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- >> Unison Research amplifier
- >> Focal speakers
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- >> Eclipse active subwoofer
- >> Yamaha multichannel amplifier

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CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2006 ISSUE 287

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



As you'll no doubt have gathered from our gilded cover, this is a very special edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*. It's special because it contains *The Hi-Fi Awards 2006* – the only annual awards to focus solely on high-performance audio replay across a multitude of price points, from the best budget kit to the true high end. It is also the only such awards with a shortlist derived from *Hi-Fi Choice's* rigorous test programme, and compiled via democratic vote by our highly experienced team of reviewers – so these really are the awards you can trust. Quite simply, if you're thinking about buying a hi-fi component in 2006/2007, this is one issue you really shouldn't miss.

Of course, you should never buy a component based solely on the recommendation of a magazine – even one as highly regarded as *Hi-Fi Choice*. Instead, use our recommendations to make a shortlist and then take the time to audition the equipment thoroughly at a reputable dealer, using your own discs. Only then can you be sure you've made the right decision.

Our job at *Hi-Fi Choice* is to guide you in the right direction, and our impartial, in-depth tests ensure we give you the most reliable advice around. So, peruse *The Hi-Fi Awards 2006* (from p30) at your leisure – we hope you find them useful. But before you do, why not check out our regular mix of news, views and in-depth component reviews, gathered elsewhere in this issue. Until next time, happy listening!

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

Wooden it be nice?

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*.



MALCOLM STEWARD

Former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* magazine, Malcolm was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible *The British Audio Journal*.



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.



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.

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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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."*

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FEATURES



Wide Dispersion



3D Audio



Low Resonance Cabinets



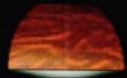
Time Coherence



Hand Crafted



Amplifier Optimized



State of the Art Technology- Musical Masterpieces!

"...Try some Crystal Cables and find out for yourself that small rules..."
Vade Forrester, SoundStage1.com, September 2006

"...the Micro's are arguably the most transparent cables I've heard to date..."
Neil Gader, The Absolute Sound, September 2006

"...Wow. And wow again. Together, the Crystal Cable Reference IC's and speaker cables transmitted my Integris CDP's extraordinary resolution to perfection. I don't think that's an overstatement..."
Mike Silverton, UltraAudio.com, May 2006

"...with the Ultra's I can easily listen 6dB lower without feeling that I'm giving up any detail or fullness..."
Srajan Ebaen, 6moons.com, June 2006

"...after playing with these cables for a while, I find more and more that Crystal Cable is as neutral as possible. No own sound, no own colour. Transparent to the bone..."
Rene van Es, HiFi.nl, May 2006

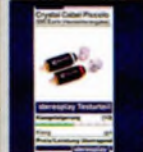
"...totally insensitive to any kind of distortion..."
Dalibor Baric, Stereoplay, November 2005



Product	Price
Reference Series	10.0
Micro Series	5.0
Ultra Series	10.0
Crystal Series	10.0
Speaker Series	150.0
Coax Series	5.0
Optical Series	10.0
Micro Series	10.0
Ultra Series	75.0

Particolarmente apprezzate e apprezzate
valutazione: 4/5

Distribuzione
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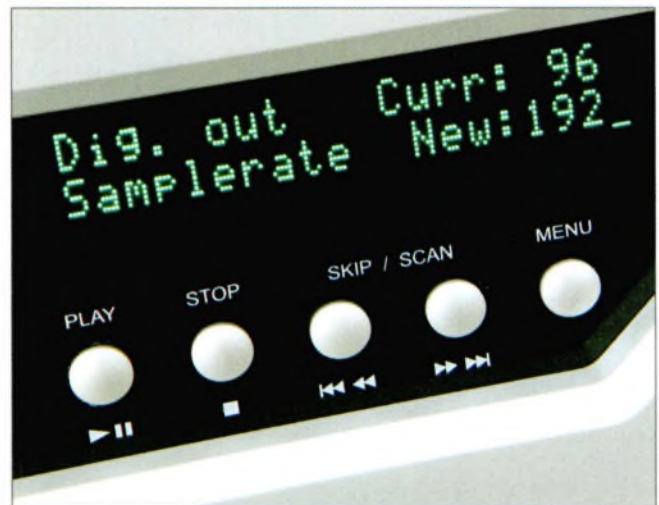


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Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News, March 2006



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MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY v8 AND X-T100 CD PLAYER AND INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

▶ Musical Fidelity's entry-level X-Series components have long been favourites for those craving high-quality sound from a mini-sized system. Never a company to rest on its laurels, MF has unleashed two new X-Series components – and they promise to be the best yet.

First up, the X-Ray v8 CD player boasts eight times oversampling, with 192kHz upsampling using 24-bit DACs in dual-differential configuration, all packed

into MF's ultra-smart, compact X Series case. Then there's the new X-T100 amp, which comes complete with a separate power supply – the Triple-X (also pictured). It delivers 70 watts per channel and incorporates a valve-based preamplifier stage, plus an integral phono stage. To find out what our golden-eared reviewers think, make sure you tune in next month.

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

PRODUCT Musical Fidelity X-Ray v8 and X-T100

TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier with separate PSU

PRICE (X-Ray v8) £799; (X-T100) £899

KEY FEATURES (X-Ray v8) 8x oversampling
● 24-bit dual differential DACs ● (X-T100) 70 watts per channel ● Valve preamp stage

CONTACT ☎ 020 8900 2866
🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com



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DVD Player:
DVD-3930
DVD-2930



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AVI NEUTRON IV ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKER

Forward-thinking AVI boss Ashley James has let us loose with a pair of his Amp Pak'd Neutron IVs – the active version of his established standmount. The speakers become active with the inclusion of a low-distortion, high-voltage amp, said to offer the same power and performance as the firm's Lab Series Integrated. AVI's active option offers a high-fidelity solution to iPod, Mac/PC and audio server users,

which challenges the norm of separates. The Neutron IV is a conventional speaker in every sense, with a 25mm fabric tweeter, 125mm doped paper midrange unit and a five-litre enclosure. But now, with the Amp Pak, it has an extra dimension that could introduce hi-fi sound to a whole new generation of would-be audiophiles.

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

PRODUCT	AVI Active Neutron IV
TYPE	Active standmount loudspeaker
PRICE	£1,049 per pair
KEY FEATURES	Bi-polar Class AB power • Rated power: 150 watts • 25mm fabric tweeter • 125mm doped paper midrange unit • Single line-level input
CONTACT	01453 752656 • www.avihifi.com

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



ARCAM FMJ DV139

Arcam's new FMJ DV139 – the DIVA DV137's bigger brother (see our test in HFC 285) – will be the world's first universal disc player to take advantage of Anchor Bay's ABT102 deinterlacer chip, for what Arcam founder John Dawson describes as a "cracking picture". The HDMI-equipped player is said to be Arcam's best ever DVD player, featuring some of the most cutting-edge disc replay technology in the world.

Attention has also been paid to sound quality, with Wolfson 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs, a complex audiophile-friendly power-supply arrangement and an 'audio-direct' mode. The player also utilises Arcam's tri-laminate Acousteel chassis to isolate the electronics from airborne vibration.

Price £1,800 **Due** November ☎ 01223 203200 ☎ www.arcam.co.uk



YAMAHA RX-N600D

Yamaha's latest multichannel receiver is its first to offer network functionality, allowing users to stream music files from remote PCs and to listen to internet radio. The feature-packed receiver is also USB flash drive compatible and offers iPod connectivity via Yamaha's optional YDS-10 docking station. Compressed music files can also be enhanced through the on-board DSP, which is said to improve MP3, WMA and iPod audio. Further features include DAB radio, 24-bit/192kHz DACs for all channels, plus a Direct Stereo mode for two-channel listening.

Price £600 **Due** now ☎ 01923 233166 ☎ www.yamaha-uk.com



TANNOY PRESTIGE SE

Hi-Fi Choice can exclusively reveal that Tannoy has revised four models from its classic Prestige speaker range. Four models will now gain 'SE' status – the two entry-level speakers, plus the two uppermost models. The changes include a number of key crossover and signal path improvements.

The SE-suffixed versions will feature new Acrolink cabling throughout, plus Hovland capacitors and optimization of the crossover circuit. The speakers, based around Tannoy's famous dual-concentric drive unit, will remain unchanged aesthetically, save for an SE badge and some baffle trim detail.

Price from £2,500 to £17,900 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01236 420199 ☎ www.tannoy.com

ALR JORDAN CLASSIC 1

Top speaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink has developed a new ALR Jordan loudspeaker to complete the company's Classic speaker range. The Classic 1 mini monitor uses a 115mm metal cone bass/mid driver with a 25mm soft-dome tweeter, housed in a real-wood veneered cabinet. The diminutive speaker measures just 13x22x19cm (WxHxD) and is available with a matching custom-designed loudspeaker stand called the ES72.

Price Classic 1 £500 per pair, ES72 £200 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01730 261924

☎ www.uberphon.co.uk





MARANTZ DV6001

Here's a slim-line tonic for the space-challenged audiophile – Marantz's new DV6001 universal disc player. It's a low-profile disc spinner, packed with technology including HDMI connectivity and 1080p upscaling. In addition to its low-jitter 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs and its Analog Devices video DAC, the new player also offers upsampling of regular 16-bit CD data. Further features include DivX video playback, an RS232c port for multiroom systems, shock absorbing feet and a thick alloy fascia.

Price £350 **Due** now ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com



ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS NEO

Acoustic Energy's new Aegis Neo loudspeaker series is said to be the world's first affordable range to use neodymium magnets across all models. The use

of neodymium allows the bass drivers to extend a full octave lower than the old Aegis Evo units, according to AE. The four-strong budget range is headed up by the Neo Three, a two-and-a-half way, reflex-loaded floorstander with 170-watt power handling. A smaller standmount, a centre speaker and subwoofer complete the line-up, and all are available in black ash, oak or walnut-effect vinyl finishes. The range is said to sound cleaner, faster, tighter and sweeter than the Aegis Evo range it replaces.

Price from £150 to £370 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01285 654432 🌐 www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

PHILIPS SHN9500

Philips has joined the 'war on noise' with its latest headphones, unveiling a battalion of three noise-cancelling models for the autumn. Leading the charge is the SHN9500, a closed-back design that's said to eliminate up to 85 per cent of unwanted external noise. It's supplied with soft ear cushions, an adjustable headband and a mute button feature to allow conversation without the need to remove the 'phones.

Joining the flagship is a wireless headphone, the SHC8585, plus an in-ear model – the SHG8015 – aimed predominantly at gamers. All models feature neodymium magnets and incorporate 40mm Mylar drive units.

Price SHN9500 £150 **Due** now ☎ 0906 101 0016 🌐 www.philips.co.uk



Soundbites

LOUDSPEAKERS is the name of a new book from Focal Press, which serves as a reference point for all things speaker related. Written by Philip Newell and Keith Howard, the tome offers practical advice from choosing and using speakers, to the room/speaker interface and subjective and objective assessment. The hardback is priced at £38.

☎ 01865 474010



ETON's new E100 pocket radio is as small as a mobile phone and receives AM/FM, MW and Shortwave radio, making it suitable for global use. Said to be small and light enough to fit in a shirt pocket, the E100 has a 200-preset memory and can be powered by batteries or mains supply. Expect to pay £60.

☎ 02392 313090

QED has launched a new reference-level HDMI cable named the HDMI-SR. The wire uses silver-plated OFC copper conductors, individually shielded with a gold Mylar wrap. It is available in 0.5 metre and one-metre versions, priced at £70 and £80 respectively.

☎ 01279 501111

OEHLBACH has developed a new high-end loudspeaker cable called the Fusion 2. Priced at £425 for a three-metre, made-to-order pair, the new wire is said to incorporate a unique construction, where the signal path follows 12 solid copper cores, each wrapped in ultra-thin copper foil. The cable comes complete with a lifetime warranty.

☎ 020 8863 8979

MERIDIAN has launched a range of in-wall and on-wall speakers available as either passive units, or active versions, if used with Meridian's C41 amplifier.

There are two ranges – the 200 Series of in-ceiling designs using 200mm bass drivers and the 300 Series of in-wall or on-wall speakers using slim-line 165mm units. Prices start at £1,260 for a passive unit.

☎ 01480 445678



LEEMA ACOUSTICS ANTILA

Leema Acoustics' apparent deployment of 20 separate DACs in its new Antila CD player could make it the most jitter-free CD player on the market. The proprietary MD² Active Differential Multi-DAC technology developed by the ex-BBC team means a fully balanced signal is created in the digital domain. It uses ten 24-bit/192kHz DACs to produce a positive phase signal and another ten for a negative signal. The technique is said to reduce noise and distortion and offer "analogue-like" treble and extreme bass precision.

Price £2,495 **Due** now ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

IAN BARNETT

Job Title: Regional Manager
Company: Sevenoaks
Sound and vision



What is the future of hi-fi in the home?

Seamless audio distribution, either wired or wireless, for the whole family to enjoy.

What is the most innovative product you've encountered recently?

Definitely the Sonos wireless multiroom audio systems, again making music more accessible throughout the home.

DVD-Audio or SACD - and why?

Both, now there are more affordable universal DVD players available.

Name a great album you've heard recently

Shawn Colvin *These Four Walls*, one of the best-sounding CDs I've heard this year.

Are audio servers the source of the future?

End users are comfortable importing music onto computers and audio servers, but for the purist, there will always be a place for a CD player.

CD or vinyl and why?

Vinyl, which incidentally is making a real comeback in the specialist marketplace with many new albums being pressed on 'black gold'.

Are we experiencing a stereo resurgence?

Most definitely. Aside from a resurgence in hi-fi separates sales, people are asking how they can get the best sound from their MP3 player when it's connected to a hi-fi system.

Hi-Fi Diary

NOVEMBER

3-5 **What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Show**
Novotel London West Hotel
Hammersmith, London
www.whathifishow.co.uk
Major home entertainment show

JANUARY 2007

27-28 **Northern Sound and Vision**
Radisson SAS, Manchester Airport
www.chestergroup.org
Northern hi-fi and home cinema show

FEBRUARY

23-25 **Sound & Vision - The Bristol Show**
Marriott City Centre Hotel, Bristol
www.bristolshow.co.uk
The UK's biggest hi-fi show

SHOW REPORT

Heathrow, 2006

Not one, but two events side by side this year, as Jason Kennedy discovers Heathrow's 21st Century schizoid shows

Heathrow 2006 was a split event. With the event's two hotels being run by separate organisers there was a schism that was metaphorically greater than the road that separates the two buildings. This, thankfully, didn't stop the exhibitors from revealing some superb new creations.

Among the more interesting source components was a CD player from newcomer **AMR** (Abingdon Music Research), which boasts internet audio critic Thorsten Loesch among its design team. The AMR CD-77 (£4,399) offers selectable oversampling rates all the way from 192kHz down to four times, two times and none. **Gamut** revealed its CD3 (£3,500) in a case to match the DI 150 amplifier. Described as complete redesign of the CD1, it uses a stainless inner chassis with rubber suspension for the transport and digital output board. The name **Edgar** is new to us, but this Czech built CD player with its wooden fascia and valve output stage looks rather appealing at £1,300.

“Being run by separate organisers, there was a schism that was metaphorically greater than the road that separates the two buildings.”

On the vinyl replay front, **Cartridge Man** has released a parallel tracking, air-bearing tonearm called **Conductor** for £1,500. It fits on an SME mount and has a carbon-fibre arm and precision engineered metalwork, the example we saw was supporting the new **MusicMaker Classic** cartridge (£1,200), a silver-coiled and refined variant on the popular MM3. Less easy to see but just as significant is **Clearaudio's** new ceramic magnetic bearing. It uses opposing magnets to decouple the platter, plus a ceramic shaft for maximum rigidity, and will be available on all Clearaudio turntables (save the Emotion), including the mighty **Statement** (£55k).



The most up to date source on show was **Panasonic's** DMP-BD10 Blu-ray player. With an on-sale date of mid-October and a price of £1,299, it looks likely to beat most of the software to market.

When it comes to amps, **Krell** brought the latest in its Evolution series, the 600 (£12,900 each) and 900 (£17,500 each) monoblock power amps, plus the 222 preamplifier (£8,498) with Krell's current mode topology, fully balanced operation and the CAST connection system seen on all Evolution components. On the tube front, **Bewitch** is a new brand and its valve A30 integrated (£1,100) and A8000 CD player

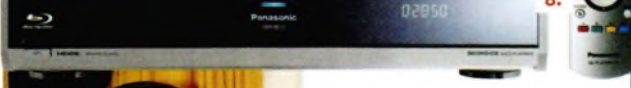
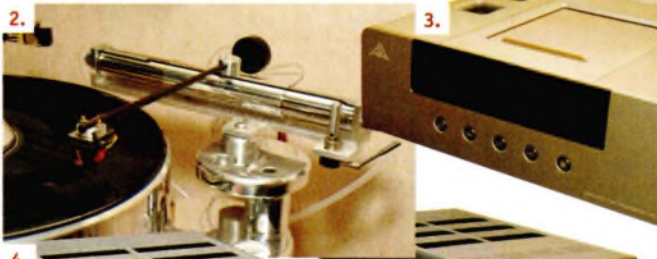
with tube output (£900) both look like great value. And in terms of digital, **Flying Mole** is expanding its range of PWM powered compact amps with two new integrations: the single-input, 20-watt CA-S3 (£500) and the three-input, 100-watt CA-S10 (£1,000).

Among the shiniest components on show was **Chord Electronics' CPA5000** preamplifier (£10,000). It boasts a -148dB noise floor, eight inputs and a precision VU display in blue LEDs so that you can see how loud the signal is. Very cool.

New speakers of note include the latest incarnation of **Wilson Audio's** WATT/Puppy, dubbed System 8 (£24,950), while **Overkill Audio** lived up to its name with the tube and transistor driven Angel active speakers. These feature an open back acrylic bass section and a composite 'head' for the wide-band Manger drive unit. Price is a tidy £10,000, including digital crossover.

Not everything at these shows cost a fortune - **van den Hul** unveiled TLF oil (£30), developed especially for turntable bearings, and **The Solution** (£25), which protects contacts from corrosion. But the prices do reflect the nature of this event, the high end has claimed Heathrow for its own. **HFC**





1. Chord CPA5000 reference preamplifier
2. Cartridge Man Conductor air-bearing tonearm
3. AMR CD-77 CD player
4. Krell EVO-600 monoblock power amplifiers
5. Flying Mole amplifiers
6. Bewitch A30 integrated amp
7. The Solution and TLF, by vdH
8. Panasonic's DMP-DB10 Blu-ray player
9. Overkill Audio Angel active loudspeakers

New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



TOM WAITS

Title: *Orphans, Brawlers, Bawlers and Bastards*

Release date: 27 November

The original idea was an album of songs written for various projects over the years but never recorded. Then he found he'd got 30 new songs in addition to the ones that got away – hence *Orphans* is now planned as a 54 track triple album. In typical Waitsian fashion he describes the collection as containing "rumbas about mermaids, shuffles about train wrecks, tarantellas about insects, madrigals about drowning".



Describing the new songs as "dark, bigger and quite abrasive", the band's Kele Okereke says: "We've taken it heavier in places, more electronic in places." Production is by Jacknife Lee (Snow Patrol/Kasabian)

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

Title: *tbc*

Release date: early 2007

Wainwright reports that he has been working "feverishly" on the follow-up to his two-part release *Want One and Want Two*. Sessions have already taken place in New York, Berlin and London with more planned and the prolific singer-songwriter unveiled a number of new songs that may or may not make the final cut during UK festival appearances in August.

THE DARKNESS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

Between singer Justin Hawkins' spell of rehab in The Priory and rumours that Atlantic were about to drop them, it seems that The Darkness have already started work on their next release. A message by Hawkins' fellow band members says that the singer is feeling "better already" and work is underway on album number three.

HAPPY MONDAYS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: *tbc*

Shaun Ryder's baggie originals, whose last release was 1992's *Yes, Please*, have been working with producers Sunny Levine and Howie B and the record will reportedly include a guest appearance by Ry Cooder. "It's Shaun back on it. He's singing well, rapping well and his lyrics are just right on it," says Howie B. The only problem is that they're currently without a record deal.

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/CLASSICAL

London Conchord Ensemble Bach Concertos (Nov); **John Abercrombie and Eddie Gomez** Structures (Nov); **Anna Netrebko** The Russian Album; **Pavarotti** Greatest Hit; **Ray Charles** Ray Sings, Basie Swings; **Madeleine Peyroux** Half The Perfect World

SACD/DVD-AUDIO

Flaming Lips At War With the Mystics (DVD-Audio, Oct); **LSO** Berlioz: Symphony Fantastique (DVD-A, Oct); **Danny Elfman** Serenada Schizophrenia (SACD, Oct); **Barb Jung** Walking in the Sun (SACD, Oct); **LSO** Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers (DVD-A, Nov)

BLOC PARTY

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

Bloc Party are claiming that album number two is going to be radically different from their acclaimed debut *Silent Alarm*.



That's dedication

The dedicated CD player is back!

As this issue marks *The Hi-Fi Awards 2006*, it makes sense to look back at some of the year's most notable trends. First, the apparent resurgence in dedicated CD players – not that CD itself had ever gone away, you understand. But the recent focus on multiformat machines playing CD almost as a 'legacy' format appears to have waned, with a number of exciting new dedicated players entering the market.

New models from Cambridge Audio, Creek and Rega have helped stoke the cheaper regions of audiophilia, while recent introductions from Audio Research, Linn, Meridian and Naim have all fuelled the high end. It's not exactly a 'plethora' – there are still plenty of SACD/CD, DVD-A/CD and universal players, and new models appear regularly –

“It seems tomorrow's hi-fi buff might play non-existent CDs on an invisible system. Let's hope this is not the Emperor's New Hi-Fi.”

but it seems as long as there are CD-only transports available, there will be CD-only players to utilise them.

The same names crop up in the amp sector, too. In particular, Cambridge Audio's 840A, with its new Class XD technology, is potentially a revolution in amp design, delivering near Class A sound without Class A electricity bills or Class A heat. Then, at a point way past the other extreme comes the Krell Evolution, an amplifier that's so expensive it is priced in Porsches, not Pounds. In between are some exciting amp designs, of which the Chapter Précis and Copland CTA-405 feature strongly.

In contrast, the speaker market is possibly less exciting this year, although newcomers like Q Acoustics and Nbien have made great inroads. I think the UK is still reeling from B&W's great diamond leap forward and the next great advances in loudspeaker technology will come in the next couple of years. Of course, the last time I made a conservative prediction about speaker technology, NXT was announced within a week. So take that with a pinch of salt.

And what else is coming soon? Content is key and what method of content delivery is adopted will dictate how hi-fi systems will look over the next few years. Until a couple of years ago, content delivery meant 'disc'. Then came iTunes and other music download sites. Now, owning a physical disc is an optional extra for some. So, it's little wonder that audiophile manufacturer Naim Audio announced a range of music servers for its forthcoming custom install market. It seems tomorrow's hi-fi buff might play non-existent CDs on an invisible system. Let's hope this is not the Emperor's New Hi-Fi and people still buy music.

Actually, this seems likely. Sales of seven-inch vinyl singles have topped the one million mark for the first time in nearly a decade. Whether the teenagers are seeking a link with previous generations, wanting permanence in an impermanent world, or just making a fashion statement, only time will tell. Perhaps we have a new generation of audiophiles in the making. *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*



Finesse first

Good hi-fi is wonderful, if you do it right

The magazine you hold in your hands – HFC's 2006 Awards – is a defining issue. And the distinction it makes is that there's all the difference in the world between 'music' and mere 'sound'. The two things aren't the same. To enjoy music, you don't need a system that will liquify your viscera with 140 decibels of throbbing sound pressure. Quite the opposite. Finesse usually gives firepower a rare old pasting.

Admittedly, bass has to have wallop and extension to be realistic, but it must also be capable of playing tunes and keeping time. Overblown and lethargic bottom ends have nothing to do with musical enjoyment and everything to do with 'mine's bigger/louder/more expensive than yours' macho posturing. Fine as a sport, but not hi-fi.

A thoughtful, designed-from-scratch approach is more important than how much money you can throw at the enterprise. But if you're going to lob it anywhere, aim for the front end. Won't a classy, brawny amp fry more modestly specced speakers? Sounds like common sense but actually it's tripe. You're far more likely to harm a speaker by driving it with the signal from a small amp being worked too hard and producing high levels of distortion than you are with a big amp that's capable of controlling the excursions of the speaker cone with a vice-like grip.

On the other hand, you can't expect miracles with budget boxes. Upgrading speakers when funds permit should be a priority. Why? Lots of reasons. Decent speakers are better mechanically. Both chassis and cone are lighter but more rigid, more efficient at dissipating heat and less prone to distortion, especially on musical peaks or 'transients'. They have bigger magnets and more precisely wound voice coil assemblies to ensure better control of the longer cone excursions that, in turn, will move more air for a deeper and more realistic bass response. Their tweeters will have high-flux magnets and be made from light, rigid materials for a smoother response at high frequencies and better dispersion, so that convincing stereo isn't confined to one spot. ▣

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

MERIDIAN 565 DIGITAL PROCESSOR



The 565, introduced in July 1994, was a genuinely revolutionary product. It was the world's first digital surround processor to use

a DSP as its core engine, with surround algorithms loaded from instructions stored on EPROM. It sounds rather mundane now, but at the time surround codecs were routinely hard wired into dedicated processors, if they were done digitally. The Meridian allowed new codecs and improvements to be included as soon as the code was signed off.

The 565 was also among the first processors worldwide to include Dolby AC-3 (later renamed Dolby Digital), which became available on NTSC Laserdisc a year or two before DVD-Video was introduced. It also acquired the ability to decode DTS and MPEG, and up to 7.1 output channels using an add-in hardware card. The Meridian always offered THX post processing and the ability to switch THX on and off was retained throughout the 565's life. Around the start of the DVD era, MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing) was even listed as an option for the 565, but this was a purely theoretical capability, which never lived on outside Meridian's own labs.

By the time Dolby AC-3 first law light of day, a few years after the processor was introduced, the 565 had already demonstrated the remarkable flexibility and resilience of the platform. It is interesting to note that the final firmware update to the 565 was developed and introduced free of charge after the unit was discontinued in 1999.

But the Meridian also had significance for the specialist audio market, something not mirrored by any processor, before or since. Largely because the company's chief, Bob Stuart, had a love of music in surround, the 565 was remarkable for its unprecedented support of surround sound codecs aimed squarely at the music lover. Several sound patterns and variations were offered, the key ones being Ambisonics and Trifield. Ambisonics used an arbitrary number of speakers (two or more) and a complex algorithm to distribute the two-channel input, which prior to DSP never worked properly. The



“The 565 had already demonstrated the remarkable flexibility and resilience of the platform.”

Meridian was probably the only source of Ambisonics decoders that did.

The other, Trifield, uses three similar speakers distributed across the front of the soundstage, though it could also direct a subtle output from additional speakers arranged typically in a 5.1 or 7.1 array. The input signal was two-channel and was backwards-compatible with standard two-speaker stereo, but in properly decoded form, and with the extra centre speaker, image location was much firmer and more positively located, especially for off-axis listeners. Remember stereo was originally designed for three-speaker use, so Trifield was in a sense a return to roots. Trifield (developed by Michael Gurzon *et al*) is available for licence, but Meridian is one of only two companies to have done so, and the only one to provide positive backing for the process.

According to Meridian, any sample of the 565, dating back to serial number 0001, sounds and performs exactly the same as the final production models, as long as the available updates have been applied. After five years, the unit sold for £2,250 in 5.1-channel form, or £2,850 with the extra channels installed for 7.1-channel operation.

Thanks are due to Meridian's Des Ford and John Bamford, without whom all the memory lapses would have been my own. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

❏ The sonic benefits of upgrading the speakers build on the advantages of having 'enough' power, as the more capable drivers are good at exploiting the extra muscle and grip. You can expect something that realistically places musicians identifiably in place, with more sense of atmosphere, too.

You'll find a lot of that in this issue. The good news is that it's the right approach that will get you there faster than a fistful of dollars.

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



The BFA view

What the hi-fi industry thinks about 2006

Some would call it an interesting year. Some a hard year. Most would be pleased with the growth – or at least a halt to the decline – of the hi-fi business.

Unfortunately, the home cinema business is not doing so well. The budget home cinema system business is considerably down, the mid

market extremely unexciting and the quality end of multichannel is disappointing.

The back to stereo movement makes sense. Specialist retailers are far more capable of demonstrating and adding value to stereo systems; they have, in general, failed dismally at demoing and comparing upscale home cinema systems. Low-end systems often don't get demonstrated at all.

Manufacturers and distributors have had to cope with these market changes as well as more legislation, mainly originating in Brussels.

On July 1st this year, the RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) directive came into force. The reasons behind this and the benefits (and flaws in the arguments) have been covered excessively in the press, so there is no need to go over them again here. Consumer Electronics products of all types have to comply. The legislation gives maximum levels of lead, cadmium and four other substances that must not be exceeded. This has proved, in practice, difficult to achieve as, for example, component suppliers have not certified their components as compliant until the last possible day, if at all. Physical testing is expensive and time consuming. It requires the use of very specialist external laboratories that are, of course, very willing to assist, at a price.

The RoHS directive has involved manufacturers with an enormous amount of work to achieve the documented compliance. This meant thousands of hours of listening to new components, substantial write-offs of non-compliant parts and increased costs for components and some processes.

Next, we have the WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) Directive that will cost manufacturers and distributors a few percent of sales. The directive is for sales after January 1st and for 'historic waste' – the company's share of all the products sold in the past. Later, we may have to worry about standby power consumption, which could be a very interesting challenge.

Considering all the barriers to entry, the hassle, the paperwork and the legislation, it is surprising that we get new entrants into our market, but we do. They enter the business because good sound is still a driving force and good music drives such powerful emotions.

I'm very proud of being part of an industry that brings pleasure to so many people and which survives and progresses, despite the challenges they keep throwing our way.

Steve Harris is chairman of the British Federation of Audio and runs a marketing consultancy business called AudioPlus

“A directive both for sales after January 1st and for ‘historic waste’ – the company’s share of all the products sold in the past.”





Alvin Gold

Hi-lo silver lining

Lo-fi or hi-fi, it's all part of the joy of winning

Reading through the list of nominations and winners for this year's Awards, I was struck by something I had been vaguely aware of for some time, but had not previously articulated. It seems the recent past provides an object lesson in the blurring of boundaries of what is, and what isn't high fidelity.

The obvious example of this, though it plays no direct part in the Awards themselves, is the rampant progression of the MP3 revolution. The revolution, of course, has been led by the iPod. In fact, this is actually an AAC recorder in native form, not MP3, but we'll let that pass.

This really isn't the place or the time to debate the issues surrounding these devices, except to note that they have found a ready and enthusiastic following, and on the whole, of course, this is welcome, particularly in the way that they have helped widen and democratise access to music. The main objection is the limited sound quality of these devices, and this is hard to gainsay. Even if the sound that exits the players is beyond reproach, what comes out of the earbuds that pass for headphones, or the so-called 'hi-fi systems' that provide external amplification and speakers, is a very long way from high quality, still less high fidelity.

But there is a much more interesting example that really is encroaching on traditional hi-fi, and which has made it into the Awards: the product category defined by Arcam when it introduced the Solo – all-in-one disc and radio based systems, complete with amplification in a single box. Ostensibly they are designed as starter systems, typically aimed at the student living in digs, which is where a lot of them end up. The version that we at HFC consider the current best of breed is the Primare CD110, which has a CD player, DAB/FM tuner and a surprisingly good Class D amplifier – a form of digital amplification – in one box. The emphasis on the word 'digital' here is deliberate, as this is one of the first cases where the use of digital and amplification in the same sentence needs neither explanation nor apology.

Even this is only a start. Although it plays no part in the awards this year, just a few months ago, I had a tantalising listen to a prototype



When Arthur Lee died in a Memphis hospital, aged 61, late this summer, he left a beguiling epitaph to the world in the form of his lyrical masterpiece. Since 1967, the album has been seducing listeners and continues to cast a magic spell with its mixture of acoustic and electric guitar, orchestration and Mexicana brass.

Surprisingly, given its level of quietness, *Forever Changes* is the template for what would become heavy metal. Johnny Echols' twin-necked Gibson leads and Lee's lyrical dexterity would inspire Jimmy Page and Robert Plant to write the Led Zeppelin symphonic masterpiece, *Stairway To Heaven*.

Lee, a shrewd Memphis virtuoso musician who landed Jim Morrison a deal with Elektra, was a black hippie who loved his LSD, Burt Bacharach, Beatles and Jimi Hendrix. The doyens of Sunset Strip LA, Love had great success with their first two albums, *Love* and *Da Capo*, the latter showing a willingness to decorate candy-coloured compositions with harpsichord, flute and horns. Conscious of the avant-garde sweep of *Sgt Pepper*, Lee decided with engineer Bruce Botnick that *Forever Changes* would be orchestrated.

Recorded in three bursts over just eight days at Sunset Sound Recorders, Los Angeles between June and September of 1967, the initial June sessions were a disaster. Poor rehearsals and bad drugs meant that Echols, MacLean, Forssi and Stuart were not up to the job, initially. In fact, Echols and MacLean couldn't even get their guitars in tune. Lee abandoned the band and brought in studio veterans like Jim Gordon, Hal Blaine, Don Randi and Carol Kaye who hammered out *The Daily Planet* and *Old Man* in just a few hours with Lee singing and strumming. The chugging guitar at the front of *Planet* is all Kaye's!

