

HI-FI CHOICE

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Cambridge 840 CD player and amp worth £1,500!
See page 28



IN-DEPTH TESTS INSIDE!



AVI Spellbinding desktop speakers for audiophile ears



Grado Are these the best headphones in the world?



Primare New pre/power amp is a musical delight



EXCLUSIVE TEST

REVEALED! Why we love Musical Fidelity's new X-Series

RATED!

DECEMBER 2006 £3.95 14



9 770955 111083

Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

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



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>> SPEAKERS

- FEATURING**
- > B&W CM7
 - > ALR Jordan Note 3
 - > Focal Chorus 816 V
 - > Nbien NX-6T
 - > Triangle Antal Esw
 - > Quadral Rondo

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020 7487 3455

The Audio Room
Hull
01482 891375

Infidelity
Kingston on Thames
020 8943 3530

Sound Academy
Bloxwich
01922 493499

Cloney Audio
Dublin
+353 1283 4887

Leicester Hi-Fi Studios
Leicester
0116 253 9753

Sound Gallery
High Wycombe
01494 531682

Glasgow Audio
Glasgow
0141 332 4707

Martins Hi-Fi
Norwich
01603 627010

Grahams Hi-Fi
Islington
020 7226 5500

Phase 3 Hi-Fi
Worthing
01903 249577

CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE DECEMBER 2006 ISSUE 288

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



As a chap who admires the purity of 'old school' hi-fi, it's easy to fall into a grump about the state of audio today. In a world where bitrates and iThings hog the limelight and tiny, shiny speakers are paraded as the mutts nuts, those of us who care about music – the way it was supposed to be heard – might wish that a winter of hibernation were a realistic option. At least until the inevitable Christmas gadget-fest has removed its cold, clammy hands from our throats – and it's shrill, tinny sound from our ears...

But hang on. Things aren't as bad as they seem. Proper hi-fi has always been something of a niche pursuit – a specialist purchase for those who place real importance on its musical values – as opposed to a mass-market commodity. If it seems that things are on an unstoppable downward curve, take heart: the hi-fi industry is still delivering the goods for people who care, as evidenced by the standard of new components that *Hi-Fi Choice* unearths in each and every issue (the one you now hold in your hands being a perfect example).

Our last edition carried *The Hi-Fi Awards 2006*, the definitive annual tribute to the best in home audio. By way of congratulations, we invited all the winners to a special party held in their honour – to show our appreciation for the pleasure their products give us, day in, day out. Make no mistake: these are challenging times for the hi-fi industry. But in terms of product quality, we've never had it better.

So enjoy, until next time.

Tim Bowers

Tim Bowers 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*

Wooden it be nice?

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

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

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

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



PAUL MESSENGER
A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



DAN GEORGE
Dan is a hi-fi nut whose dream came true when he became *HFC*'s reviews editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only interesting products make it into *HFC*.



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



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.

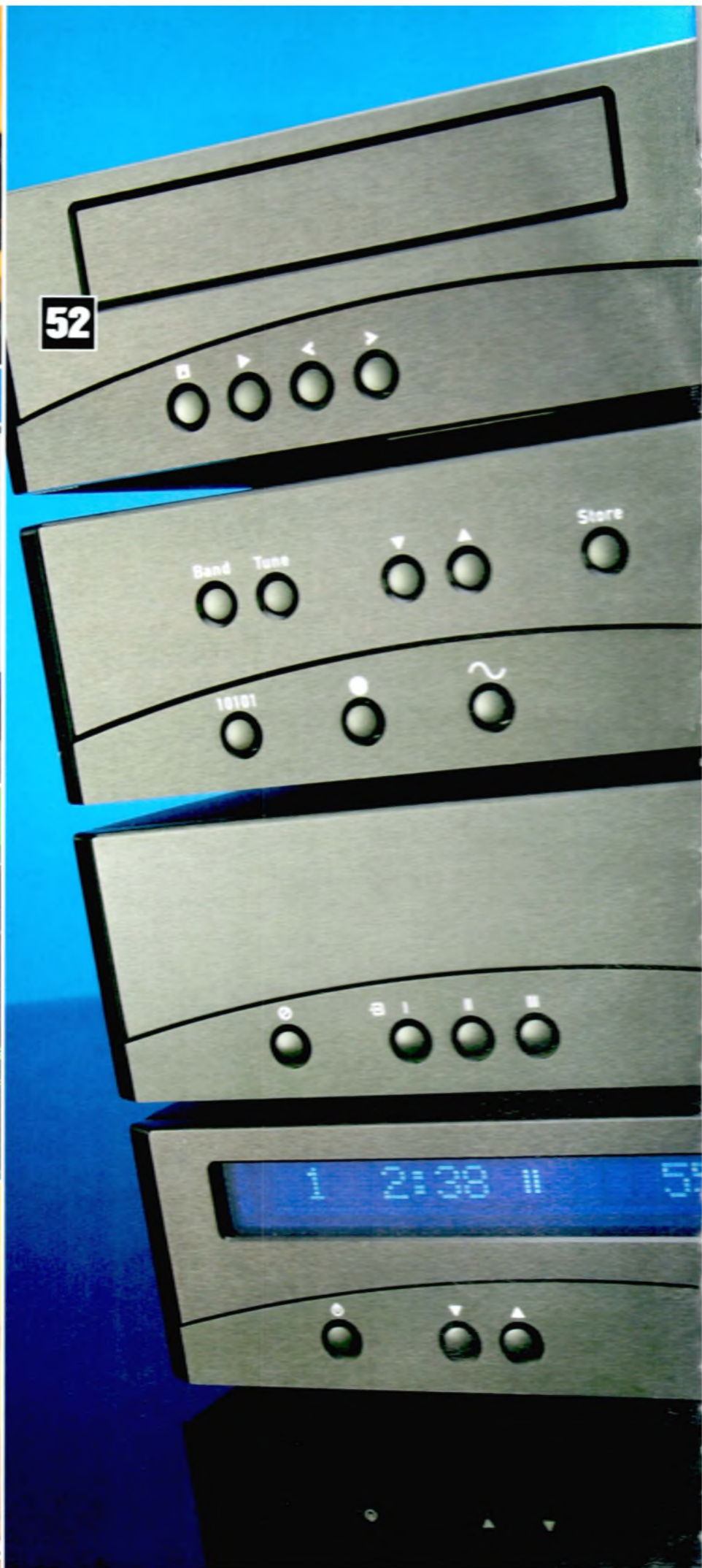


JASON KENNEDY
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



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 punist 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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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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State of the Art Technology- Musical Masterpieces!

"...Try some Crystal Cables and find out for yourself that small rules..."

Vade Forrester, SoundStage!.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. Find 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..."

Flens van Es, Hifi.nl, May 2006

"...totally insensitive to any kind of distortion..."

Dalibor Beric, Stereoplay, November 2005

2006 **the absolute sound**
EDITORS' CHOICE
AWARDS

Available Toon	10.0
Price/Value	9.8
Sound	10.0
Build	10.0
Features	10.0
Value	9.8
Quality	10.0
Materials	10.0
Time	75.4

Persepolis musica, multimedia
cristallo Dimension 88

Distributor: Audioland
011 5096-4888
Praça, Milano
Crystal Cable Reference 1 meter
DIN4 au N4R USA 2.280
Crystal Cable Reference Carca
Resistor 1.4 meters USB 4.380



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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



TD510 March 2008



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The Eclipse TD510 & 508II speaker systems have professional studio single driver technology to give you a faster, clearer and tighter wave of sound. So it reaches your ear in near perfect time, making your living space a better place for music.

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TD510 / TD508II

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LEEMA ACOUSTICS ANTILA CD PLAYER



Every once in a while, along comes a product that really grabs our attention. This time, it's the turn of the Leema Acoustics Antila CD player, the latest product from the brand's ex-BBC team. What separates it from the chaff is the unique MD2 Active Differential Multi-DAC technology, which places *twenty* 24-bit/96kHz DACs in the signal path, in a bid to eliminate jitter. Ten of these DACs are used to produce a positive phase signal and another ten produce a

negative signal. These signals combine to provide a fully balanced signal entirely within the digital domain.

Leema suggests the technique offers reduced noise and distortion, delivering "breathtaking" realism. The player forms part of a new range from Leema, to compliment its existing speaker line up. See what 20 DACs can do for your CD collection in *HFC* soon!

To find out more, see our exclusive review in the February 2007 issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Leema Acoustics Antila
TYPE CD player
PRICE £2,498
KEY FEATURES Multi-DAC technology • Twenty 24-bit/96kHz D/A chips • Simple remote handset • LIPS (Leema Intelligent Protocol System) compliant
CONTACT ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com



Amplified Emotions.

DVD Player:
DVD-3930
DVD-2930



Discover the magic of realism. Impressive, unrivalled DVD performance. Completely up-to-date with outstanding Hollywood Quality Video (HQV) technology, which up to now was reserved for the DVD-A1XVA reference player. With the Silicon Optix Image Processor, HQV is capable of converting the standard resolution of DVDs closer to high resolution, with superb images – even up to the maximum 1080p HDTV quality. The CD/SACD and DVD audio playback is equally lifelike, omitting no detail. Details available at authorised dealerships and under www.denon.com

- HQV technology transforms DVDs into nearly HDTV quality
- REALTA Video Processor (DVD-3930), REON Video Processor (DVD-2930)
- Complete 10-bit Video Signal Processing, DENON Pixel Image Correction
- Keystone correction feature (DVD-3930), extensive video equaliser including Gamma Equaliser
- HDMI output up to 1080p and support of PC resolutions
- Sophisticated audio component for the best surround and CD playback
- DENON Link for optimal transfer of Digital Audio

Visit www.denon.co.uk or call 01234 741200.

DENON



LYNGDORF TDA 2200 DIGITAL INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Lyngdorf's second-generation, compact digital integrated is more than just a stereo amp. Fitted with the optional 'Room Perfect' equalization system, it's transformed into a "complete digital signal processing control centre" and needs just a CD transport and speakers to make sweet music, Scandinavian style.

Room Perfect technology offers optional comprehensive digital signal manipulation, giving control over room-induced resonances

with further equalisation and correction options. Put simply, this gives added flexibility in problem rooms.

The unit has full digital-to-analogue conversion capability and is described by Lyngdorf as probably the world's most versatile hi-fi product. With all this Nordic know-how, the TDA 2200 could prove to be a truly flexible friend, but how does it sound?

To find out more, see our exclusive review in the January 2007 issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Lyngdorf TDA 2200
TYPE Digital integrated amplifier
PRICE £3,600 (with Room Perfect system)
KEY FEATURES Digital amplification • Effectively 200 watts per channel into eight ohms • On-board D/A conversion • Room Perfect equalization technology • Optional A/D conversion module
CONTACT ☎ 0870 9100 100 🌐 www.lyngdorf.com

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



KRELL EVO-505

➤ Krell's new high-end Evolution CD/SACD player is now available in the UK, following its US debut in January at the CES 2006 show. Called the EVO-505, the player follows Krell's first-ever SACD player – the £4,000 entry-level SACD Standard – and is based on new EVO technology. It boasts matched 24-bit/192kHz DACs across all channels and separate power supplies for the drive mechanism, and analogue and digital circuits. A key feature of the new player is its DAC output – Krell claims its innovative signal manipulation techniques have eliminated a cause of distortion that plagues most CD players. Find out just how good it really is in our exclusive review next issue.

Price £8,777 **Due now** ☎ 020 8971 3909 • www.krell.com



DENON AVR-2307

➤ Denon has unveiled its 2007 range of entry-level multichannel receivers, with all models featuring automatic set-up, optional iPod integration and the new 'Ergo' remote control handset. Leading the range is the £600 AVR-2307, complete with HDMI switching, multiroom capability and 135 watts across each channel. It is able to convert video sources to HDMI and boasts the latest audio decoding with full 96kHz processing on board. It is joined by three further models, all said to have offer a plethora of useful additional features compared to the 2006 models they replace.

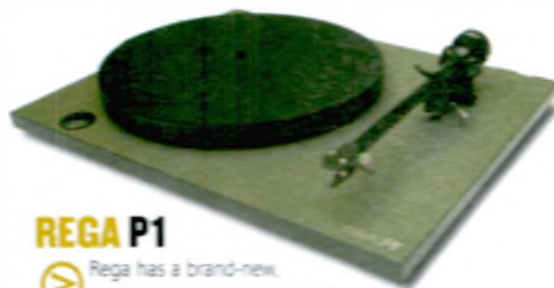
Price from £250 to £600 **Due now** ☎ 01234 741200 • www.denon.co.uk



EPOS M16

➤ Next month sees the launch of the new, two-way M16 floorstanding loudspeaker from Epos. It's the latest speaker to join the expanding M Series and utilizes Epos's new M tweeter, which is shared throughout the product range. It uses a purpose-designed 130mm bass/mid driver, plus the 130mm bass driver from the ELS 303. The slender speaker is supplied with a base plinth and is available in a choice of three real-wood finishes.

Price £800 **Due** December
☎ 01442 260146 • www.epos-acoustics.com



REGA P1

➤ Rega has a brand-new, British-made turntable called the P1. It's the first turntable to join Rega's Planar range for several years and is the Essex specialist's most affordable model to date. It features a new R8100 tonearm with a high-quality main bearing, and an Ortofon OM5e moving magnet cartridge is fitted as standard. Key features include an AC synchronous motor with moulded belt drive and a stabilized MDF platter.

Price £189 **Due now**
☎ 01702 333071 • www.rega.co.uk



ACCUSTIC ARTS CD PLAYER 1 MK2

Accustic Arts, the German high-end hi-fi specialist, has launched a new Mk2 version of its top-loading CD Player 1. The latest model offers 24-bit upsampling, a Philips CDM Pro 2 mechanism and five separate power supply units for the key electronics. It features a host of high-end elements including shielded compartments, a jitter minimising digital output stage with oversized power supply, plus anti-resonance aluminium casework.

Price £3,985 **Due** now

☎ 01252 702705 ✉ www.accusticarts.de

MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE REFERENCE

Monitor Audio has completely revised its Bronze series. The new Bronze Reference speaker range is topped by the BR6 two-and-a-half-way tower, featuring the latest version of MA's proprietary C-Cam metal tweeter. The new HF unit is partnered by two new 165mm bass drivers with four-layer coils, plus a similarly sized midrange cone. A further six models complete the line, including two standmounts, a smaller floorstander and centre and surround speakers.

Price from £150 to £550 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01268 740580 ✉ www.monitoraudio.co.uk

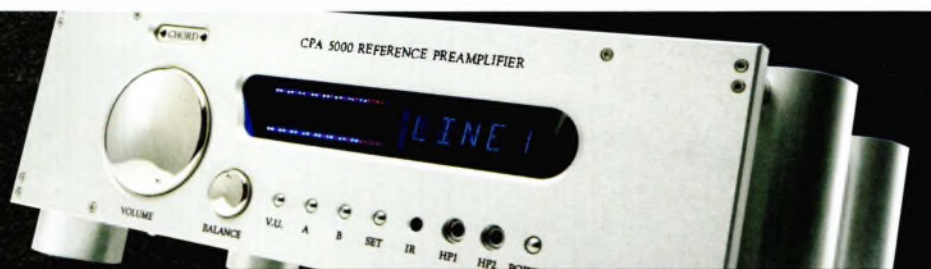


RUSS ANDREWS DAC-1 USB

A new micro-sized DAC from Russ Andrews is claimed to bring audiophile quality to computer-based audio and upgrade the output of CD and DVD players to boot. The DAC-1 USB can be used with standalone hi-fi equipment and other digital music devices, or to bypass computer soundcards when connected to a PC or Mac via USB. It is said to use a "premium quality" DAC chipset with a fully discrete Class A output stage, coupled with 24-bit/192kHz upsampling. It features one coaxial and two optical digital inputs, alongside USB, plus RCA phono outputs for connection to conventional analogue amps.

Price £599 **Due** now

☎ 0845 345 1550 ✉ www.russandrews.com



CHORD ELECTRONICS CPA5000

At the upper end of Chord Electronics' high-end portfolio is the new CPA5000 Reference preamp, a no-compromise product that replaces its predecessor, the CPA4000. It uses Chord's latest proprietary Ultra High Frequency power supply and Ultra Low Noise circuitry, said to offer amazing noise floor performance. Chord has paid particular attention to the internals of the amp with solid milled aluminium shielding inside. The rear panel has four pairs of balanced XLR inputs, in addition to single-ended connections. As well as stereo usage, the preamp can be used with a multichannel processor using its AV bypass circuitry.

Price £9,980 **Due** now ☎ 01622 721444 ✉ www.chordelectronics.co.uk

Soundbites

VITA AUDIO is a new name in high-quality compact audio. Its first product is a new DAB/FM radio called the R1, finished in real wood with a pressed steel fascia housing a headphone socket and line input for portable music players. It can be fully controlled by a top-mounted dial and also features gold-plated phono outputs, plus a switch mode power supply allowing use throughout the world. Prices start at £160.

☎ 01702 601410



BLACK RHODIUM's latest version of its Harmony interconnect is priced at just £60 for a one-metre pair. It features a twisted pair configuration and is insulated with low loss silicone rubber. Hourglass-shaped phono plugs are employed for ease of insertion and removal to and from equipment.

☎ 01332 342233

DENON has a stylish new mini system from its Smart Life series. The S-81 DAB offers full iPod integration and has been specifically designed to offer intuitive control. It uses a 50-watt digital amplifier, European-designed speakers tweaked for UK ears, and a DAB/FM radio with RDS. Other features include a two-line fluorescent display, clock radio function and a shallow chassis for easy placement on bookshelves. Expect to pay £600.

☎ 01234 741200



MARANTZ's SR5001 – the company's latest HDMI switching receiver – includes the full gamut of audio decoding and a raft of new technology for £480. It includes video upconversion, 24-bit/192kHz DACs and 32-bit DSPs. Two HDMI inputs and one output are offered, plus three component inputs and two outputs. Crystal DACs are used across all seven channels and a pure direct mode is available for stereo listening.

☎ 01753 680868

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ALAN O'ROURKE

Job Title: Managing Director
Company: Ruark Acoustics



What is your most exciting product that is currently in development?

The new Crusader III has recently been unveiled, which is a refreshed and revitalized version of one of our favourite loudspeakers of the 1980s.

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

Strangely, I feel high-end hi-fi will probably stay pretty much as it is for the foreseeable future. As for the mainstream market, there's so much technological movement it's pretty hard to have any firm ideas as to which way it will go.

DVD-Audio or SACD - and why?

Although I'm not the type to place nails in coffins, they're both pretty dead in the water.

Are audio servers hi-fi's future?

They might be, as long as they don't overuse compression technology. We should never forget that legacy formats have huge strength through the sheer quantity of software out there. So, you'll never find a server that won't play CDs.

CD or vinyl and why?

They both have their merits and both can sound extraordinarily good through the right equipment. Okay then... vinyl.

Are we experiencing a stereo resurgence?

The demand for high-quality stereo still exists and will continue to do so.

Hi-Fi Diary

JANUARY 2007

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

FEBRUARY

11 Audiojumble 2007
The Angel Leisure Centre,
Tonbridge, Kent
www.audiojumble.co.uk
The place to find vintage hi-fi bargains

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

Apogee revived down under

Australian Graeme Keet has gone from repairing and rebuilding Apogee ribbon speakers to acquiring the rights to the Apogee Acoustics brand and domain name. He is now making his own version of the legendary Scintilla - one of the world's worst loudspeaker loads, with an impedance of one ohm. Having consulted his customer base about what they would want from a new Apogee, it turned out to be the same sound from something that didn't require a monster amplifier - so Graeme created the Synergy 1.5. This is a full-range ribbon design with high 95dB sensitivity and a nominal impedance of 2.5ohms. It can be tri-wired or actively driven and has an external North Creek crossover. It stands 1.5 metres tall and looks much like the original Scintilla. For more info visit www.apogeeacoustics.com



Better sound from MP3

Creative has introduced the Xmod, a plug-in device that is claimed to enhance the sound of compressed music formats. Used with a PC or personal music player, this device is said to 'upconvert music during playback to 24-bit surround audio'. Based on Creative's X-Fi Xtreme Fidelity platform, it connects between either a PC, Mac or personal player and the stereo speakers or headphones. X-Fi contains a 'Crystalizer', which Creative suggests works to 'upconvert MP3 music by analyzing and identifying which parts of the audio stream have been truncated or damaged during compression'.

Meanwhile, SRS has developed an 'audio toolbox' especially for iTunes. Called iWow for Macs and Audio Sandbox for PCs, both create surround effects from a stereo signal played on two speakers. The user can adjust the position of vocals within the mix and the package comes with tools to improve compressed sound. The software is at www.srsiabs.com for a free trial period.



A musical speaker

Onkyo has teamed up with musical instrument maker Takamine to manufacture the company's first 'musical loudspeaker' based on musical instrument design. As Takamine is a guitar specialist, the Onkyo D-TK10 was made using the thin wooden shell and bracing techniques found in acoustic guitars (Piano maker Bosendorfer has made similar use of its centuries of piano building knowledge to produce its range of loudspeakers). Rejecting conventional rigid construction, Onkyo's speaker cabinet resonates in sympathy with the music produced by two drive units: a ring driver tweeter with 100kHz extension and a 100mm woven cone bass/mid unit. Production is limited to just 50 pairs.



Universal hi-def

Warner has patented a single, multiformat high-definition disc that can store both Blu-ray and HD DVD content, as well as standard DVD. The technology, developed by New Medium Enterprises, offers a solution to the choice between high-definition formats. But licensing issues could make such discs commercially unviable. Each version of a movie would have to be separately licensed, making the discs more expensive to produce than their individual counterparts.

In the commercial world, Warner has had to slash sales predictions for high-definition titles such as *The Lake House*, which is now available in Blu-ray, HD-DVD and DVD formats. The company blames the limited availability of HD machines on the US market.



Double whammy for Apple music

⊗ Microsoft has released details of its Zune digital media player (pictured below), which is launching in the US in mid-November at a retail price of \$249. It offers 30GB of storage, a selection of preloaded content and a wireless facility that lets Zune users share music and videos. There is also a music store, offering downloads on a subscription basis.

Apple's Steve Jobs has responded by saying that Zune is "no threat" but has taken up the wi-fi challenge by filing a patent application to make iPods the only media players capable of purchasing content online.

This is not the only blot on Apple's landscape as the iPod celebrates its fifth birthday. 'DVD Jon' Johansen, the man who reverse-engineered both DVD copy protection and Apple's FairPlay DRM is licensing the latter, dubbed PyMusique. In practice, this means that music purchased from iTunes can be loaded onto any other personal media player.

Meanwhile, the UK government is planning to revoke a 300 year old law, which prevents copying an artistic work onto another medium. In other words, it makes converting CDs into MP3 files illegal. Of course, MP3 players were less advanced back in 1710...



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #47

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



Wintertime spring cleaning

It's been said before, but it's important to periodically treat your equipment to a good clean and general tightening up. Turn everything off at the mains. Plug and unplug every component a couple of times. If you have bare wire terminals, strip back some more wire to expose fresh copper or get good quality 'cold welded' crimped plugs fitted. Now, tighten every bolt and spike in the system and ensure all tables and stands are level. Do the same to electronics with exposed bolts and screws. You can even tighten the surrounds on loudspeakers, but remember the magnet inside the speaker driver could turn a loosely held screwdriver into a speaker murderer.

TOP 10 HI-FI YOU MUST HEAR BEFORE CHRISTMAS

1. Grado GS1000 headphones
2. An iPod through AVI's Active Neutrons
3. Cambridge Audio 840C CD player
4. Rega P1 turntable
5. Your standmounts on Partington Heavi II stands
6. Live concerts on a Denon TU-1800DAB tuner
7. Bass from Townshend's Isolda DCT speaker cables
8. Marantz PM7001 integrated amplifier
9. The new Sumiko-owned REL subwoofers
10. Krell EVO-505 CD/SACD player



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



GNARLS BARKLEY

Title: tbc

Release date: 2007

The duo of Danger Mouse and Cee-Lo have started work on the follow-up to 2006's *St Elsewhere*. "We've started to throw ideas around and done some rough demos. We want to make the record sooner rather than later," they say. Although Danger Mouse has been busy producing records by The Rapture and Damon Albarn's new project, he insists GB remains his priority.



U2

Title: tbc

Release date: 2007

Still the world's biggest band, U2 have revealed via their website that the follow-up to 2004's *How to Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* is being produced by Rick Rubin. Work began on the album in August and while in the studio the band have been joined by Green Day for a cover of the Skids' *The Saints Are Coming*, recorded for the Hurricane Katrina relief fund.

made five records while I was watching *Monday Night Football*," he quipped in typically sardonic fashion.

GREEN DAY

Title: tbc

Release date: 2007

Billie Joe Armstrong and his modern day punk-rockers are hard at work on the follow-up to 2004's *American Idiot*, which has to date sold 13 million copies. "Like everything we do it's completely, 100 per cent passion and energy-driven," Armstrong says. "It's going to be an event, not just putting a record out."

ARCTIC MONKEYS

Title: tbc

Release date: early 2007

Everyone's favourite new band has revealed that the follow-up to their all-conquering debut *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* should be out early next year. Chief Monkey Alex Turner says: "We began rehearsing for the new record on 8 September and we've got about 13 or 14 songs in different states."

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/CLASSICAL

Anna Netrebko/ St. Petersburg Chamber Chorus Russian Album (Nov); **Jacques Loussier Trio** Bach Brandenburg Concertos (Nov); **Harry Sever (boy soprano) and Nadanai Laohakunakorn** Schubert: Die schöne Müllerin (Nov); **George Benson/ Al Jarreau** Giving It Up

SACD/ DVD-A

Andrew Cook Bach: Cello Suites 1, 2 and 3 (DVD-A, Dec); **David Crosby** If I Could Only Remember My Name (DVD-A, Nov); **Neil Young and Crazy Horse** Live At Fillmore East (DVD-A, Nov); **Beatles, arr George Martin** Love (DVD-A, Nov); **John Hicks, Buster Williams and Louis Hayes** Tribeca Blues (SACD, Nov)

RANDY NEWMAN

Title: tbc

Release date: spring 2007

Despite his prolific work as a film composer, albums of new Newman songs have become as rare as hen's teeth. Finally, the long wait since 1999's *Bad Love* is almost over and he's announced the follow-up should be completed this year. "I regret I haven't put out more work. Elton John



It's all for charidee, mate

Surrey trembles at Jon's deft box-thumbing

As all keen audiophiles know, one nagging difficulty is how to feed the habit without ending up on your bank manager's Most Wanted list. I'm not talking here about a never-ending spiral of upgraded equipment, but the most important part of any system – the music itself.

While we all love that shrink-wrap moment as the cover comes off a new CD or LP, keeping a steady supply of fresh CDs or LPs flowing won't always fit in the budget.

The answer, of course, is the charity shop. One of my favourite hunting grounds is 'The Strip' that is Surbiton High Street. Traders have pretty much mined out charity shops when it comes to the profitable collectables, but there's plenty of other good stuff still there. A typical session goes something like this:

"The answer, of course, is the charity shop. One of my favourite hunting grounds is 'The Strip' that is Surbiton High Street."

I hit the ground running at the bus stop and head for the first rendezvous point, the Princess Alice Hospice. Inside, I home in on the music section. A minute later, and I realise I'm out of luck this time, so I console myself with a video of the film *Magnolia* for a pound.

50 metres beyond the station lies the second target; the British Heart Foundation. After a very late lunch, time is against me – it's 4.15 (half past four is the deadline for most charity shops, so I need to keep moving). Stuck behind a member of the blue-rinse brigade explaining her cat's health problems to the woman on the till, I begin to wonder what the sentence is for bundling a granny at a shop counter; mmm, two weeks community service sweeping the streets of New York with Boy George – definitely not worth it. Finally, I get to hand over my pound in return for a copy of The The's searing *Infected* album on cassette.

4.19pm, and my pulse rate is rising as I enter Oxfam. Oh yes; Voice of the Beehive, Wendy and Lisa, and Sound Garden all end up in my sweaty mitts (my taste could euphemistically

be called 'eclectic'). They're all on cassette, but if they're as enjoyable to listen to as I hope they will be, I can always buy them on vinyl or CD (used, of course).

After the quick hit in Oxfam, I still have a whole seven minutes for Fara and the Mental Aid Project shop. I relax and wipe the sweat from my brow. MAP yields a promo copy of a limited edition LP of dEUS, one of my favourite groups, for a couple of quid.

Having a last flick through the LPs in Fara, I'm about to leave when I reach the back of the bunch. PAYDIRT! I clutch the LP in my hands. I want it badly. How much? Two pounds... deal!

The sense of anticipation grows as I head home. Hitting the platter as soon as I've turned my system on is Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys. Never have banjo guitar and stetson sounded so damned fine. "Pass that jug of DIY jet fuel. Pa, we're gonna have a hoe-down."

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



EAR waxing

Huntingdon's vinyl baron revitalises Art's LPs

Obviously, Tim de Paravicini loves phonograph records. It's as simple as that. I've had the pleasure of reviewing two of his more recent preamplifiers – the EAR 324 and the EAR 912 – and both were more than just competent: they coaxed my playback system to new heights.

Now I'm going back to see what I might have missed in the EAR line, and my happiest find so far is the 834P – a modestly priced phono preamplifier that's been in continuous production for over 10 years. The version I've borrowed – the £715 Signature version – uses a step-up transformer for the first round of voltage gain, and a trio of ECC83 valves after that, for gain and buffering alike. There's a push-button on the back, in case your cartridge generates a millivolt or more; otherwise, the 834P delivers a remarkable 70dB of gain, with minimal tube hiss and no other noise that I could detect. Its output impedance seems low and its character remains the same, regardless of the line stage it is driving.

That character is as lovable as they come. The 834P's sound is distinctly valve-like, in the nicest of ways. Musical textures are convincingly thick and substantial, while rhythms and pitch relationships are preserved, for the most part. The only exception can be heard in the lowest two octaves, where bass notes are just a bit slow to decay. Then again, the generous quantity of bass information suits my Quad ESLs just fine.

So far, I've used the EAR preamp with a Linn Akiva, Rega Apheta (which, I'm sorry to say, never lost its treble rasp, even after running in), Miyabi 47, Lyra Helikon Mono, Supex 900 Super and Brinkmann EMT Titanium. All of these cartridges seem to enjoy driving Tim's step-up transformers, none more so than – surprise! – the Linn Akiva. I continue to admire Linn's own Linto phono preamplifier, especially for its lack of hiss and hum, but the combination of Linn's moving coils and Tim's stationary ones made for an even better, more organic sense of musical flow and drama. Of those cartridges, the Miyabi seemed to be the least comfortable (experience tells me it ☐

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

TEAC VRDS-7
CD PLAYER



One of the early units to use the TEAC VRDS mechanism, the VRDS-7 is a clear precursor of the Esoteric range – arguably the

quintessential high-end brand of CD players and other disc spinners. The VRDS-7 was built to professional standards, and looked as though it was designed to survive severe treatment; there is a thriving market in rebuilding, fixing and fine-tuning these players and others in the VRDS series, even though in this case, the player has not been in production for around a decade. If the VRDS-7 – a moderately expensive, but at £600, far from top-end design – was not a sound quality classic in its own right, the Esoteric models that followed were built on the same basic platform, and showed what was possible by suitable refinements to the basic design.

There is an absence of external fuss to this player, though appearance is livened by internal lighting of the square selector buttons, a feature borrowed from studio practice. The internal electronics are exacting, but remain the most conventional part of the player. It was built around a differential implementation of a Philips SAA7350 D/A converter – a Bitstream design – with a 20-bit, 8x oversampling digital filter. If this sounds alarmingly prosaic, it bears a striking resemblance to many Naim players. Naim Audio is on record as suggesting that the architecture of the D/A converter is almost immaterial, that such criteria as the mechanical stability, power supply integrity and control over jitter take priority. Different as it may be in almost every other detail, there is a clear parallel between the Naim and TEAC/Esoteric approach to disc player design at this fundamental level, though Naim Audio omits digital outputs from its players. TEAC doesn't.

VRDS is an acronym for Vibration-free Rigid Disc clamping System, and it is a very superior piece of engineering – an object of excellence, which is sometimes spotlighted behind glass at various hi-fi gatherings. There have been many iterations on the basic VRDS groundplan, but in each case the mechanism is based on diecast or fully machined laser-carrying sleds with very limited freedom of movement. This is



“The VRDS-7 was built to professional standards, and looked as though it was designed to survive.”

in stark contrast to the usual CD carriages, which are free to move in all planes, with control exercised by servos rather than inherent physical stability. Servos appear to have a similar disadvantage to feedback loops in amplifiers: they respond to errors only after they have occurred, and are in a perpetual state of catch-up.

