

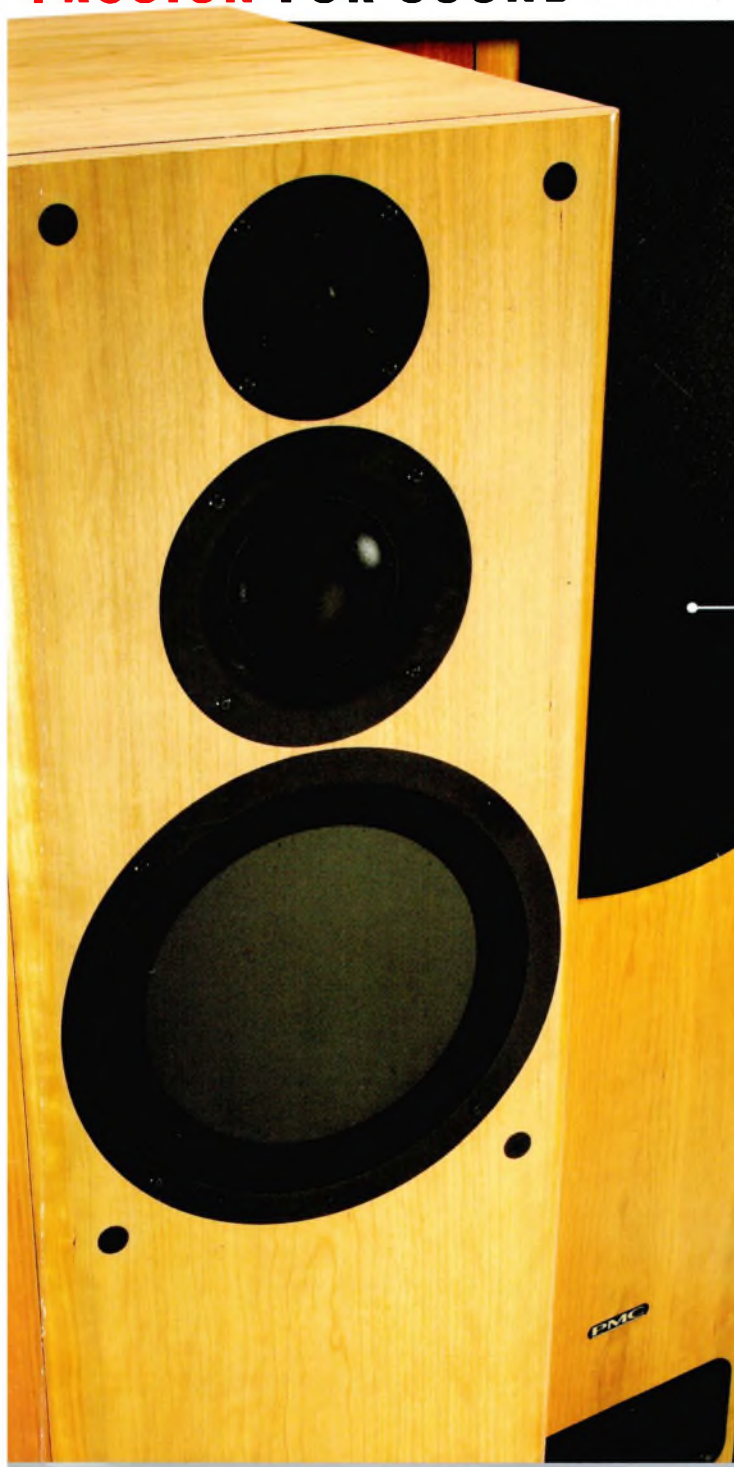
HI-FI CHOICE

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See page 26



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CLASSIC BRITISH CD PLAYER REBORN
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STUNNING NEW STANDMOUNT SPEAKERS



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FEATURING

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- > Mission M66i
- > Quadral Pico



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For more than 20 years Classé has been designing and manufacturing extraordinary audio equipment for enthusiasts who demand nothing less than the very best. Our engineers have a passion for what they create and it shows: engineering, style, user-interface, product reliability and performance are all second to none. The new Delta series is an inspired statement about the art of high performance design. Visit us at www.classeaudio.com or experience the product range at one of the following authorised retailers.

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020 7487 3455

The Audio Room
Hull
01482 891375

Infidelity
Kingston on Thames
020 8943 3530

Sound Academy
Bloxwich
01922 493499

Cloney Audio
Dublin
+353 1283 4887

Leicester Hi-Fi Studios
Leicester
0116 253 9753

Sound Gallery
High Wycombe
01494 531682

Glasgow Audio
Glasgow
0141 332 4707

Martins Hi-Fi
Norwich
01603 627010

Grahams Hi-Fi
Islington
020 7226 5500

Phase 3 Hi-Fi
Worthing
01903 245577

CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE APRIL 2007 ISSUE 292

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



What a week I'm having! I'm in the midst of moving house, and I've got a stinking cold to boot. Boxes surround me as I write – and the worst thing is, I've had to pack all my music away! The hi-fi's boxed up too, which means I can't build the usual sonic cathedrals to deliver inspiration. It's all so painfully quiet...

But there is an upside! The house we're moving to is larger, with plenty of scope for some cracking hi-fi action (without fear of upsetting the wife). There's a basement, for start – its concrete floor will be great for bass – and the main reception room offers plenty of space for a high-performance multichannel system. Plus, there's a gorgeous Victorian attic room – just add bean bags, some rugs, a high-quality two-channel system optimised for a smaller space... So while I endure this week of pain, I'm keeping my mind fixed firmly on the end result!

Thankfully, however, I've hardly been bereft of gorgeous sounds during the past month – after all, I'm fortunate enough to be Editor of the UK's finest hi-fi magazine (the only title in its sector to enjoy an ABC-audited circulation increase, for the third consecutive year). This issue sees more exclusive, in-depth reviews of exciting new kit from around the world, including some of Britain's finest: PMC's fantastic EB1 speakers, a new hi-tech one-box system from Meridian and a fully featured DAB tuner from Cyrus, to name but three. And should any of these fine products tempt you towards an audition, make sure the dealer you choose is a BADA member; check out your free copy of the *Hi-Fi Choice Little Black Book* for details! Enjoy, until next time...

Tim Bown

Tim Bown Editor

WHY WE'RE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- We now publish 13 issues a year, including two special editions: *The Collection*, an issue dedicated to the finest high-end components, and *The Hi-Fi Awards* – the most important annual awards in the hi-fi calendar.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, interviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers from the UK and around the world.
- We only review the most interesting and worthy new hi-fi components – high-performance audio products across a wide range of price points. We obtain more genuine hi-fi exclusives than any other magazine – if it's worthy of your attention, you'll read about it first in *Hi-Fi Choice*.
- Our tests are the most rigorous in the business, conducted by the UK's most experienced team of hi-fi reviewers.
- Alongside in-depth component reviews and accessory round-ups, every regular issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* features an *Ultimate Group Test* on a core hi-fi product category – from source components to amps and speakers.
- Each *Ultimate Group Test* is conducted using a uniquely thorough three-step test regime. This consists of carefully controlled 'blind' and sighted listening sessions, a full set of laboratory tests and extended 'hands on' testing by the primary reviewer. No other magazine goes to such lengths to ensure accurate comparative reviews.
- Components that best meet our exacting standards are listed in the *Buyer's Bible* section – the world's most reliable reference guide for the hi-fi buyer.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...

The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home

Beautiful in-house photography, so you see the product in all its glory.

Cherry-picked kit – only the most worthy components make it into *Hi-Fi Choice*.

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

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 *HFC*'s deputy editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book, an encyclopaedic knowledge of what's what in hi-fi and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only interesting products make it into *HFC*.



RICHARD BLACK

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



MALCOLM STEWARD

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



ALVIN GOLD

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



DAVID VIVIAN

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



JASON KENNEDY

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



KEN KESSLER

The hi-fi industry's own *Grand Complication*, Ken brings decades of high-end experience to the fore in *HFC*. He has also been to every hi-fi show around the world. Many times over. Yet, he is still a stranger to the beard trimmer.

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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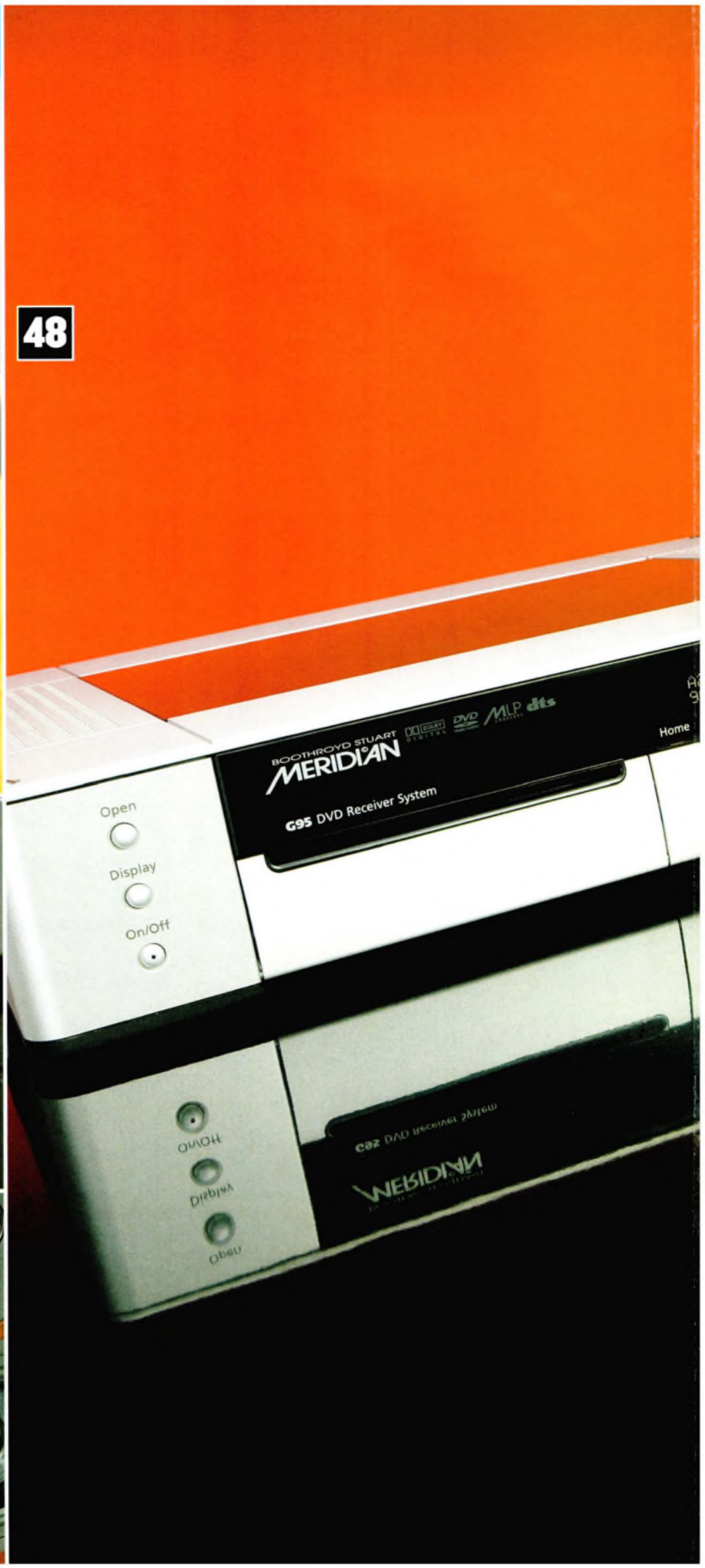
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Ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV equipment, gathering together all our favourite products for you. Your shortlist starts here...

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FREE MINI-MAG!

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

- 2 2nd-hand shootout – this issue, classic tuners for £500
- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified



100 % Beryllium
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► Electra 1037 Be (2007 newcomer)
and Electra 1027 Be, Classic finish

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FOCAL
the Spirit of Sound



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 740C AND 740A CD PLAYER AND INTEGRATED AMP

With its new Azur 740 series, Cambridge is staking its claim to the hotly contested middle ground of the separates market. It's taking on the big boys at what is rapidly becoming the entry-level point for those seeking seriously good sounding kit, with build quality to match.

The 740C CD player gets close to its 840C stable mate with the same 32-bit DSP and ability to upsample to 24-bit/384kHz. Making it the first player at its price point to provide upsampling. It does this using ATF, (Adaptive Time Filtering) which interpolates CD's 16-bit data with an Analog Devices Black Fin DSP. Digital to analogue conversion is courtesy of Wolfson DACs, in a dual differential configuration.

Utilising technology from its top Azur 840 range, as well as an evolution of circuitry from the 640A V2, the 740A amplifier uses

the traditional transistor output stage of the latter to deliver 100 watts per channel, alongside the customisable input naming of the former. Combined with a suitable dock, it can also offer basic iPod control direct from the remote handset. With all that technology for just £500, the Azur 740 series could well be setting the standard.

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

PRODUCT	Cambridge Audio 740C and 740A
TYPE	CD player and integrated amplifier
PRICE	£500 each
KEY FEATURES	(740C) Asynchronous upsampling technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Wolfson WM8740 DACs • Virtual earth balanced Bessel anti-aliasing filters • (740A) 100 watts per channel (8 ohms) • Six inputs/two outputs • Assignable outputs
CONTACT	0870 900 1000 www.cambridgeaudio.com



Taste it before you judge it!

because music matters

Manufacturers of home and visual entertainment for more than 50 years know what counts. **Marantz – because music matters.** Visit your nearest dealer for a demonstration.

DENON DRA-CX3 SACD SYSTEM

It's a mini system, but only because of its size, and that's where the comparison ends. The Denon CX3 is unlike any compact system we've ever seen, Denon Japan has used high end technology and build quality to produce an uncompromised, yet domestically friendly system. Think high end Japanese separates and you will get an idea of what this system is all about. But it's hard to imagine how technically advanced this mini is. For instance, Denon has used digital amplification for the first time in the CX3; this is how it gets to specify a power rating of 75 watts per channel, despite the 30cm width of the CX3's casework.

The CD/SACD player has also been built from the ground up, using a newly developed Denon transport mechanism with one of the smoothest drawer actions in the

business. There is also an onboard FM/AM radio and an MM/MC phono stage. This luxurious combo also comes with matching speakers in superbly finished real wood veneer. Dubbed SC-CX303, they house carbon fibre cones and soft dome tweeters 'to realise a lustrous vocal sound'.

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

PRODUCT Denon DRA-CX3

TYPE CD/SACD/tuner mini system

PRICE £2,700

KEY FEATURES SACD player with Denon AL24 processing • 75 watt digital amplifier • AM/FM tuner • Anti-vibration construction • MM/MC phono stage • Two-way loudspeaker in cherry veneer

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

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

MARANTZ ST-15S1

Marantz is making a play for the top end of the tuner market with its new ST-15S1 dual-band DAB/FM stereo model. Among its arsenal of station-seeking features is a high quality FM tuning section with a 'careful balance' of sensitivity, selectivity, capture ratio and dynamic range.

On the DAB front, the tuner has the latest generation receiver chip and allows stations to be selected with a 'gyro touch dial' allied to a display that shows station, artist and track names in an 'easy-to-read' form. Digital to analogue conversion is courtesy of a 24-bit/192kHz DAC from Analog Devices.

There are 200 presets to store stations, so you should be able to put all your favourites into memory. Marantz has employed low resonance, acoustically damped panels in the chassis to provide a solid platform for the circuitry. It also uses shock-absorbing feet to minimise the effect of support-borne vibration. Outputs include optical and coaxial digital, plus analogue options, and there is also an optical RDI interface to give the unit a bit of future-proofing.

Price £700 **Due** now ☎ 01753 680868 ☎ www.marantz.com



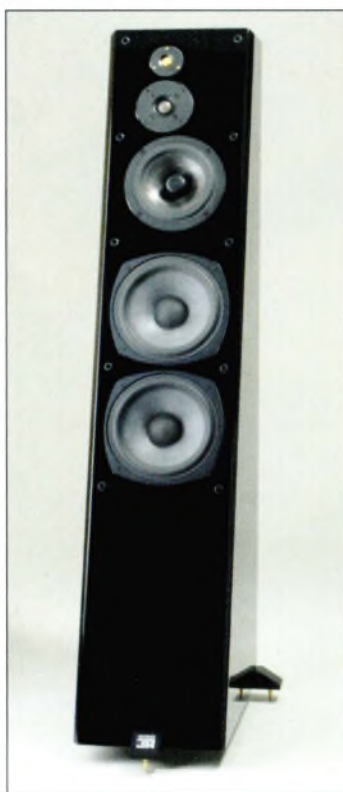
REFERENCE 3A GRAND VEENA

Reference 3A, which made its name with high end, two way standmounts, is branching upwards with the Grand Veena, a four-way floorstander. Named after a Southern Indian lute, the Grand Veena is a slender tower with a heavily tilted baffle, angled to provide a coherent phase response. The Grand Veena uses Reference 3A's hand-built 175mm midrange driver, a unit that is constructed to work without filtering. Two 200mm units using cones made of glass fibre and Kevlar in a honeycomb construction, take care of the bass, while the cabinet houses a 'unique acoustic device' to absorb internal excess pressure generated by standing waves.

A silk dome tweeter delivers treble with a copper Faraday ring in its motor for increased power handling. There is also a supertweeter from Murata, which uses a 12mm ceramic dome that expands and contracts in order to disperse frequencies from 20Hz to 100kHz. Grand Veena stands 129cm high and weighs a considerable 34 kilograms.

Price from £7,000 **Due** now

☎ 020 8549 8113 ☎ www.reference3a.com



HARBETH 7ES-3

Harbeth has been working on its HL Compact 7 series and claims "the best just got better". This bold statement comes by way of announcing the new HL Compact 7ES-3 two-way, standmount. It's a model that takes the unusual but welcome step of including an 200mm main driver. The new unit uses Harbeth's Radial cone technology, which uses a cone material called TPX, further developed by the company.

The cabinet is also distinctive as

it follows a 'thin wall BBC-style' approach, where instead of trying to resist resonance, the cabinet is designed so that it "quite literally breathes at the lowest frequencies, as do the finest wooden instruments", according to Harbeth's designer and managing director, Alan Shaw.

Price from £1,799

Due now

☎ 01444 484371

☎ www.harbeth.co.uk



KRISTA & STONE RANGE

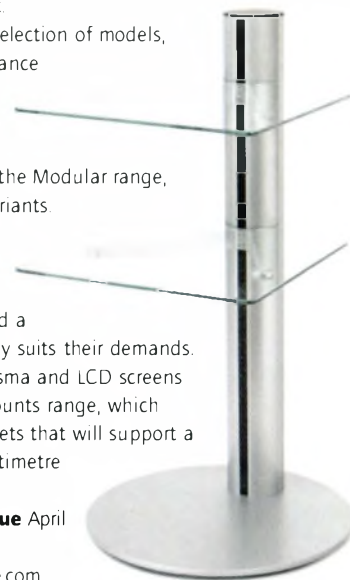
Krista & Stone is a new name in equipment supports, specialising in hi-fi and home cinema racks. It offers a comprehensive range at the entry level made out of glass, aluminium and steel, with a big emphasis on style and quality. Selling points include a ten-year guarantee on the materials, the use of UV bonded glass and integrated cable management.

It has a diverse selection of models, including the Elegance range with brushed satin metalwork and curved glass, plus the Modular range, with three style variants. These offer a high degree of flexibility and allow users to build a stand that perfectly suits their demands. Owners of flat plasma and LCD screens can opt for the Mounts range, which incorporates brackets that will support a monitor just a centimetre from the wall.

Price from £200 **Due** April

☎ 0870 900 1000

☎ www.krista-stone.com



NAD T585

NAD has launched its first universal disc player, the T585. Capable of playing DVD, DVD-Audio and SACD, as well



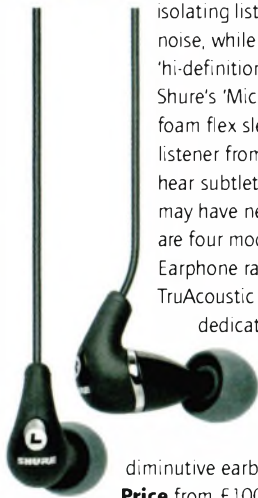
as MP3-encoded discs, the new machine has 'audiophile quality' 24-bit/192kHz DACs and full bass management facilities. This allows set-up for both speaker position and size, including multichannel systems as. This also offers alternative filter slopes for the crossover point between subwoofer and surround channels. For stereo, it's equipped with SRS True Surround circuitry, which emulates surround sound through two channels.

On the video front, a Faroudja DCDi chip scales standard DVD to 720p or 1080i, to improve picture quality via both component and HDMI outputs. It also has composite and S-Video video out, plus digital audio outputs in coaxial and optical, as well as stereo and 5.1 analogue. There's also a I2S digital output on the HDMI connection – a rare audiophile concession at any price.

Price £800 **Due** now ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

SHURE SOUND ISOLATION

Shure's latest range of earphones is designed to bring high fidelity to the personal stereo by isolating listeners from environmental noise, while claiming to deliver 'hi-definition' wide bandwidth sound. Shure's 'Microspeakers' feature soft foam flex sleeves, to isolate the listener from their surroundings 'to hear subtleties in recordings that they may have never noticed before'. There are four models in the Sound Isolating Earphone range, including the Dual TruAcoustic SE420, which specifies a dedicated tweeter and woofer, and the range topping Triple TruAcoustic SE530 that has two drivers and a tweeter all in a diminutive earbud design.



Price from £100 to £360 **Due** now

☎ 020 8808 2222 🌐 www.shure.co.uk

TOWNSHEND MkV ROCK

Townshend Audio has produced a new MkV version of the Rock turntable and a revitalized Excalibur II tonearm. It retains the unique trough that mechanically damps the tonearm with silicone fluid, but the latest version is made from water-cut stainless steel and locks into place. The subchassis incorporates a new system of isolation consisting of three spring/air damped bellows. The platter is a sandwich of high-density polypropylene, a damping layer and glass, for 'blacker silences'.

The Excalibur II arm places the bearing in the plane of the vinyl in order to maintain consistent downforce. Its arm tube is thin-wall stainless steel, to keep resonance high, while twin counterweights keep the mass close to the bearing.

Price £4,590 **Due** now

☎ 020 8979 3787

🌐 www.townshendaudio.co.uk



Soundbites



CLEARAUDIO has developed a magnetic turntable bearing, which negates the need for a ball bearing at point of contact, because there is no point of contact. It uses a non-magnetic ceramic shaft, shielded to prevent problems with the cartridge. It's available as an upgrade to existing Clearaudio decks and as an option on new ones. Prices start at £325. ☎ 01252 702705

GRACENOTE, which provides automatic artist, album and track titling for a number of applications including iTunes, has launched its classical music initiative (CMI). It is hoped the CMI project will provide more comprehensive information about classical music on digital devices. The CMI project is supported by orchestras, labels and artists. 🌐 www.gracenote.com

MOBIBLU'S new Cubisto portable audio player weighs in at 18 grams and offers 2GB of storage supporting WMA, MP3 and OGG files. It has a tiny OLED read-out for track names and battery status. Features include an FM tuner with recording and an alarm clock. Pricing tbc. 🌐 www.mobiblu.com

FURUTECH'S DeMag claims to enhance the sound of CDs, cables and vinyl by demagnetizing them. Furutech says that pigment added to vinyl during the manufacturing process causes LPs to become magnetized. The same goes for all optical discs where the label contains easily magnetized materials and where the aluminium substrate is not 100% aluminium. The DeMag costs £1,150. ☎ 01435 867438

THE CHORD COMPANY has launched a new low profile HDMI cable called Lo-Pro. It has been designed to sit unobtrusively against a wall and minimise interference. Prices start at £50. ☎ 01980 625700



ARCAM FMJ MS250

It's been a busy month at Arcam. No sooner had the company launched its new Solo Movie 5.1 than it rolled out another first. The FMJ MS250 MusicFile Server is the company's initial foray into the music server market. As we have come to expect of FMJ models, sound and build quality is top notch, with a custom designed soundcard and 400GB internal drive.

Arcam is hoping to make an impression on the competitive custom install market. The server can store up to 640 CDs in uncompressed form, or up to 80,000 songs in MP3, using some compression. It offers 'audiophile quality' CD playback and has a six-line display for ease of track selection. Music formats supported include WMA and, of course, MP3. There are analogue outputs for four independent zones and IR inputs for each of those zones. With an internet connection, it can also be used to tune into web radio.

Price £3,000 **Due** April ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

THOMAS SILLESEN
Job Title: Head Honcho
Company: Densen Audio Technologies



What is your most exciting product in development?

The whole fun of development is to push ever harder to make a product perfect. Many tend to stop early and say 'this is good enough' That is normally the point where we start going

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

We will see a lot of new gadgets, but the core will always be some kind of system that can produce music in a manner that makes our customers forget time and place.

Are audio servers the future?

Both yes and no, as they will get highly popular, but I think two-channel will be the centre for real music lovers, probably with a connection to the audio server.

Are we experiencing a two-channel resurgence?

No, but we have just found out that two is better than five when it comes to having fun with music in the house.

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

We will still be making audio equipment that pushes the borders for what you can expect, exactly as Ferrari pushes the automotive borders by making even more refined cars, but still cars that are red and rear wheel driven.

Hi-Fi Diary

MARCH/ APRIL

31-1 The Heathrow High Fidelity Show
 Park Inn, Heathrow Airport
www.chestergroup.org/heathrowshow07
 London's premier dedicated hi-fi show

MAY

17-20 High End 2007
 M.O.C. Munich
www.highendsociety.de
 Europe's leading high-end show

JUNE

25-28 Cedia UK Expo 2007
 ExCel London
www.cedia.co.uk
 The UK's biggest custom install show

DIGITAL RADIO SPECIAL FEATURE

The future of DAB

We were the first country to adopt DAB, but will we be the last to use its successor?

DAB is dead. Long live DAB+! To read some of the excitable comment in certain quarters, one could be forgiven for thinking that DAB's head is on the block and the blade already falling. But DAB+ only crept into the collective consciousness a couple of months back and there's certainly been no formal announcement of its imminent adoption – so is buying a current DAB tuner a really dumb idea, as some claim?

Where DAB uses the MPEG2 coding (data reduction) system, DAB+ uses AAC+. AAC (short for 'Advanced Audio Coding') is a more recent development than MPEG2, and is used by a number of music download services because it offers higher quality at a given bitrate than earlier systems. AAC+ is AAC with an extension at low bitrates to give better treble performance. So DAB+ is what we've all been waiting for: DAB with higher sound quality.

It might not be quite so simple, though. DAB+ isn't being broadcast here, for a start, and no tuners support it. The reason why it has suddenly popped up on the radar is that both Frontier Silicon and Radioscape, who between them make most of the



Cyrus 8.0 DAB tuner – record DAB

Much has been made of the fact that several countries across the world have announced interest in DAB+. Significantly, however, none of the countries expressing interest in DAB+ have seen much market penetration of DAB; some never implemented it. The situation in the UK is different. DAB has been on air for several years and around four million receivers have been sold. Despite the particular interest we audiophiles have in higher sound quality, it is hardly in the interests of the broadcasters, or the bodies that oversee radio to turn round to the owners of those receivers and say, effectively, 'sorry, you'll have to buy a new one'.

“In the short term, DAB+ changes nothing. There seems little likelihood of even experimental services appearing in the next couple of years.”

'front ends' for DAB tuners, have announced new models which can be upgraded in service to decode DAB+ broadcasts. The Frontier Silicon front end has yet to be mass-produced, while the Radioscape one is being built into a model from Morphy Richards (not a name we often feature in these pages) due to hit the streets around the same time as this issue.

THE WILD FRONTIER

The Frontier Silicon device is particularly interesting. FS front ends are used, apparently, in some 80% of DAB tuners sold in the UK (including those from market leader Pure Digital, a company allied to FS).

The new model, which supports future codec upgrades, is not only smaller and cheaper than previous versions, but also uses considerably less power, so incorporating it at the earliest opportunity is a bit of a no-brainer for manufacturers of finished radios. The implication would appear to be that a very large number of radios that are potentially DAB+ compatible will be around in the not too distant future.

Official reaction has been muted, but sensible. Peter Davie, director of radio and multimedia for UK communications regulatory body Ofcom's Director of Radio and Multimedia, gave a talk in late January 2007, in which he brought up DAB+, pointing out that adopting it before most DAB tuners are equipped to receive it would be inadvisable. The BBC "fully supports the introduction of AAC... alongside MPEG" but again points to the four million DAB tuners in current use and will therefore 'continue to monitor the situation'.

THE OBVIOUS TRUTH

Peter Davies also mentions what is, when one thinks about it, an obvious truth: "With any implementation of AAC, broadcasters would have to make the same trade-off between sound quality and other things as they have [currently]... the link with sound quality is not automatic". If bitrates are kept the same and coding is changed from current MPEG to AAC, quality will undoubtedly improve. But who says there's any danger of that happening? If



broadcasters suddenly have the option of keeping quality about the same, while fitting two stations into the space previously occupied by one, will they not be tempted? It's also highly likely that broadcasters will also take advantage of DAB's rich metadata options (currently deeply underused) in the space freed up by more advanced codecs.

In the short term, DAB+ changes nothing. There seems little likelihood of even experimental services appearing in the next couple of years, and then it's probable that initial offerings will be 'slotted in' around existing DAB stations at low bitrates and relatively low quality. We've seen plausible-looking predictions in the region of seven years before popular stations start migrating to AAC, if at all.

In the mean time, if you want a DAB radio now, buy one now. It's in the nature of technology that it will be out of date in two years and long in the tooth in five but by then you'll have had plenty of use and (one hopes!) pleasure out of it. **HFC**

Richard Black



Top: Some websites demand rapid DAB change
Above: World DAB is digital radio's nerve centre

New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



MANIC STREET PREACHERS

Title: *Send Away The Tigers*

Release date: April

In a bid to freshen up their sound, the Manics' have turned to Chris Lord Alge, who mixed Green Day's *American Idiot*.

According to bassist Nicky Wire, the result is a "glossy punk album" with "a bit of politics, euphoria". And in case you were wondering, the title is apparently taken from an old saying by 1950s/1960s British comedy legend, Tony Hancock.



ARCTIC MONKEYS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: May

Arctic Monkeys' main man Alex Turner reckons the studio in which the band are recording the follow-up to their 2006 landmark debut *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* is haunted. Overall, he says there won't be any major stylistic departures – but how the ghostly presence will affect new songs such as *D Is For Dangerous* and *Fluorescent Adolescent* remains to be seen.

EDITORS

Title: *tba*

Release date: summer

The follow-up to 2005's acclaimed *The Back Room* from the Birmingham-based indie-rockers is set to be one of the most eagerly-awaited British albums of 2007. According to frontman Tom Smith: "We are making the songs that will compete with the Killers and Razorlight. We've got them in our sights with this record. The songs are sounding really big."

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

Title: *Restless Under Stars*

Release date: April

Intriguingly produced by the Pet Shop Boys' Neil Tennant, Wainwright reckons the follow-up to *Want Two* is "simpler and less

full of grand musical gestures" than we've heard from him before. Guests include Richard Thompson and Rufus's sister Martha, and he promises "lots of piano, lots of melody." Apparently, he's even written a love song to Brandon Flowers of the Killers.

QUEEN

Title: *tbc*

Release date: tbc

After the Queen reunion tour with Paul Rogers taking Freddie Mercury's place on vocals, the new line-up has been working on freshly-written material. "We'd already tested it pretty good on stage and now we've come up with some tracks, which I think are really great," says guitarist Brian May. "They're unlike anything that we've done, or anything that Paul's done".

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Lang Lang *Dragon Songs* (Mar), **Sting** *The Journey & The Labyrinth* (Mar), **Natalie Cole** *Leavin'* (Mar), **Sonny Rollins** *Sonny, Please* (Mar)

SACD/ DVD-A

Genesis *1st Set of 5* (SACD + DVD, Mar), **Keaton Simons** *Drive Away* (DVD-A, Mar), **Steffen Horn** *Konsert* (SACD, Mar), **Kings of Leon** *Aha Shake Heartbreak* (DualDisc, Apr), **Moody Blues** *Seventh Sojourn* (SACD, Apr)



Green-fi

Is it time to go all environmental?

OK, I give in. February's UN report has made me think again about the contribution that the audiophile community makes to global warming. Constantly running power amps might be an indulgence that we will have to learn to live without. It's not the end of the world; by switching them off, we also get to reduce our spiralling electricity bills.

I believe in recycling where possible and re-using foremost. And the great thing about decent hi-fi equipment is that it lasts for decades. Just look at the value of Quad II valve amps on eBay, in real terms its nearly as high as the original purchase price for a product that's still used regularly and is now well into its fifties.

“It’s hard enough shifting high-end audio at the best of times, but having to rescue a power amp while swimming has no appeal.”

The waste problem in hi-fi hardware lies at the other end of the scale. Go to a rubbish dump most days and you will see at least one all-in-one 'hi-fi' system that's malfunctioned in some minor respect or simply got too big by today's small'n'silver standards and been thrown out. If its owners had purchased a good quality system, it would still be serving a useful purpose and not be landfill.

Given this state of affairs, there's a good argument for buying high quality, locally produced components. Not only does hi-fi that's built in the UK and Europe have fewer miles to travel but it is also manufactured under conditions that are ecologically sound. Regulations that ensure this happens are already in place, and will be getting even more stringent in the near future. The EU is drafting laws that are designed to minimise the amount of energy that is used in the production of manufactured goods, as well as the efficiency of those goods when in use.

One way in which we can go green while holding on to our high fidelity aspirations is to get into digital amplification. You can even run some of them from a photovoltaic panel and inverter at no cost to the environment or your power bill. Anyone remotely interested in the subject will also realise that solar power has the potential to be extremely clean in sonic terms as well. It can only be a matter of time before Russ Andrews brings out his own branded panels hooked up with Kimber Kable.

So is this sudden concern entirely altruistic? Well... not entirely. You see, in October 2000, a river near where I live managed to flood the town with water levels five feet high. It's hard enough shifting high end audio at the best of times, but having to rescue a power amp while swimming has no appeal whatsoever!

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



Alvin Gold

System synergy

Change one thing, change the system entire

In *HFC 285*, I noted in a review of the Prima Luna ProLogue Six monoblocks a problem concerning the high output impedance of its main output. I concluded that this meant its performance in specific systems was virtually unpredictable.

Just to lay it on the line, any amplifier with a high output impedance will interact with the reactive component of the loudspeaker impedance. This effectively produces a tuned circuit with a distinctive frequency response and overall sonic balance. In effect, you cannot know how the system will sound, and this problem is not limited to this brand.

In fact, you will find synergy issues almost everywhere you look in a hi-fi system. One such example concerns high-resolution SACD players. SACD has an extended bandwidth that most amplifiers are simply unable to cope with because they lack the headroom necessary for the job. Many listeners may still be using amplifiers that were designed or built before SACD shifted the goalposts. Also, many early SACD players in particular had a switchable output filter to limit bandwidth at the output to 50kHz, but this is rare now. DVD-Audio only exceeds this bandwidth with its 192kHz stereo recordings, but these discs have never been widely available.