Shocked into reality, the rest of Love came back in August in tip-top condition. Even Johnny Echols kicked drugs for copious amounts of coffee and made his squealing double-tracked Gibson guitar solos a standout on *A House Is Not A Motel* and *Live And Let Live*. Ballads *Andmoreagain*, *Old Man* and *The*

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

LOVE
FOREVER CHANGES



“Conscious of the sweep of *Sgt Pepper*, Lee decided that *Forever Changes* would be orchestrated.”

Good Humor Man were suffused with a strange autumnal acoustic guitar hue and throughout, Michael Stuart's accelerated drums and Forssi's almost rigid bass figures define the album's rhythm section. Both *The Red Telephone* and the valedictory *You Set The Scene* were sumptuous compositions, overlaid by members of the Los Angeles Philly, orchestrated by David Angel and conducted by Lee himself over two days in September 1967.

Yet the most important song on the record, *Alone Again Or*, written by Bryan MacLean prior to 1965, was the very last thing to be recorded that September. Its mixture of beautiful acoustic guitar, tri-part harmony vocal and those famous Mariachi horns has stood the test of time. Its fulsome arrangement and breakneck speed never ceases to dazzle and new listeners always think it was recorded yesterday. Yet on release, *Forever Changes* was criticised for Lee's muddy production (a factor which just added to the mystery) and its wordy lyrics. Chart-wise, it failed in America but reached 24 in the UK on the back of *Alone Again Or*. In the end, *Forever Changes* became America's *Sgt Pepper*, a prismatic reflection of how it felt to be alive in the Summer of '67. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

Forever Changes is now available as a Deluxe Remastered CD with seven bonus cuts

loudspeaker that consisted of a single drive unit planted in the end of what looked like a plank of wood, which stood vertically on a vestigial stand. It sounded utterly raw and threadbare, and being compact and a dipole, it was utterly devoid of bass – until some room equalisation electronics (from Lyngdorf) transformed the loudspeaker into what can only be described as a high-quality product. At least in sound terms... it still looked awful.

We will see more of its like in the future, and I for one look forward to the time when such a product appears in the HFC Awards. The same company produces digital amplifiers, which will surely hit the mainstream in years to come. Perhaps they will also contribute to the long overdue 'greening' of our great hobby.

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



Weighty matters

Heavy-duty hi-fi isn't a back's best friend

The gear that I have been reviewing over the past year has been getting heavier. There was a time, not so long ago, when I could carry most components up the stairs without too much effort. That has changed to the point that most things require an awful lot of grunting and groaning or the assistance of another person and a heavy-duty sack barrow. This is probably because I have been doing more high-end reviewing than usual, but it also reflects a trend among makers of expensive kit, a seeming consensus of opinion that dictates that expensive must be heavy. A few companies take the opposite position – DNM comes to mind – and state that mass is a bad thing for electronics in particular. Perhaps as you might expect, DNM's products have a light and fast sound to go with the ease of portability. But DNM is the exception; battleship build is the norm and is a reflection of the fact that high-end audio has to try a lot harder to make a case for its existence.

I drive a relatively ancient Mercedes because, apart from being an impoverished reviewer, it gives me build quality that approaches that of the hi-fi I work with. Most affordable modern cars are disconcertingly plasticky, even some of the less affordable ones, and I'd rather put up



“Most things require an awful lot of grunting and groaning or the assistance of another person and a heavy-duty sack barrow.”

with poor fuel economy than tacky interiors and a sense that I'm driving something lighter than a tank.

Of course, there's more to build quality than weight. Anyone can make a box and put a lead brick inside it but thankfully such things do not happen even if it sometimes feels that way when unpacking the things. No, high-end audio is built to a standard that you would have to pay holiday home prices for if they were in a car. The Esoteric and Classé CD players in this issue are a great example of the incredible attention to detail and finish that a medium-size hi-fi company can achieve, at prices that, while high, are by no means excessive. What you get is a state-of-the-art product that contains leading-edge audio electronics engineered in a fashion that is designed to last longer than we are. *Hi-Fi Choice* regularly gets letters from guys who bought their first system 25 years ago and are now thinking that it might be time for an upgrade. A state of affairs that's not necessarily been spurred by a loss of functionality; more often than not it's because such systems are no longer cute enough for a contemporary lifestyle. When they were originally purchased, those products cost in the region of a month's wages. To achieve a similar build quality now costs about the same.

For the price of a small Fiat, you can buy an absolutely superb piece of equipment that will reward you every time you use it with its tactile response and spirit-lifting sound quality. It will also, unlike the Fiat, still be worth something

in 20 years' time. If you don't believe me, have a look at the prices of high-end kit from the mid-1980s. High-end audio may be heavy but there's a good reason for it and, unlike me, you won't have to pack it up for a long time.

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



A Rega year

Two-channel hi-fi rules in Essex

Despite the distractions of multichannel home cinema systems and portable iPods, 2006 hasn't turned out to be a bad year for manufacturers and enthusiasts who remain loyal to traditional two-channel stereo music. Predictions that cheap DVD players would kill off sales of specialist CD-only players seem to have been just as ill-judged as the twenty years' dissing that vinyl lovers have endured. A number of British CD player makers went through a bit of a crisis some three years

back, when Sony Europe decided to stop supplying the core components that many of them were using. But all have successfully solved the problem in their different ways, and we now have a new generation of players that combine performance improvements with much greater engineering diversity.

Last out of the blocks was Rega, but the wait was well worthwhile, as it is working with British chip manufacturer Wolfson, which had recently developed brand new servo and data acquisition silicon specifically oriented towards CD replay. With much greater on-board memory than earlier implementations, this impressive disc drive mechanism forms the basis of the excellent Apollo and Saturn CD players, both of which have picked up *HFC* Gold Awards.

Of all the major, long established British hi-fi brands, none has been more resolutely loyal to two-channel stereo than Rega, and if its CD players have been grabbing the recent headlines, its considerable and continuous contribution to vinyl replay shouldn't be overlooked. Its turntables have long enjoyed the advantage of the excellent RB-series tonearms, and have benefited from regular upgrades in styling, motor mounting and power supplies. Less well known perhaps are Rega's phono cartridges, which have been built in house since the late 1980s. Hitherto these moving magnet designs have sold well, but had limited impact on the audiophile scene.

However, that could be about to change, as Rega has just introduced its first moving-coil model, and the first new British MC design to appear for decades. At £898, the Apheta ('bringer of life') is the company's first cartridge to take a serious tilt at the high end, and has more than a touch of originality about the way it's designed and built. Much is familiar enough: Vital stylus; tapered hollow aluminium cantilever; alloy chassis. Where it differs significantly from the norm is that it lacks both tie-wire and a damping block; apart from that provided by the rubber block that locates cantilever and armature, this cartridge is essentially undamped.

Which is probably why it sounds, above all, irrepressibly fast and exciting, making the music a whole lot of fun. It's not perfect, to be sure, as the top end is rather too strong, which can emphasise surface noise on older, worn discs. But it's by no means the only upmarket cartridge with such a characteristic, and Rega is planning a new phono stage that incorporates specific response correction. The Apheta is unlikely to match the impact on the hi-fi market of the Apollo and Saturn CD players, but it is sure to make plenty of audiophiles happy.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

A CLASS THING



Of this year's Awards winners, one stands out as introducing a new technological development: the Cambridge Audio 840A amplifier, with its 'Class XD' output.

Audio amplifiers are divided into different 'classes' of operation. There's nothing sacred about the names: quite simply, Class A came first, historically.

Not surprisingly, then, Class A is the simplest, with a transistor (or valve or whatever) which sits at the output with current running through it at all times. The amount of current depends on the voltage it is asked to support into whatever load may be applied, but the important thing is that current always flows.

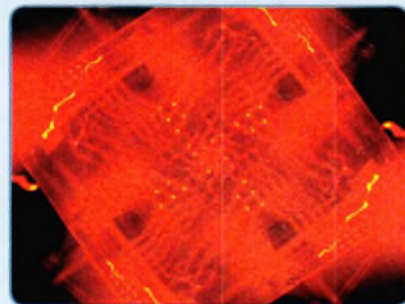
I said 'a' transistor, but Class A can also work in 'push-pull', where a pair of output devices work in harmony, one conducting in each direction. They both still conduct all the time. Class B is a push-pull only setup, where either one output device or the other is conducting – this leads to much greater efficiency.

In Class C, there are times when nothing conducts and this leads to serious nonlinearity, which doesn't matter in the radio-frequency circuits where the technique is applied. Class D implies switching outputs (pulse-width modulation and other more-or-less digital tricks) and any classes beyond that are proprietary configurations.

No class is perfect. Class A wastes a fantastic amount of electricity as heat (a 100W amplifier necessarily wastes at least 100W even when it's idling), while Class B suffers from problems with output devices switching off slowly as they 'hand over' from one to the other, resulting in distortion that is worst at low signal levels, exactly where you don't want it.

Because of that, most practical amplifiers work in Class AB, which maintains enough excess current flow to smooth the crossover region reasonably well, while also achieving decent efficiency.

Class AB can achieve very good operation, but Class A still beats it, as has been extensively documented by Doug Self, the inventor of Class XD. But what if one could somehow 'cheat' the output devices into



“This could, in principle, avoid the problems that plague all amplifying components.”

conducting even when they would normally be turned off? This could, in principle, avoid the problems that plague all amplifying components as they go from conduction into cut-off mode. Now the idea of doing this has occurred to probably every designer who's ever worked on audio. But that's no cleverer than thinking 'Why don't we fly to the moon?' The clever part is doing it, and this is where Doug Self deserves credit.

If you want the full technical monty on this, with circuit diagrams and performance simulations and measurements, look for the 24-page white paper on Cambridge Audio's website. The gist of it, however, is that a subsidiary circuit next to the main output 'sucks' a current through the output transistors so that they don't turn off at, or near, zero signal level. In fact they are allowed to turn off at high levels but that's almost certainly less important as under such conditions everything else is distorting, loudspeakers, other amplifying stages, your ears. The result is Class A performance over most of the power range, with efficiency not dramatically worse than Class B. There's more to amplifier subjective performance than distortion measurements, but Class XD is a clever, practical and successful step forward in real-world amplifier design. **HFC**

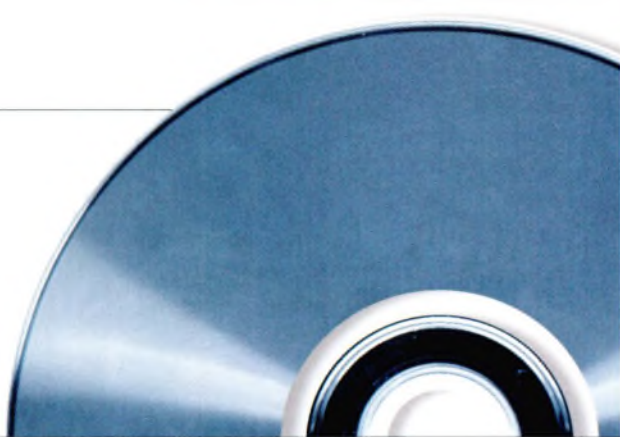
Richard Black

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

SKIP JAMES

Today!

Vanguard/Pure Pleasure
180g vinyl

Music: Bluesman Skip James remains relatively unknown. Lack of success forced him out of music. John Fahey and Bill Barth rediscovered him in a hospital bed in 1964, aged 62, persuading him to

play at the Newport festival that year. That led to this recording with Vanguard, one of many made on the back of the folk revival of the 1960s. James had a distinctive tenor voice and played guitar with a precision and fluidity that clearly influenced Fahey. This is a gem of an album, James exchanging guitar for piano on some tracks but never straying from the heart of the blues. ★★★★★

Sound: While both voice and guitar are well recorded, there is a fair amount of hiss on these tapes, as well as some low frequency thudding of foot on floor. Neither get in the way of the magic of the music. ★★★ JK

SON HOUSE

Father Of The Delta Blues

Columbia/Pure Pleasure
2x180g vinyl

Music: Eddie J 'Son' House junior's musical career has some spooky similarities with that of Skip James. He too recorded for the first and almost last time for Paramount in 1930. He was also revived in the 1960s folk boom and made

his comeback at Newport '64. He plays some exceptional blues slide guitar and has a powerful voice which resonates with a depth that only comes with a life of hard times. This double album features alternate versions and the engineer's instructions but is dominated by Son's overwhelming humanity. ★★★★★

Sound: Columbia must have had more impressive facilities than Vanguard, because this is a clean and open recording that shows relatively little sign of age. Either that or they stored the tape properly – it has survived the last 41 years very well. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Classic Records and Pure Pleasure
© www.classicrecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



GRAND UNION

Through The Green Fuse

People Tree

Music: The spirit of 1960s folk jazz pioneers Pentangle is alive and well and living in Brentford, west London. This acoustic outfit uses traditional folk tunes and rhythms as a tree from whose branches they hang all manner of trippy jazz workouts, pale funk excursions, new age hippy meanderings and much more besides, all put through the 21st Century blender. With floaty vocals courtesy of Kate Stahl, plus some excellent flute and violin touches, highlights include jazzy early single *Morning Brings The Light*, and the dubby folk ballad that is *Rain And Snow*. ★★★★★

Sound: Retains a close-knit, organic feel throughout, which sounds warm and natural rather than claustrophobic. ★★★★★ DO



NIGEL KENNEDY

Blue Note Sessions

Blue Note

Music: Why has the world's best-selling classical violinist made a jazz album? Because he's apparently been a total jazz head since meeting the great Stephane Grappelli as a student. There's a real sense of swing to his virtuoso playing and he sounds entirely at home with some of the greatest names in modern jazz, including a rhythm section of Ron Carter and Jack DeJohnette and horn players Joe Lovano and JD Allen. What's more, although there's plenty of space for improvisation, Kennedy brings a discipline so there's none of the noodling that can so often mar instrumental jazz recordings. ★★★★★

Sound: The live ensemble playing is brilliantly captured by producer Jay Newland. Mention should also be made of Lucky Peterson's thrilling Hammond playing. ★★★★★ NW



JIM CROCE

Life & Times

Castle

Music: The 'Bob Dylan of the truck-stop diner' spent a decade playing folk joints before finally breaking through with his weakest track, *You Don't Mess Around With Jim*, in 1972 – just months before a plane crash killed him. His third album was in many ways his best. It contains half a dozen moments of greatness, most noticeably the bitter sing-songy *Next Time, This Time* as well as the dolefully wistful *These Dreams* and the genuinely poignant *Alabama Rain* (the latter being, perhaps, the melodic forerunner of *I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song*). Comes with a live bonus disc which has some wonderful moments – as well as the truly obscene *Ball of Kerymur*. ★★★★★

Sound: One of those clear, but 'real', recordings that NYC's Hit Factory produced in the 1970s. ★★★★★ PS



OUTKAST

Idlewild

RCA

Music: When Andre '3000' Benjamin and Antwan 'Big Boi' Patton released *Speakerboxx/The Love Below* in 2003, they not only showed that there was life for hip-hop beyond bang and bling, but with 11 million sales, they also proved there was a ton of money to be made. But after the globe-straddling success of that album, this soundtrack to their upcoming movie set in a 1930s speakeasy falls a mite short of expectations. They add jazz, blues and soul to their hip-hop pop stew and there are a few sterling moments, including funky blues groove *Idlewild Blue* and the Prince-esque *Chronomentrophobia*, but where the last record gave two good albums for the price of one, this offers more like half. ★★★

Sound: Slick and polished as you might expect, but with plenty of dynamic punch throughout, with judicious use of acoustic guitar and a horn section as well as quest vocals from the likes of Macy Gray and Janelle Monáe. ★★★★★ DO



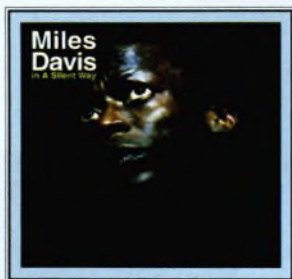
ROBERT FRIPP

Exposure

DGM/Panegyric

Music: Fripp traces the multifarious and often punky music of *Exposure* to his trip to Berlin in 1977, where he recorded *Heroes* with Bowie and Eno. It's peppered by ambient 'Frippertronics', the white soul voice of Hall and real sound snippets from Eno and guru JG Bennett. It's a rich stew including the prog of *Breathless*, the new wave sneer of *You Burn Me Up I'm A Cigarette* and the poignancy of *Here Comes The Flood*, without seeming fractured. Disc two is a remixed 1983 version with five bonus cuts. ★★★★★

Sound: Originally the 17-track vinyl album had a terrible sound, but thankfully Simon Heyworth has remastered everything to a bright, in-your-face, sheen. ★★★★★ MP



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "It is a thing of radiant, long-form beauty"

MILES DAVIS In A Silent Way Columbia

Music: This album marked Miles' crossover from pure jazz to a fusion of jazz and rock that was to shape the future of both forms. The line-up Miles gathered in 1969 was nothing short of stellar: Hancock, Shorter and Williams had played with him before but were joined by four relative unknowns: John McLaughlin, Joe Zawinul, Chick Corea and Dave Holland. The sessions they produced can be heard on the *Complete Silent Way* three-disc set, but this is the final cut and it is a thing of

radiant, long-form beauty without which your musical life will not be complete. ★★★★★
Sound: A good vinyl print of this might sound better than the 24-bit CD remaster, but it would require a fine turntable and a clean pressing to prove the point. By modern standards, it's a shade hard-edged with a floor of tape hiss; while the band is confined to left and right channels, the trumpet gets centre stage and the only real scale in the mix. ★★★★★ JK



BADLY DRAWN BOY
Born In The UK

EMI

Music: If you thought Damon Gough – aka Badly Drawn Boy – was an introspective, homespun singer-songwriter, you're in for a surprise with his fifth album since winning the Mercury Prize for his 2000 debut. The

Springsteen-inspired title track sets the tone – a rock'n'roll anthem that presents the other side of the coin to the Pistols' *Anarchy in the UK* with a rollicking celebration of everything that's great about Blighty. The lovely, Bacharach-like piano ballad *Nothing's Going To Change Your Mind* affords a rare, more intimate moment before it's back to the denser, rock textures of *Welcome To The Overground* and the almost disco-sounding *Walk You Home*. They're still great songs – but long-time fans might want to inspect carefully before purchase. ★★★

Sound: You can thank producer Nick Franglen from Lemon Jelly for the change of direction. Gough didn't really need a sampledelic knob-twiddler – but at least he's chosen one of the best. ★★★ NW



ELGAR

Piano Music: Enigma Variations; Dream Children; Sonatina; May Song
Ashley Wass

Naxos 8 570166

Music: The *Enigma Variations* for piano is a reduction composed by Elgar himself. Most of the other compositions are relatively short. The collection reveals a more eclectic and international side to Elgar the composer than is sometimes allowed by his stereotyping as the quintessential patriotic English composer. Ashley Wass turns out to be an ideal interpreter; his playing has bold dynamics and expression, with enough virtuosity to carry the music off without making it hard work. ★★★★★

Sound: Wass extracts a ripe, full and colourful sound which does full justice to the scores on a Steinway in St George's Church in Brandon Hill, Bristol. Good stuff. ★★★★★ AG



RAVEL

Daphnis et Chloé
Myung-Whun Chung (conductor),
Orchestre Philharmonique et Choeur de
Radio France

DGG 00289 4775706

Music: Ravel's complex, sophisticated score is performed by a large orchestra with occasional interventions in the form of wordless off-stage choral passages. *Daphnis* is undeniably a masterpiece, and receives here a passionate, clearheaded account from an orchestra and conductor steeped in the Ravel tradition. ★★★★★

Sound: This Radio France recording addresses the density and range of the complex score, but it is a difficult recording to pull off successfully. It's one that makes great demands on the replay system and this could have benefited from the additional resolving power of SACD. ★★★★★ AG

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

QUINSIN NACHOFF

Magic Numbers

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Songlines

Music: Quinsin Nachoff is a Canadian saxophonist and composer with a taste for the unconventional; *Magic Numbers* combines a jazz trio and a string quartet. Nachoff sites influences as diverse as Sonny Rollins, Shostakovich and Schoenberg and it's the latter two who seem to be primarily in evidence here.

Along with Nachoff's tenor and soprano saxes we have Mark Helias on bass and the impressive Jim Black on drums. The string players consist of three violins, viola and cello. The result varies between interestingly contrapuntal and outright challenging in the second Viennese school tradition. The album explores the textures and tones of its instrumentation in striking ways and while it occasionally gets a little angular, there is no shortage of ideas. ★★★

Sound: The recording captures the powerful dynamics and broad tonal range of the various instruments in the mix, reproducing the natural acoustic of the drums and the subtle textures of the strings. ★★★★★ JK



TCHAIKOVSKY, STRAVINSKY

Suite No. 3 in G, Op 55; Divertimento

Vladimir Jurowski, Russian National Orchestra

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Pentatone PTC 5186061

Music: Although there doesn't seem a lot to connect the two pieces on this disc, other than the fact that they are both Russian, the cover notes make a convincing case that there are clear links between the two. Musically, too, they are not as far apart as you might expect as the Stravinsky is neo-classical, like *Pulcinella*, rather than from the spiky *Rite Of Spring* school. The performance by the Russian National Orchestra is totally compelling, and is beautifully directed by the relatively young Vladimir Jurowski. ★★★★★

Sound: The recording from Polyhymnia studios has tremendous clarity in its detail and textures, combined with a solid sense of body, and that peerless *rubato* that Russian orchestras often bring to play with Russian music. In fact, the recording quality complements the performance, making this a disc that truly illustrates the multichannel benefits that SACD can bring. ★★★★★ AG



ELEANOR MCEVOY

Out There

SACD (stereo SACD plus stereo CD)

MoscoDisc

Music: The classically trained Irish singer-songwriter has been crafting thoroughly decent, highly successful, if unspectacular, folk rock albums since 1996 and has already shown an affection for the high-resolution and surround possibilities of SACD – this is her second album to be released in the format.

She plays almost every instrument on this set of mid-paced songs, which vary from the catchy *Non Smoking Single Female* to a lament for the lost soul of the Celtic economic tiger in *Fields Of Dublin 4*. Elsewhere there's and an instrumental air on violin, a stripped-down version of the Marvin Gaye classic *Mercy Mercy Me*, which brings the lyrics to the fore, and some clever lyrical wordplay in a collaboration with the Beautiful South's Dave Rotheray, *Quote I Love You Unquote*. ★★★

Sound: Recorded at the recently refurbished Grange Studio in Norfolk, it's a warm, even cosy sound with the SACD track in particular giving full range both to McEvoy's smoky Dublin brogue and the largely acoustic arrangements. No wonder she's a favourite among hi-fi buffs. ★★★★★ DO





'arc angels'



**"THE SOUND WAS SO MAGICAL
MERLIN HIMSELF WOULD SURELY BUY ONE"**

THE PHONO / ISSUE 40 / JOHN BIRCHALL / 1987

AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE 3 VACUUM TUBE PRE AMPLIFIER



**"THE SOUND OF THE PH7 IS WHAT COUNTS AND
IT'S A STUNNER"**

THE PHONO / ISSUE 40 / JOHN BIRCHALL / 1987

AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE PH7 VACUUM TUBE PRE- PRE AMPLIFIER



**"IT JUST SOUNDS LIKE YOU ALWAYS HOPED
CD COULD SOUND, IF CD WAS DONE RIGHT"**

HPC THE COLLECTION / MAY '86 / ALAN BIRCHALL / 1987

AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE CD 7 VACUUM TUBE CD PLAYER

Audio Research has always used the knowledge gained through designing their Reference series components to benefit every model in their range. Phono stages, pre-amplifiers, power amps – Audio Research believes, like Formula 1 car designers, that the benefits gained at the cutting edge should be shared.

A new entry-level pre-amp delivers a taste of Reference sonics to a wider audience: the LS17. Fully-featured and supremely functional, it is a dream match for the VS55 stereo power amplifier – an astonishingly affordable introduction to Bill Johnson's wizardry. And we remain dazzled by the LS26, which we suspect will find itself driving more than a few Reference 110s.

Reference 110 is the first ever single-chassis, stereo power amplifier in the Reference range: the 2x110W Reference 110 – a perfect match for the LS26 or the Ref 3, the finest pre-amp ever issued by Audio Research. But there's more.

So fine is the CD3 Mk II that Audio Research was inspired to develop it further. The resultant CD7 is so good – its internals include a Ref 3-derived output stage – that this player has earned the honour of becoming the first-ever Reference series digital source component. For analogue supporters, the all-tube Ref PH7 phono stage is probably the best phono section available today. Completed with either the flagship Ref 610T or 210 monoblocks, the Reference models reign supreme.

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ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

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



MAINS EVENT

After trying all possible combinations of interconnects and speaker cables at my disposal and having achieved the best sound possible, I then learn from your magazine that mains leads can have an equally measurable effect on sound. Hours spent researching the subject led me to the conclusion that the most effective method of defeating RF and EMI is to use braided cables. If it were this simple, I thought, then just plaiting my mains leads would surely have the same effect. It proved impracticable to plait more than three leads at a time, but what a difference this simple procedure has made. The sound is cleaner, has greater depth and the bass especially is tighter and more melodic.

Jim Hull via email



Above: Clearer Audio Silver-line power cable

HFC We'll pass this one on to Jimmy Hughes, Jim. Do try and borrow a few leads from a dealer, however, as you might find there are further gains to be had without spending too much. Supra's £40 LoRAD is a good place to start (01223 441299) and if you fancy something clearly different, try Clearer Audio's Silver-line cable at £150 (01702 543981).

A TWEAK TOO FAR

I refer to Jimmy's *Tweaks* number 44 – *Don't OD on Tweaks* – in your September issue (HFC 284). Jimmy says, "don't buy too many cones". How about don't buy any for a change? Why can't these tweaks ever be about something real? How many audiophiles actually know, for instance, that the Russ Andrews RAVE USB system that you tested in the same issue, uses a digital signal from your PC so mucked about with that it bears little resemblance to the original? And yes, there are tweaks to fix this, but is that so time consuming (and geeky) to talk about, that you have to stick with the nonsense of cones?

Ali Elam New York City

"I thought that just plaiting my mains leads would have the same effect."

HFC Over the years, Jimmy's *Tweaks* have introduced us all to some very practical tips, many of which involve only time and not expense. In fact, *Tweak* number 44 to which you refer, is an attempt to try and save us all time and money by not OD'ing on accessories, and that's advice we hope most of you would appreciate.

HD FOR CD?

Whatever happened to HDCD? It seemed like an eminently good idea to get 20-bit quality from a 16-bit format, without the need for special media at special media prices, while remaining compatible with standard players. The few machines to appear with the necessary on-board HDCD decoding certainly seemed to validate the benefits of this approach. So why has it not been more widely adopted? Is it anything to do with the relationship between Pacific Microsonics and Microsoft? Have politics once again robbed the consumer of affordable high-quality ▶

Letter of the month

VINYL REVIVAL

There's been some coverage in the press recently about vinyl's comeback. Let's hope this latest resurgence is not as transient as the popularity of some of the young upstarts. It appears that some singles have made it into what's left of the singles chart, based purely on vinyl sales alone. An article that I read even suggested that vinyl is cool again in youth culture and that the future may see vinyl survive and CD disappear. It's great to see positive reports on the black stuff.

Dominic Lobo via email

HFC It is great to see, Dominic. This year, for the first time in nearly a decade, sales of seven-inch vinyl singles topped the million mark. Whether this is the start of a vinyl revival or just another short-lived teenage fad like Pokemon cards and Tamagotchi remains to be seen.

Every good bit of publicity for vinyl is a small victory for high-quality audio in the home. After all, people will always need a turntable to play their vinyl on and a hi-fi system to play it through... although we have seen a USB turntable!



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...)

sound, just as has happened with the potential for DAB? One sometimes wonders whether audio technology is going forwards or backwards as far as quality is concerned.

Douglas Marc Herts

HFC We spoke to Marantz's Brand Ambassador, Ken Ishiwata, who replied: "HDCD was indeed developed to have 20-bit resolution from 16-bit systems using a very specific and complicated technique. Pacific Microsonics offered a chipset for this processing. Within this process, very specific digital filtering was employed; in fact – and this is my own personal point of view – this digital filter had a distinctive sound characteristic.

"As you may know, Marantz has been working on its own digital filtering for CD playback for almost two decades. We know very well how digital filtering influences the sound of CD, and HDCD sound characteristics are similar to this specific digital filter. There are still many extremely good HDCD discs made in certain continents, especially China."

GROUPIE

I enjoy *Hi-Fi Choice* every month, with its mix of in-depth reviews and lab-based group tests, but I do miss the days when you published more than one comparative test. As I am a consumer, I am far more likely to buy a product that has done well in a test environment than one that has been reviewed in isolation by a reviewer with no obvious comparative rival. Indeed, a Best Buy award in an *Ultimate Group Test* for me is the green light to buy and I for one miss reading more group tests. Say you'll bring them back?

Russel Martin Dorset

HFC If only we had enough pages, Russel. We'd love to run another group test but some manufacturers still shy away from our no-holds-barred comparative testing, which is why we agree that an *Ultimate Group Test* winner is a seriously good bit of kit.

SUPPORT REPORT

I'm trying to find an equipment support and have been told that those with glass shelves and wooden legs are best at minimising resonances. I've also been told that wooden shelves and metal legs are superior in this respect. Is one really better than the other?

Andrew Bevan Bristol

HFC There are differences in the sound of different shelving materials, for sure. We've often found that traditional glass and steel racks add their own sonic character, good or bad. Glass with wood offers some improvement, but for maximum resonance damping, try all wood, or even composite racks. Clearlight Audio's RDC Aspekt



Above: Custom Design Icon Signature Acoustic rack

"I've been told that those with glass shelves and wooden legs are best."

(01635 291357) is a great composite design at £725, and one of our current favourites is the £600 Custom Design Icon Signature Acoustic (0191 262 4646), which uses wooden legs with glass shelves faced with Custom Design's unique Acoustic Steel.

DO YOU WANT TO BE FAMOUS?

Now's your chance! We're looking for avid hi-fi fans to appear in a new feature called *System File*, in which we aim to explore, explain and experience the hi-fi system of one lucky reader per issue. The idea is this: first, you send us a letter or an email, explaining why you and your hi-fi should be featured. Then, we pick one reader and arrange one of our reviewers to visit, with notebook and camera in hand. Finally, once the lucky reader and our reviewer have finished listening, describing, discussing and recommending, we publish the results – for the benefit of all! If you'd like to be considered for this feature, simply write a 'review' of your system – good or bad – using 500 words or less and send it to: System File, *Hi-Fi Choice*, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Alternatively, you can email it to: tim.bowern@futurenet.co.uk. If we pick you, you'll not only receive a visit from one of our reviewers – you'll also get a special *Hi-Fi Choice* goody bag thrown in, too! So get writing... the first instalment of *System File* will appear in a few issues' time

Onlinef@rum

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



The clinical sound of compact disc is making me think it might be worthwhile getting something to play vinyl on. Can anyone recommend something? I'd be happy with a Michell Gyro but it's a bit pricey considering I have only 10 LPs so far.

Celestion

...Look at Pro-Ject's offerings or something by Rega. ClearAudio is more stylish, with some nice budget decks. If you're looking for great value, give the Pro-Ject Xperience X-pack a serious look.

Skippy

...For sound per pound go

for a Rega P3. If you want pretty sounds try a Roksan Radius 5 with Nima Tonearm.

Dud'sboxer

I've just bought a Puresound Bewitch A30 Class A valve integrated amp over the weekend from Coherent Systems. If you have around £2,000

to spend on a new amp, you'd be a fool not to consider this beauty. I've been after one for a while. Those with bad backs stay away.

Kingsxfan

Throw away your stupid two-channel systems right now! Check out Geneva Lab's Model XL

iPod docking system.

still tones

...There doesn't seem to have been much thought to the design – there's no handle on the top and no padding underneath – how am I supposed to carry that around on my shoulder!?

Telstr



“Welcome
black”



DVD RECEIVER DR-H300DAB



REFERENCE 300 mkIII DAB



CD RECEIVER CR-H255DAB

Black is back. And now, it's even better.

Our upgraded Reference 300 mk III DAB has enhanced class leading sound performance. The Reference 255 DAB has the unique USB playback and record (to MP3) facility setting it further apart from the competition. Adding a new dimension to the Reference family is the all new DVD system, the DR-H300 DAB offering HDMI output to enhance the quality of your movies. All systems have DAB radio. Pair any of these systems with our new iPod Nano wireless remote control adapter, the IIV-C5 and you will really 'get connected'.

It's what you would expect from the leaders in digital music.

Don't wait, **get connected now** at your nearest retailer or contact TEAC on 0845 130 2511 or at info@teac.co.uk

(And if you still prefer the traditional look, they're also available in silver)

www.teac.co.uk



“Get
connected”
TEAC
The leaders in digital music

Welcome to...

THE HI-FI AWARDS 2006



Spread across the next 40 pages you'll find our pick of the best hi-fi components currently available, painstakingly plucked from each relevant product category with prices ranging from entry-level to the aspirational high end.

As you'd expect from *Hi-Fi Choice*, this is no flippant, Oscars-style ceremony. Instead, we have rigorously filtered all our favourite products to come up with a final list of Award-winning components to suit every pocket – after all, how could you possibly compare the best CD player costing less than £500 to the best priced at over £5,000? Both deserve to be judged against their peers, and that's just what you get with *HFC*.

