

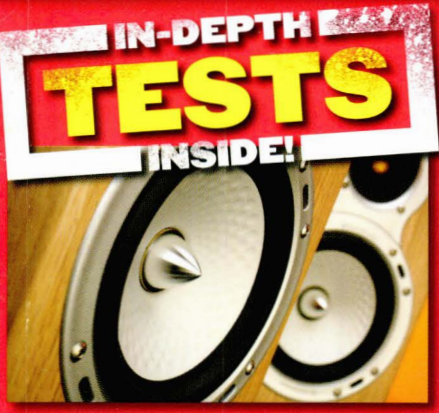
HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND SEPTEMBER 2006 £3.95 WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK

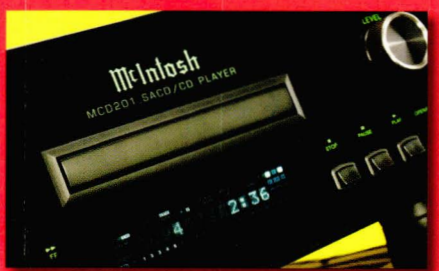


WIN!

Marantz's DV9600 universal player worth £1,500! See page 24



Monitor Audio GS10 speakers strike sonic gold



McIntosh New CD/SACD player makes musical magic



Funk Firm State of the art vinyl sound for under £800

WORLD BEATER

EXCLUSIVE! Is this the best CD player in the world?

THE UK'S MOST RIGOROUS HI-FI TESTS
HFC LABS

CLASSE
CDP-202

STANDBY MENU EJECT

CD/DA PCM 03
09:05 elapsed on disc
controls
playlist reverse play forward stop

STOP PRESS!
NEW £600 MARANTZ KI SIGNATURE CD PLAYER RATED INSIDE!

SEPTEMBER 2006 £3.95 10>
Future MEDIA WITH PASSION 9 770955 111083

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

HI-FI HOME CINEMA

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>> SPEAKERS

- FEATURING**
- > Canton Ergo 602
 - > Castle Richmond 3i
 - > KEF iQ3
 - > Mordaunt-Short Avant 908i
 - > Nbien DX-5
 - > Q Acoustics 1050

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



Rotel RA-05 integrated amplifier. You will have noticed that a pattern has developed over the past 25 years or so. When Rotel launches a new amp, the buttons and knobs tend to stay in the same place. It's what is inside that changes. We continuously evaluate and select components that offer the best possible performance, such as UK-designed metal film resistors. We keep refining circuit board layouts and signal paths to maintain the purity of the signal. We even manufacture our own power supplies, which generate our uniquely vital sound. We may even add an additional feature or two. And every time, it's a better amp. www.rotel.com

Exceptional sound No exceptions

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www.rotel.com



What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision
August 2006



Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE SEPTEMBER 2006 ISSUE 284

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



Trust me – if making money is your primary aim in life, working on a magazine should not be your first-choice vocation. Similarly, if an entrepreneur is looking for an industry in which to make a fortune, hi-fi is unlikely to top the list. But thankfully it's not

all about money. By working on a hi-fi magazine, I get to indulge my passion for great music on great hi-fi; and by making the equipment that gives people like me so much pleasure, those who design and produce hi-fi have the chance to make dreams come alive.

The passion that drives the UK hi-fi industry is the thing that makes it special. Many of our best-loved brands were founded by enthusiasts – people with a love of music and engineering, who simply wanted to find a way to make their music sound better. From the Brit-fi boom years of the seventies and eighties, right up until the present day, the industry has been peppered with mavericks and eccentrics, big mouths and *bona fide* geniuses, all – well, most – fuelled by utter dedication to the cause.

Of course, it's not easy for specialist hi-fi manufacturers to make a mint these days, but for the canniest operators business remains sound. The likes of Naim and Rega, for example, have kept things rocking with smart products, a strong dealer base and a loyal, enthusiastic following, all nurtured with apposite care and attention. And the biggest beneficiaries of their industrious passions are music fans like you and me...

This edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* contains the juiciest new fruit from the hi-fi tree, both budget and high-end, from Britain and beyond. Have fun!

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.

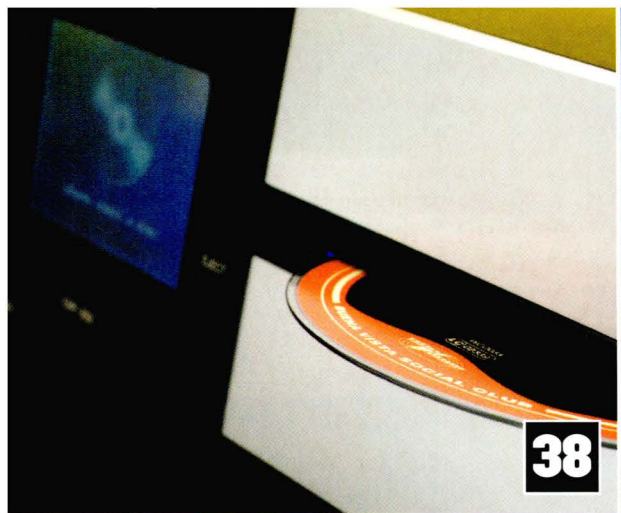


JASON KENNEDY
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



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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BUYER'S BIBLE

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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FREE MINI-MAG!

Inside your free 2nd-hand hi-fi mini-mag...

- 2 Guide to 2nd-hand kit – this issue, Yamaha, plus DIY tips
- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified

TRUST YOUR SENSES



BLIND FAITH

"Superb value for dollar, rich and full sound at lower volume levels, engaging detail and musicality,"

Stereophile

"There is much to like about this speaker, most obviously its impressive suppression of cabinet colorations, but also in the high-class drive unit technology it employs."

Hifi Choice

*"Indeed a terrific loudspeaker...somewhat more "joyful" than its little brother (MS4), yet unmistakably superior."
"In terms of measured performance an almost perfect transducer."*







Stereo

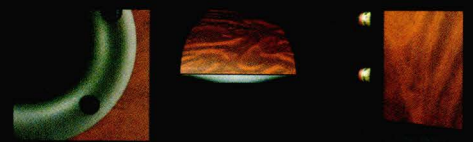
IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

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FEATURES

-  Wide Dispersion
-  3D Audio
-  Low Resonance Cabinets
-  Time Coherence
-  Hand Crafted
-  Amplifier Optimized





KRELLS ANGELS

THE EVOLUTION CHAPTER

Since launching the legendary **KSA-50** amplifier a quarter of a century ago, **Krell** have established themselves as the absolute world leaders in the design of high end audio electronics, rocking the establishment over the years with novel technologies that have redefined the way we listen to music.

In 2005, chief designer Dan D'Agostino took the audio community by storm with the introduction of the stunning eight-chassis **Evolution One** and **Evolution Two** amplification systems, a creation that represented his ultimate strike of genius on the high end, and received accolades all over the world.

What's more, it doesn't stop there: this year sees the launch of a complete new range of **Krell Evolution** pre- and power amplifiers - plus two exciting source components and an extraordinary unique integrated amplifier.

Out go the sharp heatsinks, in comes the most beautiful casework ever seen, housing technology that delivers totally lifelike music, with nothing added and nothing taken away. Included in the line-up are the **Evolution 505** CD/SACD player, the **Evolution 525** audio-video source, the Evolution 202 two-chassis preamplifier with the **Evolution 222** single case version, the **Evolution 402** stereo amplifier plus the incredibly powerful **Evolution 600** and **900** monoblocs.

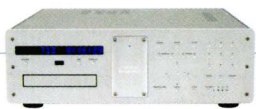
For the home theatre, there is the powerful **Evolution 403** three-channel amplifier and the **Evolution 707** processor, a reference model that is without equal, and demonstrates Krell's passion for unparalleled performance and innovation.

Attracting huge interest and praise is the unique **FBI** Fully Balanced Integrated amplifier. Aimed at those who desire the superb performance of the long-established Class 'A' Krell **FPB** series in a single chassis, this is the true master of all integrated amplifiers.

 the badge of prestige, passion and excellence. Call **Absolute Sounds** for full details.



EVOLUTION 402



EVOLUTION 505



EVOLUTION 222

absolute sounds ltd
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62
www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com



UNISON RESEARCH PERFORMANCE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

One of Unison Research's most visually distinctive valve amps, the Performance, has been brought back into production. This prestigious dual-mono beauty operates in pure Class A, and this latest version benefits from a 16-watt increase in power to 40 watts per channel. This is achieved via six KT88 valves in the output stage, which require two large thermic radiators mounted on both sides to dissipate all that heat.

Within the single 50kg chassis lie two identical, but independent amplifiers, to avoid cross-channel interference. These use valves exclusively for all of the amplification stages, all operating in Class A. Unison Research is particularly proud of the output stage with those six KT88s – three per channel in a parallel, single-ended, ultra-linear configuration.

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

PRODUCT Unison Research Performance

TYPE Integrated valve amplifier

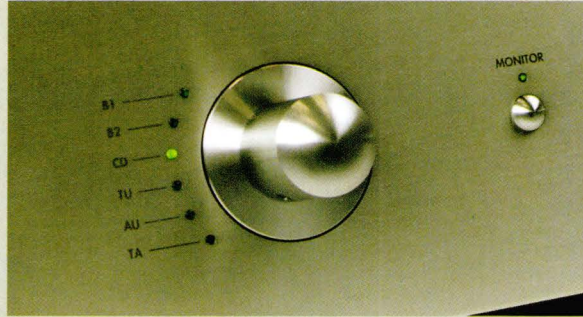
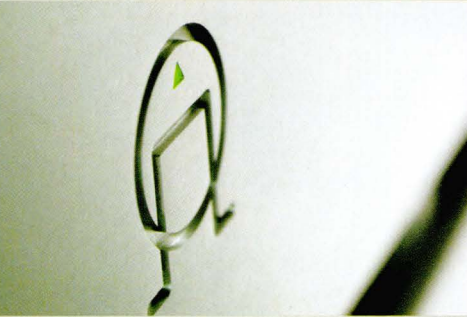
PRICE £5,500

KEY FEATURES Rated power: 40 watts per channel • Class A, dual-mono design • Output stage features three KT88 valves per channel

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669

🌐 www.unisonresearch.com





SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

I 130

"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




Primare marries timeless Scandinavian design with impeccable build quality to deliver sound and vision as large as life itself from elegant, compact audio and video components that are as easy to install as they are to appreciate

Affordable high-end audio and video from Scandinavia

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01423 359054



ROTEL RC-06/RB-06 PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

 Rotel has long produced some of the most affordable pre/power amp combos around, a tradition that continues with the new RC-06 preamp and RB-06 stereo power amp. Priced at just £299 apiece, Rotel reckons they deliver “a sound comparable in quality to that of expensive audiophile equipment”. If that’s true, this dynamite duo might just be the hi-fi bargain of the summer!

The preamp offers five line-level inputs, a phono stage and fascia-mounted sockets for headphones and portable music players. The power amp, meanwhile, kicks out 70 watts per channel, or a whopping 180 watts in bridged mode. Described as ‘purist’ amplifiers, the duo share symmetrical circuit board layouts, short signal path routes and proprietary transformers and power supplies. But is the sound really ‘audiophile’ standard?







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

PRODUCT Rotel RC-06 and RB-06

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE £299 each

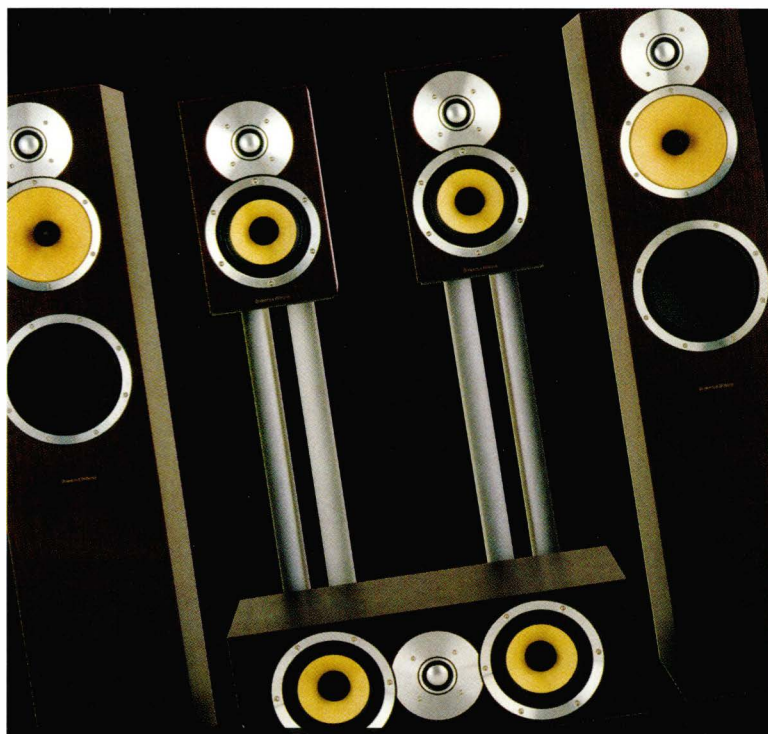
KEY FEATURES (RC-06) Five line-level inputs

 MM phono stage
  Fascia-mounted sockets for headphones and portable music players
  Remote control
  (RB-06) Rated power: 70 watts per channel (8 ohms)
  Bridged mode facility
  Rotel toroidal transformer

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.rotel.com



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



B&W CM7

B&W, the world's largest specialist hi-fi speaker manufacturer, has launched a new £999 per pair floorstander called the CM7. It joins the recently introduced CM1 standmount (see review, HFC 279) as part of B&W's expanding CM Series and incorporates a 25mm Nautilus tweeter, 130mm Kevlar midrange cone and a 165mm paper/Kevlar bass driver in a three-way configuration. Also new to the CM Series is the CM Centre, a centre channel speaker designed for multichannel applications (pictured above with the CM1 and CM7). All the speakers benefit from wood-veneered cabinets, Flowport bass ports and crossover technology shared with the high-end 800 Series.

Price CM7 £999 per pair; CM Centre £399 **Due** now

☎ 01903 221500 • www.bwsspeakers.com

LUMLEY STRATOSPHERE MK2

Sussex-based loudspeaker specialist Lumley has relaunched its Stratosphere turntable with a host of radical improvements. The new Mk2 fully utilises



Clearaudio's Magix suspension system, which enables the turntable to 'float' on a bed of air, with no contact between deck and stand. The Stratosphere, first launched 12 years ago, uses two damped acrylic platters said to "take isolation to the extreme", alongside a new arm pod and mains-powered motor assembly. Lumley has introduced a number of further refinements to the turntable, including an upgraded titanium-plated spindle for the bearing, ensuring ultra-quiet running, plus a silk thread-driven flywheel with internal damping. Normally £12,000, there will be a limited edition run in the UK priced at £9,500.

Price £12,000 (excludes arm/cartridge) **Due** now

☎ 01435 867438 • www.metropolis-music.co.uk

BOULDER 850

Fancy getting your hands on some American muscle? Check out Boulder's new high-end monoblock, the 850. This monster mono power amp boasts 200 watts of power, 12 output transistors and advanced protection circuits. Designed and hand-built in Boulder, Colorado, all of the metalwork is CNC machined and fabricated in-house. It uses a balanced XLR input and has a 12-volt trigger for automated activation within a suitably equipped system.

Price £8,500 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01435 867438 • www.metropolis-music.co.uk



ATC SCM RANGE

ATC, the active speaker specialist, has replaced its passive entry-level range with an all-new SCM line-up. The four-strong range begins with an updated version of the popular SCM7 compact standmount, now joined by two larger standmounts – the SCM 11 (pictured below) and SCM19 – and a three-way floorstander called the SCM40. All four models feature ATC's new monocoque cabinet, which is said to have increased rigidity and now comes with a stepped, double-front baffle with curved edges for reduced diffraction. Other upgrades include a new 25mm soft-dome tweeter with a proprietary aluminium face plate, designed to deliver smoother treble, and improvements to the crossovers, with each model said to offer a flat impedance curve. Expect a review of the £1,499 per pair SCM19 in our next issue.

Price from £499 to £1,999 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01285 760561 • www.atc.gb.net





FATMAN iTUBE

It was only a matter of time before some bright spark built an 'audiophile' iPod docking station using valve amplification... and here it is! The Fatman iTube consists of a smart, purpose-built integrated valve amp with a 13-watt output, plus a matching dock that is compatible with all iPods bar the Shuffle. There's also a remote control, an auxiliary input for an alternative source, plus a video output to allow iPods with video capability to be connected to suitable display. All you need is a pair of speakers... and an iPod, naturally!

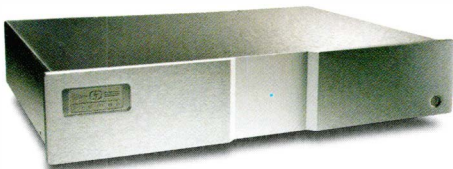
Price £299 **Due** August ☎ 01462 492090 # www.fat-man.co.uk

ISOTEK SIGMA

Mains specialist Isotek's new Sigma mains distribution box has been designed to bridge the gap between the entry-level MiniSub and flagship Titan/Nova mains conditioners. Utilising much of the filtering technology developed for the Titan and Nova, the Sigma supplies four medium-power and two high-power mains outlets, helping to ensure your entire system is fed with a pure, clean supply from the mains. It weighs in at a hefty 9.5kg, comes with a 25-year guarantee and is reviewed next issue.

Price £995 **Due** now

☎ 01635 291357 # www.isoteksystems.com

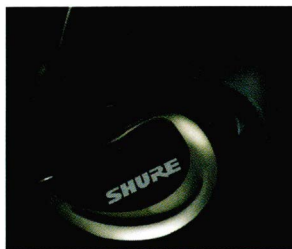


SHURE E500PTH

Shure's new in-ear, sound isolating headphones manage to pack three miniature drivers into each earphone – a tweeter and two woofers. Designed to eradicate outside noise, the tiny headphones are able to operate at lower volumes even with the presence of background noise. They also boast a unique microphone feature called PTH (Push To Hear) Control, which enables conversation without the need to remove the earphones. Shure says the earphones offer "unparalleled acoustic accuracy". Find out if that's true in next issue's review

Price £490 **Due** now

☎ 020 8808 2222 # www.shure.co.uk



Soundbites

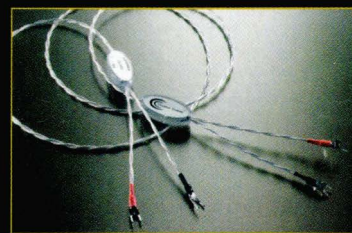
MORDAUNT-SHORT's new Avant Architect is an eight-strong in-wall and in-ceiling speaker series with M-S's in-house CPC bass/mid drivers, adjustable tweeters and paintable grilles. Prices start at £120. ☎ 01753 680868

ROBERTS has added DAB technology to its classic-look Rambler 76 portable radio. It can be powered by mains or battery and has a backlit LCD display, headphone socket and rotary tuner control. ☎ 01709 571222

PURE DIGITAL's lightest-ever DAB/FM radio, the £90 PocketDAB 1500, weighs just 123g and comes with Sennheiser MX300 in-ear headphones for £90. ☎ 01923 260511

LINN Kisto and Kinos owners can now control their systems with Linn's Kinik software, which gives Pocket PCs wireless control of RS232-compatible Linn sources. ☎ 0500 888909

CRYSTAL CABLE's flagship Ultra Series uses a new technique that aligns the crystals in its silver and gold alloy to minimise distortion. Prices tbc. ☎ 020 8971 3909



Lo-Fi

Bad meeting, poor weather, lousy traffic. It's going to take hours to get home and I have to put up with dreadful sounds from my in-car entertainment system.

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ASHLEY JAMES
Job Title: Director
Company: AVI



What's your most exciting product?
 Our powered Amp Pak speakers are extremely powerful, compact and inexpensive yet provide the finest possible sound quality. All the customer needs is an iPod, PC with soundcard or a MAC for a compact and cost-effective hi-fi system that renders many separates redundant.

What is the future of home hi-fi?
 Computers can play, burn or archive CDs and DVDs, receive internet and terrestrial radio and TV and process photos. They can also communicate with systems in other rooms and if they are used with powered speakers, they make separates based systems redundant.

Are audio servers the future?
 It's one of many tasks that can be done by a computer at a fraction of the price. Convenience, ease of use, low cost and space savings mean they are virtually the only choice. As far as we are concerned, hi-fi has never been as exciting as now. Evolution rather than revolution, we believe, is what is wanted and we mustn't forget that most people are interested in music and not necessarily technology.

Is there a two-channel resurgence?
 No, but it is now clear that not everyone likes multichannel sound, definitely not anyone with hearing difficulties. Installers tell us that customers often opt for 2.1 sound – stereo augmented with a subwoofer.

Hi-Fi Diary

SEPTEMBER

1-6 **IFA 2006**
 Messe Berlin, Germany
Europe's biggest consumer electronics showcase hits Berlin

22-24 **The London Sound & Vision Show 2006**
 Park Inn Hotel, Heathrow, London
 01829 740650
 www.chestergroup.org
A new, independent London show

22-24 **Hi-Fi News Show 2006**
 Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow, London
 020 8726 8000
London's longest-running hi-fi show

Naim all over

Naim has announced Naimnet, its comprehensive assault on the multiroom market. It uses an internet-based system called Streamnet for distributing uncompressed audio around the home with virtually no delay (Naim claims one millisecond max). A web browser control interface can be operated by wall pads, tablets or PDAs and there is a range of new components built with Naimnet in mind, though it can also work with existing Naim products. The NNT01 DAB/FM multi-tuner can receive four separate transmissions and the two-box NS REF, which includes around two terabytes of storage space, tops a range of hard disk servers. These can record at up to 24-bit/96kHz quality and deliver comprehensive information about each track on the 400 to 600MB drives. Naimnet will be rolled out from October.



Tube wars

One of the world's largest audio valve makers is under threat from Russian corporate raiders who want to acquire its manufacturing facility. Expopul may not be a familiar name but it's the company behind many of the most popular vacuum tube brands on the market, including Sovtek, Electro-Harmonix, Svetlana and Mullard – tubes used by Audio Research, Audio Note, Jadis and many others.



Expopul's factory is based in Saratov, Russia, on part of a site that Russian conglomerate SOK, renowned for its aggressive takeover techniques, is seeking to acquire. SOK subsidiary RBE has purchased buildings adjacent to Expopul and when American owner Mike Matthews refused to sell, it cut off the electricity supply.

Matthews enlisted the aid of local political heads and managed to restore power, only to then have the gas supply severed. This has also been reinstated but the intimidation continues. Matthews, who made his name with the Big Muff guitar fuzz box, is not giving in and stated: "We're confident we'll win. We hope our victory is a catalyst to never give in to racketeers... they're fighting rock 'n' roll this time." Not 'alf!

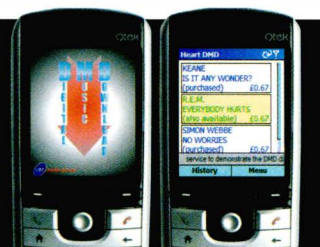
Voice Of The Theatre returns

In much the same way that Western Electric revived its classic 300B tube, Altec Lansing has rebuilt the mighty VOTT loudspeaker system in the guise of the Legacy A7 – a no-compromise, horn and reflex enclosure hybrid that has its roots in 1950s cinema technology. Original examples have long been sought after by lovers of low-power SET valve amps because it offers a 97dB sensitivity, which can make seven watts go a long way. Measuring 76cm wide and 137cm tall, this is a full-figured speaker made in birch ply with a die-cast, high-frequency horn. Stateside price is \$3,300 per speaker.



DAB on your mobile

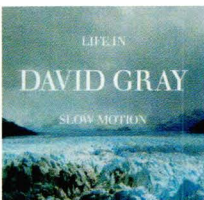
Digital Audio Broadcasting will soon be available on mobile phones, along with the ability to buy songs you hear as they are played. UBC Media, the independent programming producer that supplies the BBC, is due to trial the technology with Heart FM in Birmingham in August. The idea is that listeners would pay for downloaded songs with a similar credit plan to that used to pay for calls, but prices would be higher than for computer-based downloads at around £1.25 per track. One copy would be downloaded to the phone with another being sent to an online library for later download to the purchaser's PC.



Elsewhere in download land, Apple has been having a hard time with anti-iTunes DRM protests taking place outside Apple stores in the US and its share price dropping to an eight-month low after announcing delays on new iPods. The company has won a victory, though – the French government has backed down from forcing iTunes to make the music it sells compatible with non-Apple playback devices, a move which might have meant the company withdrawing from that market.

Sony BMG DRM settlement

⊗ In March we reported that Sony BMG was having to back down on its use of intrusive digital rights management (DRM) software in its CDs because the technologies used, XCP and MediaMax, were causing problems on PCs. The record company has now had to settle a class action suit and is offering compensation to all consumers that purchased the affected discs. These include free replacement CDs, this time without the offending DRM that operated as root kit, planting itself deep inside users' computers and in some cases sending back information about disc use habits via the internet. The titles affected were only sold in the US and a full list along with the compensation offered can be found at: <https://secureweb.rustconsulting.com/sonybmgcdtechsettlement/Instructions.aspx>.



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #44

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



Don't OD on tweaks and accessories!

Sometimes you buy an accessory – say, a set of support cones or perhaps a specialist mains cable – and the benefit it produces is huge. So much so, you decide to buy more of the said item in order to get an even greater improvement. But take care! Just because a set of cones under your CD player produces a worthwhile increase in

clarity and sharpness, it doesn't necessarily follow that putting similar cones under the preamp and power amp will improve things further.

Some 'improvements' merely create shifts in the tonal balance, making things sound sharper and more forward. In moderation this can be a good thing. But taken too far it may make your system sound lean, aggressive, and too forward. So, always make one change at a time. And don't assume that, just because having one of an item worked, having ten of it will make things ten times better!

➤ New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



BOB DYLAN

Title: *Modern Times*
Release date: 28 August

As first reported here five months ago, Bob Dylan has recorded his first album of new songs in five years. Much in the style of 2001's *Love & Theft* and recorded with his current road band (the first time he's done so), titles include *Ain't Talkin', Thunder On The Mountain, Spirit On The Water, Workingman's and Blues*.

ROXY MUSIC

Title: *tbc*
Release date: autumn

Is Brian Eno rejoining Roxy Music or not? Well, sort of. He's *not* playing upcoming live dates with his old colleagues. But he *is* on the group's first studio album since 1982's *Avalon*. "The band hadn't changed one bit in terms of its internal dynamics," he says. "After all that time, the relationships seemed exactly the same."

U2

Title: *tbc*
Release date: *tbc*

Bono has promised bandmates that he's "thinning out" his schedule of politics and activism to begin work on the new U2 album. "I've got a lot of songs from taking piano lessons. My kid's piano teacher has been teaching me and every time she gives me a lesson, I write a new song."

STING

Title: *tbc*
Release date: October

Not a collection of conventional songs, but an album for classical label Deutsche Grammophon of music performed by Sting on the *lute*. "It's a strange record, a delightful record and I think people will be intrigued by it," he says on his website. "It's voice and lute with four part harmonies and it's all music from the 16th century."

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Jorge Ben Jo Football & Samba Groove Association (Aug) **Thelonious Monk & John Coltrane** Complete 1957 Riverside Recordings (Aug) **Gergiev/ LSO** Prokofiev Complete Symphonies

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Beach Boys Pet Sounds 40th Anniversary Edition (DVD A, Aug) **Bolshoi Theatre** (Vedernikov) Highlights From Russian Operas (SACD, Aug) **Läubin, Hannes and Kuen** Solo De Concours. (SACD, Aug)



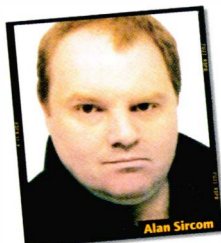
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Expo info

CEDIA Expo may hold the future of hi-fi

It's perhaps not the show for die-hard hi-fi buffs, but this year saw the 10th annual CEDIA Expo for the custom installation industry go from strength to strength, as it moved to the ExCeL centre in London's Docklands, having outgrown Birmingham's ICC.

The rank and file hi-fi enthusiast may not be impressed by AMX control architectures or Lutron lighting systems. But many hi-fi cognoscenti had stands at CEDIA, and Linn, Meridian and especially Naim's new NaimNet system all received plenty of interest. But it's the back story that's really important.

In a way, CEDIA represents the future of hi-fi. Or at least, a future. No, we are not going to

“In a way, CEDIA represents the future of hi-fi. Or at least, a future, one that asks whether we will still be spinning CDs in a decade.”

be forced to run CAT 5 cables in our walls to spin a CD, but the question as to whether we will still be spinning CDs in a decade is key. And it's a question that's being asked (and possibly answered) at the CEDIA Expo.

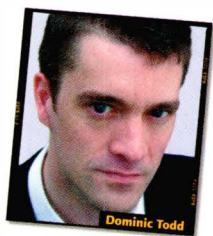
Already we are seeing broadband-streamed Channel 4 TV programs, broadcast online at the same time as the traditional aired version. Also, Sky Movies subscribers have access to download films to their PC, while in the US, several companies are supplying essentially iTunes for movies... and only licensing issues prevent similar plans occurring in the UK. High-bandwidth broadband connections make high-definition audio downloads feasible, too. And, much of this will be driven by systems like Microsoft's Vista OS, coupled with Intel's Viiv platform, first seen at this year's CES.

The other big story was about DRM – digital rights management. Music and especially movie files can be marked to allow replay at one specific location and storage on a

particular device – transferring files to a different location is either difficult or impossible. Some of these DRM systems are capable of being cracked, some aren't... but that's not the point. The very concept of DRM goes against the grain in custom install, where a file should be accessible in any location the end user chooses (in the case of some systems, that even includes access in other countries, or porting seamlessly from a home server to an identical one on board a yacht). But not using DRM is simply impossible, because the media companies insist on more security, not less. So, methods need to develop that bring rapprochement between the custom installers and the media companies.

One thing's clear, however. CEDIA may not be about purist hi-fi, but it's becoming increasingly important for music.

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



Dominic Todd

DAB's the way to do it!

Digital radio has reached hi-fi people

A recent NAD press release reads: "NAD didn't hurry to bring a DAB product to the market". Too right! A whole eight years after Arcam introduced the British public to digital radio with the Alpha 10, it's only now that we're really starting to see a proper selection of separate DAB tuners. Take a look at the figures, though, and you can hardly blame the likes of NAD, Rotel and Denon for being a little reticent. Although the DAB world is boasting of three million DAB receivers sold in the UK, that's still only three per cent of tuner devices here. Compare that with the phenomenal penetration of DVD, launched around the same time, and it's clear DAB hasn't been the soaraway success some predicted. Still, though most listeners who care about sound quality will still opt for FM, recent releases do show signs of hope for the format.

NAD may have been slow on the uptake, but its new C445 does actually sound pretty good. Like many other DAB tuners, it also offers FM, so that listeners can take advantage of FM while it's still 'on air'. Another DAB/FM integrated, the Cambridge Audio Azur 640T, has also just been upgraded. Now in v2 mode, it benefits from a new Wolfson DAC, the same as used in the highly rated 640C CD player. Although the format has limitations, it's good to see manufacturers finally getting the most from it. Yet if DAB is really to prosper, then it needs true budget heroes. Heroes like the Denon TU-260L, which in its analogue day was the best selling separates tuner for nearly ten years running. Denon has recently launched a replacement for this long-running king of budget tuners – the TU-1500AE (£130), reviewed in *HFC* 281 – but like its predecessor, it's AM/FM, not DAB. Most DAB separates still sell for at least £200, like Denon's own TU-1800DAB (£250). But Cambridge Audio provides exceptions, and others will follow.

A greater choice of product for the consumer is good news, but there are other aspects that effect whether you or I would want to make the switch to DAB. Sadly, it doesn't appear that the bandwidth will ever increase, at least not in the near future, but at least the reception area has improved, and features are steadily

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

YAMAHA DSP-1 DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR



Yamaha has just celebrated an auspicious anniversary. It's 20 years since it introduced Digital Signal Processing of audio data to

consumers with a landmark product called the DSP-1. It was a revolutionary component, based on a genuinely audacious idea. Yamaha's engineers realised they could model the sound of real-life acoustic spaces (concert halls, clubs, stadia and so on) and encode the results in a digital form, which could subsequently be imprinted on a musical signal or a film soundtrack. With the DSP-1, digital soundfield processing was born. Not only was the idea audacious at the time, the hardware needed to process the audio was very much cutting edge.

It didn't take long for others to realise that DSP processing was a powerful inducement for the buying public, which could be offered the chance of selecting a range of rich and varied acoustics at the press of a button. The wherewithal to replicate the technology was not particularly onerous once geared up for mass production, especially when incorporated in a multichannel processor or amp. But Yamaha's DSP had a touch of class denied many of its rivals. The original sampling of the acoustic space was performed by Yamaha's engineers in real acoustics – the first concert hall modelled was close to Yamaha's musical instrument factory in Hamamatsu – slightly off the centre line, giving what was quickly realised would be a more interesting and realistic effect. In many of Yamaha's more sophisticated AV amps, the parameters of the spaces modelled by DSP can be almost infinitely varied, so users can roll their own, and Yamaha later advocated the use of two additional front speakers, behind and above the main speakers, to improve the reproduction of ambient data, though these complexities generally didn't appeal to a market that even then was turning toward simpler solutions.

But the DSP-1 predated the extra front speakers, indeed it predated Dolby Pro Logic, and as a result it was based on a simple Dolby Surround platform, with four outputs, one for each corner of the room, and no centre channel. For many, however, it was less a home



"It's 20 years since Yamaha introduced Digital Signal Processing of audio data with the DSP-1."

cinema processor than a way of enhancing stereo, with the black box, some extra power amplification and a pair or rear speakers turning stereo replay into something altogether more three-dimensional than traditional two-channel stereo. The DSP-1 itself was externally simple, but the remote control provided access to 16 preset sound patterns and it was also possible to change many of the parameters, to fine-tune the effects on offer.

At the time, the DSP-1 was cutting edge, both sonically and technologically. Now, it's hard to find a home cinema amp that *doesn't* boast similar facilities, many enhanced for 5.1 and even 7.1 channel systems.

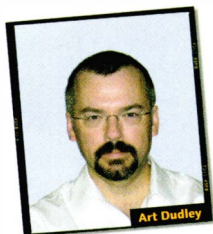
Meanwhile interest in DSP for stereo replay has waned with the resurgence of interest in simple, high-quality systems with purist appeal. In any case, many have long-held misgivings about using DSP to add ambient information to a raw sound that already has its own inherent acoustic information from the original recording. Another objection to DSP patterns, especially those based on large acoustic spaces – cathedrals, stadia and the like – is that they were typically too rich and reverberant. Mixing the DSP data with the audio often led to less clarity. But few even now would dare launch a multichannel amplifier without its own internal homage to the DSP-1 on board. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

improving. A year after Electronic Program Guides for Digital TV, the BBC has finally launched a DAB version. At the time of writing, only Pure's, Bug TOO is compatible, but others will no doubt follow.

It's been slow, but the signs are that DAB is now finally beginning to bloom.

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



Monoquadraphonic

Art's vintage ESLs sound even better in mono

Remember the Quad ESLs I wrote about in HFC 277 – the ones I bought on eBay for \$660? I found time during the winter months to bind their wounds and undo as many of the indignities of aging as I could, providing them with new rectifier blocks,

high-voltage wiring, dustcovers for the bass panels, and rebuilt treble panels. All that plus paint, polish, and protection circuits.

