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HI-FI CHOICE

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 See page 24



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 - > Creek Evo
 - > Marantz PM7001 KI
 - > NAD C372
 - > Onkyo A-9555
 - > Rotel RA-06

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Islington
020 7226 5500

Phase 3 Hi-Fi
Worthing
01903 245577

CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE JANUARY 2007 ISSUE 289

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



As we perch precariously on the cusp of another New Year, it's comforting to think that, whatever else the world may throw at us, we can always seek solace in the comforting sonic arms of our hi-fi systems. Where would we be without music? And how much poorer would we be without high-performance audio gear to enrich the emotional quality of our lives?

It is with great sincerity, therefore, that we salute those who labour to bring us an ever-improving catalogue of products from which to choose. And this despite the increasing pressures that bear down upon those seeking to make a living from their hi-fi passion, by designing, building and selling components to punters like you and me. The challenges posed by the influence of online retail, for instance, and the financial burden borne by manufacturers as a result of European legislation. Plus, of course, the gargantuan task of improving upon the downward qualitative pressures of shifting technology, upholding the traditions of hi-fi while traversing the inevitable tide of change. Running a profitable hi-fi business has become a truly formidable task.

But still the products keep on coming, from UK sources and abroad. And still the quality keeps improving – in this issue alone, we're carrying first-ever tests of brilliant new kit from the likes of Krell, Gamut and Lyngdorf, all set to deliver an abundance of aural pleasure through 2007 and beyond. We're also launching a new feature column from legendary hi-fi commentator, Ken Kessler – henceforth he'll be waxing lyrical in every issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*. Enjoy!

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*

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

Wooden it be nice?

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

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

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



DAN GEORGE

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



RICHARD BLACK

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



MALCOLM STEWARD

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



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopaedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides).



DAVID VIVIAN

An award-winning journalist, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for *HFC*. He also writes about cars, but who needs the latest Lotus when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive.



MASON KENNEDY

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



ALAN SIRCOM

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

To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business.



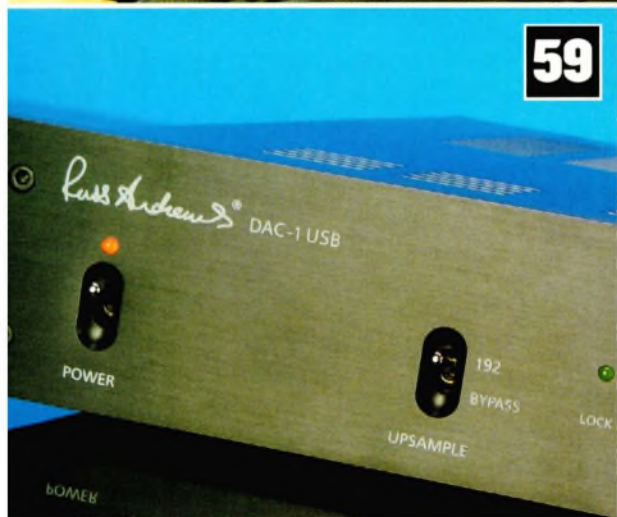
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The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV, gathering together all our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...

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**"YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE NOTION OF LIQUIDITY IN SOUND AND
YOU WILL MARVEL AT THE COHERENCE"**

HI FI NEWS / JULY 06 / KEN KESSLER / DUETTE

**"THEIR PERFORMANCE IS REMARKABLE, OPTIMIZED AND IDEALLY SITED
IT REALLY IS SPECTACULAR"**

HI FI PLUS / ISSUE 47 / ROY GREGORY / DUETTE

PROVO-NANCE

Provo, Utah's hi-fi artisans, the speaker builders of **Wilson Audio**, have now been at the top of the high-end tree for three decades. Recent recognition of their achievements tells us that complacency has yet to affect David A. Wilson's enthusiasm, as is evident in the rave reviews afforded the stunning new small speaker, the **Duette** - a Wilson 'first' designed to perform as well against walls or on shelves as it does in free space. The award-winning **Alexandria** has been acknowledged globally as the greatest cost-no-object speaker available today. As the **Alexandria** paves the way for new and exciting advances in music reproduction, so, too, does the deliriously exciting **Wilson WATT Puppy System 8**, which remains the benchmark for consumers who desire compact speakers that demonstrate zero compromise. For this season, we're pleased to note that its single-chassis sister, the sublime **Sophia** has been revised to earn the **Sophia 2** name. And for the comprehensive embrace of authentic surround-sound, only the wall mountable effects speakers and centre channel model in the **WATCH** range achieve the ultimate in home theatre sound playback. Now that's what we call "Provonance".



Wilson WATT Puppy System 8

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AUDIO**

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TRIANGLE MAGELLAN CONCERTO SW2 LOUDSPEAKER

Hi-Fi Choice first reviewed Triangle's magnificent Magellan Concerto speaker almost exactly two years ago, in HFC 262. Since then, the speaker specialist has been carefully crafting an expanded Magellan range, including a new version of the second-from-top Concerto

Despite the post-code suffix, the new Magellan Concerto sw2 is not made in Clapham Junction – the French are responsible for this beauty. According to Triangle, the development of the sw2 has been both a search for the absolute and a labour of love. It features a distinctive front and rear-firing tweeter and midrange system called DPS (Dynamic Pulse System), which is said to make the speakers less directional, and therefore less sensitive to placement. Triangle claims this creates a more natural, lively and expressive sound.

There are all-new drivers for the latest Magellan line up, the Concerto featuring three dedicated bass units to compliment the bipolar treble and midrange array. It's said to offer 80 per cent of the flagship Magellan's performance, for 50 per cent of the price. Find out next month if that's true. To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Triangle Magellan Concerto sw2

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £14,750 per pair

KEY FEATURES Bipolar diffusion • New drive units • Ten-coat lacquering • Decoupled midrange drivers • Sensitivity: 90dB

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669
🌐 www.triangle.fr.com



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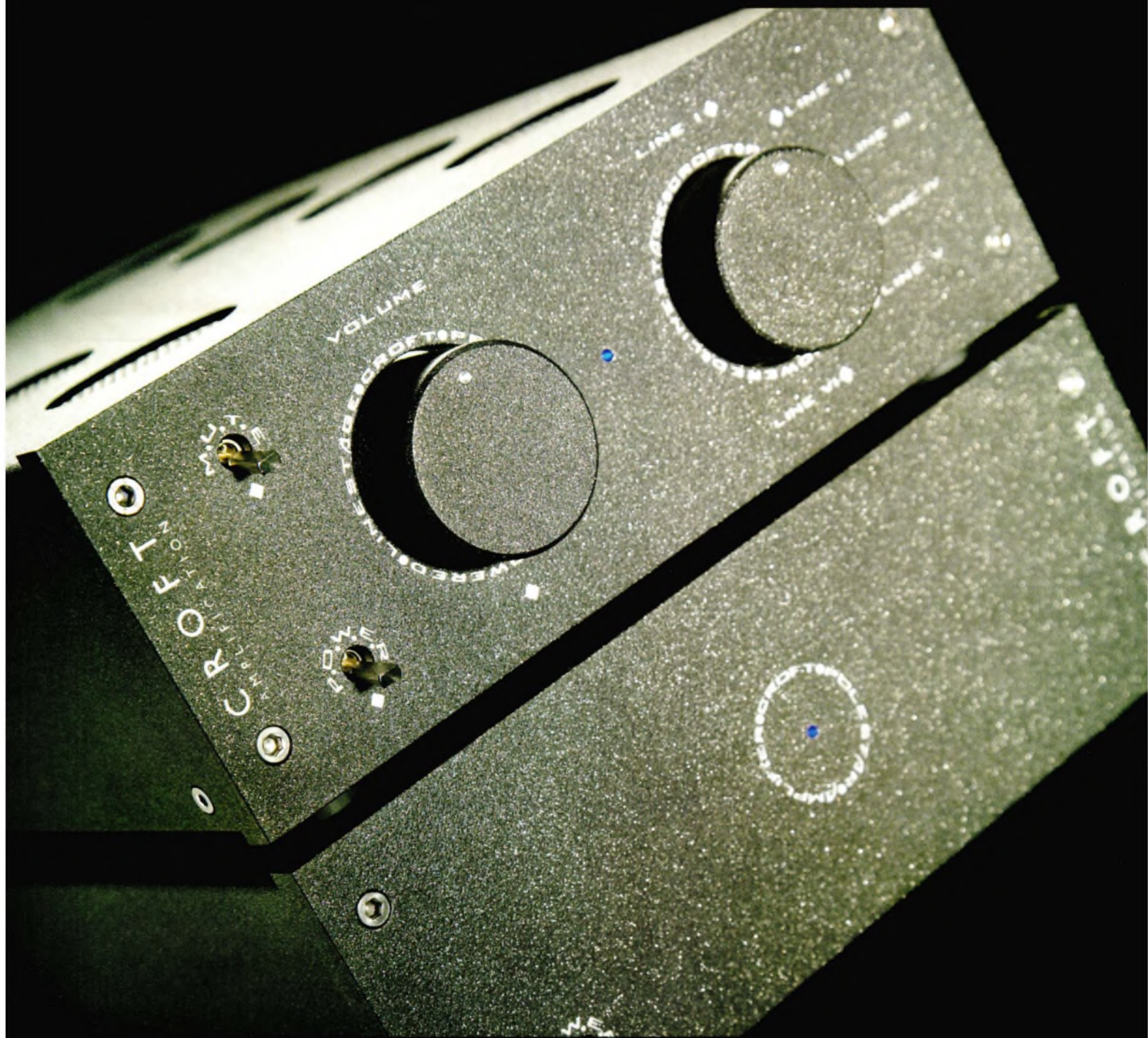


Tucana AUDIOPHILE STEREO AMPLIFIER



Cygnus ADVANCED PHONO STAGE





CROFT MICRONAUT PRECESSION AND POLESTAR PREAMPLIFIER AND POWER AMPLIFIER

Croft, the valve amp specialist, has developed a range of half-width amps called the Micronaut Series. We've scooped the entry-level DC-powered Precession preamp – offering a 1,000-hour battery life – and the matching 25-watt Polestar power amp. A key advantage of the battery-powered approach is the lack of transformer noise, plus energy consumption is much lower... and the batteries cost around £5 a time.

At £1,400 for the pair, Croft has crammed in plenty of audiophile electronics. Eichmann provides the socketry, proprietary hybridized Croft circuits reside in the power amp and each product is designed and hand built here in the UK. Croft says its goal is provide “the world’s best hi-fi at reasonable cost”. We’ll let you know if it’s succeeding next issue.

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

PRODUCT Croft Micronaut Precession and Polestar
TYPE Preamplifier and power amplifier
PRICE (Precession) £600; (Polestar) £800
KEY FEATURES DC powered preamp ● Half-width dimensions ● Stereo/mono configuration ● 25 watts
CONTACT ☎ 01746 716881
 🌐 www.eminentaudio.co.uk

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



IMERGE S3000

High-end audio from a hard disk source could be a reality with the new Imerge S3000 sound server. Now in its fourth generation, the latest design promises audiophile sound quality from its Wolfson DACs and is overflowing with new technology. Key features include uncompressed recording (16-bit/44kHz), a capacity of up to 400GB, four multiplexed zones for simultaneous use and a new graphical interface. You can also cluster up to four servers to give 16 possible outputs, connect the unit to the internet and search for music by era, genre and year, in addition to more common search methods. Expect a review soon.

Price from £1,600 **Due** now ☎ 01954 783600 🌐 www.imerge.co.uk

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640R

Cambridge Audio's budget Azur series has expanded to include a new 7.1-channel AV receiver, the 640R. It has been specifically designed for high-performance surround sound and is said to take an uncompromising approach to music reproduction. Key features include HDMI switching, HDTV capability via component or HDMI/DVI and multichannel inputs for DVD-Audio/SACD players. Additionally, there is a stereo direct mode for serious music listening and seven 100-watt discrete amplifiers.

Price £600 **Due** now ☎ 0870 900 1000 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



FINAL SOUND SPEAKER RANGE

A new approach to electrostatic panel design is a key innovation in Final Sound's new electrostatic speaker range. The Dutch expert's patented Inverter Technology changes the way sound and current moves inside the loudspeaker, by feeding the audio signal to the diaphragm instead of the stator plates, as in conventional electrostatic systems. Final Sound says the technique means a stronger, clearer and more responsive sound. There are three new models from UK distributor UKD, headed by the 1000i – a 1.8 metre tall, full-range panel with extension down to 32Hz.

Price from £1,500 to £4,995 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.finalsound.com



WILSON BENESCH TORUS

Wilson Benesch has engineered an innovative high-end bass system that is devoid of traditional woofers. Called the Torus System, the 'infrasonic generator' has at its heart a 16kg magnetic core acting as a push-pull motor, driving proprietary carbon/Kevlar diaphragms. These are configured isobarically, as a kind of clamshell, and are claimed by the company to be the stiffest, lightest and most highly damped diaphragms in the world. The electronics are kept outside of the system in a separate unit, the Torus amplifier. See next issue for an in-depth HFC review.

Price Torus £3,000; Torus amplifier £2,240 **Due** now ☎ 0114 285 2656 🌐 www.wilson-benesch.com





REL T-SERIES

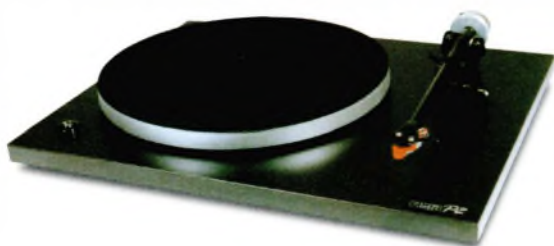
⊕ Bass lovers on a budget will welcome REL's new entry-level subwoofer range, the T-Series. The three-strong line up has been designed from scratch, with all models featuring an active forward-firing woofer, plus a downward-firing passive unit. The subs all share REL's high-level input for seamless, high-quality hi-fi integration, together with a line-level RCA phono connector and .1/LFE input for home cinema use. The range is available in black ash or cherry composite laminate finishes, with high gloss black lacquered rails.

Price from £395 to £595 **Due** now ☎ 01656 768777 🌐 www.rel.net

REGA P2

⊕ Following on from last month's announcement of a new budget Rega turntable called the P1, the Essex-based company has revealed that it has also revamped its classic P2 deck. It's entirely British-made and sports the classic RB250 tonearm, with Rega's Bias 2 cartridge also available as an option. The deck has a new, stabilised 22mm platter design for great speed stability and a high-quality main bearing and sub-platter assembly. The belt-driven P2 also comes with an AC synchronous motor.

Price £249 (£300 with Bias 2 cartridge) **Due** now ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk



DENSEN B-410

⊕ This is Densen's new entry-level CD player, the B-410. It is the first of a new line of CD players from the Danish company and is said to outperform the existing and more expensive B-400 Plus. It uses a Densen-modded CD drive with a new clock drive to combat jitter, and is upgradable to the forthcoming B-420 and B-440 models. Key features include 24-bit DAC, Densen's proprietary Class-A output stage and "virtually immeasurable jitter".

As with all Densen products, the player comes with a lifetime guarantee. Read our full review next month.

Price £1,000 **Due** now ☎ 07799 146002 🌐 www.densen.dk



FLYING MOLE CA-S10

⊕ Flying Mole, the Japanese digital amplifier specialist, has launched a new stereo integrated amplifier with a host of proprietary technology. The CA-S10 is a 100-watt digital stereo amp with a dual-mono design and low-noise circuitry, said to offer uncompromised sound. The amp has three line-level inputs, a preamp output and a 27-step mechanical volume control, all housed in an aluminium case with a 10mm-thick front panel. Expect a review soon.

Price £1,000 **Due** now ☎ 01442 399548 🌐 www.flyingmole.co.jp

Soundbites



NORDOST has launched a new Dual Micro Mono Filament HDMI cable called the Silver Screen. The OFC conductors are helically wrapped Dual Micro Mono Filament threads, extruded within a tube for low insulation contact. Nordost claims it is the most detailed HDMI cable on the market. Prices start at £200 for a one-metre length.

☎ 01635 291357

ETON's new upmarket portable world radio, the E1, has over 1,700 presets and is packed with useful radio features. With a large digital display and auto-tuning, the E1 should make filling those presets simple. It retails for £400.

☎ 023 92 313090

HELIOS has a new budget DVD player, which it says is the only model on the market that can upscale to 1080p through HDMI, component and VGA/RGB outputs. The H4000 HD upscales standard DVD discs, plus home-produced DVD-Rs recorded in MPEG4, DivX and XviD formats. The player is available directly from NeoDigits, priced at £90.

☎ www.neodigits.com

PURE DIGITAL's latest version of the Elan portable DAB radio has completely new electronics that include new features such as textSCAN, to scroll DAB text, and Intellitext, which allows further access to text services such as news headlines and sports results. The Elan DX40 costs £70.

☎ 01923 260511

NAD's latest DVD-A/CD player, the T515 costs just £200. Capable of playing stereo DVD-A, DVD-V and CDs, the new player also boasts HDMI connectivity. It plays all blank media discs as well as DivX, MP3 and WMA encoded discs.

☎ 01908 319360



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ARTHUR KHOUBESSERIAN
Job Title: Founder and Owner
Company: The Funk Firm



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

Pickup arms are now the single worst component left in the audio chain (and surprisingly complex to deal with). So, we need to shoot the messenger... in the arm.

Can 'Generation iPod' go hi-fi?

Sadly I fear the reality of the question is not "Can they be turned?" but "Why would they want to be?"

CD or vinyl, and why?

CDs limits are pre-defined – simple and serene and yet inherently sterile. Vinyl is delicate, distracting and demanding of involvement. Each performance is unique and exciting.

What type of products really excite you?

So many designs are just 'me too' products. Others say more simply 'me', confidently reinforcing that you, the buyer, are an individual. The designer has actually achieved something you want to get involved with and so be proud of... long after it has been bought.

What type of products will consumers be buying from you in five years time?

Five years, eh? Through the mists of a rusty crystal ball: Eyecatchin', earticklin', brainstrummin', fingerstrokin', mindbendin', soulcoaxin' – Funky. What ever they are, I pray they're not boring.

Hi-Fi Diary

JANUARY

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

FEBRUARY

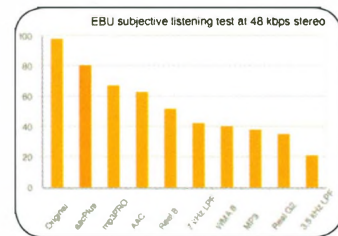
11 Audiojumble 2007
 The Angel Leisure Centre,
 Tonbridge, Kent
www.audiojumble.co.uk
The place to find vintage hi-fi bargains

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

WorldDAB sets the standard

With new countries setting up DAB broadcasting networks, the WorldDAB organisation has been investigating ways of using more efficient coding for transmissions. The result is that 'aacPlus', a recent member of the MPEG-4 codec family, looks like becoming the new standard for digital radio broadcasting. Existing DAB networks use MPEG-2 coding, but this less efficient compression system needs at least 128kbps to give 'near CD quality'. In contrast, aacPlus is said to deliver the same quality at a mere 48kbps, which frees up space for more channels. It even claims to be able to deliver 5.1 surround via 128kbps.

The technology will be used in new territories as well as being broadcast alongside existing networks for the mobile phone market. A trademark of Coding Technologies, aacPlus has been shown to perform well in the company's own subjective listening tests.



Wild Western

Western Electric, one of the most iconic names in valve audio, is once again making a foray into the amplifier market. Having been at the top of the valve tree for some time, Western Electric recently collaborated with Wavelength Audio, in an attempt to rebuild some of its classic designs. Sadly, that scheme has foundered and Western Electric has decided to try a different avenue.

The company is now licensing an existing design from the David Berning Company, which makes ZOTL amplifiers that don't require output transformers. The Seigfried single-ended amplifier incorporates 300B output valves – Western Electric's legendary triode. As yet there have been no official announcements regarding availability and price, but by way of a guide, the David Berning Seigfried is priced at \$6,950 with this output tube.



Quieter cubes

Wilson Benesch has developed a means of reducing cabinet vibration, said to reduce radiation from a speaker enclosure by almost 6dB. By placing a stiffened variant on an auxiliary bass radiator directly behind the main driver, the company has provided a means for the energy in the box to be absorbed without involving the cabinet itself. This functions like a dipole, where there are drive units on opposite sides of the cabinet, but avoids the response fluctuations that such an approach can create. This technique has been applied to the firm's new entry-level Square range, which can be placed close to the wall as a result of the 'quieter' cabinet.



Abingdon – home of high end

It's not often that a new, fully formed, high-end hi-fi company emerges in the UK, but this appears to be the case with Abingdon Music Research, better known as AMR. The company arrived at the Heathrow hi-fi show in September with a complete system finished to a very high standard and featuring a number of novel technologies. AMR apparently wants to "revive and build upon extreme audio principles" and numbers internet audio critic and designer Thorsten Loesch among its board members.

AMR's first products are the AM-77 amplifier, a hybrid integrated with error correction circuits to "remove the drawbacks of solid-state circuits", and the CD-77, which offers user variable oversampling along with the option to bypass the process entirely. Both components are priced at £4,399. The LS-77 standmount loudspeaker with its aluminium casework and PH-77 'super' phono stage are yet to be finalised.



Look ma, no wires

Ⓢ Sony, Panasonic and Samsung are just three of the big names behind a new wireless system for sending high-definition audio and video from one device to another. WirelessHD will initially be transmitting at between two and five gigabits per second. However, the system is said to be capable of running at 20Gbps, which makes it a major competitor for HDMI-wired connections, with the connection between DVD player and projector/display being the most obvious link to be replaced. As a high-speed wireless system, WirelessHD will also be



a potential alternative to the forthcoming 802.11n standard, albeit with more in the way of content protection built in.

Its high-speed data rate also makes it potentially useful as a replacement for speaker cables, making active multichannel systems significantly easier to install.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #48

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



Nothing between the speakers

A simple but surprisingly effective way of maximising sound quality is to make sure there's nothing situated in the space between your two loudspeakers. Free space between the speakers allows your hi-fi system to image much more coherently and precisely, creating a vivid and believable soundstage. In particular, you'll

find you get a more solid central image – probably because the presence of objects placed centrally causes unwanted reflections. Alas, many users situate their hi-fi and/or a TV screen centrally for practical reasons. Although not ideal, you can reduce the ill effects of this by pulling the speakers as far forward as is practical, while pushing any centrally-placed equipment back towards the rear wall. The worst thing is having the speakers in-line with the items placed in-between – you wouldn't believe how badly this messes things up

TOP 10 HI-FI COMPONENTS WE CAN'T WAIT FOR IN 2007

1. Naim SuperNait amplifier
2. Monitor Audio Platinum speakers
3. Rega P2 turntable
4. Densen B-410 CD player
5. Chord Electronics' flagship CD player
6. Marantz Legendary Series SA7-S1 SACD player
7. Imerge S3000 sound server (v4)
8. Cyrus Discmaster DVD player
9. Leema Acoustics Antila CD player
10. A new entry-level CD player from Arcam (hint)



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



DINOSAUR JR

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

First of two 1980s bands to get reunion fever are influential American noise-pop kings Dinosaur Jr, who after a successful comeback tour by the original line-up are now making their first album in 18 years. "I thought we'd be done after the tour, but then the album magically popped up," says the band's Lou Barlow.



THE PIXIES

Title: *tbc*

Release date: *tbc*

Often hailed as the band that saved 1980s rock 'n' roll, the Pixies are recording their first studio album in 15 years. "Since we got back together for touring, not to record anything it's like being a county fair band," says singer Frank Black. "So we're starting an album in January and we're going to become a vital band again."

SMASHING PUMPKINS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

The follow-up to 2000's *MACHINA: The Machines Of God* is being recorded with former Queen producer Roy Thomas Baker and Terry Date (Pantera/Soundgarden). Working with Baker has been "one of the best musical experiences we've ever had," according to Pumpkins' drummer Jimmy Chamberlin, although aside from frontman Billy Corgan, it is unclear whether any other original members will be involved.

MIA

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

After making one of the most striking debuts of recent years with 2005's Mercury Prize-nominated *Arular*, the British/Sri Lankan grime singer has been working on the as yet untitled follow-up in Trinidad and India. She's producing the album

herself and the first single to be taken from the set will be called *Bird Flu*. "This beat is going to kill everyone," she predicts, with great modesty.

MICHAEL JACKSON

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2007

The one-time 'king of pop' is holed up in a studio in Ireland making the follow-up to 2001's inappropriately titled *Invincible* and in an attempt to regain his former crown he has turned to Black Eyed Peas' frontman Will.i.Am to produce. In a further typically bizarre Jacksonian twist, the album is due to appear on Two Seas Records, an obscure label owned by Prince Abdulla Hamad Alkhalifa of Bahrain.

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/CLASSICAL

Anne-Sofie von Otter Noël (Dec); **Lang Lang** *The Banquet* OST (Dec); **Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops** *Christmas Time Is Here!* (Dec); **Jimmy Scott** *Milestone Profiles* (Dec)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Fitzwilliam Quartet Brahms, Mozart and Sweeney (SACD, Dec); **Cowboy Junkies** *Whites Off Earth Now!!* (SACD, Dec); **Barenaked Ladies** *Barenaked Ladies Are Me* (DVD-A, Dec); **Robert Plant** *Nine Lives* (DVD-A, Dec)



Alvin Gold

Welcome to the Jungle

Classical music is the new rock 'n' roll

I discovered *Mozart in the Jungle* while idly passing time at a bookshop in a town I was visiting. It carried a provocative strap across the front suggesting that it would be "enough to make Pete Doherty blush... classical musicians make their rock 'n' roll counterparts look decidedly tame".

In fact, it is both less and more than the billing suggests. It is a frank and sometimes startling autobiography of Blair Tindall, a jobbing classical oboist. The reader follows her from high school to the North Carolina School for the Arts and then to New York where she played for the New York Philharmonic, and went on to give her chamber debut at Carnegie Hall. It follows her through years as a poorly paid symphonic replacement player

"I discovered Mozart in the Jungle while idly passing time at a bookshop in a town I was visiting. It carried a provocative strap."

while living at the slum-like Allendale Apartments near New York's Harlem, surrounded and befriended by other musicians. It is about the drug-infested lifestyles they lived, and the sexual favours that were granted to get the best gigs from the power brokers in the orchestral world – the section leaders, soloists and conductors.

In the end, Blair becomes disillusioned with the lifestyle, which led her to play yearlong stints in theatre orchestra pits for Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals. This provided security, but no variety or musical satisfaction. Eventually, with many of her friends succumbing to AIDS-related illnesses or spending much of their time stoned, she escaped the industry by enrolling in a creative writing course and later teaching journalism at Stamford University, then oboe playing at the University of California-Berkeley.

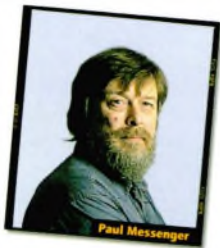
The book is a polemic about the state of the classical music industry, and a hard hitting one at that. It charts the rise of live classical

performance and the establishment of the great orchestras – mostly after World War II, where supporting such efforts was seen in America as part of the war with the cultural values of the Soviet bloc – and the fall, when ageing European immigrant audiences started to die off. At one point, American music schools were turning out 5,000 classically trained musicians a year to fill 250 vacancies, and she also relates how the use of synths has reduced the need for live musicians.

In short, the book is a plea for the industry to cut its cloth according to its means. It is elegantly written, completely unstuffy, and a real page tuner that should be essential reading for anyone who loves classical music.

Mozart in the Jungle – Sex, Drugs and Classical Music is by Blair Tindall, and is published by Atlantic Books, London at £8.99.

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



Paul Messenger

Interactivity

Room/speaker interaction – the final frontier

The most interesting thing about hi-fi is that you never get to know it all. It was something the late Spencer Hughes (founder of Spondor) told me when I joined his company fresh out of college, thirtysomething years ago, and it remains just as true today. As our systems continue to improve, the large and obvious elephant in the room is the issue of speaker placement and room interaction.

A year or so back, I'd tried Focal's upmarket Electra 1027Be, getting excellent results when I simply placed them where I would normally site a pair of good size floorstanders. When I did exactly the same with the 1027Be's smaller 1007Be standmount siblings, results were much less satisfactory, delivering a distracting thump on bass-rich material. I encountered similar problem with the Leema Xone (reviewed on p50). With a little help from the test gear, both problems did ultimately prove tractable, though this also necessitated positioning the speakers awkwardly close to the entrance into the room.

These experiences emphasise the fundamentally unpredictable nature of speaker/room bass interaction, and raise several interesting issues. First it should be said that a specific loudspeaker design is not necessarily a 'universal' solution. Although most will perform well enough in most rooms, there are bound to be some instances where a good room match is either difficult to achieve, or where optimum acoustic siting is incompatible with other lifestyle considerations (location of doors, windows, fireplaces etc.).

Since the late 1980s I've tried hundreds of different pairs of speakers in my 4.3x2.6x5.5m listening room. It's basically a good all-rounder: a little large for the smallest speakers and a little small for the largest, and therefore a pretty good compromise. Like all rooms there are bass modes to contend with, but even these seem reasonably well controlled, showing modest peaks at just above 50Hz and just below 30Hz.

While this is again a pretty good compromise, that 50Hz mode does seem to favour some speakers more than others. ▣

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

COPLAND CDA288
CD PLAYER



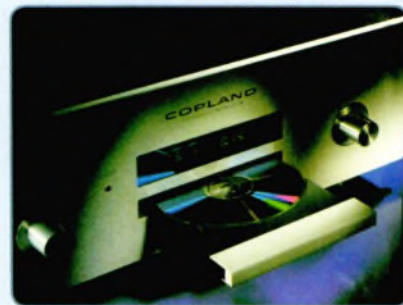
Last month's *Retro* column featured a TEAC CD player with one of the world's finest mechanisms, the famous VRDS.

TEAC also supplies this mechanism to a select number of other manufacturers, one of which is Scandinavian favourite Copland.

The CDA288, introduced in 1996, was the first Copland CD player, but a distinguished one from the pen of the Morten Simonsen. This was his first project for the company, having previously worked in senior roles for B&O and Philips, where he worked on advanced product concepts. He was part of the MPEG development team, attempting to marry DSP technology to psychoacoustics.

The CDA288 used the VRDS CMK-4 mechanism and specified two K-grade 20-bit PCM63 D/A convertors. The output of these devices was arranged in an unusual time-averaging configuration, designed to achieve near 16x oversampling, rather than using the more usual differential noise-cancelling scheme. Like many of the better players of the time it was equipped with the Pacific Microsonics HDCD compatible PD100, not specifically because of the HDCD compatibility, but because it was thought to be an excellent sounding digital filter irrespective of the headline selling feature. Incidentally, although we can't confirm this, the CDA288 appears to have been the first European HDCD-equipped player. The CDA288's analogue electronics, including I/V-conversion, reconstruction filter, and output stage, were constructed using discrete components in a Class-A configuration. A second-order, linear phase Bessel analogue filter was specified.

The CDA288 was the first Copland product to use transistors only rather than valve or valve hybrid electronics. Realising that the human hearing is sensitive to the aharmonic sound of even very low levels of distortion with a spectral footprint consisting of uneven harmonics, the kind transistor stages typically produce, the CDA288 was designed with an analogue stage having a distortion pattern dominated by even-order harmonics. In fact, the spectral footprint of the distortion in the



“The player sounded as well-mannered and as elegant as its neat appearance suggested.”

CDA288 was comparable with, but considerably lower in magnitude than, that of a single-ended triode amplifier.

Its elegant, impressive presentation was also a talking point, though nothing less should have been expected of Copland with its Scandinavian design heritage. It was built into the same cavernous case then used for Copland's big valve powered pre and power amplifiers – it measured 43.2x17.5x39.5cm (WxHxD) and weighed 18kg – with a classically simple and beautiful exterior. One of the two large controls either side of the fascia was the machined alloy power switch; the matching control, at the other end of the front panel display, selected 'play' (by pressing) and 'track skip' (by part-rotating the control to the left or right). This unusual control was sourced from Thorens. That was more or less it for external furniture, apart from a diminutive 'open' button, and the usual analogue and digital interfaces around the back. Only the artless and button-bound remote control let down the impression of style, but this is an all too common story.

The player sounded as well-mannered and as elegant as its neat appearance suggested, and had a full though not blowsy bass performance, and a slightly forward mid-top. Oddly, the CDA288 was eventually succeeded by a lower model number, the CDA266. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

Very small speakers with 130mm bass/mid drivers and enclosures of less than 10 litres actually benefit from 50Hz port-tuning. Add in the room-mode gain, place them close to a wall, and these miniatures can deliver surprisingly adequate bass right down to 50Hz.

The problem comes with larger speakers – those with 165mm bass/mid drivers (or twin 130mm units in the Leema's case) and larger enclosures. Under my conditions, such a speaker with 50Hz port tuning suffers bass excess when the pair is placed in my usual 'free space' locations. Moving them still further out into the room does solve the problem, but places them rather in the way.

Under such circumstances, while it's not fair to blame the speakers (which would doubtless work fine under different room conditions), the only solution is probably to choose a different model – those with ports tuned to around 40Hz or lower work better in my room.

I welcome the news that at least one UK dealer (Coherent Systems in Worcestershire) is offering a room measurement consultancy service. There may well be others that haven't yet come to my notice, but now that laptops and appropriate software has become relatively inexpensive, I feel this is a service that ought to become more widespread.