Perhaps the most striking example of a mutually dependent subsystem is the combination of amplifier, loudspeaker cable and loudspeaker. Not the gross effects associated with high impedance amplifier output stages, but the more subtle interactions associated with materials and construction of the speaker cable. The cable, along with the two terminations, and even the characteristics of the amplifiers' internal feedback loop can combine to affect the voicing of the system in ways that are all but impossible to predict. Although they may be subtle, the differences involved may be all that are needed to distinguish a great system from an also ran.

Of course, you should be able to find out about any such issue in product reviews, and in *HFC's* defence, matters of system and room synergy are explicitly addressed in the longer

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

YAMAHA CT-7000
FM TUNER



For those who believe that the passage of time inevitably brings technological advance and ever improving performance standards, read on and weep. Back in the 1970s, when it was introduced, the CT-7000 was by common consent one of the half dozen finest tuners available, an FM-only design brimming with sophistication and designed to take on the best that FM had on offer. It remains one of the best even today. Now all we have to show for advancing technology is DAB...

Introduced in 1974 and finally killed off four years later, Yamaha's brief was slightly different to other high end designs, for example from Accuphase (the T-100), McIntosh (MR 78), Day Sequerra, Pioneer and Kenwood. Most of these were designed for the best possible RF performance, with high levels of sensitivity, selectivity and a strong capture effect to help deal with the very crowded RF spectrum typical at the time in parts of the United States. The CT-7000 was no slouch in this respect either, but first and foremost, it was designed for the best possible sound quality, under the slightly more benign RF conditions typical of Europe. Even so, it did offer switchable narrow and wide IF bandwidth settings, and seven ceramic and LC IF filters. Although selectivity was intentionally not state of the art, the unit still offered a seven gang tuning capacitor – the first of its type – and the tuner still offered a very high sensitivity and IF interference rejection by normal standards. The tuning mechanism was a fully weighted design with a long, clearly marked slide rule type tuning scale – its most distinctive visual feature.

Accurate tuning was helped by the AFC circuit, which was automatically disengaged when the tuning control was touched, and reapplied when the hand was removed from the tuning control. User aids include two moving coil meters which could be switched to show centre tuning, signal strength and multipath, the latter effectively acting as an indicator of the cleanliness of the received signal. Two stage high blend helped cope with noise build-up when operating in stereo from very weak sources, and continuously variable



“It remains one of the best even today. Now all we have to show for advancing technology is DAB.”

interstation muting circuit allowed through stations that would otherwise be killed stone dead by the muting circuit.

A headphone amplifier was also included in the design, but surprising there was only a single aerial input (with 75 Ohm and 300 Ohm alternatives). And, of course, it was an analogue design without preset tuning.

The Yamaha features seven stages in its IF stage, each of which required independent alignment, and all of which are mutually dependent – meaning adjustments to one affected them all. As a result, setting up the tuner demanded some skill and could take several hours, but once this has been done, the tuner front end was apparently very stable and didn't drift. Old tuners may require new electrolytic capacitors as the originals are bound have drifted from their nominal values, but the design is otherwise said to wear well.

Finally, and this hardly needs saying given the accompanying picture, the CT-7000 is a truly fabulous piece of equipment in the purely physical sense. It tips the scales at just a tad under 14kg – nearly 30lbs in old money, which is remarkable for a tuner, and it is engineered like a Swiss watch internally. Yet even discounting the effects of inflation, its new price at the end of its model life was still comfortably below £800. Impressive. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



reviews using appropriately titled boxouts. The reality, however, is that it is not always possible to test products in a representative range of systems, and some interactions may not always be obvious, even in the most diligently conducted review.

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



Loved up

All you need is Love, at Christmas

I was given *Love at Christmas*. It was in the form of the new Beatles CD, *Love*. By some dint of good luck or, more likely, the smart marketing prowess of Amazon, I was given a double disc set – the 'Digipack' with a bonus DVD-A 5.1 Surround Sound separate disc.

Being pissed over most of Christmas – well so were you – this fact only came to light on one of those lovely quiet days following the

“The music – produced by George Martin and his son Giles (no, not me) – is a new take on The Beatles’ long worn familiarity.”

misty day itself when everyone's gone but the cards and decorations are still up, the fire is glowing and there's bubble and squeak with cold turkey in the offing. The first thing I did was to play the CD. Joy! Probably because, whatever anyone tells you, The Beatles were quite outstanding, not just for their time – but for eternity. The music – brilliantly produced by fifth Beatle George Martin and his son Giles (no, not me) – is a new take on The Beatles' long worn familiarity. Clear, re-mixed, all that stuff. Wonderful – who needs anything else?

Grudgingly, I turned to the DVD-Audio disc. Let it be known now that I despise listening to music in anything but two channel and sometimes I even refuse to call that stereo. I recall many a small herb-smoke filled hotel room at Harrogate Shows in the 1970s, locked in animated conversations with the likes of Linn's Ivor Tiefenbrun, Naim's Julian Vereker and *Hi-Fi Answers'* Editor Paul Benson (alas two of those worthies are no longer with us). We would deliberate on the worth of separating the music. I was in the minority, needless to say, arguing with frothing fervency that when you went to live performance gigs the band didn't separate before your very ears.

At a classical concert strings don't separate into a left side of a room while woodwind twitters on the right.

Of course, I capitulated in the end and accepted. I even got to like Dire Straits' first album. Or did I fake it that night? Stereo was here to stay and I was prepared to accept its unnatural duality as long as it didn't overdo it... like no headphones, please! But 5.1? Music in 5.1? You really are having a laugh. I just wouldn't accept the concept and quite frankly why should anyone?

Well, I'll tell you why. The Beatles *Love* album DVD-A, that's why. I played this – and because I'm in PR, I can't tell which system I use – but what I can say is that this DVD-A recording is peerless. It's given me a re-think on what can be achieved with multichannel music, in a seamless gathering of quite brilliant harmonic phrasing. OK, as I've suggested, The Beatles were exceptional, but this recording puts them in the realms of Gods.

You know what – it's true. All you need is *Love*. In 5.1 DVD-A.

Andy Giles is one of British hi-fi's biggest personalities. A former journalist, he has strong industry ties and a long-standing PR business



Malcolm Steward

Cheer up!

The state of hi-fi isn't THAT bad!

People in Britain seem to thrive on negativity. For example, we awoke this morning to about six inches of snow and my wife set of to school with our youngest son. When she arrived, she was greeted by a teacher, who told her that the school was closed: Why? Because of the 'appalling' weather! Now we live several miles away from the school but most of its pupils live within walking distance. Why on earth close it? It's typical of the attitude that prevails in this once great country. However, for a more relevant example of negative thinking, look at this industry's attitude towards hi-fi shows. "They're all dying... just like the people who used to enjoy visiting them," is the complaint.

It's true that today's hi-fi shows do not boast the attendance figures that those from the 1980s enjoyed – for a whole variety of reasons. But why not look on the positive side? Chesterfield Communications' recent events have been posting increasing visitor numbers. There might be a general downward-trend in the UK, that certainly doesn't seem the case elsewhere in Europe.

One only has to visit the annual *High End* show in Munich to see that while UK music fans might not relish spending their weekends auditioning hi-fi, the Germans along with other European visitors still positively revel in it. Many even come armed with cameras – and I'm talking about serious pro quality digital SLRs rather than the ubiquitous camera phones seen in the UK – so that they can relive their visit later and share the experience with their friends. Most importantly, they come armed with enthusiasm and, unlike us, they seem to leave their cynicism in the car park.

I'm not suggesting that you go to any show and suspend your critical faculties the second you walk through the door, but try to remember why we all got involved with hi-fi in the first place – because it's about having fun and enjoying yourself. Having said that, I will admit that there's little to be joyous about in some of the UK venues that host shows.

Another difference between Munich and the UK shows are the conversations that visitors have with the exhibitors. At the German show I've frequently witnessed intelligent debates



There will always be some who plump for the heads-down debut *In The City*, or the moment when they developed a distinctive voice of their own, on *All Mod Cons*. But it was The Jam's fifth album that saw them really stretch their wings and deliver a masterpiece.

It seems like a very long time ago, but in 1980 Paul Weller and his band seemed like an unstoppable force of nature, churning out hit after hit, which not only climbed to the upper reaches of the chart, but also garnered lavish critical praise. It's not insignificant that unofficial single *That's Entertainment*, written, allegedly "in five minutes, after the pub," reached number 21 even though it wasn't released in the UK – fans flocked to buy Dutch versions on import. As the 1980s dawned, The Jam could do no wrong.

And while there's a strong argument to be made that the best Jam album would have to be one of the numerous singles collections that have appeared since their demise, of the six studio albums they produced in their five year career, *Sound Affects* was the most ambitious, most coherent and best realised disc of the bunch. Paul Weller has claimed it as his favourite for the sensible reason that, "It's the only one I like all of the tracks on."

Despite the title, there's not very much in the way of studio trickery at work. There's a bit of backwards guitar here, some artful echo there, the addition of a few new instruments (piano and acoustic guitar, some horns) and more complex arrangements than they'd delivered previously. But mostly it's down to superbly written, tightly arranged pop rock tunes played with the energy of a band that *knows* it's the best in Britain and is determined to prove it.

There's the wry social observation of *Pretty Green* and in particular, *Man In The Corner Shop*, that would have pleased Ray Davies, the ebullient pop of *Bcy About Town* and *But I'm Different Now*, classic Weller rage on *Set The house Ablaze* and *Scrape Away*, hints of psychedelia on *Monday*, *Dreamtime* and *Music For The Last Couple* and of course the powering acoustic guitar and tautly controlled invective of *That's Entertainment*. And while

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

THE JAM
SOUND AFFECTS



"The lack of any law suits showed their tacit approval of Weller's 'homage' to *Taxman*."

The Beatles would have been familiar with the riff to number one single *Start!*, the lack of any law suits showed their tacit approval of Weller's 'homage' to *Taxman*

Rick Buckler's impeccable drumming and Bruce Foxton's busy basslines never found a better setting than Weller's songs, and Weller himself knew a thing or two about getting the best from a Rickenbacker guitar. The production is a subtle work of art. Engineer Vic Coppersmith-Heaven got his production break with *All Mod Cons* and had stuck with the Jam ever since. He successfully went for a warm, analogue sixties pop sound that seemed at once very modern, and impeccably vintage.

The Jam may have owed big debts to The Who, The Small Faces, The Kinks and The Beatles, but on their day they could best The Who for energy, The Small Faces for barrowboy botheration and bowed only to The Kinks and The Beatles in terms of lyrical deftness and melodic development respectively. The influences may be obvious, but it's a fact that pop has never sounded more powerful, more determined than this

The late, lamented, Mobile Fidelity's audiophile version of the album, twinned with *All Mod Cons* in 1996 (UDCD-1 673) is worth tracking down to hear Woking's finest moment at its best. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

between manufacturers and their potential customers, while in the UK I generally see people making snide remarks to their mates about the equipment they've auditioned as they leave the room. Surely if you have something to say about a demonstration, you're better off saying it to the person running it. Perhaps he might take your remarks on board and the next time you visit you may find the sound more to your liking.

So, if you feel like trekking across to Munich this year and spending some time listening to serious – along with a smattering of seriously wacky – hi-fi, do remember to pack your sense of fun and leave your cynicism in the hotel. Unless, of course, you're intent on giving us Brits a bad name!

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



Singin' the woos

A sprinkling of scepticism can be helpful

On the interweb, there are forums, and forums. Some of them aren't a nice place for a hi-fi buff to visit. Which is exactly why you should go there.

Take JREF, for example. That's the James Randi Educational Foundation, a place dedicated to promoting critical thinking and debunking pseudoscience in all its guises. In other words, it's a forum filled with sceptics that will spend hours pulling apart anything even slightly left of field. If you can't measure it, nibble it or sit on it... it's bunkum, and the community will happily tell you so. At length.

According to JREF, we are 'audiophools' and the explanations given by hi-fi companies (among others) are called 'woo'. Great word, it comes from the sound made by the easily impressed. Okay, not all of it is 'woo'... the stuff that has real physics behind it is woo-free (or at least reduced fat, sugar-free, woo), but 'white papers' devoted to why one loudspeaker cable is better than another, now that's prime cuts of Empire-strength woo. In fairness, audio usually comes in under JREF's radar (complementary medicine, spoon bending and



“The explanations given by hi-fi companies are called ‘woo’. Great word, it comes from the sound made by the easily impressed.”

creationism are popular JREF topics, compared to hi-fi), but the occasional new piece of audio craziness filters through and the forum kicks off. It's entertaining stuff for sure, until some poor sap tries to argue the case for the improvable and improbable, and the forum piranhas come out to feed.

We need that scepticism in audio. Many of us come to hi-fi from musical appreciation and a love of the finer things in life, rather than an academic understanding of electronics and mechanical engineering. This is both a good thing and a bad thing: good because people with a love of music prevent hi-fi from being an arid, engineer's hobby; bad because the lack of engineering and scientific nous can make suckers of us, as we accept all sorts of woo at face value and reach for the credit card. A healthy dose of scepticism should be deployed at all times.

On the other hand, we need to separate scepticism from cynicism. A sceptic will challenge statements to determine their validity. A cynic will just challenge for the sake of the challenge. In hi-fi, a sceptic may have a very fine (if woo-free) system, chosen using as tight a set of value judgements as any. A cynic won't, because 'they are above all that nonsense'. Listen to the sceptics and you might not spend a fortune on cables and tables... and even 192kHz sampling is taken with a pinch of salt, but you may well get to put together some good, no-nonsense audio. Listen to a cynic and pretty soon, you'll forget about listening to music altogether.

For a while, a site like JREF is breath of fresh air compared to audio forums that happily keep swallowing yet another brand of snake oil. But, if you aren't careful, that air can get pretty stale, pretty quickly, especially if you don't clean out your woo tray regularly.

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



Levinson and Lexus

When the stereo's great, the miles just drift by

May 21st, 2002. The ultimatum: make Denver by breakfast tomorrow. It came from my daughter, Sarah. It had to be breakfast, so she could freshen up before hitting the shops with her friends, nu-metalers Lostprophets. That's why we were in America; tailing as much of the band's marathon tour as we could in a week. Trouble was, we were still in Las Vegas, the sun had been up for hours and, keen to pack in a spot

of classic tourism, we decided to do the Grand Canyon on the way.

A great drive? Different. Epic. Dizzily straight tarmac dissolving into distant ripply heat; a million shades of dust and 360 degrees of glare; wall-to-wall r'n'b on the radio, Lostprophets in the CD.

Ah, the CD player. Indeed, the whole damn Mark Levinson sound system fitted as standard to our Lexus LS430. By the end, it was the only thing that kept us sane. We drove to Vegas from LA through the Nevada desert, we drove out of it into the Arizona desert. Same deal, more cacti. The great thing about the Grand Canyon is that it takes your breath away the moment you see it. Hanging around is an anti-climax. A few slow pans of the camcorder and we were on our way.

According to the nav system there were just another 659 miles to go. My spirits sank, but I couldn't have been in a better car. Or at least a better car with a comparable stereo. The trick with a long haul road trip against the clock is to disengage brain, let time and distance slip effortlessly by. With radar cruise control and an unerring sense of direction, the sublimely quiet and comfortable LS430 all but drove itself. At midnight I saw the lights of Albuquerque without realising we were in New Mexico. Five hours later, Denver's skyline made small indentations in the fringe of first morning light on the horizon. The trip read 970 miles. I slept the next eight hours.

The key, though, was the quality of multi-speakered Mark Levinson sound system, which, to this day, remains the best hi-fi on wheels I've ever heard. It wasn't that we played it terribly loud, but its subterranean bass and ballistic transient attack were nose-on-face plain at moderate volume settings. Thing was, it just sounded so musical. Musical in a very unshowy and undemonstrative way. It had that unmistakable quality of having oodles of grunt in reserve. With a little care over the front/rear balance, the results were detailed and natural with an easy presentation of detail, good timbral resolution and fine overall integration. Soundstaging was convincing (notoriously hard to achieve in a car), rhythmic coherence bang on the money.

If the Lexus hadn't been such a refined car, the music wouldn't have sounded half as good (and, remember, we could compare Lostprophets' *Fake Sound of Progress* CD with the real thing). Indeed, it was hard to see how things could have been any better. The Lexus's stereo may not have been most overtly 'hi-fi' in Christendom, but its subtle charms more than compensated for any drive-by jollies.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

FEEDBACK



On p52 of this issue, you will find a review of Densen's B-110 amplifier, a model which is unusual in using no feedback.

But what is this feedback thing all about? Densen and a very few other makers of transistor amplifiers avoid it, as do quite a few valve amplifier brands – indeed, evangelists for some of the latter go as far as to imply that feedback is the very death of good sound quality. Can a single aspect of amplifier design be so critically important?

Feedback is well named, although it has got little in common with the howl-around so beloved of Jimi Hendrix. In any physical system, where an input state is converted to an output, it is possible to sample the output, feed back some information about it to the input point, and then compare that information with the original input state, and thus modify the output so that it bears a specific relation to the input.

Now, that all sounds a bit complex. Let's think this through in the present case of an audio amplifier. The input state is a voltage and so is the output state, which should simply be the same as the input but bigger, typically some 20 or so times bigger in the case of a typical power amp. Why not simply make an amplifying circuit with a gain of 20?

The answer is all to do with the vagaries of real-world amplifying devices. In a nutshell, they don't ever have a gain of exactly 20 – or if they do, it only applies at one specific point on their operating curve. Apply some input voltage so that operating conditions change slightly and the gain changes too, giving rise to distortion.

In a feedback circuit, however, the bit of the circuit that does the feeding back is reducing a voltage rather than amplifying it, which is easier to do with very high precision. Make this part of the circuit the determining factor in the overall performance, and we have something much closer to the 'perfect' amplifier. This can be done, of course, and millions of amplifying circuits, in applications from industrial control to audio, are able to demonstrate it.



“Indeed, evangelists go as far as to imply that feedback is the very death of good sound quality.”

But, the problem with feedback is phase shift. Real electronic circuits take a finite amount of time to do anything and that translates to phase shift. For one thing, if you aren't careful when designing a feedback circuit that can turn an amplifier into an oscillator. Even if one avoids that pitfall, the amplifier is still 'chasing its own tail', feeding back a signal, which is basically slightly late compared to what is currently at the input. This is the commonest charge levelled at feedback circuits in audio: they may appear to work with sinewaves but with real audio they are always slightly inaccurate.

Feedback circuits originally got a bad name because some high-feedback power amps in the 1970s did indeed sound grim. The real reason, however, was that they had terrible crossover distortion and since at crossover the gain is next to nothing the feedback did nothing or even made things worse.

Within competently designed circuits, however, feedback can and does work perfectly well, both with sinewaves and with real-world audio signals. There are good, bad and indifferent amps using any amount of feedback you care to name and, like so many marketing-led bits of techno-speak, feedback is just one of the many things you shouldn't need to know about a product. **HFC**

Richard Black

 *Sonus faber*®

Sonus Faber Grand Piano Domus



For over two decades, Sonus faber have treated us to speakers so beautiful that they've revolutionised the entire industry. Where once there were only parallel sides, we now have curves. Where once we suffered poor veneers, we now savour finishes worthy of the finest furniture. From the exquisite Homage series, representing the ultimate in Sonus faber artistry, to the Cremona range, offering the pleasure of Homage for a wider audience, Sonus faber has addressed the needs of the majority of music and cinema lovers. Now, the audience is wider still.

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SYSTEM FILE

Rev Counter built up a system thanks to a dealer miles and miles away

THE SYSTEM

- Marantz SA-11S1 SACD/CD player
- Arcam A85 integrated amplifier
- Arcam P85 power amplifier
- Pioneer PDR-509 CD recorder
- KEF xQ1 loudspeakers
- Soundstyle equipment support
- vdH/QED/LAT cables
- IsoTek GII Mini Sub mains isolator

Suppose it's inevitable. If you are in the RAF with a surname like 'Counter', you are going to get a nickname like 'Rev'.

The name stuck, and only his mum and the taxman know Rev Counter's real first name. Perhaps it's a good thing the name 'Rev' stuck, on civvy street, he's now Mr Counter the accountant, a nickname waiting to happen.

Like most people involved with hi-fi, Rev has been building up his system over the years. No mad rush into hi-fi, no six new products a month for Rev. Slow and steady wins the race. Rev could also be considered poster boy for the power of a good dealer, as he buys his equipment from Unilet in New Malden, despite living in a county far, far away from the Surrey-based dealer. Regardless, Unilet served him well in the past and geography is no limitation.

The hi-fi bug bit Rev almost 20 years ago, and he wound up with an Ariston turntable (like many record decks, still an attic-dweller), Arcam CD player, Creek amp and speakers by Mordaunt-Short. Over the years, products came and went, but there have been surprisingly few changes since 1988.

KRAUTROCK ROCKS

Perhaps the biggest series of changes have happened to the CD player. Out went the Arcam, in came a NAD, then another Arcam before settling on the Marantz SA-11S1 SACD and CD playing masterpiece. This has changed the way Rev buys music, as he actively seeks out SACDs whenever he can. Although SACD is commonly thought of as the classical buff's player of choice, there is not a classical disc in the building. But Rev is a big fan of Krautrock from the 1970s, and many Can recordings have been remastered on SACD recently.

The system (comfortably Arcam biamped until a matching Marantz comes along) is perfectly suited for this sort of music. It's the mail'd fist in the velvet glove, with surprising levels of power and depth, never once tripping over the complex polyrhythms of Neu! or the noodlings of Amon Düül.

Rev's other great musical influence is Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys (*Surf's Up* is his favourite track, ever), and the big, controlled, almost Krell-like sound of the system perfectly suits that effortless West Coast sound.

The system is smooth, but not overly laid back. This is a system that can deliver the drive and energy of music just as easily, too. The best example of how this works in both cases is *Breathe* from the SACD of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. This manages to deliver the power and the glory – no mean feat.

Part of this comes through the small size of the room, never putting pressure on the speakers, and the sort of volume levels needed to drive such a compact space. But, most comes from very precise selection to fit the criteria Rev has placed on his system. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



C'MON - JOIN IN THE FUN!

If you'd like your system to be featured in *System File*, simply write a 'review' of your system using 500 words or less and send it to: System File, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email it to: hifisub@futurenet.co.uk (please include your name and address). If we pick you, you'll get a visit from one of our reviewers, plus a special 'goody bag' consisting of a Hi-Fi Choice T-shirt, IsoTek's System Enhancer CD and Russ Andrews' Sound Solutions book... so get writing!



The world according to...

AVI hi-fi

Hi-Fi Choice talks to **Ashley James**, outspoken boss of audiophile maverick AVI, about his vision of hi-fi and technology in perfect harmony. Interview: Malcolm Steward

I wasn't looking forward to the drive to Stroud to meet Ashley James, the boss at AVI, because the weather forecast predicted snow and sleet. But, the sun shone all day and my journey was a pleasant one, topped off by listening to delightful, compressed recordings (yes, you did read that correctly) through the company's newest active loudspeakers.

HFC You have described AVI as an anarchic company: what do you mean by that?

AJ Anarchic probably isn't the most accurate term: we just looked initially at what the market was offering those people who were willing to spend up to about £1,000 and thought that perhaps we could offer something that was better and more suitable for the current times. The iPod and iTunes are frighteningly popular, and not just with the 'snowboarding generation' – all sorts of hi-falutin' people are using them – people who

had top-of-the-range BMW cars, for example, came to see us and they had docks for iPods in them, for example, and then we thought why not go straight to the computer as a source and plug straight into iTunes or whatever software they were using?

So, we started with the Active Neutrons, which plug into a screen and a Mac Mini or PC and offer great performance. Using two small active speakers is a much more convenient solution than using separate amplifiers. You can do a better job this way. It also saves people a whole lot of money as well as space in their homes. So we're not really anarchic at all, it's more a case that we at AVI are moving forward while the rest of the industry has been rather sedentary for the past few years.

HFC How do you feel toward hi-fi retailers?

AJ I think a lot of them are enthusiasts and perhaps, slightly less commercial than they could be. I also think they've been slow to latch

on to computers, even from the point of using them to research the products and manufacturers they deal with. I even have problems getting some dealers to use email to place orders! They like their turntables and they like their separates, but they don't see that it isn't what all their customers want.

Another problem is that they've been singularly slow to adapt. That is why, especially with the specialised products that we make, the customers' first point of call is our website (www.avihifi.co.uk), where they research us very thoroughly before they go to the shop and ask questions. When they don't get the right answers, they become very frustrated and angry: I know because I answer all their phone calls! I've tried to get retailers to visit the website, but many won't because this doesn't fit with their mindsets.

HFC Do you believe that you can achieve genuine high fidelity with your computer?

AJ No, they actually give a significant improvement in sound quality because, for one, you have individual purpose-designed amplifiers driving each speaker drive unit and a very clever electronic crossover, which you can't do passively. It's a big improvement over separates; that's the whole point.

HFC You suggest that jitter in CD players isn't the problem that manufacturers claim.

AJ It isn't. If you look at the websites of all the major DAC chipset manufacturers they tell you that jitter isn't a problem. What is a problem is that most people are using high-speed converters, which generate RFI (Radio Frequency Interference), and they react differently with the amplifiers, depending upon how competent those amplifiers are at dealing with it. So reviews of a CD player often won't reflect its true performance because its 'problems' are probably caused by the amplifier to which it's connected. Jitter is well catered for by the architecture of most modern DACs, so it isn't a problem: and that is not our opinion but that of the DAC manufacturers!

“iPod and iTunes are frighteningly popular; not just with the ‘snowboarding generation’ – all sorts of hi-falutin’ people use them.”



HFC Could you be a little more specific about these RF problems?

AJ If you place an oscilloscope near even one of the best CD players with a high-speed converter in it, you'll see an output on the screen, which indicates a degree of RF output. A few years ago, a very highly regarded and well reviewed bitstream DAC from a high profile manufacturer produced so much RF that any FM radio within a hundred feet of it would not work. And I've been at hi-fi shows when a similarly highly praised American DAC caused systems in adjacent rooms to produce an offensive noise. The levels of RF these DACs produced reflected the competence of their designers to read the extremely comprehensive instruction manuals that come with these chips. Every conceivable piece of information is made available to these designers and yet they still manage to produce products that generate excessive RF and so react differently with every amplifier to which they're connected. There's absolutely no excuse to get things so wrong but many people still do!

HFC Surely this poses problems for reviewers, too, when they mix and match components in their test systems?

AJ That's why we don't like the mix and match approach, because no one manufacturer will accept the blame when a system fails to satisfy: they always blame the others! It's why we prefer people to buy systems from a single manufacturer. Preferably us. But if AVI doesn't work for you then you're better off buying a complete system from someone else.

HFC Surely part of the appeal of hi-fi for the hobbyist is that mixing and matching?

AJ I don't think that people can always afford to buy a whole system in one hit so there's probably always going to be that mix and match element. It's fine as long as people remember that it is then impossible to tell which bit of the system it is that's giving them the result they don't like. That's when people generally start messing about with cables!

HFC What about MP3 and compressed audio in general, which is an important component in any computer-based system?

AJ We think that people should keep an open mind about it, though, we would caution that with MP3 in particular, the sound quality does vary dramatically, depending upon the competence of the system it's played through. With a good, low-distortion system, MP3s are surprisingly okay. However, experts recommend that you store your music losslessly as well (or keep your original CDs) because compression systems are constantly improving and you might want to rip and compress your music ☑



again a couple of years later to gain the benefits of new algorithms. The other thing to do if you want to store your music and you don't have as much disk space as you'd like, is to use the AAC system and choose a bit-rate whereby you can't tell the difference between your recordings and the originals. People should not run away with the idea that compressed music is the enemy, because it's not: it's surprising how effective it is. And that is not solely our opinion – all I'm doing is quoting other authorities and there's a host of well-accredited experts who argue that it's impossible to tell the difference between an original CD and a 128K AAC+ recording.

One thing about MP3 quality is the type of music itself that you're recording: with some you can get away with much heavier compression than you can with other types. Music from the 1950s and 1960s will tolerate more data reduction than pop songs from the 1980s, for example.

Ultimately though, we've no comment to make other than to encourage people to listen for themselves and decide. If they have a rotten hi-fi system – and what it cost is no indicator of its quality – they may not get the same results. If their system is better, then they might be rather surprised how good compressed music can be.

HFC *May we change tack and talk about digital radio for the moment?*

AJ Well, with internet radio and its 4,000 or more stations, there is so much music available from so many parts of the world, it's really

“Anyone who dismisses internet radio or DAB as just compressed digital music is cutting off their nose to spite their face.”

exciting and interesting. Anyone who dismisses internet radio or DAB as just compressed digital music is cutting off their nose to spite their face. It's an exciting time. Hi-fi has really opened up. And the attitude of some people towards DAB... the rubbish that's been talked about it... The reason was the disgraceful sounding DAB tuners that some manufacturers have put on the market. Some of them had digital outputs and when we plugged a Wolfson demonstration board into the back of a particularly bad example, it transformed it. It sounded quite respectable: okay, it was MP2 at 128K and wasn't as good as CD, but people who cared about radio absolutely loved it.

People who enjoy radio are loving DAB to death and saying that it's better than FM, which it is, while there are others who are screaming, complaining and writing rubbish on



websites and really having a go. It's pointless, all they're achieving is stopping people from buying tuners that they actually want and could enjoy. We've had emails from customers saying that because of all this negative comment they've not bought a DAB tuner and have bought a portable instead, and now they're missing their hi-fi tuner. That's one reason why we have our website: we just thought that this sort of thing was getting out of hand and we hoped that we might help prevent hi-fi from marginalising itself even more. If you think back to the early 1980s when VCRs punched a huge hole in the hi-fi market, then came satellite TV, then multiroom,

then computer-based music... all these things have dug into what was originally the hi-fi market, which has become increasingly split and marginalised.

Installers, who have to provide high quality sound to their customers, often won't talk to hi-fi retailers because they imagine they're barking mad. The industry has made itself unappealing to 'normal' people: if you're an everyday kind of chap who would like a good sounding system and you read articles in the *Sunday Times* about hi-fi types freezing CDs or daubing them with green ink to make them sound better, you're hardly likely to visit a hi-fi retailer, are you? You're not going to want to get involved with that sort of malarkey! That's not the way to talk to people, particularly, professionals who can appreciate the difference between logic and lunacy.

Although AVI might seem to be out on a limb to some, we are really trying to respond to today's mainstream, quality-conscious buyers. Traditional hi-fi – if it refuses to look beyond turntables and valve amplifiers – could find itself facing the same situation that the British motorbike industry faced years ago, in which the bickering descended to the point where the traditional British bikers were stopping owners of Japanese bikes in the street and insulting them, asking why they were riding these new 'crap' machines. As we know, that didn't halt the progress of those foreign bikes because they were far more in tune with what the majority of bikers wanted.

HFC *We've listened to a lot of music today, sourced from a sub-£400 Mac Mini, which strikes me as a very impressive little device*

AJ It is. Provided you use capable amplifiers and loudspeakers, the Mini is actually rather better than most of what one writer, rather condescendingly, refers to as 'mid-fi' CD players. Apple has been involved with music for many years and is very experienced: I can remember seeing audiophile recordings being mastered at Telarc on Macs with black and white screens! As far as the hi-fi enthusiast is concerned, the Mini is simply a very capable CD transport/recorder. It can produce better music from its hard disk than the best CD player can manage because computer data has to be perfect and isn't streamed in real-time, unlike a CD player. The computer has to get all the 0s and 1s in the right place: it can't rely upon error correction and interpolation.

And so, having made a mental note to check out the Mac Mini further, I left Stroud and headed for the motorway, thinking of perhaps stopping off at any Tesco I passed – because it has, apparently, signed a deal to stock Apple products in some of its stores. **HFC**

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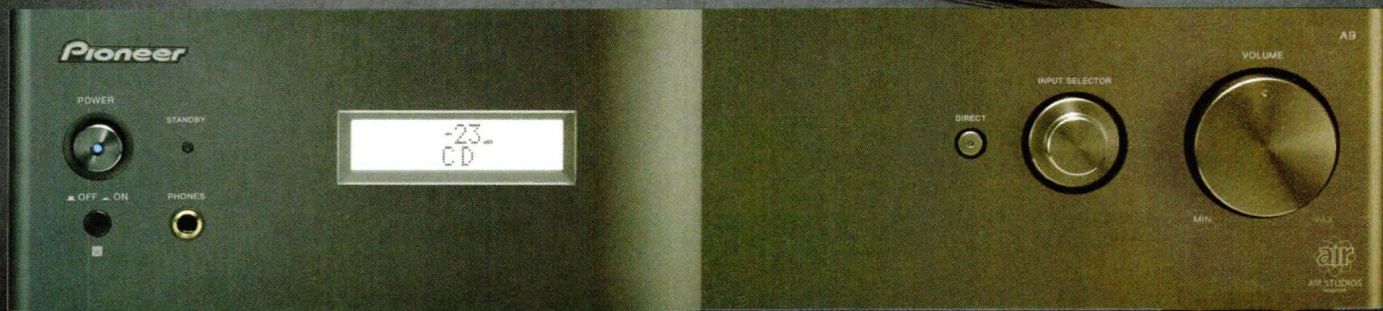
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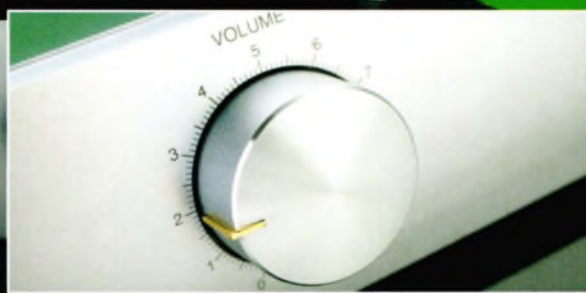
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WIN!

A FLYING MOLE CA-S10 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER WORTH £1,000



Flying Mole is a small Japanese company with big ambitions for its digital amplifier technology. These ambitions are brought to fruition in the CA-S10 integrated amplifier, which we reviewed last month (*HFC 291*). This is not only the smallest 100 watt amplifier we've ever seen, it's also one of the most revealing and transparent integrated amps at the price point. Both factors are a result of the PWM bi-phase digital technology under the beautifully finished lid.

Flying Mole amplifiers have a degree of detail resolution that's way out of their league; you won't find this sort of resolution among the traditionally equipped competition, however hard you look. The other factor that sets this brand apart is the quality of build; this is the best of Japanese engineering, a fact that's immediately obvious when you see it in the flesh. The CA-S10 has line three inputs alongside a preamp output and thus can be used with a Flying Mole power amplifier for a bi-amplified system. If you'd like the chance to experience the 'Mole', get to your phone now. For your chance to win, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.



CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winner, Glen Knox of Northants, who wins a pair of AVI Active Neutron speakers worth £1,049!

QUESTION:

What sort of digital amplifier technology does the Flying Mole CA-S10 use?