It was time and money well spent. Not only do my reconditioned Quads have just the right time-machine look – interior designers who would mate blonde wood finishes with copper-coloured metalwork appear to have died around 1965 – but their performance is just stunning. My ESLs get the pitches and the rhythms right; have surprisingly good drama and scale for smallish electrostats; and bow to none when it comes to purity, presence, and sheer, unadulterated *directness* of sound. To hear so superior a product from 1959 is to gain tremendous faith in the audio community's capacity for self-delusion during the years since.

But they don't image terribly well. It doesn't really matter whether that's an essential flaw, or if listeners like me have simply been conditioned to expect a certain sort of spatial presentation, unrealistic though it may be. The positions of instrumental and vocal images can vary so drastically if I don't sit perfectly still in

just the right spot, listening to stereo recordings on a pair of old Quads can be a disconcertingly fussy thing to do.

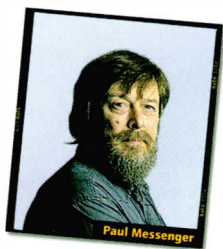
But I thought back to the first evening I auditioned my handiwork: a single Quad playing mono recordings from the centre of my room – brilliantly well – while the other awaited completion on my bench. Now I have a more-or-less dedicated mono system built around one ESL, positioned for maximum bass extension, response smoothness and nothing else. And I've learned that mono recordings sound better in every way – more substantial, more present, more colourful, and more convincing – when the sound comes at me from a loudspeaker as opposed to free space.

A pair of loudspeakers playing a more or less identical music signal can convey the illusion that the music is emanating from the space between them. But why settle for an illusion when you can have the real thing?

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

“I've learned that mono recordings sound better in every way – more substantial, more colourful, and more convincing...”





Net worth

How NaimNet could run your musical life

CEDIA is all about Custom Install (CI), the multiroom spin-off from hi-fi that hides the equipment out of sight. It overtook its parent years ago in the States, and looks set to do the same over here soon, judging by the success of this year's show. There's often little to interest hi-fi buffs at a CEDIA show, but one of this year's highlights was Naim Audio's ambitious new foray into CI, with the launch of a whole suite of NaimNet components (see *Happenings*, p14). The intention, Naim says, is to maintain the company's commitment to top-quality sound reproduction while providing its customers with the extra flexibility of a full networking multi-zone approach.

Naim is a relative latecomer to the CI scene – Meridian and Linn have been doing it for years – but its new initiative is both interesting and ambitious. At its heart is a partnership with computer networking specialist NetStreams, and the use of its StreamNet IP (internet protocol) network technology to carry control data alongside uncompressed digital sound around and even beyond (through phone lines) the immediate home.

Wiring is accomplished using simple and standard CAT 5 cabling. A fully equipped NaimNet residence will have total flexibility to play any of a number of sources independently in any appropriately equipped room, and with perfect synchronisation if the same source is relayed to more than one zone.

The NaimNet hardware consists of a number of components you never knew you needed. There are two grades of room amplifier, each intended to drive the local pair of speakers without compromise, yet also equipped with inputs for adding local sources to the network.

Core sources consist of a multi-tuner, which can tune four different FM or DAB radio stations simultaneously, plus a hierarchy of four different servers. Servers (for those who didn't know they needed them) are the core digital music storage components of the multiroom age, based around computer hard drives. You could call them digital jukeboxes, because you dump into them all the music on your PC and iPod, load up your favourite CDs, and then treat them as your core music source. The four servers go from a single-output ▶

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

JAMES BROWN LIVE AT THE APOLLO



"So now, ladies and gentlemen, it is star time. Are you ready for star time?!" So began MC Fats

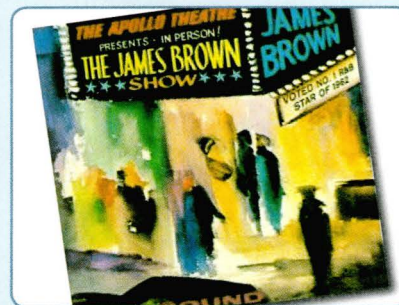
Gonder's introduction to the yet-to-be soul brother number one, James Brown, as the band vamped behind him at Harlem's 125th Street Apollo Theater on Wednesday, 24 October 1962. Brown was already a star, but still far from the legend he was to become. But the album that would follow his performance would see him leapfrog to the top of the pop charts and cement his reputation as the most dynamic performer in America, if not the world.

The no-brakes versions of *I'll Go Crazy*, *Think* and *Night Train* can exhaust an audience just listening to them, let alone if they could see the dances, swoops and vocal pyrotechnics that Brown tested to the full. The band, of course, is famously well-drilled and super-tight, switching tempo and tune in a heartbeat at a sign from their leader. The audience participation is crucial, and the surging build-up and sudden drop at the beginning of *Lost Someone*, most likely accompanied by the Godfather throwing himself onto his much-battered knees, is surely one of the most gasp-inducing moments in music. Theatrical it may be, but no-one can doubt Mr Dynamite's sincerity, and certainly not on that night.

Surprisingly for such an avowedly *soul* album, *Live At The Apollo* reached number two in the US Billboard charts, breaking soul out of the R&B ghetto into which it had been consigned, for good.

Ironically, Brown's label, King, didn't want to release the album. Label boss Syd Nathan saw Brown as a singles artist, and thought there would be no interest in a concert album, especially since he was on the road virtually all the time anyway, and people would be able to see the real thing soon enough. And anyway, radio didn't play albums.

But Brown was determined, and inspired by the success of *Ray Charles In Person* in 1960, and his understanding of his audience (he'd played the Apollo several times by this point, and fully knew what to expect), he paid for the recording himself.



"It reached number two in the US Billboard charts, breaking soul out of the R&B ghetto for good."

Nathan's reservations about radio proved to be unfounded – the record became so popular that DJs often conceded to play single tracks during the day (King hurriedly pressed up some single versions of tracks), then play the entire 30-minute album in the evening, when controls were less stringent.

The original vinyl pressings included canned applause and screams to augment the genuine article. These have been eschewed from later CD reissues, though the original audience reaction is powerful enough, as of course is Brown's incendiary delivery.

There have been several CD releases over the years, notably from the late, lamented Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab's 1990 gold disc, which moved the sound firmly into the left and right channels but virtually none in the middle, resulting in a crystal clear yet strangely distanced mix.

Polygram produced an expanded CD edition in 2004, which boasted a complete (improved) remastering from the original source and four extra tracks, including two of the single versions released after King belatedly saw the album's potential when it took off like a rocket.

Live At The Apollo deserves its reputation as one of the great live albums, and it's sounding even better now than it did then. **HFC**

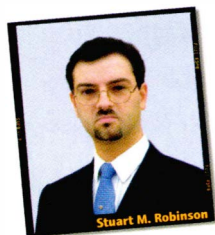
Dave Oliver

example via a four-output model to a four-output-with-touch-screen/display, and the no-compromise audiophile-oriented two-box NS REF. All have built-in CD drives, backup hard drives, front panel USB sockets for convenient PC/iPod connection, and use AMG to compile a content database that makes finding your music much easier than with individual discs.

Link them all together with the NaimNet digital preamp (which also accepts analogue inputs) and a NetStreams switcher, and then add as many other compatible Digilinx components (such as lighting, control panels, heating and security items) as you like.

The NaimNet approach won't suit every Naim customer, but I can see the appeal of this convenient and flexible way of organising, collating and distributing music around the home, with minimal sound quality compromise.

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



Lost Moon

The best-ever Pink Floyd is online, right now

It's supposed to be a secret, but we're all friends so come closer... The finest hi-res music 'release' in recent months is a DVD-Audio version of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*, and not just any old version. It's not the James Guthrie remix released on SACD as that format's standard-bearer, nor is it a live bootleg; this is the real-deal Alan Parsons' EMI SQ (and Q8) quad mix, the same mix heard by the press at the album's infamous launch at the London Planetarium in 1973.

As Parsons explained in his 1975 article for *Studio Sound* magazine, although *DSOTM* was designed for two-channel playback, many elements were recorded and mixed to the 16-track master for a quad reduction. Other 'unofficial' surround discs of *DSOTM* have come from vinyl or Q8 recordings; this one comes from the master tapes...

The disc's origins are a bit cloak and dagger, but we know that the DVD-A version's creator gained access to what he describes as a "superb" set of files – digital copies of those precious tapes. Due to a love of the album and mix, he decided those files deserved exposure and in a "universal" way, which is why the disc



“This is the real deal, Alan Parsons’ EMI SQ (and Q8) quad mix, as played at the album’s launch at the London Planetarium in 1973.”

includes Dolby Digital and DTS versions for DVD-Video compatibility alongside the hi-res 24/96 surround track.

"The ethos was – if it's worth doing, it's worth doing properly," he explains. "The original files were not tampered with in any way at all – no rework, no maximizing, nothing. The album is as it would have been heard back in the studio when Alan Parsons originally mixed it, and whenever I play it, it still makes all the hairs on my arms rise up – and something that good should never be lost to us."

After a lot of thought, a few copies were given away to people who would appreciate it. Never a commercial project and created at the author's own expense, the idea was to preserve the mix for posterity as EMI had no intentions of releasing it, and once the few remaining Q8 carts with their tape hiss, poor dynamic range and matrix SQ origins were no longer playable it would be gone forever.

For an "unofficial" release, the disc has remarkable production values and the fidelity is revelatory, especially if you're familiar with the glories of Parsons' quad mix. With MLP encoding, on-screen menus and original artwork, it's clearly a labour of love and one of an exceptionally high standard.

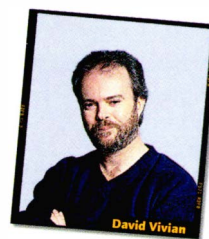
"What I feel is important is that this music is finally available in a high-quality form," says the author. "I wouldn't have had to do it if EMI had done the right thing in the first place."

And that would be where the story ends... were it not for an invention that might one day catch on, something called 'the internet'.

Nobody knows how the disc's content made it online, but Floyd fans are glad it did. "I don't know who put this online – it certainly wasn't me," the disc's creator says, "but in a way I am glad it is finally out there. It's easy enough to find if you look for it, and nobody should pay for a copy, at least not until EMI finally do the right thing and release it officially. At which time, I will be first in line to buy one."

Google is the audiophile's friend...

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



Top gear

Great hi-fi should thrill like a great car

Take your pick: one, two or three. One, you're the bloke Motörhead's Lemmy really should consult for power amp advice. Friends call you a headbanger, but you can't hear them. You crave maximum impact, it doesn't matter how raw and bloody. By the time you've finished, it's all academic anyway;

the system will be flat out. It simply doesn't have any more to give.

Two, you're an überpurist. You listen with your cerebrum not your chest cavity. Brand heroes include Chord and Wilson Benesch. Clarity matters, both in presentational style and dynamic demeanour. You get your kicks not from being pummelled by shockwaves but defining music in microscopic resolution. It's a kind of quantum approach: the small things matter. Your ears are alive to the subtlest of messages, nuances missed by most.

And three, you're the sort of hi-fi buyer who is definitely into the idea of volume and physical impact but doesn't want it to become a my-curry's-hotter-than-yours/big testicles thing. Perhaps you don't really trust yourself to be responsible with the volume knob. Or maybe you just like the notion of having more than enough on tap and are content to keep it in reserve. Chances are you're drawn to the products of Marantz and Rotel.

Chosen? Good. The great thing about modern hi-fi is that so much of it has got all the bases covered. It's not dissimilar to what's going on with cars. In fact, the parallels are quite striking. In the spirit of the times, let's sketch in a few you-are-what-you-drive-how-you-listen comparisons. If your hi-fi has Lemmy running for cover, for instance, you should be driving a TVR Tuscan, an automotive stick-on hairy chest of such virile luxuriance that it comes with a full set of pubic accessories. Purity and resolution merchant? You need a Caterham CSR 260 Superlight – the tactility dished up by the CSR delivers a driving hit of unparalleled connectedness, clarity and intensity. Then again, a Merc SL55 – all active roll control, effortless V8 muscle and failsafe traction/stability management – will get you there with talent to spare but, perhaps, not the nth degree of intimacy and engagement.

For me, it's the systems (and cars) that fuse both disciplines into a singularity greater than the sum of their parts that are most remarkable of all. Maybe what we should all be aspiring to is the Porsche 911 Turbo of hi-fi systems. Here's an all-drive, all-weather supercar that delivers such mind-bending pace and ability that it simply achieves more for a given input from the driver. Heroic feats are accessible to even the modestly skilled.

What I want is a hi-fi system that can pull off much the same trick: one that can thrill, enthrall and enrapture whatever the music, whatever the genre, whatever the quality of the recording. Have I found it yet? Come close but, nope, the Havana is safe for the time being. But I'll be sure to let you know when I do reach for the lighter.

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

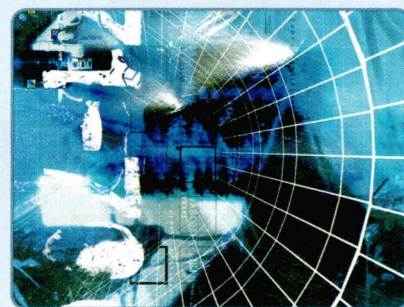


A letter in *HFC* 280 from reader Euan McDade asked an often-pondered question: can we carry on discovering more and more detail in existing recordings from many years ago? Addressing this question brings up major issues related to just how we define sound quality, from both subjective and technical points of view.

It's a remarkable fact that recording is often easier than playing back. A major reason for this is that scratching a groove into a disc, or magnetising iron oxide on a tape, requires relatively high power levels so one is not constantly fighting against noise, as one is when replaying. Lowering the intrinsic noise of replay equipment is a very good way to recover more net information from an old recording, but at some point one will come up against the noise inherent in the recording itself. Similarly with bandwidth: one can build, for instance, better tape replay heads (taking advantage of materials and machining methods which weren't available decades ago) which get more bass and treble off a tape, but there are still limitations in the recording due not only to the tape recorder used but to microphones etc.

There is, in fact, a continual battle between bandwidth and signal-to-noise. Suppose one has a reel of tape which was recorded with equipment which reached down to 50Hz pretty well but lacked any real bass response beyond that. One can boost those very low frequencies almost without limit and in principle recover some of what was 'lost', but noise will come up as well. The decision on where to stop boosting is ultimately a subjective one.

Of course, one can boost that low bass more when one has reason to suppose that there is some real information there – for example, at a point where someone whacks a large drum. Increasing LF noise at such a time won't matter so much. And then one can use high-tech noise reduction systems such as 'Cedar' to cut audible noise without significantly affecting the audio. It's slightly ironic that systems like Cedar rely on very similar science to MP3 and its ilk.



“Can we carry on discovering more detail in existing recordings from many years ago?”

There are other things one can do to improve replay of old recordings. Many suffer from audible levels of wow and flutter – speed variation – which even when not directly obvious, can still affect detail. In principle, there are various ways to reduce this. A recently-announced system from the oddly named 'Plangent Processes' does exactly that with tape recordings, using the minute residual of bias or erase tone on the tape (a high-frequency signal left behind as a by-product) to correct the audio as if it had never been affected by W&F. This is an interesting case because it relies on using the original tape – copies (and certainly copies to digital media, unless sampled at about 1MHz) are useless because they don't carry the bias tone.

Distortion reduction is another area of current research, and we heard recently that Cedar is actively pursuing this. If one can get a 'fingerprint' of how a recording system distorts one has some chance of (partially) reversing the process, so it's an intriguing area.

The answer then, is that there is at present plenty of mileage in improving the sound from old recordings. Archiving, recovery and enhancement are among the most lively areas in professional audio, and will continue to develop for years to come. **HFC**

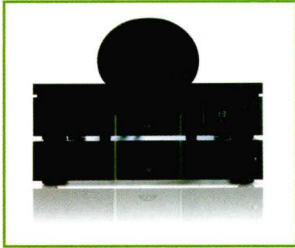
Richard Black

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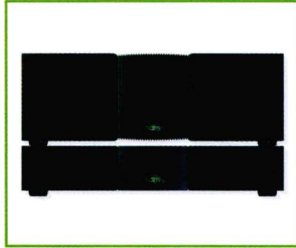
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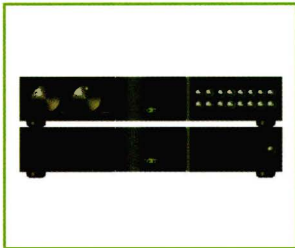
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Naim CD555 has arrived!

Magnificent '7

The kings of sumptuous downtempo, **Zero 7** are back with a new album. And this time they've utilised the folk vibes of José González as well as seventies AOR

Sam Hardaker and Henry Binns learnt their craft on an Akai S950 sampler and an Atari 1040 computer before getting the lucky break of remixing Radiohead. Then, in 2001, they released the acclaimed, soulful, downtempo *Simple Things*. Now, the boys are back with album number three, *The Garden*, which blends the folky vibes of José González (he of Sony Bravia bouncing balls ad fame) with seventies-style AOR production, crisp beats and chilled aesthetics.

because of the pairs' injection of a little seventies AOR. And though audio obsessives will love it, *songs* are still the backbone. Production for production's sake, this ain't. And along the way, they were also inspired by albums whose sonics they personally admire.

"One would be some of the Island records stuff from the seventies and early eighties," Sam explains. "A lot of them Grace Jones records and stuff like that. We'd bring a couple of those in and we'd also bring D'Angelo – the *Voodoo*

listen to music on but the idea is that if you can make it sound good on them then it should sound good on most things."

And that's Zero 7 down to a tee: technologically, as well as creatively, a mix of past and present, innovative and straight, organic and electronic. 'Nuff said.

Gal Detourn

"Look at Al Green's records... it sounds as if someone's playing the drums in the loft but it's brilliant sounding."

"I mastered the record onto vinyl in an attempt to make it sound different," Henry reveals. "If anything it was about narrowing the bandwidth because that's how we're used to hearing records. A record could sound brilliant but that doesn't mean it's posh. Look at Al Green... it sounds like someone's playing drums in the loft but it's brilliant sounding."

Additionally, the fact that the album was mixed on an old Audiotronic analogue mixing desk created a balance between the digital recording world of Pro-Tools and something way more classic. It was a set-up that also provided limitations, which Sam and Henry turned to their advantage, as the said desk only allowed them to pan sounds to either 'extreme left', 'extreme right' or 'dead centre'.

"It was interesting that that was dictating what we could do," Sam enthuses. "Everybody makes music with Pro-Tools through a Mackie desk, with the same plug-ins and it's all the same. We wanted something different."

"That created a lot of space for vocals and set the precedent for the mixes," Henry adds. The result is curiously modern, yet retro. Not least

album – and if you put them up together they're so dramatically different, yet we drew on them as things we really liked."

"On Grace Jones the sound is so super bright," Henry adds, "and with D'Angelo it's the dynamic range, the width of the thing. I suppose that's the changes in technology. In the old days they were trying to scoop off the bottom to get it loud on the radio."

And what do they listen to these gems on? Well, Henry (right) will only state that his hi-fi "needs addressing". But Sam is more enthusiastic.

"Yeah, I've got this classic, eighties NAD amp, one that clunks when you press the buttons, like an old video recorder. I've had it for years. You get to know your system so that's what you bring stuff back for, to get a point of reference, because you know what stuff sounds like."

In the studio, however, their choice is a little more conventional. "We've got Yamaha NS10 monitors," Sam states, "which everybody has. They're pretty uninspiring to



ESSENTIAL ZERO 7

Simple Things (2001)

The one that catapulted them into orbit. *Simple Things* was compared to Air at the time, but had its own suave, soulful, languid downtempo quality.



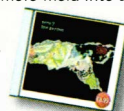
When It Falls (2004)

New ideas, instruments and effects were introduced to build on the vibe established on *Simple Things*, creating a more unusual and 'cosmic' tinged album.



The Garden (2006)

Folk, seventies AOR, downtempo and more meld into a warm, lush concoction that effortlessly blends past and present, organic and electronic.



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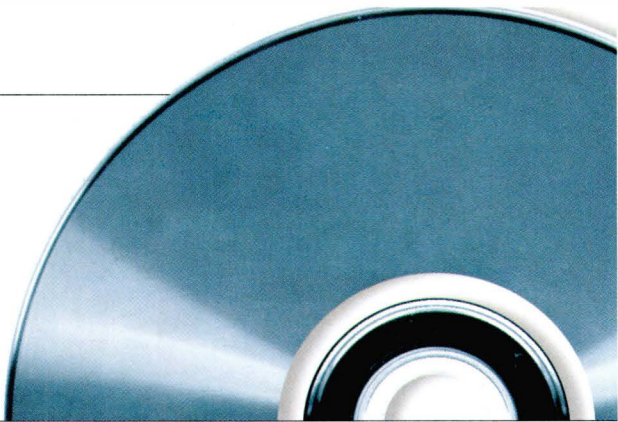
...the closest approach to the original sound

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

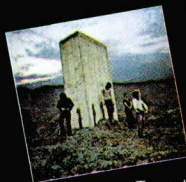
Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

THE WHO

Who's Next



Track/Classic Records
150g vinyl

Music: Containing two of their biggest Stateside hits (*Behind Blue Eyes*, *Won't Get Fooled Again*), The Who's 1971 album cemented their rock qualifications. Pete

Townshend used ARP and VCS3 synthesizers to great effect on many of the nine tracks but never more effectively than on the opener *Baba O'Riley*, which was used so effectively in the film *American Beauty*. Unlike most other rock acts of the time, solos are pretty scarce; rather, each piece involves all four musicians and occasionally others as well – piano and violin also feature. This is the definitive hard-rock Who album. ★★★★★

Sound: Despite being lauded for a production of "chilly perfection" in *Rolling Stone* at the time of release, this is not a great recording. The CD sounds similar so don't blame Classic Records, who have done their damndest to cut through the sonic crud. ★★★ JK

NEIL YOUNG

Prairie Wind

Reprise/Classic Records



2x200g vinyl

Music: Last year's Neil Young album has been issued on two slabs of Classic Records' premium Quix 200g vinyl in a luxurious gatefold cover with 18-page booklet.

Musically it sees a return to the seventies sound of *Harvest*, a sense encouraged by acoustic instruments and more than a few warm and cosy songs. The ten tracks are spread over three sides with an interview taking up the fourth. Despite this being familiar ground, Young still manages to make it sound fresh and engaging. Songs like *Far From Home* are delightfully upbeat, while *No Wonder* is a reflection on the aftermath of 9/11 that is reminiscent of his greatest tunes. ★★★★★

Sound: Classic Records has produced a gloriously lush, warm sound that 'out analogues' analogue, if that were possible. This is one of the best sounding slabs of vinyl we've heard for a long time, with superb scale and depth. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Classic Records.
www.classicrecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



PAOLO NUTINI

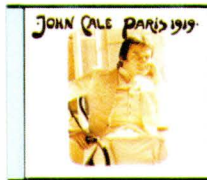
Paolo Nutini

Atlantic

Music: Already hailed as the new James Blunt, the debut album from this 19-year-old Scottish singer-songwriter is an assured affair with polished production by Ken Nelson (Comez/Coldplay).

Thankfully, though, he whines less than his labelmate Blunt and his soulful voice packs real conviction. On one level he sounds mature beyond his years. Yet his songs are all drawn from such youthful experiences as leaving home for the first time and the turbulence of teen love. There's an AOR quality that means you can expect to hear him all over Radio 2, but he should also strike a chord in student bedsit-land. ★★★★★

Sound: Nutini clearly favours a classic troubadour approach, yet at times the production veers more towards the Lighthouse Family – it's the album's only real flaw. ★★★ NW



JOHN CALE

Paris 1919

Rhino UK

Music: Off heroin and relocated from New York to LA, the early 1970s was Cale's ultra-commercial period. Signed briefly to Reprise, 1973's *Paris 1919* is often seen as Cale's best pop record, coming between his avant-garde experiments with Terry Riley and his rockier work with Eno. Lyrically influenced by literature and with a fine sepia cover, the music wafts between beautiful acoustic ballads (*Hanky Panky Nohow/Andalucia*) and robustly orchestrated fare (*The Endless Plain Of Fortune* and the title track). ★★★★★

Sound: Now remastered, this Rhino version adds eleven session tracks. Assisted by Little Feat in the studio, you can immediately hear that it's Cale's classical precision and sonic lyricism that make the album sound so good. ★★★★★ MP



MOZART, CHOPIN, SCHUMANN, LISZT

Memory: Piano Sonata (C maj), Piano Sonata 3 (B min), Kinderszenen, Hungarian Rhapsody 2

Lang Lang (piano)

DGG 00289 477 5976

Music: This two-disc set is of music that has a special association with Lang Lang's youth, from the childlike simplicity of Mozart's *Piano Sonata* and Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, to the fiery Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody*. It is hard to criticise Lang Lang's performance, but it is curiously hard to empathise with it either. The reasons are hard to pin down, bar perhaps the oddly stilted phrasing in some of the more languorous passages. ★★★

Sound: This recording, made using a pair of spaced omnis as the main pick-up, is realistic enough, with a touch more warmth than is historically the case on this label. ★★★★★ AG



CERYS MATTHEWS

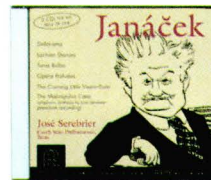
Never Said Goodbye

Rough Trade

Music: After a charming, country-tinged debut solo album recorded in Nashville, former Catatonia singer Cerys Matthews has adopted a more overtly pop approach on the follow-up. Her gritty Welsh voice is more expressive than

ever, one minute all kittenish and innocent, the next as raucous and knowing as a bordello madam. She's also developed into a writer of genuine wit and invention on such stand-out songs as first single *Open Roads*, *A Bird In The Hand* and *Morning Sun*. It's a radical departure from the new direction she forged on last album *Cockahoop*, but fans of her old band who weren't enamoured with her reinvention as a folksy, country queen will no doubt welcome her return to pop divadom. ★★★

Sound: The stripped-down, organic simplicity of her solo debut has been replaced by bubbling electronic beats and layered textures of sound that at times risk sounding cluttered and over-busy. ★★ NW



JANÁČEK

Sinfonietta, Lachian Dances, Taras Bulba, Opera Preludes, The Cunning Little Vixen

José Serebrier (conductor), Czech State Philharmonic Orchestra

RR-2103 HDCD

Music: Here is as compelling a collection of Janáček as you will find. In part this must be because the Czech State Phil plays with a palpably idiomatic edge. They live and breathe the music, and at times they play as though possessed. Great music, great performances and incidentally a great workout for your system. ★★★★★

Sound: The recording is if anything even better than the performances, which benefits enormously from Prof Johnson's engineering and the HDCD process. The sound is ripe yet never overblown across the vast dynamic range. ★★★★★ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Plant's voice at the height of its powers"

LED ZEPPELIN III Atlantic

Music: As a musical statement, *III* proved that Jimmy Page and co had significantly more strings to their bow than anyone had imagined. The album opens with the chugging beat and crashing guitars of *Immigrant Song*, a quintessential Zep track with a surprise ending. From there the sound morphs into tabla and acoustic guitar for *Friends* and before the side is out there is a return to grass roots with the slow blues of *Since I've Been Loving You*. Side two kicks in with the remarkable

Gallows Pole, showing off Plant's voice at the height of its powers, then chills out for the acoustic *Tangerine*. Rock records don't get much better. ★★★★★

Sound: Classic Records' 200g pressing totally revitalises this storming record and digs up details that seventies styli have erased from original pressings. If you want to hear this gem the way it did back in the day, you can't get any closer than this. ★★★★★ JK



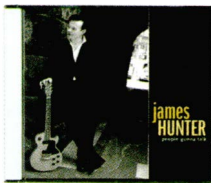
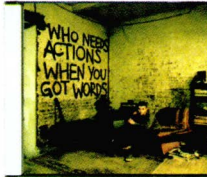
PLAN B

Who Needs Actions When You Got Words

679

Music: Plan B (Ben Drew really) comes on like an East End Eminem or an angrier Streets, rapping tales of inner city and family woe over sparse beats. What makes him different from and better than either of those two is that his lyrics are genuinely impressive – rawer than the former, and more coherent and inventive than the latter. Verbal tsunamis of angst and hurt, examining the minutiae of life on council estates, in Macjobs, and of getting by without knowing why you're doing it, spill out at a furious but generally easily intelligible rate. There's no shortage of invective, and it says something about his writing skills that he can impress with his wit one minute, while genuinely making hardened rap listeners wince the next. There's clearly a rare talent at work here, look out for him. ★★★★★

Sound: He's just as likely to accompany his raps with an acoustic guitar as a drum machine and while the production is necessarily raw, there's enough polish on it not to distract from the words. ★★★ DO



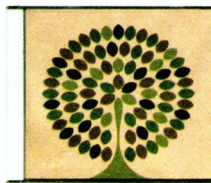
JAMES HUNTER

People Gonna Talk

Go Records

Music: James H has been creating some great soul-style songs for years and now he's finally beginning to get the recognition he deserves with the likes of Van Morrison, no less, saying he's "One of the best kept voices, and best kept secrets, in British R'n'B and Soul!" This latest set sees him in modern Sam Cooke mode, cooking up numbers that instantly sound like standards – of the highest order. Each one wonderfully arranged – with just the right amount of string, sax and organ backing – and perfectly pitched for his dry yet warm vocals. A modern classic. ★★★★★

Sound: This has some good, clean lines laid down by Toe Rag Studios' Liam Watson. Retro without sounding old, it captures the Hunter vocal rasp with pleasant ease. ★★★★★ PS



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Welcome To The People Tree

People Tree

Music: Something is stirring in the cornfield of British folk. With barely a passing nod to American 'alt.country', acoustic Brit folkers are coming thick and fast, harking back to the likes of Fairport Convention, Bert Jansch and Nick Drake. On People Tree Records' first compilation, Grand Union recall Pentangle at their trippy, improvised best, Matt Deighton improves on Paul Weller's acoustic template and old soldier John Martyn drops an impressively sparse version of Portishead's *Glory Box*, which would have served as a suitable title for the album as a whole. ★★★★★

Sound: The image may be rustic and for the most part the sound isn't much more sophisticated, albeit in a modern, digitally recorded fashion. ★★★ DO

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

KRAFTWERK

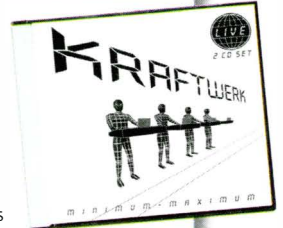
Minimum-Maximum

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

EMI

Music: Despite over three decades on the throne of electronic pop, this is Kraftwerk's first official live album. And if you're a fan, it will have been worth the wait. It gathers 22 of the pop robots' finest tracks to produce a compilation that easily outshines that on *The Mix*, 1991's remixed selection. Here the old favourites *Autobahn*, *Man Machine*, *Trans Europe Express* are joined by the less familiar *Tour De France* and *Metal On Metal*. Though it seems odd to describe the programmed nature of this material as 'live', the music does vary from the standard album variety with most tracks having been tweaked to good effect. They also leave some crowd noise on to give a proper 'live' effect but it's the sound that wins the day. ★★★

Sound: This is a superb-sounding pair of discs with a bold, three-dimensional quality that has not been encountered on previous outings. You will be surprised at how much tonal variety and shape these masters at work can extract from computers. ★★★★★ JK



MAHLER

Symphonies 1 & 2 (Resurrection)

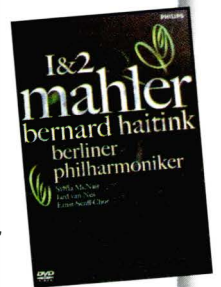
Bernard Haitink (conductor), Berlin Philharmonic, Silvia McNair, Jard van Nes, Ernst-Senff-Chor

DVD-Video (DTS 5.1)

Philips 074 3131

Music: Haitink is generally regarded as having a strong affinity for Mahler's music, but he is sometimes criticised (more in the past than at present) for his intelligent, but somehow rather dour, stolid interpretations. This recording, made with Berlin's premier band in the late nineties, falls into this trap, notwithstanding a particularly exciting and well judged finale in the Second, which somehow fails to show how much it seemed to mirror a world rapidly disintegrating towards the end of the 19th century when it first appeared. The orchestral playing, however, and the choral support in the finale of the Second, are exemplary. ★★★★★

Sound: Although this well-fined DVD-Video is encoded in DTS, the multichannel mix is derived from stereo masters using the AMSI-II (Ambient Sound Imaging) process, and while the mix is spatially up to the mark, the sound lacks consistency and has an artificial bloom which does not wear well. ★★★ AG



ILS

Soul Trader

DualDisc (one side CD stereo, other DVD-Audio 5.1)

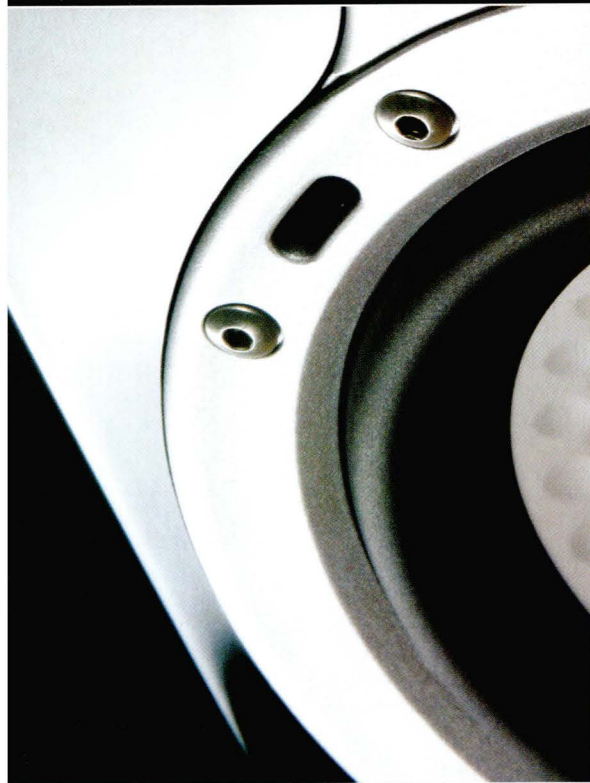
MuUtopia

Music: Ilian Walker is a remixer and DJ who's name is hardly mainstream, but you've probably heard him already thanks to the urgent, clattering single *6 Space (Next Level)*, which was appropriated for a TV advert for mobile giant Orange. Juxtaposing spooky urban atmospherics with some stonking riffs and soulful vocals, *Soul Trader* is one of those breaks albums that has enough interesting stuff going on harmonically and melodically to warrant some proper listening, as opposed to just dancing, with intense driving junglist beats one minute, segueing into smooth atmospherica the next. He's also helped by some powerful vocal contributions from the likes of Moby favourite Diane Charlemagne (D-Empress) and others. ★★★★★

Sound: In stereo the sound is powerful, if perhaps a mite cluttered and mired in bass on occasion. In 5.1 however it really comes into its own, still bass heavy, but with a wealth of samples, sounds and squalls skittering around the speakers like musical scattergun shot. ★★★★★ DO



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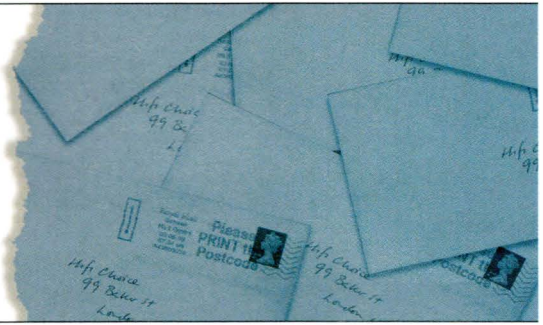
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Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



SIGNAL FAILURE

I've been getting confusing messages recently. My Cyrus brochure argues that the CD format is set to remain the dominant audio format for the foreseeable future. However, reports on the radio recently have featured people in the music industry claiming that they have locked up their CD collections and have resorted to MP3 downloads.