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



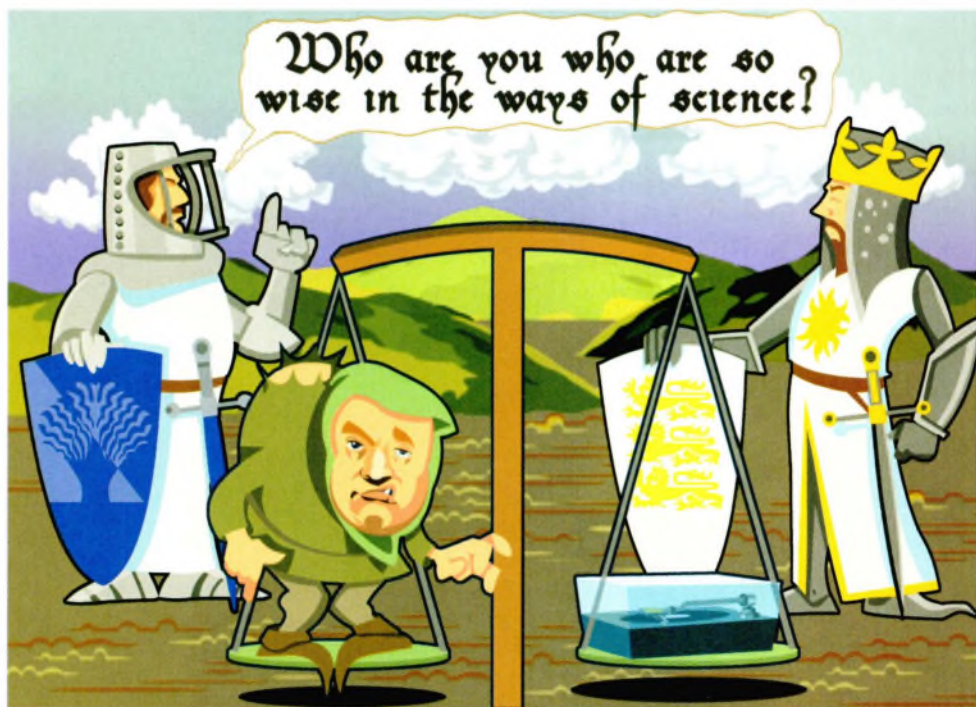
Holy-fi

Is it belief, or science, that drives the buff?

Do hi-fi buffs 'understand' audio, or 'believe' in it? Is hi-fi a belief system? Is being an audiophile an act of faith?

On the face of it, no: hi-fi has no bells and smells, no holy books, holy relics or holy rollers. But organised religions are not the only manifestations of faith. You can believe in ghosts and have faith that your government is acting in your best interests, despite evidence to the contrary. Likewise, audiophiles believe in hi-fi, and that drives many to buy expensive products.

"Ah," says the audiophile. "Hi-fi isn't a faith, we have scientific measurements to back up what we claim." And yes, hi-fi is predicated on



“Recognise and embrace your faith. And when someone says something like ‘CD is better than vinyl’, please don’t burn the heretic.”

a series of objective measurements designed to determine the abilities and compatibility of a product. Except that, as any good audiophile will attest, when it comes to placing your trust in measurements or your ears, ears come first and measurements 'do not count' or 'are not capable of measuring what we can hear'. This is similar to those who, when faced with scientific evidence that challenges the efficacy of homoeopathic medicine, state that science doesn't understand nebulous concepts like 'vital force'. In both cases, the audiophile and homoeopath rely on the inner doctrines of their system to explain away obstacles presented by the sceptic or the scientist.

There's even a sense of revealed wisdom in being an audiophile. Someone buying hi-fi separates for the first time – without being exposed to hi-fi credo – would never dream of spending large sums on cables, tables or stands or mains leads, because they can't hear the difference. But, if the same person starts talking to their hi-fi buff chums (or reading too much into too many magazines, websites and dealers), before long they can hear vast differences between one set of spikes and another. Whether this is training the ear or a mild form of brainwashing, I'll leave it for you to decide.

Let's face it, those who hear their best ever system (it's never their system, always that of someone who's further up the audiophile ecclesiastical ladder), call it 'hi-fi heaven' or 'audiophile nirvana'. Yet, such a state is in fact never attainable, you replicate the heavenly system, only to find it pall after a while. The endless cycle of minor changes and 'improvements' continues.

Given all this, then yes... 'audiophile' entails a belief system. Worse, that would make me one of hi-fi's officiants. More tea, vicar?

If hi-fi is a form of faith, is that a bad thing? Not necessarily, although if you find yourself at an audiophile 'party' with 5,000 other hi-fi buffs in a hut in Guyana and some wild-eyed type starts passing round the Kool Aid, pass it up. Your life is not in danger if you place your faith in hi-fi, although your bank balance may be. Holding audiophile beliefs doesn't push out other belief systems, you can be an Anglican and an Audiophile – or a Buddhist and a Buff – at the same time. But, recognise and embrace your faith. And when someone says something like 'CD is better than vinyl', please don't burn the heretic.

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



AR-A RIP

Alistair Robertson-Aikman, 1924-2006

We are sad to report that one of the founding fathers of the hi-fi industry, Alistair Robertson-Aikman, passed away on the 29th of October. AR-A, as he was known, set up SME (Scale Model Equipment) in 1946, primarily to produce model railways and cars. However, his enthusiasm for music meant that when the hi-fi boom hit the country in the 1950s, he decided to produce a tonearm. The 3009, was launched in 1961 and remained in production for over forty years, undergoing revisions for Mk1 and Mk2 forms and being produced in 12in and 9in lengths. This tonearm became a benchmark by which all others were measured thanks to the high quality of engineering that has always been the hallmark of SME products.

AR-A was as fully committed a music and audio enthusiast as you are likely to find. He built a legendary large listening room in his West Sussex house and was one of the first people to use stacked Quad electrostatic speakers in order to fill the sizeable space. *Hi-Fi Choice* visited the room in the late 1980s to produce a feature on what was a spectacular space with two pairs of mass-loaded Quad ESL-63s powered by Krell amplification.

SME is a precision engineering company with facilities that you will be hard pressed to find in any factory. It was AR-A's quest to create the perfect tonearm that built the company and therefore allowed him to manufacture to such high tolerances.

In the 1980s, Alistair decided to build an arm that would be better suited than the 3009 to the new generation of low compliance moving coil cartridges that were beginning to appear. In 1986, he launched the Series V, the first pick-up arm with a single piece magnesium arm, headshell and counterweight sled. This arm brought a degree of rigidity that had never previously been achieved and re-affirmed SME's reputation as a force to be reckoned with in the analogue arena.

The Series V and Series IV (a more affordable, silver finished version with fewer features) proved a huge success and were followed by the 309, a similar design but with a removable headshell. The latter was also produced in 12in and 10in variants. More recently there has

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

PINK FLOYD THE PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN



Listening to Pink Floyd's debut album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*, one is assailed by every kind of sound effect and

treatment Abbey Road Studios had to offer in 1967. The sound of the record is dominated by prepared pianos, whooshing vocals, cuckoos, geese, celeste, cow bells, maraccas and cleverly panned percussion and guitars. If the spatial effects and bloody good sound are down to the visionary production of Norman Smith, the overall feeling of childhood whimsy coupled with a deep love of rural heritage was that of Floyd's leader, the late Roger 'Syd' Barrett.

The album was described by Smith as "a mood creation in sound" and from the opener, *Astronomy Dominae*, we are in the land of sound painting as distorted voice, rippling Telecaster guitar, phased double-Premier drums, a Farfisa Duo organ and Roger Waters' bass throb all swirl to convey a feeling of the cosmos. There is a spatial quality to the sound, in that you can actually pick out each instrument very clearly as layer upon layer of overdub is added. The secret to this comes from EMI's then customised mixing boards. Whereas most pop bands would go for the board's 'Pop' EQ, the Floyd insisted on the 'Classical' EQ settings. This produced a wider frequency spectrum and could accommodate all the timbres that Syd and the Floyd's imaginations could muster.

Another aspect of *Piper* is the swirling quality that dominates throughout. Both Syd Barrett and Rick Wright utilised a gizmo called a Binson Echorec to 'psychedelicise' the sound. This was an Italian device that not only controlled the length, tone and volume of notes fed into it but also had delays, repeats, reverbs and even a little mixer. The prismatic sound one hears throughout *Piper* is because of this little box with a blinking green light.

Official sessions for *Piper* ran from March 1967 through to the end of June 1967 at EMI Studio 3. Next door in Studio 2, The Beatles were recording *Sgt Pepper* and late one evening in March, during sessions for *Pow R. Toc H*, Pink Floyd were invited into the Beatles' sanctum as they were finishing *Lovely Rita*. The Beatles' massive overdub policy obviously



"There is a spatial quality to the sound, in that you can pick out each instrument very clearly."

rubbed off on the Floyd. *Astronomy Dominae* was dubbed down from four hours of sessions, *Lucifer Sam* took seven different sessions to get right and the final track *Bike* required twelve takes and three different overdubs.

Given the primitive four-track equipment of the time, it's a wonder that *Piper* sounds good at all. Barrett's accented fairytale English was accentuated by ADT (Automatic Double Tracking), a new device then. This can be heard all over such wondrous creations as *Matilda Mother* and *Flaming*. The latter is definitely Barrett's most successful voyage into English psychedelia – a true effervescence of nostalgic childhood/pastoral heritage. Recorded in one take, *Flaming* shimmers with Binson, bells, percussion, tape echo and celeste. Its bicycle bell ending and brevity make it a standout.

Interstellar Overdrive, at this time a live favourite, sounds incredibly dated. Amazingly, the track was Syd's version of Love's *My Little Red Book*. Today it is Barrett's rich lyrical vision and eclectic musical taste that makes the album so unique. Its final two tracks are peerless in the world of 1960s psychedelia. The 12-string acoustic guitar at 1:31 on *Scorecrow* remains a wonder and the bewitching clockwork effects at 1:57 on *Bike* (bookended by the sound of flying geese) still have the power to tantalize, even after all these years. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

even been a 12in version of the Series V, which HFC plans to review along with the matching Model 20/12 turntable in the coming months.

Having re-established his company with the Series V, Alistair turned his attention to the turntable. 1991 saw the launch of the Model 30 that, like the Series V before it, proved that when it came to engineering quality, SME was the very best. Using fluid-damped suspension and a bearing the like of which had not been in hi-fi before, the 30 was and still is among the least compromised components ever made.

Alistair was a true gentleman. All who met him became aware of what a considerate and genuine person he was. I was fortunate enough to visit him and enjoy his listening room on two occasions and found that his enthusiasm for music (especially opera) and audio was as great as his products.

Alistair's son Cameron is now running SME and our condolences go to him and the rest of the family.

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



Life is hard

Music is already moving to hard disk

I think hard disk audio will be floating your boat soon. We're halfway there already; digital music players are widely accepted (across generations), they're already in millions of UK homes and are irreversibly shifting attitudes about how music is bought, played and stored. Mainstream hi-fi companies are switched on to portable connectivity, with docking stations, fascia-mounted USB sockets and mini-jack inputs a common sight. And have you heard AVI's pioneering Active Neutron with an iPod yet (HFC 288)? It's sublime. Integration is where it's going.

And that's just the portables. Of course, specialist 'hi-fi' servers are already on the market at all price points. Big guns like Naim Audio, Cyrus and Cambridge Audio are all throwing money at their own interpretations of the hard disk music server. But it will take a sea change to shift certain attitudes towards it. However much die-hard audiophilia runs



"I'll compare the quality to CD... Before you heckle, remember short-trouser advocate Baden-Powell's motto: Be prepared!"

through your blood, you'd be missing out if you stick your head in the sand. While *Hi-Fi Choice* has mostly swerved around portable iPod-style players, full-size music servers have caught our attention, because they deserve to.

While servers may never entirely replace our CDs and vinyl, it's time we began to let them compliment – not dominate – our systems and therefore, our enjoyment of music.

According to *The Guardian*, Ged Doherty (the UK head of record label Sony BMG) has predicted that CD sales will collapse by 50 per cent over the next three years. He goes on to predict digital growth at 25 per cent per year. David Balfour, *HFC* columnist and editor of the industry newsletter *Record of the Day*, concurs: "The trend cannot be denied," he says.

We'll still be enjoying our CDs and good ol' vinyl (whose sustainability throws a lifeline to CD), but we'll embrace disc-less sources too; music servers will come of age, capable of compiling the perfect evening's listening to audiophile standards. And with 'high-definition' (CD-quality) downloads at up to 1,092kbps now available in the US from MusicGiants.com, in the near future servers will not just be reflections of our existing music collections. MusicGiants already has content from the 'big four' major labels and uses the 'lossless' Windows Media Audio format, which it says is unmatched in the market place.

Until similar high-quality download sites appear in the UK, we can for now load CDs onto servers – uncompressed, of course. And that's exactly what I'll be doing over the

coming weeks, all for the sake of hi-fi journalism. I'll be comparing the replay quality to CD players at £500, £1,000 and above, plus experimenting with the latest DACs. Before you heckle, remember short-trouser advocate Baden-Powell's motto. Be prepared!

Dan George is Hi-Fi Choice's deputy editor. With a penchant for big speakers and high SPLs, his house hits a six on the Richter scale



Oops...

Will David suffer buyer's remorse?

The question I'm asking myself as I sit down to write this column is "should I have bought it?" But by the time I realised what was happening it was too late and the mysterious forces were too strong: boot sale, old and once expensive turntable priced to tempt and, among the small interested gathering, only I knew what it was.

Back in the early 1990s, something called the CEC ST-930 was the turntable you bought instead of a Linn Sondek/Pink Triangle/

Michell Gyrodec if you were a) completely clueless, b) addicted to living dangerously or c) unusually well informed.

The conventional wisdom, of course, was that if you were going to entrust the well being of your precious vinyl collection in the burgeoning digital age to just one, final, forever-and-a-day turntable, it was indeed fortunate that rightly revered companies such as Linn, Pink Triangle, Roksan et al were at your beck and call to sell you, in exchange for upwards of £1,000, the deck of your dreams.

Given this, it wasn't hard to understand why the dwindling (but ever more fastidious) analogue camp had accorded the niche brinkmanship of a wannabe big-league turntable from one largely undistinguished Far East maker of budget CD players (CEC) the sort of recognition that would have disappointed the invisible man. The CEC ST-930 (£2,057 with SME IV arm and Ortofon MC2000II cartridge, £630 as a motor unit only) was only available through 25 dealers in the UK and had effectively gatecrashed what diehards were rather prematurely calling the last party in town by creeping quietly through a side door.

Something of a lost cause, then. As it turned out, yes. The ST-930, although a reasonable seller in the States, caused ripples that might have been made by a small piece of grit in the UK. It was the last turntable CEC ever made. Which seems a shame in the light of the following. Before it decided to manufacture its own turntable, the massive and massively expensive 30, SME used an ST-930 as a testbed for its arms and, so the story goes, was so impressed with the quietness and speed stability of the motor unit and external regulated power supply/speed control box, along with the inherently stable four-point suspension system, that it contracted CEC to supply it with the former and employed the principle of the latter for its own high-end design.

That's not a bad endorsement... and a useful thing to know when you're staring at a rather sad looking CEC ST-930 (without arm) on a Formica-topped kitchen table, on sale for fifty quid. Hell, it looked as if it had been styled by MFI when it was new. Of course, I bought it. Switch it on and the platter goes round and round. It's a start.

From what I can gather, the ST-930 was a smooth and musical performer – especially with the SME arm – that wasn't quite in the Linn/PT league. But its laid back presentation was said to be particularly well suited to classical and jazz, and certainly a cut above the average Rega and Thorens of the day. Let's call it a work in progress. Long live vinyl.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

LOSING IT?



A letter from a reader in *HFC* 288 suggested we should investigate lossless coding of audio files as applied to PCs, servers and potentially portable music players, too. Were there, he wondered, differences between lossless coders?

First a little background. Even if you don't use any of them, you must have heard of MP3, AAC, Dolby Digital, ATRAC, WMA and the various other systems that compress digital audio files into a substantially smaller space. These are generically called 'lossy coders' (or sometimes 'codecs', short for COder/DECoder): lossy, because they do actually lose some audio information, although the information lost is deemed to be unimportant.

There's another class of coder, though: lossless. The aim here is the same – to save storage space – but in this case the audio is stored in such a way as to be completely reconstituted on replay. The degree of space saving is considerably less, but simply by using a more efficient representation of the signal it is typically possible to save anything between half and two-thirds of the space – in other words, one can store between 160 and 240 minutes of music on a CD, potentially.

By the way, the degree of compression available depends on the 'entropy' or degree of chaos of the music. More chaos, less compression. It's faintly amusing to look at the compression figures achieved with different musical styles and contemplate what that says about the music's chaos/organisation ratio.

Both SACD and DVD-A have lossless coding built in, to allow the storage of full-bandwidth surround sound. In the case of DVD-A, it's Meridian Lossless Packing, or MLP, which is probably the best-known coder. But there are plenty of others available for use on desktop computers. My own favourite is Monkey's Audio, but FLAC is also popular and the Hydrogen Audio website lists at least a dozen altogether, including lossless versions of WMA and MPEG-4.

How does one choose between these schemes? There are differences in features, speed, efficiency (only small differences there) and operating system support, but there



“The point of lossless coding is that the signal is reconstituted with 100 per cent accuracy.”

shouldn't be differences in sound. The whole point of lossless coding is that the audio signal is reconstituted with 100 per cent accuracy and that basically means bits in equals bits out. I've checked this several times with different coders and it's true; you can encode a file, decode it and subtract it digitally from the original and the difference is a string of zeros.

Now we know that CD players all handle the same string of digits and still sound different, but it's important to understand where the sound quality differences come in. While the audio is still in the original digital form, it's identical from one situation to another, and it's only when one starts doing something to it – usually directly before squirting it out into the world as analogue audio – that changes can occur. Those changes may be added noise or distortion, or jitter, but they all apply to stages after the basic data storage.

The same is true with lossless coders and audio servers. What's important is what happens to the data as it starts being converted to analogue, and that means in the D/A converter and output stages. In short, if you run the output of any server, with any lossless coder (or none), into an ideal external DAC, the audio will be exactly the same. In the age of non-local data storage, the DAC is the critical component. **HFC**

Richard Black

The world according to...

Townshend Audio

Hi-Fi Choice talks to Max Townshend, the outspoken owner of Townshend Audio and designer of everything from air-suspended equipment platforms to frozen cables. Interview: Malcolm Steward

From Australia to the UK, and from the Seismic Sink to complete systems wired with deep cryogenically treated cable, life has provided a fascinating journey for the enigmatic Max Townshend.

HFC What brought you from Australia to the UK and the hi-fi industry?

MT As a schoolboy, I started messing around making an equivalent to the Dansette. I spent days filing down the hardened steel spindles of 78rpm record players to play LPs. I was always mucking about with amplifiers and electronics of some sort or another.

I was into record players in a big way and I had a pair of stacked Quads. I had my record player on a pillar that rose up through the bench to isolate it from footfall; that was wrong. It should have been suspended not touching the ground – but it didn't half make a difference to the sound. I had subwoofers built into the floor, and I became fascinated by super-tweeters. Those with the Quads and subwoofers gave me a taste for really good sound. But I couldn't get any volume out of the Quads before they sparked and blew up, so I decided that wasn't the way to go. Why shouldn't you be able to create the sound of an orchestra or a rock band in your living room?

Then, a well-known UK journalist wrote about the Shure V15 Mk3 cartridge, saying that it was bright and edgy. I sent one to the Garrett brothers to have a parabolic stylus fitted. It was unbelievably good so my wife Sue and I sold up, flew to the UK and I went to see the journalist to show him that the V15 Mk3 could work. He liked it and shortly after I was selling them by the bucket-load, along with other similarly modified cartridges. As a result of just one hi-fi show, I sold enough of my Elite alignment gauge to get the deposit for a house – houses were much cheaper then!

I then built the little wedge-shaped Elite 600c preamp so that you could meaningfully compare cartridges. Phono stages in those days

were unbelievably bad and the 600c was way ahead of its time.

Not long after that, I met Jack Dinsdale, who was a senior lecturer at Cranfield Institute of Technology. He asked me if I'd be interested in a turntable design he had. He'd come up with the idea of the trough, which damped the front end of the tonearm. He'd hawked the idea round all the turntable manufacturers but none of them expressed an interest. I looked at it and immediately decided it was a good idea. We made about 150 Cranfield turntables, but we had troubles with one of our subcontractors that messed up the business. Despite being a great deck, it wasn't a commercial success. That

cost me dearly so I made the little Rock. That wasn't a pretty deck, but we sold about 4,000 of them despite facing fierce competition from Linn and the LP12.

HFC Will you bring back the Rock?

MT Yes. I've designed three over the past five years, but they were all very fancy and ambitious with remote controlled VTA and the like. However, over the last six months, I've been designing a more sensible 'workhorse' Rock without any 'bling' and whose cost won't be prohibitive. In effect, it's my original deck with some neat new clothes.

Backtracking a bit, the original Rock had a brass bellows suspension, but the factory that

“As a result of just one hi-fi show, I sold enough alignment gauges to get the deposit for a house – houses were cheaper then!”



Every night is party night when you open a bottle of Cryogenically Treated wine

made the bellows closed down and now I'd have to pay about £40 each for them with a minimum order of 1,000 units, which makes them uneconomical.

In the mid-1980s, I came up with the first Seismic Sink, and that used those bellows. They were fantastically successful but when the bellows factory closed, that put paid to the design. Then I manufactured a Seismic Sink using a partially inflated bicycle tube. It was unbelievably effective – I think we've sold approaching 200,000 units since 1990 – but pollution causes rubber to burst and leak, and you get leaks through the valve, because the Seismic Sink only operated at about 1 lb per square inch. This was too low to maintain a proper seal with a valve that's designed to work at about 30 lb. I realised that I had to come up with something better than air.

Springs seemed the obvious way to go, but they have their problems. The best suspension is the bounciest, but you need shock absorbers, too. However, they inevitably harden the ride and reduce the effectiveness of the spring as an isolator. So, I came up with the idea of putting a bellows around the outside of the spring as a damper. This time it's a rubber bellows, because it doesn't have to take any continuous pressure, with a 1 mm diameter hole. This allows you to have a high-Q spring for when it's stationary and a low-Q spring when you bounce it. Developing that suspension, which I've now perfected, has allowed me to do the new turntable. It'll have isolation as good as the best sprung decks but without their foibles.

HFC When will we see this new Rock?

MT With a bit of luck it's only about a month away. I just have to finalise the design to meet my target price, which is around £3,000. And it will be upgradeable. I had a prototype years ago; it was a corker but it looked ugly! The new deck won't. And in the meantime, I've designed a moving coil pickup cartridge with Enhanced Deep Cryogenically Treated wire, which sounds fabulous.

HFC Could you just explain a little about the Enhanced Deep Cryogenic Treatment that you use with your cables and wire?

MT In the 1980s, we were making speaker cables, taking six lengths of 50-ohm coax and paralleling them to get eight ohms, following on from the idea of the low-impedance cables that we'd seen from Japan a few years earlier. That progressed to making speaker cables using two flat strips of copper and they sounded fantastic but weren't without areas that could have been improved. The journalist, Keith Howard, asked me for samples of our



annealed copper for an experiment. He sent it back after it had undergone Deep Cryogenic treatment and I made up three sets of cable: one from regular copper, one from annealed copper and one from the cryogenically treated copper. The treated one was so superior it wasn't worth considering the others – the differences were enormous.

HFC Is there any other advice or information you'd like to impart to our readers?

MT Listening is all about brain waves. Most of the time we're using Beta waves but when you listen to music or are at a concert and, say, you close your eyes and let yourself get into the music, you start using Alpha waves.

When people say that the only way to compare hi-fi is to do a double-blind A/B test, I don't think that's right – there's no way you can tell the difference between components under those circumstances. You need to live with components and listen to them in a relaxed manner with your Alpha waves running. I have to stand up for reviewers here and say that is the only way they can make meaningful decisions.

And if your readers are going for a demonstration they should always make sure that they have at least half-an-hour to relax before listening because, apart from getting themselves into Alpha wave mode, the ear has an automatic gain control which varies the sensitivity of their hearing quite significantly to compensate for the noise they've encountered while travelling to the dem in the car or on the train. Normally you'll always encounter background noise. In the Royal Albert Hall, with its thick stone walls, I think you can get down to 35dB absolute so you can hear a violin being played incredibly softly whereas in your living room or a demonstration studio, the isolation is probably only to 50db absolute. If you want to listen to quieter sounds you need to turn the system up 15dB to accommodate the higher noise floor, which means that the higher level sounds will be approaching the pain threshold.

When you've been in a car or on a train your hearing's automatic gain control will have desensitised your ears. That effect is frequency dependant, so the system you're auditioning is more than likely going to appear bright and edgy because your sensitivity to bass will have been reduced. That happens a lot at hi-fi shows because of all the boom from subwoofers you hear in the corridors; the bass travels while the higher frequencies do not, so your ear compensates by reducing your sensitivity to LF.

HFC Can we return to how the Deep Cryogenic Treatment came to feature in your universal disc player?

MT When we did the player we wanted it to play high-resolution audio properly so we used



After years of changing records, it's hard for Max to use a remote

“When people say that the only way to compare hi-fi is a double-blind A/B test, I don't think that's right.”

the Pioneer 565 because it has the perfect chip set for that purpose. Everybody will tell you that you can't make a good CD player if you want it to have video, SACD and DVD-Audio processing as well. Well, my opinion of that can be summed up with one word that starts with B and ends with T. I've proven that by making a universal player that's as good with CD as anything on the market today. To achieve that we really had to jump through some hoops. We had to sort out the power supplies, as everybody else does, and come up with something special for the output stage. So we went balanced from the DAC and the traditional way to go to single-ended is through an op-amp but they are inherently floored. We tried many, but we couldn't find one we liked. So, we decided to use discrete components and a transformer, which doesn't have high-order harmonic distortion. We got a 1:2 centre-tapped transformer made and suddenly you could hear it sounded fabulously detailed... but it also sounded slightly jangly. Then we realised there was about 40 feet of non-DCT wire in the transformer, so we treated that winding and the result was a phenomenal sound – clean, honest and neutral on every type of disc.

HFC Is the effort of making the player worthwhile given the dearth of material on the hi-res formats?

MT There are thousands and thousands of releases on SACD and DVD-A – including a lot

of classical music. But the best thing is that you can make DVD-As on your computer and there's no reason why amateurs can't release DVD-As forever. With a good sound card and A/D converter there are limitless possibilities with DVD-A. I believe that might well be the future of high fidelity.

HFC So, we're going to have people producing their own material?

MT There's already a high-definition tape transfer company in America that buys master tapes and converts them on ultra-high-quality equipment to 24/96 – though, unfortunately, not 24/192 – DVD-Audio discs. They sell them on the internet and they are fabulous. There's also a huge range on sites such as Amazon and the numbers are growing all the time. There's a myth out there that these discs aren't available when they are.

HFC You told us earlier that Townshend Audio's aim is to produce a complete system

MT Any manufacturer who specialises in just, say, speakers or amplifiers or CD players, is always limited by the other equipment so in order to make everything better you have to be involved with every part of the chain. If you insert any component that is not DCT wired into my system you're going to hear it. And that's even when it's a reputable component – it's obvious that they're not DCT wired.

Look out for Max's impressive demos of his full system concept at a hi-fi show near you! **HFC**

MEGALINE
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PIANO
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CONCEPT
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engraf. lauren



MEET OUR MENTOR

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IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

WIN!

A PAIR OF GRADO GS1000 HEADPHONES WORTH £995!



Grado's GS1000s have set a formidable new standard for headphones. Reviewed last issue, these sublime, open-backed cans achieved one of our highest-ever overall scores: an incredible 96 per cent! Why? Well, Grado's flagship cans are so good, they might just be the finest electricity-to-sound transducers in the world. In fact, we stated, "the GS1000s offer a level of musical revelation unmatched by almost any replay or live performance". To say you owe it to yourself to hear a pair is an understatement!

Key to the GS1000s' success is the redesigned drive unit, which has a new wooden housing and large foam cushions. This is said to create a "listening room" for the ears. And therein lies the secret: the tonal balance and freedom from room-induced resonances that plague loudspeakers redefine the concept of neutral. Add effortless dynamics with precise imaging and you have the ultimate audiophile headphone, perfect for losing yourself in your own private sonic universe. For your chance to win a pair, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.

CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winner, Mr. Wicks of Sheffield, who wins a superb IsoTek Sigmas mains distribution block worth £1,000!

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What is the key to the GS1000s' success?

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- B:** A redesigned drive shaft
- C:** A redesigned block-paved drive

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By Text: Simply send the text message **GRADO** (followed by a space) with the answer A, B or C to **84383**. For example, if you think the answer is C: A redesigned block-paved drive, then text **GRADO C** to 84383.

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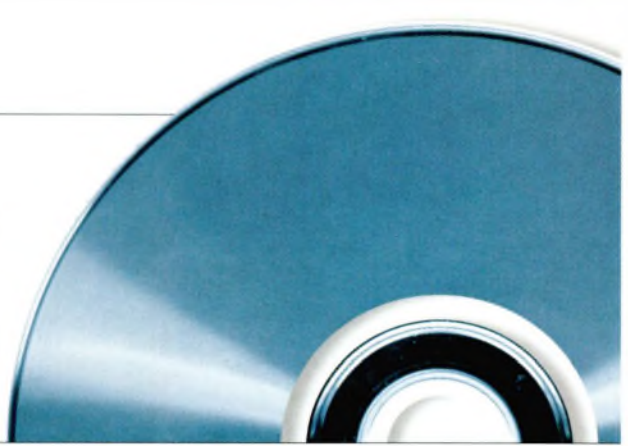
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ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

CHRISTINE PERFECT

Christine Perfect

Blue Horizon/Pure Pleasure

180g vinyl

Music: When Christine Perfect married Fleetwood Mac bass player John McVie and adopted his surname, she largely left behind her early days on blues piano with Peter Green's original

Fleetwood Mac. Which is a bit of a shame, because she was probably the most successful woman on the British blues scene of the late 1960s. In fact, prior to this solo outing, she fronted Chicken Shack who scored a huge hit with *I'd Rather Go Blind*, their version of which is on this 1970 solo album. This is very much a blues album though, so don't expect a nascent *Rumours*. ★★☆☆

Sound: As authentic blues sounds go, this has a slightly grubby quality even by the standards of the era. That said, there is plenty of energy and decent bass and the music is well served. Ray Staff's mastering and the Pallas pressing do a great job at picking out the detail. ★★☆☆ JK

THE POINTER SISTERS

That's A Plenty

Blue Thumb/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl

Music: Ruth, Anita, Bonnie and June Pointer produced their first record in 1973 and continue to do so today but *That's A Plenty* is a standout collection. Very different from their later disco hits

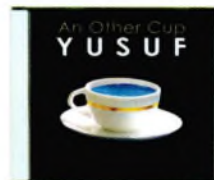
for which they are best known, these are jazz, big band and blues songs from the 1940s and 1950s. The title track is a Benny Goodman song from the same era. Everything is sung with considerable energy and good humour. There's even a country number, the self-penned *Fairytale*, which got them an appearance at the Grand Old Opry and a cover by one Elvis Presley. It's the upbeat numbers such as *Salt Peanuts* and the title track that are most inspiring, the tempo of the former making fast-talking rap stars such as Lil' Kim sound lazy. ★★☆☆

Sound: This is a pretty slick recording. It's not always possible to follow the high-speed lyrics, but it has great tone and plenty of energy. The presence of top quality musicians throughout the recording is easy to hear. A class act from the early 1970s. ★★☆☆ JK

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COMPACT DISC & VINYL



YUSUF

An Other Cup

Ya/Polydor

Music: Some 28 years after retiring from music to become a Muslim, the artist formerly known as Cat Stevens is back and sounding like he never went away. Even the title of his comeback album is carefully chosen to echo his 1970 classic, *Tea For The Tillerman*. A couple of the songs were written way back then but never recorded, yet so closely do the new compositions follow the old, familiar pattern that it's impossible to tell them apart. His lyrics still express profound emotions with eloquence and the only discernible change is that instead of *Morning Has Broken*, he's setting the 13th century Sufi poet Rumi to music. ★★☆☆

Sound: The mellow yearning of the voice has changed little and the tunes are as melodic as ever in a sparkling production. ★★☆☆ NW



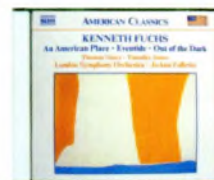
JIMI HENDRIX

Message From Nine To The Universe

Reclamation

Music: In the New York jazz/rock scene of the early seventies, producer Alan Douglas had plans to unite Miles Davis, Hendrix and Bill Evans in a new fusion supergroup but Jimi died before anything could happen. In 1980, Douglas released *Nine To The Universe*, a collection of five Hendrix jams from with his Band of Gypsies augmented by jazzers such as Dave Holland and Larry Young. These were heavily tweaked but the new disc expands that album to ten unedited tracks including the incredible *Highway Of Broken Dreams*, showing how advanced Hendrix was at lengthy improvisation. ★★☆☆

Sound: The best sounding jazzy Hendrix yet. Dave Holland's bass on *Easy Blues* really cuts through and Hendrix's spooky guitar on *Highway* at 3:41 will floor you every time. ★★☆☆ MP



KENNETH FUCHS

An American Place, Eventide, Out Of The Dark

LSO, JoAnn Falletta (cond)

Naxos American Classics 9.559224

Music: Fuchs (b. 1956) writes for an eclectic range of instruments as well as orchestral and jazz ensembles. *An American Place* is attractive, yet has enough meat to engage the brain. *Eventide* is slightly less brash, more reflective, but no less approachable, again with a distinctly American feel.

