

HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND JULY 2006 | £3.95 | WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK



WIN!
A superb Arcam FMJ CD36 CD player worth £1,400!
See page 24

MERIDIAN EXPOSED!

EXCLUSIVE TEST!

We lift the lid off the new G06 CD player

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

£3.95
0.7



9 770955 111083

PLUS!

Meridian's boss reveals the future of hi-fi



SCOOP! Brilliant Marantz SACD sound for under £500



TESTED! Mordaunt-Short's best-ever budget floorstander



RATED! Radical Cambridge amp is a sonic revelation

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



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>
SPEAKERS

- FEATURING
- > A2T Mezzo
 - > Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII
 - > B&W XT4
 - > Dynaudio Focus 220
 - > Monopulse 82
 - > Pinsh 2.1

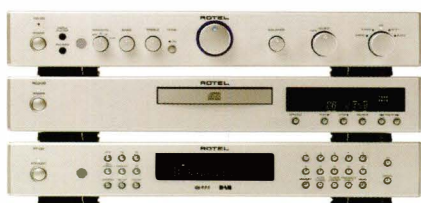
BUYER'S BIBLE
The world's best hi-fi rated





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

Exceptional sound No exceptions



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Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE JULY 2006 ISSUE 281

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



The internet is barely out of nappies, yet it's changed so much already. The burgeoning concept of digital music piped directly to our homes, not packaged on physical media, is just one example. But for hi-fi fans, is this a threat or an opportunity?

Think of it this way. We've always had a choice of music formats; in days gone by, cassette was the mass-market format of choice. In absolute terms it was relatively lo-fi, but that didn't stop the concept of hi-fi flourishing during the 1980s. It's all about choice – convenience and affordability versus high-performance at a premium price. The technology may change but the choice, in essence, is the same; given sufficient demand, there will always be those who offer high-performance alternatives for the transmission, storage and playback of media.

Digital technology evolves constantly, and with evolution come new opportunities. Magazines, for example, can offer readers the chance to interact with each other and receive content via purpose-built websites; *Hi-Fi Choice* has a hugely popular online forum and later this year we'll be giving our website a thorough upgrade. Like any paper-based magazine, our challenge is to ensure that our online presence complements our physical product, while maintaining the kind of engaging, informative and accessible content that only a paper-based journal can deliver.

So, enjoy the issue and your free *Accessories Handbook*. Until next time...

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

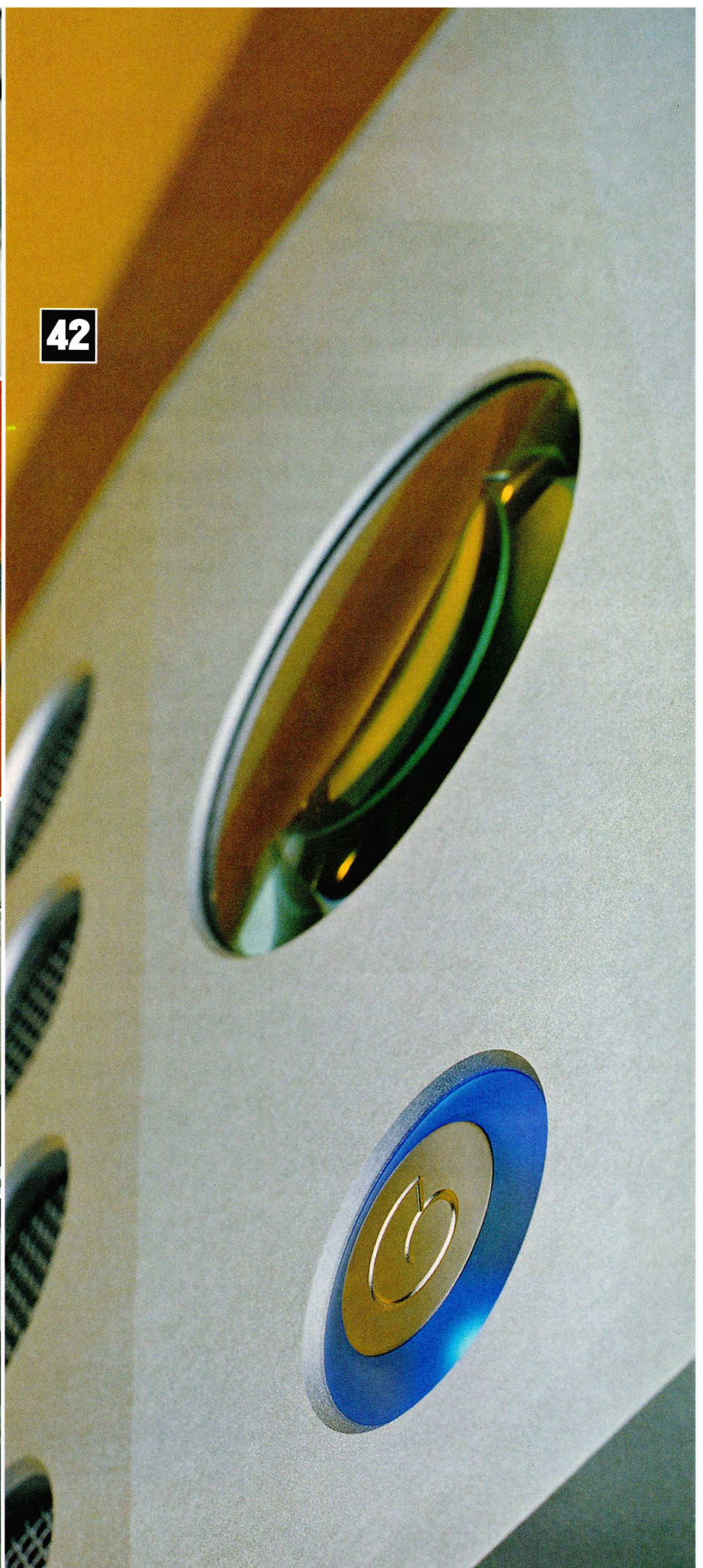
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



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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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV gathering together all our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...

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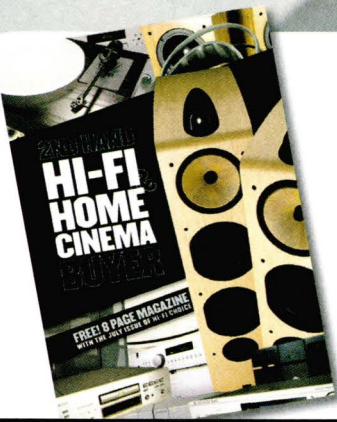
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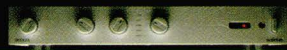
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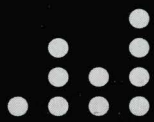




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PRIMARE CDI 10 STEREO CD RECEIVER

▶ The CDI 10 is Primare's answer to hi-fi in a box. The sound of the Swedish company's upmarket CD players is said to have trickled down to its new stereo CD receiver, thanks to the high-performance transport and the 24-bit/192kHz DAC charged with analogue conversion across CD and DAB. At its heart lies a 75-watt, Class D (switch mode) amplifier design, where all incoming signals are balanced to remove noise before the power amp stage. There's

also a DAB/FM tuner, RS232 communications input, a large graphic display and buttons for direct access to commonly used functions.

Primare makes much of the "intuitive user interface" (meaning it's easy to use) and the special attention paid to the quick connection of MP3 players. There's even an line-in socket on the fascia. If it sounds as good as it looks, it'll sell better than Tamiflu in Fife.

To find out more, see our in-depth review in August issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Primare CDI 10

TYPE One-box CD player, amp and DAB/FM tuner

PRICE £1,500

KEY FEATURES 24-Bit/192kHz DACs ▶ DAB/FM tuner ▶ 75-watt Class D amplifier ▶ Comprehensive range of connection options

CONTACT ☎ 01423 359 054 🌐 www.primare.net

DALI Loudspeakers



Stillpoints Isolation



Vertex AQ



ExactPower Conditioners



JAS Audio



Final Electrostatics



Lyngdorf Audio



The word on the street....

what the experts are saying about some of our products!

Lyngdorf CD-1 player/transport

"You can drop this into a system with a price tag in excess of £50,000, and it will not let it down. If its reliability is as solid as its construction, the CD-1 will see most of you out in the way that Quad gear used to go to the grave with its first owners. The user-adjustability will keep 'enthusiasts' permanently amused, and the sound is, well, delicious. Good grief, what a debut!"

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News March 2006.

We say "what else do you expect from the leaders in digital amplification?"



Lyngdorf SDA2175 Power Amplifier

"This is one silky sounding amplifier, stable as hell in its delivery, detailed and dynamic across the midband, and with superb imaging and staging... Supremely smooth and well balanced in every respect, this amplifier starkly shows what other solid-state does wrong. Brilliantly engineered, it's nothing less than an epoch-making audio product."

2005 Power Amplifier of the Year, Hi-Fi World

We say "at £845, this is ludicrous value and performance"

Lyngdorf SDA2175 Integrated Amplifier

"Build quality is equally brilliant for the asking price while the visual design is my favourite of the group as it expresses a buttoned-down discretion that can only come from first-class craftsmanship. In some respects, this product sounds like 'superfi'; its refinement, subtlety, unflappability and sheer control are remarkable."

Hi-Fi World, November 2005

We say "200W of super-fi at £1245!"

Stillpoints Resonance Control

"Approaches that seek to combine isolation with the sinking of internal energy are becoming increasingly common, but the most sophisticated and universally applicable comes from Stillpoints. Underestimate them at your peril – or alternatively, invest in some serious support technology and finally realise the potential in the equipment you already own."

2005 Product of the Year, Hi-Fi+

ExactPower Conditioners

"Remove the ExactPower from the supply chain and the soundstage collapses, the images shrink and congest, the sound goes edgy, thin and tinny. ... Whilst there are those that will find the regulated supply smoother and less exciting, I say listen a little longer, 'cos in reality there's plenty been added and nothing taken away. In fact, dynamics are quicker and wider, they're simply more natural."

Roy Gregory, Hi-Fi+, 2005

AudioDeskSysteme CD Improver

"This is a 'must have' product for anyone really interested in maximizing the potential of their CD/SACD collection. The price is reasonable and the construction and presentation of the product is outstanding. The results are simply quite staggering."

Richard S. Foster, Hi-Fi+, May 2006

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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www.lyngdorfaudio.co.uk

CREEK EVO CD PLAYER AND INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Creek's new EVO series picks up where the 43 series left off back in 2002, and represents the new entry point for Creek ownership. Designed in the UK by founder and owner Mike Creek, the EVO models are built in the Far East, and have been made to look similar to the upmarket Destiny range, even down to the 12mm solid aluminium fascia with machined alloy control buttons.

EVO's integrated amp features a massive toroidal transformer, delivering 85 watts per channel. Overseas readers will be pleased to learn that it also boasts an external voltage

selector, for use in other territories. Up front, there's a large Vacuum Fluorescent Display (VFD) and – as with all Creek amps – you can fit an optional phono board.

The matching CD player has had much emphasis placed on the master clock to eradicate jitter. Despite the 24-bit/192kHz capable DACs, Creek eschews upsampling, citing a lack of performance advantages unless done correctly. Is this the best hi-fi this side of £500?

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

PRODUCT Creek EVO

TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £495 each

KEY FEATURES (CD player) low jitter master clock
 • VFD screen • Same ATAPI CD-ROM mechanism as Destiny CD
 • (Amplifier) Rated power: 85 watts per channel
 • four inputs plus tape • optional phono stage • external voltage selector

CONTACT ☎ 01442 260 146

🌐 www.creekaudio.com



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



ROTEL O6 SERIES

Rotel's long-running, entry-level O2 Series has been replaced with a comprehensive new line-up, intriguingly called the O6 Series (named after the year of launch, perhaps?). Key improvements to the range include 24-bit processing for CD (up from 20-bit), loudspeaker protection for amplifiers, plus the development of Rotel's Balanced Design Concept of exhaustive component selection across the portfolio.

The O6 Series comprises a CD player, a DAB tuner, three integrated stereo amps and a pre/power combo. Heading up the integrated amps is the RA-06, a 70-watt design complete with MM phono stage and separate pre/power amp sections within the same chassis. Six line-level inputs and twin speaker outputs are among the facilities provided. Expect definitive *HFC* reviews of the key components soon.

Price From £250 to £500 each **Due** now ☎ 01903 221 500 🌐 www.rotel.com



PRIMARE A32

This Nordic newcomer is Primare's mammoth A32 stereo power amp. Conservatively rated at 250 watts per channel into eight ohms, the powerhouse uses balanced transmission to banish interference from the signal path. It's based around a massive power supply with four separate windings – two for each stereo channel. Features include both balanced and single-ended connections, twin speaker terminals and a nifty feature called 'Audiophile Standby', which means the amp is always ready to go with no warm-up period.

Price £3,000 **Due** now ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.net

PARASOUND D200

Parasound, the US-based audio/video specialist, has launched a new, competitively priced universal disc player at the nursery slopes of the high end. The D200 uses a newly engineered transport and is compatible with a wide range of formats including DivX, MP3, DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW.

On the audio side, the player features comprehensive bass management for SACD and DVD-Audio, alongside its 24-bit/192kHz DACs. Video, meanwhile, is well served by a high-grade 12-bit/216MHz DAC and Faroudja DCDi processor, with 1080p upscaling and HDMI digital connectivity. Usefully, the video circuits can also be powered down for serious music listening.

Price £1,300 **Due** now

☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.parasound.com



CANTON ERGO

German speaker specialist Canton's mid-priced Ergo range has been revamped to include drive units from the upmarket Vento models. The three-strong floorstanding line-up boasts a brand new cabinet design, in-house drive units and hand-built crossovers. An alloy of aluminium-manganese is used for the tweeters, with black aluminium chosen for the bass/mid drivers. Ergo is due to expand soon with matching 5.1 speakers and smaller stereo models for more compact listening rooms.

Price From £1,000 to £1,600 per pair

Due now

☎ 023 9250 1888

🌐 www.canton.de





MARANTZ ST7001

The recently introduced, entry-level 7001 product range from Marantz has expanded to include a new DAB/FM radio tuner, complementing the SA7001 CD/SACD player (reviewed on p56) and PM7001 integrated amp (reviewed in *HFC* 279). The tuner joins forthcoming KI Signature versions of the player and amp to complete the line-up. The ST7001 features the latest DAB electronics, with a high-grade 24-bit/192kHz DAC from Analog Devices, and Marantz has used a circuit architecture similar to that of its CD players to maximise sound quality. There are over 200 presets, a jog-dial control and an RDI optical digital output, allowing future reception and decoding of radio data when connected to a PC or set-top box.

Price £310 **Due** now ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

NAD C325BEE

For high-quality on a tight budget, consider making a beeline for NAD's latest entry-level integrated amp, the C325BEE. With a host of proprietary technologies instigated by designer Bjorn Erik Edvardsen (hence the BEE suffix), the new 50-watt amp replaces the C320BEE. It incorporates familiar NAD features such as PowerDrive technology for generous dynamic headroom and Soft Clipping to tame overdrive distortion, plus the new BEE clamp, said to improve amp stability under difficult conditions.

Price £250 **Due** now

☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

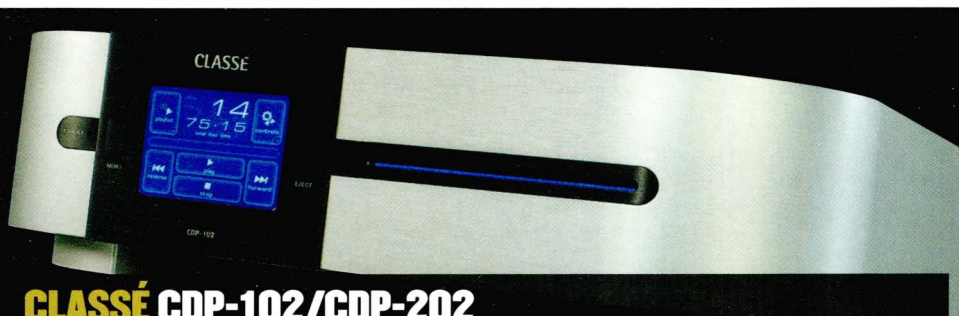


AUDIO RESEARCH LS26

"Like a REF 3 on a smaller scale" is how Audio Research describes its new LS26 preamplifier, the replacement for the long-standing LS25MkII. The pure Class A LS26 does look like a scaled-down version of REF 3 and comes complete with a smaller vacuum-fluorescent display. It has a massive power supply and incorporates the REF 3's high-headroom volume control and other technology filtered down from the flagship. The display is capable of showing remaining 'tube hours' and has eight levels of illumination, including display-off.

Price £3,000 **Due** now

☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.audioresearch.com



CLASSÉ CDP-102/CDP-202

How about a bona fide high-end CD player with the added bonus of DVD-Audio/Video playback? That's what Classé's new Delta Series machines are offering audiophiles: CD first, with DVD-A/V compatibility to boot. There are two CD players to choose from, both of which are unique in featuring Classé's touch-screen control and preview functionality on the front panel – users can navigate DVD-A menus without the need to connect the device to a separate display. Both players incorporate a slot-loading TEAC DVD-ROM mechanism with superior disc handling characteristics, reliability and flexibility, according to Classé. All digital signals are routed through a CPLD (Complex Programmable Logic Device) and sample rate converter for processing at 24-bit resolution, attacking jitter at source. Both players offer single-ended and balanced outputs, two-channel downmixing for 5.1 audio and RS-232 control. Expect an exclusive review in *HFC* soon.

Price CDP-102 £2,950; CDP-202 £4,750 **Due** now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classaudio.com

Soundbites



RUSS ANDREWS has launched three new mains conditioning products. They comprise a stand-alone unit called the Ultra Purifier (£300), and two mains extension blocks – the Ultra PurifierBlock (£501) and the Ultra PurifierBlock-Ag (£975), which is internally wired with pure silver Kimber mains cable. All three products use Russ Andrews' proprietary mains technology and come with a 60-day money-back guarantee.

☎ 0845 3451550

TEAC's new AG-790 stereo receiver is a full-width, 100-watt AM/FM model that costs just £150. It has five line inputs, a 30-preset tuner and remote control. It's finished in jet black and is said to be just one of a new range of affordable stereo TEAC products to come in 2006.

☎ 0845 1302511

PHILIPS has enabled low-cost playback of computer audio files through hi-fi systems for consumers with wireless home networks. The Universal Plug and Play (UPnP) SLA5520i is a wireless audio link that streams music from a PC to a hi-fi using the 802.11g (Wi-Fi) connection standard. It connects to music systems via RCA inputs and has an LCD display to view digital music files. Expect to pay around £100.

☎ 0906 1010016

TCl has fashioned a new entry-level interconnect called the Tiger. Made using a twisted pair configuration, the silver-plated cable has TCl gold-plated phono plugs and can be ordered with Naim-style DIN connections for an extra £10 per end. The phono-terminated cable costs £30 per pair.

☎ 07710 196949

CRYSTAL AUDIO is a comparatively new name in speakers to these shores. The Greek specialist has a new model available in the UK called the T3, which has some individual design features such as the 'free air' tweeter that can be rotated to face ear axis, making room integration easier. The three-and-a-half-way T3 uses fibreglass bass/mid drivers, a silk-dome tweeter and costs £600 per pair.

☎ 020 7022 2970

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ED SELLEY

Job Title: Product and technical consultant
Company: Cambridge Audio, Mordaunt-Short and Opus



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

Without a doubt, the Azur 840C – the matching CD player for the 840A amp. We've been given an opportunity to really push the boat out technologically speaking, and I have very high hopes for it.

What's a really great album that you've heard recently?

Sound Mirrors by Coldcut. A real surprise for me as it has been so long since their last effort. It's well worth a listen. Fans of the peculiar might wish to check out the eponymous album by Clor as well.

CD or vinyl – and why?

While I don't doubt that vinyl will still beat CD under ideal conditions, I'm a child of the 1990s and grew up with CD being the dominant format. With a little effort, CD can enthrall in a good system – and then be used in the car once you've finished.

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

With the proviso that most designers are only as good as the teams that support them, I'd give the nod to Graeme Foy and his acoustics team at Mordaunt-Short. The Performance 6 is a truly brilliant speaker and the new Performance 9 subwoofer is quite sensational.

Hi-Fi Diary

MAY

25-28 High End 2006
The MOC, Munich, Germany
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A chance to experience some of the world's finest hi-fi

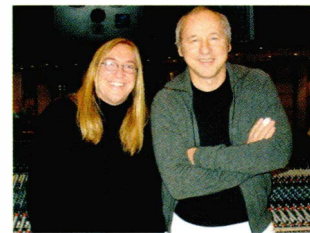
SEPTEMBER

1-6 IFA 2006
Messe Berlin, Germany
Europe's biggest consumer electronics show makes its biannual appearance

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

Brothers in ATCs

20 years on from its release, the album that put CD on the musical map has been remixed for SACD and DVD-Audio. Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms – 20th Anniversary Edition* has been remixed by Chuck Ainley using ATC monitors, a project that has resulted in the title being awarded Best Surround Sound Album at the 48th Annual Grammy Awards. The high-resolution engineering work was performed at Straits' frontman Mark Knopfler's ATC-equipped British Grove Studios in London.



The monitoring system consists of ATC 300As mounted in a left-centre-right configuration, with two 300As for rear surround on a unique track system that allows the engineer to place them according to taste. Dual ATC SCM0.1/15ASL PRO subwoofers alongside the main left and right channels provide the LFE (low frequency effects) monitoring. "It's a total showcase studio, probably the best I've ever worked in," said Ainley (pictured above with Knopfler). "The ATCs [at British Grove Studios] are fabulous."

Music Plus Batteries

Living Voice has developed Music Plus, a battery power supply that takes the notion of mains purifying to the extreme. Music Plus uses a 24-volt charger to charge up two 24-volt cells, each made up of 200 amp/hour 12-volt gel batteries. The power from these cells is passed through a pair of 24-volt, 3,000VA sinewave-generating inverters run in parallel to keep the impedance as low as possible. In practise, this set-up allows you to run a system that consumes 500 watts for between four and five hours without it being connected to the mains. Not a compact solution, Music Plus is designed to be housed in a separate room, but has remote switching and a status monitoring system to tell you how much juice is left and how long it will last.



Designed for a customer in the Far East who had problems with mains voltage consistency, the Music Plus battery system is available to any audiophile who wants the ultimate outboard power supply and has £10,000 to spare. (For more on this story, see p20.)

Vinyl MP3s

In a bizarre turn of events, vinyl is finding its way onto the download market, thanks to some of the biggest brands in digital music. MSN, Yahoo, iTunes and over seventy other download sites are offering a 'When it was Wax' range of rare and unreleased music that has only been released on vinyl. The 'digital wax' program is coming from independent music distributor The Orchard. It uses a mouth-watering 'mastering' system consisting of Simon Yorke's S7 turntable and arm with a KSL IO-J cartridge, SFz silver step-up transformer and M1000 preamplifier.

Similarly, See Why Audio in the UK is offering DVD-Audio copies of classic vinyl through the High Resolution Music Club (www.pushband.com/colin/hrmc/main). Members can trade titles, if they own other legally purchased ones.



Online overdrive

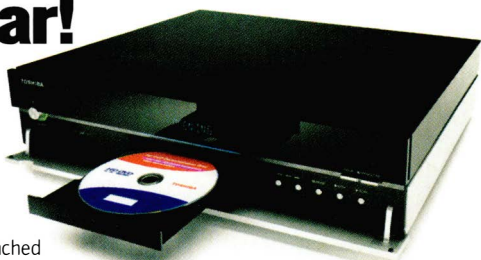
Online music sales will increase by more than ten times over the next five years, according to a survey of European music buying trends by Forrester. The survey predicts that the total online music market value will be close to four billion euros by 2011. What is perhaps surprising is that this figure represents only thirty per cent of total projected music sales, expected to grow to 11 billion euros over the same period. At present, the total market is worth 9.5 billion euros.

In an attempt to take a share of this market, Amazon – the online retailer – is reported to be planning the launch its own music download service (see last issue's *AudioFile: Dispatches*). The company is said to be negotiating with major record labels and plans to offer a subscription service, where users can download unlimited tracks for a fixed monthly fee. Rumours also abound about an Amazon branded player made by Samsung, but so far the online giant is keeping things under wraps.



It's war!

 The mother of all format wars is about to kick-off in the US, where the formats hoping to replace DVD are being launched



this summer. So far, there are three HD-DVD titles and eight Blu-ray discs confirmed for release. On the hardware side, Toshiba has already launched its HD-XA1 HD-DVD player (pictured above) in Japan. Samsung plans to launch a Blu-ray machine on the US market in June at \$999, Sony's BDP-S1 is expected in July for around \$1,000 and Panasonic's DMP-BD10 should be available in September for "less than \$1,500".

While it is not mandatory for either format to playback music-only discs, the HD-XA1 plays CDs, but neither SACD nor DVD-A. The new HD surround sound technologies from Dolby (TrueHD) and DTS (DTS-HD) have capabilities beyond those formats, but there is so far no news as to whether record companies will be making compatible discs. The increased data capacity of the formats offers great potential for the audiophile – a single layer Blu-ray offers 25GB against SACD's 4.7GB, which means that lossless 24-bit/192kHz 7.1-channel sound is one of many theoretical options.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #42

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



Keep your CDs Clean

Although compact discs seem largely unaffected by things like fingerprints and scratches, sound quality will suffer if discs become heavily soiled. True, a CD player's error correction circuitry can disguise some of the problems, but only up to a point. A badly-soiled CD may play without jumping, but the sound will be rougher

and more congested than it would have been had the playing surface been kept spotlessly clean. The brighter and shinier the surface of the disc, the better it will sound. CDs are tricky to clean without causing fine surface scratches. One way is to use a removable sticky label, putting the sticky bit on the surface of the disc so that loose particles are removed without the need to rub. Badly soiled discs can be washed using a mild soapy detergent (like washing up liquid), and then gently patted dry with a clean cotton cloth or paper towel. But the best advice has to be this: don't let your discs get dirty in the first place!

TOP 10 FUTURE CLASSICS OF HIGH-END HI-FI

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Krell | FBI amplifier |
| 2. Mark Levinson | No 326S/No 432 pre/power amps |
| 3. Chord | Media Engine CD/DVD/hard disk server |
| 4. Linn | Artikulat 350 active loudspeakers |
| 5. Musical Fidelity | kW DM25 Super CD player |
| 6. Audio Research | Reference 210 mono power amp |
| 7. Jadis | JD3 Evolution CD player |
| 8. Martin Logan | Vantage loudspeaker |
| 9. Meridian | 800 V4 DVD-Audio/Video player |
| 10. Sonus Faber | Guarneri Momento loudspeaker |

New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



BLOC PARTY

Title: *tbc*

Due: autumn

Art-rockers Bloc Party have already begun work on the follow-up to their 2005 breakthrough debut, *Silent Alarm*. According to singer Kele Okereke, the second album will be "less brash, slightly more considered" than its platinum-selling predecessor. The band has already previewed several new tracks from the as yet untitled album live, including *Hunting For Witches, Uniform, Wet* and *Blue Moon*.

MUSE

Title: *tbc*

Due: 3 July

The follow-up to 2003's *Absolution* is set to shock fans of Muse's pomp-rock with some "drastic" changes of direction, according to drummer Dominic Howard. "There's a mix of styles, ranging from mellow jazz to Prince-influenced, groove-based rock weirdness," he reckons. The band rented a chateau in France to write the album and then relocated to New York to record it.

THE REPLACEMENTS

Title: *Don't You Know Who I Think I Was?*

Due: 13 June

Sadly not an entire album of new material from Paul Westerberg and his Minneapolis crew of rabble-rousers but a 'best of' compilation. However, it does contain two newly-recorded songs, the first time Westerberg, Tommy Stinson and Chris Mars have been in the studio together in 16 years. Fans are now keeping fingers crossed for a full-on Pixies-style reunion.

PRIMAL SCREAM

Title: *Riot City Blues*

Due: June

"It's all high-energy rock 'n' roll made for playing live," says Primal Scream frontman Bobby Gillespie of the band's first album



since 2000's *XTRMNR*. "It's really 'up' from start to finish." Guests include Bunnyman guitarist Will Sergeant and Alison Mosshart from The Killers, who sings a duet with Gillespie on *Dolls*. One source claims it's the best thing they've recorded since 1991's classic *Screamadelica*.

THE RAPTURE

Title: *tbc*

Due: autumn

Brooklyn band The Rapture are in an LA studio with producer Danger Mouse, who topped the charts under the guise of Gnarls Barkley. According to reports, the mood is lighter than the Brooklyn band's dark debut, 2003's *Echoes*. "We wanted to do more of a fun thing," says bassist Matt Safer.

ALSO COMING SOON...

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Triniti Triniti (May); **Nicola Benedetti** Mendelssohn Violin Concerto (May); **Placido Domingo** Italia Te Amo (May); **Puppini Sisters** (July)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Various True Audiophile – The Best Of Groove Note (SACD, May); **Sarah O'Brien** Harp Recital (SACD, May); **The Byrds** The Notorious Byrd Brothers (SACD, May); **Gerry Mulligan and Scott Hamilton** Soft Lights, Sweet Music (SACD, May); **Bruce Springsteen** We Shall Overcome (DualDisc, May)

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Bobcasting

What does the future hold for high-resolution music, in the time of HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs? We ask the man with three decades of keeping his finger on the audio pulse: Meridian's Bob Stuart

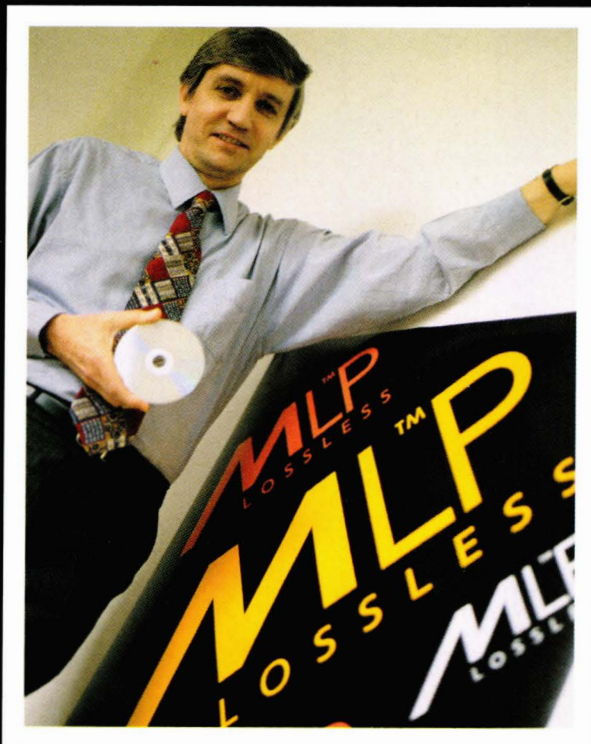
Founder and principal Bob Stuart has headed up Meridian Audio for the last thirty years. In that time, the company has turned from small specialist amplifier maker into Britain's leading manufacturer of high-end hi-fi and home cinema equipment. Meridian firmly grasped the digital audio nettle as soon as CD was launched, and has pioneered innovations like digital active speakers and advanced multichannel digital signal processing.

The development of MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing), which significantly reduces the storage capacity needed for digital audio signals, has given Meridian Audio a seat on the top table, alongside the giant consumer electronics multi-nationals, in planning future audio and AV formats. This gives Bob a unique insight into the way technology is evolving.

Few are more aware of the difficulties of establishing a new format. At the recent Bristol Sound & Vision show press conference, he archly pointed out: "In the confrontation between DVD-Audio and SACD, the iPod has come out the winner". Although there are many DVD-A players out there, and DualDisc CD/DVD-A software is making some progress in the US, Bob still regards the whole DVD-A/SACD saga as an opportunity that was lost because neither hardware nor software industries reached a consensus to back a single format.

"Format success is determined by the content providers. But without a single vehicle, you simply don't get the content." He states. "People tend to sit on the fence, and even those that do provide some support aren't wholehearted. There's a Japanese proverb that goes 'If we all cross the road together, nobody gets hurt', but because the industries didn't properly back either SACD or DVD-A, neither succeeded big time.

"Indeed, the introduction of 'combi' players [those capable of handling both DVD-A and SACD as well as regular CD formats] was one of the worst things that could have happened, because it allowed the hardware makers to sit on the fence instead of committing themselves to one or other high-resolution format. DVD succeeded because everybody backed it, and it



Bob's current worry is that the industry has failed to learn any lessons from the DVD-A/SACD episode, and could well repeat the same mistakes with the new Blu-ray and HD-DVD super-formats. Meridian's MLP is an integral part of both, giving high-resolution audio options like eight channels of 24-bit/96kHz or six channels of 24-bit/192kHz, so Meridian stands to prosper whichever format succeeds. "But having two rivals poses problems, because those selling the software won't be prepared to carry more than one inventory. The worry is that we could end up downloading movies on demand from the Blockbuster website to our Skyboxes," says Bob.

We asked Bob whether he thought that there was any chance these new high-definition home cinema formats would be used for high-band audio-only programming. "Though it's technically feasible, I think it's commercially unlikely. The vast majority of people are happy enough with CD quality and already have large CD collections. Although blue laser discs offer potentially higher quality, a top-quality system can deliver excellent results from CD. And a high-quality dedicated CD player will have an edge over a DVD player, which is why we've recently introduced our GO8 and GO6 standalone CD players. In addition, the music business is currently in some disarray, and is really looking for good on-line business models right now."

So, how does he see hi-fi developing in the near future? "I think many people would like their hi-fi, and especially their speakers, to be

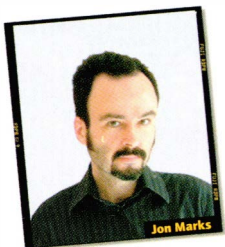
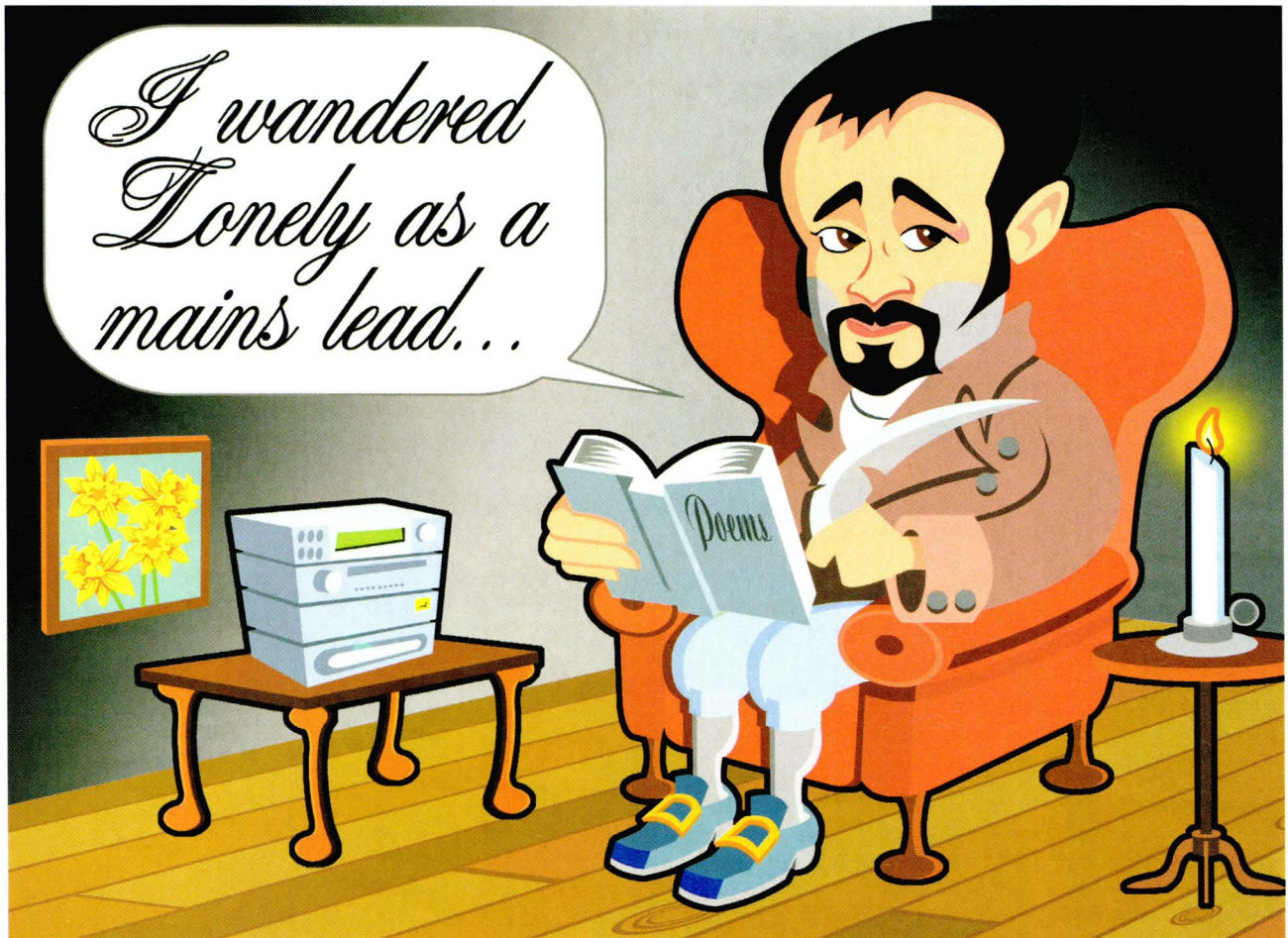
"We started out simply intending to offer a format with better sound quality, but committees started getting in the way."

offered an obvious and dramatic improvement over videotape for movies."

It was different for music, says Bob. "With DVD-A, we started out simply intending to offer a format with better sound quality, but committees started getting in the way with other agendas. Some members wanted a new format because sales of the old one were lagging; others wanted something new because the Chinese were taking over mass sales of the older format."

more discreet. In-wall and on-wall speakers may have been around for years, but performance has usually been compromised. We're just introducing some in-wall speakers with serious engineering content and are getting excellent results – they actually avoid some of the acoustic problems inherent in freestanding models. Such speakers are already very popular in the US, and the trend could well spread to Europe." **HFC**

Paul Messenger



Jon Marks

Beauty and the beats

What hi-fi needs – poetry power!

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” the poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning once said of her hi-fi (apparently, and presumably not when her other half was around). Appreciation of hi-fi comes in many different shapes and forms, and for most audiophiles, pride of possession is made up of a mix of these headed up by the most obvious – sound quality.

While specialist hi-fi is responsible for some of the blandest boxes ever to ‘grace’ a bookshelf, there are companies which regularly produce equipment that’s easier on the eye – take Michell as a prime example, or Opera.

“‘How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,’ the poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning once said of her hi-fi.”

Build can be important in subjective appeal, even though there’s plenty of affordable hi-fi out there where budgets have been aimed squarely at sound quality rather than being squandered on back-breaker casework. This often seems to result in a bullet-proof fascia an inch thick and enough heatsinking to cool a small reactor without producing the goods as far as the ears go. Whatever the sound and looks of a component, though, you can always be sure the same equipment will evoke different opinions in different beholders, areas such as cables yielding perhaps some of the most entertaining.

One of the best bits of online spectator sport I’ve witnessed occurred after someone had carried out a double-blind test to see if they could identify the difference between a common-or-garden mains cable and one from a hi-fi specialist. Claims that there was an

audible difference, and that listeners were repeatedly able to tell the two cables apart, drew ridicule from a hard-core of those who believe that all cables sound the same regardless and that said test was flawed and statistically unreliable. It was only when another contributor, who happened to have a PhD in statistical analysis, weighed in to confirm that the test had been correctly constructed and executed that the temperature of the debate cooled somewhat.

There is, however, a whole other appreciation of hi-fi beyond subjective as defined by most listeners, of a beauty which lies beneath the metalwork. Among electronics engineers and knowledgeable amateurs (or at least those who don’t slavishly follow a single, immutable ‘tradition’ of accepted engineering) there is a passion and admiration for the elegance, innovation and effectiveness of the circuitry

employed, the degree to which it has been optimised to produce a superb set of test results without any extraneous components, and the ability to do so reliably and on budget.

In the world of objective measurement you'll find the subjective too, as designers juggle priorities and means to ends – what you might call 'vigorous' debate is frequently the order of the day. Long may it continue to be so, since it is this debate which will produce tomorrow's hi-fi. Elizabeth Browning's poem may have ended, "and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death," but it looks as if there's life left in the audiophile world yet.

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



Speaking out

The AES goes public

I have just spent some time at the Audio Engineering Society's Audio at Home convention, and subsequent public day, held at Cambridge University's New Hall, at which a number of technical papers were read and discussed by an audience of industry movers and shakers – bearded engineering types, mostly. This column is the first of a two-part skim over some of the major points of interest.

Several sessions were given over to multichannel sound developments, for example how many speakers are necessary or desirable in a system, assessing some of the finer issues relating to new formats, HD-DVD and Blu-ray in particular, and in one memorable paper, digital rights management.