Personally, I couldn't give a stuff about iPods, but as an impoverished pleb (unlike you) I need to work out if it is worth upgrading to say, a Cyrus CD6s, or look at some kind of docking system that will feed into my amp. Confused? You bet.

Starmist via HFC online forum

HFC Our take would be to get the CD player. No contest. As to the future, there will always be differences of opinion. We'd say if

you care about good sound and you've amassed a decent music collection, a dedicated CD player will be a sensible choice going forward. The only way to even consider enjoying music using a portable as a source is if the tracks are transferred uncompressed (CD quality) and played through a hi-fi. It's not our choice and not as good as an accomplished CD player, but there is a small group even within the hi-fi industry who advocate this option and have even demonstrated ancillary kit to us in this way. Surprised? You bet.

EAR THIS

"Always buy with your ears" is an often-quoted and obviously sensible piece of advice. But it needs to be at home with your kit and your acoustics. I used to smile about 50-100 hour running in times, but know the truth of it now.

"My Cyrus brochure argues that the CD format is set to remain dominant."

So, what you need are two or three friendly dealers who'll lend you genuinely run-in kit, or let you keep it for the time you need to run in it yourself, so you can compare the options. An alternative is to read all the reviews and take flyers on kit you think will suit you. As my system has become more expensive, it's strange how the latter has become my method of choice... or madness.

Matthew Mowle via email

HFC Our reviews are the most reliable around, but we'd never suggest you base a purchase on them alone – it's import to audition components for yourself. However, many readers tell us it's getting harder to dem stuff properly and it's really hard to get stuff on loan. The shrinking pool of hi-fi stores compounds this and so some people feel pressured to buy without a proper listen. So come on all you dealers – our readers want to demo stuff, but they're finding it increasingly difficult – it shouldn't be this hard. ▶



Above: Cyrus CD6s CD player

Letter of the month

TOP OF THE FLOPS

I see *Top of the Pops* has flopped, pulled by the BBC after decades of regular TV airplay. That's a real shame. Not because I am a regular viewer, but because I think it's sad for music. Apparently, audience figures plummeted and the BBC blamed the usual scapegoat for anything in decline to do with music – MP3 downloads. It seems nobody is buying singles anymore. And I suppose, why would you at £2.3 a pop when it involves a trip to the shops? You can get that song immediately for 80 pence as a download. So

I'm sad to see it go, but more so, I hope the awareness of music doesn't suffer as a result.

Peter Redmond via email

HFC Upon *TOTP's* launch, Sir Jimmy Savile famously quipped that the show would last as long as people bought singles. And he was right. Turn back a few decades and bands were simply less 'available' than they are now. Nowadays, you can get an instant fix on the internet – songs, videos, pictures, lyrics – it's all there 24/7. So, sadly you can see why *TOTP* became redundant.



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...)

AGAINST THE WALL

Thank you for a great magazine, I picked it up about a year ago and it has opened a whole new world to me. Since then I subscribed. I would like to buy stereo speakers to be put in the living room (4x6m) and these

will need to be some 20cm from the wall. I need your advice please due to the near-wall limitation. I understand that with floorstanding speakers, the bass can get overemphasized when they are located near the wall. Does this mean I can only buy standmount speakers? You talk of blocking ports – what does that mean?

Asher Uziel via email

HFC As a general rule, the larger the speaker, the more bass you can expect. For that reason, floorstanders tend to offer deeper bass than compact standmounts. Many speakers incorporate a kind of exhaust pipe for the bass/mid driver called a 'reflex port' – this allows displaced air to escape the cabinet, and has the effect of 'boosting' the bass. If such a port is situated on the rear of a speaker, placing it close to a wall will cause reflections that 'boost' the bass further; sometimes this is desirable, sometimes not. Some speakers come supplied with a foam 'bung' that can be used to plug the port, thereby lessening the effect.

Check out the speaker listings in our *Buyer's Bible*, which have a column specifically identifying those speakers that work best when they're placed close to a wall.

SHEFFIELD STEAL

I've never written to a hi-fi mag before, but thought I'd share a recent experience. I recently bought the Sheffield Labs *Kodo Heartbeat Drummers of Japan* CD and it has proved to be the best burn-in device and cost effective upgrade I've come across. Back in 1994, you wrote about a similar effect from a KLF recording, which dramatically enhanced systems. I tried this disc and it did indeed work, but the *Kodo* recording is in another league. It's like upgrading from a £300 amplifier to a £13,000 Krell. The dynamic range is increased, dynamics are greater and the system seems to gain in transparency and fine detail. Every time I play this disc my system seems to improve further.

Mark via email

"I understand that with floorstanders the bass can get overemphasized."

HFC Do you work for Sheffield Labs Mark? It sure sounds like it! We'd love to hear a CD that transforms a £300 amp into a £13,000 Krell model, because we could all save a fortune! But, we're glad you're happy with the disc and that it's helping you to appreciate your music more.

There are a few other dedicated system enhancement discs on the market. Our favourites include the USHER disc and the Isotek System Enhancer CD, both available from our Choice Bits accessories shop 0870 240 7228 or www.choicebits.co.uk. See p82 for more details.



Above: Fancy floorstanders? Try Dali's Megalines for size!

Onlineforum

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



Last night, the wife commented, "Why spend so much money to get all this hi-fi, as it sounds crap at home? It sounded great at the dealer's place." I have noticed it too. Please help. Seems like I am spending for crap.

TKYong 1

...Well for one thing your front room has different

acoustics to a demo room. Another reason can be that you have a dirty mains supply. Dirty mains can be cleaned up without too much of a problem, Russ Andrews and others have tools (some would say toys) that can help.

Wolflinn

I occasionally listen to FM radio in the evenings,

especially when the BBC have live concert broadcasts. My old tuner is not really up to scratch; do I buy a better FM tuner or go for DAB?

Aardvark

...DAB gets my vote! I understand completely about the alleged superiority of FM sound quality (I'm a big analogue

fan). However, if you only listen occasionally then is that going to be a problem for you?

Rockmonkey

...Why don't you go for a DAB/FM tuner such as the Cambridge Audio Azur 640T or Denon TU-1800DAB? That way, you get the best of both.

Miser

I visited the Munich high-end show this year over both days of the weekend and although I believe that the rooms are not convenient for this kind of event, I enjoyed it very much. It is one of rare opportunities where normal mortals can hear hi-fi systems costing a small fortune.

Dejan

Ayre

The shape of things to come....

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MUSICAL FIDELITY KW DM25 TRANSPORT | MUSICAL FIDELITY KW DM25 DAC | MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 CR PREAMP
MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 CR POWER AMP | MONITOR AUDIO RS8 LOUDSPEAKERS | £7,796

M Class

Two British grandmasters of affordable high-end audio take on the world – and win!

Did men really walk on the moon? A handful of years ago at NASA's One Tranquility Base facility in Huntsville, Alabama, I asked Fred Haise (Apollo 13) the very same question, just to see what would happen. He fixed me with a pitying stare and said: "Boy, have you gotta brain in that head?" and walked off. So the jury's out. What about Elvis: living in Herne Bay? Thought I saw him sifting through discarded burger wrappers last Thursday, but he didn't answer to his name when I yelled it out from across the road. Strange. That top secret UFO parking lot at Area 51 in southern Nevada, then. Must have looked for it a hundred times on Google Earth but, damn, it just isn't there.

You know, it might be time to give up on conspiracy theories. But maybe not just yet. There's one haunting us here at *Beautiful Systems* that needs to be flushed out from the shadows and given its time in the harsh light of day. It's cute, it's controversial and it's this: Much high end hi-fi sells for vastly inflated prices because, if it was any cheaper, people in the market for 'the best' simply wouldn't buy it.

Felt it too, didn't you? That electric tingle you get when something in you says "yeah, that's right – has to be". Doesn't last long, does it? Now you're having the "nah – couldn't be, could it? You get what you pay for" doubts. The 'too good to be true' implications have kicked in. What if you didn't have to win the lottery or re-mortgage the house to buy the Bugatti Veyron of hi-fi, the ultimate system, the Shangri La of stereo? What if 'the best' isn't necessarily the same thing as the 'most expensive'?


Before you finally dismiss the idea as fanciful – if not downright foolish – let's hear what Musical Fidelity's outspoken founder, boss and high-end critic Antony Michaelson has to say on the subject. "In

general, people believe that more expensive a product is the better it must be. The brand conscious trophy hunter says to himself 'this isn't expensive, there's no bullshit or mystique, so it can't possibly be as good as something costing five times more, can it?' Musical Fidelity is proud to offer good value. Reviewers often write that a Musical Fidelity amplifier sounds better than an amplifier costing two or three times the price. Sometimes we are asked why we don't charge more for our products. I think the question really is, why do other companies charge so much more for products that offer much less in terms of quality and components?"

Michaelson continues: "Each Musical Fidelity product is designed to combine form and function. The idea is to make hi-fi components perform beautifully for all the senses – the eyes as well as the ears." In other words, a truly *Beautiful System*. Is this man on-message or what?

So here's the deal. Taking Michaelson's argument at face value, this month's *Beautiful System* – based around Musical Fidelity electronics – has one simple mission: to deliver state-of-the-art sonics and aesthetics (that is, sound and looks that rank with the very best we've encountered at *Beautiful Systems*) for real world (well, almost) money.

THE BOLDEST CLAIM

To say it hits the ground running is a massive understatement. In Musical Fidelity's kW DM25 CD playing system – the kW DM25 transport and kW DM25 DAC – we have a front-end that, according to Michaelson, outperforms anything available from any manufacturer at any price. I'll pause for a moment to let that sink in. Right. It costs £3,998. Not cheap by any stretch, but it really isn't that hard to find disc spinners for triple or quadruple the price. 

"In Musical Fidelity's kW DM25 CD playing system, we have a front-end that, according to Michaelson, outperforms anything available."



Musical Fidelity kW DM25 transport
£1,999

More a turntable for CDs than an expensive CD player without the DAC.



Musical Fidelity kW DM25 DAC
£1,999

The digital heart of the kW SACD player, transplanted to a new vibration-free, tweaked-up home.



Musical Fidelity A5 CR preamp £1,499

MF's second-best preamp, but shares many of the flagship's attributes, including huge overload margins.



Musical Fidelity A5 CR power amp
£1,499

How much muscle do you need? We'd be surprised if it was more than the 250 watts on offer here.



Monitor Audio RS8 loudspeaker
£800 per pair

Lots of speaker for the money with a bold, dynamic and musical sound.



And we're talking plain CD players, here, not universals. Indeed, it seems that good old Red Book CD is rapidly re-establishing itself the purist music lover's digital replay standard of choice, as SACD and DVD-A struggle to acquire even enough titles to sustain interest.

At least part of the extraordinary 'world's best' claim is founded in the way the heavyweight kW components attack the business of extracting and preserving information from discs. The transport uses feedback-killing isolation techniques lifted from MF's recent M1 turntable and has what the company calls "a unique configuration of power supplies for primary information retrieval" that comprises choke regulated systems for both the transport motor and servo and another regulated supply for the digital electronics. The 'go for broke' engineering is carried through to the digital output, which is split into left and right channels, each output AES/EBU balanced and operating at 96kHz (rather than the usual 44.1 kHz). These measures have never before been implemented, says Michaelson.

The kW DM25 DAC doesn't exactly usher in a rush of modesty from Mr M. It uses a modified version of the DAC from a previous *Beautiful Systems* star, the kW SACD player, which he described, unequivocally, as the best in the world. In this implementation, the double dual

differential, low-noise, 24-bit/192kHz upsampling DAC has four full choke regulated power supplies, an astounding signal-to-noise ratio of 123dB, "almost non-existent" jitter and distortion of less than 0.001 per cent. Michaelson compares its advantage over other DACs to that of a fine film camera over an average digital job. With the digital camera, the shadows in a photo are just shadows, he contends. With the film camera you can see right into them which gives an air of reality that the digital camera can't get near. Likewise, with the kW DM25 you can hear right into every nook and cranny of the recording, whispering ambient cues and all. This was the comparison used to highlight the superiority of turntables over CD players. Times change.

BAIT AND SWITCH

On the spacious back plate, there are two inputs, one balanced and dedicated to the kW DM25 transport and the other for digital inputs with sampling frequencies up to 96kHz. And there are two ultra-low-impedance outputs, one Class A transistor and the other valve. They operate simultaneously, so you can connect both and switch between them if you want. So, your starter for 10: What games do audiophiles play at parties?

The kW components get this system off to such a supersonic start, we can

afford to throttle back a little with the Musical Fidelity A5CR pre/power amp combo. A perfectly safe move, according to Michaelson, since the only amps better than the A5s come from MF's own kW range. "Technically the equal of any at any price" is one of his more reserved descriptions. The preamp's system matching cold-metal-butch industrial chic – chunky, weighty, tactile, ergonomically sussed – is a dual-mono, double-choke-regulated design that, like the CD front end, pushes noise and distortion into the 'vanishingly low' zone. It features a quality MM/MC phono stage in addition to the six line inputs. The partnering A5 CR power amp packs a considerable wallop (250 watts a side into eight ohms, high-current delivery, ultra-low noise and distortion) and, like the preamp, has a dual-mono circuit configuration and dual-mono power supply choke regulation.

At which point, let's pause briefly to ponder. Where on earth do you go to find speakers with the power handling, dynamic range, loudness capability, bandwidth, clarity, subtlety, insight, cold-metal-butch industrial chic (and sumptuous real-wood veneer) to anchor such preternaturally gifted electronics? For eight-hundred quid. Essex, actually.

Just as there is no other CD player on the planet quite like the kW DM25, we can't think of another speaker with a





“We can’t think of another loudspeaker with a more appropriate blend of talents than Monitor Audio’s RS8 to slot into this giant-killing system. At least not anywhere close to its price.”

more appropriate blend of talents than Monitor Audio’s RS8 to slot into this giant-killing system. At least not anywhere close to its price. Firepower is the first thing that strikes you when you look at the RS8. Not only does its name sound like an Audi enthusiast’s most lurid fantasy, it also happens to be equipped with no fewer than three 150mm metal C-CAM (ceramic-coated magnesium alloy) drivers – two for the bass, one for the midrange – and a 25mm ‘Gold Dome’ C-CAM tweeter. It stands 90cm tall, just enough height to accommodate the array of drivers.

That said, the comprehensively-braced, front and rear-ported MDF enclosures aren’t excessively deep and barely any wider than the three larger drive units. The overall effect is surprisingly discreet with the cloth grilles in place... but with them removed, the tendency is to wriggle back in your seat. Monitor Audio (no shrinking violet itself when it comes to claims) says the RS8 “marries a genuine wide-bandwidth performance with knockout dynamics and killer bass from a slim and elegant enclosure”.

The term ‘hi-fi’ seems almost too clinical to describe what this system does. Its performance is way too big, uncompressed and dynamic. Too ‘un-edgy’. Too unforced. Too musical. It’s all a world away from systems – good ones at that – that set out to excel with their grasp of high-end benchmarks but forget how to make music.

HOW NOW, NO WOW?

If you crave instant ‘wow factor’, you won’t find it here. Your attention isn’t immediately drawn to any part of the frequency spectrum. Treble doesn’t have conspicuous fizz, edge or shine. The midrange has presence but not prominence. And the bass, while extended, fast, powerful and tuneful, won’t re-arrange your internal organs. But, best of all, it’s all in proportion.

Slap on some Marcus Miller. His 1977 Fender Jazz Bass sounds convincingly (rather than hyped) leading-edgy. But it isn’t in your face. What this system gives you is funk, weight and effortless control. It isn’t the power that’s remarkable (systems that sound overly

endowed in this department often aren’t) but the poise. And it doesn’t matter what you play. The system’s astonishing powers of resolution and ability to hear deep, deep into the recording can work for better or worse, but it never sounds less than real.

That means rhythmically lucid and sure-footed, too, with fabulous inner detail. The result is graceful balance. At low volumes with laid back material, the system relaxes beautifully, sounding expansive, airy and tactile. And rock played at high levels has impetus and impact rather than ear-ringing loudness. The RS8, it has to be said, has a marginal preference for being driven hard. High energy cuts – Lostprophets’ latest, *Liberation Transmission*, for example – are underpinned by that weighty, fast and ever tuneful bass.

So, the best *Beautiful System* ever? Not quite, but it’s up there, mixing it with systems many times its price. And on that score there’s no arguing with Antony Michaelson. For the money, this is truly hard to beat. **HFC**

David Vivian



Minimalist masterpieces!



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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

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

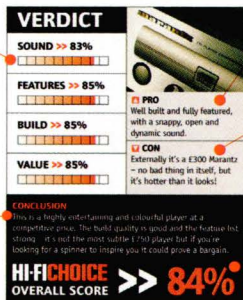
The things we like most about the product

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 overall conclusion

after a livelier tubes shone through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable sidence and ease. It even seems to be



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...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



CLASSE

STANDBY

MENU



EJECT

CDP-202

CDb-505

Distinctly Classé

Classé's new top-of-the-Delta-range CD player is not your average high-end spinner

PRODUCT Classé CDP-202

TYPE CD player (with two-channel DVD-A/V playback)

PRICE £4,750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44.5x12.1x41.9cm

• Weight: 12.3kg • Analogue outputs: balanced and single-ended (variable) • Digital outputs: coaxial S/PDIF, AES/EBU, Toslink • Touchscreen video display

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

B&W-owned Classé from Canada makes a very, er, classy product. Its latest CD players in the Delta range put many expensive alternatives to shame with their standard of finish and plethora of features. The CDP-202 is the more expensive of two new high-end, stereo-only disc spinners that are first and foremost dedicated to CD music replay, but have DVD-Video and DVD-Audio replay capabilities thrown in to boot.

It achieves this unusual combination (for a stereo player) by using a DVD-ROM drive behind its neat slot-loading mechanism and features video as well as audio outputs – albeit not as comprehensive as those you'll find on a well-stocked video-oriented player. There's no component or HDMI output, so although the CDP-202 plays video, this is not what it is primarily designed for. If you need a top-notch DVD player that also does a good job with CD, rather than the other way round, then the CDP-300 with its 1080-line progressive scan video output via HDMI is the Classé of choice.

DVD playback isn't the only feature here that's unusual for a CD-optimised stereo player – the front panel display screen is distinctly individual, too. Common throughout Classé's Delta range, this screen is touch-sensitive and may be used (along with the remote handset) to access the player's functions. It also acts as

a small monitor screen, which aside from looking extremely cool, is useful for navigating music DVDs without the need for a separate TV or video display – a very 'music first' sort of feature, when you think about it.

Like the equally new and slightly more affordable CDP-102 player, the '202 utilises technology that makes every effort to eliminate jitter "at its source" (see the Q&A sidebar on the following page). Both players also use a CPLD (complex programmable logic device), which is a block of programmable logic that interfaces signals to the different devices within the design, to re-synchronise and buffer clocks and data, and control clock distribution. After this, the signal is upsampled to 24-bit/192kHz, prior to re-clocking and being sent on to the digital converters.

As far as differences between the two new players go, we are told that the CDP-202 has a



“DVD playback isn’t the only feature that’s unusual for a CD-optimised stereo player – there’s the front panel display screen, too.”

“greater number and cost of parts” compared to the CDP-102. This means double the number of Burr-Brown PCM1792 converters, each channel operating in double balanced mode, with each half of each channel’s signal being converted differentially. This eliminates noise, but requires great precision of manufacture to ensure things don’t get out of sync in the process. It’s not hard to see why Classé is keen that this player should be listened to via its balanced outputs. That said, the single-ended circuits have their own DACs and filtering, too. This means they remain completely independent, which is useful if your amp doesn’t have balanced inputs.

On the connections front, you’ll find analogue outputs in balanced and single-ended form, digital in all three flavours and video in coaxial and S-Video varieties. Thanks to an on-board volume control, the players’ analogue output can be used directly into a power amp and there are various parameters that can be set for this feature, via the touchscreen menu system.

This control system is pretty wild. It contains a number of menus that allow the user to adjust a broad array of parameters. These include variations on digital output, lip sync for video, format preference, ‘teach IR’ (which sends a signal from the player to a third party remote) and programming for the four ‘F’ keys on the supplied remote, the latter making it easier to access the more obscure features of the player. There is even a data display that tells you the internal temperature of the player and the voltage coming in from the mains, plus much more.

In fact, some of these readings are so obscure that it’s difficult to see a rationale behind them. For example, a display for the front channel level (as you would find in a multichannel processor) is seemingly pointless in the context of a two-channel device. In fairness, though, there is a digital output for Dolby and DTS streams, so surround can be achieved if you have a processor.

We asked Classé why it had chosen a slot rather than drawer loading drive and the main reason given is that it was chosen to “complement the industrial design of the Classé Delta series”. Classé claims that there are no sonic pros or cons to this approach, but consider reliability to be higher than the drawer approach. One practical drawback with the slot drive is that once a disc is ejected the player is unable to suck it back in – you have to push it in manually, but we’d guess that ▶



Q&A

We spoke to Alan Clark, Classe's chief development officer, about the design of the CDP-202



HFC Your literature refers to "killing jitter at its source".

How do you achieve this?

AC Jitter is always present in a digital signal propagation path. For example, in a mixed signal design (digital and analogue electronics) the instant of data conversion into the analogue domain is a key point in determining the quality of the converted audio. If jitter has been allowed to accumulate in the digital domain to this point, conversion will be compromised, resulting in an audible reduction of fidelity. Killing jitter at its source is a simple way of saying that at each stage of the circuit, measures are taken to ensure that jitter is controlled.

Given its potential as a preamp, why doesn't the CDP-202 include a digital input?

We find so few two-channel digital sources being used that we didn't feel it would have justified the development effort to do it properly. Most people today use surround processors in the role formerly filled by outboard digital converters. A digital input that cannot also handle multichannel signals (even if they are to be downmixed for two-channel playback) is of limited value. In this context, you can see that we would have felt the need to do more than simply add an S/PDIF digital receiver and connector to the chassis.

Why doesn't it have a high-quality video output such as component or HDMI/DVI?

We now have four players in the Delta range: two focus on two-channel audio (CDP-202 and CDP-102), the other two (CDP-300 and CDT-300) are more home cinema focussed. Our CDP-300 and CDT-300 support component video output and HDMI up to and including 1080p. In other words, if you want component and HDMI, you will also want deinterlacing and scaling. With the CDP-102 and 202, the money is spent on audio. For about \$10 in parts, it was a simple matter to offer S-Video and composite outputs, as the unit is capable of decoding video. This feature can be handy for DVD-Audio, if the unit's front panel isn't close by. It also lets the user watch an occasional DVD movie if there is a TV as part of the audio system.

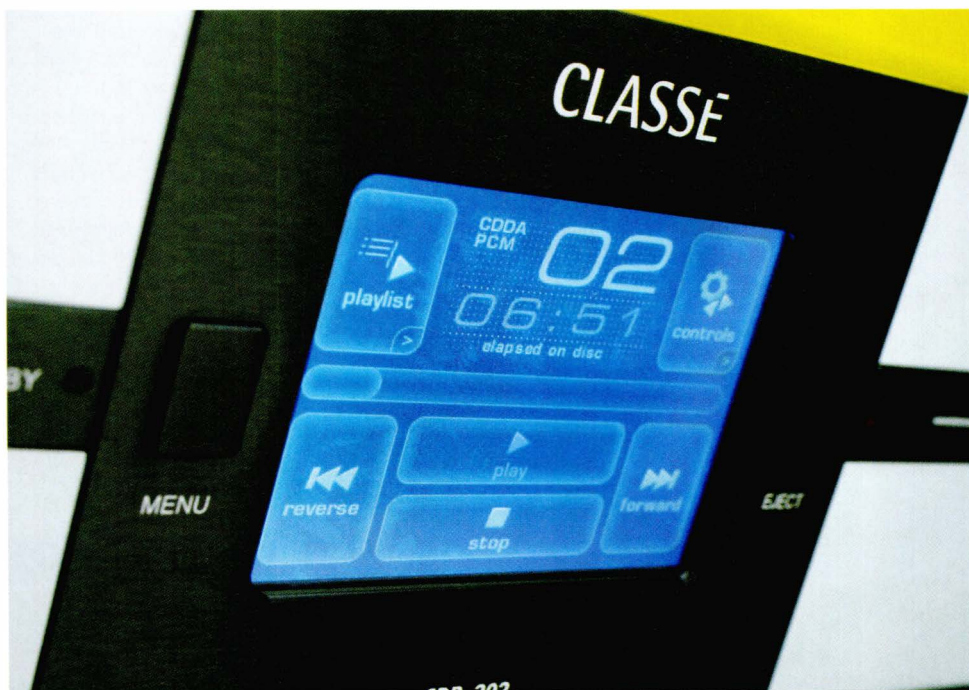


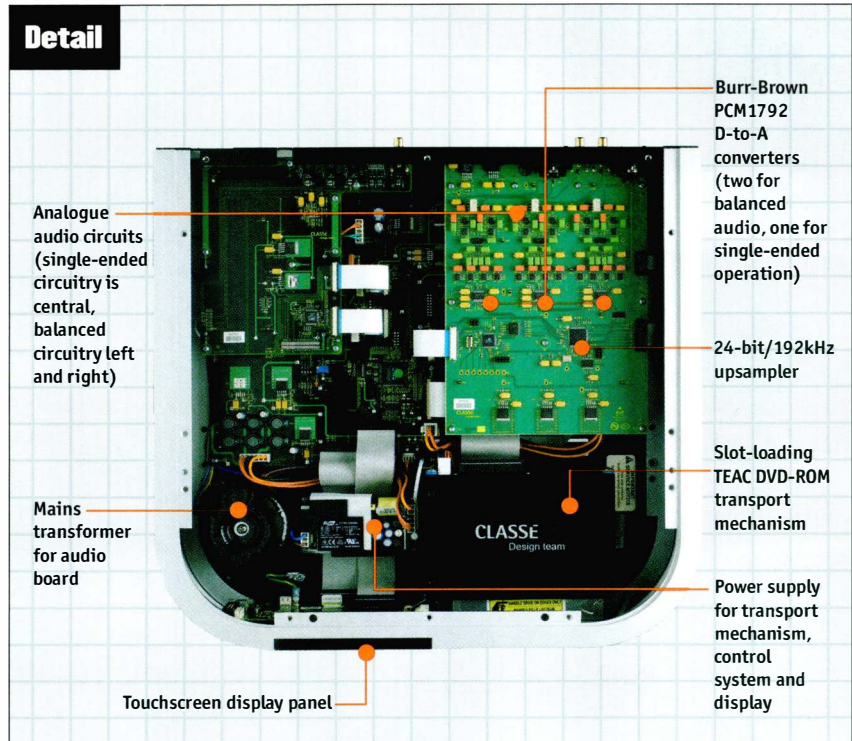
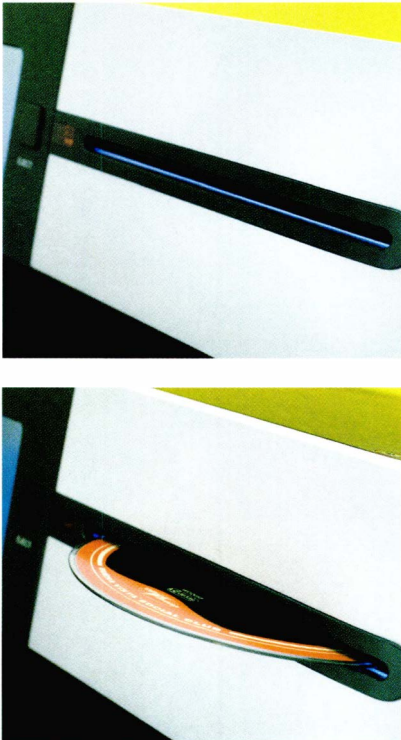
non-reviewers won't be too concerned about this. The remote handset is a chunky tube of aluminium with keys that illuminate every time you use one, and the usual array of functions you'd find on a DVD remote – plus volume, mute and the aforementioned F keys.

SOUND QUALITY

It took a while, a week or so, for this player to come on song and deliver a sound that was commensurate with its price tag. But, once it got there, we had a grand time revelling in fine detail and textures that are rarely encountered with CD.

Initial impressions are of a smooth and luxurious sound that reflects the build quality, but doesn't suggest tremendous transparency. Indeed, early comparisons with our Townshend TA 565 CD reference player made the newcomer seem rather lacking in definition. Some of this, it turned out, was due to limitations in the transparency of the amplification and not a function of the player itself. Once that had been sorted, the Classe began to come into its own, revealing a degree of finesse and smoothness that delivers music in a relaxed and natural fashion, without seeming to add any emphasis of its own.





The player is unusual in that it doesn't have any tendency to try and etch out the image or time signature of the music, but rather fills in more of the 'steps' in the signal and provides a more complete and refined soundscape. There are those who will prefer a more emphatic and distinctly defined soundstage, but in a high-resolution system, the extra detail provided by the Classé makes a strong case for its more subtle approach. To draw an artistic analogy, a line drawing produces a more strongly defined image than a painting of the same subject, because the latter doesn't have a distinct line between objects, but a change in colour and shade. This is what the Classé makes other players sound like; as if they are telling you where the line is, but failing to fill in the fine detail of the shading.

The CDP-202 does a remarkable job of tracking level. It clearly brings out differences between tracks that other players make less of. This is probably due to the noise reducing abilities of the balanced output that was used for most of our listening. It can also be played louder than average without discomfort, which is a sure sign of very low distortion. We found ourselves winding up the wick on Fink's 'alt.folk' tunes rather further than is the norm, which is a lot of fun. It also works at the other end of the scale too, tracking the level of different notes and voices within the music to provide a more complete picture of the ebb and flow of the entire piece.

Moving over to DVD-Audio replay did nothing to undermine the confidence this player inspires, an orchestral piece (Beethoven *Symphony No.6*, Barenboim, Berlin Staatskapelle) providing the impetus for the player to revel in the depth and space of the

“In a high-resolution system, the extra detail provided by the Classé CDP-202 makes a strong case for its more subtle approach.”

recording. This made it easy to hear where each section of the orchestra was sitting in both lateral and stage depth terms. This format really brings out the best in the Classé, widening the divide between it and our reference considerably. Its degree of refinement goes significantly beyond the resolve that's available from a CD, something that is probably the case with other high-end players, but which is emphasised here by the relative quality of a higher resolution format. It clearly extends further than usual at high frequencies and has a naturalness through the midband that is totally 'un-digital' in its finesse and lack of even a hint of grain.

So, is the CDP-202 really a world beater? Well, it's certainly an exceptional beast in many respects and among the very best audio players we've heard in the £5,000 ballpark. There's plenty of high-quality competition at this level, of course, and in the end it is largely a matter of sonic preference. Those who like a more direct, clear-cut sort of sound may lean more towards the likes of Naim, for example. But if smooth refinement, power and poise sounds like your bag, the chances are you'll be hugely impressed by this Classé.

The last thing we'd want to suggest is that the CDP-202 glosses over fine detail in the quest for a smooth result. There are plenty of players that do just that, but not the Classé. Present it with a hard-sounding disc and it

sounds just that – hard. But give it a good quality recording and it will astonish you with its natural sense of musical texture, light and shade. It delivers CDs with the skill of an accomplished artist, and offers the bonus of excellent two-channel DVD-Audio/Video replay, too. For the depth of its sonic resolve, this player is almost in a Classé of its own. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 94% [Progress bar]	PRO High-resolution CD player with exceptional smooth and refined sound, plus the added bonus of DVD-Audio/Video replay. Great roster of features via touchscreen control.
FEATURES >>> 92% [Progress bar]	CON Some may find the sound a little too relaxed. Facilities on the video side are limited – but this player is all about two-channel audio.
BUILD >>> 94% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >>> 85% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION The CDP-202 is principally a high-end CD player, with DVD-Audio and Video playback included as a bonus. It's beautifully built and bristling with unusual features, plus a sound that is refined and resolute. If sophistication is your bag, it's hard to beat.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 90%	

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



MA strikes gold

Refinement and clarity from a beautifully made speaker that doesn't cost an arm and leg

PRODUCT Monitor Audio Gold Signature 10

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £800 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20.6x36x27mm

• Weight: 11 kg (each) • Gold anodised 25mm alloy dome tweeter • 150mm alloy cone bass/mid driver

Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance: 8 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01268 740580 🌐 www.goldsignature.co.uk

The new Gold Signature range from Monitor Audio replaces the Gold Reference line-up, and you'll not be surprised to hear that the maker claims improvements in every area. In most cases, happily, there is no increase in price. In fact, one model (not the GS10 reviewed here), has actually been *reduced* in price while

construction quality and materials appear to have been improved (this is presumably the benefit of off-shore manufacturing). The GS10 is the smallest stereo model in the new range, if we ignore the dedicated home cinema centre and surround effects speakers.

The GS10 pushes all the right buttons straight from the box. First it's a sensible size,



small enough to fit comfortably on pedestal stands, but big enough to offer the promise of respectable bass extension. Second, finish is clearly a little special. It's wood veneered on all surfaces, but there is no danger that this veneer could be mistaken for vinyl. The GS10 is enhanced further by the radiusing of all the edges and corners, back as well as front.

Third and last is the impressive, though mostly unobtrusive detailing, which extends from the diecast surrounds around the drivers, to the design of the terminal block, the unique rifling of the internal wall of the reflex port, and even the discrete nameplate on the back edge of the top panel. The only criticism, and in fairness almost all manufacturers fall into this trap, concerns the stamped metal plate links that short the bi-wire terminals for mono-wire systems. If this is how you will use the speakers, our advice would be to ditch them in favour of better quality cable links – the difference is surprisingly audible.

Technically, the GS10 hardly sets out to break the mould. It is a rear-vented two-way, based on a 150mm bass/mid unit and a 25mm tweeter, using a metal cone and dome respectively as is Monitor Audio's wont. So far, so so, but a lot of detailed design work has gone into the drivers, both of which are new and not refugees from the old GR range. The bass/mid chassis, and the external clamp that holds it in place on the baffle, for example, are made from cast aluminium and zinc respectively, the different materials chosen to provide mutual damping. The cone has a revised profile and is formed with hundreds of

“There may be compromises, but on the whole, speakers either sing – or they don't. And this one most definitely sings...”

concentric dimples, which are said to reduce mass (though it's not clear how), increase stiffness and eliminate the bending associated with conventional metal cone designs (again, how?). The cone was refined using finite area analysis, and legitimised like almost every aspect of the design by its own acronym – in this case RST2, for Rigid Surface Technology 2.

The new gold anodised C-CAM ceramic coated aluminium/magnesium alloy tweeter dome drives frequency coverage to beyond 40kHz, though reading between the lines, the first HF resonance is probably around 25kHz. The rifling of the HIVE reflex port is claimed to aid airflow and reduce turbulence, and according to Monitor Audio, the bottom line is a more powerful bass coupled with superior transient response. We don't doubt these things are so, but it must have been difficult to prove.