THE JUDGING PROCESS

The process we undertake in judging our Awards is painstaking. We've listened to the kit, measured it and sought the opinions of blind listening teams before extensive consultation with a judging panel of exceptional

experience: the *HFC* reviewing team! We then gradually whittled down our list of both stereo and multichannel components until we reached a final, democratically agreed selection, with three products in each price category ranked in order of Gold, Silver and Bronze. We checked the availability of each product and made sure the list is as up to date as possible – that's why some of the featured products are reviewed for the first time in this very issue. The result is an Awards edition for those who really care about quality – hi-fi awards you can really trust.

Of course, anyone's choice of hi-fi will ultimately come down to personal taste, and you'll find many other fine components worthy of your audition list nestling in our *Buyer's Bible* section at the back of the magazine. Yet all our special Award winners have succeeded due to their exceptional mix of qualities at each individual price point – whether the gong is Gold, Silver or Bronze, these are products you simply have to hear. The shortlist for your next upgrade starts here.....

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THE JUDGING PANEL



TIM BOWN
Hi-Fi Choice's current
Editor-In-Chief



PAUL MESSENGER
Former Hi-Fi Choice
Editor, speaker master



ALVIN GOLD
Top hi-fi and home
cinema journalist



DAN GEORGE
Hi-Fi Choice's own
Reviews Editor



JASON KENNEDY
Former Hi-Fi Choice
Editor, audio expert



ALAN SIRCOM
Virtuoso hi-fi and
home cinema reviewer



RICHARD BLACK
Hi-Fi Choice's resident
electronics guru



MALCOLM STEWARD
Renowned reviewer
and industry expert

Key: Source Components Amplifiers Loudspeakers Ancillaries

Enjoy.

BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £500



Rega Apollo

PRICE £498 CONTACT 01702 333071 www.rega.co.uk

One of our most stunning discoveries of the year has to be Rega's new entry-level CD player – the brilliant Apollo. We've been banging on about this top-loader for months now, so what's so special? Its sheer musical

ability, that's what. Its delivery is crisp and fluid, with good bass and a great midrange, but the most impressive aspect is its high-frequency performance – astonishingly extended and detailed for a sub-£500 player.

Marantz SA7001

PRICE £430 CONTACT 01753 680868 www.marantz.com



Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2

PRICE £250 CONTACT 0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com



BEST CD PLAYER £500-£1,000



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C

PRICE £750 CONTACT 0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com

Given that Cambridge Audio is best known for its budget wonders, the new Azur 840 CD player and amp came as something of a surprise. The 840C is the fruit of a partnership with Swiss digital experts

Anagram, resulting in a genuinely innovative CD player of extraordinary ability given its price point. Its sound is beautifully subtle and refined – truly, an 'open window' on the music being played. At £750, it's a bargain.

Cyrus CD8x

PRICE £1,000 CONTACT 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com



Naim CD5i

PRICE £825 CONTACT 01722 426600 www.naim-audio.com



BEST CD PLAYER £1,000-£2,000



Rega Saturn

PRICE £1,298 CONTACT 01702 333071 www.rega.co.uk

If you'd suggested to us at the start of the year that Rega would scoop two of our annual Gold Awards – and both would be for CD players – we might not have taken you seriously. And yet the company, best known

for its legendary turntables, has pulled off this unlikely double with two brilliantly designed machines. The new Saturn builds on the Apollo's premiss, delivering stronger bass and more precision. A true audiophile bargain.

BEST CD PLAYER £2,000-£5,000



Esoteric X-03SE

PRICE £4,995 CONTACT 01727 865488 www.teac.com/esoteric

There are two things you should know about Esoteric. First, it's the über-audiophile division of Japanese firm TEAC. Second, it's responsible for perhaps the finest range of high-end, cost-no-object CD/SACD

players on the planet. Believe it or not, the X-03SE is Esoteric's entry-level model in the UK, but it still delivers astonishing sonic detail and precision, coupled with a gorgeous sense of musical structure. Truly, it's brilliant.

Copland CDA823

PRICE £1,750 CONTACT 020 8971 3909 www.copland.dk



Meridian G06

PRICE £1,695 CONTACT 01480 445678 www.meridian.audio.com



Classé CDP-202

PRICE £4,750 CONTACT 01903 221500 www.classeaudio.com



Resolution Audio Opus 21

PRICE £2,995 CONTACT 01277 227355 www.resolutionaudio.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.



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.



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

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www.csesolutions.co.uk
01423 359054



BEST CD PLAYER OVER £5,000



Naim Audio CD555

PRICE £14,000 CONTACT 01722 426600 www.naim-audio.com

This category resulted in some of the hottest debate among our Judging Panel, which isn't surprising given the wealth of sublime CD spinners available at this end of the market. It's largely a matter of taste,

and both the Esoteric and Audio Research machines (right) are stunning. But in the end we plumped for Naim's masterpiece – the year's most talked about high-end player and the ultimate statement of Naim musicality.

Esoteric X-01 Limited

PRICE £9,495 (G-0s Clock Generator, also pictured, £8,995)
CONTACT 01727 865488 www.teac.com/esoteric



Audio Research Reference CD7

PRICE £7,998
CONTACT 020 8971 3909 www.audioresearch.com



INFO – DISC PLAYERS

Some say that the dedicated CD player has had its day, and that the future of audio lies with multiformat, multichannel disc players, hard disk-based servers and sundry PC-linked playback devices. At HFC, we'd agree – certainly in terms of a macroscopic view of the market. But that's not the whole story.

In hi-fi circles, the age of the dedicated CD player is far from over – that's why we've devoted three pages of our Awards to a comprehensive summation of the current state of the art. True enough, unit sales of CD separates are a fraction of what they once were, and dedicated audio CD mechanisms have become much harder for manufacturers to source. And yet a steady stream of new CD players from specialist companies continues unabated, this year joined – interestingly enough – by new models from broad-scale Far Eastern brands like Denon, Onkyo and Yamaha. These are brands that have largely focused their UK operation on home cinema in recent years, so their renewed participation in the hi-fi separates sector tells you something about the state of the market. Stereo, it seems, is back!

As long as we continue to have large, expanding and treasured CD collections, a dedicated CD player by and large remains the best way to make the most of your discs. There are various reasons for this. One is that the complexity brought about by the inclusion of video circuits and so on can interfere with the audio signal. Another is that through two decades of experimentation and acquired knowledge, the sheer variety of finely tuned designs allows the consumer to choose the ideal candidate for his/her own budget, musical taste and sonic preferences.

That said, the concept of the multiformat disc player is equally valid for the hi-fi/music enthusiast. Across the next few pages you will see some of the best, beginning with a selection of DVD players from £250 to almost £4,000. Few of these will match our Award-winning CD players in corresponding price categories with straightforward CD replay, but they are improving in this regard and the best machines now sound genuinely impressive as CD sources. What's more, all do a splendid job with DVD-Video discs, and all play at least one high-resolution multichannel music format – DVD-Audio and/or SACD (DVD players that work with both are commonly termed 'universal disc players' – a handy catch-all solution that's improving with each generation).

In truth, neither DVD-Audio nor SACD has set the commercial music world alight. But classical music fans in particular may find the SACD catalogue worth investigating – if you're looking for a suitable player, consider a universal, or an audio-only CD/SACD player like the Marantz SA7001 (p32) or Esoteric X-03SE (p33).

The emergence of new hard disk-based audio components with serious audio intent remains more of a trickle than a stream, but you'll find a trio worthy of investigation on p47. This year we've decided not to give the ubiquitous iPod any further publicity – it hardly needs our help – and instead focus on dedicated devices for home hi-fi replay. Expect this sector to pick up some pace in the coming year. And finally, a word about Blu-ray and HD DVD. The UK launch of these new video-oriented optical disc formats is imminent, but the jury is still out on the impact they'll have on the home movie market, let alone the music sector. Watch this space...

Ayre

MX-R mono amplifier



The Ayre MX-R represents a radical new approach to power amplifier design, exceeding all previously known performance limits. Housed in an ultra-rigid chassis machined from a solid block of aircraft-grade aluminum, the MX-R's unique form factor provides for easy placement as well as a stunning appearance.

Innovative new circuit technologies combine to create a previously unrealized sonic experience that will deepen your appreciation of your favourite music.

 symmetry

t: 01727 865488

e: info@symmetry-systems.co.uk

w: www.symmetry-systems.co.uk

BEST DVD PLAYER UNDER £600



Marantz DV7600

PRICE £600 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT 01753 680868 www.marantz.com

You can buy a DVD player for next to nothing these days. But if you want a player that will play music to true hi-fi standards, while also doing a fine job with movies, you'll need to spend a good deal

more. The DV7600 is a great example: it's not stacked with video-oriented gadgets but it's a great all-rounder, good with movies and class-leading with music on CD, SACD and DVD-A alike – a DVD player for music fans.

Denon DVD-1930

PRICE £250 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT 01234 741200 www.denon.co.uk



Harman Kardon DVD 47

PRICE £400 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT 01707 278100 www.harmankardon.com



BEST DVD PLAYER £600-£1,000



Pioneer DV-989AVi-S

PRICE £800 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT 01753 789900 www.pioneer.co.uk

Pioneer was the first company to produce a so-called 'universal' player – one which plays DVD-Audio and SACD hi-res music discs as well as CDs and DVD-Videos – and it still makes some of the most competitive

machines around. The DV-989AVi may not be the very latest but it remains one of the greatest, combining cracking picture quality with great sonics and a comprehensive range of connection options – great value all round.

Sony DVP-NS9100ES

PRICE £1,000 FORMATS DVD-V/CD/SACD CONTACT 08705 111999 www.sony.co.uk



Arcam DiVA DV79

PRICE £1,000 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD CONTACT 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk



IXOS IXOTICA

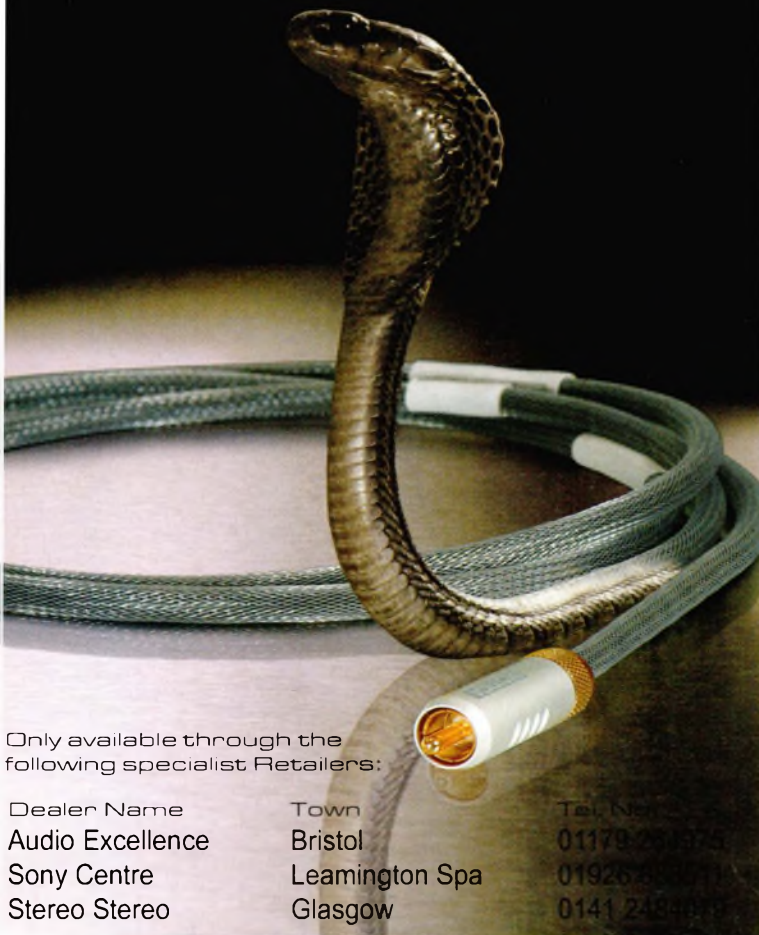
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HI-FI WORLD
IXOTICA IX1 REVIEW

MAY 2006

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Sony Centre	Leamington Spa	01926 477000
Stereo Stereo	Glasgow	0141 248 4000

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To experience the Bolzano Villettri sound visit www.bolzanovilletri.com, locate the dealer nearest to you and book a demonstration. The Bolzano Villettri loudspeaker range is exceptional value for money and will soon have you re-evaluating your priorities in loudspeaker fulfilment.

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BEST DVD PLAYER £1,000-£2,000



Denon DVD-3930

PRICE £1,100 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT ☎ 01234 741200 @ www.denon.co.uk

Reviewed this very issue, Denon's brand new DVD-3930 is a real disc-playing *tour de force*. Performance is state of the art for a multiformat player at the price, fusing 'near HD' video upscaling with a thoroughly

impressive sonic ability. There's some tough competition around – both the Arcam and Marantz players (right) are fabulous music and movie machines – but at just £1,100, the Denon pips them for the top prize here.

BEST DVD PLAYER OVER £2,000



Meridian G98AH

PRICE £3,625 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD CONTACT ☎ 01480 445678 @ www.meridian-audio.com

Meridian has long been at the forefront of high-end digital audio, but in recent years the company has secured a place at the cutting edge of digital video, too. The G98AH sports a full set of analogue

outputs alongside Meridian's hi-res digital connections, and benefits from its maker's continuous improvement programme to keep it ahead of the pack. Both sonically and visually, it's top notch – in a word, stunning.

Arcam DiVA DV137

PRICE £1,250 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT ☎ 01223 203200 @ www.arcam.co.uk



Marantz DV9600

PRICE £1,500 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 @ www.marantz.com



Denon DVD-A1XVA

PRICE £2,700 FORMATS DVD-V/DVD-A/CD/SACD CONTACT ☎ 01234 741200 @ www.denon.co.uk



Naim DVD5

PRICE £2,425 FORMATS DVD-V/CD (DVD-A £260 extra) CONTACT ☎ 01722 426600 @ www.naim-audio.com



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BEST TURNTABLE UNDER £500



The Funk Firm Funk

PRICE £450 (tonearm/cartridge extra) CONTACT ☎ 020 8697 2705 @ www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

New turntable brand The Funk Firm has taken our reviewers by storm this year. There are two decks in the current range, topped off by the excellent Funk V (see below). But it's the standard Funk we're

focusing on in the sub-£500 category, and if you find yourself digging its, er, funky looks, you'll be bowled over by its sound. Team it with a Rega RB300 arm, along with the best cartridge you can afford, and it's stunning.

Pro-Ject RPM 5

PRICE £400 (including Pro-Ject arm/Ortofon cartridge)
CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 @ www.henleydesigns.co.uk



Goldring GR2

PRICE £265 (including Rega arm/Goldring cartridge)
CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 @ www.goldring.co.uk



BEST TURNTABLE £500-£1,000



Pro-Ject RPM 9.1

PRICE £1,000 (including Pro-Ject carbon-fibre tonearm) CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 @ www.henleydesigns.co.uk

Pro-Ject is one of the great success stories of recent turntable history. Although best known for its budget decks, the Czech firm has built a great reputation throughout the vinyl pantheon, thanks to excellent

turntables like the new, improved RPM 9.1. Pictured here is the transparent acrylic 9.1 X, a bargain in both material and sonic terms, with a sound that's open, clear and thoroughly engaging.

Funk Firm Funk V

PRICE £760 (tonearm/cartridge extra)
CONTACT ☎ 020 8697 2705 @ www.thefunkfirm.co.uk



Michell Tecnodec

PRICE £767 (inc. arm) CONTACT ☎ 020 8953 0771 @ www.michell-engineering.co.uk



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– Sam Tellig, *Stereophile magazine*

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– Noel Keywood, *Hi-Fi World*

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BEST TURNTABLE £1,000-£3,000



SME Model 10

PRICE £2,776 (tonearm/cartridge extra) CONTACT ☎ 01903 814321 🌐 www.sme.ltd.uk

SME's superbly engineered tonearms and turntables have been delighting music fans for years, so it's thoroughly appropriate that one should feature in our Awards for yet another year. The entry-level Model 10's

price without a tonearm only just allows it to be shoehorned into this category, but add one of SME's own very fine arms and its delivery of the musical truth will eclipse just about every other turntable in its price range.

Rega P9

PRICE £2,598 (including Rega RB1000 tonearm)
CONTACT ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk



Clearaudio Ambient

PRICE £2,630 (tonearm/cartridge extra)
CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.clearaudio.de



BEST TURNTABLE OVER £3,000



Brinkman LaGrange

PRICE £6,895 (tonearm/cartridge extra) CONTACT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.brinkmann-audio.com

Sure, it's a hefty price to pay for a turntable, with tonearm and cartridge to budget for on top, but in sonic terms this astounding deck is something of a bargain. It's the perfect turntable for those who

admire the stability of CD but crave the musicality of vinyl; it's dynamic, detailed and tonally neutral, with perfectly scaled precision and bass to die for. Quite simply, digital audio doesn't come close – at any price.

Avid Acutus

PRICE £6,000 (tonearm/cartridge extra)
CONTACT ☎ 01480 457300 🌐 www.avidhifi.co.uk



Roksan TMS2

PRICE £7,500 (including Roksan Artemiz tonearm)
CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk



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WHAT HI-FI?
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AWARDS 2006

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

CD PLAYERS

CYRUS CD6s

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AWARDS 2006

CD PLAYER

BEST CD PLAYER £1000-£1500

CYRUS CDBx

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AWARDS 2006

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £750 - £1250

CYRUS 8vs2



time-shifting DAB radio to suit your lifestyle!

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BEST RADIO TUNER UNDER £500



Denon TU-1800DAB

PRICE £250 TYPE DAB/FM/AM CONTACT 01234 791200 www.denon.co.uk

Denon's long-standing position at the forefront of the budget tuner market continues with this cracking model – our top recommendation for the second year running. Well-implemented flexibility is the

key here, combining the practical advantages of DAB digital radio with a highly creditable FM performance, wrapped up in a neat package that's a joy to use. A great crossover product and very fine value for money.

BEST RADIO TUNER OVER £500



Magnum Dynalab MD-90T

PRICE £1,295 TYPE FM CONTACT 020 8948 4153 www.magnumdynalab.com

Digital radio has a lot going for it: variety, ease of use... but on pure sound quality grounds, you still can't beat a good FM tuner and a suitable rooftop 'twig'. If you're serious about your radio, the all-analogue

tuners from Canadian FM radio specialist Magnum Dynalab are in a different league. The MD-90T is the entry-level model and it sounds breathtaking – only MD's more upmarket tuners deliver more.

Cyrus FM-X

PRICE £500 TYPE FM CONTACT 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com



Rega Radio 3

PRICE £398 TYPE FM/AM CONTACT 0870 900 1000 www.rega.co.uk



T+A T1210R

PRICE £1,000 TYPE FM CONTACT 01623 517000 www.taelektroakustik.de



Creek Classic Tuner

PRICE £550 TYPE FM/AM CONTACT 01442 260146 www.creekaudio.com



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The new KW250s - a pair of 250 watt monobloc power amps, a tube hybrid preamp, a 24-bit 192k upsampling CD player and a 24-bit 192k upsampling FM and DAB tuner, with phono mcm input, digital input on the back, and ipod input on the front. All in one box!

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BEST HARD DISK AUDIO COMPONENT



Cambridge Audio Azur 640H

PRICE £600 TYPE 160GB music server CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

Cambridge Audio goes from strength to strength. Not content with a new up-market CD player and amp, the company launched its first music server, the Azur 640H. Easy to use and simple to integrate into the

company's own Incognito multiroom system, the 640H can store, sort and playback up to 3,000 songs on its 160GB hard disk. It's flexible and great value for money, and it even makes a pretty tasty CD player!

BEST ONE-BOX CD SYSTEM



Primare CDI10

PRICE £1,200 TYPE CD player, amplifier, DAB/FM tuner CONTACT ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.primare.net

The emergence of more single-box stereo systems from specialist hi-fi brands has been an obvious trend this year. Arcam's Solo remains popular, combining CD player, amp and DAB tuner in a single neat box, but there

are now some cracking alternatives – Audio Analogue's warmer sounding, valve-equipped Enigma, for example. But we reckon Primare's CDI10 is currently the best of the bunch – superbly built with a highly engaging sound.

Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro

PRICE £850 TYPE 160GB music server CONTACT ☎ 01189 497656 🌐 www.opposition-group.co.uk



Yamaha CDR-HD1500

PRICE £599 TYPE CD/hard disk recorder CONTACT ☎ 01923 233166 🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com



Arcam Solo

PRICE £1,000 TYPE CD player, amplifier, DAB/FM tuner CONTACT ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk



Audio Analogue Enigma

PRICE £900 TYPE CD player, amplifier, FM/AM tuner CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.audioanalogue.com



BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER UNDER £500



Marantz PM7001

PRICE £350 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01753 680868 www.marantz.com

The PM7001 is the successor to another HFC Award winner, the highly regarded PM7200. The new amp eschews the switchable Class A option of its predecessor in favour of an all-new Class AB stage, and

the result is a 70-watt amp of exceptional poise, given its affordable price tag. Its sound is detailed and expressive, and it's well equipped too – a sub-£500 cracker that gives much more costly amps a run for their money.

Arcam DiVA A70

PRICE £500 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk



Cambridge Audio Azur 640A v2

PRICE £300 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com



BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £500-£1,000



Cambridge Audio Azur 840A

PRICE £750 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com

Not content with developing our new Gold Award-winning CD player in the £500-£1,000 category, Cambridge Audio has gone and made it a double! The Azur 840A is no ordinary amp: it features a new

and genuinely innovative technology that Cambridge calls Class XD. What you get is 120 watts per channel combined with tremendous subtlety and refinement, and the most glorious midrange this side of £1,000.

Marantz PM7001 KI

PRICE £550 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01753 680868 www.marantz.com



Arcam DiVA A90

PRICE £850 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk



BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £1,000-£2,000



Primare I30

PRICE £1,500 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01423 359054 www.primare.net

Are you looking for an amp that combines weight and musical gravitas with detail, rhythm and subtlety? Then form an orderly queue, because Primare's heavyweight integrated delivers all of the

above – and then some. It's a dream to use, thanks to its excellent build quality and wonderfully solid controls; add its sonic prowess to the mix and this £1,500 integrated is something of a steal.

Naim Audio NAC 122x/NAP 150x

PRICE £1,500 TYPE Pre/ power amplifier CONTACT 01722 426600 www.naim-audio.com



Creek Destiny

PRICE £1,200 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01442 260146 www.creekaudio.com



BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £2,000-£5,000



Copland CTA405

PRICE £2,498 TYPE Integrated valve amplifier CONTACT 020 8971 3909 www.copland.dk

Following much deliberation involving some very fine amplifiers, we eventually plumbed for Copland's new valve-based integrated for our Gold Award in this category. It's not that we think it's the best

amp this side of five grand per se; it's just that its massively enjoyable musicality is extremely hard to beat at its price point. All the effusiveness of a great valve amp and none of the stereotypical softness. Brilliant!

Chapter Précis

PRICE £4,495 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01392 686797 www.chapterelectronics.co.uk



Densen Beat B-150

PRICE £3,000 TYPE Integrated amplifier CONTACT 01732 458938 www.densen.dk



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Tucana STEREO AMPLIFIER



Cygnus ADVANCED PRE-AMPLIFIER



BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER OVER £5,000



Krell FBI

PRICE £13,950 **TYPE** Integrated amplifier **CONTACT** 020 8971 3909 www.krellonline.com

This year, Krell unleashed the mightiest integrated amplifier ever devised. The FBI (Fully Balanced Integrated) is built on the grandest of scales, operating in pure Class A and delivering 300 watts per channel into

eight ohms, so even the most stubborn speakers are a walk in the park. Most impressive of all, that extraordinary power is married to the sort of solidity and resolution we've come to expect from Krell, and more.

Ayre K-1xe/V-1xe

PRICE £12,490 **TYPE** Pre/power amplifier **CONTACT** 01727 865488 www.ayre.com



Gamut DI 150

PRICE £5,650 **TYPE** Integrated amplifier **CONTACT** 01252 702705 www.gamut.de



INFO – AMPLIFIERS

There are several decisions to make when choosing an amp. For example, it's crucial you pick one with enough inputs to take all your sources, both present and future. And how about features like remote control and tone adjustment? Once vilified in specialist hi-fi circles, it's now generally accepted that if implemented well, such niceties needn't have a broadly adverse effect on sound (though they might add to the price tag). For those with wide-ranging music tastes, tone controls many prove useful to tame aggressive recordings, for example, while remote control is a convenience many now take for granted – which is why amps without it are now few and far between.

Another key decision is whether you want to build a straightforward two-channel system or whether you want to go multichannel for surround sound music and movie replay. This is simply a matter of priority – if you're building a system to primarily play music from sources like CD, vinyl and radio, then we'd suggest you concentrate your resources on optimising a pure stereo system. Remember also that there's nothing stopping you playing DVDs or SACDs in plain stereo – even surround sound discs will sound much better through a good two-channel set-up than through a bad multichannel one.

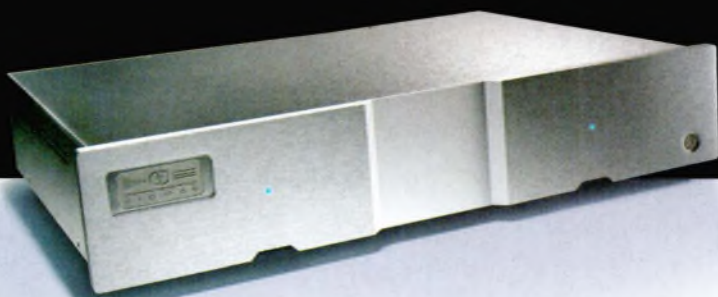
That said, multichannel AV amps are getting better all the time, notably in their ability to play two-channel material off CD etc. When building a multichannel system, don't be swayed by unnecessary frills – work out how many channels you require (in many rooms, and with multichannel music in particular, 5.1 is perfectly sufficient). And while the number of surround processing formats (Dolby, DTS *et al*) is continually growing, it's likely that many will remain unused in most systems – a plethora of processing options isn't everything!

Much more important are the amplifying fundamentals – a healthy power supply, high-quality circuit components, appropriate shielding, signal paths that are as simple as possible and so on. There are now some remarkably good sub-£500 integrated multichannel amps on the market (like Sony's STR-DA1200ES, p53), but you shouldn't expect miracles from something so complex and yet so affordable – a good, similarly priced two-channel amp will beat its AV equivalent hands down with a straight stereo source like CD. However, top-end multichannel integrated amplifiers can now perform all functions (stereo included) with aplomb, often with future-proof 'upgradability' built in to boot. Just don't expect this level of quality to come cheap!

It's certainly true to say that multichannel music has taken the 'AV amp' concept away from its previous role as purely a slave to home cinema, with undoubted qualitative benefits. Perhaps the best way to experience 'hi-fi multichannel' is to buy a separate preamp/processor and multiple channels of power amplification from a specialist manufacturer. This is the most costly route of all, but also the most flexible and easy to optimise for genuine hi-fi sound. For the uninitiated, the results with a good multichannel DVD-Audio/SACD music disc or a DVD film soundtrack can be startling, with high-level two-channel sound a real possibility too.

Lastly, and briefly, the subject of power. The spec sheet isn't everything, and in the case of AV amps in particular it's often misleading. But don't worry – with the exception of very low-powered valve designs, most modern amps will have no trouble driving most modern speakers. It's the sonic character that really counts (to which many factors contribute) – not nominal figures on the spec sheet!

Exceeding expectations....

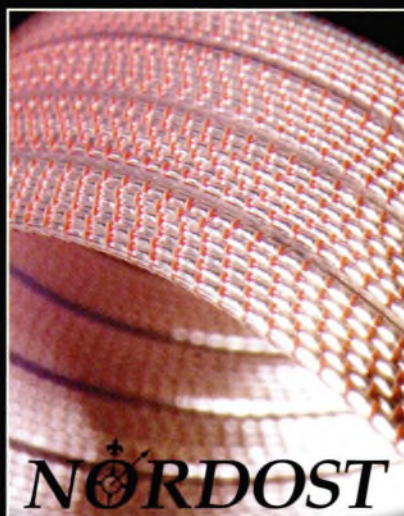


"...as things stand the benefits are considerable and the value of this unit is not hard to confirm." Hi-Fi Choice

"Excellent build quality, protection circuits, a fully-adaptive filtration circuit and stunning performance make the Sigmas a true bargain." Hi-Fi News

IsoTek are probably the best known producer of high quality power conditioners in the UK. Over the last 5 years the company has won close to 20 awards, the latest being international recognition. With products starting at £15.00 IsoTek continues to offer superb performance and value for money.

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 Audio Excellence: Bristol 01179 264975
 Audio Excellence: Cardiff 02920 228565
 Audio Excellence: Swansea 01792 474608
 Cheshire Audio: Cheshire 01270 580734
 Cool Gales: Bath 0800 043 6710
 Cornflake Ltd: London 0207 631 0472
 Doug Brady Hi-Fi: Warrington 01925 828009
 Global Hi-Fi Centre: Newcastle 0191 2303600
 Gloucester Hi-Fi: Gloucestershire 01452 382222
 High End Cable: Lincolnshire 01775 761880
 Hi-Fi Sound: Darlington 01325 241888
 Home Media Ltd: Maidstone, Kent 01622 676703
 Horsham Hi-Fi: West Sussex 01403 272931
 James-Morrow: Edinburgh 0131 2298777
 KJ West One: London 0207 486 8263

Lintone Audio Ltd: Gateshead 0191 4774167
 Loud & Clear: Edinburgh 0131 226 6500
 Loud & Clear: Glasgow 0141 221 0221
 Marquee Home Ltd: Egham, Surrey 07004 567888
 MAX: Belbroughton, W. Midlands 01562 731100
 Musical Images: Beckenham 0208 663 3777
 Musical Images: London 0207 497 1346
 Music Matters: Middlesex 0208 420 1925
 Music Matters: Solihull 0121 742 0254
 Music Matters: Stourbridge 01384 444184
 Moorgate Acoustics: Sheffield 0114 2756048
 Noteworthy Audio: Aylesbury 01296 422224
 Phase 3: Southampton 023 8022 8434
 Phase 3: Worthing 01903 245577
 PJ Hi-Fi Ltd: Guildford 01483 504801
 Progressive Audio: Rainham 01634 389004
 Rayleigh Hi-Fi: Colchester 01206 577682
 Rayleigh Hi-Fi: Rayleigh 01268 779762
 Sevenoaks S & V: Bristol 0117 9238298
 Sevenoaks S & V: Bromley 0208 290 1988

Sevenoaks S & V: Chelsea 0207 352 9466
 Sevenoaks S & V: Guildford 01483 536666
 Sevenoaks S & V: Hull 01483 587171
 Sevenoaks S & V: Lincoln 01522 527397
 Sevenoaks S & V: Sevenoaks 01732 459555
 Sevenoaks S & V: Staines 01784 460777
 Sevenoaks S & V: Swindon 01793 610992
 Sevenoaks S & V: Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
 Sevenoaks S & V: Witham 01376 501733
 Sevenoaks S & V: Yeovil 01935 700078
 Shadow Audio: Glenrothes, Fife 01592 744779
 SMC: Shrewsbury 01743 232065
 Soundcraft: Ashford, Kent 01233 624441
 Sounds Expensive: Rugby 01788 540772
 Stone Audio: Dorchester 01305 257555
 Swifts of Wilmslow: Wilmslow 01625 526213
 The Sound Gallery: High Wycombe 01494 531682
 Videotech: Huddersfield 01484 516670
 Worcester Hi-Fi: Worcestershire 01905 612929
 Zouch Audio: Ashby-de-La-Zouch 01530 414128

BEST MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER UNDER £600



Sony STR-DA1200ES

PRICE £400 TYPE AV receiver CONTACT 08705 111999 @ www.sony.co.uk

This new seven-channel receiver from Sony is a real sub-£500 superstar. It's fully loaded with everything a modern home cinema fan demands, like HDMI switching and video-upconversion to component from

composite or S-Video connections. It's surprisingly well built too, given the price. But the clincher is its sound quality, with good musical detail and an open, articulate midrange that puts its rivals in the shade.

Yamaha DSP-AX759SE

PRICE £550 TYPE Integrated AV amplifier CONTACT 01923 233165 @ www.yamaha-uk.com



Denon AVR-1907

PRICE £400 TYPE AV receiver CONTACT 01234 741200 @ www.denon.co.uk



BEST MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER £600-£2,000



Arcam DiVA AVR350

PRICE £1,500 TYPE AV receiver CONTACT 01223 203200 @ www.arcam.co.uk

It may look similar to its AVR300 older brother, but Arcam's latest receiver is notably better equipped, with seven channels of amplification (at 100 watts apiece) and HDMI switching, plus the

interference-reducing Stealth Mat technology developed for the FMJ series. The result is a well-equipped home cinema receiver that hi-fi fans can also enjoy – as engaging with music as it is with movies.

Primare SPA21

PRICE £2,000 TYPE Integrated AV amplifier CONTACT 01423 359054 @ www.primare.net



Yamaha RX-V2600

PRICE £900 TYPE AV receiver CONTACT 01223 203200 @ www.arcam.co.uk



Totem Hawk

The HAWK exemplifies total involvement with all your senses. Truly full range, extremely compact and aesthetically balanced, it has incredible attributes and strengths that will envelop you like no other. Detail, continuity, harmonic nuances, timbre precision and its self-efficient holography all point to an experience that will never cease to amaze and fulfil your aural needs.