One session (given by Peter Willison, of GCap Media) was devoted to high-definition audio broadcast. The paper was largely given over to building a case to show that there was no good reason or even the will to go HD, given the way most people use radio. We are, in effect, stuck with the mess that broadcasting is in today, driven (for example) by the commercial imperative of broadcasters to make their transmissions loud/compressed enough to make the inveterate knob twiddler stop on their station rather than the one next door. Another discussion centred on new

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

PIONEER CT-95
CASSETTE DECK



Cast your mind back over the finest cassette decks you have ever known or lusted over, and probably just one name springs to

mind – Nakamichi. But good as they were, Nakamichi didn't have the high-end cassette market all to itself. Companies like Revox, Tandberg and Sony, even our very own Arcam made some superb decks, but none of them mounted what might be described as a sustained challenge to Nakamichi. The nearest that any producer came to doing so was probably Pioneer, which produced a sequence of progressively better equipped and better engineered models right up to the demise of the format (as a high-end recording medium) at the hand of recordable CD and also in Pioneer's case, DAT.

The CT-95 was one of the last and best of the Pioneer cassette deck dynasty. It went on sale in the early 1990s, at a time when CD was already firmly established, and as a counter to the imminent perceived threat from DCC and MiniDisc. It turns out that Pioneer needn't have bothered, but it was not to know that at the time.

The company already had a track record of innovation in cassette related technology. The CT-95 was a three-head model, with real time off-tape monitoring. The tape was driven by a beautifully engineered 'slanted' dual-capstan mechanism, which controlled the torque applied to the tape within the loop. This loop was defined by the lead and slightly slower running trailing capstan. Dolby B and C noise reduction were supplemented by Dolby S and Dolby HX Pro, a short lived headroom extension process. It was even possible to turn the display off, an unusual refinement at the time. A very narrow replay head gap, plus continuous automatic head azimuth adjust and special equalisation made it possible to record up to 30kHz bandwidth with Type IV metal tapes. However, some residual granularity from a head gap of such proportions led to some low-level unevenness that was sometimes audible. But it is possible that the variable coating of the tape was the dominant factor.



“Under the skin, the deck was equipped with some of the finest passive components available.”

Another headline feature was a new tape alignment process called Super Auto BLE, which configured bias, equalisation and level for all tape types to a very high standard. The machine set-up was further tweakable by a user-set fine bias control. Under the skin, the deck was equipped with some of the finest passive components then available, including the capacitors used in the audio signal circuits and the power supply. Pioneer made extensive use of copper screening of the various circuit blocks, even down to individual microprocessor level in some cases. Finally, it was housed in a drop dead gorgeous gold-finished housing. The price – £1,000 – was far from excessive even then, given the nature of the package.

Apart from the slight loss of consistency with metal tapes noted above, the CT-95 was a peach, with a clean, open and lucid sound, full of musical detail, and no more subject to audible speed variations than a CD player. Curiously enough, what finally shut the door on cassette technology for Pioneer was DAT, which Pioneer did more to improve than any of its other supporters, not least with its advocacy of 96kHz sampling. But while Digital Audio Tape was used quite widely in professional recording studios (unlike DCC and MiniDisc), it never caught on domestically, and CD-R and hard disk recording eventually sealed tape's fate. **HFC**

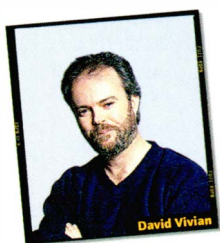
Alvin Gold

multichannel formats inspired by the burgeoning interest in Digital Cinema. But, of course, there were also topics of purist audiophile appeal: powerful advocacy in favour of active loudspeakers from Meridian's Bob Stuart, and digital amplifiers from Steven Harris of D2Audio Corporation among others.

One of the most intriguing presentations was the closing one given by technical commentator Keith Howard, who reminded us that purist audio is a long way from being where it can be described as job done. Among the arguments he used by way of illustration was that some of the better answers of the past have been in effect ignored – Michael Gerzon's Ambisonics, for example.

He also pointed to the more recent interest in wavefield synthesis, which can be used to create a stable soundfield over a large area – an idea that works, but which is technically difficult to achieve, though the use of multi-exciter NXT panels was mentioned. One of his main points was to highlight the opportunity lost when the Trifield algorithm (an elegant way of reproducing stereo over multiple loudspeakers arrays) failed to attract significant support. Today, Trifield has only one major protagonist: Meridian, Trifield's solitary hardware licensee. Meridian, coincidentally, was demonstrating Trifield very effectively the day after AES at the public 'fun day', showing how effectively the process firms up the central focus of a stereo system.

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



Outta space

Weird speakers sound great

It's a surprisingly reliable rule of thumb that the more bizarre an item of hi-fi looks, the better it sounds. It's not foolproof – but, like Max Townshend's rule of thumb that the best tasting bottles of Aussie red have the highest alcoholic content, it's usually right.

The history of hi-fi is littered with oddball components that have knocked over the sonic skittles: the Nakamichi Dragon cassette deck, the Transcriptors turntable, the B&W Nautilus, the Chord DAC64 and the Shanling T100 CD player to name but a famous five.

But, for me, there's one component that, for sheer surreal impact, knocks the rest into a 17-sided sardine can, balanced on a bowler hat floating in a sea of Mercury just off the coast of Ramsgate.

The Ferguson-Hill FH001, a speaker that looks like a space-funneling model of a black hole. Its designer, Tim Hill, was always aware of its utter weirdness. An elliptically-shaped acrylic horn 1.65m tall and 0.72m deep was never going to sit comfortably with those who like their speakers bijou, boxy and tucked away in the corners. But when people came up to him and asked "do they sound any good?" – assuming that they were mere lifestyle confections – his brow furrowed. He made the FH001's look the way they do because sound quality (particularly Tim's dissatisfaction with the performance of conventional speakers) was his core consideration.

The thinking was that what normal hi-fi speakers do well – principally, produce a wide frequency response without too many peaks and troughs – wasn't the main thing. Musical realism has more to do with timing, pitch accuracy, dynamics and, perhaps most important of all, coherence. Tim felt that putting multiple drive units in a wooden box wasn't the most obvious way of achieving these qualities. Crossover networks that hand over between drivers can cause phase

anomalies and contribute to low efficiency which, in turn, robs music of its dynamism.

But rather than look to new technologies to restore the life and vibrancy to hi-fi reproduction, Hill put a fresh twist on some rather old ideas. Horn loading to increase efficiency hails from a time before hi-fi itself (the trumpet on a wind-up gramophone works on the same principle), while the modified full-range Lowther DX3 driver that sat just behind the throat of the 8mm-thick, precision moulded, toughened, see-through acrylic of the horn was an updated version of a super-efficient cult drive unit that had been produced for over 40 years.

The twist was in the implementation. Partly for the sake of practicality, some single-driver designs load the driver from behind with a space-efficient folded horn. Tim went for the purist front-ended approach and the result, because of the need to get the Lowther driver to reach down to 150Hz, was a horn of sublime elegance but conversation-stopping dimensions. The comparatively tiny Lowther driver sat in a support ring that was precision machined from aluminium alloy. This, in turn, was secured to the vertical pillar of the welded stainless steel, satin-finish stand, which is supplied with internal damping, integral spikes and floor protector discs. That was it. Simplicity was the key.

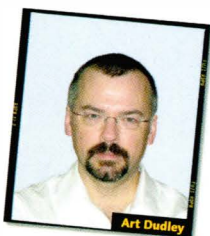
“A speaker that looks like a space-funneling model of a black hole. Its designer, Tim Hill, was always aware of its utter weirdness.”



The FH001 doesn't really do bass at all. Then again, a flat frequency response isn't exactly what made the Lowther driver famous. But remove hi-fi preconceptions before engaging with the FH001s. Because engage you do. If your idea of hi-fi is instruments and performers in your room that you feel you could reach out and touch – plus dynamics hard-wired directly to the hairs on the back of your neck – the Fergies are sublime.

When they went back to their maker, I missed the looks of disbelief when people walked into room. But more than that, I missed the music.

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



High-end a bargain...

...compared to concert going!

I wanted to go and hear some music. David Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra were scheduled to play the Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem* at Carnegie Hall at the end of March. Since the hall rarely, if ever, sells out these days, I decided to visit New York on the spur of the moment and treat myself to a concert.

I live four hours from Manhattan, so hotel accommodations were a must. But the lowest price I could find for a decent room – by which I mean a room with a full bath, an unstained carpet, and a working lock on the door – was just under \$300 per night, excluding tax.

Parking was an extra \$50, which is almost as much as the round-trip train fare between my little corner of the world and midtown Manhattan. So I bought myself a train ride, too: That was a real no-brainer, as they say.

Dinner and a drink in midtown Manhattan? Another \$50 or so. Taxi to the Carnegie? About \$9 each way, including the requisite if ill-deserved tip. A single ticket in an area where supplemental oxygen is not required? \$55 plus tax. The cost of staying up late the night before and ironing a shirt? Nestimable.

To hear *Ein Deutsches Requiem* played significantly less well than Fritz Lehman and the Berlin Philharmonic did it for Deutsche Grammophon's recording engineers in 1955 cost me a little over \$500 – and the socialite in the row behind me nattered incessantly. ☑

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

STEEL PULSE
HANDSWORTH REVOLUTION



The UK charts in the late 1970s pogoed to the rough and ready beat of punk. But there was a sub-current that was gaining ground – and it wasn't *Saturday Night Fever*. Roots reggae was the positive music of choice for the 'no future' punks. Groups like the Clash, the Slits and the Ruts used its influence overtly, and unlikely punk godfather John Peel, responsible for breaking so many punk and new wave records overground, regularly played roots reggae records.

The punks weren't the only British citizens who were listening, of course. Genuine reggae groups were springing up around the country. Among them, former child actor Brinsley Forde's Aswad in London, and in Birmingham, there was Steel Pulse.

Formed in 1975 by singer/guitarist David Hinds with school friends Basil Gabbidon (lead guitar, vocals) and Ponnice McQueen (bass) and named after a racehorse, Steel Pulse originally had trouble getting gigs on the British reggae circuit on account of their Rastafarian beliefs. So they ended up falling in with the punk crowd, playing gigs with the likes of the Stranglers and Generation X.

A more obviously appropriate partnering with Rasta icon Burning Spear led to them being signed to Island and, swelled to a seven-piece, they produced their debut album, *Handsworth Revolution* in 1978. As its title suggests, this was no lover's rock or reggae sunsplash. The main messages throughout the album are politics and religion (with an obligatory nod to the dance and the weed).

Handsworth Revolution offered a positive, consciousness-raising message in stark contrast to punk's nihilism, though it's not without anger. Released just three years before the outbreak of the first Brixton riots, David Hinds later said: "It was a symbolic statement, the way we saw it as Steel Pulse, we felt it was just a matter of time before riots broke out in every black city."

But despite its revolutionary undertones, the title track doesn't imply an armed uprising, but a raising of consciousness and sense of worth ("Doesn't justice stand for all"). *Ku Klux Klan* is



"Their sense of melody, in particular, is reminiscent of Bob Marley and the great man liked them."

a reaction to the rise of the National Front in Britain, ("Rape, lynch, kill and maim, Things can't remain the same"). *Bad Man*, *Soldiers* and *Prodigal Son*, meanwhile, are indictments of imperialism and slavery, while *Sound System* celebrates the healing powers of dance and *Macka Splaff* salutes marijuana, a fundamental component of the Rastafari religion, although strictly speaking illegal in Britain.

Throughout, there's a keen melodic bite and lyrical bounce, gorgeous harmonies as well as an impressive level of musicianship and rhythmic development for such a young band. Their sense of melody, in particular, is reminiscent of Bob Marley and the great man liked them enough to invite them on his 1978 European tour, although his initial reaction when they were first introduced was, "What kind of name is that?"

Steel Pulse have produced a dozen or so albums since, and are still playing today, creating new works in much the same vein. But their debut remains their defining statement.

Handsworth Revolution hasn't always been best served by CD reissues, the unforgivably flat and compressed reproduction on the Island greatest hits package *Sound System*, which includes the three Island albums in their entirety, being a particular offender. Track down the original vinyl if you can. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

At that rate, assuming one wishes to hear great or good music on a fairly regular basis, even an apparently extravagant audio component such as a Lamm monoblock amplifier can pay for itself in a little over a year. A nice pair of Avantgarde horn loudspeakers can pay for itself in seven or eight months, and a Linn LP12 turntable can perform the same neat trick in a matter of weeks. The record, and thousands of great ones like it, can be had for the price of a taxi ride alone – or a drink. And the only nattering you or any other consumer will hear is that of the nitwit reviewers who thought you should buy something else instead. And they're easy to tune out, if that's what you want.

I wanted to go and hear some music. So, I went into the next room and powered up the amps. Maybe hi-fi isn't as dead as I thought...
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



Assault and battery

Definitive Audio means mains business

Battery powered hi-fi isn't new. But few go as far as the Definitive Audio demonstration at February's Bristol Sound & Vision show.

Proprietor Kevin Scott has developed an elaborate and costly package that combines high-capacity gel batteries and charger with control electronics and mains inverters. Costing around £10,000 (including installation), this Living Voice Music Plus power supply allows any hi-fi system to be entirely isolated from mains power.

Why bother? Because the quality and purity of our mains electricity has deteriorated over the years. Blame it on electronics, from dimmer switches to switch mode power supplies, all of which contribute to 'dirtying up' the purity of the mains' 50Hz sine wave.

As a result, mains quality is often a limiting factor in system sound quality, and nowhere is this more true than at a hi-fi show, where every room is liable to add to the pollution affecting every system. No surprise, then, that the very expensive battery-powered Kondo valve system playing interesting music in the Definitive room sounded absolutely delicious.



“An elaborate package that combines high capacity gel batteries and charger with control electronics and mains inverters.”

The whole business of mains supplies is infernally complicated, conditions varying dramatically from one country to another, and between urban and rural environments. Mains pollution can be created by your own electrical equipment, or your neighbours, or even through your mains wiring acting as an aerial that picks up signals from increasingly busy radio frequency bands.

Isolating the system completely from the mains has obvious benefits in countering any mains pollution effects, though there are possible negatives associated with the mains inverter unit that converts the 24-volt DC battery output back to 240 volts AC. A mains inverter is actually a form of switch-mode supply, so it has its own potential to generate high frequency pollution, and also has a significantly higher source impedance than the mains, which will reduce the speed with which the supply can react. To help reduce the source impedance, Kevin recommends using two or three inverters in parallel.

The key question must therefore be whether the advantages outweigh any disadvantages in any particular application. Kevin has already found the battery supply an invaluable tool in speaker development work, because it remains consistent from one day to the next, unlike the mains. He also has a very satisfied customer in Thailand, where mains electricity tends to be rather unreliable.

It's too early to say just what impact the Music Plus power system will have on the hi-fi scene as a whole. The Living Voice package is too expensive to appeal to more than a wealthy minority, but mains deterioration will continue, and I wouldn't be surprised to find less costly alternatives appearing soon.

Paul Messenger is a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and has been writing about his favourite hobby for nearly 30 years



Rip it up

Another CD collection turns virtual

I was having dinner with some friends the other day, when one of them asked if I knew anyone who wanted a brace of CD racks. Only last year, these racks heaved under the sheer weight of polycarbonate. What on earth happened?

“Oh, I've loaded everything on my PC, now.”

The almost bloody steak fell from my fork. Fortunately, it fell into my mouth.

The end came after one of those catastrophic CD player failures that only occur during holidays. On Christmas Eve, to be exact. So, he ripped his discs onto a PC at a low compression rate, used it as a server over the holiday season and by New Year was a convert. The discs were soon on eBay. He's even found a method of ripping DVDs to hard disc and now has eliminated most of his DVD collection, too.

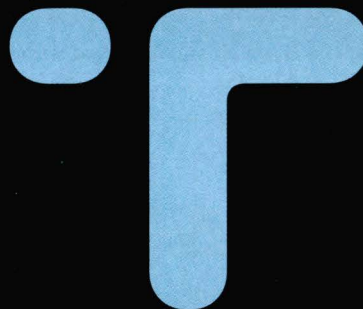
Of course, being an ex-IT guy who keeps his finger on the techno-pulse helps greatly. Everything was in place: a full-on wireless LAN at home, with terabytes of storage and a thorough grounding in the necessity of backing up data. He now downloads all his music, and his house has been disc-free for a couple of months. Even the car's CD autochanger is falling into disuse, now that the iPod plugs into the car stereo. The quality of the compressed recordings is not quite as good as a CD, but falls within 'close enough' parameters for most people.

You might think this is the audiophile get-out clause, that he doesn't listen intently enough to count and his collection reflects this lightweight approach to music. Sadly, nothing could be further from the truth and he regaled me with tales of 'discovering' composers like Bax and Finzi on Classical.com.

He might just be the future of music buying. And if he is, we may have lost an audiophile. The compressed sound, replayed on cheaper separates is tolerable; equipment capable of resolving the differences between formats with aplomb may not be so forgiving. Worse, now those original discs are no longer in his possession, the compressed format is all that's left. I would be worried about doing this; I fear these recordings would soon appear as old hat as 640x480 pixel photographs (from six or seven years ago) do in today's multi-megapixel digital world.

But here's the real problem. If you know someone who gives up collecting CDs, keep it quiet. A collection of discs takes up useful shelf space; if someone you know voluntarily gives up that shelf space in favour of HDD storage, you can guarantee you will hear the dreaded 'why don't you do that?' from your partner, spouse or significant other. And you will hear that dreaded 'why don't you do that?' (and variations on the theme) every time you buy a disc, every time you go shopping for furniture, every time you walk past Habitat and every weekend until you give in.

To paraphrase the Manic Street Preachers: if you tolerate this, then your CDs will be next. *Alan Sirtom* began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He has since become one of the hi-fi and AV industry's most respected scribes



TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

LOUDSPEAKERS: BIG OR SMALL?



No hi-fi component comes in as diverse a range of shapes as sizes as the loudspeaker. From Anthony Gallo's tiny aluminium globes to

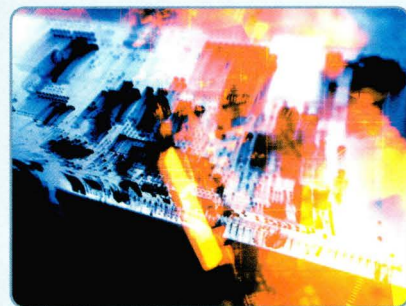
Tannoy's huge monoliths, from tiny NXT panels to huge Wilson Audio daleks, the variety is enormous. Why do they have to vary so?

Obviously, fashion plays a part. Small speakers are far more attractive than huge, tall designs to a hi-fi neutral partner. Also, as you live with this stuff in your home and you are quite entitled to care about how it looks. But even if you couldn't give two hoots about the visual side of things, there are plenty of pros and cons to both large and small speakers. Some are more obvious than others...

It's often put about that big speakers give you better bass. In practice, on average, this is probably true. But there is no direct cause and effect here. Instead, there is a three-way compromise between size, bass extension and sensitivity. In principle, a compact bookshelf loudspeaker can have fantastic bass extension, but it would be very insensitive and would therefore need vast amounts of power to make it go loud. Since most of the power in any loudspeaker ends up as heat, the poor thing would fall to bits or catch fire, and even before reaching that point, it would almost certainly suffer from high levels of distortion.

Distortion in loudspeakers arises from several causes. At low frequencies, one of the main ones is nonlinearity of the 'motor', comprising the voice coil and the magnet. At the rest position, a given current in the voice coil causes a proportional amount of driving force due to interaction with the magnetic field. But, as soon as the voice coil moves a bit, it finds itself in a magnetic field of slightly different strength, so the drive force alters. The further the coil moves, the greater the nonlinearity. To reproduce a low frequency at a given level, a fixed volume of air must be moved, so a small drive unit must move its cone further than a big one. Hence, small drive units tend to have higher distortion. Round one to big speakers.

In the treble, none of that applies. Here, limitations in performance typically have more to do with diffraction effects, where



“Instead, there is a three-way compromise between size, bass extension and sensitivity.”

small-wavelength sounds 'bounce around' the front of the loudspeaker cabinet, causing all sorts of time-delay-related filtering, smeared images and general upset. The bigger the cabinet, the lower the frequency at which this occurs. It's avoidable to some extent by the simple expedient of putting the tweeter in a separate enclosure, as done decades ago by B&W, KEF and the like. Still, small speakers are at something of an advantage here.

That leaves the midrange. Distortion and diffraction may well be much of a muchness for small and large speakers here, but it's in the midrange that cabinet resonances make themselves most obvious. The much larger chunks of wood or whatever that make up the cabinet of a large speaker give more scope for resonances. Small speakers may be far from blameless but, as a very broad generalisation, they do emit less sound from their back and sides than large ones, and because this sound is subject to a time delay (in the nature of any resonance), any improvement in this area can be a great subjective benefit.

For all these reasons, and more, there is no hard and fast rule about small or big speakers being 'better' in any very general sense. Some small speakers have great bass, some big ones image superbly. They all have something to offer. **HFC**

Richard Black

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ISSUE 35 / HI FI PLUS / PH5 / JIMMY HUGHES



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

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Goodbye Granddad

In their fourteen-year history, Jason Lytle's Grandaddy journeyed from lo-fi innovation to spacey, indie Americana. Now it's time to stop the ride

Jason Lytle wanders into V2's hospitality lounge clutching a glass of red wine and looking somewhat weary. He's spent a whole day talking about his band's split, and the farewell album, *Just Like The Fambly Cat*. Grandaddy might not be touring to promote it, but that doesn't mean Jason isn't proud of it. When the decision to split came during its making, Lytle felt he had nothing to lose creatively, and pulled out all the stops. Hence, there are plaintive piano laments, crunching multi-layered guitars, emotive pop-injected melodies, sensitive lushness, alternative sensibilities and more. It sees guitars and synths blended into a unique brew of tradition and modernity that any hi-fi loving audiophile will appreciate.

"It was the attempt at combining elements that shouldn't traditionally be combined," he explains. "I had to paint the inside of my house just recently, but before I did so I used to write all these quotes, lines and stuff, on the wall. One of the things I wrote was about what I'm trying to achieve. I wrote that it was the attempt to combine the unnatural with the natural, to achieve the supernatural... shoving the piano, and the synths and the drums and drum machines together and somehow making them co-exist peacefully is a challenge that really gets me excited."

Naturally, it provides a challenge in terms of production too. However, by getting a balance between the warmth of recording to two-inch tape and the digital world of Pro-Tools, he got there. Along with the help of a few hi-fi systems along the way.

"We have a pretty common man approach when we're mixing," he reveals. "There's a benefit to listening to it on many different systems. Literally, within a two-week mix session, we would listen to it on maybe like eight different sets of speakers, from the ones in the mix room, speaker switch to the little boom box, then my Toyota, and then back at



"I listen to music on the gear that I record the albums on. I have a pair of Genelec 1031A monitors without the subwoofer."

the hotel, and then someone's wife's car, and at some friends'. We try to see how it translates onto different systems. When it works on all of those, that's when you step away from it."

For Jason Lytle, his goal is the creation of music that's fun to listen to. Period. Hence, even though the results of his home studio set-up are to be admired for their multi-layered production smarts, he remains modest about the fact.

"I think the way I record doesn't really lend itself to being considered audiophile type stuff," he shrugs. "They're recorded in such a way that they're gonna be more of a listening experience rather than a Ry Cooder or something. Now that's like quality shit!"

Being a dedicated muso who's filled his home with music making paraphernalia, Jason doesn't listen to his own music heroes on a bog

standard stereo. "I listen to music on the gear that I record the albums on," he beams. "I have a pair of Genelec 1031A monitors without the subwoofer. I have a bunch of speakers too, like little Tannoys, as well as JBLs. It's probably overkill, but there's some things that I don't mind spending extra bits of money on. But there's a whole world of hi-fi that's freakish. I'm really intimidated because I don't know too much about it. Fifteen thousand-dollar phonograph players and weird level stuff like that. I've only seen it from afar and from the glass of the stores."

Does he mean YOU dear readers? Maybe, just maybe. If so, you could do much worse than crank your system into gear with Grandaddy's parting shot. **HFC**

Gal Detourn
Just Like The Fambly Cat is out on V2 on 8 May

ESSENTIAL GRANDADDY

Sumday (2003)

This album was described at the time by one writer as 'American psychedelia nouveau'. Lush, dreamy and very positive.



Excerpts From The Diary of Todd Zilla (2005)

High-quality mini-album inspired by Jason's dissatisfaction with Modesto, the town he used to love.

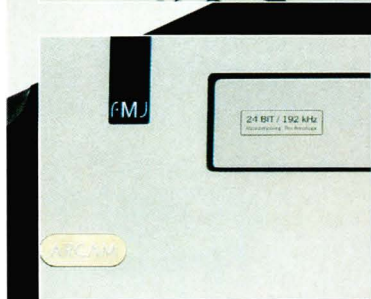


Just Like The Fambly Cat (2006)

The farewell album. File under 'sensitive indie-Americana with a twist'. Various lush, pop, beautiful, charged and reflective.



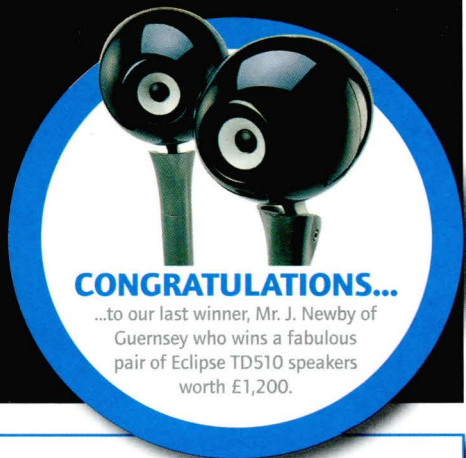
WIN! AN ARCAM FMJ CD36 WORTH £1,400!



Arcam's excellent FMJ CD36 CD player not only proved itself last month in our *Ultimate Group Test* with a Best Buy Badge (*HFC 280*), it went on to form the hub of our *Beautiful Systems* feature in the same issue. This flagship Arcam CD source is an established pedigree performer representing some of the most accomplished CD sounds money can buy. It's not hard to see why this is Arcam's top player – it uses upsampling chips from Analog Devices that feed four Wolfson DACs to obliterate noise. There are two mains transformers, comprehensive internal screening, plus anti-resonance casing, which features Arcam's proprietary Stealth Mat material: a special mesh that provides a continuous screen. In fact, *Hi-Fi Choice* first tipped this player back in the September 2005 issue (*HFC 271*), where we concluded

that it was: "a finely conceived and engineered bit of kit". A sentiment echoed in our *Ultimate Group Test* just last month.

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



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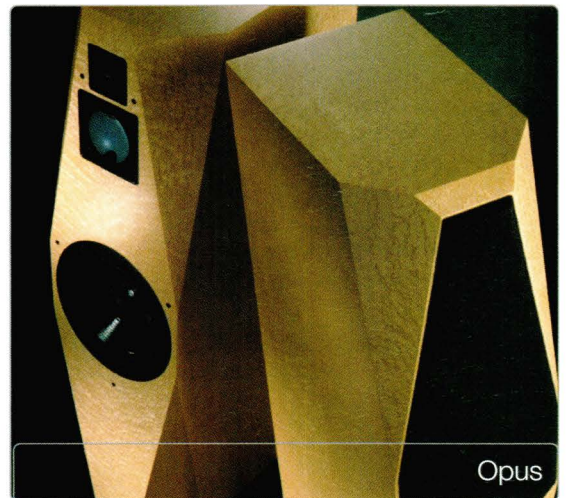
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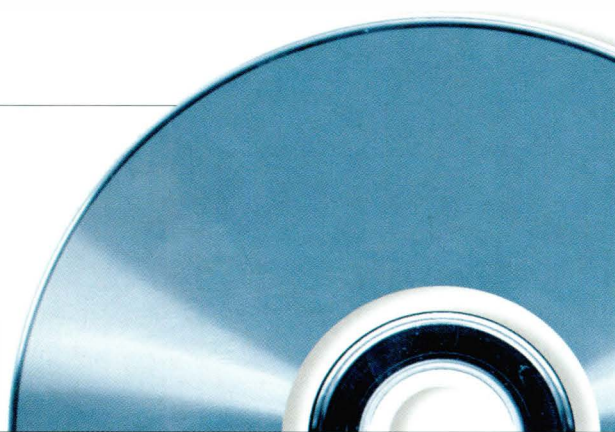
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ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

GRANT GREEN His Majesty King Funk

Verve/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl

Music: Guitarist Grant Green made his name on the Blue Note label playing R&B and what has become known as soul-jazz – fluid and danceable jazz that veers away from the technical. It also stands the

test of time very well. This Verve outing from 1965 finds Grant Green in the company of organ player Larry Young and tenor sax player Harold Vick laying down some solid but smooth grooves that get to the root of funk rather than being overt about it. It takes a couple of listens to get, but this is quality music with more depth than many of its ilk. Its five tracks cover all the bases of cool funk. ★★★★★

Sound: As with all Speakers Corner albums, the quality of the gatefold artwork and pressing are exemplary – only the weight of the vinyl tells you that this isn't an original (that and the fact that it's new!). The sound is excellent for the era and the originals are unlikely to have ever sounded this good. ★★★★★ JK

JOHN COLTRANE Africa/Brass

Impulse/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl

Music: This 1961 Impulse recording combine's Trane's talents with a brass orchestra featuring a who's who of jazz musicians of the era. All three tunes are arranged by Eric Dolphy, who contributes alto

sax, flute and bass clarinet alongside Booker Little and Freddie Hubbard on trumpets, McCoy Tyner on piano and Elvin Jones on drums among others, which include multiple cor anglais and euphoniums. This makes for a big sound to back up Coltrane and Tyner's solos and keeps the former from straying too far from the script (the playing is less extreme than later albums). This may be the blues but few could play them better. ★★★★★

Sound: A Rudy van Gelder recording is always a treat and this is no exception. The placement of soloists in the left channel with the rest of the band spread across the rest of the stage may seem old fashioned, but it still sounds cracking 40 years later. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure.

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COMPACT DISC & VINYL



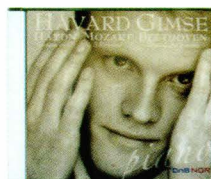
PAUL SIMON

Surprise

Warner Bros

Music: It seemed unlikely that Paul Simon would ever make another great album. Yet in his 65th year, with Brian Eno's production assistance, he's gone and done just that. *Surprise* is full of great melodies and smart lyrics on a bunch of highly autobiographical songs, many of which deal with the advancing years. *Outrageous* is the tale of a middle-aged man doing 900 sit-ups a day while "painting my hair the colour of mud." On *Everything About It Is A Love Song*, he looks back with wry good humour on his life. Mature, heartfelt, and beautifully sung, it's a surprise of the very best kind. ★★★★★

Sound: Eno's ambient textures take Simon's songcraft into new territory with often striking results – a perfect example of a great producer's collaborative skills. ★★★★★ NW



HAYDN, MOZART, BEETHOVEN

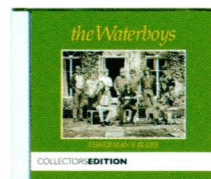
Sonata in C; Rondo in D (KV485), F (KV494) and A (KV511); Sonata Op. 27 No. 2 (Moonlight)

Havard Gimse (piano)

Naim CD089

Music: The *Moonlight Sonata*, is a work of considerable harmonic richness, with real technical difficulties that are addressed here with real virtuosity and grace. Ditto the Haydn, on whose shoulders Beethoven is famously depicted as having stood. The Mozart is technically less challenging, and in this case less musically interesting, perhaps because they were written for aspiring keyboard students. ★★★★★

Sound: The uses Naim's True Stereo process. It has considerable vitality and clarity, though the sound is dry, and has little of the richness of the very finest piano recordings. Though this may be a function of the instrument or the venue than the recording itself. ★★★★★ AG



THE WATERBOYS

Fisherman's Blues

EMI

Music: From the brilliant hoedown opening of the title track to the heady groove of *We Will Not Be Lovers*, you know that you are into something special here. From the beginning of 1986 to the autumn of 1988, Mike Scott and the Waterboys, including ace Irish fiddler Steve Wickham, brought Irish Rock back to Ireland. Drenched in a hundred sessions which criss-crossed Ireland from Dublin to Spiddal, Scott and co whipped up a heady brew that produced their very best, bestselling album. Van Morrison is covered, as is Woody Guthrie but the killer track is Scott's *When Ye Go Away*. ★★★★★

Sound: With a whole disc of out-takes it's obvious that the band took some time getting that 'wild mercury sound'. And Dylan producer Bob Johnston is on-board to boot! ★★★★★ MP



GOTAN PROJECT

Lunatico

XL Recordings

Music: The visionary fusion of tango and electronic beats on Gotan Project's award-winning debut album *La Revancha Del Tango* gave them a leftfield cut hit three years ago. The follow-up from the Paris-based trio doesn't depart too far from the recipe (it would be unfair to call such a distinctive sound a formula), but the ingredients are given a subtly different flavour. The dub and hip-hop elements are still present, but they're less in your face. Somehow, the fusion seems more organic, reminding us why, before it was hijacked by the ballroom dancing crowd, tango was called the sexiest music in the world. ★★★★★

Sound: 'Real' instruments such as the bandoneon and double bass dominate the proceedings, with the digital wizardry there simply to enhance rather than to compete with them. This is a rare mix and sounds all the better for the intelligent synergy. ★★★★★ NW



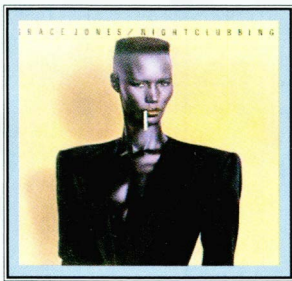
LAROCA

Friends In Far Away Places

Absolute Zero CD

Music: Rob Pollard and Olly Wakeford's first serious effort is a rich smorgasbord of world beats, smooth electronica and cinema/loungecore ambience. Cool and atmospheric yet, in the main, danceable, the duo's work has obviously been influenced by everything from Sufi, Afrobeat and flamenco to Eastern European gypsy vibes and Sakamoto's *Merry Xmas Mr. Lawrence* score. While it may not be relevant to a hi-fi mag, it does also come in a beautiful – and yes, recycled – sleeve. All in all, it's good to have friends in faraway places. ★★★★★

Sound: Lush and layered even though – or maybe because – this was mostly recorded at home with the very latest computer technology. Simon Heyworth's mastering brings out the very best of it. ★★★★★ PS

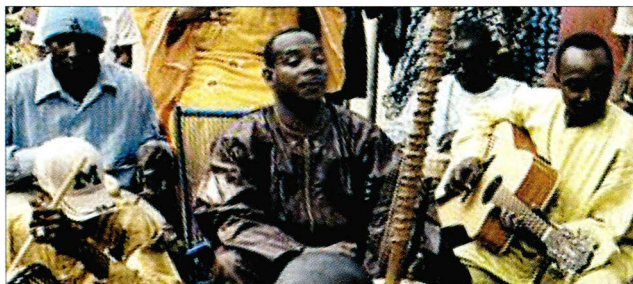


THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "A very slick recording with a luxury feel."

GRACE JONES *Nightclubbing* Island

Music: *Nightclubbing* from 1981 is actually a dub album, re-branded by bringing in a striking, androgynous non-singer to give it commercial appeal. With careful song selection and the production and playing skills of top dub stars Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, it proved a killer combination. The Iggy/Bowie-penned title track is almost unrecognisable at such a relaxed tempo and Bill Withers' *Use Me* has an even dirtier feel than the original. With *Pull Up To The Bumper*,

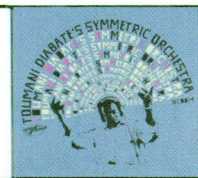
imagination does not need to come into it. What keeps this music fresh is the quality of playing and her style of delivery, still a highly potent combination 25 years on. ★★★★★
Sound: This is a very slick recording with a luxury feel, but plenty of energy to go with it. Dub is usually associated with heavy bass, but this has enough dynamics and space to keep the best of systems busy. And it sounds great on far more modest ones, too. ★★★★★ JK



TOUMANI DIABATE'S SYMMETRIC ORCHESTRA

Boulevard De L'Independence
Rough Trade

Music: Arguably the most accomplished but definitely the world's most celebrated kora (West African harp) player, Toumani Diabate made his international name from associations with Spanish flamenco maestros Ketama, blues legend Taj Mahal and Blur's Damon Albarn (though he later distanced himself from Albarn's flawed *Mali Music* project). For this album, Toumani Diabate returns to Mali and the Hotel Mandé in Bamako, where a fortnight of sessions yielded these nine stunning tracks. Diabate's lilting, melodic playing is absolutely to the fore. This can shift in a heartbeat from delicately plucked lullaby melodies to searing, lightning fingered runs. Of course, being backed by the horn section of funk legend and former James Brown musical director Pee Wee Ellis helps, too. ★★★★★
Sound: The informal sessions have resulted in an intimate feel, beautifully balanced and presented but with plenty of life and immediacy, as if you'd just dropped in on a live session in a Bamako hotel. ★★★★★ DO

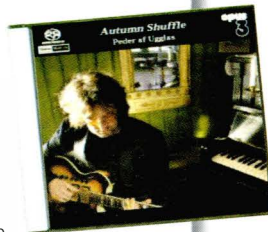


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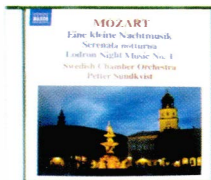
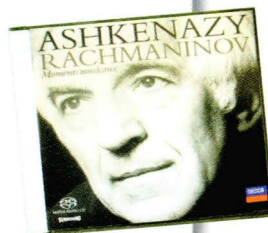
Music: Pedder af Ugglas may not be the first name that comes to mind when thinking of Scandinavian jazz/rock artists but this guitar player and keyboard tinkerer has been on the scene for some time. A lot of his work has been for TV and film and as a result is very strong on atmosphere, bearing more than a passing resemblance to the film work of Ry Cooder and to his score for *Paris, Texas* in particular. At other times, he's like Hendrix in bluesy mood and even Mark Knopfler, yet there is an originality to his material which makes it distinct from those influences. He plays with a band that includes trombone, double bass, drums and even a didgeridoo, an ensemble that makes its playing sound effortless but always engaging on this fabulous sounding disc. ★★★★★
Sound: Opus3 uses tube electronics to make its recordings, and the result is a gloriously deep and open sound that oozes quality. Like the music, it's strong on atmosphere and generous of tone. ★★★★★ JK



RACHMANINOV

Moments Musicaux
Vladimir Ashkenazy (piano)
SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)
Decca 475 6398

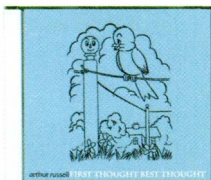
Music: Ashkenazy is something of a Rachmaninov specialist, but this recording includes a number of short pieces he has never recorded before, plus *Moments Musicaux Opus 16* and *Morceaux De Fantaisie Opus 3*. These are early works, but Rachmaninov was already developing a style of his own, as you can hear from *Prelude in C Sharp Minor*, the earliest piece for which he was widely recognised, and which is included as track eight in *Morceaux De Fantaisie*. The performance standard throughout is first rate, with stunning virtuosity where required – the left hand playing in the presto of *Moments Musicaux* for example, but it is never overplayed, and always at the service of the music. ★★★★★
Sound: Performed on a Steinway, the microphones appear to have been placed fairly close, yet the sound breathes well. The rich, complex tonality is particularly well formed in the SACD layer, with a real sense of warmth and grace. Imagery is also three dimensional – an excellent recording. ★★★★★ AG



MOZART

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik; Serenata notturna; Lodron Night Music No. 1
Petter Sundkvist (conductor), Swedish Chamber Orchestra
Naxos 8.557023

Music: These are popular and attractive works, padded out here by some attractive but less familiar, and less than profound, early works from his Salzburg period. The disc works well as a programme however, and is performed with panache by the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, who bring the proper dance-like lightness of touch and elegance to the proceedings. ★★★★★
Sound: The recording was made at the Swedish Chamber Orchestra's home concert hall, and offers good sound, with solid low frequency content, strong presence and explicit stereo imagery. Given the low price, this is a thoroughly recommendable disc. ★★★★★ AG



ARTHUR RUSSELL

First Thought Best Thought
Rough Trade
Music: Arthur Russell's work varied from pioneering electronic dance excursions to exploratory classical compositions.