The speaker's frequency response is claimed to be 40Hz-43kHz, though this is rendered almost meaningless by the lack of limits. Sensitivity is 88dB/watt at one metre, which is about right for an eight-ohm speaker this size, and nominal power handling is around 100 watts. The two drive units meet at 2.7kHz, which is unexceptional, but implies a tweeter with a low resonant frequency and one that should have respectable power handling.

SOUND QUALITY

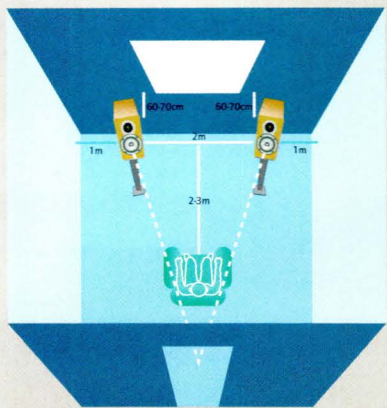
Loudspeakers are a mass of compromises. There is no way that everything can come together perfectly in one design, if only because optimising one aspect of performance is almost invariably at the expense of some other parameter. It's just the way speakers are. But you develop a nose for the good ones. There may be compromises, but on the whole, speakers either sing – or they don't.

This one most definitely sings. It is indeed small enough for a well nuanced playback of, for example, female voice and small-scale acoustic material. But orchestral-scale material, such as a newly arrived *Mahler 2* from Boulez, was reproduced with effortless scale and a solid sense of authority from a system that also included an SACD-compatible disc player from T+A, plus the new MA6300 solid state integrated amp from McIntosh that will be the subject of a full HFC test soon.

And it wasn't just these two classes of music that were served so well by the GS10. It delivered a muscular, even exciting, room-filling ride with Marc Cohn, and on a completely different tack we were particularly impressed by *Signals From Heaven* from *Quotation Of Dream* (Takemitsu/London Sinfonietta/Oliver Knussen on Decca). This ▶

[Review] Monitor Audio Gold Signature 10 loudspeaker

SET-UP



POSITIONING

The Monitor Audio GS10 is generally best sited about 60-70cm away from the rear wall. Nine times out of ten it responded better with no foam plugs to damp the bass, though some vocal material did benefit from the extra upper bass/lower mid control, and the greater perceived separation between instruments and voices that the foam allowed. Used without the plugs in a medium-size room, you should achieve a near optimum blend of grace and detail – the overall frequency response is subjectively very close to neutral – and a soundstage with impressive depth differentiation which extends appreciably beyond the left and right speaker baseline laterally. Musical dynamics sound naturally unforced, but have a real sense of power and range.

SYSTEM MATCHING

The GS10 was used with a number of amps, including the £250, 50-watt Denon PMA-700AE (see review, p54), and the combination sounded entirely at ease, though the overall balance was a little weak, especially at high volume. There was not the power headroom available from more expensive amps, and the balance seemed dry and undernourished. Other amps used for this test were much more powerful, and include the Primare Pre 30 and A32 power amp combination, though much of the time was spent using the McIntosh MA6300 solid-state integrated amplifier (as described in the body of the review).

The speakers were used on heavy 50cm stands, with the tweeters at about ear level, and with the speakers moderately toed in so that the inside panels of the two enclosures could just be glimpsed by leaning forward. They worked beautifully with Nordost Valhalla cables, but this represents an absurd price mismatch that still offers plenty of fine detail resolution and a suggestion of warmth.



Detail

Gold anodised tweeter is covered in a robust mesh to help prevent accidents

Metal surround acts as a clamp to hold driver rigidly in place

150mm bass/mid driver. Note concentric rings of dimples and fixed pole piece/diffuser

High-quality vertically and radially braced enclosure, real wood veneer

Low diffraction surround also helps to clamp tweeter in position

20.6cm

36cm

Reflex port with rifling on internal surface to help control air flow. A reticulated foam insert can damp port if required

Equipped for bi-wiring. Stamped metal links should be replaced or removed to improve sound quality

Radiused edges and corners give a smooth finish and reduce diffraction

recording has a searing brass section that can really hurt, especially through less than well designed metal dome tweeters and crossover networks. In this case, however, the sound was ripe and full, but with no noticeable loss of detail or bite – a very impressive performance for a loudspeaker at this price.

It is important to take considerable care over set-up, and we procrastinated for some time over positioning and whether to use the supplied foam port plugs. But there isn't necessarily a single optimum to aim for here, it all depends on what kind of music you listen to.

Don't expect the speaker to sound its best straight from the box, either – by some accounts, it needs a full 500 hours before it's fully on song. By the end of our test period we'd given our review pair a very thorough work-out, and if anything the sound was still improving when the time came for their return.

There is nothing serious lacking dynamically, but the speaker was occasionally a little too soft and relaxed when perhaps it ought to

have been spitting blood, and this tended to encourage slightly higher volume replay levels than usual. Coloration levels were low, with just a hint of a broad but very shallow suckout across the midband and the lower reaches of the treble. The power handling capacity is far from prodigious, but there is more than enough muscle to cope without significant compression effects even at uncomfortably high volume levels in a medium size room.

The new GS range includes models to complete a full multichannel system, though we have not auditioned them yet. But the GS10's appeal as a general-purpose, high-performance loudspeaker is obvious. Essentially it is a vice-free, expressive and refined speaker with enough low frequency bandwidth for most types of music, more than enough subtlety and transparency to suit almost any taste, and the resolving ability required to extract the most from high-quality amplifiers and source components. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



PRO

Attractive, high-resolution standmount speaker suits most good systems and small-to-medium-size rooms.

EASE OF DRIVE >> 84%



CON

It's a speaker that needs particular care over set-up and is best with bi-wire cables, or alternatively using replacement shorting leads. Performance is slightly soft centred under duress.

BUILD >> 93%



VALUE >> 86%



CONCLUSION

One of the best-balanced Monitor Audio designs to date, the GS10 provides stable imaging, a strong sense of soundstage width and depth, and good image focus, in the context of an expressive though essentially neutral tonality.

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

your current
system isn't
terminal...

it just needs
some ayre
to breathe

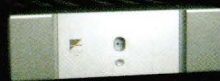


MX-R

coming soon



D-1xe DVD CD Player



V-6xe Multichannel Amp



AX-7e Integrated Amp



K-1xe Preamp



K-5xe Preamp



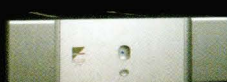
CX-7e CD Player



DX-7e DVD Player



V-1xe Power Amp



V-5xe Power Amp

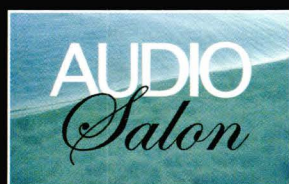


C-5xe Universal Player



P-5xe Phono Preamp

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*Power Amplifiers
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0845 4000 400

info@audiosalon.co.uk www.audiosalon.co.uk www.ayre.com



Light as Ayre

We gave Ayre's CX-7e CD player a glowing review... so is the matching amp just as nimble?

PRODUCT Ayre AX-7e

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £1,995

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.8x12x35cm

• Weight: 12kg • Inputs: Two single-ended (RCA-phono), two balanced (XLR) • Rated power: 60 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.ayre.com

Back in HFC 281, we had a look and listen to the Ayre CX-7e CD player. This little beauty is its partnering amplifier: a relatively low-powered design with some distinctly high-end design features.

The AX-7e is an expensive 60-watt integrated amplifier by UK standards, but it has design features that you won't find in less costly alternatives and that are scarce even in dearer ones. Most significantly, it is totally balanced in operation and has zero feedback. The former is a very effective way of keeping noise out of the signal, while the latter is a tried and tested means of avoiding timing problems, albeit not one that all amp designers agree upon.

Although the nature of the level display and a touch-sensitive bar (instead of a knob) to control volume reveal that this is a

microprocessor-driven design, this part of the amplifier switches off when it's not being used, which helps keep the signal clean. To go with the balanced topology is a pair of balanced inputs indicated by left/right symmetrical icons – a star and a planet – whereas the single-ended inputs use asymmetric icons. That aside, there is no easy way of relating your CD player to a specific icon, although you could buy a Moon CD player and plug it into the crescent moon input... but perhaps that's going a bit too far!

The AX-7e has relatively low power output for a solid-state integrated at this price. This suggests that the money has been spent on quality rather than quantity, something that's born out when you notice that the output doubles when the load drops from eight to four ohms. There may only be 60 watts per channel on offer, but they are obviously being produced by a high-quality power supply.

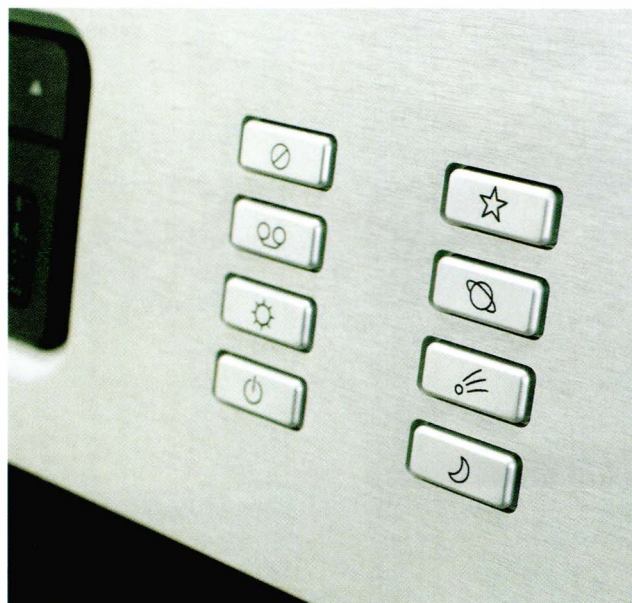
The 'e' suffix in the amp's name stands for Evolution, which in the AX-7e's case means what Ayre's Charles Hansen calls "a combination of proprietary technologies used on the AC side of the power supply". What this actually consists of is additional filtering to keep out radio frequency interference (RFI) and

increased current delivery and filtering for rectifier switching noise. According to Ayre, this is something that remains an issue even when the quietest rectifiers are used.

The voltage gain stage of the power supply also has two stages of regulation that utilize a FET input and a bi-polar output. This reduces output impedance and thus allows the amp greater control over the loudspeaker. It likewise increases input impedance, which allows Ayre to use a high-quality polypropylene voltage reference capacitor. This is said to increase the coherency of the sound.

The AX-7e is £200 less expensive than its CD playing partner, yet comes in the same smart casework. In fact, the faceplate looks exactly the same, but where the disc drawer used to be, there's a bar with arrows at either end – this, you may have guessed, is the volume control. In our opinion, you can't beat a good ol' rotary knob for this job, but the touch-sensitive bar does give aesthetic continuity and with most volume adjustments carried out via the remote, it's no biggie.

The remote is a basic plastic affair (a hewn from solid aluminium version is available at extra cost) with controls for both amp and CD player. It has up and down switches for volume



“It is more relaxed than beefier solid-state amp designs and is able to ‘breathe’ with the micro-dynamics of the music with ease.”

and input above one another, which can mean that the casual user often ends up changing input when they’re attempting to increase volume – not ideal, but hardly disastrous.

SOUND QUALITY

Encouraged by the distributor to try some more challenging speakers than one might normally partner with a 60-watt amplifier, we stuck them on the end of our resident B&W 802Ds. This is a high-end speaker that’s not a particularly tough load (90dB/W/m sensitivity and an impedance that doesn’t drop below 3.5 ohms), but is extremely revealing and requires a firm hand if the bass is to stay sharp. This proved a task that the Ayre was more than happy to deal with, taking the opportunity to show off impressive finesse and a keen sense of timing in the process. It’s a combination that makes the most of rhythmically subtle material as well as good-quality source components. It was not difficult, for instance, to differentiate between the Classé CDP-202 and Townshend TA 565 disc players, even though both are highly capable designs. In this context, the fine detail of the former ultimately outshone the slightly more etched style of the latter, in part because the Ayre seems to have broadly the same sort of character as the Classé, albeit with a greater emphasis on timing qualities.

Moving over to a pair of more appropriately priced Living Voice OBX-Rs, the increase in sensitivity – if not a significantly

easier load – took a bit of adjusting to, but resulted in an equally engaging musical result. The amp took the opportunity to show off its ability to render the acoustic environment in which a live recording was made, and bring out the the bass of something less live.

Out of interest, we used this speaker to compare the Ayre with the similarly-priced Sugden A21SE amp, a process that made the British amp sound positively lush and expansive, if a touch on the colourful side. The AX-7e has a rather more even handed and precise style that scores well on imaging, while giving something away in terms of fun factor.

When pushed hard, there is a degree of thinness to the sound that is not otherwise apparent – almost a degree of compression, in fact. The Ayre is not as well suited as the Sugden for this type of listening. But, with a neutrally balanced speaker, the gap closes.

There is a lot to enjoy in the Ayre’s sound. It is more relaxed than beefier solid-state amp designs and is able to ‘breathe’ with the micro-dynamics of the music with ease. It is also appealingly open in its presentation but where it really scores is in the elusive timing department. All manner of music – from Beethoven *Sonatas* to Gabor Szabo’s sitar funk – has an ebb and flow that is right on the money. This comes down to a high level of transparency and doesn’t seem to rely on a

forward-leaning balance, at least up until it runs out of steam.



The AX-7e is an unusual and entertaining amplifier. It eschews variable input gain and input naming and even the modern enthusiasm for high power, seeking in its place to deliver a well-balanced, revealing and rhythmically tight sound. To give of its best it needs that uncommon thing: a neutral and relatively high-efficiency loudspeaker. In many ways, it is better matched to the big B&W we tried than the more efficient Living Voice. This makes us suspect that as long as the speaker’s impedance is not too challenging, the Ayre is happy driving some pretty revealing designs.

There are many advantages to the integrated approach, but the fact that the casework is usually the most expensive bit of an amplifier is the greatest. Just one reason why you will have difficulty finding a pre/power combo that delivers the finesse on offer here at anywhere near the price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



FEATURES >> 81%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 83%



PRO

Very nice casework, a great sense of timing and considerable finesse contribute to a revealing and engaging sound. Processor pass-through a bonus.

CON

Not as powerful as some of the competition – a drawback if you like to play loud; needs care in speaker choices because of this.

CONCLUSION

With sensible speaker matching, this Ayre gives a taste of high-end sound at a reasonable price. It lacks the balls of less revealing designs, but has degree of refinement and precision in the timing department that draws you into the music.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



McIntosh
MCD201 SACD/CD PLAYER



Old name, new disc

The latest in stereo CD/SACD replay from one of the most respected names in the business

PRODUCT McIntosh MCD201

TYPE CD/SACD player

PRICE £3,400

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44.5x15.3x42cm

• Weight: 10.4kg • Audio outputs: 2x single-ended (RCA-phono) and 2x balanced (XLR) – fixed and variable output • Digital outputs: optical and electrical (coaxial) • System data link for McIntosh preamps, etc.

CONTACT ☎ 01977 798844 🌐 www.mcintoshlabs.com

Following some years in the shadow of other high-end brands, McIntosh is enjoying more proactive distribution in this country and a new found acceptance and status, just as it is doing in its native USA. It is a brand which has a very distinctive cachet, based on unusually solid engineering, painstaking technical briefs and an instantly recognisable aesthetic scheme. Key to the latter is a bold, retro-style control system, the highlight of which is a very clear fibre optic backlit glass front panel. McIntosh components could not be mistaken for any other brand

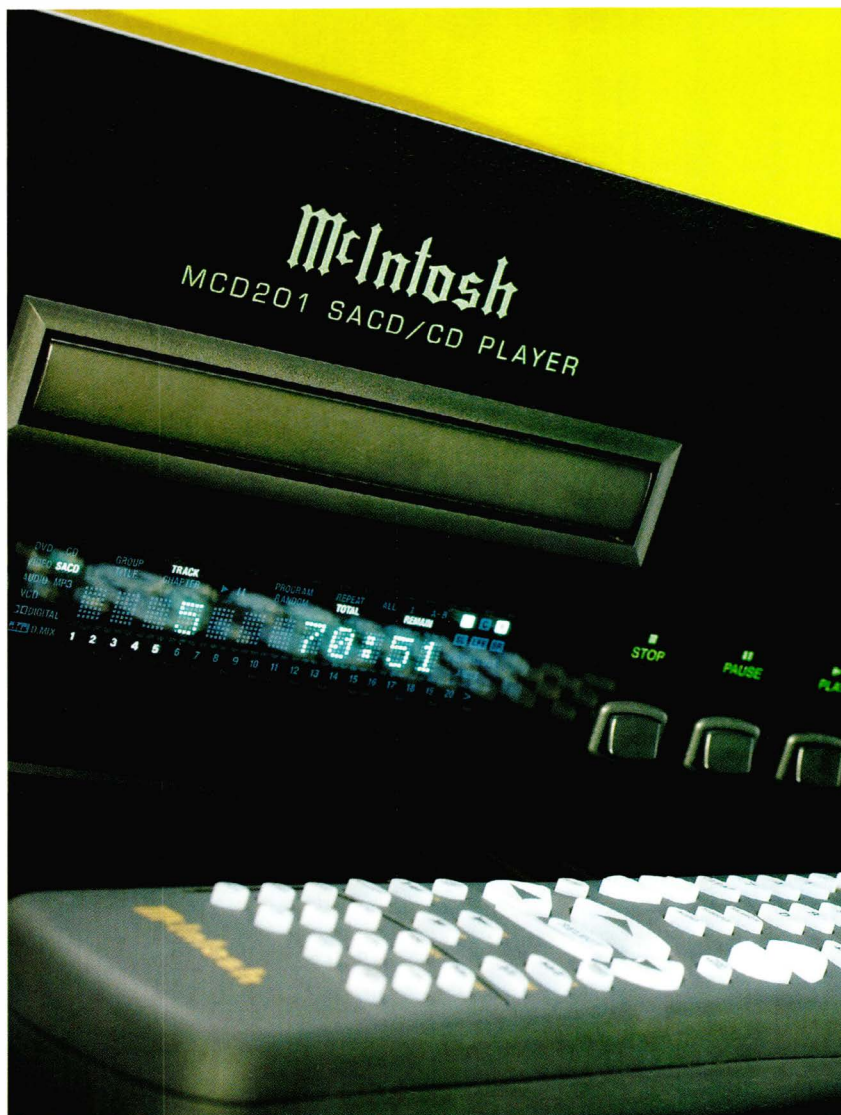
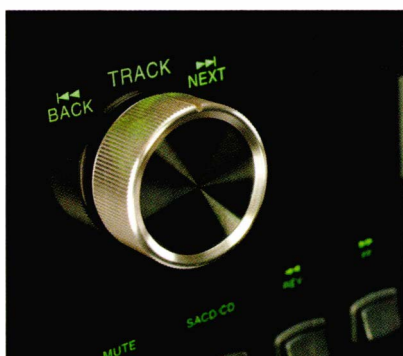
even at the briefest exposure, and where in the past this has worked against them, it now appears to be working in the products' favour.

The MCD201 is the new 'mainstream' McIntosh disc spinner. It's an SACD/CD player which, like many such introductions we have followed in the last year or so, is designed exclusively for stereo playback. The player also has another very welcome trick up its sleeve in the form of a 214-step, fine-resolution volume control built into an output stage with enough headroom to be viable as a one-source preamplifier. In fact, the MCD201 has two sets of outputs, at fixed and variable level, in both cases with phono (single-ended) and balanced (XLR) output options. As we quickly discovered, the output stage is well endowed for driving high-quality power amplifiers without intervention from a separate preamplifier, and for much of the test period, this is now it was used – with Nordost Valhalla cabling.

Internal hardware includes a multi-bit/DSD hybrid 24/192 PCM/DSD DAC – the CS4398 from Cirrus Logic. Unusually (but in the

manner of Meridian's players), the digital servo-controlled mechanism reads CD data off disc at 4x, and SACD data at 2x nominal speed into a buffer memory, which means lost or corrupted data can be reread from disc if needed, giving a more robust read performance. There have been complaints on some websites that the twin laser mechanism is mechanically noisy, but our sample turned out to be extremely quiet. We understand from the importer that units fresh from the box can be noisy, but that this settles down after the unit has been thoroughly run in. The test player has had several hundred hours use under its belt, and the advice is to run a disc in auto-repeat mode for a week or two when the player is new. An important feature of all McIntosh components is the integrity of the power supplies, and sure enough this is a major feature of this player, too.

The instructions supplied with the McIntosh include a written warning against using the CD side of DualDiscs (dual-sided CD/DVD hybrid discs), which as the instructions wryly note, "do



“The player is notable for its solid, expressive bass and slightly restrained treble, which frame a beautifully articulated midband.”

not meet the Compact Disc Digital Audio specifications found in the industry 'Red Book'. Sure enough, sample DualDiscs presented to the player failed to fulfil their mission.

The player comes with range of rear-panel sockets that allow linked operation in a multiroom or custom install McIntosh system, and a well-designed remote control. Highlights of the unusually tactile and well-signposted front panel include the rotary volume control, the spring-loaded track-skip control and a clear display that includes an SACD Text readout.

SOUND QUALITY

At HFC, we're now beginning to become accustomed to the 'McIntosh sound', which tends to be quite distinctive from other high-end brands. This was so with the MA2275 amplifier (reviewed a year ago in

HFC 271), and some of the same qualities are also apparent here. The MCD201 is a supremely 'together-sounding' player, one which has a certain boldness and dynamic quality, with large scale, well-placed stereo imagery across all disc types. The *quid quo pro*, if you can call it that, is that compared to other similar players, the McIntosh doesn't have quite the same exquisite refinement and fineness of detail when playing SACDs rather than CD.

Addressing the latter first, as a CD player, the MCD201 is first class, and to these ears completely convincing. It has a bold musculature, which reflects musically as a strength and conviction that underpins the performance and makes dynamics sing out. Orchestral music has a ripeness and retains its complexity, which helps to make the most of source material that is inherently complex.

Simpler acoustic material – chamber, or accompanied voice – is open and expressive, with a strong sense of soundstage presence but no excessive forwardness. The MCD201 also has the ability to civilise difficult material without reducing or diminishing it, and the sense of musical structure is one point that remains consistent across a wide range of music types.

Compared to some high-end CD players, the McIntosh gives an easier, more relaxed and more enveloping ride than many rivals. With music imposing demands on the playback system as diverse as Sarah McLachlan's sentimental *Angel* and Christian McBride's 'low down, gritty, nasty and funky' *Night Train*, or the pungently brassy yet atmospheric Janáček's *Sinfonietta* from José Serebrier and the Czech State Philharmonic on the consistently excellent Reference Recordings label, the player's openness and dynamic ability shine through extraordinarily well. In all these cases and elsewhere, the McIntosh is notable for its solid, expressive bass and a characteristically slightly restrained treble (part of the McIntosh voicing), which frame a beautifully articulated and ▶

Q&A

We spoke to Andy Davison, director of 'A' Audiosolutions (McIntosh's UK importer) about the issues and the technology involved in the development of the MCD201



HFC What was the impetus behind bringing this player to market?

AD For quite some time there has been a five-disc CD player (MCD205), a universal player (MVP861) and a high-end two-box player (MCD1000/MDA1000) but no single-disc CD player. McIntosh engineers found that noise issues with the SACD format meant that performance on most players was worse than Red Book CD. They did not wish to join the party with another 'also ran' product, and spent a lot of time getting the technology right.

Why did McIntosh include SACD?

McIntosh had gained much experience in addressing SACD's issues with the MVP861 universal disc player, so it would seem logical for the new player to be an SACD player.

What are the major technical highlights?

The MCD 201 has a special CD drive mechanism that has dual lasers (one for each format) and this also spins the disc at up to four times the normal speed, giving the laser a chance to re-access reading errors and making less than perfect discs playable. The player also incorporates a precision active preamplifier and volume control, which incorporates the 214-point stepped attenuator seen in McIntosh's preamplifiers. The unit is capable of driving a power amplifier, with the output available balanced and unbalanced. The all-important power supply has an R-core transformer and many separate stages of regulation.

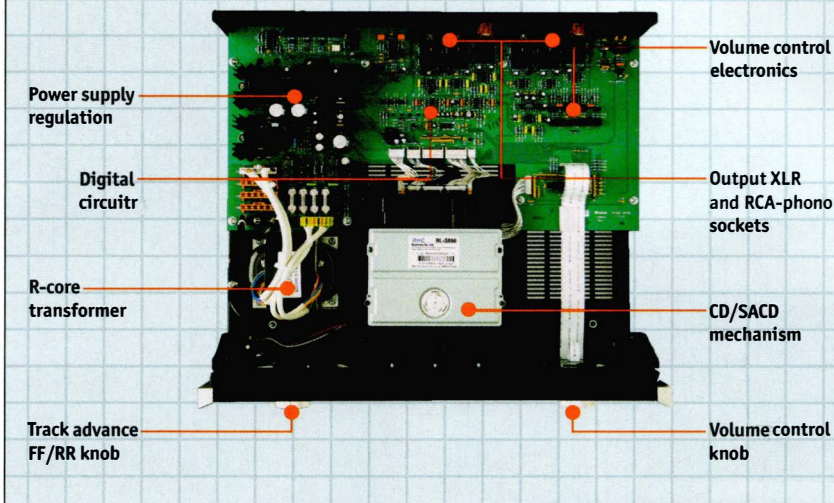
How does McIntosh see the market developing for ambitious players of the MCD201's ilk?

It is generally accepted that SACD has not been taken up in the way that was expected. However, it is not like buying a Betamax video player when VHS was becoming the more popular format. Let's just say that CD was supposed to replace the vinyl LP and in the consumer mass market it pretty much did, but for many dedicated specialists it simply lacked sufficient appeal.

What of the future for component hi-fi?

This lies in our own hands – we all need to get better at making the unaware aware of what it can offer. If every car buyer's needs were just A-to-B transport then we would all drive a Reliant Robin.

Detail



layered midband. The only mild surprise, perhaps, is that the last disc named is an HDCD recording, and the McIntosh MCDV201 doesn't support HDCD decoding, which means that there is clearly more to give.

As an SACD player, the McIntosh does well, but ultimately it doesn't push the cause as far forward of its baseline CD performance as some other competing players, such as the Ayre C-5xe (a universal that costs about £1,000 more) or the Denon DCD-SA1 (likewise). It is not always easy to hear where SACD offers much more than CD, though there is always a hint of extra resolution and more refined musical transitions between notes, instruments and voices.

Think of the MCD201 as an excellent CD player that happens to also play SACDs, rather than being a great SACD player that happens to play CDs. But also, don't forget the MCD201 doubles up as a rather fine, but very simple preamplifier thanks to its built-in volume control. This sounds more like a preamplifier proper than some players with internal volume controls. There is plenty of drive available, both from the single-ended and the balanced outputs, and it is only a pity that there are no rear panel inputs that would have freed many potential purchasers from adding a dedicated preamplifier to their systems. There was never any doubt that the balanced option was the better choice with the power amplifiers available for this test, which included a Classé

CA-5200 used in stereo trim, and a Primare A32, and that bypassing the preamplifiers paid a useful if subtle musical dividend.

This is a superb player, not quite in the same league as the very best, but at a much more user-friendly price than most of them. Think of it as a great CD player with a more than routinely good SACD player riding piggyback, which will help you make productive use of the now quite impressive range of SACD material available to those who know here to look. It is also an excellent entry point to the seductive world of McIntosh sound, and as a bonus it is likely to retain its long-term value better than almost any of the competition. Even through its leanest moments, McIntosh has always had almost unmatched cachet as a high-end hi-fi brand, and this model will only enhance that legendary reputation. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 90% >> SUB RATINGS CD 89% SACD 90%	PRO Expressive CD performer that reaches a little further still with SACD, and which can be used directly into a power amplifier with no need for a preamp as intermediary.
FEATURES >> 83% 	CON This player is more about the enjoyment about music, well reproduced, than the highest resolving power. Pity no extra inputs are fitted.
BUILD >> 93% 	
VALUE >> 86% 	

CONCLUSION
 This player has a sound you can luxuriate in, and seems expressly designed to produce a winning musical performance, rather than just making an impressive noise. It's realistically priced too, and should outlast most of the opposition.

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

Heritage

1972 saw the introduction of Mark Levinson's JC-1 preamplifier, a concrete, functional symbol of Mark Levinson's approach to audio reproduction. It evidenced a signature blending of vision and science. It was the beginning of a series of groundbreaking audio components that helped to establish the high end as we know it today.

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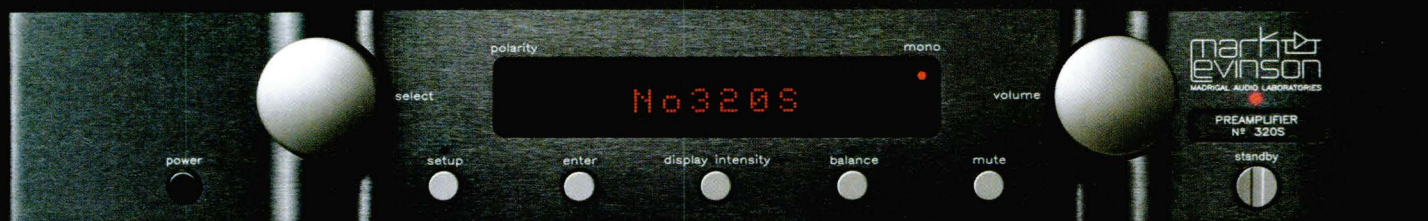
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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



P R I M A R E

VOL: 18

The single life

Primare's single-box system is sexy, convenient and fun. Here's the first review of the final-spec version...

PRODUCT Primare CDI10

TYPE One-box CD player/tuner/amplifier

PRICE £1,200

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 48x11x38.5cm

• Weight: 8kg • CD Text • DAB/FM • Rated power: 75 watts per channel • 3x line inputs • Front-mounted 'iPod' input • 2x digital outputs • Headphone output

CONTACT ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.net

Remember music centres? Primare would probably rather you didn't – they were mostly pretty nasty. But the Swedish style-meister has produced here what can honestly be described as a music centre for the 21st Century, and by that we mean in terms of looks, features and (one hopes!) performance.

Primare is by no means the first 'specialist' hi-fi manufacturer to develop such a product in recent times – there's Arcam's Solo, Audio Analogue's Enigma and, of course, Linn's long-running Classik, not to mention Naim's DVD-playing N-Vi. The CDI10 is simply the latest in a growing range – clearly, the serious all-in-one-box system is fast becoming a force to reckon with. Not to beat about the bush, it's

an attractively obvious plot, the key to which is the front panel of this very unit. There's nothing to give away the fact that this is more than just a CD player. On the top panel are a mere six buttons. The remote control looks like any other system remote. Even the overall dimensions and weight of the CDI10 are unremarkable for a mid-range CD player.

But the rear panel is another story – three sets of line-level inputs, an F-type aerial socket and speaker terminals, plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. What we have here, in fact, is a well-featured component comprising CD player, DAB and FM tuner, line-level integrated amp and analogue-to-digital converter. Two major factors make this possible, with a proper hi-fi specification at every stage.

First, electronic miniaturisation. Surface-mounted components throughout mean that the necessary complexities can be fitted within one case. And second, a switching-type ('Class D') power amp. Primare is keen to emphasise that this is not a digital amp but it's certainly not analogue in the conventional sense either. Instead, one pair of implausibly small transistors per channel switch current on and off in such a

way that the averaged output in the audio band forms a high-fidelity replica of the input.

As a result, each power amplifying channel resides entirely on a circuit board measuring 70x85mm, which nevertheless puts out some 75 watts of low-distortion power. We ran some tests on this and the claims are met, with pretty low distortion (not astonishing, but perfectly respectable) and a wide bandwidth. Our only mild concern is that into a typical tweeter load, the response climbs a bit in the very high treble.

Because Class D is so efficient, no heatsinks are required, saving on both space and weight. The power supply also saves weight by being a switch-mode type, though in terms of size it's no gain over a conventional transformer. Meanwhile, the DAB/FM tuner module is the usual cigarette-packet-sized affair, mounted above the main audio board and after the CD transport (a familiar DVD-ROM type). Even after the control circuits have been factored in there's still some fresh air in the box.

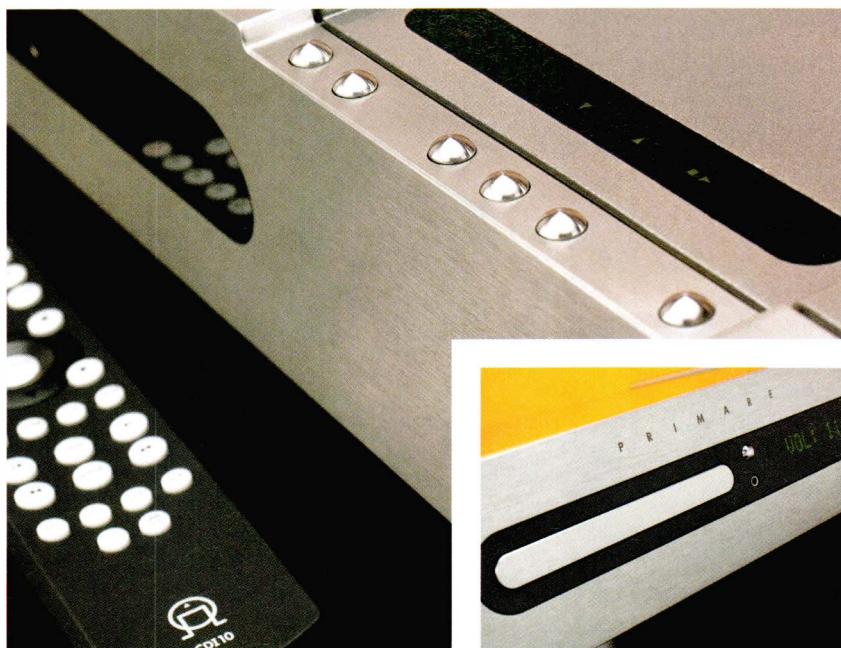
What we must emphasise is that this is not £400-worth each of tuner, CD player and amp. The case is usually the most expensive part of any smart-looking hi-fi, so there is a real gain

in putting the whole caboodle in just one case. So, that makes it probably more like £700-£800 per component instead. We're taken with the concept – but how does it sound?

SOUND QUALITY

First, and perhaps most important: there's little or nothing to give away the Class D technology of the amplifier. It's comforting to know that the designers have done their homework and come up with a hi-tech product that requires no special pleading. High efficiency and low weight are nice but if they make for poor sound we ain't interested, thanks.

On the contrary, this is overall a particularly beguiling piece of kit. Funnily enough, at times it sounded almost valve-like in its melodiousness, though not too many valve amps could match it for attack when the drummer takes a big solo. And it's fearless in the bass, too, with effortless extension that lacks little in control compared with some quite chunky 'conventional' power amps.



“At times it sounded almost valve-like in its melodiousness, though not too many valve amps could match it for attack.”

So far, so impressive. We have some reservations, which mostly concern the minutiae of fine detail. Just now and then we did feel there was a little veiling of detail. Although it had little effect on the musical flow, this did leave us rather in the dark about the precise instrumentation, for instance, of large symphonic works, or about the placing of particular instruments in familiar tracks. Mind you, it's a little hard to know how unforgiving to be on this score. Taking our own estimate of a £700-odd amplifier plus similarly priced CD source, it's a valid criticism, but if we are to adopt as reference a £1,200 assemblage of separates it's hardly a major sin.

