krell's KAV-400xi, Denon's PMA-SA1 and Audia's Flight Two worked very well, but with discernable differences in voicing, not easily explicable from the very flat impedance curve.

The advice, then, is to audition your chosen amplifier in combination with the Jamo before making a commitment. Above all, look for a design with firm control and good resolution.



with a better finish than Jamo's selection of high-gloss black, red or yellow laquers.

Some may be surprised that a speaker so idiosyncratic has been made by Jamo, but in fact, the company has a good track record in cost no object, state of the art loudspeakers. The R909 simply marks a return to radical form. The original prototype, the brainchild of Jamo's chief acoustics engineer,

Henrik Mortensen, was constructed about eight years ago, but

the decision to release it as a commercial product is much more recent, triggered perhaps by the recent takeover of Jamo by Klipsch. Or perhaps not: Jamo claims that the R 909 is a response to increasing demand for high-quality stereo reproduction.

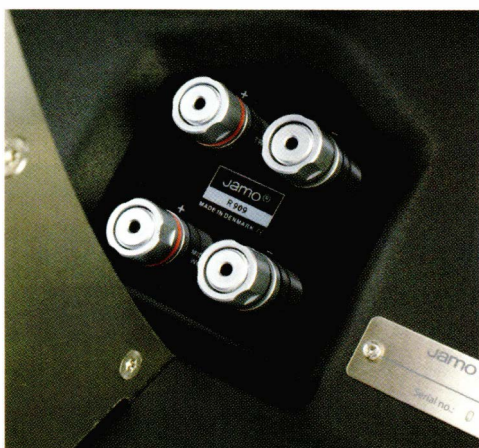
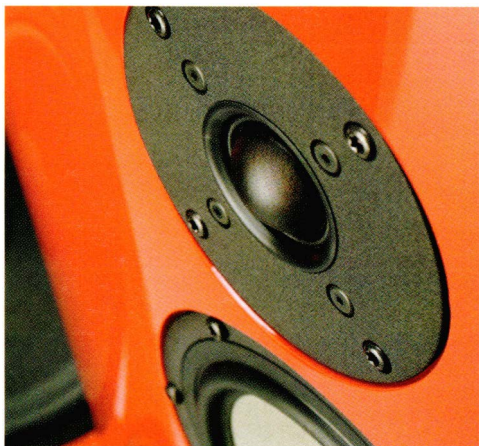
### SOUND QUALITY

Jamo has not merely made a cover version of what is already available. Its assertion that dipoles don't interact severely with their

surroundings, however, is only partially vindicated. It certainly sounds different in different rooms, but it worked extremely well in my own main room, with the R 909 spaced about two and a half meters apart, toed in by about 25 degrees and placed clear of the corners and walls in a room measuring five meters wide, and at a listening range of about three metres. The tweeter is high up on the baffle, and it is difficult to find a seating position such that the tweeter doesn't point a little above the ear plane, but that may have been a deliberate design decision. Certainly, the balance is shy in the upper midband through to the high treble, which complements an overall balance that naturally favours the bass over the midrange, albeit only slightly.

The R 909's voicing tends to be warm and full, with a touch of receding upper frequency content. Complementing this, imagery is broad and deep, but this is not a speaker that offers the holographic, 'in your lap' imaging of the best MartinLogans, or some of the more analytical conventional moving coils. In short, this is a speaker with personality. What you get here is an enormous sense of scale, far exceeding conventional speakers even big ones like B&W's larger 800 Series models. And yet somehow Jamo has conspired to deliver this scale without any obvious sins of overhang or 'boom'. The sense of drama, of the physical presence of the musical performers right there in the listening room, appears to be intrinsic,





where more conventional speakers with a similar balance often sound overblown.

Jamo claims there is “no cabinet contribution” to the sound, and that the R 909 is “clear and uncoloured”. This is putting it too strongly. As already suggested above, the R 909 is far from being a speaker devoid of the kind of character generally associated with loudspeaker enclosures, but its character is different. From one point of view, the big, easy and relaxed sound of this speaker is one of its greatest strengths, especially as it is achieved without loss of detail, and without sounding ‘blowsy’ or out of control. And this is exactly what the R 909 does achieve. Sure, it is perceptibly warm, but the bass is unusually tuneful and well proportioned in its own right. Orchestral entries are well timed, with the kind of balance and weight you might well be looking for when seated, say, one third to one half of the way to the back of many concert halls; the kind of balance that allows a rich, yet complex sound from the cellos and double basses.

But the Jamo is just as good at the more subtle stuff. Although the Revelator tweeter doesn’t have quite the precision and crystalline purity of a diamond or beryllium tweeter, it is better than most of the rest. In particular, it offers broad and even dispersion, and it’s good at maintaining its voicing at a wide range of different power levels. There is no hint of a change in sound, or of any loss or articulation or clarity during very loud passages, and the

## “On paper, the Jamo R 909 may look like a difficult proposition, but in real life it’s much more forgiving than many of its peers.”

R 909 is one of the most adaptable of speakers in that it retains a sense of presence, scale and consistency across a wide volume range.

It is also a speaker which works really well with human voice, female voice in particular. The likes of Madeleine Peyroux, Patricia Barber and Suzannah McCorkle, whose expressive, jazzy lyricism often gets mangled when processed in the high-fidelity machine, come across with a rare beauty, the kind of expressiveness and fluidity often associated with much smaller speakers, and a freedom from chestiness or the usual box type artefacts. But, and this is rare in combination, the R 909 is also a superb instrument for large-scale material in any genre. It worked well, for example, in Schoenberg’s densely scored *Pelleas und Melisande* (a personal favourite), thanks to its crisp midband, strong overall homogeneity and a sense of weight and extension and that is as rare as it is precious.

On paper, the Jamo R 909 may look like a difficult proposition, but in real life it’s much more forgiving than many of its peers. True, it doesn’t suffer inadequate amps without protest, but it doesn’t require excessive power, just firm

control, and it turns out to be easy to place in medium size rooms or larger. It is also an easy loudspeaker to listen to, which is not always the case at this end of the market – it’s sufficiently but not excessively analytical, and its attractive balance is just on the warm side of neutral. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 93%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Deep bass and expansive imaging. Easy on the ear and just as easy on the eye thanks to the distinctive and elegant enclosureless design.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE &gt;&gt; 70%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Not as sharp or as analytical as some similarly priced models, may be too ‘fruity’ for some tastes. The physical characteristics of the speaker are not for everyone.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 96%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 84%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> An individual take on the high-end loudspeaker, the R 909 is relatively easy to integrate into real world systems and rooms, and its proportions look just right (not a given at this end of the market), the shallow depth being especially striking.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 89%</b>	





**marantz**

SUPER AUDIO CD / DVD PLAYER DV9600

STANDBY  
POWER ON/OFF



# Jack of all trades

*...and master of most of them, too – the new DV9600 is a top-notch, one-stop disc-playing machine*

**PRODUCT** Marantz DV9600  
**TYPE** Universal disc player  
**PRICE** £1,500  
**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x11.5x38.4cm  
● Weight: 8.6kg ● Digital outputs: HDMI and i.Link, plus optical and electrical S/PDIF ● 1080p video scaling  
● DD/DTS decoders fitted ● Video and display on/off  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 680868 # www.marantz.com

**D**espite claims to the contrary, the profile of many brands best fits either a hi-fi scenario or a home cinema one. Marantz is one of the very few companies with feet successfully planted in both camps. So, it's

in an ideal position to rule the universal disc player roost, where musical performance – both stereo and multichannel – is as important as the visuals. The DV9600 ably demonstrates that Marantz lives up to the task, thanks to a role-call of video toys that would make any home cinema buff salivate and a level of audio performance that even the most die-hard music snob will find to their liking.

**The big plus point** to the Marantz sound quality lies in those eight evenly spaced gold plated phono sockets along the top of the back panel. With two sets of stereo outputs and the four surround connectors, these phonos sit in front of a board made up of discrete and

proprietary HDAM circuits, one for each channel. Normally, HDAM circuits are limited to the stereo channels, the rest making do with conventional op-amps. Even very expensive players make this sacrifice, usually on the grounds of cost-saving. Marantz has given every channel HDAMs, immediately raising the bar on multichannel sound at the price.

Natty amp modules are all very well, but if the electronics that precede them don't cut the musical mustard, they will merely amplify poor sound. Fortunately, Marantz doesn't seem to have cut corners here, either. It delivers 24-bit/192kHz performance all round, with the audio processing circuit based on a brace





**“There is plenty of detail on offer. The DV9600 pulls a lot of information from a CD, especially with all the displays turned off.”**

of Cirrus Logic CS4298 chips. This stereo Delta-Sigma D-to-A converter chip has two useful feathers in its tiny silicon hat: it delivers a mighty 120dB dynamic range and deals with Direct Stream Digital data from an SACD player like a native, filtering the datastream at 50kHz. Marantz has also designed the chassis to separate the audio, video, transport and PSU stages; with a substantial transport mechanism and large transformer inside, these need to be isolated from the delicate audio and video circuits. If you want to keep the audio in the digital domain, there are optical and coaxial outputs for CD and DVD-Video data, plus a pair of i.Link connectors that will additionally pass SACD and DVD-Audio to suitably-equipped amps. Unlike the majority of today's players, there's even a headphone socket and the now obligatory RS232 and remote control links.

This is impressive enough to prick up audiophile ears, but the video side is perhaps even more significant. The HDMI (v1.1) digital output supports HDCP (High-Bandwidth Digital Copy Protection), a must-have for the latest 'HD-Ready' screens and projectors. This is nothing special – most HDMI-equipped DVD players do the same. The big improvement is the addition of 1080p scaling – Classé got there first, but Marantz is the first company to deliver 1080p on a player that's not hand-built (and not with an accordingly stratospheric price tag).

What is 1080p scaling? Put simply, it takes the 480-line, progressive scan picture output of a DVD player and blows it up to 1,080 lines while retaining the progressive scan (frame by frame instead of line by line) functionality. This is done thanks to industry-standard Anchor Bay technology, using the latest, high-precision 10-bit scalar chip to produce up-converted 720p, 1080i and 1080p video signals from 480p signals received via the HDMI port. It can even be used as external video processor for 480i output sources.

Marantz uses top-notch video processing for more humble screens too, with 14-bit/216MHz D-to-A conversion and an Analogue Devices Noise Shaping Video processor. The video DAC is a notch above the average at the price (meaning sharper, more colourful images) and the NSV system allows the user to perfectly tailor the output of the player to match the picture quality of the monitor.

**SOUND QUALITY**

This is one of those rare universal players that remembers CD might be the senior format, but it's in no way a 'legacy' one. With five squillion CDs out there, and millions more bought every month, it's still the dominant source for music on disc. Often, it seems that the designers get starry-eyed at the prospect of high-resolution sources and overlook the simple fact that the

bulk of most people's collections are CD-based. Fortunately, Marantz has made CD playback a priority with the DV9600.

There is an excellent sense of stereo soundstaging from CD. The music stretches far beyond the speakers, with good stage width and very decent image depth. Many universal players present a wide, but paper-thin soundstage; here, the Marantz expands the stage by projecting into the room and behind the speakers. There's even some stage height, but this really is the domain of top-notch dedicated CD players.

There is also plenty of detail on offer. The DV9600 pulls a lot of information from a CD, especially with all the video and displays turned off. There is a slight emphasis toward midrange and bass, making the player seem natural rather than 'digitally' bright, but that's no bad thing. This has an added bonus of bringing out the articulation of voices, especially female vocals. In fact, the only point where the DV9600 is demonstrably inferior to top-quality standalone CD players is in timing. There's some sense of temporal sluggishness that the best players don't have. But this 'snap' in musical timing is almost unheard of in universal players, especially at this price.

Of course, where the DV9600 really shines is in multichannel audio. Separate HDAM circuits in every channel (instead of just the stereo channels) really raise the bar for high-resolution music sources, especially SACD. All the findings of CD replay remain extant across the hi-res formats, but with the added bonus of snappier timing. Perhaps this is due to temporal limitations being swamped by the sheer amount of information from all ▶



Q&A

Ken Ishiwata, brand ambassador at Marantz, discusses the innovative design that went into the DV9600



**HFC** Is a high-end universal player harder to make than an SACD player, from an audiophile standing?

**KI** When we introduced CD, nobody asked us to come up with a player that played both LP and CD! Yet the difference between LP and CD is much smaller than between all those different formats on 12cm silver discs. People do not realise how difficult it is to cope with all the different standards on the 12cm discs. The fewer standards you build into your player, the easier it is to engineer. The market, however, demands a universal player.

As a premium audio brand, Marantz had to study the possibility of making such player. But the truth is, there will always be some compromise to be made if we must cover every format.

Of course, Marantz has tried to minimise the influences of one format on another but, once again, if you eliminate the numbers of formats involved, you have a much better chance of getting a good sounding machine!

That said, we know we have created by far the best sounding universal player on the market, underlining our 'because music matters' philosophy.

**What has Marantz done to make the DV9600 sound so good with CD?**

A key R&D focus of the DV9600 was stereo sound quality. We have spent a huge amount of time optimising the sound quality of DV9600! But it must be remembered that this development actually started when we introduced the 9500, so we have been continuously improving the sound of this product for more than 30 months.

**Why do the discrete HDAM circuits need their own circuit board?**

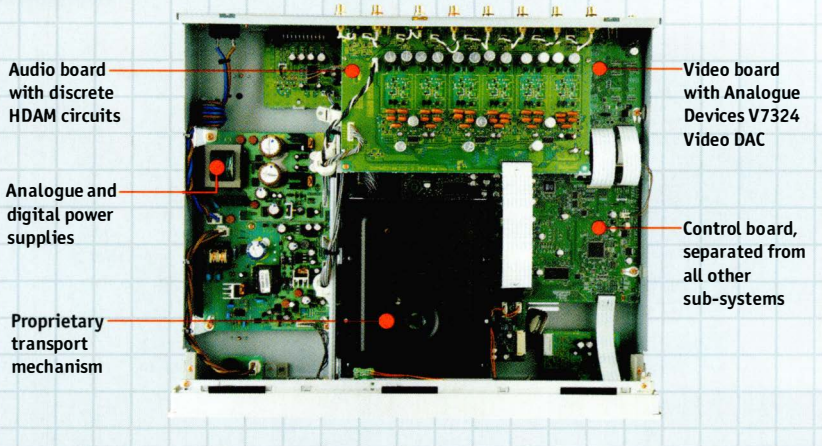
Actually, HDAMs do not require an independent circuit board, but to cut external influences from so many other circuitries to an absolute minimum we decided to make it this way. You can really hear the difference!

**Does video upsampling pose any problems for good sound quality?**

Once again, it's entirely dependent on the solution you come up with. In our audio-only disc mode, none of the video circuits receive any power. This completely removes interference from them. However, to keep a high standard on DVD-Video sound quality, we must pay a lot of attention on this execution.



Detail



Audio board with discrete HDAM circuits

Analogue and digital power supplies

Proprietary transport mechanism

Video board with Analogue Devices V7324 Video DAC

Control board, separated from all other sub-systems

channels, but this locks tighter to the sound than CD. Of the two formats, DVD-Audio is (just) the weaker, sounding exciting but lacking the palpable 'there' sense of solidity and naturalness of SACD.

Intelligently crafted discs that use the surround element to build ambience and deliver accurate, naturally recorded acoustic instruments (which means almost all of the SACD classical canon) are simply wonderful to behold. The subtle detail and room-opening nature of the player, coupled with a balance that gently adds the merest touch of useful and euphonic presence will make even SACD-sceptics long for more.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

The DV900's sound is 'merely' very good; the video is something far, far better. If you can take full advantage of the on-board 1080p video upsampling, your DVDs are transformed. Pictures are even more cinematic than usual, with none of the stair-step edges of even the best interlaced pictures. Shifting back to standard digital and analogue video incurs a drop in quality, with less picture resolution, more colour blurring, a touch of moiré (in composite video) and increasingly jagged edges. But – and this is significant – the performance of the Marantz in any given video output is better than most of its rivals. It even looks decent with bog-standard composite video... All of which means the video processing inside this baby is doing something really special.

Put it together and you've got one of the best multi-format disc players on the market today. The balance of stunning pictures – especially

through 1080p, which are so good, they'll likely keep the Marantz running long into the Blu-ray and HD-DVD era – and excellent sound quality across all major disc types is hard to resist.

New AV formats may be just around the corner, but for enthusiasts wanting to make the most of their existing music and movie collection, this player is a star. Given that finding anything approaching a rival on all counts might mean spending twice as much, it's hard not to get very excited about the Marantz DV9600. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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



VERDICT

**SOUND >> 87%**

PRO Truly superb video performance, coupled with impressive stereo and superb surround sound make this the universal disc player to beat.

**VISION >> 94%**

CON CD replay is very slightly behind dedicated CD players in the timing stakes. Similarly, DVD-Audio replay lags behind SACD (but not by a wide margin).

**FEATURES >> 93%**

**VALUE >> 89%**

CONCLUSION

Marantz has ticked all the spec sheet boxes here, but has also delivered a universal disc player that comes up with the goods. There's no need to wait for new formats like Blu-ray or HD-DVD, the DV9600 raises today's discs to tomorrow's standards.

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



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# Take two

*Lifting two grand off the price of the existing Flight One, will this new amplifier fly off the shelves?*

**PRODUCT** Audia Flight Two

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £2,500

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 42x11.3x43cm

• Weight: 19kg • Inputs: eight line-level (seven single-ended RCA-phono, one balanced XLR) • Outputs: tape monitor and preamp out (RCA-phono) • Rated power: 100W per channel (eight ohms), 180W per channel (four ohms)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk)

**A**udia is an Italian producer of *ne plus ultra* electronics, based near Rome. The company is responsible for a small, select range, currently limited to CD players and amplifiers. Although the Flight Two is the more affordable of the two integrated amps produced so far – the other is the Flight One – it appears to be more or less identical in its fundamentals to the more costly model in engineering and design terms. The changes are designed to reduce cost, but on the whole the designer has not sought to achieve this by reducing quality, but by slimming down the feature set. Even the headline power output stays the same, and it has the same basic mix of single-ended inputs, plus one balanced-mode XLR connector, and a very similar microprocessor based control system. It

also has a simple, but impressively solid, aluminium remote control to ward off intruders. It is palpably not a refugee from the usual OEM parts bin.

The main change from the more costly Flight One is the elimination of that model's idiosyncratic nod towards multichannel operation. The Flight One has a stereo power amplifier section, but it also has a six-channel line-level input, with the extra channels available after the volume control at preamp level. Audia produces a matching three-channel power amplifier to help drive a 5.1-channel system – there's no surround decoder or support for 7.1 channels, and the arrangement is clearly designed more for DVD-Audio and/or SACD-based audio systems than outright home cinema. Eliminating this novel facility, plus a few other changes, has allowed a substantial reduction in cost, down by £2,000 from the Flight One's £4,500.

The Flight Two feels like a high-quality piece of kit, and in most respects it behaves as one. The sockets on the rear panel are particularly sturdy and positive, and the controls (with one exception) are excellent, a comment that also applies more generally to the amp's meticulous detailing and solid build. But this is more than can be said of some of the control firmware, which makes the amp unnecessarily obstructive

in day to day use. Changing inputs, for example, involves hitting 'input' and turning the single rotary control through an almost imperceptibly small angle, and then waiting for the control assignment to time out before the volume level can be changed. In volume control mode, the gearing action of the continuous turn is very slow, and the dial doesn't usually spin freely, though a sharp tug towards the user helps. In fairness, though, most of the problems identified here could easily be addressed in the amplifier's firmware.

On the plus side, the software-mediated slow turn on and exit from mute is well-handled, and there some other useful features, such as absolute phase control for each input, +/-12dB programmable input normalisation (so you don't get too surprised when changing inputs before you're in a position to adjust the volume) and a five-stage display dimmer control. An internal MM/MC phono stage can also be added.

In common with all prior Flight amplifiers, integrated and pre/power, the internal architecture involves a massive power supply section, with separate 520VA toroidal transformers for each channel and current feedback rather than the usual voltage variety. One word of warning: this amplifier runs extremely hot. It claims to operate in Class A,





**“There is something about the Two’s fluidity, its expansive image scale and relaxed feel, that suggests thermionic origin.”**

but clearly doesn't do so across the entire 100-watt power rating; that would require an amp the size of a refrigerator that runs as hot as the surface of the sun (well, almost). Instead, it likely runs in an enriched Class B mode, which involves running the first few all-important watts in Class A and lots of heat dissipation. Don't even think about stacking it with other components, unless they're on separate shelves of a well-ventilated housing unit.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The Audia Flight Two is emphatically not like other amplifiers. It is a very individual, very classy animal. Ignore build quality for now; 'classy' in this context means simply that almost from the moment you first use this amplifier, it conveys an unusual, and clearly musical authority and presence. One aspect of this is that the audio chain that you are listening to practically disappears.

There are few of the traditional cues that alert the senses, subtly making you notice that you're listening to an electro-mechanical system. There's no sense that, at some level, the system is manipulating the music signal, and no tipping the listener off that this is not quite the real thing, regardless of how detailed or dynamic the source material is. It is just indefinably but unarguably real. We should

add here that the main source for this test was a T+A SACD 1245 R player, and that it was used to drive a number of speakers, including the Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 and the Jamo R909 (reviewed on p36).

It does not have quite the slam or solidity of many similarly priced solid-state alternatives, and if we were to guess without any prior knowledge, we might suspect the Flight Two to be a valve design and not solid-state at all. There is something about the Two's fluidity, its expansive image scale and the relaxed feel of its sound, that suggests a thermionic origin rather than silicon. Perhaps the amplifiers that the designer most admires are valve-based.

In the end, this matters little. What does matter is that the Flight Two is a highly expressive amplifier, with expansive soundstaging and a fine sense of detail, though always in a well-proportioned way. It doesn't have quite the lightning reflexes of some counterparts – in fact, it sounds almost relaxed by some standards. But it does have the natural ability to dig deeply into very complex polyphony, and the presentation does help to deliver a very human style of music reproduction. There's no hint of sterility here, nothing 'mechanical' and the Flight Two is not as 'driven' as some designs. But, as long as the source material gives the system a chance in

the first place, the Audia helps to retain a real sense of the passion that's locked up in your music collection.

It goes further. Again, it all depends on what is being reproduced, but given this, we are struck by the sheer beauty of the sound. On the whole, this was most apparent with acoustic material rather than the electrically generated variety, but it was very obvious that the Flight Two breathes in a natural way, and that a whole range of recordings seemed to give up their essence in a more organic and believable manner.

This is a truly significant amplifier, one that retains the musical essence of its stablemate, but with slightly simplified features, and at a price that many will find more palatable. You can buy similarly equipped and similarly powerful amplifiers at half the cost, but there is something very special about the way this one goes about its business. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



**VERDICT**

<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 89%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Engaged, expressive music making gets right to the heart of the music. Good build and power. Takes the performance of the excellent Flight One into the stereo-only domain.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 85%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Runs very hot. Sound not as sharp or controlled as some, but this is more a matter of style than substance. Some minor control system issues.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 88%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 82%</b> [Progress bar]	

**CONCLUSION**  
A curious design, its musical qualities take some time to seep through. This is an amplifier with heart and soul, and not just muscle. It's a fine choice for high-quality systems, but even more than usual, lesser ones just won't see the benefit.

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





# Mighty mites

*They might be small, but Meridian's latest speakers make a convincing case for going active*

**PRODUCT** Meridian M3100

**TYPE** Standmount active loudspeaker

**PRICE** £1,845 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 19.4x38.6x25.4cm

- Weight: 13.5kg
- 25mm fabric dome tweeter
- 160mm carbon fibre bass/mid driver
- Built-in amps (per speaker): tweeter 50W, bass/mid driver 75W
- Finishes: black or silver
- Interconnect cables supplied

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

**A**ctive loudspeakers – speakers with on-board power amps – are fabulous things if you want to play loud and enjoy great bass, which is why they're standard fare in recording studios. Long-time advocate

Meridian hopes to make active speakers more domestically appealing with two attractive and compact new models called the M3100 and DSP3100 (see box opposite) that don't cost the earth and will suit most living rooms.

Active speakers have several advantages over traditional (passive) designs. For a start, the crossover is electronic and sits between the preamp and the power amp. This means the power amp connects directly to the drive unit and can therefore control it far more easily than a power amp several meters away with cable and a crossover in between.

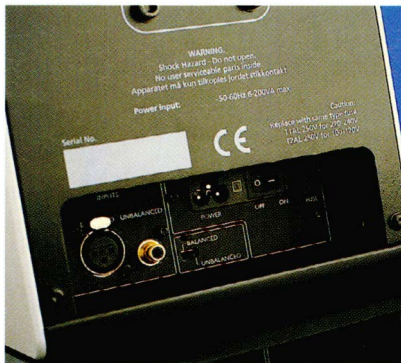
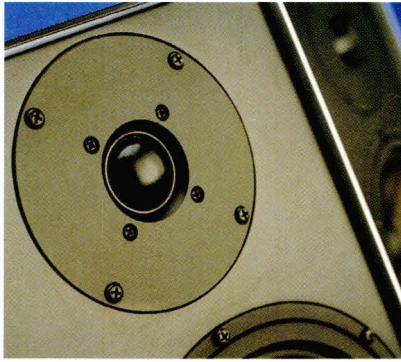
As a passive speaker does not have an external power supply, the energy it uses must come from the signal itself. In practice, the energy

used by a crossover varies with frequency, which can inevitably result in colouration of the signal. Also, the proportion of the energy used by various parts of the crossover varies with signal level, which is one reason why the character of the sound changes as volume is varied.

The drawbacks of the active approach are that you can't change power amps and you need to listen through an electronic crossover. However, that may be an advantage too, because you no longer need high power handling components within the crossover.

Meridian has been making active speakers since the 1970s and more recently started putting its DSP technology into them, so a digital signal could remain in its native form





**“It’s capable of projecting full-scale imaging and playing rather louder than would be the case with similarly-scaled passive designs.”**

as long as possible. The two way, reflex-loaded M3100 is the least expensive and most diminutive Meridian speaker yet. The cabinet is made of MDF, laminated with aluminium on the sides to enhance rigidity and capped top and bottom with piano lacquer. Also, the whole thing is braced and damped with bitumen. This combination is designed to minimise resonance within the cabinet; it also looks great, especially the silver version.

The drive units employed are a long throw 160mm bass/mid driver with a carbon fibre cone and a 25mm tweeter in doped fabric, the latter being described as “very high quality” and badged as Meridian. Each driver has its own bi-polar power amp – the bass/mid gets 75 watts, while the tweeter has 50 watts to itself.

There is a matching centre channel speaker to go with the M3100 called the 3100HC. This has two 120mm woofers and the same tweeter but sits horizontally, and is also available in a DSP variety. A five metre Meridian-branded van den Hul interconnect cable is supplied with each speaker, as well as screw-on feet and spikes. On the rear panel, single-ended and balanced inputs sit next to an unusual cloverleaf mains inlet. Fortunately, a matching cable is supplied.

#### SOUND QUALITY

Before we sat down to listen to the M3100 in anger, it seemed like a good idea to compare this standard version with its DSP-equipped

alter ego. The differences were marked and under the circumstances made a strong case for the M3100, but we could not compare the two directly because of the way they work. The DSP3100 was run directly from the digital output of a Meridian G09 CD player, where the M3100 was driven by the analogue output of the same player, controlled by a £5,500 ECSpre line preamplifier. The playing field was never going to be even and any theoretical advantage that the ‘digital’ version had was more than compensated for by the quality of amplification used with the analogue M3100.

The M3100 is a revealing and powerful speaker for its size. It’s capable of projecting full-scale imaging and playing rather louder than would be the case with most similarly scaled passive designs. It is also transparent to variations in recording quality and style; if an album is compressed and hard-edged you know all about it, so much so that you think that this must be the speaker’s character too. But put something less compromised on and it expands out from the boxes and comes across in impressively three-dimensional fashion.

The size of main driver limits absolute bass extension, but only just. Meridian claims it reaches just 45Hz (at -3dB), but this doesn’t stop the M3100 from delivering decent grunt of the variety that most passive designs can only dream about. During our test programme, the kick drum on Eleanor McEvoy’s *Isn’t It A Little Late* genuinely kicked under its auspices, ▶

## DSP3100 – THE DIGITAL DOMAIN

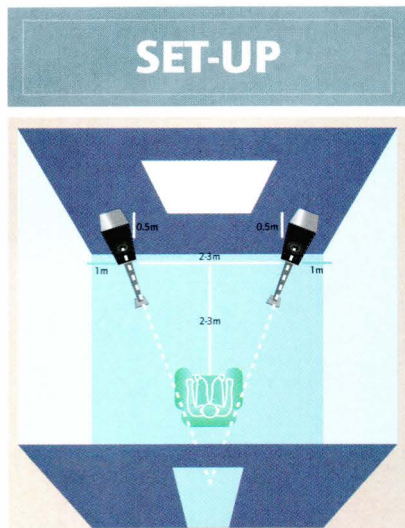
For £2,595 per pair, you can have an all-digital version of the M3100 that offers a remarkable selection of features and completely changes the way that this active speaker works. The DSP in the name stands for ‘digital signal processing’ and reflects the fact that everything up to the amplifiers is in the digital domain.