A soul mover of the highest calibre. The "Claw" decoupling system available both in silver or black come as standard. The 5 1/2" woofer has an especially extreme long throw, non-resonant cone and dust cap with dynamic linear suspension for maximum airflow and patented magnet system. Along with the 1" tweeter, which has a special low resonance chambered unit, these drivers just hint at the magic behind the facade.



Soar to new heights with this powerful Totem, you will never forget its true character: elegant, simple, extreme high end.

The loudspeaker cabinet of the Hawk is internally and externally veneered with the highest quality veneer. On top of the internal veneer there has been a borosilicate damping material sprayed to avoid unwanted accumulated energy, that energy will immediately be spread around at the whole surface. The Hawk's being made in four different finishes: cherry, mahogany, maple and black ash. An extensive cross brace improves the stiffness of this unique but simple looking cabinet. It offers W.B.T bi-wirable terminals.

Use the Totem Hawk to see EVERY detail in your music and enjoy its internal sweetness.

London Area	Cornflake.co.uk, LONDON, Tel: 0207 6310472 O'Brien Hifi, London, Tel: 00208 9461528 Audio-T, READING, Berkshire Tel: 01189 585463 Audio-T, CAMBERLEY, Surrey Tel: 01276 685597
South East	Rayleigh Hi-Fi, RAYLEIGH, Essex, Tel: 01268 779762 Rayleigh Hi-Fi, CHELMSFORD, Essex, Tel: 01245 265245 Audio-T, TUNBRIDGE WELLS, Kent, Tel: 01892 525666 Rayleigh Hi-Fi, SOUTHEND, Essex, Tel: 01702 435255 Rayleigh Hi-Fi, COLCHESTER, Essex, Tel: 01206 577682
South	Norman Hobbs, HAYWARDS HEATH, West Sussex, Tel: 01444 413353 Audio-T, EASTBOURNE, Tel: 01323 731336
South West	Audio-T, PORTSMOUTH, Hampshire, Tel: 023 9266 3604 Audio-T, SOUTHAMPTON, Hampshire, Tel: 023 8025 2827 Audio Destination, TIVERTON, Devon, Tel: 01884 243584 Movement Audio, POOLE, Dorset, Tel: 01202 730865/380018 Audio Excellence, BRISTOL, Tel: 0117 926 4975
Midlands	Leicester Hifi, LEICESTER, Tel: 01162 539753 Audio Excellence, WORCESTER, Tel: 01905 619059
North	Audio Counsel, CHEADLE, cheshire, Tel: 01614 916090 The Sound Organisation, YORK, Yorkshire, Tel: 01904 627108
Scotland	Loud & Clear, EDINBURGH, Tel: 0131 5553963
Wales	Loud & Clear, GLASGOW, Tel: 0141 2210221 Audio Excellence, SWANSEA, Tel: 01792 474608

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Belgium Tel: 0032 15 285 585

BEST MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER £2,000-£5,000



Denon AVC-A11XVA

PRICE £2,500 TYPE Integrated AV amplifier CONTACT 01234 741200 www.denon.co.uk

Denon's mighty amps have this category pretty much sewn up. But why plump for the AVC-A11XVA over the humongous 'A1XVA? Well, extraordinary as it is, we reckon the larger amp might just represent

overkill in most systems, whereas Denon's £2,500 champ is a fully featured leviathan of tremendous flexibility and terrific sound that just stops short of 10-channel lunacy. At the price, it's the multichannel amp to beat.

Denon AVC-A1XVA

PRICE £4,800 TYPE Integrated AV amplifier CONTACT 01234 741200 www.denon.co.uk



Lexicon RV-8

PRICE £5,000 TYPE AV receiver CONTACT 01423 359054 www.lexicon.com



BEST MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER OVER £5,000



Classé SSP-600/CA-5200

PRICE £11,900 TYPE Processor/power amplifier CONTACT 01903 221500 www.classeaudio.com

Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel amp solution that's equally adept with music and movie sources should park their ears here. This beautifully built processor and five-channel power amp combo incorporates

a host of funky features, like a touch-screen video display, but the critical factor is the way it sounds. Unlike the vast majority of AV amps, it sings with the sumptuous clarity of real high-end hi-fi. Enough said.

Arcam FMJ AV9/P7

PRICE £6,200 TYPE Processor/power amplifier CONTACT 01623 203200 www.arcam.co.uk



Chord Electronics DSP8000R/SPM2400

PRICE £13,535 TYPE Processor/power amplifier CONTACT 01622 721444 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

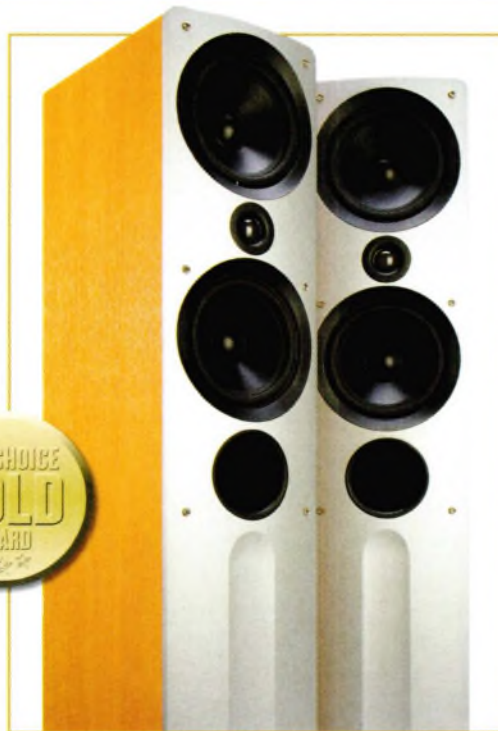


BEST LOUDSPEAKER UNDER £500

Q Acoustics 1050

PRICE £330 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 @ www.qacoustics.co.uk

Armour Home Electronics is home to many well-known hi-fi brands, like QED, Goldring and Myryad. This year, the company also launched a brand new 'budget' speaker brand, called Q Acoustics. Each model in this impressively engineered range offers great value for money, and this cracking floorstander is at the top of the pile, delivering an engaging sound with fine dynamics and impressive transparency. At just £330 per pair, it's a winner.



Rega R3

PRICE £448 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01702 333071 @ www.rega.co.uk



Epos M12.2

PRICE £449 per pair TYPE Standmount CONTACT ☎ 01442 260146 @ www.epos-acoustics.com



BEST LOUDSPEAKER £500-£1,000

DALI Ikon 7

PRICE £999 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 0145 6443537 @ www.dali-uk.co.uk

DALI's Ikon range has made quite an impact on our reviewers' ears during the past year. First there was the excellent Ikon 6, which featured in last year's HFC Awards, and now the slightly larger Ikon 7, which adds another bass driver in return for an extra £100 per pair. Both speakers feature a ribbon super-tweeter as well as a standard dome, and though we've decided to focus on the 7 here, both deliver an engrossing musical performance.



Castle Richmond 7i

PRICE £900 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01756 795333 @ www.castle-uk.com



KEF iQ9

PRICE £800 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01622 672261 @ www.kef.com



BEST LOUDSPEAKER £1,000-£2,000

B&W 805S

PRICE £1,600 per pair TYPE Standmount CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 @ www.bwspeakers.com

This gorgeous standmount will be no stranger to regular readers of *HFC*. It's been a huge favourite since its launch last year, thanks to its perfectly formed cabinet and impeccably engineered component parts. It's the kind of speaker that blends perfectly into all but the largest of rooms, with a sound that's coherent, detailed and highly rewarding musically. And that's why it gets our Gold Award for a second consecutive year.



ATC SCM19

PRICE £1,499 per pair TYPE Standmount CONTACT ☎ 01285 760561 @ www.atc.gb.net



Triangle Celius Esw

PRICE £1,495 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669 @ www.triangle-fr.com



BEST LOUDSPEAKER £2,000-£5,000

MartinLogan Vantage

PRICE £3,998 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909 @ www.martinlogan.com

Okay, we admit it – presenting a Gold Award to an electrostatic design is bound to raise a few eyebrows. But the MartinLogan Vantage is no ordinary 'static. Using the mighty, range-topping Summit as its starting point, it wraps the gloriously open and precise sonic imagery of electrostatic sound into an unusually cohesive package that works with a wide range of rooms and music types, and is affordably priced, too. Truly, it's a stunner.



Mordaunt-Short Performance 6

PRICE £3,500 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 @ www.mordauntshort.com



Focal Electra 1027 Be

PRICE £3,999 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 0845 660 2680 @ www.focal-uk.com



KEY TO PRODUCTS STOCKED:

AA = Audio Analogue **O** = Opera **UR** = Unison Research
G = GRAAF **D** = Diapason **B** = BCD Engineering
P = Patios Acoustics **F** = Final **K** = Kemp Electronics
T = Triangle **HD** = HiDiamond

tel : 01753 652 669 | email : info@ukd.co.uk | web : www.ukd.co.uk

CENTRAL LONDON

K.J. West One (020 7486 0552) **AA, O, UR, P, G, B, T**
www.kjwestone.com
Audio Visual Lounge (0207 375 3691) **UR, P**
www.theavlounge.com

LONDON (SOUTH WEST)

O'Brien Hi Fi (020 8946 1528) **AA, O, UR, FT, K, HD**

THAMES VALLEY

Audio Venue (01628 633995) **AA, Q, UR, K**

BERKSHIRE

The Audio Consultants (0118 981 9891) **UR, G, P, F**
www.audioconsultants.co.uk

MEDWAY

Progressive Audio (01634 389 004) **AA, Q, UR, G, D, F, P, K**
Audio Analogue Maestro Point Stockist

SURREY

Guildford Audio (01483 537577) **UR, P, O**
Lyngdorf Audio (0870-9100-100) **F**

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Noteworthy Audio (01296 422224) **UR**
www.noteworthyaudio.co.uk

AVON

V'Audio (01179 686005) **AA, Q, T**
Audience (01255 333310) **Q, P, AA**

BEDFORDSHIRE

Technosound Ltd (01582-663297) **F, P, O**

SUFFOLK

Audio Images (01502 582853) **T, P, K**
www.audioimages-hifi.com

DEVON

Audio Destination (01884 243584) **AA, F**

SOMERSET

Alternative Audio (01984 624242) **UR, O, D, P**
Pinewood Music Company (01460-54322) **UR, P**

OXFORDSHIRE

Oxford Audio Consultants (01865 790879) **AA, Q, UR, G, B, D, P, K, T**
www.oxfordaudio.co.uk

LEICS/NORTHANTS

Divine Audio (01858 432999) **AA, Q, T, UR, P, K**
www.divineaudio.co.uk

WEST MIDLANDS

Midland Audio Exchange (01562 731100) **D, G, P**
www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk

SHROPSHIRE

SMC Sound & Vision (01743 232065) **Q, F, UR, P**
www.smcsoundandvision.co.uk

N. WALES

Acton Gate Audio (01978 364500) **AA, Q, UR, F**

CHESHIRE

Philip Dooley (01625 264666) **AA, O, UR, G, K**
www.dooleys-hifi.co.uk
Practical Hi Fi Plus Warrington (01925 632179) **AA, G, P, T, UR, F**
www.practicalhifi.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Practical Hi-Fi (0161 839 8869) **P, AA, UR**
www.practicalhifi.co.uk

LANCS

Practical Hi Fi Preston (01722-883958) **AA, UR**
Practical Hi Fi Bolton (01204-395789) **AA**
www.practicalhifi.co.uk
Lyngdorf Audio (01282-867819) **F**

YORKSHIRE

The Hi Fi Studios (01302 781387) **UR**
Vickers Hi Fi (01904 629659) **UR, AA, Q, P**
www.vickers-hifi.co.uk

CO. DURHAM

Hi-Fi Sound (01325 241888) **AA, T, Q, UR**

TYNE & WEAR

Global Hi Fi (0191 230 3600) **UR, K, P**
www.globalhificentre.com

SCOTLAND

Glasgow: The Audio Salon (0141 333 9700) **B, T, K, P, UR**
www.audiosalon.co.uk

N. IRELAND

Kronos Hi Fi (028-8775-3606) **AA, O, UR, G, D, T, P**
www.kronoshi-fi.co.uk

Excellence in Electrostatics

The electrostatic panels of the Final range are an amazing combination of art and science. By improving on the classic electrostatic technology, Final merge audiophile sound with ultramodern, elegant design. The new patented Inverter Technology products combine detailed sound with discrete styling and optimum practicality.



Luxurious Italian Loudspeakers

For many years Opera have specialised in crafting beautiful loudspeakers at their factory in Italy's Veneto region. The new Linea Classica series continues this proud tradition, from the small but luxurious Mezza to the top-of-the-range Qunita. With its authentic Italian flair Opera is the natural choice for any music lover's system.

Loudspeakers that Love Music

French manufacturer Triangle have earned a world-wide reputation for exciting sound and impeccably engineered, high sensitivity loudspeaker designs. The new flagship Magellan Concerto and Grand Concert models represent the pinnacle of the company's achievement and are undoubtedly two of the finest performing loudspeakers in the world today.



The Unorthodox Approach

Pathos Acoustics, based in Vicenza, Italy, are internationally renowned for their uniquely-designed high performance valve/solid state amplifiers. Now sees the launch of their first CD player, and it's as stunning as everybody expected! Combing top quality styling and build with a detailed and liquid sound, the Endorphin is already making big waves in the industry.



PATHOS

BEST LOUDSPEAKER OVER £5,000

B&W 802D

PRICE £8,000 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 @ www.bwspeakers.com

It's fair to say the 802D isn't the very best speaker in B&W's 800 Series – that accolade belongs to the awesome 800D. But the 802D has one crucial advantage: it costs £5,000 less, yet it delivers 95 per cent of the sound, diamond tweeter and all. It's a fantastic speaker in its own right, of course, capable of astonishing scale and insight, and in terms of value – both material and sonic – it's really quite a bargain!



Jamo R909

PRICE £7,500 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 01923 205600 @ www.jamo.com



MartinLogan Summit

PRICE £8,498 per pair TYPE Floorstander CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909 @ www.martinlogan.com



INFO – LOUDSPEAKERS

There are more manufacturers of speakers on the market today than of any other hi-fi product category. Two reasons – one, they're relatively easy to develop and bring to market (though much harder to perfect). Two, whatever type of audio system you're building, speakers are the one component that everybody needs.

The result is a huge selection of designs of myriad shapes and sizes, and equally wide-ranging quality of sound. Tonally at least, no other component exerts such influence on the sonic character of a system, and as with any component, some careful auditioning is called for to ensure you choose the right model to suit your tastes.

First, you need to decide how many you need – two for a stereo set-up or more for multichannel (surround sound). In this year's HFC Awards, we've simply featured speakers in pairs rather than repeating the process with multichannel packages. This is because, even with multichannel, the most important thing is to choose the best 'main front' pair for you – this is what you'll hear with stereo material, and with multichannel sources they'll deliver a large portion of the overall soundfield. What's more, a speaker that performs well with music will also do a fine job with film soundtracks, but the reverse is not always true. Choose your main pair of speakers with care then, and build the rest around them.

There are various ways to consider the centre and rear speakers within a multichannel set-up. For music, it's recommended that you choose five identical full-range speakers and place them equidistant from the listener, firing directly towards his/her position in the centre (this is known as the ITU configuration). But this is often impractical – most multichannel systems also incorporate a video screen and a

horizontal 'centre speaker' may be the only realistic solution; likewise, it may be difficult to incorporate anything but a smaller pair at the rear. The important thing is to ensure that all speakers are as similar as possible – from the same range with the same essential voicing and the same critical drive units. So once you've chosen your main front speakers, pick your centre and rears accordingly – the result should be a sound that suits your ears across all available sources.

There's no obvious answer to the 'does size matter' question. Larger floorstanding speakers will usually plumb greater depths of bass and may offer superior dynamics, with a larger main drive unit (or units). But for the speaker engineer, there can be inherent advantages in working with a smaller box, and the best of the breed sound gloriously coherent (when used with an appropriate stand). Try before you buy, and try not to let aesthetic considerations be the major ruling factor – the only real rule is to avoid using large speakers in very small spaces, and to experiment with positioning once you've got them home.

Small sub/sat systems may appeal to some people aesthetically, but rarely will they challenge the coherence of a good, full-range integrated loudspeaker system, which is why you'll find none in this year's HFC Awards. That said, a number of stylish and compact solutions with obvious AV or PC appeal have emerged from some highly reputed brands, and with sound quality certainly improving this is an area to watch. Subwoofers themselves continue to be viewed as largely the preserve of home cinema enthusiasts, but the effect of a 'musical' sub in augmenting the bass and 'driving the room' in cahoots with a good hi-fi system shouldn't be ignored, multichannel or not. Our subwoofer Awards on p61 hold such ability paramount.

Classic Hi-Fi

Aristocratic sound for aristocratic music lovers

The Ultimate Super DigiFine Class A Pure Integrated Amplifier



Made in Japan

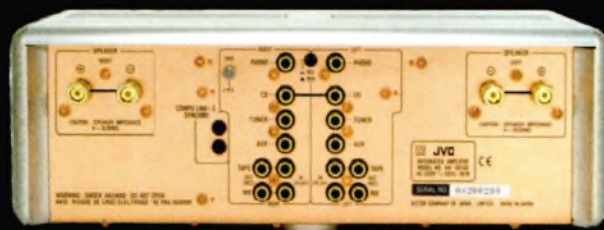
JVC AX-SD1 GD

With the AX-SD1 GD you will experience sound quality like never before, simply out of this world! Since JVC started in 1927 this is the best pure amplifier they have ever made.

5 years warranty

VERDICT

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



Inside View

JVC analog reference allows you to enjoy a sound quality that is closest ever to that of the original master. The AX-SD1 GD represents our idea of 'no-interference energy amplification' to achieve the purest of pure sound. First, there's the independent 3-block construction separating the power amp, preamp and control section, to prevent even the slightest interference. Then, the signal paths are trimmed to the shortest length possible, to keep signals contamination-free. Finally, the extra thick power cable enters the chassis through a hole in the bottom plate, directly running to the power transformers, reducing power-related interference. Parts and circuits, including terminals on the rear panel are laid out in total symmetry for the left and right channels, to ensure the sense of true stereo that gives substance to the music. Also, the three-point suspension provides an unshakeable support to the entire unit.

- Power output: 90w x 2 into 4 ohms at 1kHz with 0.7% THD (IEC 268-3)
- Advanced Super-A in push-pull configuration
- Quality parts: Dual power transformers (one for plus, one for minus voltage), thick OFC (Oxygen-Free Copper) power cable, low-leakage EI-core power transformer, copper-plated rear panel
- Staggered-resonance heat sinks with tapered fins
- Ultra phono stage MC and MM
- High output discrete phono equaliser amplifier
- 3-mode 'Presence' control
- Gold-plated brass speaker terminals
- System remote control
- RM-SASD1U Remote Control Unit (included)

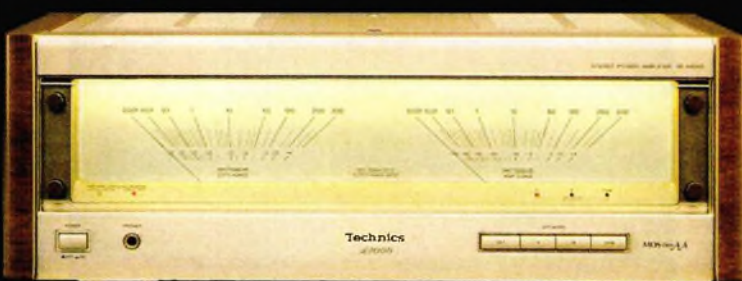
Matching CD Player Available
XL-SD1GD

The best of both worlds? There is no doubt about it



Victor · JVC

Technics The 2000 Series



Made in Japan

The 2000 Series is Technics top-of-the-line separate component system, featuring the SE-A2000 power amp and SU-C2000 control amp. Exclusive components with ingenious circuit construction. Sturdy, attractive designs. Incredible sound quality. In other words, a system that's the closest thing yet to audio perfection.

Original innovations in circuit technology

Super Linearity and Super Sound

Quality - MOS Class AA

The best device for use in an amplifier's output stage is the MOS-FET (metal oxide semi-conductor field effect transistor). In contrast to the common bi-polar transistor which is a current amplification device, the MOS-FET uses input voltage to amplify output current, much like vacuum tube. This gives the MOS-FET outstanding transfer characteristics particularly in terms of linearity, as confirmed by its audibly superior sound quality.

• brings the lushness and beauty normally reserved for the province of valves (Hi-Fi News)

Only available in Black Limited stock!

LUXMAN



Made in Japan

Be emotional with your sound of music. The "f" Series integrated amplifiers from Luxman.

Have you experienced the resolute, roaring undertones played by the Berlin Philharmonic's strings? How about the piercing howl of the New York Philharmonic's brass? Have you heard the subtlest nuances woven into a tapestry of music?

Introducing the "f" Series integrated amplifiers-the L-509f, L-507f and L-505f. First class performances and first-class music are best played back by first-class audio equipment, such as Luxman's. The history of the "f" Series started with the separate power and preamplifier (M-7f and C-7f). The series has met an enthusiastic response from many music fans and audiophiles alike. The new integrated amplifiers are all capable of presenting an ephemeral excitement just before music starts, and releasing potential energies contained in music. They are also superb in recreating the natural sonority of music as it's played live. Play your favorite music and find the thrills and wonders you never knew. Great music always sound wonderfully great with Luxman.

For full information on these products please call : 020 7272 0922
For a sound to remember Classic Hi-Fi Bringng you Closer To The Musical Truth

BEST SUBWOOFER UNDER £1,000

REL R-305

PRICE £795 CONTACT 01856 768777 www.rel.net

REL has been reborn. Its founder, Richard Lord, has retired and the brand is now owned and run by its American distributor, Sumiko. Any concerns that the products would suffer during the handover period were unfounded, as the new R-305 is faster, more naturally voiced and delivers even more tuneful deep bass than previous Q-series subs. It's a prettier product, too. In short, REL looks set to continue its domination of the bottom end.



B&W PV1

PRICE £950 CONTACT 01903 221500 www.bwspeakers.com



Velodyne SPL-800R

PRICE £699 CONTACT 0131 555 3922 www.velodyne.com



BEST SUBWOOFER OVER £1,000

Eclipse 725sw

PRICE £2,700 CONTACT 020 7328 4499 www.eclipse-td.com

Designing a subwoofer with sufficient speed and precision to blend seamlessly with Eclipse's superfast Time Domain speakers was never going to be an easy task, but the 725sw is perfect for the job. With two cross-coupled 250mm bass units hooked to a 500-watt Class D amplifier, it's fast enough to keep even the snappiest speakers happy, coupling great depth with uncommon subtlety. Sheer bottom-end brilliance!



MartinLogan Descent

PRICE £2,700 CONTACT 020 8971 3909 www.martinlogan.com

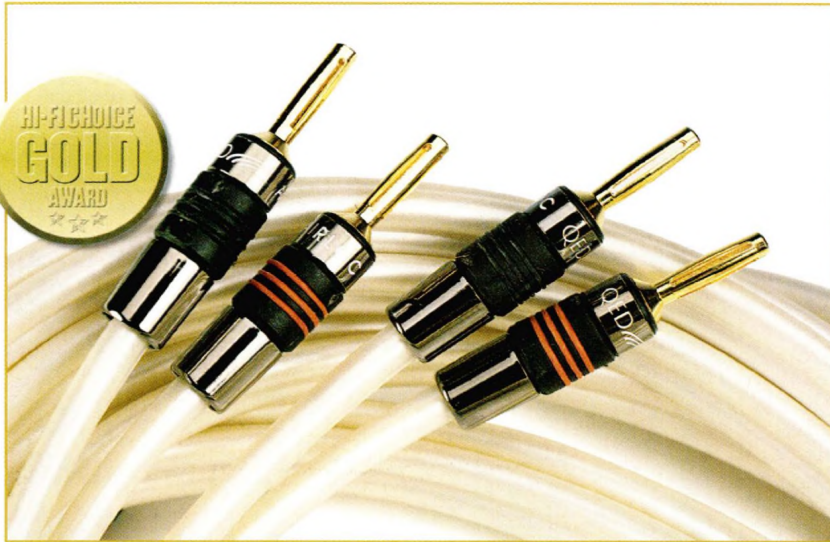


B&W ASW855

PRICE £2,000 CONTACT 01903 221500 www.bwspeakers.com



BEST SPEAKER CABLE UNDER £10/m



QED X-Tube XT300

PRICE £10/m CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.qed.co.uk

This might look like just another speaker cable of classic 'figure-8' construction, but the conductors aren't the usual mass of twisted copper strands. Instead, each is a hollow tube over a central core of polythene,

hence the name for this range: 'X-Tube'. Its sound is natural and well controlled, with excellent bass and an overall balance of virtues that make it a fine recommendation for a wide range of systems.

Kimber 4PR

PRICE £10/m
CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.kimber.com



QED Silver Anniversary XT

PRICE £5.50/m
CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.qed.co.uk



BEST SPEAKER CABLE OVER £10/m



Townshend Audio Isolda DCT

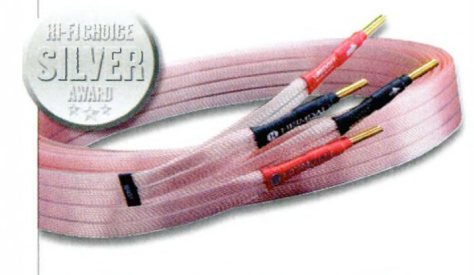
PRICE £50/m CONTACT ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

It may seem pricey, but the level of sonic problem solving that's gone into the Isolda DCT is impressive – there's a combination of passive components at each end of the cable that will stabilise any problem amps without

effecting the sound, plus Townshend's 'Deep Cryogenic Treatment' of the conductors. The result is effortless treble, deep and powerful bass, plus a midrange that's rich in textural, timbral and spatial information.

Nordost Heimdall

PRICE £1,175 (3m terminated pair)
CONTACT ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.nordostuk.com



Chord Company Epic Twin

PRICE £40/m
CONTACT ☎ 01980 625700 🌐 www.chord.co.uk



BEST INTERCONNECT UNDER £100 PER PAIR



van den Hul The Well Hybrid

PRICE £85 (1m pair) CONTACT 01935 511166 www.vandenhul.com

We originally tested this cable some time ago, so it's a testament to its quality that it remains our favourite interconnect under £100. It features van den Hul's trademark mixture of silver-plated copper

and 'linear structured carbon', double screen and all. In practice, The Well communicates music with graceful ease – not for the first time, van den Hul has made a low cost cable that performs way beyond its class.

Monster M350i

PRICE £45 (1m pair) CONTACT 01923 431634 www.monstercable.com



Kimbre Timbre

PRICE £89 (1m pair) CONTACT 0845 345 1550 www.kimbre.com



BEST INTERCONNECT OVER £100 PER PAIR



Nordost Heimdall

PRICE £370 (1m pair) CONTACT 01635 291357 www.nordostuk.com

Looking for a cable that will deliver taut bass, lashings of detail and stunning clarity? Try Nordost's Heimdall for size. Both the interconnect featured here and the matching speaker cable use the same

'Mono-Filament' technology handed down from Nordost's awesome (and hugely costly) Valhalla cables, with remarkably similar sonic results. They may not be cheap, but that makes them a bargain!

Townshend Audio Isolda DCT 300

PRICE £300 (1m pair) CONTACT 020 8979 2155 www.townshendaudio.com



Ixos Ixotica IX1

PRICE £195 (1m pair) CONTACT 01844 219000 www.ixos.co.uk



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—Richard Black, *Hi-Fi Choice*, July 2006

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Meridian has been at the forefront of Compact Disc since the beginning. In 1984, we released the world's first audiophile CD player, and since then, we've never looked back.

Compact Disc remains the world's most popular music medium, and the format is capable of exceptional quality – with the right player.

The Meridian G06 is a fine example. Based on the G08, the premium CD player in the popular G Series range, the G06 is an exciting, affordable and above all *musical* CD player.

Inside the G06 is a ROM drive that can read the disc up to ten times faster than normal speed, for absolutely accurate data recovery. Triple reclocking circuitry minimises jitter, for extended highs and

stable, precise stereo localisation. Bass is awe-inspiringly real. Multiple power supplies and audiophile-grade components ensure that the audio performance of the G06 is second to none in its price range.

Contact us to locate your nearest dealer and experience Meridian's Higher Fidelity in person. You owe it to yourself – and to your music library.

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www.meridian-audio.com

BEST DIGITAL INTERCONNECT



Kimber Select KS2020

PRICE £629 (1m) TYPE Coaxial CONTACT 0845 345 1550 www.kimber.com

Yes, you can build a complete hi-fi system for less than the cost of this cable. But the fact is, the KS2020 produced a distinct improvement in every system we tried it with, from budget to high end. There's more than

just solder inside those wood-bodied phono plugs: both hot and cold return conductors are connected through capacitors, reducing the chance of stray circulating earth currents. And believe us, it works!

Wireworld Starlight 5

PRICE £90 (1m) TYPE Coaxial CONTACT 020 8991 9200 www.wireworldaudio.com

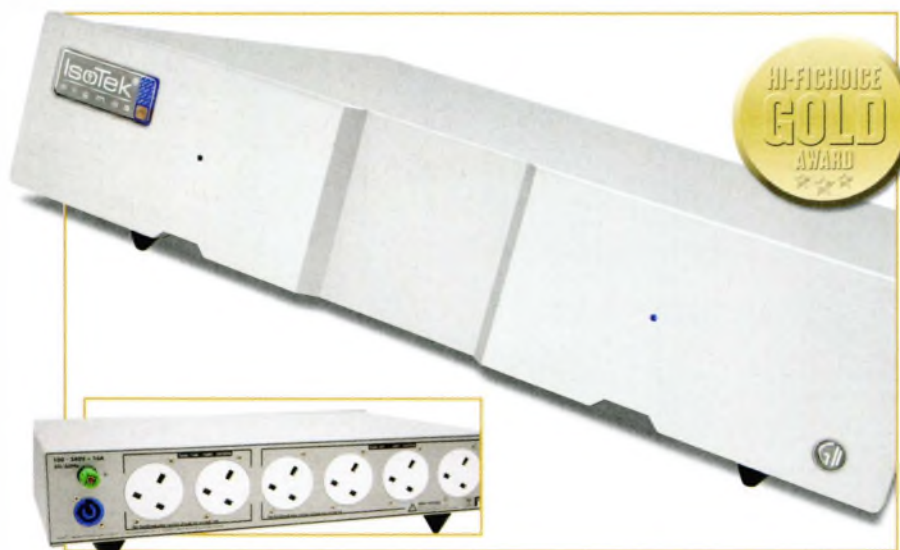


QED Qunex P75

PRICE £25 (1m) TYPE Coaxial CONTACT 01279 501111 www.qed.co.uk



BEST MAINS CONDITIONER/CABLE



IsoTek Sigmas

PRICE £995 CONTACT 0870 241 2459 www.isoteksystems.com

IsoTek is the UK's biggest name in mains filtration, and the company's brilliant GII Mini Sub distribution box has won our Gold Award in this category for the last two years. But this year we hail a new product:

the Sigmas. Like the Mini Sub, it's a six-way mains distribution box with on-board filtration, but it effectively ups the ante for higher-end systems. The result is purer mains and a clearer, more detailed sound.

Russ Andrews Ultra Purifier Block

PRICE £425 CONTACT 0845 345 1550 www.russandrews.com



Clearer Audio Copper-line Power Cable

PRICE £95 (1m) CONTACT 01702 543981 www.cleareraudio.com



with
age
comes
wisdom



peak consult (10 years)



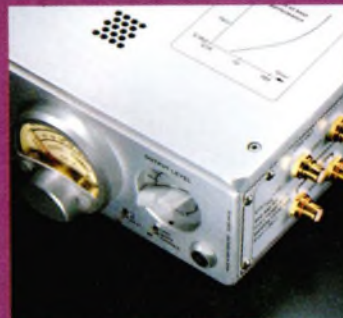
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BEST HEADPHONES UNDER £200

Sennheiser HD 595

PRICE £150 CONTACT 01494 551551 www.sennheiser.co.uk

No change from last year – these open-backed 'phones from Sennheiser are deserving winners for the second year running. They use many of the technologies found in the superb HD650 (see below), yet thankfully listener comfort has not been sacrificed in the quest to hit a lower price point – the velvet soft cups will sit happily around the largest of ears. What's more, the sound quality – with solid bass and excellent detail – comes surprisingly close to the £300 benchmark, making these £150 cans a true audiophile bargain.



Grado SR 80

PRICE £110 CONTACT 01279 501111 www.gradolabs.com



Grado SR 60

PRICE £90 CONTACT 01279 501111 www.gradolabs.com



BEST HEADPHONES OVER £200

Sennheiser HD 650

PRICE £300 CONTACT 01494 551551 www.sennheiser.co.uk

Our favourite pair of headphones over £200 continues its success in this year's HFC Awards – quite simply, there's nothing to touch its deftly judged mix of skills at the price. The HD650 features hand-selected drivers with special low-mass coils and diaphragms for extended frequency response, and specially optimised magnet design for lower distortion. Sound quality is a revelation – the combination of a neutral balance and extraordinary resolution means that listening fatigue is all but banished, while the bass is truly splendid.