Another VRDS signature element is the elaborate disc clamp, which supports the whole of the label side of the disc, and pins the middle from the other side into a slight hollow. This means the disc is fully supported at its edge. This also plays its part in reducing digital servo demands, and with it helps produce a calmer electrical environment inside the player.

It was about ten years ago that we reviewed this player in a group test with a blind panel, where none of the team of listeners knows the identity of the player, or any others they were listening to. Although some of the panel approved of this player for its positive, driving sound, the majority felt the player sounded a little crude, even mechanical, with a touch of granularity at the top end. What is open to speculation is how the player would stand up today, in the right system context, and with suitably updated and slightly more transparent internal electronics. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

Ⓣ prefers trannies, too, albeit ones with lower impedance primaries).
 I feel like the record collector who spends his days filling in the holes in his collection – how in heaven's name did I manage to miss *The Gilded Palace of Sin* the first time around? And, while worthy competitors abound, none are as enduring, nor as endearingly affordable, as the 834P. A sweet find, and one that I'll be very sorry to give up.

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



Mini mad

David's gone stark raving Radius

We all know about disappearing speakers. Slip in the silver disc, ease up the volume and music floods into the room from no discernable source. Sonically, at least, those five-foot monoliths of MDF, veneer and pulsating technology have vanished and you let the good times roll.

Except that they haven't. Open your eyes and they stare right back at you. That's the trouble with transducers, they're no respecters of floorspace or indeed – unless you find boxiness attractive – domestic decor.

It's hardly surprising that one of the more identifiable growth areas in the speaker market is for tiny, high-performance models that melt into the background and can be used in a wide variety of applications without compromising sound quality. Monitor Audio, KEF, Moudant, Short, B&W to mention just a few of the British contingent – they've all got 'em.

The preferred look is miniature drive units in tough silver, black or coloured plastic. Some use single, full-frequency drive units. As well as being cheaper and more space-efficient than multi-driver arrangements, there are sonic benefits, too. The speaker system that doesn't require a crossover network is, by definition, free from crossover distortion and phase anomalies and therefore should be capable of delivering a cleaner, more immediate and better integrated sound.

The downside, of course, is frequency response. If you want to scale the heights, it's very difficult to plumb the depths, especially as you can't expect much help from modestly dimensioned enclosures.

Or maybe not. For instance, from experience I can report that Monitor Audio's diminutive, two-way, ported Radius 90 – when securely wall or stand mounted – can deliver astounding results. Capable of punching out transients with tremendous snap and precision while preserving enough of the music's body to project very tangible images into the room, the sheer speed, vitality and mid-range transparency of the R90s is startling and evident with just about any ju-tempo material. They can also take hefty slugs of current while still sounding as crisp as the cashpoint tinner.

Get the positioning right and the MAs prove that tiny speakers can work delivering pace, weight, projection, a convincingly even tonal balance and an easy sense of musical flow. Voices sound clean and articulate, treble well extended and bass surprisingly solid and tuneful, even making a fair fist of conveying the sheer welly of that bass synth.

All babies aren't born equal, of course, but with a little care and experimentation, most really can disappear, both sonically and visually. And the best might just open your ears to a whole new way of listening.

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

“Open your eyes and they stare right back at you. That's the trouble with transducers – they're no respecters of floorspace.”





Return to sender

Accepted wisdom gets redirected sometimes

I have never been a great believer in accepted wisdom and, looking back, I'm happy that the years have usually proven me right, in dismissing, or at least questioning, those things that 'everybody knew'.

For instance, I could never come to terms with solid-core cables. Looking around today's market shows that they barely stood the test of time. I'm thankful this is the case, because I disliked their sound and their impracticality. I still remember one lightweight preamplifier hovering above the table it was supposed to be sitting on because the solid interconnects it used were so inflexible.

Then, of course, we had the rigidity fixation: tonearms had to be rigid and built to resemble bridge girders until designs such as the Naim Aro came along and disproved that theory. In light of this, many 'floppy' arms such as the venerable Decca, Hadcock and Mayware were, effectively, rediscovered, and, all of a sudden, the once immutable rules were rewritten.

The rigidity concept also extended to loudspeakers, and this was where things became a little less cut and dried, because while most loudspeakers certainly benefited from a solid coupling to the floor, not all of them did. There were several noteworthy designs that enjoyed a little more freedom. Take the magnificent Shahinian Obelisk as an example. This came fitted not with spikes but with castors. Castors, for goodness' sake! And, guess what? It sounded far better when used as supplied than when it was spiked and rigidly coupled to the floor.

Equally, every support manufacturer was once resolutely convinced that glass was not a suitable material for tabletops. Then, along came the glass-shelved Mana platforms, which blew the performance of other tables into the weeds. Suddenly, glass was a good thing. Look around today and it's hard to find a support range that doesn't feature glass shelving.

When you move beyond the widely accepted wisdom mythologies into the zone of pathological tweakiness, we reach the land of sticky foil, crocodile clips attached to your water pipes and 'treated' safety pins in your soft furnishings, where the advocates and opponents were so vociferously divided that ▶



Even if *Arrival* didn't contain Abba's single greatest recorded moment (*Dancing Queen* – but you knew that) it would have been a landmark in the Swedish superstars' career. By 1976, Abba were already a Eurovision-defying phenomenon, bucking the one-hit wonder trend of that tele-aural-visual abomination and well on their way to rivalling Volvo as Sweden's biggest export.

By the time of their fourth album, they'd already had European hits with Eurovision winner *Waterloo*, *Mama Mia* and *SOS*, but had yet to make much of an impression in America, Australia and the rest of the world. *Arrival* would prove to be the tipping point after which they would go on to dominate the world stage for the duration of the decade. Media headlines would soon be screaming about punk rock, but it was Abba that would be shifting platinum units and defining the pop sound of the 1970s.

The songs for *Arrival* were, as ever, crafted by Benny (piano, beard) and Björn (guitar, scarecut) on their island of Viggso in the Stockholm archipelago, with the help of a Swedish-English dictionary. Recording then took place at Stockholm's Metronome studios, where they recorded most of their albums.

Their music may have been pure pop, but it was anything but throwaway. The pair's attention to detail in the studio was legendary and their talent for perfect arrangements was growing exponentially with their success (though to this day, apparently, neither of them reads or writes music).

The songs were, of course, intended for hearing on tinny transistor radios and the 'music centres' that were increasingly taking up space in UK living rooms. But, listening to the 24-bit digital remastering of the original album (which has just been released as a Deluxe edition with an additional DVD including contemporary TV appearances and interviews), it's surprising just how muscular the production is.

It's pop, but with some serious rock dynamics at play, such as the ringing guitar power chords of the prescient break-up ballad

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

ABBA
ARRIVAL



“Besides the genuine hits, almost every track on the album could have been a contender.”

Knowing Me, Knowing You, the crashing sound effects on *Money, Money, Money* and, of course, that terrific descending piano figure that distinguished the group's nod to the nascent disco craze, *Dancing Queen*.

But besides the genuine hits, almost every track on the album could have been a contender, particularly the jaunty *When I Kissed The Teacher*, the rock stomp of *Tiger*, even the melancholic Celtic instrumental title track which closes the album.

Despite the rather sullen expressions on the group's faces as they sit in their helicopter on the cover, *Arrival* marked the point at which Abba went from being a relatively local European success story to a global phenomenon. Artistically, the quartet were at the top of their game, before the pressures of international superstardom would begin to take their toll and the marriages of first Björn and Agnetha, and later Benny and Frida, would collapse, as eventually would the group in 1982.

But at this point in 1976, Abba's star was rising fast. They were producing the best music of their career, both couples were romantically entwined, *Dancing Queen* would soon be number one on both sides of the Atlantic, and the group were about to embark on an extended tour of the globe that would see them take over the world. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

neither 'accepted' nor 'wisdom' ever entered into the discussions. On the outer reaches of this type of craziness, we find the erstwhile, female, American, hi-fi scribe who proposed removing one's clothes and jewellery before listening to one's stereo in order to improve its sound. One can only presume this promoted a great deal of confusion when adherents to her philosophy asked their dinner guests to disrobe so that they could relax, unwind and enjoy the host's 12-incher.

While there is more to obtaining good sound than current science can explain satisfactorily, my visitors can rest assured that I'll be continuing my investigations fully clothed.

Malcolm Stewart was one of the country's best-known and most outspoken hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently publishes the hi-fi industry trade bible, the British Audio Journal



Tubes to taste

Pro valve use is the same, but different

Speaking to a recording studio engineer recently, I heard that he was expecting a new valve compressor to come in and was looking forward to working with it. The purpose of such devices in the studio is to add colour and energy to what are largely digital recordings. They use the natural characteristics of valves to limit the dynamic range, to spice up the sound and give it a bit of shape. They also use analogue tape for the same purpose, because it compresses in a nice sounding way and limits things in a natural fashion. There are numerous software versions of valve and tape compression characteristics available, but nothing in a computer can beat the sound of the real thing.

It seems odd to use any form of compression if you are trying to make the sound more lively, but this is precisely what compressors are used for. They bring a sense of homogeneity to the variously treated elements within a recording. This might otherwise make each voice or instrument sound like it was recorded in a different place. The compression is used to get the final mix to gel in a cohesive manner.

In hi-fi, we prize valves for their midrange transparency and dynamic sound. At first, this seems like the opposite of their appeal to the



"In fact, getting more than a watt out of many valve amps without running into distortion is unusual."

sound engineer, who likes the euphonic way they distort the sound. But if you think about it, this is what we as music and hi-fi enthusiasts like, too. True, valve amp fans think that transistors sound grey and lifeless, flat even, and prize the energy and vivacity that tubes reveal. Or should that be 'add'.

I'm not saying that valves make up notes, but they do to emphasise certain facets of the sound such as harmonics, tonal colour and energy. Also, given the fact that they are essentially low power devices it is not unusual to run them into clipping.

On the test bench, valves do not do all that well by most of the standard measured parameters, harmonic distortion is always high and undistorted power output rarely breaks the single figure mark. In fact, getting more than a watt out of many valve amps without running into distortion is unusual.

It is therefore the nature of this distortion that gives valves their appeal. It actually seems to bring out the qualities in music that the recording process fails to fully capture. I guess the most significant one is energy or dynamics, the sense of a vital force in the sound that brings it to life. This is why studios spend good money on tube compressors and paradoxically why we do the same thing with amplifiers. Not only preamps, power amps and the occasional integrated amp, but even the output stage on many a CD player, too – the character of the output device making up for the clinical inclinations of digital formats. Yet, in other respects, this is adding something to the

original, while in the studio they are using the effect to create the original. Tubes often seem to enhance sound quality, but we must not kid ourselves that we are necessarily getting closer to the absolute sound.

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



OK Computer

Big changes in little time for downbeat hi-fi

AV's clever little Active Neutron (reviewed on p50 of this issue) is a bit of a groundbreaker and it shows just how far and fast we are moving down the computer audio route.

Back in HFC 261 I wrote a Dispatches column about one of my friends virtualising his CD collection, by ripping his music onto a computer and using it as a sound server. At the time, I was aghast, and so were the people who sent in emails 'rubishing' such a concept.

Seven issues and half a year on, and we have reputable hi-fi companies like AVI making product designed for just such a downloaded music ethos. Squeezeboxes are supplanting or sitting alongside CD players. Apple iPod docks have become commonplace on a number of new amplifiers, receivers and systems. Even the British Federation of Audio has fired off missives about maintaining good quality from downloaded music.

At the same time, many high-street stores have begun to sideline CD, with redesigned HMV stores placing video and games discs foremost in the shop, pushing music to the furthest corners of the premises. This has also given many a store the chance to restructure the stocking policy, reducing stocks of some genre to token gesture levels – genre like world music, classical, folk or jazz. A year ago, each of these genres might have had a whole shelf to play with; now the whole lot sits in the space where Mozart alone used to be sold.

And yet, curiously, no one seems to have noticed that most DVDs sell at a heavy discount, so shelf upon shelf of remaindered DVDs will be on sale at three for a tenner. The conspiracy theorist in me thinks this is deliberate. By shrinking the number of CDs available in store, the music lover has to look further to get their jollies. They have to move online. It's only a short jump from 'buying music online' to 'downloading music online', and many have already made the leap.

Once again, back in *HFC* 281, I was concerned that someone content to download their music is lost as an audiophile. I now realise this statement was made in haste. The AVI speakers (and products like the Squeezebox) demonstrate why this isn't the case. There are limits to the sound compared to the audiophile-approved method, but the music still comes through. I've heard a lot worse than the iPod Nano/Active Neutron combination, too – and much of that 'worse' stems from proper hi-fi equipment.

We can fear this change, or we can embrace it. Personally, I'm for the latter idea. No, I will not be selling off my LP or CD collection and I will still continue to buy the bulk of my music in physical formats rather than virtual ones. But, I can no longer automatically assume that anyone using downloaded music is sacrificing music quality in the process. It would be best for people to download the best possible signal quality, ideally lossless or high bit-rate MP3 files, but even standard AAC need not spell dreadful sound. Perhaps the next generation of equipment will focus on getting the best from these files. This is a lot better than just dismissing them.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

IMAGES IN THE HEAD



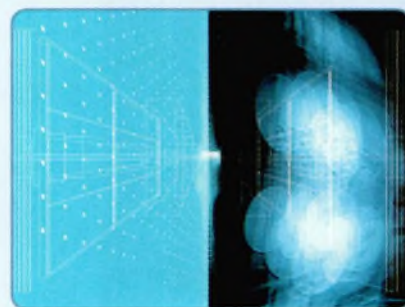
Reviewing the Grado GS1000 headphones for this very issue (see p59), the subject of imaging came forcibly to mind. Imaging is

an important arbiter of equipment performance, but headphones are a bit of a special case. There's a fundamental difference between the ways images are presented by speakers and by headphones, and it's down to one simple fact: when listening to speakers, both your ears hear both speakers. With headphones, each ear hears its own driver only.

At first sight, the headphone situation looks ideal – as long as the recording has been made with headphone listening in mind. Space a pair of microphones apart by about the width of a human head, with or without some kind of baffle between them, and the result is stereo ideally suited to headphone reproduction. There's room for argument about the ideal baffle shape, microphone types, directional responses and so on, but the basic principle is perfectly workable and results in what is often called 'binaural' sound.

The classic 'Blumlein' microphone arrangement, invented in the 1930s by Alan Dower Blumlein, was conceived with loudspeaker reproduction in mind. A pair of directional microphones at the same point in space produce outputs which, when played back on speakers, closely approximate the results given by head-spaced microphones played back over headphones. The 'leakage' from left speaker to right ear, and vice versa, is included in the reasoning that produces this result, you can work this out from first principles with the help of some sketched diagrams and the knowledge that sound travels at about 330m/s.

Headspaced mics and Blumlein 'coincident' miking give fundamentally different kinds of output. Spacing microphones apart gives a phase (timing) difference between them but, especially if they are omnidirectional, next to no amplitude difference. Coincident mics, by contrast, won't give any phase differences but, by virtue of their directional responses, will produce amplitude differences. When those amplitude differences are reproduced over



“The headphone situation looks ideal – as long as the recording has been made with headphones in mind.”

speakers, the 'leakage' effectively converts them to timing differences, though some degree of amplitude difference remains at higher frequencies where the head shades the left ear from the right speaker and vice versa.

We hear imaging as a function of both amplitude and phase, and both coincident mics/speakers and spaced mics/headphones setups are capable of reproducing cues if care is taken over microphone types and use. It's a point of interest that very, very few recordings achieve either aim accurately, indeed most engineers haven't a clue about the theoretical basis of stereo and 'tune to taste' in a thoroughly unscientific manner aimed principally at speakers). But what happens when spaced mic recordings are played on speakers or coincident on headphones?

Despite the lack of justification, both work tolerably well. This simple observation is actually one of audio's biggest mysteries. It's so hard to get imaging just right, yet it seems to work even with mixed-up amplitude and phase cues when the reproducing equipment is of high quality. Learned books have been written on how we hear space, but the human ear seems to defy reason.

For further reading on stereo theory, try www.regonaudio.com or the Michael Gerzon Archive at www.audiosignal.co.uk. **HFC**

Richard Black

The world according to...

Creek Audio

This issue, Hi-Fi Choice talks to Mike Creek, the founder of Creek Audio and the owner of Epos Acoustics. Interview: Malcolm Steward

Mike Creek joined the audio business in 1970, founding Creek some years later. In 1982, he launched the quirky but highly successful CAS4040 amplifier, which sold for just £99. Within three years, it was leading the budget electronics sector. In 1999, he purchased loudspeaker manufacturer, Epos Acoustics, which he'd recognised as having important synergies with his electronics.

Recently, Creek Audio produced its first products made outside the UK, in the shape of the Chinese-built Evo range. But the company also still produces its more upmarket Destiny and Classic products here in the UK. So, exactly how does a small specialist business survive against the big boys?

HFC Creek seems to have always produced realistically priced designs. I have you never felt the urge to build something totally crazy and expensive?

Mike Creek Occasionally, but those designs never emerged as products because they weren't sufficiently commercial.

I guess the closest I've come to a really high-end product was the predecessor to the current Destiny range. When we started to get costings for it and looked at suppliers for the metalwork required to produce the product, it occurred to us that we'd perhaps gone a little crazy and that it might make sense to go back to a more conventional approach. We might revisit that design one day, though.

HFC So, you don't have any philosophical objections to real high-end products or their multi-thousand pound prices?

MC That depends on what you consider to be very expensive. There are Japanese tube amplifiers that cost tens of thousands of pounds and I can't imagine how anyone would find that amount of cost in a product to retail it at that kind of price. But apart from that, I have no philosophical objections to making more expensive products. I do have a commercial rule-of-thumb that what a product

costs to produce multiplied by a certain factor should be what it sells for.

Having come from the background I did – working for a company that made affordable consumer electronics – I simply have greater experience in that area. I have absolutely no experience in money-no-object engineering because I've never even bought anything like that. Having never had the desire to own that sort of product, I probably don't understand the mentality of people who buy such things.

nor how to market products to them.

HFC That said, you've owned some expensive cars over the years.

MC I've had TVs, Jaguars and the like – budget exotica, rather than supercars.

HFC What changes have you observed in retailing in the UK during Creek's history?

MC Creek Audio was among the top ten best-selling brands in the UK, along with Naim, Rega, Linn and Exocore. We were in all the top independent specialist hi-fi stores and so

“It takes a long time to build up a brand before it becomes successful enough to create demand for itself.”



Never one to sit still for a moment, Mike Creek inspects his handiwork.

the numbers we were selling were so much greater than they have been subsequently. This is due to the exposure we achieved in those 60-100 specialist stores that were around in the mid-1980s.

Nowadays, things are marketed differently and the growth in multiple-outlet stores and franchises has changed the situation. They can't stock everything, so even if you come along with a product that is demonstrably superior to what they have, it doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be able to sell it to them. In that respect, it's unfortunate for people who, like myself years ago, think it would be a great idea to make a product and sell it in the hi-fi industry, because the chances of success are that much lower.

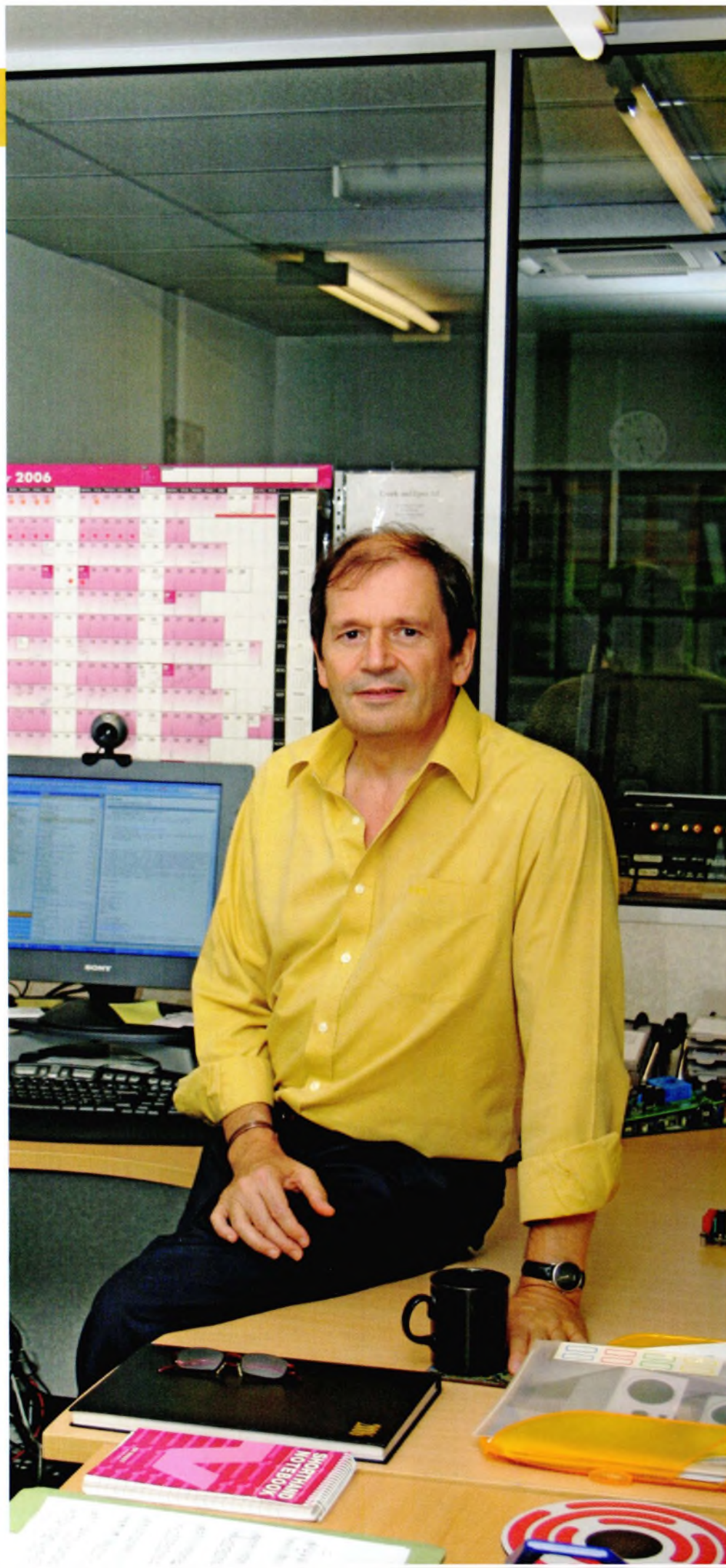
It takes a long time to build up a brand before it becomes successful enough to create a demand for itself, which the retailers inevitably have to follow. It takes some time for a product – even a good one – to find its way onto the market these days, at least compared to when I started.

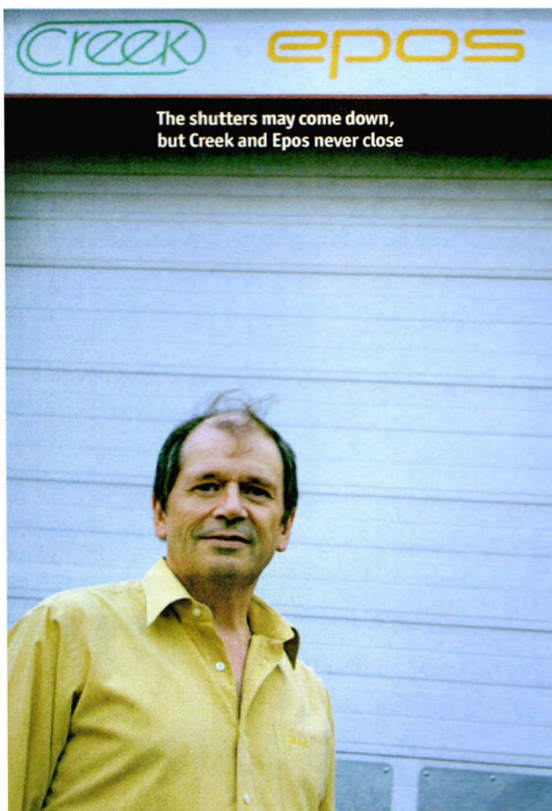
For example, when I began Creek, I developed a product at home without doing any market research – just a gut feeling – and took it to a London exhibition. And I chose that because it was the earliest show that year where I could take the nearly-finished product and demonstrate it to the public. That was in January and by March, I was selling the first products from the exposure I got at that show. It was a rolling success story from the moment we started showing the product to people. There was an underground communication system between the retailers; unlike today, where they are that much more concerned with their existence than they were then. In those days, if one dealer heard something good – even if it came from a company whose owner was barking mad – he'd ring other dealers and share the news, which would generate an interest in the product even before it had reached production. I sold my first 100 products that way.

Before I knew it, I couldn't run my company in the same way any more. I was spending so much time on the phone talking to potential customers that I would have quickly become a victim of my own success through having no time to build, finish and despatch the products

HFC If you were to start Creek from scratch today, could you start the company in a similar manner, without falling foul of new standards of legislation?

Thinking about it by today's standards, it would be virtually impossible to do something similar because of all the restrictions, safety





approval testing, CE marking, investing in WEEE, RoHS compliance and all the other complications that are making it unattractive to get into this industry nowadays.

HFC Is it purely the legislative activities that make it unattractive and impossible to do what you did nearly 30 years ago?

MC There is always the degree of lunacy involved. When it comes to the commercial aspects, I don't think I ever filled in a cashflow forecast or a profit and loss analysis to tell me whether I'd make any money – I just relied on my instincts. It was something I had to do, even if it failed, I had to get it out of my system.

I did it and lost money in the first year, because I didn't start trading until the end of March, but in the following year I made the biggest profit I've ever made – I simply couldn't make enough products. The problems changed and if it hadn't been for my previous experience in manufacturing, I don't think I could have driven the sub-contract manufacturer as well because I wouldn't have known how to do it or what to expect.

Having such a diverse education in that field at the age of 27 would be unusual these days. This is because most people have probably been at university until their early 20s, which would have qualified them in one discipline, but not all the disciplines I was fortunate enough to have experienced through working in my family's business. I never went to university; I learnt

everything by hands-on experience and by talking to people who had studied the specific subjects. I pretty much learned my trade by trial and error, along with a degree of arrogance that said I was going to do this anyway and I wouldn't care what anyone said or thought.

HFC Do you think that you are the last of that hands-on breed, and that we won't see any more young Mike Creeks emerging?

MC In the AV business, that's probably true. Anyone who wants to start a company should remember the old adage: if you want to make a small fortune in hi-fi, you need to start with a very large one.

You need to be able to take advantage of economies of scale to be a truly competitive operation these days, and that involves huge amounts of money, which most start-ups probably don't have.

HFC Do you think that consumers have a skewed view of what their money really buys these days?

MC I think consumers have become very spoilt because, for example, they can buy an iPod for under £100. If you can imagine the kind of investment that has gone into developing that, there's no way you can see that cost reflected in the retail price; it's just that Apple is selling millions of them and it can amortise the costs far more effectively than can a small company selling, perhaps, 100 products a month. Such advantages of scale and economy are completely lost to small companies.

HFC Changing tack entirely, when we met at the September hi-fi show you were talking about wireless loudspeakers. Is that something we're likely to see shortly from Epos Acoustics?

MC That would be unlikely over the next year, but it's something we're constantly developing. We've already had customers asking us for such products. We've developed small, active loudspeakers, which I would contend, work better than a separate amplifier and loudspeaker connected by a long length of expensive cable. Further down the line, it's become clear to me that, not only will amplifiers change from linear to switching designs, but also that they'll no longer need analogue inputs. It would make more sense, and you'd achieve better performance, by sending a digital signal straight from, say, a CD transport to an active loudspeaker. And the logical way to do this would be to transmit that

signal wirelessly from the source to an IP-addressable loudspeaker. One only has to wait for the kind of performance that's being promised by some silicon manufacturers to see that very soon there'll be no point in having a CD player with an analogue output. We won't need to have an amplifier that outputs an analogue signal down a thick cable across your carpet to loudspeakers using bulky, low tolerance, high-loss components in a filter to select the frequency range of the signal to drive the individual transducers.

HFC You say "soon" but what sort of time scale are you suggesting?

MC The technology exists today and I'm certain that many companies are already working on it.

HFC When will we see it – 2010?

MC Sooner than that. It won't be long before the types of products we're talking about become more desirable than what is currently available. I would make them now if I had the

“Anyone starting a company should remember: if you want to make a small fortune in hi-fi, start with a large one.”

technology to do it. However, there are developments going on now that won't see the light of day much before next year, but they'll enable us to use this technology to develop finished goods.

HFC Is this the end of analogue audio as we know it, then?

MC I shouldn't think so, any more than it's the end of transistors or valves. There will always be a market for analogue but I just see a sea change on the horizon. When, for example, you have to make an amplifier that uses big transformers, which are lousy and generate a lot of interference into the mains through rectification that can't be filtered out, by law you're going to have to use higher frequency switching that doesn't cause problems that low frequency power supplies do. And if current consumption or efficiency become problems, we are going to be legislated into using the newer technologies, which may for some people seem like heresy, but I think it will come in the end. And there's no reason why it should be a retrograde step.

Ultimately, anything that encourages people to listen to more music rather than sit dumstruck in front of the TV, wondering what else they could be doing with their lives is important. So what if it produces a slightly lower level of performance than you'd like: is that any reason not to listen to it? **HFC**

MEGALINE
EUPHONIA
HELICON
MENTOR - 6
PIANO
IKON
CONCEPT
SUBWOOFER

engel baron



MEET OUR MENTOR

FEATURES

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



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

A photograph of Peter Gabriel in a recording studio. He is bald with a goatee, wearing a blue jacket, and has his arms crossed, leaning on a large mixing console. The studio is filled with various pieces of audio equipment, including speakers, a keyboard, and racks of gear. The lighting is dramatic, with warm tones from the ceiling lights and cooler tones from the equipment.

Here comes the digital flood

Listeners of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your mediocre sound, says the all-digital revolutionary, Peter Gabriel. Interview: Nigel Williamson

Peter Gabriel has called upon the music industry to use digital delivery to bring about a quantum leap in the quality of audio "as radically different as stereo is to mono." He has also called upon music buyers to demand more from their digital systems.

The singer, who made his name with Genesis in the early 1970s and went on to enjoy a string of solo hits such as *Solsbury Hill* and *Sledgehammer*, has long been in the forefront of new technology. On the website of his record company Real World, he recently launched a virtual 'production room' and sample packs, which enable users to create their own remixes

of some of his best-known songs, such as *Shock The Monkey* (one of the first recorded tracks ever to use sampling technology) and material by other artists on his label. He has also purchased Sound State Logic, a company that manufactures state-of-the-art recording equipment. Its consoles are used in a number of leading studios, including his own Real World studio at Box, Wiltshire.

"Most of the stuff we hear now has been squashed and compressed down to MP3," he says. "But my hope is that we will demand more and want better sound. I don't think the recording quality that is now available should

be wasted. With people spending money on home cinema systems with 5:1 sound, musicians can take advantage of that and start immersing people in the music in a way that is as radically different as stereo is to mono."

Although the recording industry has been under pressure from downloading, he still sees the Internet as its saviour. "We haven't bottomed out of the recession, but I'm very positive about the possibilities of the digital world and Real World is looking at all sorts of interesting ways people might find music digitally," he says. "I still feel very buoyant, because I think there's great content out there

and I have a childlike belief that great music will eventually find an audience. I think the Internet can help bring that about."

He is also convinced that the capacity of the Internet to change the way music is distributed and consumed can also have a knock-on and entirely beneficial effect upon the way music is made. "In the same way that the economic reality of a 45rpm single and a juke-box world dictated the kind of music that got made, the lack of cost constraints in a digital environment – in terms of manufacturing and distribution – means a piece of music can be five days long as well as five minutes," he postulates.

"Why not? There's room for all sorts of things to co-exist and because the overheads are so much lower, perhaps you only need to find 100 or 1,000 people before a project becomes financially self-supporting. Previously nothing made it through the doors of a record company unless it believed it could sell 250,000, so the Internet offers a new economic model that is inevitably going to be reflected in the way music is made."