- A:** PG Tips
- B:** KFC Secret Recipe
- C:** PWM bi-phase

TO ENTER:

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The competition start date is 08th March. The closing date is 04th April. Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. The entries will be judged after the closing date and the winners will be notified by telephone within ten days of that date. Prizes will be sent out within 28 days of notification by the companies involved, not Hi-Fi Choice or Future Publishing. Entering costs – BY TEXT: 1x £1.00 (including VAT) for each entry plus your usual text message cost. This service is available to T-Mobile, Orange, Vodafone and O2 customers only. BY PHONELINE: Each call costs a maximum of £1.50. Please remember to get permission from the person who pays the bill before you enter. No purchase necessary. Alternatively, please send your name, address and telephone number with the correct answer to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. If you have any problems making your call or sending your text, please contact the service provider, Opat Telecom. Tel: 0845 330 5002. Email: futuresupport@opatelecom.co.uk



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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

JIM HALL

Concierto

CTI/Pure Pleasure

2x 180g vinyl



Music: Guitarist Jim Hall was a cool and subtle jazz stylist in the spirit of Bill Evans with whom he has recorded. This 1975 outing is considered by many to be the best

release in CTI's illustrious (though oft obscure) pantheon, and benefits from the presence of Paul Desmond on alto sax and Chet Baker on trumpet alongside Ron Carter (bass) and Rolland Hanna (piano). Carter in particular gels superbly with Hall, the two stringed instruments interweaving to great effect when the rest of the band lets them go. One for the connoisseurs. ★★★★★

Sound: CTI had a reputation for fine sounding albums and this Rudy Van Gelder engineered production is no exception. It has great imaging and tone for the era. ★★★★★ JK

ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis' Great Hits

RCA/Speakers Corner

180g



Music: 1964's *Great Hits* marks the transition from the young, rockin' Elvis to the more mature balladeer. It has a good few upbeat numbers, but his style is far more

polished and the arrangements often more sophisticated. Having said that tracks like (*Marie's The Name Of*) *His Latest Flame* are incredibly simple and sparse with only drum, guitar and voice. *It's Now or Never* on the other hand has superb backing vocals and marvellous mariachi guitar in a far more orchestrated arrangement. Classic stuff. ★★★★★

Sound: This album has a very distinctive character, presumably that of tube electronics but also of a highly polished recording made with no expense spared. Hardly hair shirt, this is more like a journey into the high fidelity sound of bygone era. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure
www.purepleasurerecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



LUCINDA WILLIAMS

West

Lost Highway

Music: Lucinda Williams has long been America's most fearlessly honest songwriter, but the recent death of her mother and "a tumultuous relationship that ended badly" here invoke even more emotional nakedness than usual. Now in her fifties, she's that rare creature in popular music who didn't hit her stride until her forties and has simply gone on getting better. To describe her voice as a world-weary southern drawl is accurate but misleading, for the effect is also voluptuous. Her ability to translate pain into beauty is breathtaking – if you set a Flannery O'Connor story to music, it would surely sound like this. ★★★★★

Sound: Think Neil Young's *Harvest* crossed with Bob Dylan's *Oh Mercy* and thank co-producer Hal Wilner for such an inspired crossbreed. ★★★★★ NW



NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE

Live At The Fillmore East (March 6/7 1970)

Reprise

Music: Young went on the road with Crazy Horse shortly after they recorded *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, their first album together, and unleashed soon-to-be classics like *Cinnamon Girl* and *Down By The River*, the latter produced here in a blistering 12 min guitar duel with Danny Whitten. Elsewhere there's a spikey *Come On Baby Let's Go Downtown* but this first of Young's archive series is surprisingly short both in length (43 mins) and in classic performances. ★★★

Sound: Young has decided to duplicate the album; firstly on a HDCD, which is harsh on the ears with rough bottom end and painful cymbals and guitar squeals and on a DVD-Video with only stills to accompany the music, but with much cleaner sound. ★★★ MP



GARDEN OF DREAMS

Jerry Junkin (cond) Dallas Wind Symphony

Reference Recordings RR-108 (HDCD)

Music: David Maslanka is a contemporary US composer with a widely published output, perhaps best known for the richness and variety of his writing for wind instruments and percussion. This disc is an excellent introduction to his genre and while the music itself is at times fiercely complex, and not hummable, it's also easy on the ear, because the orchestration is often thinned down to reveal structures of utmost simplicity and beauty. ★★★★★

Sound: Reference Recordings HDCD discs have a reputation for sonic excellence borne of the consummate care and attention that goes into the engineering as much as for the HDCD algorithm itself. This is no exception and comes into its own during the more complex passages. ★★★★★ AG



BRYAN FERRY

Dylanesque

Virgin

Music: Roxy Music fans who loved Ferry's 1973 hit version of *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* have been waiting for him to make an entire album of Dylan covers ever since. But diehard Bobcats who thought his mannered take on the great man's song was a travesty, prayed such a thing could never happen. But if *A Hard Rain* was all style and no substance, after 34 years, the mature Ferry (along with his regular touring band, amply enhanced on *If Not For You* by that other former Roxy Music superstar and Friend of the Ferry, Brian Eno) has finally redressed the balance with these thoughtful and well-judged interpretations of songs such as *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, *Positively Fourth Street* and *Simple Twist Of Fate*. ★★★

Sound: The once smooth voice is now pitted and battered and much the better for it, while the production and arrangements go for simple honesty over superficial flash. A revelation. ★★★★★ NW



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Joe Meek EP Collection

Castle CD Boxed Set

Music: These dozen CDs, repackaged in the same sleeves as the original vinyl 45s, capture much of the twisted genius of indie producer Joe Meek, who died 40 years ago. The majority of these 48 tracks show that Mad Joe was well ahead of the game in his search for sensation through sound. Epics like The Tornados' *TelStar* and John Leyton's *Johnny Remember Me* still sound freshly unreal today while The Packabats, Flee-Rekkers, Heinz, Don Charles and Mike Berry more than make up the numbers. By turns, as camp, threatening and innovative as JM himself. ★★★

Sound: Varies, depending on how far out our Joseph was trying to be with his hand-built effects on any given track. But when it hits, it's magic. ★★★ PS



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "A religious musical experience for fans"

JAGA JAZZIST What We Must Ninja Tune

Music: Not a jazz band by any stretch, but these ten virtuoso Norwegian musicians use acoustic and electric instruments to generate a texturally rich wall of sound, possessed of an energy that ebbs and flows in intriguing fashion. This is music that's difficult to categorise; one part prog rock, one part big band, and one part wall of sound. This 2005 album is undoubtedly their finest, its pinnacle being the joyous noise that builds into a tempest on *Oslo Skyline*. Nothing less

than a religious musical experience for fans, but not for the faint-hearted ★★★★★

Sound: With so many instruments and voices in the mix, it takes a very decent system to open up the rather compressed nature of this recording. As such, the recording responds to the hi-fi treatment extremely well, revealing some incredibly powerful drumming that's far too deep in the mix for its own good ★★★★★ JK



LAURA VEIRS Saltbreakers

Nonesuch

Music: While she may have so far failed to revitalise librarian chic outside of her immediate fan circle, Laura Veirs has a way with a melody and a subtly emotional delivery that gives her music an appeal far beyond the US college rock scene, which seems her natural home. Having settled into a winning groove with 2006's *Year Of Meteors*, *Saltbreakers* offers more of the same – "she remains tantalised by the mysteries and marvels of the natural world", according to her MySpace site. However, she also retains her blend of tentatively optimistic melancholia with a *souçon* of intellectualism, creatively interpreted by her regular band, who move easily between fuzzed-up rockers and gently rolling acoustic numbers. An underground talent here in the UK for sure, but well worth checking out ★★★★★

Sound: Veirs is clearly very much in the rock singer/songwriter tradition, but the arrangements offer a surprisingly diverse palette with a wealth of subtle sonic highlights on a record that rewards close listening ★★★★★ DO



DVD-AUDIO & SACD

MCCOY TYNER Sahara

SACD (stereo only SACD plus stereo CD)

Mobile Fidelity Soundlab

Music: This is a very good example of what John Coltrane's favourite pianist was capable of back in 1975. You can hear a lot of Trane's influence for sure, but there is more of Tyner and his cohorts, including Alphonse Mouzon (drums) and Sonny Fortune (sax, flute), who are clearly their own men. *Sahara* is a powerful, intense and uncompromising album; it has its mellow moments such as when Tyner turns to the koto (a 13 string Japanese relative of the zither) on *Valley Of Life*, but most of this five track album is certainly not for the Smooth FM (*née* Jazz FM) listener ★★★★★

Sound: MOFI has served up the power and energy on offer in this recording, but it shows its vintage in limited low frequency power and a relatively flat image, but the format undoubtedly helps one through the denser passages. ★★★★★ JK



WILLIAM WALTON Symphony No 1

Sir Colin Davis (cond), LSO

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

LSO Live LS00576

Music: This high-resolution multichannel recording is the first budget high-resolution recording of this compelling work. Excellent even in stereo CD, SACD helps make the best of its jazzy, syncopated and sometimes (especially in the *Scherzo*) violent structure. Composed in the 1930s, although it does not directly refer to the uncertain political situation of the day, it could be thought to do so in the way it combines the lyricism of Elgar or Sibelius with the diamond like brilliance of Bernstein, though musically it is cast from a then new mould ★★★★★

Sound: This is arguably the first truly compelling account since André Previn's landmark 1966 recording, and it's more than welcome, not just in documenting an electrifying performance, made live at the Barbican, but also thanks to its superb sound quality in both formats. ★★★★★ AG



OSVALDO GOLIJOV

Ainadamar

Dawn Upshaw, Atlantic SO, Robert Spano (cond)
DGG 00289 477 6165

Music: This short, melodramatic opera is based on the life (actually the death) and times of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. It uses an eclectic mixture of South American and European musical influences, from the neo-Strauss *Also Sprach Zarathustra*-like opening, through Hebraic and Arabic Moorish moments, to extended passages of full on flamenco and others with powerful repeated riffs which make this a truly compelling work. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded in the Atlanta Symphony Hall, it has a powerfully full quality, underlying the sometimes fruity bass lines, and a real sense of electricity. Stereo imagery is surprisingly three dimensional. ★★★★★ AG



MONEY MARK

Brand New By Tomorrow

Island/Brushfire

Music: The one-time Beastie Boy has been ploughing his own lo-fi, gently soulful and funky inventive furrow for a decade now. His fourth cut nods to greasy 1970s funk, easy-listening jazz and sixties-tinged pop. They're all proper three-minute pop songs, marking a move away from the usual eclectic collection of instrumentals. He hasn't the strongest of voices, but there's an unforced sense of fun that makes this record a delight, particularly on the modestly proportioned epic *Black Butterfly*, and the Rhodes-dominated *Summer Blue*. ★★★★★

Sound: It's certainly not polished, but it's far from rough, and the keyboard-in-the-living-room sound adds an immediacy that gives the record some much-needed bounce. ★★★★★ DO

ERICH KUNZEL/CINCINNATI POPS

Mega Movies

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Telarc

Music: This disc showcases some of the main blockbuster movie themes from the last decade or so, with some system-challenging special audio effects from the same movies. It's elevated well above the status of an SFX test disc, however, by the quality of the music from Oscar winners like Jerry Goldsmith (*LA Confidential*), John Williams (*Star Wars*) and James Horner (*Titanic*) as well as Randy Newman (*A Bug's Life*) and David Arnold (*Godzilla*) all reproduced by the reliable Cincinnati Pops orchestra. There are useful sleeve notes by SFX designer Michael Bishop, who created all the movie sound effects on the album. How else would you discover that the bee attack in *The X-Files* required six separate microphones coated with honey or that *Godzilla's* stroll through New York required the splicing together of 270 separate audio tracks? ★★★★★

Sound: Attention to detail in the mix is exemplary and there are plenty of low-end rumblings (some down to 5Hz, apparently) and sudden volume eruptions to give your system a thorough testing. ★★★★★ DO



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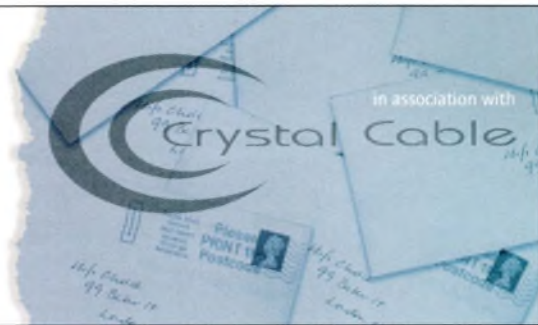
It's a Cyrus tuner, so you know it will sound great. It's bristling with the latest digital technology, like using EPG to select and record shows to an SD card while you're out and about. To find out more about its advanced features visit www.cyrusaudio.com

ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

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



PENSIONED OFF

During my working life, my income increased and my hi-fi improved. Now I have retired, my fixed income dictates a cautious approach to replacing hardware, but I want the best that I can afford. I also want it at a time that my hearing will permit me to appreciate it. A dealer once told me that hearing declines with age, but the appreciation of music is not lost. Do you have any older reviewers who can support this or are reviewers pensioned off at a certain age?

Jeffrey Borland via email



Above: Monitor Audio Radius 90 loudspeaker

HFC We're not sure some of our reviewers would like us to describe them as 'older', but we do have some senior members, if not yet senior citizens. We'd concur that the appreciation of music will stay with you, even if you're not hearing as well as you once were. Luckily, if money is tight, there is some excellent mid-priced kit out there; **Arcam, Cambridge Audio, Creek and Marantz have all been consistently good in this area.**

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

In December's *Audiophile Dispatches*, (HFC 288), David Vivian shares some of his experiences with the Monitor Audio Radius 90 speakers. His impressions were very positive. Yet, there is no review of these and they are not even mentioned in your *Buyer's Bible* section. I use Radius 90s in my second system and I'm amazed by the sound quality of this miniature setup. Why aren't the Radius 90s reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice* when obviously they deserve it?

Milos Dunjic Ontario Canada

HFC David did indeed wax lyrical about the diminutive Radius 90 speakers in his column and it sounds like they are indeed very good speakers. They are, however, satellite speakers and as such, have limited

"Why aren't the Radius 90s reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice* when they deserve it?"

appeal to our purist two-channel audio readership in *Hi-Fi Choice*. We are pleased to announce, however, that Monitor Audio will be awarding us an exclusive review of one of its new flagship Platinum range loudspeakers in the coming months, so keep an eye out for that review.

COMMON SENSE

I have just e-mailed a rival magazine to tell them that I have bought my last copy. I feel its publication has gone down hill in recent times, so I have now decided to buy *Hi-Fi Choice*. Keep up the good work. *Hi-Fi Choice* goes from strength to strength.

Bruce Reader Shropshire

HFC Thanks, Bruce and welcome aboard. There's never been a better time to start regularly reading *Hi-Fi Choice*. In fact, we have a cracking Russ Andrews subscription offer this month on p80 that shouldn't be missed. ☐

Letter of the month

VALIDATING THE INVALID

I refer Craig Brown's letter *Invalid Vinyl and Valves* in *Choice Mail* (HFC 290). Why, Craig do you still find it laughable that people still hang on to their 'antiquated record players'?

You obviously haven't heard just how good '1950's technology' can sound. With vinyl on my Rega P7, it beats the sound of any CD player I've ever have heard. It has a warmth, delicacy and attack that CD players can only dream of, and I can demonstrate it.

So Craig, here's my offer: why don't you come to Devon sometime and hear just how

good a properly set up turntable can sound. Tea and biscuits supplied, of course! I expect the nice people at *Hi-Fi Choice* will give you my e-mail address if you ask them and they are also more than welcome to come as well.

Bob Reed Devon

HFC Tea, biscuits and a hi-fi demonstration... what more could you ask for? However, we would have suggested scones with Devon clotted cream, to seal the deal. We will see if Mr Brown takes the cake bait...



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...)

KESSLER KOMPLAINT I

I have been a reader of your fine magazine for about five years and have always felt that *Hi-Fi Choice* offers by far the best balance between thorough, well-judged reviews and classy photography. I've always thought of *HFC* as tasteful, both in its presentation and its writing. However, all this time

I've had a nagging sense that something was missing from the pages of *HFC*, without being able to put my finger on it. Then, it hit me: what was missing was the word 'asshole'.

Sure, your expert reviewers were always competent, elegant writers, able to strike the right balance between technical and subjective appreciation, all for the benefit of the reader. But where was the vulgarity and the contempt? The explicit, misogynistic posturing? Where was the in-ye-face, gung-ho attitude to make the mag more edgy and thus more appealing? Seriously, what does Ken Kessler bring to the party? Is he considered witty or something? Surely it would have been wiser to persuade your reviewers to tone down the class, wit and sharpness and tone up the foul language and 'politics'? That way at least,

what you're trying to pass off as witty and biting commentary would be offset by some substance.

P. Ross via email

KESSLER KOMPLAINT II

As a reader of *Hi-Fi Choice* for a number of years, I was amazed to read a critique of Labour's economic policy as well as an addition to the globalisation debate presented by Ken Kessler (*HFC* 290). This is inappropriate in this setting.

Brian Cox via email

"I should be deeply offended by the musings of Ken 'Genghis' Kessler."

First, I buy *Hi-Fi Choice* to focus on equipment reviews and CD reviews. For contributions to the discourse on the social impact of global economic theory, I look elsewhere. Secondly, the language in the article was particularly offensive at times, leaving me checking if I had been sent a copy of *Viz* by mistake.

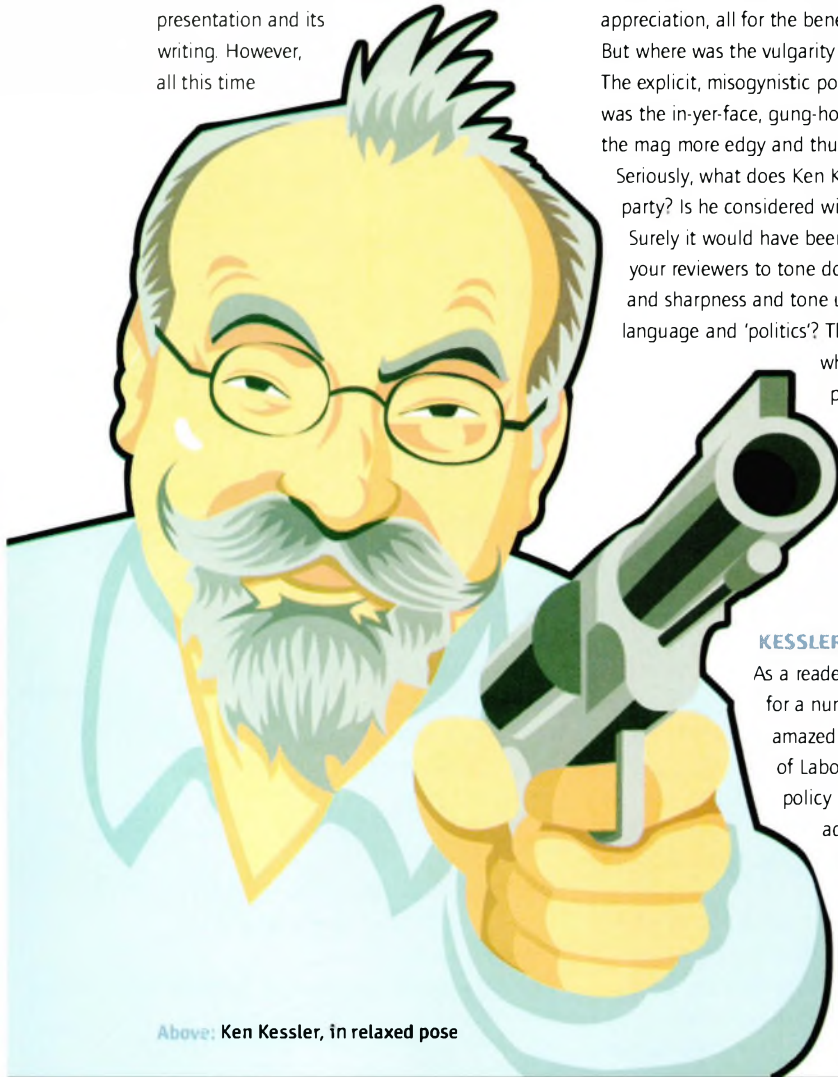
Richard Stak via email

KESSLER KONGRATULATIONS

As a 'human-rights-bleating-Euro-twat' (a *Guardian* reading one at that, although I don't live in Notting Hill Gate), I should be deeply offended by the musings of Ken 'Genghis' Kessler (*HFC* 290). Yet, I keep reading and giggling where I really shouldn't, just like I do when I read P J O'Rourke. Does this mean I am a closet Republican?

We have a Burmese cat called Genghis, because of his ability to go all claws and spit at visitors (and because he likes to invade next door's garden). I just thought the angry kitty and the angry Ken seem so similar. Love it!

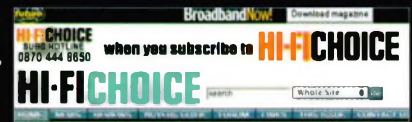
HFC Ken has certainly ignited passion amongst readers on a number of subjects. We do make a point of stating after each **Natural Born Kessler** feature that Ken's views do not necessarily reflect those of *Hi-Fi Choice* or its staff, and this is always true.



Above: Ken Kessler, in relaxed pose

Onlineforum

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



I'm looking to buy myself a new MP3 player. I'm interested in music only, but if it supports movies as well, great. My primary aim from this is to achieve great sound quality. I heard an iRiver some time ago and it blew the iPod out of the water. Is there anything else I should know?

Jimla

...I know its not fashionable and is bulkier, but get into MiniDisc!

blogger

...I use a Zen Vision M and rip at a variable rate of 288-350 kbps using WMP9. You might find this website useful; www.anythingbutipod.com

Aardvark

Here's a thought; should your best interconnect be placed between the CD player and preamp, or between the preamp and power amp?

Bramdo

...Toss a coin. Choose the prettier one to go in the location, which is more visible.

Sobry

I'm thinking of getting a new computer and wondered about the best way to listen to music on it. Should I feed the digital output into my DAC? If so, what kind of soundcards give this option?

Clive2

...PC soundcards that can output digital output

(coaxial and/or optical) include the M-Audio Revolution series, AudioTrak Prodigy series and the E-MU series.

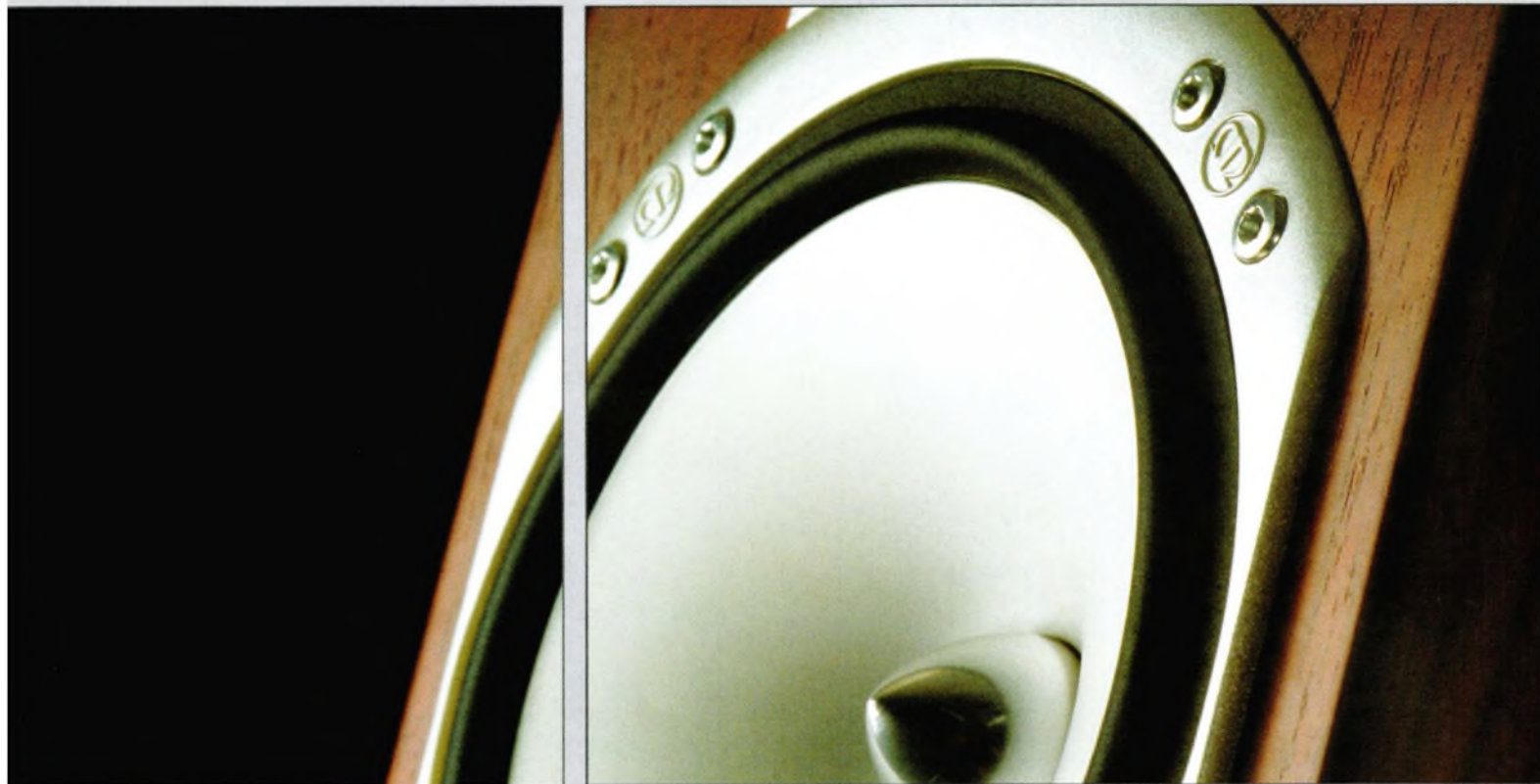
Zorander

Check out the Squeezebox. This is getting very good reviews around the globe.

Wireless or wired version.

Zorander

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Time to raise your expectations with the RS loudspeakers from Monitor Audio. Endowed with our signature blend of craftsmanship, technology and compelling sound quality, they've won near universal acclaim from the critical press.

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2005

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
SPEAKER PACKAGES
MONITOR AUDIO RS6 AV

RS6-AV, Awards 05

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

RS1, Oct 05
RS6, Sept 05
RSW-12, May 06
RS1-AV, Nov 05

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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.

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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



Qube³ mains power conditioner for high power loads

ISOL - 8

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





NATURAL BORN KESSLER

With enough air miles saved up to buy his own Boeing, Ken Kessler jets into Las Vegas to see how important 'specialty audio' is to the titanic annual Consumer Electronics Show

Either guts or a supreme ego are needed to deem a hi-fi show as 'pivotal'. Hell, every show turns up something newsworthy, and life itself is in constant flux. But 'pivotal'? A milestone? In a hi-fi context, those terms should be reserved for big launch years, as when CD or DAB first appeared.

Yes, this is a pivotal year, but not one that marks something good. For those who need to think of the 2007 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas as a blip on the timeline might consider this: perhaps this is the year when high-end audio (or 'specialty audio' as the American trade show now labels it) genuinely ceased to be a force to take seriously.

Let's back up a bit, for some history is needed. And while this is not a trade magazine, it is important for audio devotees (you, the customers) to understand CES, because for the last 40 years, it has shaped the industry for the following year, just like Paris fashion week determines what the clothing shops will carry. This is not to suggest it makes or breaks products, or categorically forms

trends, but there is no better yardstick for 'the State of the (audio) Union'. So read on, because it affects the hobby that you're so very passionate about. Sort of like a regular Formula 1 fan reading about the shenanigans of the FIA...

Unlike most shows, CES is trade-only, with no public days at all. Thus its importance is paramount, for it is the primary show for the consumer electronics industry, an event where there are few absentees. Indeed, the old axiom was that your absence at a CES pretty much meant you were either metaphorically or literally dead. Yes, it's that important. And the only genuine challenge to its supremacy is the deservedly successful, equally professional CEDIA event in the autumn, which has grown like a zit on a 14-year-old's chin, concurrent with the swelling of the custom install market.

Although it takes place in the USA (though there's every reason to believe that one day a show in China might challenge it), no other trade show, including the monster-sized events in Berlin and Tokyo, comes near it for sheer

clout. That's not nationalism on my part.

That's fact. The only people who could contest that statement are organisers of would-be rival shows, or belligerent anti-Americans.

And when you learn that the projected size of the US market in 2007 – yes, just the US market – is \$150 billion, well, you can understand why American shows have priority

SKIP THE HALLS WITH STANDS OF WI-FI

Over the decades, the four day long CES has grown so huge that no-one can cover it completely. On the other hand, the organisers have done a reasonable job of grouping products by category. So, for example, you can skip whole halls if you don't sell, distribute or write about car audio, home cinema, Wi-Fi accessories or any other specific genre. And high-end audio has been, for some time, a subgenre. Or a subgenre of a subgenre.

Let's put it another way: aside from Bose, B&O, Monster Cable and Harman International, no brands that fall under the heading of pure audio or hi-fi or whatever you want to call it, will even be visited by the mainstream trade or the mainstream press. In other words, pure hi-fi is now merely a cult. Like trainspotting, macramé and stamp collecting. To illustrate how separates have fallen from grace, 60 million iPods were sold last year. If you added up every single hi-fi component sale in the world, it probably wouldn't equal that. There are hi-fi companies that experience multiple orgasms if they sell an amp a day. Globally.

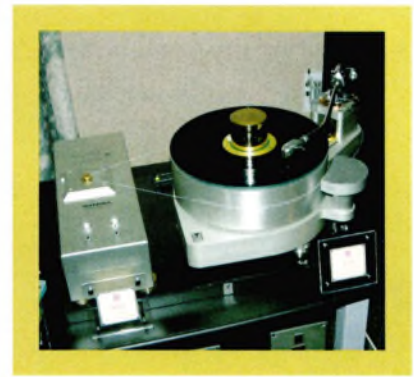
Note: Just why we're in this sorry state is another story. Suffice it to say, the latest generation of music buyers prefers headphones and portables, not separates. And I don't have the answer to bringing them into our fold.

Shuffled around like a senile aunt, specialty audio spent the past few years in a ghetto of depression away from the main event, pandering to the inverse snobbery of high-end audio. The attitude was that high-end audio was too good to share space with mass-market brands in the gargantuan Las Vegas Convention Center (a.k.a. LVCC), where Sony, LG, Samsung and Panasonic exhibited. ☹

“The CES has shaped the industry for the following year, just like Paris fashion week.”



Above: The CES celebrates its 40th birthday by taking in some clear winter skies, Las Vegas style



Above: Audio Note Ginga turntable, seen here with IO-M cartridge fitted to a vintage 12in SME tonearm

Left: As ever, the main walkways and big halls were packed with tech trade visitors

❑ In a flash, the bright sparks who selected that off-site disaster alienated all but those who had to visit the high-end exhibits: pure audio retailers, distributors and press. With the wave of a hand, they said 'Piss off' to passing trade, to any retailers or distributors who didn't even know they existed, but who might – one day – choose to go upmarket. And you were wondering why the man on the street, when asked to name upscale hi-fi brands, says only 'Bose', 'B&O' and 'Sony'?

COMMERCIAL SAVVY ZONE

For the rest of us, it meant long cab rides and trudging up and down stairs to see brands that wouldn't last the year out. The smart high-end players with commercial savvy – Dynaudio, Klipsch, Monster Cable, Meridan and a bunch of others – exhibited in the Convention Center, where the traffic was phenomenal.

Then, the inevitable happened. Just like this year's London show scenario, with a rival show setting up across the road from the traditional event, a bunch of malcontents created T.H.E. (The Home Entertainment) Show right next door to that train wreck where CES stuck the high-end. Arguments in T.H.E. Show's defence included lower prices – good for the one-man

operations that shouldn't be in business anyway – and arguably greater respect for pure audio. But the reality was – and is – price.

If it weren't so stupid, destructive, divisive and indicative of everything that's wrong with specialty audio, the scenario would be funny in a Jack Lemmon/Walter Matthau way – the giant CES against the dinky little specialty malcontents. Bitchery, sniping, sabotage – you name it. Attendees at CES who had to cover T.H.E. Show, especially the press, had to

Towers at the Venetian hotel – where, as in the old days, rooms were on whole floors rather than in up-down motel rooms. Those of you who attend shows at Bristol, London or Manchester would find this familiar, for it is the way all hi-fi shows (where demos take place) have been held for a very simple reason: it works.

So, you're thinking, back to my remarks in the second paragraph, how does this signify high-end audio as ceasing to be a force? Here's where a reading of Machiavelli's *The*

“A bunch of malcontents created T.H.E. Show next door to where CES stuck the high-end.”

remove the latter's stick-on badges when returning to CES or face the wrath of the guards. T.H.E. Show's courtesy coaches were threatened by CES, so they had 'to drop us off around the corner.'

SO LONG, PSYCHO!

Which brings us to 2007. Not being privy to the inner workings of the CES, I don't know what finally inspired them to leave the Bates Motel to put the specialty brands in a decent hotel – the

Prince or that Samurai codebook beloved of thrusting business types in the 1980s might help you. Because it gets rather convoluted.

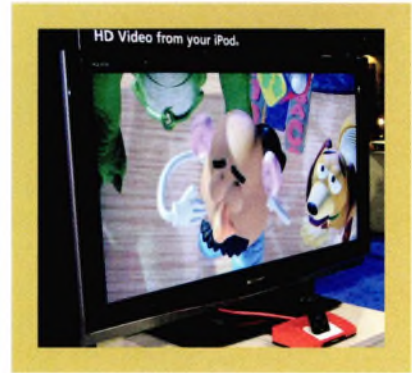
Instantly, CES had achieved what it couldn't during the life of T.H.E. Show: it isolated that rival event the way Norton isolates a virus on your PC. Because T.H.E. Show was now next door to, well, nothing, the numbers were down. Of course, the organisers and exhibitors argue that it was a smash hit, as all show organisers do even when the world knows it was a fiasco.



Above: MBL has stacked its pulsating tangerine driver to create a new flagship speaker with outboard bass tower

Right: One of the most raved-about products at the show: Ayre's new MX-R monoblocks





Above: Meridian's Video iPod dock showing killer images on a large screen

Left: KK's lottery win desire: the Nagra system including the new CD player and VPS phono stage in the upper right hand corner

When it was situated mere yards away from the official CES site, all the traffic for the sort of brands at T.H.E. Show could visit it with ease. CES knew that, T.H.E. Show knew that, and even those who hated the idea of supporting 'outboarders' had no excuse beyond the political for not visiting the rebel event. I soon yielded despite trying to hold out, after more and more 'important' brands, like Magnepan and Audio Research, left CES for the rival.

RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

But CES got better for the high end, at least in theory. By offering the high-end brands space in the Venetian, which is attached to the Sands Convention Center, which in turn housed huge brands in a fashion complementary to the LVCC, all of a sudden, the high-end was legitimate and back in the family! It was as if the senile auntie finally had a non-leaking colostomy bag and false teeth that fit.

Did it work out that way? Sort of. The rooms were clearly better, but the brands were spread out. I only found out after the show what was lurking in the Sands rather than the Towers, while some European brands were relegated even further afield, requiring a long trek through two vast resort hotels, a monorail ride

and a Hilton full of Trekkers. Elevator access to the Venetian Tower floors was – in typical, global hi-fi show fashion – comical. But the exhibitors I spoke to loved it, the rooms were for the most part terrific, and you didn't feel like Anthony Perkins was hiding behind the shower curtain with a butcher knife.