Out Of The Dark is slightly more wispy and less substantial, but overall this is an excellent recording, played with real commitment and panache. ★★☆☆ **Sound:** Recorded at St Luke's, Finsbury, this recording has a warmhearted, lush and expansive sound that probably has as much to do with JoAnn Falletta's palpable immersion in the music as the recording itself. Sound quality is simply exemplary. ★★☆☆ AG



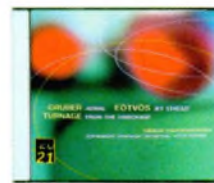
ERIC CLAPTON AND JJ.CALE

The Road To Escondido

Reprise

Music: Back in 1970, Clapton recorded a song called *After Midnight* by the laidback Tulsa troubadour, JJ Cale. They've been friends ever since and the only surprise is that it's taken them this long to make an album together. The results are very much what you would expect: lots of high-quality, mid-tempo blues-rock with plenty of classy guitar solos backed by a stellar band that includes the late Billy Preston on keyboards (Preston was the 'Fifth Beatle' who died in June 2006 and will be sorely missed) and young tyro John Mayer. Cale dominates the songwriting by 11 compositions to Clapton's one, but as Clapton has hardly written a decent song since *Tears In Heaven*, that's probably to the album's benefit. ★★☆☆

Sound: A roasty stew of old-fashioned guitars, moody Hammond organ and southern-fried rhythms that would have sounded little different if they'd made the album in 1970. ★★☆☆ NW



GRUBER, EÖTVÖS, TURNAGE

Aerial, Jet Stream, From the Wreckage

Håkan Hardenberger (trumpet),

Gothenburg Sym, Peter Eötvös (cond)

DGG 20/21 00289 4776150

Music: As the disc notes point out, the trumpet was in on the birth of the concerto, but its widespread use has had to wait for the emergence of a talented virtuosi like Håkan Hardenberger, for whom two of the three works on this excellent disc were written. The three works here are contemporary, and although the musical structure may be unfamiliar, the jazz and blues elements add to the richness and variety of the programme. ★★☆☆

Sound: The recording was made in the orchestra's home town in Sweden, and is adroit in the way that the unfamiliar tonalities and textures are handled, making this an excellent test recording, in the best sense. ★★☆☆ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "The quality of the bass is very fine"

SLY & ROBBIE A Dub Experience Island

Music: Bass player Robbie Shakespeare and drummer Sly Dunbar provided the backing to many of the great reggae and dub albums of the last 25 years, including sets by Grace Jones, Black Uhuru and Lee 'Scratch' Perry. These eight tracks were originally released on 45rpm dub plates on the Taxi label but here they have been remixed by Paul Smykle, who has given them a distinctly sharper, tighter sound than you get with most dub recordings. The monster bass lines and

killer beats are enlivened by horns, synths and a range of sound effects that wouldn't be out of place in a shoot 'em up video game. So there's plenty to keep you entertained while you win' your body to the killer rhythms. ★★★★★
Sound: The quality of bass is very fine, with plenty of shape and life along with the weight. There is also extensive use of reverb that expands the acoustic every which way, so long as the system can deliver it. ★★★★★ JK



SOLVEIG SLETTAHJELL
Good Rain

ACT

Music: For her third album released outside Norway, Solveig Slettahjell (that's pronounced Sul-vay Shlet -I-Yell) collaborates once again with her Slow Motion Quintet to produce a quietly compelling blend of piano trio augmented by muted horns and gently teasing electronics. The arrangements are mostly spare, allowing plenty of room for Slettahjell's rich, occasionally fragile alto. Highlights include the yearning *Where Do You Run To* and the twisted blues of *Don't Look Back*. The tunes are hummable but the group offers enough playful innovation to earn their place in the constantly brewing melting pot of Scandinavian jazz, which includes such luminaries as Bugge Wesseltoft, Lars Danielson and Esbjörn Svensson Trio. ★★★★★
Sound: Recorded at Bugge Wesseltoft's Oslo studio, there's an intimate feel to the record overall. The sound seems less like a singer and her backing band, more five extremely sympathetic musicians interacting with sometimes fearsome synergy. ★★★★★ DO



BEIRUT
Gulag Orkestar

4AD

Music: Beirut is Zach Condon, Santa Fe multi-instrumentalist and California's foremost promoter of Balkan beats. His fey tenor isn't the strongest of voices, but the mix of thumping percussion, blaring brass, swirling accordions and wheezing pump organs is infectious. There's no attempt at ersatz recreation of the increasingly popular sounds coming out of Eastern Europe, but he has hit upon an incredibly engaging Balkanisation of left-field indie and Western European folk roots to produce one of the most vital-sounding records of 2006. ★★★★★
Sound: Unsurprisingly considering the influences involved, the sound of the album varies broadly and the instruments often feel a bit too densely packed for their own good. ★★★★★ DO



FREDDIE STEVENSON
Body On The Line

T-Boy

Music: Almost the entire Scottish press have raved about twenty-something Freddie and his debut album. But for once, the hype has been worthwhile – this is a fine, witty set that draws on some of the best aspects of the finest singer-songwriters of the past 30 years; Paul Simon, Nick Drake, Morrissey, Al Stewart, Jonathan Richman and Belle and Sebastian. Not that it's all angst; there's also a band who can kick, Stevenson's high rasp vocals and his arch, intelligent sense of humour. An intriguing, uplifting set. ★★★★★
Sound: *Body On The Line* was skillfully produced by ex-Only Ones guitarist John Perry, who also plays guitar here, and his years of studio experience show. This manages to be dry without ever being background. ★★★★★ FS

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

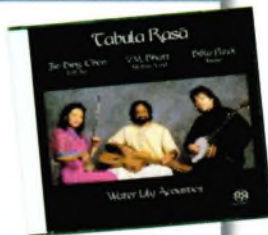
FLECK/ BHATT/ CHENN

Tabula Rasa

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Water Lily Acoustics

Music: Tabula Rasa brings together musicians from India, China and the US, all of whom use some form of stringed instrument – Jie-Bing Chen plays er-hu, a two-stringed Chinese fiddle, and Bela Fleck plays the banjo. Combined with Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's string bending on the guitar, they make for a plucky ensemble that produces some beautiful sounds. Mridangam (a karnatic drum with tabla-like sound), flute and violin from Sangeet Shankar all contribute to the meditative material that occasionally almost boogies. ★★★★★
Sound: Audiophile label Water Lily uses highly purist recording techniques, avoiding any form of equalisation or compression... and hardware made or modified by EAR. There's no noise reduction either, so you get natural tape hiss as well. But it doesn't intrude. ★★★★★ JK



BEETHOVEN

Piano Sonatas Nos 16, 17 and 18

Mari Kodama (piano)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Pentatone 5186063

Music: Something of a child prodigy in her native Japan, Mari Kodama's formative musical education took place in Paris. She has since matured into a fluid and expressive player, with a fine ear for the jazz-like cross rhythms of the finale of *The Tempest*. There is no showmanship for its own sake here, but she plays these Beethoven sonatas with a freshness, vitality and intelligence that meshes particularly well with the predominantly sunny Opus 31 sonatas. ★★★★★



Sound: Pentatone, an offshot (actually a management buyout) of the once highly respected Philips Classics Recording Centre, specialises in high-resolution DSD recordings. These are usually made in concert locations and use equipment that has been specified or modified in-house. This one was made at the Doopsgezinde Kerk, a small church with a rather fine acoustic in Haarlem, Netherlands, and is an extremely winning example of their quality. ★★★★★ AG

THE DOORS

The Doors Of Perception

DVD-Audio (CD and DVD-Audio 12-disc box set)

Rhino

Music: The Doors were arguably the most successful chroniclers of the dark side of the 1960s hippy ideal, albeit in terms severely obfuscated by self-regarding cod poetry and legendarily crowded leather trousers. Rhino has boxed up the band's entire six-album original canon in double disc packages – original stereo mix on CD, and a surround version on DVD-A. Each album may be a curate's egg (for every *Light My Fire* there's a *Horse Latitudes* or arguably even an *Unknown Soldier*) but when Jim Morrison's doomy vocals make way for some inspired soloing from organ maestro Ray Manzarek or guitarist Robby Krieger, there are some sublime moments of good vibes and bad karma. ★★★★★

Sound: The surround versions do much to open up the sound, giving more prominence to the group's various studio bass players (all replaced by Manzarek's left hand on stage), but there is also much fun to be had from the original, often claustrophobic stereo mixes. ★★★★★ DO





SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

I 130

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STREAMING LUNACY?

I'm not convinced music servers are necessary. They have to contain a computer and a DAC in a single box. High-quality DACs and powerful computers are incredibly cheap and on the slide. A 'hi-fi' server manufacturer can't keep up with developments in computers, hard disks and DACs in order to make a competitive product. Most people already have a PC with a hard disk and a DAC within their hi-fi source.

What would be useful, however, is a 'streamer' – I have such a device, in fact. It has

an Ethernet port on one end, allowing you to connect Network Attached Storage (NAS), and a digital output on the other for your DAC. The streamer can search and select groups of tracks on the NAS storage and stream them (at audiophile quality) into your DAC. NAS is so cheap now that there is no need to compress music, so it ought to be possible to make something that is both cheap and audiophile. You can use your computer to load the NAS up. The streamer is the perfect gadget, and with a good DAC it's audiophile quality.

Andrew Lyall via email

HFC NAS architecture is found more in custom installations than conventional hi-fi systems, but the technology is not unknown in hi-fi. Nevertheless, the prospect of a true hi-fi server does get us excited. While such servers are still in their infancy, we've had great results with the Cambridge Audio 640H and the Yamaha CDR-HD1500, both of which make great ancillary devices. We'll be reviewing the new Imerge S3000 in a forthcoming issue and we're currently looking into a Slim Devices Transporter – a WiFi 'streamer' similar to your device, which is said to be the first audiophile network music player. If it lives up to the claims, you can expect a full review of this new technology-led hi-fi innovation.

“A 'hi-fi' server manufacturer can't keep up with PCs and hard disks.”

HOW TO REVIEW

How do you actually review stuff? From my experience, whenever you make a change in a hi-fi system, the other components take a little while to acclimatize to the new one. For example, when I changed my speakers, I felt the amp took three weeks to adjust to them, possibly due to the different load. Putting my equipment on a rack for the first time had a similar effect, the components taking time settling in to their new surroundings. As did changing the mains supply. This means that it would be very difficult to do any sort of meaningful A/B comparisons.

Mark Clayton via email

HFC All of our reviewers have reference systems that they know intimately and this makes it easier to assess new products. Reviewing the item is therefore much simpler, as the new equipment's characteristics show up quite easily. A/B testing, however, is different and more



Above: Cambridge Audio Azur 604H hard disk music server

Letter of the month

SO LONG SACD

Now that SACD is widely accepted to be a dead duck, will we see CD players going back to being just CD players? It seems there's a wave of Japanese-led brands that see the SACD playback angle as key selling point. But, if SACD is dead and no one is buying the discs, why bother? As a consumer, I would prefer to buy a player that has had all the money spent on CD replay. So as long as SACD playback is getting attention, I'll be shopping elsewhere, for a British player.

Steven Young via email

HFC Fair point. But at least you have a choice. Both Denon and Marantz, for example, have both CD/SACD and CD-only players on the market, which if SACD trends continue, may not be a feature of their next respective portfolios.

But don't discount SACD players automatically. Even if you never buy a single SACD, CD/SACD players – especially stereo-only models – can bring out the best from all discs; some CD/SACD players now out-perform similarly-priced CD-only players on sonic grounds – with CD!



WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!
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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...)

relevant when testing one product against another, or testing an accessory, such as a cable. We'll routinely spend around four to six weeks with a product before telling you exactly what it can do for your system.

BAR HUMBUG

Surely the bar graphs that you use in your Ultimate Group Tests are superfluous? Directly under each graph you give meaning to the five parameters with your percentage scores. Is that not sufficient? The graphs do look a bit corny.

John Creeke S. Africa

HFC The bar graphs are used as a graphical representation of how the products measure against a group average. They provide a quick 'at a glance' impression of how the product performs, without having to delve into a list of numerical data. It also serves from a design perspective by breaking up the page summarizing some aspects of the 'techie' lab report.

BOXED IN

It has been 13 years since I last bought hi-fi equipment. I now have greater use of an open-plan living area and more time to play music. One option is to reduce the number of separate units I have. I noted what used to be 'music centres' have been renamed 'one-box systems' and have even become respectable in

Below: Primare CDI10 one-box system



recent times. The problem I have is in picking up from where I left off. Many of the respected names seem to have disappeared, and I now live 200 miles north of the dealers I knew. The real question is, has the sound quality improved at the budget end of the market?

Ian Roberts via email

HFC 'Has hi-fi improved over the last decade or so?' is a question on repeat here at Hi-Fi Choice. The definitive answer is 'yes'. And over the last decade especially, the cowboys have fallen to natural selection and digital technology has rapidly driven quality forward. One-box CD systems have indeed gained respect, too. Our favourite is the Primare CDI10 (£1,200), closely followed by the Arcam Solo at £1,000. Both have a CD player, built-in amp and DAB/FM radio and are generally speaking comparable to separates of the same value, but without the bulk and synergy issues. So take the plunge, your ears will thank you.

STRIKE IT LUCKY

I am novice at the hi-fi game and I'm not confident in conceptualising how a piece of equipment will fit into a system. At the moment, I have a pair of Castle Conway 3 speakers, a NAD C542 CD player and an old Marantz SR92 receiver. I'm planning to update the amp and CD player. Will a Cambridge Audio 840A have the power to efficiently drive my speakers, as I am quite keen on it from my dealer visits.

Unfortunately, the dealer has not been very obliging in letting me bring my speakers in to try it out.

Peter Psarakis via email

“What were called ‘music centres’ have been renamed ‘one box systems’.”

HFC The 840A amplifier is an excellent choice, Peter. In fact, it won our annual Best Stereo Amplifier gong in the £500-£1,000 category two issues ago (HFC 287), so buy with confidence. It's a shame your dealer couldn't be more obliging, but in this case, you'll have no regrets.

DO YOU WANT TO BE FAMOUS?

Now's your chance! We're looking for avid hi-fi fans to appear in a new feature called System File, in which we aim to explore, explain and experience the hi-fi system of one lucky reader per issue.

The idea is this: first, you send us a letter or an email, explaining why you and your hi-fi should be featured. Then, we pick one reader and arrange one of our reviewers to visit, with notebook and camera in hand. Finally, once the lucky reader and our reviewer have finished listening, describing, discussing and recommending, we publish the results - for the benefit of all!

If you'd like to be considered for this feature, simply write a 'review' of your system - good or bad - using 500 words or less and send it to: System File, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Alternatively, you can email it to: tim.bowern@futurenet.co.uk. If we pick you, you'll not only receive a visit from one of our reviewers - you'll also get a special Hi-Fi Choice goody bag thrown in, too! So get writing... the first instalment of System File will appear next issue.

Onlineforum

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



It's high time vinyl went the way of the Jurassic era. It's plainly way behind in both technology and sound. A well-made CD beats the pants of the old turntable. The past is the past; stop lingering on nostalgia...

Coffee

...I'd gladly invite you to

do a comparison with the original vinyl release, versus a just-remastered compact disc...

Happy Elephant

...Irrelevant. This is about preference, not an objectively measurable phenomenon. But, you also need to consider that when a master for CD is

created, the engineer will add his idea of how it should sound. And that will invariably be different from the sound of the vinyl master-engineer.

Mikehit

Check out this £500 iPod docking station and amp with valves...

Trizza



...But it's compressed audio, so it's never going to be as good...

django5

...While I have never tried it, I understand that the Apple Lossless format is

quite good. Which is presumably what you would use if you were to spend £500 purely on an iPod system...

Trizza

Valves and iPods... what's next? How about a PC powered by a water wheel and steam-driven telly!

Citizen Bidet

For
a FREE
gift, click on
www.musicalfidelity.com

I could do with
one of those!



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

MUSICAL FIDELITY

Hearing is believing.

www.musicalfidelity.com

If you've spent more than **£500** on your Hi-Fi, you need one of these

Does your system sound better at some times than at others?

If the answer is yes, you could benefit from a cleaner power supply. The chaotic nature of mains-borne distortion means that your system may be subject to damaging interference effects, sudden power surges and background noise.

ISOL-8's new range of advanced mains filters and conditioning units is here to help.

Embracing a wide variety of easy-to-use treatments devised for single source or amplifier components, and accommodating systems of up to twelve devices, the ISOL-8 product range is engineered to allow your system to shine like never before. It could be the best value upgrade you'll ever make.

Visit isol-8.co.uk and read our article, 'Why condition your mains' to find out more, or call **01423 359054** for your nearest ISOL-8 dealer.



Nic Poulson is the designer of all Isol-8 products. An inventive, accomplished designer in fields as diverse as thermionic valve amplification and international airport runway lighting systems, his drive to tackle the huge problem of compromised power supply led to the founding of Isotek in the late nineties.



IsoLink high quality mains leads



CleanLine² entry-level, mains power distribution and conditioner unit for up to six components



MainLine² high quality mains supply for individual components



Qube¹ mains power conditioner for high power loads

ISOL - 8

Isolate, *Ī SŌ-lāt*, v.t. to render free from external influence





NATURAL BORN KESSLER

In his first column for *Hi-Fi Choice*, the one and only guerrilla guru, the shock jock of audio, the closest thing to a force of nature in hi-fi journalism... Ken Kessler picks a few of his favourite systems

Cliché or not, every journalist will tell you that he or she is bombarded with requests to answer one question: 'What is the best?' It doesn't matter what the subject is, from notebook computers to fishing rods to sat-nav systems to model railway controllers. Anyone paid by some journal, website or TV programme for his or her opinion will be asked for on-the-spot consultation. And only 'the best' will do.

Why such brazenness when only the truly shameless would dare to ask a doctor/lawyer/plumber for free advice? Human nature is the reason. I suppose that, in a way, journalists are considered public property, and therefore fair game. You don't expect an invoice from a journalist, whereas a lawyer charges by the second. Additionally, no journalist wants to seem an arrogant prat by refusing to answer.

A more subtle reason for asking reviewers face-to-face 'what's best' is that readers always assume (correctly) that what's published in a magazine is, by its very nature, general. No reviewer can come up with the ideal speaker for every reader's amp or room, and no reviewer can try every product in every possible combination. (Equally, readers often assume incorrectly that opinions – at least in the UK press – are somehow censored. They're not.)

What it gets down to is this: those asking the question want to know specifically what's the best for them. But that's rarely how the question is phrased. So, they get angry when a reviewer tells them that, for example, the best amp in the world – in his opinion – is Model XYZ, which costs £27,000. As they can only afford £650, they stomp off muttering things like 'conceited asshole'.

Conversely, there are car enthusiasts and watch crazies and audiophiles and wine lovers who, simply to satisfy their intellectual curiosity, genuinely want to know the answer to that unanswerable question. Best car? Well, one would never suggest that a Range Rover cancels out a Ferrari, or that a Mini Copper S negates the *raison d'être* of the Mercedes S Class, so there is no overall best car. Cameras? A Leica won't do what a Widelux will, and vice versa. So, too, with hi-fi: you don't compare a three-watt, single-ended triode with a 600-watt, solid-state, Class A monoblock.



“Journalists are considered public property. You don't expect an invoice from a journalist, whereas a lawyer charges by the second.”

Audiophiles are as bad as anyone for refusing to take 'no' for an answer, so I'm getting this off my chest after two decades plus of fielding the 'what's best?' question. I'll tell you what I think is the best, with the following provisos. My taste invariably differs from yours, as does my preferred sonic balance: midrange authenticity above everything else, because I mainly listen to vocals. Convincing soundstage and an absence of grizzly, fatigue-inducing coloration follow that. And way down the scale is bass quantity. Please keep that in mind as you read on.

But it's never that easy, and I won't be trapped, so I'm breaking it down into systems, with a few exceptions. You simply cannot use the same scale of 'bestness' for small speakers

as you would large, especially when the latter won't fit into certain rooms. The best preamp for CD ain't necessarily what you'd use for vinyl. And I refuse to stage transistors against tubes because you love one or the other, or you're open-minded and employ both without concern for the stuff inside. Whatever stance you take, be it CD against vinyl or tubes vs transistors, it's like comparing red wine with white.

Other considerations? Everything on these pages is in current production, operates purely in two-channel stereo and is available in the UK. And I've heard them. Which also means that everything that I haven't heard isn't in the running! Talk about undermining the story before it's even started. So, with all those provisos in mind, here goes: ▶



BEST COMPACT SYSTEM IF YOU HAVE A SMALL ROOM AND A SMALL BUDGET:

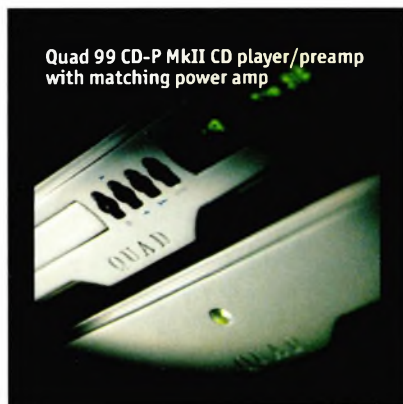
Arcam Solo one-box system, PMC DB1+ speakers

Arcam has delivered a brilliant one-box solution for the iPod era, and the PMC speakers sound great even with mediocre amplification. Price, with a bunch of accessories, will be under £2k. This is a budget system for which you need never apologise: musical, coherent and detailed. No, it won't provide the dynamics that only come with size and power, but compromise is the rule when the budget is finite. By the way, if you're wondering what I'd suggest for under £1,000, you're out of luck. Time to grow up. When 11-year-olds have £200 Playstations and a few dozen games and their own TVs and mobile phones and computers, £2,000 for grown-ups is nothing short of realistic. This is 2006, not 1978. If you disagree, then you should be reading *The Big Issue* or *The Guardian*.

BEST COMPACT SYSTEM IF YOU HAVE A SMALL ROOM AND A BIGGER BUDGET:

Quad 99 CD-P MkII CD/preamp, Quad 909 power amp, Stirling LS3/5a speakers

We're talking around three grand, but wow! What a system! And the Quad CDP includes a preamp – genius! If, like some harried audiophiles with miserable



Quad 99 CD-P MkII CD player/preamp with matching power amp

wives, you have a small-ish room, this will deliver the magic in a space as compact as 12x10ft. I resisted using vintage LS3/5as because of the proviso that everything here is in production, but the Stirlings are simply the most accurate replica for which an LS3/5a-ophile could have begged. They have a smooth and silky sound, and midband to die for – as you'd expect of an LS3/5a. And if you do need more bass, REL's latest subwoofers are so comprehensively adjustable that you can use them with the Stirlings without compromising their purity.

BEST COMPACT SYSTEM IF YOU HAVE A SMALL ROOM AND AN EVEN BIGGER BUDGET:

Quad 99 CD-P MkII CD/preamp, Audio Research VS100 power amp, Wilson Duette speakers

This is obviously an upgrade path: stick with the Quad CD/preamp, but change the Stirlings for Wilson Duettes, and the power amp for an Audio Research VS100. Sweeter sound, more detail and an added bonus: the Duette was designed to be used in two operating modes. Away from the wall on stands, or right up against it, on shelves. This makes it a natural for a high-end package in a room where the free-standing option just ain't gonna happen. The crossover is external, and Wilson supplies two different sets of cables and resistors clearly marked for either application. They're so good against the wall, that it's almost a hi-fi party trick, defying reason.

BEST COMPACT SYSTEM FOR TOTALLY UNRECONSTRUCTED AUDIOPHILES:

Musical Fidelity X-RAY3 CD player, Prima Luna Prologue 2 valve amp, Tannoy Autograph Mini speakers

My X-RAY gets more use than any CD player in my arsenal because

it's on my desk. The Prima Luna re-wrote the rules by being one of the first entry-level, Chinese-built valve amps with European build quality. And the wee Tannoy? A little miracle, a co-axial for the miniaturist. While this system will hardly cause the floorboards to flex bass-wise, it is so involving and musical that you'll forget all about its street cred. But 'cred' it has in spades, and you'll spend half your listening time just grinning at the Tannoys. Oh, for those who can't spare the bottom octave, I did use these with a REL Britannia subwoofer and the match was magical.

BEST ONE-BRAND SYSTEM THAT COSTS LESS THAN A FERRARI:

Quad 99 CD-P MkII CD/preamp, Quad II/forty valve amps or 909 power amp, Quad ESL 2905 electrostatic speakers

Trust me. Peter Walker (Quad supremo, now deceased) is smiling down on this, even if it is more expensive than he'd authorise and hails from the land of dim sum and Maoism. The 2905 is possibly the best speaker on earth if you can live with panels, the front-end is the best-kept secret in hi-fi and the amps are warm 'n' friendly. I used



Tannoy Autograph Mini speakers

this exact package for a few weeks when reviewing the 2905, and every single visitor was knocked out. I should have asked Quad for a commission on the number of ESLs it sold!

BEST SOLID STATE AMP PACKAGE I EVER HEARD:

darTZeel NHB-18NS preamp and NHB-108 power amps

Costs a bundle, looks like hell – the gold colour redefines what is truly vile about ‘bling’ – but, damn... do these pieces sing! Swiss build quality, clever ergonomics, the darTZeels are a deserved global success. What’s so shocking is that the company came out of nowhere and shot straight to the top, first dazzling influential reviewers in the USA, then knocking ‘em out in Asia. I’ve used them with Quad ESL, Sonus Faber Guarneri, Wilson WATT Puppy System 7, LS3/5a and other speakers, with a variety of sources, and they remain consistently pure and commanding.

THE VALVE ELECTRONICS I’D BUY IF I COULD AFFORD THEM:

Nagra PL-L and PL-P preamps, VPA power amps

With the right speakers – and they sound magical with the Quads, LS3/5as and the current MartinLogans – this pairing delivers everything you could want from valve electronics, with an added bonus: they’re Swiss-built, like the darTZeels. (Detect a pattern here?) They’re so delicious that owners grow addicted to them, such that one dealer told me they’re the most scarce of all the amplifiers on the second-hand trail. With a pedigree like Nagra’s, you’re talking about one of the very few audio brands that can match the undeniable credibility in other fields



of Leica, Rolex and Porsche. And you simply cannot beat that modulometer for sheer audiophile cool.

WHAT I’D OWN WITH NO BUDGET CONSTRAINTS AND A ROOM THE SIZE OF THE ALBERT HALL:

SME Model 30/2 turntable, Series V tonearm, Koetsu Uusishi cartidge, EMT phono stage, Nagra CD player, McIntosh C2200 preamp, Audio Research REF 210 power amps, Wilson Audio #2 Alexandria speakers

This, I suppose, is the one you’ve been waiting for, and it is contentious because it’s valve-heavy. But, hey, that’s my prejudice. More important, though, it silences the sort of pissy little idiot who accuses reviewers of being obsessed with the most costly objects; in every case, there are more expensive items on the market. In fact, in absolute terms, this system is almost apologetic. There’s a dearer Audio Research amp and a much dearer McIntosh preamp, dearer Koetsu, dearer phono stages and turntables at four times the cost of the SME. But to purchase by price is to fall into the very trap that has discredited the high end. Unapologetically then, this is simply my lottery win package.

This system is all about authenticity and realism, but tempered with warmth and humanity.

There’s no sacrifice of detail, but it eschews the hyper-etched sound that ruins so many otherwise delicious systems. You hear everything because this system is an open window into the performance, rather than a highlighting of any single element. And yet you’d be hard-pressed to better the transient attack, the transparency, the low-end slam. This isn’t merely high-end hi-fi: it’s pedigreed, commanding, coherent and musical high-end hi-fi.

So, do the above solutions answer the question about what’s the best? No. Will they stop readers from collaring me at hi-fi shows? No. Did I address cables? No. But what I tried to provide, in a nutshell, is a partial display of what I’ve learned over the past 40 years. It omits my favourite cables (Yter, Kimber, Siltech, Transparent and Atlas) because I just don’t go there any more. It didn’t allow for my favourite all-around speaker choice for those with miserable wives (MartinLogans). And there’s no space in the above for my pick of vintage hi-fi equipment, some of which still sees off anything currently available.

All of which proves there is no ‘best’. There’s only what suits your budget, taste and dimensions. Anyone who suggests otherwise is either too arrogant to be reviewing, or to ill-informed to be believed. There’s a lot of phenomenal gear out there. So, go and listen. **HFC**



Above: SME Model 30/2 turntable with Series V tonearm



MERIDIAN 808i SIGNATURE REFERENCE CD PLAYER | MERIDIAN DSP5200 ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKERS | £14,400

Digital defined

Almost from the outset, Meridian has been at CD's cutting edge. This super-neat, three-piece system shows just how far the format has come

Let's begin on an encouraging note, possibly the most encouraging note a *Beautiful System* review has ever begun on. It's a quote from Meridian Audio Ltd's chairman and chief designer, Bob Stuart. "The 808," says Bob, "is the best-sounding CD player we've ever made."

From a man who can justly claim to have invented the concept of the 'audiophile-grade' CD player and who now fronts a company that has built its considerable reputation on what many believe to be its unrivalled mastery of the digital domain, it's a statement that borders on the thrilling. Just how good, you wonder to yourself, must it be? Patience, dear reader, patience.

DIGITAL DARK AGES

First, the back story. Rewind 22 years. It's 1984, the dawn of compact disc and, almost immediately, the marketing lie of decade, if not the century – 'perfect sound forever' – is exposed for what it is by the Meridian MCD, which is so much better than the 'perfect' first-generation, 14-bit Philips CD player it's based on. In fact, it posits the idea that 'perfect' in this context is actually a synonym for 'crap'. For audiophiles, this is both good news and bad.

The bad news is that, straight out of the box, CD isn't up to snuff and far inferior, sonically, to analogue. The good news is that Bob and Meridian are on the case and have given the world its first souped-up machine... and it doesn't sound half bad.

The long haul has begun, and not just for Meridian. Improving the sound of CD will soon become the major preoccupation of the hi-fi industry. The important thing for the small Huntingdon-based company is that it's got the drop on the competition. And it's determined to stay ahead.

"24 CD players on, the sum of everything Meridian knows about the format is poured into one go-for-broke, two-channel player: the 808."

Next up, and an early indication that progress in the digital field is going to rip along, is the Pro-MCD. This features a separate, custom-designed power supply, DAC and oscillator, mounted underneath the transport. Even now, when most first generation CD players have been either binned or kept as quaintly-styled curiosities, the Pro-MCD is a sought-after classic that can more than hold its own with more modern players.

In 1985, Meridian invents the CD transport, separating the disc-reading mechanism from the digital-to-analogue converter to minimize jitter and other distortions associated with the transport. The combo is called the 200/203 and it's received with rave reviews. But bigger things are in the offing. With the 208 in 1989, 20-bit conversion and preamp functionality are combined in one machine. Three years later, the two-box approach re-emerges with the 602 transport, 601 Digital Signal Processing (DSP) preamp, 603 Digital Control Unit or 606 DAC. Of the 602/606, this magazine wrote at the time "it was damn near impossible to fault" and "a very special combination".

MERIDIAN IN BLOOM

The 500 series is launched in 1993 and blossoms into a full range of audio/video products, including Meridian's first DVD player, the 596, in 1997. From 1994 onwards, the 508 sets Meridian's standard for CD until the advent of the G08 in 2003. Then, in 2004, 20 years after the birth of CD and 24 CD players on, the sum of everything Meridian knows about the format is poured into one, go-for-broke, two-channel player: the 808. As Bob says, simply the best spinner of the ubiquitous silver disc he knows how to make.

The 808 Signature Reference Compact Disc Player, to give it its full title (Bob ☑



Meridian 808i Signature Reference CD player/preamp
£8,250

Without question one of the world's great CD spinners, distilling and applying everything Meridian has learned over 22 years at the cutting edge of digital design. Which is a lot. Clean, restrained and sleek aesthetics, stunning build and sound quality to die for. The 808i delivers peak performance when teamed direct with Meridian's own DSP active speakers.



Meridian DSP5200 active loudspeaker

£6,150 per pair
Baby floorstanders of Meridian's active DSP range, the 91cm tall, three-driver 5200s are nevertheless capable of serious volume and dynamics courtesy of the direct digital signal feed from the 808i and three 75-watt power amplifiers in each enclosure. Not instantly engaging, perhaps, but control, clout and resolution are a winning combination for long-term listening.



Stuart and Meridian co-founder Allen Boothroyd sign each one, in case you were wondering), evolved out of the massive and hugely sophisticated 800, Meridian's last word on multiformat, multichannel optical disc replay with full DVD-Audio/Video capability. At its heart is a multi-speed DVD-ROM drive, capable of reading at standard and high speeds. This is a boon for re-reading operations if your CD is scratched or otherwise damaged.

Three powerful on-board digital signal processing (DSP) chips, each capable of 150 MIPS (million instructions per second), handle the datastream from the disc. One upsamples the 16-bit/44.1kHz CD signal to 24-bit/176.4kHz. This signal is then fed to DVD-Audio Delta-Sigma DACs to drive the analogue outputs, while a digital signal at 88.2kHz sampling rate is routed to the digital outputs. Meridian's claim is that this unusual technique enables "filtering to take place far beyond the range of human hearing, as well as offering other, audible benefits, right across the audio band, for ultimate transparency from a CD source". The 808 has a triple buffering system, which reduces jitter to below 90 picoseconds. This is made possible by a new high-stability clocking system that re-clocks all digital data. The 808's analogue and digital sections are fed from separate power supplies.



The 808's construction employs a motherboard and multiple cards. Each card has its own power supplies and buffering so that each section – computer, decoder, FIFO buffers, DSP upsampling, D/A conversion, digital output, analogue input and even digital input – is on a separate and isolated card. The player uses audiophile-grade capacitors throughout and every component, even the resistors, have been hand selected.

The PCBs are all multilayer, many of them using six-layer technology for the lowest noise and jitter and for optimum grounding. The hefty metal and glass casing, finished in black lacquer or satin silver (silver, matching the speakers, in this case) is non-metallic.

SUBLIME SOLUTION

So, there seems little doubt, you could use the 808 in any high-end system and get sublime results. Many have. But, perhaps unsurprisingly, Meridian's 'system solution' is to keep the signal digital to the very last link in the chain and, for that, you need a pair of Meridian DSP speakers. An obvious advantage here is that you connect the speakers, with their own built-in amplification, directly to the 808. Make no mistake, we're talking compound elegance here, the inherent beauty of the Boothroyd-styled components

combining with the stark simplicity of a system that comprises just three of them (the player and two speakers). Okay, four if you include the equally chic MSR+ learning/programmable remote control.

Outputs include both balanced and unbalanced analogue, S/PDIF digital coaxial and, as is the case here, Meridian comms sockets on DIN connectors for direct feeds to Meridian's DSP5200 loudspeakers. Thus configured as a player/preamp (the '808i'), it can handle up to six stereo analogue inputs, three digital coaxial S/PDIF inputs, and two Toslink optical digital inputs. In either configuration, the 808 can drive analogue power amplifiers through its variable outputs.

Meridian argues that, as well as circumventing the driver-crossover headache of conventional passive speakers, DSP technology delivers bass extension vastly superior to that of other loudspeakers of the same volume. Moreover, keeping the signal in the digital domain until the last moment means that there is an unbroken link between the recording studio or concert hall and your listening room.