In a similar vein, we noted some mild constriction in the treble from time to time – indeed it's quite possible that this is a symptom of the same cause as the veiling. It's worth bearing in mind, though, that similar flaws can be caused by unsuitable interconnect cables, a breed of component rendered largely redundant by the CDI10. In other words, the best separates you could care to name could end up similarly hampered by the wires connecting them!

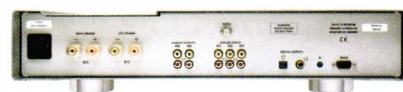
In many areas, our enthusiasm was almost entirely without qualification. We've already mentioned the bass, and time and again, from Mahler to The Mavericks to Miles Davis, we enjoyed its combination of depth, rhythm and tune. The midrange we found gorgeously balanced tonally, and voices in any musical style (or spoken, for that matter) are beautifully flattered by the CDI10. It does make for a very inviting musical experience – and once the invitation has been accepted one is happy to stay for a good long while.

Our comments so far apply basically to the most obvious mode – internal CD player feeding the internal amplifier. Testing these portions separately, we were inclined to judge the CD section as more detailed than the amp, though oddly it seemed a little bland. Of course, what that really means is that the amp adds a touch of excitement, which we were able to confirm by feeding it from various familiar reference sources, and if the flip side of that is the mild veiling we noted then so be it. Many users will be happy with that, us included at this price.

You'll be wondering about the radio section. Well... in truth, we're not blown away. The FM is only middling, with veiling present as persistent muddle and background noise. But DAB is perfectly okay, given our well-rehearsed reservations over the format itself. But if DAB appeals, this is a neat and satisfactory solution. Oh, and the built-in analogue-to-digital converter is a nice touch that sounds at least as good as those in any CD recorder.

This is a tasty-looking bit of kit that performs very comfortably above the level of most separates stacks we could assemble at its price. It's also pleasant and convenient to use... as long as you don't lose the remote control (operation is tedious without)! It won't appeal much to tweakers or cable manufacturers, but if you want high-quality, hassle-free sounds, it's a very attractive proposition. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 85% [Progress bar]	PRO Great fun factor coupled with a considerable degree of insight, particularly in the rather excellent bass. A practical and space-saving sonic solution.
FEATURES >> 90% [Progress bar]	CON Fine detail is not the best in the world, though not seriously lacking. Front-panel controls are a little on the minimalist side.
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 93% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION From several points of view, this is an admirable product. It's pretty much hassle-free, 'green'(-ish), nicely put together and offers fine sound quality in most of the important areas. It's the best of the current breed of serious one-box CD systems.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 89%	



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REL reborn

Under new transatlantic ownership, REL reinvents its entry-level range – in style!

PRODUCT REL R-305

TYPE Active subwoofer

PRICE £795

CONTACT ☎ 01656 768777 @ www.rel.net

REL's previous leader, Richard Lord, has handed over the reins to the company that was previously REL's US distributor, Sumiko. Many models remain as before, but Sumiko's main contribution to date has been to introduce new, less expensive compact subwoofers, most notably the R-range, which replaces the well-liked, but aging Q-series.

The R-305, replacing the Q-201 but capable of 12dB extra acoustic output, is the second of three R-series models. The 19kg R-305 is a true compact, with a near cubic form factor and a footprint of a little over one square foot. The cosmetics are altogether more sophisticated, featuring black gloss panels (only made possible by outsourcing enclosure construction to China) and some subtle design work that replaces the old, utilitarian

textured black Grittex with slashes of slate grey, plus some intriguing fine detailing and a natty glass cover that conceals the controls. But unlike the Q-201, there's no remote handset.

The technical design has also changed. The sealed construction of the Q-series has been retained, so no ports and no 'chuffing', and the enclosure's build is extremely solid. In contrast to the Q models, the R-series uses a stiff but lightweight 250mm carbon fibre/pulp cone that features a powerful magnet assembly to overcome the spring resistance of the trapped internal air. Motive power comes from a 300-watt ICEpower Class D amp module, housed externally below the main enclosure, with some proprietary fine tuning and limiting.

SOUND QUALITY

REL is promoting a new method of setting up systems with subwoofers, specifically for the R-series. REL's view is that, where possible, subs should be rolled into circuit where the main

speaker output dies away. With floorstanding speakers this means crossing over at around 30-35Hz, so the subwoofer is probably only in circuit for a half octave or so. Of course, smaller speakers can still use higher crossover points, and there is no reason not to switch as high as 100Hz if required (the full scope of the low pass filter on the R-305 spans from 25-100Hz). With simultaneous use of the LFE and the Neutrik input, the host system can be configured to make use of stereo (2.1) and home cinema (5.1 or greater) arrays simultaneously.

Compared to its darker-sounding predecessor in the Q range, the R-305 is faster, with less overhang; it's a more touchie-feelie result, and one that is more naturally voiced. The subwoofer barely contributes even to the bass and is limited to the sub-bass, where its character is less audible – but the extra depth and weight it delivers is not only audible, but very alluring. The other benefit is that the deep bass is more tuneful and larger in scale, with less 'pulling' of pitch at the lowest frequencies.

A major benefit is that 2.1 channel operation, using a subwoofer with a pair of main speakers, is much more transparent and sure footed than you might expect – augmented stereo is viable without significant loss of sound quality. Using two subs is still the preferred strategy, but a secondary benefit of a low crossover frequency is that there is less monoing of bass over much of the audio band.

Either way, this is a faster, more agile, deeper and louder subwoofer than the Q-201, and much better turned out – with there's no price penalty. A no-brainer, in fact. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 88%



FEATURES >>> 82%



BUILD >>> 91%



VALUE >>> 87%



PRO
Louder, faster and more full on, as well as being more tuneful than Q-201; simplified control system and more domestically acceptable styling and finish.

CON
No obvious problems, unless you miss the remote control (we didn't) or you prefer the more industrial appearance of the old model (some do).

CONCLUSION

This is that rarity – a subwoofer that doesn't cost a fortune, but whose design forces a reevaluation of how a sub should be designed and used. The R-305 is excellent for multichannel, but is one of the few subs transparent enough for stereo, too.

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

BEST BUY

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magazine





More... for less!

Denon returns to entry-level hi-fi separates with this great-value amp and CD player

PRODUCT Denon DCD-700AE and PMA-700AE

TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £250 each

KEY FEATURES (DCD-700AE) Size (WxHxD): 43.4x10.7x27.9cm • Weight: 4.2kg • Analogue outputs: single-ended (RCA-phonos) only • Digital output: Electrical (coaxial) and optical • (PMA-700AE) Size (WxHxD): 43.4x12.1x33.7cm • Weight: 7kg • Inputs: five line-level, one MM phono, single-ended (RCA-phonos) only • Outputs: two tape, one preamp output • Two sets of speaker terminals • Tone controls • Rated power: 50 watts per channel (eight ohms)

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

component hi-fi market. These were introduced here just as home cinema was beginning to lose some of its glitter. The SA1 pairing has been used as the platform from which a number of progressively lower cost models have been derived, namely the 2000AE and most recently the 1500AE player/amp combinations. The 700AE series is simply the latest, and most affordable of these spin-off projects, but it retains key styling cues from the senior models (most obviously the trademark curvy front panel). Some key technical features have been trickled down from above, too.

The two models that wear the 700AE badge are a CD player, from which the SACD option has been dropped for obvious cost-related reasons, and a matching stereo integrated amplifier. Both retain a metal fascia and generally solid build, and feature well-specified power supplies. Despite the huge price disparity (£5,500 compared to £250), much of the amp architecture of the SA1 has been reproduced in PMA-700AE, albeit in slightly less refined form and with lower power components.

The DCD-700AE CD player features Denon's favoured (and proprietary) AL24 curve smoothing technology. AL24 is designed to reduce quantisation noise, combined with a 24-bit converter stage whose architecture is largely inherited from the more costly models, though again in a less refined form appropriate to the selling price. Key vibration-reducing measures have been taken internally, and the already full feature set is extended to include a headphone outlet with volume control, and a pitch control (+/-12% in steps of 0.1%). These can be used to trim recordings, or match the pitch when using the player to accompany live instruments. The usual digital outputs are available in electrical and optical versions.

The matching PMA-700AE stereo integrated amplifier is similarly well specified. Arguably too well, sporting as it does tone controls and independent tape/listen selectors, though a suitable (and effective) bypass circuit is included in the design. Socketry includes an input for a moving magnet phono cartridge, and two tape circuits, and there is also a

Big news: Denon is back in the budget hi-fi separates arena! It's been obvious over the last year or so that there is a resurgence of interest in stereo hi-fi – the very market Denon and others had all but abandoned in the home cinema gold-rush years.

The key introductions in Denon's case were the über-expensive DCD-SA1 SACD player and PMA-SA1 amplifier, which reflected the continuing strength of the Japanese



“These are remarkable components for very little money, and both are notable for their transparency and liveliness.”

preamp level output. The power supply has generous reserves, and internally low and high level circuits are kept well apart. Power output is rated at 50 watts per channel across the audio band into an eight-ohm load, with a claimed substantial increase to 80 watts available into four ohm loads.

Both components are supplied with a new system remote control – but you only need one for both components. The front panel controls have a good operational feel, and both units are impressively detailed and finished.

SOUND QUALITY

This is one of those cases where you get exactly what it says on the tin. Perhaps even a little more, if you're used to the prevailing standards of players and amplifiers in this price class. First and foremost, the two Denons are well balanced, both in relation to each other, and as a combination. Both sound clean and expansive. The level of detail is high, they sound dynamic, timing is good and they have a subjectively broad frequency response, which is less common than you might suppose if you judge hi-fi by perusing the specifications.

On the whole, you can expect low-cost CD players to be flat, scrawny and to exaggerate high-frequency transitions. But not the DCD-700AE, which has none of these faults. It sounds smooth, progressive and organic. Timing is on the button, and it is

unfailingly open and refined. By the very best standards, the Denon sometimes flags with very tautly written material, which appears to be a reflection of a bass that is slightly lightweight in feel, but this is a player that is not to be underestimated.

In our view, however, the amplifier is the real star act here. It is surprisingly powerful and even moderately sensitive speakers can be played really very loud indeed. Of course, there is not the headroom for truly seamless performance with the throttles fully open, and with some material this did show. But in most cases, the Denon PMA-700AE could be hard to distinguish from some decent amplifiers in the £1,000 class. Good going by any standard.

It should be underlined here that the shortcomings noted above are the exception and not the rule. With the vast majority of recordings, this entry-level Denon pairing is a remarkably good fit. The bulk the CD canon gladly offered up their inner secrets to the Denon amp, which performed transparently and with a quiet sense of life and conviction.

Really good budget CD players and amps transcend their price tags, and you quickly

forget that you are listening to lower priced electronics. In contrast, less competent budget products remind you of their cheap status every time you listen to them. Fortunately for Denon, these two are both remarkable components for very little money, and both are notable for their transparency and liveliness. The CD player is clearly a very strong product at the price, and – although it can fail to perform with some very difficult source material when played through demanding speakers – no one told the amplifier how cheap it really is. It happily stands its ground with far more expensive rivals. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT – DCD-700AE

SOUND >> 79%

FEATURES >> 83%

BUILD >> 80%

VALUE >> 94%

CONCLUSION
 One of the best all-round CD players we have heard at this price. There are no significant shortcomings that cannot be forgiven on price grounds.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 87%

VERDICT – PMA-700AE

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 87%

BUILD >> 80%

VALUE >> 97%

CONCLUSION
 Something to shout about: a low cost amplifier that really works, this newcomer is excellent under all bar the most arduous conditions.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 90%

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The power of funk

The standard deck is funking great. So what can the upmarket Funk V add to the party?

PRODUCT Funk Firm Funk V

TYPE Turntable

PRICE £760 (excluding tonearm and cartridge)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8697 2705 🌐 www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

When it launched the £450 Funk, the Funk Firm put a seriously big firework under the budget turntable world.

This strange-looking deck with its lightweight platter and ball-shaped feet turned out to be a giant slayer when we tested it in *HFC* 279.

The Funk and Funk V are based on the same MDF plinth and come ready cut-out for a Rega tonearm. They also share Sorbothane damping, which decouples the ball feet from the plinth and even have the same plug-top power transformer with electronic speed switching built into the plinth.

What differentiates the more costly Funk V is its Vector drive system – the belt runs around two asymmetrically placed pulleys as well as the motor spindle, so it makes contact with the acrylic sub-platter at three points. Funk Firm's reasoning is that in a normal belt drive system, the belt pulls the subplatter and bearing in one direction and this means that even the smallest deviations in the bearing shaft will cause a rocking motion in the platter. This movement, though small, is greater than the

contours in the vinyl groove and thus causes distortion, with adverse sonic results.

Other differences include a closer tolerance bearing and a dish in the expanded polyvinyl Achroplatt platter, so that the supplied clamp achieves optimal contact with the record. Oh, and its looks have been upgraded too, with a metallic paint finish, transparent plastic feet and a nicer speed/on/off switch.

SOUND QUALITY

Like the 'standard' model, the Funk V turntable is extraordinarily revealing. It highlights the performance of cartridges so brilliantly that it can be used a myriad of designs without sounding mismatched. It might sound ludicrous, but if you really want to hear what this deck is capable of, try it with a two-grand van den Hul Condor cartridge – we did, and it was fabulous! Thinking more realistically price-wise, try Sumiko's Blue Point Special Evo III (£240) on the end of a Rega RB300 arm (£188). This bodyless moving coil cartridge is a great sonic match, but bear in mind that the on/off/speed control knob is close to the stylus when the arm is at rest; heavy hands on the controls and a denuded cartridge could spell trashed styli.

The V is a rather more sophisticated version of the standard Funk in both finish and sound. It is calmer and more resolute and thus even better at resolving fine detail. Fortunately, it

also retains the qualities that make the basic Funk so entertaining. So, great energy and a snappy sense of timing are still on the menu, but now you can hear what's going on at low levels rather more clearly.

This is a remarkably fine and subtle-sounding deck for the money. The advantages of the Achroplatt are clearer thanks to Vector drive and the sound is cleaner, finer and calmer than the standard Funk. We challenge you to find a lower distortion deck at anywhere near this price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 92% 	PRO Extremely resolute and neutral sound; it images, times and differentiates recordings with a rare skill and energy, especially at this price point.
FEATURES >> 85% 	CON Well isolated support is a must, and you won't want to skimp on the cartridge or you'll never hear what the deck can really do.
BUILD >> 84% 	
VALUE >> 94% 	
CONCLUSION The Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution and finesse. Low-level detail and all manner of subtleties are as well resolved as the fundamentals. For high-class analogue sound on a budget, it's a killer!	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 93%	



Viva la DiVA

Arcam claims this is its best-sounding multichannel receiver to date, and we don't disagree...

PRODUCT Arcam DiVA AVR350

TYPE Multichannel AV receiver

PRICE £1,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.3x14.5x42cm
● Weight: 16.2kg ● Analogue audio inputs: 7x stereo, 3x tape ● Digital audio inputs: 3x coaxial, 3x optical
● Two-way HDMI switching ● Rated power: 7x 100W (2x 120W in stereo mode) ● AM/FM RDS tuner

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

With Arcam's DiVA AVR300 scooping a Gold Medal in our 2005 Awards, the step-up model was always going to have a lot to live up to. Enter the AVR350, looking all but identical on the outside, but boasting a swathe of enhancements within.

Billed by Arcam as its best-ever multichannel receiver, the 350's basic specification looks identical to the AVR300, with a real-world 100 watts across seven channels or 120 watts per channel in stereo. This power is supported by an enormous toroidal transformer to ensure high-current supply when the going gets tough. It bristles with a full complement of Dolby and DTS decoding for home cinema, too. Build quality remains battleship-grade throughout and you can still assign channels six and seven to bi-amp the main speakers.

However, that is where the similarity to the AVR300 ends. The new kid on the block is actually an additional model in the range, as opposed to an AVR300 replacement. It benefits from key performance developments of the flagship AV9 (at a cool £3,600) and half the parts list from the AVP700 preamp/processor. This includes Burr-Brown OP2134 op-amps, claimed to improve mid-range clarity, and Stealth Mat technology, previously found in Arcam's high-end FMJ components.

Stealth Mat is a woven sheet containing randomised metal strands used to encapsulate the digital circuitry. The material was apparently developed for stealth aircraft as a way of reducing radar reflections and is used in the AVR350 to reduce electromagnetic interference and thus decrease background noise. Presumably, you won't get caught speeding in an AVR350 either.

The back panel now boasts a HD-compatible (100MHz) component video switching with up-conversion from S-Video, and a trio of HDMI ports – two-in, one-out. On the down side, these really are just pass-through HDMI ports as you cannot break out the audio signal nor up-convert any of the other video inputs to HDMI. More frustrating still, the on-screen display and set-up menus are not output over

HDMI at all, meaning you need an additional video connection to your display even if you only use an HDMI DVD player as a source. So much for the HDMI promise of 'one digital cable' connectivity!

This cursory nod at HDMI will not best please those looking for a comprehensive cinema-only receiver, but a peek under the hood reveals exactly where the budget has been spent – audiophile-grade components. Both the digital and analogue boards look like a celebrity gala dinner of high-end electronic devices, including Crystal Semiconductors' flagship DSPs, Wolfson 24-bit/192kHz DACs, metal film resistors, polypropylene and OSCON electrolytic capacitors, through-plated circuit boards and a rather sumptuous Wolfson precision electronic volume control. Clearly the AVR350 has premier sound quality at heart.

Which is just as well as it isn't going to win any awards for its features and gadgetry count. While every other AV receiver at this price offers auto everything and enough computing power to launch a space shuttle, the AVR350 is stoically manual, logical and simple.

The on-screen menu is straightforward monochrome text, audio tweaker extends to bass and treble adjustment for all channels (bypassed by default, of course) and the



remote control is a large, big-button affair with a smooth-textured finish and bright blue backlight. You also get independent second zone audio and video (analogue only), an AM/FM tuner with RDS and 46 presets and an RS-232 port, should you hanker for a Crestron controller (or similar). And... no, that's it.

SOUND QUALITY

We spent a long time with the older AVR300... mostly avoiding calls from Arcam when it wanted the sample back! It has a beguiling charm as an all-rounder: detailed, expressive and dynamic with both music and movies alike. But for those with a penchant for concert-realistic volumes, it's a little wanting in sheer grunt.

Oh no, not so the AVR350. Despite the identical power specifications on paper, the new toroidal transformer elevates the Arcam's presence and dynamic impact to a whole new level. Using the Stereo Direct mode, the aggressive acoustic guitar chords opening the title track to Placebo's *Meds* CD launch into the room with breathtaking clarity and scale.



“The sound is underpinned by positively subterranean bass, with all the tautness and grace of a high-end stereo power amplifier.”

Stone cold, the sound is a little ponderous and heavy, but the magic returns as it fully warms up some 30-45 minutes later. Stereo Direct mode is susceptible too, indicating slow stabilisation on the analogue side, simply rectified by leaving the AVR350 switched on.

The sound is underpinned by positively subterranean bass, with all the tautness and grace of a high-end stereo power amplifier. Partnered with speakers capable of going deep, such as the Tannoy Dimension TD12s used for this test, this unassuming-looking receiver offers low frequency timing, scale and sheer depth that comprehensively eclipses any other AV receiver in its class.

This richness and depth defines the AVR350's character, mixing the detail and inky background silence of its forebear with oodles more passion and power. With rich musical material, the effect is a huge, sumptuous soundstage and a mellifluous grace that engulfs the room. It's a wholly infectious presentation that gets you reaching for track after track, CD after CD, until it's 2am and you're duck-walking around the living-room playing air-sax to Cab Calloway's *Minnie the Moocher*. Hey, these things happen.

The Arcam takes every track in its stride with superb emotional



delivery and inspired resolution at both the top and bottom end of the scale. Being picky, its sound is slightly thicker than ideal in the lower midrange, lacking the separation that makes the rest of the audio-band so appealing. It simply doesn't manage the transparency or delicacy of the best stereo pre/power combos – but nor does it carry the stratospheric price tags associated with high-end stereo.

The scale and dynamic delivery rivals the larger Japanese multichannel monsters, with none of the aggressive edge that gets you backing off the volume. Dialogue is supremely natural, crafting not only accurate tone and timbre but neatly positioning the voice in its surroundings. People speaking outside sound like they are outside, those indoors sound like they are indoors, and the Arcam is a master at revealing both film-set and musical echo and ambience – both intentional and otherwise.

Like the music experience, the AVR350 possesses all the right ingredients to get you exploring DVD after DVD, long into the night. It takes a wide genre of film material in its stride, pulling no punches with action flicks as easily as it crafts intense emotion with dramas and weepies. Its resolution

of fine detail and subtle background effects is better than even some very esoteric

processing equipment and it is frankly difficult to fault sonically. Okay, it does not have much in the way of techno-features, but it's fundamentally easy to live with and offers all the essential qualities required to bring large-scale entertainment to your living room.

The AVR350 is a star in every respect. It does two-channel music with a level of quality that would be impressive from a stereo-only amplifier at this sort of price and goes on to add in giant-killing multichannel abilities at the touch of a button. The frugal gadget count notwithstanding, the AVR350 is not only Arcam's best-sounding multichannel receiver to date, but the best-sounding multichannel receiver on the market, full stop. **HFC**

Richard Stevenson



VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 90% <small>>>> SUB RATINGS</small> STEREO 88% MULTICHANNEL 92%	PRO Sumptuous sound with bass quality many stereo amps would struggle to achieve. Simple to set up and use, little compromise on either stereo or multichannel performance.
FEATURES >>> 83%	CON Limited HDMI connectivity with no audio-break out or on-screen display. Frugal operational features and low gadget count for the money.
BUILD >>> 88%	
VALUE >>> 90%	
CONCLUSION The AVR350 is an all-round music and movie star <i>par excellence</i> . It sounds great, is easy to live with and thrills with a wide range of content. No other multichannel receiver comes close at the price, and even some stereo amps should run scared!	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 90%	

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comes
wisdom



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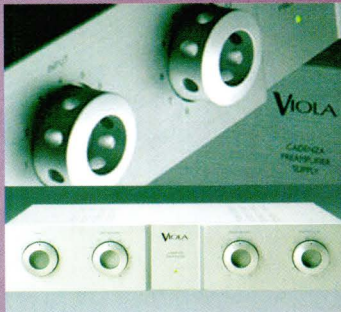
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KI-ssing cousins

Could this be the spiritual successor to the classic KI-tweaked CD players of the nineties?

PRODUCT Marantz SA7001 KI

TYPE CD/SACD player

PRICE £600

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

Surprisingly, this is the first SACD player from Marantz to receive the 'KI' treatment, which as ever means tweaks from Marantz brand ambassador Ken Ishiwata applied to an established model. Well – maybe 'existing' rather than 'established'; it's only three issues since we first saw the basic '7001!

The basic spec remains unchanged from the standard model, which means stereo-only SACD replay and, of course, regular CDs. Following the transport, audio data is sent to the so-called 'super DAC' from Cirrus Logic, a part of recent vintage that handles both PCM and DSD data streams at any sampling rate you care to name, with distinctly impressive performance. That performance is maintained by Marantz's familiar 'HDAM' amp modules, which, like all the audio circuits after the DAC, use entirely discrete transistors.

The KI mods are generally familiar: a few components are replaced, the chassis gets all copper-plated and beefed up with an extra baseplate, the mains transformer swapped out for a toroidal type, and higher quality phono sockets at the rear. The player is smart and easy to operate. It's sensibly featured with stuff like CD Text, a display you can switch off, and a decent headphone output, and it loads discs reasonably swiftly. We wouldn't have minded a

slightly lower level of mechanical noise, though, as the high-pitched whirring that emanates from it can become surprisingly intrusive in quiet surroundings.

SOUND QUALITY

Our conclusions on the non-KI form were well on the enthusiastic side and we expected great things from the present suspect. As before, we're definitely taken with the relaxed quality of its music-making and found it a pleasant bit of kit to live with, in the best possible sense.

If there is a downside it's the way this player handles energetic, rhythmic bass. Take some old danceable favourite like Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. While there's no obvious lack of low frequencies as such, the way they're presented is not always quite as immediate and convincing as it can be. This characteristic is consistent between CD and SACD, which isn't surprising as both systems share the same audio circuits throughout.

Both disc formats sound broadly similar through this player; while some (generally much more costly) SACD players appear to show clear advantages over the older format, differences here are less defined. We did detect a slightly smoother sound from SACD that perhaps yields greater texture, but on the other hand, CD is arguably a touch sharper in its focus.

In most cases, however, the SA7001 KI is likely to spend the majority of its time functioning as a CD player and even taking on board the comments above about rhythm we're inclined to think it a very good one. The key thing is that it never loses the flow and

purpose of a piece of music, and as a result one never finds one's interest waning. This is partly a function of the slightly mellow tonality and partly of the excellent levels of detail, which the SA7001 KI preserves and presents to the world. It has no trouble at all separating instruments from each other, and it does that without making a big deal of the trick. As a result, one finds everything clearly audible but not thrust aggressively out of the speakers.

Detail and its close relative, imaging, are the areas in which the KI improvements are most marked. The basic player is good but the KI excellent in this respect. The £170 premium is not overly steep and this remains a fine proposition in terms of value. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 86% >> SUB RATINGS CD 85% SACD 86%	PRO KI version retains the musical qualities of original but adds an extra level of detail for a more analytical listening experience – if wished!
FEATURES >> 85%	CON Slight lack of rhythmic drive and urgency remains, and mechanical noise is a little high. The standard SA7001 is good enough to make the KI improvements rather slight.
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 89%	
CONCLUSION Even at its higher price, the KI is not an alarmingly expensive CD player and it performs well against the direct competition. The SACD replay is a welcome and competent extra. It may not be a grand upgrade on the standard player, but a worthwhile one.	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 87% OVERALL SCORE	



Russ Andrews Ultra Purifier Block

TYPE Mains distribution block

PRICE £425

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

This is an unusually intelligently designed eight-way distribution block. Mounting those sockets the 'wrong' way up is ideal for those who use anything thicker and less flexible than the basic PVC mains lead, while using both sides of the tapered profile seems a sensible optimisation of space. Eight sockets should cater for most systems.

The sockets themselves are MK's best, unswitched, and usefully treated with Caig contact enhancer. Good quality Kimber wire is used to link them to the 16A IEC inlet, for which you'll need to buy a special mains lead as an extra: we used a Russ Andrews Reference PowerKord (£84).

What really justifies the price, however, is the inclusion inside the housing of a Russ Andrews 'Ultra Purifier' filter circuit. This unit, available separately for £255, is a 'shunt' filter that has no components between the supply and your kit, and it features not only the usual capacitors (lots of them!) but an unusual spike-clamping component that costs a lot and

claims to be particularly effective in preventing over-voltage spikes from getting through. We failed to find any spikes for it to clamp, but we did prove that the Ultra Purifier cuts noise on the mains above about 5kHz.

Sonically it had a useful effect on various source and amplifier components we tried, improving image focus by a significant degree and seeming to reduce the level of 'hash' around the sound. There's no effect on tonality, but

the precision of instruments, particularly those with transient-rich sound, is audibly improved. Overall, a recommended upgrade. **HFC**

Richard Black



Black Rhodium Tango

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

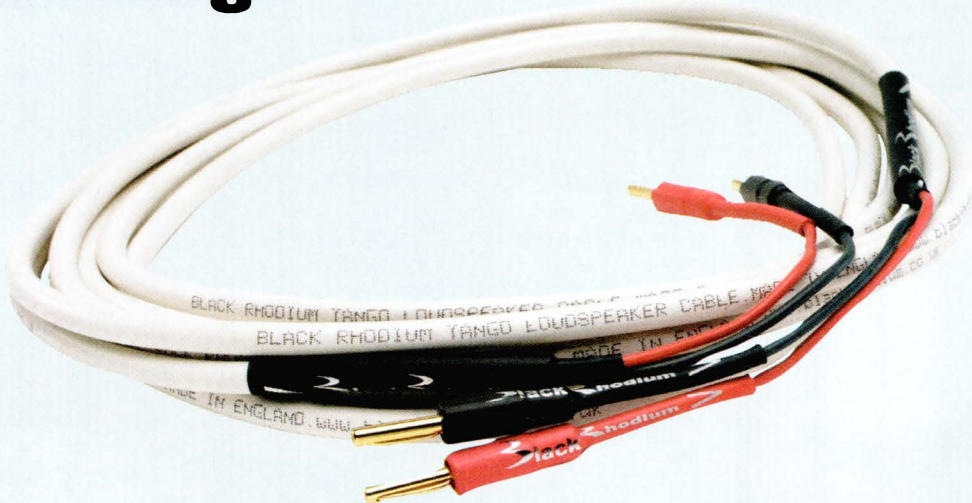
PRICE £15 per metre (terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 01332 342233 🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk

Black Rhodium has been overhauling its lower-price ranges of late, introducing new models that bear some clear resemblances to the old but differ in various ways. The most obvious family trait in Tango is the silicone rubber insulation, which has been a staple for many years. We're still not sure to what extent the insulation (particularly on speaker cables) influences the sound, but that fact that there does seem to be a Black Rhodium 'house sound' is one of the strongest indicators that there is an influence.

Round in overall cross-section, with a diameter of around 7mm, Tango uses silver-plated conductors of modest size and, while resistance is not alarmingly high, we wouldn't recommend it for very long runs. Our test sample of 5m is probably fairly typical, but if your cables follow a convoluted route for many metres there's a chance of some loss of bass control.

With many speakers, that could be a dangerous direction to take, for the bass of



the Tango is certainly not shy about coming forward. In fact, we'd stick our necks out and call it a clear departure from neutrality, but at the same time we'd have to admit to rather enjoying it, especially with smaller speakers. The good thing is that control is barely compromised, so there's still plenty of insight into what's happening in those lower octaves, but there's an added richness that reference cables don't exhibit. If you're looking to enhance a bass-light system, it could be ideal.

Higher up the spectrum, treble is a little shut in but generally clear, while midrange exhibits moderate to good levels of detail – pretty typical performance at this price level. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Not entirely neutral, but this seems a decent compromise against average, rather than outstanding, performance.

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

HT Cyberlight Magic Tweeter

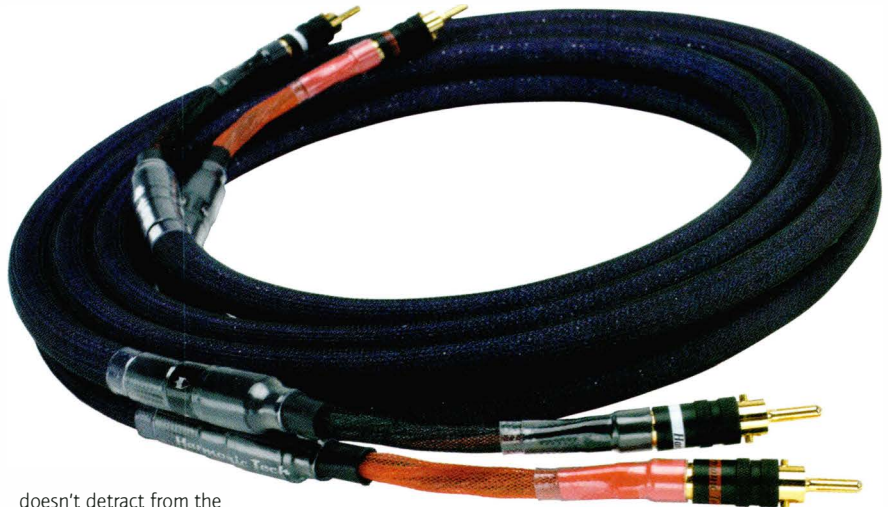
TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £2,100 (2.5m stereo set, terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8932 7995 🌐 www.harmonictech.com

Despite the name of Harmonic Technology's speaker cable, and the fact that it is recommended for the tweeter arm of a bi-wire speaker, or for general use with a single-wired speaker, it's actually a conventional, if high-quality speaker cable. It is highly tractable, and is terminated with Furutech connectors. Construction is based on four individually insulated fine gauge 7N (99.99997%) high-purity single crystal silver and 6N (99.9997%) high-purity single crystal copper conductors for each cable, and two cable runs are required per speaker.

This is an excellent sounding design, though very different in nature to the Nordost Valhalla reference cable that was used for comparison. It has a noticeable softness in the way it presents music which curiously doesn't appear to impact noticeably on detail resolution, but does help make it 'inaudible', blending organically into a test system that also used the Harmonic Technology Cyberlight interconnects (tested next issue) in a way that



doesn't detract from the remarkable transparency of the latter. The effect is pristine yet airy and organic, with subtle layering and texturing of midband information, and an open, extended feel at both extremes of the audio spectrum. There is a sense of completeness, and of a lack of an aural fingerprint, though the Nordost Valhalla is sharper and leaner, and appears faster.

Magic Tweeter is available in preset lengths, and can be extended by arbitrary amounts at a

per-metre cost much less than that of the standard terminated cable. But it's still undeniably expensive! **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Smooth, slightly soft-centred cable that works well with the same-brand Cyberlight interconnects.



Russ Andrews RAVE USB

TYPE Amp and speaker system

PRICE £249

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

We've looked at this charming little system before, but as it's now available with the added attraction of a USB digital input (the USB-enabled amp on its own is £150), we thought we would

re-live the pleasure. To recap, the basic system is based on a small, modestly-powered amp with three line-level inputs, which feeds a pair of similarly diminutive two-way speakers. The very 'Russ Andrews' part of the deal is the cables provided when you buy the full bundle – Kimber speaker wire and Yello mains cable.

Adding a USB input is not unheard of, but it's still a pretty rare feature. The idea, of course, is to offer computer-based listeners a high-quality alternative to the

analogue output of their PC or Mac, which is likely to be sub-optimal at best. USB is the ideal interface because it doesn't mind 'hot plugging', it configures itself in moments and carries uncompressed audio data.

Our system worked to the script straight off, though we found it's worth keeping an eye on the computer's settings as our test PC tended to default to a low volume.

One particular USB socket also produced a slight background whistle from the amp. Otherwise, we found the results up to the high standard of the basic system, with low noise, plenty of dynamics and the most fun you can have with a desktop audio system. Gives a whole new dimension to downloaded audio! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

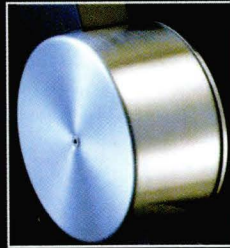
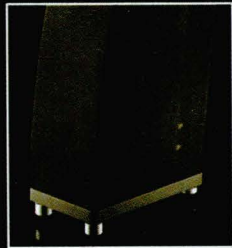
The sheer musical involvement transcends its weaknesses in areas like bass extension. An unusually 'hi-fi' PC accessory.