Grado SR 325i

PRICE £300 CONTACT 01279 501111 www.gradolabs.com



Shure E500PTH

PRICE £495 CONTACT 020 8808 2222 www.shure.com



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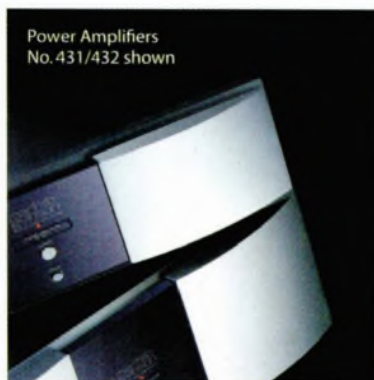
Disc Players
No. 51 shown
(available soon)



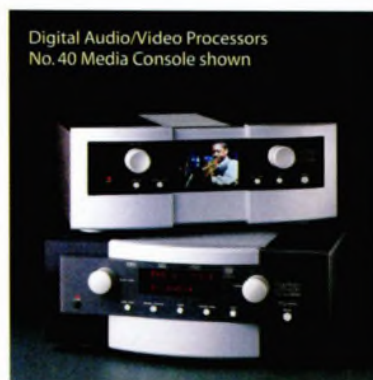
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No. 436 Monoblock pair
No. 33h Monoblock pair

mark levinson
MADRIGAL AUDIO LABORATORIES

BEST EQUIPMENT SUPPORT UNDER £500

Partington Minim

PRICE £389 (five shelves) CONTACT 01474 709299 www.partingtonandco.co.uk

Partington is a name best known for its very fine range of speaker stands, but here we honour its Minim equipment support – a specialist rack that looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot. The height of each shelf is adjustable with the turn of an allen key, while the Minim's metal and glass construction helps to deliver a sound that is tight, fast and focused, and much better than on a bog-standard shelf.



Custom Design Icon Signature

PRICE £330 (four shelves) CONTACT 0191 262 4646 www.customdesign.co.uk



Atacama Equinox

PRICE £280-300 (four shelves, price according to finish) CONTACT 01455 283251 www.atacama-audio.co.uk



BEST EQUIPMENT SUPPORT OVER £500

Townshend Audio VSSS

PRICE £1,350 (four shelves, 50cm wide version) CONTACT 020 8979 2155 www.townshendaudio.com

We've been lauding Townshend's Seismic Sink Stand for years, but the current 'Versatile' version or (VSSS for short) is even better. The air suspension system is no more, replaced by maintenance-free dual tensioned load cells and glass shelves, making the whole thing better looking and easier to live with. Fortunately, the eye-opening clarity and rock-solid imagery is still intact. An expensive stand, but you get what you pay for... and more.



Custom Design Icon Signature Acoustic

PRICE £600 (four shelves, with iRAP platforms) CONTACT 0191 262 4646 www.customdesign.co.uk



Clearlight Audio Aspekt

PRICE £725 (four shelves, real wood finish) CONTACT 01635 291357 www.clearlight-audio.de



EST.



1979

The Audio Salon prides itself on products which offer superior value and performance compared to the High Street brands "the usual suspects." Incorporating recent launches at Colorado (CEDIA), Milan (TOP) and London's two Shows the cream of the crop come together under one roof, ten minutes from Glasgow International Airport.

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0845 4000 400

info@audiosalon.co.uk
www.audiosalon.co.uk

ATC

A whole new range; from £499 to £1999. Upscale they have introduced tower versions following the acclaim of their 30th Anniversary Limited Edition. If you want to hear it as it sounded in the studio, check these out!



REVEL

The much awaited Ultima Gem, Studio (\$15,000 per pair) and Salons (\$22,000) were launched. Expect a big performance increase on previous models and a more Italian and conventional timber finish. The combination of Harman research facilities and the genius of Kevin Voecks guarantees future classics; could be the one for you!



OPERA

Opera offer cabinets with timber and leather remarkable even by Italian standards; and affordable. The value kept raising itself as the compelling reason we had to commit very seriously to this manufacturer. "These speakers sell for how little? Are you sure?" Opera is in stock and on demo as we write - from £695 up to £9,995. How to describe their sound? Detail and dynamics combined with Italian passion and organic authenticity. In other words: a high fusion of technology and music. Brilliant.



SYSTEM AUDIO

Based in Denmark and founded by music-lover Ole Witthoft. Noted for super value, the company has worked for years to design a flagship. At first glance the Explorer is a conventional slim Danish floorstander that will grace any living room. Closer inspection reveals a composite of 42 wood pieces. The drivers employ the lightest membranes ever employed: the challenge of 80mg for the tweeter is thrown out to all competitors. The result is audible. The price is the best news: £2,490 per pair.



PROAC

This aristocratic manufacturer is about to launch the Response D28. Slimmer and floor-ported than the D25 which it will replace, it will sell at £3250 - £3900 (premium finishes) per pair, UK including VAT. The D25 is already a sensation (buy our nicely run-in demo pair for only £2,350 (RRP £3,675 in Birds Eye Maple, an exquisite finish appropriate to this exquisite loudspeaker - they look as special as they sound).



THIEL

The wait for the much anticipated CS3.7 (shown at Los Angeles Show in June 2006) is almost over. The Show reports and previews give just a glimpse of this ground-breaking speaker. Pre-order yours from the Audio Salon today so you don't have to join what will be a very long queue!



ZINGALI

At the end of the alphabet and the conformity scale, Zingali is like no other loudspeaker in the world: a unique blend of coloration-free horn, compression driver, and the patented Omnidirectional dispersion. If you want to rise above loudspeaker sound, this range could be for you. Reflecting the neutrality of the design, the new signature flagship has no name. Yours is engraved on it. Employing 15-inch bass driver and 14-inch horn unit, these go on sale for £15,995 per pair. A lot of the same sound is available in a vast range of models from only £995 per pair (Prelude Ones). You won't find them in the High Street, because that marketing policy would escalate their price and dilute their no-brainer value.

To find out more - call the Audio Salon on 0845 4000 400 today!

BEST SPEAKER STANDS UNDER £150

Custom Design RS302

PRICE £100 per pair (61cm) CONTACT 0191 262 4646 www.customdesign.co.uk

Custom Design is no stranger to our annual Awards, having made some of the best value specialist hi-fi stands and supports in recent years. The RS302 speaker stand is a relative newcomer, one up from the entry-level RS300 with twin columns and a choice of steel or glass bases. Suitably filled and with the worthwhile addition of 'Acoustic Top Plates' (£10 each), these affordable stands will help your speakers to sing more sweetly.



Partington Ansa 60

PRICE £99 per pair (60cm) CONTACT 01474 709299 www.partingtonandco.co.uk



Atacama Nexus 6

PRICE £60 per pair (60cm, price according to finish) CONTACT 01455 283251 www.atacama-audio.co.uk



BEST SPEAKER STANDS OVER £150

Partington Heavi II

PRICE £399 per pair (61cm) CONTACT 01474 709299 www.partingtonandco.co.uk

Partington's Heavi II speaker stand lives up to its name – weighing in at 28kg, this is one of the most inert and robust stands around. It's designed to support even the most hefty standmount speakers, but whatever you choose to place on its steel cone toppers, what you hear is the speaker performing at its very best – no more, no less. Those looking for a top stand for a high-performance speaker should park their ears here.



Custom Design SQ404

PRICE £200 per pair (60cm) CONTACT 0191 262 4646 www.customdesign.co.uk



Partington Dreadnaught Broadside

PRICE £239 per pair (60cm) CONTACT 01474 709299 www.partingtonandco.co.uk



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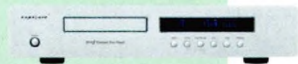


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"The first thing that struck me...was the naturalness of the presentation...there was a fine sense of air and lucidity." *Hi-Fi Choice magazine on the 2010S CD Player*

"Paired with the Sendor S8e, the Exposure electronics gave a thrilling performance that oozed finesse. This might be verging on audiophile apostasy, but I would favour the combination of the £600 CD, £600 amp and £1800 speakers against the vast majority of three-way split £3000 set-ups. The synergy really was that good." *Hi-Fi Choice magazine on the 2010S System*

Now that you have read the sales pitch and the reviews, let your ears be the judges. **Expose yourself at your nearest dealer today.**



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2010S Integrated Amplifier



2010S Power Amplifier

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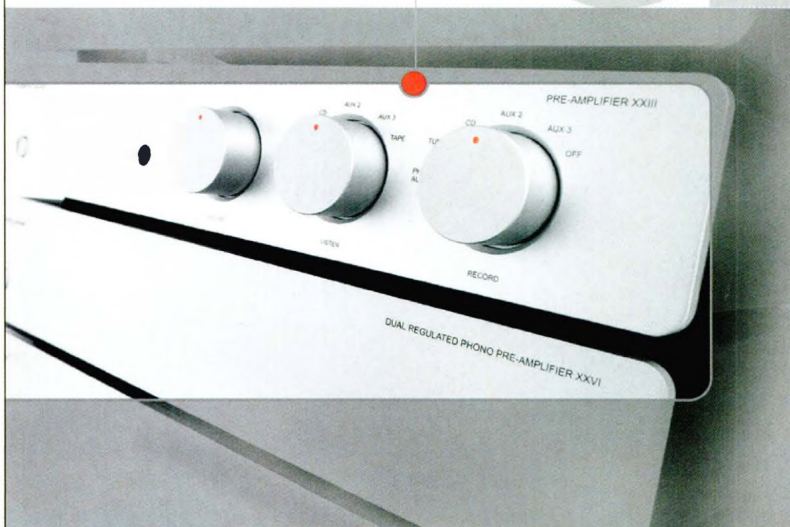
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"There's something of the 'valve sound' about its fluid and natural midrange, and the results are highly engaging - particularly, as it transpired, with the Living Voice pair of test-reference speakers. Tonally this is a particularly gratifying amplifier, highly convincing with instruments and voices - the number of times 'great voice' appeared in the listening notes started to look silly." *Hi-Fi Choice magazine on the XXIII Pre-Amplifier and XXVII Dual Mono Power Amplifier*

"It is on par with the best that I have heard."
Hi-Fi News magazine on the XXII CD Player

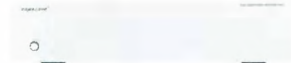
Now that you have read the sales pitch and the reviews, listen. From the first few notes, you will realise that surprisingly breath-taking hi-fi is, in fact, well within your reach. **Expose yourself at your nearest dealer today.**



CD Player XXII



Pre-Amplifier XXIII



Dual Mono Power-Amplifier XXVIII



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REVIEWS

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



EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 74** Unison Research Performance amplifier
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- 93** Partington Heavi II loudspeaker stand



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion after a levelier... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidence and ease. It even seems to be

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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

Performance art

By popular demand, Unison has reintroduced its stunning Performance model, now with extra power

PRODUCT Unison Research Performance

TYPE Integrated stereo valve amplifier

PRICE £5,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 58x48x23.5cms

• Weight: 50kg • Inputs: four line-level stereo phono, one tape input stereo phono • Outputs: one tape stereo phono, power feed for Unison phono stage • Two sets of speaker terminals • Extra speaker taps for impedance selection • Rated power: 40 watts per channel

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669

🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

This might not be the most costly integrated amplifier on the planet, but the Unison Research Performance is definitely one of the largest and heaviest of the type. Better yet, its beautifully sculpted hardwood chassis makes it just about the most dramatically elegant hi-fi amp around.

It's huge – much too big for the typical hi-fi shelving unit – and it turns the scales to register a backbreaking 50kg. Six glowing KT88 output valves chuck out plenty of heat, too – a little disconcerting given that the amp was first delivered to us for review at the

height of the summer heatwave. The £5,500 price tag is high, for sure, but not unduly so in view of all that hefty engineering. But all the negatives are quickly forgotten once this deliciously seductive beast is connected and powered up, and allowed to play music.

Founded more than 15 years ago, Unison Research and its sister loudspeaker company Opera are Italian operations located just outside Treviso in the north east of that country, not too far from Venice. Today Unison specialises in electronic components of all kinds, including CD players and 'hybrid' Unico solid state/valve designs. But valve amps of various unusual shapes and sizes have always been very much at the heart of the business, and represent the foundation on which its reputation was built.

One of Unison's earlier and more successful models, the first Performance dates back to the early 1990s and was based around twin EL34 output valves per channel. Performance *originale* had already been out of production for some years when a combination of distributors and customers persuaded the

company to reintroduce it this year, in part because of the very attractive and highly distinctive styling.

Rather than simply rehashing a classic, Unison's original founder and long-term designer Giovanni Sacchetti retained the lovely styling and single-ended circuit approach of the original Performance, but beefed it up to deliver 40 watts per channel rather than the original's 24 watts, by using three KT88 valves for each channel. To handle the extra heat generated by the increase in power, generous heatsinks are fitted into each side. Two matching stainless steel heat shields cover the top surface of the chassis proper, leaving the hot valves protruding through. This helps to protect the various other components and circuitry in the main chassis underneath the valves from excessive heating, in the interests of long term stability and reliability.

A strong case can be made for building a large integrated line-level valve amplifier, and there's plenty of precedent too (such as Audio Note's Ongaku). Such an approach minimises construction costs and also eliminates the

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine





“This is one amplifier that sounds as good as it looks, and since it looks quite wonderful, that’s high praise indeed.”

unpredictability of interconnects. The down side here is that the complete unit is an unusual 60cms wide, which makes it tricky to accommodate on regular supports, though the feet are just about close enough to place the amplifier on a top shelf – something you’d want to do in any case, to show off the beautiful aesthetics.

Construction is strictly dual-mono here, even down to the mains transformers. All four metal-jacket transformers, four large smoothing capacitors and the ten valves stand defiantly proud of the elegantly sculpted wooden top part of the chassis. All the other circuitry is mounted within the hollowed out wooden section and a steel tray/base, the wood providing a measure of mechanical damping for the whole.

As is usually the case with valve amps, the feature count is rather limited, though at least Unison has acknowledged that we’re now in the 21st century by incorporating remote control operation – still rare in valve-based designs. There are four line-level input pairs

here, plus a tape in/out loop, but useful features like mono switching, muting and balance adjustment have all been omitted, as has any form of tone control. An elegant but rather busy wood-encased RC1 remote handset was supplied with our review sample; 20 of its 24 tiny buttons address a hypothetical CD player, but two are used to adjust amplifier volume, and a third usefully provides source selection by cycling through the inputs, which is very convenient. A particularly neat touch is that the handset is shaped and weighted so that it can be stood upright on its foot, so to speak, taking up less surface space and making it easier to grab when you want to use it.

Twin (unswitched) speaker outputs facilitate bi-wiring, and extra terminal pairs provide matching for eight- or four-ohm loudspeakers. There’s also a special output socket that may be used to supply the power for Unison’s matching Phono One or Simply Phono outboard vinyl stages (£1,250 and £650 respectively, not supplied).

All the amplification stages use valves operating in pure Class A, and Unison designs and manufactures all its own output transformers. This is arguably the most important ingredient in any valve amplifier, and a vital element in creating the unusual output layout. The three parallel KT88 output valves operate in single-ended ultralinear configuration, where the output transformer sees the tetrode KT88s as if they were triodes. Preamp and driver stages, using ECC 83 and ECC82 valves, also operate as triodes.

The power supply transformers are actually designed and made just like the more critical output transformers, and incorporate numerous secondary windings in order to deliver the precise requirements for each group of components and subsidiary circuit. Much care has gone into the selection of individual components, and the matching of the Russian made valves.

SOUND QUALITY

This is one amplifier that sounds as good as it looks, and since it looks quite wonderful, that’s high praise indeed. It came as no surprise to hear the sort of spectacular midrange transparency and dynamic literacy that is the stock in trade of valve amplifiers. However, the key thing that really distinguishes the Performance from most of the valve **▶**

Q&A

Professor Giovanni Sacchetti, Unison Research's founder and chief designer, discusses some of the practicalities of his valve amplifier designs



HFC The three key elements in a valve amplifier are the output valve type, the output transformers and the circuit configuration. How do you rate their relative importance in the complete amplifier design?

GS In an amplifier, the choice of the output valve is not only based on the output power it can give, but mostly on its sound characteristics. Once it is decided how much power we want to obtain from the amplifier, and we have a general idea about how we want it to sound, I choose the circuit configuration and the tubes, and finally I design an output transformer specifically to work at its best with that particular output circuit.

I note you use different output valves for different models – the 845, KT88 and EL34. Is this purely because of power differences, or do they contribute with their own particular characters to the sound?

Actually, with every tube you can reach the power level you desire, just by increasing the number of the tubes themselves. The type of valve to use is essentially related to its sound character. For example, you can obtain 24 watts from a single 845 or from a couple of EL34s in parallel; this last solution is much more cost-effective, but it is not even comparable with the first as far as sound quality is concerned. As you can probably guess, the 845 is my favourite power valve.

Which company normally supplies your valves? Do you find big differences between suppliers of the same valve type?

Almost all the tubes we use come from the Russian Sovtek operation, which produces excellent valves for us according to some specific instructions we give them.

Why do you prefer single-ended to push-pull operation? Isn't there a problem driving loudspeakers with uneven impedances curves?

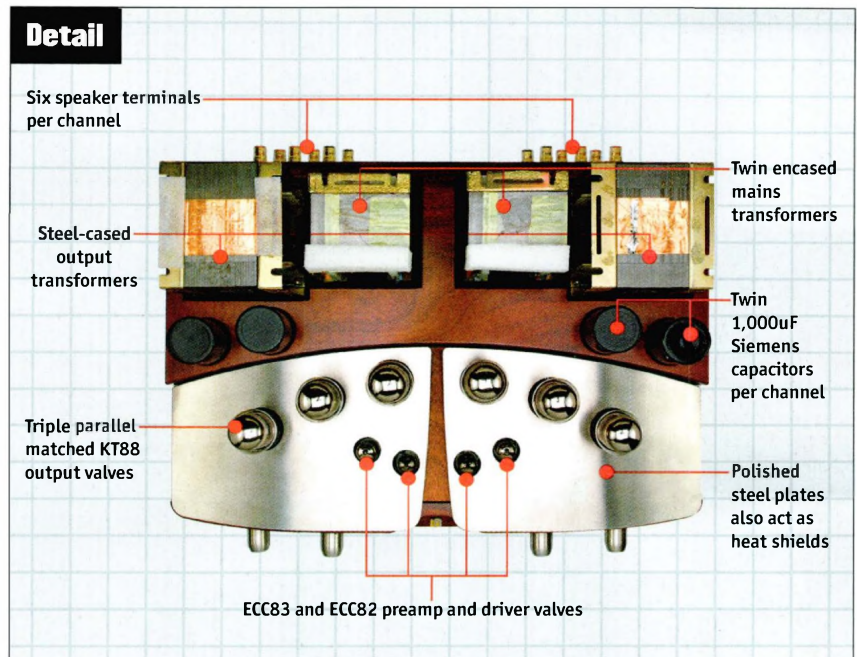
In the many years I have been working on valve amplifiers, I have always had the best results (from all points of view) with single-ended configurations. Push-pull designs have much higher efficiency, but unfortunately they are also rich in odd order harmonics, which causes the sound to seem less natural and more 'cold'.



◻ amps around is that it also seems to be substantially free from most of the stereotypical 'valve character' that one has come to expect. This is a valve amplifier that doesn't start to lose the plot as it moves towards the frequency extremes; it's exceptionally fast, and doesn't hum or hiss. So, if you want your music laced with a healthy dose of euphonic coloration, you'd do better to look elsewhere.

During our test period, the Performance gave an excellent account of itself when hooked up to a pair of B&W 800Ds – a far from easy load, but reasonably sensitive and well enough suited to the amp's four-ohm taps. It was driven via predominantly Vertex AQ cables from sources that included a Naim CD555 CD player, a Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner and a Rega P9/Naim ARO/Rega Apheta/Naim Stageline record player.





“With its lovely midband transparency and rich, generous character, the Performance proved an ideal partner for classical music.”

No amplifier is entirely free from character, and the Performance does show looseness deep down in the low bass register. There was also hardness up around the presence zone, though in truth the latter probably has as much to do with the recordings as the amplifier: the Performance doesn't romanticise when reproducing whatever it's fed.

But those are very minor criticisms indeed, in the context of an amplifier that not only possesses the lovely midband tonality, transparency and dynamic expressiveness that's a hallmark of the valve experience, but also shows unusually fine neutrality, especially for a single-ended design.

It coped very well with all sorts of material – rock, dance, or acoustic – but it was natural acoustic instruments that helped the amplifier to show its true excellence. The Proms season was getting under way when the Unison arrived in the listening room, and this provided a nightly opportunity to enjoy the silky skills of some of the world's great orchestras performing in a genuinely spacious acoustic. With its lovely midband transparency and rich, generous character, the Performance proved an ideal partner for this feast of classical music.

Yet it still knows how to rock and roll, as it proved quite conclusively when I slipped Little Feat's *Hoy Hoy* onto the turntable – a patchy hodge-podge album, for sure, but one that unquestionably, if intermittently, proves the band's true greatness. The Performance brought the very essence of this greatness roaring out of the speakers, delivering tracks

like *Gingo* and *Rock'n'Roll Doctor* with rare power and authority.

Well-recorded solo piano is remarkably difficult to reproduce convincingly, because the instrument combines an unusually wide bandwidth with subtle tonal delicacy and seriously percussive dynamics. The Performance (with some assistance from B&W) takes this combination of characteristics comfortably in its stride, punching the dynamic contrasts of the notes with uncommonly realistic attack and decay, yet also delivering the more protracted resonances from the soundboard and structure with convincing richness and appropriate decay.

Familiar voices on the radio sounded more obviously human, and classical material – even something as strange as Ligeti's *Ramifications* – was more than usually interesting. This was partly owing to the obvious 'rightness' of the tonal structure of instruments; partly because of the finely layered stereo perspectives; and partly for the way it created convincing ambient space. But perhaps the most startling experience was the sheer realism of audience applause. At the end of a Radio 3 song cycle, transmitted live from London's Cadogan Hall, instead of the usual rather amorphous mush, it was as if you were actually sitting there in the audience, and could have counted the number of people expressing their admiration.

While the 40-watt output power proved ample for most purposes, because this amplifier sounds so clean and inviting, the

temptation to wind the volume right up to clipping point is always present, so a little restraint is sometimes needed here. The fact that it chucks out nearly half a kilowatt of heat can also be a trifle irritating, especially during the summer months. But inconveniences like heatstroke are really irrelevant when set against the rich and quite gloriously musical sound this amplifier is able to generate. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT

SOUND >> 94% [Progress bar]	PRO Combines fine neutrality with superb dynamic expression and tension plus superior transparency. Remote control greatly increases operating convenience.
FEATURES >> 76% [Progress bar]	CON There's no mono, muting or balance adjustment here, and remote operation is a little clunky. And it does chuck out a lot of waste heat.
BUILD >> 93% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 86% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
Looks wonderful, sounds even better. While features are minimal and heat output considerable, these limitations are irrelevant in view of the magnificent, dynamic, full-bandwidth sound, especially from natural acoustic sources.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%

Upgraded universal

Beefed up benchmark universal player shows the others how it should be done

PRODUCT Denon DVD 3930

TYPE Universal disc player

PRICE £1,100

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.4x13.9x40.7cm

• Weight 11.5kg • Digital outputs: HDMI, DenonLink 3, optical and electrical S/PDIF • 1080p video scaling • DD/DTS decoders fitted • Optional video and display on/off

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With the latest model change from the DVD-3910 to the DVD-3930, Denon has ramped the price up by £200.

But you do get a lot of technology – and performance – for your money. Like its predecessor, the DVD-3930 was designed as a high-quality universal disc player for CD, DVD-Audio and SACD. It's also a virtually state of the art video player, designed to bridge the perceived performance gap between standard definition DVD-Video and HD DVD/Blu-ray. Thus far, the two new optical disc formats have had a stuttering start, with several reports of underperforming players – especially Blu-ray. But in fairness, neither is ready for prime time, and it would take a foolhardy commentator to say anything useful about how either will shape up a year or so down the line. Just don't buy yet.

The weight has increased by 2.2kg, which is more than can be accounted for by any

increase in the amount of digital chippery. In fact, the power supply is the main culprit, as it now includes three transformers, including a new EI transformer specifically for the audio (this was previously handled by a switch mode supply). This means that analogue, digital and video now have entirely separate signal chains and power supplies. There have also been improvements to the physical structure of the player, which is now double-layer with a four-layer base, and the motherboard is new.

The audio subsystem has been upgraded to dual differential for the main stereo channels, while the others remain single-ended as before, using Burr-Brown PCM1796 DACs in each case. DenonLink has now been upgraded to Version 3, which is SACD compatible, but the inferior sounding, higher jitter i.Link has now gone – so the advantage applies only to users of Denon amplifiers with DenonLink. Users of amplifiers with i.Link lose out, of course.

The video subsection has been significantly upgraded. Out goes the Faroudja processing in favour of a much more powerful solution. It is now 10-bit throughout (the older model was eight-bit) and it uses the enormously powerful Silicon Optix Realta T2 HQV (Hollywood Quality Video) progressive scan, noise and motion adaptive engine, previously only found in the flagship DVD-A1XVA player. There's also much better cadence detection and pixel by

pixel filtering, which gives a smoother, more progressive picture. The video DACs have been upgraded to 14-bit and entirely separate DACs are available for composite/S-Video and for component video, which alongside the performance benefits means all video outputs are available simultaneously. DiVX decoding is also built into the new player and it even includes keystone correction for squaring the picture up to the screen, but that's best avoided as it reduces picture resolution, just as it does with video projectors.

Socketry has also changed for the better to reflect the updated internals. DVI, a relic of pre-HDMI days, has gone, while HDMI has been enhanced by the missing computer resolution (VGA through WXGA) previously handled by DVI. The interface is now fully 1080 progressive compatible; the DVD-3910 was limited to the obviously inferior 1080 interlace standard. With a progressive 1080p HDMI pipeline, you are no longer at the mercy of the usually inferior progressive scaling provided by the TV display's electronics.

SOUND QUALITY

The DVD-3930 has a comprehensive series of Pure Direct modes, which bypass all unnecessary processing and the display (if required), and they should be used where possible. There is something disarmingly





“There is something disarmingly natural about the Denon with CD, which comes as a shock from a player that is so hi-tech.”

natural sounding about the Denon with CD, which almost comes as a shock from a player that is so blatantly hi-tech. It has an orchestral string quality that has great depth and pungency, and there is a trace of what almost passes for sweetness, though it lacks the kind of pasted on euphony that this nearly implies. Structurally it all sounds very together and solid with orchestral music, but also with smaller scale material, chamber, jazz and so on, which sound very 'alive'.

In its optimum configuration, using the higher quality dedicated stereo outputs with CD, the Denon is a powerful player, with the kind of open, tactile sound you can almost reach out and touch. Coming from a DVD-compatible player this is rare indeed – it's good enough to give some well-reputed dedicated CD players a run for their money and will not be disgraced in any company. The same comments apply with all audio sources tried, including DVD-Audio and SACD.

Particularly impressive is the performance of the player with SACD in stereo. With lesser players, SACD can sound a little too smoothly rounded, lacking in grip if you prefer, and

unable to articulate the raw edge that some recordings call for. This one does so, while retaining the elegant qualities that this format brings to the party. There is no obvious trade-off – the sound is very open and pure, subtle and organic, with tremendous clout when that's what the music calls for.

As often happens with universal players, DVD-Audio is very CD like, perhaps slightly more mechanical. But, with the paucity of new DVD-Audio software, this is almost academic.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

As a video player, the net result of the new series of upgrades extends its margin over the earlier player from significant to little less than startling. The Denon is remarkable for its ability to suppress the staircasing of diagonals, even in moving scenes. Motion artefacts are well handled too, making the whole effect very natural and progressive, with few of the telltale signs of picture processing usually encountered even with hi-tech players. The surround sound codecs, which include the ability to add 7.1-channel effects to 5.1-channel material, work transparently, too.



Good as its predecessor was, it's no match for the mighty upgrade that is the DVD-3930. At the price, this is a benchmark universal that couples top-notch video to a solid, believable account of music played across a range of formats, particularly CD and SACD. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



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

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 87%
 >>> SUB RATINGS
 CD 86% SACD 90% DVD-A 86%

VISION >>> 93%

FEATURES >>> 96%

VALUE >>> 92%

PRO
 Delivers superlative video and uncommonly strong audio across all formats. Musical performance is particularly gratifying, given the player's inherent complexity.

CON
 Lacks built-in test screen for colour set-up for the best in tweakability, though it'll store groups of settings. Not much else, all things considered.

CONCLUSION
 If the DVD-3910 was considered a class leader, then the DVD-3930 is in another league altogether. Its performance with DVD-Video is state of the art at the price, coupled to a truly satisfying delivery across all music formats.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 92%



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Naim check

Naim's new entry-level pre/power amp pairing is given the twice-over

PRODUCT Naim Audio NAC 122x and NAP 150x

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE (NAC 122x) £750, (NAP 150x) £825

KEY FEATURES (NAC 122x) Size (WxHxD): 43 2x7x30.1cm • Weight: 4.75kg • Inputs: Six line-level inputs (all six DIN, two replicated as phono) • Outputs: one (DIN and phono) • Remote control • (NAP 150x) Size (WxHxD): 43 2x7x30.1cm • Weight: 7.5kg • One set of speaker terminals • Rated power: 50 watts per channel (eight ohms)

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One measure of truly excellent hi-fi components is that they will sound exciting and stimulating regardless of the sort of music you play through them. They won't restrict you to listening to those vacant, over-polished demo 'favourites' we've come to loathe over the years.

Naim's new entry-level pre/power combination – the NAC 122x preamplifier and the NAP 150x power amplifier – falls squarely into this 'exciting and stimulating' camp. In fact, when first listening to the duo, it's hard to believe that they are entry-level offerings: they seem far more composed and effortlessly informative than any 'starter' combination has any right to do.

The £750 NAC 122x replaces the NAC 112x in Naim Audio's preamp hierarchy, and draws

on the heritage of the more upmarket and expensive NAC 202. In terms of improvements over the model it replaces, the new design uses a hard-wired, motorised, Alps volume control for better performance, lower noise in use and an improved feel over the resistor ladder control of the NAC 112x. Its six inputs are relay-switched rather than being multiplexed, as were those of its predecessor, which, again, is said to enhance its performance.

Furthermore, great care has been taken to make the casework and PCB as low resonance as possible and to isolate the PCB from the environment and any deleterious vibrations present therein. This means that you'll encounter a little play when plugging in connections but this is intended to be there and is nothing to be concerned about.

The £825 NAP 150x represents Naim's first step on the power amp ladder and its design also owes much to more upmarket Naim models; in this case, the flagship NAP 500. It features many improvements over the original NAP 150, including a hefty toroidal transformer for improved regulation, with discrete windings for each audio channel. There's also an enhanced power supply for the preamplifier.

As is common with most Naim preamps, the NAC 122x can be upgraded – or, perhaps more accurately, users can explore the full potential

of what it has to offer – by using an external power supply unit. This is an approach to design that seems outwardly unusual, but one that makes perfect sense when you hear the improvements that it can bring. These were neatly noted by Paul Messenger in his review of the 555PS (HFC 283), in which he preferred the sound of the superior power supply coupled to a lesser CD player over that of a notionally better CD player with a lesser power supply. As a Naim user for many years, and having experienced the efficacy of numerous power supply improvements in my own system, I have no problems accepting Naim's standpoint on the crucial effects that power supplies have upon musical performance.

For the purposes of this review, Naim also supplied a £550 Flat-Cap 2x discrete power supply, which sits in the signal path between the preamp and the power amplifier. The Flat-Cap 2x, or similar, would be obligatory were you planning on using the preamplifier with another manufacturer's power amplifier, as the NAC 122x has no integral power supply.

We listened to the NAC 122x and NAP 150x, along with the Flat-Cap 2x, giving a system with a total price of £2,125. Given the substantial performance increase when using the Flat-Cap 2x, which no one would describe as subtle, not using it seemed churlish. It's



“The Naim combination would unearth any semblance of rhythm, no matter how obscure, perverse or deeply buried.”

worth noting that the external power supply will also power the analogue stage of Naim's CD5x CD player, which is handy given that this is the level of player we'd most expect to see used in this system.

SOUND QUALITY

From the outset, the NAC 122x, Flat-Cap 2x and NAP 150x combination is surprising. The ease with which it copes with an array of demanding discs is beguiling. It reveals the beauty within discs – which we've heard other systems disguise or even completely eradicate – while simultaneously exposing their occasionally less than smooth edges.

On tracks from one such disc, Terence Trent D'Arby's *Vibrator*, the combination excelled

with its portrayal of timing. It picked out each instrument distinctly, then knitted its contribution together with others superbly to provide a cohesive, well-judged sense of drive and impetus. Dynamically, it proves equally faithful, no matter whether it is dealing with overt contrasts or the subtle variations of elements buried further back within a mix.

It doesn't show undue favour to any part of the musical spectrum, lucidly portraying high frequencies without any emphasis or aggression while displaying a notable control over the bass. This is both sonorous and precise, with full-bodied notes starting and stopping with outstanding acuity.