The key to this new model, he believes, is finding new ways to filter the overwhelming amount of material on the Internet. "I think there are all sorts of mechanisms – some of which involve real people and some of which involve sophisticated expert systems – that will help us navigate and filter out the stuff we don't want and find the stuff we do. We'll send little bots out hunting for us to scavenge the net and bring in nuggets of gold," he enthuses.

Gabriel revealed that he has been in discussions about the development of what he calls a 'self-operating mixing desk', which the user could program to search for content tailored to their own specific tastes and requirements. The idea came out of a discussion Gabriel had with Bill Joy, who co-founded Sun Microsystems. "We were discussing how computers can bring freedom of choice and he said that he thought what people really wanted was freedom *from* choice," Gabriel recalls. "I thought that was quite profound. You have access to everything that's out there, but you then have it really well filtered in a very sophisticated way so that you can choose only to get the stuff that's really



"My hope is that we will demand more and better sound. I don't think the recording quality we have now should be wasted."

going to be meaningful to you, exciting, make you happy, make you sad, make you feel like dancing – or whatever it is you want.

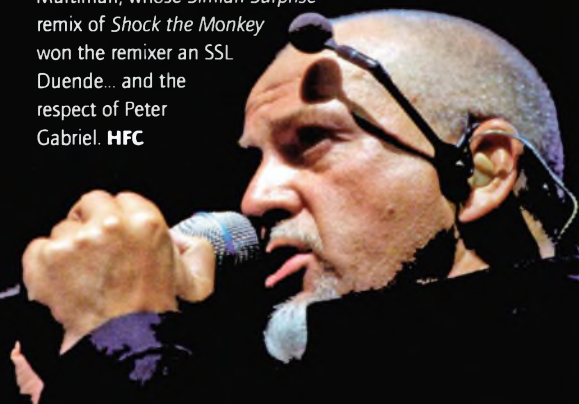
"You can program it (the desk) to say here's what my favourite magazine is giving five stars to this month, or Dr Dre's recommendations or B.B. King or whoever it is. You make these faders your 'tastemakers' and you just sit back and absorb in a way that allows people to find their own niches and mine the veins of their own taste rather than take the mainstream."

If that idea is still in the R&D stage, Gabriel is almost equally excited about a piece of technology already being marketed by Solid State Logic. Called the Duende and connecting to a standard digital audio workstation via a simple FireWire cable, it delivers pro-quality sound processing including filters, E and G series EQ and dynamic processing, and an SSL Stereo Bus Compressor.

"If we can make the Internet sophisticated enough, all of these things give us the chance to improve the way music is recorded, delivered and listened to," he says. "In terms of the

potential the Internet offers to both those who make music and those who consume it, we've only just started to scratch the surface."

To promote his open ended ideas about recording, Gabriel recently conducted a competition to find the best remix of Real World material, using the sample packs that are still available at www.RealWorldRemixed.com. The winner was a fellow named Multiman, whose *Simian Surprise* remix of *Shock the Monkey* won the remixer an SSL Duende... and the respect of Peter Gabriel. **HFC**



ESSENTIAL GABRIEL

Peter Gabriel 3 (1980)

For his first trio of solo albums, Gabriel didn't waste creativity on titles. The last of his albums to be called 'Peter Gabriel' included the synth-driven hit *Games Without Frontiers*



So (1986)

The one where a more light-hearted Peter demonstrated he knew how to dance. How to move from highbrow rock poseur to MTV pin-up while losing none of your creative clout.



The Encore Series (2003)

Pushing technical as well as musical boundaries, this is actually a series of 19 albums documenting Gabriel's 2003 US tour, designed to circumvent the demand for bootlegs.



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ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT Today!

Vanguard/Pure Pleasure
180g vinyl



Music: In the early 1960s, the career of this previously obscure blues artist born in 1892 received a lift on the back of the folk revival scene. His influence has been profound, and you

can hear it in the work of JJ Cale, John Renbourn and Davy Graham, among many others. This is because it does not sound like regular blues, but is much gentler in both singing and picking style. In particular, songs like *Candy Man* have a subtlety and charm that is irresistible. ★★★★★

Sound: Aside from limited treble extension, this record has few characteristics of a 1960s recording. There's a little bit of tape hiss, but it's not obvious and overall there is a smooth roundness to the sound that reveals the music in a clean, open fashion. ★★★★★ JK

NINA SIMONE Emergency Ward!

RCA/Speakers Corner
180g vinyl



Music: Recorded in 1972 and featuring two songs by George Harrison, only the cover fully reveals the impetus behind this four track album by the queen of soul-jazz, depicting a collection of

newspaper cuttings about the Vietnam war. For the 18-minute live version of *My Sweet Lord*, she takes things down to speak directly from the heart and then builds the tune up again to the point where the gospel choir joins in for the theme. Poet David Nelson's *Today Is A Killer* receives sympathetic piano accompaniment and on side two there's the melodic and incisive *Poppies* and the second Harrison number, *Isn't It A Pity* is very well sung. ★★★★★

Sound: It's amusing to see the name Dynaflex on such a weighty platter, originally having referred to extremely lightweight vinyl. This is a good album with wide bandwidth and atmosphere on the live side and precision on the studio cuts. ★★★★★ JK

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COMPACT DISC & VINYL

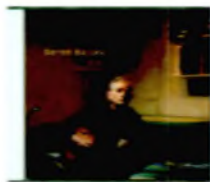


WILLIE NELSON WITH RYAN ADAMS & THE CARDINALS Songbird

Lost Highway

Music: Jack White reinvented Loretta Lynn's career a couple of years ago, so why shouldn't Ryan Adams achieve the same for Willie Nelson? The reason the collaboration doesn't entirely succeed is down to the songs. Nelson and Adams have settled for a collection of covers. Alongside standards by Leonard Cohen, Gram Parsons and Fleetwood Mac and others, there's just one new composition apiece. It's enjoyable enough in an undemanding way, but ultimately

Songbird's lack of ambition ends up sounding rather lazy. ★★★
Sound: Adams and his electric band replace Nelson's customary pared-down approach with a fuller and more rhythmic accompaniment that's unlike anything else in the old outlaw's vast catalogue. ★★★ NW



DEREK BAILEY

To Play: The Blemish Sessions
Samadroust

Music: This is profound stuff. Here, veteran English jazz guitarist Derek Bailey, in his final recording before his death last December, eats his guitar for breakfast in The Most studio on eight improvisations. Ostensibly for David Sylvian, the power of Bailey's discreet intervallic music is in the immediacy and brilliance of the execution. Anton Webern influences, flamenco, jazz and the avant-garde all fly out of his acoustic and when he audibly picks up the electric at the end, the heavens seem to open. Talent like this will be sorely missed. ★★★★★

Sound: Produced and mixed by David Sylvian, every scrape, buzz, vibration and tap can be heard through your speakers. It's a bit bright at times, but for guitar aficionados this is sonic manna. ★★★ MP



VARIOUS

Joe Meek Freakbeat
Castle

Music: Mostly culled from the last 18 months before visionary (if somewhat crazy) producer Meek's bloody demise in early 1967, this disc captures the intriguing moment when Brit beat took proto-psychedelic flight. Check out, say, Heinz' eerily catchy *Big Fat Spider* or The Buzz's blues and deranged *You're Holding Me Down*, or David Joh'n's moody *Bring It To Jerome* - all great, all unreal, all more different from each other than most erore genres are now. Joe Meek died young (murdering his landlady before turning the shotgun on himself), and is best known for his international smash *Teardrop*, but he built 'disposable pop' to last. ★★★★★

Audio: The sonic quality of these tracks varies from the sublime to, occasionally, the trashily ridiculous but that's half their charm. ★★★ PS



DAMIEN RICE

9

14th Floor Records

Music: The much-anticipated second album - the follow-up to *O* - from 'the James Blunt it's okay to like' is an extraordinary record, leaping from fragile acoustic folk beauty to epic, swelling, string-laden rock crescendos and back again with giddy effect - often all in the space of the same song. At his most melodramatic, as on *Elephant and Rootless Tree*, there's a vaulting, Coldplay-like influence to Rice's arrangements. Yet the best moments tend to come on the more reflective material, such as the stunning piano ballad *Accidental Bobbie* and the dreamy *Sleep Don't Weep*. We look forward to the day when Damien Rice puts more than one character in his album titles. ★★★★★

Sound: On first hearing, the theatrical contrasts in the quiet-loud dynamics are likely to jolt you bolt upright in your chair - which is presumably the exact effect Rice was seeking. A very different animal perhaps from his first penning, but all the better for not sticking to formula. ★★★★★ NW

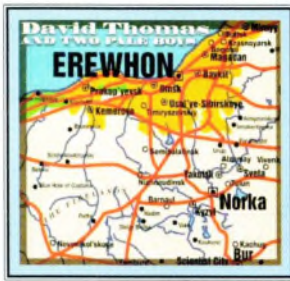


RACHMANINOV

The Bells, Spring, Three Russian Songs
Alexandrina Pentachamiska, Kaludi Kaludov, Serg Laiferkus, Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Charles Dutoit
Decca Essentialz 476 7102

Music: Rachmaninov wrote three vocal compositions for accompanied choir amounting to just 64 minutes of music, all of which are here. They have considerable stature and breadth. In a recording with a strong impression of height and depth. The performers have a clear affinity with the music, including the excellent soloists. ★★★★★

Sound: It is not clear if this release uses enhanced spatial processing, but the sound is anomalous in that image scale appears to increase at high levels. Odd and occasionally vaguely disturbing, this disc nevertheless ranks as a good recording for the price. ★★★ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "It's like a contemporary Beefheart"

DAVID THOMAS AND TWO PALE BOYS *Erewhon* Cooking Vinyl

Music: This 1996 album found former Pere Ubu frontman Thomas with two exceptional musicians in trumpet player and 'vocalist' Andy Diagram and guitarist Keith Moliné, both of whom produce a range of sounds that extend far beyond the expected. Diagram, for example, sings falsetto into his trumpet mic to produce a haunting sound that complements Thomas's wheezy melodeon beautifully. This is a strange album of longing and yearning, almost like a script to a lost

B-movie, and its vivid scenes feature aliens, hardware stores and jukeboxes, harking back to the America of Thomas's youth. It's like a contemporary Beefheart. ★★★★★
Sound: Only ever available on CD, *Erewhon* is a studio album with a fair amount of sound manipulation. Thomas' voice goes from the end of an antique telephone to a full scale auditorium reverb, so there is little pretence at high fidelity, just a great atmosphere. ★★★★★ JK



JOANNA NEWSOM

Ys

Drag City

Music: The Californian harpist and singer was rather awkwardly lumped in with the new folk movement on the release of her debut, *The Milk-Eyed Mender* in 2004. Her songs, mostly for solo harp, were certainly acoustic, often dealt with pastoral themes, and her wayward voice, heavily influenced by the free-flowing style of Appalachian singer Texas Gladden didn't seem to fit anywhere else. But for her second album she's moved on, bringing more of her classical training to bear on the five lengthy pieces that wander through kaleidoscopic Wonderland explorations with the aid of former Beach Boys collaborator Van Dyke Parks's luscious string arrangements. ★★★★★
Sound: The fantasia of the instrumentation and songs is nicely offset by the no-frills recording of one-time noise terrorist Steve Albini and the understated production approach of alternative indie/avant garde producer and composer Jim O'Rourke. You would have been forgiven for expecting something brash and edgy. You would have been wrong, too – this is sublime stuff. ★★★★★ DO



CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN

Symphony for solo piano, et al

Marc-André Hamelin

Hyperion CDA67218

Music: Alkan was a contemporary of Liszt, but his music has a rather more uncompromising flavour, which the remarkable French-Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin makes full use of. The writing is variable, but mostly of a very high order, but it is difficult music to pull off, partly because it demands an unusual virtuosity and physical strength. It is lyrical, expressive, and the musicianship is extraordinary. ★★★★★
Sound: This is a superb example of a well-prepared Steinway, recorded here by Tony Faulkner in the sympathetic acoustic of London's Henry Wood Hall. This is an instrument that provides an enormous dynamic range and the tremendously percussive quality required for this music. ★★★★★ AG



VARIOUS

What It Is!

Rhino

Music: There are lots of great soul funk compilations of course, but this one takes some beating. Subtitled *Funky Soul And Rare Grooves 1967-77*, it is a treasure trove of gems, including a new alternate take of Aretha's *Rock Steady* and a welcome cut from Little Richard's soul period. Full marks for the quality control of the compilers, since there isn't even a whiff of a scraped barrel in these 91 superb tracks of music packed with verve and bounce, grit and style. A superb reward for crate diggers and casual fans alike – make sure it's on your Christmas list. ★★★★★
Sound: All the tracks have been lovingly remastered, some for the first time, and a good job has been done of raising the quality of the sometimes dubious source material. ★★★★★ DO

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

LITTLE RICHARD

Little Richard/Here's...

SACD (two-channel mono SACD/CD)

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab

Music: This unusual SACD reissue choice combines two mono albums on one disc and revitalises some of the most explosive rock 'n' roll ever made for the audiophile community. Both contain songs that are frankly shocking in their energy – hits like *Tutti Frutti* and *Ready Teddy* have a raw power that has rarely been repeated in popular music. The combination of Richard's extraordinary vocals, great if often unsubtle songwriting (usually by the singer himself) and fabulous, saxophone-powered musical arrangements make this distinctive stuff that is hard to resist. These LPs are from 1957 and 1958, and contain all the hits: *Long Tall Sally*, *Keep A Knockin'*, *Good Golly Miss Molly* et al. Essential. ★★★★★
Sound: Mobile Fidelity has done a great job with these two albums. The mono approach delivers them in all their glory and with a dynamic system you will be amazed at the sheer excitement they can deliver. It's a marvel the microphones could take it. ★★★★★ JK



JS BACH, CPE BACH, DISTLER

Various Works

Anne Galowich, Jos van Immerseel, Anima Eterna

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Turtle Records TRSA 0024

Music: Conceived as a programme, this disc includes two baroque pieces, from JS Bach and his second son, CPE, and one from 20th century composer Hugo Distler. There are musical and geographical links that help unite them, as there is with the musicians that play them here, including the period harpsichords. Although the disc is short at under 44 minutes, the quality of the playing – and in particular the commitment and passion of the keyboard work – is truly special. ★★★★★
Sound: Turtle Records is a small, specialist outfit, which is perhaps why unusual attention to detail and care that has been taken over the recording, which rewards replay on a good player. The engineering is first rate, a picture in the informative booklet showing the spaced omni mics on a pole as the main pickup, with a couple of extra mics to flesh out the acoustic. ★★★★★ AG



ANN HAMPTON CALLAWAY

Blues In The Night

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Telarc

Music: Ann Hampton Callaway is not only an accomplished singer, but also a Broadway performer and an award-winning songwriter in her own right, with her tunes regularly covered by the likes of Barbra Streisand. In later years she's moved in more of a jazz direction and on this mix of standards and self-penned numbers she varies the mood between small-combo ballads (including an unusual interpretation of Rodgers and Hart's *Blue Moon*) and storming big band numbers (*Singin' Away The Blues*, the jokey *I'm-Too-White-To-Sing-The-Blues Blues*) with the help of the all-women Diva Jazz Orchestra. It's an easy listening treat, with Callaway's low-slung alto voice relishing the tunes and only occasionally straying into trad Broadway showiness. ★★★★★
Sound: Very much the sort of well-produced, glossily smooth fare you expect to hear at hi-fi shows... but listen a little closer, particularly in the more revealing surround mode, and Ann Hampton Callaway's obvious love for the material shines through. ★★★★★ DO





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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



GIVEN A GRILLING

I have been a subscriber to *Hi-Fi Choice* for many years and the reviews have helped me when considering changes and upgrades to my system. My wife doesn't understand the 'man thing' of having to have 'lots of big boxes' just to play music and to her, aesthetics are important. The big problem is speakers: I listen with the grilles off but my wife prefers them on. All your speaker reviews show the grilles off. I am considering a speaker upgrade and would like to involve my wife in the decision, but she can't see the speakers as she prefers

them. So here's a plea; please show speakers with grilles on and off, that will keep us both happy and make creating a shortlist much easier! Many thanks for an excellent mag.

Richard Vass via email

HFC Point taken, Richard. However, most speakers are designed to operate at their best without the grilles, and there are only a handful of models that are specifically designed for optimum performance with the grilles on. Therefore, we tend to show the speakers *sans grille*, as that's how most people will (or rather should) use them. Plus, of course, it allows readers to see more of the speaker and therefore, get more out of the text. With grilles generally being much of a muchness, we're sure if you use your imagination you could accurately visualize the speaker fully clothed.

BUY MORE GREEN

I was interested in a letter in *Choice Mail* last month (HFC 286) entitled *Environmentally III* and discussing 'green' hi-fi.

You state that a new EU directive is likely to push for greater energy efficiency in consumer electronics. If this is the case, why is the government forcing us into digital television and radio, which uses at least ten per cent more electricity?

"Please show speakers with grilles on and off, that will keep us both happy."

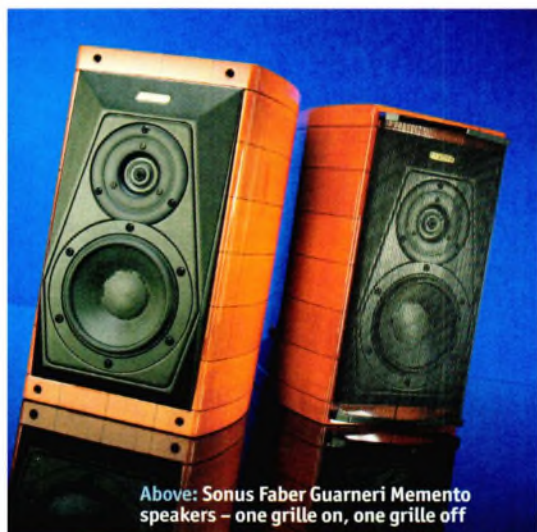
Personally, I cannot see or hear much difference between analogue and digital and even most hi-fi reviewers recommend analogue FM while it is still available. Perhaps inventor Trevor Bayliss could invent a foot-pedal operated generator? This would then satisfy both government objectives to use less energy and take exercise whilst watching digital TV.

D. Hamilton Surrey

HI-FI TAKES THE FLAC

"MP3 downloads are awful," says Andy Giles, in *Emperor's new download* (*Dispatches*, HFC 286). True. However, Andy then asks, "Can you really listen to classic albums while you're on a train or a plane" and suggests that you can't.

"All compressed music is soulless," he says. Not so. Just create your own high-quality MP3 files from your CDs – easy and free if you have a PC. If you can't tolerate the very idea of compressed files, create lossless FLAC files instead (although it would be interesting to see if Andy could tell the difference between



Above: Sonus Faber Guarneri Memento speakers – one grille on, one grille off

Letter of the month

RIPPER MATE

I rip all of my CDs onto a PC, in both the MP3 format, and lossless. I use the MP3 files for portable players and stream the lossless files to a Slimdevices Squeezebox 3 network music player for my main listening, using a Musical Fidelity X-24 DAC instead of the unit's onboard DAC. I am really impressed with the sound quality and don't actually play CDs any more, although, I always buy my music in CD format. My next move is to buy a QNAP server, so I don't need to use a PC or wireless network. I would be really interested to see a comparison

between music servers/clients and direct CD replay. Also, I'd be interested in comparisons between lossless codecs, although there isn't supposed to be a difference. How about it?

Alan via email

HFC We know of a few technology-led early adopters within the audiophile community who are taking this approach and seem happy with the results. Codec comparison sounds like a job for Richard Black, who may expand upon this subject in forthcoming *Techno* columns, so keep an eye out.



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...)

top-quality homemade MP3s and FLAC in a blind test). And the benefits don't end there. I use FLAC files on my portable, and the same files are used on my main home system – a server containing all my FLAC files, fed to my amp via a standalone DAC. It's much more convenient than my CDs and there's no compromise in sound quality.

John Killeen Herts:

HFC There's a lot to be said for lossless and uncompressed music files and going the extra mile with your music portable. Take a look at our AVI Active Neutron loudspeaker review on p50, to see just how good portables can sound in the home.

TWOGOOD

I am the happy owner of an Arcam DV79 DVD player and AVR300 receiver. My gripe is the duplication of surround decoding in my set-up. The DV79 has excellent onboard 5.1 and ProLogic II functions. As I don't need to decode any other sources, and I don't have room for seven speakers, I am wasting all the processing power of the AVR300. What I would really like is a one-box, processor-less, five-channel equivalent! Arcam does offer a multichannel version of the A90 integrated, but you still need an external power amp and the final cost is 50 per cent more than the AVR300. The only pure multichannel integrated amplifiers I have come across are the Passives Cinema-X

Below: Arcam AVR300 receiver



(but £4,750 is a little expensive!) and the Thule Space IA255B (not available in the UK). Is there a gap in the market here?

Christos Proukakis via email

HFC You are quite right, Christos. There is a whopping great gap in the market. There are other options, aside from the two you mention, but they are essentially nonsensical because no-one really wants to use three separate stereo preamps and adjust the volume controls independently. Trouble is, not all DVD players have the same level of on-board multichannel set-up and processing, and many companies prefer an amp-based processor solution, because it allows the use of microphones to simplify set-up for the end user. This situation will not last, though, as HDMI becomes more of a common multichannel standard. The doubling up of processors may well disappear.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Have those who advocate switching off electronic equipment to reduce environmental impact really done their sums properly? It is widely accepted that a principal cause of failure is thermal stress, which is greatly increased if equipment is started from cold instead of from a standby mode. If the life of equipment is shortened by any significant degree, leaving aside the financial pain, how much energy is used in manufacturing and delivering a replacement? Of course, we could all just stop listening to music and live in recyclable cardboard boxes. However, I would prefer a properly informed debate based on scientific fact not scientific cant.

James Scanlan Glasgow

“My gripe is the duplication of surround decoding in my set-up.”

HFC We'll be watching this with interest, as the impact on specialist hi-fi equipment is significant. Hi-fi companies have certainly been getting a kicking from the Government recently, what with the new RoHS legislation effecting the manufacturing process, but they've coped admirably.

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: tm.bowen@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 next issue.

Onlineforum

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



I have £2,000 to get a new system. My room is about 7x3m. I have been thinking about the new Roksan Kandy L3 and something like the new Cyrus 8vs 2 for amps, a Cyrus 6 CD player, and perhaps Dali Ikon 6 or KEF iQ9 speakers. Any suggestions?

Jmike

...Have you considered Musical Fidelity? The A3.5 range is being replaced, so you should be able to get a CD and amp for £500 each, leaving £1,000 for speakers and cables.

Searking

I have a Linn set-up and wonder about problems I might encounter playing

200g vinyl. Will I need to change the VTA?

yorkwhite

...I use 200g vinyl and I've never adjusted my VTA. It has never been a problem.

Rockmonkey

Has anyone heard of a brand called Vincent?

Gekkomna

...Vincent is re-badged Shengya from the Far East. I bought a Vincent SV-233 integrated amp and although it was very well built and good value, it didn't quite hit the synergy thing in my own system.

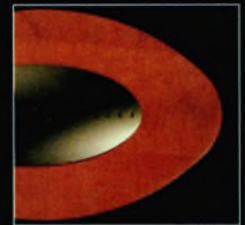
Effem

There's a lot of fuss about mains cables, but

remember: a power supply should deliver clean, unperturbed power to the unit. If the unit is sensitive to the mains lead used, then the power supply has failed at its sole function. If the power supply is adequately designed, it is not sensitive to the mains lead used.

Stebbo

KEF®



Q SERIES acoustic intelligence

"In brief, this is an impressive and surprisingly sophisticated and affordable speaker package."

What Home Cinema, 2006

"The iQ3 is a very respectable performer at its modest price."

Hi-Fi Choice, 2006

"The iQ7s offer an exceptional listening experience."

Active Home, 2006

"Once again the iQ5s prove too much for the competition. Big, confident, poised sound belies the modest dimensions. KEF's gauntlet is well and truly thrown down."

What Hi-Fi Sound and Vision, 2006

"This latest generation doesn't just add an 'i' before the 'Q'; it is also the proud bearer of some of the best speakers KEF has made ever."

Hi-Fi Choice, UK 2006

All the reviewers seem to agree - Q series, the intelligent choice.





REGA APOLLO CD PLAYER | REGA BRIO 3 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
REGA R3 LOUDSPEAKERS | £1,324

Sonic fireworks

This Rega combo delivers dynamite performance for sparklers money – 'high-end' sound has reached its lowest-ever price point...

The system you see before you is remarkable. That it's here at all, in a section of the magazine that's usually dedicated to the rare delights of the high end, is remarkable. What it costs is remarkable. Its sonic abilities are wonderfully, completely and utterly remarkable. And the most remarkable thing of all? It sounded fantastic at Bristol's Sound and Vision hi-fi show earlier this year.

Now, as you probably know, hi-fi systems and hi-fi shows usually like each other about as much as – oh, let's see – Steve McLaren and David Beckham. However meticulously the hardware is set up, it tends to underachieve in the most perplexing fashion. Over the years, hi-fi shows have often been graveyards for the good, the great and the gorgeous; the places, uniquely, where the famous and the fabulous falter.

But not this disarmingly unshowy combo from Rega. This is a stereo system that had people queuing in the corridors, mouths slightly agape, feet tapping with a will of their own, heads nodding as one. The question on everyone's lips seemed to be this: how come a system that costs just £1,324 (or rather less than a metre run of interconnect cable connecting some of the more ambitious CD spinners and amps) can sound so thrillingly natural and musical? And, of all places, at a hi-fi show. How indeed... that's why it's here.

THE SIMPLE SOLUTION

First, the one word answer: Rega. Founded in 1973 by Roy Gandy, this small specialist British hi-fi manufacturer has become nothing less than a synonym for affordable gear that sounds expensive. The company's philosophy is as simple and straightforward as its kit: "to make high

quality products at sensible prices, as a means of reproducing music as faithfully as possible."

And it all stems from one man's mission. Back when he was a boy, Gandy's mum asked him if he would prefer a television or a record player in the house. The story goes that Roy the boy begged for a record player, so she bought a telly. Mrs Gandy undoubtedly did the world a favour. Stung by this early setback, young Roy drove headlong into the world of hi-fi and flung away the rear view mirror. At 18, he built his first pair of loudspeakers.

VINYL CONNOISSEUR

An arguably even greater talent as a turntable designer surfaced a few years later with a Gandy-modified Connoisseur that, according to the reviewer who heard it in 1972, sounded unusually wonderful. The rest, as they say, is history. And what a history: the Planet and Planar turntables, the RB250 and RB300 tonearms, the Bias and Elys cartridges, the Ela loudspeaker and Elex and Elicit amps – all vital coordinates in putting Rega on the hi-fi map. Today, Rega's turntable, CD player, amplifier and loudspeaker ranges offer up numerous complete Rega systems at various, real world, price points. The company now employs fifty-five people and, with its burgeoning worldwide success, continues to grow. What Rega doesn't know about putting performance before price isn't worth knowing.

But even given all of that – and it's hard not to drop in a 'respect' at this point – this is still a remarkable system. Some have suggested it's because of an extraordinary synergy, superior even to that of other cherry-picked coalitions in the Rega line-up. Maybe. Here at *Beautiful Systems* we think the CD

"This is a stereo system that had people queuing in the corridors, mouths slightly agape, feet tapping with a will of their own."



Rega Apollo CD player
£498

Any system would be privileged to have the Apollo spinning the discs. It sounds vastly more expensive than it is with midrange and treble performance that's right out of the top drawer.



Rega Brio 3 integrated amplifier
£328

The Brio 3 continues to evolve, gaining more muscle and a better power supply. While no powerhouse, it has grip, speed and musicality in spades and makes a brilliant partner for the Apollo CD player.



Rega R3 loudspeaker
£498 per pair

If your living room is the size of The Albert Hall, you might need to look elsewhere. Otherwise, the R3 does detail, dynamics and bass with rare skill for a speaker so slim and visually unobtrusive.



player has an awful lot to hold its hand up for. The new £498 Rega Apollo is, without question in our minds, a landmark product – as significant as the Planar turntables and RB tonearms and right now, by an almost embarrassing margin, the best £500 CD player on the planet. What's really satisfying, though – what appears to set it apart from the majority of super-tweaked, breathed-on, autographed, delicately perfumed or otherwise 'enhanced' CD spinners on the market – is that its performance advantage seems to be anchored in good, old-fashioned innovation.

'Innovation' isn't just marketing leverage at Rega. It actually means something. The company's full name is Rega Research, after all. The Apollo goes some way to taking CD replay back to basics and thinking again. When a disc is clicked into its top-loading mechanism (a three-point mounting ball chuck, similar to that found in many portables, which Rega says beats conventional pucks for stability and tracking responsiveness), the laser has a longer, harder look at it than normal. It takes a few seconds. The reason is that the Apollo's unique, British-designed processor chip is analysing the disc to optimise playback. Rega compares the process to that of an engine management system on a

modern car, adjusting the engine settings according to the ambient temperature, engine temperature, fuel quality and so on.

LASER-GUIDED

Rega claims the design is unlike any other in specialist hi-fi today. The laser pickup's advanced, fully digital servo controller uses special signal processing techniques to ensure that the raw data recovered from the disc is of the very highest quality. Advanced algorithms keep the laser spot perfectly focused and in the ideal tracking position for data recovery. The entire IC is clocked via a Phase Lock Loop of Rega's own design, which is claimed to allow better CD data recovery as well as a big improvement in the quality of the data delivered to the Wolfson WM8740 Sigma Delta 24-bit DAC with differential outputs.

Ironically, the Apollo arguably looks and feels a little less 'solid' than a £500 CD player should – not helped by the slightly fiddly disc loading and plasticity finish. In fact, it could easily be mistaken for Rega's previous entry-level player, the Planet, as the casework is identical. Doesn't sound like it, though. The Planet was very good and the Apollo is better. By roughly a couple of light years. And here's the thing: that special, British-designed processing chip

has a truly fundamental impact on the Rega Apollo's performance – to the extent that improving the player in other areas really does make it sound a whole lot better. That's why the output amplifier is a high-quality, discreet design that operates in 'Class A'. It gives a big step up in performance from the Planet, says Rega, and, indeed, all its previous CD players, even more expensive models.

BRIO TRIO

Time hasn't stood still for the company's neat, no-frills integrated amplifier, either. Now, as its name suggests, in its third generation, the Brío 3 has been treated to a modified power supply and an up-rated power transformer. The increased power output (49 watts per channel into eight ohms) is claimed to greatly improve the little amp's grip and control. The Brío is a very typical Rega product, eschewing dubious 'features' for high-quality components to achieve the best sonic performance. The output amplifier is built around a pair of Sanken Darlington output transistors, while the power supply uses a new, generously rated toroidal transformer and smoothing capacitors that provide enough current to drive difficult loads.

Rounding off the combo are Rega's slim, almost dainty, R3 speakers. Don't be deceived. Each sleek enclosure





“Perhaps the most surprising thing about this stereo system, given its modest price, is its absolute faithfulness to musical accuracy, communication and pleasure.”

packs in three drivers – all produced in-house, incidentally, to Rega's exact spec. The RR125 midrange unit is claimed to offer excellent damping of cone resonances, resulting in a smoother response. More unusual, though, is the side-firing 125mm bass driver, which uses an eight-layer voice coil in aluminium rather than copper. No crossover filters are necessary for this driver, giving it better integration with the midrange unit. This, says Rega, results in exceptional timing without compromising any of the midrange and treble performance. The front-firing port means they can be placed near a wall, if required. That said, they seem happiest pulled at least a foot into the room.

HAPPY AND FAITHFUL

And we mean happy. Perhaps the most surprising thing about this stereo system, given its modest price, is its absolute faithfulness to musical accuracy, communication and pleasure. Ear-splitting sound-pressure levels and bass that makes you feel sick are of no interest to Rega's little system, and

rightly so. They have nothing to do with getting off on good tunes.

Another distinction. This Rega system doesn't sound contrived in the 'good tunes' department. You know the score: hyped transients, lean balance for that 'ultra tuneful' bass. No, it just sounds *musical* in a very unshowy and undemonstrative way. So long as you don't drive the amp too hard, the results are detailed and natural with an easy presentation of detail, excellent resolution and fine overall integration. Soundstaging is broad and spacious, rhythmic coherence excellent.