But now we come to something that's difficult to assess, which is the ambiance (or 'vibe') of the show. To put it bluntly, there wasn't one. A handful of brands too big and/or professional to go to T.H.E. Show, who for whatever reason didn't want to join the pack at the Venetian, set up shop across the street in the Mirage. B&W, Classé, Rotel, Wilson, Nagra, Krell and others, while still more pitched up all over the four or so miles of the Las Vegas strip. And beyond. But the Tower had the feel of a small, pure audio show. T.H.E. Show struggled on.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Meanwhile, every hot topic – with the exception of Goldmund's absurd notion of \$300,000 turntable, seen only in photos – revolved around non-purist goodies. Star of the show was LG's forthcoming Blu-ray/HD DVD combi-player, thus killing a format war in one fell swoop. Wireless everything permeated the

show, including speakers from specialist brands. AV and iPod addicts were marvelling at Meridian's Video iPod dock, which rendered the images suitable for 40in-plus HDTV monitors. LCD and plasma sizes increased. Hard drive systems were everywhere. The hottest CE products weren't even at the show: Warner's HD disc and Apple's iPhone. In comparison, the star high-end audio launches were, well, average.

Sorry to kick off 2007 in a downer mood, because it wasn't a catastrophe. Instead, it was a reality check. All I can think of is a situation 24 years ago, when a certain section of the audio community was doing its best to sabotage CD, despite its inevitability. It did nothing for progress. It did nothing to stop the onslaught of the major multinationals. It merely isolated pure audio even further.

On the upside, there were so many new turntables, phono stages, valve amps, cables, freak-job accessories and six-figure-price-tag speakers that an optimist might say it was business as usual. Me? I always find stuff to drool over, like the complete Nagra system and the Sonus Faber Elipsa. I just hope I'm not the only one still salivating. **HFC**

Ken Kessler's opinions do not necessarily reflect those of Hi-Fi Choice or its staff



Above: McIntosh President Charlie Randall, designer Sidney Corderman and KK at the launch of the McIntosh ...For The Love of Music

Right: 32 single-ended watts are all you get from this, just one channel of the Lamm ML3 signature and its huge outboard power supply





PATHOS ENDORPHIN CD PLAYER | PATHOS LOGOS INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
DIAPASON ADAMANTE III LOUDSPEAKERS | £9,400

La dolce vita

When a system looks this good, can its sound possibly live up to the expectation? Yes it can

Don't know about you, but I can't shake the suspicion that much of the Italian hi-fi imported to the UK is actually from a different planet. Not that I want to, mind you. The accepted notion of the audio designer as a dour lab-coated engineer sitting in front of a bank of oscilloscopes and computer displays pausing only to talk to similarly attired technicians in the bent metal casing department isn't a particularly appealing one, accurate as it might be in many instances.

And somehow... well, just run your peepers over this month's *Beautiful System*, supplied by UKD. Does it look like the product of people who lose sleep over damping factors and slew rates? Uh, no. Does it look like the product of people glad to live in the land of Lamborghini, full fat, high carb, slow cooked gastronomy, Barolo wine, effortless fashion sense, exquisitely crumbling villages, misty morning horizons, Vivaldi and the Sistine Chapel? People who have a burning, almost insatiable, hunger for the finer things in life? People that not only like to have a lot of sex, but want to be reminded of it by their consumer electronics? Please forgive the thumping stereotypes, but yes. Absolutely.

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Take the Pathos Endorphin CD player. Clearly created for people more interested in living the life less ordinary than jitter and distortion figures, it's about as 'statement' as CD players come. And, concurring with the 'different planet' theory, looks as if it's just flown in from Proxima Centuri. Then there's that name – a neurochemical occurring naturally in the human brain that promotes more dopamine to be released, providing feelings of happiness and

pleasure. Drool, if you must, over the top-flight, top-loading Philips transport with its neat integrated top plate cover/clamp, the dual differential 24-bit delta-sigma DACs and dual, fully balanced, tube, Class A design with zero feedback up to 192kHz, the dedicated digital power supply and fully balanced XLR outputs. The real message is in the name: pleasure lives here.

But then Pathos is a hi-fi company less ordinary. Founded in 1994 by three men with the most Italian-sounding names in Italy – Gaetano Zanini, Gianni Borinato and Paul Andriolo – it's based in the northern city of Vicenza, a place famous for its monuments, metal production, jewellery and fashion. Pathos sees itself as part of the city's heritage and industrial fabric, a maker of hi-fi jewellery (fairly obvious) and, oh, the home of the world's best amplifier circuit. It happened like this. Back when Zanini, Borinato and Andriolo were just three friends with a common interest in high-end audio, Borinato hatched his plan for the new circuit. Helpfully, Gaetano owned a high-end hi-fi shop in Vicenza, gifting the opportunity for it to be benchmarked against known references. The story goes that Borinato's prototype amp was so good, they initially thought there was something wrong with the reference. And so Pathos was born with the specific aim of developing and propagating a rather special new amplification circuit called INPOL (*Inseguire a Pompa Lineare* or, if you prefer, Linear Pump Tracker... kind of loses something in translation).

TT RACES

INPOL debuted in the TT, Pathos's first commercial amp, and has been at the core of every one of the company's amps since. And here's the thing. Who cares? ☑

"Concurring with the 'different planet' theory, the Pathos Endorphin looks as if it's just flown in from Proxima Centuri."



Pathos Endorphin CD player

£4,500

If CD players had hyperdrive systems, they'd look like this. But this one plays CDs with such a deft musical touch you'll be glad it's just got twin 24-bit delta sigma DACs instead.



Pathos Logos integrated amp

£2,750

Arguably the most glamorous looking amplifier ever made. Combines the aesthetic and sonic beauty of valves with the speaker driving of solid-state. It's a dream to use and to look at.



Diapason Adamante III loudspeaker

£2,150 per pair

These real-wood honeys belie their modest dimensions with surprisingly weighty bass performance and a big, spacious sound brimming with detail and subtlety.



❑ You don't buy the Pathos Logos integrated amp that partners the Endorphin CD player in this system because it has INPOL, you buy it because when you look at it, you go all pulse-racy, tingly and weak at the knees. Sure, it's going to sound gorgeous (it did the last time it featured in a *Beautiful System* some years ago, and it's evolved since then) but when you listen to it you'll want to keep your eyes open. The sheer audacious glamour of the Logos grabs your attention so vigorously, it's impossible to break free. I mean, heat sinks can be made to look pretty stylish but what other amp can you think of that uses them to spell out its name down either side of the casework, in an Art Deco-style script?

And that's just the edges. Light and dark metal, contrastingly chrome and matt, cradles the softly glowing valves that sit on a triangular wood insert that juts out from the gently curved metal front plate. Sunk deeply into this chunk of timber is the volume knob and its 0-99 integral digital red LED display. Actually, 'knob' is too small a concept. Try digital, 100-step volume control system. If you don't feel like using the sensual, wood-encased remote, just flick



it right or left for up and down. The control is resistive and returns to centre, the display reads out the volume level. Fab. Really fab.

The preamp section is entirely valve-based, runs in pure Class A and has its own dedicated power supply. The MOSFET output stage is configured in true dual-mono and depends on massive transformers and power supplies to deliver high current. Power is rated at 110 watts into eight ohms and 220 watts into four ohms. It's a flexible beast, too, with provision for with five RCA and two balanced XLR inputs.

SUBLIME SPEAKERS

So far so sublime: a CD player wired directly to the pleasure centres of your brain meets an amp that could upstage Scarlett Johansson at a Hollywood film premiere. Can it get any better? Quite possibly. Diapason is a small, specialist speaker maker based in Brescia, whose products are every bit as gorgeously crafted as those of their more famous Italian rival, Sonus Faber, with cabinets made from the same unmistakable, knuckle-rappingly real stuff, solid wood. The Adamante IIIs are the larger of two standmount models and, like the baby

entry-level Karis, feature the company's signature diffraction-reducing 'diamond' bevelled front baffle with its solidly fixed metal mesh grill covering the two drive units.

The rear-firing reflex ported cabinets are fashioned from solid 'Canaletto' walnut hardwood staves produced entirely by hand in a way that makes the structure rigid and free from resonance. The electrical design approach is just as distinctive. What Diapason calls Direct Drive technology allows a direct connection between the amplifier and the bass unit, thus doing away with the need for a low pass filter and the associated disadvantages of loss of efficiency and phase anomalies. The drivers are modified units from SEAS, while the crossovers are hard-wired with van den Hul oxygen-free silvered copper cable. There are no printed circuit boards and only polypropylene capacitors are used; the aim being to minimize signal coloration and loss. The upshot is basic simplicity allied to high efficiency (a claimed 91 dB), which means it's well suited to much of the low-powered valve amplification that also hails from Italy.

Not that we're strapped for watts here. This system sounds effortlessly dynamic,



“Treble performance is spot on. While the system sound does lean towards the romantic side of the spectrum, it has a full measure of clarity. You can listen for hours on end without fatigue.”

alive, tactile and unprocessed. It can be big, warm and muscular and it can be exquisitely spare and intimate – a wonderfully transparent window that allows the nuances, textures and microdynamics of a recording to be fully appreciated. The bass performance is remarkable considering the modest dimensions of the Diapasons. Rich, deep brown notes aren't a problem; they're delivered with believable weight and extension. Even recordings that previously sounded thin and bleached – The Crusaders' *Healing The Wounds*, for example – enjoy a plausibly fleshed-out presentation with a greater sense of drive and depth.

UP-TEMPO DEFTNESS

Clean, dynamic recordings like Steely Dan's *Everything Must Go* are delivered with great clarity and verve and, again, that surprisingly fulsome yet agile bass. Smooth, deep and nicely tuneful with

convincing leading edge definition and no hint of boominess, it underpins the undoubted emotional power and expressiveness of the CD player as well as its basic fidelity. The system is also rhythmically lucid and surefooted. It keys into up-tempo material enthusiastically yet with a deft touch and considerable discrimination. There's no mush or sense of hyped euphony and the soundstage is impressively deep and stable with pin-sharp imaging. So while Anita Baker's notoriously edgy voice gains some warmth, it does so without shedding any of its cut and definition.

Tonal balance might not be absolutely textbook but it is superbly integrated top to bottom. Treble performance is spot on: open, detailed, neither too forward nor laid back. And, while the system sound does lean towards the romantic side of the spectrum, it has a full measure of clarity. You can listen for hours on end without fatigue.

Added to which, the system goes loud without strain and always stays impressively in control. Best of all, is the way it sounds so natural and unforced. You don't have to sit bang in the middle of the speakers to get good stereo. In fact, you quickly forget about the speakers when the music starts, and that's always a good sign.

So here it is, a *Beautiful System* that really does sound as good as it looks, as lushly detailed and insightful as it is effortlessly musical. It's strong at the frequency extremes, beautifully voiced in the middle and has a sumptuously deep bass. It images superbly, tracks a rhythm like a bloodhound and can rock. Moreover, it goes loud effortlessly yet stays smooth and refined. And as with all the very best systems, it can create an almost tangible presence of real musicians playing in the room. Hi-fi heaven. **HFC**

David Vivian



MORE SAXY THAN JAZZ

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YOU CAN HEAR THE HEAVY
BREATH OF THE SAX PLAYER,
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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...
The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidelity and ease. It even seems to be

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

VERDICT

SOUND 83%
FEATURES 85%
BUILD 85%
VALUE 85%

CONCLUSION
This is a highly entertaining and colourful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature set strong – it's not the most subtle £150 player but if you're looking for a option to inspire you it could prove a bargain.

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...



Pros go home

PMC's latest 'prosumer' loudspeaker brings studio-quality sound to the home

PRODUCT PMC EB1

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £5,950 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 29.4x125.5x46.5cm

- Weight: 48kg • 27mm fabric soft dome tweeter
- 75mm fabric soft dome midrange • 250mm carbon fibre/Nomex(tm) bass unit • Connections: tri-wire binding posts • Sensitivity: 89dB
- Frequency response: 19Hz-25kHz
- Impedance: 4ohms (nom) • Finishes: cherry, walnut

CONTACT ☎ 0870 4441044 # www.pmc-speakers.com

Alongside PMC's popular FB1 and OB1 floorstanders, the company also produces a range of rather more substantial designs that are derived from the models it develops for the 'pro' audio industry. The latter are mostly actively driven types with amplification made by Canuck power meisters Bryston, customised to PMC's specification. On a recent visit to the Metropolis studios in Chiswick, we got to hear a stacked pair of PMC BB5s, a combination of a bass cabinet with a 380mm driver under a three-way, full-range cab with the same bass unit again, plus a midrange dome and big 34mm tweeter. The whole ensemble stands over two metres high and is backed up by 2,100 watts per channel. Fortunately, the mastering engineer using them was a sensible chap and wasn't out to impress us with SPLs. Instead, he played a variety of recent projects and explained that the speakers frequently caused problems with clients who had not heard their work properly before because of lesser quality monitoring in the studio. The speaker opens the window too wide for many recordings. This is the gene pool from which the new EB1 has spawned.

While it is a cheeky little speaker by the BB5's standards, it is still huskier

than your average floorstander. Having said that, it's attractively slim for something carrying a 250mm bass driver. As a design, it derives from the IB1, which has the same drive units, but comes in a cabinet that is 3.4cm wider but only 74cm high. As it's a standmount it ends up being a similar height to the EB1 in practice, but is somewhat inelegant by comparison. There was a time when the accommodating other half would put up with such a thing in the living room but since *Grand Designs* and the like arrived on

our screens, loudspeakers have had to shrink or get a lot sexier to claim their piece of domestic real estate.

The EB1 is still not a compact speaker by any stretch, but it is very nicely put together and looks great in a walnut or indeed the cherry veneer as tested here.

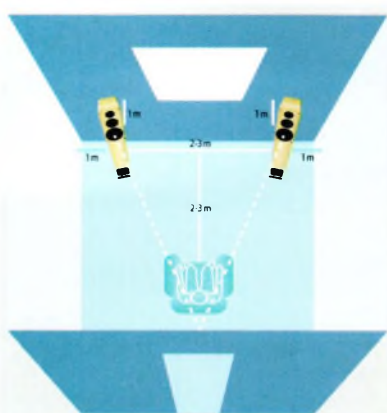
As with all of PMC's designs, the cabinet uses transmission line loading rather than the conventional reflex porting. In the case of the EB1 we have what the company calls an ATL or advanced transmission line. Advanced being a description for the way that PMC uses a

combination of foams that it developed with bed specialist Relyon to damp the line and thus more accurately tune the frequencies that exit the vent. A pure transmission line absorbs all the rearward radiation from a drive unit, B&W's Nautilus tube being a good example – but that requires an unfeasibly long damped tube behind the bass driver. PMC operates its transmission line rather like a crossover, by using damping to filter out bass above 100Hz and making a quarter-wave length line whose output takes over from the bass unit below 40Hz. This approach simultaneously increases extension and substantially reduces harmonic distortion in the bass.

The EB1 has a three-metre transmission line, which in the company of a 250mm chassis bass driver, makes for bass extension that's claimed to go all the way down to 19Hz (-6dB). The weird looking flat bass driver is made from a sandwich of carbon fibre outer skins with a Nomex honeycomb centre. The end result being similar to Focal's glass/foam 'W' cones, both are light and stiff structures, designed to approach perfect piston action. This system has both pros and cons: on the plus side, the inherent strength means that power handling is unusually high, ▶



SET-UP



POSITIONING

While the fact that the EB1 doesn't have a rear firing reflex port would suggest it could be placed fairly close to a rear wall, the depth of bass that it's capable of reproducing means that it requires a good 70cm to a metre between it and any wall if you want to get an even result. PMC realises that rooms are unpredictable things and does not make any hard and fast recommendations, save that you experiment within practical limitations. The only thing it does say is that a good starting point is to have the speaker axis crossing half a metre (50cm) behind the listener's head. In our room – which is quite long and narrow with the listening chair two thirds of the way down, away from the speakers – we ended up with the speakers a metre away from side and rear walls and with just a little bit of toe in.

Both spikes and glides are supplied with the speakers and your choice will depend on your flooring, we used the glides on a carpeted floor to minimise resonance in the suspended floor beneath it. If you have a concrete floor and a surface that won't be damaged by spikes then this option would definitely be worth trying as well.

SYSTEM MATCHING

This is a revealing loudspeaker. While not a particularly difficult load, it does require decent amounts and quality of power to give of its best. We used the 200 watt Gamut D200 to hugely entertaining effect, but got pretty impressive results with the 100 watts available from Meridian's G95. We couldn't recommend using less than this however, the EB1 might have the balance of an efficient loudspeaker but you would be doing it a disservice with an amp that doesn't have grunt.

The speaker warrants the best source and preamplification you can afford to put with it. It may have a relaxed balance at lower levels, but it is also a revealing one so source and amplifier components that have any hardness in their character will sound uncomfortable if you wick them up. That said, as long as their shortcomings are benign the result should be enjoyable. One area where PMC doesn't think you need to push out the boat is with cables; this is a result of its pro heritage where fancy wires are looked upon with suspicion. As long as you can get enough copper between power amp and speaker, you don't need to worry about the minutiae of its design.



but against this, the extra weight that the longer than average motor assembly introduces inevitably reduces sensitivity. This is combated by the use of an enormous magnet assembly that drives a 75mm edge wound voice coil – which is another pro style, power handling aid.

The 75mm midrange dome is a soft fabric unit that vents to a true transmission line behind it. This is shaped somewhat like a tapering flower pot with a rounded end, and is filled with wadding that gradually damps the rearward energy from the dome. Bitumastic is used to damp this chamber and is also extensively used to nullify any activity in the 18mm MDF carcass. Although this doesn't seem particularly thick for a speaker of these proportions, when you consider that the transmission line provides very substantial bracing throughout the box, it seems a little more sensible.

SOUND QUALITY

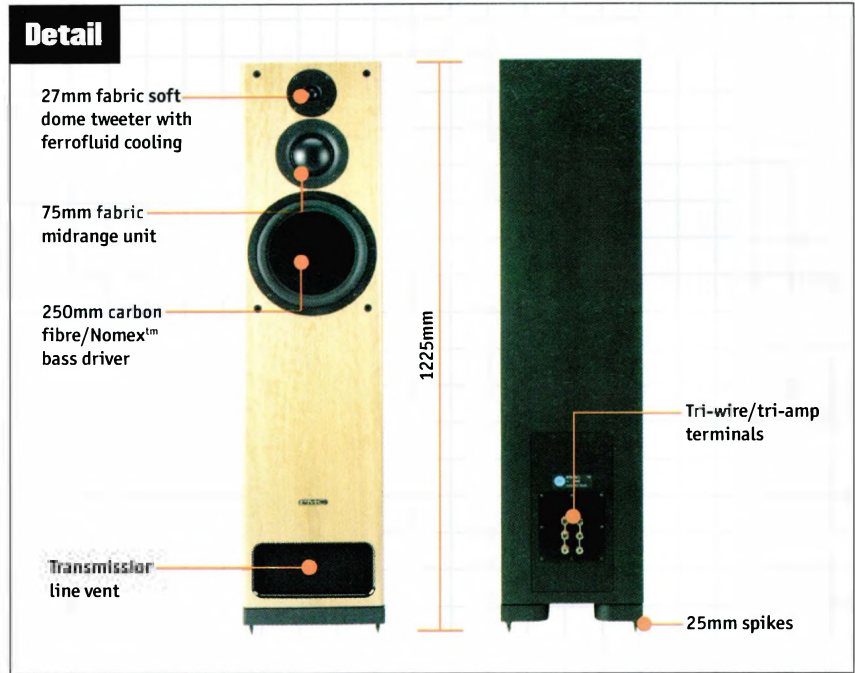
Meaty, Beaty, Big and Bouncy isn't just a Who record from the 1960s anymore, it's now also a great way to describe the sound of this remarkably entertaining and capable loudspeaker, as that's the way it sounds if you play high energy material at high levels. Conveniently, this is not the only way that you can use this loudspeaker, it is quite at home being used at more civilised levels with more refined music. But, to be frank it would be a crying shame if you owned a pair of EB1s and never let them rip. Whether you like Beethoven,

Led Zeppelin or Missy Elliott, the power of each is enhanced by a speaker that is capable of replaying them at something akin to realistic volume levels.

The ultimate limiting factor to how loud you can play without endangering passing family members or the environment will be the room and quite possibly the amplification. Our sidebar offers recommendations on the power front but to get the room sorted discreetly hang underlay-backed curtains either side of the loudspeakers to cut out the first reflection and do the same behind the listening seat. You never know... the domestic manager *might* not notice the extra curtains.

Being a company with its fingers in both domestic and pro markets, PMC makes speakers that are designed to go loud without the distortion that usually accompanies volume, this is both good and bad. Good because the character of this speaker remains remarkably consistent at both high and low levels, and bad because it encourages anti-social behaviour, also known as fun, at least if it's your music!

This is not a speaker for hooligans alone however, it might encourage such behaviour but those of a more sensitive persuasion will find them highly rewarding at sensible levels. The transmission line factor brings an openness to the sound that makes the EB1 sound like a more sensitive loudspeaker than its specs suggest. The 89dB sensitivity figure is at four ohms and equates to around 86dB at the usual eight ohm spec, but you could be



“There is an underpinning to the sound that comes from the speaker revealing every last *souçon* of bass energy.”

fooled into thinking that this is a 90dB plus design by the way that the transmission line allows the sound to breathe.

Combining this openness with deep and powerful bass extension is 'a good thing' and something that few designers achieve. It doesn't sound as subjectively flat as something like a B&W 802D, but it is extremely revealing without being bright or forward. It brings out detail across the board but seems to be particularly strong at the sort of frequencies occupied by percussion instruments such as cymbals, shakers and snare drums. The strength in this area is probably what gives the bass such a visceral quality.

Even with relatively bass light material, there is an underpinning to the sound that comes from the speaker revealing every last *souçon* of bass energy. So when you have something where there's a proper bass instrument the lower registers are comprehensively rendered and in remarkably tuneful, even fast, fashion. With the right amplifier, the EB1 delivers that elusive quality of slam: the combination of bass weight and speed that allows bass instruments to be as vivid as their counterparts higher up the spectrum.

Another reason why the EB1 encourages one to play a little louder is that it is appealingly relaxed. Recordings such as Gillian Welch's *Time (the Revelator)* often seem to have a hard edge to them, which is simply not apparent here. If the speaker had limited resolve, you could understand it but that doesn't seem to be the case. Instead, the EB1 just reproduces

the material without adding the distortion that we had come to think was in the pits of the disc. The male voice on Fink's *Biscuits for Breakfast* is delivered with a its dusty glory that sounds extremely convincing. You can hear the limitations of the recording but you can also hear right into the mix because the two go hand in hand and make for a gripping musical experience.

The quality of bass that PMC claims its ATL design can achieve is made clear when you play something with a lot of bass energy, which is normally not that clean. Our example was Soweto's *Where It's At* by the Charlie Hunter Trio. This has a voluptuous bass guitar sound that leaves the whole track sounding congested on many speakers. Here, the way that the EB1 breathes so well makes space for the bass to expand in the room and leaves plenty of room for the rest of the band to express itself.

A heavier and more expensive design like the B&W 802D delivers a slightly more resolute and realistic sound that is calmer still through the mid and top, thanks possibly to its incredibly inert cabinet. It's a factor that also creates greater precision in terms of imaging. But it's less clear-cut in the nether regions, both speakers have similar extension and tunefulness but there is an ease to the PMC that is very convincing. Given the praise heaped on the B&W design, and the price differential between the two, this PMC is something really special. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 93% [Progress bar: 93%]	PRO Effortless sound from the deepest bass to the highest treble. Holds so much in reserve, your house, amp or ears will give in before the EB1 starts to distort. Truly immersive sound that works at lower volume levels, too.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 80% [Progress bar: 80%]	
BUILD >> 91% [Progress bar: 91%]	
VALUE >> 88% [Progress bar: 88%]	CON Warn people when you play it loud. It's a big sound, from a very big speaker.
CONCLUSION The EB1 is capable of hugely entertaining results at both reasonable and unreasonable volume levels, it has an effortless quality in the bass that competes with the best and is revealing and precise across the band.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%	

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



One for all

Meridian joins the one-box multichannel system game... and raises the stakes

PRODUCT Meridian G95

TYPE One-box DVD player/multichannel receiver

PRICE £4,395 (£4,150, AM/FM tuner version)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x9x35cm • Weight: 13.5kg • Audio inputs: 3x phono analogue, 2x digital coax, 2x digital optical • Audio Outputs: 5.1, HDMI • Video inputs: 3x composite, 3x S-Video • Video outputs: HDMI, component (BNC), S-Video, composite • Optional DAB tuner • Rated power: 5 x 100 watts

CONTACT ☎ 01480 445678

🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

Lin did it a while back, Arcam just did it, and now Meridian is doing it too. It's the single box that offers CD and DVD playback, FM and/or DAB tuning, multichannel processing and amplification. Such products are clearly aimed at delivering an audio/videophile standard without a plethora of boxes and wires.

Meridian's new G95 offers HDMI connectivity, DVD-Audio playback and upsamples both onboard sources as well as external sources. But, how does Meridian get so much into one compact but admittedly weighty case without compromising results? The secret to the G95 is digital (or, more accurately 'switching') amplification; Meridian

has opted to use five Hypex output modules, which deliver 180 watts into four ohms. Despite the output, the casework remains nice and warm even in standby, but that's a function of the processor as much as amps.

At its front end, the G95 offers a ROM drive. Press the open button and nothing happens, because there is no drawer, but rather a slot loading system. If it's robust enough for the car, the chances are it will outlast anything with a mechanical drawer. The ROM drive was chosen because of superior data reading capabilities; apparently it runs at standard speed, but can work a lot faster when it needs to make multiple attempts at reading a problem part of the disc. Something we noticed when comparing with a standalone player that skipped sections on the disc that the G95 just sailed through.

As a disc player, it can deal with all the established AV and high-definition music formats save for SACD, but the latest Blu-ray and HD DVD video formats are not supported. It upsamples CD to 88.2kHz and thanks to the DSP processing onboard can present two channel media in either 5.1 surround, DPL II Movie or the three-channel stereo system Trifield, which is supported by Meridian more or less exclusively.

On the video front, things are equally advanced thanks to Meridian's close ties with Faroudja. At the heart of this is a 'broadcast quality processor/scaler', which can provide a 1080p high definition output via HDMI. In essence this means that picture quality from DVD-Video gets about as good as it can get, which is impressive enough from a standalone player let alone a player/receiver.

Videophiles will be wondering why there are no HDMI inputs for their HD satellite receivers and the new HD DVD and Blu-ray players. Meridian's solution here is its 421 (four into one) HDMI switching box, which connects to the Meridian comms socket and can be controlled via the G95 and its remote. This optional extra keeps the socket count (and the digital video processing) down to a minimum when not required.

The tuner section gives the user two factory-fit options: the model we had was supplied with a combination DAB/FM module, but for a £100 less, you can ditch DAB and have an FM/AM RDS radio instead. This latter option is no off-the-shelf item either, it has its own 24/96 A to D converter, as well as a whistle filter in DSP for improved AM reception. Regardless of reception source, one nice touch here is that you can mix bands on



your presets, so preset one can be XFM on DAB while preset two can be Radio 2 on FM etc.

SOUND QUALITY

Setting up the G95 is marginally less intuitive than normal, but having a very early sample probably didn't help; the existence of settings marked Multichannel Analogue and Surround did put us wrong to begin with, but we got there in the end. Things were lubricated by the substantial remote handset supplied with the G series, it covers all the bases and yet manages to make the relevant keys easy to find, something that's all too rare with complex handsets and a good excuse for the unusually large size of the thing.

In use, the G95 does not sound like it uses digital amplifiers. It has unusually well-defined, powerful and tactile bass – which is a digital trait true enough – but the high and mid frequencies are smoother and more solid than is often the case with digital designs. In fact, the overall balance is very much in the Meridian mould of being luxurious and a little smoother than neutral through the midband. This result does, of course, vary with the speakers used and was far more pronounced via B&W 802Ds than with the PMC EB1s also reviewed this month. The latter were not so well matched, their extremely open midband bringing out a slightly splashy quality to dense treble material that the 802Ds played down. This finding is slightly muddled by the fact that the EB1 encourages higher level listening and thus puts the amplification under more strain, and the source in a brighter spotlight.



“It has unusually well-defined, powerful and tactile bass, but the highs and mids are more solid than with digital designs.”

As there are precious few direct competitors to the G95, especially at this price level, it was difficult to compare it to anything in a meaningful way, but we had a go by stacking up a Cambridge 840A/C combo of CD player and integrated amp. Now, at £1,500 for the pair, these may seem to be in another league, but if you consider that the Meridian adds three more channels of amplification, DAB and FM tuners alongside a serious DVD player it doesn't seem so inappropriate. The face off showed the G95 to be more refined if less dynamic; it doesn't have the zing of the Cambridge pair, but the extra poise and reduction in 'transistor' character is very much in its favour.

Pitting a Rotel RCD-06 CD player against the onboard transport revealed a similar result, but did suggest that the onboard amplifier is stronger than the transport when it comes to music. In other words, the Rotel sounds more alive and three-dimensional, even though it comes in as an analogue signal that goes through an extra A/D process.

It's not limited to CD. This is the first DVD-A player we've come across that allows direct track access, which is a nice touch and encouraged a thorough investigation of our disc collection. The wider bandwidth of the format is reflected by greater treble extension and a more lively sound than it delivers with CD. It's still reticent by the standards of ▶

Q&A

We spoke to John Bamford, Meridian's product manager about the advanced developments that went into building the digital amplification and other key aspects of the G95.



HFC Is this the first digital amplifier from Meridian Audio?

JB It's not quite the first, digital amps are fitted to our in-wall loudspeakers and some in-wall subs. The bit you put in the wall is just the drive units – it's actually one drive unit and one passive radiator (or ABR) drive unit – you've then got speaker level cable leading to the sub controller, which drives the in-wall sub. No one really clocked it, but the amplifier in that controller was actually digital.

It has the same modules as the G95, which were selected after a couple of years of trying out different types and we didn't really like any of them. But they've got this one sounding sweet. We've always had the G91, our sort of all-in-one system, except it's only all in one if you're using Meridian DSP active speakers but if you wanted to use conventional passive speakers you needed power amps. When we got the Hypex digital modules sounding sweet our engineers wondered if he could take the G91 chassis and see if he could put five quite powerful amps under the bonnet.

Did Meridian Audio have to use digital amplifiers?

In that chassis, yes. Unless you wanted it to be 20 or 30 watt little toy ones. But these are powerful, they offer 180 into four ohms, so this will kick arse.

At what point does the signal become digital?

D-to-A conversion (Analog Devices 24/96) is at the end of the chain, after all digital signal processing, and right before the power amps.

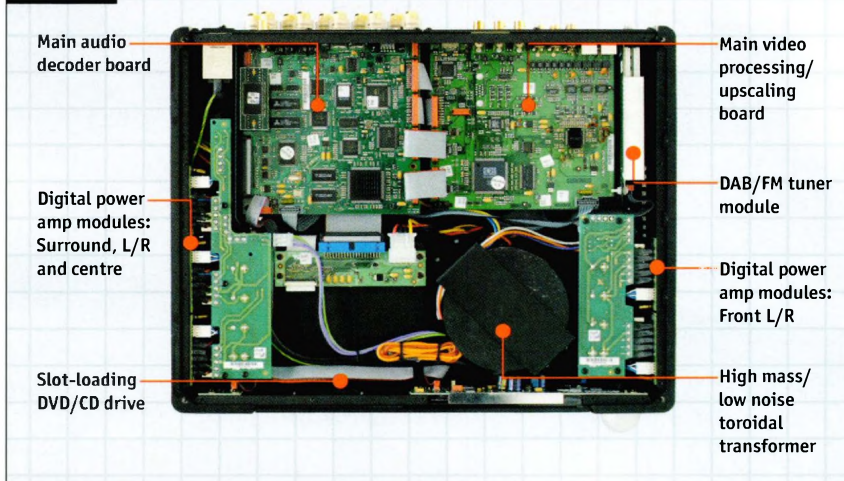
It doesn't have the option of bi-amping, using two amplifier channels per speaker in a stereo system, why not?

How much power do you need? It's not designed to be a PA system. Let's be realistic, if you're a high end audiophile why would you want an all-in-one box unless your terribly hen-pecked? This is for people that want a simple all in one system with a radio that can play DVD and CDs, but which also has enough power to drive most speakers.

Why are there are no digital outputs?

We decided it just wasn't necessary. The conclusion we've come to is that nobody records on CD recorders any more, they do it on their PCs.

Detail



serious standalone players, but the quality of bass is a strongpoint, as is the ability to eek out plenty of space from acoustic recordings. It also makes a very good case for adding centre and rear channels; the combined effect being entirely enveloping with a good disc.

With digital radio, the result is as good as we've heard from the medium, which means close to the quality one gets from a decent, if not outstanding, FM tuner. Here the medium is the limitation but the way that the G95 pulls solid and finely nuanced sounds from a very quiet background makes the format well worthy of your attention, especially when they play something good on Radio Three's *Late Junction*.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

As a DVD player the G95 is a very classy piece of kit indeed, Meridian's tie-up with Faroudja has clearly given it an edge in this rapidly moving market. We used a Loewe LCD screen with the HDMI connection and got a picture that minimised the artefacts that LCDs love to reveal and made superb use of the colour range this screen type is so good at. Skin tone is very accurately produced with none of the blotchiness that usually beleaguers DVD. It also coped extremely well with highly contrasting boundaries with little or no bleed of light into dark. Moving up to a Runco projector the similarity between the onboard upscaling of the player via HDMI and the scaling produced by the high-end projector via component was striking. We

used the facilities at Brighton's Power Plant dealership to look at the G95's picture performance and everyone was impressed with the natural, precise images it produces.

Cliché alert – the whole of the G95 is greater than the sum of the parts. But, like any good cliché, there's reason to use this phrase. The G95 is a polymath product, never less than good at everything and exceptional at some things, and this 'does it all approach' makes it simply the best of the one-box systems we've run across, albeit at a price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 82% DVD-A 86%

VISION >> 93%

FEATURES >> 94%

VALUE >> 84%

PRO

The fuss-free solution for high end music and movie sound without all the fuss of multiple boxes. Looks the business, is built to last and is a good all-rounder.

CON

CD quality not as forthright as good standalone samples; set-up is necessarily complex; SACD support would make it truly universal.

CONCLUSION

This is a beautifully executed example of the all-in-one solution, the facilities are excellent and the picture quality stunning. The sound from audio discs is a little disappointing but as one-box solutions go, it is at the top of the tree.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 89%



MEGALINE
EUPHONIA
HELICON
MENTOR
PIANO
► IKON I 6
CONCEPT
SUBWOOFER

engrad@larsen



SUPER NATURAL WINNER

"We've yet to come across a rival that can match the IKON 6's combination of full bodied midrange, treble sparkle and crisp timing."

What Hi-Fi |

"A loudspeaker of exceptional resolve for the money, the IKON 6 will show what has been recorded in exquisite detail and with pin-sharp precision."

Hi-Fi Choice |



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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Back Beat

The Densen Beat B-100 was a classic amp of the 1990s. Does the B-110 bring the Beat back?

PRODUCT Densen Beat B-110

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £1,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44 x 64 x 31 cm
● Weight: 13kg ● Inputs: six pairs line-level phonos, one pair line-level phono recording loop ● Outputs: two pairs line-level phono recording output, one pair processor phonos, two pairs preamp phono outputs
● Rated power output 60 watts (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 07799 146002 🌐 www.densen.dk

Densen's reputation is based (to a reasonable extent) on the Beat B-100 amplifier. This was a classic that stood the test of time for around a decade but was finally discontinued a couple or so years back. Although Densen has plenty of other amps around, prices were rather higher, so the B-110 reinstates the possibility of Densen ownership for the cash-strapped audiophile.