The system handles tonal texture with equal aplomb, which in the past wasn't a quality

people would always associate with Naim amplifiers. On suitable recordings, it delivers a portrayal of tonality that could be mistaken for that of a fine valve amplifier, while still being able to temper that with appropriate jagged edges where necessary. On tracks from the Nirvana CD *Unplugged*, Krist Novoselic's acoustic bass sounded fittingly warm, rounded and almost plummy while Kurt Cobain's vocals simultaneously displayed a raucous, strained quality when he pushed his voice near to the edge of his range.

Again, though, what really shines though is the amplifier's insistent rhythmic confidence. Even on notoriously difficult music, such as Edgar Varèse's *Ameriques* or Henry Kaiser's collection of guitar improvisations, *Lemon Fish Tweezer*, the Naim combination would unearth any semblance of a rhythm, no matter how obscure, perverse or deeply buried, and lay it out for you to appreciate and enjoy.

As Henry Kaiser observes in that album's sleeve notes, "Music isn't about notes – it's about feeling". If you find yourself nodding in agreement with that sentiment you'd be well advised to take a listen to this system. That it also sorts out each of those notes in all its unadulterated, perfectly formed glory is more than just a bonus. The NAC 122x and NAP 150x are delightfully communicative and musically sympathetic devices. They revel in delving into the most complex of music and laying out its various strands such that they instantly come together and make sense. Give them an easier task, such as a simple guitar and voice playing 4/4, and they simply sail through, dishing out resolution and insight by the shovel-full. And make no mistake, they love such music and deliver superb renditions of it: Nic Jones' *Canadee-I-O*, for example, came across

THE UPGRADE PATH

Part of the joy of owning a Naim system is that the company presents its customers with a clearly defined, unambiguous upgrade path. The review system, for example, can easily be upgraded – should you wish to drive more demanding loudspeakers – by swapping the NAP 150x for a £1,475 NAP 200 power amplifier. Even if your speakers aren't especially demanding, this change will still be rewarding. The NAP 200 brings about a readily perceivable, enhanced sense of scale, authority and presence to the presentation.

We asked Naim's Doug Graham to explain the dramatic improvements wrought by introducing the Flat-Cap 2x into the system and he told us that "while powering the preamp from a NAP 150x or NAP 200 is a perfectly acceptable arrangement, adding a dedicated supply, such as a Flat-Cap 2x or Hi-Cap, lowers the noise floor of the preamplifier. This gives the effect that the system seems far more powerful."

We'd used a top-of-the-range CD player for the review and wondered if he felt that this was perhaps excessive. His response: "The better the source the better the sound quality. However, the CD5x would be the way to go with a Flat-Cap 2x in this system – the Flat-Cap will power the preamplifier and the output stage of the CD5x."

[Review] Naim NAC 122x preamplifier and NAP 150x power amplifier

Q&A

We spoke to Doug Graham, Naim Audio's sales manager, about the new pre/power amp pairing and where it fits in the greater Naim line-up



HFC What advantages has the NAC 122x/NAP 150x over a NAIT integrated?

DG Given that the NAIT 5i uses a passive preamp section and different output devices than the NAP 150x, the obvious advantage of having the 122x/150x combo is that the preamp is in its own 'quiet room' eliminating noise. There is also the big advantage of the upgrade capability of the NAC 122x, which results in the amplifier combination sounding more powerful and detailed. It's easy to demonstrate the advantages of a better preamp over a bigger power amp. The NAP 150x power amp uses higher specification output devices and has a larger transformer, too.

How does an entry-level pre/power fare against today's upmarket integrated amplifiers?

There are now consumers who object to multiple boxes and they appear to be driving the market for the 'phat' integrated amplifier. The pre/power is more satisfying in terms of musical performance and flexibility. If you stack a NAC 122x and NAP 150x you take up approximately the same space and still get the advantage of the preamp being in its own enclosure.

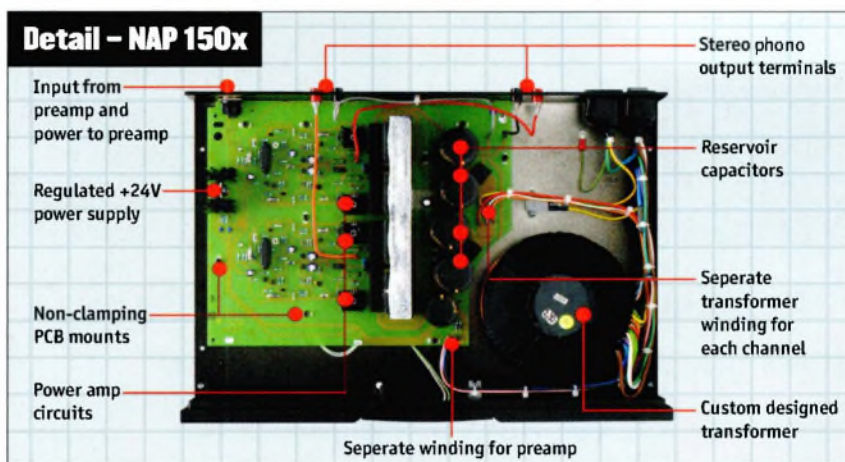
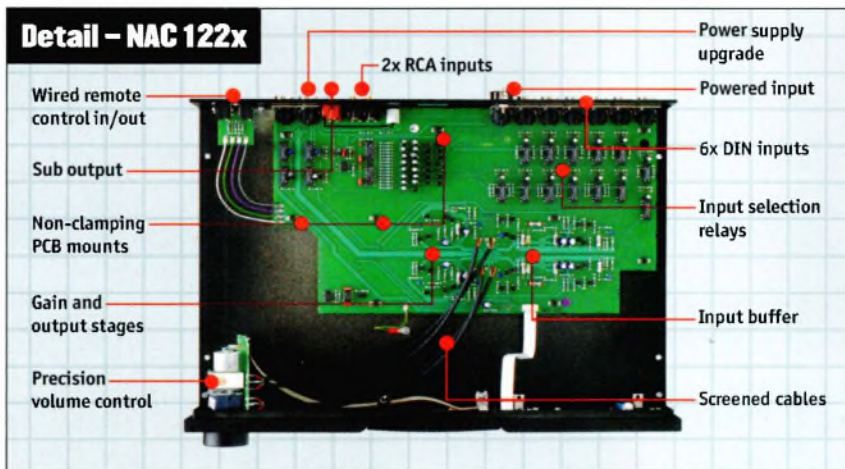
Ultimately, we rely on our professional dealer network to point customers in the right direction for their needs.

What's the next logical upgrade from the NAC 122x/Flat-Cap 2x/NAP 150x?

The NAC 122x and Flat-Cap 2x make a very capable preamplifier combination that can easily be partnered with a NAP 200 should one require more power to drive less efficient loudspeakers or difficult loads. On the other hand, if one uses multiple sources and doesn't need any more power then an upgrade to the NAC 202 using the NAPSC power supply is the way to go.

What speakers will the NAP 150x handle?

The NAP 150x, being a real-world 50-watt power amplifier, can be used with a wide range of loudspeakers. Without being too specific, the ideal partners, apart from our own designs, include the Dynaudio Audience 42 or 52, Rega R7, Sendor S5e or KEF Q7. Of course, speakers are hugely personal and impose lots of 'character' on the sound, but these seem to be popular choices.



with a hard-to-describe sense of correctness that we found truly and wholly satisfying. Sure, all the hi-fi artefacts were there – the gentle creak of his guitar body as he bent notes by pulling back on the neck – but that wasn't what brought a smile to our faces. That was down to a sense of his near-tangible presence in the room and the feeling it conveyed that he was thoroughly enjoying what he was playing.

Indeed, the NAC 122x might be the baby of Naim's preamp family but it betrays very few signs of its junior status. In fact, it probably warrants being called the NAC 122xp, with the 'p' standing for precocious. The NAP 150x exhibits equal confidence and assurance and makes the ideal partner for it. And, if your budget can be stretched to accommodate the Flat-Cap 2x power supply, you definitely won't regret the extra expenditure. And that also aids the CD5x, the logical CD partner here.

With or without that power supply, whether using a Naim CD player or not, this is a very accomplished pre/power combination and part of a range in which spending more genuinely buys you significantly greater performance and satisfaction. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



VERDICT – NAC 122x

SOUND >> 88%	CONCLUSION Upgradable preamplifier adds almost valve-like richness to the usual Naim virtues of musicality and precise rhythmic control.
FEATURES >> 80%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 92%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 90%	

VERDICT – NAP 150x

SOUND >> 85%	CONCLUSION A confident and assured power amplifier, the NAP 150x is a perfect match for the preamplifier and it makes 50 watts sound really meaty, too.
FEATURES >> 70%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 88%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 87%	



DEFINITIVE AUDIO



Main image: Art Audio Concerto Integrated Valve Amplifier £4,400



L to R: 1. Kuzma Stabi XL £10,000 2. KSL Kondo Neiro Line Stereo Valve Amplifier £23500 3. Living Voice IBX R2 (Burr Oak) £4400
4. SME 10 / SME V £4115 5. Living Voice OBX RW (Santos) £7200 6. KSL Kondo Ongaku Integrated Amplifier £49,000
7. Magnum Dynalab 106T Valve Tuner £3600 8. KSL Kondo Gakuoh 300B Mono Amplifiers £48,500
9. Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD Player £2950 10. KSL Kondo V-z (1m) Interconnect £750

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Va va voom

Focal's revamped Chorus V range takes its appearance as seriously as its sound

PRODUCT Focal Chorus 826 V

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,249 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 28.2x103.8x37.5cm
• Weight: 25.8kg • 25mm aluminium/magnesium inverted dome tweeter • 165mm polyglass midrange unit • Two 165mm polyglass bass units • Sensitivity: 91.5dB • Minimum impedance: 2.9 ohms (118Hz)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-uk.com

Focal has been making some radical changes to its entry-level loudspeakers. The 26-model Chorus V range has replaced the 54 models of the Chorus S and Cobalt S ranges. That's still a lot of speakers. So, in order not to baffle its potential customers, France's biggest speaker maker has divided Chorus V in two, creating the entry-level 700V range and the 800V 'affordable luxury' alternative.

The Chorus 826 V is the penultimate speaker in the 800 V range, sitting below the 836 V (which has an extra bass unit) and above the 816 V floorstander and 806 V and 807 V standmounts (pricing starts at £499 per pair for the 806 V). The 826 V is a three-way with a pair of 165mm bass units, a matching midrange driver and a 25mm aluminium and magnesium tweeter. Unlike previous Chorus, both cabinet and drive units are built in-house, and the tweeter drive unit (dubbed with the mystery acronym TNV) is housed in a very attractive casting.

Curiously, this speaker no longer uses the 'W' sandwich-coned units of earlier models. Instead, the new Chorus V range uses drivers made of a polyglass skin over a foam core. Given that the W glass cone has been at the core of Focal drivers for so long, this is slightly surprising. However, we are told that the new V2 polyglass cones are subjectively better sounding than the W cones used in the preceding Chorus range.

The most immediately striking thing about the 800V range is the style. This was achieved with the assistance of Paris based designers Pineau & Le Porcher, who have used black

acrylic for the wrap of top, front baffle and rear, and combined this with angled side cheeks finished in 'Moka' or 'Ebony' veneers. These look very luxurious in the flesh, especially the dark brown Moka. The more affordable 700 V range is available in only one finish (dubbed Amati) and does not feature the polished black acrylic or cast alloy base of the floorstanding 800 Vs.

It's not all styling either.

The angled sides of the box

are reflected inside to remove one set of parallel surfaces and reduce standing waves. Another more drastic design revision over previous ranges is the inclusion of significantly greater port area. Having listened to alternative port placements, the engineers at Focal went back to the drawing board and looked at the Reynolds coefficient – this states that when the airflow in a port exceeds six metres per second, it effectively becomes sealed. In the original Chorus range, this airflow speed was reached at only three watts

input, which meant that power handling was compromised. By combining front and down firing ports in the floorstanding 800V models and increasing vent diameters, Focal has managed to keep the port working up to 30 watts input. This increases the contribution that the port makes to the bass by up to 6dB.

The 826 V features a cast alloy plinth that raises the cabinet's base to allow airflow from the lower reflex port. This plinth incorporates a V shape and this is reflected in the grille top, should you leave the latter on. The grille certainly looks better than a stack of drive units and enhances the overall aesthetic of the speaker by making it look slimmer than previous models.

As with all Focals, there is only a single pair of terminals, the company being one of the few with the confidence to eschew bi-wiring in favour of total predictability of incoming signal.

SOUND QUALITY

In action, the 826 V requires a reasonable amount of space and plenty of power to give of its best. The high sensitivity would appear to facilitate lower powered amps, but only if you ignore the big dip in impedance in the upper bass. This is something decent power supplies will be able to cope with. In other words, low power from a good valve amp is better suited than a low-power budget integrated. But then again, this is a revealing enough speaker to mitigate against using it with most





“The 826 V is clearly a capable and revealing speaker, one that is easily neutral enough to be led by the components in front of it.”

budget amps. Ultimately though, the choice of low power designs is academic; you won't be able to comfortably push the speaker to high levels without something approaching 100 watts on hand.

As the cast alloy base comes with rather attractive spikes, we used these initially on the floor alone and latterly on some Townshend Audio Seismic bases, which had a profound effect on the balance. On the regular footing, the Focal has a nimble yet robust balance that errs on the exposed side at high frequencies. However, it doesn't come across as bright, once your ears have adjusted, and this is a pretty rapid process. The degree to which this is noticeable also depends on the reflectivity of your room and how loud you like to play. At low to medium levels in particular, the extra precision of imaging and detail brought by pointing both speakers at the listener is extremely useful. Turn the wick up, however, and things are more comfortable, with the speakers' axis crossing in front for a deep soundstage or placing the speakers parallel to the walls for a wider sound stage.

The decent sensitivity and wide bandwidth of the 826 V make it a highly entertaining and engaging speaker, the sensitivity giving good dynamics and decent power handling and the bandwidth conferring powerful bass and an open, revealing top end. The aluminium/magnesium alloy tweeter is smoother than standard aluminium varieties but not as warm

as non-metal types. It is rather good at picking out tape hiss and cymbals, but fortunately doesn't make a big deal out of them.

While this speaker was in-situ, Resolution Audio's Opus 21 system turned up for a forthcoming review of the XS (or Extra Sources) unit, combining FM tuner, phono stage and both analogue and digital inputs. This low-powered amp system doesn't deliver the grip of bigger amps, but allows the speaker to reveal considerable quantities of inner detail in everything played. This is a process that draws the listener into the music in no uncertain fashion and leaves the reviewing notes looking rather more like a description of the music than the speaker – and that's always a good sign. The 826 V is clearly a capable and revealing speaker, one that is easily neutral enough to be led by the components in front of it.

It is also sensitive to its support. Placing a Townshend Seismic base underneath significantly bolsters the bass, which has the knock-on effect of calming the treble, all of which improves the high level experience considerably. Despite the degree to which this base decouples the speaker from the floor, the extra energy it was pumping out had both floor and furniture vibrating with enthusiasm when Wyclef Jean was played 'in anger'.

Next to the £1,500 ATC SCM19 standmount we tested last issue, this Focal concedes some definition in the bass and is less able to 'disappear' from the soundstage. On the other

hand, it delivers a more open, relaxed and 'juicy' sound, and some will find it easier to live with both sonically and aesthetically. It's a matter of taste of course, but we think this is a great looking floorstander and as good an example of 'affordable luxury' as you'll find being built on European shores. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 78%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 90%



PRO
Impressively designed floorstander with great looks and solid build. Revealing, wide-bandwidth sound is thoroughly entertaining across a wide range of musical material.

CON
Slightly tricky load requires decent power. Bass could be a little tighter and treble a shade smoother.

CONCLUSION

If you like the way the 826 V looks, its sound won't disappoint. It times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging, if appropriately set up. It has an entertaining and revealing sound that will keep you listening late into the night.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 89%

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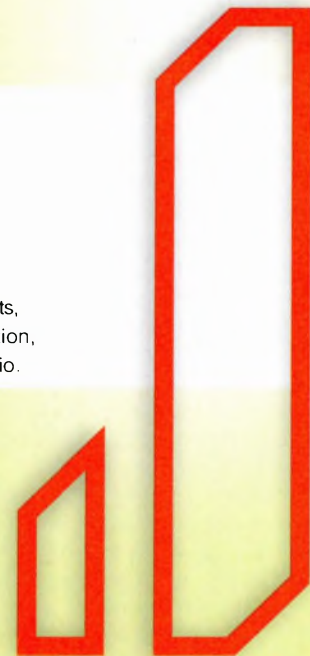
Supra Sword



Portfolio:

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Timber Matrix Foundation,
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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Music at heart

What happens if you must have home cinema, but your heart belongs to hi-fi? Ask Yamaha...

PRODUCT Yamaha DSP-AX759SE
TYPE Multichannel AV amplifier
PRICE £550
CONTACT 01923 233166 www.yamaha-uk.com

Yamaha's DSP-AX759SE landed on the *Hi-Fi Choice* test bench with a lot to live up to: its predecessor bagged a Gold Award in our Awards Issue last year. Even a cursory look over the new unit reveals that Yamaha is working on an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" philosophy.

The '759SE is a UK-tuned design. It covers all the AV decoding formats you could need, boasts a claimed 100 watts for seven channels, Yamaha's Top-ART amplifiers and the YPAO auto-set up and equaliser circuitry. Don't expect frills like HDMI switching, but it's a lot of amp for £500.

The improvements over last year's model are aimed at further enhancing its sonic abilities. The power supply has been upgraded, the DACs are now highly respected Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-Bit devices and there has been a complete re-mapping of the internal wiring and circuits to shorten signal paths, further improve S/N ratio and reduce cross talk.

Set-up is about as basic as the genre gets. Sadly, you can't engage the auto set-up routine

without the 'Yamaha Parametric Room Acoustic Optimizer' (YPAO) implementing its thing too. The YPAO system here is a basic parametric filtering network, and there is little in the way of fine tuning to be had over the YPAO's filtering post-op, so it's usually best left switched out.

SOUND QUALITY

Cutting to the chase, last year's Award-winning sound has matured nicely, gaining more grace and charm with a wider range of material. It's a smooth sound, far more subtle and refined than any of its competitors at this price, with bass that is tight and dry. Compared to its peers, which generally offer portly and gung-ho low frequency reproduction, the Yamaha is a little lightweight, but its bass is fast and tuneful and has far better resolution of individual tones.

Yamaha has made much of its Pure Direct mode, which shuts down all video processing and display functions to leave only the analogue stages powered-up. The benefit is an immediate and tangible reduction in high frequency hash and that brings a subjective increase in the airiness of the soundstage.

Relative to its class-leading musical performance, some home cinema buffs might find the '759SE's home cinema performance a tad disappointing. It lacks the clout of some competitors, and can sound a little bit soft and lightweight with high-octane movie material.

However, more subtle soundtracks revel in the Yamaha's smooth and refined character, allowing fine detail to shine through.

There is music at the heart of this UK-tuned Yamaha, a statement borne out not only in the smooth and refined sound but also in Yamaha's decision to blow the R&D budget on up-rated power supplies and high-class audio DACs rather than HDMI switching. If you're a hi-fi fan looking for an affordable home cinema solution, the '759SE has much to offer. **HFC**

Richard Stevenson

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

» SUB RATINGS
STEREO 83% MULTICHANNEL 82%

FEATURES >> 80%

» SUB RATINGS
STEREO 80% MULTICHANNEL 80%

BUILD >> 79%

» SUB RATINGS
STEREO 79% MULTICHANNEL 79%

VALUE >> 89%

» SUB RATINGS
STEREO 89% MULTICHANNEL 89%

CONCLUSION

Though not the first choice for those wishing to maximise sonic impact with blockbuster movies, the DSP-AX759SE is a cracker for anyone seeking an affordable home cinema amp that also does a great job with music. It's an unusually subtle performer.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> 86%

Totally tubular

Vincent combines visible valves with tiny transistors in a CD player that's big on bling

PRODUCT Vincent CD-S6 MkII

TYPE CD player

PRICE £999

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x12.5x33cm

• Weight: 9kg • Analogue outputs: single-ended phono, balanced XLR • Digital outputs: S/PDIF electrical • Triple valve output stage

CONTACT ☎ 01702 601410 # www.vincent-tac.de

Vincent's product development and engineering is done in Iffezheim, Germany and the manufacture in China. This is a business model that has only recently gained a foothold in the aspirational market.

Vincent is now distributed by Essex-based speaker maker Ruark. Apparently, Ruark boss Alan O'Rourke was looking for electronics to go with the company's speakers and found Vincent to be just the ticket. Ruark just imports the Design Line Three components from Vincent's large portfolio of products, which includes AV components, loudspeakers and some heavy-duty amplification.

The range coming into the UK consists of two variations on the CD-S6 CD player theme: the one tested here with balanced outputs and another that's £100 less expensive with only single-ended outputs. There is also a preamp, stereo and monoblock power amps, a

headphone amp and an FM/AM RDS tuner. All the components use a hybrid of valve and solid state components – even the tuner, albeit presumably only in the output stage if the £599 asking price is any indicator.

But nothing in the range is more expensive than the CD-S6 MkII player, a machine that incorporates plenty of hardcore technology for the price. The DAC is a Burr-Brown 24/96 type, although the exact model isn't specified, while the filter is from Pacific Microsonics and thus includes HDCD decoding. The player also contains a Philips VAM 1202 transport – a dedicated audio drive for a change.

A 12AU7 valve is on display through the circular window in the front panel and may be illuminated with varying degrees of bling via a switch at the back. But it's not alone – there are three more 12AX7 tubes hidden away that complete the analogue output stage. Elsewhere, there is a beefy mains transformer and shielded compartments for the input relays and remote control circuitry to minimise the effect of stray radiation from these components. The chassis itself is damped to minimise vibration and this combined with the power supply builds the player up to a decent nine-kilo fighting weight.

You can see from the front panel that the CD-S6 has the unusual addition of a volume controlled headphone output – which is still

quite uncommon on even an ambitious CD player. This makes a convenient change if you want to play loud without risking sonic leakage (soon to be outlawed by another EU diktat).

Among the shiny buttons on the front, there's a blue light dubbed 'warm up'. This flicks on and off when actually warming up, for about 20 seconds, and then stays on when warm. To be picky, it should really be labelled 'warmed up', or 'hot to trot' or something similar. Twenty seconds seems pretty quick for a warm up, but that's where tubes have the edge over transistors, which take closer to twenty minutes to come on song thermally – but you wouldn't want to watch a blinking light for that long.

Build quality is typically Chinese, by which we mean better than small scale manufacture almost anywhere else in the world at its price point. A £1,000 DVD player is likely to have a better quality finish, but that's because of economies of scale rather than anything else. Rear panel connections are standard-quality RCA phonos and XLRs, with another phono socket to provide an electrical digital output.

SOUND QUALITY

Using valves to build an output stage will always have a significant influence on the sound of a CD player. Most likely, it will add





“Instruments sound timbrally rich and full of depth, while voices have body and vitality that you rarely get with solid-state.”

colour to the proceedings and smooth off the high frequencies. This proved to be the case with the Vincent, and is likely to be a major source of the differences between this player and the alternatives. The treble is smooth, which makes the Vincent well suited to more revealing loudspeakers. It also gives the player a tonal balance that is closer in style to vinyl than is usually the case.

It is not easy to build a CD player even at this price that has a clean, smooth high frequency performance and Vincent should be congratulated for achieving this. The downside is that you forego some precision.

Another attractive aspect of the sound that is undoubtedly valve derived is the sense of dynamics or energy that emanates from acoustic sound sources especially. Instruments sound timbrally rich and full of depth, while well-recorded voices have body and vitality that you rarely get with solid-state electronics in this price range. Valves can be used to produce an overly warm and relaxed sound

that some assume to be a facet of Class A. When used properly, however, you get a lovely balance between fluidity and definition that suits most music down to the ground.

The Vincent also adds a little bit of space to the sound, opening things out a little in a vinyl-like fashion. As a result, a piano will sound like it's in a slightly more reverberant room and the highest notes are just a shade rounded but full of shine and strength. Timing is also better than average, and there seems to be no shortfall next to a Rega Apollo – although less expensive than the Vincent, it is particularly good in this respect. Inevitably, the Vincent has the upper hand tonally, with a rich and texturally deep character by comparison.

Because this player's limitations are ones of omission rather than of its own making, you can play it through a highly revealing system without anything nasty making itself heard. Players with flatter responses but less pristine output stages can sound uncomfortable when played in anger.

To get the best out of the Vincent, we'd recommend a loudspeaker with a balanced tone, but efficient enough to make the most of the dynamics on offer. Something that can render tonal character well, too.

The Vincent CDS6 MkII combines solid and stylish build quality (with an all-metal remote) alongside an engaging and revealing sound that will appeal to anyone who enjoys analogue sources. While the character of its tube output stage is not the most precise or neutral, it is subtle enough not to get in the way of the music. It pulls the impressive trick of making digital audio sound 'musical' at a price point where that's still a difficult task. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 87% [Progress bar]	PRO Valves help to deliver an analogue-like quality that makes for easy, open and engaging listening. A rich and effusive sounding player, and a nice remote too!
FEATURES >> 85% [Progress bar]	CON Not quite as slick as the best around this price. Valve output stage brings colour to the sound, at the expense of precision and accuracy.
BUILD >> 87% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 87% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Vincent's valve output stage helps to deliver a beguiling midrange, sweet highs and attractively figured lows, combined with fine dynamics. The headphone output is a nice touch and the remote could seal it, so the big brands better watch out.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%	

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The square egg

Eclipse finally completes its range with a subwoofer worthy of its splendid egg-shaped speakers

PRODUCT Eclipse TD725sw

TYPE Active subwoofer

PRICE £2,700

CONTACT ☎ 020 7328 4499 🌐 www.eclipse-td.com

Since its first egg-shaped TD512 Time Domain speaker, Eclipse has promised us a subwoofer fully in keeping with the thinking behind the company's satellites. Until now, the nearest we'd got was the diminutive TD316sw, which had all the speed and transient bite that the satellites demanded, but limited depth. The TD725sw looks set to address that last issue. It's a full-size, half-metre coffee table of a sub, designed to add bass to any loudspeaker that might call for a subwoofer – from Eclipse or elsewhere.

The usual Eclipse egg shape doesn't carry over to the sub. It would have cost a lot more, been a lot larger, and been wholly impractical. Anyway, at low frequencies diffraction – part of the reason why the 'egg' speakers are shaped the way they are – is not the issue. Eclipse identified that to add bass seamlessly, while

preventing the sub from sounding slothful, is to make it perform lightning fast, mitigating the cabinet signature. This took a lot of time and testing, but fitness for purpose is what counts.

Although a single large driver would provide the bass extension required, its inertia would make it sound 'slow' and produce reaction forces that would cause the enclosure to sing along. So instead, the TD725sw uses two smaller, lighter 250mm units, which are cross-coupled internally and harnessed to a remote-controlled, 500-watt Class D amp. These drivers operate in phase, so that the bracing prevents any net chassis movement. There is a degree of decoupling from the enclosure, but at very low frequencies it acts as a mechanical ground.

This type of subwoofer configuration is not unique – Eclipse has drawn inspiration from MartinLogan's superb Descent design, as has Mordaunt-Short. But there's no doubt the theory works, and here the execution is excellent.

SOUND QUALITY

From the outset, playing with a system based around a TD712 stereo pair (and TD510 centre/rears for multichannel), it was quickly

apparent that system synergy was damn near perfect. The bass opened out, and the sense of added scale and architecture, and of a richer, deeper tonal compass, was immediate, while dynamics were better formed. Best of all there was no real diminution of the precise stereo imaging that even without the subwoofer allowed instruments to hover in the air, just where the recording engineer placed them. However, we found that if you turn the volume up high, the sound becomes 'woofy'.

Careful set-up is vital. With a multichannel 'home cinema' amp or receiver, use the pre-filtered sub output direct into the TD725, bypassing the internal low pass filter, which adds group delay. Otherwise, the subwoofer is best fed directly from the amplifier's speaker output, so that it runs in parallel with the satellites. This provides a seamless quality, whatever type of speaker you're using.

We set the low pass filter to a low frequency, just where the satellites were rolling in (65Hz or so for the TD712, much lower with nominally full-range floorstanding speakers), which reduced the sub's aural footprint. But such is the TD725's ability to attack and release notes that the subwoofer was unfazed by the greater exposure when crossing over at a traditional 80Hz. Ultimately, 'stealth' remains preferable, in part because stereo imagery is more consistent and broader.

Eclipse may not be the first to configure a subwoofer in this way, but its implementation is superb. The TD725sw sets new standards for speed, integration and control, without sacrificing bass depth and power. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 94% [Progress bar]	PRO Integrates beautifully with both Eclipse speakers and models from other brands – even large ones. With ultra-quick timing and no overhang, the extra bass is very natural and open.
FEATURES >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON Dull rectangular box doesn't win too many style points. Expensive for a subwoofer, but the sound justifies the cost.
BUILD >> 85% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 86% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION This sub sets a high standard for adding bass without the usual loss of transparency, articulation and slurred transients. It offers rare musical finesse and is equally happy in hi-fi or home cinema roles – it's just a shame it looks a bit bland.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%	



Beyerdynamic DT770

TYPE Headphones

PRICE £200

CONTACT ☎ 01444 258258 # www.beyerdynamic.co.uk

Closed-back headphones are rare in the serious hi-fi world. On the whole, it seems, those listening in private prefer not to be cut off from the outside world. And besides, closed-back cans have a reputation for a more 'boxed-in' sound than the open-back variety. Still, there are often advantages to a degree of acoustic isolation (both ways!) and it's often put about that the bass of closed-back designs is superior.

Beyer includes both types in its range. The DT770 name in fact goes back a long way, though this is a new design, sharing many features with current open types including the range-topping DT990. It sports wide-range drivers of high impedance, which will be easily driven by any headphone output, though we certainly appreciated the luxury of a dedicated headphone amplifier through Beyer's offering. As closed headphones go, the DT770 offers relatively modest exclusion of the world outside and we reckon Beyer has struck a happy balance here, allowing the

listener to hear the telephone, for instance, but distinctly dulling the general background noise of the world. Comfort scores highly and the long, highly flexible cable is reasonably unintrusive.

While there is a trace of the midrange coloration that tends to plague closed 'phones as a species, it is kept to a very low level and we thoroughly enjoyed listening to a range of music. As hinted above, bass is admirably strong but not over-emphasised, and there is plenty of detail on offer across the band. This is a particularly successful example of its type and we recommend it highly. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Like most good headphones, sound in many ways leaves speakers standing and the closed-back privacy is handy

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 87%

Chord Co Epic Twin

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £39/metre (termination extra)

CONTACT ☎ 01980 625700 # www.chord.co.uk

Two down from the top of the range Signature cable, Epic Twin is one of two newly introduced speaker cables from The Chord Company. The conductor complement consists of two bundles of 19 silver-plated, oxygen-free copper strands. Each bundle is 2.5mm in diameter, and the pair is twisted together, Teflon insulated and covered by a silicone rubber jacket, before being double shielded and then finished in a translucent grey sheath. There is no mention of Litz or any special weave, but Chord has eschewed such complications in the past, favouring mainstream electrical properties, apparently for consistency in different systems.

This is a modestly thick cable (10mm in diameter) but it is very tractable and certainly less bulky than Chord's other new cable, Epic Super Twin. This cable mirrors the construction of Epic Twin but doubles up the conductors, making it ideal for bi-wiring or 'shotgunning', where two sets of cable are connected to one set of 4mm plugs

Interestingly, the two cables have much the same aural fingerprint, which is best summed up as being musical without being noticeably 'hi-fi'. There is no sheen or edge to this cable, rather it has a relaxed quality, with a full and solid bass, but not so full it sounds anything less than well controlled. By the same token, it is a detailed-sounding cable, but not in the hyper-analytical sense in which the term is often used for some true high-end cables. It's not the sort of cable to startle you in any

particular way; it's just always a pleasure to listen to. But you will find it takes a long time to fully burn in – not unknown with previous Chord cables. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

A jack-of-all-trades of a speaker cable; one that acts as a great all-round advocate for well-recorded music.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 89%

Supra Sword

TYPE Loudspeaker cable
PRICE £700 (3m terminated pair)
CONTACT ☎ 01223 441299 # www.supracables.co.uk

Supra came to prominence in the 1970s with a cheap, finely stranded speaker cable. The modern Supra range has been reinvented as a specialist 'boutique' brand, with Sword at the top of their range.

Sword's principal technical claim to fame is its zero inductance construction, which is achieved by using 24 individually insulated copper windings, half wound clockwise and half anticlockwise. Note that a few amplifiers (famously Naim designs) use the inductance of speaker cables for stability instead of a Zobel network at the output – using this cable with such a design would be potentially problematic, so check with your dealer if in doubt.

Sword is supplied as a single-wired cable; biwiring means doubling the dose, or using special £175 Supra-made links at the speaker end of the cable. The terminations are crimped connectors, 4mm or spades, with detachable tips. At 9mm thick and supplied in a figure of eight sheath, Sword is neither particularly tractable nor is it inconspicuous.



