

# HI-FI CHOICE

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**WIN!**

Totem's superb Rainmaker speakers worth £900!  
See page 26



**EXCLUSIVE!**

# BIGNAIM

**NAIM'S BEST-EVER INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW!**



**IN-DEPTH TESTS INSIDE!**



**MERIDIAN** Tabletop hi-fi system is simply amazing!



**PIONEER** New CD/SACD player and stereo amp rated!



**QUAD** Latest electrostatic speaker seduces our ears!

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

**HI-FI HOME CINEMA**

**ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>  
SPEAKERS**

**FEATURING**

- > AE Aegis Neo 3
- > Focal Chorus 705V
- > Monitor Audio BR2
- > Mordaunt-Short 904i
- > Q Acoustics 1030
- > Tannoy Mercury F4

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



# A different Classé

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](http://www.classeaudio.com) or experience the product range at one of the following authorised retailers.

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**Robert Taussig**  
London  
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**The Audio Room**  
Hull  
01482 891375

**Infidelity**  
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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 JUNE 2007 ISSUE 294

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



After more than five years at the helm of *Hi-Fi Choice*, the time has come for me to move on. This will be my penultimate *Editor's Intro* before I set sail towards challenging new waters, bidding an emotional farewell to you – our loyal band of readers. The voyage hasn't always been smooth, but I've cherished every single second of it. Ladies and gentlemen, it has truly been a blast.

You may wonder how I happened upon this privileged role in the first place. Well, a little over a decade ago, fresh from a media degree and a post-grad course in journalism, I landed a work placement at a certain magazine called *What Hi-Fi?* For a hi-fi fan that discovered his passion through a deep and unquenchable love of music, it was a veritable dream come true, made even better when I was offered a full-time job. A few years on and I moved to *HFC*, becoming Editor at the back end of 2001.

Throughout this time, the hi-fi 'truth' has endured much: the onslaught of wham-bam home cinema, the rise of compressed digital music, the ever more complex web of home entertainment technology that competes for the attention of consumers. But through the passion and dedication of audio engineers, music fans and hi-fi aficionados, the quest for pure, brilliant, unadulterated sound remains undimmed.

I'm delighted to be leaving *Hi-Fi Choice* in rude health – it is, after all, the UK's only hi-fi magazine to have enjoyed an audited circulation increase for the past three years. So remember – keep the faith and spread the word. It's all about the music!

Tim Bown

Tim Bown Editor

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

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

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

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

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

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

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



Wooden it be nice?



## 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).



### ALAN SIRCOM

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



### 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.

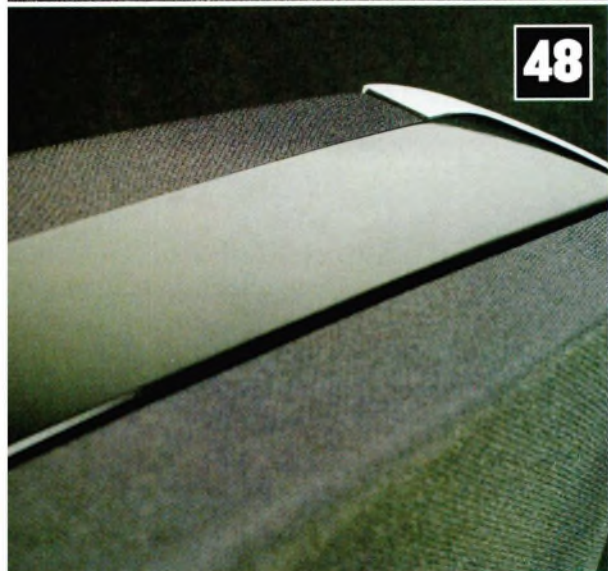


### KEN KESSLER

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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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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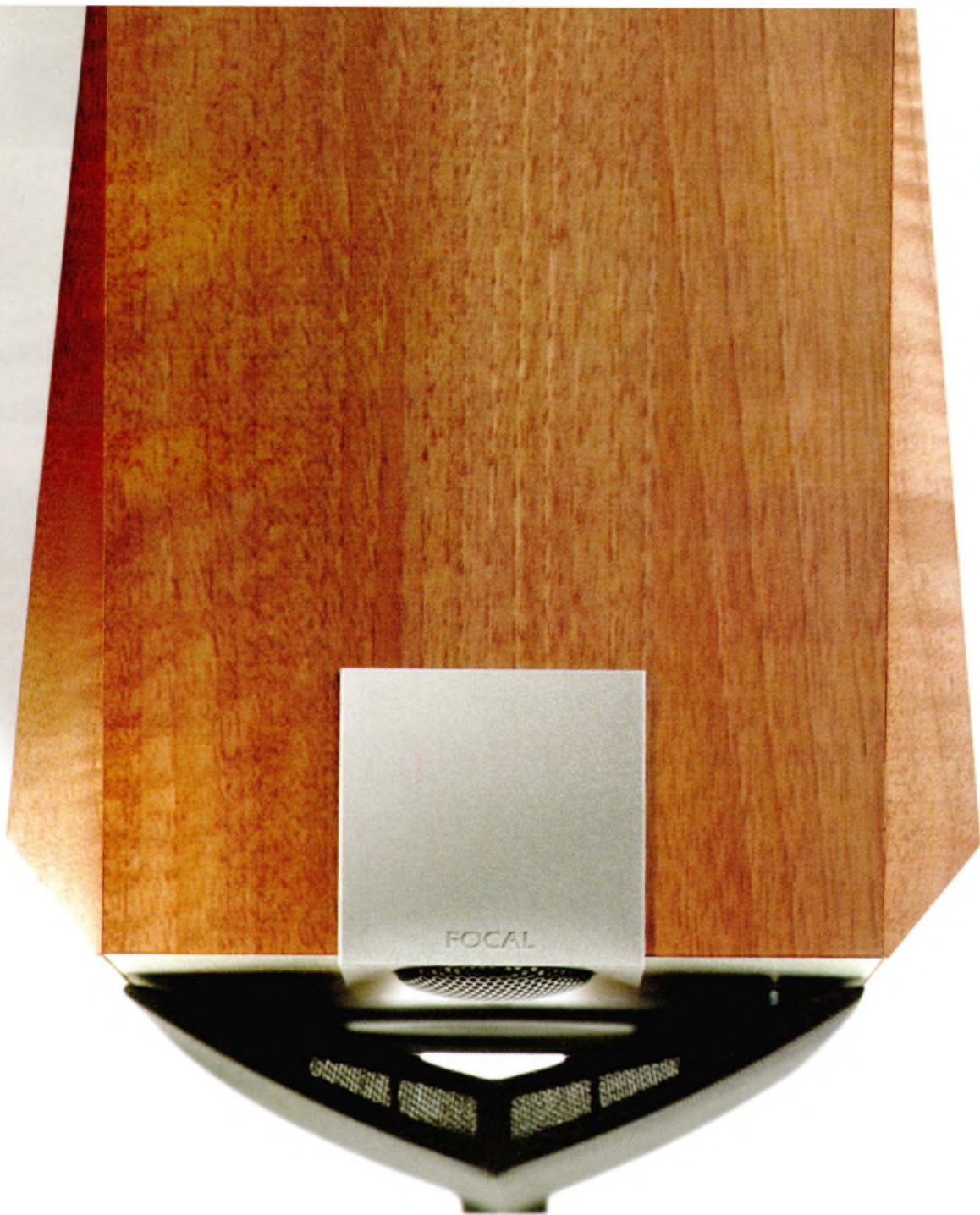
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## FREE MINI-MAG!

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

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- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified



## See the difference...

the new Chorus 700 V line

...now you need to hear the difference.

*You just have to look at our new Chorus 700 V loudspeakers to understand that the entry-level speaker will never be the same again: non-parallel inner walls, 25mm thick MDF panels, 100% made in France, 100% Focal technologies, with Aluminum/Magnesium inverted dome tweeter, Polyglass cones, DPC crossover, exceptional finish... Chorus 700 V: Why have ordinary... when you can have the extraordinary. For further information visit our website at [www.focal-fr.com](http://www.focal-fr.com)*

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**FOCAL**  
the Spirit of Sound



### MUSICAL FIDELITY A1008 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Hot on the heels of Naim's spectacular SuperNait integrated amp (see p44) comes the new A1008 'muscle amp' from Musical Fidelity. A key feature of both models is a digital input, allowing forward-thinking audiophiles with music servers to connect digitally to the amp's on-board D-to-A convertor. In this instance, the DAC is a 24-Bit/192kHz upsampling unit, identical to the one in the company's X-DAC<sup>VR</sup>. The amp offers switchable digital inputs including USB, allowing users to connect computers, too.

As a direct descendant of Musical Fidelity's monster kW550 integrated, the newcomer shares the same physical layout and circuit componentry. The difference between the two, it's claimed, is an extra 3dB dynamic

range for the kW550. In fact, when using 89db efficient (or greater) speakers, the two cannot be told apart, according to the blurb. Specifications include 250 watts per channel, a MM/MC phono stage and, of course, a high-quality, built-in DAC.

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

**PRODUCT** Musical Fidelity A1008

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £2,999

**KEY FEATURES** On-board 24-bit/192kHz DAC  
● 250 watts per channel ● MM/MC phono stage  
● Digital inputs including USB

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8900 2866

🌐 [www.musicfidelity.com](http://www.musicfidelity.com)



# P R I M A R E



COMPACT SYSTEM

## CDI10

Great sound, simple convenience and a beautifully understated Scandinavian design.



### BEST ONE BOX CD SYSTEM

"The emergence of more single-box stereo systems from specialist hi-fi brands has been an obvious trend this year...we reckon the Primare's CDI10 is currently the best of the bunch - superbly built with a highly engaging sound."

Gold Award, HiFi Choice, October 2006



concept-1.dk

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

Affordable high-end audio and video from Scandinavia

[www.csesolutions.co.uk](http://www.csesolutions.co.uk)  
01423 359054



For further information please visit [www.primare.net](http://www.primare.net)



## YAMAHA SOAVO 2 LOUDSPEAKER

Earlier this year, Yamaha announced details of a new, upmarket speaker range called Soavo. The concept was to create the most natural-sounding speakers possible, drawing on Yamaha's 100-year experience in the musical instrument field. The Soavo 2 standmount is the smaller of two stereo pairs and showcases the company's loudspeaker expertise. At its heart lies a new A-PMD (Advanced Polymer-injected Mica Diaphragm) bass woofer, said to be lighter than paper or polypropylene and exceptionally fast. Complementing this is an aluminium-dome tweeter using a proprietary DC-Diaphragm to unite the voice coil and diaphragm.

The cabinet is devoid of parallel sides to reduce standing waves and is wrapped in a birch veneer, which Yamaha uses extensively in its pianos. Further features include high-quality crossovers, a die-cast aluminium tweeter plate, and three-way mitered cabinet joints for increased rigidity. Could this be a 'natural' choice for piano fans and audiophiles?

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

**PRODUCT** Yamaha Soavo 2

**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker

**PRICE** £1,200 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Two-way bass reflex design

● Sensitivity: 88db ● 30mm aluminium dome tweeter ● Advanced PMD driver ● Independent direct crossover connection

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 233166

🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com





## NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



### SUGDEN A21a SERIES TWO

The legendary and longstanding Sugden A21a integrated amplifier has been redesigned to include a significant number of new features and design upgrades. The pure Class A, single-ended A21a Series Two now has a more direct signal path, thanks to the repositioning of the preamp board and removal of the mono button, tape switch facility and balance control. Power delivery has been improved too, which is claimed to give better bass performance. New features include a motorized Alps volume control with remote operation, a custom heatsink, and improved build quality with materials and construction equal to the flagship products. Expect an exclusive review in the August issue.

**Price** £1,299 **Due now** ☎ 01924 404088 ✉ www.sugdenaudio.com

### GOLDRING 2000 SERIES

Goldring has launched five new high-performance Moving Magnet cartridges. The 2000 Series is aimed at audiophiles and includes the latest advances in cartridge design. These include Samarium Cobalt magnets for a higher output and Permalloy armature tubes to reduce mass. All connector pins are gold plated for longevity and the cartridge bodies are threaded to allow secure fitting. Heading the range is the 2500, which features a rigid metal body, and a high-quality '2 5D' diamond stylus.



**Price** from £70 to £185 **Due now**  
☎ 01279 501111 ✉ www.goldring.co.uk

### ASCENDO C5

The Ascendo C5, the German loudspeaker specialist's most affordable new model, is now available in the UK from importer Metropolis



Music. The standmount C5 is based around a coaxial driver, where the tweeter is mounted at the centre of the bass/mid driver. Ascendo claims this gives the ideal dispersion and time-alignment characteristics;

suggested to be at the core of the company's approach. The back panel features a toggle switch that changes the speaker's frequency response to suit either near wall placement, or positioning in free space. A wide range of highly lacquered finishes is available, supplied by the nearby Porsche factory. Ascendo can also colour-match any REL sub.

**Price** £1,495 **Due now**

☎ 01435 867438

✉ www.ascendo.de



### QUADRAL ARGENTUM 02 WL

High-fidelity wireless audio is the promise from Quadral's Argentum 02 WL digital loudspeaker system. It uses a high-quality digital transmission process with a 50-watt amp module for each speaker and D/A conversion within the cabinet. Quadral guarantees 'CD quality' sound from the speaker, which features a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and 130mm bass/mid driver in a reflex-ported cabinet. Claimed frequency response is 45Hz to 20kHz.

**Price** from £650 **Due now** ☎ 020 8991 9200 ✉ www.quadral.com

## EASTERN ELECTRIC BBA

Eastern Electric, the far-eastern valve aficionado, has launched the Buffer Booster Amplifier, or BBA for short. Its aim is to help synergise hi-fi systems by providing an optimal electrical match between any combination of electrical equipment. The BBA can be placed between the source and preamp, pre and power amp, and even between a source and power amp, without the need for a control preamp. The buffering circuitry is valve-based and has its own active volume control.

**Price** £699 **Due** now ☎ 01592 744779 # www.easternelectric.co.uk



## GOLDMUND TELOS 200

If your system is lacking in a little high-end power, Swiss brand Goldmund's new Telos 200 monoblocks may be the answer. Despite being the smallest amp in the High-End Line, the Telos 200 is a 200-watt design, said to offer more than 400 watts into eight ohms before clipping. It boasts a raft of proprietary technology and a built-in DAC, allowing the connection of music servers. Further features include balanced and unbalanced connections, signal sensing auto power on, and 'ultra-fast' power supply design.