Where its real star quality shines, through, is in the upper octaves, which are fabulously well detailed and transparent. Not only does this give instruments a convincing timbral sheen, it also stuns in its immediacy, attack and verve. Mouth organ – bluesy, John Hammond – has stinging, tingling presence and tangibility, guitar – laid back, Steve Laury – a beautifully warm and natural timbre. Timing is nailed, music makes sense. It all brings a greater sense depth and subtlety to the

listening experience, the overall presentation sounding more rounded and polished yet, at the same time, endowed with greater incisiveness, precision and resolution. Everything is clear: explicit, neck-tingling musicianship shines through.

With just about any cut from John Mayer (but we'll settle for his duet with Herbie Hancock, *Stitched Up*), the system is again in its element. This is real music with startling life and authority. Taut bass, effortless dynamic swings, wonderful mid-range presence and intelligibility and, again, that thoroughly alluring sheen to the treble.

So, it's easy to see what all the fuss was about in Bristol. With the terrific Apollo doing its bidding, this hi-fi system is fast, rhythmic and musically involving, more than capable of eclipsing many mega-buck combos on the day, and it does similar in the home, too. Quite simply, it provides unhindered access to the emotional power of music. And that, dear reader, is the biggest kick of all. **HFC**

David Vivian





KRELLS ANGELS

THE EVOLUTION CHAPTER

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

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

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

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

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

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

KRELL THE LEADER IN AUDIO ENGINEERING the badge of prestige, passion and excellence. Call **Absolute Sounds** for full details.



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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

- 42** Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8 CD player and X-T100 integrated amplifier
- 46** McIntosh MA6300 integrated amplifier
- 50** AVI Active Neutron loudspeaker
- 52** Resolution Audio Opus 21, XS and S30 CD player/tuner/amp system
- 56** Primare PRE30 preamplifier and A32 power amplifier
- 59** Grado GS1000 headphones
- 60** Moon Evolution Series i-7 integrated amplifier
- 63** Ferguson Hill FH007 amp and speaker system



- 65** Rotel RA-06 integrated amplifier
- 66** Russ Andrews PowerMax mains cable
- 66** Oehlbach Rattlesnake 3 loudspeaker cable
- 67** Audica MPS-1 desktop amp and speaker system
- 67** Custom Design Reference loudspeaker stand

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

LOUDSPEAKERS £900-£1,400

- 73** ALR Jordan Note 3
- 75** B&W CM7
- 77** Focal Chorus 816 V
- 79** Nbien NX-6T
- 81** Quadral Rondo
- 83** Triangle Antal Esw



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion is that the Musical Fidelity X-T100 is a highly entertaining and successful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature list is extensive. It's not the most subtle or elegant piece of gear, but it's a gem for a beginner to anyone who could give a beginner a snappier sound with better timing that comes with dense material with remarkable confidence 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

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

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...

Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8 CD player and X-T100 integrated amplifier [Review]

The X factor

MF's new X-Series components share two things: the first is a power supply, the second is great sound



Q&A

We talked to Antony Michaelson, the brains behind Musical Fidelity, about how the new Y Series products came out of the



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Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked point here is p to the job of yo. recommend you

...the 17 MkII M, which has excellent build and e a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's als the Cyrus 7, a ng all-rounder in a compact case. 'er trying the Heart with the standard s we switched over to the Siemens grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by e fact that it was a cold F r hot swap – the l was had been on for several days with the

...after a livelier... w tubes shone through. The Siemens equipped player has an n snapper sound with etter timing that es with dense material with remarkable idence and ease. It even seems to be

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

VERDICT

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FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

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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

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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...

TRIPLE-X
POWER SUPPLY UNIT

POWER

MUSICAL FIDELITY

X-RAY V8

UPSAMPLING 24-BIT CD PLAYER

PAUSE 5 3:08

MUSICAL FIDELITY

X-T100

TUBE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

PHONO

MUTE

POWER

AUX 1

AUX 2

AUX 3

PDI

MUSICAL FIDELITY

MUSICAL FIDELITY



The X factor

MF's new X-Series components share two things: the first is a power supply, the second is great sound

PRODUCT X-RAYv8 and X-T100

TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE (X-RAYv8) £799; (X-T100) £899

KEY FEATURES (X-RAYv8) Size (WxHxD): 21.9x8.8x34cm

● Weight: 4kg ● Analogue outputs: single-ended RCA phono ● Digital outputs: S/PDIF electrical, Toslink optical

● (X-T100) Size (WxHxD): 21.9x8.8x36cm ● Weight: 3.85kg ● Inputs: three single-ended RCA phono, MM/MC phono stage ● Front-mounted portable player input

● Outputs: tape, preamp, speaker terminals (single set)

● Rated power: 70 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8900 2866

🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

Freed from the yoke of UK manufacturing, Musical Fidelity is now a British design team coupled with Taiwanese manufacturing. This appears to be the only way that good products – at least ones that don't cost as much as a small Mercedes – can be made at competitive prices. And Musical Fidelity has always been competitive.

At first glance, it's hard to pin down whether this is a single system, spread over three boxes; two components with a shared power supply; or three individual components. The regular method of purchase throws some light on this: the X-RAYv8 CD player (*sans* power supply) is sold separately, while the X-T100 integrated amplifier is supplied with the smaller TRIPLE-X power supply, designed to feed the CD player, the amp and a forthcoming X-PLORA v8 tuner.

From the front, these are three very similar, squared-off boxes, sporting a typical two-tone Musical Fidelity visage. This is neatly understated here – there are none of the blue glowing feet and landing lights of recent high-end Musical Fidelity. The black anodised extruded cases are almost identical too, save for the TRIPLE-X being about two-thirds of the width and depth of the CD and amp boxes.

The X-RAYv8 CD player is lighter and more utilitarian than most, with just six buttons, the loading tray and the display at the front, plus a pair of phono sockets and coaxial/optical digital outputs at the rear. Blue remains a design feature, with an elegant and easy to read light-on-dark-blue two-deck display beneath the CD drawer. This can be dimmed or turned off altogether from the remote control. Inside, the player sports a Philips CD mechanism coupled with 24-bit/192kHz dual differential delta-sigma DACs, with an eight times oversampling filter and jitter down to a claimed 135psec. This is very similar to other CD players in the Musical Fidelity pantheon,

although more expensive designs feature funky, valve-based analogue output stages.

Despite the compact size and enclosed cases with next to no heat output, the X-Series products are not entirely valve-free – the X-T100 has a pair of 6922 double-triode valves in the preamp stage. This 70-watt amp isn't brimming over with connections: three line-level and MM phono inputs, plus tape and preamp outputs, all in single-ended RCA phono guise. It also has a single pair of good but basic gold-plated speaker terminals for each channel. The one concession to modernism is a mini-jack at the front marked 'PDI', for Portable Device Input. Designed to take the feed from a portable player like an iPod, this shares the 'Aux 1' input. Otherwise, five little buttons, six LEDs and a big powered remote volume knob (with a decent ALPS potentiometer behind it) complete the deal.

The reasons for moving the power supply out of the single-box chassis are simple. On one level, it lowers costs to the end user; if there are a lot of repeat parts in the power supplies of both CD and amplifier, and they can be shared (without causing sonic degradation in the process), the product will cost less to build and to ship, and ends up being cheaper in the

shops. In addition, removing the power supply from the main box ends up effectively eliminating much of the hysteresis effects endemic in sticking power supplies next to sensitive low-level signal paths. Cleverly, MF has given each product a different pinning on the captive XLR lead on the back of the CD, amp and tuner, so you can only plug the CD player into the CD player socket and so on. Joining the three XLR sockets are an IEC mains input at the rear, and a power button with accompanying blue LED on the front. It really doesn't get any more minimalist than this.

Like the Resolution Audio system also tested in this issue (see p52), this is a departure from the usual CD player and integrated amp design template – but the departure here is less radical. With the Resolution Audio set-up, you cannot operate the other amp/source components without the CD player's power supply, which makes the player a mandatory component. Similarly, the X-RAYv8 requires a separate power supply to operate, but this power supply comes as standard when you buy the amp. Or, if you want to use the CD player with a different amplifier, you can buy the TRIPLE-X on its own for £299 – so you can use either component in and mix and match system if you so wish. ▣

“Despite the compact size and enclosed cases with next to no heat output, the X-Series products are not entirely valve-free.”



Q&A

We talked to Antony Michaelson, the brains behind Musical Fidelity, about how the new X-Series products grew out of the rich soil of kW products



HFC The specifications for this CD player and MF's most expensive models are almost identical. How is this possible?

AM Essentially, we use a similar level of digital processing electronics in all our CD players. This is because the difference in cost between the very best and something not so good isn't that great. As a result, from a technical standpoint, our cheaper CD players are comparable with the most expensive from anywhere. Our expensive CD players have advanced power supplies and sophisticated output stages, which improve the sound greatly and, regrettably, cost lots to implement. At least we are sure that, from a technical standpoint, our music-loving users get the best sound possible for their hard earned money.

How much of the technology in the X-T100 has trickled down from Musical Fidelity's high-end kW amplifier designs?

'Trickle down' would be an understatement. How about 'waterfall down'? The preamp circuit in the X-T100 is virtually identical to that in the kW550; less headroom, less exalted technical performance etc. The power amp circuit is almost the same as one half of a kW bridge circuit. Essential sound quality is very similar but without the massive muscle and headroom that the kW550 possesses.

How important is keeping the power supply separate by placing it in the TRIPLE-X power supply box?

Very, very important! From a sonic perspective, there is no doubt that not having a transformer interjecting magnetic hysteresis into components and PCB tracks has a significant effect on ultra-fine detail retrieval. And that, in our opinion, is what proper hi-fi should be able to do.



"That sound draws you into its enveloping and wide soundstage, and places you in with the orchestra or band."

Both these new X-Series components have plenty of upgrade potential, too. Along with the aforementioned tuner, early in 2007, Musical Fidelity plans to launch an X-DACv8 and a more beefy power supply, the TRIPLE-X170. The former is said to transform the CD sound; the latter is planned to boost the standard integrated amp to knock out 100 watts per channel into eight ohms.

SOUND QUALITY

Musical Fidelity kit seems to challenge the hi-fi folklore that suggests products need a week-long

warm-up to come on song. Plug it in, press the power button on the PSU, wait 20 seconds or so for the stand-by LED to change from red to blue and the system is ready and waiting. A week later, it sounds exactly the same. Does it improve when left on for days, with a burn-in disc left churning in the player? Perhaps, but it doesn't seem that important, here. First impressions count, and in this case, they count for a lot.

This is an immediate smiler. The sound is big, bold and ballsy, with an awful lot of heft in those 70 watts. Yet, it's also extremely subtle; play some delicate acoustic guitar work and the scale and dynamics of the system draws you in so much, you wake up in a tapas bar. At least, that's my excuse, officer.

On more heads-down rock, the system fights above its weight. It goes comfortably loud – not brain-meltingly loud, but certainly louder than anyone who shares brickwork with neighbours would care to unleash. And it's smooth right up into ear-bending volumes, presumably thanks to the valves in the system.

There's a sense of these products sharing the same sort of sound (only on a smaller scale) with Musical Fidelity's kW system. Both have the same self-assured, self-confident delivery, with the same dynamically free and exciting sound. The kW adds scale and detail and the sort of grip that scares speakers of a nervous disposition. But so it should, given the exponential differential in price.

Splitting the two X-Series components apart demonstrates exactly which contributes what to the overall performance. The CD player is the neutral performer: not in an antiseptic or bland way, but in the manner of accurate removal of information off the disc. It appears neither to overemphasise or understate musical elements in the performance and just plays music honestly. It's sublimely musical from top to bottom, with a hint of peakiness in the treble; it's not bright or steely, but its highly detailed overall presentation shows up what's going on at the top end all the more readily.

In contrast, the amplifier is the earthier, the warmer and more visceral of the two. But this is exactly where you want this sort of sound to be introduced. It's here where the X-Series breaks with the kW tradition and harks back to the sound of an old-school Musical Fidelity superstar. This sounds every bit like the old





Little Big Mac

This integrated amp brings McIntosh's distinctive, big-boned retro style to a new, lower price point

PRODUCT McIntosh MA6300

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £3,300

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44.5x17.9x47.6cm

• Weight: 34kg • Inputs: six line-level (five RCA phono, one balanced XLR), MM phono stage • Balance control • Headphone socket • System remote control • Rated power: 100 watts per channel (8 Ohms) • Dual VU meters (one per channel)

CONTACT ☎ 0870 199 3914 • www.mcintoshlabs.com

M McIntosh is best known for its distinctive, retro-styled components, which now embrace multichannel as well as stereo equipment (it has begun to include loudspeakers, too). The other thing it is well known for is its advocacy of valve-based amplifiers. A number of the oldest McIntosh designs date back almost half a century, and have legendary status. Some of those early classics are still in everyday use, while some of the newer models, including the MA2275 reviewed in these pages a little over a year ago, are closely modelled on those seminal designs.

Lately, McIntosh has been spreading its wings, a move that appears to have been precipitated by its incorporation into the D&M group, whose two largest member companies are Denon and Marantz. One of the more decisive moves the company has made, which was presaged at the last Las Vegas CES trade show in January, was to introduce some entry-level products – or at least what passes as 'entry level' for an upmarket manufacturer like McIntosh. The subject of this test is one of these more easily 'affordable' newcomers.

To produce an amplifier that doesn't cost a King's Ransom, but which still offers plenty of grunt for not excessive money, McIntosh has taken the solid-state route. This may not at first appear to be where its corporate heart lies, but the company has been using transistor-based design in some models for quite some time, so it's not an entirely new departure.

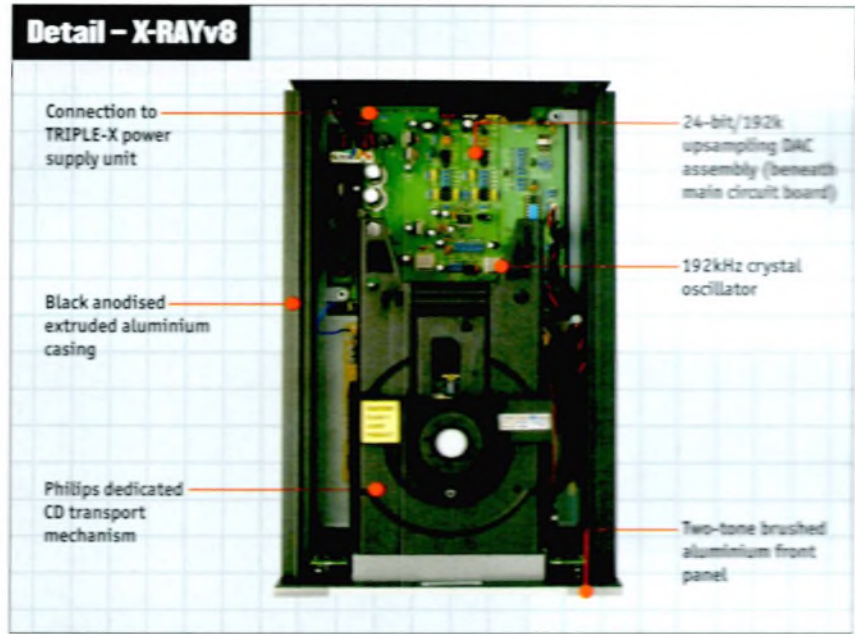
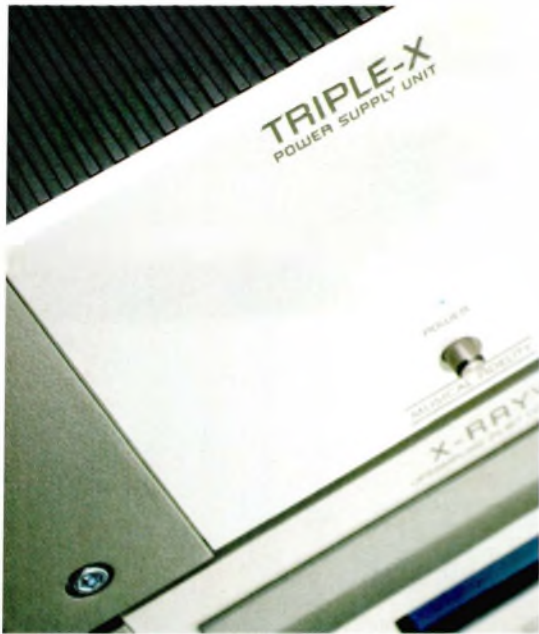
The basics are as follows. The MA6300 is an integrated stereo amplifier that delivers 100 watts per channel into 8 ohms, rising significantly to 160 watts per channel into four ohms. The unit has a moving magnet phono

stage, five single-ended, line-level inputs and a tape input, plus one balanced input using the usual XLR terminals. The pre- and power amp sections communicate via removable rear panel links, and a single pair of speakers and headphones can be connected. In addition, each input has its own serial data control socket, which can be linked to a separate McIntosh source component for remote power on/off purposes. The volume control is an unindented analogue rotary control; a second with a centre detent is used to set channel balance.

The amplifier is supplied with a remote control handset of rather pedestrian styling that can also operate McIntosh source components. The amp itself has all the traditional styling cues of other models from the company, including a glass front panel with screen-printing applied on the inner surface, where it will not be subject to physical wear. Styling is determinedly retro, and as usual the front panel and its blue power meters are internally lit by LED light sources and fibre optics.

Technology highlights include an R-core transformer at the heart of the power supply

Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8 CD player and X-T100 integrated amplifier [Review]

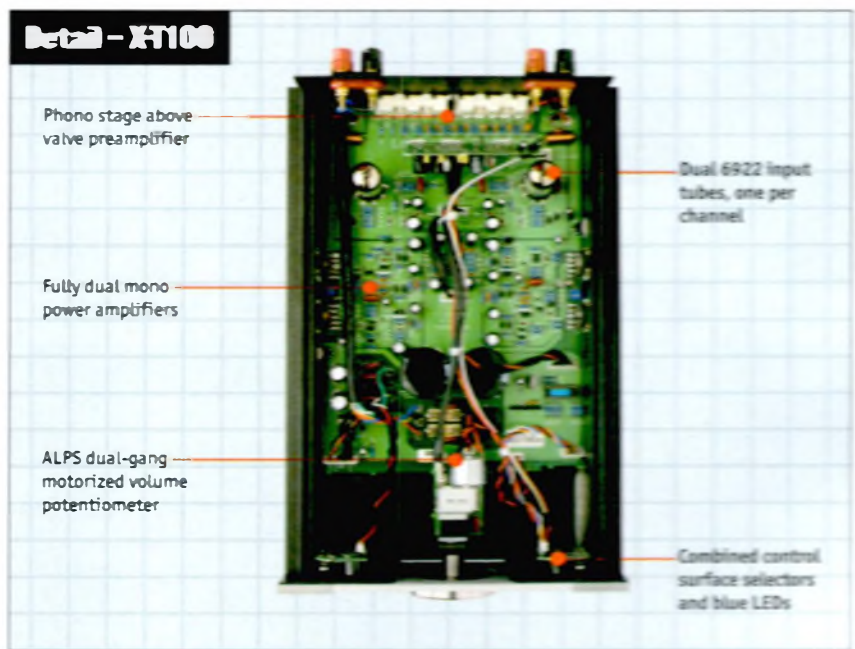


A1000 of a little over a decade ago. Those with long Musical Fidelity memories will go all-blissed out at the chance of getting hold of that design again – it was one of the best amps of its time. If you want one today, it commands more than it originally cost.

Like the A1000, the key word for the X-T100's sound is 'inviting'. That sound draws you into its enveloping and wide soundstage and places you in with the orchestra or band. Yes, it runs out of puff when you feed it vast orchestral pieces or you if want to play Emerson, Lake & Palmer at full tilt (if you do, get some help). Yes, in absolute terms, the sound isn't as crisp and leading-edge fast as the rhythm kings of Salisbury (aka Naim) can muster. But many who are looking for music as sonic sculpture and not a series of temporal peaks and troughs may prefer the X-Series approach.

On occasions during our test, the bass had a sort of Jekyll and Hyde quality to it. Bass notes were deep and clearly defined in almost every case, but for an occasional boom that was out of time with the music. Let's not overstate this; you might hear it twice in 10 hours of listening. It also went away by repositioning the loudspeakers further into the room. When swapping back to a Sugden A21SE amp, the speakers sounded thin in this new placing and back they went to their original position.

It's not that one position is intrinsically right and the other intrinsically wrong; both amps play good bass in the requisite speaker positions, with the Musical Fidelity equipment having the greater sense of solidity, the Sugden having the more comfortable and



warmer bottom end. But the two are intrinsically close, both having great depth and a sense of rootedness to the bass. Given that

you could buy two X-T100s and almost a whole spare TRIPLE-X for the same money as the A21SE, that's excellent going on the part of the X-Series set-up.

The beauty of this MF system is that the whole really is greater than the sum of the parts, and those parts are pretty damn good to start with. You could spend hundreds more and get less. **HFC**

Alon Sircom



VERDICT – X-RAYv8 CD PLAYER	
SOUND >> 85%	CONCLUSION Essentially an expensive Musical Fidelity CD player without the power supply. Well ordered, natural and always satisfyingly musical.
FEATURES >> 82%	
BUILD >> 87%	
VALUE >> 89%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 87%	
VERDICT – X-T100 AMPLIFIER	
SOUND >> 86%	CONCLUSION An immediately impressive sound, reminiscent of Musical Fidelity's best-ever amps. A flexible, potentially appreciable and classy act.
FEATURES >> 84%	
BUILD >> 87%	
VALUE >> 92%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 89%	

Q&A

We spoke to Ron Evans, Vice President of McIntosh Engineering, about the genesis of the company's new entry-level integrated amp



HFC What advantages do ThermalTrak output transistors have?

RE ThermalTrak allows us to run the amplifier cooler, and to maintain much closer control over operating temperatures. This has the secondary effect that the amplifier thermally stabilises within a minute or so of switch on. What we did find, though, was that if we ran the amplifier very hard, a subsequent low-level passage tended to underbias the output, so we have to increase bias levels to avoid thermal runaway.

What other design parameters have received particular attention in the MA6300?

We decided to cut costs by eliminating unnecessary features, so there are no tone controls, no loudness circuit and no loudspeaker switching, for example. But we use parts that are identical in spec and performance to the ones used in our more expensive amplifiers.

What about the glass/fibre optics front panel?

This isn't cheap to do, and we thought carefully about it, but decided that with a conventional front panel, people might not accept the MA6300 as a 'real' McIntosh. It's almost like a branding issue.

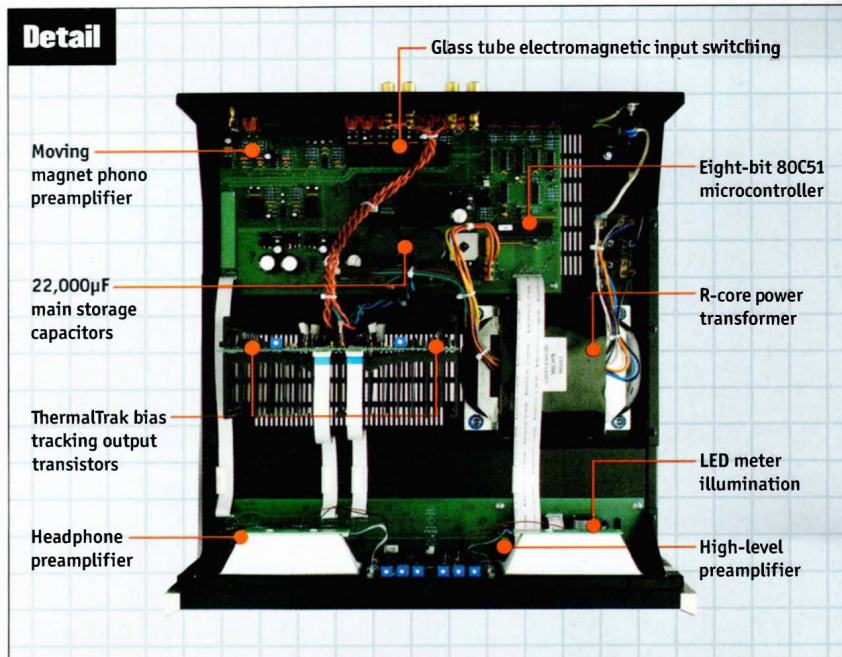
How do you see the future of component stereo high fidelity in a multichannel world?

Here in the US, multichannel is still gaining market share at the expense of stereo, though not rapidly at present. Our feeling is that stereo high fidelity has a very strong future, and our product planning over the years ahead takes this into account.

Are you influenced by your partnership with Denon and Marantz, as part of D&M Holdings?

Not really. I'm sure they would help if necessary, but we are able to fund our own product development, and all the decisions about formats and so on are made internally by McIntosh. They're not imposed from the outside.

Detail



Nevertheless, this remains a fine amplifier, and in many respects an excellent one. The balanced input is not as effective as its counterpart in Krell amplifiers, where the gain stages are inherently balanced throughout. That said, the McIntosh sound did gain a sense of space and light that its single-ended inputs couldn't quite aspire to, and this was when using the same cable type (Nordost Valhalla) in a single-ended/balanced mode comparison. That same sense of air and light suffused the amplifier at lower volume levels anyway, and remained part of the equation when pumping watts too, to an only slightly lesser degree. At these elevated levels, however, the sense of an endless dynamic range was noticeably reduced. It may be that increasing levels of harmonic distortion at higher levels caused what we experienced from this amplifier here.

This is an amp with a powerful sense of tonal colour, expressiveness and – in a mark of a worthwhile amplifier – its capabilities seem more fully formed and rounded with acoustic material than electronic. Here, the more

complex and subtle tonal colours, and the greater sense of expressiveness shine through, subject to the qualifications already stated. Bass is well extended, with more of a sense of warmth and grace than expected from some solid-state amplifiers, perhaps in deliberate emulation of the strengths of the valve amplifiers in the McIntosh range.

What started out looking like another clean sweep for the expanding McIntosh stable turns out to be an attractive and generally well implemented design, at a somewhat more accessible price than usual. However, under dynamic drive conditions there are limitations that in the final analysis make the listening experience a little anticlimactic. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

FEATURES >> 84%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 78%

PRO
Basic premise of a reduced price solid-state amplifier to provide 'entry point' to McIntosh's range is a good one. Accomplished sound in most respects, especially at lower volume levels.

CON
The amp's sound is less convincing at high volume levels, where it struggles to deal with musical crescendos.

CONCLUSION

Although the power available is not as useable as it should be due to lack of consistency across a broad volume range, this is still a moderately powerful amplifier with all the benefits of McIntosh ownership, including longevity and serviceability.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 82%



“We’ve had good experiences with McIntosh products in the recent past, and first impressions were in line with expectations.”

and so called ThermalTrak output transistors, which have an extra pin and an internal sensor to monitor their own temperature and to adjust bias levels to maintain thermal tracking. There’s actually nothing new about these transistors – the first application that came to our attention was in Kenwood amplifiers in the mid-1980s, where the technology was unaccountably (and somewhat unfortunately) known as TRAIT-R.

In contrast, R-core transformers are more recent. Matsushita first developed them if memory serves, about a decade ago. R-core technology offers more compact packaging, less electromagnetic flux leakage and very high efficiency compared to toroidal transformers, which set the standards in pre-R-core days (some would argue that toroidals still set a benchmark – their popularity in hi-fi electronics is still strong). Input switching is by noiseless electromagnetic switches, and housekeeping electronics include the Power Assurance System, which monitors output levels, momentarily throttling the amplifier back if an over-drive condition is identified, and restoring full operation thereafter, with an attack time of one two-thousandth of a

second. This is a relatively cool-running amplifier, so bias levels in the output stage are clearly not high.

SOUND QUALITY

We have had good experiences with the McIntosh products in the recent past, and first impressions here were in line with expectations. In general terms the MA6300 sounds like a superior sort of amp, with gravitas, dynamic range, a clean treble (not always the case with silicon-powered amps), a solid sense of midrange depth and tonal variety – all the things that mark good amplifiers out from the other kind, in fact. Except for one thing.

It took a while to recognise what we were not getting from the MA6300, in part because we started out using it for general jobbing duties, mostly at low-to-moderate volume levels – the power meter indicators rarely intruded into the space above one watt – and with speakers of quite high sensitivity (high sensitivity speakers are a disincentive to drawing too much power). It was only when we began to stretch the amplifier by using it to drive less sensitive loudspeakers (Vienna Acoustics, Opera and so on) at higher volume

levels, that we began to notice that it was inconsistent in its behaviour. While at moderate volume levels the amplifier did perform well, as described above, as soon as the leash was slipped, it was apparent that the McIntosh didn’t sound as comfortable, and that a certainly granularity and harshness had crept into its voice.

Not that it sounded bad, still less anything remotely approaching unlistenable. The MA6300 remains what it appeared to be at first shot: a classy and capable amplifier. But, because its aural signature was at some level not quite consistent, the amp was also not transparent. We could hear it working, almost perceptibly drawing its breath to attack the loud passages, and this was enough to take the edge off the clarity. The harsher sound when the amplifier was running hard made the music sound synthetic. If the same quality had been there to the same degree at all volume levels, it might have been possible to acclimatise to the effect, and mentally filter it out. Instead, what we heard – and what we think listeners generally will hear sooner or later – is an amplifier that sounds just slightly uncomfortable, one that doesn’t quite rise seamlessly to crescendos in acoustically recorded music. Paradoxically, on other electronically generated music types where the dynamic range is never permitted to get out of hand, the MA6300 performed better. Here, the music prompted less reaction from the amplifier when under duress. ▶

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Active living

AVI takes its mighty mite speaker and adds a powerful little power amp

PRODUCT AVI Active Neutron

TYPE Active standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,049 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 14x26.5x20.5cm
• Weight: 7kg • 25mm fabric dome tweeter
• 125mm doped paper bass/mid driver • Rated power: 150 watts per Amp-Pak/speaker • Connection: one single-ended phono socket per speaker

CONTACT ☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.com

AVI is a company that makes electronics and speakers – the two had to combine, one day. The company recently announced its Amp-Pak, a power amp module that ‘bolts’ onto the back of its popular Neutron IV or Pro-Nine-Plus standmount

speakers, or the Duo floorstander, turning them into ‘active’ speakers (it’s the active version of the Neutron IV that we’re reviewing here).

To some audiophiles, ‘active’ speakers have the amplifiers connected directly to the drive unit, with the electronic crossover sitting between the pre- and power amps. This is ‘active’ in the Linn or Naim sense. Instead, ‘active’ in AVI-speak is taken to mean moving the power amp next to the loudspeaker, in a similar manner to PMC speakers sporting Bryston power amp packs. As well as being a perfect partnership, this means no more chunky speaker cable running around the room. Instead, a line-level phono cable and a mains lead – one of each per speaker – are needed to feed and drive the amps at the rear of each speaker.

The 150-watt Amp-Pak is fitted to the back of each speaker in the factory, or can be retrofitted to existing two-way AVI speakers, for £599 a pair – it’s not a complex upgrade, but not one that’s sanctioned for DIY installation. It’s a fully linear amplifier module, with its own toroidal transformer, so it’s no low-rent bolt-on option. It would be logical to assume it is a digital design because it’s so small, but it runs its bi-polar output devices in good ol’ Class AB operation. The Amp-Pak isn’t exactly complex from the outside though, with just a mains socket, a power switch and a single phono socket on the top of the black powder-coated, folded aluminium box.

Using single-ended line-level signals, rather than either balanced line-level or speaker level

Listen Up...