Zero inductance should mean a more phase coherent sound, and as all frequencies are handled identically, there should be no time smearing. That said, this ignores the terminations. Even so, Sword works impressively well. It lacks the resolution or transparency of Nordost Valhalla (but it costs far less and is much more forgiving of system limitations). It makes up for any omissions at the HF end of the spectrum with a spectacularly clean, vivid midband – and a bass that is consistently powerful and appears to belong to the midrange. The

abiding impression is of a cable that is taut and dynamic, and that musically pulls consistently in the same direction. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION Too thick to run under carpets, Sword presents a consistently powerful musical impression. A real high-end contender.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 87%

Partington Heavi II

TYPE Loudspeaker stand
PRICE £399 per pair
CONTACT ☎ 01474 709299
 # www.partingtonandco.co.uk

Despite the trendy misspelling in the name, this stand really is about good old-fashioned mass – 28kg of it in the form of steel, sand and resin, which combine to create one of the most robust stands we can recall seeing. Designed to take the heaviest standmount speakers on the market (it was actually conceived as partner to a model from Totem, but spent most of the review period propping up some similarly massive ATCs), its six legs would certainly not buckle were the Heavi one day asked to substitute for an axle stand under a medium-size commercial vehicle.

Sand and resin are effective damping materials and it's near impossible to provoke ringing from this stand, however hard you tap it. Stability is achieved with adjustable spikes underneath (three or four to taste – suitable female screw-threads are fitted), while steel cone toppers are supplied to interface the top plate to your speaker. As an alternative to the pictured silver finish, gloss black is available.

If the name carries suggestions of bass enhancement, discard them at once. If anything, low frequencies may seem understated when this stand replaces any lesser speaker support, but that's only because it lacks the tendency of most of them to 'soup up' some part of the bass indiscriminately.

In this case, less becomes more when one realises that bass is extended and superbly taut, precise and detailed. At the same time, midrange and treble are clear and uncolored. This is truly a top stand. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
CONCLUSION If you want to hear decent standmounts at their best, get decent stands – like these. Excellent in every way.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 93%

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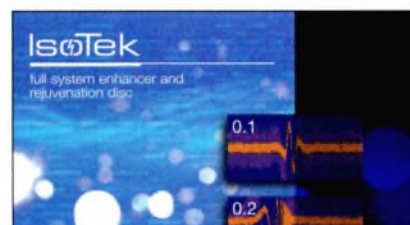
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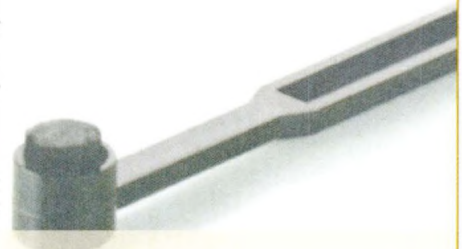
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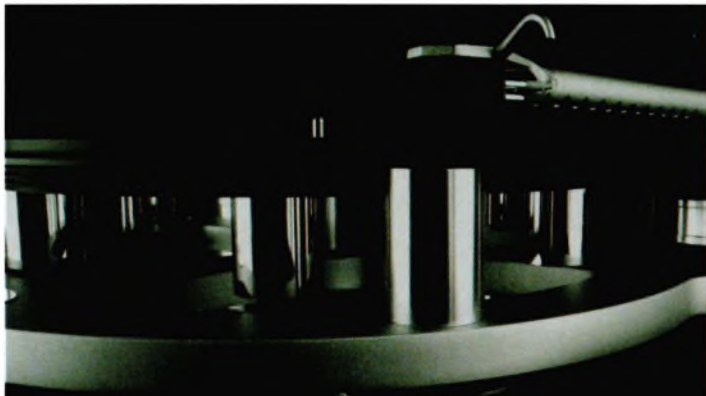
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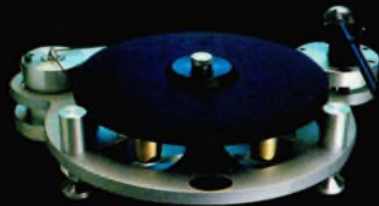
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and multichannel gear you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, plus useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most stringent techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

Products that score more than 80 per cent overall are automatically considered for inclusion in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD



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

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1 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.



Cyprus CD8x £1,000

The latest diminutive CD spinner from Cyprus 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	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	
UP TO £1,000											
🏆	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player	●	●	●			●	285	
🏆	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Highly involving and rewarding music player at a sensible price	●	●	●		●	●	286	
🏆	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift: otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value	●	●	●				285	
🏆	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	
🏆	Denon DCD-700AE	250	Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay	●	●				●	284	
🏆	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	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer		●		●			285	
🏆	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	
🌟	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	
🏆	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced	●	●		●	●	●	286	
🌟	Classé CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs	●	●	●	●	●	●	284	
🏆	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too	●	●		●	●		280	
🏆	Cyrus CD XI/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion	●	●	●		●		279	
🌟	Esoteric X-03SE	4,950	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat	●	●	●	●	●		285	
🌟	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	
🏆	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.	●	●	●	●	●	●	284	
🏆	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	
🌟	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful	●	●	●	●	●	●	263	
🏆	NAD M5	1,299	Beautifully made and very versatile CD/SACD player handles most formats with very superior dynamic range	●	●	●	●	●		285	
🏆	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance				●			280	
🌟	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●			238	
🏆	Primare CD31	1,500	A well made player that may not appeal to timing freaks but does lovely things with large musical forces	●	●	●		●		270	
🏆	Rega Saturn	1,300	Attractive simple player does the basics superbly, delivering performance with great poise, precision and range	●	●	●				286	
🌟	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	
🏆	Sugden CD21SE	1,395	Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers	●						271	
🏆	T+A CD1230R	1,500	Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering				●			280	
🌟	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits	●	●	●	●	●	●	253	

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Copland CDA823 £1,750
This distinguished, yet minimalist Scandinavian CD player combines a real ear for detail with full-scale dynamics and an effortless musical style. A genuine hi-fi star.



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

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



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

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



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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

DVD-AUDIO

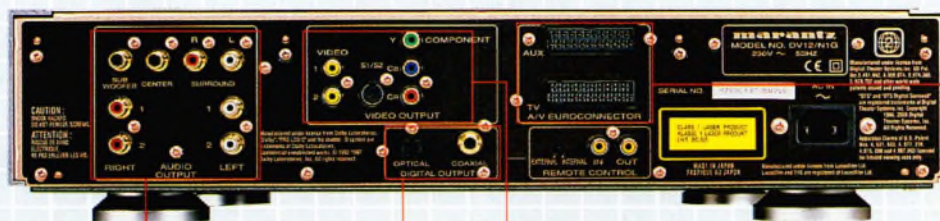


DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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

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

CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		
UP TO £1,000										
	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
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem							276
	Denon DVD-2910	600	It's now a little long in the tooth, but this mid-price Denon universal player's audio and video performance is still pretty impressive							262
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation							274
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video							275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star							274
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts							274
	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										
	Arcam DiVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing							285
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs							238
	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD							266
	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi							259
	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
	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too							265
	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio							263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity							279
	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.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Arcam DiVA DV137 £1,250
The first 'universal' player from this top British brand is a cracker, sonically and visually.

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

In celebration of Supra's 30th Anniversary, the Sword-ISL has been developed, based on technologies derived from the award winning Sword speaker cable. Sword-ISL is a high-end 2-channel interconnect, fitted with phono or XLR plugs, in 0.8m pairs. The first "run" will be supplied in a luxury Limited Edition 30th Anniversary Presentation case.

Demo sets are available from Authorised Dealers for home audition.



SUPRA Cables

MADE IN SWEDEN

INTRODUCING: The UK version of Supra's LoRad MD06-BS/SP 6-way Mains Distribution Block

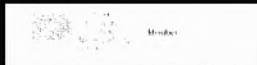
Approved to BS1363 standard.

MD06-BS/SP features 6 x 45 degree mounted 13 Amp UK mains sockets housed within an RF shielded aluminium extrusion. Tommy Jenvings' own 3-way Surge Protection system helps to prevent "nasties" getting into your hi-fi or AV system. When used with LoRad shielded mains cables, this can help improve your system from RF interference.



VISIT THE SUPRA CABLES STAND AT THE: WHAT HI-FI SHOW, HAMMERSMITH (3-5 NOVEMBER) FOR "SHOW ONLY" SPECIAL OFFERS ON: MD06-BS/SP - £99.99 ea (normally £129.99 ea) Other offers available on the stand.

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Supra Cables are available from all good hi-fi and home cinema stores in 38 countries around the world.

For UK customers who require more details or to request a brochure pack containing stockists & price information, please contact: Supra brochure line: 01223 441 299 Supra email: info@supracables.co.uk Supra on the web: www.supracables.co.uk

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 am and Goldring 1012GX cartridge, it'll blow most budget CD players into the weeds.



Michell Technodec £767

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



Clearaudio Champion £1,475

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



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

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

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
BT	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
BT	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
BT	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45		●	opt	279
BT	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45		●	opt	284
BT	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
BT	Michell Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
BT	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
BT	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
BT	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
BT	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
BT	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
BT	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			●	opt
BT	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			●	opt
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex onboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
BT	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●		●	248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●		●	259

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
BT	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
BT	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around		●		285
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too		●	●	214
	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss		●	●	235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality		●		215
BT	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound		●		270
BT	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 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 BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUJ GAIN	AUJ IMPEDANCE	
BT	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
BT	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
BT	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
BT	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

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

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

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

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

SME

The way to play vinyl ...

Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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HI-FI CHOICE

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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	PRICE	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ESSE. NUMBERS
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 a great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●	●	●	283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
	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 DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
	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-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60	●	●		●	259

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



810 preamplifier

The 810 exhibits the performance and refinement of its predecessors in a way no other preamplifier possibly could. By using the expertise gained from the proven 2010, 1012 and 1010, Boulder has created yet another preamplifier without peer in its price class.



850 mono amplifier

Meticulously engineered and refined, the 850 (200wpc) delivers high power into any load while preserving the renowned Boulder sound quality.



next generation

800 series is a gift from boulder to those who dream of owning a boulder product but could never afford it. The wait is over and now you can!

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After 5 years in production, the Dino is still one of the most popular phono stages around. Highly versatile with accessible switches on the baseplate to facilitate a wide range cartridges.

'Never Connected' power supply technology virtually removes all incoming mains noise allowing only the music to be heard.

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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 multisc 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

Multisc 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 Hifidelo Pro £850

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE? PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
			DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
CD-R/RW RECORDERS						
Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1			218
Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1			233
NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2			243
Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2			233
Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1			205
Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1			243
Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1			218
MD RECORDERS						
Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing yet that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1			205
Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1			233
HDD RECORDERS						
Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160		276
Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160		280
Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250		278

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

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 combo combines warmth and body with energy and detail – a truly musical performer.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	400	Occasionally a touch bright, but a good all-rounder with decent detail and plenty of life	5	●	●	●	40	278
	Arcam DIVA A70	500	Has the measure of the next model up, the A80, in a slightly lower rated form, but with sonic advantages in some areas	7	MM	●	●	50	286
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt	●	●	90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		●	●	75	279
	Cambridge Audio 840A	750	Detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail	7		●	●	120	286
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	●	●	85	283
	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
	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
	Denon PMA-700AE	250	One of a growing number of new low cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels	4	MM	●	●	50	284
	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension - exceptional value for money	5	●	●	●	70	279
	Marantz PM7001KI	550	Building on an already fine amp, the KI variant offers superb bass and bags of detail	5	●	●	●	70	283
	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price - another budget classic from NAD	7		●	●	55	253
	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
	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5	●	●	●	80	278
	Primare I21	750	A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality	4		●		75	273
	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
	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									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7	●	●	●	100	266
	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8		●		100	280
	Ayre AX-7e	1,995	High end sound at a sensible price. Lacks the balls of less revealing designs but has precision in the timing department that is rare	5		●		60	284
	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6	+	●	●	100	275
	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
	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt			85	255
	Copland CTA405	2,288	Avoids pratfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM	●		50	286
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		●	●	100	286
	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
	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
	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5	●	●	●	75	271
	Marant 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
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7		●		180	285
	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			●	100	267
	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
	Unison Research Unico 200	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5			●	200	269

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
	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
	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2		●		266
	Densen Beat 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
	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
	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Uprated entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication	●	●	6		●	50	262
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	●	136	256
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value	●	●	5	●	●	70	285
ABOVE £2,000										
	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●		5	opt	●		273
	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt			277

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 EC BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PREAMP IN	POWER AMP IN	LFE IN/PH	PHONO IN/UT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	STEREO NUMBER
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
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
ES	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
ES	Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Prem 350SA	20,000	Valve preamp and solid-state power deliver some of the most transparent and naturally dynamic sounds around	●	●	5		●	350	264
ES	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	●	80	276
ES	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6		●	50	254
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●			●	180	253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●	●	5	opt	●		265
ES	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●			●	200	247
ES	Halcro dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5		●	225	243
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	●	125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●			●	700	234
ES	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4		●		238
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●			●	140	208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6		●		233
ES	Pnmarc PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7		●	128	256

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX757SE £499
 If you're looking for a multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is your best bet below £500.



Arcam
DiVA AVR300 £1,300
 Here's one for those who value great sound over numerous gizmos and gadgets – an integrated AV amp for audiophiles.



Denon
AVC-A11XV £2,500
 A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



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

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV AMPLIFIERS

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
BT	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited	BT	7	●	100	284
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
BT	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
BT	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
	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
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-AX10A	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	BT	150	260
	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy		●	7	●	100
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears		●	7	●	100
EC	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with iLink encrypted outputs		●	10	●	200
BT	Yamaha DSP-AX757SE	499	Exceptional sounding budget/mid price receiver offers brilliant sound per pound; ergonomics could be better		●	9	●	100
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND P.WE AMPS								
	Arcam A90+7.1 mod. P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power		●	8	●	135
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
BT	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
	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
	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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AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYER
STRONG CONT.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
CD PLAYER
BEST CD PLAYER £200-£300
STRONG CONT.



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.

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
STEREO AMPLIFIER
PRIMARE CD1

Monitor Audio

SILVER RS6

- Floorstanding Design
- Choice of Finish Options
- Biwirable
- **What Hi-Fi? Recommended**



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

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Spendor 'S' Series loudspeakers feature;

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"They consistently deliver a refined, yet dramatic sound that's of the quality beyond what we would expect at this price."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2004
OCTOBER 2004
SPEAKER
STRONG CONT.

KEF

IQ5

- Uni-Q Technology
- Finish Options
- Floorstanding
- **What Hi-Fi? Award-Winner**

Other models in the range include

- iQ1, iQ3 and iQ7

"The IQ5s are little stars, providing stunning scale and authority from discreetly sized towers... The IQ5s are fully deserving Products of the Year."



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
SPEAKER
STRONG CONT.

Arcam DiVA

Arcam believes that superb sound quality is vital to the real enjoyment of music. The DiVA range reproduces music at a level that is remarkably true to life.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2004
BEST CD PLAYER
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ARCAM CD77

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See and Hear the difference

INTRODUCING Blu-ray



Samsung

BD-P1000 BLU-RAY DISC™ PLAYER

Due for launch in October, Samsung is introducing the BD-P1000, the UK's first Blu-Ray Disc™ player. It will play Blu-ray discs at native 720p, 1080i or 1080p resolutions, upscale existing DVDs and play audio CDs.



What is Blu-ray?

Blu-ray, also known as Blu-ray Disc (BD) is the name of a next-generation optical disc format. Developed to enable recording, rewriting and playback of high-definition video (HD), the format offers more than five times the storage capacity of traditional DVDs and can hold up to 25GB on a single-layer disc and 50GB on a dual-layer disc.

Thanks to the greatly enhanced HD video and audio quality as well as the advanced interactivity and networking features, Blu-ray represents a huge leap forward in the DVD viewing experience and will offer an unprecedented HD experience.

SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

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

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STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Rega
R3 £448

A neat little floorstander that really knows how to communicate with music. Its sound is crisp and agile, and what it lacks in sheer bass weight it makes up for in energy.



KEF
iQ9 £800

This superbly judged floorstander delivers a clean, powerful and transparent sound, with impressively taut bass. A very fine all-rounder for the money.



B&W
805S £1,600

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



Mordaunt-Short
Performance 6 £3,500

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,295,255		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
	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
	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21		A-	65	●		260
	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28		A-	40	●		279
	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29		A	35	●		253
	B&W CM7	999	Pretty compact floorstander could have greater dynamic expression, but sounds smooth and well balanced	20,91,30	●	A-	25	●		286
	Castle Richmond 3i	320	Pretty real-wood miniature sounds superbly smooth and even, if dynamically weak	17,33,23		A+	45		●	284
	Castle Richmond 7i	900	Does all the musically important stuff flawlessly. A fine communicator that delivers reassuringly credible bass	18,92.5,26	●	A+	47	●		286
	Castle Compact Column	550	Compact, not so much that you need a sub to back up the bass, an elegant and engaging speaker for its size	14,87.5,16	●	A-	50	●		280
	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●		271
	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	●	A+	22	●		275
	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24		A	40	●		215
	Dynaudio Focus 110	850	Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness	17,30,28		A-	38	●		279
	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	●	A-	28	●		273
	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40		●	269
	Epos 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
	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	●	A	25	●		275
	KEF iQ3	280	Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33		A+	40	●		284
	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	●	A	25	●		273
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●		271
	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27		A-	40	●		284
	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	●	A	33	●	●	276
	Mordaunt-Short Avant 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
	Naim n-SATS	695	Very discreet and informative, if a bit lean and forward. Just add an n-SUB for excellent all round results	20,29,21		A	50		●	268
	Nbien DX-5	250	Unusual shape miniature delivers generous scale, weight and dynamic expression for something so compact	17,5,34,24		A-	40		●	284
	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

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).

Award winning musical sound
Lifetime warranty
Sexy design



The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

The new reference integrated amplifier from Densen is perhaps the most advanced integrated amp on the market. It is filled with advanced solutions, which all share the goal of giving you even more musicality and flexibility. The B-150 is basically a scaled down version of the B-250 and B-350 (Densen's reference pre/power combo) in one box with all the high end ingredients such as relay driven volume control, zero feedback technology, custom-made components and much more.

However, there is much more to a perfect product than just superior sound quality. It is our intention to make complete products. Not just products that are sonically superior, but complete like a perfect circle. As you learn about Densen, you'll discover that we go the extra mile in every aspect: design, user-friendliness, quality, warranty, upgradeability, production methods and of course sound quality. But you really won't have a clue about it all until you get to hear and see what we're talking about in real life. Then you will know what we mean when we say Air-Guitar factor (say what? check our website). There is one Air-Guitar / Air-Baton included with every Densen product.

Discover why we say:

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



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Portugal 2006

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Our favourite  BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19.5		A	48	●	286
	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30	●	A+	28	●	284
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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									
	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
	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
	ATC SCM19	1,499	Super linear motor system, heavy weight construction and fabulous veneer that makes the ATC a pro favourite	22,3,44,31,5		A-	54	●	285
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Chario Cygnus	1,200	Beautiful solid walnut sides. Port tuning suspect, but laid back sound has fine delicacy, imaging and refinement	20,96,27	●	A-	28	●	275
	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
	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
	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
	Focal-JMLab Ato 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
	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
	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
	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 joie de vivre	23,39,27,5		A	50	●	274
	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
	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
	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 Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●	245

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	TIPOUS/NUMBER	FASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (H/L)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
	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
	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18	●	A	25	●	267
	Neat Motive 1	1,200	Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative	16,92.5,20	●	A-	20	●	276
	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	●	A	20	●	260
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
	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33.5,57.5,10	●	A+	45	●	285
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
	Rega R7	1,498	Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character	27,98,35	●	A	25	●	271
	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	●	A	20	●	256
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
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	1,995	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer	20,100,25	●	A	<20	●	279
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
	Sonus Faber Concerto Domus	1,799	Great choice, especially for acoustic material, which performs significantly above its price level	21,99,31	●	A	35	●	270
	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32	●	A	48	●	246
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 TDB	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●	240
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	●	A	35	●	277
	Triangle Celius Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	●	A	22	●	277
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
	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
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30		232
	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
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1000	28	286

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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Jason Kennedy | Hifi Choice January 2006



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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	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	SIZE NUMBER
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
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
	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●		●		200	●	194
	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort		●		●		200	●	270
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable			●	●		270	●	266
EC	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead: quality stuff					●	20		285
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

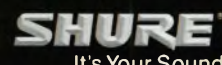
SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc



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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**

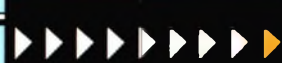
Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
EC	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
EC	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●		259
EC	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!	●		●		279
EC	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail	●		●		283
EC	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●		248
EC	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●		●		281
EC	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●		●		284
EC	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●		●		278
EC	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble	●		●		281
EC	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging	●		●		280
EC	TCI Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass	●		●		285
EC	Townshend DCT300	300	DCT wire with hum-busting ferrite sleeves. Packed with enough detail to make rivals sound flat		●	●		234
EC	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
EC	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●		●		273
EC	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cables with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●		●		259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
EC	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●		●	E	278
EC	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●	E	260
EC	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●	E	265
EC	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types				O	234
EC	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●		●	E	279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
	Black Rhodium Tango	15	A little bass-heavy but with smaller speakers, but that's no bad thing: mid and treble are detailed and clear	●		●		284
	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
EC	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●		●		227
EC	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
EC	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, high res and suitable for exacting systems	●		●		278
EC	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging - a budget bargain	●		●		276
EC	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●		241
	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
EC	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance	●		●		261
EC	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●		248
EC	Wireworld Oasis 5 Biwire	38	Full-bottled 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
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively
	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack
	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)
	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot
	Naim Fram	1,825	Pricy but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice
	Sound Organisation 2560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
80	66,46		5	Glass	247
81	50,50		4	Glass	217
82	43		4	MDF	193
87.5	48		5	MDF	193
75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
75	56,37		4	Glass	286
75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
74	48,40		4	Metal	247
62	49,44		4	Metal	271
75	45,36		5	Glass	261
96	45,34		5	Glass	232
51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
92	50,40		5	Glass	217
76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Alphason Aragon AG60	80	Good separation and imaging, with just a little coloration and bass looseness
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
60	16,14.5			3	280
56	16.5,18			1	281
61	18,16.3			4	283
63	17,20			1	220
61	15, 20			1	220
62	18,15			4	232
61	17,15			5	261
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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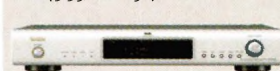
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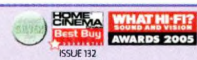
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GLOSSARY

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 0.023µsec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz

TWEETER Treble driver

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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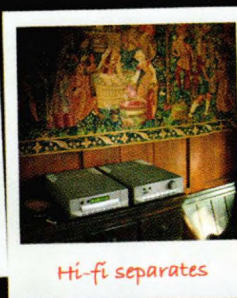
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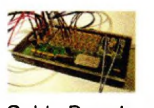


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"In some ways it always feels more rewarding to review a product that punches above its weight and this is a special little speaker that sets a price/performance yardstick that is hard to beat."

Chris Thomas
Hi-Fi+ Issue 42



magical

New ATC Range is set to challenge the very best...

New Speaker series from ATC. We love the new look. A new soft dome tweeter is used and its all change on the inside as well. Stylish monitor loudspeakers with a pedigree sound to match!
(SCM 7, 11, 19 and 40)

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ATC SCM19
Hi-Fi Choice, October 2005



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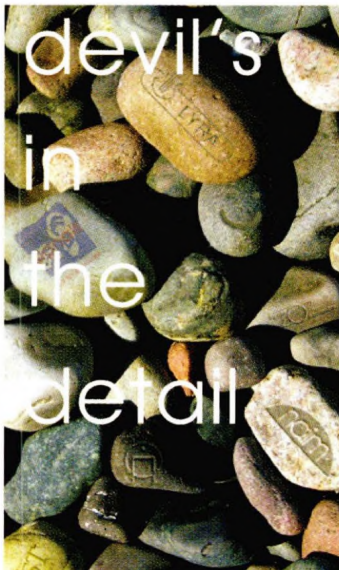
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Bewitch A30 integrated amplifier uses 6550 output valves in an ultra-linear pure class A push pull design producing 30 glorious watts per channel. We feel this amplifier's sound redefines what's possible at this price point and we're convinced it will become the benchmark that all others will be judged by. £1,000




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The Nottingham Analogue Dais turntable is the result of many years of research by the company's founder, Tom Fletcher. In our opinion it offers unmatched performance at its £3,519 price level. It's pictured here with the 12" Nottingham Analogue Ace Space tonearm which costs £710.



Audion Silver Note One. This is a specially commissioned amplifier exclusive to Noteworthy Audio. It uses a single 2A3 directly heated triode per channel in an ultra-purist single ended zero feedback design. It produces 3.7 of the finest watts available, if you have high efficiency speakers you need to hear this remarkable amplifier. £2,500




J.C. Verdier Platine. This spectacular turntable uses a high mass platter suspended by magnetic repulsion and an externally housed high quality DC motor. Its performance is as magnificent as its appearance suggests, offering a completely stable basis for the finest arms and cartridges. Prices start from £5,000



The Usher CP6371 offer astonishing value for money. These very substantial speakers (they weigh 60kg each) and cost only £2,000 for a pair. A pair of wonderfully natural sounding carbon fibre filled paper cones are used in a two way configuration with a 1" soft dome tweeter covering the high frequencies. Their sound is potent yet not overblown, and the very rigid boxes mean that cabinet colouration is extremely low.



Note products PhoNote uses an all triode valve audio circuit with short signal paths, low output impedance and no global feedback. The result is an exceptionally low noise design with breathtaking clarity and musical involvement. The MM version costs £1,500, the MC version £1,750.




The Avantgarde Duo's use horns for the high and mid frequencies and as a result offer 104dB sensitivity. They produce all the speed and dynamics you'd expect from such a design and are effortlessly musical. These speakers really do have the most astonishing mid band performance, if you're in the market for a pair of speakers at this £9,995 price point then you really must hear them.



CEC TL-51X. This top loading transport is something rather special. Its novel design uses a belt drive (rather than the more common direct drive) to spin the disc. It produces a sound which is incredibly effortless, with tremendous resolution of acoustics and space. £1,200




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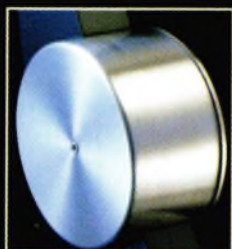
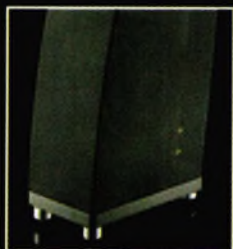
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nonconformist

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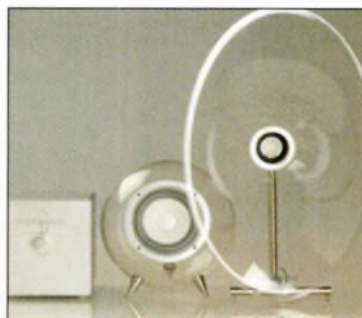
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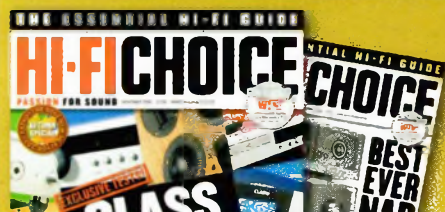
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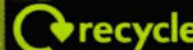
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2nd-hand shootout

In the second-hand speaker market, £1,500 buys you something wonderful

Buying nearly new hi-fi can save you a bundle. A pair of speakers that retailed for around £2,500 three or four years ago should now be available for our target price of £1,500.

The two 'nearly new' models that we've focused on here are the Neat Vito and PMC OB1. Both of these compact floorstanders enjoyed popularity in the recent past, with the advantage of being fully supported. Both were close rivals until late 2004, when the Neat was discontinued – the OB1 is still current. As ever the final choice comes down to availability and sound quality.

Of the two, the PMC is the better known. With an enviable reputation for studio supply, PMC attracts a good deal of buyers from the pro market. This has its benefits and drawbacks. With its professional background, the OB1 is very sturdily built

Turn the clock back to the 1990s and a more exotic affair becomes available. Our safe bet this time is the B&W 803 Series 2. From the top-line Matrix range, this floorstander is often overlooked, with most attention being focused upon the legendary 800/801 and high-flying 805. B&W support the 800-Series for 15 years and, with a launch date of 1992, all models will still be covered. A quick call to B&W confirmed this to be the case. With our budget, you should also be able to find a later model in perfect condition. One aspect you do have to watch out for with these speakers is cabinet damage; build quality is generally excellent, but the cabinet isn't as solid as some. A complex internal structure makes it a very expensive part to replace. Like the OB1, this particular B&W can also find itself residing in studios, meaning that

public and will even offer a same-day repair service for those wanting to drop off equipment in person. Labour charges are fixed at £46.50 per speaker – however long the repair takes – and Quad will even send you the original packaging if needed. From a company that still services its product back to the 1950s, you can't get much better peace of mind than this. Our budget should find one of the better pairs available and it's worth looking for a set that has perhaps been recently refurbished by Quad itself. If you do go down the ELS-63 route, then for goodness sake buy a pair of matching stands. Although technically a floorstander, the difference something like a pair of Quadrapod, Stand and Deliver or Arcici stands makes is substantial. Larger rooms and bassy tastes may also require a subwoofer to match the low down oomph of the others here. Otherwise, for the Classical music connoisseur, this is probably the best bet out of the four.

Between these four, pretty much every musical taste is catered for. All the models are widely available and, better still, at a substantial discount from new. As a long term buy, you can't get better. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

“Speakers that retailed for £2,500 three years ago should be available for £1,500.”

and can take more stick than the average compact floorstander. The down side is that, because of their reputation, you need to pick carefully. A pair that has resided in a busy studio may not be such a great buy, unless sold for significantly less than our budget. For a smallish speaker, the PMC has an exceptionally deep bass. Many users have also found the OB1 to be a very easy speaker to live with. It tends not to be fussy about musical genre and is more tolerant of room acoustics than rivals. Against this, although deep, the bass could be tighter and it's not the most transparent of designs.

If you like your music with more of an edge then the Vito may be a better bet. Like the OB1, the Neat has greater bass depth than expected. In the Vito's case, this is due to the isobaric bass mounting system, famously used in the classic Linn Isobarik loudspeakers of the 1980s. Where the Neat design differs from the PMC, is in offering the transparency made famous by the Petite and other successors. After the OB1, some may find the treble a little sharp, but it's still a highly enjoyable loudspeaker.

care does need to be taken when buying second-hand. Typically of the 800 Series, the 803 S2 errs on the side of neutrality. It's perhaps not the most exciting listen but will turn its hand to a wide range of music.

If these floorstanders are all rather conventional for you, then you may prefer to take a listen to the Quad ELS-63. Quad's electrostatic panels require little introduction and are famed for their seamless transparency. With more column inches than any other speaker, the ELS-63 is great for tweaking. Be careful about buying a ready tweaked pair, though. Not all modifications have been done to the same standards and, if you're in any doubt, it's best to stick to a standard. Yet even when left as standard, these 1980s classics still not only sound special, but are also fully serviceable. Quad is happy to deal directly with the

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Left to Right: Neat Vito, B&W 803 S2 and PMC OB1

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SuperConductor-2 was the new flagship line for many years, and it still outperforms the competition. In a major leap forward, era three begins. The measurements prove the performance, but SC3 is simply magic. In my experience, Kapton as an insulator is leagues ahead of anything else. Can't live without it.

Aluminata

These employ a quad twist of flexible Alumiloy with the world's finest shielding. In audio systems of high resolution, typically with excellent loudspeakers, the high cost of Alumiloy products is immediately apparent and deeply satisfying in the long term.