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nonconformist

adj. an individual who does not comply with conventional norms or socially approved patterns of behavior or thought

Black Rhodium Jive Biwire

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

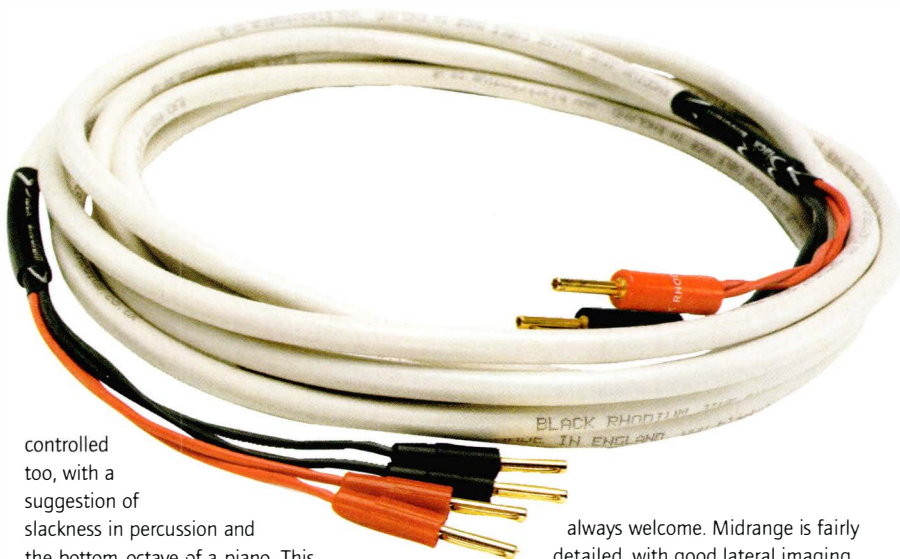
PRICE £11 per metre (terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 01332 342233 🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk

Jive is BR's next-to-entry cable at £7 per metre, and this bi-wire version is simply four instead of two conductors inside the overall silicone rubber sheath. As we've remarked before, bi-wire cables offer not only the option of separate cable runs to each drive unit (assuming they have separate terminals on the speaker cabinet) but also the possibility of simply connecting two cores in parallel for each of 'hot' and 'cold' terminals, lowering the resistance seen by each drive unit.

As with Tango (see p64), Jive features conductors that are slightly on the thin side by the standards of many speaker cables; we gather in this case they're plain copper. The review sample came fitted with a single pair of 4mm plugs at one end and two pairs at the other, the usual configuration for bi-wiring.

If Tango is the bass-lover's delight, Jive is perhaps a more general cable, but it still seems to have some mild preference for low frequencies. It's definitely less marked here, and we felt on the whole it's less well



controlled too, with a suggestion of slackness in percussion and the bottom octave of a piano. This area does vary a bit depending on how the cable's connected, with the 'shotgunned' parallel (non-bi-wire) connection giving rather better control.

Unfortunately, we felt the preferable connection from the treble point of view was bi-wire! Again, the difference is not massive but there's a touch more openness which is

always welcome. Midrange is fairly detailed, with good lateral imaging and decent depth. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

A versatile cable which seems to offer either good bass or good treble, but not truly both together. We'd save for Tango.



Monster Cable M1000i

TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £200 (1 m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01923 431634 🌐 www.monstercable.com

This is Monster's current top model from the M-series of interconnect cables. It's a moderately bulky cable that apparently conceals quite a lot of technology beneath its undemonstrative exterior. Monster makes much of this in its literature – such details as 'Three-Way Bandwidth Balanced Construction' and 'MicroFiber' dielectric. The former refers to the use of different wire gauges, which allegedly conduct different frequency ranges within the audio band, ensuring time coherence in the emerging signal. The latter, meanwhile, is a low-loss dielectric that separates individual wires within the same conductor.

We remain somewhat sceptical about the justification for all this in scientific terms, not least because the most boringly ordinary cables can give time-coherent results (by our test instruments). All the same, it's intriguing to see what Monster has come up with, and the results can only be helped by the high-quality materials used, the very grippy



'Turbine' phono plugs and the floating screen, connected at one end only.

In the end, what matters is the sound – and we heard some very good ones via the M1000i. It is a very neutral cable in tonal terms and also has some very fine detail to offer. As one would hope at this kind of price, bass is extended, clear and tuneful, though just occasionally we thought it seemed a touch dry. No such criticism applies to the treble, however, which is particularly sweet and open

and as a result makes for revealing but still relaxed listening. Imaging is excellent too, with extensive and precise depth. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Very capable, with superb sound in every area except possibly bass, which may not satisfy the super-critical.



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LOUDSPEAKERS

There are some surprises even at the cheaper end of the speaker market

Our *Ultimate Group Test* this month looks at the more affordable end of the speaker market. The least expensive pair costs exactly £250, and the most costly is £500. No surprise then that four of the six are standmounts, though it's undeniably impressive that a Chinese subcontractor can make, and Q Acoustics ship and sell, a high-quality three-driver floorstander for just £330.

Although one could split the group between standmounts and floorstanders, it's actually more logical to divide our six into three pairs of models. The smallest duo, from Castle and Nbien, are genuine miniatures with relatively small (around 130mm) bass/mid drive units, and are almost certain to benefit from close-to-wall siting. Such placement means the speaker is working into a 'half-space' rather than 'full space', and the mid-bass is therefore boosted by a good chunk – around 6dB across the octave from 50Hz to 100Hz. The downside is that wall reflections usually cause unevenness and some coloration up in the midband.

The Canton and KEF standmounts have roughly double the enclosure

volume and use the next size up (c165mm) in main drivers, so they're bound to have more bass output and/or sensitivity.

However, for sheer material value for money it's hard to argue with the two floorstanders, from Q Acoustics and Mordaunt-Short, which aren't much more expensive than the standmounts, even without considering the additional cost of stands. Furthermore, unlike some other cheap floorstanders, both of these take trouble to provide good floor coupling with an extended footprint to ensure good stability.

Although British brands like KEF, Castle and Mordaunt-Short will be familiar enough to most readers, the other three may be less familiar. Long established Canton is Germany's largest hi-fi speaker brand, though it has only quite recently become available in Britain after a gap of more than a decade. Nbien is another recent arrival, this time from Malaysia, a country that has been manufacturing good-quality hi-fi speakers for a number of years. In contrast, Q Acoustics is a brand new name, set up by British hi-fi

conglomerate Armour and combining UK and European skills with the highly competitive manufacturing abilities of Chinese factories. **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 *Exile On Coldharbour Lane*
- ▶ System Of A Down *Mezmerize*
- ▶ Nitin Sawhney *Beyond Skin*
- ▶ Lambchop *The Decline Of Country & Western Civilization*
- ▶ Laurie Anderson *Life On A String*
- ▶ BPO Karajan *Wagner Tannhauser Overture*
- ▶ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test

ON TEST



Canton Ergo 602
£500



Castle Richmond 3i
£320



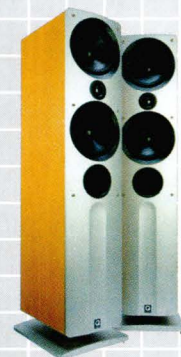
KEF iQ3
£280



Mordaunt-Short Avant 908i
£500



Nbien DX-5
£250



Q Acoustics 1050
£330

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.

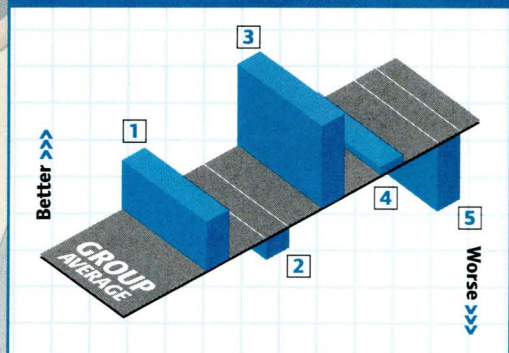
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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



£500 per pair ☎ 02392 501888 🌐 www.canton.de

CANTON ERGO 602

Timeless style combined with the latest engineering ingredients

Opening the Ergo 602's carton brought on a very real feeling of *déjà vu*. Way back in the 1980s, Canton made an earlier foray into the UK market, and *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewed some speakers that looked exactly like these. What we found with that earlier model remains mysterious, since in those days computers were primitive devices, disks were floppy, and hard disk drives hadn't yet made it into this particular household. But Canton describes the Ergos as its "timeless classics", where the presentation remains more or less constant while the engineering continues to evolve. In loudspeakerland, everything changes; but in many ways, everything remains the same.

It's no exaggeration to say that Canton is the leading German hi-fi speaker brand, and the Ergo is one of its more affordable ranges, though the real-wood veneer finish and classy radiused edges lift it comfortably clear of the beer-budget sector. The Ergo series includes six stereo pairs: the smallest of these (the 601) is a wall-mount intended primarily for surround channels, while the £500 per pair 602 is the smaller of two standmounts intended for stereo use.

It's a two-way design, naturally enough, based around a rear-port-loaded 180mm bass/mid driver housed in an attractive medium-size 'traditional' enclosure with an internal capacity of roughly 12 litres. The pretty cabinet with its artfully softened edges is available in either beech or cherry veneer, or in black or silver lacquer. A wooden picture frame surrounds the recessed front panel, and a black perforated metal grille fits flush with the edges, so is best left in place for aesthetic reasons if nothing else.



The main driver has an anodised aluminium cone 115mm in diameter, terminated in Canton's proprietary 'wave geometry' rubber surround. The tweeter has a 25mm aluminium/manganese alloy dome, with a claimed response up to 40kHz. Signal connection is made via a high-quality single terminal pair.

SOUND QUALITY

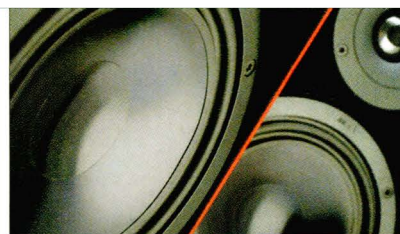
Clearly best mounted on proper stands located clear of walls, the Ergo 602 unsurprisingly loses out to the floorstanders in terms of bass power and weight, but in every other respect this pretty (if by group standards relatively costly) standmount goes a long way towards justifying its premium price, with a notably neutral tonal balance and very low coloration.

German speakers have often tended to have a slightly brighter balance than those which hail from British designers, and that is certainly the case here. This might just be a matter of taste, though there is also a (possibly apocryphal) theory that a brighter than usual top end helps make the consonant-heavy German language more intelligible.

Whatever the reason, the 602 is definitely brighter than average, and that in turn does help make lyrics and speech particularly explicit and easy to follow. However, although this arguably positive attribute entirely avoids any tendency for the voice band to sound 'shut in', it also means that the top end is arguably a little too obvious, because this is quite a small speaker and the bass end of things sounds a little dry and underfed. The bottom end is also a shade soft and lacking in punch, though it is both clean and beautifully even-handed.

The 602 could perhaps do with a little more warmth and harmonic richness, particularly

through the lower registers. But overall its superior smoothness and superb top-to-bottom neutrality, as well as the attractively traditional styling and finish, makes it a welcome addition to today's marketplace that comfortably justifies the asking price. **HFC**

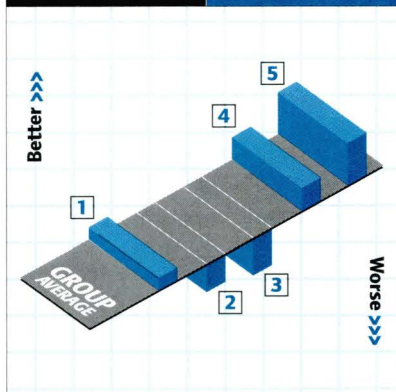


LAB REPORT

You could draw a ruler line through the Ergo 602's in-room far-field averaged response and see only tiny room-induced variations from flatness – just +/-2dB above 1209Hz, and still staying within +/-5dB down to below 40Hz. While such impressive flatness is welcome, with the promise of exceptional neutrality, the treble level is certainly stronger than average here, which might not suit every taste or system. And the bass as a whole is rather restrained, in terms of relative level and ultimate extension, which will tend to leave the strong treble that much more exposed.

Canton claims an efficiency (as distinct from sensitivity) of 86.5dB, which actually corresponds very closely with our own sensitivity rating of 89.5dB, since the speaker is predominantly a four-ohm load which will therefore be drawing two watts (rather than one) with the normal 2.83V datum that most manufacturers use.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +10%
- 2] Bass extension >> -15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -25%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +15%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86.5dB	89.5dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	33Hz	38Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 82%

PRACTICALITY >> 82%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 83%

This attractive medium-size standmount has quality real wood veneer and cleverly softened edges. The sound is beautifully open and neutral through the midband and presence, though the overall balance is dry and bright.

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

£320 per pair ☎ 01756 795333 🌐 www.castleacoustics.co.uk

CASTLE RICHMOND 3i

Refined sound and real-wood finish at a very nice price

Castle Acoustics is a stalwart of British hi-fi speaker manufacture, renowned (rightly) for the originality of its designs, but most particularly for the excellence of the top-quality real-wood veneerwork that it utilises throughout its Classic range. The Richmond 3i is a prime example of that range; it's available in an impressive variety of different veneers, mostly at the 'standard' £320 per pair asking price.

The latest in a long line of relatively affordable Castle luxury miniatures, this latest Richmond is slightly larger than its predecessor, in order to compensate for the fact that some of the enclosure interior is now taken up with bituminous damping pads. *Hi-Fi Choice* first looked at this model some two years ago (back in *HFC* 260), with very positive results, and the speaker has subsequently grown into something of a cult among consumers and trade alike. However, the small size does suggest it may be better suited to smaller rooms than the medium-to-large (4.3x2.6x5.5m) room that we used for this *Ultimate Group Test*.

It's a two-way design, loaded by a rear port situated below twin terminal pairs. The drivers are inverted, with the tweeter below the bass/mid unit for optimum integration when standmounted, and both units are neatly flush-mounted into the front panel. The tweeters are also offset from the centre line, the better to distribute baffle-edge diffraction effects, so the enclosure pairs are mirror-imaged to preserve left/right symmetry. The pair is normally installed so that the tweeters are closest to the inside edges.

The classy main driver has a cast frame, large magnet and a cone made from a polymerised

woven carbon-fibre matrix. Said cone, however, is only 100mm in diameter, and therefore one of the smallest in the test group. While this inevitably compromises its ability to physically move large quantities of air, and will constrain bass headroom and extension to an extent, a small cone is more likely to preserve its rigidity towards the top end of its operating range. It will also aid wide sound distribution near the crossover point. The tweeter's 19mm polyamide dome diaphragm is also smaller than the average.

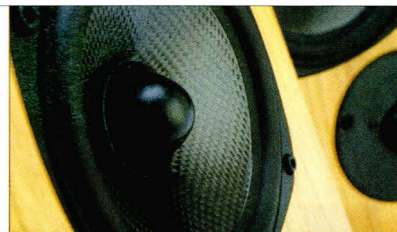
SOUND QUALITY

Initially auditioned in isolation, this pretty little miniature immediately impressed with its notably even and well balanced sound, and freedom from unwanted boxiness. Most significantly, it is unusually smooth for such a modestly priced speaker, and that major strength sets it well apart from the pack.

Although it delivers a lovely smooth balance on stands well clear of walls, perhaps inevitably there's an obvious shortage of bass under these conditions. Mounting the speakers close to a wall boosts the bass and helps the all-round balance significantly, though this also adds a little chestiness and thickening in the upper bass region, and somewhat compromises the midband smoothness by adding a little coloration here. One relevant observation is that the Richmond 3i is likely to work very well when used clear of walls and with the bass augmented by some sort of additional subwoofer.

Voice reproduction is this speaker's real forte, however, as it makes speech in particular sound beautifully clean, natural and unexaggerated. Imaging too is precise and well focused. But the downside is that dynamic grip and tension tends to sound constrained, and

contrasts seem slightly diluted. This is not the most vivid or exciting sounding speaker around, in terms of dynamic expression and contrasts, though it does make up for that with its subtle sweetness, delicate neutrality and superior imaging. **HFC**

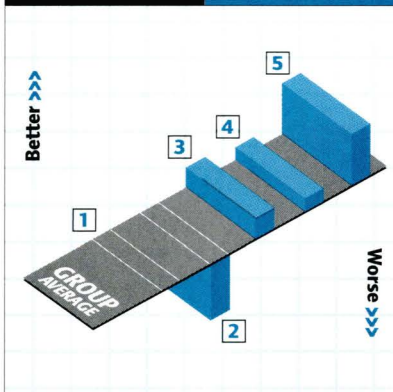


LAB REPORT

Our measured sensitivity for the Richmond 3i comfortably matches the manufacturer's specified 88.5dB, and this is achieved without compromising the load that the amplifier has to drive. The use of a generous main driver magnet, however, has the down side that bass extension tends to be somewhat curtailed. Even with the assistance of room modes and port output, average output falls off quite markedly below 120Hz when the speakers are mounted on open stands clear of walls.

Moving the speakers back against a wall helps to fill in the midbass and gives respectable extension down to around 50Hz, but at the same time it does rather perturb the exceptional smoothness of which this speaker is capable. In free space, the room-averaged response held an impressively smooth +/-3dB, but the bass region is significantly less smooth with wall assistance.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> -40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88.5dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/-	8/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	65Hz	45Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%

PRACTICALITY >> 85%

BUILD >> 87%

VALUE >> 86%

Pretty real-wood veneered miniature with a superbly smooth and even overall balance, though inevitably the bottom end is lacking. Dynamic expression is weak, and subwoofer reinforcement would be beneficial.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 82%



VENTO

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KEF iQ3

Neat looks and good all-round sound, with KEF's latest Uni-Q driver

One of Britain's best known and longest established speaker brands, KEF is now owned by Chinese interests and uses Chinese manufacturing, while its engineering and marketing operations are still based in Maidstone. Its latest near-budget iQ-series was originally launched in mid-2005, replacing the 2002 Q-series, and we actually reviewed this £280 per pair iQ3 alongside its big iQ9 brother back in *HFC* 273.

The iQ3 is the larger of two iQ standmounts, and is based on a solitary 165mm Uni-Q drive unit – an exclusive KEF coaxial design – to handle the bass, midrange and treble. The enclosure features beautifully curved and tapered sides, which not only look very attractive, but should also improve overall stiffness, and avoid the focusing of internal lateral standing waves that rectilinear boxes tend to create. This shape is echoed in a very gently curved front panel. The speakers are available in a choice of maple, walnut, dark apple or black ash vinyl woodprint, plus silver finishes, and are further decorated by a moulded black 'bump' that covers much of the top surface, matching the curve of the Uni-Q driver frame.

Much of the difference between the old Q-series and the new iQs lies in improved drive units. The latest Uni-Q drivers now feature die-cast frames, stiffer, titanium-coated 115mm plastic cones, longer throw suspensions, copper-plated flat aluminium wire voice coils and elliptical-profile tweeter domes.

The unique Uni-Q feature is that a small 19mm tweeter is mounted on top of the pole-piece that protrudes from the middle of

the bass/mid driver cone, and is actually located at its 'acoustic centre'. This makes it very easy to accomplish a smooth crossover transition, and also ensures that the transitions are as smooth off-axis as they are on-axis, so the far-field power response should be smooth, too.

The iQ3's solitary 165mm Uni-Q driver is reflex-loaded by a large, flared front port, and equipped with twin terminal pairs connected together by wire links if bi-wiring is not adopted. Optional port-blocking foam bungs are supplied – probably useful if the speakers are placed close to a wall.

SOUND QUALITY

Best kept well clear of walls, although the supplied bungs could be useful if individual conditions dictate close-to-wall siting, the iQ3 delivers a good overall sound balance, with an attractive warmth and fair dynamic expression, though its character isn't the smoothest or sweetest around. The midband is slightly obvious, bringing good projection to voices, yet at the same time the presence zone is sufficiently restrained to avoid undue exaggeration of sibilants or consonants.

One obvious bonus with the Uni-Q driver's coaxial tweeter is that the sound remains relatively consistent whatever the listening axis, and there's none of the 'lobing' that can afflict vertical head movements with conventional speakers. Another Uni-Q feature is that high frequency dispersion is a little restricted, which sharpens up stereo image focus and precision, at some expense in terms of the 'musicians in the room' impression.

There is just a touch of 'hollow' coloration here, and the bottom end might have been capable of a little more weight and authority, but percussion and bass lines are clean and clear, though the top end does lack a little sweetness. But cabinet coloration as such is clearly very low and the dynamic range usefully wide, giving good analysis throughout the bass region. On balance, the iQ3 is a thoroughly attractive all-rounder, with a shape that's both functional and pleasing to the eye, and at a price that's very nice. **HFC**

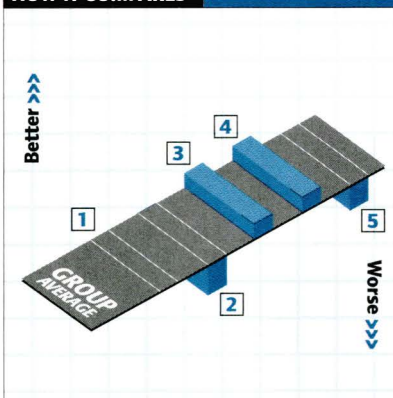


LAB REPORT

The iQ3 comfortably meets the manufacturer's specified 89dB sensitivity rating alongside an undemanding amp load, which falls to around five ohms at the port-tuned frequency of 48Hz, then around 150-300Hz, and again above 10kHz, but which stays above six ohms elsewhere. The overall frequency balance looks well judged, giving decent output level down to 40Hz when the speakers are mounted on open stands clear of walls.

The far-field in-room averaged frequency response looks particularly impressive above 300Hz: virtually flat from 300Hz up to 2.2kHz, and gently down-tilted thereafter, though there is some unevenness around the crossover region, between 2.2kHz and 4kHz, which might account for the slight lack of treble sweetness. Below 300Hz the averaged balance looks well enough judged, but also far from smooth, showing a series of +/-5dB peaks and troughs through the bass and lower midband.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -15%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/-	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%



PRACTICALITY >> 87%



BUILD >> 83%



VALUE >> 91%



Sounds lively and dynamic, and Uni-Q coaxial driver gives good consistency in forward radiation. Imaging is notably precise and well focused, but midband is strong and could be smoother and sweeter.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 86%

£500 per pair ☎ 0207 940 2200 🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

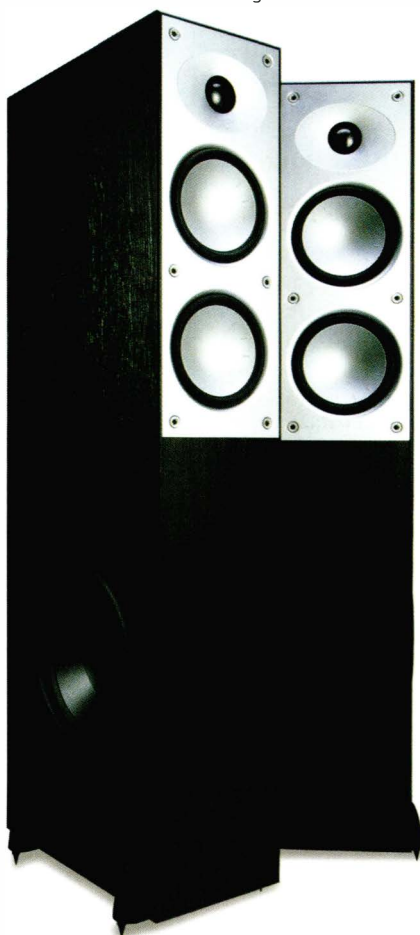
MORDAUNT-SHORT AVANT 908i

Slim 'n' silver three-way with twin midrange drivers

Mordaunt-Short's Avant 908i might look very similar to the Avant 906i from HFC 281, but the resemblance is largely superficial. The difference is clear when one attempts to lift this senior model from its carton, and discovers that 19kg is a much more serious proposition than the 906i's 12kg. And, predictably enough, the price is heavier too, up from £350 to £500 per pair.

Although the attractively slim front view of both models looks very similar, with the same silver coloured aluminium 'skin' sub-baffle covering the top half, and the same twin metal-dish bass/mid drivers and tweeter, closer scrutiny reveals several important differences. Even though the width remains the same, the enclosure is deeper and taller than its junior brother, and tucked into one of the sides is an extra 255mm bass-only driver.

A full three-way design, the enclosure proper is available covered in either black or maple vinyl woodprint, though the main focus of the cosmetics is clearly that silver front section. The twin midrange drivers are actually mounted from behind the front panel, to create a clean look with no visible mounting hardware. An



elliptical 'dished' section around the tweeter, redolent of an earlier Mordaunt-Short era, probably contributes to directivity control. A nicely embossed name completes the look.

The speakers are made in mirror-imaged pairs, and are normally installed so that the side-mounted bass drivers with their 190mm cones face towards each other. The twin midrange drivers use small 100mm diameter dish-shaped (rather than cone-shaped) diaphragms, described as CPC (Continuous Profile Cone) technology. These diaphragms 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.

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. Spike-equipped moulded feet improve the lateral footprint and mechanical stability of the slim enclosure (improved production control has sorted the spike-fixing problem we encountered in the 906i).

SOUND QUALITY

Not unexpectedly, this speaker is best kept well clear of walls, for fear of generating excessive mid-bass and thickening up the sound – all the more likely since the port is on the rear and the driver is inevitably rather closer to the wall than the front-mounted mid and treble. Although M-S recommends orienting the pair with the bass drivers pointing inwards (which we did for our review), all rooms are different and the outward-facing alternative might well be worth exploring.

Compared to the smaller 906i, this heftier three-way has welcome extra authority and headroom, bringing a greater sense of ease and relaxation to the music, especially when turning up the volume. Voices are just a shade restrained, but quite strong sibilants and consonants ensure good intelligibility, while images show fine focus and spread.

However, the curse of the three-way is that it's necessarily much more complex than the two-way, especially in its crossover network circuitry, and this presumably explains why the overall sound lacks some overall coherence. Complex textures – including audience applause – are a little confused, the midband sounds a little constrained and somehow fails to deliver genuine 'hear through' transparency, while dynamic tension and expression are both a little underdeveloped. **HFC**

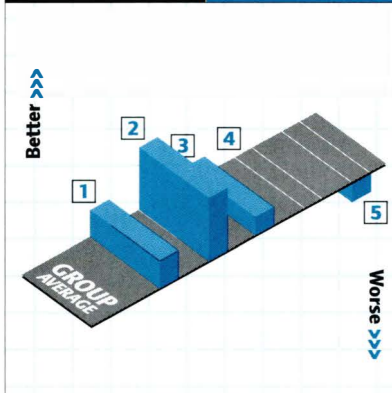


LAB REPORT

The generous 90dB sensitivity rating corresponds exactly with the manufacturer's claim, and is accompanied by a reasonably easy-to-drive impedance characteristic that stays above five ohms throughout. Similarly, bass extension registers a very healthy -9dB at 20Hz.

That all looks very impressive, but it is relatively easy to get good measurements out of a three-way, and the rather more surprising observation is that the 908i doesn't really seem to offer much advantage over the 906i. Yes, the 908i's deep bass is stronger, and its load is less demanding here too, but this senior model's overall balance is arguably less neutral overall, tending to emphasise the broad midband, 200Hz-1kHz, and the important upper crossover transition through the vital presence region is certainly less smooth. On balance it must be said that the 908i's measured performance is competent enough, but no more.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> +50%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 0%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -15%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m / 2.83V	90dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	8/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%

PRACTICALITY >> 84%

BUILD >> 81%

VALUE >> 82%

HI-FI CHOICE

OVERALL SCORE

80%

This slim three-way with a side-mounted bass driver sounds lively and goes loud with excellent headroom and fine imaging. Voices have explicit detail, but the sound could be more top-to-bottom coherent.

£250 per pair ☎ 029 2064 1005 🌐 www.nbien.com

NBIEN DX-5

Malaysian brand's pretty little DX-5 miniature is new to the UK

Nbien is a relatively new name to *Hi-Fi Choice*, with just one previous appearance (of the NX-6) way back in *HFC* 275. Chances are it will also probably be a completely new name to many readers, although this Malaysian company has in fact already put in a couple of appearances at a few British hi-fi shows. And indeed, the country itself is already well established as a significant source of serious hi-fi speakers, since Malaysian interests purchased Acoustic Energy some years ago.

Nbien has four distinct ranges, and the three DX models include a centre channel and a floorstander alongside this small £250 per pair DX-5 standmount. Based around a 130mm bass/mid driver, loaded by a transmission-line style port, it manages to incorporate a number of unusual features.

The enclosure comes in a variety of finishes; our samples were painted in high-gloss metallic graphite, but real-wood veneers are also available, which is surprising at such a modest price. The cabinet has an interestingly asymmetric elevation, with heavily post-formed horizontal edges and a large, angled slice taken out of the top and rear. Additional internal bracing and damping helps control cabinet vibrations, and a generous and nicely shaped front slot, on the end of a short folded line, port-loads the main driver.

The main driver is also unusual, using a Fabric Ceramic Composite Technology (FCCT) cone with a diameter of 95mm, which combines a lightweight fabric substrate with a ceramic stiffener and fill. The fabric cone is coated with a resin and ceramic powder mix,

before being hardened by repeated heating until any existing air gaps are filled. This composite is then coloured and doped with polymer damping material. The tweeter uses a 25mm soft fabric dome and twin terminal pairs are fitted on the rear.

SOUND QUALITY

The good news is that this is an excellent little newcomer that richly deserves a seat at the grown-ups' hi-fi table. Although it's possible to use the DX5 out in free space, under these conditions the bass end is rather weak. Placing the speakers close to a wall certainly redressed the balance – indeed, if anything the bottom end was now a shade strong, the more obviously so because the treble end of things is distinctly restrained. More significantly, close-to-wall placement seems to suit this little loudspeaker particularly well, as its strong upper midband doesn't seem to be unduly disturbed by wall proximity, and colorations remain well controlled.

Indeed, box coloration is exceptionally low here, and this little speaker proves remarkably effective at generating generous and spacious stereo images with a degree of weight and scale that's entirely surprising from such a compact device. To some extent this is a consequence of its relatively low sensitivity (it's always possible to trade off between sensitivity and bass extension), and the tilt in favour of extension will inevitably limit the speaker's ultimate loudness capability to a degree.

While it's true that the top end is relatively restrained, the transition from midband to treble is handled so smoothly and gradually one is hardly aware that the treble is a little light, or indeed of the changeover from one driver to the other. Though not entirely neutral, the DX-5's excellent overall coherence, fine expression, good solidity and superior dynamic range all add up to an impressive 'budget' newcomer, representing excellent value for money. **HFC**

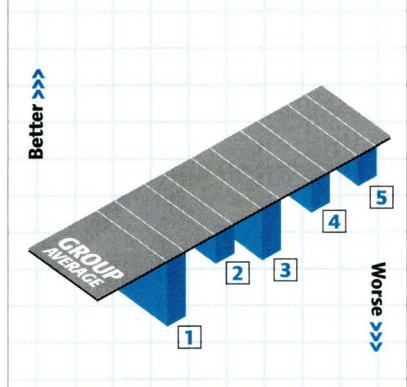


LAB REPORT

The paradox of loudspeakers is that measurements don't really say how good a loudspeaker will sound. The DX-5 gave measurements below the group average on every count, yet the sound quality judgement was entirely positive. The sensitivity rating is a low 85dB here, exactly as specified by the manufacturer, which is bound to place some limit on its loudness capability. And, although the load stays comfortably above six ohms for most of the band, it does dip down to around four ohms around 2.5kHz.

The far-field in-room frequency response traces are neither particularly flat nor all that smooth, and would seem on balance to favour close-to-wall positioning, as this tends to balance up and therefore disguise the upper midband prominence. Certainly, the upper midband (700Hz-1.5kHz) is a little too strong on balance, and that in turn tends to make the rather restrained treble a little more obviously shy.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -50%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -35%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	85dB	85dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	50Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

- SOUND >> 82%**
[Progress bar]
- PRACTICALITY >> 82%**
[Progress bar]
- BUILD >> 86%**
[Progress bar]
- VALUE >> 94%**
[Progress bar]

This pretty mini has an unusual shape and main driver. It works well with close-to-wall reinforcement, and delivers surprisingly generous scale, weight and dynamic expression for something so compact.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 88%

DEFINITIVE AUDIO

THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI SYSTEMS

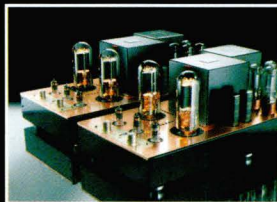
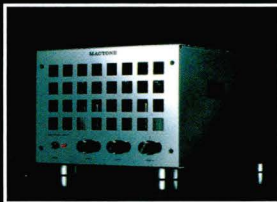


LIVING VOICE

Loudspeaker Systems

Main image: Living Voice OBX RW loudspeaker in Santos Rosewood £7400

LV AUDITORIUM from £2100, LV AVATAR from £3000, LV IBX R2 from £4000, LV OBX R2 from £4400, LV IBX RW from £6500, LV OBX RW from £7000



Left to right: 1. Living Voice IBX R2 (Maple) £4000 2. Art Audio Concerto integrated (GE) £4400 3. SME 10, Series V arm £4515
4. KSL Kondo Neiro integrated amplifier £23,500 5. KSL Kondo Gakuoh 300B mono amplifiers £48,500 6. Mactone 300B stereo power amplifier £6500
7. Kuzma XL, SME V, KSL Kondo lo-J £24,000 8. KSL Kondo 'Shinden' 211 mono amplifiers £76,000 9. Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player £2950
10. KSL Kondo 'Ongaku' 211 integrated amplifier £49,000

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£330 per pair ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.qacoustics.co.uk

Q ACOUSTICS 1050

This impressive new brand offers remarkable value for money

Armour Home Electronics is a relatively recent operation that brings together a number of well known British names – QED, Alphason, Myryad and Goldring, to name just four – into a specialist hi-fi conglomerate that's particularly strong in the budget price accessory sector.

Armour also used to distribute Mission's budget M-series speakers, but that arrangement came to an end when the Mission brand was purchased by IAG in mid-2005. Armour looked at the options and decided the best strategy was to develop its own speaker brand, and a year later it has brought a clutch of brand-new models to the marketplace, under the new Q Acoustics banner.

Since this hefty floorstander is the largest and most costly of four stereo pairs, yet carries a surprisingly modest £330 price tag, this is very much a budget range. It's therefore no surprise to find it's made in China, though all the basic design and engineering work was carried out by Armour personnel, alongside European consultants.

It's also therefore inevitable that the finish is predominately vinyl woodprint. That said, the silver-painted front panel is both thick and

sculpted. The whole thing feels very solid, as confirmed by its 18kg total weight. However, the most impressive feature, again in a price context, is the alloy plinth that lifts the speaker a few centimetres off the floor, extends the stability footprint and generally tidies up the appearance. It incorporates top-adjustable spikes, but there is no lock-nut provision.

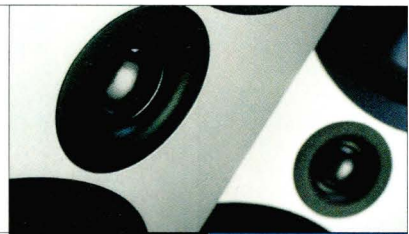
This is a two-way design, based around twin 165mm bass/mid drivers mounted above and below a solitary tweeter. It's an arrangement that combines muscle with simplicity, and has an impressive pedigree – in last month's high-end *The Collection* edition, the thoroughly impressive £40,000+ Audio Acoustics Sapphire Ti-C SE adopted just such a configuration. The two main drivers both have 115mm doped paper cones and are loaded by a fat front port. Twin zig-zag terminal pairs are integrated with a cable-tidy, and a fabric-covered perforated metal grille is supplied.

SOUND QUALITY

Okay, it's not perfect, but this good-looking floorstander is capable of batting way beyond its humble price point, sonically speaking, and indeed can hold its head high among models costing twice as much. Expectations for such affordable floorstanders have never been high – all too often the sonic cracks that result from engineering cost constraints are clearly audible. But that is less obviously the case here.