Signal is delivered to one speaker via a coaxial S/PDIF cable, from a digital preamp or source component. It is then sent from this ‘master’ speaker to any other ‘slave’ speakers in the system. The master speaker accepts commands from a remote, which it relays to the other channel(s). The signal is digitally filtered and controlled prior to separate 24-bit conversion and amplification for each drive unit.

Digital crossovers have a number of advantages. Meridian suggests they allow the creation of ‘impossible’ crossovers, in other words networks that allow linear phase, steep crossover slopes and time delay compensation. Things which cannot be done with analogue filters.

The balance control doesn’t merely make one speaker louder than another but combines this with time delay compensation, so that the signal from the more distant speaker arrives at the same time as the nearer one. This is quite handy for those of us who can’t sit on axis; it’s even possible to adjust the axis of the midrange to account for different seating heights. Other features include remote volume, tone and loudness control. In short, it’s a whole digital system in a speaker.





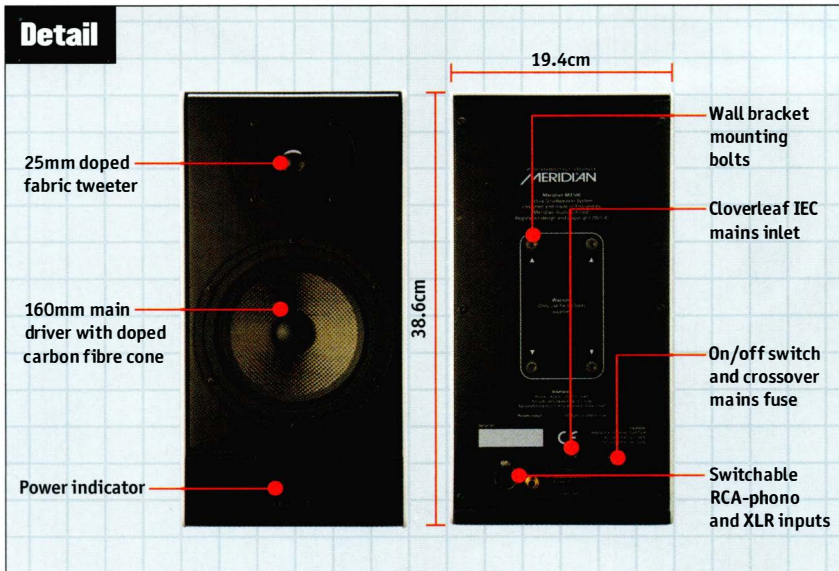
**POSITIONING**

Meridian doesn't make any specific placement recommendations in the installation and user guide, but we found that a gap of 50cm behind the speaker gave a good balance between bass reinforcement and imaging qualities. With its rear firing reflex port, this is not a boundary speaker design, despite its compact size. We found that toeing the M3100 in to point to an imaginary spot about a metre behind the listener's head gives optimal tonal balance and imaging.

While this speaker will work well on any good quality 60cm stand, Meridian produces matching aluminium stands for the M3100 (£300 per pair) and these are an obvious partner. The stands come in black or silver to suit the speaker finish chosen, and have mounting holes on top and floor-friendly puck feet below. They can be mass loaded and have removable panels on the back which can be used to hide the cables. Alternatively, wall mounting brackets are available, which can be bolted to the back of the speaker, but these are really designed for multichannel set ups. In such systems, the bass will be provided by a subwoofer, so the signal sent to the speaker can be rolled off to avoid the bass problems that are likely to ensue with close to wall siting.

**SYSTEM MATCHING**

The M3100 can be used with almost any decent source component and preamplifier, or the preamp section of a good integrated, but will let you appreciate upgrades in ancillary components. Meridian has a total system philosophy, which the company naturally feels yields superior results to any mix and match system. MD Bob Stuart points out that you would be unlikely to build a car using parts from different companies, unless you were building a hot-rod; he states that "all our components explicitly speak the same electric and acoustic language" and that "they sing when placed [together] in chorus". This holistic approach makes it easy to build a Meridian system but does not mean that the kit won't gel with other essentially neutrally balanced components, as was the case here.



leaving plenty of acoustic space for her voice to express itself higher up in the soundstage. Meanwhile, the voice and guitar of *Iron and Wine* on vinyl sounded superbly natural, if a little on the warm side. This seems to be an accurate reflection of the recording, yet it still sounds vastly superior to most CDs.

One CD that does come close to LP is *Adem's Homesongs*. This also revealed its cosy side via the Meridian speaker, which makes one wonder if this is not a characteristic of the latter. Next to a Chapter Précis amplifier/ATC SCM12 speaker pairing, the Meridian does indeed seem a little soft, but in terms of scale and openness the M3100 is in a higher league. It's also notable that using the Chapter in preamp mode brought a starker sound to the Meridian speaker, so it would be unfair to call the M3100 'cosy' *per se* – it's just relaxed and revealing.

This speaker is capable of reproducing a very strong sense of an instrument or voice's presence in the room. On several occasions it delivered a 'reach out and grab it' sensation, as if the notes were played on instruments actually in front of you. This effect depended

entirely upon the recording, of course, but was achieved with a variety of different tracks.

The M3100 has a reticent character that gets out of the way and lets the music do the talking. This means that its sound will depend upon the source and preamplification more than average. It is closer to neutral than all but a few passive designs at the price and, while its high frequency qualities are a little behind the best, at the other end of the scale the active factor makes it a very strong contender. Theoretically, it will give of its best in an all-Meridian system, but there is no doubt that it works well with low distortion components from other brands as well – we got some superb results under such circumstances.

The only domestic active alternative we can find near the price is ATC's SCM10-2A, a rather more forthright and muscular speaker against which the Meridian sounds more easy going and relaxed, though perhaps less gripping.

All in all, this is a highly capable and well balanced active speaker and one which should win plenty of listeners around to the advantages of active operation. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 87%**

**FEATURES >> 86%**

**BUILD >> 94%**

**VALUE >> 87%**

**PRO**  
 Unusually good aesthetic design. Plenty of power, high neutrality, low coloration, great imaging and strong bass for its size.

**CON**  
 Needs quite a high signal level from preamp. Not quite as transparent as the best passives nor perhaps as powerfully dynamic as the best active speakers.

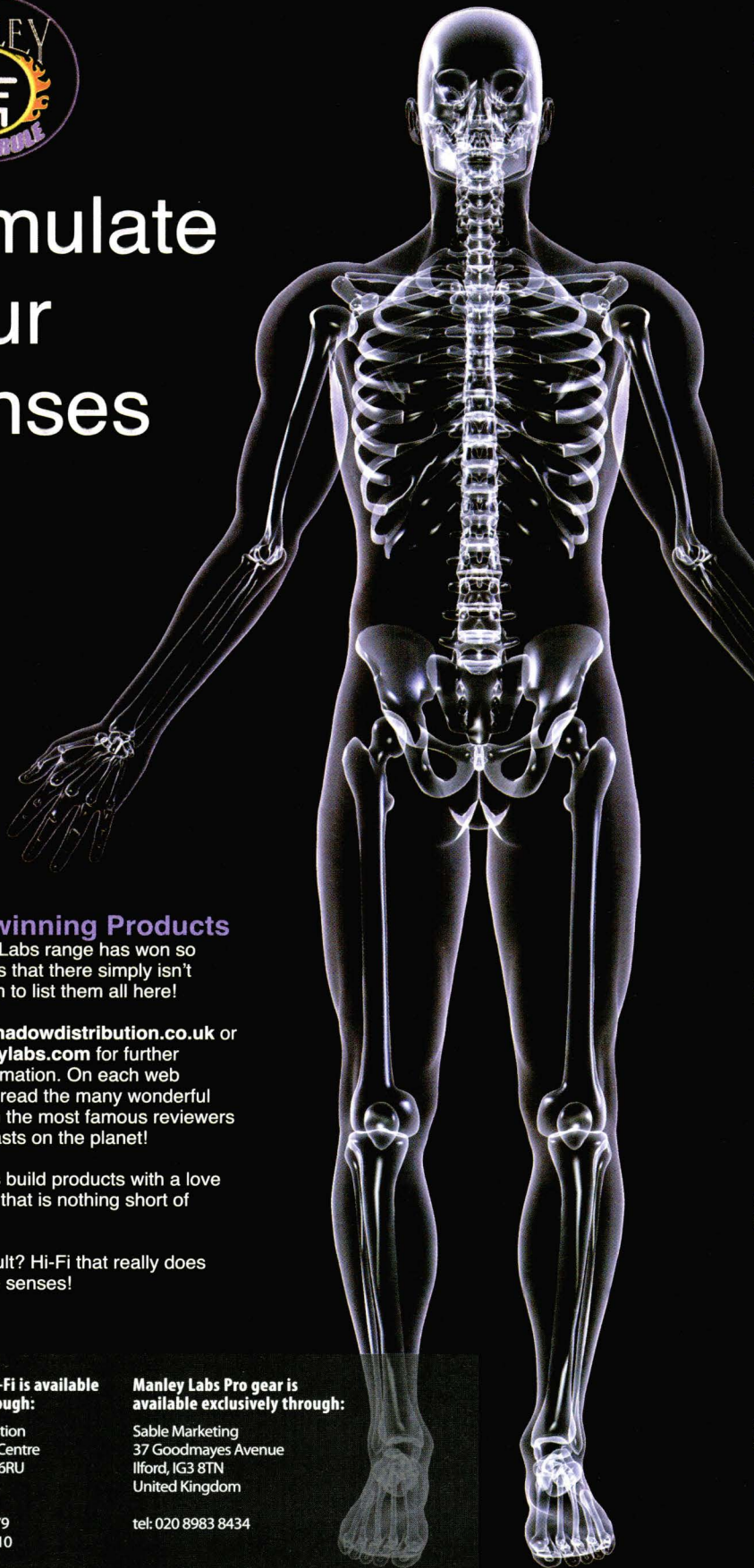
**CONCLUSION**  
 This is an attractive and capable loudspeaker with great imaging and strong bass. It will also play louder, without distress, than most passive equivalents and has a degree of neutrality that lets you know about the recording being played.

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





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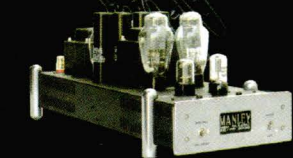
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# Disc drive

*It looks great... but does Yamaha's latest player have the engine of a winner?*

**PRODUCT** Yamaha DVD-S2500

**TYPE** Universal disc player

**PRICE** £700

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 42.5x10x31.4cm  
• Weight: 5.6kg • Digital outputs: HDMI and i.Link, plus optical and electrical S/PDIF • 5.1 analogue audio outputs • Advanced video processing (including Faroudja DCDi scaler/deinterlacer) • Video on/off

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 233166 🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com

**V**iewed against regular releases from the likes of Denon, Yamaha has taken its time to upgrade its DVD-S2300 MkII midmarket universal disc player. But finally the company has come up with a considerably more sophisticated player in the shape of the new DVD-S2500. The latest model has all the usual bells and whistles, including some powerful internal clockwork, and impressively comprehensive interconnection possibilities.

Like all universal players, the new Yamaha supports the usual audio and video suspects, including DVD-Audio and DVD-Video, SACD and good ol' CD. There are some notable omissions, though. It doesn't play DVD-RAM discs, but this is hardly surprising as DVD-RAM seems a uniquely Panasonic take on recordable DVD. There's also nothing on board for dealing with WMA or DivX/MPEG4 encoded discs.

Yamaha has been canny with its features. Instead of filling the specification sheet with functions that may seem good on paper but can potentially undermine performance, the DVD-S2500 is cut to fighting weight, retaining the features that count. So, while the player sports an extravagant melange of analogue and digital audio connectors, including i.Link for DVD-Audio and SACD, there are no built-in Dolby Digital or DTS multichannel decoders. The player does provide a very rudimentary set of speaker/bass management options for SACD, though. The thinking here is that DD/DTS decoding is best performed in the amplifier, but also means there is less circuitry to potentially foul up the music signal. In the same vein, the video subsystem can (and should) be turned off when playing audio-only discs. There's also no headphone socket, although sadly this is fast becoming a commonplace omission and is unlikely to have been cut on sonic grounds.

The digital connections are well catered for, and very well protected. The i.Link/FireWire/IEEE 1394 connector provides a near transparent, 'hi-res' encrypted digital audio link from SACD or DVD-Audio discs to amps with an i.Link input. Similarly, the Yamaha includes an HDCP-encrypted HDMI video output that is available with fixed sampling

rates, upsampled up to 720p or 1080i. This fits perfectly with the requirements of the latest HD-capable TV display panels. The HDMI connection can 'handshake' with similarly equipped screens to deliver the best possible picture resolution on screen, though it must be noted that any DVD source played through an HD-Ready screen will likely be upsampled and this will never be as good as a native HDTV source.

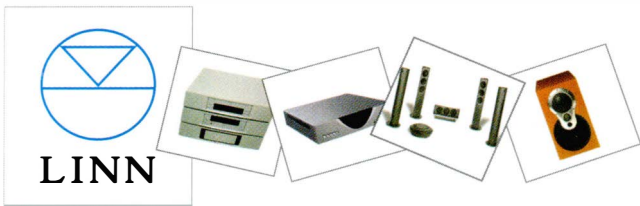
One restriction with this player is that a digital video output from HDMI disables the component video feed and vice versa, so this player is not a great choice for multi-zone use unless the appropriate video switching is available from the partnering amplifier. Note also that most of the picture tweaking options, of which there is a good variety, only act on the analogue video output. Digital video is always delivered in unsullied form.

Internal circuitry is comprehensive. It includes a 24-bit/192kHz DAC for PCM and DSD audio processing, a 12-bit/216MHz video DAC, progressive scan from PAL and NTSC with 3:2 pulldown and a Faroudja DCDi (progressive scan only) scaler and deinterlacer. This last is a distinctly superior solution that occasionally appears on similarly priced players, while others use proprietary solutions that are almost always inferior.









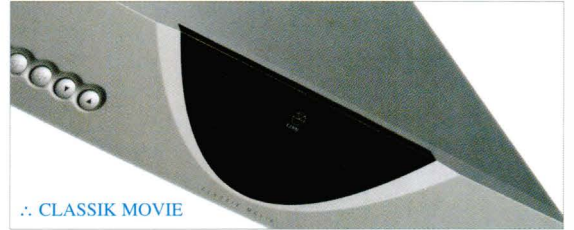
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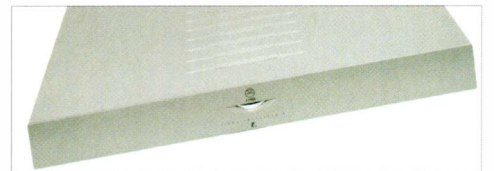
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∴ AKURATE 212



∴ UNIDISK SC



∴ KLIMAX CHAKRA TWIN



∴ UNIDISK 1.1 (above)

∴ C4200 (below)







# Serves you right!

*The Hifidelio Pro is the audio equivalent of the Swiss Army knife... but is it really hi-fi?*

**PRODUCT** Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro  
**TYPE** Hard disk music server  
**PRICE** £850  
**CONTACT** ☎ 020 7683 3333 🌐 www.hifi-wifi.co.uk

At its most basic level, the Hermstedt Hifidelio audio server is a CD player (and recorder) with a slot loading mechanism that copes with the usual CD variants, including CD-R/RW. But this is just the start. The unit also includes a 160GB hard disk (HDD) and a built-in but updatable 'FreeDB' album/track title database. In addition to this 'Pro' model, there is a 'standard' version with an 80GB HDD and fewer functions, but this has now been discontinued in the UK.

Among many other talents, the unit will connect to your computer via USB 1.1 or 2.0, or even act as a four-port Ethernet hub or as a WiFi 802.11g transmitter (nominally 54Mbps), an antenna for which is included in the box. The unit automatically rips an inserted CD, first to the internal hard disk at full CD resolution, and then optionally using FLAC 'lossless' compression, or MP3 with a choice of 128, 160, 192 and 'near CD' 320kbps compression rates.

Audio files including MP3s can also be imported directly from your computer, network or the internet. AAC (the iPod's native file format) can be replayed and, with the latest Hifidelio models, also encoded. Unlike some recent products, there's no dedicated iPod connector, but you can transfer music data via one of two USB inputs and view an iPod's display on the Hifidelio's own LCD readout.

The display looks vaguely iPod like, and the player even uses a cool-running PowerPC processor (late of Apple Macs), which contributes to the quiet running of the fanless unit. But the firmware that drives the player is slow, sometimes painfully so, taking up to 45 seconds to initiate some processes, and failing to acknowledge commands in a timely manner.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Hifidelio Pro managed to comfortably exceed expectations for a product of its ilk. The unit is mechanically quiet in normal use, and it was hard to provoke into stuttering or skipping in playback, even when recording/encoding and playing back simultaneously. It's also electrically quiet. Playing CDs directly, or uncompressed from the hard disk, the Hifidelio is thoroughly competent, with a strong, detailed but easy on the ear quality that is almost the opposite of what is normally associated with computer-based audio.

We are particularly impressed by the player's performance with demanding, large scale works. Although not strictly a high-end performer (in fairness it's not priced as one either), the Hifidelio in CD play mode is smooth, agile and stable sounding. Orchestral tone is not as propulsive or as solid as a true high-end player, but it gives a surprisingly varied and realistic impression of tonal colour, and a strong sense of the complexity of many musical performances. And the news remains good with the alternative codecs when played back from the hard disk.

Lossless FLAC files are indistinguishable from straight Red Book CD and double the capacity of the 160GB hard disk to around 450 albums.

MP3 further raises capacity, with the ability to store thousands of CDs (or vinyl albums, for that matter), but introduces the familiar restriction on sound quality, to a degree dependent on the compression setting. There's the usual sharpness you get with MP3, and also the inevitable loss of air, separation and complexity – but its pretty good at 192kbps, and better still at 320kbps, the best of the lossy settings.

Not flawless then, but this is an impressive product that goes a long way to delivering the kind of quality often missing from audio servers. It's practical, too – it handles most day to day situations with aplomb, and sits naturally within a middle-range hi-fi system. For convenient HDD music storage and access, not to mention CD-burning, it's a real contender. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

## VERDICT

### SOUND >> 79%



### FEATURES >> 94%



### BUILD >> 83%



### VALUE >> 86%



**PRO**  
Impressively flexible audio server with full MP3 and AAC encode/decode compatibility and strong computer network integration. Sounds good, too.

**CON**  
Some minor usability issues, including slow response times with some commands. You're still sacrificing some sound quality compared to a good, similarly priced CD player.

### CONCLUSION

This is one of the few audio components that seeks to bridge the gap between computers and hi-fi. It delivers a strong musical package with an impressively broad and flexible set of user features at a reasonable price.

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



# Dynamic Duo

AVI's two-way floorstanding Duo speaker is a neutral yet thoroughly engaging performer

**PRODUCT** AVI Duo

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £1,299 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 19.5x77x28cm

- ◉ Weight: 44kg
- ◉ 25mm fabric dome tweeter
- ◉ 165mm bass/mid driver with 32mm voice coil
- ◉ Sensitivity/impedance: 88dB/6 ohms (nominal)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.co.uk

If you've ever been stirred (maybe a little shaken) by the sound of a pair of £300 speakers on the end of a capable hi-fi system, you'll appreciate what a risky business companies that choose to make a pair of £1,300 speakers are in. While it's often a breeze for well-designed budget boxes to punch above their weight when hooked up to a classy front end, it's much easier for pricey speakers to fall flat on their grilles given something only slightly grubbier than immaculate to play with.

The development of AVI's speakers is tightly interwoven with that of their electronics. It's a kind of virtuous sonic circle and it seems to work a treat: AVI's Lab Series CD player, DAB tuner and amps are well regarded around the world. And so are its speakers. For a 'whole system' manufacturer, that's a rare achievement.

The AVI Duo is a two-way reflex floorstander that sits exactly in the middle of the company's tiddler-to-titan speaker range, above the Neutron and Pro Nine standmounts and below the rather heftier Trio and Brio floorstanders. Although clearly cut from the same functional, understated cloth that supplies much of the Brit-fi industry, AVI's speakers are claimed by their maker to approach the business of sound quality in a different manner to most. Crucially, it boils down to how the crossover is implemented.

In the Duo, the bass/mid driver and the tweeter are

driven by their respective crossovers with the intention that the signal arrives with each at exactly the same time for at least an octave either side of the crossover point. The aim is to eliminate phase distortion because this, AVI contends, is what people are sensitive to rather than the amplitude irregularities most speaker designs home in on. It also allows the design to opt for a lower than average crossover point of 2.5kHz – only possible, says AVI, with a good fabric dome tweeter because hard or metal diaphragms resonate at higher frequencies.

Because it gets the crossover right first, AVI's reasoning goes, it gives

itself greater freedom to optimise the performance of the drive units. The Duo's 165mm bass/mid driver from Peerless, for instance, is said to sound far better if its hands over to the tweeter at 2.5kHz rather than the more usual 3.5kHz. Incidentally, it isn't the same unit used in the Pro Nine Plus standmount; it has a larger (32mm) voice coil and better quality diaphragm. The 25mm doped silk fabric Scan-Speak tweeter, on the other hand, is the one AVI uses in all its speakers, apparently because it has yet to hear a better one, regardless of price.

The Duo's enclosure is firmly at the bijou end of the floorstander scale, measuring just 77cm tall and 19.5cm wide, but very solidly constructed from 18mm multi-braced MDF and superbly finished in real wood veneer – a cheerful cherry in the test pair's case. The twin reflex ports are forward firing, allowing some flexibility when it comes to placement. AVI claims a frequency response of 80Hz to 28kHz +/- 2dB with useful output (-6dB) down to 50Hz. Sensitivity is quoted at 88dB, so the Duo might not be first choice for those with valve amps. Naturally, AVI recommends its own 175-watt Lab Series Integrated but, if you haven't got one of those, something with at least 50 watts per channel.

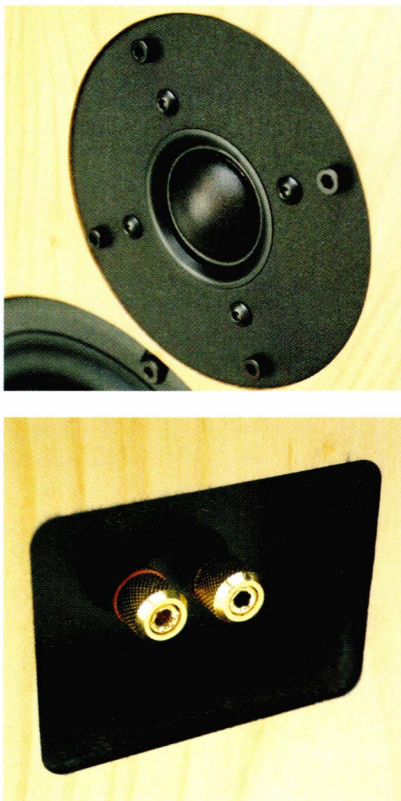
## SOUND QUALITY

As a long time user of AVI's satisfying muscular little £1,500 integrated amp and matching Lab Series CD player, it would have been churlish for me not to let the Duo team up, but not until we'd tried them with a slightly more modest front end; Primare's CD21 CD player and 75-watt I21 integrated amp fitted the bill to a tee.

It's often the case with speakers that set out to be accurate – rather than manipulative – that the fireworks seem locked securely in their box. But what is sometimes mistaken for reticence or politeness is usually just the absence of hype and exaggeration. After a little acclimatisation,







**“It all combines to deliver an unusually assured and unruffled style of music making that renders the densest mix enjoyable.”**

the revved-up presentational style of ostensibly more 'exciting' speakers isn't missed and a more natural sense of life, pace and perspective settles in. Live with a pair of Duos for just a few hours and you'll feel no great compunction to go back to a more in-yer-face delivery.

Essentially, the sound of the Duo is tactile, low in distortion and tightly focused, creating a stereo arc that projects well beyond and behind the boundaries of the cabinets. If it lacks something of the scale and weight of AVI's very much larger and more expensive Trio, the sense of compromise isn't great; for its size, this is a genuinely dynamic speaker.

With the chilled funk of Norman Brown's *West Coast Coolin'* CD, the presentation of fine detail – both specific and ambient – wasn't just engaging but thoroughly beguiling. The music sounded open and airy yet potently full-blooded, with beautifully resolved tonal colours and timbres. The bass not only integrates seamlessly but delivers controlled extension with convincing energy and rhythmic drive. This is where over-achieving budget boxes tend to sound strained and congested.

With the more expensive all-AVI front end in situ, though, the Duo sound is yet more transparent and revealing, capable of unveiling nuances of technique and the recording acoustic that other compact floorstanders too

often fumble. In fact, it's hard to think of any other floorstander at this price point that images with such solidity or resolves ambient information more naturally.

It's an unavoidable consequence of physics that this speaker system doesn't possess prodigious bass weight. What it does have is great drive, pitch precision and speed. Low notes are taut, articulate and, when the music demands, suitably propulsive. Yet the Duo also sounds very smooth and clean, with a total absence of grain and hardness that encourages lengthy listening sessions without a hint of fatigue. Detail is so well integrated into the larger musical picture, it never seems spotlighted. It all combines to deliver an unusually assured and unruffled style of music making that renders the densest of mixes intelligible and enjoyable. The speakers sing and tug at the emotions while, at the same time, sounding perfectly controlled and even-handed.

Because of its inherent smoothness the Duo scores a level of listenability that can't help but have broad appeal. All right, there are a few budget electrostatic hybrids that might sound a little more airy and transparent. And, yes, bigger bangers are going to do rock more thunderously. But then the Duo isn't really a character act. It simply lets the music do the talking in emphatic fashion.

This transparency and talent for capturing subtle ambient cues comes into its own with densely produced material – say, Barry Adamson's *The King of Notting Hill*. What might sound thick and turgid is unravelled with little effort and strikingly forced perspectives; you don't have to listen hard to hear exactly what's going on. Simpler tunes are handled just as deftly, James Taylor's voice being portrayed with just the right degree of nasality and warmth on the beautifully produced *October Road* CD. While the Duo has stunning powers of analysis, it doesn't put the freezer on music's emotional heart.

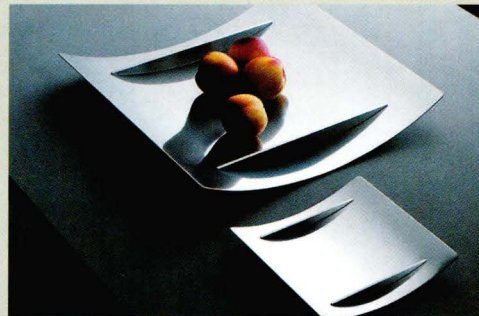
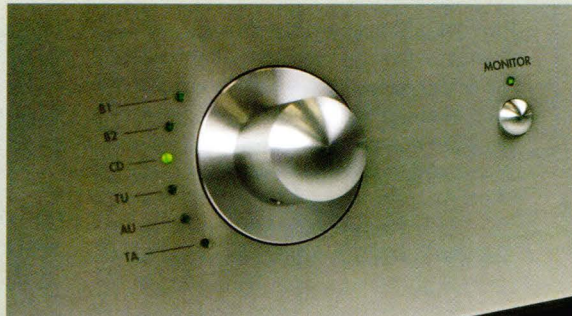
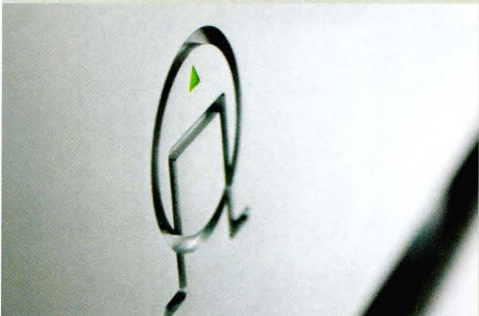
In short, it doesn't matter what you throw at the Duo – it never trips up. It's a remarkably complete, engaging and capable design. **HFC**

David Vivian

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 90%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Outstandingly clean, clear and dynamic sound from such modestly dimensioned boxes with seamless integration and wonderful 3D imaging. Can be positioned close to walls.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE &gt;&gt; 77%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Won't appeal to those who want their music with a dash of sonic Tabasco. Tells it like it is, not how you might wish it to be.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 89%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 90%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> AVI's reputation for top-notch sonics deserves to be strengthened by the Duo. Not cheap, but top-quality drivers and meticulous engineering deliver the goods – and not just with AVI electronics. Remarkable value, too.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	



P R I M A R E



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# NAD about stereo

*NAD has combined a DVD player with stereo receiver – is it a match made in one-box hi-fi heaven?*

**PRODUCT** NAD L53

**TYPE** One-box DVD player/radio tuner/stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £400

**CONTACT** 01908 319360  
www.nadelectronics.com

The NAD L53 seeks to provide a basic, but good quality all-in-one system, offering DVD/CD playback, an AM/FM tuner and stereo amp. There's no DVD-Audio or SACD decoding, nor any digital video output socket or video scaling for HD-Ready TVs. However, it does feature progressive scan with matching component video – the highest quality analogue video output. The rest of the socketry is equally well chosen. A Scart connector and S-Video in/outputs take care of the video side, while gold plated phonos (one tape loop and one line input), along with digital in and outputs (optical and coaxial in, optical-only out) look after the audio. Unlike many single-box systems at this price, the speaker sockets are proper 4mm binding posts.