The DSP5200 looks like a smaller version of Meridian's flagship DSP8000 and, in essence, it is. The curved and tapered cabinet is said to improve both stiffness and high-frequency dispersion. Cabinet construction uses 19mm-thick



“The longer you listen to this system, the more you appreciate its controlled and considered approach. It doesn’t desperately seek the listener’s attention with the usual canon of sonic sweeteners.”

multi-layer materials, with proprietary heavy poured resin, and is claimed to be inherently stiff with good self-damping properties. A two-and-a-half-way design, there are three custom-made drivers, three 75-watt amplifiers, two multi-bit Delta-Sigma digital converters and digital crossovers, plus full remote control over bass, treble tilt, time-correct balance, absolute phase, tweeter axis and input. The dual bass drivers are 160mm long-throw composite designs and the tweeter a 25mm aluminium dome, silver-wired design. The cabinet vents through a dual rear port. Meridian says that its advanced signal processing “packs dynamics and bass into a size that defies imagination”

HEAD-SCRATCHING CLAIMS

It’s a claim that might have you scratching your head, as it did me. Initially at least, this system sounds anything but explosive. There are usually two reasons for this kind of first impression. One, the system really is as flat as tap water. Or two, there’s a big stick carried in there somewhere but, as

is often the case with true dynamic expression, its size and weight isn’t immediately apparent. Crank up the volume and so the sense of life, pace and impact increases.

Plain from the start is that the Meridian combo’s presentation is controlled, low in distortion, finely focused and projected well beyond the boundaries of the cabinets – both in breadth and depth. True, it does lack a degree of the startling immediacy and ‘presence’ that characterises some active designs, but the effortless weight and presentation of small details, both specific and ambient, lends music a realism that draws you in.

With the right material – Dave Gilmour’s atmospheric *On An Island*, for instance – the system can sound stunningly open and airy, yet simultaneously solid and propulsive with full-blooded tonal colours and beautifully resolved timbres. The bass not only integrates extremely well but combines genuine, controlled extension with huge energy and wonderfully engaging rhythmic drive.

Even more impressive is the system’s sympathetic treatment of indifferent or over-zealous productions. It pumped some colour and vitality into Eric Clapton’s normally weedy-sounding *August* CD but held George Benson’s outrageously OTT Irreplaceable beautifully in check: the usually ludicrously over-ripe sounding *Six Play* acquired a degree of listenability that was hard to credit.

In fact, the longer you listen to this system, the more you appreciate its controlled and considered approach. It doesn’t desperately seek the listener’s attention with the usual canon of sonic sweeteners, preferring to let the music make its own case. The real surprise is that your CDs often seem better than you remember them, by a large margin with discs hitherto considered of dubious quality.

As Meridian says in its promotion literature, slipping a CD into the hi-fi and kicking back in your favourite chair to listen is one of life’s great pleasures. The guys mean it. **HFC**

David Vivian



Totem Arro

It's our slimmest floor standing speaker, with a 4.5" sandwich cone woofer with dual magnet, and a soft dome tweeter tuned for low resonant frequency. Although this design is very slim, it produces an amazing - never expected - deep bass. The Arro can perform comfortably even near walls. As with other Totem models, the Arro's small lateral dimensions are a virtue, not a compromise. Its very smallness allows it to project a completely believable stereo image most large speakers are unable to replicate.

The Arro brings Totem quality to smaller rooms and smaller budgets. Yet it performs like a champion, as its narrow cabinet has the rigidity of an expensive stand. It has the firm monocoque chassis you expect from Totem, with interlocked mitred joints, and unique borosilicate damping. It also has a hard-wired crossover network with bypassed oil capacitors, and it can be bi-wired.



Five different finishes are available—four types of veneer: cherry, mahogany, maple and black ash and the fifth being a sublime white satin lacquer.

The standard added plinth with four spikes can be mounted by our specialists, although optional, using the unique Totem "Claw" with ball bearing to floor system will give even better results.

The name is evocative of the arrow, which echoes the tribal theme suggested by our name, Totem.

The shape of this stand also mirrors an arrow, long and slim. Like a fine quality arrow, it is, at once, noticeably light and extremely rigid. And it reaches its target...the heart of the music. Listen to it, and you'll conclude that Totem has hit another bullseye with the Arro.

| | |
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REVIEWS

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



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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

after a lively... tubes shone through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es 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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Darwin's delight

Krell's SACD Standard player has evolved into something stunning

PRODUCT Krell Evolution 505

TYPE CD/SACD player

PRICE £8,777

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.8x15.3x43.8cm

• Weight: 16.8kg • Analogue outputs: single-ended (two and six channel) RCA phono, balanced XLR (stereo only), Krell CAST connection (stereo only) • Digital outputs: coaxial, optical, HDMI • RS232c control, RC-5 system link, 12V trigger in/out • Compatible with the following disc formats: CD, SACD, CD-R, 44.1k WAV, AAC, DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/+RW, MP3-CD/DVD, WMA

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Although best known for its predominantly high-end, high-power amplifiers, Krell is a full-range manufacturer whose remit extends to AV equipment, loudspeakers and disc players of various types and levels of sophistication. In fact, the company produced what to many was the finest CD player of its day – the extraordinary but frighteningly expensive KPS25. Sadly, this player was discontinued when the supply of transport mechanisms dried up.

It was followed by the SACD Standard from the entry-level KAV range, which included multichannel SACD replay in a unit costing about half that of the Evolution 505, the subject of this test. That model was introduced in 2003 and subsequently revised when the original mechanism became unavailable. The 505, Krell's third SACD player, is from the company's no holds barred Evolution series, and adds more sophisticated in design and construction as befits the higher price. A



“Highlights include a fully machined case with no sharp edges, first class fit and finish and a very thick, solid front panel extrusion.”

second Evolution model, the 525, will follow soon, adding DVD-Video replay to the feature set (but not DVD-Audio). There will be a price premium, of course, but the two 500 series players will otherwise be identical.

The 505 inside story starts with the use of separate discrete power supplies, built around a 65VA linear transformer for the drive mechanism and a 45VA transformer for the audio circuits, the latter optimised for Class A operation. Both work through with several stages of regulation to give a stiff, rock solid foundation, which has always been Krell's way. Internal signal transmission is entirely balanced and in Class A throughout, free of feedback and the internal architecture operates in current mode, with a whopping great 500kHz bandwidth.

Inter-component connections optionally use the proprietary CAST (Current Audio Signal Transmission) interface as an alternative to single-ended (for stereo or multichannel) or balanced (two channels only) modes. In CAST mode, according to Krell, all linked components in a system operate effectively as a single component. There is only a single current-to-voltage converter stage in the whole


system when used with a Krell CAST-equipped amp, minimising (Krell says eliminating) signal transmission aberrations, and effects due to cable impedance when transmitting signals in the voltage domain.

This is the first Krell SACD player with CAST, though the interface was part of the late-spec KPS25 CD player. Current mirrors operate using LED voltage references, said to result in a two-thirds reduction in harmonic distortion. The player is equipped with PCM1738 differential DACs on each channel, and in-house designed DAC reconstruction filters. Four SACD and two CD anti-aliasing filters are available to 'fine tune' the sound.

So much for the internal nuts and bolts. Externally, the player is scarcely less impressive, with highlights including a fully machined case with no sharp edges or corners (unusual), first-class fit and finish, a very thick, solid front panel extrusion, and a case-within-a-case design. This last includes a high level of decoupling of the mechanism to reduce microphony. This, incidentally, reduces the differences that are usually gained by mass-loading, and it looks nicer than sticking a brick on top of the box. The controls also have an unusually good

operational feel, even by Krell standards, but some may find themselves befuddled by the field of tiny buttons on the right hand side of the fascia, and curse the fully machined remote control that needs to be half dismantled before the batteries can be changed. SACD Text is included in the player, though CD Text is not. As part of its mission to be a complete disc-playing solution, MP3 CD (and, intriguingly, also MP3 DVD discs) can be played.

SOUND QUALITY

To help extract the most from the 505 in two-channel mode, we hooked it up to Krell's own FBI amplifier (reviewed in *HFC 282*) using balanced Nordost Valhalla cables. The FBI was then swapped with a Classé SSP-300 processor and CA5100 five-channel power amplifier for multichannel operation, and in both cases the main loudspeakers (in part because they was available in a multichannel configuration) included a B&W system based on the 80SS standmounts, HTM1D centre speaker and ASW825 subwoofer. Other speakers used included a multichannel system containing five Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 floorstanders and a Performance 9 subwoofer, plus stereo 

Q&A

Peter McKay, vice president of sales and marketing for Krell Industries, discusses the evolution of the Evolution



Why did you introduce this, your third SACD player, so soon after the previous model?

The Evolution 505 was introduced to complement the new series of Evolution products. It features CAST technology, which the SACD Standard did not have. It also uses a different transport, which has proven to be much more reliable.

Does the inclusion of SACD have any impact on CD performance?

Since an SACD has a data density similar to a DVD, the servo mechanism has to be more precise and the error correcting system more robust. This benefits CD playback as well and, in fact, the 505 accesses CD tracks more quickly and plays scratched discs better than the SACD Standard.

How would you characterise the architecture of the Burr-Brown DACs?

The D/A converter uses what Burr-Brown calls its Advanced Segment topology. This hybrid multi-bit delta-sigma architecture improves low-level linearity and noise. It would be tough to call it a native DSD or PCM DAC.

Can you explain about the mechanism and its control system?

The mechanism works on a DCI (DVD Control Interface) as opposed to an IDE interface. From the end user's point of view, there is no difference between DCI and IDE. As far as sourcing goes, we have assured ourselves a solid supply of drives through an agreement with the manufacturer. Also, since we now have a direct relationship with the manufacturer, which was not possible with Philips, we get much better service and are able to repair drives ourselves or send them back for repair with good results. This relationship has also enabled us to make our own modifications to the drive's control software, which have resulted in a richer and more intuitive user interface.



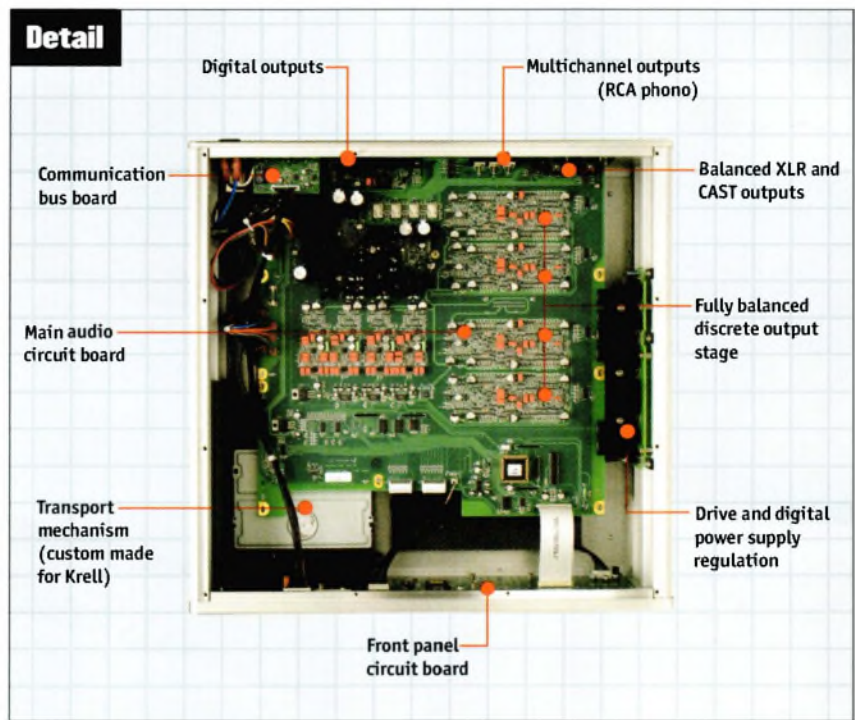
pairs from Opera and Focal. The FBI clearly favoured the speakers that offered the greatest power handling capacity, allowing it to fully spread its wings.

But does the 505 really show other players a clean set of heels? One point to bear in mind is that it needs about a week to burn in before it comes on song, and it goes off the boil alarmingly quickly, as we discovered after a power cut. Under 'cold' conditions, it just doesn't want to communicate – it sounds dull and congested. But when it's warmed up, it could not sound more different. The first disc we played – and it was just a warm-up piece on auto-repeat in a different room – was Eric Bibb's *Good Stuff* (Opus 3 SACD, but in stereo). Played back at a relatively low volume level as I walked around the room, the notes seemed to crystallise out of the air and hang there. The music (try *Don't Ever Let Nobody*

Drag Your Spirit Down) has an exquisite sense of rightness and of timing. I knew, without looking, that there was a musician there behind my back, playing in the room... except, of course, there wasn't!

The same palpable sense of real music being made happened again and again, for example with the Pentatone version of Shostakovich's eighth symphony (Berglund – Russian National Orchestra – multichannel SACD this time), and then with a long-term piano favourite, the Martha Argerich and Mikhail Pletnev disc of Prokofiev and Ravel (DGG, on CD). In a way, the last of these – and we could have named many more – was the most impressive, not because of its sonic excellence, though it is very good, but again for the exquisite sense of timing. The notes were conjured into the air, and each note hung around to be savoured until its tail had died away. It was not just





good sound (though it was certainly that). It was the absolute quintessence of good musical communication. And that's very rare.

One rather obvious question at this point was how to distinguish between CD and SACD, and the lame but unavoidable answer is that a direct comparison is not really possible. The Krell is far too good an SACD player to fall for the common pratfalls. It is not lacking in transient vitality and it doesn't sweeten the music; when the occasion demands, it has a hard-driving, bold and physical sound. But there is no accounting for the provenance of recordings that are available in both CD and SACD form, for example from hybrid dual-layer discs, which are nominally the same in each version. The notes are the same, but there is no getting over the effect of the different processing chains.

There is also the question of the switchable filters. It is hard to compare SACD filters 'one' and 'two' with 'three' and 'four', since the two groups have completely different output gain settings. Although the differences within each group – between filter one and two for example, with CD and SACD alike – are sometimes blindingly obvious, at others times we found them hard to detect. In general terms, we tended to prefer one and two over three and four, and usually – but not always – with CD one over two, as the latter slightly softens the impact. The same preference was found with SACD, though the differences were audibly reduced.

Perhaps the really important point is that in general terms, SACD provides an even better result than CD. It was in stereo SACD mode that the Eric Bibb recording provoked the comments referred to above, and this was far from being the only SACD to trigger reactions

“I knew, without looking, that there was a musician there behind my back, playing in the room... except, of course, there wasn't!”

of this kind. Exceptional CDs could also provoke that tangible, uncanny sense of musicians in the room, but the effect was statistically more likely with SACD.

Why would you buy this player, if (at nearly nine grand, a big 'if') you were in a position to do so? One reason is its state of the art SACD replay. However, commercially at least, SACD's star does appear to be on the wane. But SACD is neither technically nor sonically deficient. The format has already seen off DVD-Audio, there are plenty of discs available, at least in certain key categories (classical, jazz, acoustic) and SACD won't be redundant until HD DVD and/or Blu-ray provide a truly wide-bandwidth home for high-resolution audio. Given the relative lack of success for DVD-A and SACD, that day may never come. SACD's travails are the worst news for high fidelity, and more importantly for reproduced music itself. But as it stands right now, a good reason in favour of the Evolution 505 is that it is a late (perhaps final) chance to procure one of the finest of all multichannel, high-resolution disc players.

Its CD-playing pedigree is at least equally compelling. The KPS25 has not been available for some years, and it was not possible to compare to two. Nevertheless, it seems that the 505 trades points with that legendary old model. The Evolution 505 has most of the architectural solidity of its distant predecessor, but with a new sophistication, sheen and polish, plus greater resolution. And if you object that

the price is simply too high to make any kind of sense, well maybe, but you pay for exclusivity – and as long as any product can show cheaper models a clean set of heels, then it has a place. This one does, and therefore it has.

If you are keen to seek out the very best in CD and SACD replay, the 505 should appear at the top of your short list. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



| VERDICT | |
|--|---|
| SOUND >>> 96% >> SUB RATINGS CD 95% SACD 97% | PRO A true heavyweight in every sense, which addresses all the musical issues in a rigorous way. Superb build quality and finish represent the icing on a world-beating cake. |
| FEATURES >>> 90% | CON No hi-res digital output; balanced/CAST outputs only from the two main channels; could use an extra display dim setting. And it's expensive! |
| BUILD >>> 95% | |
| VALUE >>> 85% | |
| CONCLUSION Tour de force of disc playing technology with exquisite musical discrimination – for example, as we discovered on test, between different recordings of Steinway pianos. CD and SACD replay are of essentially similar calibre. | |
| HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 91% | |

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



LYNGDORF

DIGITAL

ANALOG

MUTE

TDA 2200 Digital Amplifier



Perfect pitch

Lyngdorf's latest digital amp pitches up to perfect the sound in any room

PRODUCT Lyngdorf TDA 2200

TYPE Integrated stereo digital amplifier

PRICE £3,875 (as tested)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 45x10x45.5cm

• Weight: 18kg • Inputs: three single-ended RCA phono, one balanced XLR (with optional A/D converter module) • Digital inputs: three coaxial, one AES/EBU balanced XLR, one Toslink optical • Outputs: stereo phono outputs from DAC, loudspeaker terminals • Microphone, trigger minijack inputs • RS232 in/output • Rated power: 200 watts per channel (8 ohms)

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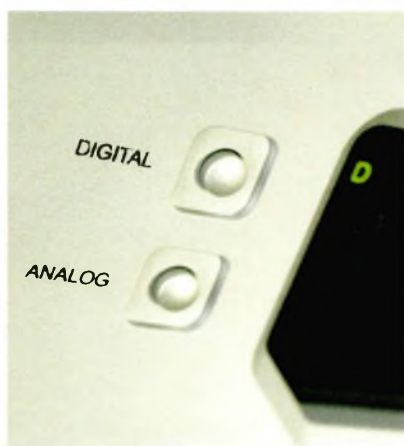
In one guise or another, Lyngdorf has been at the cutting edge of digital amplification for as long as there has been digital amplification. Its best-known digital product, the Millennium, was (and, in Mk IV livery, still is) the first and best of the digital amp breed. Much of that Millennium genome can be

found in the more down-to-earth TDA 2200 integrated digital amplifier.

This is a very digital, very modular affair. In its basic layout, the £2,400 TDA 2200 doesn't even process analogue signals, save to output them to other sources or to loudspeakers. The A/D module (£275) brings line-level analogue inputs to the party, but the more significant module is the £1,200 RoomPerfect system. Together with a long length of cable and a very, very accurate measuring microphone, 'RoomPerfect' attempts to minimise the deleterious effects of room, listening position and loudspeaker idiosyncrasies to deliver the best possible sound. RoomPerfect isn't designed to make every system sound the same, though; it's designed to maintain the tonal balance of the speakers, but also compensate for the room's influence and mild peaks and troughs in the speakers' frequency

response. In other words, it's designed to bring out the hidden 'inner speaker' inside your existing loudspeakers, no less.

Here's how it works. Entering the RoomPerfect set-up menu on the scrolling blue dot-matrix front panel display, you position the microphone as close as possible to your optimum listening position. The TDA 2200 then goes through a series of eerie BBC Radiophonic Workshop style sound effects (your neighbours will think you are sitting through a *Blake's 7* retrospective) and then prompts you to reposition the microphone. This is the 'focus' measurement. You can make eight 'focus' presets on the TDA 2200, so you could have different positional settings for sitting slightly forward or back in the chair, or sitting to the side and so on. Next, place the mic randomly in the room (not between the speakers) several times until you have achieved



“RoomPerfect helps to improve the bass without undermining the rest of the sound and the result is the best of both worlds.”

a 90 per cent (or more) ‘Room Knowledge’. Now you have a ‘global’ setting established. Fortunately, all this is guided by the menu system and is no more complex than setting up a home cinema system. Don’t try to skip using the microphone stand, though, as the subtle micro-movements and your pulse will give false readings that will be automatically rejected by the TDA 2200.

You can add more measurements and refinements like your speaker/rear wall distance, too. These settings are attached to all the filter options on the amplifier. You can also by-pass the whole RoomPerfect system by pressing ‘0’ on the Arcam/Linn-like remote handset (some better labelling would be nice).

Discounting the RoomPerfect and the A/D module, the TDA 2200 is a richly specified all-digital amplifier, delivering 200 watts into eight ohms and 375 watts into four ohms. It’s designed to work up to 33kHz, so it’s no SACD-enhancing, super-wide-bandwidth design, but it’s claimed to stick within 0.2dB of a ruler flat 20Hz-20kHz frequency response and no analogue design comes close to that accuracy. It also includes upgradable voicing

curve filters, to soften, open up or remove sharpness from a digital recording. Some may think this ‘cheating’, but these are deliberate attempts at removing some of the more obvious tonal lifts and tweaks placed on recordings at source, to make them more airplay and download friendly.

Upgrades are key, too. Lyngdorf is constantly sampling new installations and adding them to the room and speaker correction database. These come through as periodic updates that can be squirted through the RS232 link via a PC. But, for all this complexity, the amplifier is deceptively simple to use and navigate, thanks to a handful of small multifunction buttons, a dirty great controller/volume dial and a useful display. This all sits in front of a well-built box, albeit one larger than most integrated amps.

SOUND QUALITY

If you speak to a non-audiophile electronics engineer or scientist, you’ll hear the criticisms of the sceptic about all hi-fi: amplifiers, like CD players and (especially) cables, make little or no change to the overall performance. But, this time, the amplifier (with RoomPerfect in place)

makes a big difference. How big a difference depends on how far you deviate from the hi-fi hot seat ideal.

If you set up your system according to traditional hi-fi attributes (with the speakers well into the room to eliminate bass boom from the corners), RoomPerfect’s ‘focus’ setting has its work cut out. This is not because the system is already as good as it is going to get, but because you are already, unconsciously doing the work for the amplifier. Move the speakers into their best position to deliver deep bass and the sound gets thick in the bass, but midband and treble are at their best. In this position, RoomPerfect helps to improve the bass without undermining the rest of the sound and the result is the best of both worlds.

Even in more traditional settings, the voicing curves help to improve performance with troublesome recordings. Although not applicable to every disc (voicing curves make a big improvement to modern pop recordings designed for MP3 replay and are best avoided on sublime classical cuts from the 1950s to the 1970s), these voicing shifts appeared to make an even bigger improvement than RoomPerfect in our test room. In fairness, it transpired that – in almost any listening position – this room just happens to be so perfect a match for the Studio 140 floorstanders we were using that ProAc should really consider putting up a blue plaque outside. But, as they say on the interweb, ‘YMMV’ (Your Mileage May Vary). ▶

[Review] Lyngdorf TDA 2200 integrated amplifier

Q&A

We spoke to Peter Lyngdorf, owner and founder of Lyngdorf Audio, about RoomPerfect and its place in a hi-fi system



HFC Is RoomPerfect a replacement for good set-up?

PL No correction system can remove reflections or change the directivity of the speakers. Therefore, it is desirable to place your speakers symmetrically in the room. Also, it is desirable to have a reasonable amount of absorption. It is quite important to control reflections from behind the listening position and from the floor in front of the speakers.

On the other hand, with RoomPerfect in your system, you should not try to 'control' the bass by moving the speakers far away from the boundaries. Keep the speakers where they produce too much bass and let RoomPerfect reduce the level in the correction filter. The net result will be tighter and more time-coherent bass, plus more dynamic range and less distortion.

How does the growing database of installations shape RoomPerfect?

Every month, we visit some of our clients to get a first-hand experience of how the system performs under very different conditions. Based on the first 50+ visits, we are now releasing a number of new voicings to accommodate personal taste and to compensate for less than perfect recordings. So far, we did not find any situation that required modifications to the RoomPerfect algorithms.

Can RoomPerfect work in the analogue domain?

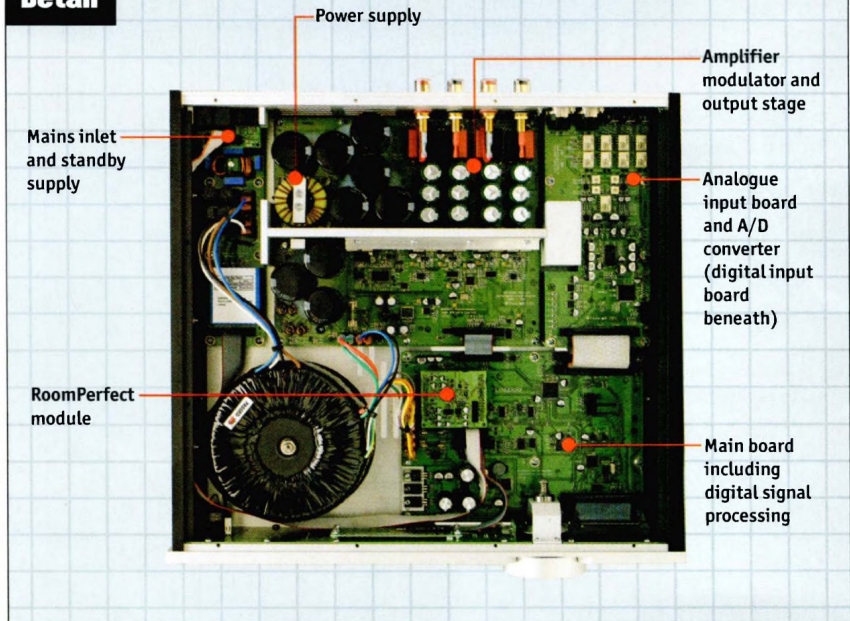
RoomPerfect will be available in stand-alone products, both as a preamplifier with digital and analogue inputs and outputs, and also as a pure analogue in/analogue out option, to be used between your preamp and power amp.

The strategy of Lyngdorf Audio is to enhance sound reproduction in listening rooms. Today we have the RoomPerfect technology, but we are working on other areas of improvement using our DSP and acoustics know-how. We now have more than 20 engineers working on R&D, which enables us to do real scientific research.

Will RoomPerfect technology be licensed to other manufacturers?

Yes – the first contract has already been signed for third-party consumer products, which will be much more expensive than existing Lyngdorf components. The first contract on the pro-audio side is also imminent.

Detail



Even in the best room for the task, there is still only one place where all the magic happens. If you sit even slightly off axis – too high, too low or too close – the sound of the speakers quickly deteriorates. It's here that RoomPerfect comes into its own. Set to 'global', the loudspeakers quickly become almost omnidirectional, giving everyone in the room a shot at good sound. Yes, this is the audiophile equivalent of a Pyrrhic victory; to achieve the best sound around the room, the quality of the sweet spot must fall. But the added felicity that comes from the rest of the room having a good time soon balances this out (besides, when the other listeners are gone, you can quickly turn things back to normal).

What is the TDA 2200 like without all the processing in place? The basics are all there, although it's not an amplifier that does 'mellow' well. This is an accurate, precise and clean-sounding amplifier, which could err on the side of brightness with metal-domed loudspeakers. It is powerful enough to deal with large dynamic swings found in complex modern classical music like Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, yet is also refined enough to cope solo female vocals and the complexity of be-bop rhythms. If you want a slight softening of leading edges (say, your musical tastes run from Maceo Parker to Fred Wesley

and the Horny Horns), use the analogue stage; it doesn't change the fundamental sound of the system, but it does make it less 'direct'.

This might sound more than slightly crazy, but even if we were unsure of the TDA 2200's basic sound, it would still be on our shortlist. The digital processing is so seamless and works so well that it's hard not to be impressed. Yes, the closer you get to traditional audiophile perfection in the system and the room, the less RoomPerfect seems to affect the sound, but this is a good thing – it doesn't intrude on systems where its presence is not vital, but is a welcome bonus to those who need it. We suspect that Lyngdorf will not be keeping RoomPerfect to itself for long and many digital-savvy companies will be beating a path to the Danish firm's door soon. Regardless, RoomPerfect lives up to the name. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



| VERDICT | |
|--|--|
| SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar] | PRO Ingenious method of removing the room from the 'good sound' equation. Crisp, detailed sound, capable of flexibility in replay filtration. Upgradable, too! |
| FEATURES >> 95% [Progress bar] | CON The better your system and the better your room, the less the need you have for RoomPerfect. Remote handset could do with better labelling. |
| BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar] | |
| VALUE >> 85% [Progress bar] | |
| CONCLUSION If your system is perfectly sorted, this may be a solution in search of a problem, but a surprising number of speakers and rooms will benefit from this revolutionary approach to music replay. Those who really need it will never want anything else! | |
| HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87% | |

exposure



Those who appreciate good sound will prefer the tighter "S."

New 3010S series:

Tighter bottom-end, livelier sound, more drive...same price

CD player £1200

- Brand-new "CD solution" – custom-made transport mechanism, servo units and control mechanisms
- Twin Burr-Brown PCM 1704 mono DACs and a discrete output stage
- Low jitter clock and a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the transport mechanism and audio stages.

Integrated Amplifier £1000

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- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- 6 line inputs, bi-wiring and bi-amping compatible
- Option to fit a MC or MM phono cartridge
- Remote control

Power Amplifier £800

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- Capable of driving sophisticated speaker systems, in bi-amping mode or monoblock mode
- Clean and extended low frequency response

The Xone ranger

This super-cute floorstander is the latest speaker in Leema's growing range

PRODUCT Leema Acoustics Xone

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £2,245 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 14.2x89x21 cm

● Weight: 15kg ● 25mm fabric dome tweeter

● Two 100mm polypropylene bass/mid drivers

● Sensitivity: 87.5dB ● Impedance: 6 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01635 291357

🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com

Named after its two principals, the respected and experienced ProAudio engineers Lee Taylor and Mallory Nicholls, Leema Acoustics was founded in 1998, with the initial intention of re-inventing the miniature loudspeaker, in the form of a tiny metal-encased sub-miniature called the Xen, which we reviewed very favourably back in *HFC* 245.

Several other Leema speakers have appeared since then, as well as an attractive and unusual range of electronics, but in one key respect this Xone resembles that original Xen. Although it's a floorstander – only the second in the Leema line-up – the enclosure actually has the same footprint as the tiny Xen. It also uses superficially similar drive units, but in this case there's an extra bass/mid unit immediately below the main one (the Xone is a two-and-a-half way design). This second driver is used to augment the bass end of things, along with the port located on the rear.

Both the little cone drivers have 100mm chassis, which explains why Leema has managed to come up with a floorstander that's just 14.2 centimetres wide. It's a little deeper than its width, though the depth is still very modest at 21 cm, and the whole thing stands just 89cm tall (including its plinth), which places the drive unit array just a little below seated ear height.

Few floorstanders look more discreet and few are more prettily dressed, either. Our samples came in a quite deliciously figured pale birds eye maple, though darker rosewood and ebony alternatives are also on the options list. Sharp edges all round give a very crisp impression, and a small

grille is supplied to cover up the drivers, though its wooden frame looks a little thick for optimum acoustic performance so it was not used during the review. In any case, the drivers are properly and neatly flush mounted into the front panel.

Because the footprint is so small, stability is potentially

a real issue, so a proper additional plinth is supplied, crafted from black painted MDF. This means the floor coupling spikes are located well outside the enclosure edge. Happily, spike accommodation is secure, with no tendency to strip the threads of the sockets. Strangely, no lock-nuts were supplied with the 6mm spikes, which is inexplicable and inexcusable.

High-quality ingredients are used throughout. The cabinet is damped internally with bitumastic panels, acoustic foam liners and natural wool. Internal wiring uses Nordost Micro-Mono-Filament cables, and the bi-wired crossover has Clarity Cap capacitors and air- and iron-dust-cored inductors. Soldering is fully RoHS compliant, using lead-free, silver-loaded solder, and twin gold plated terminals are fitted conveniently low down at the back.

The Seas-sourced bass and bass/mid drivers have large, magnetically screened magnets and open, unobstructive baskets. A fibreglass composite coil former drives the 80mm diameter cone. The tweeter is a screened neodymium magnet device from Tympany (formerly known as Vifa), as used in the rest of the Leema range; its fabric dome diaphragm is quoted as 25mm diameter, but looks more like 28mm on our ruler.

SOUND QUALITY

By adding an extra bass-only driver and a larger enclosure to the Xen configuration, one would expect the Xone to resemble the Xen closely, while also offering extra bass weight and extension. There's some truth in such a prediction, for sure, but our measurements show that the situation is actually rather more complex. Despite the undoubted similarity of Xone and Xen in both dimensions and drivers, the two designs show a number of important differences.

For starters, both speakers have quite similar port tuning frequencies – 53Hz for the Xen and 46Hz for the Xone – so any increase in the latter's bass extension won't be all that great.

Where the Xone really scores, however, is in a significantly greater sensitivity, especially through the bass region. That's partly achieved by drawing extra amplifier current through the





“Musically speaking, this is a very engaging little floorstander, capable of distinguishing the innate quality of any given recording.”

region where both main drivers are operating in parallel (such as below 600Hz). The main implication is that, unlike the Xen, the Xone no longer needs wall proximity to boost its bass region to match the midband. The impedance is still pretty easy to drive, staying above five ohms throughout, though a rather obvious ‘bump’ at 125Hz indicates a resonance that may be related to the columnar shape.

In fact, the enthusiasm of its port output, and the latter’s proximity to a major mode in our listening room, made finding the best position for the speakers quite tricky. At our ‘normal’ free space sites, fronts 1.1m out from the wall, there was too much mid-bass output, and it wasn’t until the speakers were a full 1.5m out that this mid-bass peak was largely avoided. While the bottom end still wasn’t particularly smooth or even, decent extension to 30Hz in-room was now achieved.

The overall tonal balance is pretty well ordered through the bass and lower midband, but the smoothness from 600Hz up to 3kHz that so characterized the little Xen is unfortunately not repeated here. Rather, the Xone’s output peaks up about 2-3dB around 900Hz-1.3kHz, and then shows an obvious notch at around 1.8kHz.

Sonically, and when optimally positioned, the Xone has a dry, cool bottom end, and a slightly forward overall character. Detail is notably

clean, coherent and well projected, though this does mean that poor quality recordings and compressed material can sound rather unforgiving and sometimes even a little aggressive and fatiguing, especially if the volume is turned up high.