Rather the 1050 turns out to be a genuine star performer, delivering an essentially well balanced sound with decent transparency and much more than its fair share of dynamic grip and expression. When taken alongside good bass alignment and extension, generous sensitivity and headroom, and well controlled enclosure coloration, the net result is an exceptionally communicative loudspeaker that makes all kinds of music sound thoroughly involving and entertaining.

Yes, it could be smoother and tidier. The sound it generates does verge on the unruly, and this is not a speaker that hides any deficiencies in the software or the sources, and it doesn't deliver the most spacious imaging. But it does combine decent dynamic grip and expression with a measure of transparency and overall coherence that makes even difficult material impressively believable – applause, for example, which is a stern test for any speaker, sounds very convincing. The bottom line is that the 1050 brings real musical tension to the proceedings, and so ensures that listener involvement remains high. **HFC**

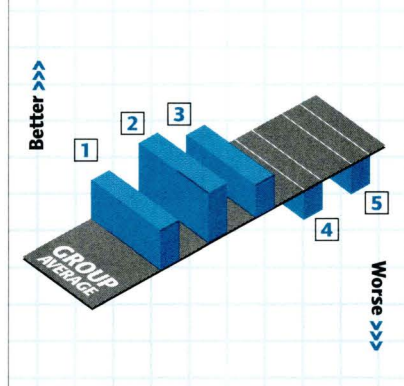


LAB REPORT

The 1050 has a notably generous sensitivity – 91dB according to our measurement, which is certainly close enough to the 92dB found in the manufacturer's specification. Furthermore, this impressive figure is in no way compromised by a fundamentally benign load that stays above six ohms almost throughout. However, because the port is tuned to around 43Hz, the lowest, bottom-octave bass is somewhat curtailed.

The far-field in-room averaged frequency balance is far from smooth, but it does hold within very decent +/-5dB right across the audio band, from 40Hz up to 15kHz, and the trend therein looks very well judged. There's a slight lack of energy through two octaves in the upper midband and lower treble, between 1kHz and 4kHz, but it only amounts to a couple of decibels, and will therefore only tend to tame any aggressive tendencies, rather than make the speaker sound 'shut in'.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >>> +30%
- 2] Bass extension >>> +40%
- 3] Ease of drive >>> +25%
- 4] Overall frequency balance <<< -20%
- 5] Response smoothness <<< -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	92dB	91dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/3.8 ohms	8/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	44Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 84%

□□□□□□□□

PRACTICALITY >>> 89%

□□□□□□□□

BUILD >>> 81%

□□□□□□□□

VALUE >>> 96%

□□□□□□□□

This generous floorstander offers superb value for money. The sound might not be the smoothest around, but it has fine dynamic expression and tension, and a very impressive level of 'hear-through' transparency.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 90%



CONCLUSIONS

Six very different approaches to making loudspeakers, but each one gives excellent value for money

Let's start off with the unequivocal statement that all six of these speakers offer very decent performance at even more respectable prices. Value for money is therefore consistently high, although the sound quality naturally tends to fall somewhat short of that achieved in more costly sectors of the market.

As suggested in the introduction, breaking our six models down into three pairs, broadly corresponding to their enclosure volumes and main

driver sizes, makes a great deal of sense – considerably more sense, in fact, than merely listing the speakers in ascending price order.

The tiny two, from Castle and Nbien, take advantage of their small surface areas by including high-quality real-wood veneer – or a high-gloss metallic alternative with the Nbien. The latter's DX-5 has a price advantage over the Castle Richmond 3i, and is better suited to close-to-wall operation, but the Castle's smoothness and

subtle voicing is its own reward, especially if a subwoofer is used to augment the bass.

KEF's £280 iQ3 and Canton's £500 Ergo both belong to the next size up – medium-size standmounts with main drivers of around 165mm. The wide disparity in their prices has much to do with the curvaceous KEF's use of vinyl woodprint finish, against the Canton's tasty real-wood veneer. However, the two speakers also have very different characters, the

KEF with a fuller, more laid back balance while the Canton has a dry, bright, open and smooth neutrality.

Both the floorstanders, from Mordaunt-Short and Q Acoustics, take floor-coupling seriously and are inevitably vinyl-wrapped, but differ from each other in both the number and configuration of the drivers. While the super-slim three-way Avant 908i is arguably the better looking, the two-way 1050 clearly shows the advantages of simplicity. **HFC**

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CD PLAYERS

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REGA APOLLO £500

Outstanding top-loader with a sweet and clean top end.

AMPLIFIERS

CAMBRIDGE AZUR 640A V2 £300

A powerful and lively sounding integrated at a bargain price.

MARANTZ PM7001 £350

Detailed and communicative amp with good bass weight and a sweet top end.

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



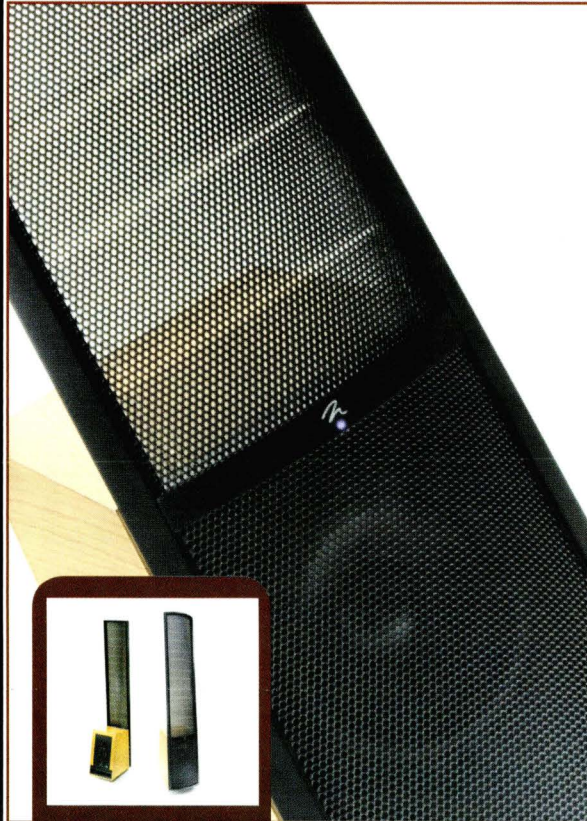
MAKE MODEL	Canton Ergo 602	Castle Richmond 3i	KEF iQ3	Mordaunt-Short Avant 908i	Nbien DX-5	Q Acoustics 1050
PRICE	£500	£320	£280	£500	£250	£330
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Beautifully open and neutral midband and presence, though a little dry and bright overall.	Pretty real-wood miniature has superbly smooth and even balance, though bottom end and dynamics are weak.	Shapely vinyl-covered standmount is engagingly lively and dynamic, though it could be a little smoother and sweeter.	Super-slim three-way floorstander sounds lively with excellent headroom, but could sound more coherent overall.	Neat miniature works well with wall reinforcement, and delivers surprisingly generous weight and dynamic expression.	Tremendous value. Could be smoother, but has fine dynamic expression and tension and impressive transparency.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	22x40x30.5cm	17x33x23cm	22x36.5x33cm	16.5x9.5x34cm	17.5x34x24cm	19.5x97.5x29.5cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	2-way	2-way	3-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x170mm	1x130mm	1x165mm	1x235mm, 2x130mm	1x130mm	2x165mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Stand	Stand	Floor	Stand	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Real wood	Real wood	Vinyl/ woodprint	Vinyl/ woodprint	High-gloss metallic	Vinyl/ woodprint
BI-WIRE?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	89.5dB A	89dB A	89dB A	90dB G	85dB P	91dB G
EST. BASS EXTENSION	38Hz A	45Hz P	40Hz A	28Hz G	40Hz A	28Hz G
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	6/4 ohms A	8/5 ohms G	7/5 ohms A	8/5 ohms G	6/4 ohms A	8/5 ohms G
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	+15% A	+10% A	+10% A	0% A	-20% A	-20% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+30% G	+40% G	-15% A	-15% A	-20% A	-20% A

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Vantage - the affordable Electrostatic from Martin Logan

Living in the shadow of a speaker as impressive as the Summit™ is no easy thing. Vantage rises to the challenge by compressing Summit's groundbreaking ultra-high-resolution XStat

™, AirFrame™, and PoweredForce™ technologies into a surprisingly compact package – at a surprisingly compact price. What do you give up? Basically, about a half octave of low bass and some peak output capability. No fooling, it just knocks us out what the kid sis can do – you have to hear it to believe it.

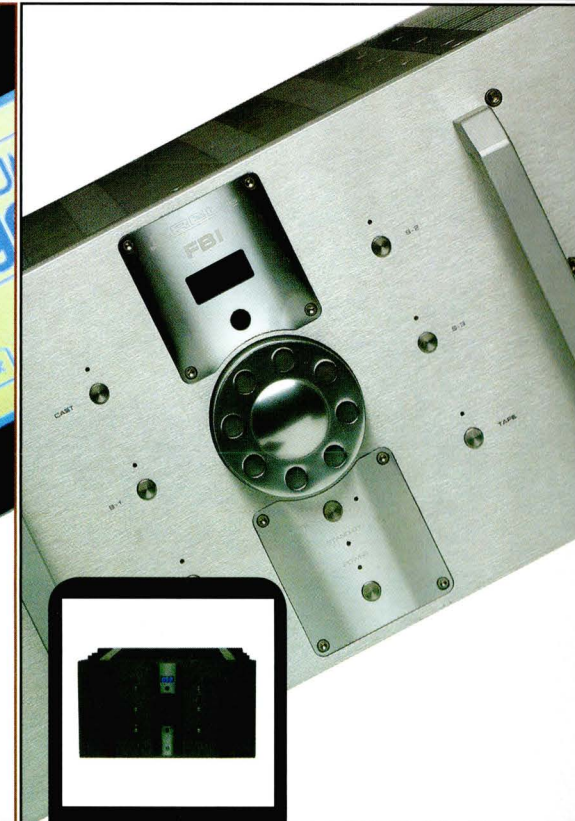
Available in a variety of hand-rubbed wood finishes, MartinLogan Vantage loudspeakers can be personalized to match any decor.



MD109 is Undeniably, the World's best FM Tuner

Primary highlights include an ultra stable power supply, a direct output Triode audio section and most importantly, the introduction of the World Source Platform.

Designed to remain perpetually current, the MD 109 starts with receiving and delivering with sonic accuracy all terrestrial FM signals better than any FM tuner that we have ever developed. Beyond this, it is also upgradeable to accommodate digital audio from various sources, including satellite radio, CD, DVD and Internet Sources. Quite simply, the MD 109 serves as your source component for all future listening options and variables.



The Krell FBI Reference - is taking no prisoners

The Fully Balanced Integrated Amplifier (FBI) is a large-format integrated amplifier that offers all the power and control afforded by big Krell amplifiers in a

convenient, integrated package that is simple to operate. A new Current Mode preamplifier topology features a CAST input for pristine signal integrity while a balanced, 300 watt/channel amplifier delivers the dynamic contrasts for which Krell is legend. The hand machined aluminium chassis and exquisite diamond cut finish complete a package that obliterates any notion of compromise. Elegant, graceful, powerful -- new from Krell, classic from Krell.

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Welcome to our new, expanded Choice Bits accessories shop. Every month, our highly-trained audio experts trawl the world of hi-fi for the freshest goodies and the finest accessories, all perfect to help bring the most out of your system and each one ready to be delivered straight to your door.

This issue, look no further for the last word in disc cleaning (until the next one) courtesy of the very estimable Last, a company with something of a history in the noble art of audio disc hygiene. Their CD/DVD cleaner promises even less risk for your precious discs. For our full selection, visit our dedicated website: www.choicebits.co.uk



LAST CD/ DVD CLEANER

It is now an acknowledged fact that for digital media to perform optimally, it needs to be kept clean to ensure low error rates and the accurate reading of data. Stalwart cleaning manufacturer Last, a company

which made its name in both stylus and vinyl cleaning solutions for analogue, has entered the marketplace with its CD/DVD cleaning solution. This formulation has been developed to effectively remove grease, dirt and static from the surface of optical media whilst preventing particulate matter from making contact with the disc surface during cleaning and potentially marring the surface with microscopic scratches. Where Last is unusual is in its ability to minimise the effect of scratches on disc playback, due to its chemical formulation, which minimizes data errors due to disc surface damage.

ONLY £19.95

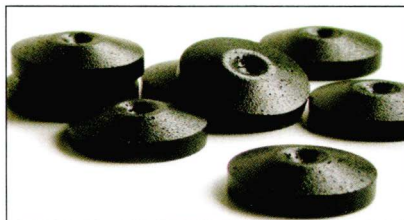
Best Buy Accessories



Clearaudio Deluxe Bubble Level

Use Clearaudio's high-quality stainless steel bubble level to ensure your turntable is lined up.

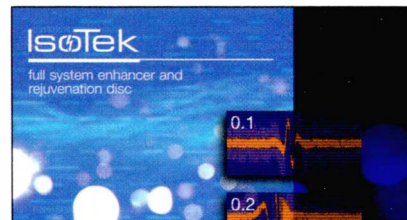
Price: £21.95



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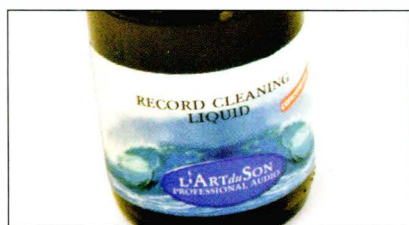
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L'Art du Son Record Cleaning Liquid

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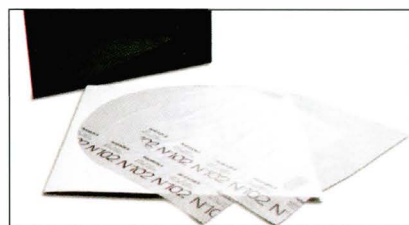
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Knosti Disco Antistat Record Cleaner

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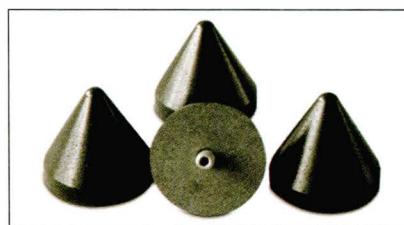
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Quite simply, the best LP inner sleeves made. The audiophile's choice. Sold in packs of 50.

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LAST Stylus Cleaner

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Price: £19.95

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Furutech Ultimate Rhodium Fuse	£32.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
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IsoTek GII Nova	£1495.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kemp Electronics PowerStrip 4-Way	£324.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kemp Electronics Power Strip 6-Way	£375.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kemp Electronics Power Strip 8-Way	£424.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost THOR by IsoTek	£1595.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
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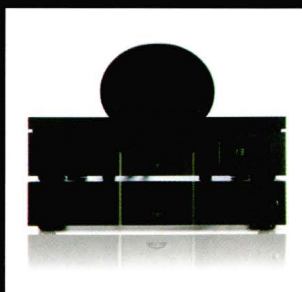
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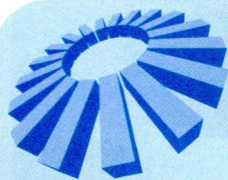
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mc1201 : Fully double balanced from input to speaker output. Two matched amplifiers with complimentary balanced circuitry operate in a PUSH-PULL configuration. Their outputs are combined in a balanced "OUTPUT AUTOFORMER". The resulting double balanced configuration cancels virtually all distortion. This circuit is ONLY possible with the exclusive "McINTOSH OUTPUT AUTOFORMER".



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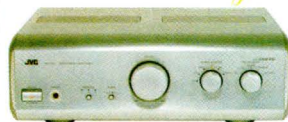


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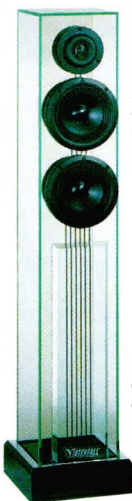
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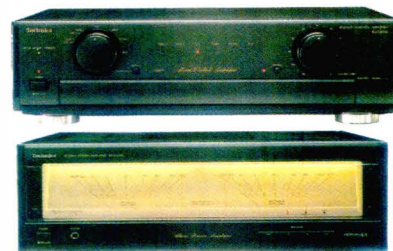
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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 44.1 kHz to 192kHz.

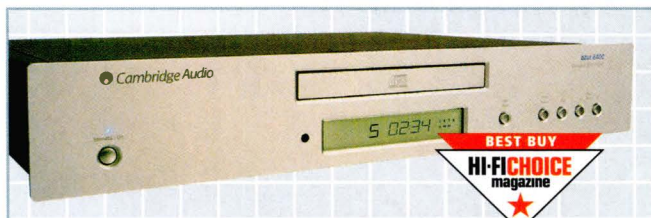
CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



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.

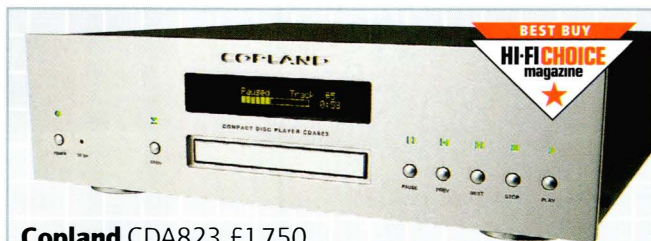


Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

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	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
BEST BUY	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
	Creek EVO	495	Excellent bass, good imaging and tonal neutrality are barely compromised by a shade of treble dryness		●	●	●				283
	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
	Marantz SA7001	430	Easy, relaxed sound arguably lacks true grit, but is extremely listenable from CD and SACD	●		●		●		●	281
	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
	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 FMJ CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality: 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!		●	●	●	●			280
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender		●					●	281
	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm		●	●	●				283
	Marantz SA-15 S1	1,200	Some inconsistency over imaging, but enjoyable performance, strong on detail	●	●	●	●				276
	Meridian G06	1,695	Great combination of all-round attainment with superb looks and build quality, plus superb remote control		●	●	●	●			281
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful		●	●	●	●	●	●	263
	Myryad MXC6000	1,400	A highly listenable player with excellent tonal balance and very fine detail		●		●				270
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance				●				280
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits		●	●	●		●	●	253
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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

V DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

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



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

DVD-AUDIO

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

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

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



Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

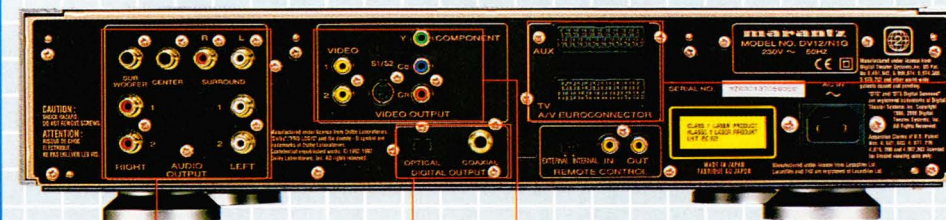
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	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
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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

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magazine



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

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

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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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
BB	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
BB	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
BB	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			●	279
BB	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
BB	Michell Tecnodoc	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
BB	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
BB	Nottingham Analogue Horizon	529	A fluid midrange and nimble but rich bass are two of the many attributes of this bargain deck (price inc RB250 arm)	33/45			●	253
BB	Pro-Ject 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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
BB	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			●	257
BB	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			●	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
BB	Roksan Radius S/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 ● in 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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

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

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU. GAIN	AU. IMPEDANCE	
BB	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
BB	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
BB	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●				201
BB	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

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

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

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

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

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- 1 - Ascendo
- 2 - Hansen
- 3 - Kharma
- 4 - Quad
- 5 - Lumley
- 6 - Rockport

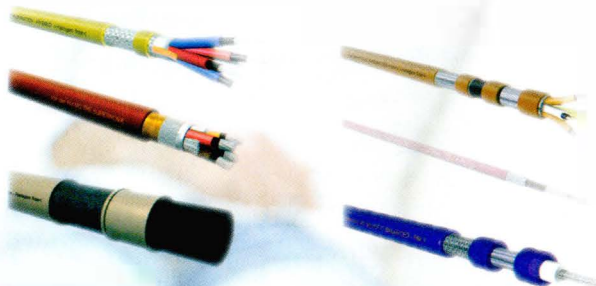
- 7 - Hyperion
- 8 - Wilson Audio
- 9 - LSA
- 10 - Martin Logan
- 11 - Krell
- 12 - Sonus Faber

- 13 - Gamut
- 14 - Vivid Audio
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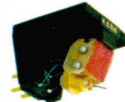
FROG

A custom handbuilt moving coil cartridge with the coil of a GRASSHOPPER III and the frontpole and suspension of the GRASSHOPPER IV: the best cartridge available for its price. Output 0.65 mV/channel, matched crystal copper-wire coils and extra magnet modification.



CONDOR

What do you get when you cross a Colibri with a Frog? Yes..... a Condor! The CONDOR is a top performance custom handbuilt moving coil phono cartridge. A crossbreed of our The FROG and The COLIBRI (two of the world's finest cartridges) featuring the best of both and available in a wide range of versions matching the personal demands of the customer.



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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 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.



T+A T1210R £1,000
This FM tuner looks, feels and sounds top-notch – great detail and imaging.



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195
FM tuner with valves – 'affordable' for an MD, but still streets ahead of most radios.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7		●	●	●	283
	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto	FM,M,L	100	●			●	281
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, the generally decent performance on both bands makes this an great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●		●	283
	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
	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!	200	●	●		●		283
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		●		230
	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	283
	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20		●			283
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100	●	●			283
DAB TUNERS										
	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
	Cambridge Audio DAB 500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
	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
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	242
	Sony ST-SDB 900	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.

IXOS IXOTICA

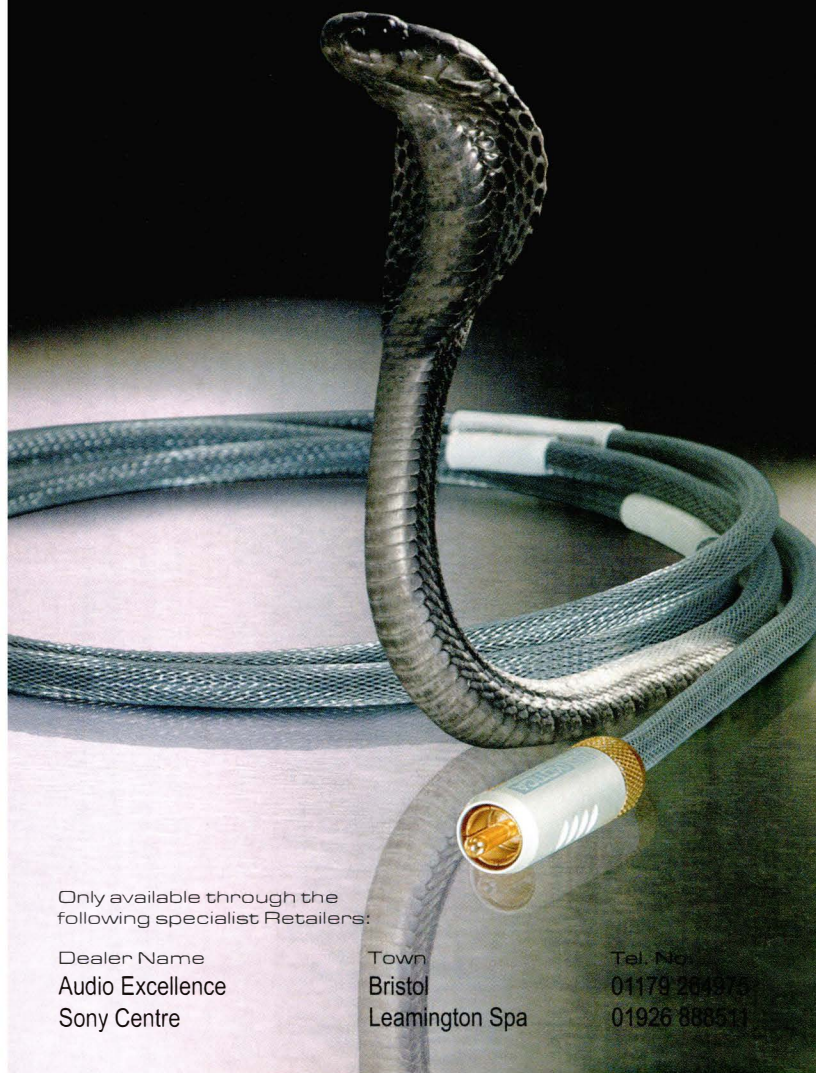
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HI-FI WORLD
IXOTICA IX1 REVIEW

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SYSTEM OF THE MONTH

Wilson Duette, Krell SACD Standard, Krell KAV-400xi. Simple, beautiful, performance beyond the expected

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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



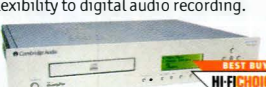
Philips CDR802 £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and capable, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



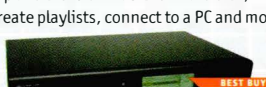
Yamaha CDR-HD1500 £599

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 BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



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

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

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

How to choose an amp

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



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

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

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

HOME CINEMA STEREO

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

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

Q&A

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

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

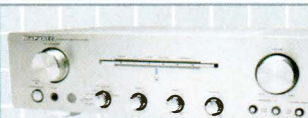
WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

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

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

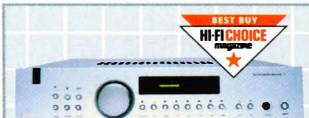
Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



Marantz 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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	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
BB	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Very well specified, well built, a delight to use and a real musical all-rounder	7	opt	●	●	90	273
BB	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		●	●	75	279
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 540A	200	A well built and fully featured amplifier that costs this little should not sound this revealing	6	opt	●	●	50	255
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	750	A very fine amplifier, practical, smart and well made; offers some of the best sounds we've heard at this price	7		●	●	120	281
BB	Creek EVO	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	●	●	85	283
	Cyrus 6vs	600	Best seen in a Cyrus rack but capable of sweet sounds elsewhere too. Impressively clean and agile but lacking musical grunt	7		●	●	40	262
	Cyrus 8vs	800	Slightly inferior to Cyrus 6vs, but the tables are turned with the add-on PSX-R power supply – in that form it's a real Best Buy	7		●	●	70	261
BB	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
BB	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension – exceptional value for money	5	●	●	●	70	279
BB	Marantz PM7001KI	550	Building on an already fine amp, the KI variant offers superb bass and bags of detail	5	●	●	●	70	283
BB	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price – another budget classic from NAD	7		●	●	55	253
BB	Naim Nait 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner	4		●		50	252
BB	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5	●	●	●	80	278
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
BB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7	●	●	●	100	266
EC	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8		●		100	280
EC	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6	●	●	●	100	275
EC	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6		●		130	281
BB	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85	255
BB	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
BB	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
EC	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
EC	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
EC	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
EC	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5	●	●		75	271
BB	Marantz PM-11S1	2,500	A good-looking, well-endowed, high-quality amp that's a great match for the impressive SA-11S1 stereo CD/SACD player	6	●	●	●	100	265
BB	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			●	100	267
EC	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4		●		40	268
BB	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
BB	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	●	100	227
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2		●		266
EC	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
BB	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated	●	●	6		●	75	264
BB	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Upgraded entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication	●	●	6		●	50	262
BB	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	●	136	256
ABOVE £2,000										
BB	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●		5	opt	●		273
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt			277
EC	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					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5	●	120	269
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	80	276
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●	50	254
EDITOR'S CHOICE	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●			180	253
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●			200	247
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Halcro dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	225	243
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	125	250
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6	●		233
BEST BUY	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 AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
BEST BUY	Arcam DiVA AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	●	100	257
EC	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
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously		●	●	170	266
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
BEST BUY	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	●	7	●	100	273
BEST BUY	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
EC	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs	●	10	●	200	253
BEST BUY	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								
BEST BUY	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 super 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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier		4			260
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
BEST BUY	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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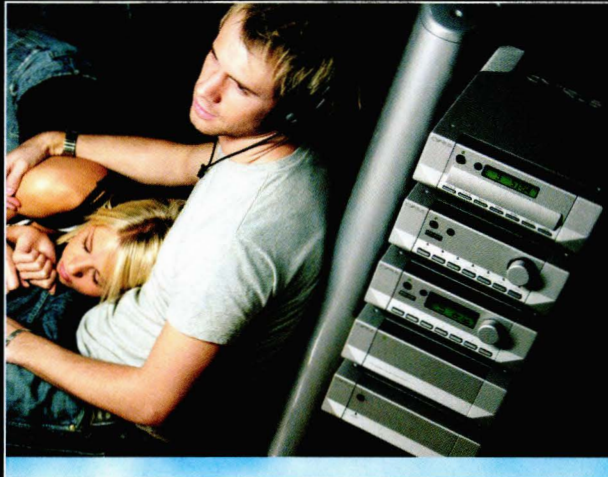
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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYER
CYRUS CDA

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
BEST CD PLAYER & COMPACT DISC
CYRUS CDA




Primare

Primare has built a worldwide reputation for producing innovative audio and video products that challenge convention. With a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, class-leading build quality, and proprietary state-of-the-art technological advance, they build into elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
CD PLAYERS
BEST CD PLAYER & COMPACT DISC
PRIMARE CD01

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
STEREO AMPLIFIERS
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER & CD/CD-ROM
PRIMARE L30



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? AWARDS 2005
TURNTABLES
BEST TURNTABLE & MOTOR UNIT
PROJECT DEBUT II

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

Monitor Audio

NEW GOLD SIGNATURE RANGE

Monitor Audio's Gold Signature is a new flagship range that reaches unprecedented standards of design, innovation, performance, technical excellence, build quality and value in its class.

The line-up comprises the **GS10** stand-mount; the **GS20** and **GS60** floorstanders; the **GS-FX** surround; a dedicated centre-channel speaker, the **GS-LCR**; and the **GSW-12** active subwoofer.



SILVER RS6

"The Silver RS6 is a success: it looks dressed to kill, delivers plenty of detail and punches like a heavyweight"

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
★★★★★
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- Tube Loaded Aluminium Tweeter
- Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy

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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."



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. The Range Includes: -

- Integrated, Pre and Power Amplifiers
- CD Player and DAB Tuner

"The Rotel RA-05 does everything asked of it in superb style"



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



Marantz

Marantz is introducing a host of new products ranging from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and AV receivers. The two main products groups are the 'premium' and 'range' series.

Latest additions to its hi-fi range include the entry-level **CD5001** CD player and **PM4001** amplifier offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.

Features Include: -

- CD-R/RW Compatibility
- 30 Watts Per Channel
- Five Line-Level Inputs & Two Tape Outputs



MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

MAKE THE INFORMED CHOICE TO ENHANCE YOUR LISTENING PLEASURE

Denon **New** AV Receiver

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 others are judged.



Denon's range includes the award-winning DVD-2910 DVD player and the New AVR-2807 AV receiver.



Arcam

Arcam offers the movie and music lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions.



New **DiVA**

- The new **DV137** universal player from Arcam is their first to feature SACD as well as DVD-Video and audio playback.
- The **AVR350** takes the traditional Arcam virtue of great sound and adds HDMI switching, important for anyone thinking of the move to an HDTV surround system.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005
COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGES
BEST COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGE SYSTEM
B&W MT-30



MINI THEATRE MT-30

"Talented, covetable and worth every penny, the MT-30 (and especially the PV1) could well be heading for iconic status"

B&W

With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

New REL

R SERIES

The R-Series is designed to augment the performance of "full range" speaker systems and to provide linear response down to below 20Hz.

- R-205, R-305 and R-505
- Class D Amplification
- Piano Black Lacquer Finish



Pioneer

- Model PDP4365XE
- 43 Inch Plasma TV
- HDMI socket
- Wall or Stand Mount
- Integrated Freeview Tuner



"If you could think of nothing worse than having a separate media box, then be thankful you can now enjoy Pioneer's stunning big-screen plasmas, too."

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
★★★★★
MAY 2005

HD ready

InFocus **IN76**

Fill your screen with bright, vivid and crisp images. This projector includes DVI and HDMI inputs, for the highest quality from DVD players, HD receivers and new HD game consoles with HDCP.



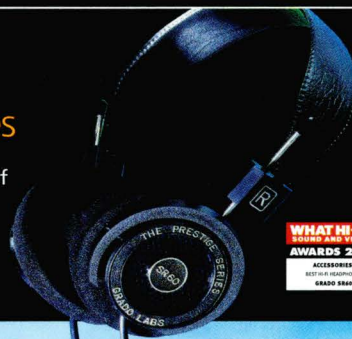
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
★★★★★
JUN 2005

"Brilliant - marks a big step forwards for budget projectors."

Grado

SR60 Headphones

"These have been on our list of favourite accessories since 1999, and we've yet to hear more impressive sub-£100 headphones."



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005
ACCESSORIES
BEST HEADPHONES
GRADO SR60

Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily into one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK

We have 49 stores and are specialists in:-

- Hi-Fi
- Home Cinema
- Custom Design and Installation

Exceptional Product Range

We have one of the most comprehensive ranges of the best products from leading brands.

To find out more:-

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- Call us on 0800 587 9909
- Log on to www.ssav.com

Custom Design and Install

Our custom design and install service ensures that you achieve the best results effortlessly.

- We discuss your vision for your Home Cinema or Multi-Room system
- We visit your home to review the best options
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- We manage the Installation
- You have years of enjoyment

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Spread the cost of buying. Flexible finance options* are available on the majority of products we stock.

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

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ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 24/08/2006, E&OE.

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.

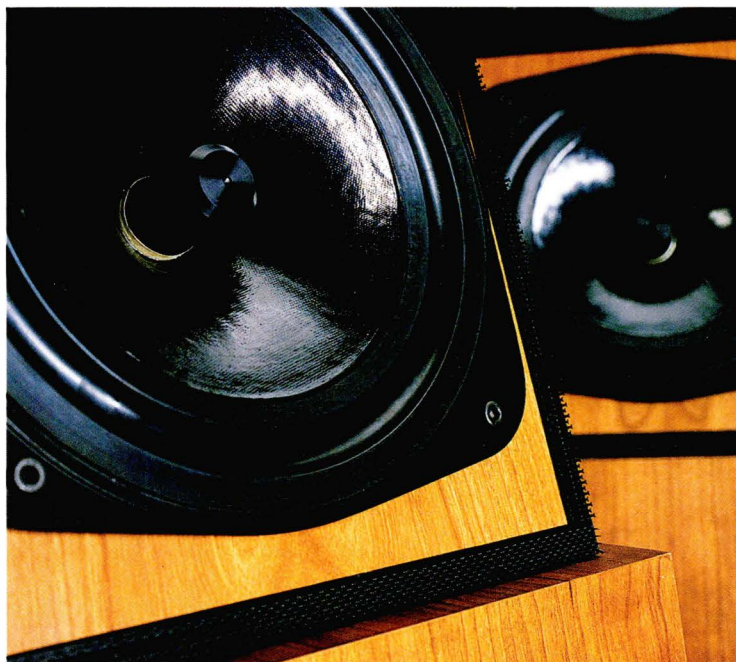
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion.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

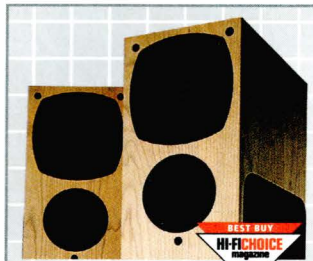
WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

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 AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5	A-	45	●			283
	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
EC	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
EC	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26	A-	55		●		253
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●			241
EC	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40		●		269
EC	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40	●			265
	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	●	A-	25	●		275
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●		255
EC	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
EC	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	165,85,295	●	A	40	●		281
EC	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).