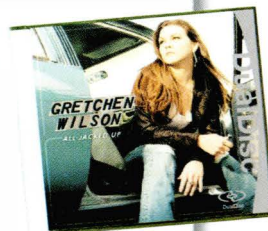
The first disc of this new compilation, much of which was never previously released, focuses on *Instrumentals*; offbeat tunes and sketches, many of which could have been turned into downbeat pop songs, but were actually intended to be performed as part of a 48-hour cycle of music. The second CD is dominated by *Tower Of Meaning*, a long, contemplative piece that evokes Russell's native Iowa. ★★★★★
Sound: Rightly revered in certain circles, Russell never made much money from his art, and recording tended to be done on a hand to mouth basis. As a result much of the material sounds less than polished. ★★★★★ DO

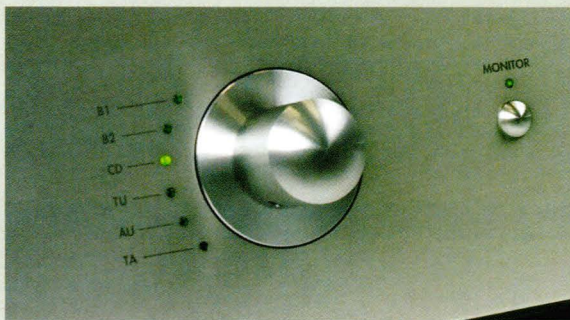
GRETCHEN WILSON

All Jacked Up
DualDisc (one side CD stereo, the other DVD-Audio 5.1)
Epic

Music: A couple of years ago Gretchen Wilson's first album rocketed to number one in the US country chart (and number two in the pop charts) on the strength of her white trash blue collar single *Redneck Woman*. Her second album follows much the same pattern – rabble-rousing country rock with full-throated singing, a manure-kickin' band and lyrics that mark her out as more than just another new Nashville clone.

The title track could easily refer to a busted vehicle, or the lady herself after one too many Jack Ds. Other tunes like *One Bud Wiser* and *Not Bad For A Bartender* give a fair idea of the kind of glass she views the world through. Half full or half empty... who cares! ★★★★★
Sound: This is not an obvious candidate for the surround treatment, and in fairness it is not too imaginatively done, but the band and especially Gretchen Wilson's full-on vocal performance are good enough to make the exercise worthwhile. ★★★★★ DO





SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

I I30

"It has the kind of performance that products in the next price class upwards would envy, yet has sacrificed nothing in build, finish or usability in the process."

What Hi Fi? Sound & Vision Awards 2005



I CD31

"If you want an elegant, superbly built top-end player, Primare's CD31 is an excellent place to start. It sounds fabulous and is built to sky-high standards."

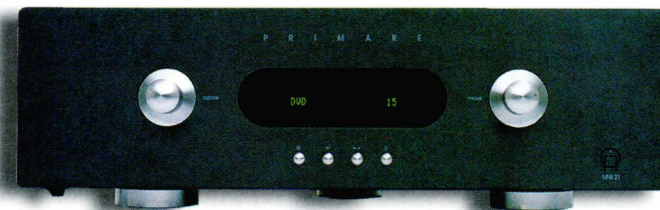
What Hi Fi? Sound & Vision Awards 2005



I SPA21

"If you're after the Holy Grail of home cinema amps – great sound with both music and movies – then the SPA21 is it. The queue to pay homage starts here."

What Hi Fi? Sound & Vision Awards 2005



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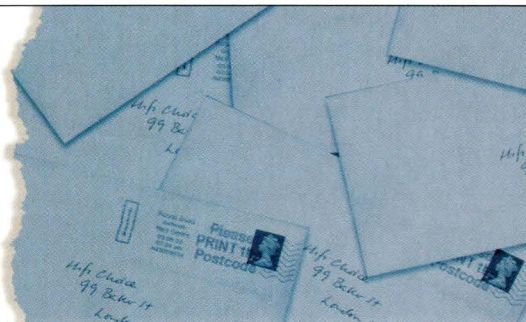


ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



A SCREW LOOSE?

In last month's issue (*HFC* 279), I chanced upon Jimmy's *Tweaks*, which I am told is the 41st such gem. My God, I am glad I haven't noticed the others. Next to what looks like a cartoon of Jonathan King wielding a spanner, Jimmy (for it is he) informs us of the importance of having our plugs fitted correctly. We are persuaded that one should remove all

of the plugs and "check that all the screws in the mains plugs are properly tight" and to also remove and clean the fuse, as there may be a build up of corrosion and dirt. We are assured that this will result in an audible improvement.

As if this weren't enough of an insult to our intelligence, he then goes on to assure us that lining up the slot heads in the plug's screws will actually result in yet another audible

improvement. Perhaps it is Jimmy Hughes with the loose screws?

Jampal via email

HFC By Jimmy's own admission, this is "wacky territory", but what harm can it do? His tweaks are usually just that: tweaks. They tend to cost nothing to implement and are merely ideas that may bring an improvement to your sound for very little effort. Whether you believe in the efficacy of a tweak is down to you, but there's nothing to lose in giving them a try. Although, we admit mains screw alignment is – as Jimmy states – "wacky".

"This is causing me great difficulty, as I need to isolate the turntable."

BRING BACK HANGING

I use a Lovan hi-fi rack to support my system. However, I have wood flooring in my house which is timber framed with stud walls. This is causing me great difficulty, as I need to isolate the turntable, which I have to tip-toe around at the moment. Wall-mounted platforms don't seem to work either. The only thing I can think of is suspending the turntable from the ceiling. There must be an easier way!

Gerry Diamond Ireland

HFC It might be worth giving Townshend Audio a call (020 8979 3837). Its comprehensive range of Seismic Sink air-sprung supports may offer the kind of isolation your system needs in your difficult room. If your budget will reach, the excellent, re-vamped VSSS Seismic Sink Stand and its dual-tensioned load cells may help sort your deck out. Hopefully, this could mean no more tip-toeing around the turntable, although it does sound fun to watch. ☐



Above: Townshend VSSS support

Letter of the month

WHERE'S THE M-F REVIEWS?

I enjoyed your CD player themed issue last month (*HFC* 279) and the reviews within, but I often wonder why there are certain brands you never seem to cover. Take Musical Fidelity, for example. It is a big British brand with a presence in other magazines, but I rarely read about the company in *Hi-Fi Choice*. It is not alone in being passed over for reviews. These products seem to be off your radar completely. Why is this and what is your review policy?

Clive Johnson via email

HFC We strive to put the best new products into the magazine, but there are certain manufacturers who simply won't supply product to us. This might be because they are intimidated by our rigorous test programme, or have taken exception to a less than flattering review in the past. Often, however, if a product has done well in another magazine, suppliers won't risk 'diluting' the perception of the product, just in case subsequent reviews are less complimentary than the first.



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: Marantz PM7001 amplifier

LIQUID SOUNDS

My preamp developed a hum problem, so I approached my local dealer and left it with them. A few weeks later, I returned to find that the dealer had gone into liquidation. It seems very unlikely I'll be able to get my amp back so what would you recommend up to £1,500? I am looking for a natural, dynamic sound, free from treble harshness.

Ray Lukic Cheshire

HFC If you were given any kind of receipt to acknowledge that you handed over your amp it will make it easier to recover from the liquidators dealing with the shop's affairs. If, however, you do happen to need a new preamp, we'd recommend Arcam's FMJ C31 or Primare's PRE30, both of which are exquisite examples of amplifier excellence.

INSENSITIVE

After the glowing review of the Marantz PM7200 (HFC 248), I ended up buying one. I have it connected to a pair of ATC SCM7 speakers, which I adore. The only issue is that I think the amp struggles driving speakers with such low sensitivity (84dB). I've read your

latest review on the amp's replacement – the PM7001 (HFC 279) and would like to ask if the latest amp is more capable of driving difficult speakers? I love the Marantz sound as it seems to play a variety of musical genres well.

Dinos Constantinou via email

HFC Both amplifiers deliver around 100 watts, so the PM7001 is unlikely to be dramatically different in terms of driving the ATC's load. If you crave more grip and

"It seems to play a variety of musical genres well."

dynamics from your sound, you may have to look elsewhere for the extra 'oomph'. We would suggest looking upmarket for the perfect partner to the ATCs – the AVI Lab Series integrated is an ideal match. However, Rotel's new RC-06 preamp with two new bridged RB-06 power amps (180 watts) might well do the trick without breaking the bank. Expect a review in the August issue.

SOUNDSTAGE WOES

I have a problem with my system. While the sound quality is very good in the detail/voice projection arena, the soundstaging lacks front-to-back depth and height. Where do I start in fixing this problem? Am I asking too much from my modest Rotel system and if so, how much would I need to spend and which component would I need to replace?

Cliff Francis via email

HFC Although it depends greatly on room size and loudspeaker design, generally your speakers should be about 2-3m apart and 3-4m from your listening position. This should form a near isosceles triangle, with your listening position at the apex. Aside from possibly a rug, there should be nothing inside this triangle, as reflections from objects inside this space – especially reflective surfaces such as glass coffee tables – can subtly ruin imaging.

Now, try 'toeing in' the speakers. Beginning with the front baffles pointing directly at you from the listening position (meaning the speakers are firing directly at your ears), experiment with turning the speakers toward one another (so an imaginary beam from the tweeter passes in front of your nose) and then away from one another (so the same tweeter beam would fire along the room). Make sure both speakers are evenly toed-in and make small movements until you are happy with the soundstaging. Toe-in should offer the depth you crave and finding the right amount is all about experimentation.

Your Rotel system should be able to cope with this. Tweaking what you have may be better than throwing cash at the problem. Let us know how you get on.

Onlineforum

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



Does anybody have experience of Russ Andrews or Isotek mains conditioners? All I know about them is that one uses passive filtration and the other is active. Does the active filtration make a big difference? I currently have RA kit, but I have been advised to change over...

Windup600

...see if you can dem the Isotek stuff. If it's a dealer suggesting this, then it should allow you to try it without obligation. This kind of thing divides opinion, and the best advice is to try it for yourself.

Analogekidd

Can anyone direct me to a good two-channel audio

shop that will allow me to audition a full system at my leisure? I'm looking at a £1,000 system...

Paul Szpunar

...I have always found Richer Sounds more than accommodating (though some of these stores do get very busy) and you can book their audition rooms for your use. The

Cambridge Audio range it sells is good, too.

Smiler

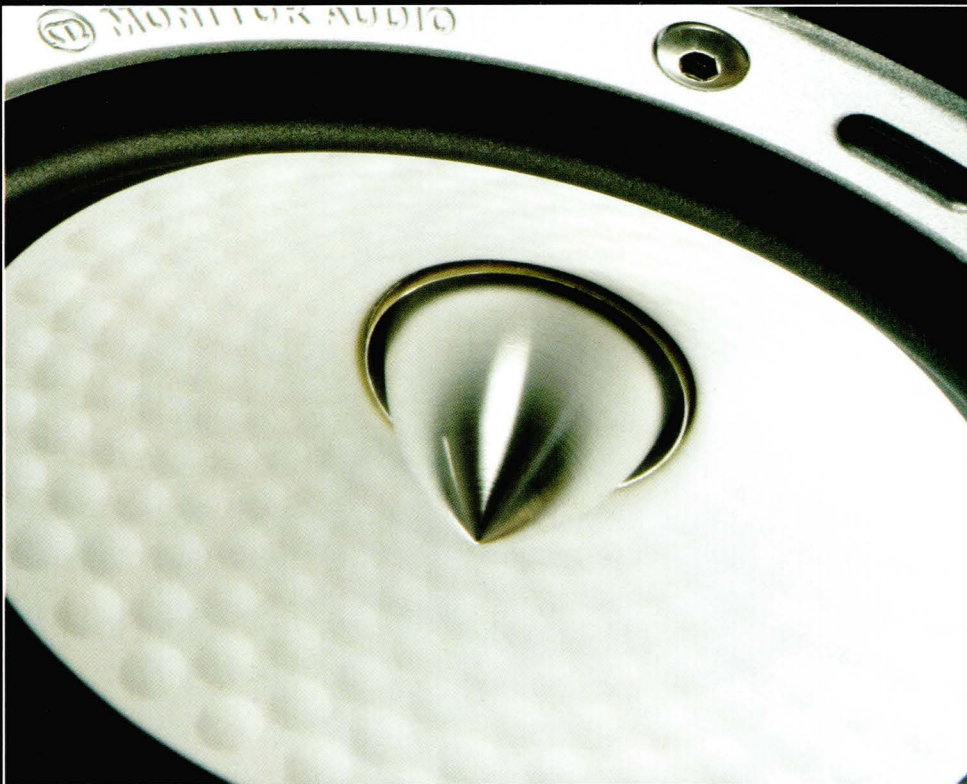
I've just taken possession of a new Arcam CD73 CD player that I will link up to my Arcam AVR100 amp. Which interconnects are best suited to the Arcam sound? I have around £50 to spend...

Nomadicwesti

...Arcam isn't especially cable-fussy, but with £50, I would go for the Ecosse The Conductor interconnect. You can get them on eBay for around £50. Or one of the QED interconnects – the Silver Spiral works very well with Arcam. In fact, you can't go far wrong with any QED interconnect.

Wolfinn

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MORDAUNT-SHORT PERFORMANCE 6 LOUDSPEAKERS | £8,000

Top gear

It costs as much as a car, but only a small car. For this system's true automotive equivalent, you'll have to look up market

Car analogies are usually resisted here at *Beautiful Systems*. It's probably a subconscious thing; when I'm not doing this, I work for a car magazine – it would be too easy to slip in the odd 'built like a Bentley' or 'slicker than a BMW on a greasy roundabout driven by David Cameron'. You see the problem: car references are a pretty blunt instrument if the intention is to nail the often elusive character of a hi-fi system. After all, a good many of the combos featured in these pages cost as much as a modestly-specced Merc. And the asking price of a few systems could frighten a Ferrari. As a luxury purchase, a five-figure *Beautiful System* stands toe to toe with any car; it doesn't need an automotive context to justify itself or, indeed, be understood.



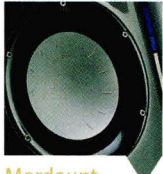
That said – and don't tell me you didn't see it coming – here's the car analogy. If this month's *Beautiful System* from Marantz and Mordaunt-Short were a car it would have to be, without any shadow of a doubt... a Lexus. Any particular model? The hunky, handsome GS300, I think. I won't labour the point, but there's an understated glamour and ineffable sense of nuggety, nth-degree engineered solidity that informs both the upper-medium sized executive saloon from Toyota's premium-brand division and this flagship coalition from Japan's Marantz and London's Mordaunt-Short. Some of the jewellery is maybe a little too conspicuous (very Lexus, very Marantz) and some of it resides on the cusp of tastefulness. But you feel sure that your money has been well spent and that the (ever so slightly glitzy) beauty is more than skin deep.

Let's start with that winning mix of images and feelings conjured up by Marantz at its most audiophile orientated. Sensual: the kind of surface

and control tactility that could turn us all into hi-fi fondling fetishists. Comforting: battleship-by-NASA build quality. Pampering: features and functions that emphatically refute the idea that less is more (underlined, in this case, by tiny slabs of shiny metal and softly glowing blue strip lighting). Subliminal: the reassuringly cool designer dress sense of brand ambassador and impossibly talented sonic sorcerer Ken Ishiwata. Then there's the association built up over the years that bright, brittle sonics and Marantz occupy opposite ends of the audio universe. Everything we know about Marantz suggests it isn't just Ishiwata's ears that are golden.

OUT OF THIN AIR

Question is, just how good does it get? The SA-11S1 immediately sets the bar up where the air is thin. A two-channel CD/SACD player of weighty substance and frankly fabulous build, you'll encounter few disc spinners as rewarding to place on a support table. All right, £2,000 flies comfortably above the mid-fi radar, but the SA-11S1 has the look, feel and operational refinement of a product that costs twice, maybe even three times as much. The exterior metalwork is double-thick and subtly bowed at the front. The control buttons that flank the display/transport drawer centre plate are lightly bathed in a blue light, and the power-up button in the centre of that plate is worthy of... well, since we're not quite off the car thing, an Aston DB9.

Under the bonnet, things get more serious still with a copper-plated chassis and copper shielding for key components, including the TO-220 voltage regulators. The transport mechanism is mostly metal (no   



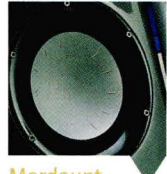
Marantz SA-11S1 CD/SACD player
£2,000

There may well be a better built disc spinner out there, but not for anything like £2k. The competition's tough, but there's nothing significantly ahead in sound quality, either.



Marantz PM-11S1 integrated amp
£2,500

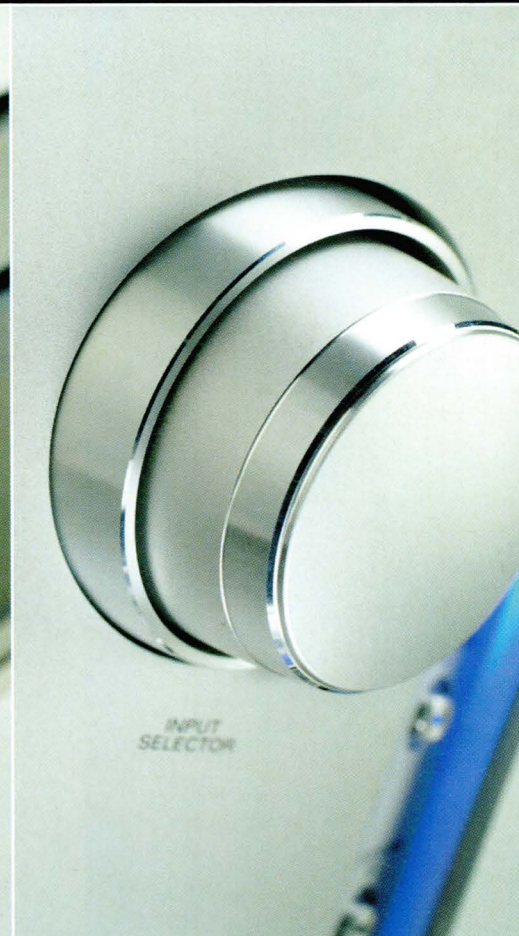
The matching amp may not be quite as muscular as it looks, but it's a gorgeous thing to listen to with exquisite treble and an almost valve-like midrange. It even has tone controls fitted!



Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 loudspeaker
£3,500 per pair

The remarkable Performance 6 marries technical innovation with an extraordinarily transparent and truthful sound. A high-end bargain.

"If this month's *Beautiful System* from Marantz and Mordaunt-Short were a car it would have to be, without any shadow of a doubt... a Lexus."



flimsy plastic here) and the audio circuitry all discrete (no rank and file op-amps). You'll need the remote handset – beautifully built, a dream to use – to access the player's full panoply of features. These include six selectable digital filters (three each for CD and SACD), switchable noise-shapers on top of the digital filters for additional fine tuning and even a DC filter for zapping unwanted "added components" in older recordings. Hard-bitten audiophiles might find such 'enhancements' superfluous but, on the other hand, you could argue that a little choice never hurt anyone. The SA-11S1 offers balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs as well as digital outputs (16-bit/44.1 kHz only) of both electrical and optical varieties.

Marantz claims that its best integrated stereo amp, the £2,500 PM-11S1, is "derived from legends and built for audiophile purists" and will "leave you breathless". That's true, it weighs a wrist-clicking 26kg and, therefore, is an obvious candidate for the bottom shelf of any equipment rack. But that's okay – we like our serious amps to be brutes and this one has an effortless 100 watts a side, backed up by oodles of current. Copious amounts of copper again feature in the areas of chassis

construction and electromagnetic shielding, while the outer casing is made of an aluminium alloy and very attractive it is, too.

In line with the cutting edge of Marantz thinking, the PM-11S1 (identical styling to the CD player, just deeper with knobs on and a smaller display) is based around the company's current feedback topology with a discrete HDAM buffer amplifier between stages, short, symmetrical signal paths and low impedance, wide-bandwidth choke-regulated power supplies. There are five standard inputs plus a single balanced input that can be fed from the corresponding output on the CD player.

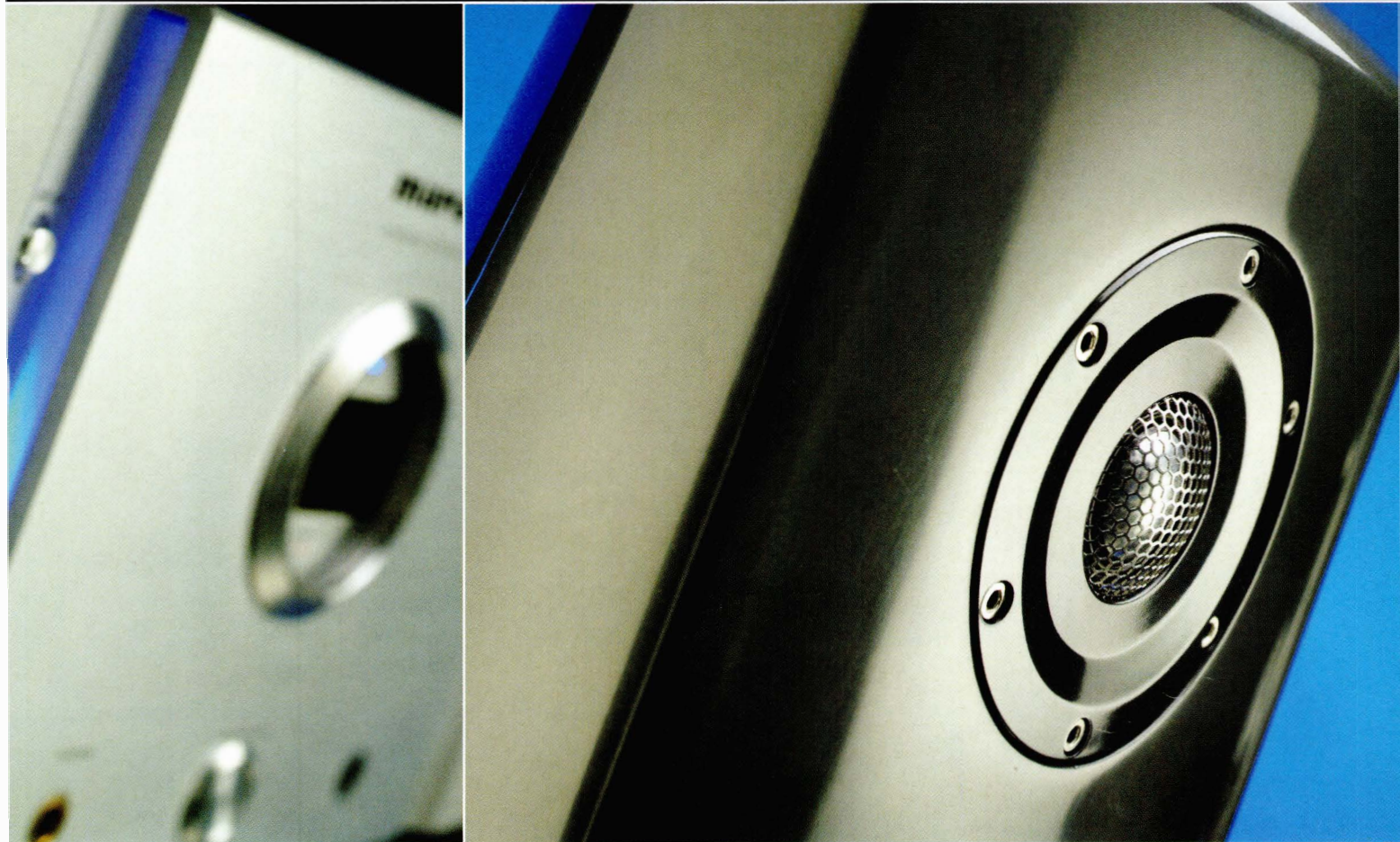
WHAT A PERFORMANCE

Does it get any better? Quite possibly. To say that the Performance 6 is the best speaker Mordaunt-Short (a company most recently concerned with the budget end of the market) has ever made is to undersell it. To the considerable credit of M-S, it might just be the best £3,500 speaker anyone has ever made.

See if there's anything here that in any way sounds built down to a price. A curved and tapering injection-moulded monocoque polymer resin enclosure, with sides of varying thicknesses to eliminate resonances within the

structure. Drivers that are 'floated' off of the front baffle and connected directly to the rear of the enclosure. And that interesting-looking spike projecting back from the enclosure at tweeter level? No, not a coat hook. And not, perhaps more surprisingly, a tube for absorbing rear radiation, B&W style. The spike is vented. It allows the radiation from the aluminium dome tweeter to emerge from a logarithmically spaced spiral of holes, effectively removing the phase information from the rear output and thereby reducing the tendency for the front output to 'beam'. The upshot is a more consistent performance over a wider listening area. The midrange and twin bass drivers employ improved versions of Mordaunt-Short's favoured smooth-dish aluminium diaphragms. The crossover is located in the bottom of the enclosure, solidly attached to the thick metal base that provides extra stability. Three sets of very funky bullet-shaped speaker terminals allow tri-wiring or tri-amping if required.

What defines the difference between a good hi-fi and a great music system? The great music system is the one that allows the real character of individual recordings to shine through. The contrasts, the playing and, most crucially of all, the emotion. Here's a system that



“It doesn’t matter whether it’s soulful and seductive or raw and raucous, this combo nails that narrowest of lines, which exists between resolving detail and encompassing the bigger picture.”

grabs your attention on that level and never lets go. The building blocks are its clarity, speed, grip, exceedingly low coloration – it’s almost electrostatic-like in this respect – and knockout dynamics. With the right recording (say Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of The Moon* on SACD), the music has a shimmering, scalp-tingling presence. Who needs the swirling, hallucinatory, almost migraine-inducing multichannel SACD mix, when stereo gets this damn good?

SOUL SEDUCTION

It doesn’t matter whether it’s soulful and seductive or raw and raucous, this combo nails that narrowest of lines, which exists between resolving detail and fully encompassing the bigger picture. The sound is finely revealing, harmonically rich and rhythmically coherent. Treble has brilliance and definition but no glare or grain.

Bass has speed, shape, pitch precision and tremendous extension but maybe not quite as much weight as you might

expect. It’s a very particular kind of presentation, devoid of manipulative emphasis, undoubtedly quite dry, but ultimately deeply satisfying. It’s initially disconcerting, though: many systems tend to deliver a bass that’s more flabby or bloated, and the first time you encounter this muscular, lean bottom end, it seems wrong somehow. But first impressions can be deceptive, and sometimes just plain wrong. When you familiarise yourself with this taut bass sound, there’s no going back.

On jazz saxophonist David Sanborn’s *Up Front* CD, Sanborn’s tenor sounds authentically loud and fruity, imbued with just the right amount of rasp and biting edge. The system’s ability to track a rhythm and keep its finger on the pulse of the music is right on the money, too. In contrast, big, orchestral arrangements – which can so often end up sounding strangely amorphous and monochromatic unless all the components are pulling in the same direction – are lush, finely textured and properly expansive. It’s an

immensely crisp and vivid presentation, with a sense of scale that’s accurate, not over-inflated, with all disc types.

Of the digital filter settings, I preferred number 1 (on both CD and SACD) with the DC filter switched out. The differences between the filters are very subtle, but seem to get slightly more rose-tinted and romantic as you head towards 3. For brio and musical involvement, 1’s the, er, one I’d choose, if for no other reason than I listen to more rock, dance and jazz than classical and small ensemble acoustic. Thing is, settings 2 and 3 work brilliantly with classical/acoustic material. All the bases covered, then.

So, as good as a Lexus GS300? Better. For the car, there’s always that obstacle called the BMW 5 Series it can’t quite overcome. But this Marantz/M-S system bows to no rival at the price. And that, we promise, is the last car analogy for some time... at least until we buckle up for next issue’s *Beautiful Systems*. **HFC**

David Vivian





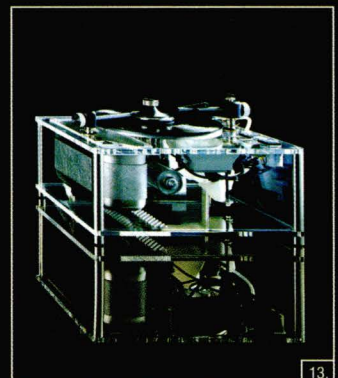
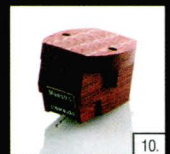
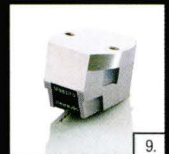
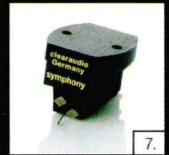
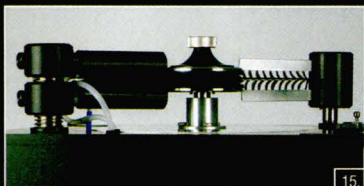
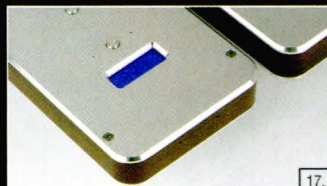
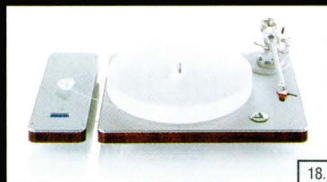
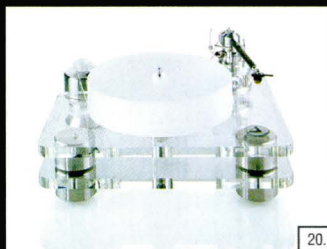
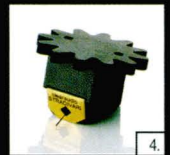
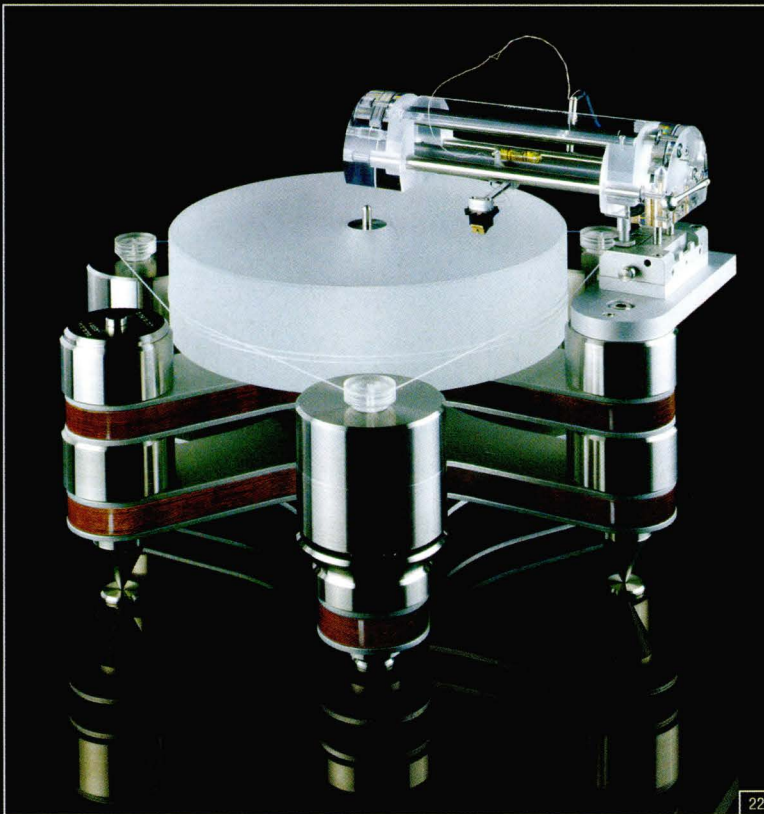
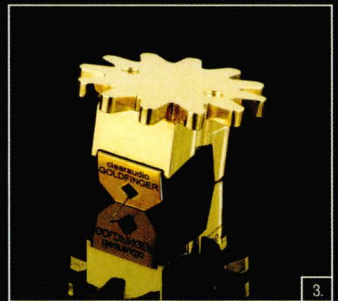
For all things analogue...



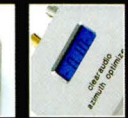
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23.

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REVIEWS

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



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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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...

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN

G06 24-bit CD Player

Open

Display

On/Off

OPEN

G06 hits the spot

Meridian's G Series has spawned a new entry-level CD player. Can it match our high expectations?

PRODUCT Meridian G06

TYPE CD player

PRICE £1,695

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x9x35cm

• Weight: 8kg • Compatible with CD, CD-R, CD-RW
• CD Text • Audio outputs: analogue (RCA-phono),
digital (optical and electrical) • Analogue output level:
2.3V • Finish: black or silver

CONTACT ☎ 01480 445678

🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

More than a year has passed since we looked at Meridian's 'statement' CD player, the 808, but memories of its highly desirable sound remain fresh. It's proved a hit with buyers, too. All the same, there's only so many people who will ever be able to fork out £8,000 for any CD player. The new G06, however, is a considerably more realistic beast at just over a fifth the price. Meridian

presumably doesn't rate it as equal to the big monster, but how close does it get?

In terms of appearance and ergonomics, pretty close. We're particularly taken with the controls, which are – in our experience – truly novel: the front panel buttons are (mostly) not labelled until the machine is turned on, whereupon labels for them appear on the large graphic display above. That's cool, but even cooler is that by pressing the 'More' button, one can get access to fast forward/backward and programming buttons, the labels above the buttons changing as the buttons themselves are reconfigured. This at least removes the necessity for the remote control on most occasions – but for once this is almost an own goal, because Meridian's fantastic system remote is supplied as standard. This king-sized creation is truly a delight in itself; it's backlit, powerful and unusually neatly labelled. Better still, as it's a multi-product,

multi-manufacturer and learning remote, you can use it for every other bit of kit you own.

So, it's a proper high-end user experience at least. The general appearance you can gauge from the photos, but this won't tell you just how solid the machine feels. Thoughtful choice of materials and assembly methods has made the G06 unusually dead and non-resonant, while its considerable weight ensures there's no danger whatsoever of it sliding around in use or at the whim of some unusually inflexible interconnect cable.

The weight is almost entirely casework. Meridian has never been big on monster power supplies, and in fact the supply is a universal switch-mode type that accepts any mains voltage and frequency. As far as we could tell, it also eliminates any signature in terms of hum or other breakthrough to the audio. It is partnered by two other main functional blocks: the transport and the audio board.

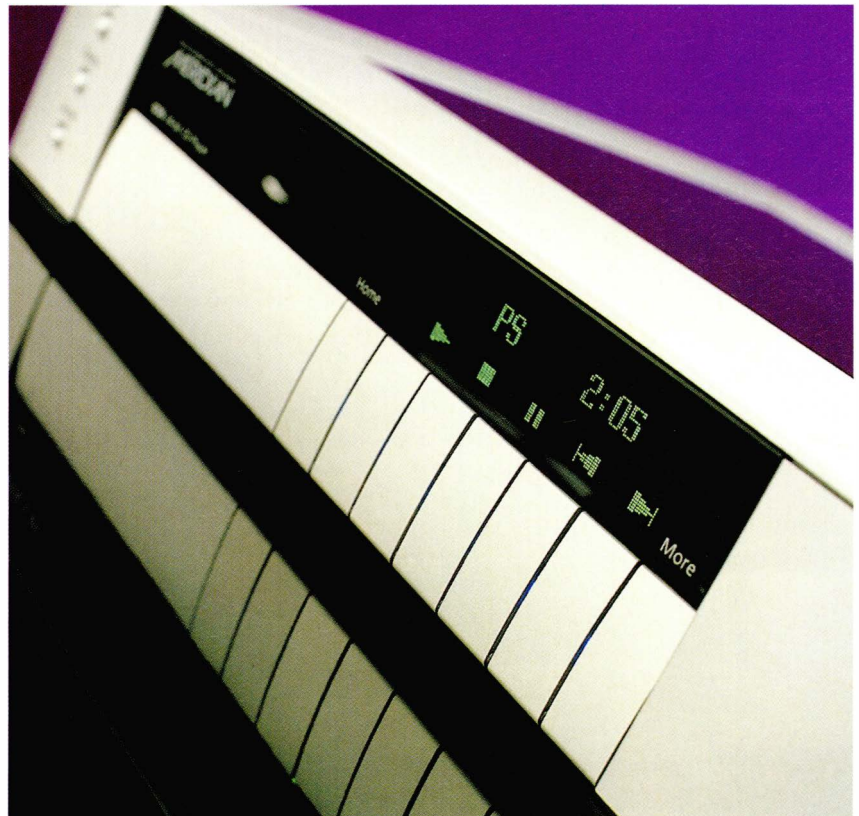


It's no great surprise that the transport is a DVD-ROM type (thankfully quieter mechanically than most – it's essentially inaudible from more than a metre away, apart from a faint, periodic clicking sound). It claims "ten times better" error correction than normal transports, but don't be fooled – even this deck won't play those marmalade-smear discs!

What may be less expected is that the audio board is at first glance quite similar in its chip count to that of many other CD players in this general price bracket. The D-to-A converter, for a start, is a familiar type and the output op-amps likewise. True, there are a few detail differences but on the whole this looks like a not-untypical assemblage of parts. We can't criticise Meridian for this: at this kind of price, in the quantities one can reasonably expect to shift, the choice is quite simply between a truly novel functional implementation in a bog-basic box and a smart-looking unit with a largely conventional electronics complement. Given the performance levels we know from experience that can be achieved with the latter solution, Meridian's choice seems sensible. Anyway, if you really want something a bit less ordinary, you can look instead at the impressive G08, which in a near-identical package offers Meridian's own upsampling implementation and various other niceties, at a premium of some £550.

Back to the issue at hand: what, then, does Meridian claim for this player? As you might expect, low distortion and low jitter both figure, as does low noise. We're happy to confirm those claims are all among the

“Meridian’s fantastic system remote is truly a delight in itself; it’s backlit, powerful and unusually neatly labelled.”



Q & A

We talked to John Bamford, product manager at Meridian Audio, about the new G06 CD player



HFC To what extent does this player build upon past or existing Meridian CD or DVD-Audio players?

JB It's based extensively on the award-winning G08, but without the G08's upsampling circuitry. And we dispensed with the balanced outputs to reduce the cost. While G08 is the perfect partner for our G02 balanced preamplifier, this new model is ideally matched with our more affordable G01 preamp. It allows enthusiasts to assemble a very high performance separates system within a smaller budget.

Is this Meridian's idea of a 'budget' model or can we expect even lower-priced players?

G06 is the cheapest player we make right now. We've nothing cheaper on the drawing board as we speak, but never say never...

The main components of the G06 are clearly industry-standard parts. Are there any special Meridian 'nips and tucks' you can share with us?

So much of what we do is proprietary – the manner in which we handle data to preserve integrity and minimise errors – that to tell would be to give away all our secrets. So I'll have to dodge this question!

How does this player fit into the Meridian 'all-digital' scheme of things?

Actually, the G06 is not the Meridian player to buy if one is planning towards building a fully digital Meridian system featuring our DSP loudspeakers. Better to dig a little deeper for the more expensive upsampling G08, because its digital output can be activated to output at 24-bit/88.2kHz.

With the Meridian High Resolution (MHR) digital interface (with SmartLink), this makes for an even lower jitter 'digital transport' with which to feed our DSP loudspeakers.

Do you design by ear or by measurement?

Both. Our engineers always measure first, as ears can too easily be deceived. Then we listen, refine, measure, listen, sleep on it, compare, measure, listen, ask our colleagues to listen, and after all that make a small production batch. Then we listen again as a final check before we start shipping to dealers. In fact, production units usually sound a little bit better than prototypes.



best we've seen at any price and generally exemplary. A few other technical tests we've dreamed up failed to show any worrying trends, with digital filter ripple basically non-existent and the ultrasonic band above 24kHz exceptionally well suppressed. The one weakness, compared with the 808 and a very few other high-end players/DACs we've seen, is the all-too-common use of a filter configuration that attenuates at half the sampling frequency by only a modest amount.

Naturally, with Meridian being leading proponents of digital loudspeakers and inter-equipment communications, options are provided for these, the former by the usual S/PDIF digital outputs (electrical and Toslink) and the latter by two 'Meridian Comms' DIN sockets and one BNC. An RS232 input is also provided for maintenance and updating of the internal firmware.

SOUND QUALITY

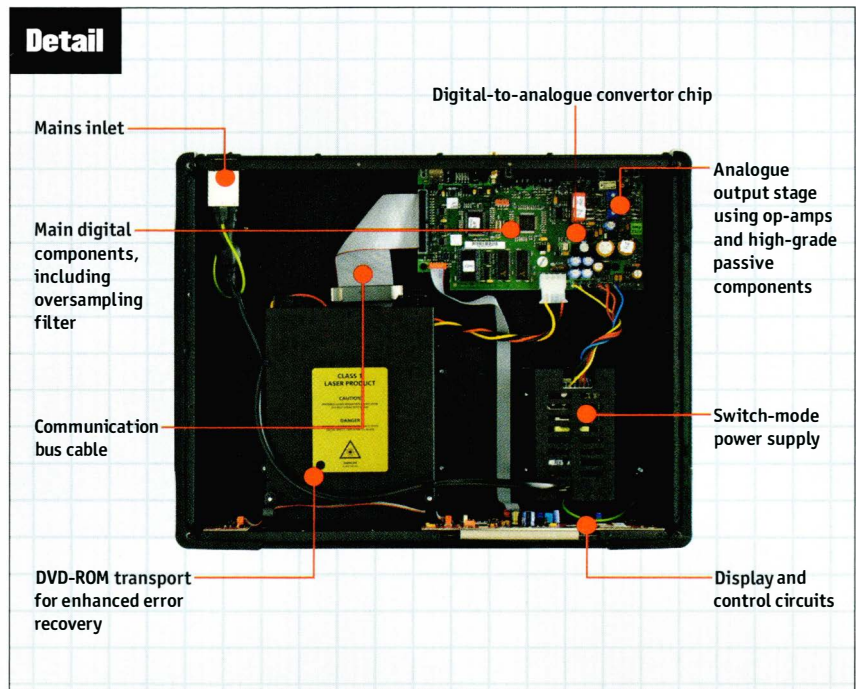
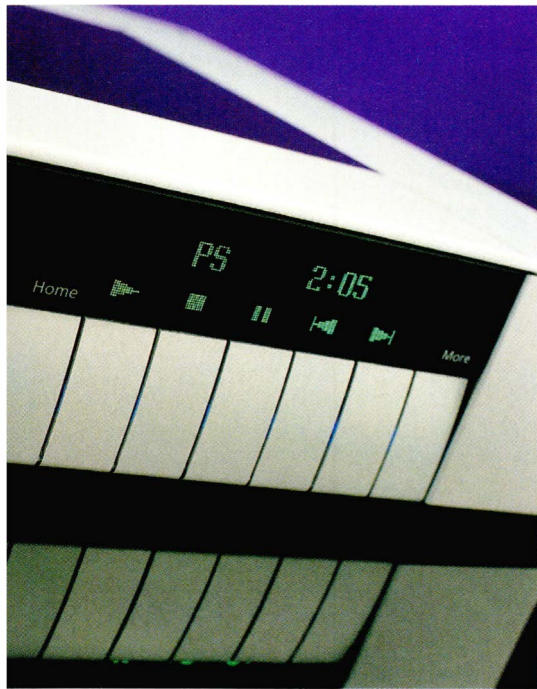
Coming to us hot on the heels of a group of CD players of similar price to this one, the G06 found us in no mood to tolerate even the smallest of foibles, since one evidently doesn't have to. Not that we seriously expected any. From the very outset (whatever one might

think of the advisability of warming up and burning in kit), it was clear that we would have to try very hard if we were going to disturb this Meridian's *sang-froid*. It's a very, very confident all-rounder with impressive abilities in just about every area. If it was a person, it would be a cross between Jeeves and Bruce Lee.