**Price** £11,790 (per pair) **Due** now

☎ 01727 865488 # www.goldmund.com



## EDGAR HI-FI

Edgar is a Slovakian hi-fi manufacturer with a small range of valve-based electronics now available in the UK. Noted for its distinctive Cherrywood fascia, the range includes a CD player, two amplifiers, phono stage and headphone amp. A key product in the line-up is the TP105VR integrated amplifier (£1,450): a 40-watt design featuring 12 tubes and two output stages in an ultralinear design. It sports a huge power supply, remote control and Electro Harmonix valves.

**Price** from £1,150 to £1,745 **Due** now

☎ 01435 867438 # www.edgar.sk



## Soundbites

VITA AUDIO has unveiled a new DAB/FM tabletop radio called the R2. Closely following the acclaimed R1, launched four months ago, the new radio features twin drivers, Vita's distinctive RotoDial controller and a machined wood cabinet. Prices start at £220 and vary according to finish.

☎ 01702 601410



SONY has launched a mini hi-fi system with a built-in 80GB hard disk, allowing users to record from all types of source without the need for a PC. The Giga Juke HDD can store up 40,000 music tracks, and boasts up to 16x speed audio ripping from CD. There's also automatic artist/album/track title labeling, and the ability to transfer tracks to an MP3 player at up to 50x speed.

☎ 08705 111999

AUROUSAL is a brand new name in loudspeakers with a range of standmount designs based on a single drive unit. Heading the range is the A1, which uses a controlled-flex driver, comprising a light metal alloy diaphragm, contoured so its flex can be controlled. It has a front-firing port and a claimed sensitivity of 90db. Three finishes are available, with the A1 priced at £450.

# www.aurousal.com

HOVLAND's new Stratos solid-state monoblocks are the company's most advanced to date, at a cool £26,000 per pair. They offer 400 watts into eight ohms and are a purist design with a fully differential balanced output system and high-speed bipolar transistors.

☎ 01435 867438



## DENSEN B-420

The B-420 is the second CD player from Densen in a new line-up from the Danish expert. Described as a successor to the upmarket B-400XS, the newcomer is not only upgradable, it comes with a lifetime guarantee for the first owner. Key features include a customised CD transport with an external clock controller, a 24-bit DAC mounted under a shielded box and a massive power transformer with individual supplies to the player's main circuits.

**Price** £1,400 **Due** now ☎ 07799 146002 # www.densen.dk



### The Insider

#### THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

##### PROFESSOR GIOVANNI SACHETTI

**Job Title:** Head of Engineering  
**Company:** Unison Research



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

We have a new one-box hi-fi system with an iPod interface, designed to show the content on the system's display, with navigation using our remote control. It will benefit from a 68 watt high-performance integrated power stage, OLED display and highly intuitive user interface.

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

We expect that both amplifiers and sources will feature advanced functions, such as the possibility to store music and use different kinds of digital interfaces.

##### Can generation iPod be turned on to hi-fi?

We think it is difficult: the iPod generation has a unique way to approach and consume music, which is completely different from the audiophile. It seems one can't lead to the other.

##### What type of products really excite you?

We think that high-end valve amplifiers, in which modern electronic design, accurate choice of components and materials, and excellent craftsmanship meet, are still the most prestigious choice for a home hi-fi system.

##### Are we now experiencing a two-channel stereo resurgence?

It never really went away. Our sales around the world demonstrate that there is still plenty of life as far as stereo systems are concerned.

### Hi-Fi Diary

#### MAY

17-20 High End 2007  
M.O.C. Munich  
[www.highendsociety.de](http://www.highendsociety.de)  
*Europe's leading high-end show*

#### JUNE

25-28 Cedia UK Expo 2007  
ExCel London  
[www.chedia.co.uk](http://www.chedia.co.uk)  
*The UK's biggest custom install show*

#### SEPTEMBER

21-23 London Sound and Vision show 2007  
Park Inn, Heathrow  
[www.chestergroup.org](http://www.chestergroup.org)  
*London's finest hi-fi show*

## Studio masters online

Linn Records is getting hip to the download generation by offering its back catalogue in DRM-free form. Unlike the competition, however, it is taking a genuinely audiophile approach to sound quality by offering music at three quality levels – MP3 at 320kbps, a lossless format called 'CD quality', and 'Studio Master' quality, where the bit rate is dependent on the original recording. In this format, DSD originals can be had in 24-bit/96kHz for some titles, for example. The Studio Master version is the label's premium format and at £18 (or 80p per track), is priced at 50 per cent higher than the physical SACD. This is because you can't rip from the SACD layer and produce the same quality files at home. MP3 files are priced at 79p per track, or £8 for the whole album.

At present, Studio Master is optimised for playback via WMA on a PC, but can be replayed through a Mac 'with limited use'. Linn Records is, however, working on a format that will offer the same functionality and sound quality on Macs.



## Tubes with ICE



Genesis Automotive is a UK based in-car amp maker with a difference. The company has created a hybrid power amplifier that uses a valve front end and runs in Class A for its first 30 watts. Designed by Gordon Taylor, the P15 uses Russian 6H30Pi tubes that were made for rocket guidance systems – its ability to withstand up to 500G should stand it in good stead with enthusiastic Vauxhall Corsa drivers! The P15's transistor output stage uses Class A+C circuitry to deliver 200 watts per channel, and sports separate power supplies for the valve and solid-state sections. At 23kg, it suggests that in-car audio is not to be taken lightly.

## George Hadcock 1930-2007

Veteran tonearm builder George F. C.

Hadcock died on the 17th of March after a long and valiant fight with cancer. George started out as an aeronautical engineer before making his first tonearm, the Unipoise, in 1967. He produced over 170,000 tonearms since that time including the popular GH228 and GH242, which was released in 1973 and continues in updated form today as the GH242 Cryo. George was a delightful man who exuded old-fashioned courtesy and charm. He was a genuine individual and one-off in the audio world. As with many audio entrepreneurs, his enthusiasm was driven by the love of both engineering and great music. The Hadcock company will continue under the management of his son Charles.



## EMI goes DRM free

EMI has changed the face of digital music by announcing that it will be offering its back catalogue without DRM (Digital Rights Management) copy protection, when downloaded through Apple's iTunes. EMI is the first major label to take such a bold step, which allows buyers to copy purchased tunes and play them on any device they own. Until now, this has not been possible with any of the music sold through iTunes. Apple is also upping the ante by offering songs at a higher bit rate (256kbps) for a 30 per cent price premium over the standard 128kbps.

EMI also appears to be making headway with Apple Corp, owner of the Beatles' back catalogue. The surviving members of the band have recently settled a £30million row over royalty payments, which is expected to result in the Fab Four's material being made available online for the first time.

Meanwhile, an EC antitrust investigation into pricing disparities between different European countries sites iTunes and the four major record companies, including EMI, as the main perpetrators. Music purchasers are forced to buy from the store in their country, which runs against EC trade restriction rules.



# New acoustic space

⊕ Finnish architects Martti Kalliala and Esa Ruskeepää have created an unusual listening 'room' made out of 720 sheets of corrugated cardboard in 360 layers. Dubbed Mafoombey, this acoustic space won the



Habitare design contest in Helsinki and was highly commended in *Architectural Review's* emerging architecture awards. The curvaceous internal space was conceived with acoustic quality in mind and has been carved from within a 2.5m cube of cardboard sheets that are not fixed together, but held under their own weight. It houses a multichannel system, donated by Sony Finland. Next time you're thinking about improving the sound of your room, don't forget the potential of the box your system came in.

## JIMMY'S TWEAKS #51

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



### Add super-tweeters to cure boom

If you've a problem with the low frequencies not sounding as clean and tight as you'd like, it's natural to explore possible cures that relate to the bottom end. Adding a subwoofer might be one option, or perhaps a new set of speaker stands. But also consider something that might not seem like a suitable remedy; add some

super-tweeters! It's amazing how adding a good set of super-tweeters (like Townshend's Maximum Super Tweeters) improves bass tightness and control, as well as making your system image better and sound more airy and holographic. The super-tweeters only need contribute a tiny amount of sound – I use a set of Townshend's myself, and have them set on 1. Don't up the output of the super-tweeters in the mistaken belief that their influence will be increased. I find that they have a more profound overall effect when they're set to minimum. Very strange!

## TOP 10

RECENT HI-FI INNOVATIONS

1. Amplifiers with built-in DACs
2. Esoteric's CD transport
3. Lyngdorf's Room Perfect technology
4. One-box hi-fi systems
5. SD card recording for DAB
6. Digital amplification
7. Clearaudio Ceramic Magnetic bearing
8. Cambridge Audio Class XD technology
9. Never connected power supplies
10. Townshend's Seismic Sink



## ⊕ New Music

### IN THE STUDIO

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



#### JAMES BLUNT

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** autumn

His soft-focus songs seem to have an uncanny ability to get up people's noses and Blunt knows it – hence his promise that the album he's currently recording in Los Angeles will have a bit more "grit and edge" than his multi-platinum debut, *Back To Bedlam*. He also claims the new songs have "more of a 1970s feel".

#### MARC ALMOND

**Title:** *Stardom Road*

**Release date:** June

After his near-fatal motorcycle crash in 2004, the former Soft Cell man makes a welcome return with an album of covers of his favourite songs, including *Strangers In The Night* and *Dream Lover*. Making the album, he says, was an essential part of his recovery and guests include Sarah Cracknell (Saint Etienne) and Antony Hegarty (Antony & the Johnsons).

#### PAUL MCCARTNEY

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** summer

The big story is not just that McCartney's making a new record but that the former Beatle has left EMI after 45 years with the label – and signed with the new Hear Music label, a subsidiary of Starbucks. "It's a new world now and people are thinking of new ways to reach the people and for me that's always been my aim," he says.

#### SPINARETTE

**Title:** *Spinarette*

**Release date:** summer

Okay, you've never heard of them – but Spinarette are the new band formed by punk icon Brody Dalle, lead singer with The Distillers. The new songs – which she calls "the most articulate music and lyrics I've ever written" – weren't suitable for the



Distillers, but the group still exists, she insists. Alain Johannes (PJ Harvey/Eagles Of Death Metal/No Doubt) is producing.

#### SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** summer

In what is likely to prove the most unexpected comeback of the year, Sly Stone has reunited with the original Family Stone for their first album together since 1983. Stone has been writing, recording and producing the new material at his home studio in California.

#### ALSO COMING SOON

##### JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

**David Russell** *Art Of The Guitar* (May);

**Turtle Island Quartet** *A Love Supreme* (May);

**Atlanta Symphony (Shaw)** *Stravinsky: The Firebird* (May);

**Scottish Chamber Orch (Mackerras, O'Conor)** *Field Piano Concertos 2 & 3* (May);

**Lang Lang** *The Art Of Lang Lang* (May)

##### SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

**Ilse Huisinga** *Beyond Broadway* (SACD, May);

**Porcupine Tree** *Fear of a Blank Planet* (DVD-A, May);

**Claire Martin** *He Never Mentioned Love – The Songs Of Shirley Horn* (SACD, Jun);

**Rebecca Pidgeon** *The Raven* (SACD, May);

**Rush Snakes and Arrows (DVD-A, May)**



## Fender Stratospheric

*Guitar prices make hi-fi sums look tame*

I've discovered the perfect foil for those who tell you that you're mad to spend as much as you do on hi-fi: 'replica' guitar collecting.

Even the most obsessive audiophile is really quite sane by comparison to guitar collectors. They will happily spend vast amounts of money for an instrument that has been deliberately down-graded to decades-old specifications, fitted with rusty hardware, and antiqued – as in wrapped in chains and then dragged down several flights of stairs – to give its finish that 'gigged regularly' look.

Fender, for example, has just released a special edition version of its fabulous Telecaster. Very special, in fact, because it recreates that marvellous tone that Andy

**“I must phone Linn and see if they want to make a Malcolm Steward 1983 Tribute LP12®, complete with cigarette burns.”**

Summers introduced to the Police with the 1961 Tele that he bought from a student he had been teaching earlier. That particular guitar had been hacked about and fitted out with a humbucking neck pickup and active circuitry. It was never the tidiest Tele on the planet and the work that had been done on it certainly wasn't the finest example of the luthier's art, but its sound appealed to Summers. So, he bought it for about \$200.

If you want to own a copy of that guitar now (and far be it from me to criticise Fender for seizing a valuable marketing opportunity with a Police reunion imminent) you have two choices: buy a new Tele with the same Alder body and Maple neck, scratch off most of the finish, then get yourself a hacksaw and soldering iron, scour the internet for the relevant bits and pieces, then spend a few nights attacking (sorry, carefully modifying) the instrument. It'll cost less than £2,500 depending on what sort of Tele you choose to start with (American, Mexican, Japanese or a

copy). Or you could buy the official replica, the Fender Custom Shop Andy Summers Tribute Telecaster®, and pay around £9,000 for the privilege of owning a guitar that looks like a beaten-up wreck. If you're more into Van Halen, Fender will sell you a replica of the Frankenstein Strat he built (for about \$150) when he started playing. The price: £15,000.

This really is too good an opportunity to miss: I must phone Linn and see if they want to make a Malcolm Steward 1983 Tribute LP12®, complete with cigarette burns on the edge of the plinth. Then Naim: perhaps they can come up with original casework (including the missing screws and wine stains on the top) and the drill-modified PCB for the MS Replica NAC32®. There surely must be enthusiasts out there who'd spend over the odds for them!

*Malcolm Steward 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*



## DIY-Fi Choice

Make your own hi-fi mag

**N**ot sure how much money you or I would need in the bank to cushion the launch of a brand new magazine and give it a better than even chance of surviving these days. Question is, if we were lucky enough to have the capital and the inclination to plough it into a publishing venture, what kind of magazine would we start?

Any takers for a hi-fi magazine? Thought so. C'mon, we've all dreamed. What could be easier? Set up shop, wave wonga at your favourite writers and photographers, book in the kit you want to read about and, indeed, (being the boss) listen to, hope and pray that enough people out there agree with your good taste. Sounds hopelessly naive. But, believe it or not, that's exactly the way to do it.

An indulgent fascination for the subject has always been the key to the hi-fi mags I've most enjoyed reading and working for over the years. There may be alternatives to enthusiasm and passion, but there are no substitutes. The best hi-fi magazines are, and always have been, those written by people who love the subject and, more importantly, love music.

Get the right bunch of audio focused musicheads together and the creative process, at least, is self-perpetuating. So much for the dream. The reality? Anyone who can identify a gap in the UK hi-fi magazine market that doesn't require a micrometer to measure is either a fantasist or a liar. When it comes to mags about audio and audio stuff, it's covered, sussed, down and tight. No market is truly finite, of course, and an obviously superior product is always going to be in with a shout.