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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Tower of power

A micro-sized system with high-end sound – Resolution Audio's four-box set-up is distinctly different

PRODUCT Resolution Audio Opus 21, XS and S30

TYPE CD player, tuner and amp system

PRICE (Opus 21) £2,995; (XS) £1,395; (S30) £2,150

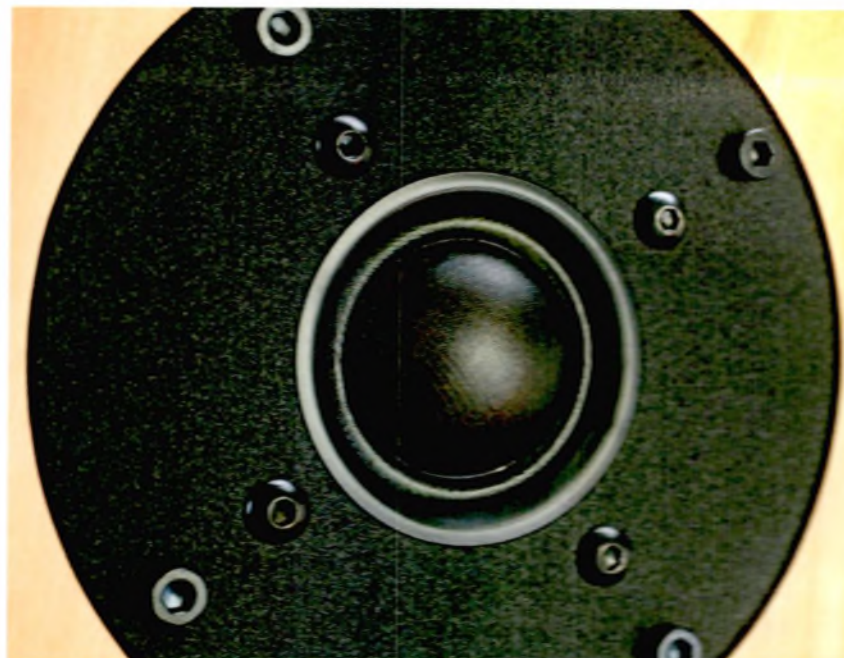
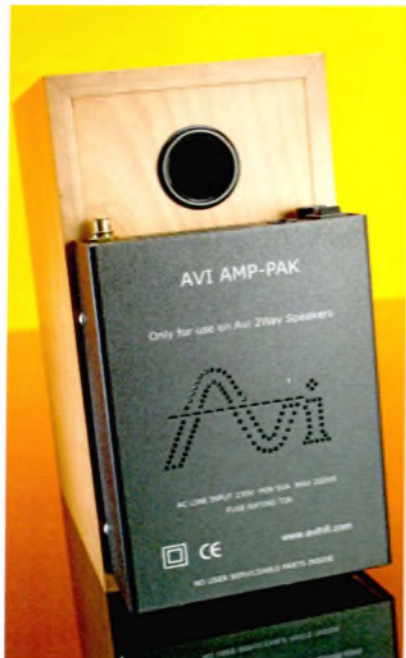
KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): each unit 24x7.5x25cm
● Combined weight: 12kg ● Analogue inputs: two line-level, MC/MM phono ● Digital inputs: two coaxial, two Toslink, USB ● Outputs: coaxial digital, fixed and variable analogue (direct to S30) ● FM/MW/LW tuner

CONTACT ☎ 01277 227355 🌐 www.resolutionaudio.com

Plenty of companies claim to have a new angle, but most are variations on a theme. Not so Jeff Kalt's Resolution Audio – the San Francisco-based company's products reveal genuine out-of-box thinking. This system ably demonstrates that mindset. It costs as much as big-box separates, but offers more features than most and in a far less unwieldy form. It's housed in weird-sized

cases – wider than a half-width Cyrus but shallower – and the whole system shares a single power supply, housed in the case with the front panel display (see picture above). This is part of the Opus 21 CD player and you can't use the S30 amp or the new XS unit without it.

The XS, or 'extra sources', provides an MM/MMC phono stage, FM/MW/LW RDS radio tuner and both analogue and digital inputs,



“There is a sense of directness and purpose about the Active Neutron sound that is very hard to achieve with passive designs.”

connections, does put a strict length limit on cables connecting sources or preamplifiers to the power amps. Anything up to five metres should be fine in most cases, however.

The Amp-Pak sits just below the rear port of the Neutron IV (where the loudspeaker sockets usually live), but it doesn't appear to create any nasty turbulence in the process. Otherwise, the Neutron IV is unchanged; it's a diminutive two-way speaker that uses a 25mm fabric dome tweeter and a bass/mid driver with a 125mm doped paper cone and 25mm voice coil. This all sits in a very slim little five-litre box that is best used about 30cm from the walls. This isn't a bassy speaker – AVI rates it from 100Hz-23kHz and puts the -6dB bass response figure at 65Hz, meaning deep bass is almost totally non-existent and the upper-mid bass will sound slightly lacking compared to many speakers. But that's nothing new among classy mini-monitors and the Neutron IV both look and sounds like it's an LS3/5a on a diet. We gave the passive version a Best Buy thumbs up back in *HFC* 260.

SOUND QUALITY

First and foremost, this is an excellent speaker. On its own, the Neutron IV delivers a remarkably transparent performance. It is revealing and dynamic, and goes surprisingly deep for so small a cabinet, ultimately trading really deep bass for speed and accuracy.

The addition of the Amp-Pak improves the Neutron IV's performance still further. With the Active Neutron, the upper midband is kept in

check, where before this was amp-dependent. It's still a little etched-sounding in the mids and top, but this is forgivable, because of the stunning amounts of detail on offer.

There's a sense of directness and purpose about the Active Neutron sound that is very hard to achieve with passive designs. This comes across as both speed of attack and solidity; the latter is interesting, as people often equate solidity with powerful bass drive. Here, the bass is tight and controlled, but not especially powerful, yet sounds are rooted firmly in their own three-dimensional space. All of this contributes to the 'disappearing' effect the Active Neutrons do so well.

On the end of a good CD source and preamplifier, this active speaker system delivers an impressively detailed, precise and accurate sound. A loud sound, too – those Amp-Paks really drive the speakers up to a useful loudness ceiling that is more than enough for small rooms or close-up listening. You get good transparency, excellent detail, fine imaging and a natural sense of rhythm, too.

But a CD player and preamp is only the start. AVI suggests that by hooking these speakers up to an iPod or a PC, you can do without the hi-fi system altogether. We did just that and AVI is right... disturbingly so. We hooked the speakers into a generation-old Apple PowerBook and used that as an audio server. This delivered the same snap and precision that the CD and preamp did, but with the practical advantages of a single-box server. Yes, the hi-fi system had the edge in terms of a comfortable,

lengthy listening session sound; it was more natural and musicians seemed even more tangible. But the fine differences between the hi-fi and a laptop seemed comparatively small.

We also went iPod hunting, searching around for an Average Joe with an Average iPod, who recorded their music in Average AAC. We found one... and the little iPod Nano looks faintly daft in this context, dwarfed by even the minijack socket connecting it up. But it did not compromise the sound – in fact, it sounded very close to the sound of the computer, and that of the CD and preamp. Not identical and not superior, but unless you happen to have the CD and amp nearby to check, more than good enough to be musically entertaining.

AVI's bold claim may hold this speaker back, disenfranchising audiophiles who think iPods are the work of the Devil. If so, these hi-fi fundamentalists are missing a trick, because this is a great amp and speaker system, whatever it plugs into. **HFC**

Aidan Sircorn

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 86%	PRO A beautifully transparent amp/speaker combo with a lively, open midrange and loadings of detail. Compact size and built-on power amps make it great for iPod or PC audio applications.
PRACTICALITY >> 90%	CON Lacks deep bass, while some will prefer a more laid-back sound. Not suitable for large rooms or listening at distance.
BUILD >> 87%	
VALUE >> 85%	
CONCLUSION The Amp-Pak is a deeply clever addition to AVI's portfolio. In tandem with the Neutron III, they're perfect for small-room applications in place of a standard power amp. And used in a desktop system with a computer or an iPod, they're sensational.	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 88% OVERALL SCORE	

the latter in USB as well as the usual varieties. The digital inputs use the four Burr-Brown PCM 1704 24-bit digital converters in the Opus 21, connecting via a short link of Reson solid-core interconnect. The 'extra sources' name seems entirely appropriate given this roster of options and when you realise the quality of the components that have been selected, it seems like great value as well.

There seems to be a meeting of minds between Resolution Audio's Jeff Kalt and Denis Morecroft, the man behind DNM electronics, who also invented slit foil capacitors. It comes as no surprise, then, to find DNM amplification stages in Resolution Audio components and a DNM phono stage in the XS. Previously, you would have had to purchase a DNM preamp to get one of these, and such things are both rare and expensive. The tuner is the same module that you will find in Creek's Classic Tuner, another well regarded component oft associated with DNM and Resolution Audio equipment. A plug-in DAB module is also available.

The provision of two analogue inputs on the XS might be a red herring here, because the S30 amplifier already includes three inputs (two single-ended, one balanced). However, these are rendered practically useless when the XS is introduced. Another potentially confusing facet of this for those familiar with the Opus 21 is that the variable outputs on the CD player are also overridden by those on the XS, which has its own fixed and variable options. But that's only an issue when using a third-party power amp; the S30 requires no external cabling but uses SCSI-style bus links between boxes.

So, how on earth did Resolution Audio get away with producing such a weird system? By starting out with a truly great CD player, that's how. The Opus 21 blew us away when we first heard it in 2003 (*HFC 244*) and it has been subtly refined since that time – this sample sounds rather more refined than the original. It cleverly splits the noisy but necessary power supply from the sensitive disc reading and decoding elements, a very DNM-like approach and one that seems to help the player produce an unusually dynamic and nimble sound.

The player was followed by the S30 'integrated' amplifier, which is a hybrid of DNM's PA3Δ and PA3ΔS power amps and, at 35 watts, delivers slightly more power than its name would suggest. Speaker terminals are separate spade and banana plug varieties, with a third wire option on the latter for use with DNM Reson speaker cable and earthable loudspeakers.

The XS remote handset controls the whole system and is rather basic given the overall cost, but if you want male jewellery this is never going to be the kit for you. The distributor always sends us the



“How did Resolution Audio get away with producing such a weird system? By starting out with a truly great CD player, that’s how.”

black versions of these units, but you can have all-anodised natural aluminium front plates, which we think look better.

SOUND QUALITY

With just 35 watts on tap, this system requires sensitive speakers if its going to shift any air. Resolution Audio's equipment is often seen used with the hugely efficient Rethm speakers, and is well suited to the Living Voice OBX-R, which is our efficient speaker of choice. But, as long as you don't expect a pair of low-efficiency speakers to play at ear-splitting levels in a big room, the S30 is up to the job in hand.

The XS brings to the party a moving coil phono stage, that acquitted itself with aplomb, delivering a crisp, detailed and rhythmically precise sound that got right into the nitty gritty of the music. It reveals more treble detail than phono stages like the Trichord Delphini, but doesn't actually seem bright. Rather, it seems to extend further and use its treble to render the edges of notes in a definite way. This brings out the inner detail and atmosphere of recordings extremely well. It also delivers pace with a poise that is rare, digging into every rhythmic nuance that the cartridge delivers.

One issue that did arise with the phono stage was hum. With the power supply in its traditional place at the base of the stack, there is a clear hum when using low-output moving coil cartridges (such as the vdH Condor, at 0.37mV). In reality, though, few record decks sport a cartridge with an output as low as this, and the level of hum drops as you approach 'real-world' MC output levels. This hum can be further reduced if you place the PSU on a separate shelf below the stack, but the short connector for the amplifier limits placement and upsets the aesthetic balance of the system. In addition, at present there is no earth point for tonearm cables and a phono socket ground has to be used for the purpose – a more elegant solution is in the pipeline.

In many respects, the amplifier's sound mirrors that of the CD player. This is ▶



Q&A

We spoke to Jeff Kalt, Resolution Audio's founder, about the new XS unit and how it fits into the wider Resolution Audio system



HFC Bringing the XS into the system reduces the amount of inputs and outputs. Can this be avoided?

JK The original XS design didn't include an analogue inputs, as it was intended to be more of a source component than a preamp (of sorts). This was based on the assumption that the XS would mostly be used with our amplifier as well. Once we considered the added flexibility of using the CD and XS with a different amp, it became obvious that we should include analogue inputs. It's true the number drops from three to two, but these other sources would have been a tuner and/or phono preamp.

The balanced output of the CD player and input of the amplifier remain functional, so it depends on how the system is used. The balanced outputs can be used when playing CD (or digital inputs), and the XS phonos can be used for tuner, phono and analogue. And the tuner and phono designs would not benefit from balanced outputs.

How have you hybridised the DNM PA3Δ and PA3ΔS designs to make the S30?

The S30 makes use of all the advanced circuitry of the PA3ΔS except for the regulated power supply. While the S30 supply is unregulated (which provides for higher power output), the use of T-network capacitors and a cascaded gain stage improves its power supply performance.

What has changed in the Opus 21 CD player since we reviewed it three years ago?

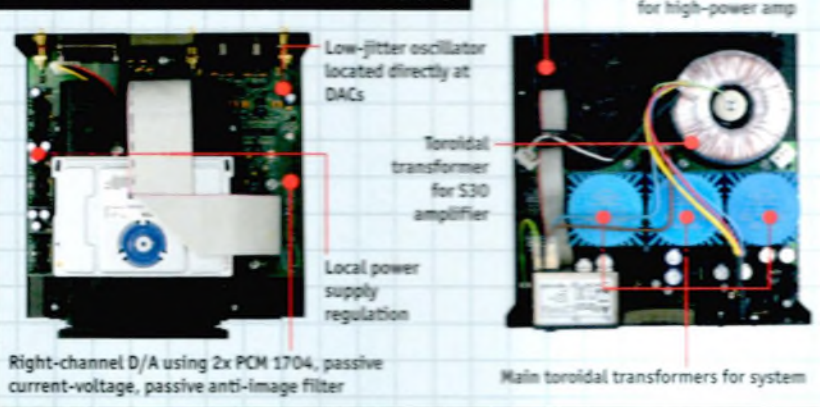
The only changes relate to software support for the XS, including the new remote control. All of these changes are limited to the Power Centre, which can be updated by installing a single socketed chip.

Which loudspeakers do you recommend?

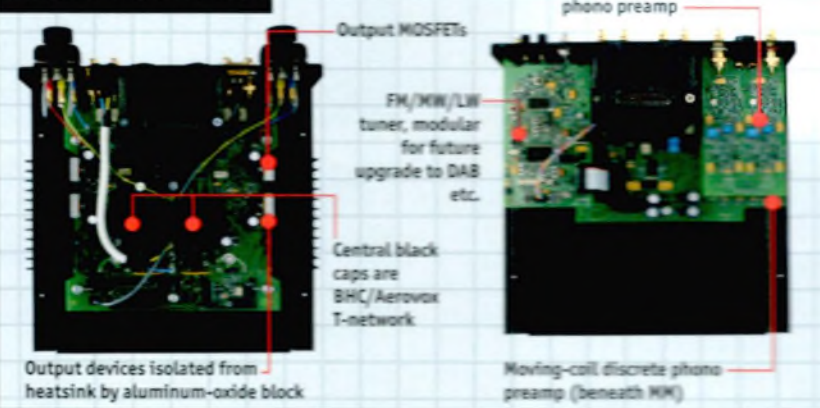
We recommend speakers of at least 90dB sensitivity for use with the S30. Of course, this depends on room size and listening level. I personally have been drawn toward high-efficiency speakers (95dB+), as I feel they better communicate the immediacy and presence of live music.



Detail – Opus 21 and power supply



Detail – S30 and XS



no bad thing, because the Opus 21 is one of the most bold, rhythmic and dynamic-sounding machines around. It also lives up to its maker's name – 'Resolution Audio' – which is again no surprise given the DNM amplifier connection. Perhaps those after the best possible imaging and refinement would choose a less forthright system, but the sheer speed of the Resolution sound will find favour with many.

Tonally, the price you pay for the speed that the Resolution Audio system delivers is a brighter than neutral balance. This is a quality that we have long associated with DNM electronics and it's one that has found a lot of fans, but is not to all tastes. It's a balance that favours intimacy rather than energy; it draws you inside the music and reveals hidden treasures of nuance and atmosphere. Some may miss the left and authority of greater power, gripping hold of the drive units of less efficient speakers – the Resolution Audio kit encourages more sensible listening levels, bringing out all the fascination in the music without having to resort to bombast.

If you want a more powerful sound, this can be achieved by substituting a bigger power amp. We did this with a Gamut D200, an amp that added balls to the speed and delicacy on offer before to create a stunning result. There is a bigger Resolution Audio power amp in the pipeline, though it could be a long time coming. But do you really need the extra

power? Playing Miles Davis' *In A Silent Way* on the Resolution system as it stands today transports you back to a musical event nearly forty years ago and reveals a widescreen holorama of sound. In the scheme of things, and at the price, it's an impressive result.

As a system, this Resolution Audio kit draws the life out of a recording with considerable skill, pulling out all the important musical subtleties to create an extremely engaging result. If you have the right speakers, it's the micro system to beat all micro systems. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



PRO
Compact and easy to use, with a fast, detailed and dynamic sound, a cracking phono stage and a nifty roster of features. Distinctly different – and distinctly high quality.

FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 87%



CON
Amp needs high-sensitivity/ easy-load speakers for best results. Doesn't look the money in black finish (although the silver is cool).

CONCLUSION
It may look unassuming, but this compact stack of boxes delivers genuine 'high-end' sound. Its performance is full of pace, detail and subtlety. The S30 and XS units building on the CD player to form a pint-sized system of genuine ingenuity.

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

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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Power of two

Primare's mighty new power amp is a terrific partner for the company's excellent preamp

PRODUCT Primare PRE30 and A32

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE (PRE30) £1,200; (A32) £2,999

KEY FEATURES (PRE30) Size (WxHxD): 43x10x41cm
• Weight: 9.5kg • Inputs: five single-ended RCA phono, two balanced XLR • Outputs: single-ended RCA phono and balanced XLR • 12V trigger • (A32) Size (WxHxD): 43x21.6x54.6cm • Weight: 40kg • Inputs: single-ended RCA phono and balanced XLR • 12V trigger • Rated power: 250 watts per channel (8 ohms), 400 watts per channel (4 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01423 359054 # www.primare.net

The PRE30 preamplifier was first reviewed in this magazine in August 2004 (HFC 256), accompanied by the A30.2 power amp. Now, Primare has extended its power amp range with the new, top-of-the-line, stereo A32. This pumps out a mighty 250 watts per channel – enough for low-sensitivity speakers

in large, absorbent rooms, even when high volume levels are required.

The unfeasibly heavy new amplifier – you risk life and limb if you attempt to move it without help – is truly a solid lump of muscle, for which the designer has specified a mighty 21VA toroidal transformer and 90,000µF of reservoir capacity. Internally, the amplifier is a full balanced-mode design, with single-ended inputs that are converted to balanced mode at the input for subsequent processing.

The A32 is configured as a dual-mono design internally, and employs current feedback. Active temperature compensated current sources are used instead of passive resistors, and the output stage uses no less than 16 Toshiba bipolar output devices per channel to provide current sharing. High-quality components are used throughout, including Vishay resistors, and the signal path is

completely free of capacitors. However, it is not servo-controlled to mitigate effects on very low frequency performance caused by servo drift; instead, the DC level is set on the production line. Surface mount components and short signal paths are used throughout.

The power amp offers DC servo protection, fuses to protect against short circuits (current limiting has been avoided as it is said to adversely affect sound quality when operating with low-impedance loads) and thermal monitoring. Two separate standby modes are supported – the first, described as the 'audiophile' mode, leaves the power supplies active; only the speaker relay and idle current are reduced, which means a quick startup at near optimum sound quality. The other, which we suppose must be described as the 'lo-fi mode', turns off the analogue power supplies and is intended for use when the amplifier will



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

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Grado's greatest

Grado's flagship cans might just make the best sounds you'll ever hear

PRODUCT Grado GS1000

TYPE Open-back headphones

PRICE £995

CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.gradolabs.com

A grand for a pair of headphones? You can buy a pair for a tenner, and a good pair for just £100. Grado may have to do some justifying here.

Appearances are promising, though, with newly designed drivers and high-purity copper windings and leads. However, with Grado's typical reticence, it declines to give much technical detail. The company is known for no-nonsense products, many of which have a unprepossessing look about them, and while these are considerably smarter than the rest of the Grado range, the GS1000s are not above sharing some items, including the headband adjustment slide. So, has the extra money really delivered the goods sonically?

Headphones can impose on the listener's head and ears in a very physical way, and Grado's other models, with their 'supra-aural' foam pads that rest directly on the ears, are not everyone's idea of fun. The GS1000s, however, rest quite gently on a large area outside the ear itself, giving plenty of clearance for even protuberant ears. They do get a bit warm, though, and we found the lightly padded headband needs careful positioning on a balding head in order not to press uncomfortably. On the other hand – and despite Grado's own suggestion that there is a distinct sonic 'sweet spot' with regard to positioning – we found results are highly consistent and the headphones are very stable on the head.

SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps the most telling moment in a long auditioning period spent with these cans came when a passing professional musician raised both eyebrows on being told the price of a pair of GS1000s, only to nod and concede the point completely within about five seconds of hearing them. That really

sums up the achievement of these headphones: they can make the most seasoned of critical listeners realise sound reproduction can be *that* good. The GS1000s offer a level of musical revelation unmatched, in our experience, by almost any replay or, indeed, live performance.

Eh? Yes, we do go that far. Obviously that presupposes a good recording, but just as there are plenty of indifferent recordings around there are also indifferent live music venues where poor acoustics, ventilation noise, lighting buzz, noisy neighbours or a multitude of other incidental distractions get in the way. Grado can't compensate for the 'being there' chemistry of live music, but the level of detail and insight the GS1000s bring to the party considerably exceeds what we've heard in all but a few concerts.

In hi-fi terms, the tonal balance redefines the concept of neutral. Dynamics are so effortlessly wide that they take some getting used to: but they make most other cans and practically all speakers sound seriously congested. Imaging is precise and extended in a way that most reproducers only dream of. We've heard other hi-fi components that have pointed up new details in familiar recordings, but these quite literally make those discs sound completely new, such is the extra insight they convey.

All concerned with making recordings owe it to themselves and their audience to check their skills via these cans. Meanwhile, if you like headphones you'll love these to bits. And if you never got on with them, these could make you change your mind. They are that good. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 97%



COMFORT >> 85%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 95%



PRO

Detail, neutrality and musicality all exceed what we had previously thought possible. Admirably unfussy about partnering equipment.

CON

Once heard, can induce lasting depression regarding almost every other hi-fi experience. Ear pads can make your ears feel warm after extended listening.

CONCLUSION

This may well be the finest electricity-to-sound transducer in the world. If you don't want to be haunted by the suspicion that your interest in audio is terminally superficial, you absolutely must hear a pair of these.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **96%**

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



MOON

Standby

Display

U61 30.0

Monitor

Mute

Setup

OK

i-7 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Heavenly body

HFC trains its telescope on a new high-end integrated amplifier from Moon

PRODUCT Moon Evolution Series i-7

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £4,750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 47.6x14x41.9cm

• Weight: 26kg • Inputs: five line-level (four RCA phono, one balanced XLR) • Outputs: tape monitor, preamp out, speaker terminals (single set) • 12V trigger out • Rated power: 150 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 0131 555 3922 ≡ www.simaudio.com

This imposing heavyweight, fully balanced stereo integrated amplifier has a fabulously constructed chassis, and Levinsonesque styling. Much of the weight of the Moon i-7 is attributable to the chassis and three large transformers, including a massive 0.5kVA toroid. Spikes help to couple the amp firmly to the surface it sits on, but washers or cups are available to spread the load. Power output is 150 watts into eight ohms, not quite doubling to 250 watts into four ohms and with a more than generous current yield said to be around 40 amps peak.

The list of major facilities is short and sweet. There are five inputs, one of which is balanced, and the single-ended options include a single tape circuit. All inputs are exclusively at line level. A processor facility can be used to lock

the volume control out when the i-7 is used with an external processor.

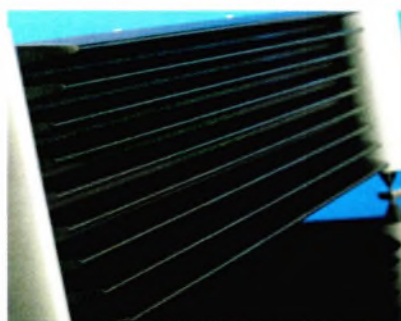
The user interface is centred on a massive programmable dot matrix alphanumeric display that can be seen across the street, a smooth acting rotary encoder (that otherwise defaults to volume control) and a number of small push buttons, which alter the encoder's current assignment. The range of features (accessed this way) closely parallels that of recent microprocessor-based amplifiers from Arcam and others. It includes programmable maximum volume for individual inputs, volume offsets to match levels between inputs, a 12V trigger that can be associated with any or all inputs, and input labelling, again on a per input basis. Finally, you have the ability to disable unassigned inputs. Curiously, there is no accessible means of adjusting channel balance, even using the anatomically-shaped diecast remote control.

A design feature we were particularly intrigued by was the very feature that put the lid on the otherwise promising performance of the Prima Luna pre/power combination reviewed in *HFC* 285. Namely, the elimination of overall negative feedback. Simaudio (the company behind the Moon designs) points out that eliminating negative feedback means "real

time" amplification. This is true by definition, as there is no processing time for the input to respond to feedback from the changing output if there is no loop feedback. This in turn means "virtually zero" TIM (transient intermodulation distortion – essentially distortion of musical "leading edges") and the elimination of phase errors resulting from feedback.

You should take all this with a pinch of salt. Although the theoretical benefits of no global feedback are not in dispute, there is nothing in the description to suggest that there is no local feedback around individual gain stages, which can amount to much the same thing. The good news is that there is absolutely no sign of the high output impedance of the Prima Luna that makes the performance available from different speakers so variable.

The i-7 includes a massive custom proprietary dual-mono power supply, which features low magnetic, electrical and thermal losses. This is said to result in increased current speed and better dynamics. The circuit is mounted on a four-layer PCB, and the signal path is very short. A comms facility allows remote synchronisation of display brightness with other Simaudio products. Last, but not least, the remote control uses a stepped ladder arrangement with 108 resolution over the first



“What you get from the Moon is a very accomplished and disciplined sound, with very high levels of internal detail.”

30dB of its operating range, and 0.5dB steps thereafter. The control is free from clicks other than the faintly perceptible mechanical ticking of the relays that make it all happen.

SOUND QUALITY

Alarming, the maker's recommendations call for 400 hours of break-in time before the amplifier is fully on song. My review sample had been run in, but because it had not been used for some weeks, it still needed several days of warm-up, to which it responded well.

Attempting to nail down the performance of a really good system or hi-fi component is difficult at the best of times. There is alchemy at play, or at least there is when it all clicks as it should. And this one really does click...

What you get from the Moon is a very accomplished and disciplined sound, with very high levels of internal detail combined with a hint of warmth and real grace. The bass end is deep and powerful, but completely at one with the midband. The treble, by contrast, has a liquid, valve-like euphony and lack of grain or glare, but the sound was utterly consistent irrespective of the speakers used. This

consistency takes some practice to identify, but it is a crucial prerequisite for musical satisfaction, perhaps because the brain has an easier time dealing with a sound that is closer to mirroring real life – assuming, of course, that the speakers have a similar consistency in their own behaviour.

There is an expansive quality and a midband warmth unusual in amplifiers in its class, which combines well with the impressive clarity on offer. The overall tonal balance of the bass is just perceptibly lean and dry. The warmth appears to be associated primarily with the midband rather than any excess in the low frequencies, and for the most part the treble is barely noticeable independently of the rest of the audio band, tonally-speaking. It has very little discernable character other than that highlighted earlier, no grain or edge, and it certainly doesn't intrude. It is simply very natural, and it doesn't get in the way of the amplifier's inherent, almost limpid transparency.

The i-7 is like a valve amplifier, with all of the benefits you might expect of the breed, but executed in transistors, without the waffly bass, and with a surprising expansiveness and

sense of scale. This is by any standards is an engaging amplifier, one that does justice to the music, and that paints its structure in sharp relief, yet without a hint of artificiality.

Per capita, Canada – Simaudio's home – is extraordinarily well-endowed with high-quality, leading-edge hi-fi brands. This is in much the same way that Scandinavia consistently outperforms the major European countries, the UK included, on the same basis. There are some obvious parallels between Simaudio and other Canadian companies like Bryston and pre-B&W Classé. Although not quite an unknown quantity in this country, in our estimation the outstanding mix of authority and sophistication, and the fabulous build of the i-7, propels Moon to pole position in the market for high-end one-box amplifiers. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 95%	PRO Gracefully limpid, spacious and highly sophisticated performer with great consistency, all wrapped in very impressive clothing.
FEATURES >> 85%	CON No balance control, no balanced preamp or line-level balanced audio out. Make sure you protect your equipment support from the curious under-amp spikes!
BUILD >> 94%	
VALUE >> 88%	

CONCLUSION
The i-7 is a thoroughly impressive amplifier - well designed and built, with a tremendous range of sonic strengths and very few weaknesses. It's a great all-rounder with enough power and quality for any reasonable system and room size.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 92%



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Antila ADVANCED PHONO STAGE



Shrink fit

Ferguson Hill has shrunk its acrylic horn speaker down to size, and now it fits on your desk... just!

PRODUCT Ferguson Hill FH007
TYPE Desktop stereo amp and speaker system
PRICE £599
CONTACT ☎ 0207 284 0969 @ www.fergusonhill.co.uk

Ferguson Hill made a splash when it introduced its first product: an enormous pair of acrylic horn speakers, dubbed FH001. At over 1.6 metres tall and costing nigh on ten grand, this striking speaker appeals to a limited market, but FH's new 'mini me' variation is cute enough to hit a much wider audience.

The FH007 came about as a result of the models made to develop the '001. These looked great, so Ferguson Hill decided to build a range of smaller transparent horns, starting with this 'desktop' variant.

On its own, a horn of this size is distinctly challenged in terms of bass; it may be 42cm tall, but uses a single 38mm drive unit, so bandwidth is focused on the midrange. But, with the addition of the spherical 'bass' speakers, the system's reach extends down to 75Hz. While it's lower than the horns achieve on their own, it's only just bass as we know it.

The final element of this system is a dedicated amplifier with just a single input via phonos or a mini-jack. The brochure suggests all manner of

applications including computers and CD or DVD players, but the system's loudness limitations mean it is less appropriate if you can't sit fairly close. Then again, it's a pretty space-hungry set-up for your average desktop.

The amp is unusual in that it incorporates four 16-watt outputs, one each for the four speakers, with one pair being tailored for the bass speakers. Connection is via mini-jacks, which you find at the end of the captive leads on the speakers. Controls extend to volume, bass level and power, but the latter is on the back and – while not inaccessible – could be better placed.

SOUND QUALITY

What hits you first with this system is its lack of bass. With the bass control turned up this improves matters, but the midrange suffers and the best balance is achieved with the control set flat. The second thing that you hear is the 'cuppy' characteristic of the horn itself. That said, it doesn't often get in the way and the system's qualities of speed and delicacy go a long way to making up for it.

What you hear best are things like guitar strings and voices. The nimbleness of a picked acoustic guitar or the emotional depth of a voice comes across with ease. In other words, the system has fine communicative skills, so long as you don't try to play it too hard.

It may be bandwidth limited, but that doesn't stop the FH007 digging out character and colour in recordings. It's only when you put something heavy on that the absence of bass becomes an issue.

This is more a top-notch desktop system than a compact hi-fi, but so long as you don't expect it to deliver high-sound-pressure power chords, you will find yourself being seduced by its ability to draw you into the music. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 74%



PRACTICALITY >> 72%



BUILD >> 79%



VALUE >> 87%



PRO

The best-looking desktop system on the market. Great midrange transparency and speed, and a nicely built amplifier, too.

CON

Limited bandwidth, especially at low frequencies. Limited loudness. 'Cuppy' coloration endemic to most horn designs clearly apparent here. Big for a desktop system.

CONCLUSION

This is the most aesthetically appealing speaker system we've seen in ages. It's limited in terms of bandwidth and loudness, but it can do things in the midband that more expensive set-ups cannot. An attractive option for desktop applications.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **80%**
OVERALL SCORE

M I R A G E

I T S N O I L L U S I O N

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Gryphon Mirage (Pre-amplifier)



Rock 'n' Rotel

The top amp in Rotel's starter range is bigger than its peers... but is it powerful enough to rock?

PRODUCT Rotel RA-06
TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE £499
CONTACT 01903 221500 www.europe.rotel.com

The RA-06 is top of Rotel's entry-level amplifier range and sits next to two variants on the same theme – the RA-04 and RA-05. These are both 40-watt designs, but the latter costs £100 more and offers remote control. This is an approach seen on previous Rotel ranges but is unusual elsewhere.

The RA-06 is a bigger box than either of those amps, yet it doesn't appear to offer much more in terms of features; defeatable tone controls and six inputs – including a phono stage and one for a 'media player' – seem to be common to the range. The difference concerns the power amp half of the equation: the RA-06 offers 70 watts a side, the increased power warranting the inclusion of larger mains transformer.

The RA-06 would appear to be comprehensively equipped in a way that is almost expected from amps at this price point, although some brands strip away the extra knobs and circuitry that tone controls and tape monitors require in order to keep the signal cleaner and the costs down. The best-equipped amps in this sector offer an extra tape output and a full-size headphone jack, but the Rotel has a front-mounted input for a portable audio player, which will be handy for anyone wanting to plug in an Apple iPod or similar.