This attention to detail is reflected in the build quality – given the price, the finish is especially impressive. The aluminium front panel, lid dampers, die-cast heatsink and lack of IC in the power amp stage are all features normally associated with more expensive machines. Don't expect much more than a Chinese DVD-ROM mechanism and basic

frame transformer, but – given NAD's track record – there's a good chance these components will have been carefully selected. For the record, the output is a respectable 50 watts per channel, and the L53 includes SRS pseudo-surround for those not content with plain stereo. Gadget fans will also be impressed by the learning remote control, which also features an illuminated handset.

As this is a receiver unit, there's also a built-in radio tuner. It's not of the DAB variety, but it does feature AM and FM with RDS.

**SOUND QUALITY**

With either DVD or CD, the stereo sound is clearly leagues above its one-box rivals under £500. The staging is spacious, well separated and even lends vocalists a decent level of projection. Best of all, the sound always has a thoroughly well balanced feel to it. The bass is powerful enough, yet doesn't dominate and neither does the treble. If one was being fussy, criticism could be levelled at the lethargic timing and loss of focus in the treble. By the standards of its contemporaries, though, the L53 is natural, focused and a joy to listen to.

On movie soundtracks, SRS does make effects more spacious, but it also adds coloration to the sound, especially in the treble. Turn it off and stick with stereo!

Sensibly, NAD has calibrated the FM tuner to work well with weaker signals. Even with an indoor aerial, there's a pleasing lack of hiss and

rejection of interference. Listen to a good quality broadcast on Radio 3 and you'll experience detail and stage depth still unknown to DAB.

**VIDEO PERFORMANCE**

There's no HDMI, but the L53's picture has good depth and stability. Colours are natural and there's a level of detail and vibrancy that's up with good standalone players over £100.

Cleverly, NAD has made a fine-sounding hi-fi system that also plays DVD, rather than a home cinema package that plays music at a pinch. It's a great-value single-box solution. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 76%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> A well-built, good-looking unit that offers a fine picture and an impressively well balanced sound. Brings DVD replay to the hi-fi system without costing a fortune.
<b>VISION &gt;&gt; 78%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Lack of facilities like digital video output means this isn't the best-equipped machine on the market. Separates still have the performance edge.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 74%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 92%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> By eschewing full-on surround sound and sticking with stereo, NAD has created a one-box, sub-£500 DVD system that's strong with both movies and music. Separates still have the edge, but as a compact second-room solution it's great value for money.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 84%</b>	

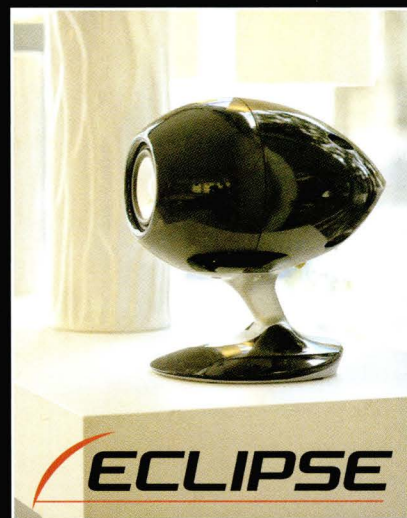
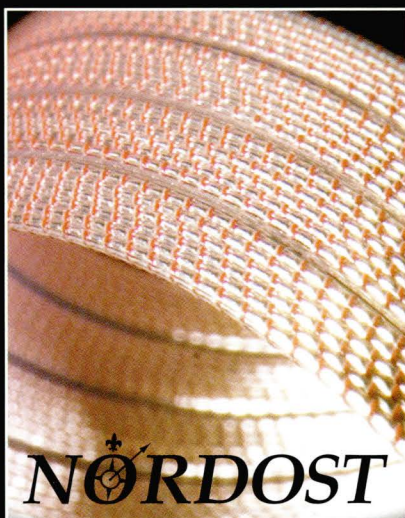


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# Column inches

Castle's petite new floorstander combines compact size with engaging sound and a real-wood finish

**PRODUCT** Castle Compact Column

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £550 per pair

**CONTACT** ☎ 01756 795333 🌐 www.castle.uk.com

Responding to the commercial pressure to make speakers near invisible, Castle has produced a Compact range that it has compacted as far as it considers possible without undermining accuracy. Castle's argument is that there is a size below which all potential for realistic sound is lost – if you want any sense of dynamics or bandwidth, a speaker has to move a decent air volume... and that requires reasonably sized drivers. The small, thin sound of many dinky surround sound speaker sets adds credence to Castle's premise.

The smallest Compact Satellite measures 14x20x16cm (WxHxD) and sits alongside the Centre LCR centre speaker, Cube subwoofer and a dipole surround speaker. Yes, this is home cinema/multichannel kit, but unlike many, it does more than simply claim to 'do music' as well. This is where the new Compact Column will come in handy. It is the same width as the Satellite but is 3cm deeper and 67.5cm taller and thus as big as a 'proper' loudspeaker in volume terms.

The Column was designed by Karl Heinz Fink, a freelance speaker designer who has had a hand in many well-known contemporary speakers and who currently heads up the ALR Jordan brand. Fink uses Klippel measurement techniques to optimise drive units, a system that's also popular with B&W. In this instance, the approach has resulted in a speaker equipped with an 80mm glass fibre coned main driver with a four-layer voice coil and copper capped magnets.

Operating as a two-way design with a fourth-order acoustic crossover, the Castle Compact Column is said to extend down to 50Hz in the bass. High frequencies are taken care of by a smaller than average (19mm) fabric dome tweeter that is claimed to reach 40kHz in order to make the most of wide-band sources such as SACD.

The cabinet has three internal braces and the base of the box has a slope to break up standing waves. The whole lot sits on a plinth with optional spikes to improve stability.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Column is an extremely engaging loudspeaker thanks to its ability to stay in time with the music. By making an effort to keep box resonance to an absolute minimum, the time-smearing distortion that a cabinet can add has been minimised. This is facilitated by the relatively small size of the box in the first place and it's true that compact boxes

generally add less of this type of coloration as a whole. But they don't all time well, which is where speaker design becomes an arcane art.

Tonally, the Column is a touch forward but this can be smoothed with a relaxed cable or a closer to wall siting – the Column's front firing port means it will happily sit very close to a wall without the bass clouding the midrange. This is partly because the bass is nimble and tight; at times you wonder about the 50Hz extension claim, but then a deep note comes along and proves that it can get down that far. Bass instruments sound suitably earthy and organic, the bass sax on Jaga Jazzist's *Living Room Hush* proving the point in almost 'chewy' fashion.

Detail levels are good, too. We could hear plenty of variety in terms of the recording character on Bob Dylan's *Bootleg* albums – both his voice and 'harp' were well articulated and the sound changed from track to track, which is always a good sign. There's a slight 'edge' to the treble, which draws attention to high-frequency detail and will undoubtedly add a sense of immediacy to the dull balance of many movie soundtracks.

For a dual purpose design, the Column works remarkably well with music, thanks to the cohesion that its sense of timing brings. The bass is inevitably not prodigious, but its tunefulness more than makes up for it. While this is certainly a fine compact multichannel speaker it would be a waste to only use it with films. The fact that it does all this and comes in a neat real-wood box for £550 makes it both an aesthetic and sonic bargain. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 83%**



### PRO

Attractively built real-wood box with a great sense of timing, good detail and tight bass. Successfully combines fashionably compact style with good hi-fi sound.

**EASE OF DRIVE >> 80%**



**BUILD >> 86%**



### CON

Treble is a touch forward and bass is on the light side, while dynamics are ultimately limited by the speaker's size. No bi-wiring facility.

**VALUE >> 92%**



## CONCLUSION

Compact, but not so bijou so that you need to back it up in the bass, the Column is an elegant and impressively engaging floorstander given its modest dimensions. It's clearly far too good for home cinema alone!

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



# Goldring DR100 and DR150

**TYPE** Headphones

**PRICE** (DR100) £55; (DR150) £70

**CONTACT** ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.armorhe.co.uk

**C**elebrating its centenary this year, Goldring has promised several new products, of which these headphones are the harbingers. Visually very similar, the DR100 and DR150 differ in a few external details, such as the cable, which on the DR150 is a QED special with metal plugs. Internally, the motor part of the drive units is common to both, but where the DR100 has a Mylar diaphragm, the dearer version uses titanium. Visually reminiscent of some recent upmarket Sennheisers, they share with those products a very comfortable earpad which is deep enough to offer real ear comfort on almost any head, and long-term wear is not a problem.

Sonically, the differences are interesting and – in a way – frustrating. There are two significant differences between the models, with the DR150 offering considerably higher output but also, surprisingly, more marked coloration of the sound. We found the DR100 to be a pretty neutral design, one of the best in that department that we've heard in the



sub-£60 class, but it is also one of the least efficient. While we're all in favour of avoiding ear damage, it's nice to have some spare gain for quietly-mastered recordings. In stark contrast, the DR150 achieves plenty of output, but there is significant treble coloration which shows up on sibilants and also on background noise, which is made more audible than usual. Bass also seems slightly boosted. Both headphones offer good detail – the DR150 is

slightly better here, but both are above par for their price. If you're in the market, do try both before buying either! **HFC**

*Richard Black*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Both offer desirable features, but we aren't in a position to get carried away. They are worth a try, though.	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> 77%

# Monster MCX-1s

**TYPE** Loudspeaker cable

**PRICE** £60 (3m pair)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 431634 🌐 www.monstercable.com

**M**onster remains a byword for aftermarket audio cables worldwide, but has not always maintained a high profile on the UK scene. Nevertheless, a wide range of Monster products is on the market here and we're happy to have sight of some for the first time in a little while.

This speaker cable is a relatively modest one of distinctive design, almost circular in cross section but with flattened sides. It comes with a certain amount of techno-babble attached, none of which is actually wrong but some is of arguable relevance. What impresses us rather more are the decently low resistance, the useful flexibility and particularly the unique Monster termination pins. These can be put naked into screw-down terminals of most designs or fitted with Monster's 4mm plugs or spade lugs. Capacitance is on the high side of average, though probably not enough to upset any but the twitchiest of amps.

Sound is not true high end, but comes close to it in one particular area, for the bass is really



rather impressive. To be really fussy, one might on occasion complain that it's a little *too* present and not impeccably controlled, but if Monster has done this deliberately, thinking of the small standmount speakers with which the cable is often likely to be partnered, we can't argue with the logic. At the same time, there's a healthy dose of detail, a very good stab at imaging depth (speaker cables' hardest trick) and nice clear treble which just slightly

lapses into harshness at the loudest climaxes. An all-round result that will complement a range of entry to mid-price systems. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> The sound offers some of the best bass around from budget speaker wires, with pretty good HF performance, too.	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> 86%



# Alphason Aragon AG60

**TYPE** Loudspeaker stand

**PRICE** £80 per pair (60cm)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01942 885600

🌐 www.alphasondesigns.com

**A**lphason's origins lie in esoteric audio components, but these days the company's wide range of supports is more oriented towards AV. All the same, this is a serious enough speaker stand and its only real limitation is the rather small top plate. It's perfectly possible to put over-size speakers on the top panel, but they do look and feel a little precarious in place.

The essence of the design is a hollow central pillar, which includes a separate channel for routing cables beside the main cavity – quite thick ones can be accommodated. A suitable quantity of 'Sound Sink Filling' (coarse sand) is supplied in sealed plastic bags and if you're nervous about sand escaping you don't have to open the bags – we got perfectly satisfactory results just by leaving them sealed. Two thin pipes at the front of the main pillar aid integrity and the vertical components screw to the steel top and bottom plates easily enough, with spikes supplied for both floor and speaker

support. Available finishes are silver, black and chrome.

While the results we obtained were not up to the standards of resolution delivered by our favourite stands from the likes of Partington and Kudos, we can still report good instrumental separation and stereo imaging from speakers supported by the Aragon. There's a little coloration in the upper midrange and bass is not quite as firm or as tuneful as with the best stands around, but for the price these do a good job of keeping speakers securely clear of the floor. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

**CONCLUSION**  
A simple and highly affordable way of supporting small speakers, with only slightly coloured results.



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



# Oehlbach Silver Express Plus

**TYPE** Analogue interconnect cable

**PRICE** £93 (1 m pair)

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8424 8844 🌐 www.bestes-kable.de

**N**ew to these shores, Oehlbach has been producing specialist hi-fi cables in Germany for about as long as the concept has existed. The company's range covers pretty much the whole gamut of types, configurations and prices. Do we really need another cable brand in the UK, though? Maybe not, but if Oehlbach thinks it can offer us users an edge in performance, price or both when compared with familiar brands, why not?

This interconnect, one of the company's more upmarket models, is a simple coaxial design using silver-plated conductors and low loss dielectric. It also has a thin earth wire running between the left and right channels, the whole lot being held together in a zip-cord-like manner. You don't have to use the earth, of course, but it makes the cable eminently suitable for turntable duty, something where the low capacitance will aid performance, too. Assembly is good, with a very dense braided screen and Oehlbach's own robust phono plugs. The cable is also usefully flexible.

We were very pleasantly surprised by the performance, which proved to be highly detailed and agile, with a nice, firm bass – in the end, bass extension may not be the greatest we've heard, but there is a very good combination of solidity and tunefulness to it that makes the most of good recordings and keeps the sound in good overall perspective. Treble is open and clear, certainly up with the best we've heard at this price, and imaging is

precise with unusually well defined depth. If this is the standard we can expect from Oehlbach, we're glad to see the range on offer. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

**CONCLUSION**  
A simple, practical and sensibly priced cable which provides a precise and wide-bandwidth link.



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





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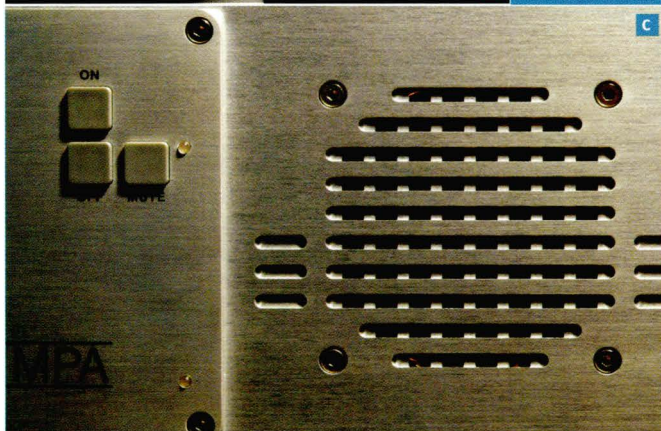


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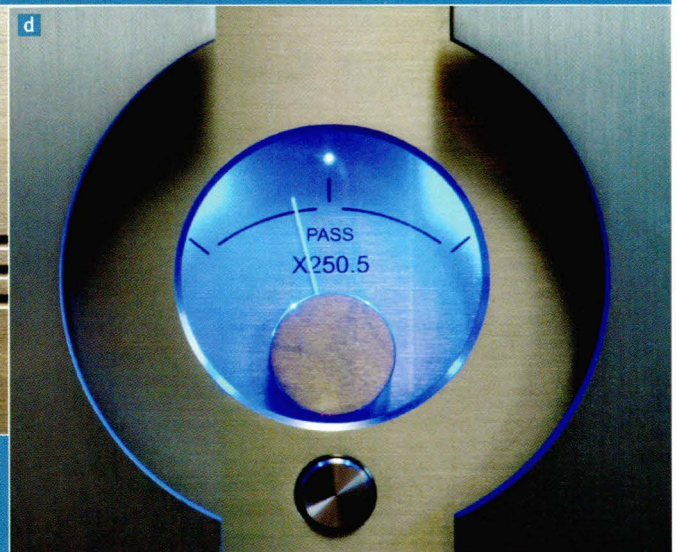


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# Monster M850i

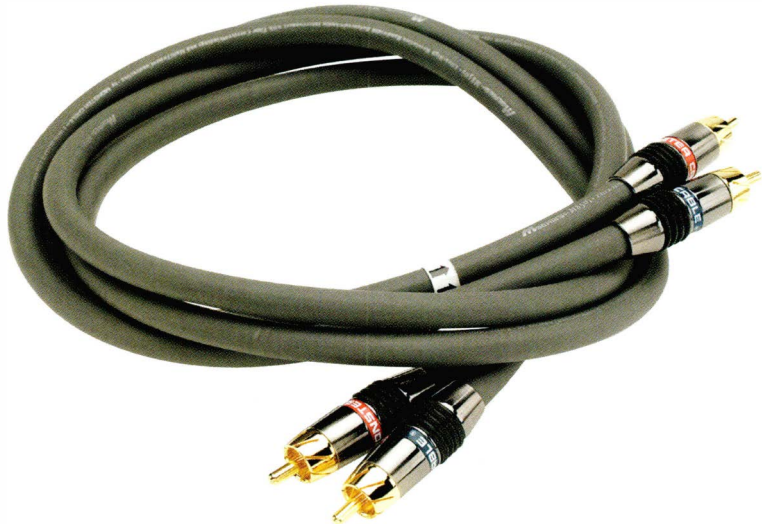
**TYPE** Analogue Interconnect cable

**PRICE** £90 (1m pair)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 431634 🌐 www.monstercable.com

**A** midrange cable, this is a twin-conductor screened design, but one which features conductors of varying diameter wound together so as to “optimise varying magnetic fields” – there’s no detailed analysis of how this works and we couldn’t detect any particularly unusual effects at audio or radio frequencies, but it’s a good deal less strange than some things we’ve been told by cable manufacturers. With an overall diameter of about 8mm, the cable isn’t that flexible, but it behaves reasonably well and the phono plugs hold it well in place. Monster uses a ‘turbine cut’ in the plug screen which gives a very secure grip, just sufficiently loosened by a gentle clockwise twist as the plug is inserted or withdrawn. The centre pin is split, too. Capacitance of the cable is quite high but not excessively so and dielectric loss is medium to low.

On audition, this cable came across as slightly ‘dark’ sounding, with excellent silences between the musical moments but some subtle coloration, which doesn’t always aid resolution



of details. Nevertheless, it’s a pleasant enough listen and in music with a very busy treble there’s a welcome absence of harshness or muddle. We thought it most successful in classical and jazz music, less so in synth-based styles, where some of the innate energy seemed a little rounded off at the edges. Bass can sometimes be very slightly dry but we were never actually troubled by it, while imaging is excellent side-to-side and pretty good in the

depth direction, well defined and stable but slightly compressed in extent. A qualified success that will please some tastes. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

### CONCLUSION

Your reaction will depend on that upper bass coloration. Decent detail and sweet (if occasionally tame) treble.



# Russ Andrews Torlyte Stand

**TYPE** Loudspeaker stand

**PRICE** £299 per pair (60cm)

**CONTACT** ☎ 0845 345 1550

🌐 www.russandrews.com

**T**here aren’t that many non-metal speaker stands around, and these will already appeal to those who simply prefer the friendly tones of wood in their listening room. But as always with Russ Andrews, there is a performance incentive here too, the essence of which is that the use of Torlyte in the bottom plate gives a combination of freedom from coloration and rigidity that’s hard to achieve by other means. Torlyte is a handmade (and expensive), wood-based material that is mostly fresh air and it gives very rapid dissipation of vibration. The legs of the stand are made of solid oak (cut to length to order) and the top plate of veneered MDF. Assembly is quick and easy and spikes are supplied for the base; on the top plate, three of RA’s oak cones are used, freestanding, under each speaker.

Given the inherently rigid triangular design of the stand, it’s no surprise that stability is excellent and – even with heavy ATC SCM20

speakers sitting on top – there’s barely a trace of ‘give’. It is possible to detect a little lateral vibration, especially with heavy speakers, but it’s at a low frequency and quickly damped. Sonically, we were very taken with the results, which do indeed lack the slight hardness the great majority of metal stands impart. Imaging is really excellent, but the most welcome contribution is the extra listening comfort these stands bring.

Expensive but well worth it. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

### CONCLUSION

These stands offer a more relaxed version of the music than most metal ones, without trading any precision.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine

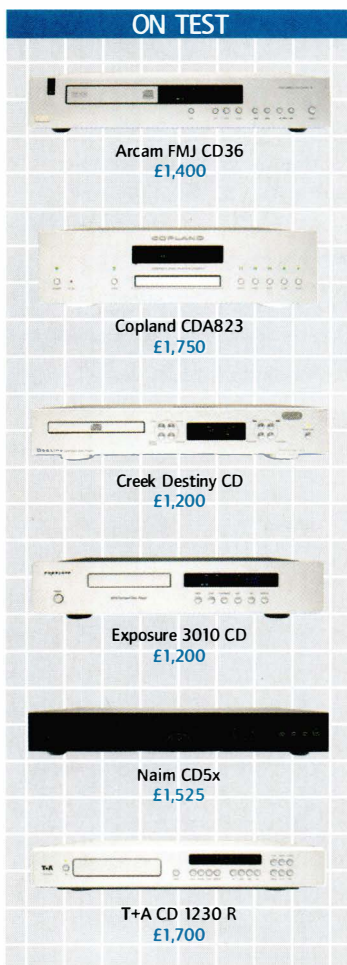




GROUP TEST AND LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

# CD PLAYERS

*Is it really still worth spending well over a grand on a dedicated CD spinner?*



**F**or this *Ultimate Group Test* of CD players, we've gone more upmarket than on the last couple of occasions, perhaps not to what most readers of *HFC* would call real 'high end', but not far short. And after all, £1,200 – the price of the cheapest player here – is a lot of money to spend when you can get a DVD player that does CD as a mere side-show for £30. It's not even as if the sound from one of those will necessarily be truly dreadful. It might be quite nice.

The whole point of decent hi-fi, though, is that in terms of musical enjoyment there is an awfully long way to go before 'quite nice' becomes the real deal. Those of us who actually listen to music (as opposed to just letting it wash past, like other people's conversations on a bus) – and I assume I'm speaking for most readers of this journal – do so because it's more than just a nice noise; it's a major contributor to one's overall sense of well-being. Accordingly, it's well worth spending a little time and money doing it right, and this is where high-quality audio kit comes in.

That said, can one really justify spending £1,200 or more on a CD player these days? Given the improvement in performance of mid-price players of late, you might think CD has a price ceiling. But, given that there has been a similarly marked improvement on players costing three, eight and thirty grand in the last couple of years, the high-end CD spinner still has some mileage left.

Perhaps that's not the right question. Can you justify spending £1,200 or more on a CD player? That's only answerable by listening to CD players at that price, above it and below it, which is one of the reasons this test is taking place.

Over the decades of *HFC's* existence, we've heard CD players of every kind and price, and we've no doubt whatsoever that, while there are some fine sub-£1,000 bargains to be had, you can still get better performance by

digging a little deeper into the wallet. Read more about the kinds of improvement you can expect in the following pages – and don't forget to listen for yourself at your local friendly dealer! You might be surprised at how big a difference a few hundred quid can make to the sound of CD replay.

Advances continue to be made in CD player quality despite the appearance of 'hi-res' formats; perhaps partly because of them too, as integrated circuit manufacturers improve performance to match the demands of DVD and SACD formats. Manufacturers are continually learning new 'tricks' to maximise the accuracy with which music is recovered from the discs.

At the same time, advances in design and in manufacturing techniques allow all this to be done in smarter-looking units for no more, or even less, money than previously. Heck, these six players start to look like a bargain! **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Exposure 3010 integrated stereo amplifier
- ⊕ EAR 802 preamp/519 monoblocks
- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Kimber, Monster and Oehlbach cables

## MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Ian Dury *That's enough of that*
- ⊕ Dick Hyman *Dick Hyman plays Fats Waller*
- ⊕ Otis Redding *Sad Song*
- ⊕ Mahler *5th Symphony*
- ⊕ Nathalie Chalkley *Cinq Voyages*
- ⊕ Herzogenberg *Piano duets*

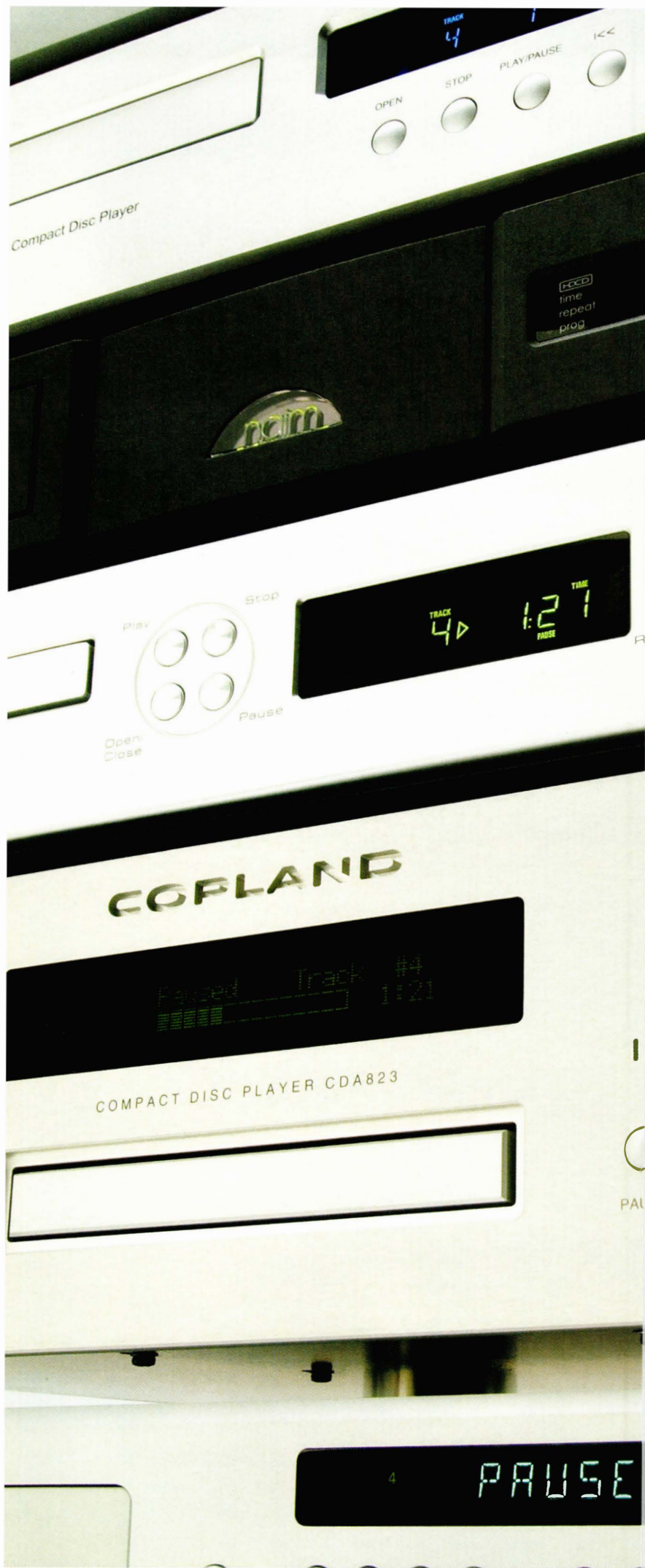
## EARS USED

As ever, gratitude is due in bulk to the following industry stalwarts for giving up their time to listen 'blind' to the players:

- ⊕ Mark Wilson (Creek Audio)
- ⊕ David Denyer (David Denyer Public Relations)
- ⊕ Ed Selley (Cambridge Audio)







## STRUCTURED LAB AND LISTENING TESTS

Each of the players in the group was subjected to a rigorous programme of listening and laboratory tests. Measurements were made using a combination of custom-made CD-Rs, generated specifically for these tests, and a high-quality ADC, which converted the analogue output of each player back to digital for analysis by PC. A variety of additional lab instruments were employed during the course of the test, including the Audio Precision System One, a Hewlett Packard 3561A Dynamic Signal Analyser, a Neutrik Digilyser and a Kikusui KJM6135 Jitter Analyser. Our methodology provides a searching analysis of a multitude of aspects, the most important of which are summarised in the bar graphs (with other significant findings mentioned in the text).

Our comprehensive listening tests were no less rigorous, being conducted under blind, level-matched conditions with some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. In addition, there were extended sighted listening tests by the author, using a wider variety of equipment and music and under a varied range of volume levels to attempt to determine real-world performance.