Just over a year ago, in *HFC 277*, we reviewed Densen's upmarket integrated, the B-150. Given that Densen makes a point of casing all its products identically, it's no surprise that there's a visual similarity between the two models, but one might not expect quite so many common features. Okay... not actually *features* then at least *possibilities*. On the face of things, the B-110 has your completely standard list of inputs, outputs, power and so on, but Densen makes a real speciality of upgrade potential and we're not

just talking about the chance to change a couple of capacitors for 'boutique' alternatives.

Add-on phono stages aren't astoundingly rare; external power supplies have a long and honourable history, but the ability to insert an active crossover into the B-110 is decidedly noteworthy. Since active crossovers are specific to a particular loudspeaker model, Densen makes boards to order using parameters previously measured or, failing that, obtained from your very own speakers. Unfortunately, the latter route means shipping them across to Denmark. Because of the necessary complication of matching amps, crossovers and speakers, active systems have never really caught on to the extent they should have, but they have a lot to recommend them, if done well. If all that isn't enough, the B-110 is also upgradeable to surround operation.

But, what of the basic stereo unit? Under that thick aluminium skin (practically unbustable, and also completely dust-proof, we're happy to note, dust being a major enemy of electronic longevity) is an immaculately constructed unit based on a single circuit board. All the components – apart from large power transistors and smoothing capacitors – are surface-mount types, and all the ones we could identify are of suitably high quality. It all starts with a pretty generous toroidal transformer, which feeds a pair of smoothing capacitors via a couple of standard bridge rectifiers. Additional capacitors provide

filtering for the more sensitive small-signal stages of the amplifier.

Op-amps are conspicuous by their absence, Densen preferring the 'roll you own' approach of discrete transistors. Indeed, op-amps would be completely incompatible with Densen's preference for feedback-free circuits, a bold design philosophy not often seen in solid-state amplifiers. Densen has grasped the nettle and has achieved technical results that need no special pleading on any grounds: while we can't confirm the claim of 400kHz bandwidth (we actually found it to be under 100kHz – still a perfectly respectable figure), we pretty much agree with the claim of 0.05% distortion at rated power – not staggering, granted, but not half bad either.

While we're being numerical, we're happy to add a good few extra watts to Densen's claimed 60 watts into eight ohms. This is no mad powerhouse, but it's healthy and unafraid of low-impedance loads.

The back panel is particularly well stocked with sockets. Six inputs are accompanied by no less than five outputs – two 'tape', one processor and two preamp – and an extra input for the processor. A five-pin XLR allows for the external power supply while a 15-pin D-connector offers integration with a DenLink multi-component control system.

As with the B-150, we feel moved to gripe, gently, about the volume control. Having 200 individual steps, switched by relays, is lovely,



“The balance Densen has struck between the various constituents of ‘good sound’ makes this an amp we just like to listen to.”

but listening to all those relays chattering is not. OK, they're silent while you're actually listening, but still...

SOUND QUALITY

We found plenty to like about the B-150 when we tested it, perhaps most of all its bass. For less than half the price, can the B-110 equal it? Densen may not entirely thank us for saying this, but we reckon it can, or as near as makes very little odds. Once again, it has all the requirements for classic low-frequency performance – extension, control and tunefulness. One or two of these alone can be quite exciting at times, but usually ends up being frustrating now and then. When you get all three together through, it's hard not to smile. Not all music makes great demands in the bass, of course, but stuff that does, such as anything will full orchestra, big-bodied rock-'n'-roll, most modern synth-based stuff, quite a lot of jazz, develops a whole new dimension when heard via amplification with truly first-class bass.

Extension is obvious. Control can be misinterpreted to mean dryness, but we certainly have no thought of that here. Think instead of lack of boom, precision, 'speed' (strictly a contradiction in terms but we all

know roughly what it means, don't we?) and spatial definition. And tunefulness doesn't always apply, but is an invaluable attribute when one listens to very quiet, subtle bass, which is suddenly elevated above the vague thud previously heard.

Still, we'd like some upper frequencies too. Tonally, we felt the B-110 is again the equal of the B-150, perhaps in some ways even better. But it's hard to judge that with confidence because other effects make themselves felt. Most obviously, the B-150 is the more detailed and revealing of the pair. The B-110 is good at detail and lays out a clear stereo image but it doesn't have the really scalpel-sharp analytical skill of the B-150. In the context of similarly priced amps, we'd say the B-110 is above average in this area – but that 'average' refers to quite distinguished performance.

Even a small degree of veiling makes it harder to be certain about tonal purity in the midband. It also constricts the treble a touch and makes it slightly less sweet and open, and in this case we're inclined if anything, to rate the B-110 behind par for the course.

Taken as the sum of its parts, then, this amplifier would appear to be a winner for those who demand great things from low frequencies but less so for lovers of pure treble.

Taking a more holistic view, though, we're strongly inclined to give it a hearty thumbs-up. You see, we haven't mentioned the killer characteristic yet: the sheer 'bounce' it gives to the sound. In practically any style of music you can name, there's an almost tangible *joie-de-vivre* which really puts the music's emotional impact centre stage and makes one overlook the odd minor technical foible – not just in the amplifier's own performance, indeed, but also in the rest of the system.

As with one or two other components we've reviewed over the years, we're not sure that the B-110 is quite the most accurate amplifier around, but what it does 'wrong' is clearly outweighed by what it does right. Yes, arms-and-legs-money amps can equal its bass and give greater precision at high frequencies, but somehow the balance Densen has struck between the various constituents of 'good sound' makes this an amplifier that we just like to listen to. And we're sure that we're not alone in saying that! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar]	PRO Bass is really gorgeous, capable of reproducing all the depth and nuances of everything from goth rock to church organ. Good solid and stable imaging.
FEATURES >> 86% [Progress bar]	CON Midrange and treble lack a little precision and analytical skills are no better than they ought to be. Not as good – or as pricy – as the B-150.
BUILD >> 87% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 89% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Founded on that bass, the B-110's sound is particularly involving and enjoyable and for day-to-day listening pleasure it is hard to, er, beat – real 'smile factor'. There's more to the B-110 than bass, of course, but it's a great foundation.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%	



Baby grand

Exceptional enclosure finish distinguishes this pretty little standmount

PRODUCT Vienna Acoustics Haydn Grand

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE from £795 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 17.4x36x26.5cm

• Weight: 7.4kg • 25mm silk dome tweeter • 95mm 'X3P' cone bass driver • Sensitivity: 89dB • Impedance: 4 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01656 768777

🌐 www.vienna-acoustics.com

Relative newcomers to the UK, Vienna Acoustics has still to celebrate its 20th birthday, so it's one of the younger speaker brands on the world stage.

Vienna's UK distribution changed last year, as a result of US company Sumiko purchasing UK subwoofer specialist REL. Sumiko has long distributed both REL and Vienna Acoustics in

the US, so bringing the two brands together in Britain was entirely logical.

Vienna Acoustics has just three ranges of speakers: Reference, the mainstream wood-finish Grands, plus the shiny, shapely metal-jacket Schonbergs. The subject of this review is the smallest of the mainstream range, the Haydn Grand; a quite exquisitely beautiful compact standmount that costs from £795 per pair. The pair we actually reviewed cost £100 more, because they came dressed in a strikingly patterned rosewood veneer, with a deep gloss 10-layer lacquer finish – very pretty indeed. Alternative finishes at the standard price are maple, cherry or piano black. Besides its lovely appearance, the box itself is very strong, with unusually thick front and back panels, cunningly veneered over chamfered edges, sandwiching the wrap.

Like the vast majority of standmounts, it's a simple two-way design, and is slimmer than many by virtue of a relatively small (150mm nominal diameter) bass/mid driver.

Decent depth and height ensure that the enclosure volume of 10 litres is comfortably larger than the classic seven-litre 'miniature'.

The port consists of a casting integrated with the tweeter mounting, and vents through two slots either side of the vertically-oriented tweeter front plate. This affords great mechanical integrity, but whether the bifurcated construction offers any advantage over more conventional types is difficult to say. However, it certainly looks elegant and avoids using up space elsewhere on the small front panel.

Peter Gansterer, Vienna's design engineer, places great store by both the material used for drive unit cones, and the way these are made,



“The imaging is its best feature, maybe because the care taken in pair-matching helps the precision and focus.”

In order to achieve the best possible compromise between obtaining good midrange clarity, while at the same time avoiding any attendant harshness. His material of choice is called X3P, which is a visually transparent combination of TPX (polymethylpentene) with polypropylene.

The main driver cones themselves, just 95mm in diameter, are fabricated in Austria, but then transferred to Norway where driver specialist SEAS builds them into drive units, using cast frames and generous magnets. The tweeter, also from a Scandinavian source, uses a 25mm doped silk fabric dome.

Much effort has gone into selecting the individual components for the crossover network design. This deliberately has relatively simple 6- and 12dB/octave slopes, and very high quality components. Just a single pair of top quality socket/binder input terminals are mounted directly through an alloy back plate, avoiding the usual flimsy moulded plastic terminal block.

Vienna takes great care to ensure that production samples are as close to the original reference as possible. This involves careful measuring pair-matching, with comparison to production references derived from the original prototype reference model. That said, a minor discrepancy was noted in the compliances of our pair's main drivers.

SOUND QUALITY

Sumiko's John Hunter was keen that we got to hear the Haydn Grands at their best, so he delivered them and spent some time, taking great care in positioning the speakers in the room.



It was interesting, if a tad mystifying, to watch Hunter move the speaker positions by small amounts in relation to the room boundaries until he was satisfied with the results. The final locations he chose were only about 30cm away from where I normally place standmounts – a little further back and further apart, and on higher stands – a fascinating sonic exercise in its own right.

A common thread runs through all the Vienna Acoustics speakers we've tried, and it's a thread that distinguishes them from the overwhelming market majority. It concerns a suck-out in the presence zone. And if this feature seemed somewhat less extreme with the Haydn Grand than some of its larger siblings, it was still obvious enough on our far-field in-room averaged measurement.

In this case, this was a lack of energy through most of the treble range. On our measurements, the output level fell something like 5dB between 1.2kHz and 1.7kHz, and above that the treble then stayed flat for nearly two octaves, before starting to rise steadily again above 6kHz, and increasing by some 4dB by the time it peaks up at 12kHz.

The bass and midrange was better ordered overall, holding within modest limits, if uneven along the way. It made little difference to the

averaged measurements whether the speakers were sited in our normal standmount positions, or those specifically selected by John Hunter: either way, helped by 50Hz port tuning, the Haydn Grand seems well suited to free space siting, delivering usefully unexaggerated bass down to around 40Hz under in-room conditions.

The lack of presence and treble inevitably stamps its signature on the sound quality, and must be viewed as compromising fidelity in the true meaning of the word. But, the sonic presentation sounds very nice indeed, as it has an attractive spaciousness and a freedom from aggression that many listeners will appreciate.

Listening past the balance, this is clearly a quality loudspeaker, with very well controlled cabinet coloration and an encouraging freedom from boxiness. The imaging is probably its best feature, perhaps in part because the laid-back presentation tends to emphasise the spaciousness and depth of the stereo image, but also maybe because the care taken in pair-matching helps the precision and focus. Furthermore, this speaker always sounds sweet and never becomes aggressive, which might not be good news for Prodigy fans, but goes down rather well with Mozart. Speech is muffled, shut in and nasal, but intelligibility is helped by the way the treble peak enhances the leading edges of consonants.

While there are obvious limits in terms of bass extension and power, the Haydn Grand sounds bigger and more capable than one expects, and certainly shows good agility, while the freedom from unwanted 'thump', which is all too common with larger port-loaded standmounts, is much appreciated. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 75% [Progress bar]	PRO Beautiful presentation and top quality build throughout gives a very positive first impression. Mellow sound has an attractive spaciousness with great imaging and no obvious box coloration.
FEATURES >> 77% [Progress bar]	CON Lack of treble energy gives a laid back, dull presentation, speech in particular sounds muffled and shut in.
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 77% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Lovely cabinetwork and top quality build are big pluses, but a relative lack of treble energy is well outside the market norm, giving a mellow, sweet sound that's free from aggression, but which sounds rather muffled on speech.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 77%	

Performance



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Hi-Fi Choice, December 2005



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Hi-Fi World, April 2005



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What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, December 2005



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Stereophile, September 2005

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www.mordaunt-short.com



Remember radio

Cyrus delivers a compact hi-fi tuner capable of recording DAB to SD memory card

PRODUCT Cyrus DAB 8.0
TYPE DAB/FM radio tuner
PRICE £500
CONTACT 01480 410900 www.cyrusaudio.com

Cyrus has put some high-tech products into its distinctive 'singing shoebox' case over the years, but never before has it offered a DAB tuner. Following rather than leading technological trends is no bad thing, though, as it allows the inclusion of the latest features. In this case, the outstanding feature is the inclusion of an SD memory card, plugged into a little socket at the rear.

Cyrus points out on its website that we're all well accustomed to time-shifting TV programmes on video recorders analogue or digital, and with tuners like this you can do the same for radio. The DAB 8.0 implements this sensibly and efficiently, storing MP2 data direct from the transmitted digits, obtaining a practical capacity of up to about 11 hours even at Radio 3's data rate (some 17 hours for most stations) on a 1GB memory card. With a 1GB card selling for £8 at the time of writing and probably less by the time you read this, that's about the same cost per hour as a cassette.

You can set recording start and end times directly on the DAB 8.0, making it an all-in-one solution to time-shifting, and it can also play MP3 files written to an SD card on a computer.

You can upload radio recordings to your computer via USB. That's not all, for the internal memory (separate from the SD card) allows pause and 'rewind' of audio, so that you need never miss the title of an intriguing song or that crucial line in *The Archers*.

The DAB 8.0 also receives FM broadcasts, though in that case the recording features don't apply (you do at least get RDS). It uses one of the latest breed of DAB/FM modules to decode both on the same chip, using signals from the same antenna. This module is made by Frontier Silicon and does practically everything. Cyrus's contribution is the user interface, including the informative four-line display and the analogue output circuitry, plus of course the power supply. It's a nicely featured and nicely built bit of kit in every way.

SOUND QUALITY

Although there's precious little to choose between most DAB tuners on sound terms, this one actually has a weakness. It's not by any means crippling, but the DAB 8.0's noise residual is definitely not as low as it might be.

Having said that, we proceeded to convince ourselves that the effect on most broadcasts is negligible. However, with good quality sources it's possible to hear – in direct comparisons with other DAB tuners – that there's a trace more hiss present and as a result a little less detail and image depth. It's a shame, as it must obviously weaken our recommendation

of what is in all other respects, one of the best DAB tuners around. You can use it with an external DAC, of course, in which case watch out, as our sample had the channels reversed through the digital output, a fault we can't remember encountering before in consumer audio equipment.

FM sound is, as so often in dual-mode tuners, rather less than impressive, unclear and tonally uneven compared with good FM-only models. For occasional listening it will be fine but don't throw out any old faithful FM tuner on its account! **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 75% [Progress bar]	PRO Built-in recording and pause/rewind features are brilliant and the tuner is very pleasant to use. CON Sound is not quite as clear as it should be thanks to compromised noise performance: FM best for non-critical listening. Curiously, channels reversed on our digital output, too.
FEATURES >> 93% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 84% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 82% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Despite the mild sonic shortcomings, which we hope Cyrus/Frontier will address, this has plenty to recommend it to habitual radio listeners, who will welcome the chance to tune, record and play back all in one unit.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 80%	



Back to the lab

After a long absence and plenty of changes, Audiolab has gone back to what it knew best – hi-fi

PRODUCT Audiolab 8000CD

TYPE CD player

PRICE £600

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44.5x7.4x33.5cm

• Weight: 6kg • Outputs: Analogue (2 phono sets), optical digital, electrical digital (BNC and phono)

• Output level: 2.4V • Dimmable display

CONTACT ☎ 0845 458 0011 🌐 www.audiolab.co.uk

Just in case you've been out of the hi-fi scene for a few years and missed it, the story with Audiolab is that it was a very successful amplifier brand, taken over and turned into TAG McLaren Audio, which, sadly, failed and sank. The Audiolab brand was salvaged from the wreckage, though, and lives on with a product range that is (externally at least) similar to those of old. This CD player sits alongside an integrated amplifier, preamp, stereo and mono power amps, home cinema products and even loudspeakers that hark back to earlier Audiolab and TAG McLaren products.

In its literature, Audiolab (redux) comments that amplifiers of today are similar to those of a decade ago while CD players have changed significantly. Indeed, it's certainly true that new

digital-to-analogue (DAC) chips and generally higher levels of integration made designing high-quality digital audio devices easier.

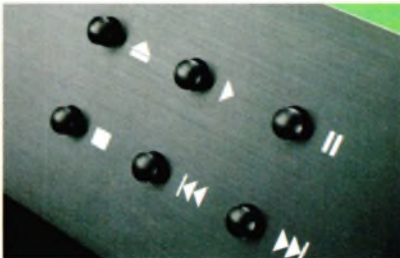
A pretty good hint at that can be got by looking under the lid of this neatly presented player, for the audio board is very modest, bearing a recent DAC from Cirrus Logic, analogue filtering and buffering components, power supply regulation and a few bits associated with digital output (on both phono and BNC connectors plus Toslink), all in an area of around 65cm².

The reduction in area from a much larger equivalent board in older products is mostly down to the use of miniature surface-mounted electronic components. The main sound production blocks are still conceptually similar to those of 20 years ago: the filtering is done partly by oversampling and partly by analogue filters and the analogue stages in particular have changed very little in layout. The biggest change is in the internals of the DAC, where modern design techniques allow considerably higher performance with respect to such features as low and high-level distortion and jitter than were common in early players.

One interesting feature of the DAC used here is that it has two filter settings available, 'slow'

and 'fast' attenuation types with the former allowing more ultrasonic distortion through. Audiolab has taken the opportunity to offer both of these to the user of the 8000CD. Most people who have experimented with filter selection will agree that the differences between them can often be quite significantly audible, but strictly speaking, the slower roll-off types are less accurate. Unfortunately, as is almost invariably the case, even the 'fast' filter here is not quite up to the mark by our reckoning but, given that, it's actually good when compared with the general run of digital audio components. We used 'fast' for most of our listening, finding it a little clearer generally.

That apart, you get a pretty much standard feature set with this player. Given that it boasts a nice high-resolution dot-matrix display, we were disappointed that it doesn't make any use of CD-Text information, but it does read finalised CD-RW discs. Thanks to the audio-only transport (apparently custom-made for this product) disc reading is fast and mechanical noise is very low, indeed barely audible under any circumstances, even with one's ear close to the machine. The front panel buttons are obviously a bit of a feature which some will hate: they move a long



“In these days of basically decent baseline performance from CD players, ‘presentation’ is an increasingly important parameter.”

way against a moderately strong spring before finally operating with a last little click. It prevents accidental operation all right, but takes a little getting used to. We got quite fond of it by the end!

SOUND QUALITY

From the very first track spun, we were impressed by the player’s unfussed presentation. However, we were also underwhelmed by the fine detail it revealed, and on the whole we continued to feel that way about it through a wide selection of tracks over a relatively extended review period.

In these days of basically decent baseline performance from CD players and general lack of obvious flaws, ‘presentation’ is an increasingly important parameter. It’s the overall impression, experienced as a summation of various little character traits. Some of these are so minor that only the fussiest listener would bother to enumerate them. That’s particularly true in this case, we’d say, as by ‘unfussed’, we mean that the sound is nicely present without unnatural emphasis on any tonal or other aspect. It’s the sort of sound that, in a nutshell, makes one quickly think, ‘Ah yes, very satisfying’

That said, we identified some specific pros and cons around the 8000CD. Among the pros, we would have to include the bass. It will not necessarily please those who like bass to

be really stomping, but it has firmness and extension that, on extended listening, proves probably more pleasant, and certainly more realistic, than low-frequency exaggeration. It also has an exceptionally tuneful quality that helps reproduce low-lying melodies with the same aplomb as percussion and sound effects, and with considerable grace, too.

Tonally, the midrange and treble seem very fine too; the former not favouring one particular voice range or instrument, the latter sweet and free from the dreaded dryness and constriction that can so weary the listener. But as mentioned above, we never quite convinced ourselves that all the detail in well-made recordings was coming through.

Image width is no problem for the 8000CD, which is both extended and specific in that regard. Depth, however, seemed a little uncertain, the more so as textures thicken and more instruments are added. At the same time, instruments became less clearly differentiated and their individual lines less easy to follow. Throughout, the bass remained calm and unflappable, which is a welcome result but we’d have been just that little bit happier with more information at higher frequencies.

We’ve had similar findings in the past with various items of kit and, as on those occasions, we feel that the 8000CD’s success depends to some extent, on the music one plays through it. As you’d expect, simpler musical styles show

it off to best advantage and if your tastes run to, say, ballads or jazz trios you’ll probably find it a corker. Even so, a drum kit can add up to quite a few instruments and modern studio recordings of outward simplicity can feature plenty of background information, which could end up clouding the essential issue.

We found a clue for this in rising levels of distortion with frequency. Audiolab has done a great job in measured terms, but high frequencies don’t pass quite as cleanly as we’ve seen and we’re inclined to point the finger there. Measurements may not tell the whole story, but when they tie in with subjective testing, it looks more than just coincidence.

We’re inclined to offer the 8000CD a cautious rather than fulsome welcome. £600 is a pretty well-stocked price point for CD players, but then again, none of the direct competition truly offers excellence in every area and this one has some good qualities in a unique blend that will appeal. Recommended with just that caveat about detail. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 83% [Progress bar]	PRO Doesn't draw attention to itself and presents a very finely judged tonal balance including excellent bass. Nicely built and smart.
FEATURES >> 87% [Progress bar]	CON Compared with the state of the art around its price, detail is a little subdued, with instruments rather hard to pick out of a busy mix both spatially and timbrally.
BUILD >> 84% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 83% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION A good – rather than great – performer, but possessed of its own kind of charm nonetheless. A little fussy about musical styles, it’s good for jazz, moderate for rock and pop and perhaps least strong on classical.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 83%	

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Most loudspeaker sensitivities are in the 85 to 87 dB range. But few amps offer the power that these speakers need to work properly. The result is that many (maybe even most) systems are woefully underpowered and are physically incapable of producing

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Loudspeaker sensitivity Amp power for 105dB peak

83dB	800 watts per channel
85dB	500 watts per channel
87dB	320 watts per channel
89dB	200 watts per channel
91dB	130 watts per channel

Reference calculations can be found at musicalfidelity.com

MUSICAL FIDELITY

Hearing is believing.



Blue note

Cambridge Audio's new Azur multichannel receiver is targeted at the sonically aware

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 640R

TYPE Multichannel AV receiver

PRICE £600

CONTACT ☎ 0845 900 1230
 @ www.cambridgeaudio.com

By common consent, the UK does not make good affordable AV amplifiers and processors. Well here's the exception to the rule – a product from Cambridge Audio, which designs its products in the UK, sourcing them from China to minimise production costs.

The Azur 640R is targeted at those looking for a multichannel solution that can do justice to stereo playback. Much of the design effort has gone into the audio fundamentals, which includes a well built, relatively non-resonant case design, a very well-endowed power supply, and a cooling system that most of the time operates in passive convection mode. When needed, this will progressively introduce forced air cooling using a thermostatically controlled fan. The amplifier is rated at 120 watts stereo, or 100 watts multichannel, and the 640R will drive a 5, 6 or 7.1 channel speaker array, with explicit support for 2.1 (stereo with subwoofer) modes. The amp is supplied with a remarkably clean and therefore more than usually ergonomic remote unit. This makes control simple; you're all set.

The feature set is small, but beautifully formed. Forget the toys – tone controls, all but the most basic DSP effects, auto setup and so on. Everything here is high performance, so there are three HDCP-encrypted HDMI inputs and one output to feed a flat screen display or projector. There's also analogue video transcoding between composite, S-Video and component video, a full set of Dolby and DTS converters, full integration with Cambridge Audio's multiroom systems and so on.

SOUND QUALITY

Sound quality quickly settles down to a very straightforward overall balance. No loose low frequency padding you get from many multichannel receivers. The feel is taut and detailed, and it remains so over a broad dynamic range. Although the 640R doesn't go especially loud, it remains consistent almost irrespective of volume level, a signal perhaps of the careful optimisation that has gone into the design of the power supply.

The new Azur receiver is particularly impressive in stereo. The system sounds clean and agile, but not sanitised, and where there were problems with other equipment or source material, there was nothing to conceal the evidence. That was impressive with well-recorded music of a type that doesn't usually thrive with multichannel hardware.

Multichannel performance is in some ways more impressive still, thanks to well-designed HDMI and HD-ready component video subsystems, and a good if conventional Dolby/DTS decoder.

This is a simple, ungimmicky AV receiver that delivers in stereo, and makes the most of the latest AV interfaces like HDMI. The Azur not only delivers the goods, but it does so with great ergonomics, even better build quality and all at a remarkably equitable price. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

■ SUB RATINGS
 STEREO 85% MULTICHANNEL 87%

FEATURES >> 80%

■ BUILD >> 88%

■ VALUE >> 90%

■ CONCLUSION

There is nothing here you would not expect to find on any other well designed receiver, but experience teaches there are remarkably few that live up to the hype, especially around this price level.

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

Wireworld Luna 16/4

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £5/m

CONTACT ☎ 020 8991 9200 🌐 www.wireworldaudio.co.uk

Wireworld is best known for its 'Symmetricoax' cables, which use a hollow coaxial construction to achieve low series inductance along with the noise rejection of screened cables. However, the company clearly felt that such a design had some practical limitations in certain circumstances and as a result, has produced a new line of wires in slightly more conventional form. Luna is one of these. It's actually marketed at the installation market, but there's no reason to discount the rugged cable for conventional audio duty.

From the outside, Luna looks much like most speaker cables, with a round cross-section and a diameter of around 8mm. The conductors, however, are flat and thin, and designed to be bi-wired. They are arranged face-to-face rather than edge-to-edge and give the cable a similar low inductance/high capacitance character to the Symmetricoax types. Our sample came with Wireworld's new 'Insta-Wire' banana plugs, which seem ingenious and efficient.



We've had good results from Symmetricoax and on the whole we'd say Luna is on a par. For a budget cable, it offers very good bass with both extension and tunefulness, and nicely clear treble too.

The midrange isn't quite as detailed as some, but we'd struggle to better it for under a tenner a metre and even the usual speaker cable weakness of image depth is well preserved here. We also found results remarkably consistent between bi-wire and

simple parallel connection, making this a good choice for owners of speakers with single terminals and bi-wire sockets alike. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION A very good budget cable which equals any of its peers in midrange and treble and beats almost all in the bass.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 88%

Edirol R-09

TYPE Portable digital recorder

PRICE £299

CONTACT ☎ 0870 350 1515 🌐 www.edirol.co.uk

Not many of the digital audio players on the market record, and most that do have pretty limited quality and/or require an add-on adaptor. This nifty gadget is principally a recorder (it does also play, of course) and will appeal to audiophiles who like handling a microphone now and then, as it will store uncompressed 24-bit, 44.1 or 48kHz-sampled audio, as well as in MP3 form. Using interchangeable SD cards gives a capacity of over six hours from the single 4GB variety. And, with battery life good for over nine hours of recording (from high-capacity Ni-MH cells in our own tests), and good-quality microphones built in, it's both a super-grade dictation recorder and the handiest bootlegging device we've ever seen (we didn't say that). Unlike MD, it's mechanically silent and the display and controls are far nicer than any MD recorder we've used.

The surprise, though, is the audio quality: via line in, performance is most commendable, with distortion and jitter hardly worse than in

professional A-D converters and noise perfectly acceptable. The mic input is hardly less impressive and the output is also very clean, making this both a serious recorder and an exceptionally upmarket digital audio player. We took it to a couple of professional sessions and were frankly blown away that such a tiny device came so close to equalling our regular bulky kit in sound terms. The only features we might ideally add would be digital input and some way of automatically dividing tracks on record. Basically, though, we *love* it. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
CONCLUSION Audiophile recording and replay, top display and great flexibility make this the best portable audio device to date.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 90%

Vita Audio R1

TYPE DAB/FM table radio

PRICE £160

CONTACT ☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.vitaaudio.com

The 'audiophile table radio' market was effectively created by Tivoli, whose delightful little models were distributed in the UK for many years by Ruark, before moving recently to Armour HE. Vita Audio, the latest company apparently inspired by the Tivoli phenomenon, is not unrelated to Ruark, but the product itself is by no means a clone. For a start, it's a DAB/FM tuner and its look and ergonomics are substantially different. Tuning apart, it features alarm functions and as such is just as home in the bedroom as in the kitchen, but we're more interested in the sonic performance. Does it compare well to Tivoli and to existing DAB models?

Vita has equipped the R1 with a '7W nominal' amplifier and an unusually beefy-looking loudspeaker and as a result there's considerably more heft to the sound than most DAB competition can provide. Compared with Tivoli, the sound may not always be quite as clear but there's more bass extension, and anyway comparison is slightly

confused by the fact that Tivoli has better FM reception but no DAB. In many ways, a table radio like this is the best way to hear DAB as the high-frequency twittering that plagues it is less audible through a single speaker (probably not being heard on-axis). Should you wish to go stereo, there's a socket for an extra speaker (not yet available) and a stereo line output on phono sockets; you also get a headphone jack and, usefully, a line input for MP3 players etc. You'll look in vain for funky DAB features like pause and recording, but on purely sound terms this is currently the model to beat. **HFC**

Richard Black



Supra Sword-ISL

TYPE Interconnect cable

PRICE £379 (1m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01223 441299 🌐 www.supracables.co.uk

Supra Sword-ISL is designed as the natural partner for the Sword speaker cable, which itself received an Editor's Choice back in *HFC* 287. Described as a 'global limited edition', the first 3,000 pairs of the cable will be supplied in a 30th anniversary presentation case. After this, the single-ended 'ISL' and 'IXLR' balanced versions will be made available in standard packaging. The cable will, of course, remain entirely unchanged.

It draws on the same broad design parameters, and is billed as inductance free, thanks to its proprietary construction. Supra is one of the few cable makers that extrudes, insulates and winds its own cable, rather than simply terminating off the reel. The non-inductive nature of the cable arises because half the 12 individually insulated conductors are wound clockwise, the other half anticlockwise, so there is no net magnetic field, and virtually no phase distortion. In some ways, the interconnect is an improvement on the speaker cable: there is no detachable

termination, and the plug produces a tight friction fit with the sockets when the plug collar is rotated. The wooden boss acts as a spacer for the two conductors and also indicates the direction of signal flow.

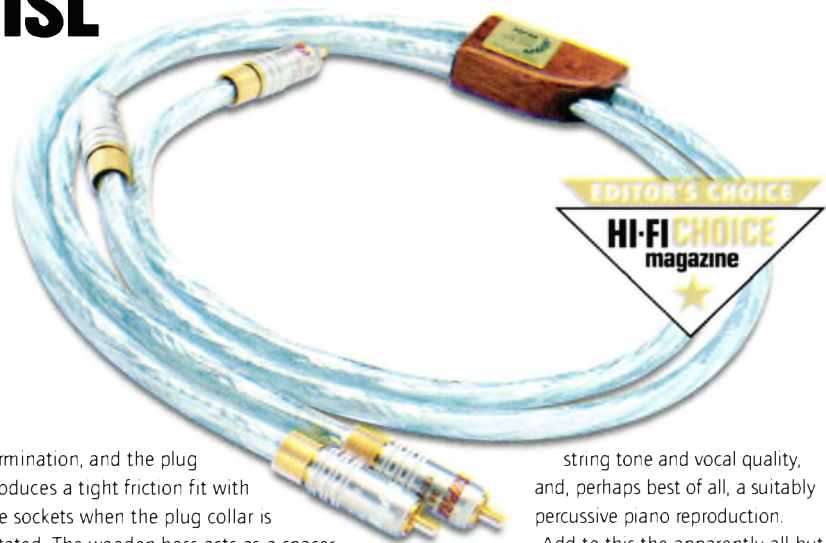
On audition, this is a very striking cable, in the best sense. It is bold, architectural and outgoing, with unsuppressed dynamics when the music gets going, but spaces between notes have an inky blackness that more than hints that the musical energy is going just where it was intended, with no bloat or overhang.

Detail is also abundant, but it is produced quite naturally, with wholly believable orchestral

string tone and vocal quality, and, perhaps best of all, a suitably percussive piano reproduction.

Add to this the apparently all but indestructible nature of the cable, which looks unlikely to give up the ghost as many cables do under long term reviewing conditions, and pricing looks more than fair. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Genuine high-end performance and build quality in a package that is clearly destined to last.

HI-FI CHOICE
99% >> 89%

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

The most active price point in loudspeakers is a varied place to visit

This month's *Ultimate Group Test* looks at what is usually termed the 'popularly priced' sector of the speaker market, with a range of models priced between £500 (the Mission M66i, one of the largest in the group), and £850 (the Quadral Pico, which ironically is the smallest).

On this occasion, the floorstanders outnumber the standmounts by four to two, reversing the ratio we encountered when we last covered this price group roughly a year ago, but this weighting certainly reflects the preferences of the marketplace. Talking to those in the trade, it seems that floorstanders outsell their standmount equivalents by a substantial margin, even though the standmount often has the performance advantage. Presumably the reasons have much to do with perceived value and fashion as well as a dislike of speaker stands.

Although the floorstander usually has more drive units, and will therefore probably deliver more and/or deeper bass, the extra drivers are not necessarily a significant advantage, as

they also imply greater complexity, while the surface area of the floorstander's enclosure – a major source of speaker coloration – is probably three times that of a standmount. Furthermore, the tall column shape of the floorstander is more likely to create an unwanted standing wave resonance in the upper bass, as well as inhibiting the propagation of low frequencies from the drivers.

Of our six loudspeakers, two are British, two German, one Danish and one French – though that just refers to the origins of the brands. The British brands are owned by Malaysian (AE) and Chinese (Mission) interests, and are also probably manufactured in those countries. Jamo is now owned by the American Klipsch operation, and there's really no telling where enclosures and drivers are built these days, nor where final assembly has taken place.

Although the floorstanders clearly offer greater box volume for the money, in this price sector they tend not have the same standard of surface finish.

Vinyl woodprints are much more convincing that they used to be, but the luxurious finishes adopted by the Jamo and Quadral standmounts are clearly more attractive than those found on the floorstanders. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

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

MUSIC USED

- Ⓢ Rodrigo Y Gabriela
Live Manchester and Dublin
- Ⓢ Bob Dylan *Modern Times*
- Ⓢ Ali Farka Toure *Savane*
- Ⓢ Tom Waits *Orphans*
- Ⓢ Be Good Tanyas *Hello Love*
- Ⓢ BPO Karajan *Wagner Tannhauser Overture*
- Ⓢ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test

ON TEST



Acoustic Energy Aelite 3
£750



ALR Jordan Entry XL
£800



Focal Chorus 716V
£749



Jamo Concert 803
£700



Mission M66i
£500



Quadral Pico
£850

LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

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

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

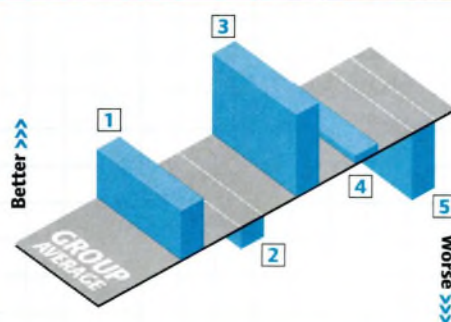
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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Inside View

JVC AX-SD1 GD

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VERDICT



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

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

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- Quality parts: Dual power transformers (one for plus, one for minus voltage), thick OFC (Oxygen-Free Copper) power cable, low-leakage EI-core power transformer, copper-plated rear panel
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RECIPE CLIPPINGS

Recipe no.2 :-

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- 1. X Tannoy Glenair Speakers

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RECIPE CLIPPINGS



Recipe No.3 :-

Will follow next month...