In use, the amp's remote – with its cross-shaped volume control and assorted buttons for tuner, amp and CD, including direct access buttons – is a little busy, but not difficult to learn. It allows reasonably fine control of volume level, something that hampers a few budget amps, but doesn't offer a great deal of range on the volume control itself. Unless you have particularly inefficient speakers, the usable area comes before nine o'clock on the dial, which is a bit limiting.

SOUND QUALITY

With a Castle speaker of average sensitivity and seemingly benign load, the result is good stereo separation, but only average stereo solidity. In addition, the soundstage is wide, but lacks the front-to-back depth that the speaker can deliver. That said, it times well, thanks to some nimbleness across the band that makes the sound crisp but not forward.

We had a Rega Mira 3 to hand to use as a benchmark, albeit one that costs an extra £99. Putting this in the same system is a bit like turning up the contrast. This is largely because the Rega has fuller bass and a more dynamic and lively presentation. Further listening soon makes it clear that, while the Rega does the big picture well, it is less sensitive to the finer details that the Rotel brings to the fore. This also shows the RA-06's bass to be that bit more controlled and in tune.

Moving over to the Focal Chorus 826 V speaker (reviewed last issue) demonstrates that the Rotel has a decent grip and can produce a

detailed and tight sound. It is good at reverb and, inconveniently, tape hiss where it exists. Spotting the upper midrange like this is uncomfortable with edgy recordings. The Focal has a similar tonal leaning and therefore this quality is exaggerated in such company. Other speakers are a better match, like those in B&W's range – the CM1 being near perfect.

There is a tendency to concentrate on the detail rather than the bigger picture with the RA-06, but it has a fine sense of pace and reveals things that its competitors might not. This is a tough sector, but this Rotel has just enough edge to put it in the running, if the partnering speaker is chosen with care. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 80% [Progress bar]	PRO Very strong on timing and detail with good, tight bass. Decent roster of features, including a useful MP3 player input on the front panel.
FEATURES >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON Emphasis on the treble makes for a detailed rather than effusive sound. Needs careful speaker partnering. Remote control is busy, although not hard to learn.
BUILD >> 80% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 84% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION An amp for those with calmly balanced speakers and a taste for the intimacies of the music rather than its more visceral qualities. A good selection of features combine with strong timing and taut bass to make this well worth checking out.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 82%	

Russ Andrews PowerMax

TYPE Mains cable

PRICE £30 per metre (terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

This is very much the budget mains cable from RA, from a range that includes the Silver Signature PowerKord at a daunting £1,500. On first inspection it looks remarkably like a bog-ordinary kettle lead kind of affair, with the usual three stranded PVC-insulated conductors sheathed overall in blue PVC, with a basic commercial plug and IEC socket fitted. Nevertheless, the conductors evidently use Kimber high-purity copper and the insulation is also claimed to be unusually pure; although lacking a materials laboratory capable of testing that assertion, we have to take this at face value. We did, however, confirm that in terms of both capacitance value and capacitance loss factor, this cable betters giveaway types by a noticeable margin. Its fat, stranded conductors make it suitable for demanding applications, and as one expects from RA it's impeccably assembled.

Given its modest price and technological attainments, we didn't expect anything remarkable from this cable in the way of



sound improvements, but we ended up being very favourably impressed. It's true that its performance is not outstanding in any one area, but what it achieves is arguably more than the sum of its parts, with minor tweaks to such important areas as detail, bass extension and tunefulness, and treble sweetness adding up to a noticeably more appealing sound overall. Indeed, the immediate impression is of a more 'comfortable' sound, which is not always a

good thing. But extended listening shows that it is also at least as informative as before (typically rather more), so how could one possibly argue? **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	HI-FI CHOICE
CONCLUSION For a very modest price, the cable aids one's general involvement and enjoyment by a surprising amount.	>> 87%

Oehlbach Rattlesnake 3

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £6.50 per mono meter (unterminated)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8863 8979 🌐 www.oehlbach.co.uk

Once again, Oehlbach's frankly weird corporate image, as seen on website, publicity and packaging, yields up a comfortingly normal cable. Normal, that is, as in straightforward figure-eight construction speaker cable, with copper conductors and what looks (and smells!) like polyurethane insulation. In fact, the conductors consist of a mix of plain and silver-plated copper bunched together in a rope lay. The very soft insulation and thin copper strands make this a particularly flexible cable, while the amount of conductor (magnified by the insulation, but at 3mm², pretty healthy) makes long runs no problem. We reviewed it complete with a set of Oehlbach's own screwdown banana plugs.

Sonically, the cable rather belies its soft and malleable physical nature with a bright and forward sound. This effect was mild, but we still felt it across a broad range of music and with various amps and speakers. As such, we felt the sound was characterised by more upper midrange than we're used to hearing.



This is often accompanied, in the case of cables, by a mild compression of stereo image depth, and indeed we found that here. Side-to-side imaging is really rather good and so is detail, making for good analytical listening. In terms of musical involvement, we were less than completely bowled over, but the brightness stops well short of sonic aggression and there is plenty to enjoy. A decent, rather than great, alternative to established cables from the like of QED and Black Rhodium. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	HI-FI CHOICE
CONCLUSION The detail is all there, but the balance is present-heavy and musical drive and emotion don't communicate that well.	>> 78%

Audica MPS-1

TYPE Desktop amp and speaker system

PRICE £250

CONTACT ☎ 01480 839239 # www.audica.co.uk

An amp and speakers in a box less than one foot long each way – so what's that doing in a serious hi-fi mag? Now, don't be hasty: on the one hand, its very presence in the *Cables and accessories* pages should reassure you that we're looking here for worthiness as a spare room/kitchen/office system; while on the other, the price tag gives hope that there may be more to this than the frankly dreadful plastic 'thousand watt' systems sold in computer shops the world over.

It's a good start that this isn't plastic. Both speaker and amp housings are aluminium, as is the remarkably funky remote control. Thanks to digital amp technology, 25 watts per channel is offered up to the tiny speakers, while inputs are three in number, each accessed via a 3.5mm stereo jack plug. Yes, this is aimed at the iPod generation, but after all you can connect a 'real' CD player or radio with an adaptor lead. USB sockets are only for battery-charging purposes.

While we take slight issue with Audica's assertion of 'room-filling' sound (okay, it fills the

room, just not very loudly) there is enough volume there to make casual listening perfectly pleasant and at short range it's reasonably satisfying. But it's quality more than quantity that interests us, because this is a highly convincing little set-up. Even in the bass it puts out a fair semblance of grunt, and in the midrange and treble it's really admirably clear and uncoloured.

Dynamically it's well behind a full-size system, but it has much to offer in the detail department and if one takes a little care over positioning there's some decent imaging going on too. Basically, it's a system that a diehard audiophile can listen to without losing the will to live, and that's meant as high praise. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

This system fills a real niche for the music-lover who likes to listen at the computer and suchlike. Highly convincing.

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

Custom Design Reference

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £250 per pair (glass base £30 extra)

CONTACT ☎ 0191 262 4646

www.customdesign.co.uk

Glass is a familiar enough material in equipment racks, but in a speaker stand? Leaving aside some deeply 'looks-first' products that we've seen over the years, we can't think offhand of any serious speaker stands we've encountered that use glass as a structural element. Indeed, supporting 20-odd kilos of stand plus potentially the same again of speaker on a pane of glass may seem rash, but modern toughened glass is impressive stuff. We put a 60-odd kilo reviewer on one of these with no ill effects. Certainly, the four chunky uprights will make no complaint, nor the 'Acoustic Steel' top plate (which is available in sizes other than the standard 21x19cm to order). 'Inert' filler is supplied as standard and is absolutely essential, as without it the stands are very highly resonant.

Actually, even with the filler, there's still a little ringing in evidence, at a frequency of a few hundred hertz, and we've a suspicion it's

due to those glass bases combined with the weight of the columns. It may account for the lift these stands seemed to give to vocals and melody instruments when we tried them under various speakers on assorted flooring surfaces. There's also a degree of compromise in midrange detail, with images less precise than we've heard.

That's the bad news. The good news is that bass is superb in terms of extension, detail and precision. Even speakers that don't make particularly strenuous efforts in the lower reaches seemed to find an extra note or two, while ATC's SCM20s achieved a degree of authority which we've only previously encountered with a very few stands – dearer ones, at that. Not an unqualified recommendation, then, but an enthusiastic one in context. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Something of a compromise overall, this stand will appeal more to bass-lovers than detail freaks.

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

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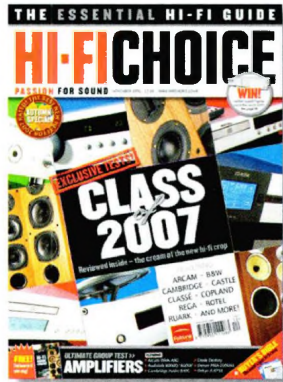


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GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

With more budget to play with, these speakers are a varied bunch

The six loudspeakers in this test group sit squarely in the middle of the mainstream speaker marketplace, costing between £995 and £1,350 per pair. While it's certainly possible to spend much more, this sort of outlay does pay for considerably more than the budget basics, and the result is an impressively varied and interesting group of speakers.

That said, cost constraints are still evident. Although the B&W and Nbien floorstanders both feature real-wood veneer finish, as do the German standmounts from ALR Jordan and Quadral, the two French floorstanders from Focal and Triangle both opt for synthetic surfaces.

While that would seem to place the advantage in B&W's court, its 'real wood' looks significantly more 'synthetic' than the lovely timber used by Nbien. And the two French models both go to great lengths in supplying cast alloy plinths to ensure optimum floor coupling.

Although the two standmounts would appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of material value for money, especially

if the cost of stands has to be added, the choice between a compact standmount and a much larger floorstander is by no means a straightforward one. While the floorstander will usually offer an advantage in bass extension, it will also tend to have more cabinet coloration and less precise imaging, as well as looking bulkier in the room.

Furthermore, the two standmounts here both have special features – the ribbon tweeter on the Quadral, and the tuneable ABR on the ALR Jordan.

It's hard to define a country of origin in our globalised world, where bits and pieces can be made and shipped from just about anywhere. Visiting factories anywhere around the world, one will nearly always find 'made in Taiwan' stamped on crates containing magnet metalwork like polepieces, and that's just one of several possible examples.

If components may be sourced from – and even assembly undertaken – virtually anywhere these days, do speakers still retain some form of national identity? Not necessarily national, but certainly each brand

needs a corporate identity and culture, and that seems to be rooted in its research and development department, wherever that might be located. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- Naim CDS 3-/555 PS CD player
- Burmester 001 CD player
- Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- Rega RB1000 turntable/arm
- Rega PS/Naim ARD turntable/arm
- Rega Apheta, Linn Akiva cartridges
- Magnum Dynalab MD 106 T tuner
- Naim NAC552 preamplifier
- Naim NAP500 power amplifier
- Cables from Vertex AQ, Chord Company, Harmonic Technology and Naim

MUSIC USED

- The Jimi Hendrix Experience
Axis Bold as Love
- Bob Dylan Modern Times
- J.J. Cale 5
- Nirva Sawtney Beyond Skin
- Arcade Fire Funeral
- Laurie Anderson Life On A String
- BPO Karajan Wagner Tannhauser Overture
- BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test

ON TEST



ALR Jordan Note 3
£1,350

B&W CM7
£999

Focal Chorus 816 V
£999

Nbien NX5T
£1,100

Quadral Rondo
£1,000

Triangle Antal Esx
£995

LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

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

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

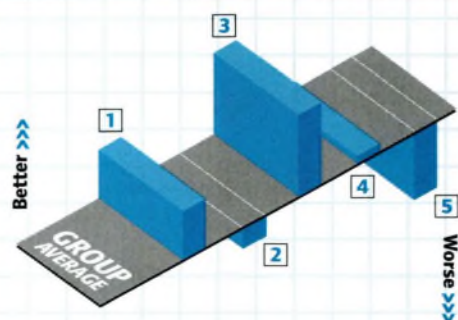
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ALR JORDAN NOTE 3

Clever standmount features a large and tuneable ABR at the rear

Although the Jordan bit refers to veteran UK speaker designer Ted Jordan, whose pioneering metal-cone technology is used in the main drive unit, ALR Jordan is actually a German brand, originally founded by another noted designer Karl-Heinz Fink. The Notes are ALR Jordan's top series, above the Entry and Classic ranges, and this compact standmount is the smallest and least costly of four Note stereo pairs.

At £1,350 per pair, the Note 3 is the most expensive model in our test group, and clearly represents a costly proposition for a two-way standmount. But it does incorporate a number of advanced features by way of justification.

The most obvious and unusual of these is a large ABR (auxiliary bass radiator, also sometimes called a 'flapping baffle'), which takes up most of this speaker's rear panel. Looking like a large elliptical drive unit, but lacking a motor assembly, this behaves exactly like a reflex port. In this implementation though, there's extra flexibility through being able to adjust the diaphragm's mass, and hence the tuning of the box/ABR resonance, by adding or subtracting weights in the form of steel washers onto a knurled bolt attached to the diaphragm centre. The range of adjustment is not all that great, allowing the tuning to be varied between 37Hz and 53Hz, but that is still useful in avoiding interaction with major room modes.

In other respects, the Note 3 closely follows the compact standmount stereotype, using a nominal 165mm frame main driver with a 110mm diameter metal cone, operating in an enclosure of around 15 litres. The tweeter is a

25mm soft dome device. The speaker is a very sturdily built affair, weighing a considerable 12kg, and nicely finished in real-wood veneer, with distinctively curved sides extending up to the edge of the black baffle. Twin terminal pairs allow bi-wiring or bi-amping if desired.

SOUND QUALITY

When delivered, two of the large washer weights were fitted to the Note 3's ABR, while another three large and one smaller example were supplied separately. First impressions of the speaker were not all that impressive, due to a rather thumpy and overbearing bass end, but after spending a little time experimenting with the weights, excellent results were achieved.

The main room modes in our listening room occur at around 52Hz and 30Hz, so by adding the maximum available mass loading to the ABR, both the smoothest bass and maximum extension thereof were achieved. This was amply confirmed on audition, as the Note 3 took on a character that seemed to combine some of the best characteristics of a standmount with the extra bass welly only usually found with multi-driver floorstanders.

Certainly there is significantly greater weight and scale here than one normally associates with a standmount of this size. And yet, the speaker also demonstrates the agility and lightness of touch, and the superior imaging, that one normally associates with a high-quality standmount design.

Above the bass region, the Note 3 delivers a smooth and essentially neutral overall balance. Dynamic expression is above average, and if sibilant reproduction can sound a little untidy, the slightly restrained presence is very well judged, allowing the

speaker to be driven hard without sounding aggressive, yet also maintaining good voice intelligibility when playing quietly. It should be stressed that best results needed careful experimentation with the bass loading options available here; once this had been achieved, the Note 3 proved capable of remarkably impressive results. **HFC**

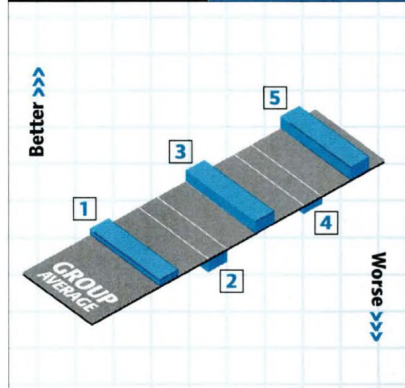


LAB REPORT

Sensitivity is closer to 89dB than the manufacturer's specified 90dB on our far-field based measurement, but this is still a very respectable figure. Decent in-room bass extension to around 25Hz at -6dB can be achieved with optimum ABR tuning. In addition, the impedance stays comfortably above 5 ohms throughout, so it should not prove a difficult speaker to drive.

The supplied range of weights allowed the ABR tuning to be adjusted between 37Hz and 53Hz. The speakers arrived with around one-third of the available mass fitted, giving an ABR resonance at 45Hz and delivering an in-room frequency balance marred by considerable 50Hz excess. Some of this excess remained with maximum mass loading, but the overall trend was preferable, holding within +/- 5dB below 125Hz and a creditable +/- 3dB above that point. Output was notably smooth above 600Hz, with just a shallow presence depression.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6 ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	26Hz

VERDICT

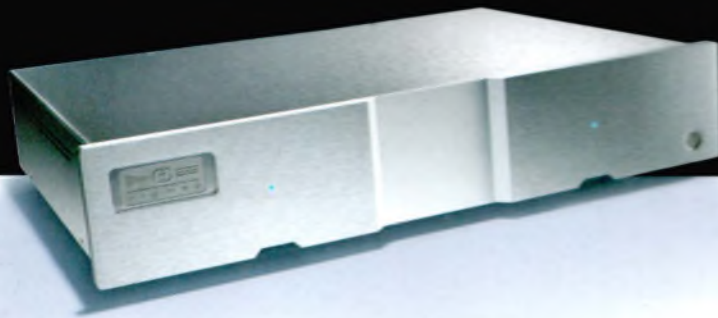
- SOUND >> 87%**
- PRACTICALITY >> 86%**
- BUILD >> 89%**
- VALUE >> 81%**

This costly design includes an ABR with adjustable frequency tuning via mass loading. It combines much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility and freedom from box coloration of a standmount.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 84%



Exceeding expectations....

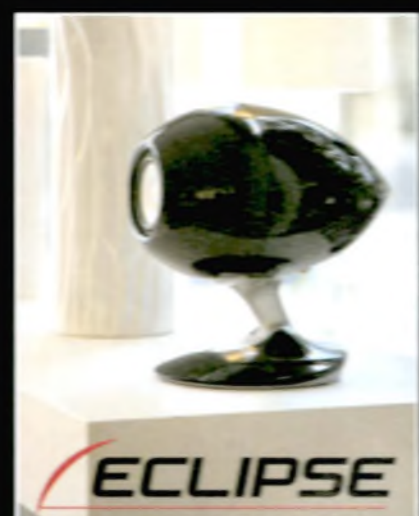


"...as things stand the benefits are considerable and the value of this unit is not hard to confirm." **Hi-Fi Choice**

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

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B&W CM7

B&W's new floorstander features the unique FST midrange driver

Filling a gap between the vinyl-covered, budget-price 600 Series and the more stylish and technically advanced 700 Series, this £999 per pair CM7 combines an attractive but cost-effective real-wood finish enclosure with the company's radical 'surroundless' FST midrange driver. The CM7 makes FST available at the lowest price to date.

The sharp-edged cabinet comes in wenge, rosenut or maple real-wood veneers. Our samples lacked any convincing grain, but the end result is certainly preferable to vinyl woodprint. Hidden magnets cleverly retain the fabric grille, so there are no unsightly lugs if the grille isn't used. Matching the shiny trim around the bass and mid drivers, the tweeter's highly polished faceplate is cut away. This means it can be sited as close to the midrange unit as possible.

The 'free edge' FST driver is only suitable for midrange duties, as the edge of its 120mm Kevlar cone is in close contact with a thick polymer gasket. This gasket is specifically designed to absorb midrange vibrations – a form of construction that effectively prohibits

the fore'n'aft cone excursion required for bass reproduction. A more conventional port-loaded driver with a reinforced 120mm paper cone supplies bass here. The unprotected (and potentially vulnerable) 25mm alloy dome tweeter has an internal rear loading tube, and a low enough fundamental resonance to allow a first-order, single capacitor network.

Twin terminal pairs are fitted below a flared Flowport, and a hollow foam sleeve is supplied which usefully enables the port to be re-tuned. There's no plinth or outrigger arrangement, which is a shame from both an aesthetic and a stability perspective, so the 6mm spikes fit directly into the base here.

SOUND QUALITY

The earlier solo review of this speaker in *HFC* 286 had already made it very clear that re-tuning the port by inserting the supplied hollow foam bungs was essential to obtain the smoothest and most even bass output in our particular listening room.

Used without these bungs, bass heaviness and thickening were all too apparent, while their insertion was wholly positive, bringing a much more natural tonality to orchestral music. Male voices no longer had a thick and chesty quality, and the speaker as a whole seemed more transparent, with significantly improved stereo imaging.

However, while the CM7 is a very competent all-rounder, it doesn't really stand out from the crowd in the context of this test group. All three drivers perform well enough over their respective sections of the audio band, but the overall coherence – the way the different sections glue together – doesn't always hit the spot.

The midband shows a fine dynamic range, but the presence zone is too restrained and laid back, leaving voices sounding shut in and short of dynamic vigour and expression. On the other hand, the top end delivers plenty of detail with a sweet, smooth character and a well judged relative output level. The bass is arguably the best bit, driving the music along with gusto, enthusiasm and a fair amount of authority too, though there is some audible box coloration in the lower midband.

Loudspeakers always involve a measure of compromise, and that's particularly true of a three-way design such as this. The advantage of maximising the performance of each drive unit must be set against the extra complexity involved in melding them into a well-integrated, coherent whole. **HFC**



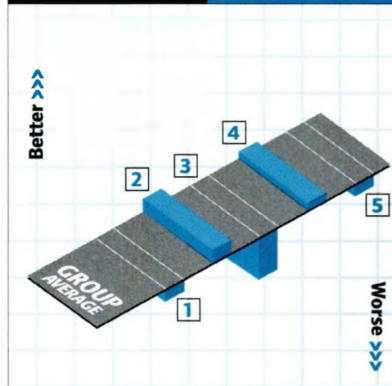
LAB REPORT

The CM7 comfortably met the manufacturer's quite conservative 88dB rated sensitivity above 500Hz. Indeed, the in-room sensitivity, even with the speakers well clear of walls, is more like 90dB below 300Hz when the ports are left fully open. There is also a gross excess at 45-70Hz, giving a decidedly unbalanced overall in-room, far-field response.

Inserting the hollow bungs, however, brought a dramatic improvement, re-tuning the port from 45Hz to 30Hz and also damping the output. The net effect was to deliver a very well balanced, though not particularly smooth, response from 25Hz upwards, albeit with some loss of output 1.7-3kHz.

Although bass extension is good, and sensitivity respectable enough, the load is not an easy one from the amplifier's perspective, as the impedance drops below 4 ohms in the upper bass, 130-160Hz, a part of the audio band where high-level signals are very likely to be found.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/3	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	62Hz	24Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

PRACTICALITY >> 75%

BUILD >> 86%

VALUE >> 82%

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 82%

This very pretty compact three-way floorstander has a version of B&W's 'free edge' FST midrange driver. With port sleeve in place, it delivers a fine overall balance, with good dynamic range and a sweet top end.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 82%



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FOCAL CHORUS 816 V

Sharp new styling distinguishes this 'luxury budget' floorstander

Focal is France's leading hi-fi speaker brand, known first and foremost for the advanced and proprietary drive unit technology that is used throughout its several ranges of speakers. Indeed, the company started out as a drive unit manufacturer, supplying OEM drivers to other speaker system builders, although the company has recently stopped the OEM side of the business, to concentrate on building its own Focal-branded loudspeakers.

The product portfolio covers a vast range of sizes and prices, with the Chorus range traditionally representing the budget, entry-level models. This year, however, sees a significant change, as the latest Chorus models now come in two distinct ranges: the budget 700Vs; and the more luxuriously finished 800Vs, with superior ingredients (including a proper cast plinth on the floorstanders), at a price premium of around £250 per pair. Each range comprises a hierarchy of five stereo pairs plus assorted AV extras.

Right in the middle of the 800V line-up, this £999 per pair 816V is the smallest of three floorstanders and the simplest too, using three drive units in a two-and-a-half way

configuration. Finished all over in synthetic laminates, the styling is certainly distinctive, with tapering side panels (reflecting non-parallel internal faces), finished in ebony or mocha woodprint, and high-gloss black on the front, back, top and base. The panels are all 20-25mm thick, and further stiffened by internal bracing. The whole thing sits on a proper alloy plinth, with a neat, retractable (though not lockable) spike arrangement.

Focal is proud of making all its drive units in house, and in France. The two cone drivers have 165mm cast alloy frames and 115mm diameter paper cones coated with glass 'micro-spheres' to increase rigidity – Polyglass in Focal parlance. The tweeter has Focal's familiar inverted dome, now in an aluminium/magnesium alloy and with a new suspension. This is mounted in a rigid cast chassis at the top edge of the enclosure, so it remains unobstructed by the V-shaped grille. Two large diameter ports (one firing downwards above the plinth) provide bass loading, and signal is applied to a single terminal pair.

SOUND QUALITY

Clearly intended for positioning well clear of walls to avoid undue bass emphasis, the 816 V is an engaging and lively performer. It has a notably clean, powerful and punchy bass, and a crisp, clean top end. However, the sound does lack overall smoothness and evenness.

The level of coloration, especially in the upper bass and lower midband, proved intrusive with our initial samples, thickening the sound and contributing obvious chestiness to male speech. A replacement, well-run-in pair proved altogether more satisfactory (see Lab Report), reducing coloration to much more acceptable levels and helping to reveal the fine dynamic expression that is perhaps this speaker's greatest strength.

The overall character still errs on the warm and rich side of neutrality, bringing a richness and fullness to large-scale orchestral recordings. It delivers realistic instrumental textures, which endows dance music with good power and drive.

The question of sample consistency raises its head here, as the second pair clearly sounded and measured much better than the first. Within the time frame allowed for this review, it's clearly impossible to establish whether this is down to differences in manufacturing consistency or running in time, but one should perhaps give Focal the benefit of the doubt, while adding a note of caution. **HFC**



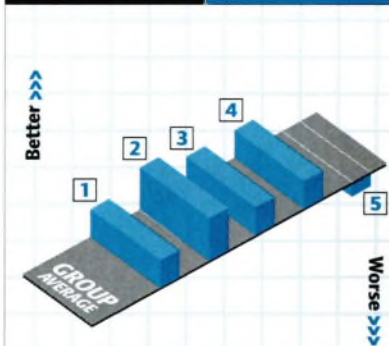
LAB REPORT

The first samples of the 816 V showed altogether too much output between 40Hz and 300Hz. A second pair was delivered, and measurements revealed significant differences in the low frequency behaviour, in both the impedance and in-room response traces.

This was perhaps because of significantly more running in. The impedances were identical above 90Hz, but the second samples showed greater damping of the low frequency peaks, and their in-room far-field averaged response was altogether better balanced overall.

In both cases, the traces are distinctly uneven, perhaps reflecting relatively light internal damping, but that unevenness still held within decent +/-4dB limits in those second samples. Sensitivity is a healthy 91dB, the load easy to drive, and the overall trend is a little warm and rich, slightly laid back in the presence zone, and a little bright in the treble.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91.5dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/-	7.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	39Hz	20Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



PRACTICALITY >> 86%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 87%



Discounting the bass from our first samples, this speaker has a fine, warm balance, notably superior dynamic expression, and a clean, sweet top end, though the sound might have been smoother overall.

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



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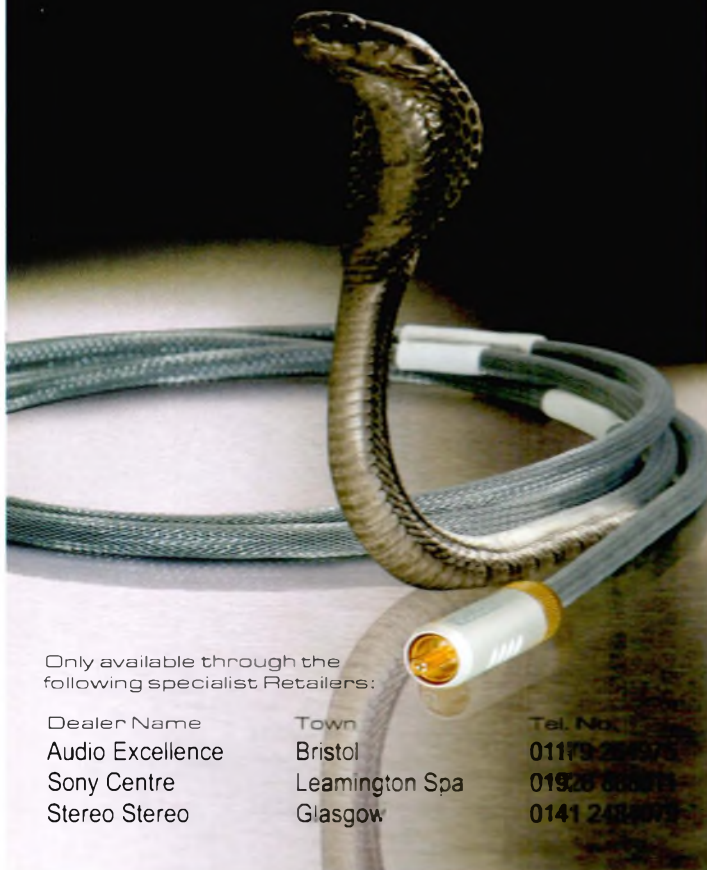
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NBIEN NX-6T

Simple and very substantial floorstander has exquisite cabinetwork

A relatively new arrival in the UK, Nbien is a Far East manufacturer based in Malaysia, which should ensure good material value for money for starters. The sound quality portents are pretty good too, if the fine sonic performance of the little DX-5 we reviewed in *HFC* 284 is anything to go by.

Nbien has four distinct model ranges, the NXs slotting in below the elaborate and costly 3E model, but above both the DX and GX ranges. This £1,100 per pair NX-6T is the largest of four NXs, and one of only two floorstanders in the company's complete roster (alongside the enormous 3E). Other NX-series models include the original NX-2 two-driver standmount, a tiny NX-Sat model, and a NX-6C centre channel speaker with the same three-driver complement as this floorstander.

Finish is exemplary, and comes with all surfaces covered in a choice of top-quality real-wood veneers in either walnut or cherry, or piano black. Although the underlying shape follows the usual rectilinear box stereotype, the construction is far from stereotypical, as the



wrap appears to have extra layers covering the front and rear thirds, and the front-to-back edges are heavily post-formed, too. Nbien calls this a 'retro-modern aesthetic', which is as good a phrase as any for an approach that's both attractive and unusual.

Other features include a wide, slot-shaped port near the floor, and a pair of sculpted outrigger slats that extend the spike footprint. The whole thing weighs in at a very substantial 25kg, probably in part due to added ballast. Two pairs of terminals feed a two-way driver line-up that uses a pair of 165mm bass/mid drivers – with coarse-textured 120mm doped paper cones and fixed 'bullet' phase plugs – mounted above and below a 20mm fabric dome tweeter, in what's usually referred to as a d'Appolito configuration.

SOUND QUALITY

The advantage of d'Appolito type operation is that it preserves the simplicity of a two-way while at the same time providing plenty of cone area for bass reproduction while also keeping the enclosure fashionably slim. The difficulty usually seems to come in getting the overall tonal balance right, and here the NX-6T is only partly successful.

The good news here is that the voice band is particularly well handled, showing nice clarity and coherence, with a sweet top end and a refreshing openness, which is free from aggressive tendencies. Speech has fine intelligibility, even when listening at low levels, and song lyrics are easier to distinguish – yes, even Tom Waits' – than is often the case.

However, Tom's voice also has a chesty quality here, and the same applies particularly to male speech, and to a lesser (and more unusual) extent to female voices, too. Music sounds just a little too rich and full, especially through the cello register. While this character adds warmth and a sense of power to the proceedings, it also tends to thicken textures and can also sound rather thumpy with some types of music – as a generalisation, dance tracks are not heard at their best when served via this speaker.

However, thanks to low coloration from the exceptionally solid enclosure, the dynamic range is impressively wide. Furthermore, alongside its fine coherence, the NX-6T seems to enjoy being pushed hard, happily going loud without getting in the least bit upset. It all adds up to a speaker that might not be the most neutral around, but which is thoroughly entertaining nonetheless. **HFC**



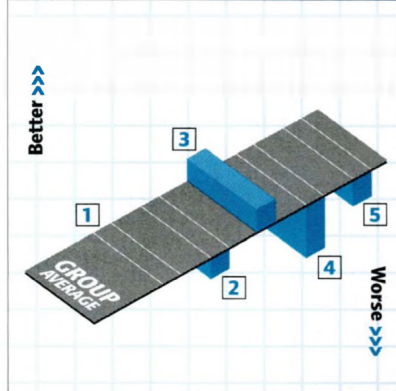
LAB REPORT

The NX-6T proved something of a mixed bag under our usual measurement scrutiny. The manufacturer claims a relatively modest sensitivity of 88dB, and this is comfortably met under our in-room far-field conditions from 300Hz upwards. In fact, the averaged response trace from 300Hz up to 13kHz was exceptionally and very impressively smooth and flat, holding within remarkably tight +/-2dB limits.