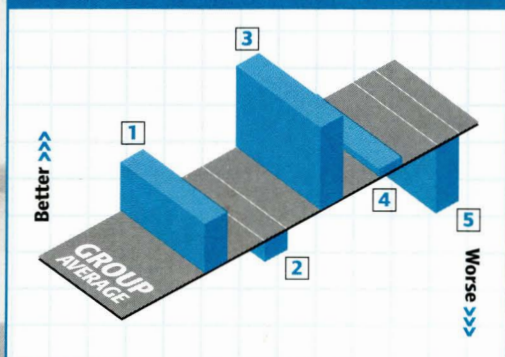
**No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.**

## LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five key technical measurements. A percentage is given that falls above or below the group average.

- 1] Total harmonic distortion:** The classic distortion criterion, measured as the purity of a single sine wave at various frequencies and levels.
- 2] Jitter:** A measure of how stable the timing clock is. Measured at the analogue output, this distortion shows up as increased noise and/or low-level interfering frequencies that can contribute to sonic 'grunge'.
- 3] Linearity:** How accurately the output level behaves at very low levels. Poor figures can lead to distortion rising considerably in quiet musical passages.
- 4] Dynamic range:** This is effectively the same as signal-to-noise ratio, the difference between full output and the practical noise floor of each player.
- 5] Digital filtering:** Frequencies above half the sampling frequency should be efficiently filtered off. The filter is tested by playing a 20kHz tone and looking for ultrasonic spurious signals that accompany it.

## OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE











£1,750 ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.copland.dk

# COPLAND CDA823

*Minimalist Danish CD player puts a CD-ROM drive to good use*

**W**e don't carry many reviews of Copland products in *Hi-Fi Choice*, because Copland maintains a relatively small product line-up and updates it infrequently. Indeed, the CDA823 is an update of a long-standing previous model, the CDA822, doubling the degree of oversampling. The analogue stages are apparently the same as in the CDA822, which is fine by us as we always thought it to be a very capable machine.

Copland, like many others, uses a CD-ROM drive to read the discs, and its plasticky whine as it opens and closes is the only external downside to this classy-looking player. Disc reading is a little slow, and it seems strange not to include CD Text when the display could so easily support it, but we definitely loved the 'thermometer-style' display of position within a track, something we've not seen elsewhere.

That drive feeds, via the usual S/PDIF connection, a sample-rate converter and DAC chip, both from Analog Devices. This is followed not by the usual assortment of op-amps but by a fully discrete filter and output stage, which offers both unbalanced and balanced outputs. Modern op-amps can give very fine performance, but Copland's designers are among those who believe that for ultimate performance it is still preferable to 'roll your own' solution from good old-fashioned transistors and passive components.

Copland's construction is based on a thick, two-part steel body, the upper part of which could benefit from more damping. The front panel features some very funky deep engraving and the buttons have a pleasingly firm feel. Rear connections include the near-obligatory remote control sockets and a coaxial digital output.

## SOUND QUALITY

The CDA823 matches the Copland 'house style' of an essentially mellow sound. Mellow, however, should not be taken to mean lazy or any other unfortunate implication, and in fact this was thought one of the most rhythmically



alert of the players. It achieves that in the best possible way, reacting to rhythm and dynamics with alacrity but not attempting to impose them when they don't apply, nor promote them when they should be secondary. Just occasionally this can be unsettling, especially if you are used to a very fast-paced sound, but a little experimentation with recordings soon shows that this Copland tells it like it is and if a recording is slack, that's what you'll hear.

Tonally, there seems to be the very subtlest hint of coloration. This shows up most clearly by projecting vocals a fraction forward of the rest of the mix. Because this coloration is in the lower harmonic ranges of the voice, though, it doesn't lead to listener fatigue. In fact, the very highest reaches of the treble are where the mellowness is best illustrated: extreme high frequencies are not actually cut back but are so effortlessly presented that one is positively encouraged to listen for long periods at a stretch. Bass is what it should be on CD – seemingly limitless and neatly controlled, without stifling resonance.

This is not the most overtly detailed-sounding CD player below £2,000, but it is certainly one of the most enjoyably musical. Its performance is full, fluid and free-breathing, and overall it comes highly recommended. **HFC**

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 92%**



**FEATURES >> 84%**



**BUILD >> 87%**



**VALUE >> 88%**



Effortless extreme treble leads to a gorgeously mellow character, while timing is excellent and dynamics and bass unforced but more than merely competent. A fine high-end CD player.

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

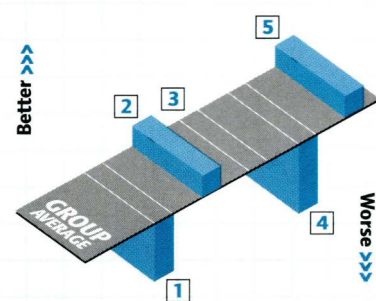


## LAB REPORT

It says much for the standards of modern CD players that this one gave the worst measured performance of the group in two key areas and yet was still, frankly, pretty impressive in both of them. Distortion a shade above 0.01% at full level and at any frequency hardly qualifies as 'poor' and given that it obliquely drops away to practically zero at outputs below -20dB, we're not much concerned. Likewise noise of -100dB: granted, with exceptionally noise-free recordings, mastered with noise-shaping from high-bit originals, this may be a limitation but it's far enough below the noise level of most discs to qualify as inaudible in general terms. Output level is a little below the 2V average, so beware when auditioning.

What does bother us is speed accuracy, which at 1,700ppm fast is well beyond the range most DACs will lock to. Blame lies with the CD-ROM transport – these things have their problems!

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -50%
- 2] Jitter >> +20%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -60%
- 5] Digital filter >> +20dB

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	1.78V
Total harmonic distortion	0.01%	0.013%
Signal-to-noise ratio	100dB	100dB



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## CREEK DESTINY CD

*Does Creek's top player have a date with Destiny?*

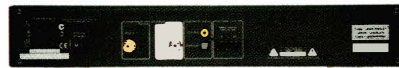
If you haven't seen the Creek Destiny products around yet, that's because they are leaving the country as fast as Creek can make them. We were certainly very taken with both Destiny CD player and amplifier back in HFC 277, though blind listening against the best of their peers is a tougher test. What that can't do, however, is detract from the smartly distinctive appearance, with a clever front panel layout adding an original twist to the ubiquitous brushed aluminium fascia.

Indeed, the entire exterior of the unit is a departure from earlier Creeks, not in shape but in construction, with thick alloy top and bottom panels securely screwed in place to tough front, back and sides in similar material. Inside that secure (and largely non-resonant) shell lies a not untypical assemblage of electronics, fed by no less than three mains transformers, which in turn are supplied via a complex mains filter in a screening box. Discs are spun on a standard DVD-ROM drive, from which the data passes to the audio board.

We couldn't resist a wry smile at Creek's claim that the D-to-A converter is '192kHz capable' – in other words, get the magic 192 number in there somehow! In fact, said chip does perfectly adequate upsampling (okay, oversampling) internally and the unarguable advantage of going without oversampling is that one maintains complete control of data rate from one place. Creek does this with a very high stability clock that ensures both low jitter and compatibility with external DACs or digital recorders, something many modern players can't achieve. Purists will be impressed, as we were, by the fact that Creek restricts the analogue signal path to a lone op-amp on each channel, assisted by high-grade passive components.

### SOUND QUALITY

Our listeners were hard pushed to find actual fault with the Destiny's performance in terms of specifics, but were not unstinting in praise – it didn't come across as the most engaging of



the day. But is it, as with the Arcam, more a lack of overt character that hampers it in what is inevitably a quite brief acquaintance?

Stereo imaging was very well liked, with praise for both its precision and its scope, while timing was mentioned in positive, if not glowing, terms. Bass was thought good, while treble was described as a touch forward by one listener and – in contrast – slightly recessed by another. There were also a couple of remarks on slight treble hardness. And detail? Few comments here, but one did specifically mention a lack compared to the other players.

Listening specifically for any sign of treble awkwardness, with those comments in mind, we thought we could see what was meant and would agree that the presentation of the treble is somehow different from the rest of the group. But it's not the kind of difference that we would expect to be upsetting in the long term and, to put it in context, is similar to the kind of effect we've heard from moving loudspeakers by a very few centimetres. Detail, though, is perhaps more of an issue and we did feel that picking out true minutiae takes a little more concentration than with, say, the Arcam FMJ CD36.

Taken all together, there's a nice cohesion to the sound and it's always a rewarding listen, particularly if you like space around your music. No gong, but no shame either. **HFC**

### VERDICT

**SOUND >>> 85%**

**FEATURES >>> 85%**

**BUILD >>> 90%**

**VALUE >>> 84%**

While most of the specifics seem right, this player didn't entirely convince our listeners, who found traces of treble hardness and compromised detail. Even so, it's always a cohesive and entertaining player.

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

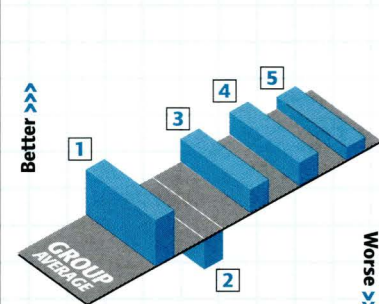


### LAB REPORT

Creek's justification for the high-stability crystal oscillator is shown in the excellent speed accuracy of this player, at 10ppm the best in the group and easily meeting the highest pro-audio standards. This only matters when one uses it with a DAC, or possibly a digital recorder, which may refuse to lock to sources more than about 100ppm out of true, but it's nice to see care being taken here.

Jitter is around the measurement limit while distortion is excellent, at least at high output levels: it doesn't quite vanish as levels drop but it comes so close that we're inclined not to worry. Noise, too, is close to state of the art and the digital filter does a very good job above 24kHz, with the usual small amount of aliasing between 20kHz and 24kHz. In the circumstances, it's hard to suggest with confidence the cause of the detail limitations that our listeners heard – perhaps some elusive interaction with cables or partnering gear?

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >>> +40%
- 2] Jitter >>> -20%
- 3] Linearity >>> +20%
- 4] Dynamic range >>> +20%
- 5] Digital filter >>> +10%

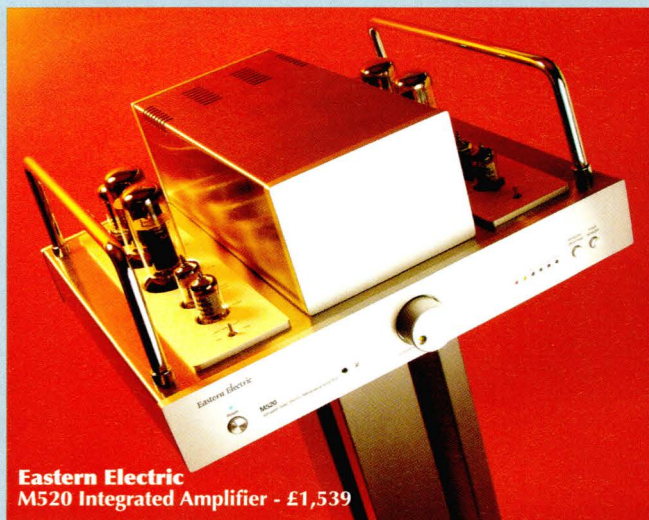
### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.02V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0008%	0.0006%
Signal-to-noise ratio	117dB	107dB



# Eastern Electric

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**Eastern Electric**  
M520 Integrated Amplifier - £1,539

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"Don't worry, there's enough bite in the treble to keep the King Kong OST entertaining, and ample attack to do justice to the upbeat tracks from Mary J Blige's terrific *The Breakthrough* disc."

"Maybe not the obvious choice at this price level, but one that many people will love once they hear it."

**WHAT Hi-Fi, March 2006**  
Eastern Electric M520 Review  
Awarded 5-stars

**VERDICT** £

"It did not produce a rose tinted 'warm', 'liquid' or 'lush' sound yet it was not clinical either."

"The Minimax was also especially good at all the differing vocals it encountered in the listening sessions, where it reproduced multi-layered, texturally sophisticated singing parts which were excellent."

"An extremely even and engaging sounding valve integrated, offering fine build and redoubtable value for money."

**Hi-Fi World, November 2005**  
Eastern Electric M520 Review  
Awarded 4.5 / 5



**Minimax Valve**  
Pre Amp - £769



**Minimax Valve**  
Phono Pre Amp - £1,099



**Minimax Valve**  
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**Minimax HDCD**  
Valve CD Player - £879



"Tube-based systems, especially low-powered ones such as this, are often expected to sound like a bar of Galaxy Caramel tastes: sweet, smooth but, ultimately, a little hard to swallow. But the first thing that strikes you about the Eastern Electric/JAS Audio combo is its exuberant sense of life and pace."

"The presentation of fine detail is beguilingly natural, and is all the more remarkable for the absence of fatiguing effects. It's not strictly neutral, but when the music is allowed to communicate this intimately, does it matter?"

Hi-Fi Choice, March 2006  
System Review. Eastern Electric Pre, Power, CD with JAS-Audio Orsa Speakers



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Dominic Todd, Hi-Fi World



## VERDICT

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The Qinpu A8000 Mk II is an Integrated Amplifier of exceptional quality and at only £1,295, it leaves the competition for dead!

Dominic Todd recently reviewed the Qinpu A8000 Mk II (Hi-FiWorld, April 2006) and wrote:

" So to the price; i would have thought between £2000 and £3000 to be about right, so at just £1295, then, this is one exceptional value amplifier, in material terms. "

" No Class-A amplification at this price could match its sheer dynamic power. "

" The balance between a raw earthy sound and refinement is extremely well judged, and there can be few that could fail to warm to the Qinpu's emotional and powerful response. "

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We sent David Vivian at Hi-Fi Choice, two separate systems and he fell in love with both..... It's not hard to see or hear why!



### \*\*System Price: £4,036

Eastern Electric Minimax CD player £879  
Eastern Electric Minimax preamplifier £769  
Eastern Electric Minimax power amplifier £989  
JAS Audio Orsa speaker £1,399 per pair

"It's hard to miss the proliferation of Chinese and Far East brands currently giving the world market apple cart a good shaking."

"Impressive sophistication considering the £1,399 per pair asking price, but the build quality and finish are, well, bananas."

"The lovely lightness of touch and grainless, almost romantic treble are true valve hallmarks and hugely alluring, as is the effortlessly fluent and wonderfully easy-breathing delivery of complex material."  
HFC, March 2006



### \*\*System Price: £8,745

Micromega Aria CD player £2,150  
Audio Zone Amp-1 Integrated amp £1,595  
ART Emotion loudspeaker £5,000 per pair

"It was suggested to us by Shadow Distribution as something 'quite extraordinary'... and that turned out to be an understatement."

"This system has a fabulous reach: a deep, tangible bass, crystalline mid and treble clarity that's strong on atmosphere. There's plenty of height and space to the soundstage, too."

"This system is different. It's quirky for a single-minded reason: the pursuit of good sound. Nothing else - not even an extra input on the amplifier - matters. And that's hard logic to fault."  
HFC, May 2006

\*\*Free JAS-Audio Cables for complete system and free UK delivery!

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Hi-Fi News, Feb 2006



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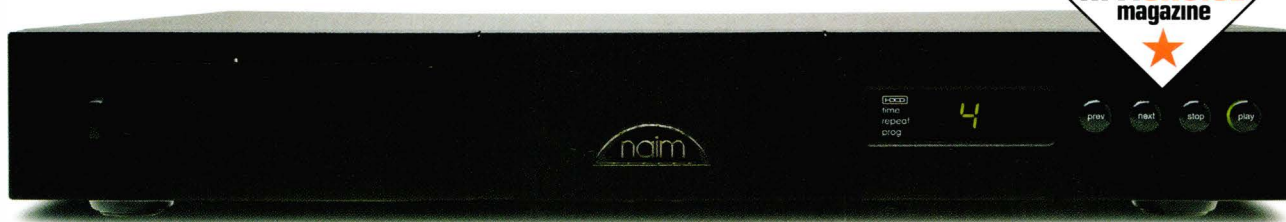
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# NAIM CD5x

*Marching to the beat of a different drum pays off*

**E**ver the individualist, Naim has ensured an immediate impression is made by the way this player loads discs. No buttons to press here: instead there's a little handle which one pulls, whereupon the loading tray swings out on a pivot. The only disadvantage is the removable puck, which one must remember to put in place by hand. Meanwhile, the minimalist front panel features only four buttons and a very simple display, plus a softly illuminated Naim logo. It's all very classy stuff.

Another Naim touch is the DIN socket at the rear. These days phonos are provided as well, but Naim is determined that the former option is preferable. Next to the outputs is the input for the optional external power supply, just in case the internal supply (which features the biggest mains transformer of this group by some way, a giant rectifier, plenty of capacitors and at least 22 separate electronic regulators) is not enough for you. Naim takes power supplies seriously!

Build quality of the case is very good, and the trend continues inside. The audio circuitry is based on Philips chips – once *the* choice of smaller manufacturers, but these days not so common – with op-amps forming the heart of the analogue stages. The critical non-Philips chip is the digital filter and HDCD decoder – yes, this player is HDCD-ready. 'Hi-res' formats seem to come and go, but HDCD remains quietly popular, and even if you don't own a single HDCD disc, the PMD200 chip is one of the best digital filters on the market. So, you can still benefit.

## SOUND QUALITY

The overall impression this player made was clearly favourable. Interestingly, given Naim's reputation for timing, our listeners (who of course didn't know it was a Naim as they listened) didn't pick out that particular area of performance as remarkably different from the other players; it did attract some favourable comment but wasn't felt to stand apart.



What does stand out from our listeners' notes is the almost complete lack of criticism, the only really negative comment concerning some slight glassiness in a couple of tracks – and that was only from one listener. Overall, it seems that this is a player that any of the listeners would happily live with, and indeed having no one aspect of performance that jumps out, in a positive or negative sense, is a good line to take for long-term enjoyment. It has a nicely rounded tonality from top to bottom, a good sense of space with well-defined and stable instrumental positions within an image, good attack and plenty of verve.

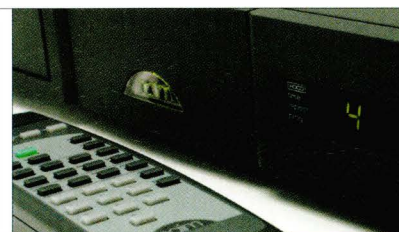
Performance seems well balanced across music types, with rock appropriately energetic and classical suitably detailed and subtle. The solo piano track went down particularly well – one listener's comment that it "sounds quite like a piano" may seem to damn with faint praise but we chose a notoriously tricky track and this is about as good as it gets, especially when taken with the very favourable comments about the pianist's musical qualities.

With a confident handling of wide dynamic ranges and clearly delineated insights into the most complex musical score, this player seems to have a most pleasing mix of virtues and very few vices. It's a cracking choice for any system, Naim-based or not. **HFC**

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	A lack of obvious flaws is happily joined with an ability to appeal to all kinds of music listeners. It's very assured and lively, with considerable sophistication and subtlety when required.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 78%</b>	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	

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

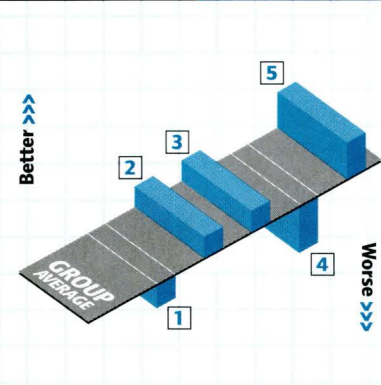


## LAB REPORT

The use of the PMD200 digital filter/HDCD decoder chip gives this player unusually good performance in the near neighbourhood of 22kHz. Most players allow some aliasing here, and while the CD5x doesn't completely banish it, the level is reduced by a good 15-20dB. The showing for stopband rejection on the bargraph looks poor, but in this case our methodology and a high group average combine to give a misleading impression. The PMD100 filter was even better, though!

There is no cause for concern elsewhere, but the distortion results are a little surprising. Typically, modern CD players show low distortion near full output and undetectable distortion at output levels below about 20dB. This one shows distortion levels rising to a maximum of about 0.1% at 40dB output, which may be little more than an academic observation given the fine results obtained for sound.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -20%
- 2] Jitter >> +20%
- 3] Linearity >> +20%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -40%
- 5] Digital filter >> +30%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.11V
Total harmonic distortion	0.1%	0.005%
Signal-to-noise ratio	-	102dB



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## New Product: The ECSpre. An audiophile Line Level Pre amplifier

The ECS pre amplifier has been painstakingly developed to meet an exciting performance brief. Not only does it complement the current ECS range of amplifier, it is also capable of delivering stunning levels of transparency, stage depth and image pin-point accuracy.

- Transformer balanced output on three-pole XLR (selectable)
- SE, Single Ended zero-feedback bipolar technology has sonic signature of a good thermionic Triode.
- Tape loop/AV loop available
- All signal is processed as balanced, user may choose any input and can use any output (RCA or XLR)
- Multiple power transformers to isolate circuit and functional blocks
- New technology double regulators isolate

- amplifier circuitry form supply line noise
- Zero-feedback, second stage regulator design for low coloration and enhanced signal dynamics.
- Multiple power supplies keep signal channels separate
- Volume control by precision, discrete, metal-film resistors for low noise and high accuracy, including channel balance.
- Volume resistors and inputs switched by selected, audiophile grade, gold contact, long life, inert gas sealed relays.
- Centralized Star-Ground topology for both channels maximises stereo focus and image depth.



## 6 and 7

PrimaLuna have just launched two new amazing models.

**ProLogue Six**  
70W mono power amp. Tubes: 2 x 12AX7,  
2 x 12AU7 and 4 x EL-34.  
Outputs: 2, 4 & 8 Ohm

**ProLogue Seven**  
70W mono power amp. Tubes: 2 x 12AX7,  
2 x 12AU7 and 4 x KT-88.  
Outputs: 2, 4 & 8 Ohm

## vantage

Living in the shadow of the impressive Summit speaker is no easy task. Martin Logan 'Vantage' rises to the challenge by compressing Summit's groundbreaking ultra high-resolution XStat™, AirFrame™ and PoweredForce™ technologies into a surprisingly compact package and price.

## cd 7

The Audio Research CD7 is a Reference Level model to complement the CD3MKII with an even higher performance. Incorporating the strongest aspects of the CD3MKII - its rugged construction, the Philips Pro2 laser mechanism, the Crystal 24 bit DAC - Reference CD7 breaks new ground!



## e a t

The Cool Damper is a radical new device for the tube accessory industry from EAT – EuroAudioTeam.

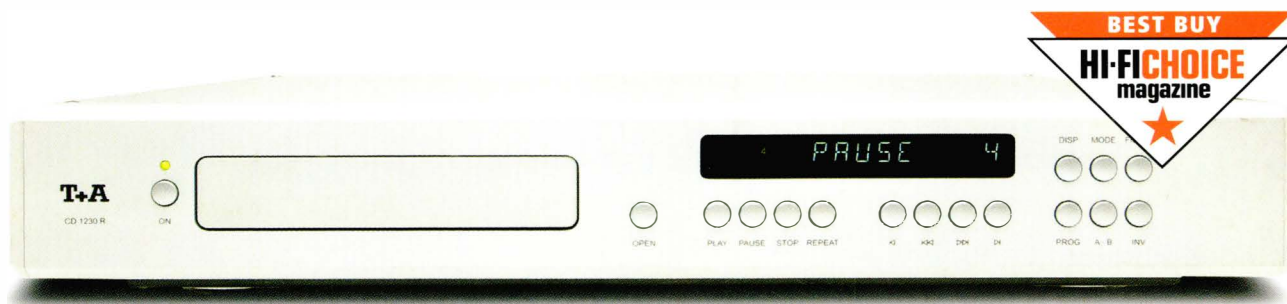
This beautifully crafted audio product offers much more than simply adding a new styling twist to your valves. It brings exceptional acoustic performance and function to your system by delivering sound that redefines the tube dampening category. No valve should be without one!

## enigma

The Audio Analogue 'Enigma' multifunction audio valve unit is a superb solution for those music lovers who require minimal fuss, minimal space, yet maximum quality. It features a 50wpc amp, CD player and am/fm tuner. There are other compact one-box audio solutions on the market but none offer the sound and build quality of the Enigma.







£1,700 ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de

# T+A CD 1230 R

*Fiddle with filters for that fine-tuned CD sound*

**G**erman high-tech brand T+A (it stands for Theory + Application, since you ask) produces a bewildering array of audio components. Some wacky, some highly desirable, and some smartly businesslike – including this one. It's arguably reminiscent of modern DVD players with its ultra-low-profile appearance, but one touch confirms that it is a very solidly-built piece of no-nonsense hi-fi.

In fact, it very nearly manages to be five pieces of hi-fi, due to the inclusion of five different filter settings, each one giving the CD 1230 R a unique sound. Everything else to do with the player (power supply, jitter, analogue stages and so on) has an important effect too, but the digital filter is undoubtedly one of the most significant factors in determining the sound of a CD player. At the very least, T+A has substantially broadened the machine's appeal. Surely one of the five will please you!

We may not agree with T+A that 'pre-echo' in conventional digital filters is a problem, but it is still fascinating to play with the settings. 'Standard' is the usual filter as used by almost everyone else, while the others include 'short FIR', 'IIR' and 'Bezier' filters. They're basically different ways of joining the dots, with more or less in-band roll-off and out-of-band aliasing and while all have been tried before, they've never been put together like this.

Construction is good with plentiful internal screening around transport and electronics, the latter using a selection of good quality modern parts. Unusually, the remote control is not supplied as standard – it costs an extra £99, unless you've already got one with another T+A component.

## SOUND QUALITY

We decided to focus on the 'Standard' and 'Filter 4' settings. These have the same output level, but differ most profoundly from each other in frequency-response behaviour. Comments reveal some common ground but



also illustrate very nicely just why T+A may have included these options. Opinions were split as to which setting was preferable.

There was some common ground between the filters, including excellent bass and very good imaging. Fine control and gradation of dynamics was also consistent. There seemed to be little obvious difference in treble tonality, and both the blind listening and our own experiments with all five filter settings suggested that there is an enduring trait of very civilised sound.

The presentation of the sound is quite significantly different and listeners thought 'Filter 4' had the most distinctive sound of the entire test. While 'Standard' gives exceptionally refined sound with detail second to none, 'Filter 4' for some listeners sounds more musically natural and coherent at the cost of some detail. In fact, details are emphasised when the dynamic level is very low, but are a little blurred in louder, busier passages.

More clearly than usual, this player illustrates how there is no 'ultimate' sound as personal taste must play a part. Luckily, in this case one bit of kit seems unusually well placed to cover all bases and for once we can put hand on heart and recommend this to lovers both of detail and of big-hearted musical character – just click that switch! A technological *tour de force* of the best kind. **HFC**

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 91%</b>	Selectable filters are the icing on this solidly made cake: the basic performance of this player is very fine in every way and it has the potential to delight almost any listener in any music.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE 90% OVERALL SCORE</b>	

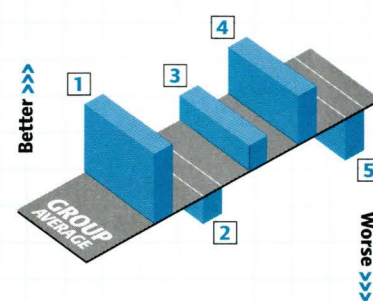


## LAB REPORT

Differences between the filters are not hard to find. While 'Standard' has the usual near-brickwall response – actually it's not like 'normal' players, hence the poor showing on stopband rejection – 'Filter 1' to 'Filter 4' have progressively less sharp response, with 'Filter 4' 3dB down at 17kHz but only 18dB down at 30kHz. This means there will typically be plenty of ultrasonic aliasing (inaudible) going on and as a result, with most speakers, potentially audible levels of alias intermodulation, too. In principle, this filter will give less pre-ringing but that's a bit of a red herring in practice.

Filters apart, this player turns in an excellent technical performance. Noise is low enough to make the most of even the quietest recordings, jitter is near-vanishing and harmonic distortion is on our measurement limit. Output level is on the high side: it's significantly lower on 'Filter 1' and 'Filter 2' though, so beware in quick comparisons!

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +50%
- 2] Jitter >> -20%
- 3] Linearity >> +20%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +35%
- 5] Digital filter >> -30%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.6V	2.52V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.0004%
Signal-to-noise ratio	106dB	108dB



# CONCLUSIONS

CD players between £1,000 and £2,000 just keep on getting better and better

As the dust settles behind a particularly enjoyable group of audio components, what conclusions can we draw? It's clear that high-quality modern CD replay requires no apology or special pleading. If, as currently seems possible, the high-resolution audio formats fail to gather critical mass, we can at least be sure that good, well-made CD recordings played on high-quality separates equipment like any of the six in this group will continue to provide a very satisfying musical experience.

But there is still something to be gained by examining the merits of different players. Despite lab

results that at first sight appear to suggest indistinguishable performance from each machine, our listeners picked up subtle nuances. Many of these nuances were in fact supported by detailed analysis of the measurements, which in the long term could have a significant impact on any individual's satisfaction with his or her replay system.