What about a single-brand mags, then? It's a genuine niche growth area in the automotive arena, so why not?. Something like Arcam Addict has a ring to it, though possibly not Quad Quarterly. Then again, it's not quite that wave-the-wonga, book-'em-in Danno Utopia, is it? Which, I guess, is why the much sexier idea of the lifestyle-consumer electronics-gadget hybrid (*Stuff*, *T3* and so on) refuses to lie down.

Not all hybrids have proved so resilient, mind you. A good few years ago now, I contributed to a magazine called *Petrolhead*. Didn't drive

# R

## RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

YAMAHA NS-10M  
LOUDSPEAKER



Precisely what is it about a loudspeaker that qualifies it for use as a studio monitor? If you think 'neutrality', you may be in

for a bit of a surprise.

The subject here is the Yamaha NS-10M, which is nominally the main professional variant of the NS-10, with detail changes to the tweeter, and an enclosure intended for use in landscape orientation, apparently for stability. The NS-10 has been sold as a domestic hi-fi speaker and indeed was originally designed for that application. But it has long been best known as a studio monitor. It's arguably the most widely used of any speaker in this application, and by default the nearest there is to a universal reference for this kind of product. This, of course, is one of the reasons – if not its initial impact – for its sustained success. The mere fact that anyone interested in using a studio facility could be all but guaranteed to find a pair available at the studio of their choice became a powerful argument in its favour. And if it wasn't available, the NS-10 was cheap and compact, and a pair could easily be taken along.

What triggered its initial adoption by the studio world is not entirely clear. One idea was certainly a growing disaffection for the over-big, over-complex, wide bandwidth studio monitors, which for many studios are there mainly to sell studio time to potential clients. Another was a perception that the Yamaha was clean and analytical. But it was never a neutral conduit for music. Indeed it has a famously characterful frequency response: uneven through the midband, and with a fiery 7dB treble peak centred on 1.5kHz, which has stayed with the design throughout its life. It was famously often used with an absorbent tissue paper over the tweeter to calm it down a little; indeed there have been learned (well, reasonably learned) reviews of different types of tissue published on the web and elsewhere, and there are also published crossover mods.

There is much folklore about this speaker, and how to make the best use of it, a consensus being that monitoring is best kept to medium level or below. Higher levels



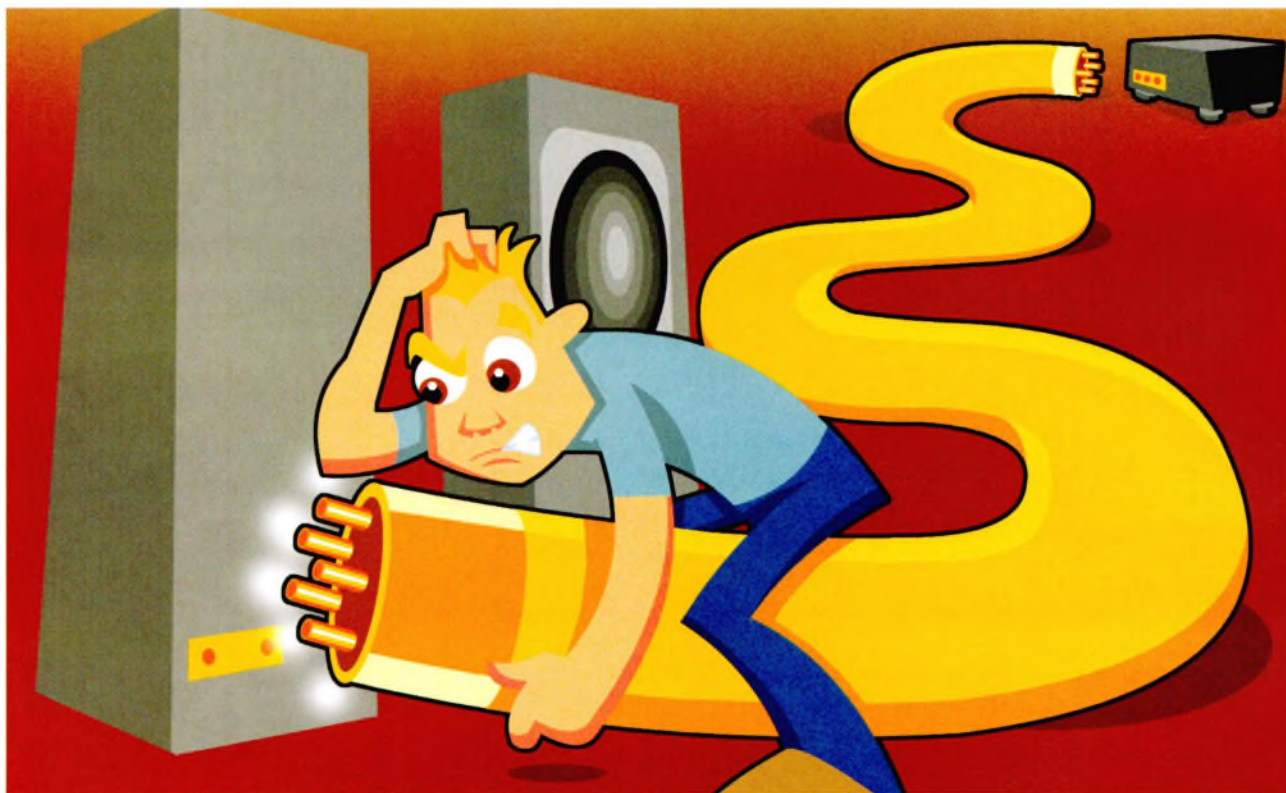
**“It has often been said that if a mix sounds good on a pair of NS-10s, it will sound good on anything.”**

apparently tend to result in rather dull mixes, and you can see why this would be the case, not to mention that monitoring at high levels can be fairly trying. It has often been said that if a mix sounds good on a pair of NS-10s, it will sound good on anything – and the vast number of recordings that have been mixed on this speaker, many of which offer fine sound quality, tend to support this assertion. Again, the reasons don't need spelling out.

The NS-10 was discontinued in 2001, but is still extensively used to the present day, and there is a thriving market for used examples and also for drive units. It was axed not because there was no longer any demand, but because the source of wood pulp used in the woofer cone dried up and a worldwide search for a suitable replacement was fruitless. By all accounts, the 'replacement' – an actively powered speaker called the HSSOM, and its HS10W subwoofer partner – improve upon the original, but still have yet to generate the same amount of street cred.

Incidentally, the legendary designer of the NS10 and many other Yamaha speakers, Akira Nakamura, retired at the beginning of 2007. Nakamura was based at Yamaha's major Hamamatsu plant, that among other things, makes musical instruments. This no doubt contributed to his 'golden ears'. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



many cars but did get off my face on Wild Turkey interviewing Motorhead's Lemmy. My next assignment had already been lined up when the plug was, inevitably, pulled: jump into the sea and get rescued by a helicopter. Strangely prophetic. Except the rescue bit

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



## Copper carve-up

*The price of copper is rising. Will cables follow?*

The economics of reduced hi-fi prices have been well documented. We all know the score. China has enjoyed massive commercial growth and, a tiny part of that has been in their ability to produce quality hi-fi separates for considerably less than products built within Europe or the US. Even companies that still build in the Western world benefit, as many source components from the

## “You may have noticed the rapidly rising price of copper – especially when you need fifty metres of piping!”

Far East. So, as with other electricals and clothing in particular, we've all benefited from cheap Chinese imports. Well, yes, but that's not to say that hi-fi is cheaper across the board, and it is also not to say that it won't be more expensive in the future.

If you take a look at some typical UK hi-fi stalwarts, that aren't built abroad, you might have noticed steady price rises over the past five to ten years. Now, don't for one minute think that UK manufacturers are ripping us off, they're not. The UK, continental European and US companies that have increased prices have only done so to reflect inflation and increased costs. In fact, when faced with rising labour and business costs, tighter manufacturing regulations and higher distribution costs it's a wonder prices haven't increased more. More to the point, it's a wonder that a good deal of companies have managed to absorb price rises entirely; until now.

Many within the hi-fi manufacturing business feel current pricing is unsustainable. Component prices and Far Eastern labour is as cheap as it will ever be and the only way for prices to go from here is up. Yes, the Far Eastern workforce is vast, and economies of

scale may bring some production costs down further, but there are other elements that are proving far more costly; and I mean 'elements' in the literal sense. If you've installed a new central heating system, as I have, of late you may have noticed the rapidly rising price of copper - especially when you need fifty metres of piping! This year alone it's gone up by 57% with a five-fold increase from the end of 2002. The reason for this, as well as sharp rises in other raw metals, is the huge demand from China. Supply simply can't keep up with demand and that, like the UK housing market, means higher prices. Now, while many hi-fi components don't rely much upon copper, others do: think about what's connecting your speakers up for a start!

What this means is that, while prices for quality hi-fi separates will probably remain effectively cheap, we might just be at the low point of a dip, with future products either costing more or having to be trimmed back. Certainly if you're planning to upgrade your cables then I'd do so sooner rather than later...

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





## The right recipe

How do you get good sound online?

I was talking to a dealer the other day. He gets a lot of calls from disgruntled audio enthusiasts with systems that seem to be totally unbalanced and poorly conceived. He blamed retailers for selling people one component at a time and not making the effort to educate and direct these people toward a coherent and well-balanced system. He also blamed magazines for reviewing components individually, which makes it easier to pick a great source or amplifier, but still quite challenging to put together a whole that is greater than its sum parts.

You occasionally see these sorts of systems in the pages of magazines where a reporter has visited the listening room of a reader. We had one recently who had four systems in the same room. That can't really have been terribly beneficial to any one system in the room.

While the most logical way to build a system is to go to one dealer and have them assemble a complete system where each component gels with the others, once you get beyond the starter system, the tendency is to upgrade one component at a time. This is inevitably where the imbalances can creep in. The problems only become truly apparent when one starts to investigate the lower slopes of the high end, the point where manufacturers start to offer components that are more sensitive to their partnerships in the system. A classic example would be a low-powered valve amplifier coupled with a low sensitivity loudspeaker. Each element might warrant an enthusiastic review and be very good in the context of a sympathetic system yet the combination is clearly going to sound weak and impoverished.

It's not too difficult to avoid this sort of mismatch if you do your homework or find a dealer who doesn't merely sell you the item in question but lays down the foundations for how to get the best out of it. In other words, look for a dealer who shows an interest in helping you build a great system overall, this will benefit you because you get a better system, and the dealer because you will go back for more when new funds/urges come along. Those dealers that compete on price and are happy to sell you the latest must-have amplifier or disc player without regard to the



While Johnny Cash's first recorded prison concert at Folsom in 1968 may be his most famous, this follow-up at

California's San Quentin penitentiary on 24th February 1969 is arguably the better album.

In the 13 months between them, Cash had found God, quit drugs and married June Carter. But the transition to something like a stable family life didn't soften him up, it merely made him sharper, more intense and more focused than he ever had been up to that point. The runaway success of the Folsom Prison album had seen Cash cross over into the rock charts, and 1969 found him pretty much at the top of his game (no less than six new Johnny Cash albums would appear that year and a song he debuted at San Quentin would also, bizarrely, furnish him with his only Top Ten pop hit – *A Boy Named Sue*, with cuss words deleted).

Preparation for the concert was also more considered. Producer Bob Johnson (responsible for some of Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel's greatest moments) brought a mobile recording truck to San Quentin's mess hall and after the previous year's live recording, he knew exactly what to expect, both from Cash and the inmates.

Cash is both wilder and more at-ease here. This is also where the infamous 'flippin' the bird' picture of Johnny angrily giving the finger to a hapless cameraman who came between him and the audience (the concert was filmed for Granada TV).

From his trademark opening "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash," there's an electricity about the event that goes way beyond what you might expect from an acoustic band with a simple boom chicka boom rhythm and there's plenty of interaction with the captive audience, though a hush generally descends when the man in black takes the mike.

There's not much audience restraint, however, when he debuts the song *San Quentin* ("San Quentin I hate every inch of you") to rapturous applause and then plays it again immediately afterwards at the prisoners' voluble request. The crowd, quite literally, goes wild, with inmates apparently jumping on tables,



**"The crowd, quite literally, goes wild, with inmates apparently jumping on tables, whooping."**

whooping and hollering. In the liner notes to the album's latest reissue, Bob Johnson claims, "I'm backed up to the door with all these guards with guns and I'm thinking, 'Man! I should have brought Tammy Wynette and George Jones – anybody but Johnny Cash!'"

There's never the sense that entertaining murderers is a cheap gimmick, but a heartfelt attempt to communicate, and maybe help. There's room for some humour too, as he informs a crouching cameraman that prison's the wrong place to bend over or defuses the tension after singing *San Quentin* by asking the warders for a drink of water – if any of them are still speaking to him.

There are many versions of this concert on record, from the original album which featured highlights to later editions which include both prison concerts and various 'complete' versions, which include all the between-song banter and also the performances of the other performers on the night – Carl Perkins, The Carter Family (including his new wife) and gospel quartet The Statler Brothers (who would open for him on every episode of TV's *Johnny Cash Show*), who all join Cash for the finale. The latest version from Sony is a two-CD box with all surviving recordings of the three-hour show, plus a DVD of the documentary that features some spellbinding footage of the event. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

# M

## MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

JOHNNY CASH  
LIVE AT SAN QUENTIN

rest of the system are not serving your needs in a similarly constructive way.

So how do you find such a dealer? I guess you have to shop around for the right person rather than the outlet that has all the brands that you think you want. Ultimately it's the attitude of the seller that counts. If you want to get the most out of your music collection, there's more to it than price and brand reputation, or there should be. Even if you don't plan to upgrade but want a decent system that will last you for the next twenty years, it pays to use the skills of someone who cares, or at least gives that impression. So next time the itch needs scratching don't just hunt down the best price for that super sexy new ingredient, find someone who knows the best recipes for an audio banquet.

*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*



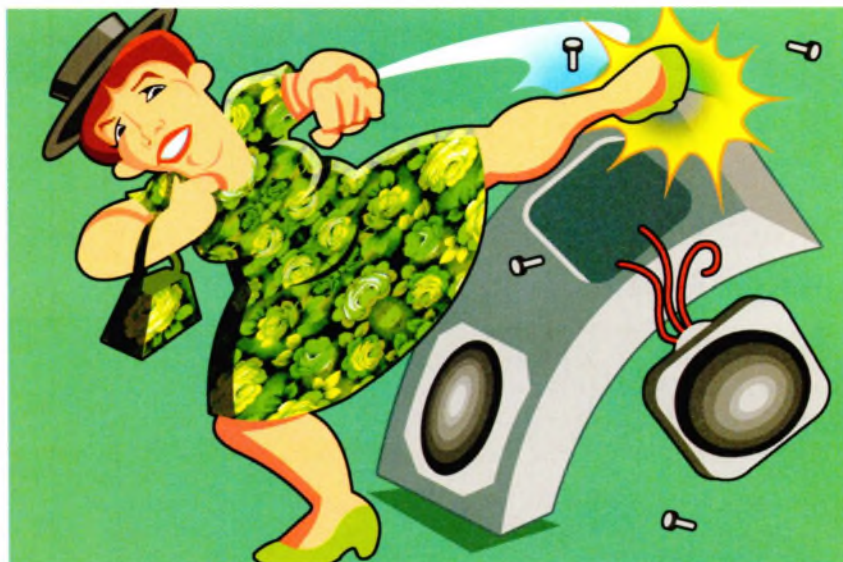
## Anaemic audio

*What we need is kick-ass hi-fi*

**W**hat happened? How did hi-fi become so damn bloodless? A few years ago, hi-fi was a visceral entertainment delivery system, designed to get past the limitations of recording and deliver a sound that was exciting and fun.