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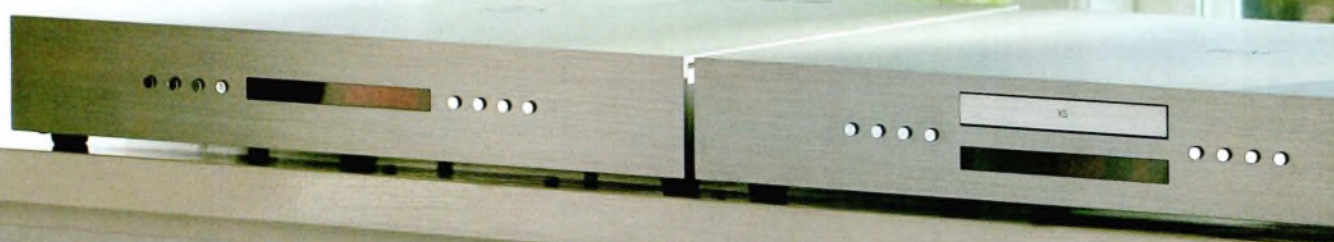
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ALR JORDAN ENTRY XL

XL adds an extra Jordan driver to the Best Buy Entry L

Although the 'Jordan' part of the brand name refers to legendary British speaker designer Ted Jordan, famous for his full-range metal-cone drive units, ALR Jordan is actually German. The company was in fact, originally founded by equally legendary speaker system designer Karl Heinz Fink.

This £800 per pair Entry XL is the top model of four stereo pairs that make up ALR Jordan's least costly Entry range. It's a d'Appolito two-way floorstander; a configuration that uses twin bass/mid drivers mounted above and below a solitary tweeter. Interestingly, said tweeter is slightly offset from the exact mid-point between the two bass/mid units.

However, since it's just 10cms taller than the Entry L (which deservedly received a Best Buy rating in *HFC 279*), and has just one extra bass/mid driver, the £300 price premium of the XL over the L does seem rather steep.

The appearance is prosaic, with a rectangular box that in our case had an attractively sparkly charcoal grey front, and a less convincing beech vinyl woodprint elsewhere; but silver and black are also optional finishes.



The main drivers here have 165mm cast frames and 120mm Jordan-designed aluminium cones, while the tweeter has a 25mm soft fabric dome. A large port is set into the front panel below the driver array, and foam bungs are supplied to block these if desired. A single terminal pair feeds a 24dB octave (acoustic) Linkwitz-Riley crossover network that uses low loss 'audiophile grade' capacitors and, unusually, an autotransformer (instead of resistors) to set relative treble level. Reversible spike/domes are supplied for floor coupling, locked by thumbwheels that have flats to allow proper spanner tightening. However, there's no separate plinth to improve either the appearance or the stability.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the significant drive unit area, enclosure volume and port diameter, it's hardly surprising that the Entry XL is best suited to free space siting, well clear of walls. That said, the port output seems to pretty well controlled and the overall bass alignment is quite dry, so some closer-to-wall reinforcement might be appropriate under some circumstances. Frankly, those bungs are unlikely to be useful unless circumstances dictate that the speaker has to be sited hard up against a wall.

First impressions were very positive, the speaker delivering music with superior coherence, good transparency and a fair measure of dynamic life and expression. Timing is particularly deft here, and the Entry XL certainly manages to capture some of the agility and deftness associated with good-quality standmounts.

Speech is reproduced very well, albeit warm and with a measure of hollow coloration, while the presence is beautifully integrated, if laid back. The overall tonal balance is basically good, if lacking in bottom end weight and welly, while the top end is too strong and obvious, though acceptable enough because of its innate sweetness.

Imaging is good with fine focus and good depth, though air and spaciousness is somewhat limited, presumably because the acoustic centre is set below seated ear height.

Purely in terms of sound quality, the Entry XL is a good loudspeaker at a realistic price. But with speakers, the reviewer also has to take account of the presentation quality, and here the value rating is less impressive. Furthermore, it's difficult to see why one extra drive unit and 10cm of enclosure should end up costing more than half as much again as the Entry L. **HFC**



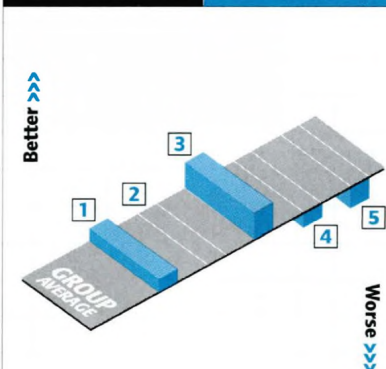
LAB REPORT

Response unevenness makes it difficult to specify the sensitivity exactly, but around 88dB looks closer to the real world actuality than the 90dB claimed by ALR Jordan. However, that's still a good figure considering the fine bass extension (24Hz under in-room, far-field conditions, assisted by a port tuning frequency of 38Hz), and the easy amplifier load, which never falls below 6 ohms and stays above 8 ohms through the bass and midrange.

Pair matching looks good, though the impedance does show a minor resonance, presumably related to the enclosure's vertical standing wave, at around 180Hz. The overall in-room averaged response is mostly good, apart from a rather obvious prominence at around 280Hz.

Output is a little restrained and uneven through the upper mid and lower treble (800Hz-3kHz), while the treble proper looks a shade strong, though smooth with it.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	24Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 86%

PRACTICALITY >>> 84%

BUILD >>> 79%

VALUE >>> 83%

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 84%

The XL has an attractively agile sound with good transparency, very superior voicing and fine communication skills, though the square-rigged vinyl-covered presentation is rather prosaic at the price.

ASCENDO

loudspeakers

amplification / cables

HOVLAND

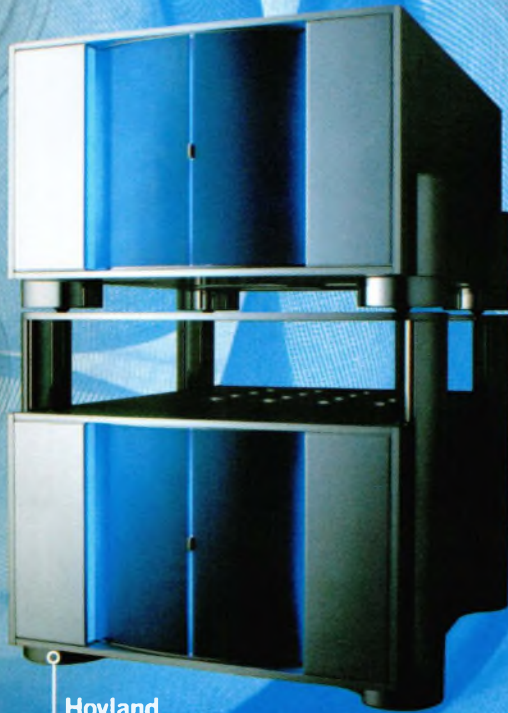
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analogue sources

the magic 3



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[the analogue master]
Stratosphere model shown.

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FOCAL CHORUS 716V

A compact floorstander from Focal's new budget range

Focal is France's leading specialist hi-fi speaker manufacturer, and one of the leading players on the international scene. Whereas the Focal name was originally reserved for the raw drivers that the company once sold to other makers, the company's complete speakers used to be marketed as JMLab. Today, however, all is Focal.

The Chorus name has long applied to the company's least costly range of speakers, but in 2006, Focal introduced not one, but two distinct Chorus ranges – a simpler 700V-series and a more elaborate 800V-series – which amounts to no fewer than 10 stereo pairs plus a gaggle of AV extras.

Two issues back (*HFC* 290) we reviewed and enjoyed the £1,549 per pair 836V, the largest of the 800Vs, so now it's time to check out one of the cheaper 700Vs. This £749 per pair 716V – a medium-size two-and-a-half-way floorstander – is the fourth model up the 700V's five-rung ladder.

Although the basic enclosure shape and driver types are similar in both the 800Vs and 700Vs, there are numerous detail differences. The 700V's most obvious economy measure is

the elimination of the 800V's costly



separate alloy plinth. Instead, the 716V comes with spikes that fit directly into the base of the enclosure. Not only does this lead to reduced overall stability, the spikes themselves were too short to fit easily, and came with silly thumbwheel lock-nuts that were difficult to tighten and keep tight.

Wrapped in Amati vinyl woodprint, the distinctive styling has tapering side panels, so the internal faces are not parallel to avoid focusing standing waves. All the panels are 20-25mm thick, with further stiffening provided by internal bracing.

Focal manufactures all its drivers in its French factory. Both cone drivers have 165mm cast alloy frames and 115mm diameter paper cones coated with 'Polyglass' glass 'micro-spheres', though the uppermost bass/mid driver has a different dust-dome treatment from the bass-only unit.

The familiar Focal inverted dome tweeter has an aluminium/magnesium alloy diaphragm, and is mounted in a rigid cast chassis at the top edge of the enclosure, unobstructed by the V-shaped grille. A large diameter front port provides bass loading, and signal is applied to a single terminal pair.

SOUND QUALITY

Finding the right positioning for the 716Vs proved quite tricky, as the bass is too dry with the speakers well out from a wall, but too heavy when close up. Best results were found with the backs about 60 cms out from the rear wall, but this will vary somewhat depending on individual room characteristics.

Analysing its sonic performance didn't prove easy either. Although the 716V is not without its fair share of imperfections, it has powerful purposefulness too. Too much warmth and a degree of 'hollowness' add some unwanted colour to the sound, yet at the same time there's no denying the fine voice articulation and high class communication skills, thanks to unusually incisive detail.

This is probably down to the very precise definition of the tweeter. However, because the top end is also obvious, this is not a particularly sweet sounding speaker – nor is it all that transparent. Indeed one could fairly accuse it of sounding rather matter-of-fact and lacking romantic appeal. But it's difficult to argue with its effectiveness in transmitting musical detail. If the 716V makes little attempt to seduce, it does a much more impressive job of telling it like it is, and that in itself provides rich reward. **HFC**

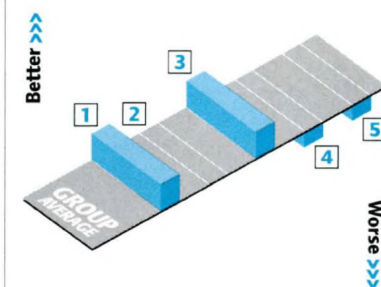


LAB REPORT

The maker's specification claims a very high sensitivity of 91.5dB, alongside a nominal 8 ohms impedance with a 4.3 ohm minimum at 146Hz, none of which agrees with our findings. Under our conditions, 89dB looks a more realistic sensitivity, while the impedance barely drops below 6 ohms throughout - figures that make plenty of sense in view of the ingredients.

Measured under far-field in-room conditions, the overall frequency balance is a bit of a mixed bag. The bass is quite dry in free space, suggesting that some reinforcement from wall proximity could be helpful, and that careful experimentation is essential to achieve the best overall balance. The speaker is very good indeed over the decade between 500Hz and 5kHz, but output through the upper bass and lower midband (90-300Hz) is a little too strong, while the treble proper peaks up significantly around 7kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	41.5Hz	24Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



PRACTICALITY >> 82%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 85%



This cunningly shaped and solidly built speaker with high-class drivers delivers an incisive sound with notably impressive fine detail. The sound could be more neutral, but is still thoroughly entertaining.

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

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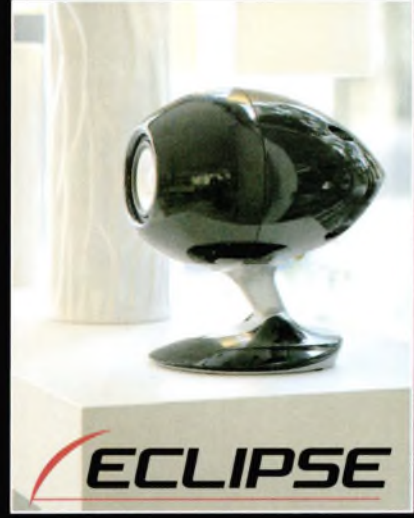
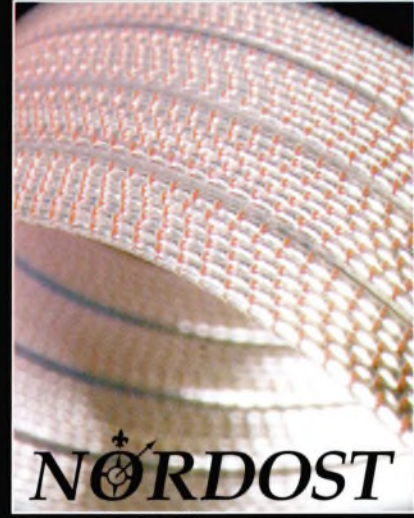
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JAMO CONCERT 803

Jamo's attractive Concert 803 features several innovations

A few years ago Jamo was one of Europe's largest speaker specialists, making a huge range of uncommonly stylish designs in a large and highly automated factory on the Danish coast. Big changes have happened since then. First, the factory was closed and manufacturing transferred to outside sources (probably Chinese); then the brand itself was purchased by US collective Klipsch. The two company's operations dovetail rather well across a global stage, with Klipsch strong in the US, while Jamo is big in Europe and China.

A solidly build and attractively finished large standmount, this £700 per pair Concert 803 is strongly reminiscent of the Concert 8 that was part of Jamo's line-up for many years. One major difference, however, is that the 803 is just half the price of its predecessor. And if it doesn't have quite the same top quality veneerwork, it's still a very good looking loudspeaker, with attractively curved sides, and a domed top which looks and feels like smoked glass. Curved panels not only increase stiffness, they also help de-focus internal standing waves, so there's a performance as well as a style bonus.

Chunkily built and shaped, and weighing a hefty 10kg, the 803 has a good size 180mm bass/mid driver with a cast alloy frame and a 125mm diameter cone made from paper, sandwiched by woven glassfibre. This unit has a cunningly shaped alloy polepiece, and what Jamo calls an Active Impedance Correction system, using an extra coil inside the voice coil, but with opposite polarity to counteract inductance variation and flux modulation in

order to reduce distortion. A 25mm fabric dome tweeter is mechanically decoupled from the vibrations generated elsewhere in the speaker, and is loaded by a shallow, wide 'waveguide' horn flare, to better manage dispersion through the crossover region.

The generous rear port has a special convex tapered vent, claimed to reduce turbulence. Two pairs of terminals are fitted for the bi-wire option, but the supplied links block the 4mm sockets, which will be inconvenient for those using 4mm-equipped mono-wire cables.

SOUND QUALITY

In most respects, the 803 proved an effective and entertaining performer, with good dynamic behaviour and very little box coloration, but there were also two areas of criticism – one at each end of audio band.

Even with speakers on 600mm stands and sited well clear of walls, the bottom end has a tendency to thump (on some material at least), even though the actual bass quality seemed pretty good. While this bass excess can bring a good sense of scale and weight to the sound effects and orchestration of movie soundtracks, a walking bass, for example, tended to show its unevenness up in a rather less favourable light.

Experimenting with port-blocking did not prove successful, as reducing the bass output tended to highlight the rather too strong treble output. While there's certainly plenty of explicit detail on offer, the top end seemed to be constantly drawing attention to itself, and this can become a little wearing, even though it is quite clean and sweet. Speech, in particular, has a slightly 'lispy' character, alongside a degree of nasality and a slightly 'hollow'

quality, while male voices sounded a little chesty.

However, these criticisms were minor and much less obvious with music program, where the drive units and quality standmount enclosure combine to deliver a dynamically expressive, detailed and spacious sound that is both involving and easy to enjoy. **HFC**



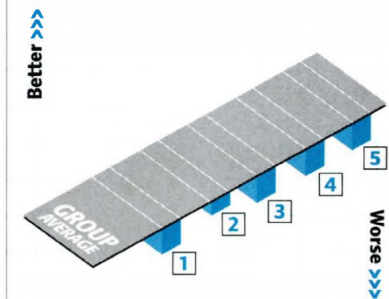
LAB REPORT

The manufacturer's rated sensitivity of 87dB corresponds very closely to our own findings. However, it should be noted that this is only achieved with an impedance that falls to 4 ohms around 200Hz (though it stays above 6 ohms above 500Hz). The pair match is very good indeed, showing no unwanted resonances.

However, the port output – tuned to 48Hz here – proved altogether too excessive when measured under our far-field in-room conditions, leading to a +8dB peak centred on 50Hz, even with the speakers mounted on 600mm stands well clear of room boundaries. This over-strong mid-bass is further compounded by a more modest excess of about 3dB in the upper bass (120-330Hz).

Above that point the response is impressively flat, albeit punctuated by a modest dip at 2kHz. It must be said that relative treble output is certainly stronger than average.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/- ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	30Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%



PRACTICALITY >> 89%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 81%

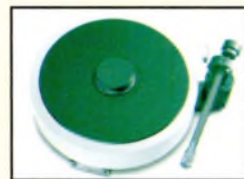


This substantial standmount does have too much emphasis at both ends of the audio band, but the quality of the drivers and enclosure are audible in the spacious sound with fine dynamic range.

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



Lucy just couldn't understand Tom's sudden lack of interest in an early night



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MISSION M66i

The M66i is a substantial, stylish speaker at a very sharp price

Mission will be celebrating its 30th birthday this year, and has built a reputation for combining style with innovative engineering through three decades. The last few years have seen changes of ownership and the company has joined other famous British hi-fi names (Quad, Wharfedale, Audiolab) under the Chinese-owned International Audio Group (IAG) banner.

That said, continuity of design has been fully maintained, and extracting these M66is from their cartons brought a real feeling of déjà vu. This might be a new model, but its roots are clearly seen in the V63 and M53 models, that we reviewed in 2003 and 2002 respectively. There are a number of detail differences, for sure, but the driver configurations and enclosure dimensions are virtually the same, so it's clear that this M66i is essentially a development of its predecessors.

The most obvious change concerns the price, which at £495 per pair is £100 less than its predecessors, but one contributing factor here is presumably that a decent quality



vinyl woodprint has replaced real wood for surface decoration. That change may well be related to the relatively complex enclosure shape, which is fattest around the middle, and tapers towards the front and the back.

It's a two-way d'Appolito design, in which twin bass/mid drivers are placed above and below a solitary tweeter (providing plenty of cone area while keeping the front panel nice and slim). The two magnetically shielded main drivers have 155mm cast frames with 110mm Paramid cones – a paper sandwich either side of a polymer loaded with aramid fibres. The tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome.

The box loads the main drivers with a 36-litre air volume and a generous rear port, and twin bi-wire/bi-amp terminals are fitted in a vertical line. The shape confers good basic stability, and is enhanced by an attractive plinth, which accommodates no fewer than six chunky spikes. Regrettably, these are thumbwheel nuts, which have a tendency to work loose.

SOUND QUALITY

The Mission has a very generous port output, and shows a tendency to 'thump' even when sited in free space, so this is a speaker that's clearly best kept well clear of walls. That said, the upper bass lacks a similar degree of power, drive and sheer 'punch', which might go some way towards explaining why it tends to sound limp and lacking in dynamic expression.

Although the basic tonal balance is decent enough, it's not particularly smooth, and while it's creditably free from boxiness, it lacks sophistication and transparency, especially towards the top of the audio band. The treble is quite strong, relatively speaking, and it's not very smooth or sweet either, a combination which is not very inviting, especially if the source or amplification signals are compromised in any way.

Speech sounds hollow and echoic, with some chestiness, but it's also coherent, if laid back, with a hint of nasal and pinched colorations. Stereo focus and imaging is respectable enough, although depth perspectives are somewhat constrained.

The bottom line, of course, is that this is a big speaker selling at an impressively low price, and if it sounds significantly cheaper than the other five assembled for this group test, that's probably simply because it is significantly cheaper. Naturally, value for money remains pretty good here – just don't expect it to match the performance of models that cost half as much again. **HFC**

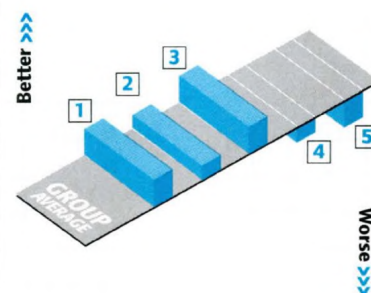


LAB REPORT

There are certainly some similarities between the M66i and its V63 predecessor, though the new model shows two very obvious differences. The sensitivity has increased by around 3dB, and now comfortably meets the specified 89dB. Furthermore it does so without compromising a relatively easily driven impedance with 6 ohm minima. And while the port tuning remains unchanged at 38Hz, the M66i has significantly less bass damping. The pair match was unexceptional, and curiously the two speakers showed enclosure resonances at slightly different frequencies (150Hz and 180Hz).

The in-room far-field averaged response trace looks pretty good overall but is also rather uneven, with rather too much output 40-50Hz, and too little 70-90Hz, even with the speakers kept well clear of room boundaries. There's also some midband excess around 250Hz, and again 600-900Hz, while the treble could have been smoother too.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	44Hz	22Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 76%



PRACTICALITY >> 84%



BUILD >> 78%



VALUE >> 84%



Generously built with very clever styling, this looks a remarkably competitive prospect. The sound quality is a little limp and lacks incisiveness, and could be smoother, but value for money is good nonetheless.

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

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QUADRAL PICO

The small Pico shares the same classy ribbon tweeter as the Rondo

Just four issues ago (HFC 288) we encountered a Quadral speaker for the first time, in the form of an elegant standmount called Rondo. This is, apparently, Germany's third largest speaker company, and it is making its first UK appearance via Axcelle Ltd, distributors of Wireworld cables.

The Quadral catalogue shows a huge range of models, only some of which will find their way to these shores. This little £849 per pair Pico is actually from the same Phonologue Kompakt range as the Rondo. Just three stereo pairs make up the Phonologue Cs – there are no multichannel partners in this case – and the Pico is actually the Rondo's baby brother, with the same styling and finish options, and the same high-quality ribbon tweeter, but a rather smaller enclosure and bass/mid driver.

The unit has a 135mm cast chassis and a 100mm diameter metal alloy cone, made from a mixture of aluminium, titanium and magnesium. Quadral calls this Altimas, logically enough, and claims it gives superior resonance control than single element metals or other materials.

The bonus with ribbon drive units is that the ribbon-shaped metal diaphragm – 60x8mm in this case – is also the voice coil to which the signal is applied, so there's no possibility of any losses due to diaphragm coupling or resonance. However, the magnetic field has to be very powerful to bridge the relatively wide gap, which is costly and makes shielding difficult. The ribbon's shape ensures fine lateral dispersion, but vertical dispersion will be more restricted, so it's important to position the speakers so that the tweeters are at ear height.

This very compact two-way standmount comes in the high-gloss graphite finish of our samples, or a choice of Maple, Bubinga or Cherry real wood veneers. It's very solidly built, with elegantly sculpted side panels, and looks very restrained, discreet and elegant, flush-mounting the silver-grey driver chassis'. A rear port loads the enclosure, and two pairs of terminals provide the bi-wire option. A pair of Open-cell foam bungs are also supplied to damp the port output.

SOUND QUALITY

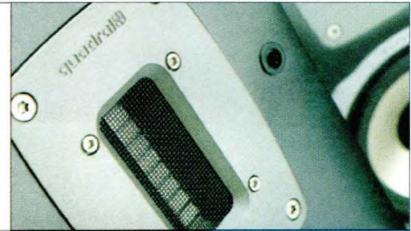
Quadral's larger Rondo showed much promise four months ago, though the bass alignment with its port unobstructed proved less than ideal, and best results were obtained with the supplied foam bungs in place. The first reaction to installing the Pico, however, was so positive that the phrase 'less is more' immediately sprang to mind.

Although those bungs could be useful if the Picos have to be placed close to a wall, our measurements indicate that free-space with ports open is likely to work best here, and this was confirmed in auditioning. Bass is inevitably somewhat limited, so this is not an ideal choice for those who like their beats hard and heavy. But what bass there is – and there's more than you might expect from the small box size – is clean, agile and refreshingly free from boom or thickening.

But it's the clarity, neutrality, openness and freedom from coloration further up the band that really sets this speaker apart. High quality speech is always a tough test, and here the Pico proved unusually good. While a mild degree of nasal and boxy coloration is detectable, both are well below what is

usually encountered, and if it doesn't quite achieve the standards of a classic BBC LS3/5a monitor, it gets impressively close.

The tough enclosure helps keep boxiness well under control, and its small size, fine coherence and sweet top end all help the speaker itself to 'disappear', leaving just the well formed and focused image. **HFC**

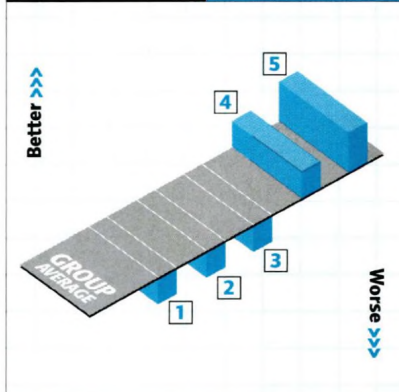


LAB REPORT

Quadral's specified 86dB sensitivity might be below average, but it's also conservative, and our tests indicate that 87dB is comfortably achieved under real-world far-field conditions – a credible figure for such a small speaker, even though the load is around 4.5 ohms through much of the midband. Pair matching has a slight discrepancy in main driver compliance between the two samples.

Despite its small dimensions, this speaker delivered a fine overall in-room frequency balance when mounted on 600mm stands well clear of room boundaries. The 48Hz-tuned rear port gave a slight excess of about 3dB around 50Hz when measured under far-field in-room conditions, and this helped deliver useful output down to 40Hz. Above 60Hz the little Pico delivered a textbook performance, with a smooth response that stays within +/-3dB limits right up to 13kHz, and shows a seamless crossover transition.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	6/4.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	44Hz	30Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

PRACTICALITY >> 83%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BUILD >> 88%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VALUE >> 84%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Could be more muscular, but does a superb job with material that's not too bass rich. Splendid neutrality and freedom from boxiness gives a beautifully spacious image, with minimal coloration and fine intelligibility.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **86%**



CONCLUSIONS

Few surprises from a sextet of solid speakers

This was a thoroughly respectable group of speakers, if perhaps one which held few surprises. That, in itself, is not unexpected, since all these models are aimed squarely at the mainstream sector of the marketplace, and represent carefully drawn compromises between engineering content, standards of finish, and price.

It therefore follows logically that the two standmounts look rather classier than the four floorstanders in terms of surface finish, especially

as three of the latter come clothed in vinyl woodprint rather than real wood veneer.

The least expensive is the £500 Mission M66i, which certainly looks a very competitive prospect, thanks to the vinyl finish and Chinese manufacture, and has very clever styling to boot. The sound quality is not without limitations, but value for money is high.

It's a big step up to the £700 Jamo Concert 803, and this standmount is a very different type of speaker. Once again, the sound

was not without problems, but the high quality drivers and enclosure demonstrate their extra class.

The ALR Jordan Entry XL seems costly when its £800 pricetag is compared to the £500 Entry L. While the sound has an attractive transparency, the presentation is rather prosaic at the price.

Focal's Chorus 716V is impressive, offering a very different flavour, which is less neutral and pretty perhaps, but its own way equally entertaining, with notably impressive fine detail. Those who

like tiny speakers should check out the £850 Quadral Pico. This Best Buy has an impressively neutral balance, high class drivers, and surprising bass for its size. It's well worth checking out.

The £750 Acoustic Energy Aelite 3 proved a real star this time around, providing evidence that the samples tested two years ago had faulty crossovers. It's not only handsome in its real wood veneer, it also delivers exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass. A clear Best Buy. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

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

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

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	ALR Jordan Entry XL	Focal Chorus 716V	Jamo Concert 803	Mission M66i	Quadral Pico
PRICE	£750	£800	£749	£700	£500	£850
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Wood-veneer all-rounder delivers exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass; top end could be more incisive.	Has an attractively agile sound with good transparency and very superior voicing, though presentation is prosaic.	High class drivers deliver incisive sound with impressive detail. Could be more neutral, but thoroughly entertaining	Emphasises both ends of the band, but fine ingredients give a spacious sound with fine dynamic range.	Clever styling and competitive price, sounds could be smoother, but good value.	Could be more muscular but splendid neutrality and openness gives spacious image with minimal coloration.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	20x103x39cm	28x115x38cm	23x42x34cm	20x35x27cm	14x89x21cm	19.4x33.6x26cm
DRIVER CONFIG	3-way	2-way	2.5-way	2-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	2x165mm + 1x135mm	2x165mm	2x165mm	1x180mm	2x155mm	1x135mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Floor	Floor	Floor	Stand	Floor	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Real wood	Vinyl	Vinyl	Real wood	Vinyl	Lacquered wood
BI-WIRE?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	88dB A	88dB A	89dB B	87dB A	89dB G	87dB A
EST. BASS EXTENSION	22Hz G	24Hz G	24Hz G	30Hz A	22Hz G	30Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/6 ohms G	8/6 ohms G	8/6 ohms G	6/4 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	6/4.5 ohms A
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	+40% G	-10% A	-10% A	-20% P	-10% A	+20% G
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+30% G	15% A	10% A	20% P	-20% P	+30% G

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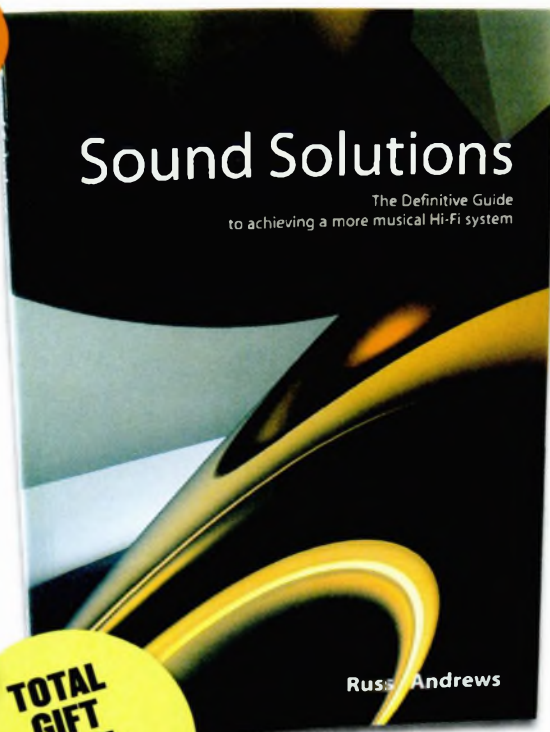
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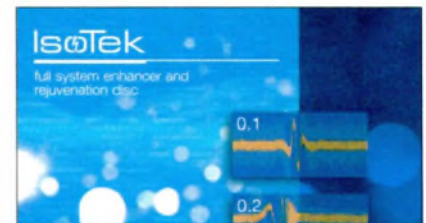
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See page 80
 for more details...

The PC jukebox comes of age

Tune in to the new Windows Vista operating system, because it puts your music collection at the heart of the personal computing experience like never before



Available since 30 January, this year, Windows Vista is the nifty new version of the Microsoft Windows operating system that's going to change the way you listen to music on your PC. The upgraded Windows Media Player 11 now finds all of your album artwork for you, and it's set up to browse your collection by cover art just as easily as it is by album title or artist.

What's more, it makes your entire CD collection accessible from anywhere. It doesn't matter if you're across your living room or on the other side of the world, the new sharing options enable you to beam your music wherever you want to listen to it.

Media Player 11 also supports hundreds of personal music devices (often referred to as 'MP3 players') right out of the box. Simply plug in your player, and Windows Vista will quickly recognise it. If you then hit the **Shuffle** button, you can instantly fill it to the brim with a random selection of tracks from your library.

Sound's good, doesn't it? But there's more. Windows Vista's new star rating system means you can award marks to every track in your music library and create playlists based on your favourite songs. So, if you share your home PC with somebody else, there's no reason for you to suffer their dodgy taste in music ever again. Now, that alone has to be worth its weight in gold. 🎵

Music library

Browse your music by artist, album, song, genre or even year.



Online updates

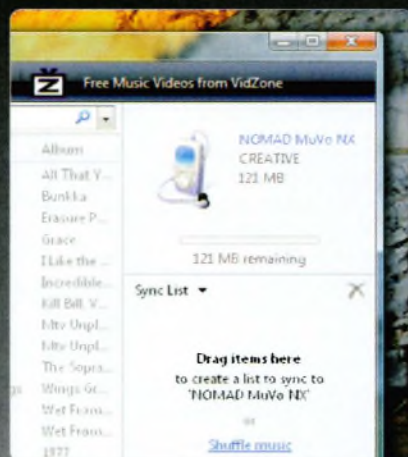
Pop in a CD and Windows Media Player 11 finds accurate album, artist and track information as well as locating cover art.

Doing the shuffle with Sync Center

Windows Vista is designed to work better with your MP3 player than previous versions of Windows. If you have a player that you've simply stopped using because the process of getting music on to it is too difficult, then the new Windows Vista Sync Center is what you've been waiting for.

Plug a recent model of MP3 player into your computer and the Sync Center will jump to attention and give you the option of transferring your music files to it in a few clicks. You can simply drag and drop your music on to your player, or you can fill it with a random selection of your music simply by hitting the Shuffle button. Plus, no matter what type of player you have, a handy

progress bar-like gauge shows a visual representation of how much space is left on your device.



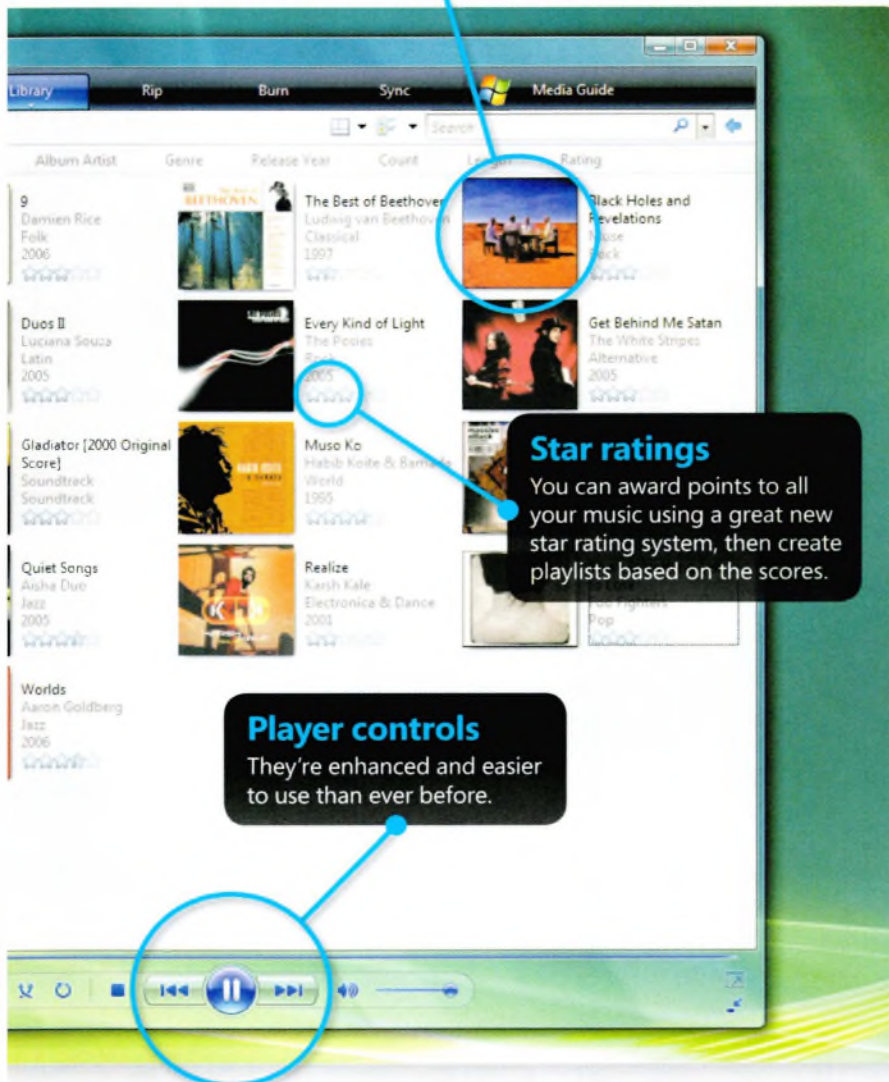
SPACE TRACKER Sync Center keeps tabs on your MP3 player's remaining capacity

Lounge music?