Although it could have more weight and drive, the speaker has good agility and an essential cleanness at the bottom end. It never ‘grumbles along’ with the music, but only makes itself heard when the material demands. It has a fine freedom from chestiness on male speech, though there is a slight thickening of textures nonetheless, and the sound could perhaps have a little more warmth. Cellos, in particular, sound too dry and lacking in ‘body’.

Although the dynamic range is wide and any boxiness well controlled and suppressed, one sort of wishes for more basic oomph and drive, and a more muscular delivery overall. There’s not much in the way of dynamic grip and tension here, though the music has good coherence and fine top-to-bottom timing.

Musically speaking, this is a very engaging little floorstander, well capable of distinguishing the innate quality of any given recording. Imaging is quite superb, with fine precision and focus in addition to the lack of boxiness and cabinet coloration. However, speech proved rather less convincing, as nasal and ‘cupped hands’ colorations were quite

obvious when compared to an established speech monitor like a BBC LS3/5a, and there was a degree of lower frequency thickening too. Although it wasn’t possible to compare the Xone with the Xen, the fact that the former’s measurements are much less even in the upper midband and presence would seem a likely reason for this speech coloration.

None of this stops the Xone delivering high entertainment value when playing music. Its lightness of touch and superior coherence certainly set it well ahead of the pack, as does the fine imaging and top quality veneered finish. Although the cool balance won’t suit every taste, the impressive detail projection and fine speed make this an impressive communicator, even when operating at very low levels. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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|---|--|
| VERDICT | |
| SOUND >>> 86% [Progress bar] | PRO Compact floorstander has a beautiful, high-performance, real-wood enclosure. It delivers a lively, open sound with bags of detail, alongside a dry but notably clean bass. |
| EASE OF DRIVE >>> 84% [Progress bar] | CON Price is high for a speaker with limited bass weight and warmth. Midband forward and projected, and speech shows nasal coloration. |
| BUILD >>> 91% [Progress bar] | |
| VALUE >>> 79% [Progress bar] | |
| CONCLUSION This pricey but exceptionally pretty ultra-compact floorstander uses classy ingredients to deliver a very clean and open sound with a dry, forward character. Imaging is superb, and the sound very coherent, though speech has some coloration. | |
| HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 83% | |

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



All change please!

No longer making one new product a decade, Gamut has moved its top CD player up several gears

PRODUCT Gamut CD3

TYPE CD player

PRICE £3,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x11.1x4.2cm

• Weight: 15kg • Analogue outputs: balanced XLR sockets, single-ended RCA phono sockets • Switchable coaxial digital output • 24-bit/192kHz upsampling

CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

It's all change at Gamut! Since Lars Goller took over two years ago, the company has been launching new products at the rate of about two or three per year. And now, Gamut's top disc player – the CD1 – has been replaced by the CD3. Its distinctive blue lights are a perfect aesthetic match for the D1 150 integrated amp that we reviewed so positively in *HFC* 275. But the question is, can this solidly built player live up to that precedent?

Gamut has taken a comprehensive approach to chassis construction and shielding. The CD3's interior is divided into three by a tunnel of stainless steel. This forms an inner chassis, which supports both the Philips disc mechanism and digital output board on rubber suspension. It also shields the power supply from the sensitive signal processing and conversion elements.

The power supply has separate toroidal mains transformers for the player's digital and analogue sections, in an attempt to minimise

any negative influence that one can exert on the other. The idea is to keep high-frequency noise out of the analogue stage, to minimise distortion in this final part of the signal chain.

To ensure voltage stability, the DAC board itself incorporates ultra-low-noise components. These are said to make for a better sounding player, with increased stability and reliability compared to its forebear. Prior to converting the signal, the CD3 uses a 24-bit/192kHz converter to upsample the digital signal. It takes this bitstream into the analogue domain via a Burr-Brown PCM 1792 24-bit DAC (replacing a Crystal unit in the CD1).

According to Gamut, the analogue output stage has been designed using a psychoacoustic (rather than purely measured) approach to making the best component choices. The selection of components therefore largely relied on subjective tests and not so much on objective lab measurements, even though the CD3 is claimed to measure very well.

The analogue stage's output can be extracted via both phono and balanced XLR sockets, the latter offering a 4.35Vrms output that doubles the single-ended voltage level and makes it eminently capable of driving long interconnects. The coaxial-only digital output has a switch beside it inscribed 'open' and '75ohm', somewhat cryptically, as is Gamut's style of late. Open actually means 'on' and

75ohm means that the output is terminated with a 75-ohm load internally and is thus 'off'. Sometimes a little clarity would be helpful!

This is a big player, but it still fits on a standard 17-inch rack. Nevertheless, it's a good-size lump with well-finished casework. The top plate has the brand name cut out, the footwear underneath appears to be in stainless steel and each foot has three silicone beads inset, in an attempt to minimise resonance in the chassis. Operationally, the remote is a touch idiosyncratic; pressing 'back skip' takes you to the previous track and pressing 'play' does not relieve one from pause mode. The lovely front panel buttons rely on words rather than symbols, which makes them a little slow to navigate and – should you use the dimming option to extinguish the lighting – you are left with no names at all. The drawer sled seems a little clunky for a player at this price, but we had a very early sample.

SOUND QUALITY

We used the CD3 with both balanced and single-ended cables. On the whole, the XLR-plugged persuasion gave a better result, but the difference is small enough for this not to be an issue if a partnering preamp has only RCA phono socket inputs.

It took a while to get to grips with the sound from this player. It doesn't have any obvious



“As with other Gamut electronics, this player carves out very solid and real imagery when the music has it to offer.”

foibles for one to grasp and it doesn't make a song and dance about any one audio aspect in particular. In this respect it's like the matching DI 150 amp: its exceptionally high resolution gradually makes itself heard and the more music you play, the more it becomes apparent that you are hearing things that were not previously noticeable. For instance, in our oft-used Brendel/Beethoven piano piece there seem to be fewer quiet moments between notes; this is because you hear more of the harmonics/decay from the preceding notes filling in the gap. An inky silence in-between may seem calmer and more attractive in some respects, but is not telling the whole story.

As with other Gamut electronics, this player carves out very solid and real imagery when the music has it to offer. Keith Jarrett's Carnegie Hall disc reveals an extremely weighty instrument sat upon a stage that Jarrett can't help but tap his foot upon. This inspires similar footwork from the listener in response. The CD player effortlessly reveals the charged atmosphere of Jarrett's first solo concert for ten years and the ambience of that iconic venue. Diana Krall's *It's Got To Be Love* is

likewise reproduced in starkly real dimensions, all three coming together to place her in the room between the speakers – though whether 'stark' is appropriate for such a sophisticated sounding recording is a moot point.

Dynamics have always been a Gamut strong point and we suspect it's because of its capabilities in this area that the CD3 really elevates itself into the front row of high-end players. In both micro-dynamics (the difference in level between notes) and energy (the ability to swing power precisely where and when it is needed), its dynamic quality is clear with both subtle and powerful music. This helps to make each piece seem more interesting and musically deep than usual. So engaging was the experience that several well-worn test tracks ended up playing their way to the end.

We were also struck by the ability to eek out space and light from Jaga Jazzist's *What We Must* disc, which usually sounds horribly compressed. The rendition it gave of *Oslo Skyline* was nothing short of awesome, the track opening up and revealing the multiple layers of instruments and effects, not to mention noise, albeit of the joyful variety. It

couldn't pull the drums up in the mix though, more's the pity; we suspect that only the sound engineer could have managed that trick.

We can imagine some listeners craving a more demonstrative sound from their discs, with beefier bass and more etched highs, but that would be to ask for a contribution from the player itself – a coloration, in fact. Subtle varieties of coloration can be found in lots of hi-fi and often to pleasing effect, but ultimately this gets in the way of the main attraction: the music. With a player of the CD3's calibre, you have to rely on the software to provide your bone-crunching lows and sky-touching highs. But have no fear, it will if you've got both Metallica and Arvo Pärt in your collection. Which, as a broad-minded, catholic tasted HFC reader, we assume you have. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



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| VERDICT | |
| SOUND >> 94% [Progress bar] | PRO Superbly balanced sound: dynamics, timing and imaging are all first class, while the tonal balance is right on the money. If you want absolute CD fidelity, this is your player. |
| FEATURES >> 82% [Progress bar] | CON Drawer mechanism on our sample could be slicker; remote operation is a little counter intuitive; unclear digital output labelling. |
| BUILD >> 92% [Progress bar] | |
| VALUE >> 88% [Progress bar] | |

CONCLUSION
Come the HFC Awards issue next year, rivals will have to raise their games to stay ahead of this Danish player. It has superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and ultimately an irresistible ability to draw you into the music.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%

a Cyrus system is not just for Christmas
– it's for life!



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

AWARDS 2006

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

CD PLAYERS

CYRUS CD6s

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

AWARDS 2006

CD PLAYER

BEST CD PLAYER £1000-£1500

CYRUS CD8x

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

AWARDS 2006

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £750 - £1250

CYRUS BVS2

Our systems will make your Christmas truly amazing
— you could ask Archie, but he is a dog and the headphones were
Photoshop'd in by the photographer :)



Back to basics

After years in the home cinema wilderness, this amp marks Yamaha's return to its stereo roots

PRODUCT Yamaha AX-497

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £300

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

The death of stereo may have been announced by multichannel-minded commentators some time ago, but Yamaha is just one of several big names to have announced a whole new range of stereo components recently. Of the two amplifiers in Yamaha's range, this is the upmarket offering.

The basic specification holds no surprises, with five line-level inputs plus phono (MM only) and two recording outputs. One of these is marked 'MD', though Yamaha currently offers no MD products – there is a cassette deck, though! Tone and balance controls are bypassable and are neatly concealed behind a drop-down panel. The claimed output power of 85 watts per channel is easily surpassed in practice, with a comfortable 100 watts available on a continuous basis and some 120 watts or more on peaks.

Internal construction is likewise par for the course. The frame transformer and mostly single-sided circuit boards would have raised no eyebrows 20 years ago. Closer inspection reveals some more modern circuits, including the surface-mounted ICs that handle source switching. Output is via a single pair of bipolar

transistors per channel, mounted on internal heatsinks, and the volume control is a motorised mechanical potentiometer.

Yamaha's publicity for this amplifier makes extensive use of buzzwords (we particularly like Total Purity Audio Reproduction Technology or 'ToP-ART') but it's clear that this is an evolutionary rather than revolutionary product.

SOUND QUALITY

The AX-497 has an essentially clean and tidy presentation, no obvious foibles in the coloration department, good extension at top and bottom of the range, and a generally open approach to dynamics and imaging.

Few will fail to appreciate this amp's sense of space and freedom in the upper midrange and treble. In this area, it truly approaches high-end performance and arguably excels most sub-£500 amps.

That must be balanced against the lower midrange, which seems to lack the tonal purity of, say, Marantz's PM7001. It's not grossly coloured but all the same there is a certain quality to it that deviates from neutrality and slightly points up instruments in the tenor range such as cellos, low saxophones and male voice. Sometimes this kind of subtle coloration sticks out on first listening but soon fades, sometimes the opposite; in this case, we found it more noticeable the longer we listened. Most folks won't find it unpleasant, but it's worth listening out for.

Moving down to the true bass, there is plenty of depth and decent weight with the Yamaha, but in the end control is not the best around. Again, this is a trade you may well be prepared to make. Few budget amps make more than a valiant attempt at this anyway and the odd moment of imprecision on ultra-low notes and bass drum hits is not too distressing.

We were glad to make the acquaintance of the AX-497. In terms of overall achievement, it scores highly and yet its particular strengths and weaknesses distinguish it from its competitors. Recommended for audition. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 79%



FEATURES >> 87%



BUILD >> 83%



VALUE >> 88%



PRO

Open and detailed upper midrange, with superb space around instruments and hence some highly plausible imaging. For the money, this is well worth a look, even in the face of the competition.

CON

A little coloration in the tenor register is a bit much with some speakers, and bass isn't the best controlled.

CONCLUSION

While it isn't all things to all men, what this amp does well it does very well and if you value clarity on female vocals and high-pitched instruments you should certainly hear it. With the right speakers, this could make a lot of hi-fi for not much cash.

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



Cutting edge

Ruark has slashed the size of its classic Sabre standmount and the result is highly emotional

PRODUCT Ruark Sabre III

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £899 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20x33.5x27cm

- Weight: 8kg • 27mm textile dome tweeter
- 150mm pulped fibre cone bass/mid driver
- Sensitivity: 86dB • Impedance: 8 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01702 601410 # www.ruark.co.uk

Twenty years ago, Ruark gave the world loudspeakers named after ancient armaments: the Broadsword and the Sabre. The latter morphed into 'MkII' form in the late 1980s, then ten years back it quietly went out of production.

Happily, the Sabre is now back in MkIII form and looking rather different to its predecessor. For a start, it's about two-thirds of the size of

the original, which was conceived in the days when beefy standmounts were still domestically acceptable. Just as fundamental is that the newcomer is a reflex-ported design rather than its infinite baffle forebear. Both drive units have changed; the main bass/mid driver is an inch smaller in diameter, with a 95mm pulp cone in a 150mm chassis, and the tweeter that was once polyamide has become a 27mm textile dome.

So, while the name may be the same there is very little in common between Sabres II and III. Apart, that is, from Ruark's high-quality finish, the company using real wood veneers – natural oak or rich walnut as standard, with yew or rosewood available at extra cost – and shiny gold plated fixings to produce a satisfying impression of quality that's more than skin deep.

But it's not easy to see why this speaker is as good as it undoubtedly is. There are no hi-tech drivers, fancy materials or silver-plated terminals for retailers to point out, just down to earth, proven technologies and a high standard of finish.

This, however, could well be the key to its success. Many speaker designers pick on something to 'big up', something that they can describe as new and able to solve all the ills of what's gone before. But when you go back to what actually went before, those problems don't seem so horrendous – in fact, if they hadn't been highlighted you'd hardly notice them.

Simple solutions often out-perform the latest whizz-bang technologies if they're well executed.

Ruark puts it down to a number of factors. The voicing, for instance, is done almost entirely by ear; Ruark uses measurements to



make sure that things don't go too awry, but the balance that the company chooses is a subjective one. The treble is lifted, apparently, which Ruark can get away with thanks to the quality of the SEAS tweeter – a new design with a larger than average dome and no ferrofluid. This allows the dome to be quicker and more agile than fluid-damped designs but also means that power handling is limited.

The bass unit has a vented spider and a very open cast frame, which should improve speed. Its paper cone may not be very different but it's a material that has proved itself hard to beat, thanks to good internal damping and a high stiffness to weight ratio. The crossover is a damped, second-order network that uses air-cored inductors. Again, nothing too clever – just proven audio technology.

A small cabinet is intrinsically stiff and the quality of finish is exemplary, so it's an attractive and inert little speaker. The finishing touches are good, too – we particularly like the small silver medallion set into the rear panel that denotes the company's craftsmanship credentials. Bi-wire terminals remain in place for those with two runs of speaker cable.

SOUND QUALITY

The voicing that Ruark has chosen is very strong on communication. It does err on the revealing side in the treble but the tweeter is up to the job and there is no sense of brightness. Instead you get openness, speed and dynamic expression. Next to the stronger elements of competition at this price point, there is a shortfall in power handling and scale, but the Sabre III has more charm than most and you soon forget about its lightweight balance.



“It’s sonic qualities like these that keep you listening because they bring out the emotionally engaging elements in the music.”

In fact, if you put on something heavy, the bass weight seems sufficient, especially when combined with the good image depth, power and timing that are served up alongside it. All the while, the treble exposure tends to deliver more texture and decay than usual.

The key to this speaker's appeal does not lie in the tonal domain but in the more critical timing one. We are naturally able to filter out or hear through variations in tonal balance, but have no capacity to make up for deficiencies in a system's timing capabilities. The Sabre III is particularly strong here, delivering a sense of rightness about the tempo that puts it above the crowd.

Voices work extremely well, possibly as a result of the balance but also because the midrange is articulate and revealing. You hear much of the character that is on the recording and nearly all of the subtlety, which is no mean feat. This is not a particularly dynamic speaker, yet one gets the impression of good dynamic range. Given the average power handling, the noise floor must be good and low. And as speakers don't have an intrinsic noise floor, this means that

there is very little overhang; notes stop and start quickly, so they don't blur those that follow.

This quality, when fed with an emotionally powerful piece of music, can make for lump-in-the-throat inducing

experiences. Gillian Welch's *14th of April* is just such a song, but it doesn't always have the power that the Ruark was able to elicit. A moving experience, no less.

At the asking price, there are alternatives that deliver more bass power and volume level potential, but you won't find one that betters the timing and communication skills on offer from the Sabre III. It's qualities like these that keep you listening because they bring out the emotionally engaging elements in the music.

While the power and energy of music is important, it is nothing without the intrinsic message and that's what the Sabre III specialises in. In the context of the standmount competition at this price, this Ruark has a small but significant advantage in nearly all musical respects. If you're more interested in music than fire-power, you really should hear a pair. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

| VERDICT | |
|--|--|
| SOUND >> 86% | PRO Excellent timing and a lovely midrange deliver real musical emotion. High-quality build and finish ensure it looks great, too. |
| EASE OF DRIVE >> 83% | CON Limited bass grunt and power handling. Given the size and sensitivity, dynamic range is good – but there are more dynamic-sounding speakers out there. |
| BUILD >> 89% | |
| VALUE >> 89% | |
| CONCLUSION It's a welcome return for this cute standmount from Ruark. The straightforward engineering and high finish quality combine to make a speaker that is good looking and even better sounding. All power to its blade. | |
| HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88% | |

Brilliantly Capable



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Back in DAC

There is still a market for outboard DACs, especially where computers are involved

PRODUCT Russ Andrews DAC-1
TYPE Digital-to-analogue convertor
PRICE £599
CONTACT 0845 3451550 www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews is best known for accessories like Torlyte and Kimber Kables, but of late the company has been expanding its electronics range. The latest tranche of these come in nicely built, half-width cases, designed to be compact enough to sit alongside your computer. This is an undoubtedly recognition that more and more of us use PCs (or Macs) for entertainment as well as more prosaic tasks.

The new range includes a power amplifier, preamplifier/headphone amp and a D/A convertor, the DAC-1. April Music, which builds Stello electronics in Korea, makes all three for Russ Andrews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Stello's 100 range looks exactly the same; the difference lies in the power supply, which has been redesigned for the DAC-1.

The unit is well equipped on the inputs front, with socketry for electrical, two optical and USB digital connections, the latter being specifically for computers. For PCs and Macs without a digital audio output, the USB connection hooks up to a soundcard within the DAC-1. Perhaps this is why the DAC-1 is marketed as a no-compromise 'external soundcard'.

On the front panel, there is a switch that gives you the option of upsampling the signal. The DAC-1 uses a 24-bit/192kHz Delta Sigma converter and can accept signals up to 24/96 (higher sampling rates can't work with coax).

Supplied along with the DAC-1 are a one-metre PowerMax mains cable (with a retail value of £29.95) and a basic USB cable to get computer users up and running.

SOUND QUALITY

We used the DAC-1 primarily with CD players acting as transports, because – short of using a stand-alone CD transport – if sound quality is the issue, they are pretty much unbeatable. Hooked up with Chord Co's Signature digital interconnect, the results produced were pretty impressive with players at both affordable and ambitious prices. Initially a Townshend TA 565 was used, a machine that has proved its worth as a CD transport on more than one occasion in our tests. By using the DAC-1 in place of the onboard convertor, the sound grew a little more robust and forthright in nature, but remained pretty close to that of the whole player, which given its high price is a result in itself. The DAC produces a strong sense of imaging with acres of space and depth, alongside distinct and precise timing. Treble is clear-cut, producing a strong sense of the acoustic in each recording and pulling out oodles of detail.

Of the upsampling options, the 192kHz position gives a more open sound, while the bypass seems a shade more natural. However, this result seemed to vary with recordings and in the long term, the 192kHz upsampled setting produced the best results for us.

With a less exalted CD player – in the form of an ancient TEAC RW-800 – the increase in refinement, vitality and precision brought out by the DAC-1 was nothing short of dramatic. It turned a lacklustre performance into a killer one that surprised us all. Rotel's RCD-06

(reviewed in *HFC* 286) also benefited with increased focus in its imaging and greater resolution of low-level detail, but the upgrade was more subtle.

Using the headphone/line output of a MacBook laptop direct and taking the USB output via the DAC-1 resulted in a more relaxed and calm sound from the 'external soundcard'. This wasn't as mighty an upgrade as with the TEAC CD player, but the degree of improvement with computers will vary greatly, depending on the hardware involved (Macs have a good reputation for sound, which might explain the small improvement we heard).

The Russ Andrews DAC-1 is a lively and precise sounding convertor, and while some might crave a slightly more relaxed sound it's very hard to criticise at the price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



FEATURES >> 89%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 90%



PRO

Images and times well, does wonders for older CD players. Wide input selection makes it ideal for computer-savvy audiophiles, too.

CON

Home PC users may find it too big for cluttered desktops. Level of improvement varies with the quality of source and digital output – Mac users may not hear big differences.

CONCLUSION

If you want to breathe life into an old CD player, the DAC-1 is a stunner. And it gives you the option to improve the sound of your computer and digital TV sources to boot! Very hard to beat and where's the competition?

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%

Atlas Compass

TYPE Digital interconnect cable (coaxial)

PRICE £50 (1m terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 0800 731 1140 🌐 www.hi-fi.org.uk

Since last we looked, Atlas's range of cables has expanded considerably and now covers pretty much all bases, across the range of audio requirements (short of the monumentally expensive). This is the middle of three digital/video cables and as such is probably the one most likely to appeal as an upgrade to basic CD transport/DAC installations. It's a classic, no-nonsense, 75-ohm coaxial cable of good construction, using a stranded centre conductor of high purity copper and a tape and braid screen for good interference rejection. The dielectric (insulation) is foamed polythene and Atlas fits some rather nice phono plugs, which feature direct gold plating over brass – some subjective evidence appears to indicate that the usual nickel intermediate layer has a sonic effect, though it's hard to imagine why or how.

Be that as it may, this cable affords no grounds for knocking the direct gold plating approach as the overall sound is very good. Differences between competent 75-ohm



digital interconnects are typically not enormous, but they are often audible. With the various transport and DAC combinations we tried, this cable consistently gave better fine detail and imaging than cheap and giveaway cables, and indeed it held up pretty well against a 'reference' handmade cable of very extravagant construction. Tonally there's little in it, but added detail often slightly improves the perception of bass tunefulness and treble

air and that proved the case here. At this price, we'd say this cable is fine value. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Holds its own against similarly-priced digital links we've tried, offering notably good sonic insight.



Russ Andrews Sound Solutions

TYPE Book

PRICE £10

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews (the man) has been an audiophile for decades. Russ Andrews (the company) has spent the last 20 years supplying useful accessories to audiophiles. This 122-page guide is a distillation of all those years of experience that Russ Andrews (the man and the company) has accumulated in improving the overall performance of a wide range of hi-fi equipment.

Divided up into five sections, covering general upgrading, mains improvements, cables, supports and room acoustics, this is more than just a glorified brochure for Kimber Kable and Torlyte. That said, these products are recommended throughout. The research could do with some methodology (there's no real differentiation between the rational and the distinctly left field), but the work Russ Andrews has put into the project is unquestionable.



Even the most sceptical observers admit that the acoustics of the room make a big difference to the listening experience. Russ Andrews suggests bookshelves as both sound absorbers and diffusers; this is at once a useful, practical and inexpensive alternative to room treatment. Advice like this makes the book well worth a read.

Many of the ideas Russ Andrews has championed over the years have become part of established hi-fi thinking, but some of the theories promoted here remain contentious. That's part of the joy of hi-fi, though, and *Sound Solutions* will help you experiment your way to good sound. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
This practical guide covers a lot of ground and whatever your level of hi-fi knowledge, you will learn from it.



Philips SHN9500

TYPE Noise cancelling headphones

PRICE £150

CONTACT ☎ 0906 1010 016 🌐 www.philips.co.uk

This is not the only noise-cancelling headphone on the market, but the concept is still a fairly rare thing. The idea is simply that a microphone built into the outside of the earpiece picks up ambient sound which is then added, in inverse phase, into the signal applied to the driver of each channel so that the net result is a much reduced level of outside noise. It sounds brilliant but in practice is restricted to low-frequency sounds such as the engines of planes, trains and buses – which covers plenty of likely applications. It also means that you need to fit a battery (one is supplied but we recommend rechargeables for regular users) and also need to remember to switch the headphones off after use!

If the battery is dead or you don't need the noise cancelling, the SHN9500 works as a perfectly normal headphone and actually sounds very decent. It's also gratifyingly comfortable, with soft earpads that fit round all the ears we tried. But we've mixed feelings

about the noise cancelling part of the equation. It does work reasonably well, but then it also boosts the level of the incoming signal, which obviously boosts one's perception of its efficacy. And the built-in amplifier that performs said boosting is not of the greatest quality. On the other hand, in noisy environments that's probably not so very crucial. The true audiophile desperate for music on the move will probably prefer Etymotic noise-blocking earphones, but this has its place. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

The end result isn't quite as impressive as one might hope for. Good results in passive mode, but expensive.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **73%**

van den Hul MC Silver IT MkIII

TYPE Analogue interconnect cable

PRICE £2,250 (1m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.henleydesigns.co.uk

MC Silver IT MkIII's three central cores are designed for balanced interconnects but can also be used to build a single ended cable. Conductors are oxygen free copper that is mechanically silver-plated. These are insulated in Teflon and double shielded for maximum noise rejection. The external red jacket is in vdH's preferred Hulliflex EHD, a halogen-free plastic with very sound ecological qualifications. Terminations are vdH's own high-quality varieties.

This flexible cable does a phenomenal job of resolving the last degree of musical detail. Unlike other supposedly high-end cables, the treble is very well extended and totally clean. So many interconnects create slight high-frequency distortion that one starts to suspect source components to be at fault, but this van den Hul proves that even expensive cable is fallible. MC Silver IT MkIII produces totally realistic and palpable tonal rendering. The bass isn't as demonstrative as some, but it is totally convincing, powerful and weighty.



The cable also has a strange ability to make other interconnects sound 'loud' or distorted, presumably by virtue of an extremely clean, neutral balance and high transparency. This lets through both the fine detail that gives each note realism and the energy that enlivens the music overall.

Over two grand is 'excessive' for an interconnect cable. But, although there is like priced competition aplenty, van den Hul's MC

Silver IT MkIII is in a class of its own and it does deliver the goods. Audition at your bank account's peril. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

We've not heard lower distortion from a cable, but the price is not sensible outside of the very high end.

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

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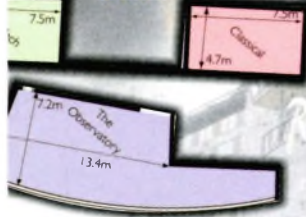
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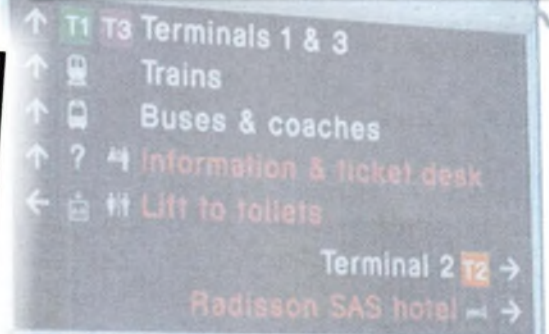
LEVEL 9

Demonstration Suites



LEVEL 1

Demonstration Suites and Market Place



Historically the North of England has hosted the biggest and best in Home Entertainment Shows, and Northern Sound & Vision is proving that. Key to its success is the choice of venue with it's superb location, staff, access & and support services. Show enjoyment means all these

things, and crucially to see and hear things that are simply not available on the average high street, demonstrated by the experts. Going to a show should be fun and great value and that's a fact that the organisers 'Chesterfield Communications' have always held dear. "That's why", says the organiser, "that Northern Sound & Vision has such a great atmosphere, all of us look forward to those two special days in January when we all appreciate a lift.

STAY OUT

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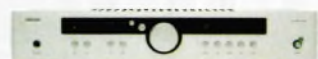
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GROUP TEST AND LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

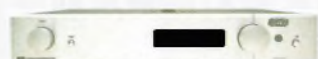
AMPLIFIERS

The latest batch of stereo integrations around the £500 mark go head-to-head

ON TEST



Arcam A70
£500



Creek Evo
£495



Marantz PM7001 KI
£550



NAD C372
£500



Onkyo A-9555
£450



Rotel RA-06
£499

This must be one of the most closely-matched groups ever to appear in *Hi-Fi Choice*, at least in terms of price. Six stereo integrated amplifiers take the stand in turn, each costing within ten per cent of £500. Their features and facilities don't vary all that much, either, so there really is everything to win or lose in terms of sonic performance.

There's plenty of scope for making amplifiers with subtly different sound characters within the constraints imposed by a £500 target price. Massively different sound is likely to be a function of either a gross flaw or some faintly bizarre design decision, but it's the subtle differences that make one amplifier more pleasant or rewarding in the long term. It's also these sonic details that define an ideal solution for any particular listener with his or her partnering equipment, tastes in music and hearing characteristics.

Over the years that *HFC* has been investigating the ins and outs of audio, differences have become more subtle than they used to be (except possibly in the rarefied high end). This is simply because the basic quality bar has been raised, and raised again. That in turn is due to a general consensus on certain desirable technical standards and ways of achieving them. Perhaps surprisingly, though, detailed design approaches to this still vary considerably from one manufacturer or range to another. Study the circuit diagrams of the amps in this or any of our *Ultimate Group Tests* and you'll find plenty of divergence in approach.

And that's without even beginning to consider the emerging breed of digital amplifier, one of which is included in this group. Now, in specific cases, it's perfectly possible that two very

differently designed and built amplifiers may sound very similar, but in general it's far more likely that there will be differences between them. Our mission, as we see it, is to try to identify those differences and suggest how they may appeal – or not – to you the listener. In turn, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to take our findings and add to them the invaluable evidence of your own ears. (Fortunately, this magazine will not self-destruct in five seconds.)

In this way, we hope that you'll find your ideal hi-fi at your predetermined budget, a goal that once achieved can result in many years of blissful listening. Let battle commence! **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2 CD player
- ⊕ dCS Elgar DAC
- ⊕ Kimber, Furukawa and Bespoke Audio hi-fi cables
- ⊕ Pink Triangle PT TOO turntable with SME309 tonearm and Highphonic MC A3 cartridge
- ⊕ EAR 'The Head' step-up transformer

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ⊕ Percy Grainger *Shepherd's Hey*
- ⊕ Bertouch *Trio Sonatas*
- ⊕ Rossini *Petite Messe Solenne*
- ⊕ Little Feat *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*
- ⊕ Hinton *Sequentia Claviensis*

EARS USED

- As ever, we couldn't do this without the help of kind and knowledgeable souls from the industry who take part in our blind listening panel tests – this time:
- ⊕ Geoff Meads (Arcam)
 - ⊕ Ed Selley (Audio Partnership)
 - ⊕ Kulwinder Singh-Rai (Rai PR)



LISTENING TESTS

In classic *HFC* fashion, the centrepiece of the listening was a 'blind' presentation of each amp to a panel of expert listeners, in an attempt to remain free of prejudices and preconceptions. Listening levels were matched and the same programme of music was played through each amp with minimal distractions. In addition, each amp was auditioned more informally, at different listening levels to suit the particular character of each amp under test.

LAB TESTS

The amplifiers were measured with a variety of equipment, including a Hameg distortion measuring set and also items of audio equipment (ADCs and DACs) adapted to lab duty and reporting data for analysis to Cool Edit and Mathcad on a PC. This approach enabled us to build up a picture of the amplifiers performance under different conditions of frequency, level and load. This allows truly accurate assessment of published amplifier specifications and precisely determines the amplifier's characteristics under real-world conditions.

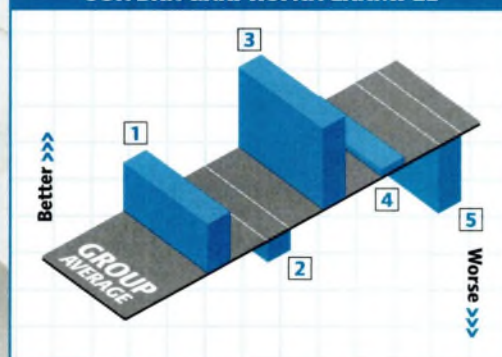
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

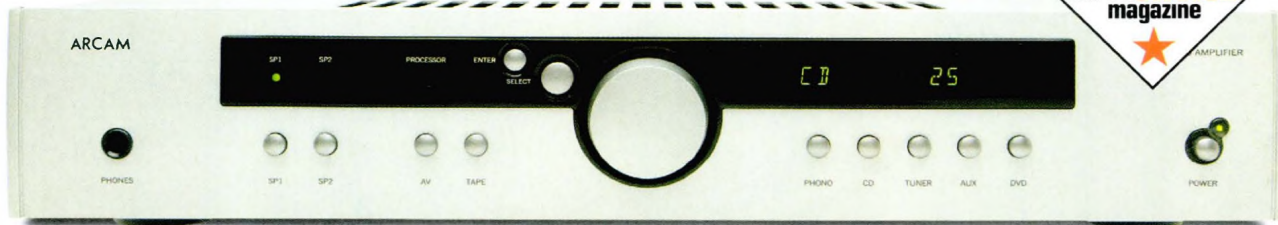
LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our unique 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average.

- 1) Dynamic power:** This reflects an aggregate of continuous and peak (instantaneous) power, giving an indication of power available under realistic conditions.
- 2) Frequency response:** This is a measure of how smooth the frequency response is within the audio band and defines the upper frequency (-3dB point) limit.
- 3) Dynamic range:** An indication of the background hiss level, as compared to maximum power output
- 4) Distortion:** An aggregate figure of measurements at different frequencies and levels.
- 5) Output impedance:** A measurement of how tight a grip the amplifier has upon the loudspeaker cones.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





£500 ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM DIVA A70

A lot of FMJ technology has trickled down to this new amp

This may be a brand new model from Arcam, but it is clearly a chip off the old block on the outside at least. Its fascia bears a distinct resemblance to existing models, with details like layout of knobs and switches, and the informative green display, all common to several other models from the firm. In terms of specifications, it offers no surprises either, with six line inputs and the 'must-have' feature of the last two or three years, a phono stage.