It happened to arrive just hours after a handful of CDs that were mastered and quality-checked on the same amplifier and speakers. One of these discs featured artists very familiar from personal acquaintance. How better to check both player and discs than by marrying them together? And it was rewarding to hear well-loved and carefully nurtured sounds welling forth, with just a little more solidity to the bass than we remembered, reassuringly stable and precise stereo imaging and treble that was very clearly extended. What we had heard previously was a shade more openness in the treble, slightly more air around the solo female voice on the most familiar recording and also just a little less harshness on her sibilants.

Still, those qualities had been noted when using a seriously upmarket professional DAC and we'd hesitate to suggest that they can be found in any sub-£2,000 CD replay machine





we've encountered. Nor indeed can we recommend offhand any direct competitor that can make a better job of the lower reaches, although some probably reach parity. There is something quite awe-inspiringly real about the G06's bass, a combination of extension and control that provides both 'slam' and tunefulness, a relatively rare achievement especially if one values tunefulness in quiet music.

That last comment in particular may suggest that this is a very good player for jazz lovers (after all, the mellow tones of the plucked upright bass underpin a large number of classic tracks) and that's a fair conclusion. The only limitation with such repertoire is in the treble, and 'limitation' is a downright unfair way to judge an unwillingness to stoop to mellowing the rather aggressive brightness of quite a few well-known jazz recordings. All the same, it's as well to be aware that in true Meridian style this is above all an honest CD player that makes no concessions to poor recordings. To the extent that they lack bass, treble or detail it will bail them out as best it can, but gross tonality faults or downright feebleness are simply relayed in all their inadequacy. Yes, there is hi-fi around that seems to make a better fist of such recordings by papering over the sonic cracks, but there's always a price to be paid in terms of performance with top-notch productions.

Similar logic applies to the business of system matching. Don't buy a G06 if you are expecting it magically to 'fix' problems elsewhere in the system. It won't do it, but it will at least help you identify the problems more precisely. And of course, it requires no special treatment, either. It sounds assured, detailed and refined in pretty much any hi-fi company we can muster for it.

"There is something awe-inspiringly real about the G06's bass, a combination of both 'slam' and tunefulness."

The most important aspect, though, which we've deliberately saved for last, is that this is a really music-loving piece of hi-fi equipment. It can be tempting to make a simplistic equation between analysis and lack of musical involvement, but this is one of those desirable bits of equipment that prove conclusively how hollow and misleading a hypothesis that is. On the contrary, it is precisely because this is a particularly detailed and analytical player that one can so easily become completely immersed in a fine musical performance.

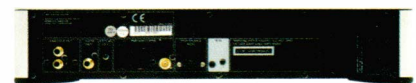
At a live gig – a good one in a decent venue with a really buzzing group of performers on stage, special effects and pyrotechnics to make up for limitations in performer or performance – one doesn't have to concentrate on one aspect of the sound to enjoy it. It's all there, in outline and in detail, for the brain to take in with minimal effort and maximum appreciation.

That's exactly what really fine hi-fi like this can achieve, balancing the various aspects of tonality, image, dynamics, rhythm and melody in such a way that whatever one wants to hear within the whole is instantly accessible. If you listen hard enough, you can pick out the detail in an AM radio broadcast on a cheap tranny, but the effort will weary your brain almost before you've begun. The G06, a perfect example of balancing virtues, doesn't ask you to do that work: it does it for you.

The second flute in a romantic symphony, or the whole orchestra? The backing vocals in a

glam rock track, or the bass? It's your choice, and the answer 'both' is also entirely possible. Meridian has achieved a high and consistent standard with this player that is not markedly partial to any musical style or instrument, nor to any other external circumstances, and while we must concede that on sound quality grounds alone it's not the only game in town (some others manage similar feats at a similar price), the G06 is by any standards a highly recommendable item. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 91% [Progress bar]	PRO Highly civilised, refined and detailed sound which can nevertheless stomp, sing, shake, rattle'n'roll and generally have a great time. Informative and involving with any kind of music.
FEATURES >> 88% [Progress bar]	CON Makes no allowance for poor recordings or partnering equipment – ruthless honesty is not to everyone's taste!
BUILD >> 92% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 88% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Few, if any, players at the price offer the all-round attainment, great looks and excellent build quality of the G06. The remote clinches it – it's a cracker, within or without a Meridian-based system, and notably better than the G07 it replaces.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%	



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Précision power

Chapter Audio is out to prove that high-end amplification doesn't just mean pre/power combos

PRODUCT Chapter Précis

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £3,995

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.7x10x30cm
• Weight: 22kg • Inputs: four single-ended (RCA phono), one balanced (XLR), front-mounted minijack
• Rated power: 130 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01392 686797
🌐 www.chapterelectronics.co.uk

Chapter Audio is a small British company with a mission to bring new technology to the hi-fi market. Forget the standard class AB output stage that you will find in most contemporary amps, and ignore the analogue volume potentiometers that we all know and 'love'. Instead, engineer Duncan

Shrimpton is cutting his own patterns from scratch and the new Précis integrated is a showcase for his talents.

Chapter started out with a power amplifier dubbed simply '2', then added a preamplifier called Preface and have now created the Précis integrated, which Duncan felt was so good that he had to re-design the pre and power. With its viewing lens in the casework and switching Class D output stage, Précis is reminiscent of Chord Electronics products, which is perhaps unsurprising because this was where Chapter's founders met.

Class D does not indicate a digital amplifier, but one which uses analogue electronics to control a switching output stage. It doesn't suffer the load dependency of digital amps,

but Class D can provide substantial amounts of power without making as much heat as is usual with analogue designs. Hence, despite the absence of any regular heat sinking, the Précis is specified as delivering 130 watts into eight ohms, and a hefty 260 watts into four ohms. That doubling of power into a halving of impedance is a sign of a very 'stiff' power amplifier stage. It's not something you'll see with many integrated designs.

A major innovation is the in-house designed differential volume control, which uses resistors and relays to achieve both high-resolution and repeatability. It's certainly the finest graduated remote volume control we've come across if the display is to be believed – and it certainly sounds that way.



“It delivers a highly articulate and immediate sound that, while tonally on the lean side, is never short of bass grunt.”

The casework is very slick, with grilles on top to vent heat and Chapter's signature illuminated standby switch and volume control. The latter can be adjusted in brightness from low to rabbit-transfixing in four steps; for those of a sensitive bent, the low setting could be a little lower but there's always the option to turn it off. The case sits on two beams that are made by Audiophile Base and use Sorbothane to provide isolation.

Précis has four single-ended and one balanced input, alongside balanced preamp outputs and a processor output/tape loop. On our sample, there were no names on the rear panel socketry because of the rather too clever – but highly attractive – casework; we are told that the company has now thought of a way round this. There is no facility to name individual inputs, so you'll just have to remember which component is plugged where, but at least the balanced input is differentiated as 'XLR'. The 3.5mm minijack on the front panel is for an MP3 player or similar.

Although there's only the one control on the amp, it allows for a good range of functions. Individual input gain, for instance, can be set at 2x, 4x and unity – this latter is extremely

useful when the Précis is used to drive the front left and right speakers in a multichannel system. Balance control works by decreasing the level of either channel by up to 6dB, while phase can be set for each input individually and 'sleep mode' allows you to tell the amp how long to leave the display and internal clocks on before automatically switching off, or not if you prefer. The final choice is between using the Précis as a preamp or power amp only, or keeping it in standard integrated form.

The solid alloy remote allows input and volume change plus mute, but doesn't access other functions. One thing you notice with volume control is that because the graduations are so fine at the higher end of the scale, it takes a long time to change the level significantly. Once you've got there, it flashes at you to say that it has 'made a note' of the level and will remember it even if you completely power down the Précis. This is potentially useful, but also quite irritating.

SOUND QUALITY

The Précis emulates Chapter's pre/power amp pairing with an uncannily low noise threshold. All solid-state amplifiers are quiet, but Chapter

seems to have eliminated the almost entirely undetectable low-level hash that you are not aware of until it's gone. Presumably this is related to the Class D operation but whatever its origin, it seems to open the sonic window that little bit wider where low-level sounds are concerned.

Almost contrary to that finding is a sense of sparseness to the sound. With vinyl, it seems to be almost too clean, but when the needle is taken out of the groove, the sound is uncharacteristically silent. Somehow the Précis manages to negate the hum that normally comes out of our vinyl front end and phono stage, something that most users of low output cartridges have to put up with. Shrimpton suggests this might be because it converts the signal into a true (not pseudo) differential signal at the input, removing any potential earth loops between the source and the amplifier stage. The preamp outputs are also fully balanced and solid-state rather than transformer coupled, so there is clearly a totally uncompromised preamp inside the Précis.

Whether this or the Class D design are pivotal in forming the Précis sound is immaterial, though. It delivers a highly articulate and immediate performance that, while tonally on the lean side, is never short of bass grunt. It doesn't seem to deliver the absolute weight of more conventional power amps, but what it does deliver appears in such a fast and dynamic fashion, it makes you wonder if the regular amps have the same ▶

Q & A

We talked to Chapter Audio's engineer Duncan Shrimpton about the thinking behind the Précis integrated amplifier, especially in the light of other products in the range



HFC How does the Précis relate to the existing Chapter Preface Plus preamplifier and Couplet power amplifier?

DS We actually came up with the ideas behind the Précis two years ago, but had to hold back on building it because it sounded better than our £11,000 pre/power combination at the time. We had to re-design the pre and the power to incorporate the improvements we'd made in the Précis. The differential volume control makes a big difference in terms of size of soundstage. That control is now in the Preface Plus.

The amplifier stage from the Précis and the Couplet are very similar. The Couplet MOSFET driver stage is a little more complex, as the output devices are larger and require more drive current, but apart from that they [the amplifier sections] are identical. The Précis had almost become the prototyping ground for the Couplet and Preface Plus units.

The volume increments at the upper end of the Précis' output are extremely fine – 0.1 dB in fact. Why have you designed it like this?

It follows what we've done in the Preface preamp. We originally picked it because it was following on from what Mark Levinson had done in the No32 preamp.

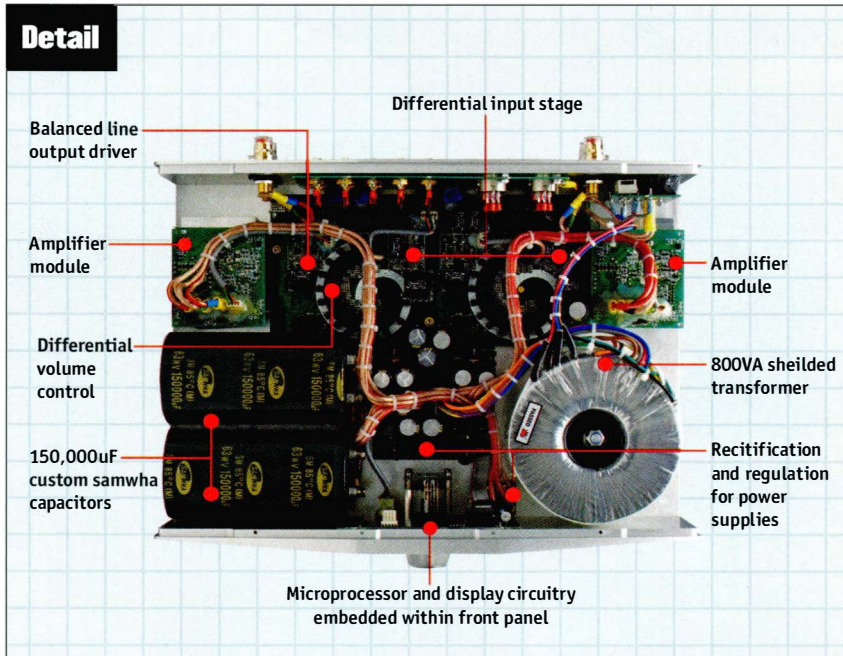
We wanted to give absolute repeatability with regards to the volume. The volume control on the remote handset does actually vector – the longer you leave your finger on the button the faster it operates.

Why Class D amplification?

Performance reasons! Traditionally, Class D tends to get used for reasons of size or efficiency. But we found that performance-wise, we had the expertise as regards switching the MOSFETs and we knew how to avoid the pitfalls with this technology.

With Class AB, the book's pretty much been written; whatever you do, you're reinventing the wheel. As soon as you get rid of the nonlinearity you get with Class AB where the crossover is, you suddenly find that you're getting this liquid, almost valve-like mid and top, combined with solid-state punch to the bass.

Detail



degree of grip on the drive units. The speed and tautness of bass coming out of the Précis is extremely musical, too. Bass notes have a shape and depth to them which is rare and this amp makes a very good case for its take on this end of the spectrum.

It's the speed element that gives this amp its lean quality; the elimination of overhang in the bass means that notes stop as quickly as they start. It's certainly very nimble and there are numerous references to the textural qualities of bass lines in our listening notes. In fact, all the voices and instruments played revealed their character with ease, from Taj Mahal's kalimba (a variation on the thumb harp theme) to the clarity with which lyrics were conveyed on old favourites such as the Pretenders' eponymous debut.

Used separately, both pre and power amp sections of the Précis deliver an upbeat and vivacious sound that is slightly brighter and livelier than the norm. However, this bright sound is delivered in such a clean fashion, there is no discomfort in the sound with even the most revealing speakers.

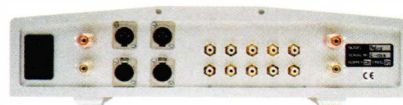
The preamp section proved a happy partner for the Meridian M3100 active speakers (with integral power amps) reviewed in *HFC* 280, and the entire amp worked extremely well with B&W 802Ds. It also allowed our Living Voice

OBX-R2 speakers to show off their midrange qualities to great effect, although the sense of dynamics was not quite as great as can be achieved with that speaker.

As with all other aspects of its sound, imaging is tightly focused. It doesn't always seem as spacious and expansive as it could be, but there is also a sense that the Chapter's take on imaging might be the more realistic and precise, and that alternatives may add some bloom of their own.

The Précis has its ergonomic foibles, but it's an engaging and revealing amplifier with a sense of speed that one rarely finds with this sort of power reserve. It could prove to be a thorn in the side for the likes of Krell's KAV-400Xi and Chord's CPM 2600 if it's put up against them – and it certainly deserves to be.

HFC
Jason Kennedy

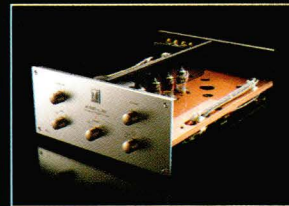
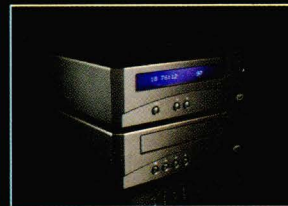


VERDICT	
SOUND >> 93% [Progress bar]	PRO Unusual combination of power and speed delivers a lively and involving sound without any sharp edges. Makes even the quietest amps sound noisy by comparison.
FEATURES >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON Remote volume control can be a little slow and the novelty of the confirmation flash wears off quite swiftly. May sound bright in some set-ups.
BUILD >> 91% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 81% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Précis effectively combines the qualities of Chapter's preamp and power amp. It delivers a sound that is tight, nimble and dynamic across the midband and unusually articulate in the bass, though it's undeniably pricey and ergonomically quirky.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%	

DEFINITIVE AUDIO



Main image: Kuzma Stabi XL Turntable with Kuzma Airline and Kondo silver wired SME Series V tonearm. Both using KSL Kondo ioJ cartridges. Price on application.



Left to right: 1. Kuzma Stabi XL Turntable 2. Art Audio Concerto Stereo Amplifier (GE) 3. SME 10A Turntable 4. KSL Kondo Neiro Integrated Amplifier 5. Living Voice OBX R2 Loudspeaker System 6. Croft Charisma X Pre/Power Valve amplifiers 7. Magnum Dynalab 106T FM & AM Valve Tuner 8. KSL Kondo Gakuoh Valve Mono amplifiers 9. Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD Player 10. KSL Kondo M1000 Ultimate Valve preamplifier

Sign of the times

Tannoy has created a miniature replica of its gigantic 1950s GRF Autograph corner horn

PRODUCT Tannoy Autograph Mini

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,250 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 21x34.5x13cm

● Weight: 4kg ● New two-way 100mm Dual Concentric

drive unit ● 19mm titanium dome tweeter in centre of

DC driver ● Sensitivity/Impedance: 88dB/8 ohms (nom)

CONTACT ☎ 01236 420199 # www.tannoy.com

This tiny little speaker has more to do with nostalgia than any other factor. Whether the Tannoy Autograph Mini deserves to be taken seriously as a real hi-fi speaker is perhaps a moot point, but as a homage to past times it has great charm.

Across the history of hi-fi, a mere handful of landmark products have truly redefined performance standards. One such was certainly Tannoy's Dual Concentric loudspeaker drive unit, which cleverly combines bass/mid driver and horn-loaded tweeter on a single chassis. The original prototype first appeared way back in 1947, yet examples continue to be produced in much the same form (as well as a host of variations) to this day.

Tannoy's story actually began in 1926, long before 'hi-fi' as we know it today had even been dreamt of. The company rose to prominence during the 1930s and 1940s, as Britain's leading supplier of PA (public address) systems. In 1936, a Western Electric patent pioneered the use of a speaker's main cone to help load a reverse-throat horn-loaded tweeter, but it was Ronald Rackham's brilliant 1947 Dual Concentric creation that refined the concept. Careful longitudinal spacing of the two voice coils and the choice of crossover point ensured precise phase-matching between the two drivers, giving remarkable point-source coherence across a wide bandwidth. The original examples, built in 380mm and 300mm sizes, quickly became an industry standard, and were widely adopted by research labs and recording studios alike.

Although most of those early Dual Concentric drivers ended up mounted in large, reflex-ported Lockwood enclosures, Tannoy put its vast experience with horn-loaded

PA equipment to good use and Rackham designed two enormous corner-horn enclosures – the GRF and the GRF Autograph – both named after the company's founder and principal Guy R. Fountain. Both used highly complex folded plywood sections to create a folded horn operating on the rear of the main driver cone, using the corner of the room as an extension to the horn mouth. Both were over a metre wide, but whereas the GRF stood a mere (!) 117cm tall, the larger Autograph stood an imposing 150cm off the deck, giving improved bass extension and also adding a short front horn to the bass/mid driver loading.

Large corner horns were not too impractical when space needed to be found for just one. But the writing was well and truly on the wall once stereo had become established, with the need to double up such bulky speakers (and find two free adjacent corners). Loudspeakers had to become smaller as stereo hi-fi became a mass market commodity, and extremely large models like the GRF and its Autograph variation became marginalised.

But they never actually disappeared. Demand might have dried up in most Western countries, but these classic Tannoys had built such a cult reputation in major Far Eastern territories like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan that demand for its large, retro-styled Prestige models has continued to this day.

While the two GRF corner horns themselves are no longer in the Tannoy catalogue – replicas and originals do crop up on the internet – the current Westminster Royal is similar to an Autograph designed for freestanding rather than corner placement.

Since those original 380mm and 300mm drivers appeared nearly 60 years ago, Tannoy has created smaller and smaller variations on the Dual Concentric theme, to suit the changing marketplace. With the increasing importance of multichannel AV, the most recent is a tiny 100mm unit that was initially developed for the Arena satellite speakers.

Soon after this mini Dual Concentric drive unit had been created, someone at Tannoy came up with the idea of using a variation in a scale model of the GRF Autograph (presumably more for marketing and promotion reasons than any expectations of comparably dramatic performance). The result is a decidedly cute sub-miniature speaker, just 3.5 litres in enclosed volume, beautifully finished and an unusual shape – what looks at first sight like a



triangular prism is actually hexagonal in section. The linear scaling is roughly 4:1, so this baby has just one sixteenth the frontal area and one sixty-fourth the volume of its ancestor. That last factor obviously prohibits any prospect of bulky horn loading, so instead the tiny enclosure is loaded by a reflex port. One tricky point will be finding a stand with a top plate that physically and aesthetically matches the Autograph Mini's essentially triangular footprint.

In a number of other respects, Tannoy has worked hard to preserve the spirit and content of the original. The driver has a substantial cast alloy frame and pulp paper cone (though not an alnico magnet), and the hexagonal enclosure is handcrafted in veneered high density birch ply, with hardwood decorative mouldings and recessed, magnetically retained oatmeal grille. Other high-quality ingredients include high-class components in the simple 2nd/1st order crossover network, silver internal wiring, and a 19mm titanium dome tweeter with a bandwidth of 5.4kHz.

SOUND QUALITY

Whatever those promising ingredients, this is a very small speaker, both in terms of the enclosure volume and the main driver's surface area. That does impose significant limitations on the Autograph Mini's performance, especially through the bass region.

Placement is particularly tricky, as the in-room traces indicate that the speakers ought to benefit from some close-to-wall bass reinforcement, but placing such slim models close to a wall will inevitably introduce unwanted midband unevenness.

At Tannoy's suggestion, the Autograph Mini was mainly auditioned on stands well clear of walls, but this does make the lightweight bass output, and the consequent lack of genuine weight and scale, rather too obvious. 'Tries hard, but...' sums up the situation here, as the sound quality is competent enough, with a notably smooth and even midband, but is not particularly inspiring overall, as dynamic expression – which often seems to be linked to main driver diaphragm area – is weak.

Midband sensitivity is good, accurately achieving the claim for 88dB, and doing so alongside a relatively benign and easy-to-drive impedance that stays around or above six ohms across most of the band. The measured far-field tonal balance is impressively well ordered through the midband, albeit becoming progressively laid back above 1.5kHz. However, the treble is less smooth, showing a pronounced +3dB 'bump' at 8-13kHz that coincides with the impedance minimum.

On the positive side, the overall sound is beautifully smooth, essentially neutral and very well ordered, free from any presence 'hyping' and with a delicately laid-back character through the voice band. Speech, for example, sounds fundamentally natural and is very easy



“The sound quality is competent enough, with a notably smooth and even midband, but is not particularly inspiring overall.”

on the ears. There's very little midband boxiness here, while the slight upper treble emphasis helps to improve intelligibility by strengthening sibilants and consonants.

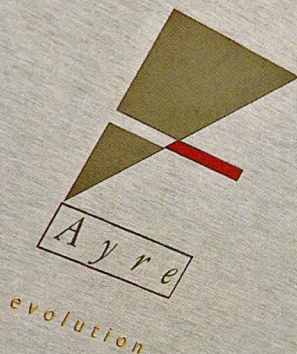
However, this little box does get somewhat out of its depth when heard across a range music styles. It's happy enough dealing with small scale material, such as folk or chamber music, aided and abetted by its superior image focus. But it sounds a little lost when presented with wide-band orchestral or pop/rock material, where the small size becomes altogether more obvious, and that treble emphasis only serves to rob the sound of a little sweetness and top end coherence.

The Autograph Mini is certainly a costly prospect if judged purely on a sound per pound basis, and if good sound from a small box is what you're after, there are other designs that are better suited to the job. But this speaker's very decorative and clever styling provides a unique mix of class and nostalgia, and the sound is thoroughly competent, if ultimately limited in scale by the very compact

dimensions. If you are looking for a product harking back to the Golden Age of hi-fi, but without the fridge-like dimensions, sign up for an Autograph audition. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 73% [Progress bar]	PRO Beautifully handcrafted replica corner horn might be about nostalgia, but delivers a very competent sound with superior neutrality.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON The combination of small enclosure and small drive unit inevitably leads to a rather small overall sound. Bass is very limited here, while upper treble is a little strong.
BUILD >> 91% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 66% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Evocative scale model of a Tannoy classic has a beautifully handcrafted enclosure. Sound quality is competent with superior neutrality, but lacks bass weight and scale, while upper treble is a little strong.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 70%	



Ayre cut

The CX-7 CD player from US-based Ayre has been upgraded... but now costs less than before!

PRODUCT Ayre CX-7e

TYPE CD player

PRICE £2,195

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.8x12x31.2cm

● Weight: 11 kg ● Analogue outputs: single ended (RCA phono) and balanced (XLR) ● Digital output: AES/EBU switchable ● Alternative filter settings

CONTACT ☎ 01727 865488 ● www.ayre.com

Ayre does make three more expensive disc players – the CX-5e, DX-7e and D-1xe – but the CX-7e is Ayre's only dedicated CD-only machine. If this player looks familiar, you've probably been reading this magazine for a while – 30 issues to be precise, because that was the last time *Hi-Fi Choice* had a CX-7 in for review. At first glance, this looks like the

same machine. But the subtle gold lettering beneath the Ayre badge indicates that this is a CX-7e, the 'e' standing for 'Evolution'. It is also a less expensive version; the old one retailed for £2,995 because of a stronger dollar and a bigger distributor's overhead. Now that the dollar is weaker and Ayre's distributed by the lean and efficient Symmetry, you get an updated player for £800 less.

So, what has Ayre founder and designer Charles Hansen done to the CX-7e to warrant the Evolution suffix? It would seem that the essence of Evolution is a change of power supply to so-called 'Dynamic Power'. This is described as a "breakthrough that quiets noisy circuit components unmasking new information from both music and video sources". We asked Ayre's founder, Charles

Hansen, for more specifics (see Q&A box overleaf), but this is obviously a fundamental shift for Ayre, as the Evolution upgrade has been applied across the Ayre product line-up.

Aside from these sweeping range changes, the CX-7e has also received a number of specific improvements, most significantly a new programmable digital filter. Prior to Evolution, there were a couple of important running changes too, including a new transport mechanism. The original transport was a TEAC CD-ROM drive, while the new drive is an "AV-specific model" that's also used by Arcam and Meridian and is said to be quieter. There are also new power supply regulators featuring a two-stage zero-feedback circuit.

Ayre components always have exemplary build and finish, and the CX-7e is no



“It produces significant differences in the recordings it plays with ease and never seems to be under any duress.”

exception – the buttons are lovely to use and the solid fascia is very reassuring. The remote control is a bit less exotic and also operates the matching AX-7e integrated amplifier. This may be why the handset has no direct track access numerals, but the lack of this facility is a shortcoming, especially when you only want to play track 15! There is also no eject button on the remote, which is a minor niggle but something many of us inveterate couch potatoes appreciate.

The back panel has a strong US feel, with both balanced and single-ended analogue outputs alongside a digital output in balanced AES/EBU flavour only. An adaptor could be used to turn this into an RCA phono output, if your digital amplifier or processor doesn't have a matching XLR input, but this isn't an ideal solution. Two small but attractively formed switches can be used to turn off the digital output and select an alternative digital filter setting respectively. This latter offers what Ayre describes as “greater accuracy in the time

precise frequency resolution” when in the ‘Measure’ position. Unsurprisingly, the company recommends listening in the ‘Listen’ position, but accepts that the alternative might be better in some situations.

Inside the player, you see some of the core Charles Hansen/Ayre philosophies at work, notably fully balanced operation throughout in order to eliminate as much noise as possible, and the absence of feedback in the analogue circuitry. Ayre believes that feedback loops introduce timing errors, something it is very keen to avoid.

SOUND QUALITY

With the balanced output delivering twice the voltage of the single-ended, it is perhaps unsurprising that the distributor encouraged us to use the beefier output. Symmetry even supplied a length of Stereovox BAL-600 balanced interconnect for the purpose. This sounded very good, but when we discovered the £950 price tag, we went back to the Living

sanity's sake. This change did little to dampen the CX-7e's resolve and brought forth a well contrasted, transparent and revealing sound from pretty well everything played. It revealed the slightly hard edge to the Gillian Welch recording, along with the fine differences between harmonised voices. Similarly, Madeleine Peyroux's band sounds taut and rhythmically solid, even spritely, in the Ayre's company, with lovely double bass pluckage and vocals that are as dusty as ever.

The CX-7e is a highly neutral player. It produces significant differences in the recordings it plays with ease and never seems to be under any duress. This ‘grace under fire’ is apparent when you play less spectacular recordings of great music at the sort of volume they warrant.

It can seem polite through the midband, though, and a few players like Townshend's TA 565 CD deliver greater transparency, but that'll cost you another £800 and can't compete on the build front. It's also nice to be able to play loud without any sense of distortion in the sound – even Zappa's crunked up *Punky's Whips* came across in surprisingly smooth fashion.

Swapping back to balanced operation with a pair of van den Hul Orchid interconnect cables did big favours for the bass, which took on a solidity and weight that even the very best players would have trouble equalling. Beck's *Devil's Haircut* became a real monster of a rack right across the audio band in its capable hands. The CX-7e also did an excellent job with the more refined *El Corazón* by Don Cherry and Ed Blackwell. Here, this excellent SACM recording delivered superb depth of tone and image from the piano, trumpet and drums. In fact, there was so much bass resolution that it calls into question what musical gain ▶



Q&A

We spoke to Charles Hansen, Ayre's founder and designer, about the CX-7e CD player and the Evolution upgrades, used across the board for Ayre's disc players and amplifier products



HFC Can you tell us more specific details about the Evolution power supply upgrade?

CH The 'Evolution' upgrade was introduced in the Fall of 2004 and it has been applied to all Ayre products. It consisted of what we call 'Dynamic Power', plus some other upgrades that were specific to particular products.

'Dynamic Power' is our term for a combination of proprietary technologies used on the AC side of the power supply. They provide additional RFI filtering of the AC mains for a 'blacker' background, increased peak current delivery for greater dynamic contrast and filtering of rectifier switching noise.

Despite using the fastest, quietest rectifiers available, there is a residual level of noise generated when the rectifiers turn on and off. Removing this noise yields improved resolution and a more dimensional, realistic presentation.

How has the digital filtering changed since the original CX-7?

We originally used a Burr-Brown DF1704 to perform the 'upsampling'. The new digital filter is implemented instead in a Xilinx programmable gate array.

This allows us to develop our own custom-designed digital filters with any desired coefficients. The new digital filter offers a noticeable improvement in resolution and transparency of the digital signal.

Why do you upsample and then oversample?

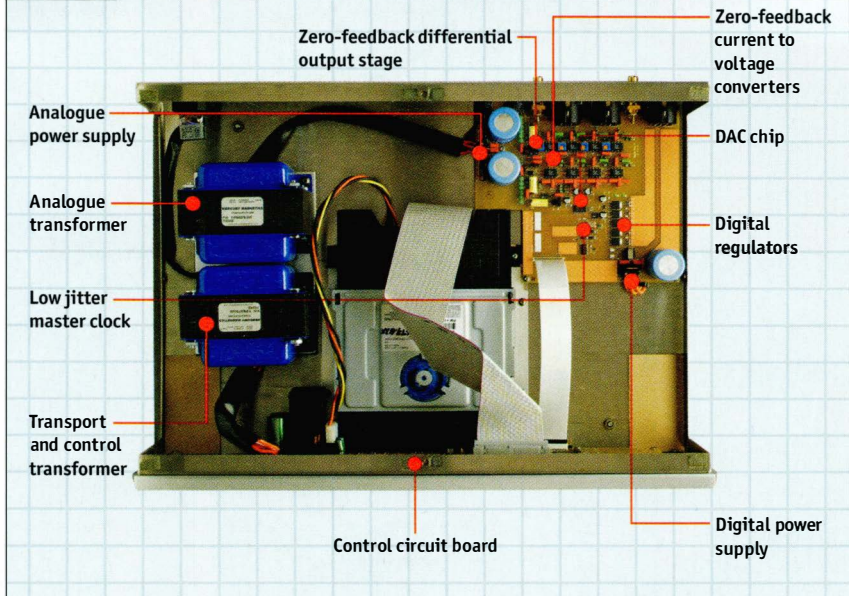
In the CX-7e (as well as the C-5xe), we oversample to 32x (1.4112 MHz) to allow for an extremely simple analogue filter. This is accomplished in two separate chips, the first performing at 4x (176.4 kHz) and the second performing at 8x for a total of 32x (1.4112 MHz).

The fact that this oversampling is performed in two separate operations means nothing, as it is routine to make a filter as a cascade of 2x sections. For example, the 8x filter is a cascade of three 2x sections.

The honest answer as to why we call it 'upsampling' is that for a few years, a CD player that didn't upsample was unsaleable. The fuss created by dCS's 'upsampling' was quite over-the-top, and people (incorrectly) assumed their existing CDs would achieve (near) high-resolution capability. The truth, of course, is that 'upsampling' is a marketing term and not a technical term. From a technical standpoint, there is absolutely no difference between 'upsampling' and 'oversampling'.

[This has been very effectively explained by Jeff Kalt, on his website: www.resolutionaudio.com. As Kalt says, "any claim that 'hidden' information can be restored by a magical upsampling process should be met with a healthy dose of skepticism."]

Detail



greater transparency might achieve. But not all recordings are in this league and you can never have too much transparency – so long as it is well balanced.

The player's mild shortcomings are very much par for the course at this price point. It could have more scale and vivacity and there's a slight shortfall in terms of differentiating the various elements within a mix, but these are all aspects of the sound that the player covers well when taken on its own terms. It also comes surprisingly close to a favourite, albeit slightly dearer, reference – the Resolution Audio Opus 21 – with the two having similar micro-dynamic characteristics and bass weight, but the Ayre loses out to the Opus 21's richer sound with clearer low-level resolution. The similarity, it turns out, is due to Resolution's Jeff Kalt being involved with the digital side of the Ayre's design.

The CX-7e is an extremely well-balanced and beautifully built machine. It has a calmness and assurance about its delivery that lets the qualities of all musical types shine through. It copes with dense mixes as well as it does solo works, thanks to a degree of neutrality that is still rare at this price point. In case that makes you think of Switzerland, it's important to point out that this player is no duller than the disc you play on it, and it's just as exciting as the discs you play, too. No more no less. And, while it's fundamentally neutral, it also has strengths that stand out: notably tunefulness, especially at low frequencies – bass lines are artfully delivered, which makes following the rhythm effortless. It also has elusively low noise, producing backgrounds of truly inky blackness for a decaying note to disappear into. So, this is neutral – as in revealing and entertaining, not grey and bland. At last, neutrality to get excited about! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

AX-7e

The natural partner for the Ayre CX-7e is the £1,995 AX-7e integrated amplifier, a 60-watt design that doubles output into four ohms and incorporates Ayre's trademark zero-feedback, fully balanced discrete circuitry. It shares a remote with the CD player, but none of its input names mention CD or any of the likely source components. Instead, cosmic symbols are used to differentiate your shooting star tuner from your crescent moon phono stage. Features include a processor throughput mode for use in surround systems and both balanced and single-ended input sockets. A custom-designed volume control uses precision metal film resistors with level numerically displayed. We will be reviewing the AX-7e in the issue after next.



VERDICT

SOUND >> 92%



FEATURES >> 79%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 86%



PRO
Very nice casework combined with a revealing and even-handed sound that times well and plays in assured fashion.

CON
Notably stronger via its balanced outputs. No direct track access and no RCA phono digital output. Possibly in need of more transparency, compared to the very best.

CONCLUSION

At its previous price and spec, the CX-7 was a fine player. Now, the timing has improved and the bass has been bolstered. If you want a clean sounding, revealing and entertaining player with great build, the CX-7 has evolved into a strong contender.

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



Listen Carefully

Calm and intelligent equipment demonstrations for lovers of all types of music

Well, hello - and welcome to my world

I represent a handful of suppliers in my deliberately small specialist showroom in North London. Through choice I have no staff - and I probably never will.

This means that the ultimate size of my twin businesses (I own simply-STAX) is limited by the care I can offer my customers. If there's a danger that I'm spreading myself too thin, then I'll put the brake on expansion. I may even contract back until it becomes relaxed again. Fine. I'm happy with that possibility.

Every aspect of the demonstration & installation is taken care of by me. I am inescapably accountable for your total satisfaction. I wouldn't have it any other way - and neither would my customers

I represent the following:

- **Ayre** - amplification and digital source
- **Brinkmann** - vinyl replay system
- **Cassiel** - power cords
- **Esoteric** - digital source
- **Grand Prix** - isolation
- **LAT** - XLR interconnect & power distribution
- **Mark Levinson** - amplification & digital source.
- **Lyra** - analogue.
- **Stereovox** - interconnects
- **Sumiko** - analogue
- **Thiel** - loudspeakers

I don't have ...

Anything to do with plasmas, home cinemas, cable bandits, dynamics-crushing mains filters or anything else I'm not passionate about.

At heart ...

I'm a systems man. This means that while I'm happy to suggest and demonstrate various items that should and probably will make an immediate and worthwhile improvement in your current set-up, my specialisation is getting components to work together - as a *properly integrated system*. The benefits are clear.

Putting an end to costly and desperate upgrades

It's true that going the system route is a bigger initial investment in the short-term, but you save overall in the long-term by avoiding *unnecessary* upgrades.

Trade-ins?

I'm happy to discuss this.

System 1

Ayre CX-7e CD & AX-7e integrated. **Thiel** CS1.6 loudspeakers. **LAT** power distribution, XLR connections & speaker leads. **Cassiel** CAS4 power

cords. This is by far the most musically satisfying system I've heard up to £10k - yet it costs *far* less. Add the Brinkmann **Oasis** and you have a magnificent vinyl replay facility too.

System 2

Ayre C-5xe digital multi-format. The **Ayre** K-1xe preamp & V-5xe power amp. The **Thiel** CS2.4 loudspeakers. **LAT** power distribution, XLR connections & speaker leads. **Cassiel** CAS4 power cords. And as an option, the incomparable Brinkmann **VRS**

It's very hard to get more musically satisfying than this. Hard, but not impossible - *at a price*. That's system 3.

System 3

No words of mine can do this justice. Just come and listen. Then you'll understand.

Substitutions

Depending on taste and budget, Esoteric digital can be substituted for Ayre. Mark Levinson digital & amplification can be substituted for either Ayre or Esoteric.

THE BRINKMANN VRS (Vinyl replay system)

Quite simply the most musically satisfying vinyl system I have ever heard anywhere at any price.

Probably because I have the world's first Brinkmann 10.5 tone arm which is both electrically balanced and with XLR outputs. The reduction in background noise and increase in dynamics over the standard 10.5 is mouth-watering. Of course, bearing in mind that few preamps have XLR-equipped phono stages, you'll need a state-of-the-art phono stage. That's the Ayre P-5xe. Incidentally, the 10.5 is in effect a Breuer 8 Dynamic, but 10.5" in length. Naturally, it sits on the magnificent LaGrange turntable.

For Listen Carefully, Mr. Brinkmann personally sets up the 10.5, his EMT Titanium cartridge and LaGrange and fine tunes it through his Lumen White loudspeakers. The arm with the cartridge is packed in one heavy duty wooden case while the base and platter sit in another. It arrives in the U.K. personally tuned by the master. You're up and running in 7 minutes. Nothing is left to chance. Literally nothing.

The price is not for the squeemish - but it puts an end to upgrading your front end - and it sounds consistently wonderful, day after day, year after year. No gurus required.

There are no intelligent substitutions here for Brinkmann nor Thiel. Currently they stand head and shoulders above *anything* else in their price band!

Demonstrations in London

You'll be surprised I think by the relaxed atmosphere here. It's a marked contrast to traditional demonstrations in conventional (dull, unimaginative, sales-hungry?) dealers.

That's because I offer just one demonstration slot in the morning, one in the afternoon and occasionally one in the evening. No fuss, no hurry, no interruptions, no other visitors, no parking wardens - and no coercion.

I've been known to conduct a demonstration on a Sunday too! Spend time with me and I guarantee

you'll benefit from my years of experience and you will receive *my undivided attention*.