Music wasn't supposed to sound like a laboratory experiment, it was supposed to sound like living, breathing musicians making impassioned pleas for their music on vinyl or polycarbonate. This happened irrespective of the genre of music; Bach's cello suites played by Casals, or Louis Armstrong playing *Basin St Blues* has as much fire in its belly as anything with guitars graunching away.

But that passion seems to be getting engineered out of the equation on the hi-fi side. Products are designed to work dispassionately, going for compatibility with other products, instead of integrating in a system that works brilliantly at the expense of inter-compatibility. Ironically, this comes at a time when people are largely buying separates from one manufacturer. So, the whole compatibility issue is less important than ever.



## “Do something everyday that scares you, but practising your Kung Fu in Peckham’s five estates might be pushing things.”

The compatibility police would have fined my first 'big league' hi-fi, a Linn LP12 turntable with a Basik arm, K9 cartridge, played through a Naim NAC42/NAP110 pre/power combo into a pair of Linn Kan II speakers. It did many things wrong, but playing music 'musically' wasn't one of them. Tap into the background of many reviewers and you'll find similarly musically passionate systems – not necessarily Linn/Naim systems, though.

Such systems are rare today. Modern kit has got more of a balance to the sound. Which, in the main, is a good thing. It means those not following one of the well-ploughed fields (like the Linn/Naim mix of the 1980s, or the Audio Note system today) can put together a system with confidence that it will work together well. But, that comes at a cost.

I suppose the bloodless state of hi-fi reflects the greater community. We are becoming a low-cholesterol, anti-smoking, under 20 units of alcohol per week, self-righteous Toyota Prius driving lot. Such a holier than thou modern puritan mentality isn't the sort that wigs out to music... it's too concerned with noise pollution.

So, what's a guy to do? Am I even allowed to be that gender-specific today?

I guess the answer is entailed within Eleanor Roosevelt's pithy quote, “Do something everyday that scares you”, but practising your Kung Fu in Peckham's five estates might be pushing things. Play louder than usual, play quieter than usual, play different music, all outside of your comfort zone. If your system doesn't live up to expectations in all of this,

you'll soon know it. If that's the case, a tough act lies ahead. Sell off all your kit and start again from scratch, this time going for the more entertaining, gutsy kit.

Scary stuff. But that's what Eleanor would have done.

*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*



## Is that it?

*Who took the 'sonic' out of 'Panasonic?'*

**A** few weeks ago, I accepted an invitation to attend the yearly Panasonic press event, held at a smart hotel near Heathrow Airport. I had no illusions about a return to hi-fi. Panasonic's Technics specialist audio division was effectively put on ice several years ago. Which was a shame – although Panasonic/Technics was perhaps never quite at the bleeding edge of the audiophile territory, but the company had a respectable

number of firsts to its credit, including high-class audio capacitors, novel amplifier topologies, R-Core transformers and more.

The Panasonic brand covers the whole consumer electronics pantheon today. This means TV and home cinema, basic audio systems, kitchen gadgets, telephones and, of course, cameras. And, like many 'tech' journalists, I can't resist a camera or three.

But I was also introduced to something else, which unexpectedly got me engaged in a very direct way with the nuts and bolts of sound reproduction. It happened in a demonstration of one of Panasonic's new and very impressive large screen plasma TVs, which really are a very special breed. They're not cheap, but they leave the usual LCDs screens that are currently flooding the market for dead. However, the demonstrations were not limited to the screens, but also to the sound systems designed to accompany them. Central to the brief, it seems, was to produce packages that would be simple and unobtrusive.

What Panasonic's engineers delivered was a sound system that was dumbed down to the lowest level. The key component was a pair of compact speakers. These are placed either side of the screen, with the centre channel split into two halves and fed equally to each of the two speakers, from which a central location provides a virtual centre image.

Of course there is a gigantic flaw here that I'm sure you have latched onto, which is that if you sit off the centre line, the image flops onto the nearest speaker.

What was, perhaps, more concerning to me, was that Panasonic's people seemed perfectly happy with poor sound as an accompaniment to the brilliant plasma picture. It was severely lacking in intelligibility, bandwidth, consistency between centre and main channels and just about every other important quality related parameter. Although the picture quality is pivotal in any AV system, can sound be so unimportant that it's relegated to the level it was presented here?

Possibly so... when confronting Panasonic's PR people over the sonic performance of this system, their response was to the effect that over several days of dealer presentations preceding the press event there had been nothing but unbridled enthusiasm for the performance of these systems. And that seemed to be the case among the press, too. Just one other journalist of those present (my group represented about one third of the total press contingent) was concerned by the sound quality. Most simply did not notice. Others did not care. Isn't that depressing?

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

# TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

## LEGATO LINK



In this issue, which sees the reappearance of Pioneer's 'Legato Link' oversampling technology in CD replay, with its claim to

extend the frequency response of CD to well above 20kHz, it seems a good moment to look at such technobabble. Can one really get useful information above the sacred 22.05kHz (half the sampling frequency) from those discs?

In a very limited sense, one can. Pioneer claims that Legato Link uses psychoacoustic processing to regenerate ultrasonic information. This could in theory be done. Using some digital signal processing, a player could examine the spectrum, moment by moment, of a piece of music and estimate the ultrasonic frequencies that must have been removed by the filters at the record stage. For instance, suppose you have a bright instrument like a violin playing a high note at 1kHz: there will be harmonics at 2kHz, 3kHz and in all likelihood 20kHz and above, clearly detectable above noise. By looking at the relative levels of these it wouldn't be too hard to calculate likely levels up to, say, 30kHz and effectively add these in (synthesise them!) so that the frequency range is genuinely extended above what CD can manage on its own.

But we've never seen that done. Instead, what Pioneer and several others have tried is simply to vary the design of the oversampling (and/or upsampling) filters so that instead of cutting off as fast as possible above 20kHz they allow some above-20kHz information through. There are various ways to implement such filtering, some of them quite complicated. The most common type of oversampling filter is a 'Finite Impulse Response' filter which looks at the values of a handful of samples at once (around 40 is typical) and, based on these, calculates the intermediate values that must apply between adjacent samples. The maths of this is subtle but well-grounded and it is not hard to give a filter exactly the cutoff frequency and slope one wants.

It is possible to do many other kinds of calculation using groups of samples, but the end result of any kind we've encountered is always just a filter which more or less closely



**"The fact remains, though, that 'slow' filters appeal more strongly through marketing than science."**

approximates the target response (no attenuation up to 20kHz, at least 80dB attenuation above 22kHz, ideally). Some of these approximations are closer than others: some have ripple (variations from flat response) in the audio band, some have roll-off below 20kHz, some allow more ultrasonic distortion through, but none can in any sensible way, reconstruct ultrasonic frequencies that were removed by the recording equipment.

There's one exception: frequencies between 22kHz and 24kHz in the sound source may have been 'aliased' down to 20-22kHz and can be aliased back up by imperfect replay filtering. However, in the real world, this is basically useless, since they will always be accompanied by at least 50 per cent distortion. This is using two wrongs to make, at best, a dodgy not-quite-right and doesn't strike us as much to boast about.

As with so many kinds of distortion, the results of imperfect anti-alias filtering may, under some circumstances, sound preferable to some listeners, to alias-free filters. And let's not forget that being alias-free is not the only requirement of a filter, though few that we've seen recently fail on any other important score. The fact remains, though, that 'slow' filters appeal more strongly through marketing than through science. **HFC**

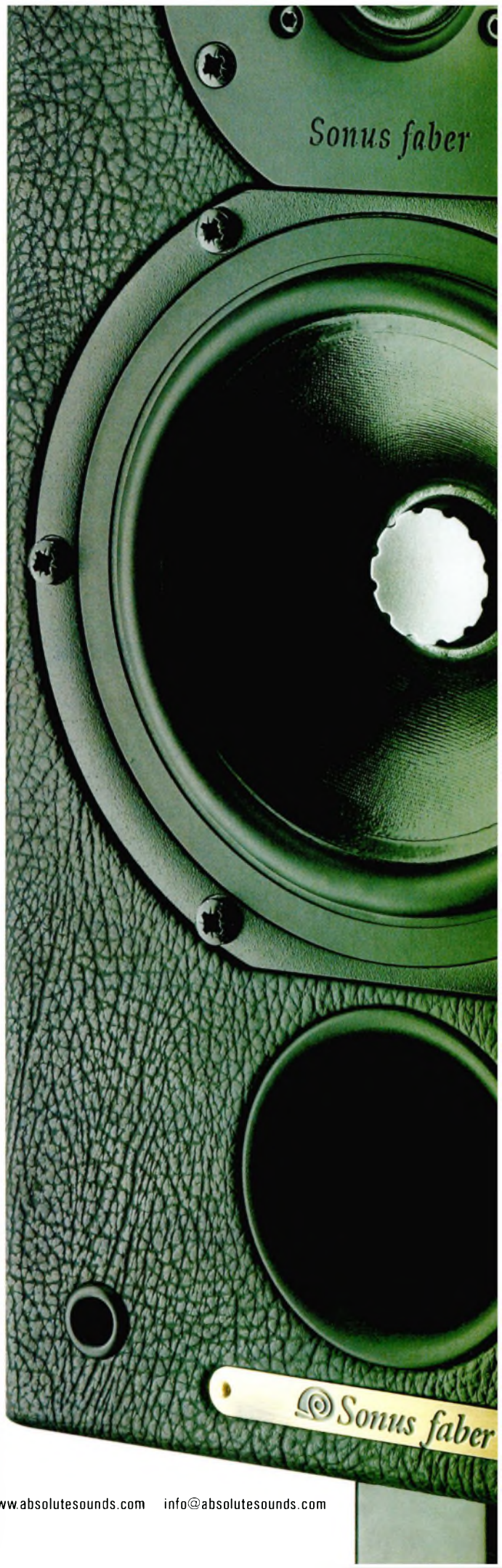
*Richard Black*

 *Sonus faber*®

Sonus Faber **Grand Piano** Domus



Sonus Faber **Concertino** 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

John Cahill has a bedroom hi-fi system that dreams are made of

## THE SYSTEM

**Turntable:** VPI HW19 MkV with TNT platter and motor, silver-wired SME IV tonearm, XYX R-100H cartridge, Whest PS 20 phono stage with MSU 20 power supply

**CD player:** Audiocom-modified Musical Fidelity 3D Nu-Vista, Whest DAP.10 DAC

**CD recorder:** Pioneer PDR-609

**Amplifier:** Music First Audio Passive Magnetic preamp, Gamut D200 power amp

**Loudspeakers:** Wharfedale Opus 3

**Mains conditioner:** PS Audio P500

Various cables, tables and accessories



John Cahill is not a rich man, yet he has a system in his attic-converted bedroom that many a rich man would dream of. And he knows its worth through hours and hours of listening. "My work is really stressful", he explains, "I listen for several hours a night and let the music take me out of myself."

Like many of us from the tail end of the Baby Boomer generation, John's frame of reference is live music; evening after evening through his 20s and 30s in darkened clubs listening to bands, then listening to the records at home. This was why his mini-system got junked, this was why the separates kept improving... few systems could match up to that live sound.

This one does. It has been painstakingly built out of new and second-hand products to deliver the scale and dynamic range needed to express John's increasingly catholic music collection, both on vinyl and CD. While we visited, everything from Dream Theatre to Surinder Sandhu, with Jeff Buckley in between, came out to play.

## SPEAKER TOUCHING

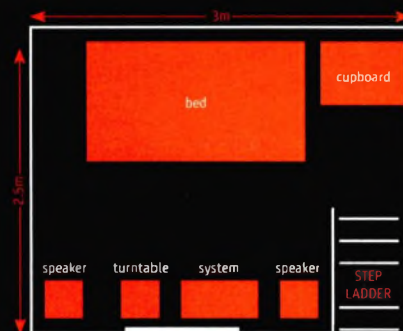
Naturally, sitting almost at speaker-touching distance means it's difficult to get a three dimensional sound. But that isn't really important. What is important is that it is both musically communicative and dynamic. It's fun sounding too, the sort of entertaining and relaxing manner, with a coherence that makes LP and CD sound remarkably similar... and both sound remarkably fine, too.

Of all the components in the system, the Wharfedale Opus 3 is the biggest bargain to John. He paid £1,000 for these underrated speakers, and he would happily put them up against speakers costing twice that.

John's vinyl replay history apes the state of record playing today. He had a record deck years ago, but moved to CD exclusively. Or so he thought... until he found himself back with a VPI and all the trimmings!

Although internet radio beckons, at last, John Cahill has a system he is happy with. It's one that recreates music at once accurately, dynamically, and without fatigue. He could squeeze more out of his discs, but not without great cost... and a house move. **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 consisting of 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](mailto: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...

## Rega Research

*This month, Hi-Fi Choice talks to Roy Gandy, turntable supremo and the man behind Essex's best known hi-fi company – Rega. Interview: Malcolm Steward*

**W**e recently visited Roy Gandy, founder of the iconoclastic Rega Research, at his home, a rambling old rectory in Essex that doubles as his recording studio, where he indulges his passion for music and, conveniently, as it was lunchtime, his similar partiality towards fine food. So, after a hearty meal he had prepared, we sat down to discuss the state of the industry from his perspective.

**HFC** How is the turntable business faring?

**RG** A lot of people are asking if there's a renaissance going on and, from Rega's point of view, there's definitely an enormous change in the market driven by people who like music. I

remember that a while ago you wrote an article saying that the companies who had smiles on their faces seemed to be those who had stuck with two-channel, and that you'd perceived a definite re-awakening of interest in music, and I thought then that you were right on the ball.

We recently had a period of stagnation, following 30 years of consistent growth. Some of that was down to not having the infrastructure to handle continued growth, but much was due to the interest in the market. We are not a marketing-led company and we reached the point where we weren't pushing products and things simply levelled off. So we started looking, researching and planning.