Do you want to choose your hifi or home cinema system, in a comfortable and relaxing environment...?

Do you want friendly and impartial advice (and a cup of tea) ...?

Do you want to buy your system based on what you hear, and see, and not what somebody tells you...?

Do you live in GUILDFORD...?

.....or Addlestone, Aldershot, Ashford(Middx), Ashstead, Bagshot, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Bookham, Bramley, Camberley, Chertsey, Chipstead, Chobham, Cobham, Cranleigh, Crowthorne, Dorking, Epsom, Esher, Farnborough, Farnham, Fleet, Frimley, Godalming, Hartley Wintney, Hampton, Haslemere, Hook, Horsham, Kingston, Liphook, Leatherhead, Liss, Molesey (East&West), New Malden, Odiham, Petersfield, Reading, Reigate, Redhill, Richmond, Shepperton, Virginia Water, Walton-on-Thames, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Windsor, Woking, Wokingham, Yateley .

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

Apollo, Arcam(Diva/FMJ), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & FMJ, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

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".....it's hifi for fun's sake....."

Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS** continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (mm)	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	Revel Concerta F12	900	The money has gone into the active hardware, so cosmetics are plain. Performance is on par with more costly designs	25,108,37	●	A-	28	●	283
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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									
HB	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26		A+	40	●	281
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,900	Luxury miniature has a laid back but bouncy sound, fine dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25		A-	30	●	281
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	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
HB	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32	●	A	20	●	257
EC	B&W 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
HB	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
HB	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
	B&W XT4	1,800	Gorgeous, silver, super-slim floorstander has notably clean bass, but sounds a little too polite and lacks dynamic grip	15,2,114,20	●	A-	25	●	281
	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
HB	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
	Canton Vento Ref 5DC	3,499	Strikingly handsome speaker has a studiously neutral balance with delightful midband analysis	25,112,35	●	A	40	●	283
	Charlo 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
EC	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
HB	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5	●	A-	<20	●	281
EC	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
EC	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	●	A	20	●	248
EC	Focal-JMLab Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	●	A+	30	●	255
EC	Focal-JMLab 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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
	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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Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	FASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
BB	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
BB	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range	27,110,25	●	A	<20	●		281
EC	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride	24,121,37	●	A-	35	●		264
	Naim Ariva	1,275	Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter	23,88,31	●	A	25		●	259
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
EC	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25	●		237
EC	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●		254
BB	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
BB	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
EC	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	30	●		265
EC	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30		A-	48	●	●	274
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Sonus Faber Cremona A.	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48	●		246
EC	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Domus	2,498	Fabulous physical appearance, and clean, refined sound especially well adapted to acoustic music and voice	21,106,31	●	A-	32	●		283
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●		240
BB	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35	●		277
BB	Triangle Celiuss 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
EC	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
BB	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
EC	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●		261
	WEGG3 Stellar 1	4,995	A full-range sound from a small(ish) box is possible, but only if you are very careful about set up, room and amps	35,97,45	●	A-	28	●		275
EC	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●		254
EC	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	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
 	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
 	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
 	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
 	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		●	224
 	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●		241
 	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
 	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
 EC	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●		253
 	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
 EC	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
 EC	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	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (HZ)	ISSUE NUMBER
 	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
 EC	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
 	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
 EC	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
 	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
 	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
 	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
 EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
 	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.

BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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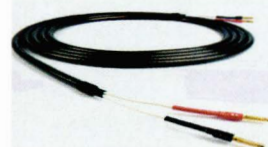
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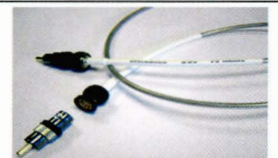
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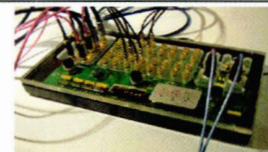
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HEADPHONES

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

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

Stereo headphones

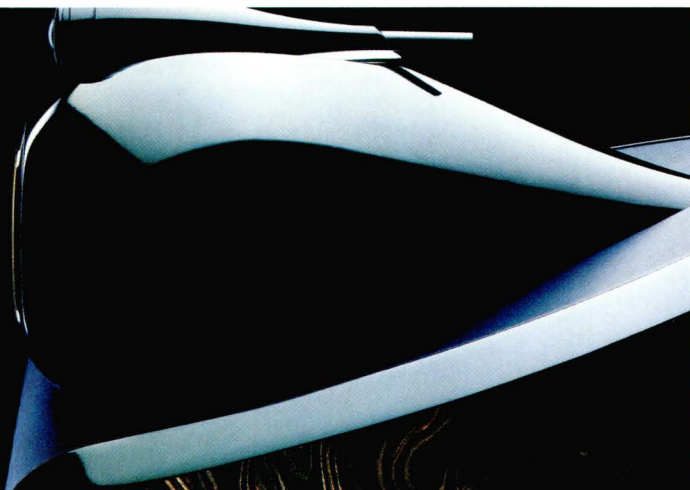
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
BB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
EC	AKG K1000	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
BB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
BB	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
BB	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort		●			●	200	●	270
BB	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
EC	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
EC	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
EC	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.

HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND

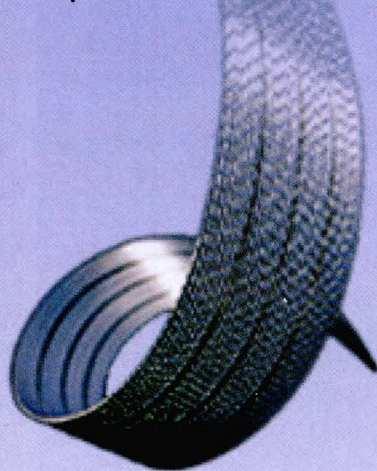
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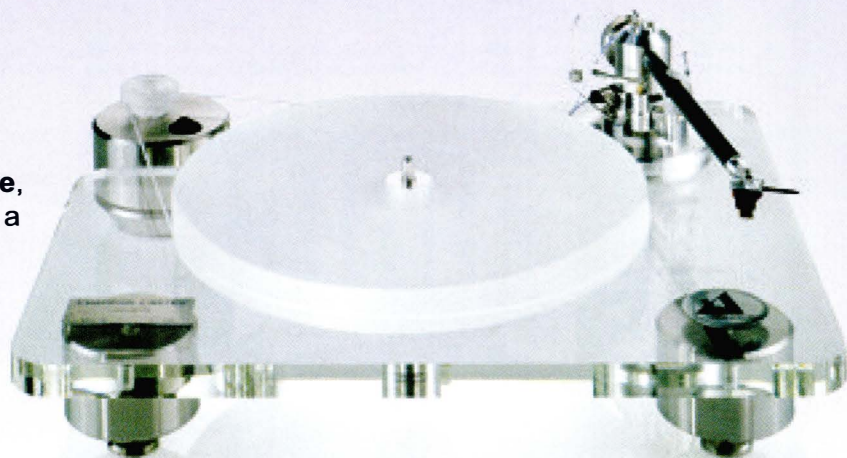


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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables				SPECIFICATIONS					
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	SCALE NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass - at a price!	●		●			279
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail	●		●			283
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monster Interlink 400 MkII	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound at a sensible price	●		●			224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●		●			281
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●		●			278
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble	●		●			281
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging	●		●			280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend DCT300	300	DCT wire with hum-busting ferrite sleeves. Packed with enough detail to make rivals sound flat		●	●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TCI Viper SE	70	A well-made cable which excels at separating and defining instruments within an image	●		●			200
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●		●			273
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●		●		E	278
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●		E	260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●		E	265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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									
	Chord Odyssey 4	34	This biwire version of Odyssey offers excellent speed and impact, with low listener fatigue	●		●			258
	Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha	10	Strong, ringing bass and neutral tonality are plus points: treble is not the purest we've heard	●		●			283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●		●			227
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Lively, energetic and possessed of fine midrange detail and imaging	●		●			277
	Wyrewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.		●	●			267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●			261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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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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)	FILLABLE	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
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40			5	Glass	217
	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
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16,5,18			1		281
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16,3			4		283
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20			1		220
	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20			1		220
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4		232
	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
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3		280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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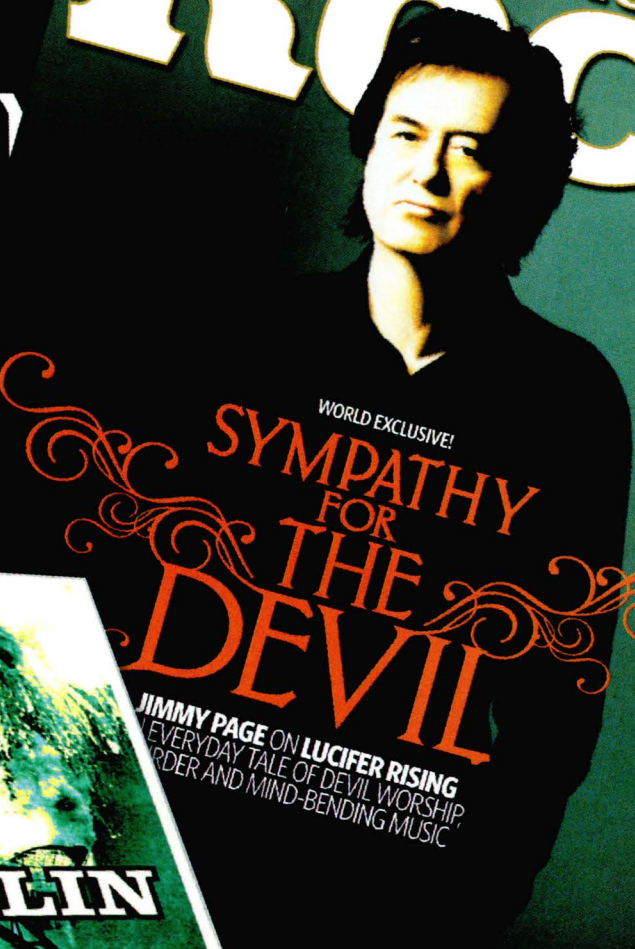
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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp). Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire) Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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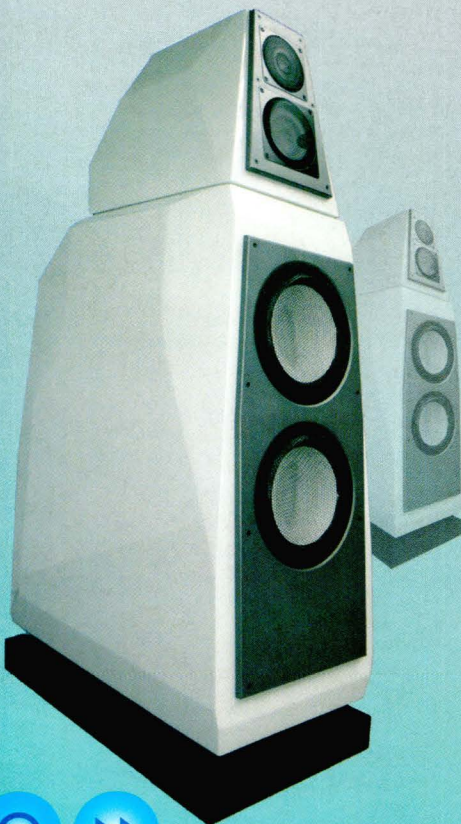
" If you want the best and don't want to pay silly money for it, buy the Plato... its the best loudspeaker we have heard! "

Two Versions: Reference / Diamond Tweeter Reference

PLATO is a three-way-plus, 5 unit floor standing speaker of true beauty.

Ceramic drive units, optional diamond tweeter (special order) and unique rear twin-ribbon super tweeter are just the beginning. Separate cabinets, 14 layer piano lacquer finish, patented 360 radiating downward port and tuning by the finest of ears complete the design.

JAS-Audio wanted to create a loudspeaker of unparalleled performance that would make the whole world sit up and listen. PLATO does this in a such an effortless way that it makes it practically impossible to live with any other loudspeaker in your system. Seriously!



Pay attention!

The beautiful piano high gloss finish and attention to detail can hardly fail to impress but its the noise this speaker makes that will leave most speechless. Listen to other speakers and in most cases you'll find one aspect, one area that you wish you could change to create that perfect loudspeaker. Listen to the Hyperion 938 and the first thing you'll ears will tell you is just how balanced the 938 is. You really cannot fault its performance in any area.



When a product wins this many awards in a single year, you know to expect something pretty special!



Sonic Bargain! VERDICT

" 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 Qinpu's emotional and powerful response."

Dominic Todd, Hi-Fi World, April 2006





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VERDICT

JungSon JA-88D

"tune your system around this amplifier and you'll get startling results..."

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



MiniMax Valve CD Player

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VERDICT

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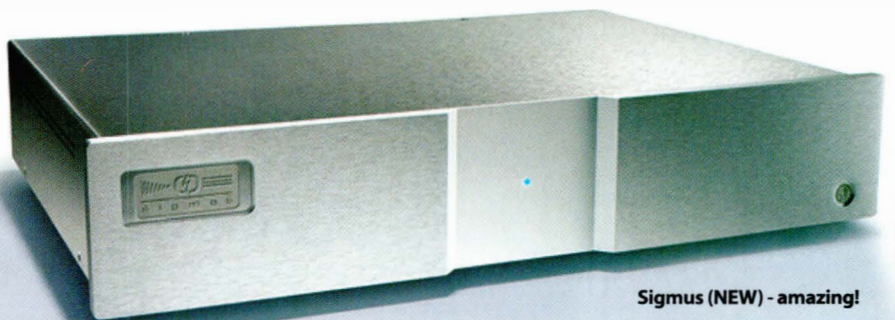
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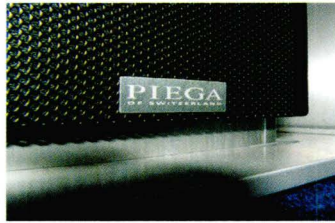
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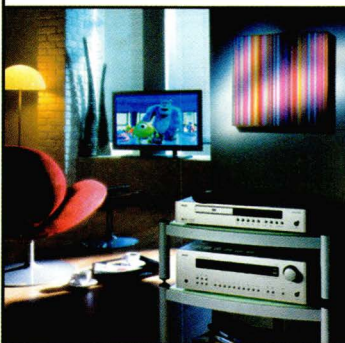
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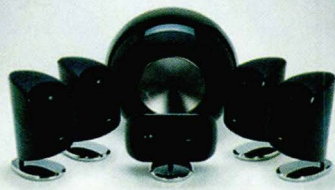
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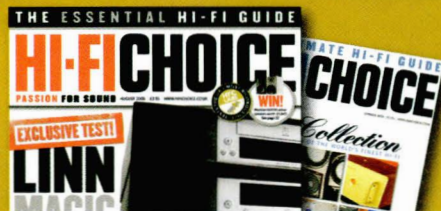
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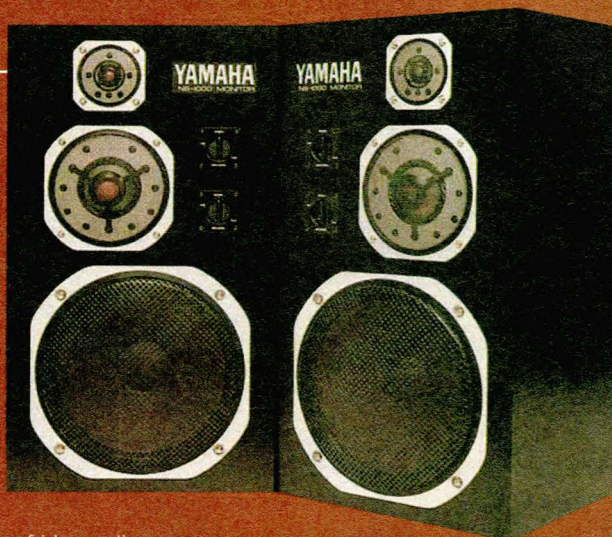


A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

#26 YAMAHA

Few speakers divide opinion quite like the Yamaha NS1000s. Back in the early 1970s, Yamaha produced a speaker that astounded with its transparency at frequency extremes. A three-way design, using rare metal Beryllium domes matched with a paper woofer, the NS1000s produced very low levels of distortion at high decibels. In the latter 'M' model (1977 onwards) the cabinet was reinforced and finished in black. At a time when most contemporary speakers sounded somewhat, shall we say, 'euphonic', the big Yamahas came as quite a shock to those used to fluffier sounding boxes. Despite this, the NS1000s sold for 20 years in the UK (1975-1995) and enjoyed a cult following. In fact, the cult continues to this day, which is

for a woofer. Although not cheap, these are durable designs. When buying a second-hand pair of NS1000s, listen for a hissing noise from the treble, as this indicates a tweeter unit that's past its best. For those who enjoy subtlety and refinement, the NS1000s will never be on the wish list, but if you're looking for a powerful and revealing speaker, perhaps to match a softish sounding valve amp, then the NS1000s make a great



Above: Yamaha NS1000Y loudspeaker

“As you'd expect from a Japanese flagship model, the build quality is superb.”

why second-hand examples aren't all that cheap. Nevertheless, with decent examples going for £700-£900, you can still buy a lot of speaker for your money.

As you'd expect from a Japanese flagship model, the build quality is superb and the only real problem to afflict the NS1000s is abuse. The good news is that while cabinets are no longer available, the drive units are. Spares for Yamaha are handled by a company called Charles Hyde & Son (08709 909474), which quoted £117.50 for a tweeter and around £153

buy, especially in 'M' designation.

More affordable and rather less controversial is the KX580SE cassette deck. This was only recently discontinued and had won awards for its performance right up to the very end. Although not all that expensive when new (£250), it encapsulated all that Yamaha and others, had learned about the compact cassette source over the years. In the words of the Yamaha service chap that we spoke to it is, "a damn good machine" and a fitting tribute to that most durable of formats. With the best

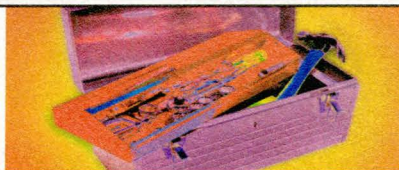
Dolby system, Dolby S – the one with which it finally all came together, and a quality transport system, the KX580SE is perhaps one of the best ways to see off your cassette collection. As it has only recently been finished, parts should be available for another seven years, with standard service parts – pinch rollers and so on – probably being available for much longer than that. With the best second-hand models costing no more than £120, this has to be the one to go for if you can't afford a Nakamichi.

Two very different models then, both proving that the Japanese giants can produce winners that can stand the test of time. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 26 Enclosure Subtleties (part 7)



Last month's column looked at enclosure damping, a complex issue that's hard to pin down properly, because optimum damping will vary from one speaker to another.

The purpose of damping the enclosure volume or panels is to control resonances (also called standing waves). These tend to be most intrusive in the midband, where the hearing is most acute, so damping is primarily oriented towards controlling midband colorations. 'Live', speech – eg from BBC Radio 4 – is one of the most effective tools for analysing and improving coloration, because it's so familiar.

For the DIY speaker builder making a 'one-off' design, the only really viable approach

is to carry out mono comparisons, adjusting the damping of one speaker while using the other as a point of reference. Indeed, listening in single-speaker mono is more effective than stereo, because there's no imaging distraction.

However, a pair of speakers operating together will generate more and smoother bass than a single speaker with the same signal, because of the way two speakers couple and add at low frequencies, and because two sources provide more even room drive.

Last month we mentioned the two methods of damping the air cavity, by lining the inside walls, or using wadding. Damping enclosure walls is more difficult, but the most popular

technique is to line the inside surfaces with bituminous damping pads, a relatively dense and lossy compound, though other strategies such as mass-damping also exist. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

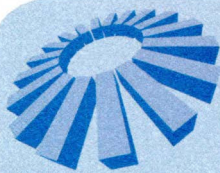
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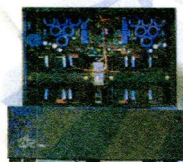
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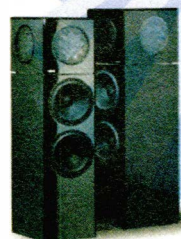
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- Musical Fidelity X-10v3 Tube buffer stage £195
- Nordost THOR mains conditioner (£1799) £995

DEFINITIVE AUDIO

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Gotham Type 39 monos (Western Electric version of Canary CA 309) 45 watts class A 300B - Turkish massage	£6000	£10000
47 Laboratory Gaincard MKII 25 watts + Humpty PSU + Input Chaser + 3m Kisherman speaker cable - 12 months - hip 'n' groovy	£2760	£3820
Finite Elemente HD12. 3 tier table - double width - new - boxed - luxurious	£3750	£4500
Audio Aero Capitole CD player - current spec - French	£2500	£4500
Living Voice turntable. Unique example of this benchmark design. 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.	£10000	£25000
McIntosh Yr-2000 Anniversary. 6550 parallel push-pull monster	£5000	£15000
Canary 303. Class A 300B monos with Living Voice upgrade - saucy	£4800	£8400
Living Voice Avatar II Maple very light use - joy	£2100	£3000
Living Voice IBX-R2 Burr Oak - nearly new - more joy	£3500	£4200
Living Voice OBX-R2 Ebony - slight cosmetic seconds - yet more joy	£3400	£4800
Voyd Split Phase Turntable - Ash - with Wilson Benesch Act1 tonearm	£900	£2500
Audio Innovations P2 - completely standard classic unit - collectable	£1000	
Pathos 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless - convenient	£1500	
Canary 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 months old - boxed	£3500	£6500
Audion Golden Night 300B monos - very good condition - light use	£1750	£4500
Cardas Neutral Reference speaker cable - 2 metres - very nearly new	£500	£780
Van den Hul Colibri - new	£1800	£3000
Art Audio PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo	£2500	£4500
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with RB300 & Living Voice Mystic Mat	£700	£1100
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use	£1500	£2500
Tube Technology Unisis Signature integrated - 30 hours use	£1500	£2500
Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista M3 CD player (2001) - as new condition - boxed	£1200	£3000
Rogue Audio Mells - Atlas pre-power. Ex dem 30 hours use	£1550	£2250
Canary 608LV integrated with BP PSU - bit tatty - rude fun	£1250	£3600
Border Patrol S.20 power-amp - mahogany - nearly new	£4750	£7000
Canary Audio 301 300B stereo push-pull power-amp - lovely	£3400	£5400
Audio Innovations Series 1000 monos silver edition - fully serviced	£1100	£2500
Audio Innovations Series 500 integrated - scruffy but lovely	£800	
Sugden Masterclass integrated with excellent phono	£1950	£3300
Sugden A21 integrated. Titanium - classic - very light use	£680	£960
Cary CD303 CD player - very nice	£900	£3000
Roksan Kandy integrated amp	£1500	
Unison Research Smart 300B 8 watt single ended mono - 1 year old	£2400	£4500
Avid Acutus - 1 lady driver, spotless and dust free - excellent condition	£3900	£6000
Aloia pre-amp - beautifully made - very light use	£900	£3000
Exposure VI - VII - VIII 3 box Pre-power - 8 years old - good condition	£490	
B&W CDM loudspeakers - go away!	£150	
Revolver 33 loudspeakers - grey and maple - new	£300	£600
Krell 300 CX stereo power amplifier	£4500	£8500



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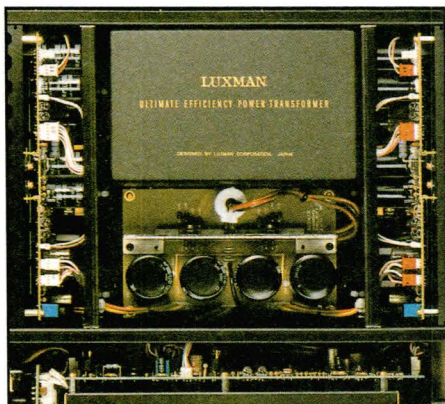
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CARDAS Quad Link 12" bi-wire, spades	Superb	£795
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CONSONANCE REF 8.8 Integrated Valve Amp (£1995)	Ex-dem	£1495
CONSONANCE REF 1 Tuner (£895)	Ex-dem	£595
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Jeff Rowland Model 5 power amp	£1995
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Hitachi FT5500 Mk11 tuner	£125
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B&W DM601S3 speakers, light wood, unmarked as new cond, superb value, £210. Inc Apollo Olympus stands, boxed, etc. Marantz CD 7300 CD player in gold, unmarked as new, box, remote, etc, £199. Will post. Chris Anelay 01766 781211 (Gwynedd).

CABLE TALK 3.1 bi-wire speaker cable with Profigold banana plugs £15. Cambridge Audio Pacific interconnects (x2), £10 each. Pioneer A305R amp, £45. MJD707 MiniDisc, £50. 07723 652769 (Birmingham).

CYRUS CD8X CD player, mint, one year old, silver, box, guarantee, can demo, £500 ono. 07947 427768 (Coventry).

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).

CYRUS SMARTPOWER as new condition. Original packing, leads and instructions. Silver finish. Upgrade forces sale, £375ono. 01344 776329 (Berks).

DALI EUPHONIA RS3 rear speakers (cherry) plus stands, £1,000. TacT W210 corner woofers (cherry), £600. TacT SDA2175 power amplifier (silver), £300. 01926 315981 (Warks).

DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 superb, real-world, moving coil cartridge, absolutely unused, (£250) £200. Thierry, evenings 07905 303718 (London).

EAR 834L valve preamp, £295. Cyrus CD6, £295. KEF Q15 II speakers, £100. 24 inch stands, £35. Lyra Lydian MC, £225. Ortofon MC25E, £100. Goldring Elite MC, £100. All mint and boxed. 01243 863371 (W.Sussex).

EXPOSURE XXV RC integrated amp, £300. Excellent condition plus original packaging (can demo). Four metres AudioQuest bi-wire and plugs, £50. Steve 01482 887409 (Beverley).

GOOD HOME NEEDED for Linn Genki CD player, £500. B&W CDM1SE and CDM/CNT speakers, red cherry, £800. Audiolab 800PX power amp and 8000S amp plus leads, pair £700. 01749 834375 (Somerset)

JAMO CONCERT 11 loudspeakers (£2,500). Roksan integrated amp (£1,000). Pioneer DVD/CD player (£700). Sturdy welded metal stand with five smoked, blue glass shelves (£400) and mains conditioner (£300). All finished in black, speakers finished in American Cherry. Sell for £2,800. 07623 928984 (Gwent).

KEF 105 MKI £250. Tannoy Cheviot MKI, £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)

LINN 5103 processor, latest model, DTS, blue display, boxed, as new, £995. Classe 25 preamp, boxed and mint, £750. Linn Aktiv crossover, Dirak PSU, cables, £275 +003531 2954076 (Dublin).

LINN KAIRN preamp, £450. Musical Fidelity A300CR dual mono power amp, boxed, £1,100. 01432 275203 (Hereford).

LINN KARIK I CD player, £200. Balanced Audio Technology valve line preamp VK3i, £600. Shanling valve CD-A10T, £125. Andrew 07889 840724 (Kent).

LINN KEOSA speakers, maple bi-wired boxed as new, £265. Naim NAC102 preamp plus NAPSC power supply, no phono boards, boxed, £550. NAP180 power amp boxed exc, £595. Call for more 023 8076 8510 (Southampton).

LINN LK100 power amp boxed, mint, £250. Hi-fi support Target four shelf, black, vgc, £25. 01226 391531 or 07836 784579 (Barnsley).

LINN UNIDISK 1.1 updated firmware, £5,500. B&W 803s cherry, new, £2,500. Naim NAP 250 power amp, £900. Arcam AV65 stereo amp, £250. Marantz RC9200, new, £320. 07740 285087 (London). ☐

WANTED

APOGEE STAGE speakers, ribbons and electronics must be A1 appearance, reasonable or better. Steve 01761 434651 or email s.clements@homecall.co.uk (Bath).

ARCAM ALPHA 10 tuner must be good cond. Karl 01942 234927 karl138ufft@msn.com (Wigan).

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

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).

JECKLIN FLOAT headphones, prefer Float Two, but any Jecklin or Ergo considered. John 07855 121587 or email john.boys444@ntlworld.co.uk (W Yorks).

LEAK STEREO 70 amplifier working or needing attention. 01938 553559 (Welshpool).

MISSION 773E floorstanders in cherry and mint. LPT spares also wanted. 01323 487640 (Sussex).

SONY SCDXA3000ES SACD player, must be unmarked as new cond. Good money for mint. 01766 781211 (Porthmadog).

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

█ **LUXMAN PD131** direct drive turntable, plinth cover and SME Series III arm, excellent, £350. Rotel RB991 power amp THX spec 2x200 watts, boxed, excellent, £300 01782 256087 (Stoke-On-Trent).

█ **MARANTZ PM7200 KI** £250 ovno. Denon TU260L II, £50ono. Both black, mint, boxed. Cable Talk 3.1 bi-wire, 2x9ft, £25. Sony TC-PX100 drawer loading tape deck, £30ovno. 01355 248467 (Glasgow).

█ **MARANTZ PM7200** six months old £185. Mission 752F speakers, rosewood, £225. TCI Viper interconnects, £25. DNM Reson speaker cable, £5 p/m 01582 724414 (Luton).

█ **MARTIN LOGAN AERIUS I** oak trim, £650. REL Stadium II, rosewood, £350. Paul Pascoe, 01743 289240 (Shrewsbury).

█ **MCINTOSH MCD201** SACD/CD player. Mac's latest, just eight weeks old, mint, boxed, as seen in *HFC* May – review in this issue! (£3,400) £2,300. 01904 708382 or 07716 141986 (York).

█ **MERIDIAN 507** 24-bit CD with MSR £675. 501 preamp, £395. 556 Amp (100w), £425. All in superb, mint condition with original manuals, leads and

boxes. Steve 07963 232638 (Herts).

█ **MICROMEGA STAGE 6** CD player, perfect cond, £350, with remote, manual, original packing. Ken 0141 571 0851 (Glasgow).

█ **MONITOR AUDIO GOLD** Reference 20 speakers, piano black, as new, boxed, (£1,800) £650. 01491 613760 (Oxford). █ **MUSICAL FIDELITY A5** power amp, two months old, 250 watts per channel, (£1,500) £900. Boxed and mint. 0161 681 1583 (Manchester).

█ **MUSICAL FIDELITY F19** (£4,000) £1,100. B&W Nautilus HTM1 black, (£1,700) £700. Cardas Golden Cross speaker cable, two metres, (£2,000) £500. 07900 394165 (London).

█ **MUSICAL FIDELITY X-10 V3** buffer stage, (£300) £175, as new, boxed. Audusa interconnects IS300 signature, £80 1m pair. 01491 613760 (Oxfordshire).

█ **NAD C660** compact disc recorder (twin deck) as new with remote, manual, original box, £150ono. 01257 266010 (Preston, Lancs).

█ **NAIM NAC82** (1999) with latest style black NAPSC, exc cond, with leads and box, £1150ono. 07973 785360 (W Sussex)

█ **NAIM NAIT 51** amplifier, £450. Naim CD5i CD player, £500. Naim speaker cable 10m terminated, £50. All in A1 condition, boxed, manuals, remotes. 0151 348 1781 (Wirral).

█ **NORDOST FLATLINE GOLD** 8m pair. New speaker cable and Nordost Solar Wind interconnect, 0.5m, (£480) £200. 07881 943785 (Birmingham).

█ **PHILIPS CD100** £40. Spondor Preludes, £75. Transcriptors Saturn Turntable, £200. Cambridge original P50 amp/T55 tuner, £75 pair. Nytech CA252 amp (MC), £45. All vgc. 01832 270071 (Oundle).

█ **PMC AM11** active standmounts with dedicated stands. Bryston circuits inside, same as 3B-SST, 2B-SST, 10B crossover. 28Hz-25kHz. Best regardless of price, (£3,800) £2,200. email simon@kentuk.net (Kent).

█ **PRIMARE A30.1** amp with remote (mint, boxed), £750. Townshend Isolda (cryogenic) 3m pair speaker cable, £200. Chord Chorus 1m Interconnect, £100.

Van den Hul Ultimate 0.5m interconnect, £100. Soundstyle five-tier rack (racing green) with matching glass shelves, £50. 01495 752200 (S Wales)

█ **PROAC TABLETTE REF 8** Mahogany, £400. Castle Isis speakers, Mahogany, perfect, £100. Atacama stands, black, £25. 01977 618403 (Pontefract)

█ **QUAD 12L** speakers, rosewood, mint, with Atacama SE6 stands, £275ono. Prima Luna 4 power amp, six months old, mint, £325. 07941 174804 (Berks)

█ **QUAD 33/ 303/ FM3** including attenuator cable for CD. Near mint condition, Quad Silver service four years ago, not used since, £250, no offers, buyer collects. 0161 371 9134 (Manchester).

█ **QUAD 99** preamp, £390. 99 FM tuner, £350. 99 CDP-1, £500. Ruark Equinox speaker with stands, £500. 3x Russ Andrews 1m Yello power cables, £15 each, four-way Yello power block, £30. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

█ **ROTEL RCD-02** CD player and RA-01 amp, (£778 with cable) £399. In silver, fully boxed. With free Atlas Hyper 2.0 speaker cable worth £148. Professionally fitted by Atlas with Atlas bananas. Both items immaculate. Lee 01384 412234 (W Mids).

█ **SONY STR-DB790** AV receiver, unused, *HFC* Best Buy, £150. Sony TAF3000ES amplifier, (£500) £200. Sony MDSJ3000ES MD recorder, (£600) £200. Rod, 01706 345418 or email hfc@rodtheobald.force9.co.uk (Sheffield).

█ **REGA PLANET** CD player (silver), seven months old, boxed hardly used, £250. Phil 07957 855825 (Merseyside).

█ **REL QUAKE** subwoofer, £200, 100 watts, cherry veneer, mint, in original packaging, with manual. To include 9m high level Neutrik cable. 01257 277857 (Lancs).

█ **ROKSAN TABRIZ** tonearm, boxed, with instructions, £100. Armboard for Thorens TD150, £5. Ringmats 330 MkII XLR and anniversary for, £30. Thorens TD160 turntable and cover, £100. 020 8590 8530 (Ilford).

█ **ROTEL RC-1070** preamp, black, boxed, as new, can demo, £120. 07766 415325 (West Mids) █ **RUARK CRUSADER II** black ash veneer, excellent condition, £800. 01286 540140 (Essex).

█ **RUSS ANDREWS PURIFIER** block with a four foot, high current Power Kord mains lead, £275. Nordost SPM interconnects 1m, £450. All perfect condition. 01433 631399 (Sheffield).

█ **SPENDOR BC1** (teak). New bass units, £300. ProAc 2 rosewood, volt bass, £200. New Sony SCD XA333ES, (£1,200) £400. Chris 01428 714244 (Surrey).



Above: Cyrus CD8x CD player

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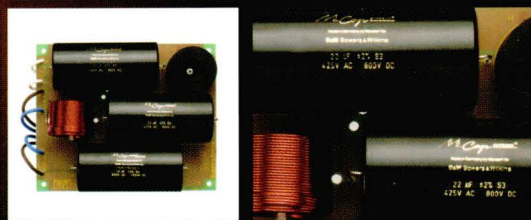
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