Home demonstrations

I offer these in London (within the M25), Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire too.

Human contact ...

If you feel you'd like a bit of human interaction, then feel free to pick up the phone right now. You can get me, if I'm not in a demonstration or installation by phoning me on 0208 447 8485. I'm happy to discuss anything re audio with you. I might not have the answer, but I assure you that your opinion - even if I don't agree with it - is important to me. Really!

But what about the music?

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An unsolicited customer comment:

"The system I heard, Brinkmann LaGrange + their arm, EMT, Ayre amps, all balanced with approp cables into Lumen White Silver Flame speakers was (this is painful), head and shoulders above my Roksan/Naim/Sonus system at around similar or less cost. I'm giving serious thought to having a total clear out and buying that very system lock stock."

Interested? Fine. I offer you a calm and intelligent demonstration of magnificent audio equipment for of all types of music. Prepare to be amazed.

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Different class

Breaking with convention, Cambridge Audio's new range-topping amp is truly in a class of its own

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 840A

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x11.5x38.5cm

• Weight: 15kg • Class XD operation • Inputs: one balanced XLR, seven single-ended line-level RCA-phono
• Outputs: one tape, one preamp output • Two sets of speaker terminals • Rated power: 120W per channel (eight ohms) • Incognito multiroom connections

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

Cambridge Audio can hardly be blamed for making the most of the success that its Azur range has enjoyed. We weren't entirely prepared, however, for the full extent to which the company has taken Azur upmarket. Make no mistake, the 840A integrated amp is a fancy and, allegedly, very high-flying bit of kit.

The amp is on the heavy side, even by the standards of recent high-power integrations. It

also possesses an unusual front panel made of thick, engraved, brushed aluminium with a large LCD panel. This shows not only volume setting – both in dB and on a 'rotary' graphic display – but also the appropriate names for each of the seven line inputs. By default they are simply 'Input 1' and so on, but they can be named to suit whatever you've connected. Nice touch!

Central to several features is the electronic volume control, which replaces the usual mechanical potentiometer control. The rotary volume knob controls relays, which connect an array of resistors in such a way as to give the required gain on each channel. Using relays in this way avoids integrated-circuit volume distortion, noise and limited headroom, but introduces another problem which we could frankly have done without – loud mechanical clicking noises from the amp as the volume is changed. The actual output is click-free, but the racket from within the amp, like some antique telephone exchange, is off-putting. The volume knob is a bit wobbly, too.

This volume control technique allows gain trim for each input, balance control 'for free' (with no added circuitry) and a civilised ramp-up in volume as the amp is turned on. The tone controls – defeatable individually or together – are more conventional.

At the rear of the unit are the sockets for seven regular inputs plus tape, with Input 1 offering a choice of balanced or unbalanced connection. Twin speaker outputs are individually switchable, and there's a preamp out, plus the usual remote control sockets and connections to Cambridge's new 'Incognito' multiroom technology.

Inside the amp, proceedings are dominated by a particularly large toroidal mains transformer, which helps support the claimed output of 120 watts per channel (comfortably met in our tests). It is surrounded by cunningly shaped heatsinks on which are mounted two pairs of large output transistors per channel, plus the 'current displacer' which makes 'Class XD' work (see box). With an additional small toroid

mounted on the rear panel, full dual-mono construction starting with separate mains transformer windings, and a host of ancillary and protection circuitry built in, the whole assembly is impressive.

Given Cambridge's claims for the technical performance of Class XD operation, we had to run some lab tests and indeed this is a very well-behaved amplifier. Distortion isn't truly eliminated as claimed, but we couldn't find any test results among amplifiers we've looked at recently that are as good. Can the extra few distortion-free dB make the crucial difference?

SOUND QUALITY

The 840A has to face the high standard set by its little brother, the 640A v2 (see HFC 279), which at £300 is a very classy 'budget' amp. But the 640A does lack a little authority compared to the best models a little higher up the price range, and we were keen to see if that attribute could be found in abundance in the 840A.

As listening wore on, we tended increasingly to the view that it does indeed offer a considerable degree of authority, handling a variety of loudspeakers with what can fairly be described as an iron grip. It puts out the power with invariably finely judged control and discretion. Above all, it seems pretty much completely unflappable.

Any amplifier with a few watts on hand will play loud. Really good amps – and we include the 840A in that group – will play loud and subtle. It often happens that loud sounds are combined with a variety of quieter ones in the background, which nevertheless contribute significantly to the whole. The ability to resolve those background sounds is something one cannot take for granted in audio kit, but this amp seems to have no trouble doing just that.

This ability was most marked in one of our orchestra test tracks, where a combination of loud brass and percussion instruments all too often essentially obliterates the woodwind. In this case, by contrast, not only could the woodwind be heard but it was still possible to locate oboes and flutes separately. Even better,



“Any amplifier will play loud. Really good amps – and we include the 840A in that group – will play loud and subtle.”

we'd swear the cymbals sounded less harsh than we're used to. There's no sweetening going on, the sound seems amazingly clean.

Bass is very hard to fault by any standards, while treble is extended and open. Once or twice we thought we caught a hint of midrange coloration on voices (both male and female) but it's hard to be sure. If there is a weakness to the 840A, it's in the rhythm and timing department. This doesn't quite have the 'snap' of some amps, but we're inclined to suggest that this is a real either/or decision made on taste grounds: you can have superb clarity or snappy (perhaps slightly enhanced) timing, but not both.

We're very impressed with this amp. It handles simple and complex music with equal aplomb, loud and soft dynamics with equanimity. It is revealing, communicative and musically involving. It's not beyond a little tweaking – we'd love a version with quieter relays, a better damped casework and a more solid volume control. But for the price, its performance makes it a classic high-end bargain. **HFC**

Richard Black



WHAT IS CLASS XD?

The 840A's designer, Doug Self, has done more perhaps than anyone to investigate and document the performance limits of Class A, Class B and Class AB amplifier outputs. With Class XD (short for 'Crossover Displacement'), Self has come up with a cunning way of ensuring Class A-like performance with Class AB efficiency. The idea has surely crossed every designer's mind – keep standing current low, but prevent either output transistor turning off and causing crossover distortion. Class XD achieves essentially this and more. It is simple but clever and, as far as we can find out, truly novel. Indeed, distortion is about half that of the best Class AB amps we've seen. The 840A is an excellent introduction to a genuinely innovative amp design.



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	PRO With plenty of power on hand, this amp produces sound that's clear, open, inviting and generally very realistic from almost any loudspeaker, in any kind of music.
FEATURES >> 90% [Progress bar]	CON Relay-switching noises from within, and the volume knob's a little wobbly. Sonically, timing may be a little too laid back for some tastes.
BUILD >> 85% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 93% [Progress bar]	

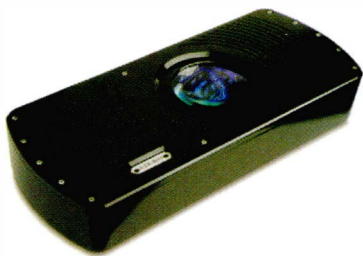
CONCLUSION
A very fine amplifier that's practical, smart, innovative and fully featured; it also sounds better than almost everything else at the price. If you're looking for an amp between £500 and £1,000, make sure you have a listen to this.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%

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Avant advantage

Mordaunt-Short's third version of its compact floorstanding speaker shows maturity, not old age

PRODUCT Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £350 per pair

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868
 # www.mordauntshort.com

Owned and operated for a number of years by The Audio Partnership, recent Mordaunt-Short designs have shown impressive consistency alongside steady development. So, the original 900-series evolved first into Avant 900s and now into Avant 900is. The configuration and styling have remained essentially the same throughout, while ingredients have undergone steady refinement.

The £350 per pair Avant 906i is a two-and-a-half-way design, where the lower of two matching main drivers is used just to augment the bass frequencies, while the upper one covers both bass and midrange. Both incorporate magnetic shielding and use small, 100mm diameter dish-shaped (rather than cone-shaped) diaphragms, described as CPC (Continuous Profile Cone) technology. These are further refined by the addition of small radial ribs set just in from the edge, which will improve stiffness. The tweeter has a mesh-protected 25mm metal dome.

The classy cosmetics have an aluminium 'skin' covering the upper section of the front where the drivers are mounted, and this matches the aluminium alloy diaphragms of all three drive units. An elliptical 'dished' section around the tweeter carries echoes of an earlier Mordaunt-Short era, and contributes to directivity control. The drivers are actually mounted from behind the front panel, in order to create that super-clean look, free from visible mounting hardware. An elegantly embossed name completes the look.

Unusually stylish bi-wire terminal pairs are mounted low down on the back panel, below two separate reflex ports – presumably one loading each of the CPC drivers via a subdivided enclosure. A blocked off hole near the base allows ballast to be added at the user's discretion.

The enclosure is available in either black or maple woodprint finish and moulded feet are supplied to improve the mechanical stability of the slim enclosure. Fitting these feet properly proved quite a trial, though. The pilot holes should have been more accurately drilled, the screw heads more durable and the feet designed so that the screws could pull them flat against the base.

SOUND QUALITY

Having struggled to fit the feet, measurement revealed the manufacturer's claim for 90dB sensitivity alongside a 4-8 ohm load was confirmed. The speakers also showed a fine far-field tonal balance, promising good overall neutrality plus decent

bass extension, with the speakers clear of walls. Or, more specifically, the speakers showed their mettle after a second pair was called for, the first having shown inconsistencies between the two speakers supplied. This kind of thing is not uncommon with early samples, and should be sorted as the speaker settles into production.

The Avant 906i is a very decent performer overall, especially in view of its very modest price. Clearly, any constraints brought about by its low price point have been carefully chosen and well disguised.

The enclosure adds a touch of woodiness in the bass region, the midband could have done with a bit more grip and dynamic tension, the overall dynamic range might have been wider, and the treble sweeter. But these are minor criticisms in the context of a speaker that's very well balanced overall, with the sort of top end restraint entirely appropriate for the equipment the speaker is likely to be partnered with. The bass end has impressive weight, boxiness is pretty well controlled and imaging is very effective, albeit with limited depth.

Coming hot on the heels of this month's *Ultimate Group Test* of more exotic loudspeakers, the Avant 906i did not sound too outclassed. Its price point inevitably entails limitations, yet its overall demeanour is musical and involving, and impressively well balanced for such a modestly priced floorstander. It comfortably merits a Best Buy in the sub-£500 category. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 78% 	PRO Sharply styled speaker with a very good overall balance, fine sensitivity, a sensibly restrained top end, impressive bass weight, well controlled boxiness, and fine imaging.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 88% 	CON Not the strongest sub-£500 speaker in any one area (but cleverly balanced overall). The fitting of the outrigger feet proved problematic.
BUILD >> 78% 	
VALUE >> 93% 	
CONCLUSION The Avant 906i is capable of a generous, evenhanded and well-balanced sound, with well-controlled boxiness and fine imaging. Concerns over sample consistency and the outrigger feet aside, this floorstander offers fine value for money.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%	

Back to basics

Marantz returns to its roots with a good, low-cost stereo CD player... but this one plays SACD, too

PRODUCT Marantz SA7001

TYPE CD/SACD (stereo) player

PRICE £430

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x12.7x33.6cm

• Weight: 8kg • Digital outputs: optical and coaxial
• Analogue outputs: stereo RCA phono • Headphone socket with volume control • Adjustable filter settings
• Silver or black finish

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

On one level, the new Marantz SA7001 offers less than many SACD players. It is not multichannel and – as it is not a universal player – it has no multimedia pretensions, either. So, the SA7001 plays stereo music only, for the enjoyment thereof. But there is method behind the apparent madness.

There is an important problem with multichannel machinery – all those extra channels to feed. This means the player can become fearsomely complex internally, with the near certainty of increased mutual internal interference. Adding DVD-Audio, the problem is further compounded because the format involves a video stream. In both cases, the problem is solvable, but the solution generally involves spending a great deal of money on the player. Almost invariably, the more work a

multichannel player is asked to do, the less well it is likely to perform as a stereo CD player, notwithstanding all the bypasses and 'pure direct' modes it may offer.

In Japan and some other Far Eastern markets, multichannel sound is not a big pull, and video is even less prized. About two years ago, the idea of a plain stereo SACD player suddenly gained traction, first over there, and then in the West. Now, there are a significant number of stereo SACD players around – that is, players with the benefit of better sound from SACD and virtually no danger of degraded CD replay quality. Marantz itself claims that the primary aim with the SA7001 was to "optimise conventional CD performance first," partly by "keeping it simple". Surprisingly, the entire Marantz SACD player line-up is now stereo only, and this includes the SA-11 and SA-15 Premium Series players. If you want Marantz multichannel SACD, you have to look at the company's universal players, like the £1,500 DV9600, tested in *HFC* 280.

The SA7001 costs just £430, which is far from extravagant for any half-serious CD player, never mind one with SACD as well, and it is tested here in its simplest version. There is, however, a souped up model: the SA7001 KI (Ken Ishiwata) special edition, which

commands a £170 premium. This will be reviewed in *HFC* as soon as they start shipping.

Marantz has learned a lot of lessons from its Premium range players, and as far as possible (within the limits of the available budget) have used this knowledge to inform the design of this new entry-level SACD spinner. The SA7001 is bulky, but it has restrained styling, at least in the black version submitted for review. There is also a simple, rather attractive fluorescent display, which has three-level dimming and can be switched off.

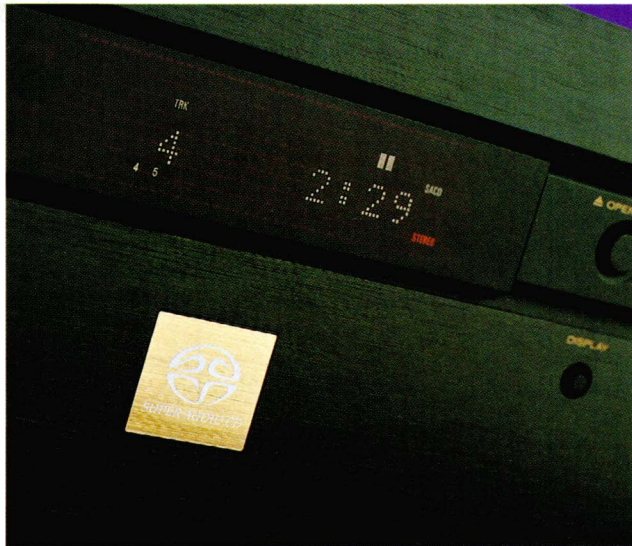
Inside, the player boasts the same Cirrus Logic CS4397 24-bit/192kHz hybrid DSD/PCM DAC as the £1,200 SA-15S1, 'block' PSU capacitors co-developed with ELNA, plus 'audio grade' electrolytic and film capacitors and Schottky barrier diodes. Discrete HDAM (high slew rate, current feedback op-amps) are present, in common with standard Marantz practice, together with a transformer designed to minimise radiated noise and three secondaries for the display, digital and analogue circuits. There's extensive shielding between different circuit blocks, and the two audio channels are laid out internally as mirror image signal paths – all pretty impressive at the price.

As the SA7001 is new from the ground up, the designers also took the opportunity to

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine





“It seems the removal of the video stages and the extra processing needed to play DVD-Audio and DVD-Video pays off.”

redesign the mechanism. The servo and decoder are now mounted on a four-layer glass epoxy board for lower noise levels, while the design of the chassis provides improved shielding from external noise sources.

The usual trick-play modes are available, and the player includes coaxial and optical digital outputs (which are, of course, available from CD only). Both CD and SACD Text are available and the player can be plumbed into a Marantz-based system for external system based remote control. The remote handset supplied with the player is fully featured yet attractive and easy to use. A headphone output and associated volume control are also provided on the player's front panel.

SOUND QUALITY

This is clearly a very able performer with CD and a highly capable SACD spinner, too. It seems the removal of the video stages and the extra processing needed to play DVD-Audio and DVD-Video pays off, as this is several notches above the quality available from most universal players, especially those under £1,000.

The SA7001 has that quintessential Marantz quality of sounding smooth, relaxed and easy on the ear, yet also pleasingly musical. There is

nothing edgy or mechanical about this player, no matter what kind of disc it is playing, and unlike our first review sample (which turned out to be faulty) it remained consistent in sound at all times, almost irrespective of what kind of programme material it was playing.

With CD, we were particularly taken with the Marantz's performance with difficult material. Madeline Peyroux's *Careless Love* album was rewarding for its understated warmth and its ability to conjure up the limpid Bessie Smith flavoured voice. And with a quite different musical genre, Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* KV364 (Harnoncourt/Vienna Phil on DG), the Marantz managed to pull the seams together into a fully believable performance, rhythmically vital and alive, and with a real sense of body.

Moving across to SACD, the Marantz was made of even sterner stuff. The sense of ease and of body was still present, but there was more texture, more light and shade, and it was possible to hear more deeply into the mix. There was still a hint of softness, just as there often is with relatively low cost SACD players, but there was a real gain when switching from the CD to the SACD layer of a well-engineered recording. The Boulez Mahler *Das Lied Von Der Erde* on DGG is a suitable example that was

used on test – the sound had a level of grip and passion that was less apparent with the CD layer, and even a greater sense of stereo depth. Such is the quality of SACD when replayed well.

If the Marantz has a shortcoming, it's that it is a little lacking in the quality that might best be described as 'electricity'. It's just a little on the soft side, and sometimes fails to make music as vital and as exciting as it can be. But as sub-£500 CD players go, this one is very easy to live with, and has the quality of working naturally with a wide range of systems. It never sounds grainy, harsh or out of control, and it won't over-expose the limitations of inexpensive and middle-ranking systems.

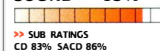
At the same time, it has something extra to give from SACD material, by sounding more detailed and generally firmer in texture. At £430, the SA7001 is a very capable CD player; the fact that it also plays SACDs, and to a level that shows the overall superiority of the format, is the icing on a very fine cake. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >>> 85%



>>> SUB RATINGS
CD 83% SACD 86%

FEATURES >>> 85%



BUILD >>> 83%



VALUE >>> 91%



PRO

Great value for money; easy and relaxed sound with body and expression from CD, and even better with SACD.

CON

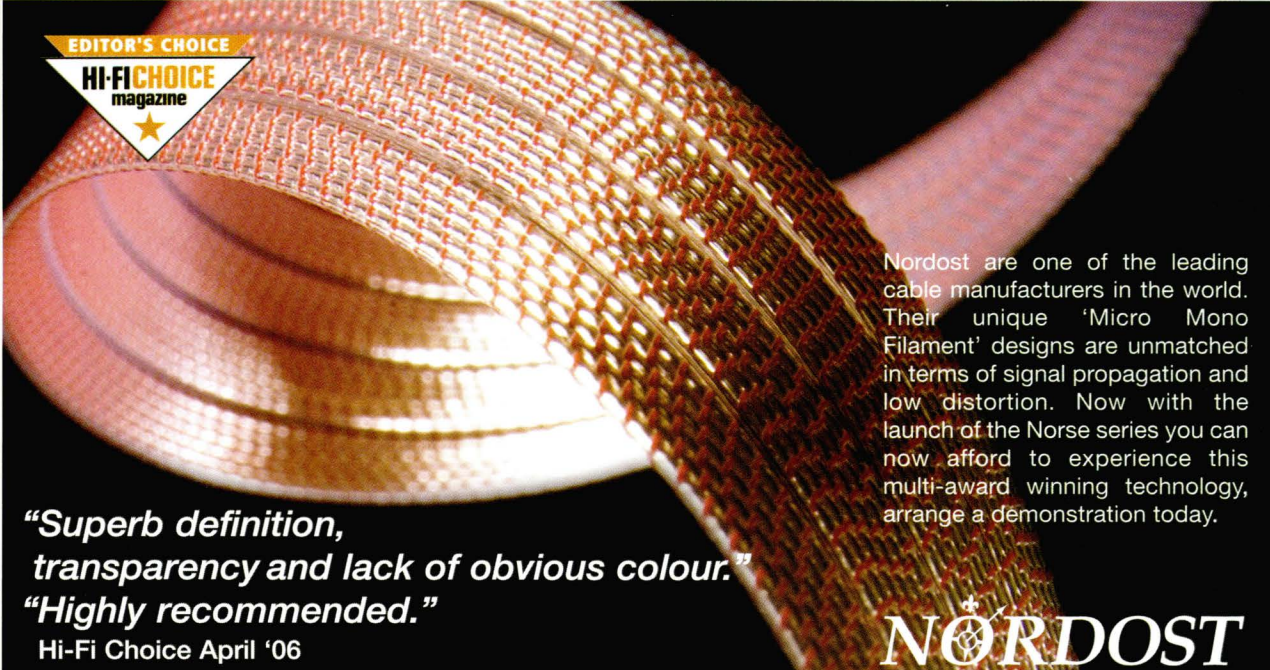
Slight lack of vitality and excitement when judged by the highest standards, but even this can be excused on the grounds that the player is a good match for less exacting systems you find at the price.

CONCLUSION

This low-cost player makes a compelling case for adding stereo SACD to an otherwise basic CD player. There appears to be nothing in the SACD format that detracts from CD sound, at least not in this case – it's a great-value two-channel player.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 88%

Exceeding expectations....



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

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transparency and lack of obvious colour.”
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Hi-Fi Choice April '06

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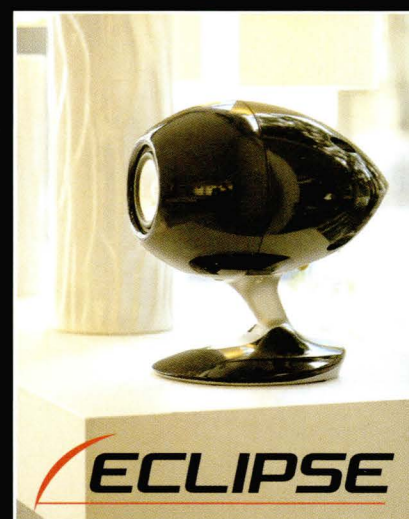
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Ruling the waves

Denon finally waves goodbye to the TU-260L II, with the birth of a new budget tuner king

PRODUCT Denon TU-1500AE

TYPE FM/AM radio tuner

PRICE £130

CONTACT 01234 741200 www.denon.co.uk

All good things come to an end, including the TU-260L II, probably the most famous budget radio tuner ever. Denon's little baby (in all its guises) was king of the heap for more than a decade, but evidently Denon felt enough was enough. Replacing it is this modern star, with full RDS, 100 presets, rotary tuning knob and a nifty 'Auto Preset' feature, which – like the auto-tune on a DAB tuner – scans the FM band and loads receivable stations into memory.

Inside the tuner, a surprise awaits. The small frame transformer is a familiar sight, as is the FM tuner head at the rear, but the main board seems awfully empty. Marked on that board, though, is the giveaway – 'TU-1800 DAB'. Yes, this is a TU-1800 (see *HFC* 274), shorn of its DAB module, and as such completely unrelated to a former TU-1500 model. What's more, that FM tuner 'head' is in fact pretty much the whole tuner, right up to left and right channel audio outputs. What used to be just the first stage of processing, in tuners from the 1970s to the 1990s, has now become the entire device, apart from power supply and controls, all thanks to miniaturisation.

As a result, what one is listening to is more Kwang Sung (a major manufacturer of tuner modules) than Denon, though of course Denon's detailed implementation and power

supply will play a major part. But then some of these modern FM modules give very good performance. In fact, when we put this unit briefly on the lab bench, we were in many areas testing the limits of our measuring kit as much as the performance of the tuner itself.

In short, build quality is absolutely fine for the price and the unit is pleasant to use.

SOUND QUALITY

Not having a TU-260L II on hand, we relied on cross-reference with old favourites from the tuner world, including models from Luxman and Revox. Listening to a range of stations with variable RF signal quality, and also via a local FM generator, we were on the whole quite impressed with the TU-1500AE. FM tuner manufacturers have risen to the challenge of the ever-more-crowded FM band and managed to squeeze decent performance even from weak signals and those plagued by multipath interference or adjacent station breakthrough, while with good reception the sound is almost entirely free of break-up and obvious distortion. There's a little roughness at the edges, but it's not badly intrusive.

In fact, tests with the FM generator were the least impressive, the TU-1500AE sounding rather hard and compressed with relatively limited stereo imaging (despite good separation measurements). Under real-world conditions, though, it comes much closer to the reference tuners, which date from a time when stations were typically spaced further apart. In fact, looking back at notes from tuners we've seen in the last five or six years, we'd say it's roughly par for the course these

days, which isn't at all bad as it's one of the cheaper models around. Pop sounds lively, classical suitably subtle (with a very low subjective noise floor making the most of quiet details) and speech quite natural; just a little chesty, but without the dreaded 'spit'.

We have no qualms about recommending this tuner as a fine-value purchase for anyone wanting to get decent, if not utterly outstanding, FM reception. As ever, a good outdoor antenna will contribute enormously and this tuner plus a £100 roof-mounted 'twig' will outperform a tuner for £230 plugged into the freebie piece of limp wire. But do bear in mind that at today's street prices, the TU-1800 offers identical FM performance with DAB thrown in for only about £90 extra. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 79%



FEATURES >> 85%



BUILD >> 79%



VALUE >> 92%



PRO

Well equipped to make the most of the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto.

CON

Under excellent reception conditions (entirely abnormal in the real world), the sound is still a little congested and also a touch harsh, though it's still lively enough.

CONCLUSION

There's no denying that for the price this tuner offers a lot, in terms of sound and features. If you're sure you don't need DAB (or already have it on another product), you'll not do much better than this for less than £200.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> 86%

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Nanotec Nespa #1

TYPE Optical disc finaliser

PRICE £399

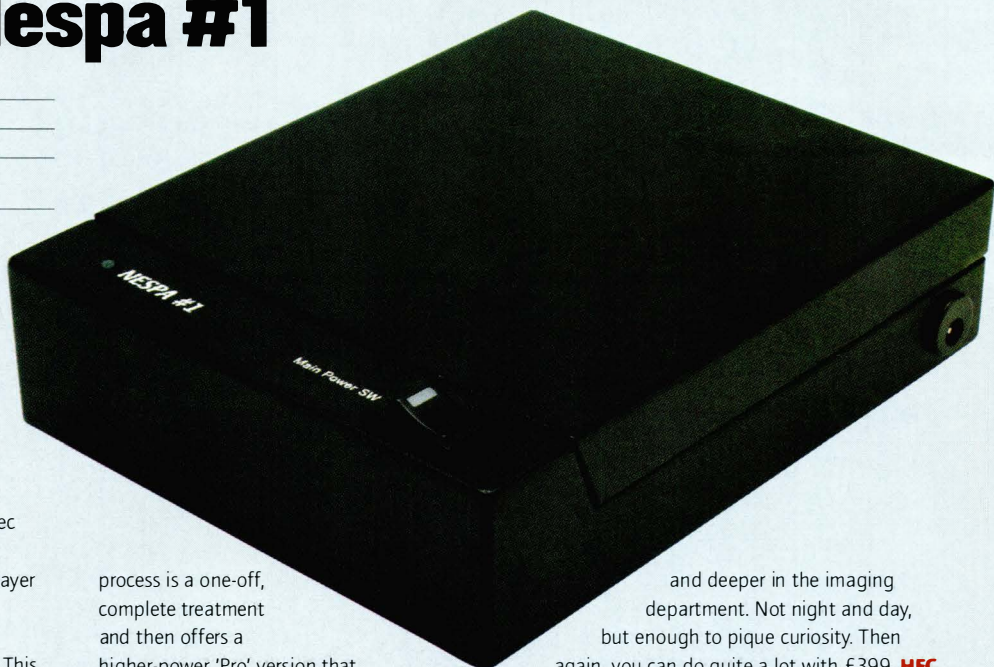
CONTACT ☎ 01785 711232

☎ www.audioatmosphere.com

Who on earth first thought that firing a flash gun at a CD at point blank range might be a good thing? For that is exactly what this little black box does. The disc is spun round at high speed while a flash tube whacks it with high power flashes, one a second for about two minutes.

At the end of this treatment, the disc is supposed to be 'finalised'. By this, Nanotec means that microscopic voids between polycarbonate and aluminium reflective layer in the disc are ironed out: allegedly, the mould-release lubricant in the voids is evaporated off by the power of the flash. This reduces laser errors and jitter, apparently.

Now, the flash gun is pretty powerful – its instantaneous power input is in the kilowatts, so it's quite plausible that it could vaporise a little lubricant. But then what happens to the vapour? We can't help being sceptical, especially when Nanotec first claims the



process is a one-off, complete treatment and then offers a higher-power 'Pro' version that supposedly sounds better. If it works, we're not sure anyone really knows why.

'If... call us self-deluded, but we thought we did detect an effect. We took two brand new, identical discs and 'Nespa'd' one, then listened. Honestly, we'd swear the treated one was just ever so slightly clearer, more fluid in the treble

and deeper in the imaging department. Not night and day, but enough to pique curiosity. Then again, you can do quite a lot with £399. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

It does something, but this device is dear and bonkers enough to make us wonder if it's strictly necessary.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 61%

Pure Evoke 3

TYPE Table-top DAB radio

PRICE £200

CONTACT ☎ 01923 277488 ☎ www.pure.com

Hallelujah! Digital radio starts properly justifying itself right here. Not, we hasten to add, because Pure has done anything to fix the lamentably low bit-rates which hamper audio quality rather depressingly in the UK. We'll continue to whinge about that, but it's not Pure's fault. What the company has done – and we're genuinely excited about this – is put all the features in to make DAB a real must-have for the avid radio fan.

Apart from the fantastic multi-line and graphics display, which shows far more information far more nicely than the usual horrid scrolling text, it's mostly about memory. The radio has both internal memory and a slot for an SD memory card. The former allows you to rewind and listen to something you missed a few seconds or minutes ago, while the latter allows you to record up to eight hours of broadcasting (depending on station bit rate and card capacity) for subsequent replay. You can even start recording from a few minutes



ago... how handy is that! There's also a timer for unattended recording.

We've been waiting for this since, well, since Marconi, really. It's a boon and a blessing to mankind and the fact that the radio is nicely turned out and easy to use is welcome, too. The internal speakers aren't up to much, but with both line and digital outputs to feed your hi-fi – who cares? It's portable, it receives FM too (can't record it, though) and overall, we

have no hesitation in calling it the best DAB radio, of any style or price, we've seen yet. Cracking stuff! **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Using the digital output puts sound on a par with any DAB tuner, but feature-wise this is far in front of the rest.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 93%

Sennheiser CX300

TYPE Ear-canal headphones

PRICE £40

CONTACT ☎ 01494 551551 🌐 www.sennheiser.co.uk

Ear-canal 'headphones' are clearly all the rage. This particular take on the breed, from one of the most respected names in cans, is mid-priced as these things go and comes with three different sizes of ear-fitting plug. As with any kind of in-ear device, comfort is highly personal and some will never get used to it, but they seemed very bearable to us after the first couple of minutes' acclimatisation.

Despite the 'bass-driven' claim on the packaging, which caused us some trepidation, these are actually pretty neutral. One would hope that bass is pretty strong and it is, but it never seems overpowering. Treble is nice and clean, too. The main problem is a slightly disappointing degree of congestion in the upper midrange, which is distinctly pronounced with classical music, although less

noticeable in most rock and pop. We've heard conventional headphones that can improve on that aspect at a similar price, though the CX300 would generally win on tonality.

There's another drawback to this headphone that bothered us: any kind of rubbing against the cable couples into the head as a loud, bassy noise. It's common to all in-ear types, but for some reason seems worse with these than with others we've tried and it's very disconcerting. On the other hand, although this model doesn't cut out as much external sound as some, it leaks very little to the

surroundings, making it a considerate choice for private listening in public. If this is as far as the budget goes, it's a good choice. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION Although it lacks some clarity in absolute terms, the CX300 is well extended and perfectly listenable.	HI-FI CHOICE 77%

Oehlbach NF214

TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £63 (1 m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8424 8844 🌐 www.bestes-kabel.de

Despite its bulky 9mm diameter, this is a reasonably practical cable which comes to you in a choice of Bordeaux or purple colour. It is also available singly for subwoofer duty. Unscrewing the phono plugs reveals the design to be coaxial, with what looks like the foamed polythene insulation used for radio-frequency cables. It's no surprise, then, that this cable has low capacitance and as such is suitable for vintage equipment and also for turntable-to-preamp duty.

Oehlbach makes no special technical claims for NF214, but does mention that it uses very fine stranding of the conductors. Whether because of that or not we'd rather not speculate, but the sound is very rich in the upper bass. It's hard to say whether this really qualifies as a tonality problem (from an objective point of view, it obviously isn't because this cable, like every other, measures dead flat as far as frequency response is concerned). It's not exactly that the bass is over-prominent, it just seems to have an

unusually rich quality to it, more a picking out of details in that range than a lift in level.

There's something of a balancing act here, because the very lowest bass seemed shy, reducing the impact of bass drum, the lowest notes on a double bass and so on. Treble and midrange, however, are little short of exemplary and there's a welcome clarity to any kind of music with very low levels of 'cable

dryness' in high-frequency sounds. You could do a lot worse than this! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
CONCLUSION The bass is a matter of taste but will work well in systems using smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble.	HI-FI CHOICE 87%

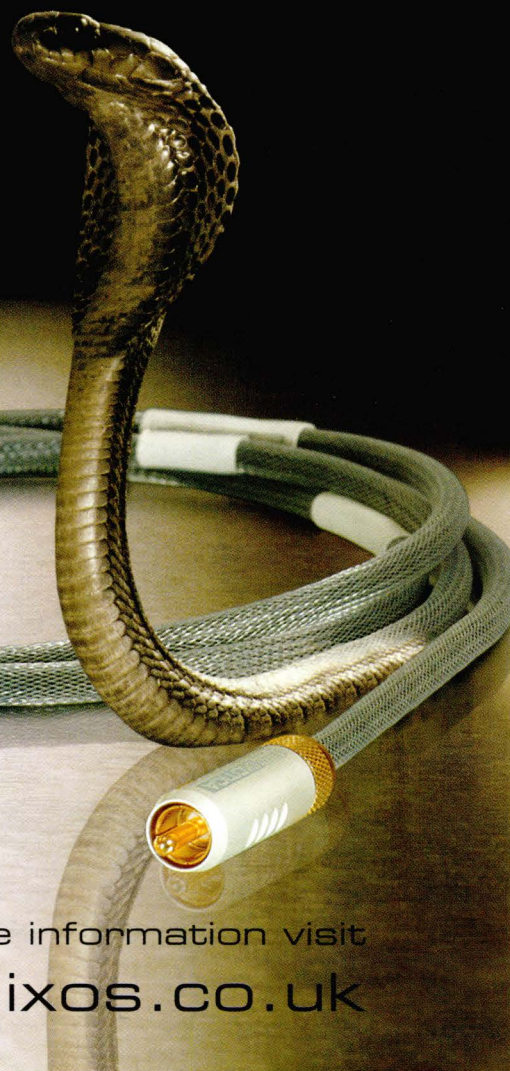
IXOS IXOTICA

King of cables

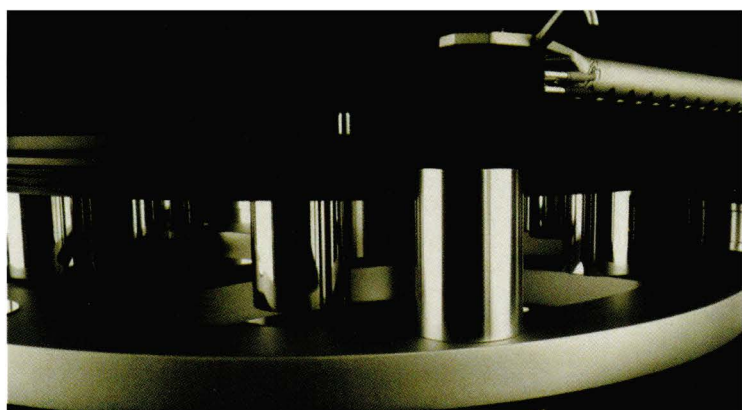
"...an extremely transparent, almost 'glass clear' cable that scythes through the mix with tremendous alacrity...Overall, an absolutely super product that's ideal for those with smooth systems, and want to get to the heart of musical matters."

HI-FI WORLD
IXOTICA IX1 REVIEW

MAY 2006



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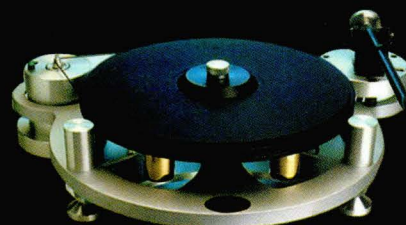
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Monster M350i

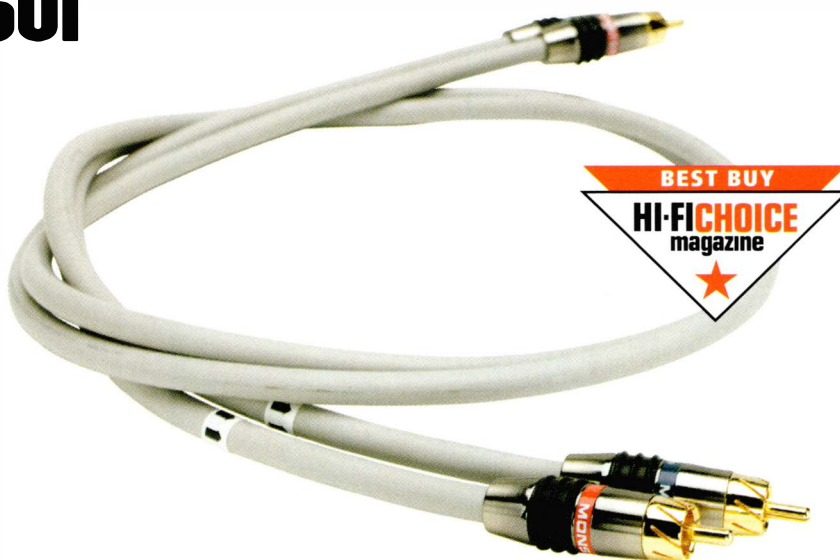
TYPE Analogue Interconnect

PRICE £45 (1 m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01923 431634 # www.monstercable.com

At something considerably less than a monster price, this modest-looking interconnect seems to have plenty to offer. In essence, it's a basic pseudo-balanced pair; 'hot' and ground conductors are identical cores within the cable, while the overall foil screen is connected to ground at just one end. This has advantages over coaxial construction in some (not all) circumstances, in terms of interference rejection. This construction makes it potentially directional and it is marked as such, though don't necessarily assume that the marked direction will invariably be best.

Under the screen, the conductors are insulated in 'PEX' dielectric, presumably something related to polythene, which has low dielectric constant and low loss. They are twisted together for hum rejection and are soldered into Monster's chunky 'Turbine' phono plugs. These have split centre pin and robust earth conductors and look most unlikely ever to lose their grip. The cable is of modest diameter, about 7mm, and is quite flexible.



We were very taken with this interconnect. It offers a notably open and natural midrange with very detailed imaging. Image depth is good too, and in general there's a nice feeling of space to any decent recording. Treble seems shut in compared with our references though, and bass is on the light side. All the same, melodic bass lines are clear enough to follow easily and there seems to be little interference with the energy of bass; it just doesn't feel as

full as sometimes. All things considered, though, this is a very likeable cable that's well suited good budget/mid-price systems. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Bass could perhaps be better, but few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space as this.

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

Custom Design RS300

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £110 per pair

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

We've seen this stand before, but not in this fully loaded incarnation. The basic RS300 is a simple, single-column affair with plain metal base and top plates, suitably spiked and effortlessly assembled with a single bolt at each end. It's available in various heights and in textured black or 'mercury' finish. On this occasion, however, we received the version with 'Acoustic Steel' top plates and Custom Design's 'Inert' filler. Acoustic Steel, a Custom Design speciality, is a sandwich of two steel sheets and a special glue, which works on the principle of constrained layer damping to produce a remarkably dead but still very rigid plate. As an option on the stand, it adds £10.

'Inert' filler frankly looks like some kind of industrial waste material, but does its job very well and once it's inside the stand, who cares how it looks? It's a black granular material, quite heavy, fine and free-running. It's simply poured into the column before the top plate is

fitted. For £5 per bag (four bags recommended for a pair of stands), it is well worth it. The basic stand (Acoustic Steel but no Inert) is pretty good but does add a slightly glary signature to the sound, losing some detail and precision. With Inert duly loaded up, however, the sound is transformed, bringing it up with some of the best stands we've come across at double the price or more. The base plate is not utterly rigid and there's a tiny degree of sway, which may account for a hint of bass lightness compared with our ultra-heavy reference stand, but in terms of tonality and textural clarity, this stand really brings out the best in a speaker. Highly recommended. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

In its new, fully loaded form, this is an exceptional speaker stand for the money. Buy with confidence.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **91%**

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

With fewer budgetary constraints, upmarket speakers come in all shapes and sizes

This month's group test consists of six upmarket loudspeakers, filling a price bracket between £1,700 and £2,500 per pair. Within that price grouping, however, there is wide variation in size, shape and configuration.