While we lacked the tenacity to trace the circuit (nearly impossible in these days of complex circuit boards), certain elements of the internal layout are clearly established Arcam stuff, too. With this amp, Arcam has brought a lot of its upmarket FMJ range's technology to the lower-price DiVA club. In terms of internal presentation, nothing we've seen from any of the really big players comes anywhere close to this unit and thanks to the wonders of surface-mount miniaturisation, you get a heck of a lot of amp inside the case.

Input switching and volume control are achieved electronically, and Arcam has not missed the chance to offer individual gain trims for each channel, balance control, power-up volume selection and volume step size options. At the other end of the chain, the output is handled by a single pair of high power bipolar transistors per channel, mounted on an internal heatsink and fed from a toroidal transformer and a set of smoothing capacitors of modest size. Even they (and a few other capacitors) get some mechanical damping.

SOUND QUALITY

While our listening panellists were not entirely at one in liking every aspect of this amp's performance, they clearly agreed that it has a particularly fine grasp of rhythm. It was found to have excellent pace and described as "vivacious". But to one listener, it sounded rather flat and lacking in involvement. Had this complaint been repeated by his colleagues, we might have thought the amp a bit of a flop; on



the contrary, however, they found it musical, coherent and convincing.

We're inclined to invoke psychoacoustics as an explanation and suggest that the way the A70 handles the leading edge of transients is the key to its varying appeal. Without there being anything so gross as a high-frequency boost, the attack on notes seems sharper than the average we're used to hearing, and it's no surprise that this makes the rhythm an outstanding success. All the same, not all listeners will care for that as a permanent feature and it's likely that a few, like our disgruntled panellist, will find it wearing.

Nevertheless, other listeners (on the panel and subsequently) who heard the review sample tended very much towards the view that this is a highly appealing amplifier, which achieves a happy balance between detail and musicality. Its stereo imaging is very good with depth probably as good as you'll find at the price, and resolution of individual instruments within an ensemble is also fine. The individual qualities of voices are well preserved, while low bass is both tuneful and well extended, lacking only a little weight compared with high-end references. Dynamics are full but unforced. Unless you have a real aversion to sharply defined leading edges, it's likely you'll find this a most attractive amplifier. **HFC**

| VERDICT | |
|--|---|
| SOUND >> 84% | Sound has real snap and pace to it, with natural dynamics and very good resolution of details. It may not suit everyone, but its vivacious sound, great feature set and good build quality add up to great value. |
| FEATURES >> 88% | |
| BUILD >> 85% | |
| VALUE >> 91% | |
| HI-FI CHOICE 88% OVERALL SCORE | |

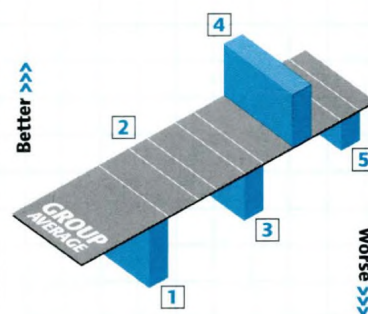


LAB REPORT

The least muscular of the group, the A70's healthy 60W output will prove ample for most speakers in domestic environments. More grunt is on tap into lower-impedance loads and dynamic peaks of over 100W are possible. Distortion is by just about every measure the best of the group and we particularly appreciate the way its level varies very little with frequency. This is one of the biggest differences between today's finest amps and 'low distortion' models of yesteryear, most of which were relatively rough at high frequencies.

Noise appears a weakness, but this is skewed by the group's excellent average in this regard; in overall terms, it's pretty good. There's some phase distortion visible in the high/low frequency intermodulation plot, suggesting the presence of a slightly unstable passive component or two. Frequency response is fine, though the phono input implements the IEC-recommended bass cut, -3dB at 20Hz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -40%
- 2] Frequency response >> 0%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 4] Distortion >> +35%
- 5] Output impedance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

| Measurement | Rated | Actual |
|---------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Power output (8 ohms) | 50W | 60W |
| Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms) | 0.005% | 0.003% |
| Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz) | ±0.25dB | ±0.3dB |



£495 01442 260146 www.creekaudio.com

CREEK EVO

Creek's Evo looks great, but is beauty only skin deep?

The Evo range is Creek's latest addition and has been available for just a few months. When we first reviewed this amplifier, with its partnering CD player, in HFC 283, we commented that Creek's no-frills reputation hardly fits with the super-smart appearance of Evo. Now, putting the amp side by side with its peers, we are even more impressed. Sleek, minimalist appearance, robust case with thick aluminium front panel and healthy power rating – have corners been cut somewhere inside?

Emphatically... no! Pulling off the lid reveals a very smart assemblage of high-quality electronic components, all through-hole types of good rating and mounted on a single circuit board. There's a large toroidal transformer feeding banks of electrolytic capacitors (Creek prefers multiple small units to lone big ones), while the bipolar output transistors are mounted on a healthy-looking internal heatsink. Inputs are switched by relays mounted right beside the sockets and the selected signal is buffered by high-quality op-amps before being passed to an electronic volume control.

Had we been shown this amp and asked to guess its price, the answer would have been considerably in excess of the correct one. It's pleasant to use and flexible too, with the option of upgrading the 'aux' input to phono (by installing a small internal circuit board). About the only areas where it lags the other amps are input and output provision: there's one less line input than most and only one set of speaker terminals. Worse things happen!

SOUND QUALITY

Reviewing the Evo sighted and with its partnering CD player, we felt it had a distinct character of its own. This time around, unaware of its identity and with the same source equipment that supplied the other amps, our unsighted listeners were less inclined to use the term 'character', but they still seem to have found some distinctive features to comment on.



They agreed with our finding that drive and attack are good, but seemed rather divided over the deepest reaches of the bass, one finding it very well extended, another just a shade dry.

Bass is only part of the formula for attack, though, and the Evo's midrange does appear to have a little coloration in its upper ranges, which adds some 'speed' to the sound. In anything more than very modest amounts, this can be tiring to listen to. However, Creek has kept this coloration well within the limits of comfort and has also balanced it well against the high treble, which is notably open and sweet. Melody lines thus come out spick, span and shining, and detail is very good.

Imaging is interesting. It's very precise and stable side-to-side, but with limited depth. There is great stability in the depth dimension, though, which does a lot to compensate. Meanwhile, the mild coloration has varying effects depending on musical forces, with vocals (both male and female) being typically lifted out of their backing. This is occasionally disconcerting but not unpleasant. Symphony orchestra can become strident on occasion, our listeners found, but smaller classical ensembles and most kinds of jazz and pop bands simply sound lively and energetic. If those last two adjectives (and add 'tuneful' for good measure) appeal to you, so will this amp. **HFC**

VERDICT

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| SOUND >> 83% | A useful range of abilities, which add up to an extremely detailed, superbly dynamic and punchy amplifier with a happy line in melody, too. Being outrageously well made for the price seals the deal. |
| FEATURES >> 80% | |
| BUILD >> 88% | |
| VALUE >> 90% | |

OVERALL SCORE 87%

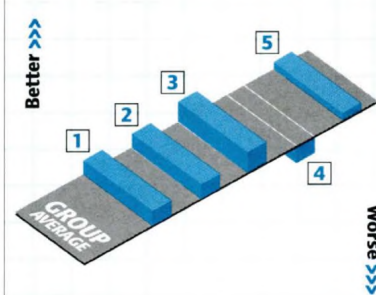


LAB REPORT

Creek's technical specifications tally closely with our own findings, including output power: a fairly typical 85W, which nearly doubles into 4 ohms. Dynamic peak power scores relatively well thanks to the large power supply capacitance available. Frequency response is wide and output impedance low across most of the frequency range, rising just a little in the high treble. Noise is good though a little behind the group's best.

Distortion is good but not outstanding, and its spectrum contains quite a few harmonics. In addition, it drops off quite slowly with decreasing output level and we'd wager that it is responsible for a good deal of the amp's character. However, it remains well suppressed at high frequencies and it shows minimal signs of phase modulation in the intermodulation plots. Power consumption is the lowest of any amp here, equivalent to about 2.5p per day running costs. There is no power standby.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >> +10%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +15%
- 4] Distortion >> -10%
- 5] Output impedance >> +5%

SPECIFICATIONS

| Measurement | Rated | Actual |
|---------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Power output (8 ohms) | 85W | 85W |
| Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms) | 0.1% | 0.01% |
| Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz) | ±0.3dB | ±0.25dB |

KEY TO PRODUCTS STOCKED:

AA = Audio Analogue **O** = Opera **UR** = Unison Research
G = GRAAF **D** = Diapason **B** = BCD Engineering
P = Pathos Acoustics **F** = Final **K** = Kemp Electronics
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O'Brien Hi Fi (020 8946 1528) **AA, O, UR, FT, K, HD**

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

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

MEDWAY

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

SURREY

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

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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

AVON

V Audio (01179 686005) **AA, O, T**
Audience (01255 333310) **O, P, AA**

BEDFORDSHIRE

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

SUFFOLK

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

DEVON

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

SOMERSET

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

OXFORDSHIRE

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

LEICS/NORTHANTS

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

WEST MIDLANDS

Midland Audio Exchange (01562 731 100) **D, G, P**
www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk

SHROPSHIRE

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

N. WALES

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

CHESHIRE

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

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Practical Hi Fi Bolton (01204-395789) **AA**
www.practicalhifi.co.uk
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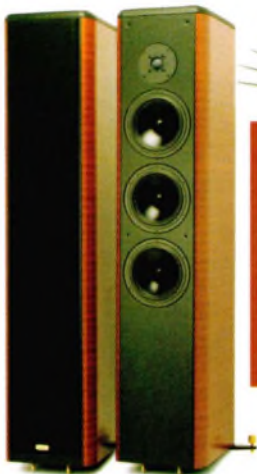
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For many years Opera have specialised in crafting beautiful loudspeakers at their factory in Italy's Veneto region. The new Linea Classica series continues this proud tradition, from the small but luxurious Mezza to the top-of-the-range Qunita. With its authentic Italian flair Opera is the natural choice for any music lover's system.

Loudspeakers that Love Music

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

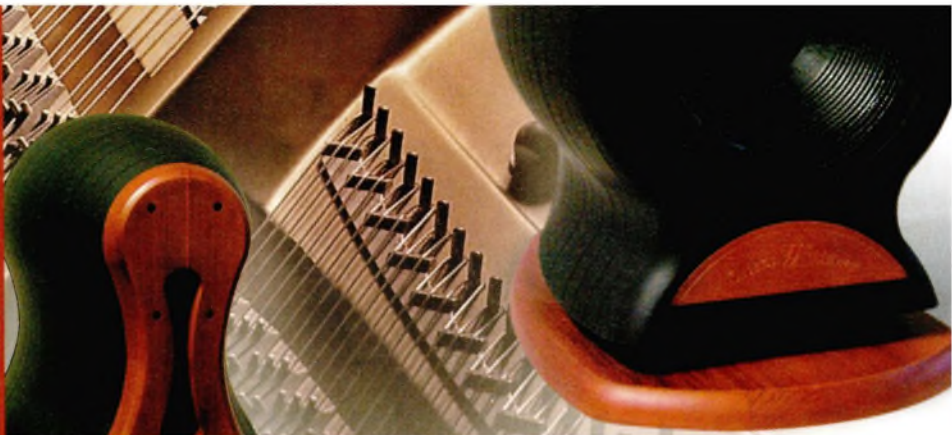


The Unorthodox Approach

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



Zingali



Zingali Loudspeakers has been my passion. A crusade since I first heard a pair of Overture Twos almost nine years ago.

Jack Lawson



Closer to the Client Name than to any loudspeaker you have ever heard...

Zingali Loudspeakers has been my passion. A crusade since I first heard a pair of Overture Twos almost nine years ago. Today the brand's signature model finally has arrived. It is a loudspeaker as beautiful as it is unconventional. It only bears the name of its creator and its owner. It is the first loudspeaker model to have no name, perhaps reflecting its neutrality.

It is the result of 20 years development to achieve the perfect loudspeaker; a transducer which adds no colouration and thickness, and subtracts no dynamics or harmonics. Coming from the land of Gucci and Ferrari, you need not ask if it is musical. It glues you to your seat; wherever you are in the room as there is no stereo sweet spot.



Happily, at 124cms height it is neither the size nor the shape of a wardrobe. At £15,995 per pair it offers very good value against

much more expensive and inferior flagship rivals.

The entire range, however, may be neglected for similar reasons of compact size and prices. Don't allow your expectations to limit your hopes. At £1,995 you may not believe it is

an upgrade from £5,000 loudspeakers, but the Overture Ones have also been refined over the years and employ exactly the same



technology; wave guiding which avoids the limitations of internal volume and external chamber (room acoustics).

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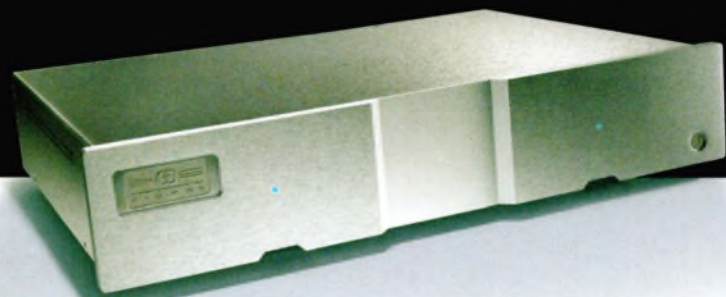
Anticipating a price increase in January 31, 2007, we have four pairs Overture Ones to sell at £1790 while stocks last. That's two speakers, two pedestals, including VAT and UK shipping. Home approval throughout the UK by arrangement as our prices are direct from the factory.

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Exceeding expectations....

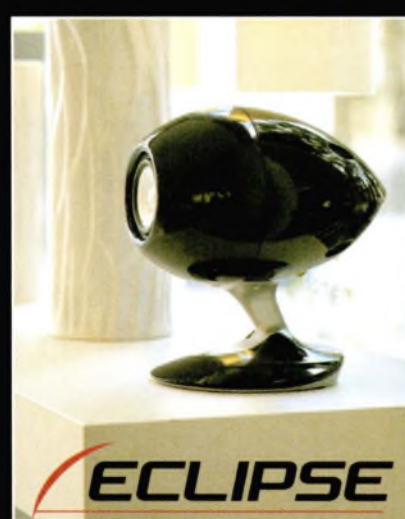


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CONCLUSIONS

Does a tight price grouping mean that all these amps sound the same? Not a bit of it!

Not for the first time, there's no obvious 'winner' in this group. Nor indeed is there a clear-cut loser. But we do find ourselves with distinct preferences.

We're a little baffled by the poor results we obtained from the Onkyo A-9555. The company's A-9755 and A-933 were well liked and our enthusiasm for them remains undimmed. However, the current contender was short on insight, detail and those subtleties that can transform a vague approximation of live music into something uncannily like the real thing.

The NAD C372 has its place, especially if you have a burning desire to play music to the entire street. In terms of watts per pound, it's a clear winner. But we're after a bit more than that here at *Hi-Fi Choice* and we'd really have loved a little less congestion and rather more air and precision.

Rotel's newcomer scored surprisingly low, too, as we've had some very jolly times in the past with the company's amplifiers. Here it's a lack of control that seems to bother listeners most, but there's some good bass around and

anything with a funky beat seems to be well served.

That leaves Marantz, Arcam and Creek. We've given the Marantz a slightly lower score overall than the others, but we can imagine some listeners ending up preferring it. Its refusal to put itself before the music is a distinctly praiseworthy attribute and if you like your hi-fi to be easily forgettable, in the best possible way, it's a damn fine amp.

All the same, our liking veers towards the Arcam and Creek for their combination of musical qualities, long-term pleasure and

resolution of details. Neither is absolutely neutral tonally, but experience suggests that this kind of departure from absolute honesty is something one soon learns to ignore. Meanwhile, the way each of them can reveal the inner workings of the most complex recordings is something for which there is no substitute. Neither gives the full story but for the modest sum of £500 they give a lot of it, differing in details of presentation. They are also both very well made and offer real pride of ownership. Fine hi-fi value! **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

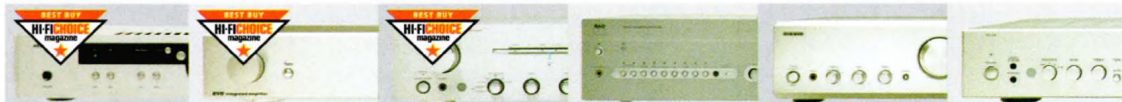
» Amps generate heat! In a rack, allow at least three inches clear above any amplifier to dissipate that heat output.

» Use decent cables in and out, and if your speaker cable has bare ends, be very careful to avoid frayed ends. Tighten terminals occasionally.

» It's 'greener' to switch an amp off at the mains than via standby. All the amps here kill the audio circuitry in standby so there's no sonic implication.

» Routing cables neatly together does more than just look good – it helps reduce interference.

STEREO AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



| MAKE MODEL | Arcam Diva A70 | Creek Evo | Marantz PM7001 KI | NAD C372 | Onkyo A-9555 | Rotel RA-06 |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| PRICE | £500 | £495 | £550 | £500 | £450 | £499 |
| SOUND | | | | | | |
| FEATURES | | | | | | |
| BUILD | | | | | | |
| VALUE | | | | | | |
| OVERALL | | | | | | |
| CONCLUSION | Good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail. Great all-round value for money. | A dynamic and punchy amplifier with a happy line in melody, too. Outrageously well made at the price. | A self-effacing amp that serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail. | A meaty powerhouse of an amp with strong, powerful bass but a lack fine detail. Great fun factor! | Slightly bright balance and some lack of insight make it harder to connect with the music. | Good bass but less control and precision than we'd like. Again, sense of fun is a redeeming feature. |
| KEY FEATURES | | | | | | |
| LINE INPUTS | 6 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 5 |
| TAPE OUTPUTS | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| PHONO INPUT | Yes (MM) | Optional | Yes (MM) | No | Yes (MM) | Yes (MM) |
| SIZE (WxHxD) | 44x8.5x29cm | 43x8x34cm | 44x12x36.5cm | 43.5x16x37cm | 43.5x15x40cm | 44x9.5x32cm |
| WEIGHT | 7.5kg | 8.6kg | 10.5kg | 11kg | 13kg | 7.7kg |
| REMOTE CONTROL | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BALANCED INPUT | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR | | | | | | |
| CLIP POINT (8 OHM) | 22V A | 26V G | 26.5V G | 40V E | 32V G | 27V G |
| FREQUENCY RESPONSE | ±0.3dB G | ±0.25dB G | ±0.25dB G | ±0.15dB G | ±1.5dB P | ±0.3dB G |
| DYNAMIC RANGE | 101dB A | 102dB A | 107dB G | 112dB E | 106dB G | 101dB A |
| DISTORTION | 0.003% E | 0.01% G | 0.005% E | 0.005% E | 0.15% P | 0.012% G |
| OUTPUT IMPEDANCE | 0.1 ohm A | 0.055 ohm G | 0.06 ohm G | 0.02 ohm E | 0.18 ohm A | 0.05 ohm G |
| POWER CONSUMPTION | 27W/1.3W | 15W/- | 22W/0.4W | 70W/2W | 38W/0.3W | 24W/3W |

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PowerMax review: Hi-Fi Choice, December 2006 (issue 288)

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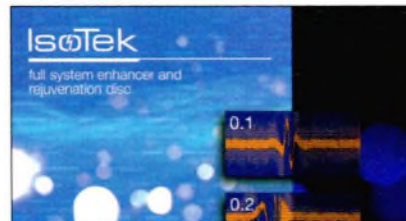
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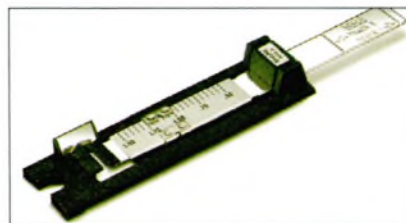
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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

Reviews you can trust

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

How to use this guide

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

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

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one

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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD

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



Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1 kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | | | ISSUE NUMBER |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|---------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| | | | | SACD COMPATIBLE | ELEC DIG OUTPUT | OPT DIG OUTPUT | CD-RW COMPATIBLE | CD TEXT | BAL ANALOGUE OUT | HEADPHONE SOCKET | |
| UP TO £1,000 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BB | Cambridge Audio Azur 640C | 250 | If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player | ● | ● | ● | | | ● | 285 | |
| BB | Cambridge Audio Azur 840C | 750 | Highly involving and rewarding music player at a sensible price | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | 286 | |
| BB | Creek Evo | 495 | A minute treble lift; otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value | ● | ● | ● | | | | 285 | |
| BB | Cyrus CD8x | 1,000 | Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400) | ● | ● | ● | | | | 270 | |
| BB | Denon DCD-700AE | 250 | Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay | ● | ● | ● | | | ● | 284 | |
| BB | Marantz SA7001 | 430 | Easy, relaxed sound arguably lacks true grit, but is extremely listenable from CD and SACD | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | 281 | |
| BB | Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8 | 1,098 | Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | 288 | |
| BB | Naim CD5i | 825 | As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price | | | | ● | | | 259 | |
| BB | Rega Apollo | 498 | Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer | ● | ● | ● | | | | 285 | |
| BB | Sony SCD-XA3000ES | 800 | A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 276 | |
| BB | 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 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BB | 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 | |
| BB | Ayre CX-7e | 2,195 | If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender | ● | | | | | ● | 281 | |
| BB | 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 | |
| BB | Copland CDA823 | 1,750 | Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too | ● | | ● | | | ● | 280 | |
| BB | Cyrus CD XI/DAC X | 1,900 | Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | 279 | |
| EC | 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 | |
| BB | Linn Majik | 1,950 | Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm | ● | ● | ● | | | | 283 | |
| BB | McIntosh MCD201 | 3,400 | Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control. | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | 284 | |
| BB | Marantz SA-15 S1 | 1,200 | Some inconsistency over imaging, but enjoyable performance, strong on detail | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | 276 | |
| BB | Meridian G06 | 1,695 | Great combination of all-round attainment with superb looks and build quality, plus superb remote control | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | 281 | |
| EC | Meridian 808: Signature | 8,250 | Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 263 | |
| BB | NAD M5 | 1,299 | Beautifully made and very versatile CD/SACD player handles most formats with very superior dynamic range | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | 285 | |
| BB | 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 | |
| BB | 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 | |
| BB | Sugden CD21SE | 1,395 | Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers | ● | | | | | | 271 | |
| BB | T+A CD1230R | 1,500 | Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering | | ● | | | | | 280 | |
| EC | Wadia 302 | 3,999 | A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 253 | |

SPECS BB **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.

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

DVD-AUDIO

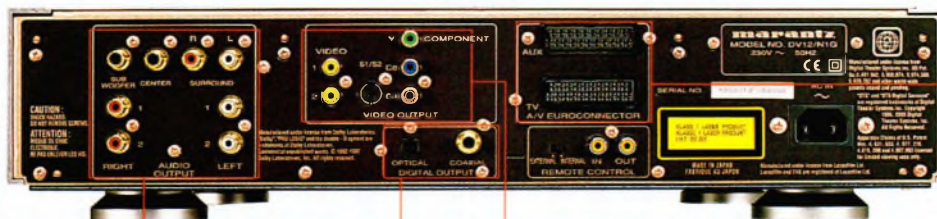
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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

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



CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | | | DVD-A COMPATIBLE | SACD COMPATIBLE | ELEC DIG OUTPUT | OPT DIG OUTPUT | HEADPHONE SOCKET | SCSI NUMBER |
| UP TO £1,000 | | | | | | | | | |
| BB | Arcam DiVA DV78 | 700 | Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money | ● | ● | ● | ● | | 254 |
| BB | Denon DVD-1920 | 250 | Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 276 |
| BB | Marantz DV7600 | 600 | A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 274 |
| BB | Onkyo DV-SP503E | 300 | Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 275 |
| BB | Philips DVP9000S | 400 | Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 274 |
| | Sony DVP-NS9100ES | 1,000 | Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts | | | | | ● | 274 |
| BB | Yamaha DVD-S2500 | 700 | Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 280 |
| Above £1,000 | | | | | | | | | |
| BB | Arcam 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 |
| BB | Denon DVD-3930 | 1,100 | Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing | ● | ● | ● | ● | | 287 |
| EC | Denon DVD-A1XV | 2,500 | Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 266 |
| EC | Linn Unidisk SC | 2,995 | Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 259 |
| BB | Marantz DV9600 | 1,500 | With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | 280 |
| EC | Meridian G98AH | 3,625 | Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too | ● | | ● | ● | | 265 |
| EC | Naim DVD5 | 2,565 | Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio | ● | | | | | 263 |
| BB | T+A SACD 1245 R | 2,000 | Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity | | | ● | ● | ● | 279 |
| EC | Townshend TA 565 CD | 3,000 | A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD | | | ● | ● | ● | 270 |

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes.

ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver.

HEADPHONE SOCKET Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Philips DVP9000S £400
An attractive and well designed DVD player with a great picture and good CD/SACD sound.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Arcam DiVA DV137 £1,250
The first 'universal' player from this top British brand is a cracker, sonically and visually.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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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 |
| BEST BUY | Avid Diva | 1,100 | A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results | 33/45 | ● | | | 247 | |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | 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 | |
| BEST BUY | Clearaudio Champion | 1,365 | Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended | 33/45 | | | ● | 268 | |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | Clearaudio Ambient | 4,220 | Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra) | 33/45 | | ● | ● | 271 | |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | 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 | |
| BEST BUY | The Funk Firm Funk | 450 | You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail | 33/45 | | | ● | 279 | |
| BEST BUY | The Funk Firm Funk V | 750 | Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer | 33/45 | | | ● | opt | 284 |
| BEST BUY | Goldring GR2 | 265 | Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality | 33/45 | | | ● | ● | 266 |
| BEST BUY | Micell Technodec | 767 | Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed | 33/45 | | | ● | | 268 |
| BEST BUY | Micell Gyro SE | 1,058 | New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm | 33/45 | ● | | ● | | 239 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | Micell 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | Rega P9/RB1000 | 2,498 | Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm | 33/45 | | ● | ● | | 228 |
| BEST BUY | Roksan Radius 5/Nima | 850 | Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested) | 33/45 | ● | | ● | | 248 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | SME Model 10A | 3,411 | Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm | 33/45 | ● | ● | ● | | 195 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | SME Model 20.2A | 5,274 | Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm | 33/45/78 | ● | ● | ● | | 186 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | 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 | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|--|----------------|----|--------------------|--------------|
| | | | | MM | MC | REPLACEABLE STYLUS | ISSUE NUMBER |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | Grado Prestige Gold | 110 | Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss | ● | | ● | 235 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | Lyra Helikon | 1,095 | Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality | ● | | | 215 |
| BEST BUY | Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III | 239 | High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound | | ● | | 270 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | van den Hul Condor XCM | 2,400 | A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for | | ● | | 265 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | Wilson Benesch Naked Analog | 1,450 | With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money | | ● | | 253 |

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------|---|-----------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|--------------|
| | | | | MM PHONO INPUTS | MC PHONO INPUTS | AU. GAIN | AU. IMPEDANCE | ISSUE NUMBER |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | Clearaudio Smart-Phono | 250 | Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound | ● | ● | | | 268 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| BEST BUY | 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 |
| EDITOR'S CHOICE | 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 |
| BEST BUY | Trichord Dino/Dino+ | 498 | Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility | ● | ● | ● | ● | 234 |

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

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

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

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

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Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



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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

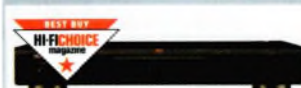
area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

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 |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------|---|
| FM TUNERS | | | |
| | Creek T50 | 550 | Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics |
| | Cyrus FM-X | 500 | A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply |
| | Denon TU-1500AE | 130 | Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto |
| | 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 |
| | Magnum Dynalab MD 90T | 1,195 | No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime |
| | Marantz ST7001 | 300 | FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper! |
| | NAD C422 | 180 | Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity |
| | Primare T21 | 600 | A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent |
| | Pure DRX-702ES | 210 | Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little |
| | Rega Radio 3 | 398 | Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer |
| | Rotel RT-02 | 279 | A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free |
| | T+A T1210R | 1,000 | High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too |

DAB TUNERS

| | | | |
|--|------------------------|-----|--|
| | Arcam DIVA DT91 | 450 | As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value |
| | Cambridge Audio DAB500 | 150 | Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet |
| | Cambridge Azur 640T | 200 | Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent |
| | Denon TU-1800DAB | 250 | DAB reception is as good as any and FM performance clearly benefits from Denon's long experience |
| | Pure Digital DRX-702ES | 330 | Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing |
| | Sony ST-SDB900 | 200 | Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear |

| SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|----------------|---------|-----|--------------------|----------------|--------------|
| WAVEBANDS | PRESETS | RDS | SIG STRENGTH METER | REMOTE CONTROL | ISSUE NUMBER |
| FM,M,L | 128 | ● | ● | ● | 251 |
| FM | 7 | | ● | ● | 283 |
| FM,M,L | 100 | | ● | ● | 281 |
| DAB,FM,M | 200 | ● | ● | ● | 283 |
| FM | opt | opt | ● | ● | 257 |
| | 200 | ● | ● | ● | 283 |
| FM,M | 30 | ● | ● | ● | 250 |
| FM | 30 | ● | ● | ● | 230 |
| DAB,FM,M | 99 | ● | ● | ● | 283 |
| FM,M | 20 | ● | ● | ● | 283 |
| FM,M | 30 | ● | ● | ● | 242 |
| FM | 100 | ● | ● | ● | 283 |

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.

For more Special Offers, Systems & Pre-Owned Bargains like these - visit www.billyvee.co.uk*

❖ Creek Evo + Epos M12.2 System - Save £210



Claim a pair of Epos M12.2 for HALF PRICE with this System. Prefer different speakers? You are welcome to visit for an audition to choose speakers that are right for you.

*Ex-Display & Pre-owned bargains can be found in the Marketplace section

| | | |
|---|------------|----------|
| Arcam A90 Amplifier New (2Yr G/tee) | (895.00) | £629.00 |
| B&W 704 Speakers Rosenut E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (1400.00) | £975.00 |
| B&W 703 Speakers Maple E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (2000.00) | £1395.00 |
| B&W 800D Nautilus Spkrs Cherry E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (13000.00) | £8459.00 |
| Linn Unidisk 2.1 Disk Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (4850.00) | £3495.00 |
| Linn Chakra 2100 Power Amp Blk E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (1400.00) | £1095.00 |
| Naim CDS3/XPS2 CD Player/P/S S/H (1Yr G/tee) | (7875.00) | £4595.00 |
| Naim NAP 300 Power Amp S/H (2Yr G/tee) | (5300.00) | £3495.00 |
| ProAc Studio 130 Speakers E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (1099.00) | £769.00 |
| ProAc Studio 140 Speakers E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (1399.00) | £975.00 |
| Quad 22L Speakers Maple E/D (2Yr G/tee) | (895.00) | £499.00 |



Sound Fantastic



Olsons new Sound Fantastic range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthline choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

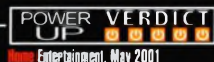
- ✓ Robust steel construction
- ✓ 13A Sockets
- ✓ 10A Panel Mount Fuse
- ✓ RFI 10A Mains Filter & Surge Suppressor
- ✓ External Earth Stud
- ✓ 2m x 1.5mm Screened Cable
- ✓ UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- ✓ Colour Black
- ✓ Specials to order

| TYPE NO. | NO. OF SOCKETS | OVERALL LENGTH | PRICE |
|----------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| HF 4 | 4 | 446mm | £83.72 |
| HF 6 | 6 | 557mm | £92.47 |
| HF 8 | 8 | 670mm | £96.70 |

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DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

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

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

Recordable CD

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

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

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

Hard drive

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

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

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

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



Yamaha CDR-HD1500 £599

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



Cambridge Audio Azur 640H £600

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



Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro £850

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | PRICE | COMMENTS | DECKS | HD CAPACITY (GB) | OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS | ELEC IN/OUTPUTS | MODEL NUMBER |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------|---|-------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| CD-R/RW RECORDERS | | | | | | | | |
| | Denon CDR-1000 | 400 | A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording | 1 | | | | 218 |
| | Marantz DR6000 | 400 | No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market | 1 | | | | 233 |
| | NAD C660 | 500 | Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue | 2 | | | | 243 |
| | Philips CDR802 | 300 | Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price | 2 | | | | 233 |
| | Philips CDR951 | 380 | An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style | 1 | | | | 205 |
| | Pioneer PDR-609 | 270 | Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay | 1 | | | | 243 |
| | Pioneer PDR-W839 | 350 | Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too | 1 | | | | 218 |
| MD RECORDERS | | | | | | | | |
| | Pioneer MJ-D508 | 200 | Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing that receives its recommendation owing to the price | 1 | | | | 205 |
| | Sony MDS-JE480 | 130 | Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price | 1 | | | | 233 |
| HDD RECORDERS | | | | | | | | |
| | Cambridge Audio Azur 640H | 600 | Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it | 1 | 160 | | | 276 |
| | Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro | 850 | Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system | 1 | 160 | | | 280 |
| | Yamaha CDR-HD1500 | 599 | Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality | 1 | 250 | | | 278 |

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

shadow audio

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- 30-day money back guarantee*
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- free speaker cable*
- free pair of speaker stands*

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.**

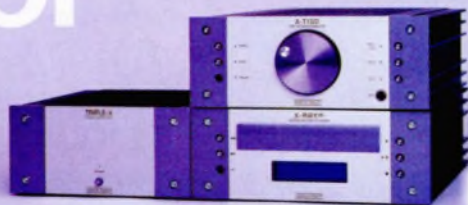


cool

x-factor

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

New styling - beautiful, advanced design and state-of-the-art circuitry give a performance comparable to products costing many times more. Should the competition be worried - definitely! **Available - now.**



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.