People were saying that the business was all going to be AV, multiroom, computer and MP3-based. Our reaction was "So what? We're not going to do cinema stuff: it's not what we're good at, we don't enjoy it, we don't like it and it's not profitable." We looked at the other companies that were doing it and thought they were off their heads. I don't know any company that's been making a profit from making AV processors: most are making huge losses but they make excuses such as 'It keeps the rest of our products going' and that sort of thing.

A while ago, we did look at all the chips required for a processor and decided that we couldn't make a better product than anyone else was providing. There's nothing you can do to improve the performance but what you can do is screw it up if you're not experienced! You can create problems in the digital domain because, as you know, laying out a board for digital media is very different to the process you employ for analogue circuits.

As well as realising that you can't improve anything we discovered that the expensive chips were often no better than the cheap ones: they just had more facilities and functions. We just thought "Why? Why is everybody doing this?" You get involved in big business practices, need a team of people just to handle licenses, and you don't make any money from doing it. It just seemed illogical. We thought that if the specialist manufacturers were taking this direction it had to fail and fall apart. The only questions were whether there'd be anybody left who'd still like music and want to listen to it at home, and whether they'd be listening on compressed media and whether they'd still want high fidelity. We didn't know the answer, but we had sufficient faith that there'd always be people to whom quality would still matter. There are always people who'll want nice food, nice wine, nice cars and who are prepared to go out and find them. If that was no longer the case, then we'd stop making equipment.

**"People were saying that the business was going to be all AV, multiroom, computer and MP3-based. Our reaction was 'So what?'"**



Fortunately, last June or July, almost overnight, we had a doubling in demand for Rega products, and that demand continues to increase. For the first time in the company's history we are way behind in making things! We're really struggling and our distributors are upset because we can't deliver the amount of equipment they're ordering. We are in chaos: even our service engineers are having to make products. It's always been our aim to turn around servicing within 48 hours but in recent months that hasn't been happening. It has been horrific! In one way, it's a nice problem to have – having one's hopes realised – but in truth, we haven't been able to cope and we have a major management project underway dealing with the situation.

**HFC** Perhaps Rega should have a waiting list, like Morgan Cars?


**RG** Sadly that wouldn't work in our business: the retailer would simply sell his customer something else!

At first we thought this situation was a result of our upgraded CD player being in demand but it wasn't: it was everything in our product range – loudspeakers, cartridges, amplifiers, turntables, tonearms. It was funny that our retailers were telling us that they couldn't sell our amplifiers, in particular, because they didn't have a remote control and they needed this, that and the other. All those excuses seem to have disappeared because currently we can't make enough of them!

**HFC** Chris Keeling (Rega's sales manager) told me that your CD player sales had exceeded turntable sales. Is this true?

**RG** Our CD player sales currently seem to be only limited by how many we can produce. When we designed the latest player we budgeted to manufacture 500 each month with a break-even figure of 300 per month. Our sales team had predicted 10 per cent growth over the previous player because they could see that CD player sales overall were dropping. This month we're trying to build 1,000. If we manage 800 or 900 it'll be good yet our distributors are still complaining that we're not supplying them with enough! We're selling twice as many loudspeakers as we did three years ago and our dealers are saying 'If you can't supply more we're not going to sell them because we can't tolerate waiting lists'. So it's a peculiar situation and we wonder what one does.

**HFC** Could you shift some of your production to China?

**RG** No, thank you! We've discovered that we are not a 'business' company; we like actually making things and most of the people in the company enjoy the hands-on element of 





## “We’ve seen a steady growth in turntable sales over the past five to ten years, but they have exploded in the past year.”

manufacturing and wouldn't relish having stuff made elsewhere. We've been through that in the past when we had a cartridge made in Japan: it was very profitable, but everybody at Rega was asking why we didn't make it ourselves. So we made our own, and it wasn't as profitable but everyone enjoyed it more.

**HFC** Could you have some products made abroad to subsidise building others here?

**RG** Yes, but again nobody at Rega wants to do that. A lot of people think that if you don't do something it's because of ignorance, but last year I went to China on three occasions primarily because the Chinese wanted to buy our products and there was a strong demand for stuff that was truly made in England (which might partly answer your question). Ultimately, we're not that sort of company: it sounds contradictory but we're not a selling organisation; we like making things and we've never been good at sales and marketing, as anyone who's ever worked in those disciplines at Rega will tell you.

**HFC** You make Rega sound rather like a profitable hobby than a business.

**RG** Rega is a business and it's very strictly financially structured – and we're very aware that if that were not the case we'd have gone out of business like several other hi-fi companies I could mention!

**HFC** So how are things in the UK market at the moment?

**RG** We could probably sell twice the amount we are currently selling if we could simply manufacture that much. We are managing our

dramatic growth carefully because the danger in simply ramping up production is that it becomes all too easy to slip into cutting corners, which is not a trap that we want to fall into.

**HFC** From what you've been saying, it seems that the hi-fi industry is in very good health.

**RG** Certainly. What's happening now doesn't look like a 'blip'. We believe that the market is settling into a new, different reality. The past two to five years have seen everyone in the industry confused and thinking that it was facing an either/or situation: is MP3 going to take over from hi-fi; is all hi-fi going to be computer-based? That sort of thinking created discomfort and confusion because none of it was really possible. People blithely made these sweeping statements – in two years time all home entertainment will be based on a PC in the living room – and buyers became wary and

stopped buying. Look now at MP3 players, for example, which are rapidly being replaced by mobile phones.

The market, however, is settling down and people are now realising that this isn't an either/or situation: they can have an entertainment computer and an iPod plus a hi-fi and an AV system.

**HFC** So, do you think there is still a future for specialist hi-fi?

**RG** When I went to China to find a new distributor I met a company that seemed to be far too big for the job. They had an enormous office block and they imported food, Honda, Toyota and Rover cars, electrical appliances including Zanussi and Electrolux: the hi-fi division was smaller and run by just two men. Real enthusiasts. When I asked them why they were interested in Rega they told me that their financial directors had instructed this multi-million-dollar company that the future in investment terms was in hi-fi and not AV systems. These were major brains in the investment world and yet I still hear retailers saying that AV is the future!

**HFC** Back to the world of turntables and I want to ask why you've now released brightly coloured mats for your players.

**RG** We've been inundated with demand world-wide and have taken on new distributors in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, and the latter wanted coloured mats for display purposes so we had a few hundred made, sent them to him and then made them generally available.

**HFC** But is it a case that one colour sounds better than another?

**RG** No, it's the same as the coloured turntables that we started making many years ago – to make sure that sellers took them out of the box before handing them over to customers. That was a bit of mischief that backfired because then people started to ask for them! Now about ten per cent of our production is coloured decks, which are perhaps for display, to bring people into shops, but they actually sell rather well.

**HFC** So, are your vinyl-based sales holding up well?

**RG** They're about the same as everything else. We've seen a steady growth in turntable sales over the past five to ten years, but they have exploded in the past year. Again, we can't quite make enough of them to satisfy current demand. And that's at all levels: we can't make enough P9s and we can't make enough P1s. We're making as many as we've ever made and we're working very hard to make even more. It's wonderful!

There's a definite buzz about vinyl and it's not just among specialists. It's reached the street. Even when I play table tennis I get people saying to me 'I hear turntables are coming back.' It's not a huge comeback – you have to put it into context – but there is a growth in record production. It's not anywhere near the levels at which it used to be, but within a niche market it's an acceptable, if not dramatic growth. And it's for the nicest reason, that vinyl sounds better. The controversy has disappeared along with all that rubbish about 'it's a nice, warm sound' and people are happy to admit that it's just a better medium for listening to music.

Two or three years ago we were being told by everybody that sound quality was unimportant and that hi-fi had to look right and have all the gadgets and gizmos. We had our small integrated amplifier that didn't have a remote control and everybody was saying 'Yes, but...' It was a simple case of us being unable to produce a remote control amplifier with decent sound quality at that price, and its sales began dwindling to the point where we began considering whether it was worth continuing to produce it. Before we could make that decision its sales took off again: now we're making hundreds every month and nobody wants remote control as much and everyone is commenting favourably on its sound quality.

So, provided that Rega is reading the market correctly, the situation for quality hi-fi, in which sound quality matters more than remote controls and fripperies, looks positively healthy. That has to be encouraging news for the industry and music fans everywhere. **HFC**



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leading hi-fi publications

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
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**AWARDS 2006**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CD PLAYERS  
CYRUS CD6s

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**AWARDS 2006**  
CD PLAYER  
BEST CD PLAYER £1000-£1500  
CYRUS CD8x

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
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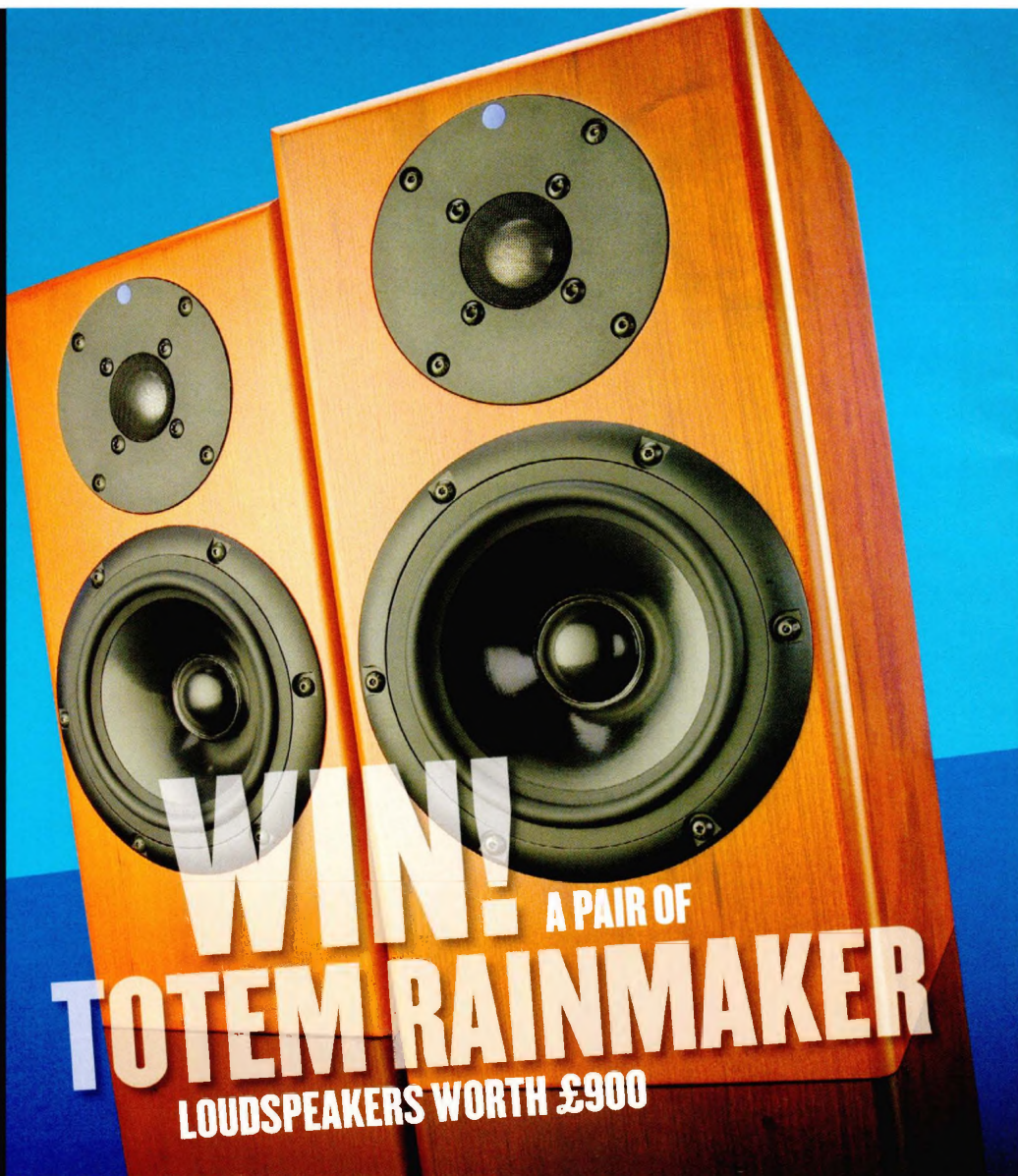
**CYRUS**



If your hi-fi is sounding a little dry, you'll love this month's competition: a chance to win a fabulous pair of Totem Rainmaker loudspeakers. This adorable Canadian standmount really is a premium product, with a big sound that belies its small footprint. The classy two-way is dressed in real wood on the outside, and on the inside, plenty of effort has gone in to maximising its acoustic performance. We awarded the Rainmaker a Best Buy badge back in our March issue (*HFC* 291) and were mightily impressed with the sheer sonic scale of this speaker. It offers surprisingly good bass extension and a remarkable freedom from coloration and boxiness. The Rainmaker is, in fact, a fine musical communicator with a beautifully judged midband and presence. For your chance to win a pair, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.



**CONGRATULATIONS...**  
 ...to our last winner, Phil Wheatman of Kendal, who wins a Flying Mole CA-510 digital amp worth £1,000!



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**HOW TO ENTER:**

Simply answer the question below by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number and pop the form in the post to: **Totem Competition, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.** Please also take the time to fill in our small questionnaire – we want to make *Hi-Fi Choice* as good as you deserve, dear reader.

**QUESTION:**

**The Rainmaker is a fine musical what?**

- a) Communicator
- b) Maestro
- c) Genius

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

The closing date for entries is 1 June 2007. No purchase necessary. Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers), their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter. Future Publishing reserves the right to verify the eligibility of all entrants. 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 company (or companies) supplying the competition prizes, not *Hi-Fi Choice* or Future Publishing. Photocopied entries will be allowed, but no multiple entries, please. By submitting a competition entry, entrants will be deemed to have accepted these terms and conditions, and to have agreed to be bound by them. Any personal data relating to entrants will not be disclosed to a third party.

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice* each month?

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What would you like to see less of in *Hi-Fi Choice* each month?

---

How much do you intend to spend on your next single item of hi-fi?

---

How do you feel about downloading music from the internet?

---

What do you think your next hi-fi purchase will be, and when?