Below 300Hz, however, things are rather different. The fact that the port is tuned to 50Hz, and therefore coincides with our major bass room mode, is unfortunate, the more so because no means of re-tuning is provided.

While one can always improvise a technique for blocking the ports, the real problem is seen in the upper bass. This is especially so between 100Hz and 300Hz, where output is a full 5dB stronger than the datum established above 300Hz, an imbalance that is bound to result in coloration.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> -15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -40%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/5 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	50Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%

PRACTICALITY >> 84%

BUILD >> 91%

VALUE >> 79%

OVERALL SCORE 80%

With fine cabinetwork and very solid build quality, the NX-6T also has open and coherent voice band reproduction, but is marred by excess in the upper bass, so voices are accompanied by chesty coloration.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **80%**

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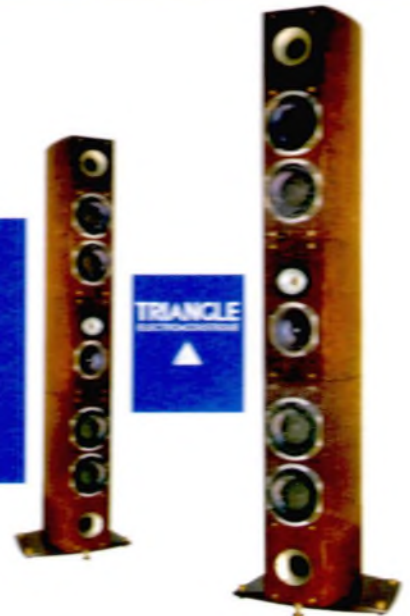


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QUADRAL RONDO

This attractive standmount is distinguished by a ribbon tweeter

A new name to *Hi-Fi Choice* readers, Quadral is Germany's third largest speaker brand, and has recently arrived in the UK courtesy of Axcelle Ltd, distributors of Wireworld cables. The complete Quadral catalogue covers an enormous range of products, including numerous 'lifestyle' AV packages, though only a selection of these will be coming to Britain.

This £1,000 per pair Rondo is one of just three models in the Phonologue Kompakt series. There are two key things that distinguish this range from the rest. First, the speakers are strictly available as stereo pairs, with no surround sound extras. Second, all three have ribbon type tweeters, a feature shared only with the three costliest 'high-end' models in the Quadral line up.

The Rondo is a compact two-way standmount, prettily finished in graphite, or a choice of maple, bubinga or cherry real-wood veneers. It's built very solidly with elegantly sculpted side panels and all very restrained, discreet and classy, with gunmetal grey driver chassis flush-mounted into the veneered front.

The 170mm bass/mid driver has a cast chassis and a metal cone that is 115mm in diameter. The latter is made from a mixture of aluminium, titanium and magnesium, a blend that Quadral claims gives an ability to control resonances that is superior to single element metals or other materials.

Ribbon drive units, usually reserved for tweeters, have the benefit that the ribbon-shaped metal diaphragm – 60x8mm in

this case – is also the voice coil to which the signal is applied. The shape ensures the very highest frequencies have fine lateral dispersion, but vertical dispersion will be more restricted. As such, it's important to position the speakers so that the tweeters are at ear height. The rear panel has two pairs of terminals, plus a large diameter port tuned to 50Hz. Helpfully, open-cell foam bungs are also supplied to provide some damping of the port output.

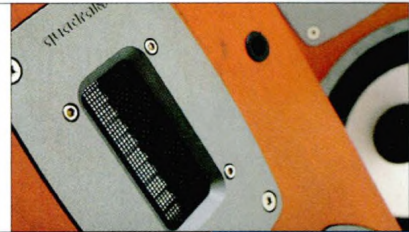
SOUND QUALITY

Best used on high-quality stands placed well clear of walls, initial impressions were something of a mixed bag. While the mid and top shows a very pleasing coherence and sweetness, with fine focus and precise imaging, the bottom end has a distinct tendency to thump when reproducing material with significant bass content.

Inserting the supplied foam bungs into the ports was most effective in solving this problem, delivering a much smoother and more even bass performance, with fine timing. Indeed, if anything the bottom end is now on the dry side, leaving the midband sounding exposed and forward – not to the point where this could get unpleasant, but rather where one might consider moving the Rondo closer to the wall.

This is a speaker that knows how to boogie, however. Fine detail is clear and lyrics are very intelligible, even when playing the system quietly. And if it's not the last word in dynamic punch, it is exceptionally smooth with a wide dynamic range.

The sound might lack a little warmth for some tastes perhaps, and bass authority is not a strong point, but the delicate, sweet top end and freedom from unwanted edginess combine to create a speaker that's exceptionally easy on the ears. This is a speaker one can enjoy for hours on end without a trace of fatigue, and the fact that it's as easy on the eyes as it is on the ears is the icing on a very attractive cake. **HFC**



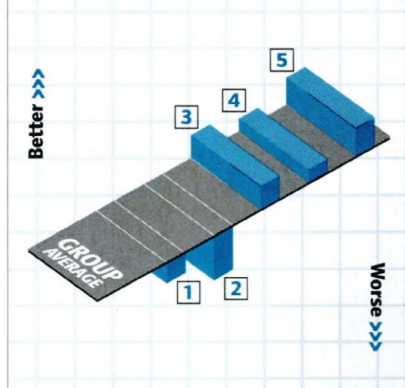
LAB REPORT

The manufacturer quotes a sensitivity of 87dB, which errs on the conservative side of our 88dB figure. Furthermore, the load presented to the amplifier looks reasonably benign, staying above 6 ohms throughout – unusual in Continental designs.

The generous port here is tuned to 50Hz, which exactly coincides with the major bass mode in our listening/test room. This results in significant exaggeration of frequencies between 45Hz and 80Hz even with the speaker situated well clear of walls.

Fortunately, Quadral also supplies a pair of open-cell foam bungs, and while these hardly affect the actual tuning frequency of the port, they do damp its output significantly, resulting in an overall far-field in-room response that holds within impressive +/-3dB limits from 40Hz right up to 14kHz. The traces are significantly smoother than average overall, and look particularly impressive above 1kHz, with a seamless crossover transition.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -15%
- 2] Bass extension >> -35%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	38Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

PRACTICALITY >> 82%

BUILD >> 89%

VALUE >> 82%

This attractive standmount incorporates a classy ribbon tweeter, and gives a sound with fine coherence and neutrality, superior image focus, and a notably sweet top end. Port damping proved useful and effective.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 84%



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TRIANGLE ANTAL Esw

This new Antal sports several improvements, especially in the bass

Leading French brand Triangle takes a notably individualistic approach to both styling and drive unit design – and with some success, judging by the three previous generations of its Antal namesakes that have come under *Hi-Fi Choice* scrutiny, all of which received Best Buy ratings.

This latest version shares many features with its namesake predecessors, but also incorporates three significant changes. The most significant of these is a new low frequency drive unit, but the crossover network has also been tweaked, and the horn-loaded type T22400 tweeter has benefited from improvements arising from the Magellan development programme.

Apart from a large aluminium dust dome reinforcing the twin bass drivers' paper cones, the £995 per pair Antal Esw looks exactly like its predecessor. That means it's not a particularly pretty speaker. A convex front panel in painted charcoal grey MDF is surrounded and backed by a choice of

Bordeaux, Champagne and Cognac vinyl woodprints. But a speaker cabinet is about more than just looks; an elaborate damped and decoupled metal plinth provides a fine combination of stability and spike-coupling, the large central pointed cone at the front providing 'single point' grounding for the entire enclosure.

It's a full three-way design, using two 165mm bass-only drivers with 120mm cones operating in tandem. These hand over to a 130mm midrange drive unit with a small 85mm cone, which is unusual in using a pleated doped-fabric surround. This is a technique that Triangle has long favoured, presumably because it has lower hysteresis (energy storage) than rubber. Cast chassis' and paper cone diaphragms are used throughout. The tweeter is a substantial horn-loaded device, chosen because matching the horn mouth diameter to that of the midrange cone gives better energy consistency through the crossover. The rear panel carries twin terminal pairs, and a flared front port reflex-loads the bass enclosure.

SOUND QUALITY

Since most of the ingredients in this speaker were already found in earlier Antals, it's no surprise to find that the Esw has much in common with its Es predecessor. A major advantage with this new version is that its bass delivery is audibly smoother, and the speaker is more tolerant of positioning, while giving best results when placed well clear of walls.

While the basic sound is still far from sweet, it is impressively smooth and well balanced in this latest incarnation, at least through the bass and midrange. The top end is less impressive, sounding a little coarse and untidy, with both mild presence dulling and a spitty quality present at times. However, while the sound could benefit from more grip and drive, it shows fine communication skills with good powers of discrimination and analysis through the bass region. Furthermore, the midband is delivered with realistically vivid dynamic expression, excellent timing and an impressive freedom from overhang.

This is a tall loudspeaker, and the midrange and treble drive units are mounted high off the ground, a scenario that enhances the sense of scale and space, and assists in delivering a realistic stereo image.

This is not the prettiest speaker around, but it does provide maximum musical insight for minimal financial outlay, along with greater refinement than earlier incarnations. **HFC**

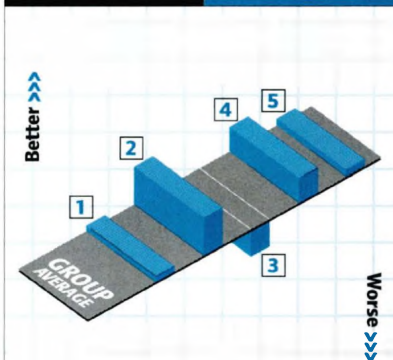


LAB REPORT

Although Triangle claims a healthy 91dB sensitivity, the most our tests could achieve under in-room far-field conditions was 89dB, and this very average figure is also accompanied by a relatively demanding impedance characteristic that holds around 4-6 ohms between 90Hz and 2kHz. The port is tuned to a low 35Hz, contributing to good ultimate in-room extension registering -6dB at 20Hz.

The Esw is clearly very different from its Es predecessor. When sited clear of walls, it delivers an impressively smooth and well balance in-room response all the way from 20Hz up to 3kHz, with no sign of the upper-mid peak found in its predecessor. The top end is not quite as impressive, with a broad dip centred on 4.2kHz, and a subsequent peak around 8.6kHz, but the total trace still holds within very respectable +/-4dB limits across the whole band.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	50Hz	20Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

BUILD >> 83%

VALUE >> 86%

This latest Antal, now with improved bass drivers, has a smoother sound than its predecessors. It has a beautifully balanced bass and midband, which is ultimately more important than the dull, uneven top.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 86%



CONCLUSIONS

Three of the six models here try to tailor the sound to suit the room, with varying degrees of success

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this group is that three of the six models give some flexibility to adjust their port output, either through increasing damping (Quadral) or adjusting the tuned frequency (B&W, ALR Jordan). All listening rooms add peaks and troughs, known as room modes, and the problem is that their frequencies (and amplitudes) vary substantially and largely unpredictably from one room to another.

By allowing the port output to be shifted in frequency – either via the simple hollow foam bung used by B&W, or the more elaborate mass-adjustable ABR employed by ALR Jordan – it is possible to shift the port-tuned frequency away from a room mode peak, so that it instead coincided with a null. This benefits the overall bass smoothness considerably.

Though less sophisticated than the above methods, Quadral's damping bung also proved

effective in avoiding mode/port reinforcement. Both the Focal and the Triangle had ports tuned comfortably below our main 50Hz room mode, so modification was unnecessary here. The Nbien might well have benefited from some port damping, but its bass difficulties occurred rather higher up the band.

Having reviewed a number of Triangle and Focal speakers over the past few years, a stereotype pattern has tended to emerge

whereby the Focals are the smoother and more neutral, while the Triangles are the more lively but also the more uneven. Curiously, judging by the 816 V and the Antal Esw included in this review, the positions would appear to have reversed. I hesitate to suggest that each has learned lessons from the other, but there's no avoiding the observation that the Triangle is the smoothie this time around, and the Focal a little coarser and more dynamic. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

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

- ▶▶ Moving a speaker from a free space location until it's close to a wall will substantially boost the mid-bass.
- ▶▶ Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.
- ▶▶ Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to perform at its best.

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	ALR Jordan Note 3	B&W CM7	Focal Chorus 816 V	Nbien NXST	Quadral Rondo	Triangle Antal Esw
PRICE	£1,350	£999	£999	£1,100	£1,000	£885
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Costly, but a clever and effective design adds extra weight to standmount agility.	Fine overall balance, good dynamic range and sweet top, from a very pretty looking speaker.	Though not smooth, our second sample had a fine overall balance and superb dynamic expression.	Top-quality cabinet and fine voice coherence, but this is marred by some upper bass excess.	Attractively styled standmount has fine coherence and neutrality with a sweet top end.	Smooth and beautifully balanced; the top end is a bit dull and scrappy, but this doesn't get in the way of the music.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	24.5x37x31.5cm	20x91x30cm	28x100x37.5cm	2.2x18.4x29cm	23x38.5x31.5cm	28x104x34cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	3-way	2.5-way	1-way	1-way	1-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x165mm	2x165mm	2x165mm	2x165mm	1x170mm	2x170mm, 1x130mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor	Stand	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Real wood	Real wood	Wenge	Real wood	Real wood	Wenge
BI-WIRE?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	89dB G	88dB A	90dB G	88dB G	78dB A	82dB G
EST. BASS EXTENSION	26Hz A	24Hz A	23Hz G	22Hz A	40Hz P	30Hz G
IMPEDANCE (NOM./MIN)	7/5 ohms A	6/4 ohms P	7/5 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	8/5 ohms G	6/4 ohms P
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	-5% A	+5% A	-20% G	-40% P	+10% A	+20% G
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	-10% A	-30% A	-40% A	-20% P	+20% G	+5% A

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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This issue, a literally off-the-wall way of nailing your vinyl audiophile colours to the mast. Or the chimney breast. Art Vinyl lets you display your best, most collectable LP sleeves and helps your passion for music turn into a passion for art, too!

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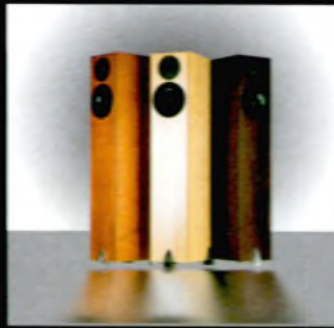
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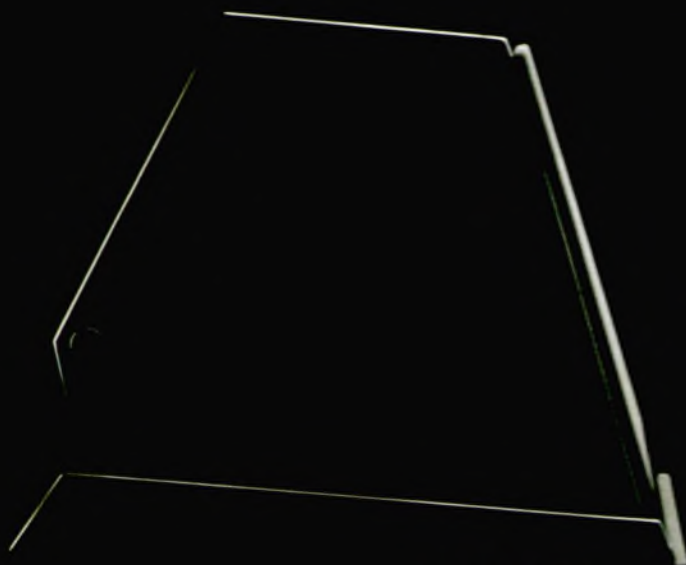
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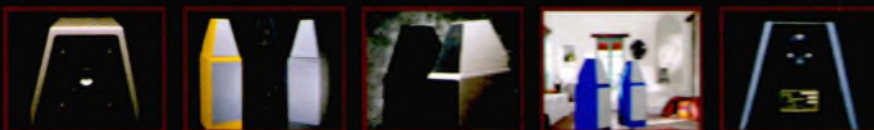
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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 to let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion.

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



Rega Apollo £498

Rega's latest entry-level player is a splendidly musical performer, given its modest price. Bass is good, midrange is great and high frequencies are truly exceptional.



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

Sitting at the top of Cambridge Audio's Azur range, the 840C is a technically innovative player with a sound that belies its sub-£1,000 price – open, subtle and refined.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **CD PLAYERS**

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE	PRODUCT	F	COMMENTS	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
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
	Vincent CD-S6 MkII	999	With its tube output stage, a beguiling midrange, sweet highs and attractively figured lows plus fine dynamics		●				●	●		287
ABOVE £1,000												
	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality. 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!		●	●	●	●				280
EC	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
EC	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 Xt/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion		●	●	●		●			279
E	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat	●	●	●	●		●			285
EC	Krell SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SACD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price	●	●	●	●		●			251
	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
EC	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
EC	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
	Rega Saturn	1,300	Attractive simple player does the basics superbly, delivering performance with great poise, precision and range		●	●	●					286
EC	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●	●		244
	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
EC	Wadla 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.



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

Esoteric's entry-level CD/SACD player delivers astonishing sonic detail and precision, coupled with a gorgeous sense of musical structure. Truly, it's brilliant.

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.

DVD-AUDIO

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



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

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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

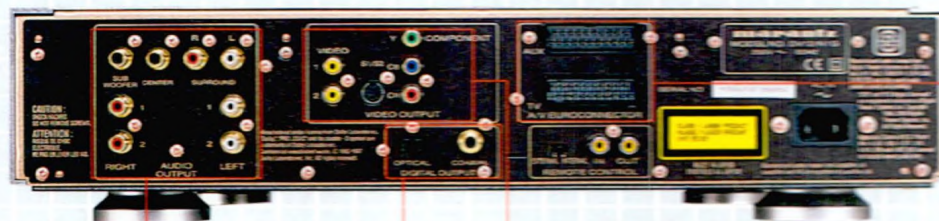
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

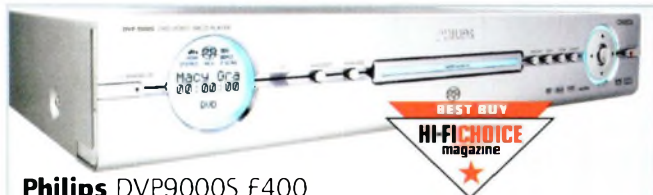
BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ESSE NUMBER
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
	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-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing						287
	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

SPEC KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Philips DVP9000S £400

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



Marantz DV7600 £600

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



Arcam DiVA DV137 £1,250

The first 'universal' player from this top British brand is a cracker, sonically and visually.



Meridian G98AH £3,625

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

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.

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Supra Cables are available from all good hi-fi and home cinema stores in 38 countries around the world.

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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.

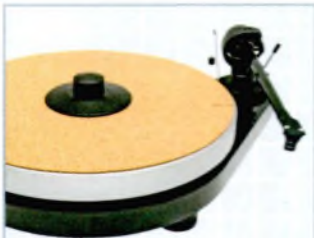


TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



Pro-Ject
 RPM 5 £400

Pro-Ject's entry-level RPM deck is a good-looking, great-sounding package that delivers terrific value for money. A class act and no mistake.



The Funk Firm
 Funk V £760

The more costly of two turntables from The Funk Firm, the Funk V builds on its sibling's virtues to deliver a sound of sheer class – dynamic, detailed and refined.



Clearaudio
 Champion £1,475

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



Avid
 Volvere Sequel £3,500

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	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
	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
	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 opt	284
	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	●	266
	Micelli Tecnodoc	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●		268
	Micelli Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●		239
EC	Micelli 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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			●	opt	257
	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			●	opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●		228
	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	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
EC	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
EC	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound		●		270
EC	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 Analogue	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●	●	253

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU INPUTS	AU GAIN	AU IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	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
	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
	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
	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

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Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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PINEWOOD MUSIC



WILSON AUDIO SYSTEM 8 Just another WATT-Puppy?

That's what we wondered at first. After all, System 7 was, is and always will be a truly fabulous transducer. What more could this latest incarnation offer, apart from an open invitation for the cynics to take a swipe? The answer is that it presents a vitality, precision and timing that we have never before experienced from a loudspeaker. David Wilson dug deep and he discovered dynamite - musical dynamite. Experience it at Pinewood Music.

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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates

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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon TU-1800DAB £250
Combines DAB with FM/AM reception and good all-round design at a tempting price.



Creek T50 £550
A thoroughly accomplished AM/FM tuner with a substantial and detailed sound.



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



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

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7		●	●	●	283
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, the generally decent performance on both bands makes this an great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●		●	283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		●		230
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20		●			283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value	DAB,FM	16		●	●	●	269
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60	●	●	●		260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	DAB reception is as good as any and FM performance clearly benefits from Denon's long experience	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●		●	274
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	242
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60	●	●	●	●	259

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

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard disk drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

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

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Yamaha CDR-HD1500 £599

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

BEST BUY
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Cambridge Audio Azur 640H £600

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

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magazine



Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro £850

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

BEST BUY
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magazine

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
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-inducinger that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
HDD RECORDERS							
■	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160	● ●	276
■	Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160	● ●	280
■	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250	● ●	278

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

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what's new



The Reference CD500 CD Player and Reference A500 Amplifier from Shanling are finally here. Shanling wanted to make a true statement with these flagship products, not just sonically but visually as well. We think they have and even more impressive is the sheer value-for-money. Musically they challenge products at twice the price! **Available - now.**



Following in the footsteps of the astonishing ART Emotion Loudspeaker, the more affordable 'Emotion Monitor' model has arrived. Again available in three versions with the option to upgrade to the next version at a later date! A stunning addition to the Emotion family! **Available - now.**



glow!

Why not put a little glow into your system this year by choosing one of the many wonderful valve products that we sell.

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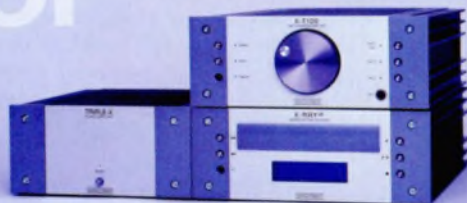
One of our favourite valve manufacturers is Eastern Electric (shown on right). Beautifully made, reliable, tiny, affordable and best of all they sound just sublime. Why not treat yourself this Christmas?



x-factor

Musical Fidelity products definitely have that X-Factor and none more so than the brand new X-Series.

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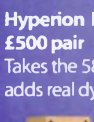
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Following in the footsteps of the incredible award-winning Hyperion 938, come three smaller, more affordable models. Same technology, same incredible performance, all in a smaller package! Ideal for two channel or multi-channel! **All Models Available - Now.**



Hyperion HWS-585
£250 pair

This model makes up for its size with sheer speed and wonderful detail retrieval.



Hyperion HWS-586
£500 pair

Takes the 585 one step further and adds real dynamic slam.



Hyperion HWS-733
£2800 pair

When you have a small room and want the performance of the bigger 938 - the 733 delivers it to you. What you cannot see is the bass unit housed in the bottom of the speaker.

Hyperion HPS-938 / HPS-938W
£3750 pair / £4500 pair

This speaker has it all and takes on the best £10k speakers with ease. Buy this speaker before Hyperion realise it should be twice the price.



essential

"Perhaps there are still some undiscovered secrets to mains filtration, but as things stand the benefits are considerable and the value of this unit is not hard to confirm."

IsoTek Sigmas
Hi-Fi Choice, October 2006



Available - now.



The Lumley Stratosphere is one of those products that has a real presence - even when it's not spinning records.

All that hear the Stratosphere fall in love with the incredible ease and naturalness in which it plays music. All those that see it fall in love immediately with its beautiful looks.

If ever a product could be described as a gift to musicians, a gift to music - the Stratosphere would be that product. A reference turntable in ever respect. We love it! **Available - now.**



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staff favourites

here are just a few and in no particular order....



Eastern Electric Minimax Valve CD Player (Hi-Fi World Award Winner)



Manley Labs Stingray Valve Integrated Amp (Exceptional value for money)



JungShon JA-1/JA-99c Pre/Power Combo (Hi-Fi World Award Winner)



Bel Canto e.One REF 1000 Monoblock (Our advice to you - buy a set!)



ATC SCM40 Speakers (Part of a new superb range)



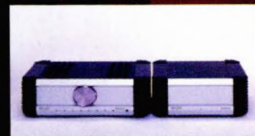
Musical Fidelity kW250S All-in-one (Audiophiles single box solution)



JAS Audio Orsa Speakers (HiFi+ Award Winner)



Clearaudio Ambient Turntable (A musical gem)



Musical Fidelity kW550 Integrated Amp (MF does it again - stunning!)

This powerhouse from Musical Fidelity will drive any loudspeaker load without breaking a sweat.

No matter what the music material, absolutely nothing phases the kW750. It really is that amazing. Don't need that much power, think again!



JAW DROPPING Integrated Amplifiers from DK Design!! Reference and Signature models on demonstration.

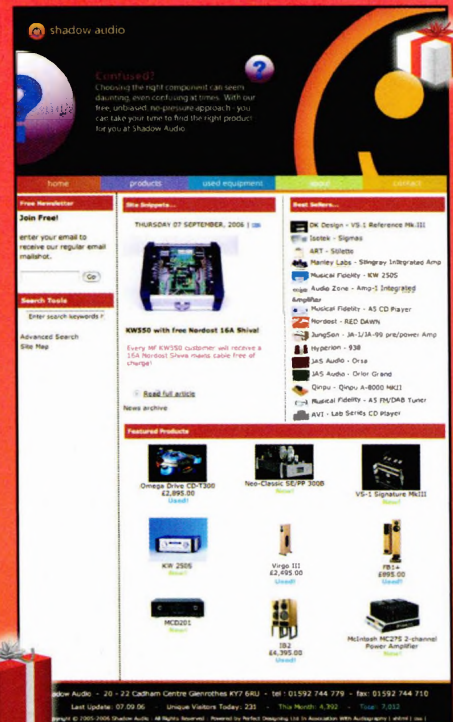
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At Shadow Audio we think good web sites allow you to access information with relative ease. Good is ok but we wanted more than that and we wanted a site that was fun to visit.

We have worked very hard to make our web site that little bit extra special and visitor feedback has been excellent.

In the coming months you will be able to enjoy many new additions to the site - watch this space!

Happy Browsing...



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.



Cambridge Audio Azur 840A £750

Like the matching 840C CD player, this is a technically innovative product with a sound so refined it belies its price point – just check out that fantastic midrange!



Primare I30 £1,500

Are you looking for an amp that combines weight and musical gravitas with rhythm, detail and subtlety, with gorgeous build quality to boot? In that case... here it is!



Copland CTA405 £2,498

This amp's massively enjoyable musicality is hard to beat: all the effusiveness of a great valve amp and none of the stereotypical softness. Brilliant!

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	400	Occasionally a touch bright, but a good all-rounder with decent detail and plenty of life	5	●	●	●	40	278
EC	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
EC	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt	●	●	90	286
EC	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		●	●	75	279
EC	Cambridge Audio 840A	750	Detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail	7		●	●	120	286
EC	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	●	●	85	283
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension – exceptional value for money	5	●	●	●	70	279
EC	Marantz PM7001KI	550	Building on an already fine amp, the KI variant offers superb bass and bags of detail	5	●	●	●	70	283
EC	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price – another budget classic from NAD	7		●	●	55	253
EC	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
EC	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5	●	●	●	80	278
EC	Primare I21	750	A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality	4		●		75	273
EC	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
EC	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									
EC	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7	●	●	●	100	266
EC	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8		●		100	280
	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
EC	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6	●	●	●	100	275
EC	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6		●		130	281
EC	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85	255
EC	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pratfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM	●		50	286
EC	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		●	●	100	286
EC	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
EC	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6		●		180	275
EC	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
EC	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5	●	●	●	75	271
EC	Marantz PM-11S1	2,500	A good-looking, well-endowed, high-quality amp that's a great match for the impressive SA-11S1 stereo CD/SACD player	6	●	●	●	100	265
EC	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7		●		180	285
EC	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			●	100	267
EC	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4		●		40	268
EC	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
EC	Unison Research Perform.	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5		●		40	287

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
EC	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	●	100	227
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2		●		266
EC	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured	●	●	6		●	125	270
EC	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
EC	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design	●	●	6	opt	●	50	287
EC	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										
EC	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●		5	opt	●		273
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt			277

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ESSE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	●	80	276
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6		●	50	254
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●				180	253
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Halco dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5		●	225	243
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6		●		233
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7		●	128	256

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD

player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX759SE £550
If you're looking for an affordable multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is top buy.



Arcam
DiVA AVR350 £1,500
Arcam's latest receiver offers a good helping of processing and connection options, with exceptionally musical sound.



Denon
AVC-A11XVA £2,500
A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



Classé
SSP-600/CA-5200 £11,900
Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel solution that's equally adept with music and movies should park their ears here.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited	●	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
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously		●	●	170	266
EC	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	●	10	●	140	267
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	●	3	●	160	255
EC	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo! Cultured sound, too		5		110	270
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	●	150	260
EC	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	●	7	●	100	273
EC	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
EC	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with iLink encrypted outputs	●	10	●	200	253
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price	●	6	●	100	287
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
EC	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 superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	●	8	●	135	275
EC	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
EC	Classé SSP-600/CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces		11	●	200	278
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	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.



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.

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Dino Phono Amplifier



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TOSHIBA'S NEW HD-DVD PLAYER LAUNCHED IN DECEMBER



THE PREMIUM HD-DVD PLAYER FROM TOSHIBA

HD-XE1 HD-DVD PLAYER

- 1080p, 1080i and 720p High Definition Resolutions via HDMI
- Fully Compatible with Existing DVDs
- Upscale DVDs to HD Resolution

£649

37WLT68 LCD TELEVISION

- 94cm screen, HD Ready, 1368x768 Resolution
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£1499

Combined with Toshiba's new 37WLT68 television, the premium HD-XE1 player gives outstanding performance - see HD-DVDs as they are meant to be seen

HD-DVD technology brings a new era of high definition video and advanced audio. This new format combines

HD DVD

the convenience of DVD with the incredible image quality of high definition video and advanced audio capabilities thanks to a higher capacity disc allowing far more information to be stored than standard DVD.



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Great performance from this one box music system combining CD, FM and DAB digital radio.

"Arcam has built a one-box hi-fi that performs like separates kit"

£999



Denon

TU-1800DAB TUNER

Hear DAB, FM and AM radio at its best. With 200 presets, the award-winning TU-1800DAB impresses with its refined and full-bodied sound.

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Pro-ject DEBUT III / PHONO SB TURNTABLE

Revive your vinyl. This 2 speed turntable features a built-in phono pre-amplifier and is supplied with Ortofon cartridge. Simply connect to any auxiliary input and play.

£225



Panasonic

DMR-EX75
HDD & DVD RECORDER

Record and watch all your favourite programs and movies with this exceptional, feature-packed, recorder.

£429 (Multi-Region)



Marantz

CD5001OSE & PM4001OSE

Enjoy superb sound quality for under £400 with this Marantz OSE CD and Amplifier combination.

£399



Monitor Audio

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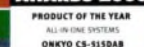
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KEF KHT2005.2 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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£599



1



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- 3 Soundstyle Finewoods WG4 Rack £279
- 4 QED Qunex SR-CV 1m Component Cable .. £85
- 5 Sennheiser PX100 (White) Headphones .. £39

Onkyo CS-515DAB MICRO SYSTEM

A truly musical micro

£229 (Ex Speakers)



2



4



5



Perfect Gifts

New Technology at Sevenoaks



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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST DVD PLAYER
SAMSUNG BD-P1000



B&W MINI THEATRE MT-30

Comprising five compact, stylish M-1 satellite speakers and the 'pressure vessel' PV-1 subwoofer, the MT-30 is capable of amazing power and speed - perfect for both music and movies.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
OCTOBER 2006
★★★★★

Pioneer PDP427XD

HD Ready, 42 Inch Plasma TV with Integrated Freeview Tuner

"It may be an inch narrower or so than its predecessor, but its performance reaches across far greater boundaries. The future of plasma television is here"

"An excellent screen - rivals now have their work cut out"

Hi-Fi Separates at Sevenoaks



Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER
CYPRUS 8042
WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST CD PLAYER
CYPRUS 1008

Primare

Class-leading build quality and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design. Primare's range includes the award-winning CD31 CD player and I30 Amplifier.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST CD PLAYER
PRIMARE CD31



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER
PRIMARE I30

Denon DVD3930 UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER



- Multiformat player
- Upscales standard DVDs for HD displays
- Plays DVD-V
- DVD-A/CD/SACD

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST DVD PLAYER
DENON DVD3930



Sonos DIGITAL MUSIC SYSTEM

Sonos is the first and only digital music system that lets you play all your digital music, all over your house - and control it from the palm of your hand.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
SONOS SYSTEM



Monitor Audio

BRONZE BR2
New entry-level speakers with amazing performance.