IsoTek / Nordost Special Offers

On the following IsoTek/Nordost mains filtration systems:

| | |
|---------------------|-------|
| IsoTek Nova | £1695 |
| IsoTek Titan | £1495 |
| IsoTek Sigmus (NEW) | £995 |
| IsoTek Gill Minisub | £545 |
| IsoTek Gill Solus | £325 |
| Nordost Thor | £1599 |

FREE delivery, FREE IsoTek mains cable worth £49 and a 30-day money back guarantee*

Nordost Thor

The Nordost Thor is an upgradeable solution to AC mains power distribution. By systematically improving the quality of the input and output power cords the performance of the unit increases dramatically. The THOR is a stunning achievement.

glow!

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

For many, valves bring a naturalness to the sound that once experienced is hard to live without.

Eastern Electric
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?

Want to move up to the next level in Valve Amplification?

Manley Labs
Manley Labs is a giant step-up in performance but not a giant step-up in price.

The Manley Labs range has won so many awards that there simply isn't enough room to list them all here!

Visit www.manleylabs.com for further product information. On each web site you can read the many wonderful reviews from the most famous reviewers and enthusiasts on the planet!

Manley Labs build products with a love and passion that is nothing short of inspiring...

The end result? Hi-Fi that really does stimulate the senses!



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Look out for these special red symbols next to some of our used/pre-owned items. You will only find these special symbols by visiting the used section on the Shadow Audio Web Site.

vinyl joy

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 it's 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



DK Design (NEW to Shadow)

JAW DROPPING Integrated Amplifiers from DK Design!! Reference and Signature models on demonstration. Visit our web site for more details.

sublime

ultimate

kW250S is the all-in-one reference box to own!

Musical Fidelity Products offer superb value for money and real pride of ownership.

The new kW250S super all-in-one incorporates a pair of 250 watt monoblock amps, a tube hybrid preamp, phono stage mc/mm, 24-bit 192k upsampling CD player, 24-bit 192k upsampling FM and DAB tuner, digital input on the back panel and ipod input on the front panel. Whew!

"For the life of me, and this is the true test of the kW 250S versus separates, I cannot find a way to duplicate what this unit offers at £4999."

Ken Kessler, HFN Aug 2006



A winning formula...

For more than 55 years, McIntosh has earned a supreme reputation for performance and reliability.

The exceptional longevity of McIntosh products owes to a design philosophy established with the very first McIntosh amp: that every component will be created with capacity so great that it will never be operated at or near its stress point.

McIntosh is one of our best selling brands and its easy to hear why...

go hyper!

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.

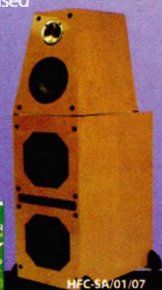


Hyperion HWS-733 £2800 pair

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.



HFC-SA/01/07



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Audiophile Powerhouse

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!

Sonic Bargain!

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

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

Dominic Todd, Hi-Fi World, April 2006

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NEW! Don't be fooled by the price - kW550 will take on the very best!

The kW550 is really gratifying to use. It has beautiful visuals and great build quality. Most important the sound is riveting. Huge soundstage vistas spread out between the loudspeakers, limitless dynamic range and sweet mutual tonal balance complete the picture. The kW550 can stand comparison with anything at any price from anywhere. It's that good.

Don't be fooled by the kW550's competitive price. If you want value for your hard earned cash as a opposed to a very expensive brand name trophy then the kW550 is worthy of very close examination.

New Monitor Range is set to challenge the very best...

New Speaker series from ATC. We love the new look. A new soft dome tweeter is used and its all change on the inside as well. Stylish monitor loudspeakers with a pedigree sound to match!
(SCM 7, 11, 19 and 40)

"With heavyweight construction and fabulous veneer, this is a classic, studio-friendly ATC design for the home. If you want to hear the nuts and bolts of favourite discs and are prepared to cope with their shortcomings, its nigh on unbeatable."

ATC SCM19
Hi-Fi Choice, October 2006





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staff favourites

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



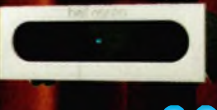
Eastern Electric Minimax Valve CD Player (Hi-Fi World Award Winner)



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



JungSon 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 superb new range)



McIntosh MCD201 (CD/SACD Player with volume)



JAS Audio Orsa Speakers (Hi-Fi+ Award Winner)



Clearaudio Ambient Turntable (A musical gem)



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



Musical Fidelity X-Series (MF has that true X-Factor!)



ART Loudspeakers Emotion Monitor (New to the Emotion family)



DK Design VS-1 Reference Integrated (A true reference among amplifiers!)



Hyperion HWS-733 Loudspeaker (The Hyperion 938 for a small room)



IsoTek Sigmas (Take your system to the next level!)



QinPu A-8000 Mk II Integrated Amp (A Hot Seller!!!!)

have you?



discover what's hot join
find save learn
used bargains

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...

HFC-SA/01/07

Merry Christmas!

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated

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

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

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

How to choose an amp

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



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

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

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

Q&A

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

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

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used.

Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

HOME CINEMA STEREO

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

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

TOP BUYS



Marantz PM7001 £350

If you thought the PM7200 was a great budget amp, just wait until you hear this! Its sound is so detailed and involving, you'll think it costs twice the price.



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 130 £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) | SS.F. NUMBER |
| UP TO £1,000 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Arcam DVA A65 Plus | 400 | Occasionally a touch bright, but a good all-rounder with decent detail and plenty of life | 5 | ⊗ | ⊗ | ● | 40 | 278 |
| ⊗ | Arcam DVA A70 | 500 | Has the measure of the next model up, the A80, in a slightly lower rated form, but with sonic advantages in some areas | 7 | MM | ● | ● | 50 | 286 |
| ⊗ | Arcam DiVAA90 | 850 | Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound | 6 | opt | ⊗ | ● | 90 | 286 |
| ⊗ | Cambridge Audio 640A V2 | 300 | Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp | 6 | | ⊗ | ● | 75 | 279 |
| ⊗ | Cambridge Audio 840A | 750 | Detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail | 7 | | ⊗ | ● | 120 | 286 |
| ⊗ | Creek Evo | 500 | Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable | 5 | opt | ⊗ | ● | 85 | 283 |
| ⊗ | Denon PMA-1500AE | 500 | Well set up to make the most of big-scale music, with copious power and drive, though slightly bright | 5 | ⊗ | ⊗ | ● | 70 | 278 |
| ⊗ | Denon PMA-700AE | 250 | One of a growing number of new low cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels | 4 | MM | ⊗ | ● | 50 | 284 |
| ⊗ | Marantz PM7001 | 350 | Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension - exceptional value for money | 5 | ⊗ | ⊗ | ● | 70 | 279 |
| ⊗ | Marantz PM7001KI | 550 | Building on an already fine amp, the KI variant offers superb bass and bags of detail | 5 | ⊗ | ⊗ | ● | 70 | 283 |
| ⊗ | Musical Fidelity X-T100 | 899 | By separating amp and TRIPLÉ-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical | 3 | ⊗ | ⊗ | ● | 70 | 288 |
| ⊗ | Naim Nail 5i | 699 | A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner | 4 | ● | | | 50 | 252 |
| ⊗ | Onkyo A-933 | 500 | Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener | 5 | ⊗ | ● | ● | 80 | 278 |
| ⊗ | Primare i21 | 750 | A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality | 4 | ● | | | 75 | 273 |
| ⊗ | Roksan Caspian M Series-1 | 1,000 | Improved version is as involving as ever but now with added focus and bass depth | 5 | | ⊗ | | 85 | 278 |
| ⊗ | Sugden A21a | 899 | This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence - an authentic classic | 5 | | | | 25 | 224 |
| ABOVE £1,000 | | | | | | | | | |
| ⊗ | Arcam FMJ A32 | 1,200 | Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical | 7 | ⊗ | ● | ● | 100 | 266 |
| ⊗ | Audia Flight TWO | 2,500 | Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks | 8 | | ⊗ | | 100 | 280 |
| | Ayre AX-7e | 1,995 | High end sound at a sensible price. Lacks the balls of less revealing designs but has precision in the timing department that is rare | 5 | | ● | | 60 | 284 |
| ⊗ | Bryston B100-SST DAC | 3,850 | A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC | 6 | ⊗ | ● | ● | 100 | 275 |
| ⊗ | Chapter Précis | 3,995 | Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined | 6 | | ⊗ | | 130 | 281 |
| ⊗ | Copland CSA29 | 1,900 | A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds | 6 | opt | ⊗ | | 85 | 255 |
| ⊗ | Copland CTA405 | 2,498 | Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed | 6 | MM | ⊗ | | 50 | 286 |
| ⊗ | Creek Destiny | 1,100 | A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music | 6 | | ● | ● | 100 | 286 |
| ⊗ | Densen Beat B150 | 3,000 | Gorgeous bass; slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too! | 6 | opt | opt | | 100 | 277 |
| ⊗ | Garant DI 150 | 5,700 | Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms | 6 | | ● | | 180 | 275 |
| ⊗ | Krell KAV-400xi | 2,698 | The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed | 5 | | ● | | 200 | 247 |
| ⊗ | McIntosh MA2275 | 5,400 | A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics | 5 | ⊗ | ● | | 75 | 271 |
| ⊗ | Moon Evolution i-7 | 4,750 | Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality. Very limited features, even by high-end standards | 5 | | ● | | 150 | 288 |
| ⊗ | NAO M3 | 1,899 | Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle | 7 | | ● | | 180 | 285 |
| ⊗ | Primare i30 | 1,500 | A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too | 6 | | ● | ● | 100 | 267 |
| ⊗ | Sugden A21SE | 1,995 | Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a | 4 | | ● | | 40 | 268 |
| ⊗ | Unison Research Unico 200 | 3,000 | Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design | 5 | | ● | ● | 200 | 269 |
| ⊗ | 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) | SS.F. NUMBER |
| UP TO £2,000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| ⊗ | Arcam FMJ A32/P35 | 1,980 | One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication | ● | ⊗ | 7 | ⊗ | ⊗ | 100 | 227 |
| ⊗ | Cyrus DAC XP | 2,200 | A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz | ⊗ | | 2 | | ● | | 266 |
| ⊗ | Densen Beat B-250/B-350 | 8,200 | Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured | ⊗ | ● | 6 | | ● | 125 | 270 |
| ⊗ | Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power | 1,098 | Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated | ⊗ | ⊗ | 6 | | ⊗ | 75 | 264 |
| ⊗ | Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x | 1,575 | Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design | ● | ⊗ | 6 | opt | ⊗ | 50 | 287 |
| ⊗ | Quad 99/909 | 1,650 | Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling | ⊗ | ⊗ | 5 | ● | ● | 136 | 256 |
| | Rotel RC-06/RB-06 | 598 | A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value | ⊗ | ⊗ | 5 | ⊗ | ⊗ | 70 | 285 |
| ABOVE £2,000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| ⊗ | Arcam FMJ C31 | 1,200 | Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little | ⊗ | | 5 | opt | ⊗ | | 273 |
| ⊗ | Border Patrol Control Unit | 2,995 | Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around | ⊗ | | 5 | opt | | | 277 |

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

Our favourite 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) | SCALE 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 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 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"/> | Halcro 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) | MODEL 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 |
| | Sony STR-D8798 | 250 | Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy | ● | 7 | ● | 100 | 273 |
| | Sony STR-D8795 | 300 | A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears | ● | 7 | ● | 100 | 260 |
| EC | Sony TA-DA9000ES | 2,600 | Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs | ● | 10 | ● | 200 | 253 |
| EC | 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 got superb purist 5.1 | | 8 | ● | 90 | 250 |
| | Arcam AWP700/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 |
| EC | Primare SP31.7/A30.5 | 4,200 | Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world | | 5 | ● | 120 | 238 |

SPECS KEY: **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

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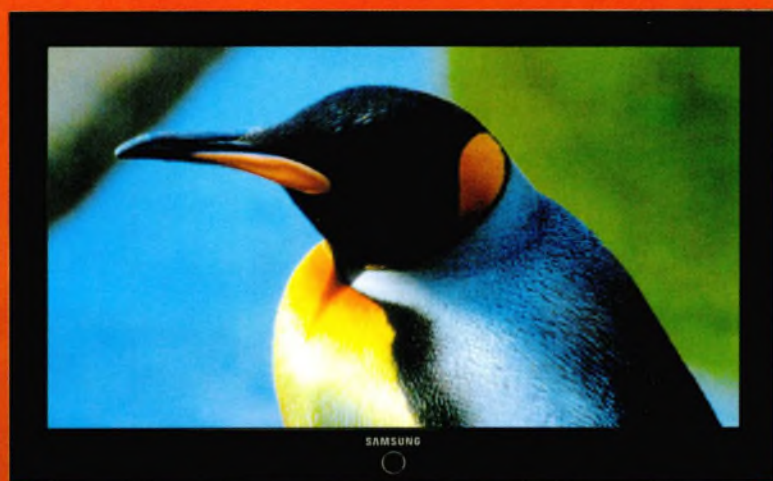
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STEREO SPEAKERS

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 produces 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 STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SIZE (W X H D, CM) | FLOORSTANDER | EASE OF DRIVE | BASS FROM (Hz) | FREE SPACE | CLOSE TO WALL | ISSUE NUMBER |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------|--|--------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| UP TO £1,000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic | 845 | Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness | 18,295,255 | | A- | 45 | | | 283 |
| | Acoustic Energy Linear 1 | 250 | Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless | 19,36,26 | | A+ | 50 | | | 277 |
| | ALR Jordan Entry L | 500 | Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency | 20,86,29 | | A | 23 | | | 279 |
| | ALR Jordan Note 3 | 1,350 | Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount | 24,537,315 | | A | 26 | | | 288 |
| | 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 | Floorstander could have greater dynamic expression, smooth and restrained sound is well balanced with bungs in place | 20,91,30 | | A- | 25 | | | 288 |
| | Castle Richmond 3i | 320 | Pretty real-wood miniature sounds superbly smooth and even, if dynamically weak | 17,33,23 | | A+ | 45 | | | 284 |
| | Castle Richmond 7i | 900 | Does all the musically important stuff flawlessly. A fine communicator that delivers reassuringly credible bass | 18,92,5,26 | | A+ | 47 | | | 286 |
| | Castle Compact Column | 550 | Compact, not so much that you need a sub to back up the bass, an elegant and engaging speaker for its size | 14,87,5,16 | | A- | 50 | | | 280 |
| | DALI Ikon 6 | 899 | Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound | 19,100,33 | | A | 37 | | | 271 |
| | DALI Ikon 7 | 999 | Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency | 20,114,34 | | A+ | 22 | | | 275 |
| | Dynaudio Audience 42 | 400 | An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price | 17,29,24 | | A | 40 | | | 215 |
| | Dynaudio Focus 110 | 850 | Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness | 17,30,28 | | A- | 38 | | | 279 |
| | Epos ELS 303 | 399 | Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail | 18,85,20 | | A- | 28 | | | 273 |
| | Epos ELS3 | 200 | Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate | 18,27,19 | | A- | 60 | | | 241 |
| | Epos M5 | 349 | Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority | 18,33,21 | | A- | 40 | | | 269 |
| | Epos M12.2 | 449 | A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration | 20,37,25 | | A- | 40 | | | 265 |
| | Epos M22 | 949 | Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband | 20,88,25 | | A- | 25 | | | 275 |
| | Focal Chorus 816 V | 1,000 | Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother | 28,100,37,5 | | A+ | 20 | | | 288 |
| | JBL Studio L880 | 700 | Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent | 22,99,37 | | A | 25 | | | 275 |
| | KEF iQ3 | 280 | Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter | 22,37,33 | | A+ | 40 | | | 284 |
| | KEF iQ9 | 800 | Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity | 22,94,33 | | A | 25 | | | 273 |
| | Monopulse 42A | 995 | Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained | 26,110,25 | | A+ | 28 | | | 271 |
| | Monitor Audio GS10 | 800 | More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive | 20,36,27 | | A- | 40 | | | 284 |
| | Monitor Audio Silver RS8 | 800 | Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms | 90,18,27 | | A | 33 | | | 276 |
| | Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i | 350 | The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes! | 16,5,85,29,5 | | A | 40 | | | 281 |
| | Naim n-SATS | 695 | Very discreet and informative, if a bit lean and forward. Just add an n-SUB for excellent all round results | 20,29,21 | | A | 50 | | | 268 |
| | Nbien DX-5 | 250 | Unusual shape miniature delivers generous scale, weight and dynamic expression for something so compact | 17,5,34,24 | | A- | 40 | | | 284 |

SPECS KEY SIZE W X H D (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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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--------|---|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| | | | | SIZE (WHD) (CM) | FLOORSTANDER | EDGE OF DRIVE | BASS FROM (HZ) | FREE SPACE | CLOSE TO WALL |
| | PMC DB1+ | 625 | Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced | 16,29,24 | | A | 50 | | 261 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | Triangle Antal Esw | 995 | Smoother than its predecessors, with a beautifully balanced bass and midband, though the top end is uneven | 20, 108, 34 | ● | A | 20 | ● | 288 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 | | | | | | | | | |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | Canton Vento 809DC | 1,800 | Quick, lively and agile, with fine overall coherence and expressive dynamics. A thoroughly impressive allrounder | 25,112,35 | ● | A | 30 | ● | 267 |
| | Canton Vento Ref 5DC | 3,499 | Strikingly handsome speaker has a studiously neutral balance with delightful midband analysis | 25,112,35 | ● | A | 40 | ● | 283 |
| | Chario Cygnus | 1,200 | Beautiful solid walnut sides. Port tuning suspect, but laid back sound has fine delicacy, imaging and refinement | 20,96,27 | ● | A- | 28 | ● | 275 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 joy de vivre | 23,39,27,5 | | A | 50 | ● | 274 |
| ECC | Focal 826 V | 1,250 | Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up. | 28,2,103,8,37,5 | ● | A | 45 | ● | 287 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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 |
| ECC | 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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STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------|--|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|------------|
| | | | | SIZE (WHD) (CM) | FLOORSTANDER | EASE OF DRIVE | BASS FROM (HZ) | FREE SPACE |
| | Meridian M3100 | 1,850 | Attractive and capable active (125w) with great imaging and strong bass. High neutrality and good power handling | 19,39,25 | ACT | 45 | opt | 280 |
| | Monopulse 82 | 2,495 | Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range | 27,110,25 | A | <20 | | 281 |
| EC | Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 | 3,500 | Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride | 24,121,37 | A- | 35 | | 264 |
| | Naim Ariva | 1,275 | Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter | 23,88,31 | A | 25 | | 259 |
| | Neat Elite SE | 1,499 | Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness | 20,90,18 | A | 25 | | 267 |
| | Neat Motive 1 | 1,200 | Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative | 16,92.5,20 | A- | 20 | | 276 |
| | PMC Wafer 2 | 1,650 | Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging | 335,57,5,10 | 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 |
| EC | PMC IB2 | 6,150 | Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power | 33,74,47 | A- | 25 | | 237 |
| EC | ProAc Response D25 | 2,995 | The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker | 22,107,25 | A+ | 20 | | 254 |
| | Rega R7 | 1,498 | Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character | 27,98,35 | A | 25 | | 271 |
| | Rega R9 | 2,498 | This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass | 17,103,39 | A | 20 | | 256 |
| EC | Revel F32 | 3,200 | Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound | 22,105,39 | A | 30 | | 265 |
| EC | Revel M22 | 1,800 | A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities | 22,37,30 | A- | 48 | | 274 |
| | Roksan Caspian FR-5 | 1,995 | Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer | 20,100,25 | A | <20 | | 279 |
| | Ruark Talisman III | 1,499 | No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals | 22,84,31 | A | 22 | | 259 |
| | Sonus Faber Concerto 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 | Standsmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests | 19,35,32 | A | 48 | | 246 |
| EC | Sonus Faber Grand Piano D. | 2,498 | The Grand Piano Domus has a fabulous physical appearance and delivers a clean, refined sound | 21,106,31 | A- | 32 | | 283 |
| EC | Tannoy Dimension TD8 | 4,000 | This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration | 31,86,30 | A- | 25 | | 240 |
| | Totem Model 1 Signature | 1,595 | Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband | 17,31,23 | A | 35 | | 277 |
| | Triangle Celius Esw | 1,395 | Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight | 20,117,34 | A | 22 | | 277 |
| EC | Triangle Magellan Concerto | 9,995 | Scintillating midrange and treble, with tuneful, well-timed bass - a thoroughly engaging musical ride | 28,149,34 | A | 35 | | 262 |
| | Usher Compass CP-6381 | 2,500 | Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build | 35,127,65 | A | 20 | | 270 |
| EC | Vivid Audio B1 | 7,750 | Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker | 27,110,38 | A- | 40 | | 261 |
| | WEGG3 Stellar 1 | 4,995 | A full-range sound from a small(ish) box is possible, but only if you are very careful about set up, room and amps | 35,97,45 | A- | 28 | | 275 |
| EC | Wilson Benesch Curve | 5,000 | Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package | 23,91,37 | A | 28 | | 254 |
| EC | Wilson Benesch ACT | 8,400 | Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter | 23,108,36 | A | 20 | | 252 |

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EB EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|--------|---|----------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| | | | | EASE OF DRIVE | NUMBER OF SPEAKERS | BASS FROM (Hz) | FREE SPACE | CLOSE TO WALL | ISSUE NUMBER |
| MB | 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 |
| MB | B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600) | 900 | Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures | A | 5 | 22 | ● | | 224 |
| | Castle CAV Sterling | 1,250 | Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard | A | 5 | 28 | | ● | 224 |
| | Dynaudio Audience 42 package | 1,142 | Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound | A- | 5 | 53 | ● | | 241 |
| | Final Sound Electrostatic system | 4,875 | Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency | A- | 6 | 20 | ● | | 251 |
| | Focal JMLab Electra package | 3,017 | Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer | A | 5 | 50 | ● | | 232 |
| EB | 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 |
| MB | 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 |
| MB | 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 MB BEST BUY EB EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------|---|-------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| | | | | SIZE (WxHxD (CM)) | POWER (W) | BASS FROM (Hz) | ISSUE NUMBER |
| MB | 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 |
| EB | 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 |
| EB | 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 |
| EB | REL 305 | 795 | Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too | 32,36,34 | 300 | 25 | 284 |
| MB | 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 |
| MB | 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 |
| EB | 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 | 1,000 | 28 | 286 |

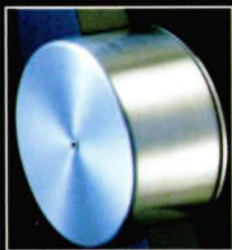
SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.

BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

The new Reference 3
with CDT II™ Tweeter Technology

Anthony Gallo isn't one to follow the crowd, a characteristic he shares with the people who buy his loudspeakers.

His latest speaker design, the Reference 3, is rewriting the price versus performance equation. So much so in fact that influential U.S. publication *The Absolute Sound* have bestowed on it their ultimate honour - product of the year.



"Gallo's Reference 3's are rewriting the book on value in high-end loudspeakers, making accessible a level of performance that might previously have been far beyond the reach of most of us."
The Absolute Sound

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nonconformist

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

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 | | | | | 3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR | ISSUE NUMBER |
|--|-----------------------------|-----|---|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | | | | ELECTROSTATIC | SUPRA-AURAL | CIRCUMAURAL | OPEN BACK | CLOSED BACK | | |
| | 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 |
| | 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 |
| EC | Grado SR325i | 310 | Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort | | | | | | 200 | 270 |
| EC | Grado GS1000 | 995 | One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for | | | | | | 250 | 288 |
| | 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; high-quality stuff | | | | | | 20 | 285 |
| | Stax SR-001 Mk II | 239 | Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity | | | | | | 280 | 268 |
| 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 |

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.



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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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

| | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|--|----------------|------------|--------|--------|--------------------|-------------|
| | | | | STRANDED | SOLID CORE | COPPER | SILVER | DIGITAL CABLE TYPE | SPEC NUMBER |
| Interconnects and speaker cables | | | | | | | | | |
| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | | | | | | |
| 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 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 8VS | 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 |

SPEC KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006



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- MP3 playback, iPod input

WAS: £199.95
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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006 BEST BUY

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006 BEST BUY



SPEAKERS
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AELITE 5.1

- Real wood birch veneer

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£995.95

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006 SPRING 2006



SPEAKERS
WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1

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- Choice of four finishes

WAS: £179.95
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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004



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Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|--------|------------------------------|-------|---|----------------|---------------------|--------|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | | | HEIGHT (CM) | TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) | WELDED | NUMBER OF SHELVES | SHELF TYPE | ISSUE NUMBER |
| | Alphason A5-G | 399 | Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail | 80 | 66,46 | | 5 | Glass | 247 |
| | Atacama Equinox | 280 | Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept | 81 | 50,50 | | 4 | Glass | 217 |
| | Audiophile Base | 615 | Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade | 82 | 43 | | 4 | MDF | 193 |
| | Avid Isosshelf | 1,100 | An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up | 87.5 | 48 | | 5 | MDF | 193 |
| | Clearlight Audio Aspekt | 650 | Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value | 75 | 53,5,45 | | 4 | MDF | 217 |
| | Custom Design Icon Signature | 330 | Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively | 75 | 56,37 | | 4 | Glass | 286 |
| | Custom Design Icon 400 | 600 | Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack | 75 | 57, 41 | | 5 | Glass | 263 |
| | Custom Design Concept 400 | 700 | Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300) | 74 | 48,40 | | 4 | Metal | 247 |
| | Custom Design Vantige | 449 | 'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright | 62 | 49,44 | | 4 | Metal | 271 |
| | Partington Minim | 389 | Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot | 75 | 45,36 | | 5 | Glass | 261 |
| | Naim Fraim | 1,825 | Pricy but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility | 96 | 45,34 | | 5 | Glass | 232 |
| | Quadraspire Q4 Reference | 480 | Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail | 51.5 | 49,39.5 | | 4 | MDF | 217 |
| | Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack | 988 | Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice | 68 | 54,49 | | 4 | Torlyte | 240 |
| | Sound Organisation Z560 | 195 | Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid! | 92 | 50,40 | | 5 | Glass | 217 |
| | Townshend VSSS | 1,300 | The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality | 76 | 35,50 | | 4 | Glass | 273 |

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

| BADGE? | PRODUCT | £ | COMMENTS | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|-----|--|----------------|---------------------|----------|--------|----------------|--------------|
| | | | | HEIGHT (CM) | TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) | FILLABLE | WELDED | NUMBER OF LEGS | ISSUE NUMBER |
| | Custom Design RS300 | 110 | An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price | 56 | 16,5,18 | | | 1 | 281 |
| | Custom Design SQ404 | 200 | Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small | 61 | 18,16,3 | | | 4 | 283 |
| | hne Cableway | 395 | Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material | 63 | 17,20 | | | 1 | 220 |
| | Kudos S50 | 159 | Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth | 61 | 15, 20 | | | 1 | 220 |
| | Partington Ansa 60 | 99 | Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent | 62 | 18,15 | | | 4 | 232 |
| | Partington Dreadnought BS | 249 | The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too! | 61 | 17,15 | | | 5 | 261 |
| | Partington Heavi II | 399 | Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies | 53 | 31,22 | | | 6 | 287 |
| | Russ Andrews Torlyte | 299 | Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too | 60,50 | 15,21 | | | 3 | 280 |

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.

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Looking for a Home Cinema System?

Isn't it easy to buy a home cinema system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and you place your order. The system is delivered to your door still in the box. You get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, conventional wide-screen CRT or back-projection TV? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or HD-DVD capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

So how do you select a system? You could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that it will be a great system. But it probably won't be. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. So where do you start? Here's an important tip...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE. There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell 'top-end' gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. In short they're too expensive. These are just myths.



..make sure you get the full service!

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.”



Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "Too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about far more than just price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.



Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| SERVICE | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| FACILITIES | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| VERDICT | ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ |

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

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- **N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI**
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
- **SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS**
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea. 020 7924 2040

SOUTH

- **Ashford, Kent SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI**
40 High Street. 01233 624441
- **Brighton POWERPLANT**
40 Church Road. 01273 775542
- **Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
- **Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
- **Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY**
9 High Street, Hampton Wick. 020 8943 3530
- **Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
44a High Street. 01268 779762
- **Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI**
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
- **Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI**
213-217 Tarring Road. 01903 245577

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- **Birmingham SOUND ACADEMY**
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- **Chester ACOUSTICA**
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227
- **Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE**
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- **Leicester CYMBIOSIS**
6 Hotel Street. 0116 262 3754
- **Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION**
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
- **Solihull MUSIC MATTERS**
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
- **Stafford ACOUSTICA**
114 Wolverhampton Road. 01785 258216

NORTH

- **Congleton HI-FI SHOWROOMS**
12a West Street. 01260 280017
- **Doncaster UNLIMITED DREAM HOME SYSTEMS**
The Long Barn, Wakefield Road. 01302 727274
- **Sheffield MOORGATE ACOUSTICS**
184 Fitzwilliam Street. 0114 275 6048
- **York SOUND ORGANISATION**
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

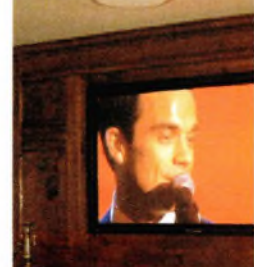
SCOTLAND

- **Glasgow LOUD & CLEAR**
520 St Vincent St, Finnieston. 0141 221 0221
- **Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR**
Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

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- **Belfast LYRIC HI-FI**
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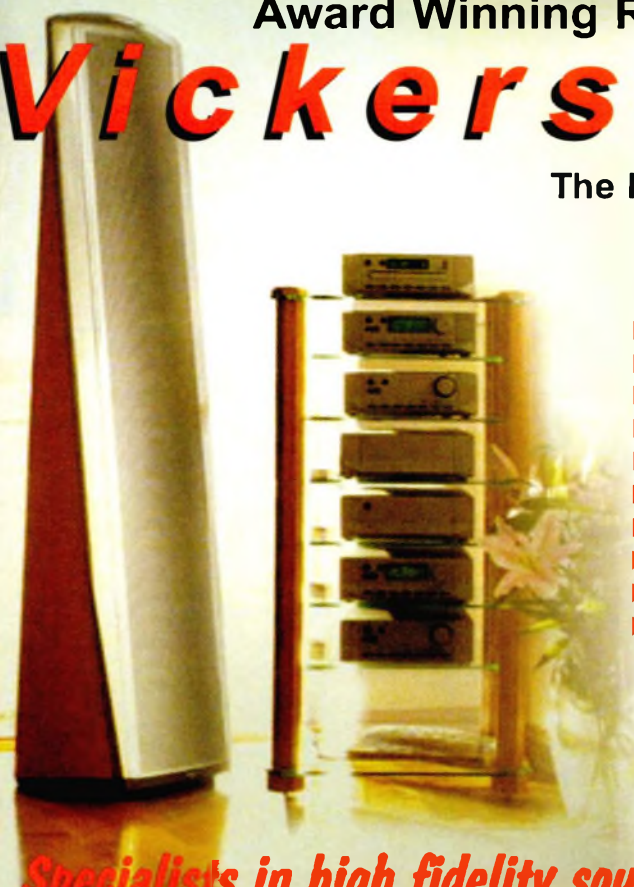
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Supports & Cabling: Naim Audio, Vertex AQ, Nordost, Chord Company, Isoblu, Kudos Audio

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| Garrard Zero 100S (78 rpm) (sh) | £— | £75 | Onix A120MK11 (new) | £995 £495 |
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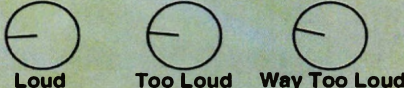
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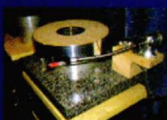
Audio Note lo 1 MC cartridge. Surely one of the best cartridges in existence, the lo uses Alnico magnets and pure silver coils to extract everything from your LP's in the most musical way possible. £1,595






The Nottingham Analogue Dais turntable is the result of many years of research by the companies founder, Tom Fletcher. In our opinion it offers unmatched performance at its £3,519 price level. It's pictured here with the 12" Nottingham Analogue Ace Space tonearm which costs £710.


J.C. Verdier Platine This spectacular turntable uses a high mass platter suspended by magnetic repulsion and an externally housed high quality DC motor. Its performance is as magnificent as its appearance suggests, offering a completely stable basis for the finest arms and cartridges. Prices start from £5,000.





Note products PhoNote uses an all triode valve audio circuit with short signal paths, low output impedance and no global feedback. The result is an exceptionally low noise design with breathtaking clarity and musical involvement. The MM version costs £1,500, the MC version £1,750.

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Bewitch A30 integrated amplifier uses 6550 output valves in an ultra-linear pure class A push pull design producing 30 glorious watts per channel. We feel this amplifiers sound redefines what's possible at this price point and we're convinced it will become the benchmark that all others will be judged by. £1,000


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The Usher CP6371 offer astonishing value for money. These very substantial speakers (they weigh 60kg each) and cost only £2,000 for a pair. A pair of wonderfully natural sounding carbon fibre filled paper cones are used in a two way configuration with a 1" soft dome tweeter covering the high frequencies. Their sound is potent yet not overblown, and the very rigid boxes mean that cabinet colouration is extremely low.






The Avantgarde Duo's use horns for the high and mid frequencies and as a result offer 104dB sensitivity. They produce all the speed and dynamics you'd expect from such a design and are effortlessly musical. These speakers really do have the most astonishing mid band performance, if you in the market for a pair of speakers at this £9,995 price point then you really must hear them.


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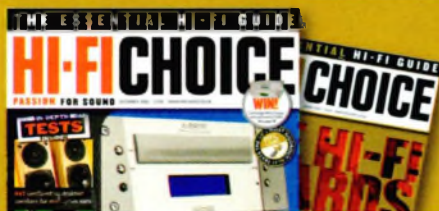
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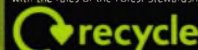
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2ND HAND HI-FI & HOME CINEMA BUYER

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WITH THE JANUARY ISSUE OF HI-FI CHOICE



WANTED

2nd-hand shootout

A £500 second-hand phono stage is close to virily heaven

If you enjoy vinyl, then a decent a phono stage is crucial to getting the best from your turntable. With a £500 budget, there is a wealth of second-hand options available, many of which will have cost more than twice this when new.