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**YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)**

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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

### VAN MORRISON

#### Blowin' Your Mind

Bang/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl



Music: Van Morrison's first solo album was released without his knowledge by producer Bert Berns, the songwriter who had penned *Here Comes The Night*. This track gave

Van Morrison's band Them one of its biggest hits. Released in the US in 1967, *Blowin' Your Mind* came out in the UK in 1973 retitled *TB Sheets*, after the epic nine minutes plus blues that's the longest track on the album. The song that made Morrison's name, however, was the opener, *Brown Eyed Girl*, a top five US hit that kicked off a career that is still intact over thirty years later. ★★★★★

Sound: The recording facilities at Berns' Bang Records don't do justice to the music on here. This is a thin sounding album that can't compete with *Astral Weeks*, which came out the following year. Still, it's the music that counts here. ★★★★★ JK

### ERIC BIBB

#### Painting Signs

Manhattan/Pure Pleasure

2x180g



Music: Released on CD in 2001, Bibb's sixth album is presented here on double vinyl by the experts at Pure Pleasure. In some respects, Bibb's easy,

almost smooth audiophile-ready vocal style seems at odds with the blues that he sings and this effect is increased by the luxuriousness of the overall sound – raw delta blues it ain't. But what's important is the feeling behind the song and he certainly has that. Bibb writes most of the 13 tracks along with some classics such as Jimmy Reed's *Honest I Do*. If you like your blues refined but heartfelt, make sure you give Eric a spin. ★★★★★

Sound: It's not hard to hear why Pure Pleasure chose to bring *Painting Signs* to vinyl, it is a beautiful sounding album with phat bass and a clean but smooth mid and treble that oozes quality. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure  
www.purepleasurerecords.com

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL



### MAVIS STAPLES

#### We'll Never Turn Back

Anti Records

Music: So how come the Lord has all the sexiest voices? Sam Cooke, Solomon Burke, Aretha Franklin and Al Green all came out of gospel music to send a righteous shiver down our spines with their vocal eroticism. So did Mavis Staples – to these ears the most sensuous of all the gospel-soulsters. Now in her late sixties, she can no longer hit all the high notes, but she still sounds utterly seductive on this collection of classic civil rights anthems. The pick of the tracks are JB Lenoir's *Down In Mississippi* and *Eyes On The Prize*, but her clarity and phrasing are faultless throughout. ★★★★★

Sound: The production by Ry Cooder is as potent as you would expect and the live-in-the-studio approach lends an old-fashioned, pre-digital organic roundness to the sound. ★★★★★ NW



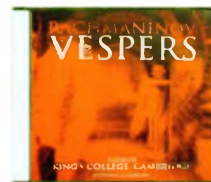
### NICO

#### The Frozen Borderline 1968-1970

Elektra/Reprise/Rhino

Music: Fans of Nico's frothy 1968 debut *Chelsea Girl* may be shocked by the full-on nature of *The Marble Index* and *Desertshore* albums. Dominated by her wheezing harmonium, the first featured eight incredible invocations of post-war angst over free-floating John Cale instrumentals, derived from varispeeded tape recordings of bell sounds, viola, celeste, piano, glockenspiel and such. *Desertshore* went further, with Cale using cluster chords and other devices to lighten the music. With 16 bonus tracks we get a chance to compare ideas with results. ★★★★★

Sound: Buffed up we can now hear the subtle instrumental auguries of *Prelude* while the dancing strings of *No One Is There* are so vivid that you can almost see Nico as a child playing in the rubble of 1945 Berlin. ★★★★★ MP



### RACHMANINOV

#### Vespers

Choir of King's College Cambridge, Stephen Cleobury (dir)  
EMI 7243 5 58752 2 4

Music: This version of the Russian Orthodox Vespers is apparently the first to exclusively feature boys' and mens' voices 'whose point of departure was a particularly fine crop of low basses at Kings (College Cambridge)'. The result is a more authentically Russian sounding performance than usual. The texts used are also performed in Russian. The performances are strong, with ravishing sound and very secure bass singing as promised. ★★★★★

Sound: This is a homogenous recording with a strong sense of space and occasion. Recorded in surround, it has been released in stereo pending "developments in domestic audio technology". So DVD-A and SACD are not good enough then? ★★★★★ AG



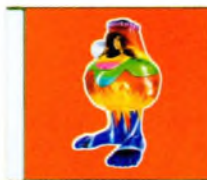
### BJÖRK

#### Volta

One Little Indian

Music: On first hearing, it's Volta's beats that stand out. Timbaland (Jay-Z, Missy Elliot etc) lends a radical, tribal-electro vibe to three tracks, while the distorted African rhythms of the Congolese troupe Konono No 1 are also manipulated to thrilling effect. Equally remarkable are the experimental, avant-garde influences that she somehow manages to render totally accessible (something she has been able to do since her Sugar Cubes days), not least in the brilliant 'found sound' collage of ships' horns which opens *Wanderlust*. Then there's her voice, as abandoned and as outré as we've heard her, without ever sounding mannered. A dazzling record. ★★★★★

Sound: Who else would have thought of combining Timbaland's beats with the delicate filigree of Toumani Diabate's kora? Björk does so on *Hope* and the track's sheer audaciousness acts as a cipher for the entire album. Stunning stuff from a musical and sonic standing. ★★★★★ NW



### COPLAND/ BARBER

#### In the Beginning

Dunedin Consort, Ben Parry (dir)  
Linn Records CKD 117 (HDCD encoded)

Music: This is the debut on the Linn label for the excellent Dunedin Consort, a mixed choir here singing *a capella* in vocal works by two of America's greatest composers. The Barber includes a very intense transcription for mixed chorus of the *Adagio* from his *String Quartet Op 11*, which is much better known in the popular version for string orchestra. ★★★★★

Sound: This is a stunning performance, and a brilliant recording, recorded to give very distinct and well disposed spatial sense, and better separation of individual voices. Vocal intonation is also very distinct, it is a good thing that the quality of the singing and ensemble are good enough to sustain the examination. ★★★★★ AG



## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "An emotionally engaging album"

**THE BE GOOD TANYAS** *Chinatown* Network/EMI

**Music:** The Be Good Tanyas are a trio of ladies from Vancouver who make some of the warmest and most appealing homespun music you'll find on record. They play all manner of plucky instruments including mandolin and ukulele and are particularly adept at harmonies and gently driven tunes that are both cosy and perceptive. Despite this, they manage to avoid drifting into syrup and schmaltz but rather enchant with breathy vocals and lyrics that are

deeper than the music might suggest. *Chinatown* is an enigmatic title for an emotionally engaging album of beautiful songs. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The broad array of acoustic instruments and voices are recorded as beautifully as the songs are sung. Guitars are crisp and the bass full and weighty. Although some might prefer a bit more grit, this is both luxurious and revealing. ★★★★★ JK



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

**A Tribute To Joni Mitchell**

Nonesuch

**Music:** Joni Mitchell is due to release her first album of original material in nine years soon, but in the meantime, we have this tribute album. And for once it's worthy of the name. Rather than commissioning a gaggle of fey, awe-struck singer-songwriters to deliver some sycophantic cover versions, this one takes a more intelligent approach that befits the cerebral nature of Joni Mitchell's work. So, the album brings in the likes of Björk for a stellar reworking of *The Boho Dance*, Sufjan Stevens gives *Free Man In Paris* a full eccentric brass treatment and Elvis Costello adds a classical string arrangement to a haunting version of *Edith And The Kingpin*. Elsewhere Annie Lennox has rarely sounded better than on *Ladies Of The Canyon* and Prince contributes a stately reading of *A Case Of You*. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Twelve tracks recorded at many different times in many different locations is never going to offer full cohesion, but Mitchell's sterling music holds it all together, despite the variety of the material. ★★★★★ DO



### THE SUPREMES

**This Is The Story**

Motown

**Music:** It is a truth all too rarely acknowledged that the Supremes didn't finish after Diana Ross left to pursue her glittering solo career in 1970, but they produced a further eight albums through the 1970s. Little-known Jean Terrell was chosen to join Mary Wilson and Cindy Birdsong and this three-CD box catalogues the six albums between 1971-73 that she sang on. Hidden gems include the psychedelic swoon of *It's Time To Break Down* and *Bad Weather*, given to the girls by Stevie Wonder. ★★★★★

**Sound:** All the albums have been dusted down and remastered and have come up a treat. These tracks may not have the pop crossover appeal of the Diana years, but there are soulful treasures aplenty. ★★★★★ DO



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

**136 1/2 Orange Street Days Vol 5**

Success

**Music:** Success is the label of Jamaican reggae star Rupie Edwards and the Archives series collects together his more noteworthy productions of reggae's first golden age (1967-73). Volume Five has lively contributions from the likes of Gregory Isaacs, Sugar Minott, Skatalite Tommy McCook, The Kingstons and The Mighty Diamonds though many of the finer, melodic tracks are by Edwards himself (hardcore Rupie fans should check out his recent *Best of Sweet Gospel: Reggae & Soul* albums). ★★★★★

**Sound:** The 21 tracks here were cut at 7.5 inches per second, usually in only one or two takes, and these limitations do show – but you don't criticize a precious antique for being old, do you? Crucial bass archaeology. ★★★★★ PS

## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

### BARB JUNGR

**Walking In The Sun**

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Linn Records

**Music:** Barb Jungr made her name as a cabaret singer in the eighties, but has since gone on to widen her repertoire with a number of interesting projects including an album of Bob Dylan songs. Her latest production has another two Dylan numbers (*Trouble In Mind*, *Blind Willie McTell*) but the style in which they are executed means you'd need to listen hard in order to spot the songs' origins. Jungr stirs Joni Mitchell and Billie Holiday in the mix, but she is very much an individual with a personality that makes itself heard. Which makes this 13-song collection an entertaining and varied experience, thanks in part to the quality of accompaniment from guitarist Eric Bibb among others. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Linn not only records in SACD's native DSD format, it mixes and masters in it as well. The result is a crisp, vivacious and full bodied sound that grips from the first track. Superb. ★★★★★ JK



### SHOSTAKOVICH

**Symphony No. 11, Op. 103, 'The Year 1905'**

Alexander Lazarev (cond), Royal Scottish Nat. Orch.

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Linn Records CKD 247LS00547

**Music:** The 11th was written to commemorate the original Bloody Sunday massacre in pre-communist St Petersburg, though the composer's intentions in doing so are disputed to this day. The structure of the work is comparatively straightforward, if brutal at times, and it has been famously satirised, and not entirely without justification, as a 'film score without a film'. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This recording from the Usher Hill Edinburgh is, for the most part, a compelling, dramatic affair. A powerful, sonorous first movement contrasts with the second movement, which has an unusually assured quality. It is taken much faster than usual, but never loses its momentum, setting a pattern that is sustained throughout the rest of the work. Sound quality is excellent, with muscular bass through the crescendos, the only serious oversight being the bells in the finale, which are clearly overblown, and sound far too close. ★★★★★ AG



### THE MOODY BLUES

**Every Good Boy Deserves Favour**

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Decca

**Music:** The reissue of the Moody Blues back catalogue in surround sound SACD continues with this and *Seventh Sojourn*, both towards the end of the group's psychedelic period. With the group pretty much at the height of its popularity at this time (1971), the band members were suffering a lot of internal pressure. But there's scant evidence of it here, with all the players seemingly giving their best, notably Michael Pinder's Mellotron explorations on *My Song* and Justin Hayward's guitar extravaganza on *The Story In Your Eyes*, possibly their finest rock song. Other standouts include John Lodge's delightful ode to his daughter, *Emily's Song* and the whimsical *Nice To Be Here*. It's the album Moody Blues fans tend to hold in highest regard. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The original album got the Quadraphonic treatment shortly after its release, so it wasn't much of a stretch to enhance those tapes for modern SACD surround. As with the other Moody Blues reissues from this period, the results are lush, full and detailed, with plenty of period atmosphere. ★★★★★ DO



# Listen Up...



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SOUND AND VISION  
**AWARDS 2005**

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# ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

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



## ALL MOD CONS

It's so twentieth century putting a CD into a player to retrieve the data whenever you want to play music. Having discovered the convenience of lossless HD music storage, I now treat CDs as a delivery method. The Editor of a US magazine – when he reviewed the Sonos system – could barely distinguish between that and a high-end CD transport, when fed into the same high-end DAC.

These are the last years of the conventional CD player. It seems ironic that Naim has released its best player ever, because we don't need it. All that attention to mechanical detail and the huge purchase cost, just to retrieve bits in real time from a spinning optical medium. No £15,000 CD player for me: I'm happier with my HD server, a good DAC and a lot more music.

**Peter Bamber** via email

**HFC** CD player numbers have been dwindling for a few years now and audiophiles are slowly becoming more open to music servers. It is, in fact, the most popular subject in our mailbag. We wouldn't share the view that CD players are not needed, as not everyone wants to use a server as the interface to playing their music. There will always be a specialist market for CD players, particularly in the high end, and audiophiles will continue to demand high performance players just as they have done with turntables over the years.

## FAB DAB

I enjoyed your DAB radio feature in *AudioFile: Happenings* (HFC 291). I once read a comment by a BBC Sound engineer, who said that if any format ever produced sound that 'hit the spot', you could no longer blame the format.

**“Linn and Naim are still quality products, but now there are more alternatives.”**

The fault must be elsewhere: recording, production, equipment etc. The same must hold true for DAB. Listening to 'thejazz' on DAB, I am consistently impressed with the sound quality it achieves on a low bit-rate mono platform.

The bass is deep, full and tuneful. The whole presentation from my Pure tuner and Meridian system keeps me coming back for more. It is clearly possible to get great quality from low bit-rate DAB to, so why aren't all stations delivering it?

**Chris Kyan** Essex

**HFC** DAB is at best reasonable and at worst, dire. And it's this disparity between good and bad DAB that keeps audiophiles sceptical and suspicious of the platform. Radio stations – including the BBC – are under real pressure to vary the bit rate of DAB broadcasts, according to a number of criteria, so consistency across the huge number of DAB stations is impossible to find. ☐



Above: Vita Audio R1 tabletop DAB radio

## Letter of the month

### IMMIGRANT SONG

I read with interest the struggle of Ricardo Franassovici during the 1970's (*Industry Profile*, Absolute Sounds, HFC 291), to bring alternative high-end hi-fi to the UK, which was at the time dominated by Naim and Linn. The rigid mindset of retailers to sell alternative product restricted consumer choice. Thank goodness for Ricardo's patience and persistence. Linn and Naim are still quality products, but now there are far more varied alternatives. The point of the story is: don't be too quick to judge new

alternative hi-fi coming from Asia and the Far East – it might just catch on.

**Karl Todd** Rochdale

**HFC** Fair comment. Some products from China offer superb value for money with good sound quality to boot. However, as with all consumer goods, you get what you pay for and there's no substitute for lovingly hand-built quality products that will last a lifetime. Only time will tell if China's new wave of hi-fi will still be delivering the goods a decade or more from now.