Media Center lies at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium versions of Windows Vista. Hook up your PC to your TV and you'll get an absolutely gorgeous way of browsing the music and video collection that's on your computer. You can choose how your music collection is organised (by artist, album or genre) or simply scroll through your album art to find what you want. And provided you have a Windows Media Center remote control, you can do it all from the comfort of your sofa.

Album cover art

Navigating your CD collection using album artwork makes everything much more fun.



Star ratings

You can award points to all your music using a great new star rating system, then create playlists based on the scores.

Player controls

They're enhanced and easier to use than ever before.

Get more from your PC with Windows Vista: The Official Magazine

Whether you're already running Windows Vista, or thinking about upgrading, the Windows Vista Magazine tells you everything you need to know

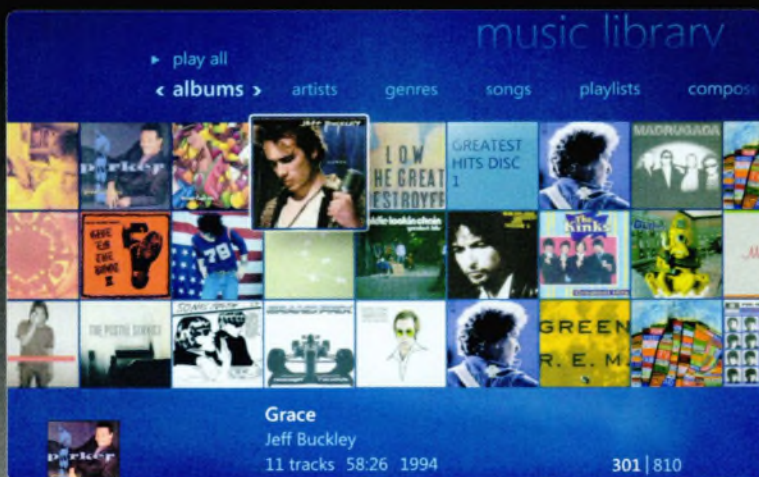
We'll show you...

- ➔ How to tell whether your PC will run Windows Vista
- ➔ Simple, cost-effective upgrades to get your PC into peak condition
- ➔ PCs you can buy today that will run Windows Vista at its best
- ➔ How to install Windows Vista and be up and running in 30 minutes
- ➔ What you can do with Windows Vista that you couldn't do with Windows XP
- ➔ Great new hardware and software that runs under Windows Vista
- ➔ And much more!



Issue two is out now – only £3.99

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NEAT INTERFACE Media Center is a very user-friendly way to browse your albums

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show



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- 6 daily seminar sessions - learn how to integrate smart technology in your home
- Leading industry experts who will share their knowledge and give you the right advice

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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 192 kHz.

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	P	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	CambridgeAudio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player								285
BB	CambridgeAudio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully underdemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing enhanced by flexibility as a DAC								291
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-RAY v8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system								288
BB	Naim CD5i	825	Bass has great extension but lacks control, slightly. Tonal neutrality higher up is excellent, however								291
BB	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation. smaller-scale works can lack focus								291
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 Xt/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	Gamut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music								289
EC	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output								289
BB	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best								291
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	Meridian G06	1,695	Great combination of all-round attainment with superb looks and build quality, plus superb remote control								281
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 KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Copland CDA823 £1,750

This distinguished, yet minimalist Scandinavian CD player combines a real ear for detail with full-scaledynamics and an effortless musical style. A genuine hi-fi star.



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

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

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



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

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



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

DVD-AUDIO

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

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

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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

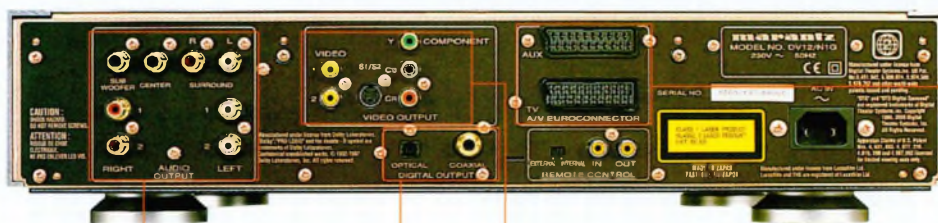
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

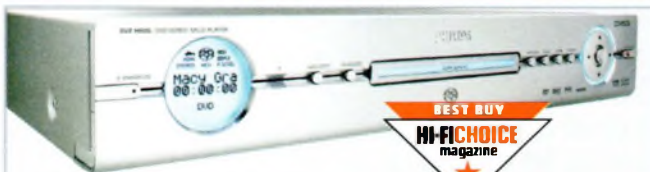
BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money						254
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem						276
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation						274
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video						275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star						274
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts						274
	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs						280
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing						285
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs						238
	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing						287
	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD						266
	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi						259
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat						280
	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio						263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity						279
	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD						270

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.



Marantz DV7600 £600

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



Arcam DiVA DV137 £1,250

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



Meridian G98AH £3,625

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



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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.

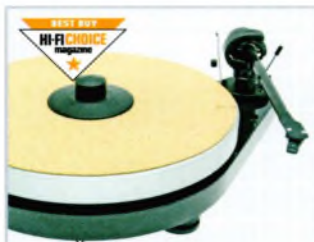


TURNTABLE SET-UP

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				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45				247
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45				229
	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45				268
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45				271
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78			opt	276
	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45			opt	279
	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45			opt opt	284
	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45				266
	Michell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45				268
	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45				239
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45				235
	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
	Pro-Ject Expression II	250	A smooth and engaging turntable with the ability to revel in the glory of vinyl, with upgradable arm cable	33/45				289
	Project RPM 5	400	Great looks plus an on the ball, engaging sound that puts it in the serious league, needs good isolation for best results	33/45				279
	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45				268
	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			opt	257
	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45				228
	Roksan Radius S/Nirna	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45				248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45				195
EC	SME Model 20 2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78				186
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45				259

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm				266
	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 Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss				235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality				215
	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound				290
	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				270
	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light				235
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for				265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money				253

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU I MPEDANCE	AU GAIN	
	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	Tested with the almost-as-good £40 540P, this remarkable phono stage brings refinement and bass weight to budget vinyl					277
	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound					268
	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money					245
	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!					234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP					201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility					234

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

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

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

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

SME

The way to play vinyl ...

Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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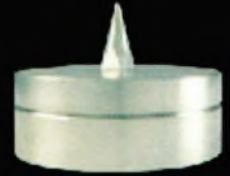
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HI-FI CHOICE Feb. 2007

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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon TU-1800DAB £250

Combines DAB with FM/AM reception and good all-round design at a tempting price.



Creek T50 £550

A thoroughly accomplished AM/FM tuner with a substantial and detailed sound.



T+A T1210R £1,000

This FM tuner looks, feels and sounds top-notch – great detail and imaging.



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

FM tuner with valves – 'affordable' for an MD, but still streets ahead of most radios.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128					251
	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7					283
	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto	FM,M,L	100					281
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, the generally decent performance on both bands makes this an great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200					283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt			257
	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!	200						283
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30					250
	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99					283
	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20					283
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30					242
	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100					283
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DIVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value	DAB,FM	16					269
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10					248
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60					260
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	DAB reception is as good as any and FM performance clearly benefits from Denon's long experience	DAB,FM,M	200					274
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99					242
	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60					259

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.

Chord Epic



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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

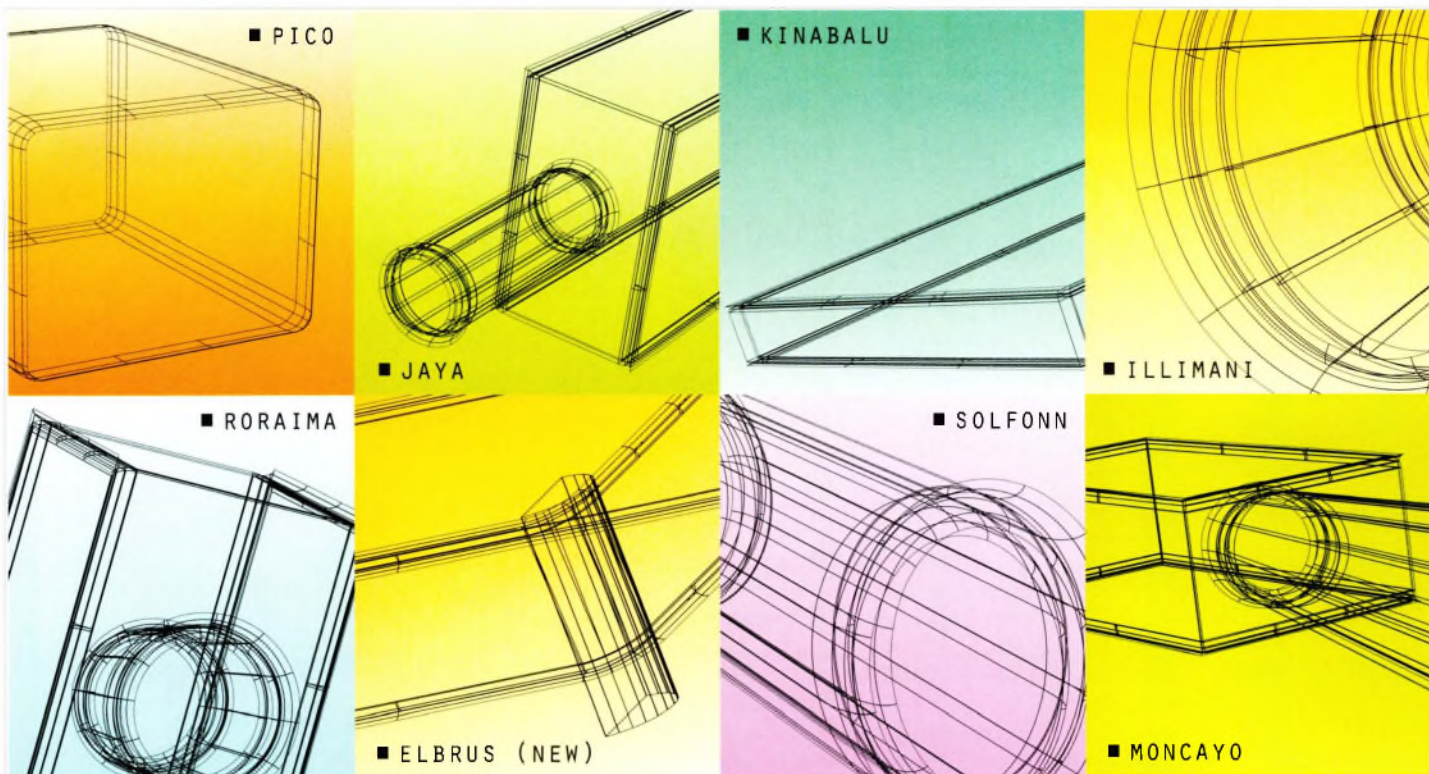
160GB hard disk and CD-R/RW drive in a box – as music servers go, this is a cracker.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1				218
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1				205
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1				243
<input type="checkbox"/>	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-inducingyer 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								
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Imerge S3000	2,800	Thought-out solution to the problem of storing, sorting and accessing a music collection: sound wouldn't shame a good midrange CD player	1	160			291
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250			278

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



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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
I30 £1,500

Are you looking for an amp that combines weight and musical gravitas with rhythm, detail and subtlety, with gorgeous build quality to boot? In that case... here it is!



Copland
CTA405 £2,498

This amp's massively enjoyable musicality is hard to beat: all the effusiveness of a great valve amp and none of the stereotypical softness. Brilliant!

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM			60	289
	Arcam DVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt			90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
	Cambridge Audio 840A	750	Detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail	7				120	286
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt			85	283
	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
	Flying Mole CA-S10	1,000	The Mole makes a mountain of detailed sound from its digital circuitry, if you choose your speakers well it's a short-cut to hi-fi nirvana	3				100	291
	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	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM			70	289
	Musical Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3				70	288
	Naim Nait 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner	4				50	252
	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5				80	278
	Primare I21	750	A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality	4				75	273
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,000	Improved version is as involving as ever but now with added focus and bass depth	5				85	278
	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence - an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7				100	266
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8				100	280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6				100	275
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6				180	275
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5				200	247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4				200	289
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5				75	271
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7				180	285
	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000											
	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication			7				100	227
	Crott Precession V/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer			6				25	290
	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical							50	290
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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

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 EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS *continued*

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL
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
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	opt	277
EC	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	100 278
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6	●	300 249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5	●	120 269
EB	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	80 276
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●			180 253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●	●	5	opt	265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●			200 247
EC	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	125 250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●			700 234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4	●	238
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●			140 208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6	●	233
EB	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 a 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)	SEE 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		●	●	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		●	●	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		●	●	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-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy		●	●	100	273
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears		●	●	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		●	●	200	253
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price		●	●	100	287
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power		●	8	135	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	Linn Exotik + DA	3,245	Good analogue preamplifier with multichannel in/out up to 7.1 and a home cinema processor of quality combine to make a tempting package		8	●		291
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

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

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Shanling CD500 CD Player (NEW)

"The singer's voice took on a sense of scale and presence that just made you wonder about that whole business of adding more channels."

Liquid, unflagging and detailed sound. Overall Rating: 19/20
Steve Harris, Hi-Fi News, March 2007

Jadis

Jadis has a remarkable range of valve products from entry-level to reference level.

Affordable, reliable and exceptionally well-made, Jadis products really are on an entirely different plane from other audio components. This in essence is what Jadis as a company is all about.

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Don't be afraid to treat yourself to a Jadis.

After all - life's too short.

(Model DA88S shown on the right).



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"subject to conditions"

Still true to two-channel

Two-channel is still the best way to listen to your music!

The speaker with big balls!

Looks like no other speaker and quite frankly, it beats every other similarly priced one.

When Shadow Audio started, we were dedicated to two-channel and today, nothing has changed! There is no finer way to enjoy your music... call us today and see how we can help you.

Duevel Planets £800/pair

On a completely different planet.

Duevel's newest model called the 'Planets' brings omni-directional magic to a completely new audience. Visually the 'Planets' will shock and the price will definitely surprise! Retailing at just £800, the beautiful 'Planets' look like no other loudspeaker and sonically they deliver a first rate performance that is nothing short of astonishing.



Hi-tech engineering, unique design, excellent frequency and phase response ensure the 'Planets' deliver a natural sound that can best be described as 'addictive'.

Shanling sets new standards

The new reference Amplifier and CD Player from Shanling are gorgeous - visually & sonically!



IsoTek

Free UK delivery, free cable and 30-day money back scheme - try IsoTek today...



The Reference CD500 CD Player and Reference AS00 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.



"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

IsoTek / Nordost Special Offers

On the following IsoTek/Nordost mains filtration systems:

IsoTek Nova	£1695	Nordost Thor	£1599
IsoTek Titan	£1495		
IsoTek SigmaS	£995	FREE delivery, FREE IsoTek mains cable worth £49 and a 30-day money back guarantee*.	
IsoTek GII Minisub	£545		
IsoTek GII Solus	£325		

Super Natural Winner

The icon of IKON (Dali).



Using the already famed and celebrated Hybrid Tweeter Module and 2 x 6 1/2" paper/wood fiber cone IKON drivers, the Dali IKON 6 has won the ears of both customers and the press alike.

"We've yet to come across a rival that can match the IKON 6's combination of full bodied midrange, treble sparkle and crisp timing."

What Hi-Fi

"A loudspeaker of exceptional resolve for the money, the IKON 6 will show what has been recorded in exquisite detail and with pin-sharp precision."

Hi-Fi Choice



Valve Music Centre

Shanling launch the NEW beautiful MC-3...



Shanling MC-3: £500 Available: March 2007

MC-3 cleverly combines a high quality CD player, tuner, dedicated i-POD input and tube power amplifier in one chassis. Just add speakers! A brilliant one box solution.



Demand is going to be very high for the MC-3, so place your order early!!



You can now buy select items online...

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McIntosh are famous across the world for producing some of the finest Hi-Fi Products available today.

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Call for more details.

Antila has 20 x DACs at its heart

Leema launch a CD Player that really delivers on every level.

Stunning sound quality and captivating good looks create a striking impression in any environment.

The new Antila CD player with its unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology provides breathtaking realism and a tactile panoramic image.

LIPS ensures the ultimate simplicity in use and flexibility for the future.



There can be only one

Xone may be small, but it packs a mighty punch...

With a footprint similar to that of Xen, but in a miniature floorstanding cabinet, Xone provides musical insight and precision together with superb bass timing, pitch, punch and extension, in a beautifully svelte package.

In collaboration with Seas, Leema have developed custom shielded bass and mid-bass drivers with new fibreglass composite coil formers delivering exceptional midrange clarity. These are employed in a two-and-a-half-way configuration. NORDOST Mono-Filament wiring is used internally and the second order crossover features Leema's 'Multi-track PCB' design method developed for the Xen EVO3.

Xone continues the Leema tradition of combining unsurpassed detail, rhythm, power and holographic imaging to provide...

...music, pure and simple.



Maximum resolution

Opus 21 can now give you a complete system.

Available in a variety of configurations and colour combinations, the Opus 21 can start as a simple cd player and evolve to a complete two-channel system.

No analog interconnects are required, and only a single cord powers the entire system.

The Opus 21 frees you to focus on the music, not the equipment.



Battleship Shanling

Shanling launch the NEW visually striking CD-T150...

Shanling CD-T150: £2000 Available: March 2007

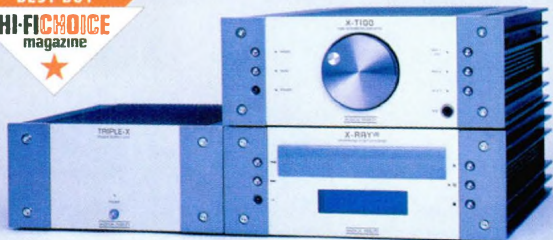
The elegant 4-cylinder-supports isolate the chassis, sensitive electronics and advanced Philips CD-PRO 2 linear tracking mechanism, delivering a stunning performance from CD.

Call or email Shadow Audio for more details on this affordable, visually striking - digital wonder.



X-Factor

Musical Fidelity products definitely have that X-Factor.



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

Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi Choice Dec 06

Look to the whest

New dual mono phono stage promises to really deliver.

With the NEW whestTWO you will hear much clearer mid and high frequencies and because the high frequency is extended ALL instruments down to basses and kick drums will sound much more realistic with better transient response and positioning within the soundstage.

It is only now by using modern audiophile playback equipment that we can appreciate just how much information there is on vinyl.



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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ESSE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,25,5	A-	45				283
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26	A+	50				277
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	245,37,31,5	A	26				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60				241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40				269
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from walls. **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).



LINN

Experience a revelation in turntable performance
9th/10th April 2007



LP12 SE Upgrades Klinik EKOS SE, KEEL, NEW TRAMPOLIN

To celebrate the launch of the new series of LP12 SE Upgrades, studioAV invite you to an LP12 SE Klinik at our new demo rooms in Eton.

Linn staff will introduce customers to the EKOS SE tonearm, the KEEL sub-chassis and armboard and new, improved metal TRAMPOLIN base board, with each upgrade representing the highest performance product of its type ever produced by Linn.

To reserve your place, e-mail us at sales@studioav.co.uk, or call us on 01753 631 000.

studio 

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Our favourite

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	BASS (FRONT Hz)	FREQUENCY	CLOSE TO WALL
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24		A	50	●	261
	PMC GB1	995	Ultra-compact floorstander is beautifully clean, articulate and free from boxiness, with a notably delicate top end	16,92,24		A+	30	●	257
	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line stand-mount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30		A	28	●	275
	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23		A+	40	●	267
	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19,5		A	48	●	286
	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30		A+	28	●	284
	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24		A	50	●	269
	Rega R3	448	Discreet, pretty and fine value. A little lightweight but impressively open, it delivers music with great agility	20,76,28		A	40	●	265
	Revel Concerta F12	900	The money has gone into the active hardware, so cosmetics are plain. Performance is on par with more costly designs	25,108,37		A-	28	●	283
	Ruark Sabre III	799	Straightforward engineering combined with high finish quality that delivers a beautifully timed and engaging sound	20,33,5,27		A-	50	●	289
	Totem Rainmaker	795	Standmount has a big sound, with a smooth midband and bright top. Could have more punch and warmth	17,35,5,23		A	25	●	291
	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
	Triangle Titus ES	370	Not pretty but busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	18,37,30		A-	40	●	269
	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40	●	265
ABOVE £1,000									
	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26		A+	40	●	281
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,900	Luxury miniature has a laid back but bouncy sound, fine dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25		A-	30	●	281
	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,200	Slim, laid back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range	17,99,26		A	28	●	275
	ATC SCM19	1,499	Super linear motor system, heavy weight construction and fabulous veneer that makes the ATC a pro favourite	22,3,44,31,5		A-	54	●	285
	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22		A+	27	●	271
	AVI Duo	1,299	Sophisticated floorstander, a natural partner for AVI's electronics. Unusually clean and honest musical presentation	19,77,28		A	50	●	280
	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32		A	20	●	257
	B&W 802D	8,000	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication. Makes sweet music	37,115,56		A	<20	●	267
	B&W 805S	1,600	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back but otherwise a real delight	24,39,33		A	25	●	271
	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36		A-	20	●	260
	B&W XT4	1,800	Gorgeous, silver, super-slim floorstander has notably clean bass but perhaps sounds a little too polite	15,2,114,20		A-	25	●	281
	Canton Vento Ref 50C	3,499	Strikingly handsome speaker has a studiously neutral balance with delightful midband analysis	25,112,35		A	40	●	283
	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46		A	20	●	264
	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5		A-	<20	●	281
	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26		A	45	●	277
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,2103,8,37,5		A	45	●	287
	Focal Profile 908	1,300	Open and revealing especially of spatial and atmospheric detail, makes up for its bass restraint with joie de vivre	23,39,27,5		A	50	●	274
	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28x115x38		A	28	●	290
	Focal 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 Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35		A-	25	●	276
	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53		A+	30	●	255
	Focal 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
	Gamut L5	5,900	Impressive build and sophisticated driver design make the L5 a stunning speaker with rare transparency levels	20,116,43		A-	32	●	271
	Jamo Reference R909	7,500	Top model (in a class of one) is open, full and easy on the ear, and surely a classic in the making	48,127,54		A-	25	●	280
	Krell Resolution 2	6,497	Large but good looking, with Sonus Faber type elasticated front. Musically a great full bandwidth all-rounder	122,29,61		B	28	●	273
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31		A-	46	●	245



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Dino Phono Amplifier



Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18		A	25			267
	Neat Motive 1	1,200	Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative	16,92 5,20		A-	20			276
	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33,57 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	2,000	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer and richer	20x100x25		A	22			290
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31		A	22			259
	Sonus Faber Concerto D	1,799	The Concerto Domus performs significantly above its price level, especially with acoustic material	21,99,31		A	35			270
	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48			246
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	14,750	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it's easier to live with and remains highly entertaining	60,160,45		A-	32			290
	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
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 AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27		241
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCF 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20		251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28		241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages - good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38		262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		210
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20		268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29		269

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, (the smaller the number the deeper the bass)
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from walls) **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)

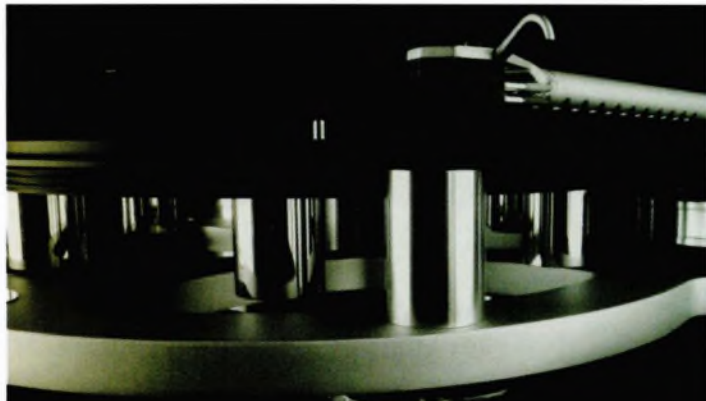
Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	45,33,45	1,000	10	290

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



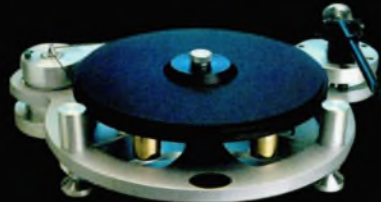
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E & O E



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						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
<input type="checkbox"/>	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed; a bargain					190		219
<input type="checkbox"/>	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material					270		230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only					270		244
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack					250		245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass					290		287
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste					200		194
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension; check for comfort					200		270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for					250		288
<input type="checkbox"/>	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone					330		219
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution					35		290
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable					270		266
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience					260		252
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff					20		285
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity					280		268
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



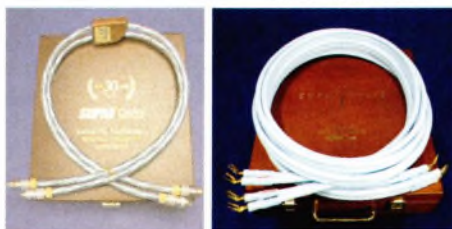
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In celebration of the company 30th Anniversary, Supra have developed the Sword-ISL and Sword-IXLR cables, based on technologies derived from the award winning Sword Loudspeaker cable. Sword-ISL is a high-end 2-channel interconnect, fitted with locking phono connectors (or as Sword-IXLR, with XLR plugs for balanced use) and supplied in 0.6, 0.8m or 1.0m pairs (other lengths to order). The first "run" are supplied in a luxury Limited Edition 30th Anniversary Presentation case. Demonstration sets are now available from Authorised Dealers for home audition.



Supra manufacture a wide range of hi-fi and AV cables, including: HDMI, DVI, and Component video, as well as Loudspeaker and shielded Mains cables. Visit our website for details of our wide range including our NEW 6-way UK Surge Protected Mains Block.

SUPRA SWORD LOUSPEAKER CABLES are available in single-wired sets in 2m, 3m, 4m and 5m pairs using BFA/Banana and/or Spade connectors. Fixed spades and/or longer/bespoke lengths are available to order.
Hi-Fi+ - "Product of the Year"
Hi-Fi Choice - "Editors Choice"
Hi-Fi World -

Matching **Sword Jumper Links** (28 cm long, fitted with wide-entry fixed spade connectors) are also available to replace those naff gold-plated (brass) bi-wire links.....to enable you to get the best sound quality from your Sword cables.

Made in Sweden by
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email: supra@jenving.se
web: www.jenving.se
We are a licensed HDMI
Adaptor manufacturer



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

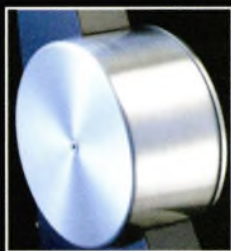
For UK customers who require more details or to request a brochure pack containing stockists & price information, please contact:

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The Absolute Sound

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www.anthonygallo.co.uk

tel. 0870 350 1348

nonconformist

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

CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Harmony	60	Clear and well defined sound with good bass and admirable articulation						290
<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
	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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Van den Hul MC Silver IT MkII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price						289
<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 type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value					E	289
<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									
	Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	A high degree of musical communication: detail is not perfect but one is seldom aware of the shortfall						290
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 checked="" 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times						291
	Wyrewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.						267

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

Do you want to choose your hifi or home cinema system, in a comfortable and relaxing environment...?

Do you want friendly and impartial advice (and a cup of tea) ...?

Do you want to buy your system based on what you hear, and see, and not what somebody tells you...?

Do you live in GUILDFORD...?

.....or Addlestone, Aldershot, Ashford(Middx), Ashstead, Bagshot, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Bookham, Bramley, Camberley, Chertsey, Chipstead, Chobham, Cobham, Cranleigh, Crowthorne, Dorking, Epsom, Esher, Farnborough, Farnham, Fleet, Frimley, Godalming, Hartley Wintney, Hampton, Haslemere, Hook, Horsham, Kingston, Liphook, Leatherhead, Liss, Molesey (East&West), New Malden, Odiham, Petersfield, Reading, Reigate, Redhill, Richmond, Shepperton, Virginia Water, Walton-on-Thames, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Windsor, Woking, Wokingham, Yateley .

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

Apollo, Arcam(Diva/**FMJ**), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & **FMJ**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/**FMJ**, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

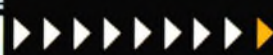
Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.
Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,
Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.
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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		4	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37		4	Glass	286
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot	75	45,36		5	Glass	261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation 2560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16.5,18			1	281
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20			1	220
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20			1	220
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15			5	261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280

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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B&W 703 Speakers Rosenut E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£1395.00
Linn Klassik Music system Silver E/D (1Yr G/tee)	£745.00
Linn Unidisk 2.1 Disk Player E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£2950.00
Naim CDS3/XPS2 CD Player-P/S S/H (1Yr G/tee)	£4295.00
Naim NAC82 Preamplifier (1Yr G/tee) S/H	£1095.00
ProAc Studio 130 Speakers E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£769.00
ProAc Studio 140 Speakers E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£975.00
Quad 22L Speakers Maple E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£499.00
Spendor S3e Speakers Rosenut (2Yr G/tee) E/D	£495.00

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£179.95



AELITE 2

- Black, cherry or birch

WAS: £449.95
SAVE: £250

£199.95



AELITE 3

- Birch finish

WAS: £749.95
SAVE: £350

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- Birch finish

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SAVE: £900

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- Choice of finishes

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IMPECCABLY MUSICAL!"
WHAT HI-FI

WAS: £349.95
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£249.95



WHAT HI-FI
★★★★★
JULY 2004

TUNER PURE DRX701ES

- DAB with second tuner input for use with an existing analogue radio, if desired
- B stock: fully guaranteed for 1 year
- Remote control
- Black or Silver

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WHAT HI-FI

WAS: £349.95
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WHAT HI-FI
★★★★★
OCTOBER 2002

TUNER PURE DRX702ES

- DAB/FM/AM tuner
- Remote control
- Black or Silver
- B stock: fully guaranteed for 1 year

"A SUPERB BUY!"
WHAT HI-FI

WAS: £329.95
SAVE: £230

£99.95



WHAT HI-FI
★★★★★
JULY 2003

AMPLIFIER NAD C352CT

- 2x 80 watts
- Remote control
- Titanium finish

WAS: £349.95
SAVE: £50

£299.95



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
MAY 2004

WHAT HI-FI
★★★★★
AWARDS 2004

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4GB MODEL
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- Uber-slim, uber-sexy – the must-have MP3 player
- Store 1000s of songs, only 7mm thin

WHAT HI-FI
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MP3 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



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- Timeslip recording, chase playback, pause live TV
- Record to 160GB HD or DVD-R/RW

WAS: £299.95
SAVE: £120

£179.95



DVD/NETWORK PLAYER HELIOS X3000

- Multi-region DVD player
- Streams video and audio from network connected PC
- HDMI and component video outputs with HD playback and upscaling up to 1080p

WAS: £229.95
SAVE: £20

£209.95



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BEST BUY
ISSUE 135

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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp). Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire). Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor) integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESERVE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESERVE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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INTERGRATED AMPLIFIER
PMA-500AE

INFORMATION

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YAMAHA

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CD PLAYER/DAB RADIO
RECEIVER WITH SPEAKERS
M170

INFORMATION

This system combines the stylish Yamaha CRX-M170 CD player with DAB digital radio receiver, plus two speakers, in one elegant and compact unit. Yamaha is known for its high quality compact speakers, and these models live up to that reputation. The M170 system has a 11cm cone woofer and 2.5cm dome tweeter, and can handle 110W of power.

Pioneer

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AV RECEIVER
VSX-1016

INFORMATION

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Ikon 6



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YSP-1100

YAMAHA

5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
M-Cube 5.1

HOME CINEMA SYSTEM
AV Package 59

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INFORMATION

Mission's Stunning M-Cube consists of an active 250W subwoofer with 2x200mm (8") bass drivers, magnetically shielded centre and satellite speakers and 5 Wall brackets.



YAMAHA

INFORMATION

This Digital Home Cinema Package generates high-quality, dynamic surround sound with a large variety of surround programs. Featuring a 5.1 channel receiver and five compact speakers this package is remarkably efficient and extremely powerful.



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Pro-ject

INFORMATION

This Award-Winning Turntable will give any CD Player a run for its money. Includes an Ortofon 510 cartridge and a host of impressive features.



Panasonic

INFORMATION

The FT-AX100 High Definition LCD Panel features 2,000 Lumen Brightness, MPEG Noise reduction, 2x Optical Zoom, 6000:1 contrast ratio and Pure Colour Filter.

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ACTIVE SUBWOOFER MS8

Sonos

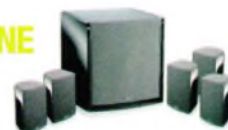
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ZP80 INTRODUCTORY PACK

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HOME CINEMA SPEAKER SYSTEM
AEGO T



INFORMATION

The ms8 is an active subwoofer designed to enhance the low bass information from both music and films. Its high efficiency in combination with a rugged 200mm bass unit gives an extra dimension to movie soundtracks.

INFORMATION

Make your favorite audio devices part of a wireless, multi-room digital music system with the Sonos™ ZP80s or ZP100. Together with the Sonos™ Controller, this popular set up will give you music in any room you choose directly from your PC.

INFORMATION

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Revive your record collection

with Project tuntables. The range includes the award-winning Debut (pictured above).

PROJECT DEBUT III

- Two Speed, Belt Drive
- Supplied Complete with Cartridge
- What Hi-Fi? Award Winner



YAMAHA CRX-M170

- Compact System
- Comprises CD Player, Amplifier and DAB/FM Tuner
- What Hi-Fi? Recommended

ONKYO CS-515DAB

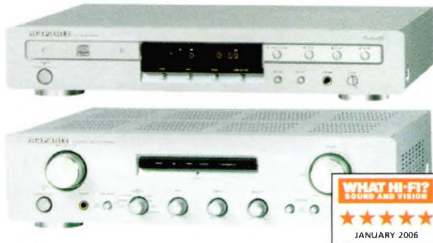
This award-winning micro delivers exceptional performance and is superb value for money.