Four are floorstanders while two are standmounts; four are two-ways, alongside a two-and-a-half-way and one three-way. All use conventional moving-coil main drivers, with a number of different cone materials, and most have conventional moving-coil dome tweeters, though one uses a ribbon drive unit at the top end. Four of our six are designs of British origin, the balance being one model each from Denmark and France.

It's patently clear that if price isn't the overriding consideration, the designers have greater freedom to pursue approaches that don't conform to the stereotypes. There's little apparent relationship here between price and size, construction, shape or complexity.

Indeed, the least costly, B&W's £1,700 per pair XT4 (the subject of a solo review in *HFC* 278) is also arguably the most complex and unusual, with a super-slim metal enclosure and three-way

configuration that clearly indicate its orientation towards multipurpose, multichannel music and home cinema.

A hunky two-and-a-half-way floorstander, Dynaudio's £1,850 Focus 220 is also near the top on perceived value. Since its diminutive Focus 110 sibling performed so well in *HFC* 279, there's good reason to expect this much beefier contender will do likewise.

A £1,990 pricetag is very hefty for a tiny standmount, but 'the smaller the better' is the mantra of many loudspeaker users, and Acoustic Energy's AE1 MkIII is stuffed with high-quality engineering. A2T's Mezzo (£1,950-£2,254, according to finish) is a somewhat larger standmount, though no less purposeful or pretty. This French brand is new to the UK, and to *Hi-Fi Choice*, but has been winning its spurs in the tough environment of the recording studio.

Pinsh is also new to *Hi-Fi Choice*, and its pretty 2.1 floorstander seeks to justify a hefty £2,000 pricetag by virtue of a high-quality ribbon tweeter. Two previous encounters with Monopulse's 'phase accurate' designs have certainly whetted the appetite to try this £2,495

82, which is comfortably the largest and most costly model in this interesting and unusually styled range. **HFC**

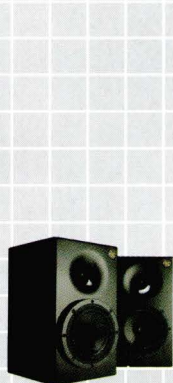
EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS 3 CD player
- ⊕ Burmester 001 CD player
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ⊕ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ⊕ Linn Akiva phono cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
- ⊕ Naim NAC552 preamplifier
- ⊕ Naim NAP500 power amplifier
- ⊕ Partington Heavi, Kudos S100 speaker stands
- ⊕ Cables from Vertex AQ, Chord Company, Harmonic Technology and Naim

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Alabama 3 *Exit on Coldharbour Lane*
- ⊕ System of a Down *Mezmerize*
- ⊕ Nitin Sawhney *Beyond Skin*
- ⊕ Sufjan Stevens *Come on Feel the Illinois*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Life on a String*
- ⊕ BPO Karajan/Wagner *Tannhauser Overture*
- ⊕ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used extensively throughout the test

ON TEST



A2T Mezzo
£2,254



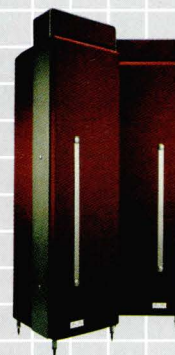
AE AE1 MkIII
£1,990



B&W XT4
£1,700



Dynaudio Focus 220
£1,850



Monopulse 82
£2,495



Pinsh 2.1
£2,000



LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the speakers compare across quantitative and qualitative measures. Individual parameters are assessed and shown as better or worse than the group average.

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

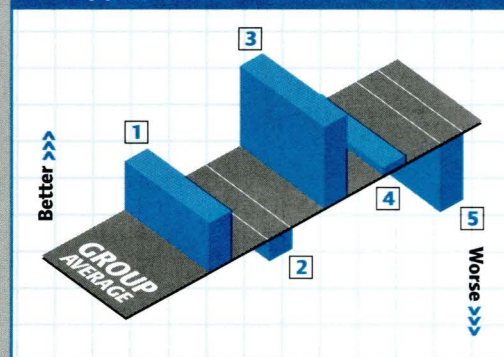
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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harmonic

Guildford Audio is committed to provide music lovers a listening experience that will meet and exceed their expectations. We are working closely with distributors and manufacturers which are chosen carefully. As part of this effort we are delighted to announce the exclusive arrival of Harmonic Technology "Cyberlight" interconnect.

We are inviting you to arrange for a demonstration to a cable that Michael Framer of Stereophile magazine describes as superior to any cable he has reviewed up to now. (Stereophile Aug. 2005).

ecs

The ECS pre amplifier has been painstakingly developed to meet an exciting performance brief. It delivers stunning levels of transparency, stage depth and image pin-point accuracy.

Some remarkable technologies have been brought together to create a product that has enduring classical sound quality virtues and yet is wholly modern in its skilful execution of the user interface.

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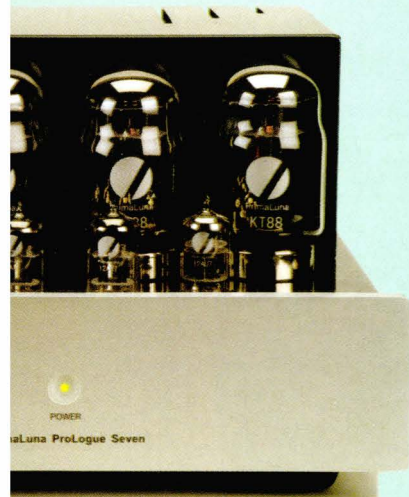


6 and 7

PrimaLuna have just launched two new amazing models.

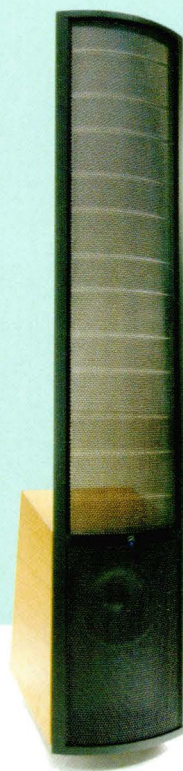
ProLogue Six
70W mono power amp. Tubes: 2 x 12AX7,
2 x 12AU7 and 4 x EL-34.
Outputs: 2, 4 & 8 Ohm

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

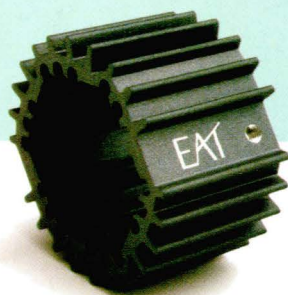
The Audio Research CD7 is a Reference Level model to complement the CD3MKII with an even higher performance. Incorporating the strongest aspects of the CD3MKII - its rugged construction, the Philips Pro2 laser mechanism, the Crystal 24 bit DAC - Reference CD7 breaks new ground!



eat

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 damping 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.

£2,254 per pair ☎ 020 7272 3722 🌐 www.a2tproduction.com

A2T MEZZO

This hi-fi variation on a French Pro-monitor still shows its roots

This 'Pro'-oriented French brand might be new to the UK, but it's been paying dues in its home country since the early 1990s, so it's rather better established than many newcomers. It's a relatively small operation, with roots firmly planted in the professional monitoring sector. This observation is amply confirmed by the fitting of Neutrik Speakon input terminals – a good connection system, but one that's rarely found amongst domestic models.

The name 'A2T' refers to co-founders Patrick Thevenot and Bernard Torossian. The starting point was work done by Thevenot, as head of the French electro-acoustic research lab INA, into the psychoacoustics of music reproduction. This highlighted the vital importance of engineering an accurate phase response and controlling the directivity.

This research led directly to a range of professional monitor speakers. These were developed and sold for a number of years and form the basis of the three models aimed at the hi-fi sector that were launched in 2004.

The largest of these is this £2,254 per pair Mezzo, though 'largest' in this instance is by no means the same as 'large'. In fact, it's a reasonably compact two-way stand-mount, with an unusual trapezoidal plan enclosure that's narrower at the front than the back.

Our samples came finished all over in high gloss black piano lacquer; alternative colours and a satin finish are also available, for £1,950. Although the shape looks strange, it makes plenty of sense from an acoustic point of view, keeping the front as narrow as the main driver allows, and ensuring that the sides

are not parallel, so that standing wave modes are spread and internal reflections dispersed.

The front panel is particularly unusual, presumably in the interests of time alignment: the 165mm bass/mid driver is set forward a centimetre or so, while the 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter is recessed by rather more, and surrounded by a generous horn flare. A small port is set into the back panel, alongside the single high current, mechanically locking Speakon socket. The supplied grille just covers the main driver, which has a 125mm doped paper cone with a hole removed from the centre of the dust dome.

SOUND QUALITY

The one thing that really singles the Mezzo out from the pack is the superb integration of its two drive units. Indeed, the transition zone is handled so well, this speaker has the sort of overall coherence normally associated with single-driver systems, while avoiding the latter's bandwidth limitations.

The tonal balance is mid-oriented and forward, the bass end as a whole sounds quite dry, and the ultimate weight and extension is clearly not that great. A2T makes a subwoofer specifically intended to partner the Mezzo, and the latter's bass character would seem well suited to such extra reinforcement.

The top end is exceptionally well judged in relative level, and sounds notably smooth too, so it never draws unwanted attention to itself. At the same time, it doesn't have the sweetest and most delicate sound around, bringing a somewhat matter-of-fact overall character to the proceedings, where a little more romance might be welcome.

Imaging is very precise and convincing, with fine focus and very good consistency across the whole listening zone, while dynamic range and expression is also comfortably better than average. The sheer accuracy of this fine speaker amply confirms its monitoring heritage and capabilities.

But whether such bald honesty will seduce the hi-fi fraternity is difficult to judge. **HFC**



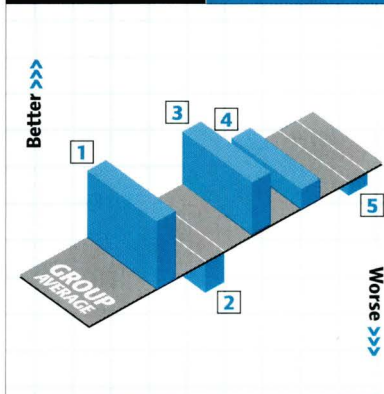
LAB REPORT

Under our conditions, sensitivity comes out at 90dB. This is just a little less than the 91dB claimed, but a generous enough figure nonetheless. What's more, as the load seen by the amplifier stays above 6 ohms throughout, the speaker is much easier than average to drive.

The load is effectively flat above 200Hz, indicating that the network also includes additional impedance compensation components. Below that point the bass resonances show a well-damped port output tuned to around 52Hz, which helps explain the relatively modest sub-40Hz output.

The far-field room-averaged balance is a little mid-prominent, with mild peaks at around 270Hz and 800Hz. Below 250Hz, the bass is dry and possibly shy. This should allow some wall reinforcement if desired, while the treble links seamlessly to the midband, and is both smooth and very well judged.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +50%
- 2] Bass extension >> -30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +40%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91 dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	-	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 89%



PRACTICALITY >> 90%



BUILD >> 88%



VALUE >> 83%



Clever driver mounting and crossover design delivers marvellously seamless overall coherence. Sound is mid-forward and the top end could be sweeter, while the dry bass alignment could benefit from a subwoofer.

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



BEST BUY

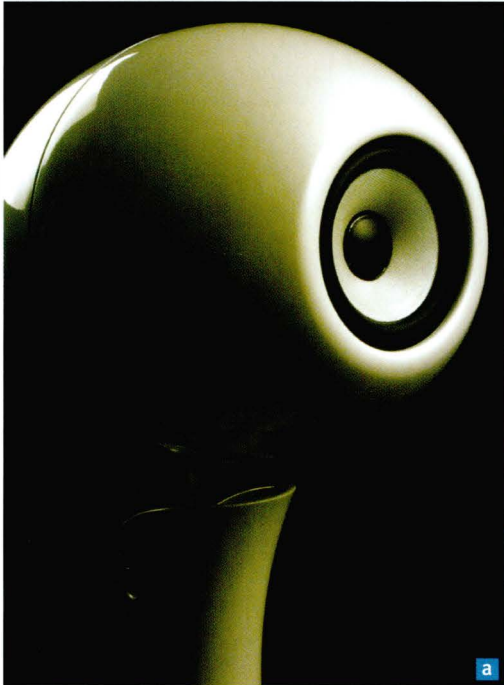
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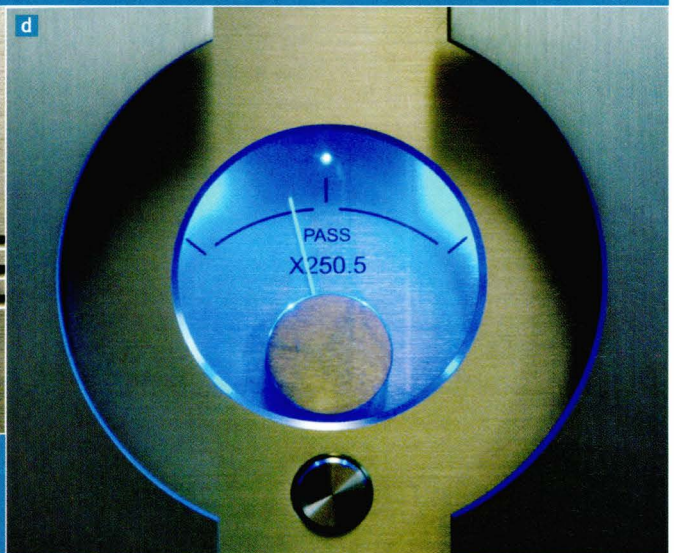
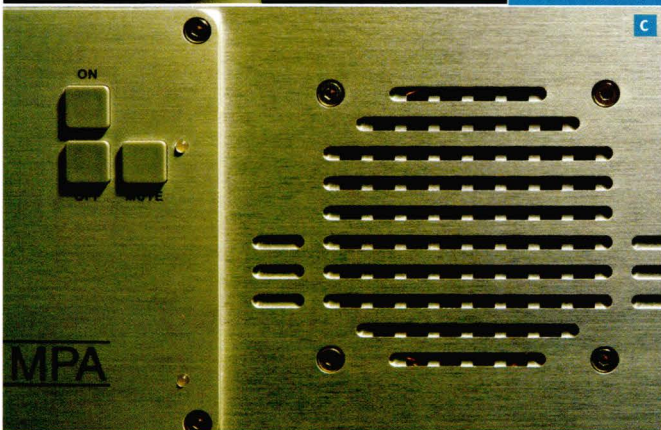
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ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 MkIII

De-luxe variation on Acoustic Energy's classic miniature theme

Acoustic Energy's first product, the diminutive and defiantly 'Pro'-look AE1 caused quite a sensation when it first appeared in 1988. Several variations on the same diminutive two-way theme have subsequently appeared, the penultimate being this luxury finish MkIII, priced at around £1,990 per pair, which we originally reviewed (together with the floorstanding AE3 MkII) in *HFC* 251. Interestingly, Acoustic Energy has just introduced a replica of the original AE1 (called the Classic), at less than half the price of this very different variation.

Much of the difference lies in the presentation. The original was covered in traditional Pro-style textured black, which is utilitarian rather than pretty. In contrast, this MkIII is the ultimate in luxury, with top quality piano lacquer black – using some seven layers of lacquer to give a really deep, mirror-flat shine. Equally attractive is the shaped aluminium front, which is a full 10mm thick to ensure exceptional mechanical integrity between the two drivers. It also hides the driver fixings and is carefully shaped around the edges and orifices.

The most obvious common factor between original and MkIII is the small (130mm) metal cone bass/mid drive unit. However, the deep-anodised hyperbolic-shaped alloy cone is significantly thinner and therefore lighter than the original. The tweeter represents a break with tradition, abandoning the original's metal dome in favour of the fabric annulus ('ring radiator') device from a Scandinavian supplier.

The rear-ported enclosure is a combination of 12mm MDF, backed by 5mm steel plates fixed

by a damping adhesive, with a tensioned cross-bolt bracing the sides apart. High power (400V-rated) crossover capacitors are used, alongside radiometal-cored inductors. The signal is applied via a single pair of good quality WBT terminals.

SOUND QUALITY

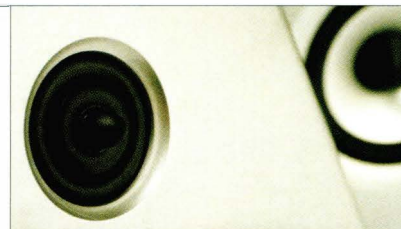
Two key factors were immediately apparent when the AE1 MkIII was initially connected. On the one hand, the sound delivered an exceptional impression of weight and scale from one so small, and in a very real sense this tiny speaker seems to deliver much of the bass weight and authority of a floorstander. But at the same time, it has the extra spaciousness and lack of boxiness associated with standmount speakers.

Indeed, reflecting its massive construction, this speaker has an amazingly low 'box sound'. There might be less dynamic tension and expression than demonstrated by larger, high sensitivity designs, but the AE1 MkIII's dynamic range remains exceptionally wide simply because of that extraordinarily low enclosure contribution.

Stereo imaging is also quite superb. It's simply not possible to pinpoint the actual locations of the speakers themselves with the eyes closed – all one hears is the soundstage of instruments and voices, precisely defined, while central focus is quite outstanding.

One reason why this little speaker sounds so big is that its basic character is warm, rich and laid back through the upper portion of the audio band. And since it doesn't have the fastest sound around, the overall effect might prove too restrained for some tastes – speech, for example, sounds almost 'shut in'.

On the positive side though, the speaker can be driven hard without sounding aggressive. And while the small main driver and low sensitivity will both tend to limit the ultimate loudness available here, it still proved possible to generate surprisingly high sound levels with a powerful amplifier, even when playing bass-rich material. **HFC**



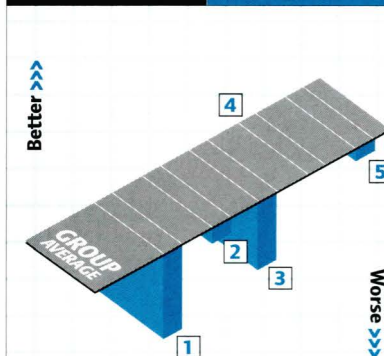
LAB REPORT

Clearly intended for siting well clear of walls, as the 40-50Hz port output is relatively strong without wall assistance, the claim for 87dB sensitivity looks very optimistic. Our own findings are more like 83dB as a real world midband figure (though nearer 86dB below 300Hz). This is below average, but corresponds with the subjective findings.

The impedance characteristics look fairly benign, with a 5-ohm minimum at 3.8kHz, but a powerful solid-state amp is recommended, so that there's plenty of voltage headroom to avoid clipping and consequent loss of control in the amp's power stage.

The far-field averaged in-room frequency response is broadly well balanced, albeit with some tendency to emphasise the low frequency end of the audio band, below 300Hz, and especially around the 40-50Hz port tuning frequency. The broad midband decade 400Hz-4kHz is somewhat recessed, while the treble is slightly strong around 4-5kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -50%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -40%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 0%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	83dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/5.8 ohms	8/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	38Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



PRACTICALITY >> 74%



BUILD >> 93%



VALUE >> 83%



This beautifully finished, massively built baby delivers a remarkably 'big' sound, at the expense of very low midband sensitivity. Tonal balance is decidedly warm and rich, but top end is also a shade bright.

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



shadow audio :)

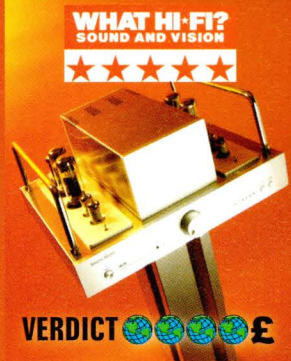
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WHAT Hi-Fi, March 2006
Eastern Electric M520 Review

"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



VERDICT £

Qinqu A8000 MK II Integrated Amp: £1,295



"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."

"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 Qinqu's emotional and powerful response."

Dominic Todd, Hi-Fi World, April 2006



JungSon JA-88D Amplifier: £899



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David Price, Hi-Fi World, May 2006
JungSon JA-88D Amplifier



System Price: £4,036



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Minimax Power amp £989
JAS Audio Orsa speaker
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David Vivian, HFC, March 2006



JAS-Audio Orsa Speaker: £1,399 (pair)



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Chris Thomas, Hi-Fi+ Issue 42

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

David Vivian, Hi-Fi Choice March 2006



System Price: £8,745



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B&W XT4

Can B&W change the reputation of slim, metal-clad speakers?

Most of B&W's popular loudspeakers use conventional wood-based enclosures. However, the need to find room for five loudspeakers, and the desire to have speakers that match silver-framed flat panel video displays, has created demand for super-slim silver speakers.

The XT4 is a lot heavier and more costly than other silver slimlines, indicating an injection of serious engineering content, and it's somewhat larger too. It features elegantly curved, silver-finished alloy casework, the sides and back extruded as a large single piece. While the silver-finished metal is clearly very rugged, its lacquer coating can be scratched. A black rubbery blanket covers the flat section of the front, providing a measure of damping.



The surprisingly hefty 22.5kg weight is due to substantial mass loading in the base, which helps ensure good stability. This is further enhanced because the spikes point outwards at around 30 degrees from the vertical, and so make floor contact comfortably outside the enclosure edge.

That super-slim front necessitates small drive units, so several are used to achieve adequate diaphragm area. Operating as a full three-way, a pair of 130mm bass drivers, each with 95mm diameter cone/dome diaphragms, operate in tandem. These are loaded by a pair of ports. The solitary Kevlar-coned midrange driver is the same size as the bass units, while the 25mm tube-loaded alloy dome tweeter is mounted so that half of it actually protrudes within a bump set into the top surface of the speaker proper. A single pair of terminals are recessed into a spine that also provides cable ducting.

SOUND QUALITY

The XT4 might not be a genuine bass excavator in terms of depth, authority or power, but it has some intriguing qualities nonetheless, with a distinctly different character from wood-based enclosures. While it might be accused of lacking warmth, the metal enclosure gives the bass a crisp, clean quality with notably low coloration. Indeed, all forms of boxiness and coloration, right up into the midband are well controlled here.

The overall tonal balance is notably well judged through the broad bass and midrange, but is arguably too laid back and restrained through the upper mid and presence. The treble is just right though, delivering ample and sweet detail without ever attracting attention to itself.

Slim enclosures tend to promote pin-point imaging, and the considerable height is also helpful in delivering a generous soundstage that fills the end of the room with precision and airiness.

Despite these impressive positives, the XT4 has rather weak dynamic punch and expression, failing to create the sort of grip and tension that brings extra excitement to any music. On balance, this speaker is happiest with classical and acoustic material, where its superior imaging, freedom from boxiness, crisp, clean lower registers, and innate laid-back politeness are all easily appreciated. Heavy rock material, on the other hand, is more inclined to show up its basic lack of low end muscle, indicating that the addition of B&W's equally gorgeous-looking PV1 subwoofer might be welcome here. **HFC**



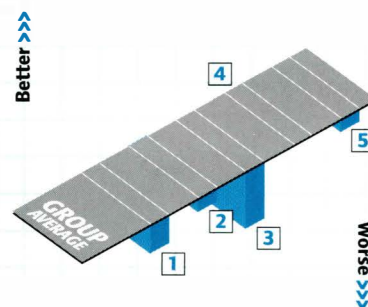
LAB REPORT

With the twin ports carefully tuned in tandem to 40Hz, the XT4 is best kept well clear of walls, whereupon it can deliver decent bass output down to below 30Hz under far-field in-room conditions. The XT4's claimed sensitivity – precisely confirmed by our measurements – is comfortably below average at 86dB.

Yet, at the same time, the minimum impedance drops to a very low and potentially very demanding 3 ohms at both 98Hz and again at 580Hz. This all adds up to one of the trickiest amplifier loads we've encountered, and while B&W is honest enough about this minimum figure, it does make a mockery of the claim of "8 ohms nominal" mentioned in the spec.

The overall tonal balance is notably well judged through the broad bass and midrange, if rather laid back and restrained through the upper mid and presence, while the treble is simply very well judged.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -40%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 0%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/3.1	4/3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	34Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

- SOUND >> 85%**
- PRACTICALITY >> 77%**
- BUILD >> 90%**
- VALUE >> 83%**

The XT4's sound is sweet and neutral, with clean bass, a decent overall balance and low coloration. It lacks some dynamic excitement, but to deliver such attractive sounds from a gorgeous, super-slim enclosure is impressive.

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

EVO A New Beginning

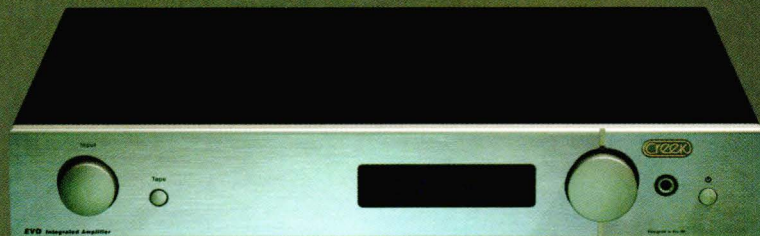
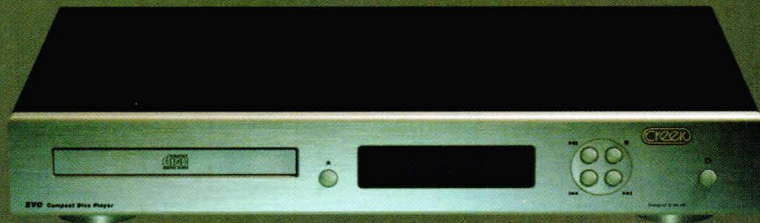
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July Issue: Read the feature on Leben Amplifiers.

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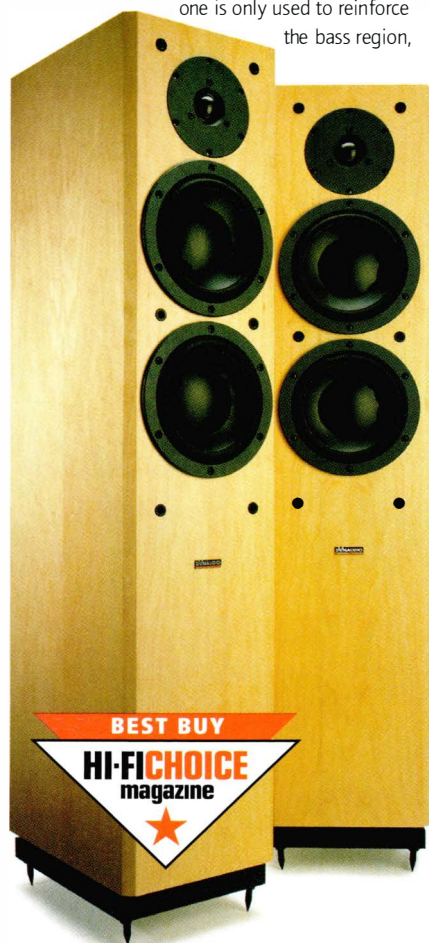
DYNAUDIO FOCUS 220

Floorstanding Focus features top-class Dynaudio drivers

An upmarket Danish brand that has its own rather different way of doing things, Dynaudio recently introduced a new mid-price Focus range of models just below the longstanding Contour series. The three Focus stereo pairs range from the tiny £850 per pair Focus 110 – which was very favourably reviewed in *HFC 279* – via a somewhat larger 140 standmount, to this very substantial Focus 220 floorstander.

Key features of this new range are classy real wood veneers (in maple, cherry, rosewood or black ash), covering cunningly shaped enclosures, alongside the very latest evolution of Dynaudio's proprietary drive units. First impression is that the 220 has a conventional rectangular-face box, but closer scrutiny of the top (or base) reveals that it is gently tapered from front to rear. Though not a dramatic departure from rectilinearity, this should still be sufficient to spread out and defocus lateral internal standing waves. Furthermore, the front edges are chamfered to reduce edge-diffraction effects and smooth the off-axis distribution.

This is a two-and-a-half-way design with twin main drive units, organised so that the lower one is only used to reinforce the bass region,



while the upper one operates right through the bass and midrange, right up to the tweeter. These main drivers have hefty cast frames and combination 115mm cone/dome diaphragms in moulded MSP (a mineral-loaded plastic), driven from a large diameter aluminium wire voice coil. The tweeter is a 25mm doped fabric dome.

All three drivers belong to Dynaudio's latest, premium-quality Esotec+ series. The bass/mid units have double-magnet motors with ultra-compressed ferrite magnets, while the type T380 tweeter has neodymium magnets and a solid metal face-plate

A single pair of terminals – Dynaudio has no truck with bi-wiring – feeds first order crossover filters, sharing the rear panel with a flared port, and foam bungs are available to block the latter if desired. A separate black MDF plinth accommodates 8mm floor-coupling spikes – it doesn't extend the stability footprint, and the sockets aren't too secure, but at least it can be changed if the latter work loose.

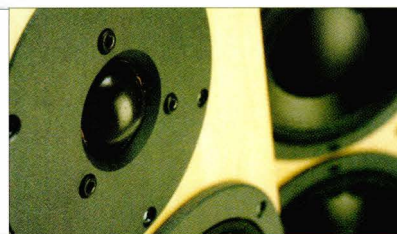
SOUND QUALITY

A paragon of studied neutrality – a not inconsiderable achievement in view of the first-order networks that Dynaudio favours – the Focus 220 has a beautifully even-handed and open sound. The top end is particularly delicate and sweet, not only vindicating the extra development that has gone into the Esotec+ version used here, but also clearly demonstrating how good a soft fabric dome diaphragm device can sound.

Not only is the mid-to-top beautifully smooth and well judged, there's little evidence of voice band coloration, barring a hint of nasality. The cabinet shaping seems to be very effective at banishing most boxy effects, though there is the sort of mild thickening and heaviness which seems to be characteristic of floorstanders, as distinct from standmounts.

In our reviewing room, the extreme low end can sound heavy, depending on the spectral content of the music being played. Happily, the port-blocking bungs removed any 'thumpy' tendencies while still maintaining good ultimate weight – indeed, the bass end sounded quite dry with these installed.

The Focus 220's one area of weakness would seem to lie in its rather restrained dynamic expression. Though unusually polite and smooth, there's also some lack of grip and tension in the way this speaker goes about its music making. But still, given its broad range of highly listenable talents, a Best Buy badge is certainly warranted overall. **HFC**



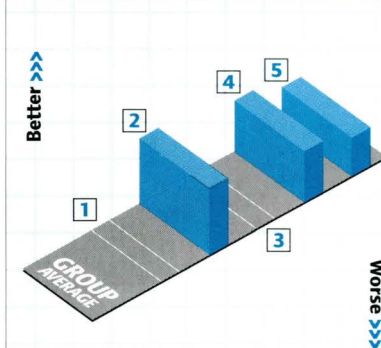
LAB REPORT

Dynaudio's claim that the Focus 220 has a sensitivity of 87dB alongside an impedance of 4 ohms exactly corresponds with our own findings. Though a 4-ohm load through the low frequency region can be quite demanding, it never drops below 4 ohms, and the impedance stays above 6 ohms at all frequencies above 500Hz.

With a port tuned to 35Hz, bass output is very strong – perhaps a little too strong – below 60Hz, even with the speakers well clear of walls. Inserting the bungs removes any excess and should be used if the speakers have to be close to a wall (and could be worth trying under any circumstances if bass is proving too overpowering in your listening room).

The overall in-room tonal balance is beautifully neutral and surprisingly smooth right across the band above 70Hz, with a just a modest downward step at around 900Hz. In short, a good, honest set of measurements.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> +50%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 89%

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 87%

Attractive, cunningly tapered real-wood floorstander has a smooth and neutral overall tonal balance and a very sweet treble. Low bass is very strong (without bungs), but dynamic expression could be more assertive.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 88%

Classic in every sense of the word

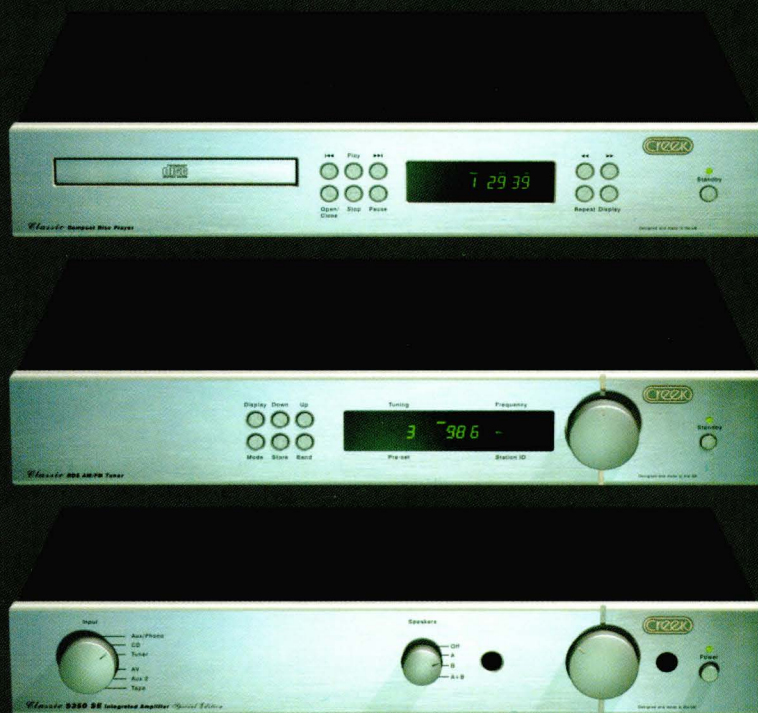
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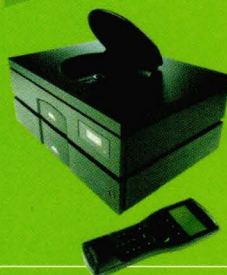
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MONOPULSE 82

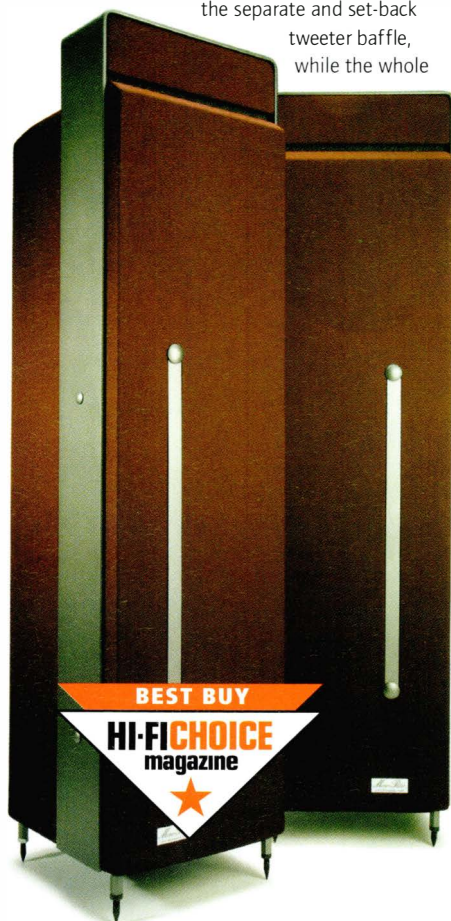
MonoPulse's biggest adds 'muscle' to the brand's strengths

The man behind MonoPulse, hi-fi enthusiast Allan Hendry, spent much of his working life on pulsed phased-array radar systems. This has made him particularly aware of the importance of phase relationships. He's applied that understanding to his loudspeakers, using the geometry of the enclosure as well as the design of the crossover network to maximise the phase coherence through the crossover zone.

Having obtained good results with the smaller 32 and 42A/AB models, this 82 is the third MonoPulse to come in for *Hi-Fi Choice* scrutiny. It's also the largest, the heaviest and the most costly, at £2,495 per pair.

All the MonoPulse models are two-ways, and all share the same very radical – some might say rather strange – styling. Though very similar to the 42, the 82 has a somewhat larger (50litre) enclosure, and its generous 240mm Dynaudio type 24W100 bass/mid driver features a large diameter voice coil that confers exceptionally high power handling.

The styling is both original and striking. The dominant feature is a hefty steel wrap that forms an inverted-U around the sides and top – the latter portion provides the mounting for the separate and set-back tweeter baffle, while the whole



adds mass and stiffness to the bass enclosure. Eye catching and, as it turns out, effective.

The bass enclosure is heftily constructed in MDF and covered in a wide choice of coloured fabrics; an additional layer of foam covers the back panel. A reflex port fitted into the base is held several centimetres off the floor by some very well founded and purposeful spikes, and the whole thing feels very solid and stable. The two drivers are mounted on separate baffles, so the bass/mid driver sits slightly nearer listeners than the 25mm soft dome tweeter. Connection is made via twin terminal pairs, allowing for bi-wiring or bi-amping.

SOUND QUALITY

The first thing one notices when placing and connecting up the 82 is just how coherent and 'real' it sounds. It might not match the strict tonal accuracy and neutrality of some of its immediate competitors, but no time-smear, combined with a vigorous dynamic delivery, provides more than ample compensation.

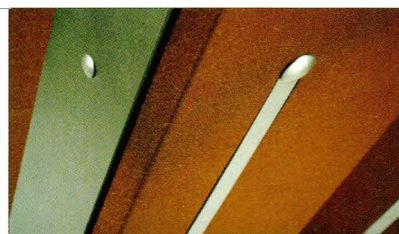
MonoPulse uses the phrase 'transient synchronism' to describe its particular strength, and that's as good as any to describe the crispness and clarity with which individual instruments are defined. Timing is truly exceptional, and percussion in particular is notably well defined, making even drum solos unusually entertaining and musical! And the Steve Reich-like vibraphone work on Sufjan Stevens' *Come on Feel the Illinois* is notably deft and clear.

The substantial enclosure build seems very effective at keeping any box colorations under tight control. As such, any low-level 'hash' is rendered substantially inaudible, further enhancing the impression of an exceptionally wide dynamic range.

The top end is arguably too restrained, so that voices lack some openness, but that doesn't spoil things too much – the ears seem to adjust quite quickly, and it does allow the system to be played quite loudly without sounding aggressive.

And if the top end is a shade restrained, the same cannot be said for the bass, which sounds strong and powerful without ever getting too 'thumpy'. Rather, it takes a firm grip on the music and drives it along with impressive authority.

The MonoPulse 82 might not place even-handed neutrality at the top of its agenda, but its music-making is hugely involving and entertaining. And that, after all, is what it's all about. **HFC**

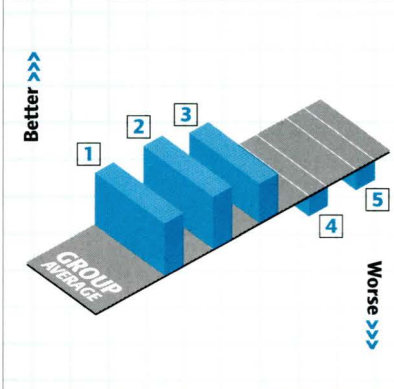


LAB REPORT

Claiming to deliver 90dB alongside an 8-ohm load, MonoPulse's beefy 82 just fails to meet both targets, but only by a smidgeon. 89dB seems a fair reflection of the sensitivity under our in-room far-field measurement conditions, while the impedance stays at or above 6-ohms (within the nominal 8-ohm spec) all the way up to 9kHz, before recording a 3.3-ohm minimum at 14kHz. This is unlikely to cause any problems, however, and the speaker should be easy enough to drive, unless you have a penchant for low-powered valve amplifiers (with particularly weak output transformers).

The tonal balance is not entirely neutral, being a little prominent in the midband (550Hz-1.2kHz), rather lean through the upper bass and lower mid (65Hz-500Hz), and a little lacking in the mid treble (5-10kHz), though the overall trend looks smooth enough. Bass extension is impressively generous, too.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +40%
- 2] Bass extension >> +40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +30%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	6/3.3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	25Hz	<20Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



Could be more neutral, but its excellent coherence, lively dynamic expression and fine stereo imaging are more than fair compensation.

PRACTICALITY >> 80%



Substantial build gives this heavyweight real authority and a wide dynamic range.

BUILD >> 89%



VALUE >> 87%



HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 89%

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Dominic Todd,
Hi-Fi World April 2006

VERDICT £

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PINSH 2.1

Pretty looks and a classy ribbon tweeter are key ingredients here

A relative newcomer to the UK hi-fi scene, and making its *Hi-Fi Choice* debut with this pretty little floorstander, Pinsh's main claim to fame is its proprietary ribbon drive unit technology, based on many years of research and development. This is now applied both in standalone super-tweeters and as the regular tweeters in the company's range of hybrid cone/ribbon full-range loudspeakers, such as the Pinsh 2.1 reviewed here.

It's a slim, rather pretty and very compact floorstander, with several distinctive styling touches. Most of the 12-litre enclosure is finished in a choice of black ash, rosenut or cherry real-wood veneers, but much of the front is covered by an extra, cunningly shaped baffle of black MDF. This 'sub-baffle' will stiffen the driver mounting significantly. Tapering steadily from an overlapping top to a narrower cover around the low-set port orifice, the top part is waisted with radiused edges either side of the ribbon tweeter, in order to reduce edge diffraction effects. Another

attractive feature is the speaker's



slightly convex top surface, but the very small footprint, especially when spikes are inserted, does rather compromise overall stability – an additional plinth would certainly have helped in this department.