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Above: Resolution Audio CD player

☐ GLOW FOR IT

Having very limited time for extended auditioning, I have subscribed to your magazine for some years, relying on it to give me good guidance on quality equipment including the Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player and Living Voice OBX R2 speakers. I am concerned, though, that during that time I have not gained a smidgen of knowledge from from your pages on any articles informing readers that the 300B valve is a vastly over-rated piece of crap! Can you please advise what valve I should be using in my Art Audio Argento, or should I consider a change of amplifier altogether?

**Brian Healey** via email

**HFC** Ah! Ken Kessler strikes again! He's consistently controversial. Some of us like the sound of 300B amplifiers, too. Ken patently doesn't. But the 300B is one of Ken's pet dislikes – a select list of 67,382 things that make Ken go 'grrr'. Just don't get him started on cheap watches, disposable cameras, tight shoes, days of the week ending in the letter 'y'...

**NOUGHTY READER**

I am trying to find out what the current specification for the Nordost Red Dawn interconnect is. I recently purchased a pair, which were advertised on the vendor's web page as 99.999999% OFC

(eight-nines), but when the cable arrived it was described, on the packaging, as 99.99999% OFC (seven-nines). The UK distributor has suggested that the difference in the number of nines is, "just a disparity between Nordost's web page and their packaging." I have asked the vendor and the UK distributor to confirm that I have been supplied with the latest version, but neither seem to know. Who would be the best person to contact? I have emailed Nordost USA requesting clarification, but they have declined to reply.

**Arthur Rennie** via email

**HFC** Er... we think you might have got a bit carried away with the whole high purity thing. The higher the purity of the copper, the longer the crystalline structure within the cable itself. But, given that once you get to 99.999% (five-nines) purity, the copper cable is effectively a 125m long crystal, the difference between this and still higher purity copper becomes effectively unimportant – and after this point, measurement introduces more false positives and contamination than actual readings of the impurities in the copper. In short, if you like the sound of Red Dawn, you like it irrespective of whether it has that extra digit.

**"Guidance on quality equipment, including the Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player."**

**STAND BY YOUR HI-FI**

I have read with interest that the government wants to ban the use of stand-by buttons on all electrical goods. I have been led to believe from the hi-fi press that to get the best from your system, it's best to leave it on stand-by, as it keeps the electrical circuit warm and ready to give the best performance? How will hi-fi equipment cope with being turned on and off from cold a few times daily? Will this also affect the way hi-fi equipment is produced in the future? I agree we all have to cut down on energy to save the planet, but will banning the stand-by button make that much difference? I stand-by for your answer.

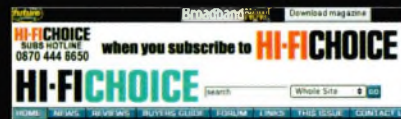
**Tom Elsdon** Kent

**HFC** We asked a spokesperson at Denon, who replied: "All hi-fi is built to be switched on and off, so this should not affect longevity. Simply turning on your hi-fi shortly before listening will be fine, the equipment will warm up very quickly."

"Denon is working to cut stand-by power on all its products, and systems such as the D-F102 consume just 0.1W on stand-by: one tenth of its predecessor. Similar reductions have taken place across Denon's latest Advanced Evolution Hi-Fi range and all responsible companies should be looking to do this in the future. Bear in mind, it's devices such as FreeView boxes and Plasma screens that are the real power hogs".

**Onlinef@rum**

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)



I have a new pair of Mordaunt-Short MS904is. The blurb says I should run these in for 36 hours 'out of phase' and face to face, and the diagram suggests one speaker should be wired + to - and the other - to +. Is this correct? What kind of volume should I play this at and does it have to be

36 hours continuously? We need to sleep!  
**Jezbo**

...The 36-hour run-in time is really to advise that the speakers won't be at their best for a while. Many speakers take much longer and some take next to no time.  
**Wolflinn**

...Running them 'out of phase' means that the frequencies cancel each other out and you will, therefore, get little noise output, allowing you your beauty sleep.  
**Puffin**

Should hi-fi go green? Should we demand efficient amplifiers?

Should we offset the energy we use? Should all equipment be modular so it can be easily upgraded?  
**Spatch**

...I'd have thought the energy consumed by hi-fi in the greater scheme of things, is so small as to be immeasurable. There's

too much emphasis being placed on the irrelevant: 4x4s, carbon offsetting, home wind turbines, hybrid cars, bio fuel etc, rather than more serious issues. So no, I don't think there is an issue. I still wish for a pair of Class A Krell monoblocks.  
**Searkind**



# Performance



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*Hi-Fi Choice*, December 2005



"Truly redefines the standard at this class... superb value for money; a modern classic."

*Hi-Fi World*, April 2005



"The Performance 6s are sensational speakers."

*What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*, December 2005



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*Stereophile*, September 2005

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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.



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# ISOL - 8

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





# NATURAL BORN KESSLER

In the last of his present series of columns, Ken 'Cheery' Kessler vents spleen about the state of the music industry and vows that he'll never download a thing...

Some of you must picture me as a gloomy harbinger-of-doom type, shabby grey hooded cape, huge scythe, bony fingers with long, yellowing nails, ambling along counting the potential corpses. I wish I could disabuse you of that image, but a recent phone conversation with a friend who I trust implicitly has heaped more depression upon me – quite independent of recent news about what's happened to our pensions, the Iran hostage crisis, et al. And while issues related to hi-fi are hardly of the same gravity as, say, Margaret Beckett's ineptitude, they do concern us here, given the subject matter of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

My friend is a Grammy-winning, world-class archivist. He is one of my Yoda figures, who must remain anonymous. He has been putting together compilations for a few decades, first vinyl and then CD. His liner notes are authoritative enough to have earned him the aforementioned Grammy, and

there's nothing he doesn't seem to know about his specialty areas: R&B, blues, early rock'n'roll, country and rockabilly.

For him to tell me, without even the slightest trace of exaggeration, that he deeply believes the end is in sight for physical software... that's the kind of shock that amplifies what we have all suspected for at least five years. It's one thing to read about a dip in CD sales in a newspaper's financial pages, or to hear some retailer whining about it on the six o'clock news. It's something else entirely to hear it face-to-face in blunt terms from someone with actual figures to back it up.

Where my friend – let's call him Eric – was once overburdened with too many projects from the sort of specialty labels we know and love, he now mainly compiles sets for TV-advertised labels. You know the sort: they show some past-it performer hawking 'a 5CD set of hits from the 1950s for four instalments of £9.95 each', usually on one of

those high-digit Sky channels you only watch by accident.

His only good news is that some of these sets, consisting of music that surely must have been purchased already by anyone interested in it, still sell phenomenally well. (Which invites a question for another day: are there really that many fans of big band or 1950s love songs still alive who don't already have everything in the genre?)

What he's alluding to is the same as a friend of mine who buys and sells vintage hi-fi: there must be a sell-by date for this stuff based on the age of the target audience. How many 20-year-olds covet Thorens TD150 turntables? Equally, I sincerely doubt that anyone buying a multi-disc set of Connie Francis hits is under 50. And yet the compilations still keep on coming. Like DVD sets of George Formby movies.

## COOLING OFF COOL

Which means that Eric is doing fewer and fewer cool collections of forgotten R&B wizards or forgotten rock'n'roll pioneers and more and more of what the record industry has called – for many decades – 'S.O.S.' That stands for 'Same Old Shit', used by the record labels when they release, say, the umpteenth 'mod' compilation containing *Itchycoo Park*, *My Generation* and a token track by The Jam to make it seem contemporary. Or yet another glam-rock set. Or 'country classics'.

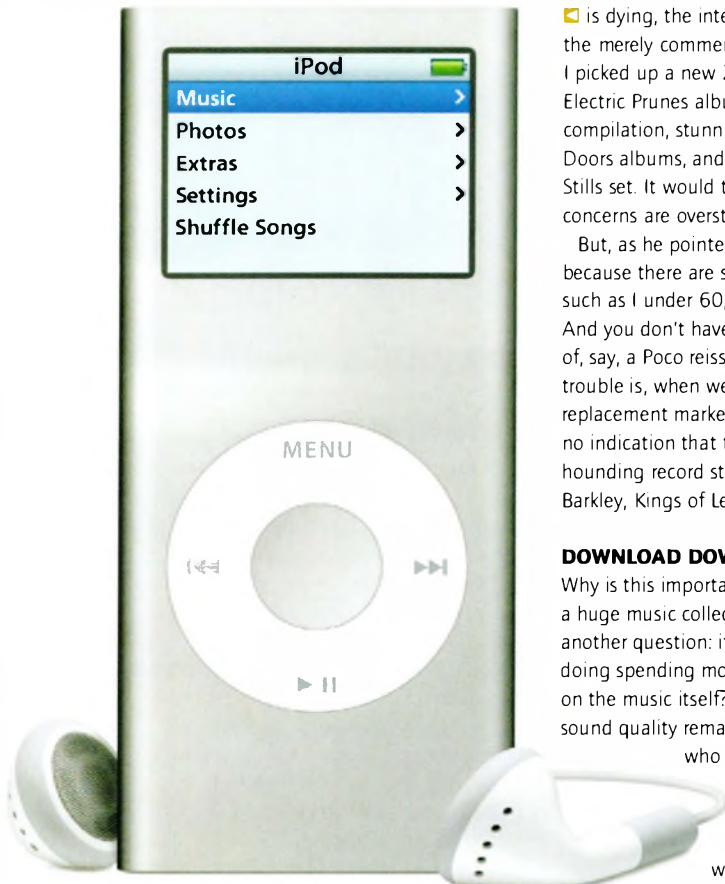
What Eric's experiences also mean is that the writing is on the wall for the antithesis of these TV-advertised labels. I'm talking about the specialist reissue houses that always try to find unreleased material, who do their best to acquire the master tapes, who commission liner notes that are full of valuable information and free of errors. And while Eric still has a reasonable amount of work from the most solid of these hardcore labels, it's diminishing annually.

At first, you'd think this is an exaggeration, or mere pessimism fuelled by KK's anorakish behaviour. And I do have to admit that every week, when I visit Fopp (the best thing to happen for music lovers in years), I never leave with less than a half-dozen discs. This surely contradicts any notion that software

**“My friend is a Grammy-winning, world-class archivist. He is one of my Yoda figures.”**

Below: The Yoda of the back catalogue

WINDOWS,  
WHEN  
CLEANING,  
AM I...



Above: The iPod – the collector's *bete noir*?

is dying, the intelligent packages as well as the merely commercial. Recently, for example, I picked up a new 2CD set with the first two Electric Prunes albums, a superb double Seeds compilation, stunning remasters of the six Doors albums, and a three-on-one Stephen Stills set. It would therefore seem that Eric's concerns are overstating the case.

But, as he pointed out, these sets come out because there are still plenty of sad bastards such as I under 60, buying stuff willy-nilly. And you don't have to sell that many copies of, say, a Poco reissue, to make it pay. The trouble is, when we go, there's no replacement market. Today's 16-year-olds give no indication that they will one day be hounding record stores for unreleased Gnarl's Barkley, Kings of Leon or Kaiser Chiefs tracks.

#### DOWNLOAD DOWN SOUND

Why is this important, especially if you're not a huge music collector? (Which invites another question: if you're not, what are you doing spending more on hi-fi equipment than on the music itself?) It's important because sound quality remains a non-issue with those who have only ever

downloaded music. And it's not too far in the future when downloads will outstrip sales of actual, physical carriers. So, their utterly

indiscriminate attitude toward sound will further bury the industry's desire to improve sound reproduction.

Let's face it: SACD and DVD-Audio haven't exactly made anyone rich.

I touched on this indifference to sound quality last month: when someone is introduced to music via portables and headphones, with no inducement to listen via speakers or though quality hi-fi full-stop, it's almost impossible to elevate their desires to what audiophiles accept as our goals for sound reproduction. My son, bless him, listens to as much music as I did when I was his age. But the difference is this: when I was scraping together every penny I could for a new single or LP, I was also saving up for a decent hi-fi. And I struggled to buy a Dual 1019 turntable, Pickering cartridge, Scott receiver and Scott speakers when I turned 16. (\$400 was a lot of money during the Jurassic period.)

My son, on the other hand, has no interest in owning a physical collection of discs. He's happy with whatever headphones I give him to replace the earbuds that broke on the way back from school. He has no problem with downloads. He doesn't care about sleeve art or liner notes. My wife would argue that he's far more sane than I am, in this respect, but it baffles me that someone can love music that much – as do his friends – yet still not give a toss about how it sounds.



Above: Gnarl's Barkley made musical history with the first download-only No 1, but will tomorrow's collectors care?



Below: SME Model 20/12A. One of Ken's favourite turntables and just the thing to hear that huge record collection at its best

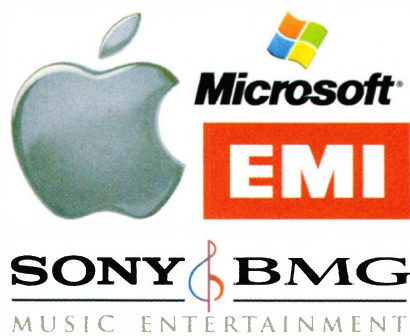
But I mustn't complain: he's just begged me to allow him to go to the Reading Festival. Considering what I got up to at his age, I could hardly refuse. (I still can't believe that my parents let me go to the Newport Jazz Festival when I was 15...)

**STUFF THE STUFF**

But back to Eric. Nearly 20 years ago, he took the mickey out of my collecting habits because he is NOT a collector. He hates the burden of Too Much Stuff, the antithesis of the late John Peel with a record collection in the many tens of thousands. Eric's prime example of my stupidity involved two box sets for the same artist. The US version had only completed songs, some 30 tracks, every single one 'listenable'. The UK edition had double that, mainly studio chatter, wheezing, farting. Precisely the daft material completists adore.

He asked me with a straight face: would I ever in my life listen to that box set again? To the studio chatter, the coughing and scratching? The false starts and half-finished filler? The answer was an embarrassed 'No'.

Below: Do computer brands rule music today?



**"I have 1,200 DVDs, 4,000 CDs and 1,000 LPs that I've not yet played."**

Now I find myself in a turmoil my son will never know, as I try to cut back on buying 'stuff'. I have 1,200 DVDs, 4,000 CDs and 1,000 LPs that I've not yet played. It dawned on me some time ago that I will not live long enough to hear my entire record collection again once in its entirety, even if I were to retire today and listen to 15 discs a day for the rest of my life. (I'm kinda hoping I have 20 years or so ahead of me...)

But Eric's news stung me deeply as an incurable music lover/collector. Each and every one of you, at least, those of you who love music more than hi-fi, has a Holy Grail of music that you're waiting to be released. It could be some missing Miles Davis, some rumoured Beatles outtakes, a mythical Dylan session, or John Ogdon playing the themes for his unfinished homage to Melville. For me, it's been the release of a definitive compilation of the only major artist who has NOT received the anorak treatment yet: Buddy Holly. The dilemma is two-fold.