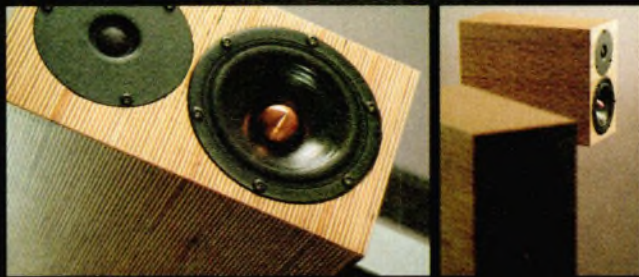
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EX DEMO AND SECOND-HAND ITEMS

	Was	Now
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Balanced S/H	3500	1799
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Single ended S/H	2999	1499
Denon Beat400 JS x demo	2000	1499
dCS Versa 1a Scala Transport/Upsampler x-demo	9500	4999
dCS Elgar Plus Firmware EE1394 DAC x-demo	9500	4999
dCS PHS SACD/CD/ESD Player x-demo	1999	1499
Krell SACD Standard x-demo	1998	2995
Krell KPS20V1 CD Preamp S/H	1999	1799
Musical Fidelity Nu Vista CR 3D Player S/H	2999	1799
Orphanus Iba One DAC with anagram x-demo	3150	1799
Orphanus Iba Zero CD player x-demo	650	2999
Primare V10 CD/DVD Player x-demo	795	499
Sugden masterclass CD x-demo	2700	1999
Sony CDP X940 SACD Player S/H	549	249
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1299
Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Decent/Balanced S/H	2900	695
Wadia 302 Black x-demo	4000	2999
DIGITAL		
Crown Jewel Ltd Edition MC Cartridge 100hrs	2650	1499
Clearaudio Emotion Turntable Package X-demo	650	499
Dynarector DV17G2 MMII S/H	599	299
Heed Audio D811 T TT PSU New B Bused	215	179
Kuzma Sba 10/15 Turntable New/B Bused	N/A	1399
Lehrmann Audio Black Cube SE S/H	499	285
Mc Cormack Micro Drive Phono Stage S/H	650	199
Reqa P2 /Bias Turntable S/H	270	179
Roksan Kerens Alphasound Xenon XPSII S/H	N/A	549
Trichord One MM DAC S/H	499	299
ANALOGUE		
Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamp/ifier x-demo	625	399
Audio research L51B Hybrid Preamp/ifier S/H	1798	449
Audi research L51B Remote/Balanced S/H	2999	1699
Conrad Johnson PV10A Valve Preamp/ifier x-demo	499	299
Conrad Johnson PV14L Remote controlled valve x-demo	2399	1750
Conrad Johnson Premier 18C3 x-demo	1999	1999
Convergent Audio CAT SL1 Signature Black S/H	6000	2299
Denon T200 Preamp/ifier S/H	1100	799
Krell KRC HR preamp/ifier S/H	2299	2499
Orphanus Two Preamp/ifier x-demo	1200	1999
Roksan L1 Preamp (resques PSII) S/H	2799	995
Roksan L1.5 Preamp/ifier (resques PSII) S/H	2699	1299
Sugden masterclass Preamp/ifier x-demo	5300	1999
Spectral DMC 30s Reference Preamp/ifier x-demo	7600	1999
Spectral DMC30s Reference Preamp/ifier S/H	6995	3499
PREAMPS		
Audio Analogue Donizetti Mono Power Amplifiers X-demo	1050	599
Audio Research C160 Re Built S/H	864	1299
Audio Research VM220 Valve mono Amplifiers x-demo	9000	7499
Audi research VT100000 Valve Power Amplifier S/H	6400	3999
Bel Canto EVO 200 2 Class T stereo power S/H	499	299
Bel canto EVO2 GenII x-demo	2899	1899
Conrad Johnson M180 SE Valve Amplifier S/H	1500	1099
Conrad Johnson Premier 150SA x-demo	8000	5999
Conrad J PSX Amplifier PSU S/H	N/A	499
Denon Beat 340 x-demo	1800	529
Denon Beat 350 mono x-demo	5200	3999
Denon Beat300s x-demo	1800	699
ECS EA1 latent spec upgrade mono S/H	5000	2999
Electrocompaniet AW200 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	4999	2999
Graaf GM20 OTL Mono Valve Amplifiers S/H	7000	2999
Orphanus Three power amplifier x-demo	2995	1399
Palson Model One Version II x-demo	1999	899
Roksan S1.5 stereo power amplifier silver S/H	1495	599
Roksan DS1.5 PSU Silver S/H	695	299
Roksan DS4 PSU Black S/H	495	179
Spectral DMA100s Amplifier x-demo	4800	2250
Spectral DMA250s Amplifier S/H	8500	4999
Sugden masterclass mono x-demo	6600	4999
AMPLIFIERS		
ATC SCA17 Cherry S/H	1000	649
Audio Physic Para Resonator Cherry x-demo	549	399
Audio Physic Spark 2 maple X-demo	1499	1199
JM Lab Micro Utopia Classic x-demo	4700	3750
JM Lab Chronos 714a Style x-demo	1700	1499
JM Lab Electra 927 Be Anniversary last pair! New	2800	2400
JM Lab S1b XL v3 Grey S/H	499	499
Marlitt Logan Amp 1 Oak BNB	1189	2400
Moat Ultimatum M7 S/H	6999	3500
Pen Audio Rebel 2 x-demo	995	699
Pen Audio Charm Active Subwoofer x-demo	1995	999
ProAc Resonator 2.5 Subwoofer S/H	1200	1299
ProAc Tablette Reference 8 Signatures YEW S/H	925	749
Revel F50 Performance In Syncamp S/H	6500	3799
Sonus Usher Concertina Home Piano lacquer S/H	300	399
Sonus Faber Leather Strands, fixed height, x-demo	310	199
Speaker 53 Cherry S/H	599	379
LOUDSPEAKERS		
Atacama 50cm Sand filled stands S/H	179	89
Audio Note 2x5ft bi wired AM 5th Speaker cable S/H	299	299
Audio Note 1m ANNX AES/EBU balanced Digital S/H	165	99
BCD Engineering 1000 Toler 4 Use S/H	1850	899
Cogan Hall Intermezza EMD 0.75m RCA S/H	N/A	99
Cardas Elys 1.5m RCA RCA S/H	550	299
Cardas Golden Cross 1.5m balanced S/H	940	499
Cardas Golden Cross 1.5m Balanced S/H	940	499
Cardas Golden Cross 2.5m bi wired speaker cable S/H	700	799
Madrigal MDX1 1m AES/EBU 110ghm Digital Cable new/bcd	420	249
Nordost Shine 2m mains cable x-demo	1200	125
Nordost Vishnu 2m mains cable x-demo	449	299
Nordost Vishnu 2m mains cable S/H	449	299
Nordost Vishnu 1m RCA RCA Interconnect S/H	2199	995
Siltech LS18B Classic 2x3m Silver B Gold Speaker cable BNB	1950	2995
Siltech Signatures GS 2.5m AES/EBU balanced Digital cable S/H	420	179
Siltech SPX20 1m IEC Shuko Mains cable x-demo	199	95
Sound Organization Resonator Back with CD insert S/H	N/A	40
Spectral M330 2m RCA BNB	580	349
Spectral M1-150 20ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo	1400	799
Spectral M120 1m RCA RCA S/H	1500	799
Spectral 2 Chord III 2m mains cable x-demo	999	499
Spectral ACT 2 Cord 2m mains cable S/H	999	499
Transparent Music Link Ultra 1m RCA RCA S/H	998	499
Transparent Music Link Ultra 2m RCA RCA S/H	1774	574
Transparent Music Wave Plus 2x 7.62m x-demo	420	179
Woodoo Arttek platform small size S/H	200	99
Western Electric 300s Valves (New) NEW	650	499
TUNERS		
Denon Beat 800 AM/FM Tuner x-demo	850	599
Magnus Dynalab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	1999	1499
hitek Substation special version S/H	1600	795
hitek Duetta S/H	1495	899
PS Audio Ultimate Outlet S/H	128	169
Sugden R21 AM/FM Tuner x-demo	875	599

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digital

Wadia B61b in silver, immaculate condition, 1 owner, just over a year old (£6950)	£4495
Micromega Aria, black, ex HiFiChoice review model (£2150)	£1595
Roksan Caspian MKII CD, boxed, immac cond, manual, remote (£1000)	£349
Cyrus CD8x, black, 2yrs old, superb condition (£1000)	£649
Primare D30.2 CD Player, black, 1 yr old, boxed, excellent cond (£1500)	£749
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, only a few months old (£4000)	£2995
Musical Fidelity kW SACD player, boxed, factory sealed box (£4000)	£1995
AVI Lab Series CD, current spec, boxed, unmarked condition (£1499)	£1195
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive, ex-dem, immaculate cond (£4000)	£3295
Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, black/silver (£2950)	£2395
Marantz SA-1151 SACD Player, silver, immac cond, boxed (£2000)	£1295
Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, latest spec 24/192 model (£1250)	£795

amplifiers

Qinpu A1.0x, ex What HiFi review model, boxed in immac cond (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295)	£895
Musical Fidelity A308 pre-amp, immaculate, boxed, manual (£1999)	£995
Musical Fidelity A5 Int, 250wpc, 6 months old, boxed, as new (£1499)	£995
Musical Fidelity A5 Power Amp, 6 months old, boxed, immac (£1499)	£995
AudioNet Amp 1 Power Amp, silver/blue display, boxed, mint (£3150)	£2195
Bryston B-100 SST Int amp, unmarked condition, boxed (£2750)	£1995
Roksan Caspian MK2 integrated, boxed with manual and remote.	£595
Roksan Caspian power amp MK2, boxed, Be quick - a steal at the price!	£495
Chord CPA2800 pre-amp+phono stage, £2800 new, in black, immac	£1395
Gamut D200 Power Amp, silver, immac condition, boxed (£3200)	£1695
Croft Epoch Pre Amp, ex-dem, boxed, immac cond (£1500)	£995
Bel Canto Evo 2i Integrated, boxed, mint cond (£2800)	£1695
Musical Fidelity KW500 Int, 1yr old, boxed, mint (£4000)	£2795
Eastern Electric M520 Int, What Hi-Fi 5 star review, 4 mnths old (£1539)	£1095
McIntosh MA2275 Integrated, mint condition, less than a year old	£3995
Eastern Electric Minimax Pre, ex-dem, mint condition, boxed (£769)	£649
Marantz PM15S1 integrated, 1 owner, boxed, superb condition (£1099)	£795
AudioNet Pre 1 G2, silver/blue display, mint (£2100)	£1495
Audionet Sam V2 Integrated, silver, boxed, exc cond (£2400)	£1195
ATC SCA2 pre amp, boxed, fully serviced by ATC only 7mnths ago (£3900)	£1295
Bow Walrus Power Amp, boxed, exc cond, 150wpc (£3995)	£1995
Bow Warlock Pre, boxed, exc cond, fully balanced, r/c (£3495)	£1695

loudspeakers

Hyperion 938, gloss black finish, immac cond, very low hours (£3750)	£2995
Quad 989, Vintage finish, only 6 months old, boxed, mint cond (£5000)	£3795
Acoustic Energy 1 MkIII, B stock, slight mark to front right corner (£1995)	£1495
B&W CM4 speakers, in Rosenut, 5 years old, boxed	£449
Mission Elegante E82, 1yr old, boxed in superb condition (£1300)	£749
PMC FB1+, cherry, boxed, immac cond, few mnths old! (£1695)	£1295
PMC FB1, upgraded to + spec in 2005, oak finish, boxed (£1695)	£895
Monitor Audio GR20, 2 yrs old, black, boxed, exc cond (£1500)	£795
Monitor Audio GR60 (4 mnths old) immac, cherry (£2395).	£1595
PMC IB2 in cherry, immac cond, boxes, 2 yrs old, awesome (£6995)	£4395
Innersound Isis Hybrid Electrostatics, exce cond, incredible £2300	£1245
PMC OB1, in oak, boxed as new, 6 mnths old, simply stunning! (£2700)	£1995
PMC OB1, cherry, 2.5 years old, immac cond (£2700)	£1495
Mirage OM7 Omnipolar in black gloss, boxed, good cond (£2000)	£695
JAS Audio Orsa, ex HiFi Plus review model, poplar tumor (£1399)	£1149
JAS Audio Supertweeters, Review pair, sound awesome!! (£649)	£595
Audio Physic Tempo 4, cherry, exd model, immaculate condition. (£2199)	£1699
Audio Physic Virga III, cherry, 6mnths old, boxed, as new (£3999)	£2495

analogue

Trichord Diablo phono stage, exc cond, only 9mnths old, boxed (£750)	£495
Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, exc cond (£2100)	£1495
Tom Evans Groove Plus phono stage, boxed, mint cond (£3600)	£2395
Eastern Electric Minimax Phonostage, ex-d, mint, boxed (£1099)	£895
VPI Scout inc JMW 9 tonearm, immac cond, boxed, very little usage (£1300)	£1195

misc

Isotek 2K Qube2, boxed, in silver, sensational mains conditioning unit. (£1595)	£595
AudioNet EPS power supply, silver/blue display, boxed, mint (£1400)	£995
Isotek GII Minisub, silver front, current spec, immac cond (£545)	£395
Cyrus PSX-R, black, 2 yrs old, immac cond, boxed, superb (£400)	£249
Townshend Supertweeters, titanium finish, boxed as new, exd (£800)	£649
Isotek Titan mains conditioner, few months old, boxed (£1500)	£1095

List is updated daily on our web site.

DEFINITIVE AUDIO

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Clearaudio Goldfinger cartridge	£4000	£5640
Tron Syren pre-amp with line/et phono - 2 months old - boxed - barely used	£4500	£7000
Mactone MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - as new, 2 mths old	£3000	£6500
Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista M3 CD player (2001) - good condition - boxed	£1000	£3000
Mactone XX330 line pre-amp - as new, 2 months old	£3000	£8000
Esoteric X01 CD player - perfect - boxed, 12 mths old	£6000	£9600
Voyd Reference turntable. Beautiful satin Rosewood plinth.	£7000	£25000
McIntosh Yr-2000 Anniversary power-amp. 6550 push-pull monster	£4000	£13500
Canary 303 monos, PP 22 watts 300B with Living Voice upgrade	£4800	£1600
AudioNote UK wired Helios Cyalene tonearm	£900	£3000
Audio Note UK IO-Limited field coil cartridge with PSU. Light use only	£2500	£10000
Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 mths old	£900	£1600
Gotham Type 39 monos (Western Electric version of Canary CA309)	£6000	£13000
Audio Innovations P2 phono stage - standard - collectible classic	£1000	
Pathos 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless!	£1500	£3500
Canary 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 mths old - boxed	£3500	£6500
Audion Golden Night 300B monos - very good condition	£1250	£4500
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - very little use	£3250	£5000
Audio Note Japan (KONDO) ANS6 cartridge transformer- MC classic	£1200	
Revolver 33 loudspeakers - grey/maple - new	£250	£600
Sugden Bijou mm/mc phono stage - 100 ohms	£450	£650
Sonus Faber Electa Amator - Walnut - stand mount - lovely condition	£1750	£3500
Art Audio PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo	£2500	£4500
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - Maple	£3500	£7000
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use	£1250	£2500
Tube Technology Unisig Signature integrated - 30 hours use	£1250	£2500
Roksan Kandy integrated amp, boxed, very tidy	£190	
Rogue Audio Metis pre, Atlas power, Ex dem - less than 20 hours use	£1000	£2250
Canary 608LV integrated amp, 25 watts with Living Voice upgrade	£950	£3000
Canary 301 300B stereo push-pull power-amp	£3400	£5400
Audio Innovations Series 1000 monos - silver edition - fully serviced	£900	£2500
Kimber Select interconnect 5m - boxed	£200	
Kimber Select interconnect KS1011 - 1m - boxed	£300	
Sugden A21 SE CD player - very tidy	£750	£1400
Unison Research Smart 300B class A power amp - 1 year old	£2250	£4500
Avid Acutus - one lady driver - fine looking example - excellent condition	£3000	£6000
Alola pre-amp - beautifully made - very little use - boxed	£900	£2800
Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood - with stands	£850	£2000
Sugden Masterclass integrated amplifier inc' phono - marvellous - beefy	£1700	£3300
Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect -1m set - boxed	£400	£1000
Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect - 2m set - boxed	£700	£1800
Nordost Blue Heaven speaker cable - 4m - revision 2 - boxed	£500	
Croft Epoch pre-amplifier with mm phono	£1250	£2000
Croft Chaisma pre-amplifier as above & series regulated valve p/supply	£2000	£3000
Living Voice loudspeakers - various ex-dem, part-ex, seconds, please call		
Primare D30.2 CD player	£650	
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck, RB300, Reson Recc & LV Mat	£1000	£1633
Tom Evans Groove - 4 years old	£250	£450
Audio Innovations series 200 pre-amp - excellent phono stage	£180	
Art Audio VP1 - pre-amp - original with phono - tired	£180	£1500
Townshend Audio Seismik Sink - 3DHD (100 kilos) 48x48	£300	

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Speakers:

Origin Live OL-2 speakers £250
Kef Concord speakers £150
Elac CL330 Jet speakers with stands £995
Revel Salon black gloss aluminium side panels (mint) £9995
Living Voice OBX R2 Speakers £2,800
Dynaudio Audience 7 speakers & stands £395
Hales Transcendence 5 Loudspeakers £2900
TDL RTL3 speakers £95
Tannoy Westminster Royal HE speakers £9995

Pre-amps:

Conrad Johnson MC 10 FET pre-amp £395
Naim Nac 92 with Nap 90/3 amp £595
Proceed PAV pre-amp £995
Rotel RC-995 pre-amp £295
Quad 44 pre-amp (late model) £150
Mark Levinson 26S balanced pre-amp £2500

Amplifiers:

Mark Levinson 431 amp (ex demo) £3850
Audionote Neiro mono-blocks £5495
Perreux 200ip int. amp £1095
Mark Levinson ML383 integrated amp £2995
Classe CA201 amp £1995
Arcam Alpha BP power amp £195
Kora Triode 100SB £3500
Ayre AX-7 Integrated Amp £1,495
Mark Levinson 432 Power Amp £4995
Audio Analogue Puccini int. amp £295
Mark Levinson 20.5 Reference Monoblocks £4500

CD Players, Transports and DACs:

Sonic Frontiers Transport 3 (5K new) only £1995
Denon DCD 590 CD player £60
Sony CDP M41 CD player £60
Pioneer PD-S502 CD player £95
Micromega Drive 3/DAC1 £495
Pioneer PD-S703 cd player £95
Krell Studio DAC Balanced-AT&T £495

Miscellaneous:

Hitachi FT5500 Mk11 tuner £125
Sony ST-SE570 tuner £60
Accuphase DS 1200V power supply £3495
Technics ST-GT550 tuner £65
Winds stylus gauge £425
Transparent Musicwave-plus speaker cable 10ft, pair £425
Quad FM4 tuner (late model) £195
AVI tuner £675
Audience 4 foot power chords (£338.80) only £195 each

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer £2495
My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new) £2750
Project 9c S carbon fibre silver wired arm £375
Trichord Delphini with power supply £595
Kingshaw Perception phono stage with power supply £350
Mark Levinson 25S Phono Stage with power supply £1995

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villetti speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.



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- Micromega Drive 2 excellent order 749
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- Musical Fidelity X04K REDUCED 229
- Musical Fidelity XDACv3 as new boxed 379
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- NAIM CD5, as new boxed REDUCED 679
- NAIM CD3, ex boxed with remote 349
- NAIM CDS1, ex with power supply, remote etc 1199
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- TEAC DV200 new, the best at its price 149
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- Arcam Alpha FMJ C30 Preamp ex boxed REDUCED 629
- Arcam AVR200, ex boxed REDUCED 379
- Arcam A85, ex boxed REDUCED 429
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- Arcam P35, ex silver 599
- Audio Innovations, 200/500 pre and power, ex, boxed 599
- Audiobus 800XP, New version in silver 399
- Audiobus 8000A, integrated in black REDUCED 229
- Audiobus 8000A in grey 149
- Audio Research LS7 Preamp 699
- Audio Research D130 Power, ex 999
- Audio Research D70 Power, ex REDUCED 899
- Audio Research SP12 Pre, ex REDUCED 599
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- Carm Mea Monoblocks, ex in silver 749
- Carm Ion T2 Monoblocks, mint in black NOW 3 FOR 2!!! 499
- Carm Ezo Nanda pre and K1 monos new £4000, BARGAIN 1749
- Conrad Johnson Sonographie SA250 REDUCED 548
- Conrad Johnson PV12/Premier 11a, as new 2249
- Cyrus 7 integrated, nr mint boxed REDUCED 399
- Cyrus 5 Integrated, ex boxed REDUCED 249
- EAR 859 Integrated, ex boxed 749
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FOR SALE

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE109

black, £150. Arcam Alpha 7 CD, £75. Arcam Alpha 9 amp, £225. Soundstyle XS310 black laquer, £150. Yamaha DSPA1 black, £225. Meridian 605 24, £600. Celestion A2 cherry (two pairs) and Celestion A4C X1 and 46 sub, offers. 07957 330708 or email cueball@1981@hotmail.com (Surrey).

ARC CD3MKI £2,700.

Transparent Musiclink 1.5m RCA interconnects with network boxes, £375. Audiosource distribution block with AC cable, £160. Monsterlink digital chord, optical, 1m, £50. 07810 434589 (Glasgow).

ATC ACTIVE 20 speakers, superb standmounts in aluminium and black, as new condition with boxes, includes free metallic silver Atacama R724 supports with lead filling, £2,200. 07952 535740 (E.Sussex).

ATC SCA 2 preamplifier. New in February 2006 and as new condition. Balance of six-year warranty, (£3,929) £1,950. Ian 07941 424322 or 01789 261585 or email ian.brunt@zen.co.uk (Warwickshire).

AUDIOLAB power amplifiers, late F serial numbers. PX and SX available, in unmarked working order with boxes and instructions, £360 and £250 respectively. Or, deal for both. Email p.deeprise@deeprise.co.uk 01483 82319 (Guildford).

AUDIOQUEST EMERALD 1m, (£260) £90. QED Silver Quenex 1m, (£95) £45. Audio Conquerer Silver 2m power cable, (£90) £40. 01278 782622 (Bridgwater).

AUDIOLAB 8000Q preamp plus remote. Boxed, excellent,

£350. Luxman direct drive turntable PD 131 plinth cover, SME MkIII arm, interchangeable arms, excellent, £300. Mr Kelsall 01782 256087 (Stoke on trent).

B&W DM601S3 speakers, unmarked as new condition in sorrento. Boxed etc, £180. Apollo Olympus 50cm stands, mint work very well with B&Ws, £35. May deliver. Readvertised due to time waster. Chris 01766 781211 (Harlech).

B&W 805V and Partington stands, mint, £400. Sony CDP-X3000ES. Tri-digital filter, champagne gold, £200. Matching tuner ST-S3000ES. Hardly used, £150. Peter 01227 794817 (Kent).

B&W DM601S standmount speakers with matching stands, one year old, vgc £130. 01909 489684 (Notts).

CAYIN SCD-T50 valve SACD player, new, sounds better than anything under £3,000. Multi award winner in Europe. (2,600 euro), £850ono. Tim 07782 137868 (London).

COLLECTORS ITEMS Trio KD2055 concrete base table with AKG P7e and Goldring G800 cartridges. Not used for five years, £45. Celef Monitor/Mordaunt Short speakers, teak, as converted by Blue Sutcliffe of Speaker Selection, Walthamstow. Malcolm 01484 430960 (Huddersfield).

CYRUS 8VS amplifier, silver, award winner, mint condition, hardly used, boxed, fantastic sound and power, £550. 07739 822360 (London).

CYRUS DVD7 mint condition, silver, with Russ Andrews Oak Cone Feet). Excellent sound and picture and fantastic with CD

playback. Can demo, £350. 01234 306930 (Bedford).

DENON DM31 CD receiver. Complete with box, packaging, manual and remote. Mint condition and perfect working order, (£230) £150. Lee 01384 412234 (Dudley).

DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 1.8 MkII speakers (£1,900) cherry. 250 watts power handling. Immaculate and boxed. Bargain at £750 ovno. 0161 7750478 or 07957 461479 (Manchester).

EPOS M15.2 floorstanding speakers including plinths, light cherry, mint condition, (£779) £375. Partington Super Dreadnought speaker stands including toppers, graphite, mint, (£160) £100. Philip 020 8923 9757 (London).

GENESIS 6.1E maple Cebuano rosewood. Approx 50 hours use. Cancelled customer order, £3,100. Genesis G928 servo sub, same story, figured maple, virtually new, £1,250. All items boxed. 020 8657 0680 (Croydon).

LINN KARIK CD player, Numerik D/A, Kairn preamp, LK100 power amps (x4), Keltik Speakers. All in mint condition, call for more info, £4,000ono. 07759 432451 (Merseyside) ▶

WANTED

ARCAM P25 power amp, in mint condition. Please email Phil at pggrimes@gotadsl.co.uk (Birmingham).

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

B&W NAUTILUS SCM1 wallmounted rear speakers. 01782 256087 (Stoke on Trent).

CLEARER AUDIO Copper Line or Silver Line mains cables. Balanced XLR cables 2.5m approx, Nordost Red Dawn, Black Rhodium Polar. Chris 01766 781211 (N.Wales).

JECKLIN FLOAT headphones, prefer Float Two, but any Jecklin or Ergo considered. John 07855 121587 or email john.boys444@ntlworld.co.uk (W Yorks).

KRELL KAV300I and Martin Logan Aeriis. May consider swop. 020 7253 4469 (London).

MISSION 773E floorstanders in cherry and mint. LPT spares also wanted. 01323 487640 (Sussex).

NYTECH power amp CPA602. Please call 01540 651453 (Scotland).

SONY XA9000ES SACD player wanted must be black finish and immaculate cash is waiting. 01494 445005 (High Wycombe).

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

█ **LINN KLIMAX 500** solo power amps, good condition, boxes, £7,500. Barrie 01323 487781 (Sussex).

JAMO CONCERT 11

loudspeakers. Maple, five years old, excellent condition. Cost when new £2,300, £600. With boxes, 01279 718072 (Herts/Essex).

KIMBER PBJ interconnect 0.5m, (£90) £35, boxed and mint. Atlas Hyper 2.0 speaker cable 3m pair, (£148) £50 factory terminated with Atlas ailoc bananas. Buy both for £75. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).

LINN AKTIV SYSTEM; 2xLK100, 1x LK140 treble, 1x Kairn Pro preamp. Aktiv system or can be removed, perfect condition. Can demo, £1,600 John. 01279 833042 (Bishops Stortford).

LS3/ 5A ORIGINAL BBC

Chartwell speakers on stands, offers. KEF Concerto speakers, £80. Marantz CD63 MkII K1, £175. Kenwood KX-5010 cassette recorder, £50. Denon TU660L AM/FM tuner, £55. 01865 882507 (Oxon).

LUXMAN D322 CD player with variable output, boxed, in as new condition with manual and remote, £150ono. John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks).

MARANTZ CD 63MKII KI SIG CD player, excellent condition.

Boxed with instructions and remote. Late 1999 unit, £180 (cash please), can deliver within easy distance of M1 junc.1-28. 0115 9268177 (Notts).

MERIDIAN 200 CD and 203 D to A, pair of Linn Kaber 500 speakers powered by Linn LK1 preamp and Dirak power supply. Linn LK280 power amp, spark power supply, tri-wired, all in unmarked condition in original boxes. Needs to go, best sensible offer secures 01242 577777 or 07831 762500 (Cheltenham).

MICROMEGA STAGE 6 CD, Cyrus 3 amp, Cyrus power amp, KAR Volante Evolution floorstanding speakers, Denon DRM 30 HX Cassette Deck, plus interconnects/cables (£400), equipment stand (£350), total value around £3,500. Excellent sound and condition, complete system, £950ono. 01785 816328 (Staffordshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1000 classic British pre/main amp. 50 wpc of pure Class A power. Immaculate condition, beautiful deep gloss black casework. £750. Peter, 01227 794817 (Kent).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-A2 amplifier, £250. Musical Fidelity X-Ray CD player, £400. 01752 291703 (Plymouth).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1001 Class A integrated amplifier, 200

watts, mint condition, with box, manual, etc, superb, (£2,500) £800. Linn Classic one box CD system, dark green, as new condition, with remote, cables, etc £650. Ruark Epilogue II speakers, mint, boxed £220. Mick 01252 870861 (North Hampshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-10 V3 buffer stage, as new, boxed, (£300) £175. Audusa interconnects IS300 signature, 1m pair, £80. 01491 613760 (Oxfordshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA preamp and 300 power amp. Mint condition, boxed with manuals, £2,200. Would deliver reasonable distance 01423 770309 (Harrogate).

NAIM 32.5 preamp upgraded with 72 boards, boxed, vgc. Russ Andrews power supply (£900 for parts supplied by RA), £450 for both. 08455 843450 (work) or 01404 46337 (home) (Devon).

NAIM CDI CD player, £300. Naim NAC 72 preamp, £300. 140 amp, £300. NAT03 tuner, £200. SBL speakers, £300. Russ Andrews powerblock, £50. Bargains, do call. 07743 630656 (Swansea).

NAIM 150X purchased new October 2004. Mint, boxed, remote, lead. Can demo, £425. 01273 385209 (Brighton).

NAIM NAC82 preamp (1999) with latest style NAPsc, remote, manual, leads, box. Excellent condition. Demonstration preferred. £1,050ono 07973 785360 (Sussex).

NORDOST SOLARWIND interconnects 2x0.6m, mint

condition, boxed, £50 each. A bargain! 01926 402824 (Warwick).

PIONEER SA420 amp (£30), TX520L tuner (£25), CT200 cassette (£20), CS353 speakers (£20) or £75 the lot. Arcam Alpha CD, good condition, £70. Sound Organisation five shelf rack (v.good) £60. Adam 07976 113 219 (Essex).

REVEL PERFORMA F50, high-end floorstanding loudspeakers in beautiful dark cherry veneer. Absolutely mint condition, dearly loved and with very little use. Fully boxed. (£6,500) £2,950 07881 821023 (Essex).

ROKSAN TABRIZ tonearm, excellent condition, fitted to Pink Triangle turntable needing new motor £100, no offers. Soundstyle five-tier rack, finished in lovely silver £60. 01323 487640 (Sussex).

RUSS ANDREWS Powerblock with Megaclamp, eight sockets, one year old, perfect condition, £165ono. Audioquest Indigo+ speaker cable, 2x3mtr pairs, fitted with 4mm QED Aircloc banana plugs. Excellent condition, £60ono. Ray 01900 606650 (Workington).

SONY XA9000ES multichannel SACD player, (£2,400) £995 mint condition 020 8951 3178 (Middx).

STAX CLASSIC system II SRS 3030 earspeakers with SRM-313 energiser. Sounds superb, excellent condition, £375. 01656 733354 (S.Wales).

TEAC P30 transport XLR RCA, ST outputs, disc clamp mechanism, (£2,500) £995ono. TAG McLaren DAC20, (£1,250) £495ono. 07811 613140 or 0117 9629725 (Bristol).

WHARFEDALE PACIFIC EVO 30 loudspeakers in winter maple, still in boxes, £500. Sennheiser HD590 headphones in box, £150. 01493 665761 (Norfolk)

WILSON AUDIO 5.1 (WATT/Puppy) loudspeakers. Immaculate gloss black finish, manual and crates. £6,100 ovno. 01926 653421 (Warwickshire).

YAMAHA NS1000 monitor speakers, vgc £650ono. 01799 502038 (Essex)



Above: Marantz CD 63MKII KI Signature CD player

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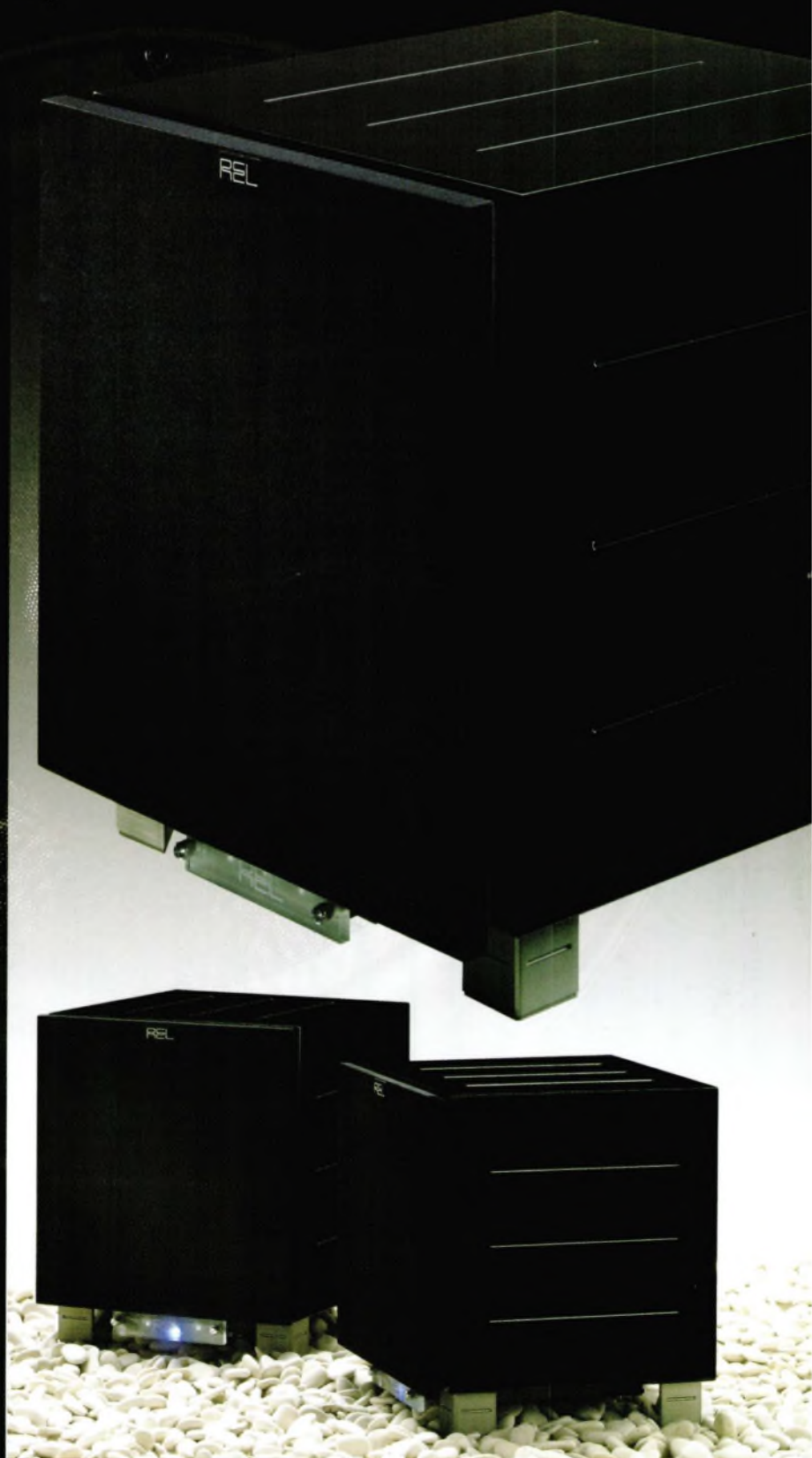
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