KEF iQ5 SPEAKERS

- Uni-Q Technology
- Finish Options
- Floorstanding
- What Hi-Fi? Award-Winner

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS
MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BR2

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- We manage the Installation
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01372 720720

EXETER
28 COWICK STREET
01392 218895

GLASGOW OPEN SUNDAY
88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD
0141 332 9655

GUILDFORD
73B NORTH STREET
01483 536666

HOLBORN
144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD
020 7837 7540

HULL
1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET
01482 587171

KINGSTON OPEN SUNDAY
43 FIFE ROAD
020 8547 0717

LEEDS
62 NORTH STREET
0113 245 2775

LEICESTER
10 LOSEBY LANE
0116 253 6567

LINCOLN
20-22 CORPORATION STREET (OFF HIGH ST)
01522 527397

LOUGHTON
7-9 GOLDINGS HILL
020 8532 0770

MAIDSTONE OPEN SUNDAY
96 WEEK STREET
01622 686366

MANCHESTER OPEN SUNDAY
69 HIGH STREET, CITY CENTRE
0161 831 7969

NEWCASTLE
19 NEWGATE STREET
0191 221 2320

NORWICH
28-29A ST GILES STREET
01603 767605

NOTTINGHAM
597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD, SHERWOOD
01195 911 2121

OXFORD
41 ST CLEMENTS STREET
01865 241773

PETERBOROUGH OPEN SUNDAY
36-38 PARK ROAD
01733 897697

PLYMOUTH
107 CORNWALL STREET
01752 226011

POOLE
LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET
01202 671677

PRESTON OPEN SUNDAY
40-41 LUNE STREET
01772 825777

READING
3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE
0118 959 7768

SEVENOAKS
109-113 LONDON ROAD
01732 459555

SHEFFIELD OPEN SUNDAY
635 QUEENS ROAD, HEELEY
0114 255 5861

SOLIHULL
149-151 STRATFORD ROAD
0121 733 3727

SOUTHAMPTON
33 LONDON ROAD
023 8033 7770

SOUTHGATE
77 CHASE SIDE
020 8886 2777

STAINES OPEN SUNDAY
4 THAMES STREET
01784 460777

SWINDON
8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD
01793 610992

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21 NORTHWAYS PARADE, FINCHLEY RD
020 7722 9777

TUNBRIDGE WELLS
28-30 ST JOHNS ROAD
01892 531543

WATFORD
47B ST ALBANS ROAD
01923 213533

WEYBRIDGE
43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT
01932 828525

WITHAM (ESSEX)
1 THE GROVE CENTRE
01376 501733

WOLVERHAMPTON
29-30 CLEVELAND STREET
01902 312225

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01935 700078

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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



Q Acoustics 1050 £330

This range-topping floorstander from newcomer Q Acoustics delivers an engaging sound with fine dynamics and impressive transparency.



DALI Ikon 6 £899

Complete with a ribbon super-tweeter, this is an exceptionally capable floorstander for the money, delivering a highly detailed and thoroughly engrossing sound.



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	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM HZ	FREE SPACE
UP TO £1,000								
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5	A	45	●	283
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26	A+	50	●	277
■	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	●
■	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	●
	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	●
■	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	●
■	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●
■	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	●
■	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	●
■	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	●
■	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	●	A	25	●
■	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	●
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●
■	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	●
■	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	165,85,29,5	●	A	40	●
■	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).



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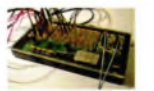


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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SIZE (HxD) (cm)	FLOOR/STANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE
	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
⊕	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
	Charco 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 Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	A	20	⊕	248
⊕	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
⊕	Focal 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,2,103,37,5	A	45	●	287
⊕	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 (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	FASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride	24,121,37	●	A-	35	●	264
	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 Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33,5,57,10	A+	45	●	●	285
	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	●	A	20	●	260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47	A-	25	●	●	237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●	254
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	30	●	265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	A-	48	●	●	274
	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 D.	1,799	The Concerto Domus performs significantly above its price level, especially with acoustic material	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sonus Faber Grand Piano D.	2,498	The Grand Piano Domus has a fabulous physical appearance and delivers a clean, refined sound	21,106,31	●	A-	32	●	283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●	240
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Magellan Concerto	9,995	Scintillating midrange and treble, with tuneful, well-timed bass - a thoroughly engaging musical ride	28,149,34	●	A	35	●	262
	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65	A	20	●	●	270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●	261
	WEGG3 Stellar 1	4,995	A full-range sound from a small(ish) box is possible, but only if you are very careful about set up, room and amps	35,97,45	●	A-	28	●	275
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●	254
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36	●	A	20	●	252

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 J/MLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50		232	
EC	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18		253	
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30		232	
	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28		241	
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A 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	SIZE (WxHxD CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
EC	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
EC	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
EC	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
EC	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239
	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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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on

the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER		
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
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
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass			●		●	290	●	287
	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

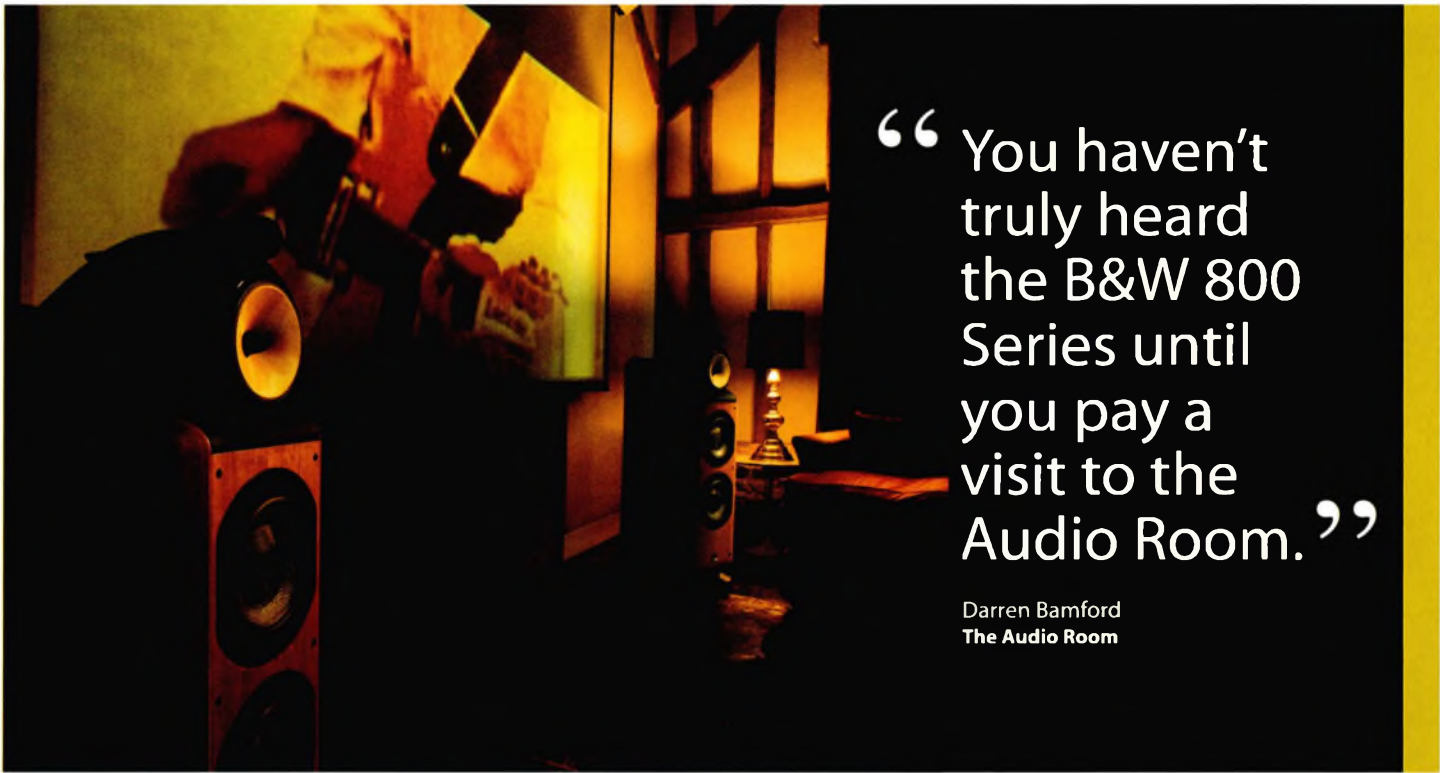
SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** in grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

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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								
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise	●	●			270
	Brilliance Hi-Fi Synergy	83	High quality materials help give this cable fine imaging; bass not as extended as some	●	●			275
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable		●	●		255
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●	●			259
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!	●	●			279
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail	●	●			283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●	●			248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●	●			281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●	●			284
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●	●			278
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble	●	●			281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging	●	●			280
<input type="checkbox"/>	TCI Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass	●	●			285
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend DCT300	300	DCT wire with hum-busting ferrite sleeves. Packed with enough detail to make rivals sound flat		●	●		234
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Well	85	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●	●			241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●	●			273
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cables with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●	●			259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●	●		E	278
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●	E	260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●	E	265
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types				O	234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●	●		E	279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chord Epic Twin	80	Good all rounder, which generally sounds relaxed and musical, and a full bass that stops the right side of sounding blowsy	●	●			287
	Chord Odyssey 4	34	This biwire version of Odyssey offers excellent speed and impact, with low listener fatigue	●	●			258
	Clearer Audio Copper-line A	10	Copper-line Alpha's strong, ringing bass and neutral tonality are plus points, but treble is not the purest we've heard	●	●			283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber BVS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●	●			227
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble	●	●			280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, high res and suitable for exacting systems	●	●			278
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging - a budget bargain	●	●			276
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical	●	●			287
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●		241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Lively, energetic and possessed of fine midrange detail and imaging	●	●			277
	Wyewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.		●	●		267
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Oasis 5 Biwire	38	Full-bodied and precise sound across the board – an excellent performer in bi-wire or single-wire mode	●	●			262

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

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SAVE: £350
£349.95

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£179.95



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- Genuine hi-fi separates in stylish, metal-cased, mini-sized boxes
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WAS: £349.95
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£249.95

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WHAT HOME CINEMA AWARDS BEST BUY JUNE 2006

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WAS: £99.99
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- Choice of real-wood finishes
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WAS: £449.95
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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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
	Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricely 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS				
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
80	66,46		5 Glass	247
81	50,50	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
56	16.5,18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	281
61	18,16.3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	283
63	17,20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	220
61	15, 20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	220
62	18,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	232
61	17,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	261
53	31,22	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		6	287
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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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 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 A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

≈ COOL GALES

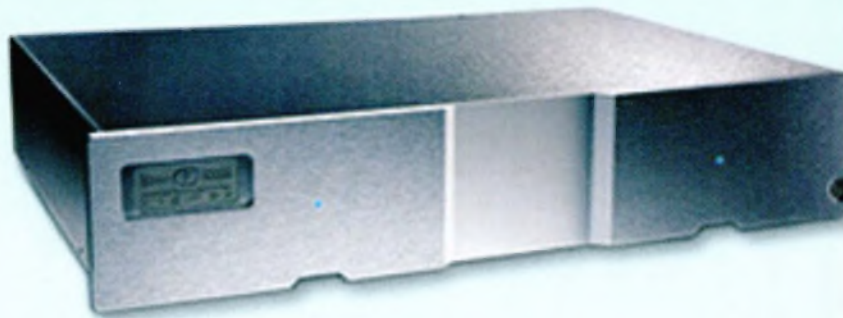
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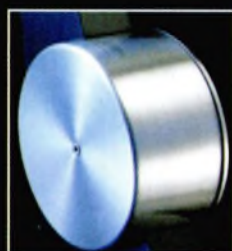
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nonconformist

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

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Jimmy Hughes, Hi-Fi Choice, Oct 2000.

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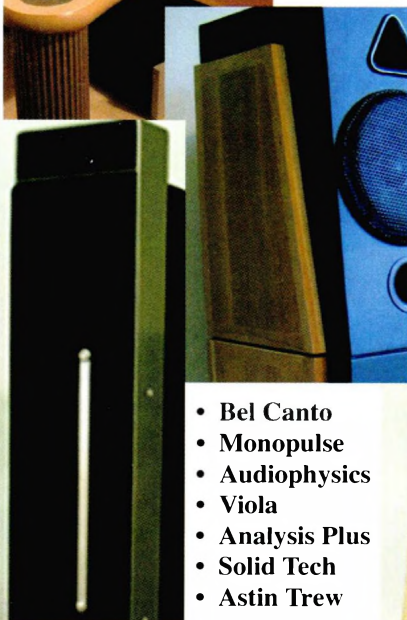
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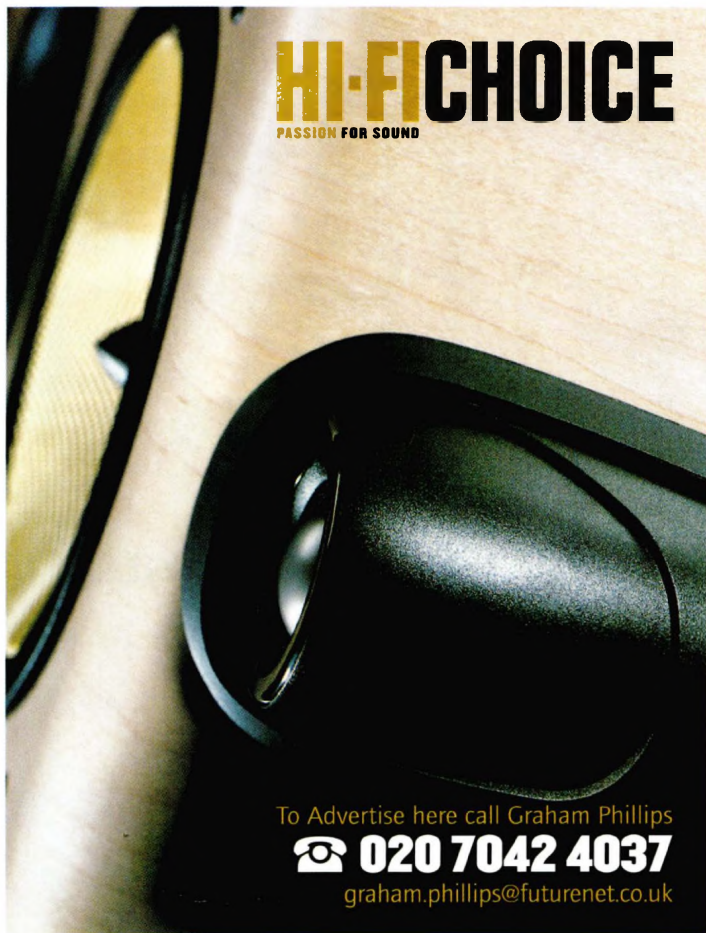
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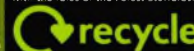
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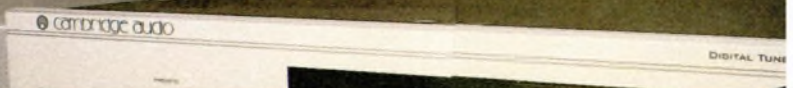


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2nd-hand shootout

Spend £2,000 on a used turntable and it'll last a lifetime

If you have £2,000 to spend on a second-hand turntable, you probably already have a substantial vinyl collection. So you will want a turntable that will not only do it justice, but also still be serviceable in years to come.

One of the safest options is to buy nearly new. Our choice this time, would be the Rega P9. Fitted with the highly regarded RB1000 tonearm, this state-of-the-art turntable costs £2,500 new.

As Rega's flagship, the P9 has a lot to prove. With its superb resolution, excellent timing and musical finesse, the P9 more than lives up to expectations. While the build quality isn't quite as heavy duty as some here, the technology and engineering used are first-rate – even at this elevated level. Take the ceramic platter for instance. It costs more to make than an entire P5

qualms about taking the plunge with a well set-up and looked after model.

Hard to believe, but the Linn Sondek LP12 is now getting on for 35 years of age. £2,000 is enough to buy a fairly recent example, offering both the Lingo power supply and Cirkus mechanical modifications. Both these improvements offer enhanced clarity, especially in the bass, without affecting those renowned LP12 rhythmic abilities. To ensure you're getting the latest spec, make sure that the serial number is later than 90,582. The Lingo power supply is easy enough to spot as it is housed in a separate box, rather than being plug or plinth mounted.

The default choice in tonearms for the LP12 today is the Linn Ekos, but don't rule out one equipped with the wacky but wonderful Naim Aro. Cartridge choice offers



Above: Michell Orbe SE turntable (with Rega arm)

launched in 1999, but came in for a round of upgrades just two years later. These upgrades focused around changing the motor from an AC design to a DC one. The corresponding power supply changed designation from Q.C. to V.C. and is how you can spot a later model.

A further change was made in 2004, with the addition of the Orbe 'always connected' Controller. This power supply is well worth having (if you have a DC powered deck) and just £259 will get you the latest spec.

Our money would be on a DC example, preferably with the Controller, with the SME Series IV or an Origin Live Silver or Encounter arm. The sound quality should have the same solidity of the SME, but with more warmth from the lower registers.

With £2,000 to spend, you should avoid the AC-powered version. This is because to upgrade the motor unit from here costs a princely £877. Service and spares? This is another deck that should rarely, if ever, go wrong, and is backed up by excellent factory support and dealer network.

Undoubtedly, these are all safe choices and there are other equally compelling options out there. For long-term owner satisfaction, your £2,000 couldn't find a better home than one of this quartet. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month: £500 phono stages

“Your £2,000 couldn't find a better home than one of this quartet.”

turntable and is stronger than anything this side of a diamond – just make sure that the P9 you're buying has it, and that it has not been substituted for a glass one! Longevity should be excellent, with the quality bearing needing only occasional lubrication for a lifetime's rumble-free performance. Rega is still very much in the turntable business and has a wide range of UK and international dealers. Parts and servicing should, therefore, present no problems.

Moving from one British turntable stalwart to a band of others, no high-end turntable comparison would be complete without SME, Linn and Michell.

Taking the great SME first, our £2,000 budget should buy us an early Model 20A. Launched in 1992, the Model 20A offers everything you'd expect from the brand; hewn from granite build quality, peerless reliability and excellent service back up. It comes with the equally impressive Series V tonearm as standard. Sound quality is immensely stable and well focused, if a little tonally dry to some ears. Although our budget would only stretch to a ten-year old example, you should have absolutely no

an even greater scope for personal choice, but our money should buy a model equipped with one of the better Linn MCs.

All turntables benefit from being properly set-up, but the LP12 is the most susceptible here. If you're not buying from a Linn dealer, then it's well worth getting the deck professionally set-up – this takes a dealer around two hours to do the job properly. As with the Rega and SME, parts and servicing shouldn't present any problems.

Slightly less well known, but very much a favourite with hi-fi reviewers, is the Michell Orbe SE. This particular super-deck was



Right: SME Model 20A turntable



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VPI Socrates inc JMW-9 tonearm, immac cond, boxed, very little usage (£1300)	£1195

analogue

Isotek 2K Qube2, boxed, in silver, sensational mains conditioning unit. (£1595)	£595
Isotek GII Minisub, silver front, current spec, immac cond (£545)	£395
Vertext Roraima Plus mains cable, 2m long, exc cond, stunning (£532)	£349
Townshend Supertweeters, titanium finish, boxed as new, exd (£800)	£649
Isotek Titan mains conditioner, few months old, boxed (£1500)	£1095

misc

List is updated daily on our web site.

HFC SA/12/06

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 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
Canon 303 monos, PP 22 watts 300B with Living Voice upgrade	£4800	£8400
AudioNote UK wired Helius 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
Audlon 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) AN56 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 Unisis 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 Charisma 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 Recca & 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 - fired	£180	£1500
Townshend Audio Seismic Sink - 3DHD (100 kilos) 48x48	£300	

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Speakers:

Origin Live OL-2 speakers
Kef Concord speakers
Elac CL330 Jet speakers with stands
Revel Salon black gloss aluminium side panels (mint)
Living Voice OBX R2 Speakers
Dynaudio Audience 7 speakers & stands
Hales Transcendence 5 loudspeakers
TDL RTL3 speakers
Tannoy Westminster Royal HE speakers

Pre-amps:

Conrad Johnson MC 10 FET pre-amp
Naim Nac 92 with Nap 90/3 amp
Proceed PAV pre-amp
Mark Levinson 26S balanced pre-amp
Mark Levinson ML28 with phone stage

Amplifiers:

Audionote Neiro mono-blocks
Perreux 200ip int. amp
Mark Levinson ML383 integrated amp
Classe CA201 amp
Arcam Alpha 8P power amp
Kora Triode 100SB
Ayre AX-7 Integrated Amp
Mark Levinson 432 Power Amp
Mark Levinson 20.5 Reference Monoblocks

CD Players, Transports and DACs:

£250	Sonic Frontiers Transport 3 (5K new) only	£1995
£150	Denon DCD 590 CD player	£60
£995	Sony CDP M41 CD player	£60
£9995	Pioneer PD-S502 CD player	£95
£2,800	Pioneer PD-S703 CD player	£95
£395	Meridian G08 CD player, mint, boxed	£1295
£2900	Esoteric X01 CD/SACD player, ex-demo, mint, fully guaranteed	£POA
£95	Micromega Leader CD player	£170
£9995		

Miscellaneous:

	Hitachi FT5500 Mk11 tuner	£125
	Sony ST-SE570 tuner	£60
£395	Accuphase DS 1200V power supply	£3495
£595	Technics ST-GT550 tuner	£65
£995	Winds stylus gauge	£425
£2500	Transparent Musicwave-plus speaker cable 10ft, pair	£425
£995	Quad FM4 tuner (late model)	£195
	AVI tuner	£675

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

£5495	Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer	£2495
£1095	My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new)	£2750
£2995	Project 9c S carbon fibre silver wired arm	£375
£1995	Trichord Delphini with power supply	£595
£195	Kingshaw Perception phono stage with power supply	£350
£3500		

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villettri speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.



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- Mendian 203 DAC excellent 229
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- Acoustic Arts Amp 2HP, ex, boxed 3499
- Acoustic Arts Pre 1 and Pow 1, excellent, £6k+ new 4699
- Arcam Alpha FMJ C30 Preamp ex boxed REDUCED 429
- Arcam A85 ex boxed REDUCED 749
- Arcam A32, ex silver c/w remote 599
- Arcam P35, ex silver 699
- Audio Research LS7 Preamp 999
- Audio Research D130 Power, ex 899
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- Audio Research SP12 Pre, ex REDUCED Call
- Audio Research SP14 Pre, ex REDUCED Call
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- Cyrus 5 Integrated, ex boxed REDUCED 349
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- ITL M8A0/M100/M100 Pre/Power x2 lovely combo NOW 799
- Krell KSA100S, just fantastic 799
- Krell KAV3000, excellent boxed 1799
- Krell KA4000, excellent boxed 329
- Linn Kolektor, excellent 399
- Linn Kairn Prio, excellent boxed, 279
- Linn LK100 power, ex boxed REDUCED 399
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- Linn Mark, ex, c/w remote, bargain Linn intro, REDUCED 279
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- Acoustic Energy Aegis EVO 3 in Maple as new 249
- Audiovector M0 Sig, active crossovers, new £4k+, amazing 1699
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- AVI NuNeutron, call for details 199
- B3W COM2SE 199
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- Celestion SL6S, excellent example of seminal standmount 349
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- Linn Kelik, absolute bargain! 749
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- Martin Logan Aenus, ex boxed 1199
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Analogue

- Ariston RD80, wood finish ex condition 149
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- Ariston RD115 c/w Infinity Back Widow, excellent 250
- Clearaudio Ref. TQI arm, Accurate cart, (new £8800) 3999
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Accessories/Systems

- Audioquest Python RCA 1m REDUCED 149
- AVI S2000 - Ref CD, Tuner, Integrated - Save loads!!! 999
- Chord Anthem RCA 1m 199
- Chord Chorus RCA 1m 129
- Chord Indigo, as new save loads! 179
- H Kardon AVR35, was £1000 449
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- JBL Control 1, Cheaper than Mr Richer Call
- Linn Classik K with onboard tuner, as new boxed 599
- Revolver Firefly X100V excellent 179
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AUDIOLAB power amplifiers, late F serial numbers. PX and SX available, in unmarked working order with boxes and instructions, £360 and £250 respectively. Or, a deal for both. Email p.deeprise@deeprise.co.uk 01483 82319 (Guildford).

AUDIOSYNTHESIS Transcend CD transport, £1,350. Perpetual technologies PIA/P3A modright signature II power supply upgrade, £1,150ono. All items mint and boxed. 01455 212362 or 07795 671932 (Warks).

AUDIOZONE AMP-1 integrated amplifier, twin volume control, outboard power supply, mint, £950. 07765 808374 (Lancs).

B&W DM601 S3 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 604 S3 black, four months old, boxed, mint condition, (£800) £600. Thomas 07835 056237 (Notts).

CASTLE RICHMOND 31 speakers in dark wood veneer, 15 months old, £175. 01502 583806 (Suffolk).

CEC TLO vgc, £5,500. Reimyo DMP777, £2,000. Z-Systems 12DP1, £1,500. Quad 33, as new, £150. NOS DAC, £100. Ocas five, metre cables, £100. 07791 720602 (London).

CELESTION SI6000 system; SI6000si speakers, SL6000 subwoofers, electronics control crossover unit, Excellent condition, original boxes and manuals, £500. 01257 277857 (Lancs).

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).

CYRUS CDB with PSX-R, Audiolab 8000S and 8000PX pre/power, Mission 753 Freedom very good condition, £1,500, may split. 07881 601783 (Berks).

EAR 869 SINGLE ENDED valve amp, 15 watt, vgc, (£2,200) £1,100. 01903 506479 (W.Sussex).

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 and superb. 020 8657 0680 (Croydon).

GRYPHON CALLISTO 2200 integrated amplifier. 200 watts, vgc, terrific clarity and dynamics. (£4,500) £2,250. 07968 189647 (London).

KEF Q35.2 black floorstanding speakers, boxed as new, £140. 07760 120668 (West Yorks).

KIMBER 8VS speaker cable with quality plugs, 3.5 metre pair, £70. 01495 717921 (Gwent).

JAMO CONCERT 11 loudspeakers. Maple, five years old, excellent condition. (£2,300) £600, with boxes. 01279 718072 (Herts/Essex).

LINN KLIMAX power amplifier, pair of 500 solos, £6,500. Pair of Chakra 500 twins, £2,750 each. Excellent condition, boxed, interconnects. Barrie 01323 487781 (East Sussex).

LINN SONDEK LP12, Lingo PSU, Ittok arm, Dynavector Karat 17D2 (new). All mint and superb sound, £1,250ono. Custom made six-tier equipment rack, spiked top and bottom. Looks great sounds better. (£700) £210. Andy 0115 9126424 (Midlands).

LUXMAN D322 CD player with variable output, boxed, in as new condition with manual and remote, £150ono. John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks). ▣

WANTED

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks)

BRYSTON 3BST power amp 01803 523553 (Paignton).

MUSICAL FIDELITY P150 power amps, will collect, must be vgc. 07733 167226 (W.Yorks)

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA DAC21 in mint condition. Willing to pay good price. No scratches or dents please and fully functioning. 07772 291425 ((Tyne and Wear).

ORIGIN LIVE SILVER tonearm. Must be good condition 01443 832372 (Wales).

PINCH ROLLER part number 642-001 for Ferroglyph Series Y open reel tape deck. 01592 750643 (Fife).

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx AQ21. Nytech. Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. Nordost Red Dawn. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

STAX OMEGA electrostatic ear-speakers up to £1,000 for mint condition example. 01333 311247 (Scotland).

WHARFEDALE 708 speakers 023 8073 8935 (Essex).

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

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).

MARANTZ PM66SE amplifier, £75. CD52 MKII CD player, £45. Trio KT1000 tuner, vintage 1970, professional re-fit in 2005, £70 0113 2506743 (W.Yorks).

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 player, 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 A3

integrated amp £450. A3 CR power amp £450. KEF Reference 1.2 in cherry, vgc, £450. All for £1,350 with free vdH CS122 speaker cable and interconnect. 07973 636413 (Bath)

MUSICAL FIDELITY KW DM25

two-box CD player. Brand new, boxed, superb sound, genuine reason for sale. (£4,000) £3,125ovno. 0115 912 6424 (Notts).

MUSICAL FIDELITY M3

Nu-Vista integrated amp, excellent condition, boxed with ancillaries. (£3,000) £1,500. Michael 01772 234563 day, 752379 eve (Preston).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-PRE V3

preamp and XP200 power amp, mint, boxed, £1,250. Saverio 01332 843758 (Derbys).

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 loudspeakers, mint, boxed, £220. Mick 01252 870861 (North Hampshire).

NAD 524

CD player, £125. T562 DVD, £125. Both remotes and instructions. Optimum 6000AV stand, chrome legs, £150. Buyer collects 07976 956298 (Devon)

NAIM NAC82

preamp (1999) with latest style NAPsc, remote, manual, leads, box. Excellent condition. Demonstration preferred, £1,050ono. 07973 785360 (Sussex).

NAIM NAC82

and MM phono, £1,200. NAP 180, £700. SBL black, latest drivers, £1,100. All boxed 020 7253 4469 (London).

NAIM NAT01

superlative tuner, early model, excellent condition, reluctant sale, original packaging, £600 including carriage and insurance. 003531 4591432 (Dublin)

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).

PMC OB1

speakers, light oak, nice condition, £1,350 may part-ex with high quality standmount. 07980 467009 (Cheshire).

QUAD 22L

speakers piano finish, few hours use, £350. Quad 67 CD player, £125. 020 8671 6560 (London).

QUAD 31/ 306

pre/power amp. Grey, heavy duty speaker connectors and new caps. Excellent condition, £250 pair. 0121 382 0145 (Birmingham).

QUAD 99

preamp, £375. 99 FM tuner, £350, mint boxed, free Thorens TD160 turntable if both

bought. Spare 99 remote, £20.

Russ Andrews four-way Yello power block, £30. 023 8073 8935 (Essex).

QUAD 99

preamp, Quad 909 power amp unused. Second system, as new, £900. 0191 4171669 after 6pm (Tyne and Wear).

QUANTUM III

space v. time speaker cable (two-metre lengths), £125. 01803 523553 (Paignton).

REGA ALYA

loudspeakers cherry veneer 15 months old, as new, little used, £200. 07929 065484 (Wigan).

REVEL PERFORMA F50

high-end floorstanding loudspeakers in beautiful dark cherry veneer. Mint condition, dearly loved and with very little use. Fully boxed. (£6,500) £2,950. 07881 821023 (Essex).

ROKSAN XERSES

record player in black ash, with PSU/XPS 3.5 power supply including Roksan Tabriz 21 tonearm. Vgc one owner, £550. 01625 502204 or 07976 838461 (Cheshire).

RUARK CRUSADER II

black ash veneer, excellent condition £600. 01268 5402140 (Essex).

RUSS ANDREWS

Powerblock with Megaclamp, eight sockets, one year old, perfect condition, £165ono. Audioquest Indigo + speaker cable, 2x3mtr pairs, fitted with 4mm QED Airloc banana plugs. Excellent condition, £60ono. Ray 01900 606650 (Workington).

SONUS FABER CONCERTINOS

walnut, mint, original bi-wire version, £195. Quad 99 power amp, mint, £150. 07941 174804 (Berks).

SUGDEN C51/ P51

pre/power amps, £250ono. Aurex mini system 15, £250. Both fine amplifiers in excellent condition 01708 457691 (Essex).

TRANSPARENT ULTRA

balanced interconnect, 4.5metre. Excellent condition with original box. (£1,949) £650. Superb full range and dynamic sound. Ideal for pre/power amp or active speaker. 07973 220663 (Leicestershire).

WILSON BENESCH ORATOR

loudspeakers latest spec, red cherry, as new one owner, £2,000 no offers please. 01268 415017 (Essex).



Above: Cyrus CD8 CD player



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