Both drivers are neatly flush-mounted; the sole bass/mid driver is a small 125mm Morel-sourced device with a 100mm cone/dome diaphragm. At 13x66mm, the Pinsh ribbon tweeter is larger than many of its type and more 'purist' too, as the ribbon itself is a pure metal with no polymer substrate, thereby minimising the moving mass. A single pair of terminals, mounted through a recessed wood panel, feed the input signal via a minimalist crossover network.

SOUND QUALITY

The Pinsh delivered a less than positive first impression, as voices sounded decidedly hooded and shut in, as one would expect from the measured in-room balance (see Lab Report). This was especially true when comparing with the other speakers in this group. The ear/brain is very accommodating of tonal balance anomalies, but it did take rather longer than usual to get used to this Pinsh's particular characteristics.

Once one had made the necessary adjustment, it became quite possible to enjoy the Pinsh's undeniable strengths. The broad midband sounds beautifully smooth and even, with a wide dynamic range and accurate tonal perspectives. And if the bass end doesn't exactly plumb the ultimate depths – one would hardly expect that given the solitary small main driver – above the bottom octave, it has an impressively punchy and even-handed delivery, underpinning the rest of the band.

To hear the maximum possible output from the ribbon tweeter, one should try to listen to it directly on axis, the more so perhaps because this is not a tall loudspeaker. The ribbon may therefore be set a little below normal seated ear height, so you may have to sit low or add a little backward tilt via the spikes. This ribbon also seems to work best when the speaker is relatively close to the listener, indicating a bias in favour of smaller rooms.

Over and beyond these factors, the top end of this speaker is subtle, delicate, transparent and sweet. And if the lack of lower treble is difficult to ignore, like all good ribbons, the upper treble is clean, obvious and beautifully coherent in the way it adds the subtle consonant and sibilant 'edge' to human voices, or the shimmer to cymbals. **HFC**



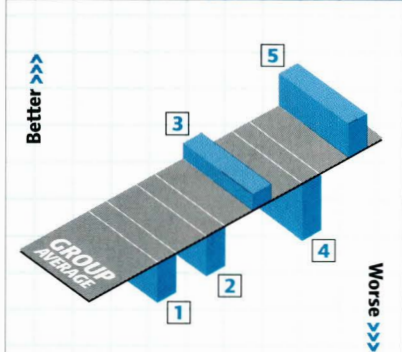
LAB REPORT

Pinsh's claim for 88dB looks decidedly optimistic, as a below average figure of 85dB was all it could muster under our far-field in-room conditions. That said, the bass extension is pretty respectable for such a compact speaker, with useful in-room output down to 40Hz, the more so because the load is a very easy-to-drive 8-ohms or better throughout.

The in-room frequency balance is very even and quite smooth across the broad midband – quite exemplary in fact. However, things start to go awry above 3kHz, leaving a broad -4dB notch through the lower treble, 4-9kHz.

Some worthwhile recovery was visible above 9kHz, however. On axis measurements showed that this dip was far less obvious at 1m measuring distance, but progressively increased as the microphone was moved further away to a more representative and typical listening distance. Those with big rooms should audition carefully.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -30%
- 2] Bass extension >> -30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	85dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	38Hz	38Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 82%

PRACTICALITY >> 83%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 72%

Compact and attractively stylish floorstander has a beautifully smooth and even midband and decent bass for its size. The low end of the ribbon's operating range lacks sufficient output in medium to large rooms.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 77%

CONCLUSIONS

Six very different approaches to making loudspeakers, with varying degrees of success

In any *Ultimate Group Test*, the more costly the speaker group, the wider the divergence between the different models. And none of those assembled here share anything much in common with any of the others.

Working up the cost ladder, B&W's £1,700 per pair XT4 might look like a super-slim home cinema speaker, but it's actually capable of serious hi-fi performance, albeit of the laid back variety. That alloy enclosure delivers a very crisp, clean bass, too.

Much more conventional in shape and attire, Dynaudio's

£1,850 per pair Focus 220 has impeccable neutrality, a beautifully sweet top end and massive bass weight, though dynamic expression does seem a little reticent.

Acoustic Energy's AE1 MkIII is extreme in every way, being tiny but decidedly costly at £1,990 per pair. Massive build and luxury finish provide the explanation, while they sound quite shockingly large for their tiny dimensions – a trick achieved by trading sensitivity and loudness capability for extra bass weight.

A strong professional audio heritage lies behind A2T's

£1,950-£2,254 per pair Mezzo. This attractively shaped and decently sized standmount from France shows a wonderfully seamless transition through the frequently problematic crossover region. Comfortably deserving its 'monitor' appellation and Best Buy status, the dry bass alignment is well suited to subwoofer reinforcement.

Pinsh's £2,000 2.1 is a very pretty and unusually compact floorstander, distinguished by a ribbon tweeter that is both a strength and a weakness. While the midband is impressively smooth and well ordered, and the upper

treble sweet and coherent, a lack of relative output at the lower end of the ribbon range and at a normal listening distances is a problem.

Biggest, heaviest and most costly in our group, the curiously styled Monopulse 82 (£2,495 per pair) fully justifies its weight and cost with authority and dynamism, as well as brilliant coherence and image focus. All of which more than compensates for minor tonal balance anomalies. Intriguingly, Monopulse was the only brand in our group to offer twin terminal pairs; does this sound the death-knell for bi-wiring? **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

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

» Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take the time and trouble to experiment.

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

» Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.
» Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to perform at its best.

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	A2T Mezzo	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	B&W XT4	Dynaudio Focus 220	Monopulse 82	Pinsh 2.1
PRICE	£2,254	£1,990	£1,700	£1,850	£2,495	£2,000
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Genuine monitor has marvellously seamless overall coherence; sound is a little mid-forward and the top could be sweeter.	Beautifully finished, massively built yet small speaker has a remarkably 'big' sound but very low midband sensitivity.	Gorgeous super-slim floorstander has notably clean bass. Sound is sweet and neutral, if restrained.	Cunningly tapered real wood floorstander has brilliantly smooth, neutral balance, sweet treble and massive bass.	Excellent coherence, lively authoritative dynamics and fine imaging more than compensate for mild balance anomalies.	Compact floorstander has a beautifully smooth midband but lacks lower treble output at normal listening distance.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	25.5x40x27.5cm	18.5x31x24cm	15x116x20cm	20.5x98x29.5cm	27x110x25cm	16x90x18.6cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	2-way	3-way	2.5-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x165mm	1x130mm	3x130mm	2x165mm	1x240mm	1x130mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Lacquered wood	Lacquered wood	Lacquered alloy	Real wood	Steel/fabric	Real wood
BI-WIRE?	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	90dB G	83dB P	86dB A	87dB A	90dB G	85dB P
EST. BASS EXTENSION	40Hz A	28Hz A	28Hz A	20Hz G	20Hz G	38Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/6 ohms G	8/5 ohms G	4/3 ohms P	6/4 ohms A	6/3.3 ohms A	8/7 ohms G
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	+20% G	0% A	0% A	+40% G	-10% A	-40% P
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	-10% A	-10% A	-10% A	+30% G	-10% A	+20% G

In a world where so much looks the same,
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Authorised dealers:

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- Ready for multiroom systems
- Ready for Bi-amping and Tri-amping
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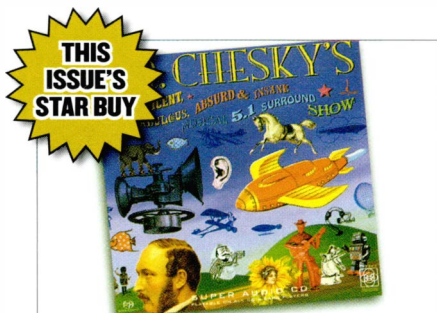
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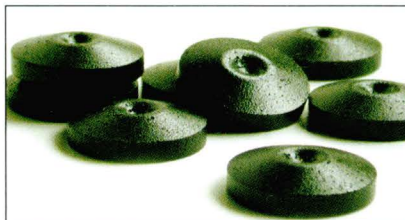
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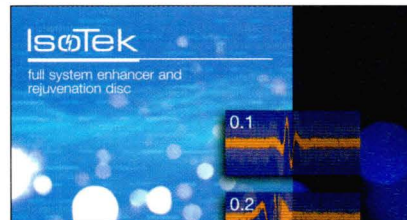
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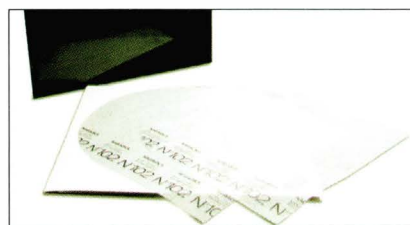
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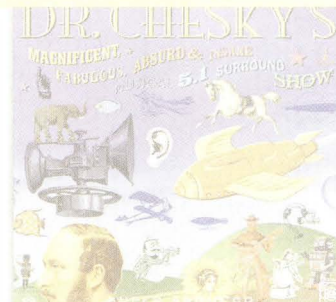
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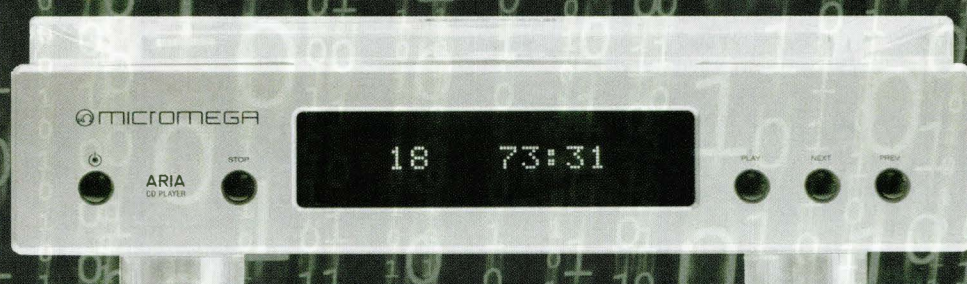
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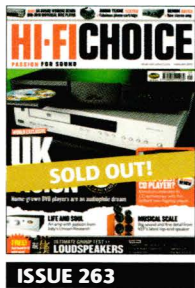
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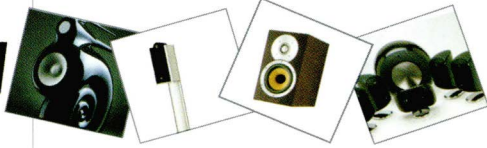
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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 🏆 BEST BUY 👑 EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	
UP TO £1,000										
🏆	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems	●	●	●	●			247
🏆	Arcam DIVA CD192	850	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
ABOVE £1,000										
🏆	Arcam CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality: 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!	●	●	●	●			280
	Audia Flight CD One	4,500	Sumptuously built toploader capable of real world dynamics with great recordings. Two digital inputs	●					●	269
👑	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	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too	●					●	280
	Creek Destiny	1,200	Our listeners failed to connect intimately with this player, though essentials all seem excellent	●	●	●	●			280
🏆	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
👑	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
🏆	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
👑	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful	●	●	●	●		●	263
🏆	Myriad MXC6000	1,400	A highly listenable player with excellent tonal balance and very fine detail	●			●			270
🏆	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance				●			280
👑	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
👑	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
🏆	T+A CD1230R	1,500	Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering		●					280
👑	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits	●	●	●			●	253
👑	Wadia 861se	9,995	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

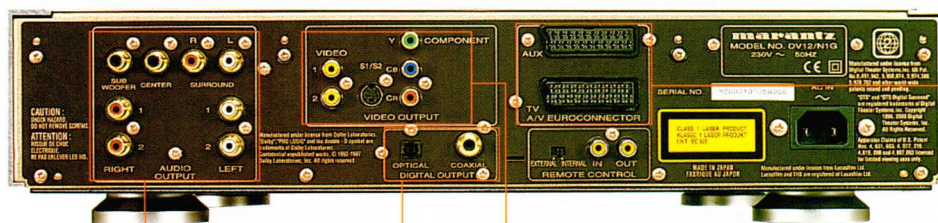
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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 DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money		●	●			254
BB	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem	●	●	●	●	●	276
BB	Denon DVD-2910	600	Denon's entry-level universal player lives in the shadow of the '3910, especially on CD, but is a fine overall model	●	●	●	●		262
BB	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation	●	●	●	●		274
BB	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video	●	●	●	●		275
BB	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
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts				●	●	274
BB	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs	●	●	●	●		280
ABOVE £1,000									
BB	Arcam FMJ DV29	1,600	An excellent DVD player, very fine with both CD and DVD-Audio music discs and superb in its video role	●	●	●			263
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs		●	●			238
EC	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD	●	●	●	●	●	266
EC	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi	●	●	●	●		259
BB	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat	●	●	●	●	●	280
EC	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too	●		●	●		265
EC	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio	●					263
BB	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
EC	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD		●	●	●	●	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.

BEST BUY
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magazine



Marantz DV7600 £600
A universal player that's strong with all formats, including music on CD/SACD/DVD-A.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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

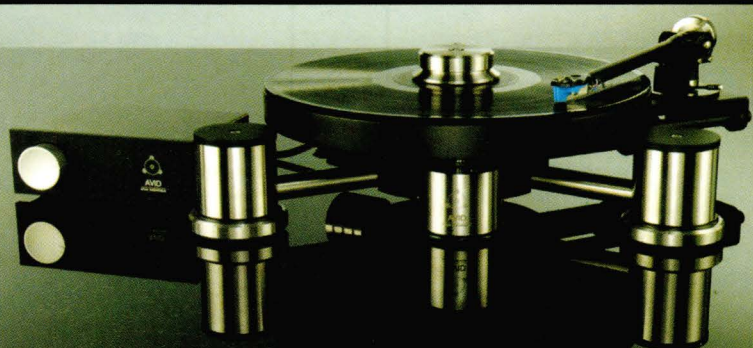
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Meridian G98AH £3,625
A digital *tour de force* – as exceptional with both audio and video as you'd expect.

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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
 Tecnodec £767

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



Clearaudio
 Champion £1,475

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



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 MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
MB	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
MB	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	268
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45		●	●	271
EC	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
MB	The Funk Firm 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
MB	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
MB	Michell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
MB	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●			235
MB	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
MB	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
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
MB	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
MB	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
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
MB	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●		●	248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
EC	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. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●		●	259

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
MB	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm	●			266
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
MB	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound		●		270
MB	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235
EC	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage		●		244
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		●		265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●		253

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

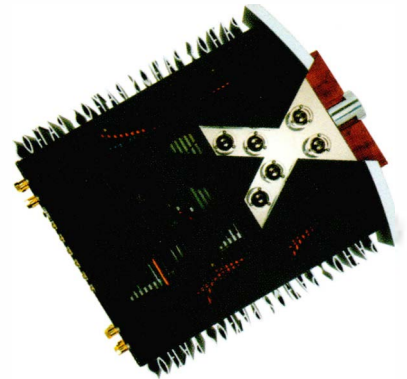
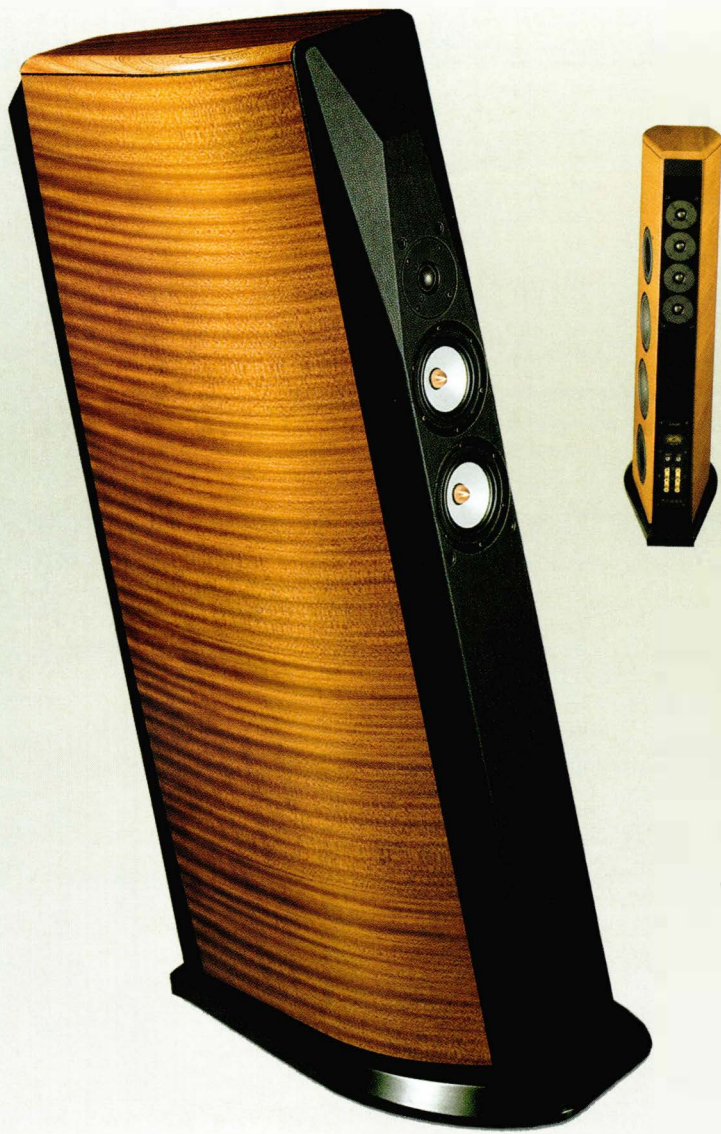
PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
MB	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
	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound	●	●			268
MB	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
MB	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●				201
MB	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.

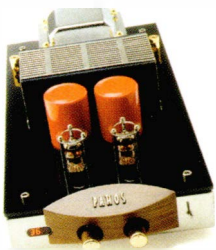


Great Music - Italian Style

Total bliss! How wonderful to sit back and immerse yourself in your favourite music, with a luxurious audio system that looks as exciting as it sounds – thanks to Italian craftsmanship, style and flair. Opera, Unison Research, Audio Analogue, Pathos, GRAAF - these names are synonymous with the best sound quality and Italian styling and, most importantly,

offer unsurpassed value for money. With UKD's comprehensive selection of respected dealers around the country you can choose from a whole range of beautiful hi-fi and home entertainment products from Italy. Contact us for your nearest retailer and start your very own Italian musical journey today...

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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is now said to be available to more than 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital entirely, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget 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.

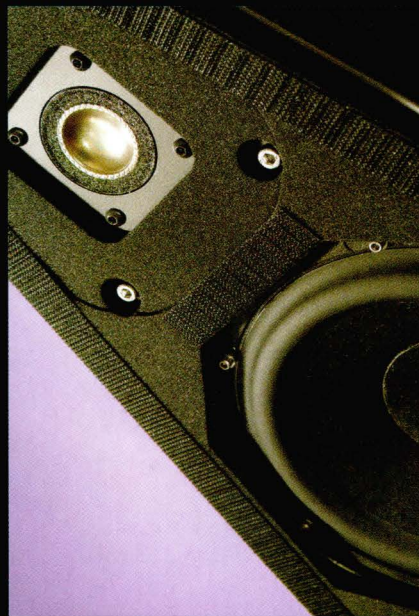
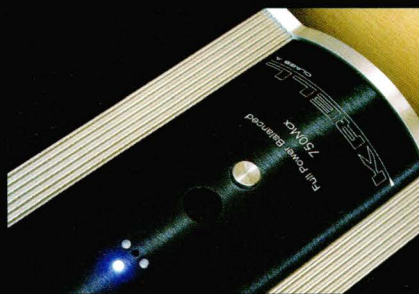
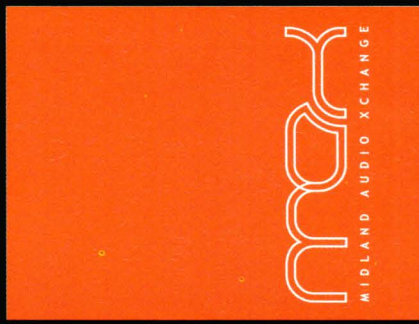
Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40		●		●	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		●		230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega Radio 3	398	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●	●	242
DAB TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DiVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value	DAB,FM	16		●	●	●	269
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10			●	●	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60		●	●	●	260
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure Digital DRX-701ES	250	A good introduction to DAB – fine value and simple to use	DAB	99		●	●	●	234
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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.



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.

KRELL 750 MCX

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.

WILSON SYSTEM 7.1

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THETA GEN. VIII

The Generation VIII is a full differential balanced DAC Preamplifier 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.

TRANSPARENT

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.

ELECTRONICS

Accuphase, Audio Analogue, Audio Research, Belcanto, Conrad Johnson, Copland, Creek, Densen, DCS, Electrocompaniet, Krell, Lavardin, Magnum Dynalab, Nagra, Orpheus, Pathos, Primare, PS Audio, Reson/Resolution Audio, Spectral, Sugden, Trichord, Unison Research, Wadia, 47 Laboratory.

LOUDSPEAKERS

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

CABLES / SUPPORTS / ACCESSORIES

Cardas, Clearaudio, Eichman, Finite Elemente, Furatech, Grand Prix Racing, Nordost, Quadrasphere, Siltech, Shakti, Shun Mook, Transparent, Van de Hul.

TURNTABLES / CARTRIDGES

Avid, Benz Micro, Dynavector, Koetsu, Kuzma, Lyra, Michell, Rega, Roksan, RS Labs, SME, Triplanar, VPI.

ENQUIRIES: T. 01562 731100
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THE OLD CHAPEL, FORGE LANE,
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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.



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.



Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro £850

160GB hard disk and CD-R/RW drive in a box – as music servers go, this is a cracker.

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
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		● ●	243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ●	233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		● ●	243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		● ●	218
MD RECORDERS							
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
HDD RECORDERS							
	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
	Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160	● ●	280
	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



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
CIRYUS CD6

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005
CD PLAYER
BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £1000
CIRYUS CD6



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 PLAYER
BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £2000
PRIMARE CD31

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005
STEREO AMPLIFIERS
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER UNDER £2000
PRIMARE 130



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 II

"The Debut is a superb value-for-money package."

Monitor Audio

NEW GOLD SIGNATURE

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**.



B&W CM1

Behind its exterior of real wood veneer and familiar two-way arrangement of tweeter and bass/midrange lie innovations, engineering and a sound that are far from conventional.



- Kevlar® Drive Unit
- Tube Loaded Aluminium Tweeter
- Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy

"When B&W moves into the luxury miniature sector, it's time to sit up and take notice" HI-FI CHOICE • MARCH 2006

LEADERS IN QUALITY HI-FI

EXPERTS IN HI-FI COMPONENTS
AND SYSTEMS

SEVENoaks
SOUND & VISION

"Yamaha's latest micro looks great and sounds even better. A winner!"



Yamaha CRX-M170

- Micro System
- DAB/FM/AM Tuner and CD Player
- Complete with 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) OFFER ENDS 31/05/2006

New Rotel 06 SERIES

Rotel's New 06 Series will give you years of enjoyment and offers excellent value for money. This range of separates creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.

- Integrated, Pre and Power Amplifiers
- CD Player and DAB Tuner
- Silver or Black Finish



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."



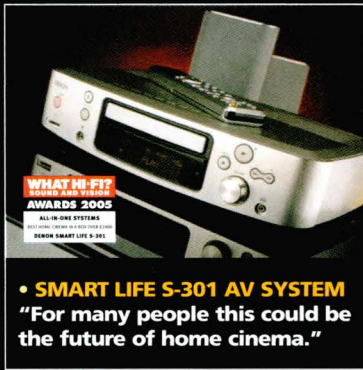
MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

MAKE THE INFORMED CHOICE TO ENHANCE YOUR LISTENING PLEASURE

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.

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"Excels in the key area - sound quality."



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- What Hi-Fi Award-Winner



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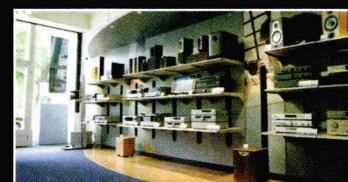
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

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

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

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)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	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
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Very well specified, well built, a delight to use and a real musical all-rounder	7	opt			90	273
BEST BUY	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Exposure 2010 S	599	Beneath the unassuming exterior lurks a very capable performer that's passionate about music	6	opt			75	262
BEST BUY	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension – exceptional value for money	5				70	279
BEST BUY	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4				55	255
BEST BUY	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price – another budget classic from NAD	7				55	253
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5				80	278
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7				100	266
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8				100	280
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6				100	275
BEST BUY	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt			85	255
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Densen Beat B1 50	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
BEST BUY	Exposure XXXV	1,599	Musical, powerful, tuneful and controlled, though not always the most analytical	6	opt			80	271
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5				200	247
BEST BUY	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5				75	271
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4				40	268
BEST BUY	Unison 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							
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
UP TO £2,000											
BEST BUY	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	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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	
BEST BUY	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	
BEST BUY	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Up-rated entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication			6			50	262	
BEST BUY	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with good strong sound and just a little veiling			5			136	256	
ABOVE £2,000											
BEST BUY	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little			5	opt			273	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around			5	opt			277	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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	278

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS *continued*

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6	●	300	249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5	●	120	269
EC	Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Prem 350SA	20,000	Valve preamp and solid-state power deliver some of the most transparent and naturally dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	●	350	264
EC	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	80	276
EC	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●	50	254
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●			180	253
EC	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
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●			200	247
EC	Halco dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	225	243
EC	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●			700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4		●	238
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●			140	208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6		●	233
EC	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 BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE **AV AMPLIFIERS**

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
<small>BT</small>	Arcam DiVA AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	●	100	257
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inlegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously			●	170	266
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>BT</small>	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	●	7	●	100	273
<small>BT</small>	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>BT</small>	Yamaha DSP-AX757SE	499	Exceptional sounding budget/mid price receiver offers brilliant sound per pound; ergonomics could be better	●	9	●	100	273
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
<small>BT</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	Classé SSP-600/ CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces		11	●	200	278
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>BT</small>	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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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.

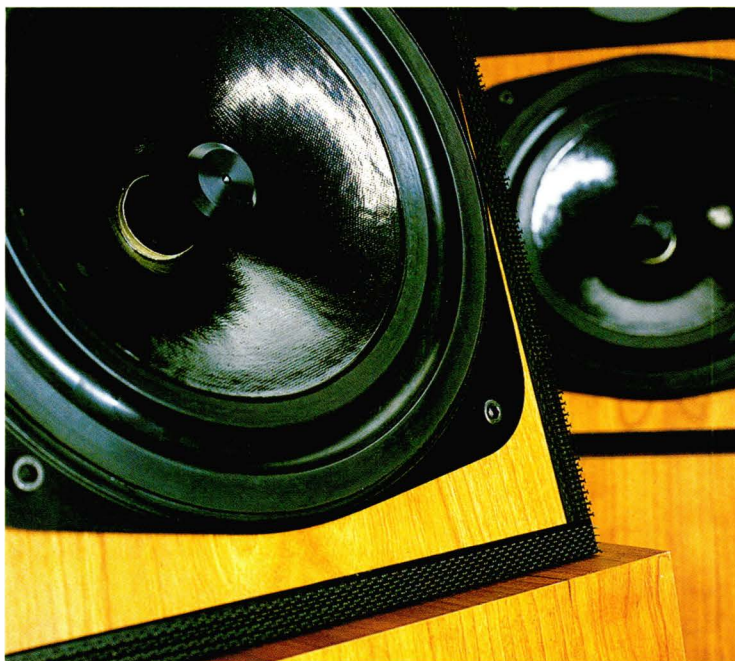
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion.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



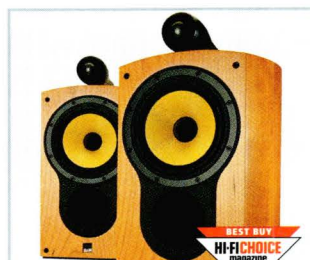
Rega
R3 £448

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.



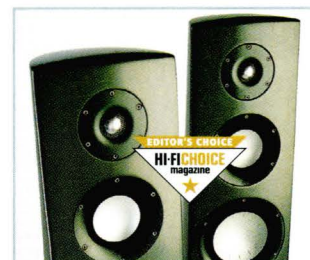
KEF
iQ9 £800

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
UP TO £1,000										
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		A	30	●		226
	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
	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
	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26		A-	55		●	253
	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
	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28		A-	40	●		279
	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29		A	35	●		253
	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
	Castle Compact Column	550	Compact, not so much that you need a sub to back up the bass, an elegant and engaging speaker for its size	14,87,5,16	●	A-	50	●		280
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40		●	269
	Epos M1 2.2	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
	Focal-JMLab Chorus 707 S	350	The size and shape might be unfashionable, but this is an outstanding all-round performer at a very sharp price	24,49,30		A	25	●		251
	Focal-JMLab Chorus 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
	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
	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
	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●		255
	Monitor Audio Silver 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
	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
	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

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).

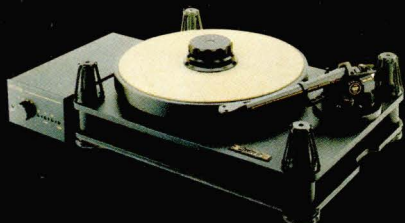
SME

The way to play vinyl ...

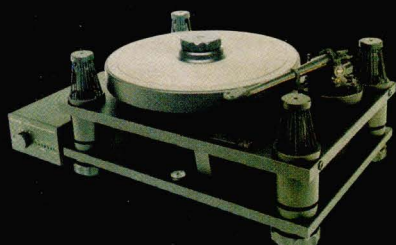
Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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e-mail: brianriv@mac.com

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40	●	265
ABOVE £1,000									
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	AVI Duo	1,299	Sophisticated floorstander, a natural partner for AVI's electronics. Unusually clean and honest musical presentation	19,77,28	●	A	50	●	280
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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 B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75	●	A+	80	●	244
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	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
E	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be	3,799	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		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 joi de vivre	23,39,27,5		A	50	●	274
E	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
E	Jamo Reference R909	7,500	Top model (in a class of one) is open, full and easy on the ear, and surely a classic in the making	48,127,54	●	A-	25	●	280
E	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
E	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	●	A+	35	●	244
	MartinLogan Mosaic	1,799	Curious hybrid construction marries many panel speaker-like attributes with moving coil simplicity	24,102,30	●	A-	46	●	257

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Acoustic Energy, Apollo, Atacama, Audio Analogue, AVI, Ayre Acoustics, Chord Cable, Consonance, Creaktiv, Custom Design, Esoteric, Grado, Isotek, Nbien, Neat, Opera, Pathos, Pure, Resolution Audio, Revolver, Roksan, Shanling, Standesign, Sugden, System Audio, TEAC, Triangle, Unison Research, Usher Audio, Van Den Hul, Wadia and more!

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
<input type="checkbox"/>	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Meridian M3100	1,850	Attractive and capable active (125w) with great imaging and strong bass. High neutrality and good power handling	19,39,25		ACT	45	●	opt	280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	30	●		265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30		A-	48	●	●	274
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35	●		277
<input type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Caelius 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●		241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38		●	262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		●	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD (cm))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (cm)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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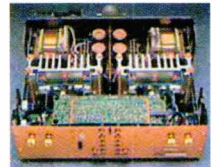
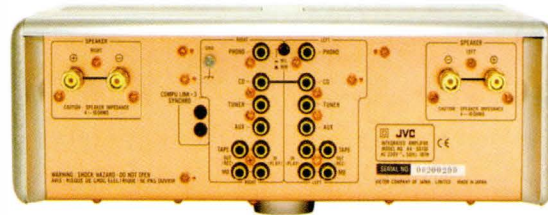
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Highly open, transparent and musical sound makes this one of the surprises of the year. Thoroughly recommended (hi-fi world).



JVC analog reference allows you to enjoy a sound quality that is closest ever to that of the original master. The AX-SD1 GD represents our idea of 'no-interference energy amplification' to achieve the purest of pure sound. First, there's the independent 3-block construction separating the power amp, preamp and control section, to prevent even the slightest interference. Then, the signal paths are trimmed to the shortest length possible, to keep signals contamination-free. Finally, the extra thick power cable enters the chassis through a hole in the bottom plate, directly running to the power transformers, reducing power-related interference. Parts and circuits, including terminals on the rear panel are laid out in total symmetry for the left and right channels, to ensure the sense of true stereo that gives substance to the music. Also, the three-point suspension provides an unshakeable support to the entire unit.

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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					ISSUE NUMBER		
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
■	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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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:

All year, the gang at Unilet try out the very best sound and vision systems they can find. They play them in their demo rooms to the type of audio and home cinema buffs who really

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.

Everyone must go!

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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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						
INTERCONNECTS AND SPEAKER CABLES									
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
☑	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise	●		●			270
	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
	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
	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
	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
	Monster Interlink 400 MkII	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound at a sensible price	●		●			224
☑	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●		●			278
	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging	●		●			280
	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
	TCI Viper SE	70	A well-made cable which excels at separating and defining instruments within an image	●		●			200
	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
	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●		●			273
	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cable with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●		●			259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
☑	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●		●		E	278
☑	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●		E	260
☑	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●		E	265
	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads					O	259
	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
☑	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
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Black Rhodium Disco	4	Lively and energetic with pretty good detail, if a touch bass-light	●		●			274
	Chord Odyssey 4	34	This biwire version of Odyssey offers excellent speed and impact, with low listener fatigue	●		●			258
	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●		●			227
	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble	●		●			280
☑	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
	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
☑	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
	Wyewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.		●	●			267
	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●			261
	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248
	Wireworld Oasis 5 Biwire	38	Full-bodied and precise sound across the board – an excellent performer in bi-wire or single-wire mode	●		●			262

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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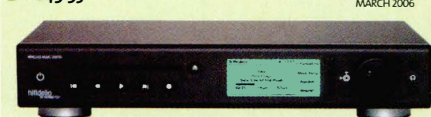
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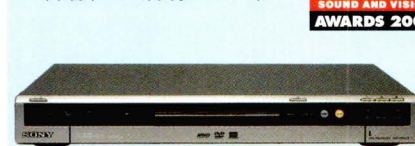


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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Aragon AG60	80	Good separation and imaging, with just a little coloration and bass looseness	60	16,14,5	●		3	280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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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The Audio Salon is proud to represent Symmetry in Scotland. Offering our customers the best portfolio of audiophile products, the best post-sales support, and the most ethical pricing policy.



It is hardly surprising that Ayre Acoustics has joined the portfolio and this advertisement celebrates Ayre's stunning achievements as best we can, with ten reasons why we sell Ayre Acoustics.

1. Only Ayre has the services of Mr Hansen. Ayre Acoustics, from Boulder Colorado, is the creation of Charles Hansen: a motivated, visionary and sincere man untainted by the materialistic and marketing ethic which unfortunately does succeed in audio and most other industries. To summarise Mr Hansen's views, he has never lost the core values (musical involvement) and is equally comfortable with very high-technology and very traditional means which play equal parts in his designs. For more details you should read his recent press interview.



2. The evolution series is the third generation of his audio designs. The x-series was the previous level; thus, a new product like

the C5 universal player is designated C5-xe, but a definitive product like the K1 pre-amp became K1-x and is now K1-xe since its launch (nearly ten years ago). Upgrades to products can be done; please enquire for details.

3. Each of Ayre's three product series competes with rivals at least one price level up. For example, the K1-xe is a two-box pre-amp selling for only £4,995 (£5,995 with its legendary fully-balanced phono stage) including VAT in the UK. It may sound different to rivals at £15k, but not inferior.

4. The same may be said about the V1-xe power amplifier: £6,495 buys a device that competes with the very best valve and transistor amplifiers that cost many times the price. Reviewers have said so; more convincingly, we can let you be the judge. Five minutes are enough!



5. On a lower budget? It is wise to spend as little as possible to achieve your required performance level. But it is foolish to buy used and abused, obsolete in the sense that it was never good value, equipment correctly rejected by previous owners! Enter the K5-xe pre-amp, astoundingly now £1,995 including VAT. How can they do it, don't hang around, and don't judge audio by its price tag? The series-5 amplifier is the V5-xe, and the UK price with the present low dollar is not £3,995, but £2,995, I had to take a second glance at the new price list!) At last, UK audiophiles can buy state of the art for High Street domestic products which

are mass-produced and bear huge marketing on costs that you pay for and don't recover upon resale. You may have to look further than the High Street for products like Ayre; now you know why!



6. If you want to pay £5k for your system, Ayre can present you with the legendary CX-7xe CD player, now just £2,195 (under Path Premier it was £2,995 only two years ago). It can be confidently asserted that the CX-7 performs by huge margins above rivals up to and beyond twice the price. Introduce the integrated amplifier AX-7 at £1,995 (formerly £2,995) and your choice of loudspeakers, and no one in-the-know can complain that true high-end is unaffordable.

7. If you are a vinyl lover and own satisfactory amplifiers, the astonishing K1 phono stage has inspired the stand-alone P5-xe single-ended and fully-balanced phono amp. Again, starting at the new price list in disbelief: £1,695 because this device is not a two grand phono stage; it's a top level piece of kit that brings analogue to its full potential. Consult the reviews, then come and hear it, and/or Ayre's phono leads which seriously revise anything you are using with these new dedicated low-level cables.

8. Digital has been evolving fast but has always seemed a compromise, and we have despised all universal players we have heard as seriously flawed; but as stated above, Ayre have acquired traditional and cutting edge techniques. Perhaps we should have expected their universal player to rewrite the book. Price is less than HALF the expected ten grand at £4,495, and performance on all formats is user-friendly and musically a revelation. It is one of the greatest hi-fi products ever made. At its price it is the no-brainer CD Player to buy, which also happens to—not just play—optimise the huge benefits of SACD, and DVD in its various versatile sub-formats.

9. Ayre Acoustics has the same reputation in video and home theatre circles with its multi-channel amplifiers and DVD players. If you want to integrate without compromise you have one manufacturer at the top of your list.

10. Ayre Accessories. If you are an impecunious, sceptical, or loaded with appalling part-exchanges no one wants, get a taste of Ayre's refreshing value and performance; buy a set of Myrtle wood equipment feet £11.50 including VAT and postage; the enhancer CD £17.95; or Signature cables (prices on request).



Every journey begins with a first step, and this could take you right to the place you started: the desire for musical involvement not disappointment.



AX-7e Integrated Amplifier



CX-7xe CD Player



C5-xe Universal CD Player



DX-7e DVD Transport



D-1xe DVD/CD Player



P-5xe Phono Stage



K1-xe Pre Amplifier



K-5xe Pre Amplifier



V-1xe Power Amplifier



V-5xe Power Amplifier



V-6xe Multichannel Amplifier

professional and hand-crafted hi-fi equipment

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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 ultra 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.



What



How &



Where...

TO BUY YOUR HI-FI SYSTEM



“...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

Oscar Wilde

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

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. It's likely that the system will help you lose interest in music pretty rapidly. The problem is that there are more myths about hi-fi than Aesop's Fables. CD gives you perfect sound. All CD players sound the same. A £50 CD player plays high fidelity music. All magazine reviewers are experts. Big speakers are always better than small ones. More watts per channel is everything. MP3 format gives you high quality. A collection of 'Best Buy' components will be a great system. And so on and so on. All myths.

Music - the real aim

Our aim must be to buy a hi-fi system that will prove musically satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money. If the system doesn't excite you musically you've wasted your money. What is even worse is that you may not even realise you've bought a bad egg - you'll just switch the TV on instead and your desire to listen to music will gradually diminish. Have you ever been in a pub or club where you realise it's very difficult to

conduct a conversation, even to the extent of being really tiring? A poor quality system continuously distorts but I don't mean it necessarily reaches the point of audibly breaking up. With a top quality system you can play music very loudly and still hold a conversation because it's free of distortion. A poor system is tiring to listen to even when it's played at low volume.

If you want proof, go into a shoe or clothes shop where they play background 'music' and try to enjoy listening. It's odds on you'll fail.

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

What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. So where do you start? Here's an important tip... **don't start with WHAT - start with WHERE.** There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. Again, just myths. Most specialist hi-fi dealers are running their business because, above all, they love music. They spend a large portion of





their time listening to music and comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Buying or being sold to?

Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ...and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problem you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the

system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by commendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

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

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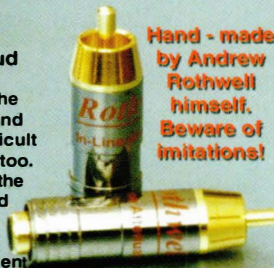


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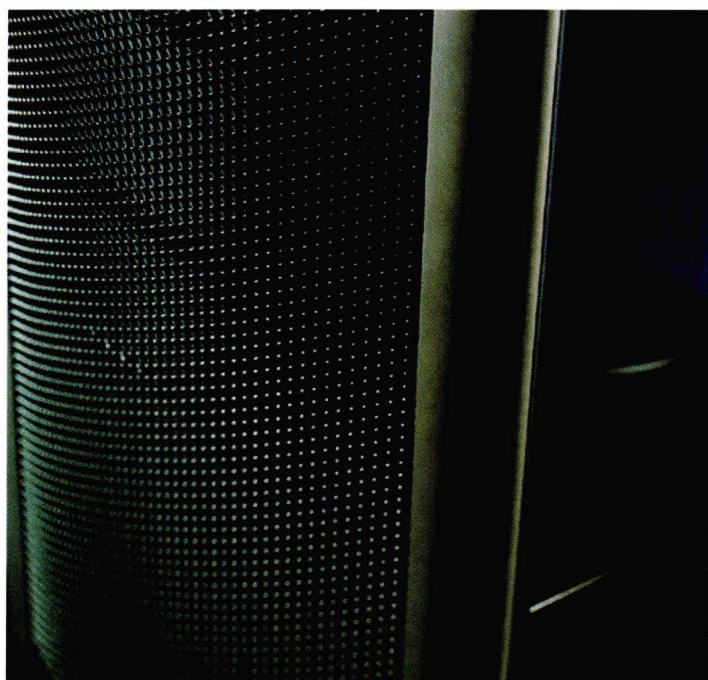


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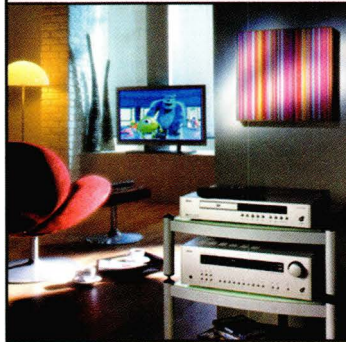
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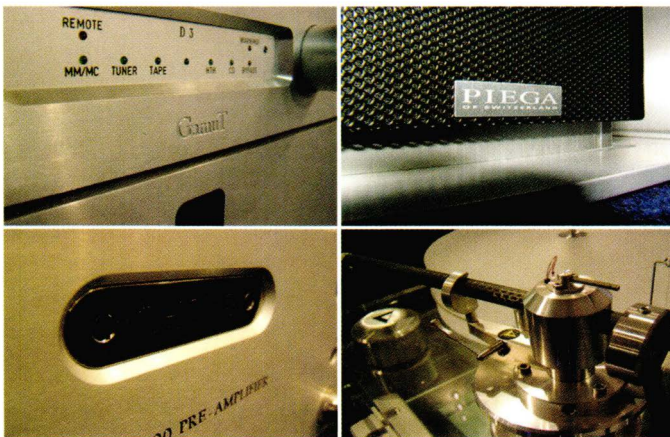
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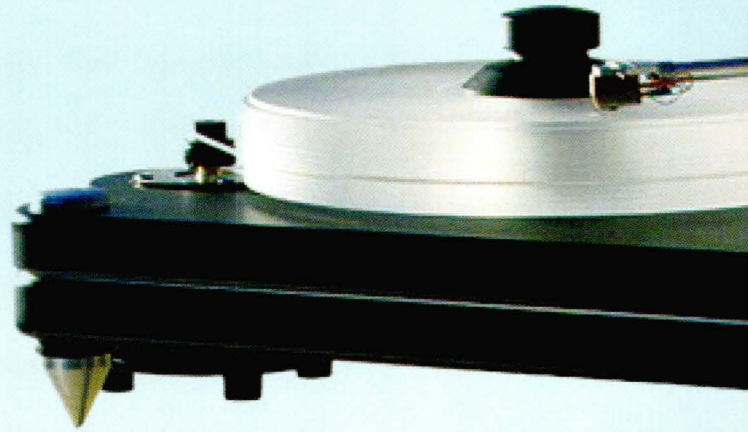
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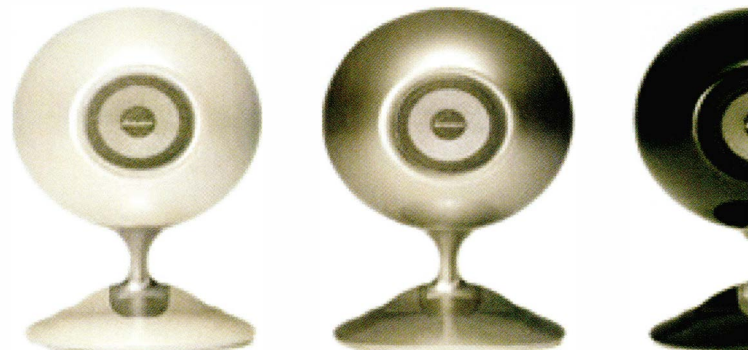


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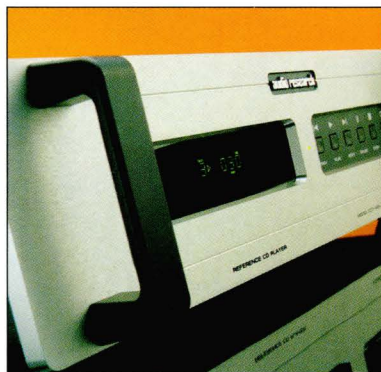
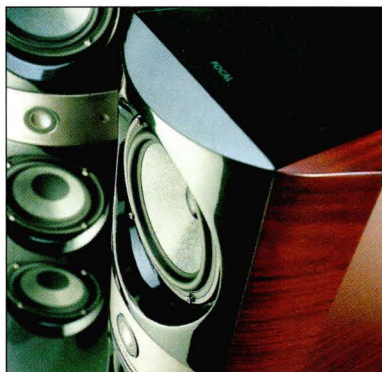
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DIGITAL TUNER E

A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT #23 TDL

Like 'em or not, there's nothing quite like the experience of listening to a huge pair of floorstanders. The ground shakes, trousers flap, eyes get pushed back into skulls and even cathedral organs sound remotely realistic. If this is the sort of experience you're looking for then a pair of TDL transmission line speakers still take some beating.

Sadly, TDL became one of the many UK hi-fi companies to go under during the 1990s. The name still exists today within the Audio Partnership company, but the speakers are aimed at a very different market. The good news for fans of the older models, though, is that many parts are still available for pre-1999 models from Lockwood Audio (020 8579 7755). Daddy of the old range is the TDL Reference Monitor. Costing up to £5,000 new,

Sadly, the KEF-designed bass units (TDL didn't make any drive units) are no longer available. Other drive units are, though, and even a crossover can still be had, albeit at a pricey £115. Lockwood recommends that any potential buyer should thoroughly inspect the cosmetic condition, as these parts, along with the woofer, are no longer available.

If you like the idea of a pair of TDLs, but have neither the space nor money needed for the Reference, then you might be surprised to learn just how good the RTL2s is. Although the one-time



Above: TDL's RTL2 loudspeaker

"A speaker that many claim started the 1990s craze for compact floorstanders."

this mammoth of a speaker really needs a room with a floorspace approaching 38 square metres. Given this huge space, its dynamic range and depth of bass is outstanding, even by today's standards.

It's perhaps a little soft of neutral; tending to suit classical more than rock music, but will still bring a smile to many a listener's face.

Available second-hand for between £800 and £1,500, this has to be one of the cheapest ways of feeling as though you're actually there.

cheapo of the TDL range, this small, semi-transmission line speakers is rather good. Indeed, many rate them as superior to the more expensive RTL3s and RTL4s. Lockwood said that the original tweeters were rather fragile, so a Series II model would probably be a better bet. Series IIs are identified by their larger 25mm tweeters. As with all the other TDL models of this vintage there are no cosmetic parts (including grills) available, so be aware of the condition.

As the RTL2 was never very well finished when new, there are a lot of tatty ones about. This is fine if very cheap, but be aware that anything with a cracked cabinet is effectively firewood. Pay between £40 and £80 for a pair in good condition and you'll have a rich and warm-sounding speaker that many claim started the 1990s craze for compact floorstanders that still defines the industry.

From RTL2s to Reference Monitors, the TDL range was one of those egalitarian model ranges that offered quality at every price level. These days they're sorely missed by many, but still make a great second-hand purchase. Buy now before they're all gone! **HFC**

Dominic Todd
Next month: Tannoy

DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 23 Enclosure Subtleties (part 4)

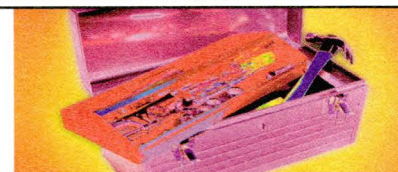
Last month's piece looked at the three main wood-based options for the speaker builder – plywood, chipboard and MDF. Of the three, MDF is the most recently developed, and has rapidly and unquestionably become the most popular.

This is because it's much the easiest and most predictable of the three to work. Unlike coarser wood composites, MDF's blend of sawdust and resin may be machined into complex shapes if desired. However, if you work MDF with routers, sanders and the like, wear a mask, and work in a well ventilated space – outdoors is ideal – because the dust it creates is not good for lungs or sinuses.

Rectangular boxes are the traditional shape for speakers, because they're the easiest to build. The trouble with rectangular boxes is that all the opposite surfaces are parallel, so tightly focused internal standing waves corresponding to width, depth and height are generated which create 'boxy' colorations.

Recently, manufacturers have adopted shapes that avoid strict rectangularity, and even tapering the sides so that front and back panels are slightly different widths, will bring a worthwhile reduction in boxiness.

The difficulty for the DIYer is cutting non-rectangular edges to a precise angle to ensure an accurate fit. If inside-edge battening



is used, this is further complicated by the need to cut the battens to similar angles. These are not easy tasks without decent tools and a fair amount of experience. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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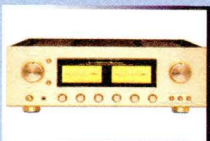
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Advantage integrated amp	£1495
Perreux 200ip int. amp	£1095
Sirius (Gamut 111) Power amp	£1795
Denon POA-T3, three ch. Amp	£275
Mark Levinson ML383 integrated amp	£3500

CD Players, Transports & DAC's:

Theta Data Basic CD transport	£395
Mark Levinson 31.5 CD transport	£4750
Sonic Frontiers Transport 3 (5K new) only	£1995
Counterpoint DA-10E DAC	£395
Lab 47 flat fish with Progression dac & PSU	£3995
Roksan Attessa with ROC DA1 dac & PSU	£695
Denon DCD 590 CD Player	£60
Sony CDP M41 CD player	£60
Pioneer PD-S502 CD player	£95

Miscellaneous:

Hitachi FT5500 Mk11 tuner	£125
Sony ST-SE570 Tuner	£60
Accuphase DS 1200V Power supply	£3495
Technics ST-GT550 Tuner	£65
Winds ALM-01 stylus Gauge (NEW)	£525

Turntables, Cartridges & Tonearms:

Blue Pearl with Graham Phantom arm	£9995
Mark Levinson 25S phono stage with PSU	£2395
Zyx airy Cryogenic copper cables	£995
Audio Tekne Cartridge with step-up transformer	£2995
My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new)	£2750
Project 9c S carbon fibre silver wired arm	£375

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villetti speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.

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digital

- Union Research Unico Valve output CD, latest spec 24/192 model (£1250) £795
- Naim CD 3.5, boxed, excellent cond, puck, remote. Bargain! £395
- Marantz CD17 K1 Signature mkII, champagne, orig box (£1200) £449
- DCS Delius 24/192 DAC, newer firewire model, boxed (£5995) £2495
- Shanling CDT-100 (3D acoustics UK model), boxed as new (£1600) £995
- Musical Fidelity kW SACD player, boxed as new (£4000) £2395
- Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, unmarked (£2950) £2195
- Denon 2800 mkII DVD player in black, progressive scan, multi region. (£300) £299
- Tom Evans Elkos CD Player, 2 box + ext power supply (#483) £1395
- Resolution Audio CD50 cd player, boxed, finished in black (£3k) £895
- Musical Fidelity A3.5 CD player, boxed, one owner (£995) £695
- Union Research Unico CD, latest spec 24/192. Ex-d (£995) £995
- Roksan Caspian CD player, one owner, unmarked. (£1100) £395
- Marantz CD94, boxed, manual 9/10 condition, very very rare £299
- McIntosh MCD205 5 disc cd player, outstanding performance EPOA
- Copland CDA 289 cd player (£1850) £799
- Marantz SA-11S1 flagship SACD player (£2000) £1595
- Talk Electronics Thunder 4 + Whirlwind 3, cd+ upgrade PSU (£1900) £495
- Naim CDi, boxed in excellent condition (£1999) £399
- Wadia 302 CD player, boxed as new, (£4000) £2795
- Advantage CD1S in black, just fully serviced (£4595) £1395
- Bel Canto PL-1, boxed as new, ex-dem. (£6990) EPOA
- Bel Canto PL-1 Universal CD/DVD-A/SACD (£9490) EPOA
- Audio Analogue Paganini (£950) £695
- Roksan Kandy MKII silver/black ex-dem £450

amplifiers

- AVI Lab Series amplifier, boxed as new (£1500) £995
- McIntosh C200 Valve pre amp, boxed as new, ex-d (£4318) EPOA
- Audio Note Meisnu integrated amplifier with internal phono stage + £1000 Border Patrol Upgrade. (£4300) sensational £2295
- Electrocompaniet AW200 power amplifier (£1500) we have two of these available buy both together (monoblocking) for £1350 £895
- Mark Levinson 26s ref pre-amp, 2 box model - ext power supply (£8000) £2395
- ATC SCA2 pre-amplifier, current model (facelift), unmarked (£3999) £1995
- Krell KAV500i integrated, very very rare, boxed, excellent (£5000) £1695
- Musical Fidelity kW500, one owner (£4000) £2795
- Moon i5 Limited Edition integrated amplifier. Boxed (£2900) £1495
- Chord CPA2200 pre amplifier in silver. Boxed unmarked (£3710) £1695
- Micromega A80 amp, boxed as new, ex-review model (£659) £379
- Micromega A120 int amp, boxed as new, ex-review model (£899) £495
- Comsonance Cyber 800 Mono Blocks (Valve) absolutely stunning (£3k) £1995
- Mark Levinson No 383 Integrated amplifier (£4995) £3295
- Audio Note M3 pre-amp, as new, silver, one owner. (£3500) £1695
- EAR 864 valve pre amplifier, boxed as new, one owner (£2000) £1095
- Vincent D150 Hybrid power amp. Good cond. Incredible performance £395
- Bryston 4BSST-C series, power amp, black, unmarked, (£2750) £1995
- Bow ZZI integrated amplifier. Boxed, unmarked in black, (£3350) £1295
- EAR V20 integrated amp. Stunning looks+performance (£3595) £1695
- Musical Fidelity kW (6112) Tube Pre, boxed as new, (£3000) £1995
- Musical Fidelity kW750 power amplifier (£5999) £3795
- Croft Syntegra hybrid integrated, ex-d (£2500) £1250
- Croft T51 with Epoch Pre (£3000) £1795
- McIntosh MC501 Monoblocks(pair), ex-d (£7800) £395
- Roksan Caspian Integrated amplifier (£1000) £2795
- Graaf GM50 Integrated Valve Amp (£4000) £2885
- McIntosh MA6900 integrated amp (£4549) £995
- Conrad Johnson PVI41 pre (£2500) £695
- EAR 834L de-luxe line stage valve pre (£1123) £795
- Musical Fidelity A3cr pre and power (£2000) £995
- Croft T51 hybrid power amp, ex-d, unmarked (£2000) £4995
- Pass Labs X350.5, supplied by us new (£7600) EPOA
- McIntosh MA2275 valve int (£5773) as new, ex-dem EPOA
- McIntosh MA6500 int amplifier, ex-dem (£3361) EPOA
- McIntosh MH7200 bx140 watts, ex-dem (£6503) £3950
- ATC SPA2 150 power amplifier (£2400) £1995
- Audio Innovations 2nd Audio Monoblocks (£3000) £995
- Linn Wakonda pre amplifier £395
- Bel Canto Evo4, boxed as new, ex-dem (£3499) EPOA
- Bel Canto Pre2, boxed as new, ex-dem (£2999) EPOA
- Bel Canto EVO 2i, boxed as new (£2750) EPOA
- Hovland HP100 pre+built in phstage (£5350) £3595
- Hovland Radia Power amplifier (£7995) £4995
- Hovland HP200 + phono stage (£7325) £4995

loudspeakers

- Living Voice OBXR2 speakers, boxed as new, ex-dem. (£4400) £2495
- JAS Audio Supertweeters, this is the actual HIFI World Review pair from the current issue (May 06) a superb speaker upgrade. (£649) £549
- Wilson Benesch Discovery, 5 months old, boxed as new (£5700) £3695
- Musical FB1 + recently upgraded to full + spec in cherry. (£1695) £895
- Wilson Benesch Actor speakers, cherry, excellent cond. (£4000) £1495
- PMC OB1 speakers, cherry, latest spec, 5 months old. (£2700) £1695
- ATC SCM-20A S Tower speakers, walnut (£5177) £1995
- Merlin VSM MM in exc condition 10/10 (£8000) £2595
- REL Q400E subwoofer in premium maple (£1200) £695
- Gershman Acoustics Avantgarde speakers, finished in Piano Black Laquer, only few weeks old, (£7900) EPOA
- Wilson Benesch ARCS with stands, silver finish (£2.5k) £1699
- Living Voice Auditorium II in Cherry (£2195) £1495
- ATC SCM-50ASL in Cherry, 4mths old (£7947) £4895
- 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 i, as new, maple, 2 months old. £2700 £1650
- Triangle Heliade, Champagne finish (£595) £395
- Quad 989 ESL Vintage, new £3000 £3600
- Quad 988 ESL in Noulveau, cost new £3750 £2999
- Audio Physic Virgo III, Cherry £2895

analogue

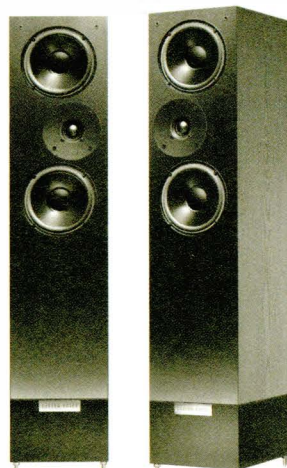
- Linn LP12, Elkos, Lingo, Cirkus, recent service, orig box + packing (£5900) £1595
- Roksan Xerxes with brand new Tabriz Zi arm, complete service ago. Fully boxed in as new condition. Superb opportunity! £795
- Trichord Dino with the never connected power supply, boxed as new, one owner, latest spec, sensational performance. (£749) £495
- Blue Note Bellaria Reference Tonearm, one owner, 3 months old (£1500) £795
- Mark Levinson JC-1 phono stage, very very rare £1495
- SME 10a, boxed as new 9mths old only (£3600) £1995
- Michelle Gyrodeck, Origin Live Tonearm, Trichord Never Connected PSU+DC motor, boxed, manuals, one owner, excellent. (£2000+) £995
- Krell KPE Reference Phono Stage £1395
- SME 10, boxed AS NEW (£2800) £1895
- SME 20/2a + SME V tonearm (£595) £3695
- Wilson Benesch Full Circle-Py Cart (£2100) £1495
- Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck £695
- Trichord Dino - silver front £199

misc

- Isotek Substation mains distribution (£1200) £549
- Nordost Vishnu 2m mains lead, one owner as new £349
- Chord Chorus 1.0m interconnect, boxed, 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
- Musical Fidelity X-Cans v2, upgraded to v3 £149
- Musical Fidelity X-10v3 Tube buffer stage £195
- Cyrus PSXR boxed unmarked in black £195
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- Townshend Super Tweeters in Titanium matt £650

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Living Voice IBX-R2

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items	Sale	New
Nordost Valhalla speaker cable - 7ft single set	£3000	£6000
Nordost Valhalla 1m interconnect - 2 sets	£2000	£4000
Hovland HP100 line/phono pre-amp	£3000	£6500
Wilson System 6 loudspeakers	£9000	£18000
McIntosh 2000 power-amp	£7000	£13500
Musical Fidelity 3D Nu Vista CD player	£1400	£2750
Van den Hul Colibri (new)	£1800	£3000
Voyd 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 Lexas platter; massive Papst motor system, extreme power supply; beautiful satin rosewood plinth. Sale includes AudioNote wired Helius Cyalene tonearm and ANUK IO-limited field coil cartridge with PSU (15 hours use). Comes with manufacturers warranty on turntable.	£12000	£25000
Conrad Johnson Premier 140 - power amp - 2003 - very good condition	£4500	£7500
Conrad Johnson Premier 16LS - remote control pre-amp - 3 years old	£4000	£8000
Living Voice OBX-R2 loudspeaker - Ebony	£3800	£5000
Pathos 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless	£1500	
Audion Golden Night 300B monos - very good condition	£1750	£4500
Union Simply 845 beefcake integrated amp	£1800	£3750
Cardas Neutral Reference speaker cable - 2 metres - very nearly new	£500	£780
Cardas Neutral Reference interconnect - 1 metre - very nearly new	£350	£500
Vertex Moncayo speaker cable - 15' pair - one month old	£1000	£2000
Border Patrol Control Unit 1 - line pre-amp	£1000	£1700
Canary Audio 608LV integrated amp - serviced - warranty - hovland caps	£1500	£3000
Art Audio PX25 - Single ended flea power for the sensitive type	£2750	£4500
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with RB300 + Living Voice Mystic Mat	£700	£1100
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30hrs use	£1500	£2500
Tube Technology Union Signature integrated - 30 hours use	£1500	£2500
Rogue Audio Metis pre-amp and Atlas power amp combo - ex dem	£1750	£2250
Oracle Delphi turntable with Linn Ittok tonearm	£475	
Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista M3 CD player (2001) - as new condition - boxed	£1400	£3000
Audio Innovations FirstAudio - fully serviced - delightful	£850	
AVI S.2000 M1 integrated amp	£300	£1000
Border Patrol S.20 power amp - mahogany - nearly new	£5000	£7000
Audio Mecca Mephisto CD transport	£1000	£2500
Sugden Optima mm/mc phono stage - excellent little thing	£199	
Canary Audio 301 300B stereo push-pull power amp - lovely	£3400	£5400
Canary Audio 303 [110v] - new - lovely	£3800	£7200
Audio Innovations Series 1000 monos - fully serviced - class A classic	£800	
Revolver 33 loudspeakers - grey and maple	£300	£600
B&W CDM loudspeakers	£199	
Audio Innovations Series 500 integrated - classic - fully serviced	£800	
Aloia pre-amp - very new - very good condition - beautifully made	£900	£2800

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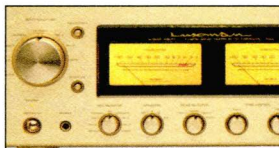
So, if you're fed up with music that seems to be gasping for breath through complex cross-overs and deisel powered amplifiers, arrange to hear it 'easy'.

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.



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AUDIONET Amp 1 Power amp (£3000)	Mint £895
AUDIO INNOVATIONS 500 Integrated amp New valves	£475
AUDIOMATIC DCI Wing Loudspeakers (£5000)	Mint, boxed £2995
BAT VK-5i Pre-amp (£3495)	Mint, boxed £1595
BAT VK-150SE Monoblocks (£15500)	Mint, flight cases £7995
BOW Wazoo XL SS Integrated	Mint, boxed £1695
CARDAS Golden Reference 1 mtr RCA	Superb £595
CARDAS Quad Link 12' bi-wire, spades	Superb £795
CAT SLI Ultimate Pre-amp + phono stage (£7000)	Mint, boxed £3995
CUSTOM DESIGN Icon hi-fi rack (£599)	Ex-dem, mint £350
CONSONANCE Ref 1.2 Pre-amp (£2995)	Ex-dem, mint £1995
CYRUS CD6 CD Player	Mint £525
DENON CD6000 OSE CD Player	Mint, boxed £125
DIAPASON KARIS Bookshelf Speakers Beautiful walnut, boxed	£595
KUZMA Stabi S (Brass)	Mint, boxed £750
LINN SONDEK LP12 (Trampolin) New Origin Live Ultra DC motor and new origin Live Conqueror arm. (Circa £4500)	Mint £2995
MELOS 402 Monoblocks (Circa £8000)	As new, boxed £2895
ORIGIN LIVE Aurora 1/1 with Silver Mk2 arm (£1595)	New £1295
ORTOFON MCA76 MC transformer - 2 Gain Levels	Superb £125
PRECIOUS METALS SS202B (Balanced)	Excellent £249
SHANLING CD-T100 CD Player	Ex-dem, boxed £1295
SME IV Tonearm (Less than 12 hrs use)	Mint, boxed £895
SUMO Gold Valve Pre & 300B Push/Pull monoblocks	Serviced £1995
TALON Raven Speakers, Black/glass finish (£7000)	Mint £2995
THE HEAD Phono-stage	Excellent £349
TOWNSHEND Isolda Spkr Cables - 3 mtr banana	Mint £375
UNISON RESEARCH Mystery Pre-amp	Excellent £799
XTC CDT1 LE CD Transport Remote control	As new, boxed £495

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AUDION 300B STEREO POWER AMP ex-dem [£2150].....	£1500	Celestion SL6's excellent cond.....	£275
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Croft Super Micro tube phono/pre-amp.....	£275	JR150, metal cylindrical speakers like BBC LS3/5a's but 2 bass drivers, mint.....	£475
Audion CD1 Valve pre-amp - classy sound.....	£325	KEF 104 A/B's, mint, stands.....	£325
ANTHEM X1 EL 34 single ended stereo valve integrated amplifier.....	£525		
BAT 3K1, hybrid, phono stage, boxed.....	£1400		
MISTRAL 5881 push-pull 20 watt integrated.....	£525		

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Arcam CD72T, black or silver	199 Arcam Alpha 9 Preamp and Power amp, nr mint, boxed	479 Acoustic Energy AE1 Mk2 vgc	1249 Audio Research PH3SE, nr mint boxed
Arcam CD23T, nr mint boxed	549 Arcam Alpha 9 Integrated	279 Acoustic Energy AE1 Mk3 ex dem	119 Audio Technica AT1100 tonearm, call for details, bargain
Arcam DV79	649 Arcam Alpha FMJ C30 Preamp ex boxed	649 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex black	999 Chord Phono stage, ex boxed
Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 ex dem	399 Arcam AVR200, ex boxed	999 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex piano black, c/w stands	499 Clearaudio Emotion package, ex dem
AVI Laboratory Series, ex boxed	549 Audio Innovations, 200/500 pre and power, ex, boxed	1699 Audiovector M3 Sig, active crossovers, new E4k+, amazing	199 Denon DP Drive, ex boxed
AVI 2000 Reference CD player	249 Audiolab 8000A Integrated in black	599 AVI Positron, burr finish, ex	399 Electrocompaniet Phono stage, mm/mc, Lynwood p/s
AVI 2000 DAC very rare off board unit	349 AudioNote OTQ, nr mint a steal at	599 B&W CDM7NT, ex, boxed	299 Goldring GR2
Consonance CD120, ex dem	1999 Audio Research VT100 Power, as new boxed	1599 JM Lab Elektra 936, ex signature finish, superb	349 JBE StateSeries 3/Mission774 rare as...
Cyrus CD9, ex, boxed	549 Audio Research SP10 Preamp/Int, ex boxed	749 KEF Reference 2 nr mint boxed	479 Kinshaw Perception phono stage and p/s
Cyrus CD70, ex, boxed	349 AVI S2000M Integrated fair	499 Mirage FFHQ, boxed in beech c/w active subs, megal	899 Linn LP12, Cirkus, Valhalla, IttokLVII, Arkiv ex boxed
Cyrus Quattro, c/w tuner module, NR HALF PRICE!	899 AVI S2000 Pre/Monoblocks, fantastic combination	229 Mission752, black	799 Linn LP12, Valhalla, IttokLVII, K9 ex
Cyrus CD30, ex, boxed	499 Cairn Ion T2 Monoblocks, mint in black	129 Monitor Audio B2 new boxed - 5 star buy at £200 only	799 Linn LP12, OL Advanced DC Kit
Cyrus PSXR, ex, boxed	1799 Cairn Eco Nanda pre and KT monos new E4000, now	499 Nben NX6 Standmount ex, boxed	199 Linn LP12 Cirkus kit
Harmon Kardon DV22, New	599 Conrad Johnson Sonographe SA250	599 Neat Acoustics Motive award winners, ex dem mint	299 Linn Axis, Akito, superb condition
Linn Genki, nr mint boxed	629 Creek 4330Mk2r Integrated, remote as new boxed	549 Neat Acoustics Petite 3 SE c/w Ultimatum bass drivers	549 Logic Datum tonearm, ex boxed
Marantz CD63KI Signature, ex remote	199 Cyrus 3 Integrated, ex boxed	179 Proac Studio 125	549 Michell Odyssey limited edition - last one!!
Marantz CD17 KI nr mint	349 Cyrus 3 Integrated, ex boxed	349 QUAD ESL53 Floorstander, Quad serviced 2005 REDUCED!!!	879 Michell Gyrodec Export/RB300/Goldring 1042
Marantz SA8400, nr mint boxed	399 DNM 3 Twin Preamp	249 QUAD 12L Standmount as new	649 Michell Reference Hydraulic/Fluid arm
Marantz SA1, ex boxed	1499 EAR 509 Mk1 monoblocks, they're tasty tasty very very...	400 REL Stadium 3 Sub, ex	1599 Michell Orbe SE, NC power supply ex dem
Meridian 200 Transport, ex remote	279 Exposure XIX Preamp, nr mint boxed superb	249 Revolver R33 ex dem, well reviewed bargain	299 Michell Focus one, Focus arm, excellent
Micromega T-drive and T-dac nr mint boxed	499 Exposure XI Pre, VIII Power and XII PIS, good condition	149 Ruark Sabreex black	299 Michell IsoHera
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Monarchy DIP vgc	149 ITL MA80/MA100/MA100 Pre/Power x2 lovely combo	399 Tandberg Studio Monitor Large!	499 MFM Source heavyweight suspended deck
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Sony 552ES/703ES, Worlds 1st 2 box, EAR modded!	299 Linn Majik, ex, c/w remote, bargain Linn introduction	329 Usher Audio 6371, nr mint	2749 Oracle Delphi V, full version, turbo ps, as new
Sony CDP3000ES toploader - free matching amp!	1499 Lumley Reference 120 Monoblocks mega bargain at	1249 Usher Audio X719, ex dem	199 Origin Live Ultra deck with off board p/s SME cut
TEAC VRDS 9, as new	899 Meridian 505 Monoblocks, ex boxed	549 WAD KLS9 kit, professional CNC cabs	999 Origin Live Aurora Gold ex dem
TEAC DV505 new, full warranty, LAST ONE!	499 Meridian 505/555 ex, boxed with MSR system remote	199 Wharfedale Diamond 94, boxed nr mint	429 Origin Live Silver as new
TEAC DV20 new, the best at its price	799 Musical Fidelity X-80, as new boxed	149 Wharfedale Diamond series, various from just	699 Origin Live Encourer ex dem
Technics SLP1200B Professional toploader	299 Musical Fidelity X-P100 & X-AS100, ex boxed	49	199 Ontolon MC30 Supreme, good life left
Wada 302 ex new boxed	179 Musical Fidelity kW500 - ex, boxed - fantastic!		379 Pink Triangle LPT/RB250, the best I've seen
	249 Musical Fidelity 3a Preamp/P150 Power, ex		479 Pink Triangle PT1
	379 Musical Fidelity MA-X50 Monoblocks		69 Project Debut 2 in yellow marked
	329 Musical Fidelity Pre/Typhoon		89 Project Debut 3 in green! As new
	379 NAIM T2/H60 pre/power combo		599 Project RFPMX9 X Dem, last one... SAVE £500!!
	399 NAIM 52/90 pre/power combo, ex boxed		349 Project Classic Cherry, ex c/w G1042 cart, bargain!
	699 Nuance preamp c/w off board p/s, beautiful		49 Project PhonoBox SE
	299 Primare A20 mk2, nr mint integrated		249 Rega Planar 3/RB300, late silver model
	199 Quad 50 Monoblocks		179 Rega Planar 3/RB300, vgc
	179 Quad 44 Preamp, 405 and 405/2 Power amps from		3749 Roksan TMS1/Artemz/DS/Shiraz, the full monty!
	549 Quad 707, ex		80 Rotel RCQ71
	299 Roksan Caspian Poweramp		199 SME 3 boxed
	449 Roksan Caspian M Series Poweramp mint unused		4698 Technics SL110
	Call Roksan Caspian M Series Pre/Monos 5 Star BARGAIN!!!		549 Thorens TD160B boxed
	299 Rotel RC970 Pre/RB990 Power ex		349 Thorens TD125/SME3009
	299 Rotel RC995 superb preamp with system remote		249 Thorens TD160B/Mayway vgc
	349 Rotel RMB1066, ex boxed		449 Townshend Rook Reference/Excalibur
	299 Sumo Artems remote preamp, balanced options		499 Townshend Elite Rock Mk2/Mission 774LC
	199 TAG McLaren 60i and 60p, ex		799 Transcriptors Skeleton/Vestigal
	249 Unison Research Mystery One Preamp - BARGAIN!		349 Transcriptors Saturn, vgc
	499 Unison Research S6 Integrated		199 Trichord Dino ex boxed
			2499 Wilson Benesch Act/Act 2 arm ex

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FOR SALE

ACCUPHASE DP65V CD player, mint condition, all documents, boxed, £2,000. 0161 928 2889 (Cheshire)

ARCAM CD192 boxed, mint, (£850) £500. Marantz PM17MkII Kl Sig integrated amp, platinum, boxed, mint, (£1,500) £800.

Quad 11L light maple, mint, (£380) £260. Partington Super Dreadnought speaker stands, (£180) £85. 07840 756855 (Bolton)

ARCAM FMJ CD33 black, two years old, mint, remote, instructions, packaging, remainder of five-year warranty, £690. 07976 261576 (Surrey).

AUDIOLAB 8000Q preamp, boxed and remote, excellent, (£1,000) £350. B&W 700 Series centre speaker black veneer, boxed, excellent condition, (£500) £200. (Stoke on Trent)

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).

B&W M1 silver 7.1 speakers (7) unused and B&W AS2 silver sub. Complete system with warranty, (£1,200) £1,000. 0191 427 0590 (Tyne and Wear).

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 (Cambs).

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640H music server, two months old, save a bundle, £300. 07725 313129 (Devon).

CHORD CHAMELEON silver plus interconnect, (£100) £45. Free postage. 01905 423021 (Worcester).

CYRUS 6 amp and CD8x, (£1,650) £800. Denon DVD1400, (£400) £150. As new Celestion AWF 302 floostanders and AWF 305 surround, (£1,200) £500. 07915 094970 (Kent).

CYRUS MONO X 150w monoblock amps in as new condition, smooth black finish, boxed with instructions and power leads as new, £1,700. 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).

DENON DVD-3910 just a few weeks old £600. Lyngdorf SDA2175 amp, 200 wpc £650. Meridian G08 £1,600. Magnum Dynalab receiver 100wpc. Bargain at £1,600. 01803 523910 (Devon).

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 M5 speakers, £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).

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).

ICON 40SE valve integrated. EL34/KT77 (supplied) switchable triode, factory upgrades, (£912) £595. EAR 834L valve preamp Mullard upgrade, (£650) £395. Cyrus CD6, (£600) £350. All mint, boxed 01243 863371 (W.Sussex). ▶

WANTED

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

ARCAM ALPHA 10 tuner must be in good condition. Karl 01942 234927 or email

karl138ufft@msn.com (Wigan).

B&W NAUTILUS HTM1 centre speaker, any finish considered, discontinued model required 01782 256087 (Stoke-on-Trent).

GOODMANS MAGISTER Will pay good price, but must be working. 01280 860221 (Bucks)

LEAK STEREO 70 amplifier working or needing attention. 01938 553559 (Welshpool).

LOWTHER ACOUSTA twins 1960s and scrap PM7A 020 8220 0380 (Essex).

MUSICAL FIDELITY amp to bi-amp A3. Also, Tri-Vista 21 or Chord DAC 64. 01305 260634 after 6pm (Dorset)

MARANTZ CD94 remote control. Also Quad 66 preamp 01277 219639 (Essex).

TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT interconnects. Andy 0115 912 6424 (Notts)

YAMAHA CA1000 or CA400 amp. Also early Sugden Class A amp 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

❑ **JAMO CONCERT T1S**

Roksan integrated amp. Pure 701ES tuner. Pioneer DV 565A with upgrade. Welded metal stand, Genesis cable and other ofcs, mains conditioner. All in black (speakers finished in American Cherry), £2,750. 07623 928984 (Gwent).

KEF 105MKI £250. Tannoy Cheviot MK1, £250. Oracle Paris turntable, £200. Meridian 602/606 CD, £400. Quad ESL 57 boxed with literature, £250. 01843 221664 (Kent)

KENWOOD DP-7090 CD player 32fs fine drive. Gold terminals, copper encased electronics, aluminium top plate. Excellent condition, boxed, remote and instructions, £145ono. 01270 765933 (Cheshire).

KIMBER SELECT 1030 (£1,100) £650. 1020, (£500) £300. Monocle XL 8ft pair, (£852) £530. Orchid digital interconnect, £120. Isotek Mainline x3, £160 each 01772 314151 (Lancs).

KIMBER SELECT 1030 £800. Russ Andrews Silver Reference PowerKord wattgate 350i (4ft), £750. Silver Powerblock plus silver Reference Powerchord (3ft), £1,100. 01475 676287 (Greenock)

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).

LYNGDORF SDA2175 black power amp 200 wpc, £650. One metre balanced Blue Heaven, £60. One metre RCA Blue Heaven, £50. Two metres Blue Heaven speaker cable, £100. Primare PRE30, £500. Power 30.2, £500. 01803 523553 (Devon)

MARANTZ CD63MKII KI £180. Linn Basik/Akito/K9, £180. Cyrus 2 with PSX and mains leads, £180 01253 866007 (Blackpool).

MARANTZ CD7300 in gold, 12 months old, £200. 07903 613418 (London)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 CD, £150. X-80 amp, £125. PMC GB1, £600 or £800 for all three. All boxed and mint. 07941 174804 (Berks)

NAIM CDS1 three months old, unused, boxed, £500. Paul 07963 947689 (Notts).

NAIM NAIT 2 amplifier, boxed, immaculate, £225. 07810 1039008 (Yorks)

NAIM CDS5 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, boxed. Andrew 01509 260537 (Leics).

NAIM NAIT01 superlative FM tuner. Early model, excellent condition, reluctant sale – elderly owner needs remote control, £820 including postage +00 3531 459 1432 (Dublin).

NORDOST FLATLINE gold speaker cable (2x8m) and Solar Wind interconnect, (£480) £220ono. JVC HD Scarlet 15 foot cable, £20 07881 943785 (Birmingham).

PARTINGTON DREADNOUGHT Ultima speaker stand limited edition graphite 18kg, £220ono 01554 820478 or 07989 658223 (S.Wales).

PROAC TABLETTE REF 8 Mahogany, £400. Castle Isis speakers also in Mahogany, perfect, £100. Atacama stands, black, £25. 01977 618403 (Pontefract).

PMC MB2 in oak plus stands, (£8,750) £4,750 for the pair. Pair Briston 4BST and pair 7BST, (£3,000) £1,250 each amp. Pair PMC XBD2A in black finish, (£3,250) £1,600 each. email: nmfrancis@btinternet.com

QUAD 99 SERIES; preamp, £415. Tuner, £385. CDP-1 player, £550. 909 amp, £575. Mint, compete system and spare remote/leads, £1,850. Ruark Equinox speakers C/W stands, £525 plus free Thorens TD160. 023 8073 8935 (Hampshire).

REGA APOLLO CD player, £295. Prima Luna Prologue 4 power amp, £375. Both less than six months old, boxes, manuals, mint condition. 07941 174804 (Berks). **REL Q50** subwoofer owned from new, good condition, no box. Call for more 01642 280994 (Middlesbrough).

ROKSAN M-SERIES preamp and power, mint, black, boxed, four months old, (£2,000) £1,200. 07891 533084 (Swansea)

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).

SPENDOR S60 speakers boxed as new, (£1,495) £700ono. System bookshelf speakers and Mission stands vgc, £200. 01491 613700 (Oxford)

SPENDOR SP1/ 2 speakers walnut finish, as new, £1,200. 01494 778064 or email stc4242a@hotmail.com (Bucks)

TANNOY IIII2 10" Monitor Golds, £375. Quad 33-303 FM3, £275. Rotel 965BX CD, £100.

Sansui TU217II amp, £75. Sansui FM tuner, £30. Ruark Sabres, £150. 01722 334694 (Wilts).

TEAC VRD510 needs service possible new laser. Offers please. 07702 424270 (Somerset).

UNISON RESEARCH SR6 £1,400. Michell ISO, £200. JM Lab 906 speakers, £600. Audiolab 8000DAC, £150. 33 Laserdiscs plus player, £100. 01928 732546 (Cheshire)

VALVE preamp with phono, £300. Linn LP12, Afrosomia, SMEIISs, Ortofon VMS20EII, £320. Pioneer PDS801 CD player, £150. Technics RSA27 cassette deck, mint, boxed, £160. Ray 07708 431963 (Cheshire)



Above: Cambridge Audio 640H music server

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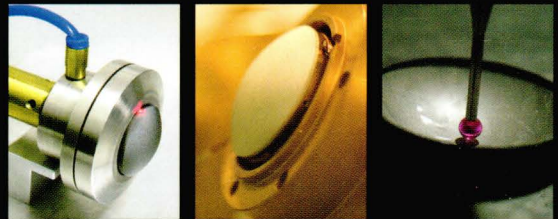


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