We start with what are probably the most predictable choices; the Audio Research PH3 and Trichord/Michell Delphini. Launched in 1995, the PH3 is an American design, housed within a suitably impressive full-size case. A J-FET input stage and three, twin-triode valves combine to give the PH3 a unique sound.

Expect a warm, mellifluous sound and you'll be in for a surprise for; while the PH3 does have valve like qualities, it is by no means slushy. The J-FET input helps produce low background noise and, while not as dynamic as the more expensive

easily be enough for the middle, £900 model. Although not given a specific title, this is the 'standard' model and is housed within twin polished-steel boxes. One of these is the separate power supply and this is how you can tell it apart from the budget model, which uses a basic plug mounted PSU.

Although a solid-state design, the Class-A ICs give the Delphini a smooth and refined sound quality. The treble is sweet yet spacious, while imaging is probably the best in its class. As with all these phono stages, no moving parts means there's little to go wrong. Like the PH3, the Delphini is still serviceable and upgradeable. A complete board upgrade from Mk1 to Mk2 is available from the factory for £350. Not bad for a pair of decade-old products.



Above: Rogue Audio Stealth, Trichord Delphini

“All of these phono stages have something very special to offer.”

Special Edition version, the PH3 still produces fine transient attack.

Although now replaced by the PH5 (also a hybrid), parts and service are still available for the PH3. It is also still possible to have a standard PH3 modified to SE spec, even if shipping it to the USA and back makes it a pricey option. With the PH3 having been popular new, there are plenty of second-hand examples on the market. Most will set you back between £600 and £700, but if you hunt around for long enough, a £500 example should be possible to find.

Around the same time as the PH3 was in its heyday, Michell's ISO phono stage was also doing rather nicely. It's still a fine phono stage today, but then nothing like as effective as its spiritual successor, the Delphini. Launched around 1999, the Delphini was a ground-up design by Graham Fowler of Trichord. Unlike the ISO, the Delphini was user adjustable and all but the very first MK1 versions could also accept a Moving Magnet cartridge.

Three versions were available ranging from £535 to £1,850. Our budget should

Now for a couple of more unusual choices. First, we have the Kinshaw Perception. Few have heard of this twin-box phono stage, but its thorough design makes it worth seeking out. Designed by an ex-telecoms engineer, the perception was something of a labour of love. Like the PH3 and Delphini, the Perception is fully adjustable to different MC loads (via internally positioned resistors) and MM cartridges. Although it has been off the market for 10 years, it is still serviceable by Kinshaw's Cornish based parent company, Goingon. Like the Delphini, the high quality separate power supply imbued the Perception with a wonderful sense of space and depth. As little as £250 is enough for a tatty one, while £400 should buy a really nice example. Apart from the paint finish scuffing, the Perception is a remarkably durable phono stage.

Somewhat newer, but with a similar cult following is the Rogue Audio Stealth. The Stealth is an American design and hard to come by in the UK, despite now having UK distribution by Audiocraft. That said,

nearly new examples are available for around £400, which makes it well within our budget. Like the other phono stages here, the Stealth is built using high quality components. In this case, it's silver-plated cabling and heavy copper circuit boards that make the difference. Although it doesn't have the sophisticated hybrid design of its fellow American – the Audio Research PH3 – the Stealth is thoroughly well engineered and features a very substantial toroidal power supply. Fully adjustable for gain and cartridge loading, the Stealth is another phono stage that will cope with MM cartridges just as easily as MCs. With exceptionally low noise, the Stealth suits low output cartridges, and has speed and detail that can make the PH3 sound a little turgid. What it doesn't have, though, is the sweet treble of the Delphini or the lucidity of the PH3.

All of these phono stages have something very special to offer, but our overall choice would have to be the Delphini. It's a superb phono stage in its own right, but the fact that it can still be serviced and upgraded adds greater appeal. If your system sounds a little flat then a Stealth could be just the tonic, and a Perception at a bargain price makes a cracking and highly underrated buy. If you're still not convinced about the benefits of a separate phono stage, just try one of these. Trust us, you'll never go back to an integrated phono amp again! **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month – High-end headphones



EX DEMO AND SECOND-HAND ITEMS

| ITEM DESCRIPTION | SALE | NEW |
|--|-------|------|
| Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Balanced 5/H | 2650 | 1799 |
| Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Single ended 5/H | 2999 | 1499 |
| Denon Beat400 XS x-demo | 2600 | 1499 |
| CS Verdi La Scala transport/Losampiler x-demo | 1800 | 4999 |
| ACS Elgar Plus Firmware IEEE1394 DAC x-demo | 9500 | 4999 |
| ACS PB SACD/CD/DSD Player x-demo | 9999 | 3999 |
| Krell SACD Standard x-demo | 9999 | 2499 |
| Krell KPS2001 CD/Processor 5/H | 14999 | 3199 |
| Musica Fidelity Au Vista CA 30 Player 5/H | 2499 | 1499 |
| Orpheus Labs One DAC with anagram x-demo | 1150 | 1799 |
| Orpheus Labs Zero CD player x-demo | 4650 | 3999 |
| Primare V10 CD/DVD Player x-demo | 795 | 499 |
| Sugden masterclass CD x-demo | 2100 | 1999 |
| Sony CDP A940 SACD Player 5/H | 549 | 249 |
| Theta Generation V Balanced 5/H | 6290 | 1299 |
| Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Ocam/Balanced 5/H | 2990 | 895 |
| Wadia 302 Black x-demo | 4000 | 2999 |
| Crown Jewel Ltd Edition MC Cartridge 100hrs | 2650 | 1499 |
| Clearaudio Emotion Turntable Package X-demo | 6500 | 499 |
| Dynavector DV1Z MK3 5/H | 599 | 249 |
| Hend Audio Orbit 1 TT PSU New B Bused | 225 | 179 |
| Kuzma Scharf/Sony 5 Turntable headw Rowett | 814 | 1399 |
| Lehmann Audio Black Cube SE 5/H | 499 | 285 |
| MC Cartech Micro Drive Phono Stage 5/H | 649 | 399 |
| Rega P7 /Riba Turntable 5/H | 770 | 179 |
| Roksan Jervex Alphaeon Xenon XPSII 5/H | N/A | 545 |
| Tichford Base MK3 5/H | 2900 | 1299 |
| Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preampifier X-demo | 625 | 399 |
| Audio research L51 Hybrid Preampifier 5/H | 1799 | 999 |
| Audio research L516 Remote/Balanced 5/H | 2999 | 1699 |
| Conrad Johnson PV12A Valve Preampifier x-demo | 469 | 749 |
| Conrad Johnson PV14L Remote controlled valve x-demo | 2199 | 1750 |
| Conrad Johnson Premier BLS x-demo | 4000 | 2299 |
| Convergent Audio CAT 3L1 Signature Black 5/H | 6000 | 2299 |
| Denon D100 Preampifier 5/H | 1100 | 799 |
| Krell KRC HR preampifier 5/H | 6999 | 3999 |
| Krell KRC HR preampifier x-demo | 3200 | 1999 |
| Roksan L1 Preamp (requires PSU) 5/H | 399 | 249 |
| Roksan L1.5 Preampifier (requires PSU) 5/H | 2699 | 1299 |
| Sugden masterclass Preampifier x-demo | 2100 | 1999 |
| Spectral DMC 30s Reference Preampifier x-demo | 7600 | 4999 |
| Spectral DMC30s Reference Preampifier 5/H | 6995 | 3499 |
| Audio Analogue Dostozatti Mono Power Amplifiers X-demo | 1050 | 599 |
| Audio Research CL40 Rev B/Btt 5/H | 1414 | 1299 |
| Audio Research VM230 Valve mono Amplifiers x-demo | 9000 | 7499 |
| Audio research VT1000M1 Valve Power Amplifier 5/H | 9400 | 3999 |
| Bel Cantia EVO 200 X Class 3 stereo power 5/H | 2499 | 999 |
| Bel canto EVO2 GenII x-demo | 2899 | 1899 |
| Conrad Johnson ANKO SE Valve Amplifier 5/H | 3999 | 1899 |
| Conrad Johnson Premier 3050A x-demo | 8000 | 5999 |
| Cyrus II /FCK Amplifier PSU 5/H | 1674 | 229 |
| Denon Beat 150 monos x-demo | 6000 | 3999 |
| Denon Beat 300s x-demo | 5200 | 3999 |
| Denon Beat 300s 5/H | 1899 | 999 |
| ECS EA1 latest spec upgrade monos 5/H | 5000 | 2999 |
| Electrocompanist AM220 Stereo Power Amplifier 5/H | 7000 | 749 |
| Graaf GM20 DTL Mono Valve Amplifiers 5/H | 2000 | 249 |
| Orpheus Three power amplifier x-demo | 2995 | 1799 |
| Pathos Model One Verso II x-demo | 2299 | 999 |
| Roksan S1.5 stereo power amplifier silver 5/H | 1495 | 599 |
| Roksan D51 5 PSU Silver 5/H | 695 | 399 |
| Roksan D54 PSU Black 5/H | 495 | 179 |
| Spectral DWA100s Amplifier x-demo | 4850 | 2750 |
| Spectral DMC250s Amplifier 5/H | 8200 | 4899 |
| Sugden masterclass monos x-demo | 6600 | 4999 |
| ATC SCM12 Cherry 5/H | 1000 | 649 |
| Audio Physic Tarr Monitor Cherry x-demo | 2699 | 399 |
| Audio Physic Sopa 2 maple x-demo | 1999 | 1199 |
| JM Lab Micro Utopia Classic x-demo | 4700 | 3750 |
| JM Lab Charon 714 Silver x-demo | 1099 | 749 |
| JM Lab Electra 927 be Anniversary last pair! New | 2800 | 2400 |
| JM Lab SR XL 95 Grey 5/H | 1099 | 899 |
| Martin Logan Aeon 1 Oak BNB | 3189 | 2480 |
| Next Ultimatum 927 5/H | 4999 | 3500 |
| Pen Audio Rebel 2 x-demo | 1995 | 999 |
| Pen Audio Charm Active Subwoofer x-demo | 2200 | 1299 |
| Pracac Resonance 1.5 Mastepay 5/H | 825 | 749 |
| Pracac Tablette Reference 8 Signatures YEW 5/H | 6500 | 3299 |
| Revel 150 Performa In Synchrony 5/H | 2499 | 399 |
| Sonus Faber Concerting Home Piano lacquer 5/H | 310 | 199 |
| Sonus Faber Leather Stands, fixed height, x-demo | 399 | 379 |
| Spendor S3 Cherry 5/H | 179 | 60 |
| Atacama 30cm Seed filled stands 5/H | 199 | 99 |
| Audio Note 2x5R bi wired AN Spa Speaker cable 5/H | 165 | 99 |
| Audio Note 1m ANVX AES/EBU balanced Digital 5/H | 1650 | 899 |
| RCA Engineering 10003 Faber x Tier 5/H | N/A | 99 |
| Logan Hall Intermezzo EMO 0.75m RCA 5/H | 50 | 299 |
| Cardas Cross 1.5m RCA 5/H | 940 | 499 |
| Cardas Golden Cross 1.5m balanced 5/H | 840 | 499 |
| Cardas Golden Cross 2.5m bi wired speaker cable 5/H | 1700 | 749 |
| Madrigal MDC1 1m AES/EBU 110ohm Digital cable new boxed | 420 | 249 |
| Nordost Shiva 2m mains cable x-demo | 220 | 129 |
| Nordost Vishnu 2m mains cable 5/H | 449 | 299 |
| Nordost Vishnu 2m mains cable 5/H | 249 | 199 |
| Nordost Vahalla 1m RCA-RCA Interconnect 5/H | 2195 | 995 |
| Siltech LS188 Classic 2x1m Silver B Gold Speaker cable BNB | 3950 | 2995 |
| Siltech Signatures G2 D.50m AES/EBU balanced Digital cable 5/H | 420 | 179 |
| Siltech SPK20 1m IEC-Shuko Mains cable x-demo | 199 | 95 |
| Shard Organisation Record Rack with CD insert 5/H | 1614 | 60 |
| Spectral M130 2m RCA BNB | 580 | 349 |
| Spectral M130 20ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo | 1400 | 799 |
| Spectral M150 1m RCA-RCA 5/H | 1500 | 899 |
| Spectral Z Chord III 2m mains cable x-demo | 999 | 499 |
| Spectral AC1 7 Cord 2m mains cable 5/H | 999 | 499 |
| Transparent Music Link Ultra 1m RCA-RCA 5/H | 1129 | 579 |
| Transparent Music Link Ultra 2m RCA-RCA 5/H | 1199 | 599 |
| Transparent Music Wave Plus 2x 7.62m x-demo | 200 | 99 |
| Voodoo Airtek platform small size 5/H | 200 | 99 |
| Western Electric 300B Valves 1Pair NEW | 850 | 599 |
| Denon Beat 800 AM/FM Tuner x-demo | 395 | 199 |
| Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude 5/H | 1460 | 795 |
| hokle Substation special version 5/H | 1495 | 849 |
| hokle Qube24 5/H | 328 | 169 |
| PS Audio Ultimate Outlet 5/H | 875 | 599 |
| Sugden R21 AM/FM Tuner x-demo | 875 | 599 |

Midland Audio X-change are looking for Audio Research, Krell, Mark Levinson, Naim Audio, SME, Wadia.

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DEFINITIVE AUDIO

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

| ITEM DESCRIPTION | SALE | NEW |
|--|--------|--------------------|
| Lamm ML 1.1 Monos - less than 30 hours use | £12000 | £20000 |
| Clearaudio Goldfinger cartridge. Brand new in sealed box | £4000 | £5640 |
| Croft ML Charisma X phono/line pre-amp | £1500 | £3000 |
| Musical Fidelity KW series DM25 CD transport + DAC - boxed, brand new (still has protective film on plugs and display) | £3000 | £4000 |
| Tron Syren pre-amp with line + phono - 3 months old - boxed - barely used | £4500 | £7000 |
| Mactone MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - 30 hours use | £3000 | £8500 |
| Mactone XCX330 line pre-amp - 10 hours use | £3000 | £8000 |
| Eoteric XD1 CD player - perfect - boxed - 10 months old | £6000 | £9600 |
| SME V tonearm - standard wire - 10 years old | £850 | £1800 |
| SME V tonearm - 1 month - standard wire | £1400 | £1800 |
| Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 12v - remote control - 6 months old | £900 | £1800 |
| Living Voice loudspeakers - various ex-demo, part-ex, seconds, from very young to very old | | <i>please call</i> |
| Tom Evans Groove Plus | £1900 | £3000 |
| Rega Jupiter CD player - professionally clocked + rebuilt with Black Gates | £600 | |
| Audio Innovations P2 phono stage - completely standard | £700 | |
| Transfiguration Esprit - 10 hours use - perfect ex-review bargain | £600 | |
| Pathos 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless | £1500 | £950 |
| Canary 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 months old - boxed | | |
| Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - chamer | £2850 | £6500 |
| Primare D30.2 CD player | £2500 | £5000 |
| Sugden Biju mm/mc phono stage - 100 ohms | £650 | |
| Sonus Faber Electa Amator - walnut - stand mount - lovely cond | £400 | £650 |
| Art Audio PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo | £1750 | £3500 |
| Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - maple | £2500 | £4500 |
| Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use | £3500 | £7000 |
| Tube Technology Unisig Signature integrated - 30 hours use | £1250 | £2500 |
| Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with Rega RB300 tonearm, Reson Raca cartridge and Living Voice mat. | £1250 | £2500 |
| Canary 608LV integrated amp, 25 watts with Living Voice upgrade | £1000 | £1633 |
| Unison Research Smart 300B class A power amp - 1 year old | £950 | £3000 |
| JPS Constrictor power cables - very nearly new | £2250 | £4500 |
| JPS SC3 interconnect - very nearly new | £600 | £1200 |
| JPS SC3 interconnect - very nearly new | £400 | £795 |
| Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santon Rosewood - with stands | £400 | £1000 |
| Linn Genki CD player | £850 | £2000 |
| Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect - 1m set - boxed | £400 | £1000 |
| Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect - 2m set - boxed | £700 | £1800 |

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digital

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|--|-------|
| Meridian 200 Transport and 203 DAC combo, absolutely mint example, great sound | £349 |
| Micromega Aria, black, ex HiFi Choice review model (£2150) | £1595 |
| Audio Research CD3 MK I, silver, unmarked condition, boxed (£4750) | £1995 |
| Shanling CDT-200, exc cond, boxed, r/c, gold legs (£2150) | £1295 |
| Naim CDX with NAXPS power supply, good condi, boxed, s, serial no. 1700xx | £1900 |
| Arcam Diva 93t, silver, exc cond, boxed, manual, r/c, 1 yr old, (£1000) | £595 |
| Micromega Aria, black, ex HiFi Choice review model (£2150) | £1595 |
| Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, only a few months old (£4000) | £2995 |
| Musical Fidelity kW SACD player, boxed, factory sealed box (£4000) | £1995 |
| AVI Lab Series CD, current spec, boxed, unmarked condition (£1499) | £1195 |
| Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive, ex-dem, immaculate cond (£4000) | £2995 |
| Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, black/silver (£2950) | £2295 |
| Marantz SA-11S1, mint cond, 6 months old, champagne finish (£1999) | £1395 |
| Musical Fidelity TriVista 21 DAC, exc cond, manual, boxed (£1400) | £695 |
| Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, latest spec 24/192 model (£1250) | £795 |

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|---|-------|
| Bryston 4B SST Power Amp, 2 months old!, black, 17" faceplate (£2750) | £2249 |
| EAR Yoshino 834T Hybrid Integrated, mint condition, boxed (£2800) | £1995 |
| Qinpu A1.0x, ex What HiFi review model, boxed in immac cond (£300) | £230 |
| Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295) | £895 |
| Parasound A21 Power Amp, immac cond, silver, only 1yr old (£1500) | £895 |
| Musical Fidelity A308 pre-amp, immaculate, boxed, manual (£1999) | £995 |
| Musical Fidelity A5 Int, 250wpc, 6 months old, boxed, as new (£1499) | £995 |
| Musical Fidelity A5 Power Amp, 6 months old, boxed, immac (£1499) | £995 |
| Michell Alecto Monoblocks, exc cond, boxed (£2000) | £695 |
| AudioNet Amp 1 Power Amp, silver/blue display, boxed, mint (£3150) | £2195 |
| Bryston B-100 SST Int amp, unmarked condition, boxed (£2750) | £1995 |
| Bryston B60 SST Integrated, excellent condition, silver, boxed (£1600) | £495 |
| McIntosh C220 Pre, only 2 months old!, boxed in mint cond (£3300) | £2795 |
| Roksan Caspian MK2 integrated, boxed with manual and remote. | £595 |
| Roksan Caspian power amp MK2, boxed. Be quick - a steal at the price! | £495 |
| Chord CPA2800 pre-amp+phono stage, £2800 new, in black, immac | £1395 |
| Gamut D200 Power Amp, silver, immac condition, boxed (£3200) | £1695 |
| Jungson JA 88D Integrated, pure class A, mint (£899) | £749 |
| AVI Lab Series Power Amp, immac cond, less than 1yr old (£1650) | £995 |
| Eastern Electric M520 Int, What Hi-Fi 5 star review, 4 mnths old (£1539) | £1095 |
| Naim NAC 102 Pre Amp, good cond, boxed, serial no. 142xxx | £550 |
| Naim NAP 250 Power Amp, good cond, boxed, serial no. 304xx | £949 |
| Manley Labs Neo Classic 300b Monoblocks, 25wpc, immac (£5895) | £3995 |
| Eastern Electric Minimax Pre, ex-dem, mint condition, boxed (£769) | £649 |
| Michell Orca Pre, excellent condition, boxed (£1600) | £425 |
| Krell PAM 5 pre amp + phono stage, exc cond, legendary perf (£2000) | £549 |
| AudioNet Pre 1 G2, silver/blue display, mint (£2100) | £1495 |
| Cyrus Pre X VS, immac cond, only 5 mnths old!, one prev owner (£1000) | £749 |
| Nagra PSA Power Amp, very rare, only 6 months old!, immac, stunning | £3595 |
| Audionet Sam V2 Integrated, silver, boxed, exc cond (£2400) | £1195 |
| ATC SIA2-150 Int amp, black, mint con....as good as brand new (£2400) | £1895 |
| Shanling SP-80C Monoblocks, exc cond gold legs, fully boxed (£2000) | £1295 |
| Unison Research Unico Line, only 3 months old!, boxed, manual (£950) | £749 |
| Unison Research Unico SE Int amp, mint cond, boxed, manual (£1375) | £795 |
| Bow Walrus Power Amp, boxed, exc cond, 150wpc (£3995) | £1995 |
| Bow Warlock Pre, boxed, exc cond, fully balanced, r/c (£3495) | £1695 |
| Pass Labs X1 Pre, mint cond, less than 1yr old!, sep power supply (£4700) | £3795 |

amplifiers

loudspeakers

| | |
|---|-------|
| Hyperion 938, gloss black finish, immac cond, very low hours (£3750) | £2995 |
| Quad 989, Vintage finish, only 6 months old, boxed, mint cond (£5000) | £3795 |
| Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic, ex-disp, never played, fully boxed with warranty! (£845) | £650 |
| Acoustic Energy 1 MkIII, B stock, slight mark to front right corner (£1995) | £1495 |
| Wilson Benesch Arc, silver stands + side cheeks, immac cond (£2600) | £1795 |
| B&W CM4 speakers, in Rosentun, 5 years old, boxed | £449 |
| Mission Elegante EB2, 1yr old, boxed in superb condition (£1300) | £749 |
| Art Emotion Signature, maple, 1yr old, boxed, immac cond (£9000) | £6495 |
| Quad ESL-63 Electrostatics, mint condition!, vintage finish (brown grills) | £1149 |
| PMC FB1+, cherry, boxed, immac cond, few mnths old! (£1695) | £1295 |
| Monitor Audio GR20, 2 yrs old, black, boxed, exc cond (£1500) | £795 |
| PMC OB1, in oak, boxed as new, 6 mnths old, simply stunning! (£2700) | £1995 |
| JAS Audio Orsa, ex HiFi Plus review model, poplar tumor (£1399) | £1149 |
| ART Stiletto 6, maple, ex-dem, as new condition, fully boxed (£2000) | £1395 |
| JAS Audio Supertweeters, Review pair, sound awesome!! (£649) | £595 |
| Audio Physic Tempo 4, cherry, exd model, immaculate condition. (£2199) | £1699 |
| Audio Physic Virgo III, cherry, 6mnths old, boxed, as new (£3999) | £2250 |

analogue

| | |
|---|-------|
| SME 20/2a, inc SME V tonearm, unmarked cond, few mnths old (£6300) | £4495 |
| Trichord Diablo phono stage, exc cond, only 9mnths old, boxed (£750) | £495 |
| Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, exc cond (£2100) | £1495 |
| Tom Evans Groove Plus phono stage, boxed, mint cond (£3600) | £2395 |
| Eastern Electric Minimax Phonostage, ex-d, mint, boxed (£1099) | £895 |
| VPI Scout inc JMW 9 tonearm, immac cond, boxed, very little usage (£1300) | £1195 |
| VPI Super Scoutmaster Signature, ex-disp, fully boxed, mint (£4995) | £4250 |

misc

| | |
|---|-------|
| Nordost Blue Heaven Speaker Cable, ex-dem, 4m pair, bi-wire (£489) | £349 |
| Isotek GII Minisub, silver front, current spec, immac cond (£545) | £395 |
| Naim Hi-Cap power supply, good cond, serial no. 304xx, superb | £550 |
| Isotek Mainline filtered mains cable, excellent condition (£200) | £95 |
| Isotek Mainline digital filtered mains cable, exc cond, stunning (£225) | £110 |
| Hovland Reference Speaker Cable, ex-dem, boxed as new, 8ft pair | £795 |
| Townshend Supertweeters, titanium finish, boxed as new, exd (£800) | £649 |
| Isotek Titan mains conditioner, few months old, boxed (£1500) | £1095 |
| Nordost Valhalla Spk Cable, 3m per side, bi-wire with z-plugs (£5700) | £3995 |

List is updated daily on our web site.

HFC-SA/01/07

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Telephone: 01903 872288

Mobile: 07860 660001 Fax: 01903 872234

Speakers:

| | |
|--|--------|
| Origin Live OL-2 speakers | £250 |
| Kef Concord speakers | £150 |
| Elac CL330 Jet speakers with stands | £995 |
| Revel Salon black gloss aluminium side panels (mint) | £9995 |
| Living Voice OBX R2 Speakers | £2,800 |
| Dynaudio Audience 7 speakers & stands | £395 |
| Hales Transcendence 5 Loudspeakers | £2900 |
| TDL RTL3 speakers | £95 |
| Tannoy Westminster Royal HE speakers | £9995 |

Pre-amps:

| | |
|---|-------|
| Naim Nac 92 with Nap 90/3 amp | £595 |
| Proceed PAV pre-amp | £995 |
| Mark Levinson 26S balanced pre-amp | £2500 |
| Mark Levinson ML28 with phono stage | £995 |
| Mark Levinson 380S pre-amp | £3495 |
| Mark Levinson 25S phono stage with power supply | £1995 |

Amplifiers:

| | |
|---|-------|
| Audionote Neiro mono-blocks | £5495 |
| Mark Levinson ML383 integrated amp | £2995 |
| Classe CA201 amp | £1995 |
| Arcam Alpha 8P power amp | £195 |
| Kora Triode 100SB | £3500 |
| Mark Levinson 432 Power Amp | £4995 |
| Mark Levinson 20.5 Reference Monoblocks | £4500 |
| Exposure 1.5 integrated amp | £345 |

CD Players, Transports and DACs:

| | |
|--|------|
| Denon DCD 590 CD player | £60 |
| Sony CDP M41 CD player | £60 |
| Pioneer PD-S 502 CD player | £95 |
| Esoteric X01 CD/SACD player, ex-demo, mint, fully guaranteed | £POA |
| Micromega Leader CD player | £170 |

Miscellaneous:

| | |
|---|-------|
| Hitachi FT5500 Mk11 tuner | £125 |
| Sony ST-SE 570 tuner | £60 |
| Accuphase DS 1200V power supply | £3495 |
| Technics ST-GT550 tuner | £65 |
| Winds stylus gague | £425 |
| Transparent Musicwave-plus speaker cable 10ft, pair | £425 |
| Nakamichi 680 three head cassette deck | £345 |
| Kimber .75 metre KS2020 digital cable (mint) | £250 |

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer | £2495 |
| My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new) | £2750 |
| Project 9c S carbon fibre silver wired arm | £375 |
| Trichord Delphini with power supply | £595 |

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villetti speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.

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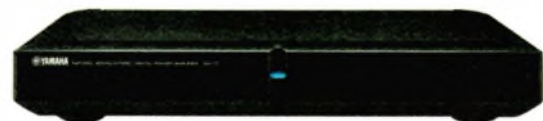
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FOR SALE

AMERICAN MAGAZINES (49)

The Perfect Vision, the Absolute Sound, Surround Professional, Widescreen Review and Stereophile Guide to Home Theater. Buyer collects, make an offer for the lot. Scottie 07762 021618 (Sussex).

ARCAM ALPHA 10 Dave AV 207 amp with processor. Alpha 10 power amp, nine channel 100wpc, programmable remote, mint, boxed. (£2,650) £1,350 01772 745553 (Lancs)

ARCAM CD72T (black), £195. NAD C350, £150. Mission 780 speakers (beech), £150. Cambridge Audio S700 DAC, £35. David 01344 427229 (Berkshire).

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).

AVI TRIO excellent floorstanding speakers. Almost new, series nr13-07. Components from Scanspeak-Vifa- Volt. Available for tests with or without your electronics, cherry colour £1,800. +0039 022150930 or email fedepenzo@hotmail.com (Italy).

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).

B&W 704 in rich American Walnut. 18 months old, perfect

condition and boxed, £800. Naim flatcap x2, 10 months old, only powered CD player, perfect condition, boxed, £400 delivered in UK. 07729 458836 (Northern Ireland).

BONNEC TIMPANO preamp with phono stage. Latest spec, £3,500. Linn Klout power amps x2. Can split, £850 each. 01704 536852 or 07736 269707 (Merseyside).

CHORD CHAMELION interconnects, 1x5m, 1x2m phono to phono, ideal for active subs. Can separate, make me an offer. Buyer collects or pays postage. Scottie 07762 021618 (Sussex).

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 CD8 with PSX-R, Audiolab 8000S and 8000PX pre/power, Mission 753 Freedom very good condition, £1,500, may split. 07881 601783 (Berks).

DENON CDR-M30 CD recorder £120. Nordost Cineflex speaker cable, 2x6m, £50. Toshiba SD350E DVD player £50. Denon RCD-100 CD/amp/tuner in one box, £175. All excellent condition. 01285 862539 (Cirencester).

EPOS M12 plus Epos original stands, cherry, (£495/£130) £299ono. Chord DAC 64 Mk1, (£1,995) £899. Email: pbjrnk1@yahoo.co.uk or call Paul 07748 485668 (London).

HAND BUILT equipment stand, four glass shelves, turned mahogany legs with carpet spike bases. 107x43x66cm (WxDxH). 19cm between shelves, vgc, £50. 01255 814016 (Clacton).

GRYPHON CALLISTO 2200

integrated amplifier. 200 watts, vgc, terrific clarity and dynamics. (£4,500) £2,250. 07968 189647 (London).

KORATO KTA100 dual mono power amp. Class A 100 watts/channel, RCA inputs, lightly used and comes boxed, £700ono. 01457 834465 (Manchester).

KRELL KAV-250A Two stereo 250 watt power amps in very good condition, owned from new. Single ended and balanced inputs and outputs. (£3,250) £1,600 each. REL Storm III in very good condition. Light oak finish, owned from new. Unused since service by REL. (£1,000) £500. 01253 729944 evenings. (Lancs).

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. Call for more information Andy 0115 9126424 (Midlands). ▣

WANTED

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts).

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).

PINCH ROLLER part number 642-001 for Ferrograph Series Y open reel tape deck. 01592 750643 (Fife).

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx AO21. Nitech. Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. Nordost Red Dawn. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

STAX OMEGA electrostatic earspeakers 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

❑ **LUXMAN D322** CD player with variable output, boxed, in as new condition with manual and remote, £150ono. John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks).

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).

MERIDIAN M2 active loudspeakers, two 70 watt amps in each enclosure. Mint with original stands. Gladly demo bring your own CDs, £425 ovno. Lecson HL1 horn loudspeakers, mint, and very rare in this condition, £375ovno. Call for more information 020 8678 1930 or 07985 520619 (London).

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD REF 10 loudspeakers, rosewood/ mahogany. Superb condition, one year, old, (£800) £425. 01472 346462 (Lincs).

MUSIC FIRST passive preamp, (£1,500) £895. Hegel H2 power amp 150 wpc, balanced/unbal outputs, (£2,500) £795. Linn LP12 turntable, afromosia, no arm, vgc £192. 01202 767873 (Dorset).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-DAC V3 £275. X-10 v3 £175. X-PSU v3, £150. Or all three together, £550. 01603 440405 (Norwich).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-PRE V3 preamp and XP200 power amp, mint, boxed, £1,250. Saverio 01332 843758 (Derby).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1001 Class A integrated amplifier, 200 watts, mint, 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 CDS2/ XPS, 1999, black, £3,000. NAC52, 1996, Supercap, 1998, black, boxed, £3,000. NAP135 (pair), recapped in 2001,

boxed, £1,300. 0191 4217905 (South Shields).

NAIM LINN LP12 (modded) Naim Armageddon power supply. Naim Aro tone arm, £750, good condition. 01453 750183 (Gloucester).

NAIM NAC 82 preamp (1999), with black style naps, remote, leads, plug-ins, manual, box. Can demonstrate, £1,025 ono. 07973 785360 (Sussex).

QUAD L-SERIES subwoofer, boxed, one month old. High gloss rosewood finish, 300 watts, £450ono. 01580 241491 (Kent).

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. As new, £900. 0191 471669 after 6pm (Tyne and Wear).

QUANTUM III space v. time speaker cable (two-metre lengths), £125. 01803 523553 (Paignton).

REGA ELA speakers, black ash. Arcam Alpha CD, Alpha 3 amplifier. Aiwa AD-F810 three-head cassette deck. Sennheiser HD520 headphones. Equipment rack, cables and interconnects, £200. Martin 01603 471204 (Norwich).

ROTEL SYSTEM; RCD-02 CD player, RA-01 amp, (£630) £350, silver, two years old. QED Qunex 3 interconnect, (£40) £20. Wharfedale 9.1 speakers in beech (£180) £95. Only a couple of months old. All items boxed, mint and can be posted or collected. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).

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).

SONAB OA14, two pairs for spares or repair, £100. Leak FM tuner £65. Pioneer F91, £110. Mark, after 8.30pm 01474 708631 (Kent).

SPENDOR SSE floorstanding speakers in maple, 22 months old, bi-wireable. Collection preferred, (£1,200) £750. Marantz CD17 MkIIM, silver, 22 months old, (£800) £375. Sony SACD/DVD player, unmarked, (£500) £150. David 07970 072290 (Morpeth).

TEAC T1 transport disc clamp mechanism, (£600) £295. TAG McLaren DAC20, (£1,400) £595 both mint box and manuals. 07939 579253 (London).

TOTEM ARRO, Dreamcatcher, centre, Lynx dipole, rears. Maple, boxed, mint, £1,450. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

TOTEM DREAMCATCHERS and Apollo AZ6 stands, maple, six months old, as new with guarantee boxes and books, (£595) £395. 01823 401181 (Somerset).

TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT speaker cable 2x2.5 metre pair, will split, (£300) £150. Also Townsend DCT interconnects, un/balanced and call 01208 76455 (Bodmin).

VAN DEN HUL FROG moving-coil cartridge, £725. New March 2006, only 60 hours use. 07729 626598 (Essex).

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1 speakers, (£180) £95. Award-winning speakers in immaculate condition with box and packaging. Only a few months old. Denon DM31 CD receiver, (£230) £125. Comes fully boxed and in absolutely pristine condition. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).



Above: Townshend Isolda DCT

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