"A truly musical micro system"



MARANTZ

Marantz products range from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and AV receivers. Its hi-fi range includes the CD5000 and CD50010SE CD players, the SA7001 SACD player and the PM4001 amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.



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BEST CD PLAYER UNDER £1000
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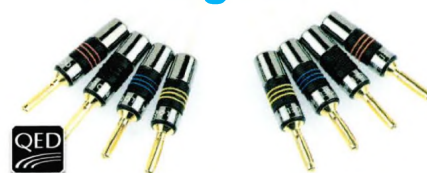
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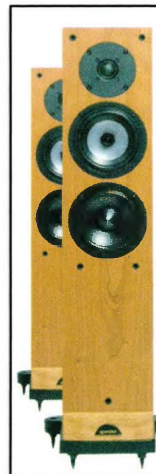
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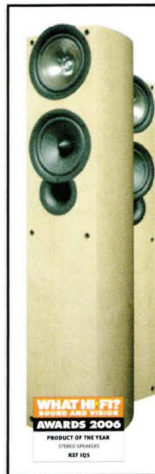


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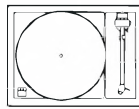
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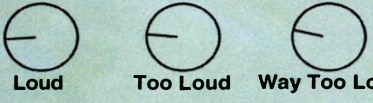
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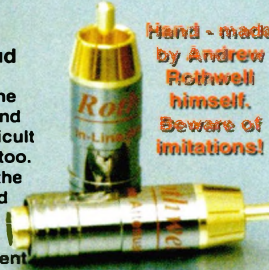


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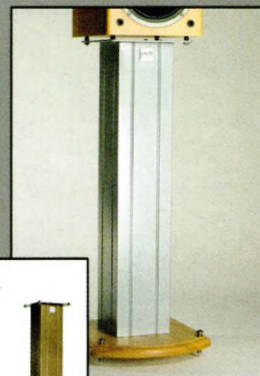
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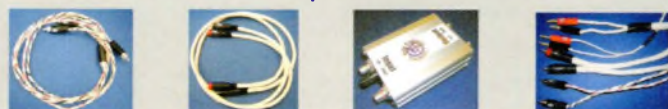
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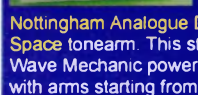
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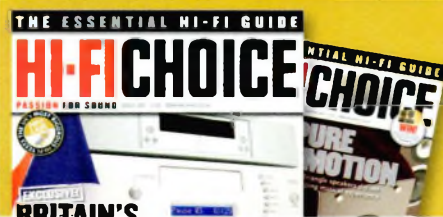
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Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW
Tel: +44 (0)20 7042 4000 Fax: +44 (0)20 7042 4529

EDITORIAL

Tim Bownen **editor** tim.bownen@futurenet.co.uk
Dan George **deputy editor** dan.george@futurenet.co.uk
Benny Benson **art editor** benjamin.benson@futurenet.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Black, Andy Giles, Alvin Gold, Stuart Hamson,
Jason Kennedy, Ken Kessler, Jon Marks,
Paul Messenger, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast,
Alan Sircom, Malcolm Steward, Phil Strongman,
Dominic Todd, David Vivian, Nigel Williamson

PHOTOGRAPHY

Adrian Lyon

ADVERTISING

Matthew Tasker **head of sales**
020 7042 4263 matthew.tasker@futurenet.co.uk
Brad Francis **account manager**
020 7042 4255 brad.francis@futurenet.co.uk
James Rhodes-Baxter **senior advertising executive**
020 7042 4260 james.rhodes-baxter@futurenet.co.uk
Mo El Moudden **display sales executive**
020 7042 4272 mo.elmoudden@futurenet.co.uk
Liz Hodges **display sales executive**
020 7042 4269 liz.hodges@futurenet.co.uk
Pierce Cook-Anderson **display sales executive**
020 7042 4251 pcookanderson@futurenet.co.uk
Graham Phillips **classified sales executive**
020 7042 4037 graham.phillips@futurenet.co.uk
Nick Weatherall **inserts and direct marketing manager**
020 7042 4155 nick.weatherall@futurenet.co.uk

MARKETING & LICENSING

Tim Hudson **head of international licensing**
tim.hudson@futurenet.co.uk
Antonio Goard **marketing manager**

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Luke Bilton **circulation manager**
Ralph Stringer **production manager**
Roberta Sanders **production coordinator**
Alexa Cuthell **ad coordinator**

PUBLISHING & MANAGEMENT

Andy Ford **group publisher**
andy.ford@futurenet.co.uk
Nick Merritt **group senior editor**
Simon Wear **group publishing director**
Jim Douglas **editorial director**
Clare Dove **advertising director**
Robert Price **managing director**

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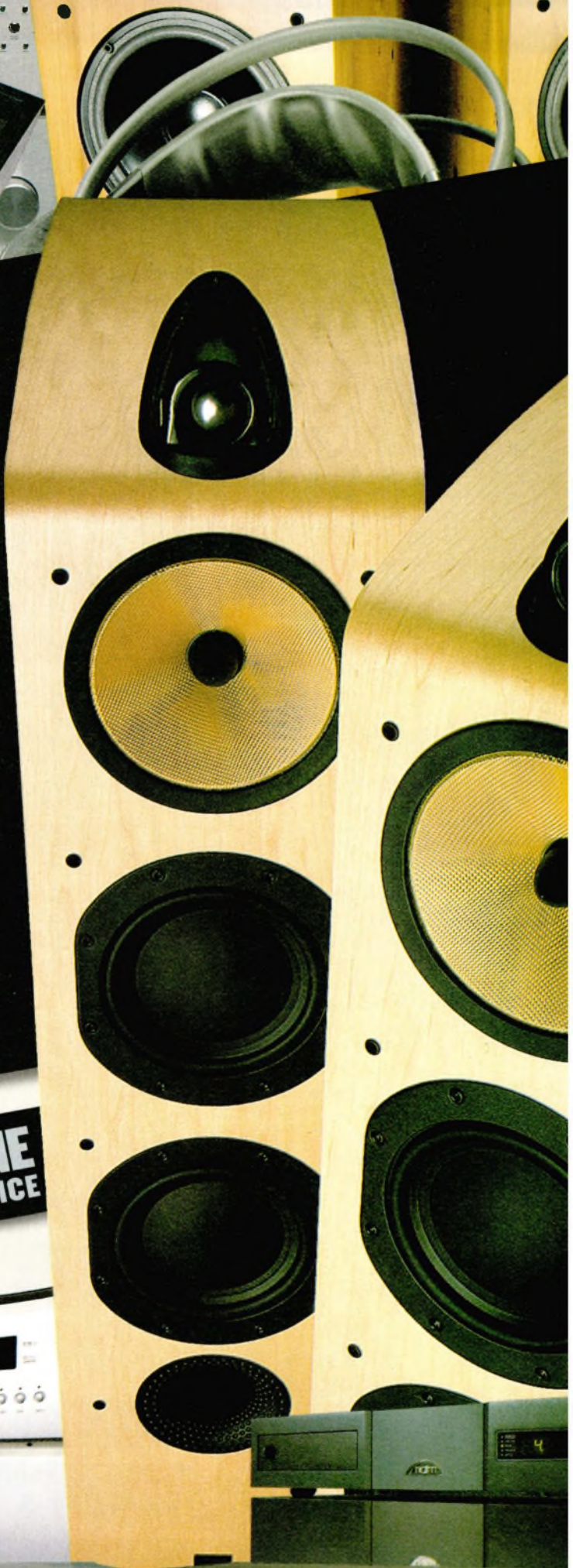


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2nd-hand shootout

Just how good a tuner can you get if you spank a monkey on one?

With the recent announcement of a revised DAB system, it may seem an odd time to pursue an FM tuner. Yet, most still agree that FM still sounds better: a fact that's unlikely to change with DAB+ when, or even 'if', that standard is adopted in the UK. FM transmissions are now likely to last until at least 2020, making a quality FM tuner a fair, if depreciating asset.

£500 may not be much money when purchasing a source, amp or speakers, yet with a tuner it can buy you the very best. One such tuner that was often labelled just that is the Naim NATO1. When first launched over 20 years ago it cost £1,000. The final versions were nearly twice that: yet worth every penny. As with most high-end Naim units, the NATO1 features a separate, fully regulated power supply. Tuning is via a simple knob and there are no presets. This FM-only tuner is about as basic as it gets, but makes up for it with its sound quality. "Spine-tingingly" is how this very magazine described it, and that's still the case now.

Acoustic transparency, depth and sheer sense of realism are NATO1 strengths. Being a Naim, servicing is straightforward enough, but you'd be unlucky to need it in the first place. Most tuners are mechanically simple and are therefore extremely reliable. With the oldest NATO1's you may find the flywheel tuning system slips or that the power supply's capacitors are beginning to leak, but that's only to be expected from an electronic component over 20 years old. Neither presents a great servicing issue.

Cosmetically, the NATO1 followed the usual Naim changes over the years, but internal alterations were limited. These days, prices range from £400 to £650, for models made in the 1980s, while £800 to £1,200 buys you an example in the 1990s

green Naim casework (the one-box NATO2, launched in 1989, also offers much of the performance for around the £500 mark). If cosmetics aren't important, go with a 1980s NATO1 and a good aerial.

By 1992, the NATO1 wasn't alone in its claim as being the best UK tuner money could buy. As with CD, Linn Products took rather a long time in coming to the tuner market, but when it did it was with its reference Kremlin model. At the time, a NATO1 cost around £1,450, so to bring the

“FM transmissions are now likely to last until at least 2020.”

Kremlin in at £300 more was a bold move. In some respects it paid off. The Linn featured 80 presets, a superior cabinet finish and optional remote control. By all accounts the sophisticated finish was mirrored by the sound quality, too. The Kremlin has excellent transparency and staging, if not perhaps the final 'bite' that the NATO1 offers. As this model was only fairly recently discontinued, Linn still support it. Unlike the NATO1, though, it features no internal moving parts and with the oldest being 14 years old, you'd be very unlucky to find one with a problem. Despite the premium over the NATO1 when new, prices are now at parity, so expect to be able to find a nice example for £500.

More of an underground classic than Linn or Naim, one-time South Coast manufacturer Onix produced a brilliant FM tuner in the late 1980s to mid-1990s, called the BWD-1. This has more in common with the Naim NATO1 than the Linn; a custom-made tuner head stage, no presets, an LED read-out and only a tuning knob to navigate the FM band. Just like the Naim, it had a separate power supply

called the SOAP, but, unlike the Naim design, the external power supply was an optional extra, designed to upgrade Onix's amp and tuner. The brushed black alloy finish has timeless appeal and the tuner's basic design means that repairs are straightforward ('Onix England' still exists as a Chinese-built brand, but there's no connection to the UK any more). Sonically, the tuner also shares a lot with the Naim design, with the same sense of immediacy and realism, if not the bass depth or three-dimensional soundstage.

They don't come along too often, but £500 will also net you a BWD-1/SOAP combination in very good condition.

Canada's Magnum Dynalab is only just over twenty years old, yet it has already established an enviable reputation for producing some of the world's finest tuners. To stay within our approximate budget we've selected the FT101A Etude. The original FT101 stretches back to the 1980s, but modifications came first with the 'A' and then the Etude model – itself only recently discontinued. Featuring an integrated circuit board, the Etude offered improved selectivity over its predecessors. It also came with a switchable 'Stereo blend' control that can prove handy if you're in a poor reception area. Magnum Dynalab offers a lifetime guarantee with the promise that no service bills will cost more than \$100 over the course of a unit's life. This is greatly reassuring for the second-hand buyer, although there are shipping costs to take into account. Perhaps more intriguing is the company's offer to upgrade to full MD102 spec. Given a FT101A Etude can be picked up for £500-£600 this could be worth exploring, especially as a new MD102 costs around £2,500. You could have a bargain on your hands.

Like Tesco Premier Cru champagne, these tuners provide a taste of the high life for less cash than you'd expect. Buy now and even in 2020, we'd imagine you'd have very few regrets indeed. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month – £1,500 amplifiers

Clockwise, from bottom left:
Naim NATO1 tuner (without power supply)
Linn Kremlin tuner
Magnum Dynalab FT101A Etude tuner



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 - Bel Canto Evo 2i Integrated, boxed, mint cond (£2800) £1695
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 - Nagra PSA Power Amp, very rare, only 6 months old!, immac, stunning £3395
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 - Nordost Thor, ex-dem, immaculate condition, boxed, Valhalla wired (£1600) £1195
 - Isotek Titan mains conditioner, few months old, boxed (£1500) £1095
 - Nordost Valhalla Speaker Cable, 3m per side, bi-wire with z-plugs (£5700) £3995

The Transporter

Wireless music streaming of the highest quality...



Slim Devices' Transporter™ was designed to appeal to the most discerning audiophiles and music lovers. It streams digital music with sound quality that surpasses even the most exotic compact disc players.

At the heart of Transporter is a "no compromise" attitude to component selection and electronic design.

Feel Your Music - The new TransNav™ controller uses dynamic tactile feedback to provide fast access to any song even in the largest music collection. The sleek, backlit, infrared remote and dual fluorescent displays make it easy to use from anywhere in the room.

Quality Connectors - Transporter's back panel features a complete set of professional-grade connectors, including both balanced and unbalanced signals for its analog and digital interfaces.

Astounding Analog - The AK4396 "Miracle DAC" was chosen for its high dynamic range and low distortion. Its low out-of-band noise allows for the use of low-order output filters with higher cutoffs, resulting in preservation of phase and reduced distortion in the audible band. This extraordinary accuracy at higher

frequencies allows Transporter to resolve the exact staging of instruments and the finest details of any recording. In addition, Transporter's digital inputs allow its built-in DAC to be used with other sources.

Accurate Digital - Transporter's digital path is not only "bit perfect", but also extremely accurate in timing precision. Clock signals in Transporter are handled not as ones and zeroes, but as precision analog signals. Specialized crystal oscillators, careful clock management, and linear-regulated logic supplies ensure the lowest possible jitter throughout the system.

Clean Power - Transporter's DAC and output amplifiers are powered by Super Regulators, based on the legendary design by Walt Jung. These regulators offer lower output impedance, faster response, and better noise rejection than standard three-terminal regulators. The result is an incredibly natural sound, with a pitch-black background and a shocking level of detail.

Transporter is the network music player audiophiles have been waiting for.

Inspired by music. Engineered to delight. At £1299 it is a true audiophile bargain!

Multimedia Loudspeakers with a difference

The NEW ADM9 Monitor from AVI really delivers the musical goods....



The fully active, two way monitor comprises of 9 litre enclosures each with two amplifiers (150 and 100 watts equivalent in passive designs) fed by 4th order active filters from a Burr-Brown DAC or normal analogue input. Either input is selected by IR handset that also controls volume and mute.

This means that you can either connect it to a traditional preamp/CD player/Tuner etc or save yourself money and space by connecting it via the USB port to a computer.

This will store all your CDs, download any music you may want and give access to 4000 odd radio stations most of which sound better and have better program material than the £4billion a year BBC.

You can get astonishingly good results with iPods and MP3 players but our favoured system is a Plasma screen TV, a Mac Mini, a Skybox and a pair of the ADM9 speakers. This gives you a complete home entertainment system cost effectively.

The speakers also have an output for the new AVI 10" high powered Subwoofer.

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DEFINITIVE AUDIO

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Clearaudio Goldfinger cartridge. Brand new, still in sealed box	£3500	£5640
Craft 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)	£2900	£4000
Canary 301 300B Stereo power amp with LV upgrade - excellent	£3500	£6500
Mactone MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - 30 hours use	£2500	£6500
Mactone XX330 line pre-amp - 10 hours use	£2500	£8000
Esoteric X01 CD player - perfect - boxed - 10 months old	£5500	£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 - 120v - remote control - 6 months old	£900	£1600
Living Voice loudspeakers - various ex-dem, part-ex, seconds, from very young to very old please call		
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	
Canary 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 months old - boxed	£2850	£6500
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - charmer	£2500	£5000
Sugden Bijou mm/mc phono stage - 100 ohms - virtually new	£300	£650
Sonus Faber Electa Amator - Walnut - stand mount - lovely condition	£1750	£3500
Aval Audio PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo	£2500	£4500
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - Maple	£3500	£7000
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use	£1250	£2500
Tube Technology Unisis Signature integrated - 30 hours use	£1250	£2500
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with Rega RB300 tonearm.		
Reson Recca cartridge and Living Voice mat.	£1000	£1633
Unison Research Smart 300B class A power amp - 1 year old	£2000	£4500
JPS Kaptivator power cables - very nearly new	£600	£1200
JPS SC3 interconnect - very nearly new £400 £795	£400	£795
Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood - with stands	£850	£2000
Beard integrated amp - beefy boy - needs some help	£350	
Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect - 1m set - boxed	£400	£1000
Nordost Quattro Fil interconnect - 2m set - boxed	£700	£1800
Nordost Blue Heaven speaker cable - 4m - revision 2 - boxed	£500	
Michell Iso / Hera phono stage	£200	
Townshend Audio Seismik Sink - 3DHD (100 kilos) 48x48	£300	
Townshend Audio Seismik Sink - 3DSS (12 kilos) 48x48	£250	

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EX DEMO AND SECOND-HAND ITEMS

	Was	Now
DIGITAL		
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Balanced S/H	3500	1799
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade 22 Bit Single ended S/H	2999	1499
Arcam Diva CD92 Silver dCS Ring Player S/H	799	449
dCS P8i SACD/CD Player factory re sealed full warranty	2500	3099
dCS Verdi laScala SACD/CD Transport/up-sampler S/H	9000	4250
dCS Verdi Encore Transport BNIB	9500	6449
dCS Elgar Plus DAC BNIB	9500	6449
Densen Beat400 XS x demo	2600	1499
Linn Karik Numerik DAC S/H	1500	499
Linn Karik CD Player S/H	1999	499
Marantz CD65 KI Sig MkII S/H	N/A	329
Nagra DAC x-demo	7250	3999
Orpheus labs Zero CD player x demo	4200	2999
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1299
Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	695
Analogue		
Heed Audio Orbit 1 TT PSU New & Boxed	225	179
Kuzma Stabi/Stasi S Turntable New & Boxed	N/A	1399
Mc Cormack Micro Drive Phono Stage Boxed	650	399
Phonomena Phono stage MM/MC BINB	650	399
Phonomena BP5 Battery supply for phono BINB	650	399
Rega P2 /Bias Turntable S/H	270	179
Yeh Grasshopper GLAIII MC Cartridge x-demo	2500	1699
VPI HR-X Turntable x-demo	9250	6999
PREAMPLIFIERS		
Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamplifier X-demo	625	399
Audio Research SP16 with Phono Stage x-demo	2249	1749
Audio research LS1 Hybrid Preamplifier S/H	1798	649
Conrad Johnson PV14L Remote controlled valve x-demo	2399	1750
Conrad Johnson Premier 18LS x-demo	4000	1999
Convergent Audio CAT SL1 Signature Black S/H	6000	2799
Densen B200 Preamplifier S/H	1100	799
Electrocompaniet EC4R Preamplifier S/H	1799	599
Musical Fidelity X P100 Preamplifier S/H	899	499
Nagra PLL with remote x-demo	5450	2999
Nagra PLP battery Phono stage x-demo	7250	4999
Orpheus Two Preamplifier x-demo	1800	999
Roksan L1 Preamp (requires PSU) S/H	2299	995
Roksan L1.5 Preamplifier (requires PSU) S/H	2699	1299
Sugden masterclass Preamplifier x-demo	2300	1599
Spectral OMC 30s Reference Preamplifier x-demo	7600	4499
AMPLIFIERS		
Audio Research VM220 Valve mono Amplifiers x-demo	9000	7499
Audio Research VT60 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	1995	795
Audio Research V55 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	2499	1699
Audio research VT100MKIII Valve Power Amplifier S/H	6400	3999
Conrad Johnson MV60 SE Valve Amplifier S/H	2500	1895
Conrad Johnson Premier 350SA x-demo	8000	5999
Densen Beat 340 x-demo	1800	999
Densen Beat 370 S/H	1800	999
Densen Beat 300xs x-demo	1800	999
Krell KAV400xi Black x-demo	2498	2199
Nagra MPA RCMI X-demo	10450	7999
Musical Fidelity X A200 mono Power Amplifiers S/H	999	599
Orpheus Three power amplifier x-demo	1750	799
Roksan S1.5 stereo power amplifier silver S/H	2995	1799
Sugden masterclass monos x-demo	1495	599
6600	4999	
LOUDSPEAKERS		
Audio Physic Spark 3 maple X-demo	1699	1099
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Diapason Adamantes III with stands S/H	2150	1299
JM Lab Micro Utopia Classic x-demo	4700	3750
JM lab Electra 927 be Anniversary S/H	2800	1699
Martin Logan Aeon 1 Oak x-demo	3189	2300
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Pen Audio Rebel 2 x-demo	995	699
Pen Audio Charm Active Subwoofer x-demo	1995	999
ProAC Response D25 Maple x-demo	2800	2199
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Sonus faber Ironwood Stands S/H	449	229
Spendor S3 Cherry S/H	599	379
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- Origin Live OL-2 speakers **£250**
- Kef Concord speakers **£150**
- Haudio Audience 7 speakers & stands **£395**
- Dynas Transcendence 5 Loudspeakers **£2900**
- TDL RTL3 speakers **£95**
- Tannoy Westminster Royal HE speakers **£9995**
- Mordaunt Short MS 902 speakers **£99**

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 ML380 pre amp **£1995**
- Mark Levinson ML380S pre amp **£3495**
- Audionote M8 pre-amp with phono stage (£19,500) **£9995**
- Audionote Zero remote control pre-amp (new) **£695**

Amplifiers:

- Audionote Neiro mono-blocks **£5495**
- Classe CA201 amp **£1995**
- Kora Triode 100SB **£3500**
- Mark Levinson 432 Power Amp **£4995**
- Mark Levinson ML336 power amp **£3495**
- Mark Levinson 11 and 12 pre/power amplifier **£1295**
- Meridian 60.5 Mono blocks **£795**
- Perraux 200 IP integrated amp **£1095**
- Exposure 1.5 integrated amp **£345**
- Audionote Keron monoamps, mint (£28,000) **£11995**

CD Players, Transports and DACs:

- Denon DCD 590 CD player **£60**
- Sony CDP M41 CD player **£60**
- Mark Levinson ML31.5 CD transport **£4495**
- Sonic Frontiers SFD1 DAC **£795**
- Esoteric XO3 CD/SACD player (our demo model) **POA**

Miscellaneous:

- Hitachi FT5500 Mk1 1 tuner **£125**
- Sony ST-SE570 tuner **£60**
- Technics ST-GT550 tuner **£65**
- Winds stylus gauge **£425**
- JPS 'The Power Plus' 2m power cable **£195**
- Sony FM/AM ST-SE370 Tuner **£75**

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

- Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer **£2495**
- My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new) **£2750**
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- Thorens TD 160 with Thorens tonearm **£195**

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FOR SALE

A WHOLE LOTTA VINYL

5,000 vinyl LPs for sale as one complete lot. Pop/rock, good condition, sensible offers considered. Terry 020 8300 6308 (Kent).

ARCAM 8R integrated amp, 8P power amp, B&W DM602 S2 standmount speakers, £450, or may split. 07710 737232 (East Lothian).

ARCAM DIVA CD72 CD player. 24-bit DAC, CD Text. What-Hi-Fi? Awards product of the year 2001. Excellent condition, boxed with remote/manuals, £250ono. 020 8907 3246 (London).

ATC SCM7 cherry, one single, as new, used as centre speaker for one week only, £100 ono. 01225 429170 (Bath).

AUDIOLAB 8000C preamp, two 8000P amps, boxed with instructions, £750. Thorens TD160, extra headshell, £80 Pair KEF T27 tweeters, £50. SME flexible link, £25. 020 8590 8530 (Essex)

AUDIOQUEST INDIGO speaker cable, 2x3m pairs, 4mm QED Airloc plugs, very good condition, £60. Stands Unique CD racks (two), 180 capacity each, mahogany finish, excellent condition, £250 both or £130 each. Raymond, 01900 65381 (Workington).

AUDIOQUEST EMERALD interconnects 1m pair, (£260) £85. QED Silver Spiral Qunex 1m pair, (£90) £35. 01278 782622 (Burnham on Sea).

B&W 602 S3 (£300) £200. All mint condition. Call Paul 07866 853944 (York).

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).

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 8VS silver amplifier. Award winner mint condition, hardly used, boxed, fantastic sound and power, £475. 07739 822360 (London)

DENON DAP 550 preamp with built in DAC, door hinge broken but looks OK, £180. 0191 417669 (Tyne & Wear)

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).

EXPOSURE 17 preamp and two Exposure stereo power amps in mint condition. Four years old, fantastic sounding trio, reluctant

sale, (£3,300) £1,500. Alan 01302 739976 or 07936 603015 (Doncaster).

FOCAL MEZZO UTOPIA seven years old, one owner, modified, (£7,250) £2,800. Photos available +00352 407702 or +00352 621 500756 or email barig@internet.lu (Luxembourg).

GARRARD 401 in plinth with lid fitted, SME Series III, £300. Will swap for Thorens 124 in plinth. 01606 784767 (Cheshire).

GRYPHON CALLISTO 2200 integrated amplifier. 200 watts, vgc, terrific clarity and dynamics. (£4,500) £2,250 07968 189647 (London).

KEF 2QDS rear dipole speakers, maple finish, 120 watts. Boxed, excellent condition, warranty, (£400) £200. Yamaha YST320 sub, 250 watts, (£375) £200. Good condition 01782 256087 (Stoke on Trent).

KRELL FPB300CX £7,500 plus shipping. Serious applications only to ewadv@hotmail.com (Israel).

LINN KLIMAX power amplifier, pair of 500 solos, £6,500. Pair of Chakra 500 twins, £2,750 each. Excellent condition, cables. Call for more info Barrie 01323 487781 (E.Sussex). ▣

WANTED

ATLAS OR NORDOST Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts).

BRYSTON 3BST power amp or larger Bryston power amp(s). 01803 523553 (Devon).

LINN OR NAIM speakers. 01793 728103 (Wilts).

MUSICAL FIDELITY P150 power amps, will collect, must be vgc. 07733 167226 (W.Yorks)

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA DAC 21 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. Nytech. Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

REL/ MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer with remote. Possible part ex for my Quad LSenes sub. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

FOR SALE

LINN SONDEK LP12 Lingo PSU, Ittok arm, Dynavector Karat 17D2 (new). All mint and superb sound, £1,250ono. Custom made six-tier equipment rack, spiked top and bottom. Looks great sounds better, (£700) £210. Andy 0115 9126424 (Midlands)

LUXMAN D322 CD player with variable output, boxed, in as new condition with manual and remote, £150ono. John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks).

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 PM6010 OSE amp with remote and instructions, ex condition, £85. Will deliver in Midlands area. Call Mike 01543 251848 (Lichfield)

MARANTZ PM66 KI amp, £120. Accuphase E202 amp, £350 ono. Tannoy M1 speakers cherry, £50. Technics SUV 900D amp, £120. 01708 457691 (Essex)

MARANTZ PM7200. Arcam CD72 CD player. Boxed, both mint condition, £100 each. 01708 853702 (Essex).

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)

MONITOR AUDIO GR20 floorstanding speakers, cherry wood finish. Excellent condition, unmarked, boxed. Great sound, very good reviews, (£1,500) £650ono. 07802 936750 (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 82 MC NAPSC black SNAIC, Hi-Cap, 250 olive facias, boxed, mint, serviced, £2,250. Naim CDI boxed, mint, serviced, £500. Chord Anthem DIN to DIN, £125. 01722 334694 (Salisbury).

NAIM CD 5 plus Hi-Cap, £725 ono. 01225 429170 (Bath)

NAIM LINN LP12 (modded) Armageddon power supply. Aro tone arm, £750, vgc. 01453 750183 eweekends. (Gloucester).

NAIM NAC 82 with MM phono stage, £1,100. NAP180, £650. SBL black, latest drivers, £1,000. All excellent condition and boxed. 020 7253 4469. (London).

NAIM NAC 82 preamp (1999), with black style NAPSC, remote, leads, plug-ins, manual, box. Can demonstrate, £1,025 ono. 07973 785360 (Sussex)

NEAT CRITIQUE speakers, £120. Sony TAF 440E amp, £75, Philips 624 CD player, £50. Various other items from the 1960s-1990s, some classic, call for information.

01224 646473 (Aberdeen)

NORDOST SOLARWIND interconnects 2x 0.6m, £40 each. van den Hul CS122 speaker cable 8m pair, £70 or 2x4metre pairs, £40/pair. Quad 99 bus leads (2x long type), £30 each. Quad 99 remote, £25. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

PRIMARE CDI10 all-in-one system, excellent condition, £800. Monitor Audio RS6 loudspeakers, floorstanders, oak, 9 months old, perfect, £400. 07946 553071 or email kesterbantn@hotmail.com (London).

QUAD 22 Control Unit and Quad II power amplifiers, the classic valve system, recently serviced, £650. 0113 275 1628 (Leeds)

REGA 7 turntable, Rega Exact cartridge. Rega Fono phono stage. All as new, £950. Sony MiniDisc JA3DES plus discs, £175. 07736 773830 (Yorks)

SENNHEISER HD600 cans, mint, boxed (£250), £80. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

SME 20/ 2A turntable. Boxed as new, £4,000. Tom Evans Groove Phonostage mint, £1,000.

Benz-micro Ruby2 cartridge, price negotiable. Loricraft PRC3 record cleaner, boxed, as new, £900. 01954 715266 (Cambridge).

SOUND ORGANISATION five-tier stand, black with glass shelves, as new, £85. Sennheiser HD495 headphones, vgc, £40. Jules, 01926 420208 (Leamington Spa).

SPENDOR S8E cherry finish speakers, five months old. Cost £2,000, accept £1,000 for quick sale, can demo. 01255 421954 (Clacton on Sea)

STELLO CDT 200 CD transport, silver, two years old, boxed, excellent condition, (£900) £450. David 01926 315981 (Warwickshire).

TDL MONITOR transmission line speakers. A powerful high quality classic design, £400. 01793 541240 (Wilts).

TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT 2.5metres speaker cable, VGC, £180. 01491 614325 (Watlington).

TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT 100 interconnect (0.6m) XLR, £50. Ecosse Diva interconnect (0.5m), £50. Chord Chameleon Silver Plus interconnect (0.6m) XLR, £60. Siltech Paris interconnect (1m), £60. 01872 278711 (Cornwall).

TRIANGLE VOLANTE floorstanders, boxed as new, superb sound, amber, upgrading, (£4,500) £2,250. No offers please. Paul 07931 314536 (Oxon).

USHER 1.5 power amp, 150 watts, pure Class A, both channels, weight 38kg, (£1,550) £850. Usher P-303 preamp, both items, £1,100. Or preamp, (£1,200) £350. 01491 614325 (Oxford).

VAN DEN HUL CS122 2x 4.5m speaker cable, £40. Linn K20 speaker cable 2x 5m, £35. Chord Odyssey bi-wire speaker cable 2x 1.5m, £25. Mission 771E rosewood, £45. 01384 894284 (Stourbridge).

YAMAHA CDX 493 CD player black, very good condition, remote, instructions, original box, c/w Chord Cobra 3 cable phono to DIN, £110, will split. 01665 782523 (Porthcawl).



Above: Primare CDI10

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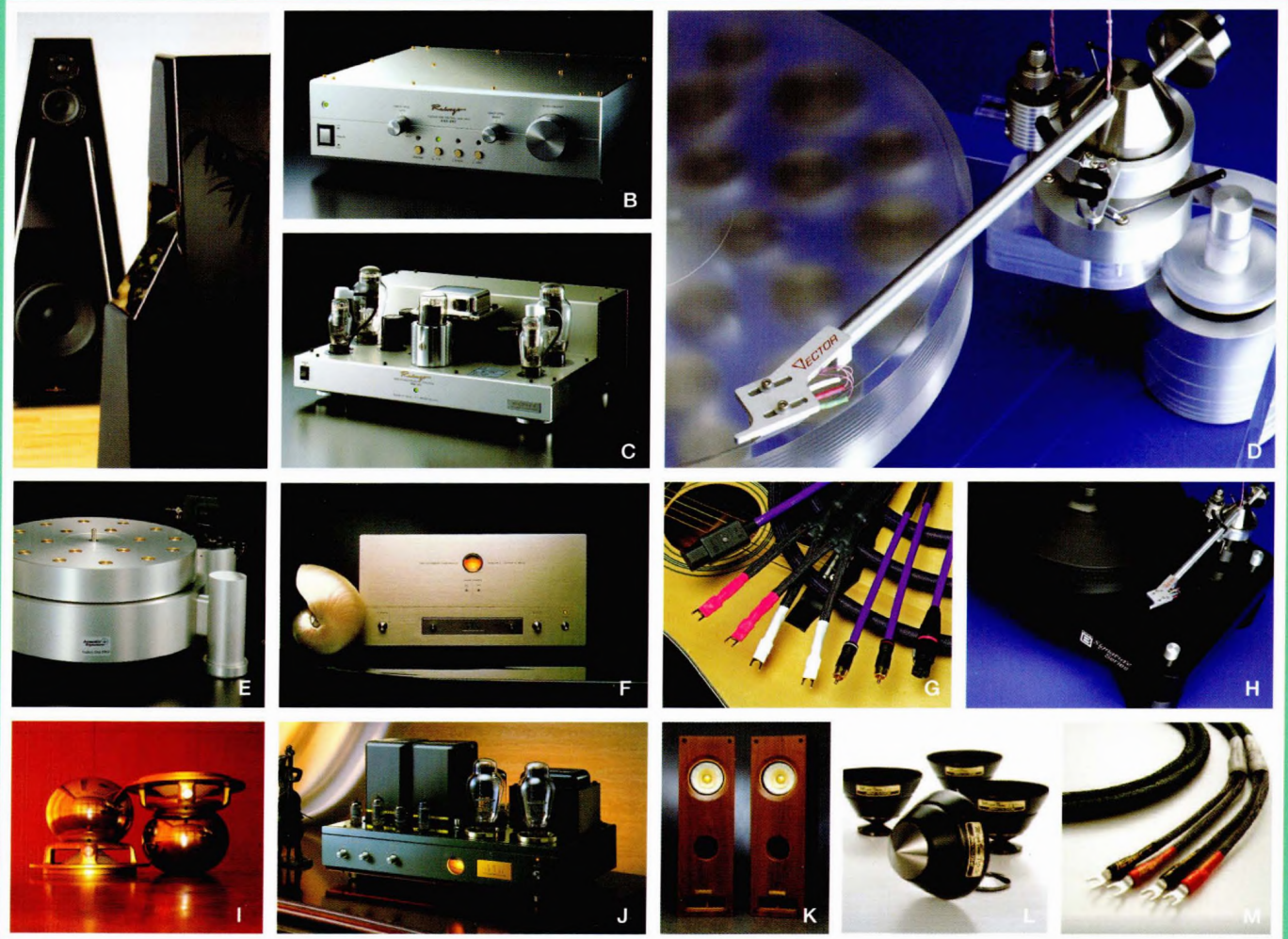
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