This was particularly the case with the Exposure 3010. For whatever reason, the level of detail retrieval we heard from it was not quite up to the high standard set by the other players. Where detail is less of an issue we liked the

sound, though, and in an age of slow-thinking CD players, we were delighted by Exposure's rapid loading and cueing of discs. Given the relative success of this player in previous tests, it shows that CD standards continue to improve.

Creek's Destiny came in for a degree of the same criticism and gave rise to slight reservations about the quality of treble, though the sound from this player is notably cohesive and generally also highly involving.

The Arcam FMJ CD36 failed to set our listening panel alight with excitement, but in this case the fault may simply be that it's the

most characterless of the group. By one definition of high fidelity, that makes it the best!

The Naim, Copland and T+A players all received much praise, pressing not just one but all of the aural buttons. Overall, the Naim presents a slightly more energetic version of events, while the Copland's beautifully free-flowing style will put it top of the musical tree for many listeners. Meanwhile, T+A achieves near-universal appeal thanks to the multiplicity of digital filters, each with its own subtle take on what is without doubt a good sonic basis. This is a group full of sonic stars, no less. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### AMPLIFIERS

**EXPOSURE 3010 INTEGRATED** £1,000  
A lively, enthusiastic amplifier that can really make the most of a good source.

**COPLAND CSA290** £1,900  
A hybrid valve/transistor amplifier with a detailed but mellow character.

### LOUDSPEAKERS

**B&W 8055** £1,600  
Beautiful standmount that delivers detail and real musical involvement.

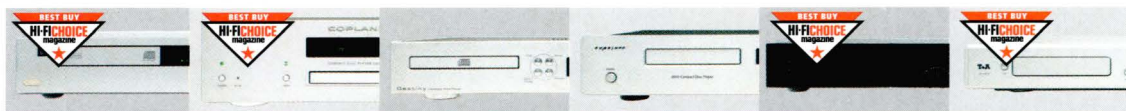
**ATC SCM35** £1,999  
Floorstander that offers astonishing levels of insight into familiar recordings.

## HINTS AND TIPS

- >> When auditioning CD players, be aware that output levels are not always perfectly matched – louder often sounds 'better' in quick-fire demonstrations.
- >> CD players aren't particularly microphonic, but any problems can be minimised by putting them out of the

- line of fire of the speakers. Keeping players out of earshot helps, too.
- >> Some players benefit from being permanently powered up, others need a warm up before sounding their best.
- >> Try switching off the CD player's display if you can. It sounds better.

## CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

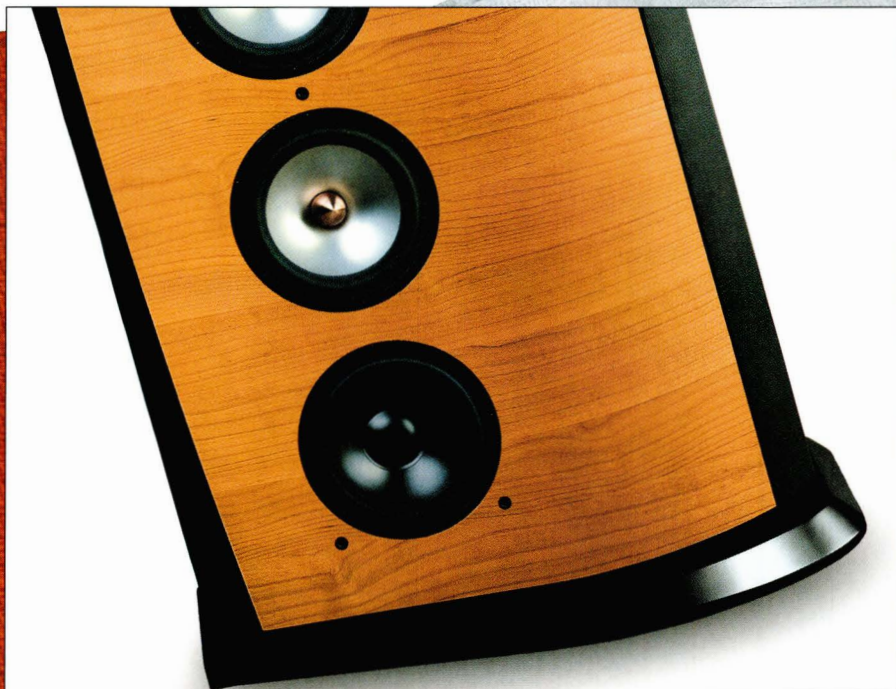


MAKE MODEL	Arcam FMJ CD36	Copland CDA823	Creek Destiny CD	Exposure 3010 CD	Naim CD5x	T+A CD 1230 R
<b>PRICE</b>	£1,400	£1,750	£1,200	£1,200	£1,525	£1,700
<b>SOUND</b>						
<b>FEATURES</b>						
<b>BUILD</b>						
<b>VALUE</b>						
<b>OVERALL</b>						
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality – 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!	Don't let the laid-back character fool you – this player has plenty of insight, too.	Our listeners failed to connect intimately with this player, though essentials all seem to be in place.	A subtle but significant lack of detail interfered with our listeners' enjoyment.	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance.	A spread of filter options makes this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
<b>ELEC DIG O/P</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>OPT DIG O/P</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>CD-RW</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>CD TEXT</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>BALANCED O/P</b>	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
<b>DISTORTION</b>	0.0012% <b>E</b>	0.013% <b>A</b>	0.0006% <b>E</b>	0.0013% <b>E</b>	0.005% <b>G</b>	0.0004% <b>E</b>
<b>JITTER</b>	0.12ns <b>E</b>	0.1ns <b>E</b>	0.12ns <b>E</b>	0.1ns <b>E</b>	0.1ns <b>E</b>	0.12ns <b>E</b>
<b>LINEARITY</b>	0.2dB <b>G</b>	0.1dB <b>E</b>	<0.1dB <b>E</b>	0.2dB <b>G</b>	<0.1dB <b>E</b>	<0.1dB <b>E</b>
<b>S/N RATIO</b>	109dB <b>E</b>	100dB <b>A</b>	107dB <b>E</b>	105dB <b>G</b>	102dB <b>A</b>	108dB <b>E</b>
<b>STOPBAND REJECTION</b>	-100dB <b>G</b>	-106dB <b>E</b>	-105dB <b>E</b>	-97dB <b>G</b>	-84dB <b>A</b>	-83dB <b>A</b>

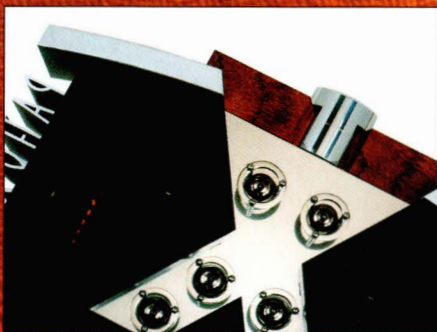


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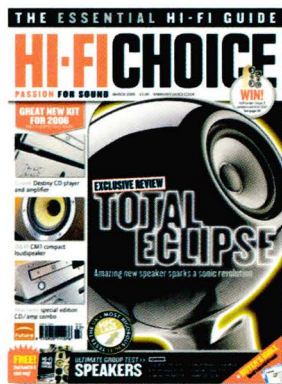
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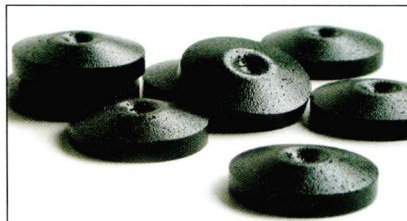
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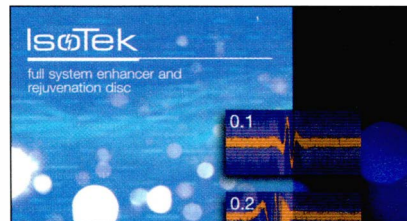
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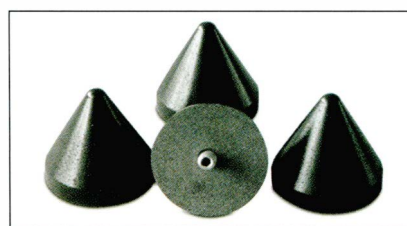
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Allsop CD Scratch Repair Kit	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allsop Radial CD Cleaner	£10.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Carbon Fibre Record Brush	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
DeoxIT Contact Cleaner (200ml)	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Exstatic Deluxe Record Brush	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Exstatic Record Sleeves	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Knostli Disco Antistat Record Cleaner</b>	<b>£44.95</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Okki Nokki Vacuum Record Cleaner	£225.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>L'Art du Son Record Cleaner (5Litre)</b>	<b>£27.95</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last All-Purpose Record Cleaner	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Record Preservative	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Last Stylus Cleaner</b>	<b>£19.95</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Stylus Stylus Treatment	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lyra SPT Stylus Cleaner	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Nagaoka Antistatic Record Inner Sleeves (50)</b>	<b>£14.95</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Eco 3 Static Inhibitor Spray	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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ProGold Contact Enhancer (ProGold 20ml)	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack Black 4 Shelf	£549.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Clearlight Audio RDC 1 Cones (Qty 4)	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Clearlight Audio RDC 2 Cones (Qty 4)</b>	<b>£29.95</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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IsoTek Elite Mains Cable (1.5M)	£79.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IsoTek Optimum Mains Cable (1.5M)	£129.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Nordost Brahma Reference Mains Cable (2.0M)	£895.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Valhalla Reference Mains Cable (2.0M)	£1750.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Furutech FI-15 IEC Connector (24ct Gold)	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furutech FI-11 Round Bodied IEC (24ct Gold)	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Kemp Electronics Power Strip 8-Way	£424.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost THOR by IsoTek	£1595.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
V.D.H. Polarity Tester	£17.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Valid From \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_ Issue number (Switch) \_\_\_\_\_

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Simply complete this order form, fill in your details and send it to: P.O. Box 5996, Newbury RG20 4XH

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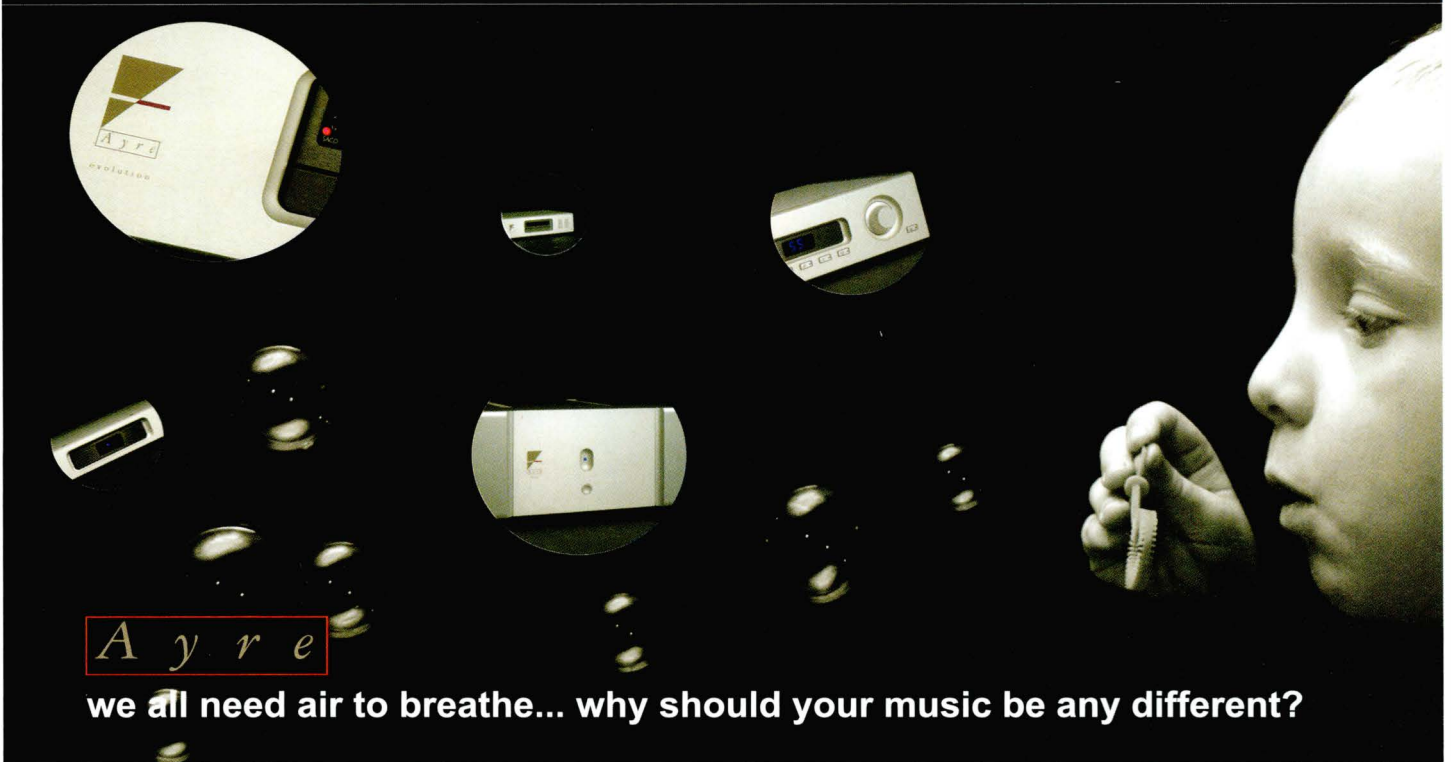
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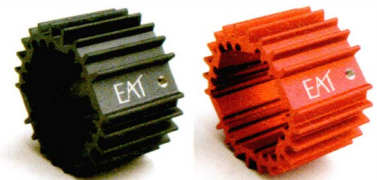
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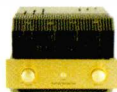
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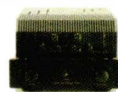
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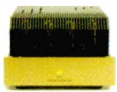
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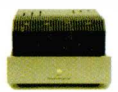
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Three



Four



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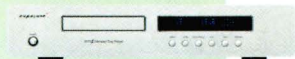


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# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and 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 considered for inclusion in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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# CD PLAYERS

*Audio disc players for music only*



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

## SUPER AUDIO CD



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

## Q&A

### WHAT'S A DAC?

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

### WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

### DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

### WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion.

Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

### CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

### CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

## TOP BUYS



### Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2 £250

The old 640C was a fantastic low-cost CD player, and its new 'v2' replacement is even better – an extraordinarily graceful and dynamic-sounding player for the money.



### 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 CD PLAYERS

BEST BUY 
  EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
	Arcam DVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems								247
	Arcam DVA CD192	850	Beautifully built, well featured player with clear, open and involving sound								264
	Cambridge Azur 640C v2	250	Does most things extremely well and has a remarkably good sense of poise for the money								274
	Consonance CD120	795	Fine performance in all areas with the possible exception of slight treble harshness								269
	Cyrus CD6s	650	Small, efficient and cheerful, with plenty of energy and just the smallest lack of detail								276
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)								270
	Exposure 2010 S	599	Highly communicative sounds with good bass, though not always the most analytical								264
	Naim CD5i	825	As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price								259
	Rega Apollo	500	Outstanding top-loader has sweet, clean top end that makes voices magical and difficult discs listenable								279
	Roksan Kandy MKIIID	650	Clean, tidy and expressive player – a more than worthwhile improvement on previous versions								259
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance								276
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,400	Deeply revealing player that tells it like it is: if you can stand the unvarnished truth, you'll love it								271
	Audia Flight CD One	4,500	Sumptuously built toploader capable of real world dynamics with great recordings. Two digital inputs								269
<b>EC</b>	Audio Research Ref CD7	8,000	Top of the CD playing tree, with a sound as open and musically accomplished as you'll ever find from the format								279
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Its ability to resolve micro dynamics and acoustic space is second to none								267
	Creek Destiny	1,200	A highly capable and particularly smart CD player which is both analytical and musically inviting								277
	Cyrus CD Xt/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion								279
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	Lindemann 820	6,999	Stereo SACD player with sumptuous build and sound, onboard analogue volume control and multiple digital inputs								262
	Marantz SA-15 S1	1,200	Some inconsistency over imaging, but enjoyable performance, strong on detail								276
	Meridian G07	1,595	Immaculately conceived and executed player with a softly-spoken voice. Needs careful system matching								259
<b>EC</b>	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful								263
	Myryad MXC6000	1,400	A highly listenable player with excellent tonal balance and very fine detail								270
	Naim CD5x	1,450	A genuinely engaging CD player with remarkable musical grip and coherence								264
<b>EC</b>	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply								238
	Primare CD31	1,500	A well made player that may not appeal to timing freaks but does lovely things with large musical forces								270
<b>EC</b>	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source								244
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,100	The newly tweaked Caspian remains a smooth, cohesive and informative player								278
	Sugden CD21SE	1,395	Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers								271
	Shanling CD-T100	1,650	Stunning-looking player that offers various operating modes: in any, sound is clear and assured								270
<b>EC</b>	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits								253
<b>EC</b>	Wadia 861se	9,995	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 multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well. The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can use



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

## Q&A

### WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

### WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

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

### DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

## DVD-AUDIO

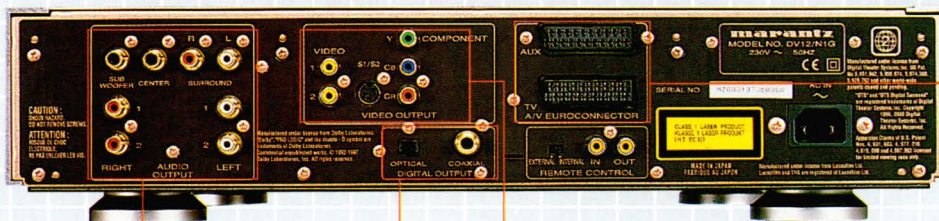
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for information – lyrics, images and so on. To save

you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



## CONNECTIONS



**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.



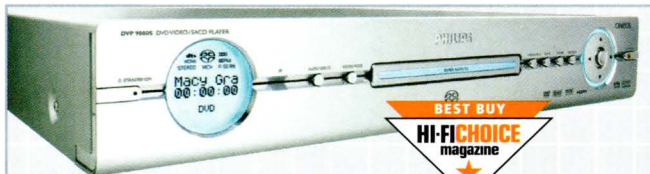
## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

### Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money		●	●			254
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem	●	●	●	●	●	276
	Denon DVD-2910	600	Denon's entry-level universal player lives in the shadow of the '3910, especially on CD, but is a fine overall model	●	●	●	●		262
	Denon DVD-3910	900	Exceptionally well-specified universal player with a performance to match. A true class-leader	●	●	●	●		260
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation	●	●	●	●		274
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video	●	●	●	●		275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star		●	●	●		274
	Pioneer DV-585A	150	Don't expect tip-top performance for this kind of money – the fact that it's a competent universal player is impressive enough!	●	●	●	●		273
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts				●	●	274
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD	●	●	●	●	●	266
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi	●	●	●	●		259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too	●		●	●		265
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity				●	●	279
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo C			●	●	●	270

**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



### Philips DVP9000S £400

An attractive and well designed DVD player with a great picture and good CD/SACD sound.



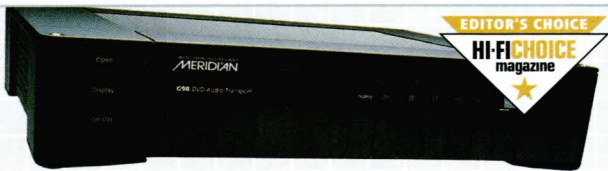
### Marantz DV7600 £600

A universal player that's strong with all formats, including music on CD/SACD/DVD-A.



### Arcam FMJ DV29 £1,600

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



### Meridian G98AH £3,625

A digital *tour de force* – as exceptional with both audio and video as you'd expect.

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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



**Goldring**  
 GR2 £265

This Rega-derived design is stunning value for money. Supplied with an RB250 arm and Goldring 1012GX cartridge, it'll blow most budget CD players into the weeds.



**Michell**  
 Technodec £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.



**Avid**  
 Volvere Sequel £3,500

Avid has been one of the most impressive exponents of the vinyl arts in recent years, and this mid-range deck is a stunning example of analogue engineering.



## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# TURNTABLES

### Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	268
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45		●	●	271
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78	●	●	opt	276
<input type="checkbox"/>	Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45		●	opt	279
<input type="checkbox"/>	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●			235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham Analogue Horizon	529	A fluid midrange and nimble but rich bass are two of the many attributes of this bargain deck (price inc RB250 arm)	33/45			●	253
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject Debut SE	200	The best Debut has a quality cartridge and easy upgrade arm cable, it delivers a scale, energy and resolve with ease	33/45			●	276
<input type="checkbox"/>	Project RPM 5	400	Great looks plus an on the ball, engaging sound that puts it in the serious league, needs good isolation for best results	33/45			●	279
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45			●	268
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●		●	248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalbur arm)	33/45	●		●	259

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO CARTRIDGES

### MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound		●		270
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage		●		244
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		●		265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●		253

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO STAGES

### Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	Tested with the almost-as-good £40 540P, this remarkable phono stage brings refinement and bass weight to budget vinyl	●	●			277
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound	●	●			268
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●				201
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

**TURNTABLE SPECS KEY** **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you.

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

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

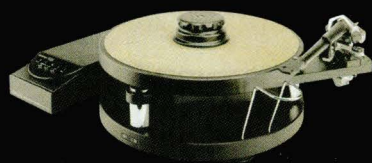
**REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality



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WARNING!! Do not listen to this amplifier unless you can afford it. Every demonstration we have given has resulted in a sale. The brainchild of Herve Deletraz, the NHB-108B is hailed as one of the world's finest amplifiers.

### KRELL EVOLUTION

Developed from the reference level Evolution One and Two, this new range of source components, preamplifiers, stereo and mono power amplifiers represents Krell's finest hour. With no fins or sharp edges, these designs are the epitome of sublime performance and beauty.

### KRELL FBI

If you want a more macho look, then there's the FBI - and what a wonderful name! This alarming-looking beast will force you to reconsider your views on integrated amplifiers.

### GUARNERI MEMENTO

The legend lives on. When Sonus faber launched the Guarneri Homage more than 12 years ago, it unleashed a revolution in loudspeaker design. Now it has been reworked, revitalised and reborn with the benefit of a minimalist crossover and the finest drivers. Just beautiful.

### Laboratorium-Yter

This is THE cable for your Sonus fabers - and as elegant as the speakers themselves. Call for details.

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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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio) for details.

### TOP BUYS



#### Denon TU260L II £130

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



#### Denon TU-1800DAB £250

Combines DAB with FM/AM reception and good all-round design at a tempting price.



#### Creek T50 £550

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



#### Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

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

## Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

### FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROTI TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>FM TUNERS</b>										
EB	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
EB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40		●		●	193
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
EB	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
EB	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		●		230
EB	Rega Radio 3	398	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
EB	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●			242
<b>DAB TUNERS</b>										
EB	Arcam DVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value	DAB,FM	16		●	●	●	269
EB	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
EB	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
EB	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	DAB reception is as good as any and FM performance clearly benefits from Denon's long experience	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●		●	274
EB	Pure Digital DRX-701ES	250	A good introduction to DAB – fine value and simple to use	DAB	99		●	●	●	234
EB	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	242
EB	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60	●	●		●	259

**SPECS KEY** WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. PRESETS How many stations can be stored in memory. RDS Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). REMOTE CONTROL For the couch potato. SIGNAL STRENGTH METER Useful for setting up an aerial. ROTARY TUNING KNOB An ergonomic alternative to buttons.



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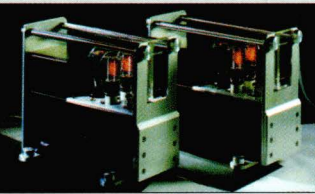
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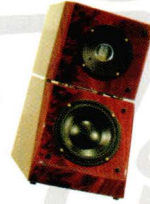
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Micromega Aria

French Flair!

Chinese Grace



JAS-Audio Orsa



Odyssey Audio Stratos

American Beefcake

Monkey says:

" Twiggly isn't the only stylish model to come out of Neasden "

acacoustics, 47 Chartley Avenue, Neasden, London, NW2 7QY  
Tel 020 8830 6509 | [info@acacoustics.co.uk](mailto:info@acacoustics.co.uk) | [www.acacoustics.co.uk](http://www.acacoustics.co.uk)

## Make sure a BADA member is on your short-list.

You've set your budget, read the reviews and prepared your short-list.

Now you're ready to listen! Your local BADA accredited dealer will be only too happy to help - with relaxed demonstration rooms, choice from the best products available and the knowledge to ensure you build your perfect system - you won't be crossing us off!



ABERDEEN	HOLBURN HI-FI	01224 585713	LONDON	AUDIO T	020 7794 7848
ASHFORD	SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI	01233 624441	LONDON	BARTLETTS HI-FI	020 7607 2148
BANBURY	OVERTURE	01295 272158	LONDON	BILLY VEE	020 8318 5755
BASINGSTOKE	AUDIO T	01256 324311	LONDON	GRAHAM'S HI-FI	020 7226 5500
BIRMINGHAM	GRIFFIN AUDIO	0121 224 7300	LONDON	ORANGES AND LEMONS	020 7924 2040
BIRMINGHAM	MUSIC MATTERS	0121 429 2811	MAIDSTONE	HOME MEDIA	01622 676703
BISHOPS STORTFORD	AUDIO FILE	01279 506576	NEW MALDEN, SURREY	UNILET	020 8942 9567
BOURNEMOUTH	MOVEMENT AUDIO	01202 529988	NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE	GLOBAL HI FI	0191 230 3600
BOURNEMOUTH	SUTTONS HI-FI	01202 555512	NORWICH	MARTINS	01603 627010
BRACON ASH	BASICALLY SOUND	01508 570829	NOTTINGHAM	NOTTINGHAM HI FI	0115 978 6919
BRENTWOOD	AUDIO T	01277 234730	OXFORD	AUDIO T	01865 765961
BRIGHTON	AUDIO T	01273 609431	OXFORD	OXFORD AUDIO	01865 790879
BRISTOL	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	0117 926 4975	POOLE	MOVEMENT AUDIO	01202 730865
CAMBERLEY	AUDIO T	01276 685597	PORTSMOUTH	AUDIO T	023 9266 3604
CARDIFF	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	029 2022 8565	RAYLEIGH	RAYLEIGH HI-FI	01268 779762
CHANDLERS FORD	AUDIO T	023 8025 2827	READING	AUDIO T	0118 958 5463
CHELMSFORD	RAYLEIGH HI-FI	01245 265245	SALISBURY	SALISBURY HI-FI	01722 322169
CHELTENHAM	AUDIO T	01242 583960	SHEFFIELD	MOORGATE ACOUSTICS	0114 275 6048
CHESTER	ACOUSTICA	01244 344227	SOLI HULL	MUSIC MATTERS	0121 742 0254
CHESTER	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	01244 345576	SOUTHAMPTON	PHASE 3 HI FI	023 8022 8434
COVENTRY	FRANK HARVEY HI-FI	024 7652 5200	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA	RAYLEIGH HI-FI	01702 435255
DARLINGTON	MUSIC MATTERS	01325 481418	STAFFORD	ACOUSTICA	01785 258216
EAST GRINSTEAD	AUDIO DESIGNS	01342 314569	STOURBRIDGE	MUSIC MATTERS	01384 444184
EASTBOURNE	AUDIO T	01323 731336	SUTTON COLDFIELD	MUSIC MATTERS	0121 354 2311
ENFIELD	AUDIO T	020 8367 3132	SWANSEA	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	01792 474608
EPSOM	AUDIO T	01372 748888	SWINDON	AUDIO T	01793 538222
EXETER	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	01392 491194	TUNBRIDGE WELLS	AUDIO T	01892 525666
GLASGOW	GLASGOW AUDIO	0141 332 4707	WARRINGTON	CHRIS BROOKS AUDIO	01925 261212
GUILDFORD	P J HI-FI	01483 504801	WARRINGTON	DOUG BRADY HI-FI	01925 828009
HAMPOLE, YORKS	HI-FI STUDIOS	01302 725550	WEYMOUTH	WEYMOUTH HI-FI	01305 785729
HARROW	HARROW AUDIO	020 8863 0938	WORCESTER	AUDIO EXCELLENCE	01905 619059
HATCH END	MUSIC MATTERS	020 8420 1925	WORTHING	PHASE 3 HI FI	01903 245577
HEREFORD	ENGLISH AUDIO	01432 355081			
HIGH WYCOMBE	AUDIO T	01494 558585			
HORSHAM	AUDIO DESIGNS	01403 267766			
HOVE	POWERPLANT (HI-FI)	01273 775978			
KINGSTON-ON-THAMES	INFIDELITY	020 8943 3530			
LEEDS	IMAGE AUDIO	0113 278 9374			
LEICESTER	CYMBIOSIS	0116 262 3754			
LEICESTER	LEICESTER HI-FI	0116 253 9753			



BADA members are bound by a strict Code of Practice, ensuring the best possible service & value.

[www.bada.co.uk](http://www.bada.co.uk)



# 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-HD1500** £599

Combining hard disk with CD-R adds flexibility to digital audio recording.

---



**Cambridge Audio Azur 640H** £600

Rip and store CD tracks on hard disk, create playlists, connect to a PC and more.

## Our favourite DIGITAL RECORDERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>CD-R/RW RECORDERS</b>								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		●	●	218
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		●	●	205
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<b>MD RECORDERS</b>								
	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
<b>HDD RECORDERS</b>								
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160	●	●	276
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250	●	●	278

**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

*leaders in home entertainment*

## HIGH DEFINITION TV

*'The biggest revolution in home viewing since colour television'*



### THE MAIN HD CHOICE

Whatever you want to watch

- Movies
- Sports
- Drama

We have the answer

- Plasma
- LCD
- Projection



### NEW InFocus IN76

The InFocus IN76 projector fills your screen with bright, vivid and crisp images, capturing every detail. This 720p resolution projector includes DVI and HDMI inputs, which provide the easiest and highest quality video interface available from DVD players, HD receivers and new HD game consoles with HDCP, bringing the big picture experience to home entertainment and gaming.



### ScreenPlay

From the worldwide leader in digital projection technology and solutions, InFocus® ScreenPlay® DLP™ projectors are changing the face of home cinema offering market-beating performance, specification and value at every price point.

WHAT IF IT?  
SCREEN AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
PROJECTORS  
BEST PROJECTOR UNDER £1000  
SCREENPLAY 7210

### Sim2

Sim2 Multimedia is a world-leading manufacturer at the forefront of home cinema technology and a name synonymous with high-end home cinema projection.



HT300E  
"Spectacular, in a word... Another terrific projector from Italy's finest."

FREE  
What Video  
Magazine  
BUY



H79 "Excellent image quality: strong specification and easy to use - a terrific projector... You must check this one out."

WHAT IF IT?  
SCREEN AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
PROJECTORS  
BEST PROJECTOR UNDER £1000  
THEMESCENE H79

### Themescene

Since its launch, the multi-award winning ThemeScene™ brand has rapidly established a five-star reputation for uncompromised image quality.



# HD TV

## Pioneer PLASMA TVs

- Class Leading Picture Quality
- Twin HDMI sockets
- Wall or Stand Mount
- 43 or 50 inch
- Integrated Freeview Tuner
- What Hi-Fi Award-Winner



"Pioneer's latest is also its greatest: this is a truly wonderful HD-Ready TV."



## Samsung MILANO II LCD TVs

- Superb Quality LCD TVs
- Stunning and Innovative Design
- 32 or 40 inch
- EISA Award-Winner for Best LCD TV



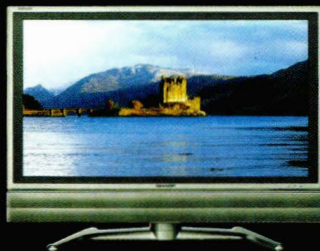
"Nothing distracts from the superb image quality."



## JOIN THE HDTV REVOLUTION WITH SEVENOAKS

**April 6 - May 31**  
a major HDTV  
product promotion in  
all SEVENOAKS stores

- SEE HIGH DEFINITION IN ACTION - JUDGE THE DIFFERENCE
- TALK WITH OUR EXPERTS LEARN WHAT HDTV WILL MEAN TO YOU
- VIEW THE RIGHT OPTIONS FOR YOU



## Sharp Aquos LC-45GD1E LCD TV

- Integrated Freeview
- 45" Screen
- Home Cinema Choice Award-Winner

## Panasonic TX32LXD60 LCD TV

- Integrated Freeview
- 32" Screen
- Twin HDMI Inputs



## Toshiba 32WL56 LCD TV

- HDMI Input
- 32" Screen
- What Hi-Fi Recommended





# HOME CINEMA SYSTEMS

ENHANCE YOUR HDTV VIEWING THROUGH SUPERB SOUND

## Yamaha

World leader in both audio and home cinema equipment. Yamaha's range includes A/V receivers, amplifiers, and DVD players plus the innovative Digital Sound Projector speaker systems.

### • DVD-S2500 DVD PLAYER

"The rock solid Yamaha produces fine picture and sound."

### • RX-V2600 AV RECEIVER

"Amazing - could well be the new class king, and is certainly a real star."



WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
DVD PLAYERS  
BEST DVD PLAYER £100-£1000  
YAMAHA DVD-S2500

## Arcam

Arcam offers the movie and music lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.

### • DiVA DV79 DVD PLAYER

"Great movies aound and vision, and the DV79 serves up fine music, too."

### • DiVA AVR250 AV RECEIVER

"Excels in the key area - sound quality."

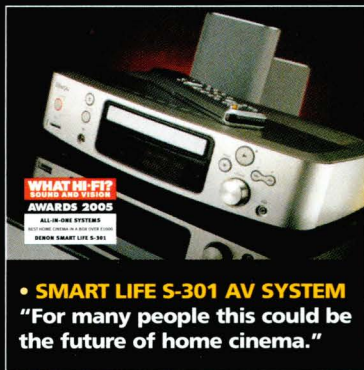


WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2004  
BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER £750-£1000  
Arcam AVR250

## Denon

Denon 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.

Denon's range includes the award-winning DVD-1920 DVD player and AVR-1905 AV receiver and Smart Life S-301 all-in-one home cinema system.



WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS  
BEST ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEM £500-£1000  
DENON SMART LIFE S-301

• SMART LIFE S-301 AV SYSTEM  
"For many people this could be the future of home cinema."

WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
DVD PLAYERS  
DENON DVD-1920



WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
SURROUND AMP/RECEIVERS  
BEST SURROUND RECEIVER UNDER £100  
DENON AVR-1905



## Monitor Audio

### SILVER RS RANGE

Meeting the needs of the most demanding music lovers and home cinema enthusiasts, Monitor Audio's Silver RS speakers take performance to the next level with stunning design, construction and driver engineering.

### RS6AV

"This system will give you truly exceptional sound."



WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
SPEAKER PACKAGES  
BEST COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGE £500-£1000  
MONITOR AUDIO RS6-AV



## KEF

### KHT2005.2 SPEAKER PACKAGE

- 5.1 Speaker Package
- Uni-Q Technology
- What Hi-Fi Award-Winner

"An exciting listen; stylish and compact."



WHAT HI-FIT  
SOUND AND VISION  
AWARDS 2005  
COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGES  
BEST COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGE £500-£1000  
B&W MT-30



### • MINI THEATRE MT-30

"Talented, covetable and worth every penny, the MT-30 (and especially the PV1) could well be heading for iconic status."

## B&W

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.



# LEADERS IN QUALITY HI-FI

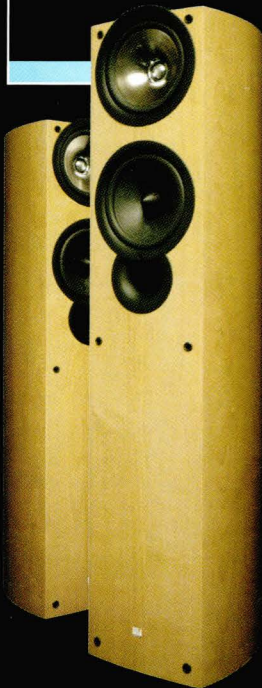
EXPERTS IN HI-FI COMPONENTS  
AND SYSTEMS

SEVENoaks  
SOUND & VISION



## Teac CR-250 DAB CD RECEIVER

- Superb one-box unit
- DAB Radio & CD Player
- Optional Speakers



## KEF IQ5 SPEAKERS

- Uni-Q technology
- Finish options
- Floorstanding
- What Hi-Fi award-winner

**"The IQ5s are little stars, providing stunning scale and authority from discreetly sized towers... The IQ5s are fully deserving Products of the Year."**



## Arcam Solo *For great sounding music*

- Amazing sound from an integrated system
- With exceptional quality CD, FM and DAB digital radio
- Integrated iPod connection - hear how good your iPod can sound
- From Arcam, a great British company



Buy an **Arcam Solo** music system with **Arcam Alto** speakers and receive a **Free 1GB iPod nano** (RRP£109)

## Marantz

Marantz is introducing a host of new products ranging from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and AV receivers. The two main products groups are the 'premium' and 'range' series.

Latest additions to its hi-fi range include the CD5001 OSE CD player and PM4001 OSE amplifier offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.



## Sonos DIGITAL MUSIC SYSTEM

Sonos is the first and only digital music system that lets you play all your digital music, all over your house - and control it from the palm of your hand. Best of all, you don't need a PC in every room, a music server or wireless network. Just a Sonos™ ZonePlayer and speakers in the rooms of your choice and a Sonos™ Controller in hand to access all of your digital music, no matter where it's stored.



**"Simple to set-up, great to use... Sound quality is first-rate."**





# MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

MAKE THE INFORMED CHOICE TO ENHANCE YOUR LISTENING PLEASURE



## 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.

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CD PLAYER  
CYRUS CDBX

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £1000  
CYRUS CDBX



## Primare

Primare Systems has built a worldwide reputation for producing innovative audio and video products that break with convention. Each product is a statement of its desire to be different. In offering a unique blend of sophisticated, timeless Scandinavian design, class-leading build quality, and proprietary state-of-the-art technological advance, out of necessity.

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £1000  
PRIMARE CD01

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
STEREO AMPLIFIERS  
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER UNDER £2000  
PRIMARE L30

## Monitor Audio

### NEW GOLD SIGNATURE RANGE

Thirty years of experience at raising the bar for the world's most demanding consumers, has inspired Monitor Audio to introduce Gold Signature, a new flagship range that reaches unprecedented standards of design, innovation, performance, technical excellence, build quality and value in its class.



**GOLD SIGNATURE RANGE** The new six model line-up comprises a stand-mounting speaker, the **GS10**; two floor standing speakers, the **GS20** and **GS60**; a dual-mode surround speaker, the **GS-FX**; a dedicated centre-channel speaker, the **GS-LCR**; and a 1000W (RMS) active subwoofer, the **GSW-12**.

## 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.



**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2004**  
BEST TWEED SPEAKERS OVER £2000  
Acoustic Energy AE1

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



## Project

Project, one of the world's leading suppliers of turntables, range includes the Award-winning Debut, Xpression II, Perspective and RPM Series.

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
TURNTABLES  
BEST TURNTABLE UNDER £1000  
PROJECT DEBUT III

"The Debut is a superb value-for-money package."



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

**Essential Accessories**



# Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily into one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK

We have 49 stores and are specialists in:-

- Hi-Fi
- Home Cinema
- Custom Design and Installation

## Exceptional Product Range

We have one of the most comprehensive ranges of the best products from leading brands.

To find out more:-

- Call in to one of our stores
- Call us on 0800 587 9909
- Log on to [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com)

## Custom Design and Install

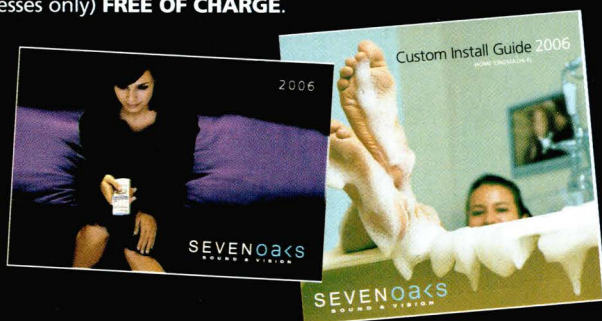
Our custom design and install service ensures that you achieve the best results effortlessly.

- We discuss your vision for your Home Cinema or Multi-Room system
- We visit your home to review the best options
- Agree a system specification and cost
- We manage the Installation
- You have years of enjoyment

## Sevenoaks Guides

### New 2006 Editions

Pick-up a copy of our new **Hi-Fi & Home Cinema or Custom Install Guides** at your nearest Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store. Alternatively, either can be ordered via our Website and posted to you (UK mainland addresses only) **FREE OF CHARGE**.



### £ 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.

### FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS\*

Spread the cost of buying. Flexible finance options are 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.

**Special Offers and Sale Offers - Not in conjunction with any other offer.** Advert valid until at least 04/05/2006, E&OE.

# SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

## NATIONWIDE STORE GUIDE

**ABERDEEN** 01224 252797

● 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**BEDFORD** 01234 272779

● 29-31 ST PETERS 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

**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 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**GUILDFORD** 01483 536666

● 73B NORTH STREET

**HOLBORN** 020 7837 7540

● 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD

**HULL** 01482 587171

● 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**KINGSTON** 020 8547 0717

● 43 FIFE ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

**LEEDS** 0113 245 2775

● 62 NORTH STREET

**LEICESTER** 0116 253 6567

● 10 LOSEBY LANE

**LINCOLN** 01522 527397

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

**LOUGHTON** 020 8532 0770 **NEW**

● 7-9 GOLDINGS HILL

**MAIDSTONE** 01622 686366

● 96 WEEK STREET

**MANCHESTER** 0161 831 7969

● 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE

**NEWCASTLE** 0191 221 2320

● 19 NEWGATE STREET

**NORWICH** 01603 767605

● 29-29A ST GILES STREET

**NOTTINGHAM** 0115 911 2121

● 597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD, SHERWOOD

**OXFORD** 01865 241773

● 41 ST CLEMENTS STREET

**PETERBOROUGH** 01733 897697

● 36-38 PARK ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

**PLYMOUTH** 01752 226011

● 107 CORNWALL STREET

**POOLE** 01202 671677

● LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET

**PRESTON** 01772 825777

● 40-41 LUNE STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**READING** 0118 959 7768

● 3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE

**SEVENOAKS** 01732 459555

● 109-113 LONDON ROAD

**SHEFFIELD** 0114 255 5861

● 635 QUEENS ROAD, HEELEY *OPEN SUNDAY*

**SOLIHULL** 0121 733 3727

● 149-151 STRATFORD ROAD

**SOUTHAMPTON** 023 8033 7770

● 33 LONDON ROAD

**SOUTHGATE** 020 8886 2777

● 77 CHASE SIDE

**STAINES** 01784 460777

● 4 THAMES STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**SWINDON** 01793 610992

● 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD

**SWISS COTTAGE** 020 7722 9777

● 21 NORTHWAYS PDE, FINCHLEY RD *OPEN SUNDAY*

**TUNBRIDGE WELLS** 01892 531543

● 28-30 ST JOHNS ROAD

**WATFORD** 01923 213533

● 478 ST ALBANS ROAD

**WEYBRIDGE** 01932 828525

● 43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT

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# STEREO AMPLIFIERS

*Integrated and pre/power amps*



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

## How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

## Q&A

### SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

### WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

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

### WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

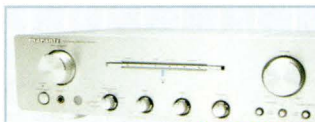
Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

## HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

## TOP BUYS



### Marantz PM7001 £350

If you thought the PM7200 was a great budget amp, just wait until you hear this! Its sound is so detailed and involving, you'll think it costs twice the price.



### Arcam DiVA A90 £890

Top dog in Arcam's DiVA range is this excellent integrated amp. Its strengths include a slick, flexible user interface and beautifully smooth and detailed sound.



### 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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

### Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SCALE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam A65 Plus	400	Occasionally a touch bright, but a good all-rounder with decent detail and plenty of life	5				40	278
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	A very competent mid-range amp with a sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6				90	251
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Very well specified, well built, a delight to use and a real musical all-rounder	7	opt			90	273
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	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
	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Denon PMA-1500AE	500	Well set up to make the most of big-scale music, with copious power and drive, though slightly bright	5				70	278
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Exposure 2010 S	599	Beneath the unassuming exterior lurks a very capable performer that's passionate about music	6	opt			75	262
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension – exceptional value for money	5				70	279
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4				55	255
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price – another budget classic from NAD	7				55	253
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5				80	278
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Primare I21	750	A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality	4				75	273
	Rotel RA-03	499	Does all the basics commendably, only losing out to dearer competition in imaging and fine detail	5				70	273
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,000	Improved version is as involving as ever but now with added focus and bass depth	5				85	278
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Sugden A21 a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7				100	266
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6				100	275
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt			85	255
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Creek Destiny	1,100	Adds impressive high-end virtues to the excellent basic performance we've come to expect from Creek	6	opt			100	277
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Denon PMA-2000AE	1,200	Unusually refined and detailed medium power design with the attributes necessary for good stereo only SACD replay	5				80	275
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Exposure XXXV	1,599	Musical, powerful, tuneful and controlled, though not always the most analytical	6	opt			80	271
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6				180	275
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5				200	247
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5				75	271
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Moon i-3	1,595	Powerful Canadian amp whose lively presentation is particularly suited to big-scale music	6				100	265
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Sugden A21 SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4				40	268
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Union Research Unico 200	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5				200	269

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

### Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>									
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Up-rated entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication			6		50	262
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with good strong sound and just a little veiling			5		136	256
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>									
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little			5	opt		273
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around			5	opt		277
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt			6	opt		100

**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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

## Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5	●	120	269
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Conrad-Johnson AECT2/Prem 350SA	20,000	Valve preamp and solid-state power deliver some of the most transparent and naturally dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	●	350	264
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BB</span>	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	80	276
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●	50	254
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●			180	253
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●			200	247
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Halcro dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	225	243
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	125	250
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6	●		233
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BB</span>	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

# AV AMPLIFIERS

*Surround sound amps for music and movies*

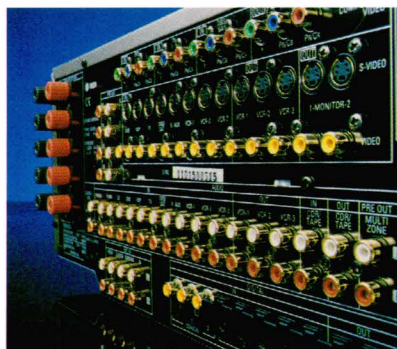


The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or 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



**Yamaha**  
**DSP-AX757SE** £499  
 If you're looking for a multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is your best bet below £500.



**Arcam**  
**DiVA AVR300** £1,300  
 Here's one for those who value great sound over numerous gizmos and gadgets – an integrated AV amp for audiophiles.



**Denon**  
**AVC-A11XV** £2,500  
 A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



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

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE AV AMPLIFIERS

### Multichannel amplifiers

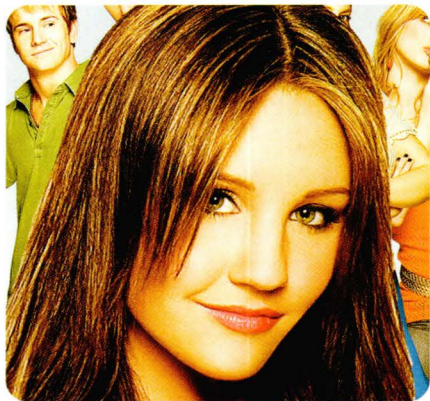
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>MULTI CHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS</b>								
	Arcam DiVA AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	●	100	257
	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o		11	●	140	273
	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
	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 SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	●	3	●	160	255
	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo! Cultured sound, too		5		110	270
	Pioneer VSA-AX10AI	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	●	150	260
	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	●	7	●	100	273
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs	●	10	●	200	253
	Yamaha DSP-AX757SE	499	Exceptional sounding budget/mid price receiver offers brilliant sound per pound; ergonomics could be better	●	9	●	100	273
<b>MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS</b>								
	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
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	●	8	●	135	275
	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
	Classé SSP-600/ CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks high tech digital interfaces		11	●	200	278
	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
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier		4			260
	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
	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

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

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## Panasonic

### 42" Widescreen Plasma Television

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- Viera 3D Colour Management System
- Nicam Stereo with 16w RMS Output
- 4000:1 Contrast Ratio
- Fasttext with 2000 Page Memory
- On-Screen Display
- Built-in Analogue and Digital TV Tuner, Stereo Speakers and Table Top Stand

Model No. TH42PE40PED



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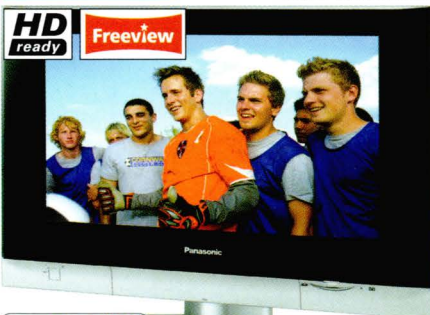
**£1199.20**  
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MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £30

directlink 1421

## Panasonic

### 32" Widescreen LCD Television



directlink 1426

- 1366 x 768 Pixel Resolution
- Viera 3D Colour Management System
- Nicam Stereo Sound
- 170 Degree Viewing Angle (H/V)
- Auto Set-Up
- Integrated Tuner, Speakers and Pedestal Stand

Model No. TX32LX060

empire direct price

**£1230.48**  
INC VAT

MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £15

## LG

### 42" Widescreen Plasma Television



directlink 1422

empire direct price

**£1600.61**  
INC VAT

MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £30

- 1024 x 768 Screen Resolution
- Nicam Stereo Sound with 30w RMS Output
- HDMI Input
- NTSC Playback
- 5000:1 Contrast Ratio
- Sleep Timer
- Integrated Tuner, Speakers and Pedestal Stand

Model No. 42PK50

## JVC

### Slimline and Stylish 26" Widescreen LCD Television

- 1366 x 768 WXGA Pixel Resolution
- Nicam Stereo Sound with 10w RMS Output
- DVI Input
- Dual SCART Sockets
- On-Screen Display
- Integrated Tuner, Speakers and Pedestal Stand

Model No. LT26AG1



empire direct price

**£585.50**  
INC VAT

MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £15

directlink 1427

## SONY

### Complete Home Theatre Speaker Package

- 5.1 Channel Micro Satellite Speaker System
- 100w Power Output Active Subwoofer
- 100w Power Handling Speakers Output
- 1 Way (Full Range Drive Unit) Satellite Speakers
- Comes in Silver Finish

Model No. SAVE155



directlink 142C

empire direct price

**£72.01**  
INC VAT

MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £4.99

## YAMAHA

### Complete Home Theatre Speaker Package

- 100w Main Speaker, 100w Rear Effect Speakers, 100w Centre Speakers and 50w Subwoofer
- Auto Standby Mode
- Advanced Active Servo Processing Design Subwoofer
- Magnetically Shielded Speakers

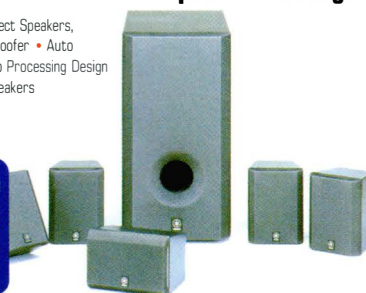
Model No. NSP220

directlink 142B

empire direct price

**£99.55**  
INC VAT

MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £4.99





**YAMAHA****7 Channel Home Theatre Receiver**

directlink 1424

- Dolby Digital Ilx, Dolby Digital and DTS Decoder • 7 x 75w Power Output
- 32-Bit Floating Point SHARC-DSP
- Dolby Digital EX, Complete DTS-ES (Discrete 6.1 & Matrix 6.1) • Auto Delay Adjustment • Built-in AM/FM Tuner

empire direct price  
**£185.87**  
INC VAT  
MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £4.99

**YAMAHA****Dolby Digital Home Theatre DAB Receiver**

directlink 1428

- Dolby Digital / DTS Decoder • Dolby Digital EX, Pro-Logic Ilx Decoding with Cinema and Music Modes • DAB Tuner with Band III Reception Capability • 6 Channel High Power Amplifier Configure
- 14 DSP Modes • 5.1 External Input

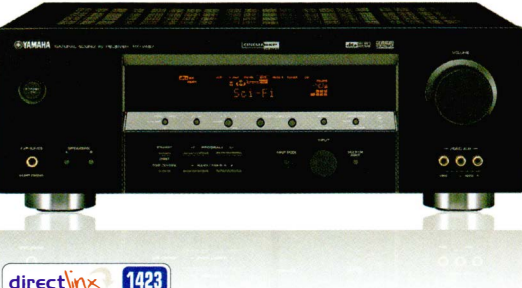
empire direct price  
**£312.29**  
INC VAT  
MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £4.99

**SONY****7 Channel Home Theatre Receiver**

directlink 1425

- Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro-Logic(II) and DTS Decoder • 7 x 100w Power Output • AM/FM/MW Tuner with Radio Data System (RDS) Function • 30 Station Presets • 5.1 Analogue Input
- 2 Component / 2 Composite Inputs

empire direct price  
**£139.20**  
INC VAT  
MAINLAND UK DELIVERY: £4.99

**YAMAHA****6 Channel Home Theatre Receiver**

directlink 1423

- 6 x 85w RMS Power Output • Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro-Logic II and DTS-ES Matrix 6.1 in Phantom Mode • 21 Surround Progs • Silent and Virtual Cinema Modes • AM / FM Tuner • 32-Bit Original LSI • Versatile Digital Inputs

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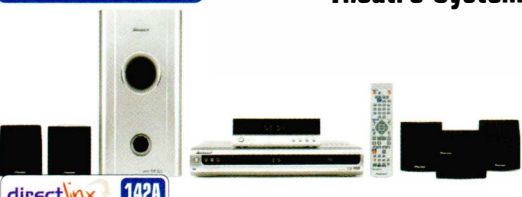
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# STEREO SPEAKERS

*Speaker pairs for stereo sound*



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

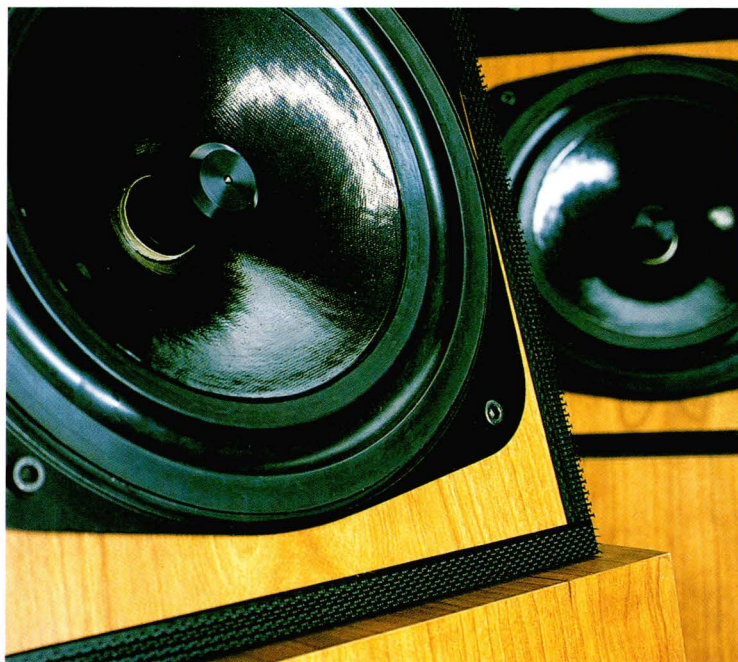
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

## Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

## Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



## Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

## Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

## POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

## Q&A

### IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

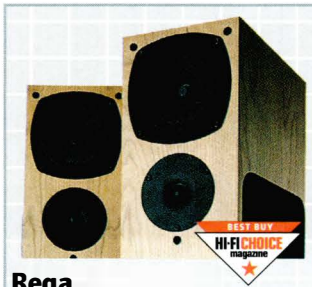
Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

### DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.



## TOP BUYS



**Rega R3** £448

A neat little floorstander that really knows how to communicate with music. Its sound is crisp and agile, and what it lacks in sheer bass weight it makes up for in energy.



**KEF iQ9** £800

This superbly judged floorstander delivers a clean, powerful and transparent sound, with impressively taut bass. A very fine all-rounder for the money.



**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 BEST BUY 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
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		A	30	●		226
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26		A+	50	●		277
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	ALR Jordan Entry L	500	Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency	20,86,29	●	A	23	●		279
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26		A-	55		●	253
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28		A-	40	●		279
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●		237
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Dali Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●		271
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Dali Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	●	A+	22	●		275
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24		A	40	●		215
	Dynaudio Audience 52	557	Brilliant neutrality, though a little understated dynamically (wood veneered version, as tested - £647)	20,33,26		A-	30	●		250
	Dynaudio Focus 110	850	Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness	17,30,28		A-	38	●		279
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	●	A-	28	●		273
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40		●	269
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25		A-	40	●		265
	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	●	A-	25	●		275
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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
	Harbeth NRG2	650	Strikingly styled standmount majors on dynamic excitement at some expense in smoothness and coloration	19,34,29		A+	42		●	263
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	●	A	25	●		275
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	●	A	25	●		273
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●		271
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●		255
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	●	A	33	●	●	276
<span style="color: #c00000;">■</span>	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

**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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**JOE**  
(Tigger) Smooth talker



**PHIL**  
(Philly the Kid) The charmer

These are the men behind the most renowned crime in the audio visual world – the Unilet Blue Murder Sale. After the sensational scenes that greeted the 20th Blue Murder Sale last year, rival dealers were hoping the authorities would apprehend these villainous price-slashers and put a stop to the Blue Murder Sale once and for all. But the news on the streets is that, due to public demand, New Malden High Street will once again witness the return of the hunters searching for yet more bargains on some of the most prestigious hi-fi and home cinema equipment yet released.

### The Victims:

No one is safe! Ex-demonstrators, previously-owned, factory specials and many virginal examples from some of the best families around will fall prey to the manic price-cutting spree that lasts from April 29 right through to June 3.

### The Motive:

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appreciate the difference quality can make. But a year is a long time and every Spring they decide to have a good clearout to make way for even more models.

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Everyone who's anyone in the hi-fi world already knows there's absolutely nothing like the Unilet Blue Murder Sale. The 'regulars' will be queuing early to grab the super specials. If you are serious about quality when it comes to audio and home cinema, you can't afford to ignore the sale that's like no other.

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## Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

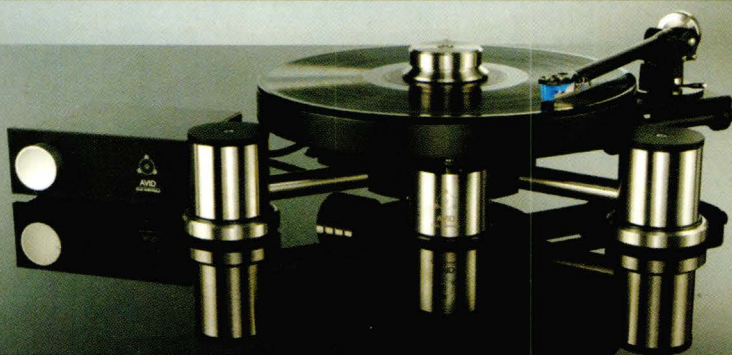
# STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (HxW) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<span>BB</span>	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
	Nbien NX6	899	Very nice cabinet work for the money and a decent speaker it makes too with good imaging and low noise	21,38,30		A	46		275
	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
<span>BB</span>	PMC GB1	995	Ultra-compact floorstander is beautifully clean, articulate and free from boxiness, with a notably delicate top end	16,92,24		A+	30		257
<span>BB</span>	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line stand-mount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30		A	28		275
<span>BB</span>	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23		A+	40		267
<span>BB</span>	Quad 21L	695	Elegant lacquer finish floorstander has a smooth, well balanced sound, even bass and good detail projection	21,80,26		A+	25		263
<span>BB</span>	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24		A	50		269
<span>BB</span>	Rega R3	448	Discreet, pretty and fine value. A little lightweight but impressively open, it delivers music with great agility	20,76,28		A	40		265
<span>BB</span>	Tannoy Fusion 4	350	This big d'Appollo twin two-way has fine coherence and dynamics. A neutral and even all-rounder	21,97,29		A	20		255
<span>BB</span>	Triangle Antal ES	975	Neither pretty nor smooth but a very exuberant and involving communicator, with plenty of scale and expression	20,108,34		A	20		263
<span>BB</span>	Triangle Titus ES	370	Not pretty but busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	18,37,30		A-	40		269
<span>BB</span>	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40		265
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
<span>BB</span>	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,690	Luxury miniature has a laid-back but bouncy sound, a marvellous dynamic range and very superior imaging	19,31,25		A-	30		251
<span>BB</span>	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,200	Slim, laid back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range	17,99,26		A	28		275
<span>BB</span>	ATC SCM35	1,999	If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory, this is a speaker to treasure	23,88,30		A-	48		250
<span>BB</span>	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22		A+	27		271
<span>BB</span>	Audiovector Mi 3 Signature	2,320	Smooth and beautifully balanced with superb neutrality, wide dynamic range and a warm, sweet character	20,100,29		A-	24		260
<span>BB</span>	Audiovector Mi 3 Super	1,596	Dynamically very expressive, clear and intelligible voices, arguably even better value than the Signature version	20,100,29		A	20		267
<span>BB</span>	Aurum Cantus Leisure 3SE	1,200	Fabulous lacquer finish and a classy ribbon tweeter. Sounds smooth and sweet, if a touch laid back	25,40,30		A	28		263
<span>BB</span>	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32		A	20		257
<span>EC</span>	B&W 802D	8,000	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication. Makes sweet music	37,115,56		A	<20		267
<span>BB</span>	B&W 805S	1,600	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back but otherwise a real delight	24,39,33		A	25		271
<span>BB</span>	B&W XT4	1,699	Gorgeous alloy-encased, super-slim floorstander has notably clean bass and a well-balanced, if polite, sound	15.2,114,20		A-	25		278
<span>BB</span>	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36		A-	20		260
	Beauhorn B22 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75		A+	80		244
<span>BB</span>	Canton Vento 809DC	1,800	Quick, lively and agile, with fine overall coherence and expressive dynamics. A thoroughly impressive allrounder	25,112,35		A	30		267
	Chario Cygnus	1,200	Beautiful solid walnut sides. Port tuning suspect, but laid back sound has fine delicacy, imaging and refinement	20,96,27		A-	28		275
<span>EC</span>	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46		A	20		264
<span>EC</span>	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26		A	45		277
	Elac FS 607 X-Jet	5,000	Highly revealing and capable, the mid/tweeter provides impressive detail and depth of soundstage	29,108,33		A	28		269
<span>EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53		A-	20		248
<span>EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53		A+	30		255
<span>EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26.5,111,35		A-	25		276
<span>EC</span>	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be	3,799	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,425,58		A	50		245
	Focal-JMLab Profile 908	1,300	Open and revealing especially of spatial and atmospheric detail, makes up for its bass restraint with joy de vivre	23,39,27		A	50		274
	Focal Profile 918	1,999	Strikingly original styling, well balanced with sweet treble, but lacks smoothness and presence is very laid back	23,99,35		A-	25		277
<span>EC</span>	Gamut L5	5,900	Impressive build and sophisticated driver design make the L5 a stunning speaker with rare transparency levels	20,116,43		A-	32		271
<span>EC</span>	Krell Resolution 2	6,497	Large., but good looking with Sonus Faber type elasticated front. Musically a great full bandwidth all-rounder	122,29,61		B	28		273
<span>EC</span>	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27		A+	35		244

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# Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

## Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM Hz?	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	MartinLogan Mosaic	1,799	Curious hybrid construction marries many panel speaker-like attributes with moving coil simplicity	24,102,30	●	A-	46	●		257
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride	24,121,37	●	A-	35	●		264
	Naim Ariva	1,275	Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter	23,88,31	●	A	25		●	259
	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18	●	A	25	●		267
	Neat Motive 1	1,200	Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative	16,92,5.20	●	A-	20	●		276
	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	●	A	20	●		260
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25	●		237
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●		254
	Rega R7	1,498	Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character	27,98,35	●	A	25	●		271
	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	●	A	20	●		256
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	30	●		265
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30		A-	48	●	●	274
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	1,995	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer	20,100,25	●	A	<20			279
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●		259
	Sonus Faber Concerto Domus	1,799	Great choice, especially for acoustic material, which performs significantly above its price level	21,99,31	●	A	35	●		270
	Sonus Faber Cremona A.	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48	●		246
	Spendor S6e	1,495	Combines deep, powerful bass with an attractively open midband, but perhaps too much restraint up top	30,88,19	●	A+	23	●		257
	Spendor S9e	2,895	An improvement on the original S9 - very entertaining at high levels with a fabulously open and weighty bass	24,101,38	●	A+	40	●		256
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●		240
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35	●		277
	Triangle Celius ESW	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	●	A	22	●		277
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Triangle Magellan Concerto	9,995	Scintillating midrange and treble, with tuneful, well-timed bass - a thoroughly engaging musical ride	28,149,34	●	A	35	●		262
	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65		A	20	●		270
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●		261
	WEGG3 Stellar 1	4,995	A full-range sound from a small(ish) box is possible, but only if you are very careful about set up, room and amps	35,97,45	●	A-	28	●		275
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●		254
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">E.C.</span>	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36	●	A	20	●		252

# AV SPEAKERS

## Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

### Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

### SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

### SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.



## TOP BUYS



**B&W**  
600 S3 package £900  
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



**Naim**  
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385  
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



**ATC**  
Concept 3 £4,877  
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



**Linn**  
Akurate package £13,750  
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

## Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

■ BEST BUY ■ EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
■	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	● opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●	241
■	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●	224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●	224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●	241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●	251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●	232
■ EC	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●	253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	232
■	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●	241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A price among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38	●	262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25	●	210
■	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20	●	268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29	●	269

**SPECS KEY** EASE OF DRIVE How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: A+ 25 watts plus A 50 watts plus A- 100 watts plus.

**NUMBER OF SPEAKERS** The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

**FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

## Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

■ BEST BUY ■ EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
■	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
■ EC	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
■	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
■	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
■ EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

**SPECS KEY** SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.

**BASS FROM** How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.



*Do you want to choose your hifi or home cinema system, in a comfortable and relaxing environment...?*

*Do you want friendly and impartial advice ( and a cup of tea) ...?*

*Do you want to buy your system based on what you hear, and see, and not what somebody tells you...?*

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**Nobody else** in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

Apollo, Arcam(Diva/FMJ), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

**Nobody else** in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & **FMJ**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

Specialist set up services: **ISF Display Calibration**.

**Nobody else** in the area offers you a "**One Stop Solution**" to all of your home entertainment requirements, as we are also Custom Installation experts. Discuss your requirements with us and we can survey, design, install, commission, and maintain full Sound and Audio-Visual distribution, and automated lighting around your home.

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# HEADPHONES

*For your ears only*



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier.

Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on

the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

### Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

## Our favourite HEADPHONES

🏆 BEST BUY 👑 EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
🏆	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
🏆	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
👑	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250		194
🏆	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
🏆	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
🏆	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort		●			●	200	●	270
🏆	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
👑	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
👑	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
👑	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. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

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## Ayre C-5xe Universal Audio Player

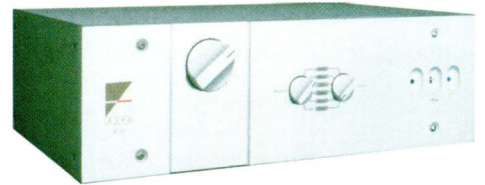
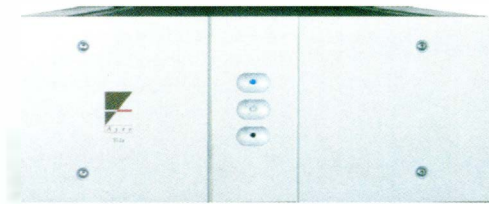
Just awarded not only **Stereophile's Digital Source of the Year** but also overall **Product of the Year**; yes it really is that good!

*"The C-5xe, as it turned out, was the very best-sounding product Wes Phillips heard all year... [a] true reference that combines superb sound quality with inspired and passionate engineering. I have yet to hear an SACD or DVD player that rivals it for pure audio purity. I'd buy it for its CD reproduction alone and consider the other formats very welcome extras."*



## Ayre K-1xe Pre Amp and V-1xe Stereo Power Amp Hi-Fi Choice Gold Award 2005 Best Amp over £5000

*"Just when you think you've got the world of hi-fi pretty much covered, along comes a product that makes you redefine just how good your system can sound... We were truly blown away by the living, breathing music they delivered. Expensive? Yes, but worth every penny."*



*"Our reference Gamut D200 power amp (also a 200 watter) is nowhere near as fine or rich as the Ayre V-1xe which also has more dynamic kick as well. The K-1xe pre amp's ability to separate out instruments and to portray their sound is the best we've encountered. To be frank I want one and I want it bad."*

**Jason Kennedy**  
Hi-Fi Choice October 2005



## Esoteric X-01 SACD Player Hi-Fi Choice Gold Award 2005 Best SACD Player

*"Our gold award simply had to go to this on the grounds that it's the best SACD player we've ever heard: supremely natural, detailed and communicative. The best digital audio component yet devised? It's certainly up there..."*



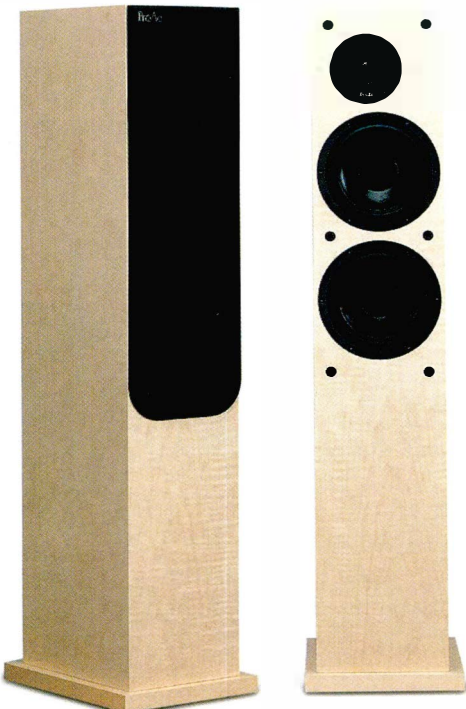
## Lyra Titan i MC Cartridge Hi-Fi News Gold Award 2005 Best Cartridge over £1000

*"Flagship model from Lyra comprises a one piece titanium body and diamond coated boron cantilever. A world reference pick up cartridge."*



## ProAc Studio 140 Loudspeakers What Hi-Fi Award 2005 Best Loudspeakers £1000-£1500

*"From Gorillaz to Mahler's Symphony No.6 the sound is unforced and wonderfully natural. Quality always shines through..."*



## SME Model 10 Hi-Fi Choice Gold Award 2005 Best Turntable £1000-£3000

*"The Model 10 is engineered to absolute perfection, with a sound quality to match and its delivery of the musical truth will eclipse just about every other turntable in its price range."*



# 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.

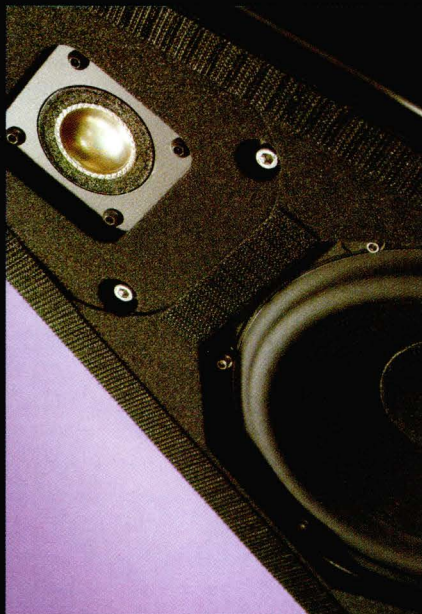
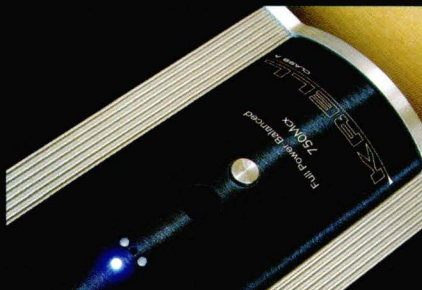
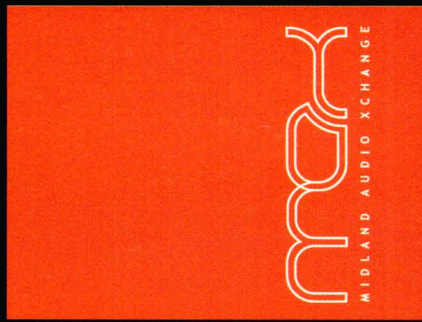
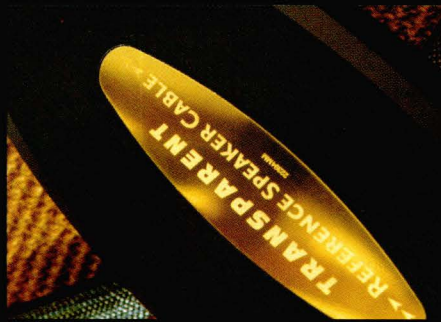
## Our favourite CABLES

  BEST BUY   EDITOR'S CHOICE

				SPECIFICATIONS					
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS						
<b>INTERCONNECTS AND SPEAKER CABLES</b>									
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Black Rhodium Opera	297	Very open, clear and detailed sound, with excellent extension at frequency extremes		●	●			260
	Brilliance Hi-Fi Synergy	83	High quality materials help give this cable fine imaging: bass not as extended as some	●		●			275
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable		●	●			255
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass - at a price!	●		●			279
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound at a sensible price	●		●			224
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●		●			278
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	van den Hul The Bay C5	55	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●		●			273
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	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
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>									
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●		●		E	278
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●		E	260
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●		E	265
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads					O	259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●		●		E	279
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>									
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Black Rhodium Disco	4	Lively and energetic with pretty good detail, if a touch bass-light	●		●			274
	Chord Company Signature	117	Dynamic, solid sounding cable, but it's bulky and not very tractable	●		●			255
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, high res and suitable for exacting systems	●		●			278
	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging - a budget bargain	●		●			276
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Lively, energetic and possessed of fine midrange detail and imaging	●		●			277
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●			261
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;"> </span>	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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**LOUDSPEAKERS**

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**THETA GEN. VIII**

The Generation VIII is a full differential balanced DAC Pre-amplifier featuring custom-designed software-programmable digital filters feeding into two channel digital-to-analogue converters per channel, one for each phase angle. It delivers the most accurate, defined, natural sound digital technology offers.

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Reference XL Speaker Cable transfers the full power of the music along with the finest nuances of instrumental timbre and recording venue, stringent requirements for parts selection and matching, the precision placement of all components required by the XL Technology Computer Model, the slow and careful assembly of the elements, and the many measurements taken to verify performance, it takes skilled artisans longer to hand-make a pair of XL cables than some companies take to build an amplifier.

**WILSON SYSTEM 7.1**

Wilson's unique materials research has led to the first new WATT cabinet in its 17-year history. For the first time, the Puppy has a new driver. And to better integrate the two, countless hours were spent refining the crossover.

The changes appear subtle; the difference they make is not in terms of resolution, coherence, bass speed and impact, an already great loudspeaker has been raised to an astonishing new level. Finally, new styling cues join the WATT and Puppy more beautifully than ever.

It was a painstaking process, but at the end of the day we had to be able to say one thing with confidence: This is the best WATT/Puppy the world has ever known.

**KRELL 750 MCX**

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It was a painstaking process, but at the end of the day we had to be able to say one thing with confidence: This is the best WATT/Puppy the world has ever known.

**AUDIO RESEARCH REF. 3**

"Breakthrough" is an overused term, but it is the most fitting word to describe the REF3. As you can probably imagine, it is difficult to write about a new product like this without sounding clichéd, but the REF3 is so good that it is startling when you hear it in your system. How is its presentation superior to the great products that have preceded it? Simply, in every way.

The REF3 is more musically transparent. It presents an immense soundstage that makes everything else sound one-dimensional. Voices and instruments have real body and weight, with pinpoint focus. The deep, powerful bass is fast, articulate, and controlled. It possesses a dynamic swing that is breathtaking. And, most importantly, there is a directness and immediacy that connects the listener with the performance. The results are simply thrilling.



# 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 EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

### Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>EB</span>	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart locks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
<span>EB</span>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
<span>EB</span>	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
<span>EB</span>	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot	75	45,36		5	Glass	261
<span>EC</span>	Naim Fram	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<span>EB</span>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<span>EC</span>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

## Our favourite EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE SPEAKER STANDS

### Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
<span>EB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>EB</span>	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15,20	●		1	220
<span>EB</span>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
<span>EC</span>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15	●	●	5	261
	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
<span>EC</span>	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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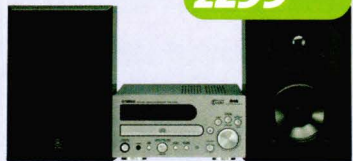
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# GLOSSARY

## TECHNICAL TERMS

**5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO** Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

**BALANCE** Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

**BASS** The lowest three octaves of the audio band – '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 217.5-230MHz 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 the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

**TWEETER** Treble driver.

**TWO/THREE-WAY** Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

**WATTS** (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

**WOOFER** Bass driver.

## DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

**AGGRESSIVE** Forward and bright sonic character.

**AMBIENCE** The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

**ANALYTICAL** Highly detailed. **ARTICULATE** Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

**ATTACK** The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

**BALANCE** Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

**BODY** Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

**BOXY** The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

**BRIGHT** A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

**DARK** A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

**DECAY** The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

**DEFINITION** (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

**DEPTH** (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

**DETAIL** The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

**DRY** A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

**DYNAMIC** The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

**EUPHONIC** An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

**FAST** Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

**FOCUS** A strong, precise sense of image projection.

**FORWARD(NESS)** Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

**GRAINY** A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

**GRIP** A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

**GRUNT** See grip. **HARD** Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

**HARSH** Grating, abrasive. **IMAGING** (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

**JUICY** Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life. **LOW-LEVEL DETAIL** The quietest sounds in a recording.

**MUSICAL** or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

**NATURALNESS** Realism. **OPAQUE** Unclear, lacking transparency.

**OPEN** Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble. **PACE** Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

**PRESENCE** A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room. **PRESENCE RANGE** The upper midrange.

**SEISMIC** Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

**SIBILANCE** An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio. **SNAP** A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

**SPEED** A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing. **STURDY** Solid, powerful, robust sound.

**THICK** A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass. **THIN** Bass light.

**TIMBRE** The tonal character of an instrument. **TIMING** A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

**TRANSIENT** The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

**TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT** A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail. **TWEAK** To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

**TWEAKER** Someone who enjoys this process. **VEILED** Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

**WARM** A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass. **WEIGHT** A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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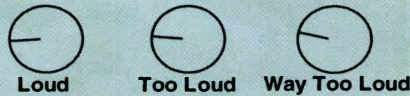
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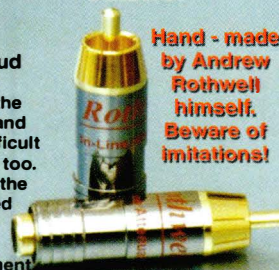


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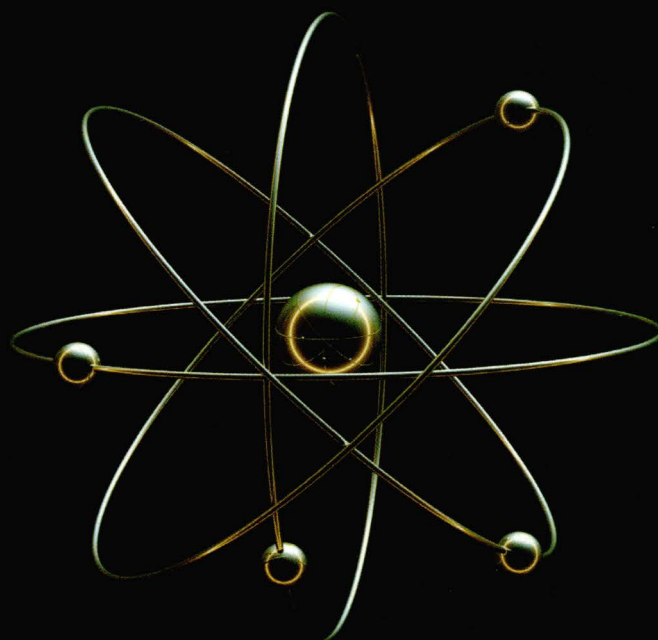
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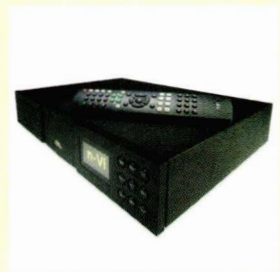
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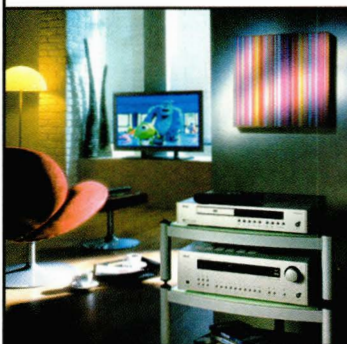
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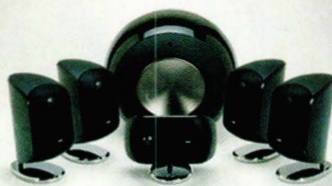
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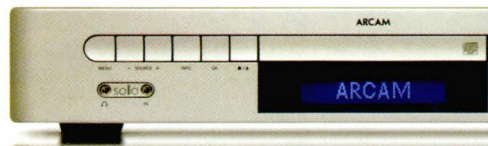
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## The New Densen B-110

The B-110 is the successor to the B-100, which became the most sold high-end amplifier ever from a Scandinavian audio manufacturer. The reviews have confirmed the quality of the "old" B-100 by awarding the B-100 a string of very favourable reviews: "You just can't beat it", "rhythmic magic" and "build quality that should embarrass everyone fighting in this price category" - words that tell you it is time to open your ears and listen! Even so the B-110 is in all aspects a giant step forward in terms of musicality, features, user friendliness and upgradability. This completely new design is simply sonically superior because of the high-end details and features it inherits from its close relation to the B-150. The B-110 even comes with lifetime warranty.

The B-110 employs a true attenuator, while everybody else uses potentiometers or cheap digital volume IC's. Densen use a sophisticated microprocessor controlled attenuator; this is the reason for the distinct click you hear as you adjust the volume and it is a definitive sign that Densen use the advanced relay driven attenuator instead of cheap inferior technologies, which substantially downgrade sound quality. The click is your assurance that Densen does not compromise!

**Features:**

- Upgradeable with external power supply
- Ready for SAXO electronic crossover
- Ready for remote control and phono stages
- Ready for multiroom systems
- Ready for Bi-amping and Tri-amping
- Upgradeable with plug-in 7.1 pass-through surround board

B-110 2x60w 8 ohms / 2x120w 4 ohms - £ 1,000  
B-150 2x100w 8 ohms / 2x200w 4 ohms - £ 3,000



The B-150 has already been awarded Best Integrated Amp of the year in Portugal. The B-110 is a down-scaled version of the B-150, so it is a real High End killer!



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# A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT #22 SONY ES

**S**ony is not usually a brand coveted by audiophiles. Look a little closer, though, and you'll find Sony has produced some class leading, and very serious, hi-fi separates over the years, most notably in the late 1990s which we're focusing on here. As we all became concerned by the millennium bug and whether or not our VCRs would still work, Sony launched the world's first SACD player. Like many first of the line products, the SCD-1 was a pretty awesome beast. Initially costing £2,700 (later to rise to nearly £4,000) it weighed a back-breaking 26.5kg, used twin lasers and pioneered the Direct Stream Digital (DSD) encoding system that's common to SACD products. Like so many other top end Sony products, the build quality is indicative of what's often referred to as 'bombproof'. Sony

in the case, provided 90% of the sound quality for half the price. That being the case, like the Nakamichi Dragon or Revox B77, there's something timelessly noble about the SCD-1. Even today, it demands respect for both its build and sound quality. Second-hand, the SCD-1 is still not cheap, but for £1,500-£1,800 you do save a fortune on the original price and get a piece of hi-fi history into the bargain.

Servicing one of these players, however, can be a little more complicated than with other brands. Sony prefers the customer to contact their nearest Sony stockist or Sony's contracted



Above: Sony's SCD-1 SACD player

Around a year after the launch of the SCD-1, Sony launched the ST-D777ES DAB tuner. Like SACD, DAB was still very much in its infancy. Now, of course DAB is exploding – which is more than can be said of SACD. For £600, the ST-D777ES carried on a tradition of neutral and open sounding Sony tuners. Crucially, the ST-D777ES featured FM/MW and LW as well as DAB. Like the SCD-1 it was also beautifully finished with an all-metal, champagne coloured case.

Although this tuner was discontinued some years ago, it still looks thoroughly up-to-date and remains a joy to use. With FM, it's no Naim NAT01, but is still surprisingly capable. Equally surprising is just how cheap these tuners are now. Regularly available for around £200, the ST-D777ES represents fantastic value for a second-hand, new technology product. Here are two models, then, that show there's still much more to Sony than the gaming phenomenon that is the PlayStation! **HFC**

Dominic Todd  
Next month: TDL

**“Like the Revox B77, there's something timelessly noble about the SCD-1.”**

had a technology to showcase and another format to beat (DVD-Audio) and so the SCD-1 had to be better than good. When it finally hit the UK, that's exactly what it turned out to be.

The massive bulk of the machine was echoed by a similarly huge soundstage and while the CD sound quality wasn't quite as good as the best CD players at the price, it wasn't far off. Switch to SACD, (two-channel only) in this case, and the sound quality astounded many reviewers in its day. Later models, as so often is

the case, provided 90% of the sound quality for half the price. That being the case, like the Nakamichi Dragon or Revox B77, there's something timelessly noble about the SCD-1. Even today, it demands respect for both its build and sound quality. Second-hand, the SCD-1 is still not cheap, but for £1,500-£1,800 you do save a fortune on the original price and get a piece of hi-fi history into the bargain. Servicing one of these players, however, can be a little more complicated than with other brands. Sony prefers the customer to contact their nearest Sony stockist or Sony's contracted

## DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 22 Enclosure Subtleties (continued)

**W**hat is the best material for building a loudspeaker enclosure? Tradition suggests some form of wood-based compound, though all sorts of other alternatives have been tried down the years, with varying degrees of success.

Solid wood might seem an attractive prospect, and does make it easy to shape an enclosure without the need for veneerwork. However, solid wood is acoustically poor, as the glues used to bind together the various wood composite materials tend to add useful damping not found in the solid version.

There are numerous variations on the wood composite theme, but the most popular three

from the speaker builder's point of view are plywood, chipboard and medium density fibreboard (MDF), each of which has its advantages and disadvantages.

Finnish or Russian birch plywood (where the wood grows slowly, with consequently fine grain) is widely regarded as the best from an acoustic performance perspective. But, it is rarely found in commercial speakers because it's costly and difficult to cut.

Chipboard – preferably of the high density variety – also tends to fragment, though its fairly large wood chips do seem to be rather more effective than MDF at damping the panels and internal sound waves. However,



MDF – effectively a resin-bonded sawdust – has the major bonus that it has no tendency to flake or fracture, and therefore is much the easiest and most predictable to work. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

### DIY CONTACTS

**FALCON ACOUSTICS** ☎ 01493 751100  
🌐 www.falcon-acoustics.co.uk

**WILMSLOW AUDIO** ☎ 01455 286603  
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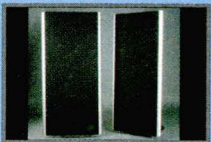
**Acoustic Signature**  
Hand-crafted masterpieces of music making, which are developed, produced and made for natural listening. Ask us to tell you about the 'Mambo' model...



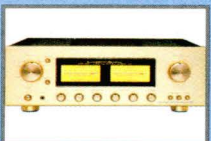
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We are the south coast main dealer for this exciting new range of electrostatic speakers from Kings Audio. If you love full-range electrostatics you must audition these!



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Krell FPB25M	£4500
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Resolution Audio CD55	£1200
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Sony SACD I	£1700
Sound Lab A1 speakers	£6000
Tannoy Canterbury	£4995
Tom Evans Groove	£1000
Transparent Ultra 8ft speaker cable	£900

**HI-CAM**

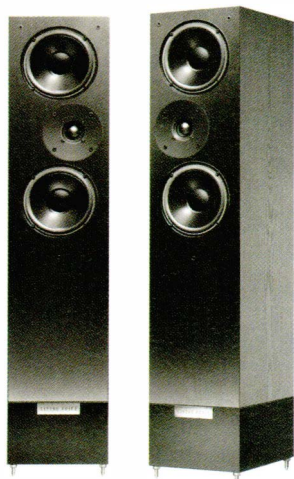
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EAR HEADPHONE AMP HP4 NEW		2275
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Definitive Audio offers you a fresh and focused way of choosing a sophisticated sound for your home. Our service is bespoke, our philosophy is unique and our reputation peerless. The systems we create are infused with an elusive quality that will expand your musical horizons. We use a judicious selection of the world's most artful and ingenious creations, including the beautiful, beguiling Living Voice loudspeakers from England and Kondo KSL electronics from Japan.



Living Voice IBX-R2

**Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items**

	Sale	New
<b>Voyd</b> Reference turntable. Unique example of this benchmark design. Offered for sale on behalf of the designer - never previously sold. This turntable has a huge specification including, 30mm Lexan platter; massive Papst motor system; extreme power supply; beautiful satin rosewood plinth. Sale includes <b>AudioNote</b> wired <b>Helius</b> Cyalene tonearm and <b>ANUK</b> IO-limited field coil cartridge with PSU (15 hours use). Comes with manufacturers warranty on turntable.	£15000	£7500
<b>Conrad Johnson</b> Premier 140 - 2003 - very good condition	£4500	£7500
<b>Living Voice</b> Avatar Mk1 loudspeaker - cherry	£1500	£2700
<b>Living Voice</b> OBX-R2 loudspeaker - walnut	£3400	£4400
<b>Sugden</b> Bijou phono amp - new	£400	£600
<b>Pathos</b> 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless	£1700	
<b>Audion</b> Golden Night 300B monos - very good condition	£1750	£3200
<b>Unison</b> Simply 845 beefcake integrated amp	£2250	£3750
<b>Cardas</b> Neutral Reference speaker cable - 2 metres - very nearly new	£500	£780
<b>Cardas</b> Neutral Reference interconnect - 1 metre - very nearly new	£350	£500
<b>Border Patrol</b> Control Unit 1 - line pre-amp	£1000	£1700
<b>Border Patrol</b> Control Unit 2 - line pre-amp	£2000	£3000
<b>Art Audio</b> PX25 - 5watts - Single ended flea power for the sensitive type	£3000	£4000
<b>Nottingham Analogue</b> Spacedeck with RB300 & Living Voice Mystic Mat	£700	£1100
<b>Helios</b> Model 1 CD player	£500	£1300
<b>Audio Note Japan</b> M7 pre-amp - line only	£3000	
<b>SJS</b> Arcadia Model 2 line pre-amp - copper chassis - silver wiring - v. good	£750	£2000
<b>Musical Fidelity</b> Nu-Vista M3 CD player (2001) - as new condition - boxed	£1600	£3000
<b>Musical Fidelity</b> Nu-Vista MC integrated amp (2000) - as new - boxed	£1600	£3000
<b>AVI</b> S.2000 M1 integrated amp	£400	£1000
<b>Border Patrol</b> S20 power amp - mahogany - nearly new	£5000	£7000
<b>Audio Mecca</b> Mephisto CD transport	£1000	£2500
<b>Sugden</b> Masterclass integrated amp	£2200	£3300
<b>Canary Audio</b> 301 300B stereo push-pull power amp	£3400	£5400
<b>Canary Audio</b> 303 [110v] - new - fillet mignon	£3800	£7200
<b>Audio Innovations</b> Series 1000 monos - fully serviced - class A classic	£900	
<b>AudioNote UK</b> CDT-Two	£1400	£2250
<b>B&amp;W</b> CDM	£250	
<b>Audio Innovations</b> Series 500 integrated - classic - fully serviced	£800	
<b>Aloia</b> pre-amp - very new - very good condition - beautifully made - OK	£900	£2800

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 List changes daily so visit [www.shadowaudio.co.uk](http://www.shadowaudio.co.uk) regularly!

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	Resolution Audio CD50 CD player, black, remote (£3000)	£895
	Musical Fidelity A3.5 CD player, boxed (£995)	£695
	Unison Research Unico CD, latest specification 24/192 (£1250)	£995
	Audionet ART V2 CD Player, ex-dem, boxed, warranty (£2450)	£1695
	Roksan Caspian CD player (£1100)	£395
	Cyrus CD8 in silver, excellent condition, stunning	£495
	Marantz CD94, boxed, manual 9/10 condition	£299
	McIntosh MCD205 5 disc cd player, ex-dem.(£2405)	£900
	Shanling CDT-100 (3D acc UK model) (£1600)	£990
	Copland CDA 289 cd player (£1850)	£799
	Marantz SA-11S1 Flagship SACD player (£2000)	£1595
	Musical Fidelity X-10v3 Tube buffer stage (£299)	£195
	Meridian 508 20-bit cd player, as new (£1500)	£695
	Talk Electronics Thunder 4 + Whirlwind 3, cd+ upgrade PSU (£1900)	£695
	Naim CDi, boxed in excellent condition (£1999)	£499
	Wadia 302 CD player, boxed as new, (£4000)	£2995
	Advantage CDT5 in black, just fully serviced (£4595)	£1395
	Cyrus CD6, crackle black finish, unmarked (£650)	£395
	Bel Canto PL-1 Universal CD/DVD/ASACD (£9490)	£900
Audio Analogue Paganini (£950)	£695	
Roksan Kandy MKIII silver/black ex-dem	£450	
amplifiers	Audio Note M3 pre-amplifier, boxed as new, in silver (£3500)	£1695
	Bryston 6BS1 power amplifier (3-channel) (£4500)	£2495
	EAR 864 valve pre amplifier, boxed as new (£2000)	£1095
	AVI Lab Series amplifier, boxed as new (£1500)	£995
	Musical Fidelity kW500, originally supplied by us new. (£4000)	£2999
	Bryston 4BS1 power amp, black, still under warranty.(£2750)	£1995
	Vincent D150 Hybrid power amplifier, Good condition, Incredible	£395
	EAR V20 integrated amp. Stunning looks/performance (£3595)	£1695
	McIntosh MC252 power amp, 6mths old, few hours use only.(£3852)	£2495
	Musical Fidelity KW (6112) Tube Pre, as new (£3000)	£1995
	Musical Fidelity kW750 power amplifier (£5999)	£3795
	Croft Syntegra hybrid Integrated, ex-d (£2500)	£1250
	Croft TS1 with Epoch Pre (£3000)	£1795
	McIntosh MC501 Monoblocks(pair), ex-d (£7800)	£900
	Roksan Caspian Integrated amplifier (£1000)	£395
	Consonance Cyber 800 Monoblocks(Valve) (£3k)	£1995
	Mark Levinson 266 2-box ref pre-amp (£8000)	£2495
	Graaf GM50 Integrated Valve Amp (£4000)	£2795
	McIntosh MA6900 integrated amp (£4549)	£2895
	Conrad Johnson PV14L pre (£2500)	£995
Shanling STP-80 integrated amp (£1300)	£895	
EAR 834L de-luxe line stage valve pre (£1123)	£695	
Cyrus 3 integrated amplifier, black (£500)	£195	
Musical Fidelity A308cr pre-amp (£2000)	£795	
Krell KAV500i integrated, very very rare	£1995	
Audio Analogue Primo Setanta, silver, ex-dem (£475)	£295	
Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta (£950)	£695	
Musical Fidelity A3cr pre, Unmarked condition	£395	
Stello M200 Monoblocks, silver, NEW unused	£900	
Croft TS1 hybrid power amp, ex-d, unmarked (£2000)	£1995	
Pass Labs X505, supplied by us new (£7600)	£6995	
Chord CPA2200 pre-amp silver unmarked (£3710)	£1895	
McIntosh MA2275 valve int (£5773) as new, ex-dem	£900	
McIntosh MA6500 int amplifier, ex-dem (£3361)	£900	
McIntosh MHT200 8x140 watts, ex-dem (£6503)	£3950	
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Bel Canto EVO 2i, boxed as new (£2750)	£900	
Hovland HP100 pre-h built in phstage (£5350)	£3595	
Hovland Radia Power amplifier (£7995)	£4995	
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loudspeakers	PMC IB25 Centre , boxed as new, black, (£2914 including stand)	£1495
	PMC IB15 loudspeakers, in black, new '05, (£3883 inc stands)	£1995
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	Quad 11L speakers, premium birds eye maple	£249
	Merlin VSM MM in excellent condition 10/10 (£8000)	£2595
	ATC SCM-20A S Tower speakers, walnut (£5177)	£1995
	REL Q400E subwoofer in premium maple (£1200)	£695
	Gershman Acoustics Avantgarde speakers, finished in Piano Black	£900
	Laquer, only few weeks old, (£7900)	
	Wilson Benesch ARC's with stands, silver finish (£2.5k)	£1699
	Living Voice Auditorium II in Cherry (£2195)	£1495
	ATC SCM-50ASL in Cherry, 4mths old (£2947)	£4895
	Wilson Benesch Discovery, 8 months old (£5700)	£3895
	Gamut L3, in Rosewood, boxed as new (£3750)	£2750
	ATC SCM-35, cherry, boxed as new (£1999)	£1395
	Wilson Benesch Curve speakers, 4 mths old (£5000)	£3495
	Dali Helicon 400, boxed as new (£3300)	£1995
	Ref 3a Dacapo 1, as new, maple, 2 months old. £2700	£1650
	Triangle Hellade, Champagne finish (£595)	£395
Living Voice Avatar OBX-R in Cherry	£2895	
Quad 989 ESL, vintage, new £5000	£3600	
Quad 988 ESL, in Nouveau, cost new £3750	£2999	
Audio Physic Virgo III, Cherry	£2895	
misc	Roksan Xerxes with brand new Tabriz Zi arm, complete service	£795
	Trichord Dino + never connected power supply (£749)	£495
	Bluenote Bellaria Reference Tonearm, 3 months old (£1500)	£895
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	SME 10a, boxed as new 9mths old only (£3600)	£1995
	Michelle Gyrodeck, Origin Live Tonearm, Trichord Never Connected	£1095
	PSU +DC motor, boxed, manuals, one owner, excellent. (£2000+)	
	Tom Evans Micro Groove Plus Phono Stage (£800)	£495
	Krell KPE Reference Phono Stage	£1395
	SME 10, boxed AS NEW (£2800)	£1895
	SME 20/2a + SME V tonearm (£5695)	£3695
	Wilson Benesch Full Circle+Ply Cart (£2100)	£1495
	Michell Orbe SE boxed as new	£1595
	Nottingham Analogue Spacedec	£695
	Trichord Dino - silver front	£199
	Chord Chorus 1.0m interconnect, one owner 6 months old. (£220)	£129
	Isol8 Sub Station II 3x 150va modules, boxed, as new. (£800)	£395
	Nordost Valhalla 0.6m interconnect, as new condition. (£1995)	£995
	PS Audio P500 power plant + latest Multiwave 2 plus module fitted, (£2400), boxed new, unused.	£1695
	Isotek Substation mains distribution, 2x 600va, 2x 300va and 2x filtered standard. (£1200) sensational performance.	£549
Musical Fidelity X-Cans v2, upgraded to v3	£149	
Musical Fidelity X-10 v3 Tube buffer stage	£195	
AVI S2000 tuner, excellent	£149	
Cyrus PSXR boxed unmarked in black	£249	
Nordost THOR mains conditioner	£995	
Nordost Brahm2 2.0m Mains cable (£895)	£595	
Vertex AQ Roraima Plus, mains lead + filter (£490)	£395	
Nordost Vishnu 2m mains lead, as new (£450)	£349	
Townshend Super Tweeters in Titanium matt	£650	



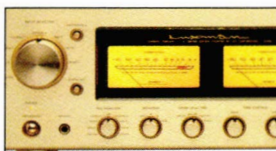
# audiolincs

## ZU Loudspeakers

We're big fans of high sensitivity loudspeakers and all three models in the Zu range boast 101dB.

So, if you're fed up with music that seems to be gasping for breath through complex cross-overs and deisel powered amplifiers, arrange to hear it 'easy'.

But be prepared, the 'shock of the real' is likely to overturn all your preconceptions and cause you to re-evaluate everything you've been led to believe about today's hype-fi.



## ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE

Meticulous engineering, superb materials and massive construction offers class leading performance with style. Our reference turntable.

## LUXMAN

The new Luxman L-509F integrated amplifier provides an effortless 150wpc of convincing musical contrasts with delicious subtlety.

The L-509F is easily capable of driving some notoriously difficult speaker loads and with a very high quality MM/MC phono-stage we believe it's also something of a bargain.

## HORNING

Rear mounted, 12" bass drivers of our reference Horning Agathons deliver real bass and Lowther midrange plus Lotus hf driver offers valve amps a dream coupling.

## LIKE NEW ... NOTHING LIKE THE PRICE!

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AUDION Silver Night Integrated (EL34) amplifier	New valves	£645
AUDIONET Amp 1 Power amp (£3,000)	Mint	£895
AUDIO INNOVATIONS 500 Integrated amp	New valves	£475
AUDIOSTATIC DCI Wing Loudspeakers (£5,000)	Mint, boxed	£2995
BAT VK-5i Pre-amp (£3,495)	Mint, boxed	£1595
BAT VK-150SE Monoblocks (£15,500)	Mint, flight cases	£7995
CARY 300B SE Monoblocks	Mint/boxed	£1995
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C.A.T SLI Ultimate Pre-amp + phono stage (£7000)	Mint, boxed	£3995
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# Cables and Nola Speakers

I have never devoted most of an advert to cables, as I usually use a mixture of interconnect and speaker cables, and often they are very different, but last year at the Novatel Show I came across a new brand with the interesting name of 'Abbey Road Cables', and they very kindly loaned me four sets of Speaker cable and one interconnect. Their cables come in a 'Monitor' range and a 'Reference' range, but as they only had the Monitor Interconnect at that time, that was the only one I got, and I only received the Reference at the Bristol Show, end of Feb. The cables have needed running in, and it's not easy to find time to sit down and evaluate different cables, but I feel the single wired Reference Speaker cable and the Monitor interconnect are now run in, as they have transformed what was anyway an excellent sound. For some time I still used my favourite Orpheus Silver interconnect, as that seemed better, but now the 'Abbey' is run in, the synergy between them is wonderful. They aren't cheap at £135 (1m) for Monitor interconnect, and £452 for 2m pair of Reference single wired speaker cable, but are user friendly, and work wonderfully with my Nola Lotus Elite Signature speakers, and from a brief listen, with the AVI Trios. The Nola Pegasus, by the way, has just received a 'Product of the Year Award' in February from Hi-Fi + Magazine (see www.nolaspeakers.com). At £39K we haven't got them in stock yet, but the smaller models come remarkably close, so if interested in hearing something really out of the ordinary (with Abbey Road Cables), just give us a ring.

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## FOR SALE

**AMPHION LENON** loudspeakers in birch. One year old, mint condition, (£2,500) £1,250. See [www.amphion.fi](http://www.amphion.fi) for details. 01633 440190 (South Wales).

**ARCAM 75P** plus power amp, silver, (£390) £169. Mission 780SE standmount speakers beech, (£350) £169. Denon DM30 remote, £90, all boxed, mint. 0115 960 3934 (Notts).

**ARCAM ALPHA 8 CD** player, instructions, boxed, mint, (£450) £130ono. Before 11am 02476 319920 after 11:30am 02476 842793 Trevor (Warks).

**ARCAM AVR300** silver, mint condition, boxed, £850. Matt 01179 560360 (Bristol).

**AUDIO RESEARCH LS7** preamp. As new condition, boxed, classic ARC styling. Comes with Russ Andrews Oak Cone Feet and power cord, (£1,600) £700. Enquiries to Terry 01376 349210 evenings (Essex).

**AUDIONET ART V2** CD player, eight months old. Stunning sound, boxed with manuals, (£2,500) £1,695. Chord 3300 integrated amp, silver with integra legs, (£6,000) £3,295, immaculate, looks fantastic. Matt 01534 768583 (Jersey).

**AURA VA100** amp, £120. Marantz CD6000 KI Signature CD player, £150 with boxes and instructions. Carriage, £10 per item. 07790 767067 (N.Ireland).

**AVI TRIO** floorstanding speakers, cherry colour, almost new condition, serial number nr 13-07, complete with original boxes and guarantee, all perfect for only £2,000. UK transport from Italy not included. Please call for details – Italy +0039-02-2150930 or email [fedepenzo@hotmail.com](mailto:fedepenzo@hotmail.com) (Italy).

**BRYSTON 4BST** 250W power amplifier, black, rack handles, 15 years warranty remaining.

Absolutely perfect, original packaging, manual and test sheet, £950. Can demo. 01223 204934 days 01487 840659 eves (Camps).

**CASTLE S2 DELUX**, Yew, mint, £625. DNM Reson speaker cable, 4x3 metres with DNM plugs £50. Chord Chrysalis interconnect £20. Terry 01706 521863 (Lancs).

**CHORD SPM 1400E** (two of), black, 480W/8ohms, £6,950. Audio Synthesis DAX Discrete variable DAC, £2,750, both 2-3 years old. Arcam FMJ DV29A DVD player, silver, five months old, £1,000. All mint, Ian 07941 424322 or email [idbrunt@f2s.com](mailto:idbrunt@f2s.com) (Warwickshire).

**CYRUS CD8X** £650. 8vs amp £495. SmartPower amp, £450. Two PSXRs, £225 each. Monitor Audio GR60 speakers, £1,275 also Rega P5 turntable, £425. All as new and boxed 0191 276 1682 or 07761 259403 (Tyne and Wear).

**CYRUS MONO X 150w** monoblock amps in as new condition, smooth black finish, boxed with instructions and power leads as new, £1,700. Call for more info 07961 454229 (Doncaster).

**CYRUS PRE X VS** preamp and PSX-R power supply. Six months old, boxed with guarantee, (£1,500) £600ono. 07766 415325 or 02476 667877 (Coventry).

**DALI SUITE 7.1** AV speakers – 2.8 fronts, C0.8 centre, R0.8 and R0.7 rears/surround, S1.2 sub, brand new, (£2,800) will accept £1,400ono. 07764 600546 (North East)

**DENON DVD-2900** universal player, gold finish, manuals and remote (not boxed) mint condition, great performer, £330ono. 07967 025990 (Norfolk).

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 MC** cartridge. A superb, real-world, moving coil cartridge, absolutely unused, (£250) £200. Thierry, evenings 07905 303718 (London).

**ELECTROCOMPANET** 4.7 pre and AW120 power amp, comes with balanced leads, phono adaptors, manuals, boxes, mint condition, (£4,335) £1,895. Sell preamp separately, but not power. Going multichannel 0161 682 8418 (Manchester).

**EPOS M5** loudspeakers in light cherry real wood. Absolutely pristine with original box, packaging and instructions. Six months old, (£350) £220. ST35 stands in black, purpose made for M5, (£99) £60. Nick 07802 202469 (Warwickshire).

**EPOS** speakers – M5, £260. ELS3, £130. Both light cherry, excellent as new condition, pair of dedicated Epos ST35 stands, £60. Arcam Alpha 7SE CDP, £95. Arcam T61 Tuner, £110. 01323 486216 (E. Sussex). ▶

## WANTED

**ARCAM ALPHA 10** tuner must be in good condition. Karl 01942 234927 or email [karl138ufft@msn.com](mailto:karl138ufft@msn.com) (Wigan).

**B&W NAUTILUS HTM1** centre speaker, any finish considered, discontinued model required 01782 256087 (Stoke-on-Trent)

**DENON AU320 MC** transformer. 01942 891741 (Wigan).

**GOODMANS MAGISTER** Will pay good price, but must be working. 01280 860221 (Bucks).

**MAGNUM DYNALAB** tuner MD102 and remote 01303 523553 or 07821 863950 (Devon).

**MARANTZ DR4050/ DR6000** player/recorder in black. Must be in perfect working order. 01594 860165 or email [jeremy.friar@gloucestershire.co.uk](mailto:jeremy.friar@gloucestershire.co.uk) evenings (Lydney).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR** power amp. 0115 9126424 (Notts)

**SONY CDP-555ES** CD Player Glen. +612 9808 2482 or email [grmsyd@yahoo.com.au](mailto:grmsyd@yahoo.com.au) (Australia).

**YAMAHA CA1000/ CA400** amplifier. Also early Sugden Class A amp any condition. Mike 01772 632082 (Lancs).

## 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!



**FOR SALE**

■ **EXPOSURE XXV RC** integrated amp, £300. Excellent condition plus original packaging (can demo). Four metres Audio Quest bi-wire and plugs, £50. Steve 01482 887409 (Beverley).

**LEXICON MC1** processor hi-fi and home cinema bargain, (£5,500) £1,495. KEF Reference 2 speakers in black, excellent sound and ideal for the typical UK lounge, £750. 020 8205 4710 (London)

**LINN GENKI CD** player, black, ex-demo, manual, lead and boxed. Will give demo, excellent condition and a fabulous machine, bargain at just £550ono. 01384 411914 (West Midlands).

**LINN SONDEK LP12** Nirvana/Valhalla/Basik LVX, walnut, 25 years old but mint, recent service and little used. Dynavector 4x high-output moving coil cartridge, £450. 0121 449 5515 (W.Mids)

**LINN SYSTEM** Karik CD, Numerik D/A converter, Kairn pro preamp, Kudos tuner, four LK-100 power amplifiers, pair of Keltik loudspeakers in rosewood, 24 Linn K400 speaker cables. Mint condition, to sell as a complete system. Demo welcome. Serial numbers available. Buyer to collect, £4,750. 0121 240 8443 (West Midlands).

**LOTH-X AMAZE** high sensitivity bookshelf loudspeakers with stands, cherry finish, £320. 020 8572 2504 (Middx)

**LS3/ 5A FOUNDATION** Designer loudspeaker stands in black. 23.5" tall, very heavy, £70. 01502 518938 (Suffolk).

**MARANTZ CD63MKII KI SIG** CD player in excellent condition. Boxed with instructions and remote, late 1999 unit, £180 (cash please) 0115 9268177 (Notts).

**MARANTZ PM7200KI** amp, gold, boxed, remote, certificate etc. Unmarked as new, £285. Marantz CD7300 CD player, gold, unmarked as new etc, £199 inc. quality interconnect. QED silver anniversary speaker cable 3m pair, as new, £10. Michell gold banana plugs, (£13) £5 per set. 01766 781211 (Wales)

**MEADOWLARK SHEARWATER** Hotrod loudspeakers, rosewood finish, £750. Audio Synthesis Desire Decade power amplifier, boxed, £750. Both items as new, Jim 020 7351 8669 or 07736 339194 evenings and weekends (London)

**MERIDIAN 203** Bitstream CD converter £95. Tannoy FX 5.1 home cinema speakers in silver, boxed, £80. Mission M70 active sub, mint condition, boxed £90. Mission M50 speaker, boxed,

£85. Micromega Stage One CD, £50. Call for more info 07967 912457 (East Yorkshire).

**MERIDIAN 500 CD** transport, £300. Audio Synthesis Passion Ultimate, £400. Boston Acoustics micro 90sat (front), 90c (centre), VRS (rear), REL Q150E, wall brackets, hardly used, (£1,275) £400. All boxed, Bob 01892 580945 (Kent).

**MICROMEGA STAGE 3** bitstream CD player, (£1,000) £400. Musical Fidelity E100 70W integrated amp, (£700) £275. Both with remote, mint, boxed and virtually unused. New/unused, boxed Mordaunt Short M520i Pearl SE speakers, (£210) £100 and Aura Tuner, (£300) £100. Richard 01372 743864 or 07775 758924 or email rrayment@gsw-w.com (Epsom).

**NAIM 112X/ 150X** only two months old, £1,000. Meridian 506 CD 16-bit, £250. Dynaudio 50 speakers, £150. All mint condition, boxed 01865 890936 after 7pm (Oxford)

**NAIM CD5** superb player, fantastic sound, as new condition, boxed with remote, interconnect etc. Serial 170xxx, built at the end of 2000. Happy to demonstrate, £595 ono. Adrian or Martin 07973 358220 (London).

**NAIM CDX2 CD** player, 20 months old, absolutely mint condition, boxed and supplied with remote, transit screw and connector lead, £1,975. Call for more info Andy 07717 202469 (Leicestershire).

**NAIM NAC82** (incl. NAPSC), £1,250. NAP250, £800, HI-CAP,

£300. All excellent with boxes. Andrew 01509 260537 (Leics)

**PIONEER PDR609** CD recorder, (£280) £100. Includes free QED SR75 digital cable (worth £50). Both boxed and perfect. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).

**PMC FB1** floorstanders (cherry) upgraded to + by Audio Excellence. Some marks but with boxes, £750. Townshend Isolda (cryogenic) 3m speaker cable, £200. Chord Chorus 1m, £100. 01495 752200 (South Wales).

**PMC MB2** in oak plus stands, (£8,750) £4,750 for the pair. Pair Bryston 4BST and pair 7BST, (£3,000) £1,250 each amp. Pair PMC XBD2A Black, (£3,250) £1,600 each. email: nmfrancis@btinternet.com

**ROKSAN M SERIES-1** preamp, power amps, black, boxed, mint, just three months old, (£2,750) £2,100. 07891 533084 (Wales)

**REGA JURA** speakers, natural ash finish, vgc, three years old, £275ono. 020 7546 6696 or 07787 551439 (London)

**SONILINK CLASSIC SERIES** A15 integrated amplifier, 5-pin connections, free DIN to phono cable supplied, £40. 3m pair Supra 4.0 speaker cables, £25. (01543 258617) (Cannock)

**SONY XA3000ES SACD** black, six months old, original box, manual and remote, as new can demo, (£800) £350. 01302 538027 (South Yorkshire).

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**TARGET TT2** four shelf rack, £45. Target wall mounted single shelf, £25. Denon DRM510 cassette deck with manual, excellent condition, £25. John 01943 463510 (West Yorkshire)

**TRIANGLE ZEPHYR** floorstanders, vgc, one owner, £110ono. NAD 304 amp, £50. 01691 610589 (Shropshire).

**YAMAHA DSP630SE** home cinema AV amplifier. Black, excellent condition, boxed with manual, £50ono. John 07050 295295 (Liverpool).



Above: Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Signature

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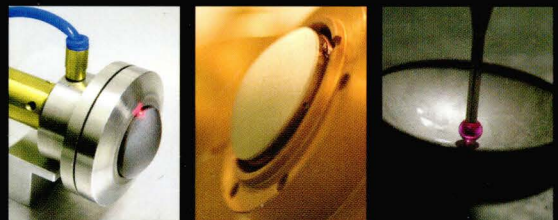
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