**DEATH TAKES ITS TOLL**

On the one hand, as Eric points out, surely the time will come when there simply aren't any people alive who give a damn about Buddy Holly. Which I accept. When you think about how huge Glenn Miller was, and how you can't give away his stuff today, Eric's probably right. So the record label that would release it (MCA) just might say, 'It's too late.' As Holly himself once sang.

But on the other hand, the estate handling Holly's affairs still cannot get its act together, so this is academic. You'd have thought that they'd realise the clock was ticking, that the golden-egg-laying goose is entering its dotage. But still they cannot agree on whatever it will take to allow the vaults to be scoured. So I may never experience Holly's studio chatter. (Tell a lie: nearly all of it's out on bootlegs...)

Compounding the health of the software industry is another issue. In many territories, copyright runs out after 50 years. We're already seeing unofficial Sinatra, Elvis, whathaveyou, copies of copies that are no better than pirate editions.

This also doesn't bode well for those of us who care about sound. Why? Because if the record companies lose any more revenue, they'll be less inclined to invest in new artists, let alone unearth historical material, and sound quality won't even be an item on the agenda. As buyers take MP3 over CD quality, good sound is already on the back burner.

All of which suggests to this miserable bugger that we're looking at, or may be in the middle of, the end of the physical music carrier era. The only consolation I have is that, if I were never to buy another disc, I still have more material than I can listen to in a few decades, on DVD, CD and LP. So, I intend to go to the grave without ever downloading a damned thing. **HFC**

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



EDGAR CD1 CD PLAYER | LSA STANDARD INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
LSA2 TOWER LOUDSPEAKERS | £6,350

# Ugly beautiful

*Did the sonic sparks fly when Edgar met Larry? We recommend you shield your eyes. It may not be pretty, but it sounds gorgeous*

Sometimes, just sometimes, you encounter a hi-fi component that doesn't seem to make sense. Or, rather, it makes a perfect nonsense of the world you think you know. How the Dickens, you wonder to yourself, stroking an imaginary (or, if you're lucky, real) Dickensian beard... how the Dickens do they do that? Yes, even here at *Beautiful Systems*, where we've reviewed systems with price tags ranging from painless to £275k, dumbfoundedness can strike. You think you've heard it all then... Wham! Those robustly cemented frames of reference fall to the floor and shatter like baubles from a Christmas tree.

I mean, take amplifiers – ostensibly the most intuitively straightforward of all hi-fi components. Here's the thing. Ideally, they shouldn't have a 'sonic fingerprint' at all, merely an ability to amplify. But, the fact is most do and, if we're honest, that's the way we like it. It's all part of the fascination. Stereotypes in the very truest sense, we buy the amp that best suits our needs and sonic predilections. No, all amplifiers are not built equal and the convention is we have to decide precisely what it is we want. Fortunately, the choice is truly vast and ranges from flea-powered tube designs with exquisite naturalness, transparency, detail and microdynamics to battleship-build solid-state behemoths that can blow chunks out of your sofa at twenty paces. Then there are the myriad points between, including, of course, representatives from the church of pace 'n' rhythm and the hallowed house of holographic imaging.

But, an integrated amp that can do all (yes, all) of the above without the faintest whiff of compromise and costs just £2,500? Its name – the LSA Standard Integrated Amp – is itself misleadingly downbeat for such a gifted

beast. After all, what's standard about a tube/dual mono solid state hybrid with 6922 triodes in the preamp and Solen output devices, capable of shifting over 300 watts a side into 4 ohms that weighs 36kg and, partly to accommodate its huge twin toroidal transformers, is the size of a small fridge? It was previously known as the DK Reference Mk III and highly thought of as such. Then an audio luminary called Larry Staples, who used to work for Thiel Audio before setting up the LSA Group in Nashville, led the team that purchased DK Design and re-launched the Reference Mk III under the LSA banner with a new industrial design and upgraded components. The amp is basically a cube with heatsinks, a volume knob and a couple of buttons. It is manufactured in China then shipped back to the States to be breathed-on by Engineering Vice President John Tucker and granted a few Thiel-flavoured tweaks by Larry Staples. Even though it's something of a giant itself – and almost absurdly rugged and well built – its reputation as a giant-killer precedes it.

## ED WOOD

Hold onto that thought for a few moments. Because sometimes, just sometimes, you encounter a hi-fi component that doesn't seem to make sense (again). Okay, get this. A Slovakian CD player (rare enough) made by a company called Edgar (charmingly bizarre) of unpromisingly lightweight build, save for a thick timber front plate resembling, in hue, the mid-way swatch in a Cuprinol garden fence stain colour chart. 'Rustic' hardly does it justice.

The psychology is easy enough to understand: woody, warm, natural organic – not all shiny and digital. But then you push the large, round



**Edgar CD1 CD player**  
£1,350

It brings the aesthetics of the garden shed to digital replay. But the valve output stage and EI core transformer endow it with a sublime naturalness that eludes most players.



**LSA Standard Integrated Amp amplifier**  
£2,500

The LSA sounds vastly more powerful and dynamic than its rated 150 watts into 8 ohms, yet combines this with wonderful finesse and élan. Nothing at the price even gets close.



**LSA2 Tower loudspeaker**  
£2,500 per pair

It's big and plain and looks like 'nothing special'. But 'special' is exactly what it is, delivering the clarity, speed and slam of the electronics with control and plenty of conviction.

**“A thick timber front plate resembling, in hue, the mid-way swatch in a Cuprinol garden fence colour chart. ‘Rustic’ hardly does it justice.”**



■ centre-facia button marked 'power' (wooden, of course) the backlit neon blue logo just above it lights up so bright that if you plonked the player on a harbour wall, it could guide sea-tossed shipping to safety. Further oddities include a cheap LCD display in a not quite matching shade of blue, a row of tiny facia buttons of uncertain action, an incongruously sumptuous and weighty, wooden-cheeked remote and a tediously tardy response to any command following the closure of the disc drawer. And it costs £1,350. Which might seem like a lot for what some will see as an aesthetic/operational basket case. But then it doesn't really sound like a CD player at all. It sounds like a high quality turntable. Weird then, and, it seems, rather wonderful.

### THREE OUT OF THREE AIN'T BAD

So, two rare gems in one system – what are the chances of that? Somewhat greater, of course, than having three. But guess what? Sometimes, just sometimes... The thing about the speakers in this month's *Beautiful System* is that they look so – how to put this? – so crushingly self-effacing. All right, if you peer around the back you notice each sports an additional, rear-firing tweeter to enhance ambience.

And yes, the enclosures have modestly curved sides that are narrower at the rear than the front. But that's it. It's the sort of three-driver, front-ported tower that wears its anonymity on its sleeve: a design so dull, ditchwater might consider taking out a libel action. But, as regular readers of this feature will know, it's the sonic beauty that lies beneath the surface that really counts and, on that basis, well, Naomi Campbell isn't worthy to polish its terminals, though given her recently acquired skills, she'd probably make a good job of it.

It doesn't always follow, of course, that a system's performance amounts to more than the sum of its parts, but we were happy to put our faith in the hint dropped by John Jeffries of *The Sounds of Music* – arguably the UK's most complete one-stop high-end shop – that, despite the prodigious individual talents gathered here, their collaboration would be more extraordinary still.

Actually, it's not such a far-fetched prediction, as the speakers come from the house of Larry (LSA), too. And in line with the company's stated approach to hi-fi, focus on seamless integration of the various drivers, and a dynamic, uncompressed midrange with the aim of "bringing vocals and instruments alive in your home". The £2,500 LSA2 Tower, as

it's called, employs a 25mm silk dome tweeter, a 175mm natural paper midrange unit and a 175mm natural paper bass driver. The rear-firing 'ambient' tweeter is frequency-limited (8-20kHz) but you can set the output level on to suit your own taste.

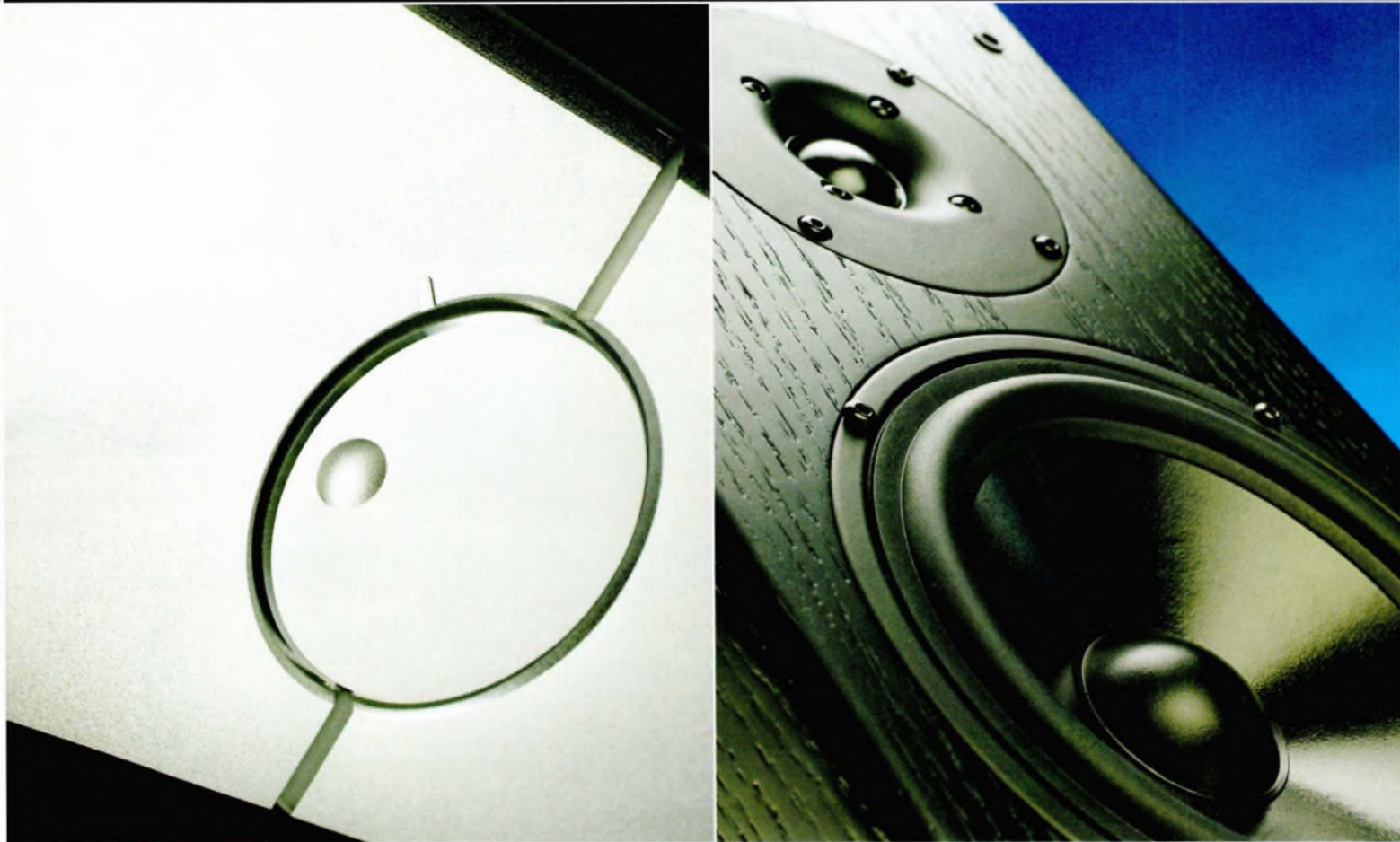
### SHAPETIME CONTINUUM

According to Larry Staples, a lot of time and effort went into getting the tapered shape of the cabinet just right for optimum sound quality. And just as much care went into the crossover design. The third order crossover between the tweeter and midrange driver is said to help eliminate the beaming effects that can occur when midrange drivers are asked to perform above their optimal range. The sharp slope of a third order lowers the crossover point from the typical 3kHz to 2kHz. As Staples says: "We at LSA are musicians and music lovers. You can always expect that anything we put our name on sounds like music".

Too modest, Larry. What this system delivers is a synergistic *tour de force*, from the sublime, analogue-like charms of the Edgar CD player, the astonishing best-of-all-worlds compass of the hybrid amp and the altogether wrong-footing sonic reach of such dour-looking speakers. It makes music as few *Beautiful Systems*







**“What hits you first is the sheer immediacy and physicality of the sound and its wonderful intimacy; the sense that all there is between you and the performers is fresh air.”**

have. With a reach-out-and-touch realism that takes your breath away.

Where to start? What hits you first is the sheer immediacy and physicality of the sound and its wonderful intimacy; the sense that all there is between you and the performers is fresh air. By comparison, most averagely capable hi-fi sounds veiled, soft and blurred round the edges. And foot-draggingly slow. Without lapsing into aggression or sounding in any way ‘lightweight’ the system’s ability to deliver lightning-fast transients without blunting or, indeed, hyping the leading edge is revelatory.

**THE PLANK CONSTANT**

And it isn’t just pace and detail that are stunning. The system’s just as potent in the areas of resolution and texture. This gives life and structure to CDs, which might previously have been considered less than sparkling examples of the digital art. The Edgar CD player might look like a plank, but it plays like a star. We’re frankly stunned at what it’s capable

of for the money. Its openness and ability to render subtle ambient cues with scalp tingling realism are especially impressive. Densely produced material – Barry Adamson’s *The King of Notting Hill* is about as glutinous as it comes – is unravelled effortlessly and projected with a natural sense of scale and perspective. The music comes to you; you don’t have to concentrate to hear exactly what’s going on. Simpler tunes are handled with the same majestic confidence and authority, Boz Scaggs’ voice being captured with just the right degree of nasality on *Runnin’ Blue* from 1971. Most importantly of all, although this system’s powers of analysis are fabulously acute, they don’t result in a cold, clinical sound. Far from it: an entirely natural-sounding balance, supports remarkable levels of musical insight. Take Chris Botti’s baleful trumpet on *Regroovable* (from *The Very Best of Chris Botti*): smooth and sonorous yet imbued with precisely the right amount of bite. Bass is fleet-footed, tuneful and articulate but convincingly

weighty and extended. It isn’t just this system’s ability to track a rhythm that makes it absorbing, but a rarer skill in cutting to the heart of the music without being too forensic.

Sure, this is a system that needs some understanding, most likely an attitude adjustment, too. Its looks are an unusual blend of butch, boring and endearingly quirky, the supersized amp needs a sturdy table of its own, and the speakers some breathing space if the rear-firing tweeter is to work effectively.

But, believe me, it’s worth making the effort. For a system costing ‘just’ £6,350, it’s very serious indeed and the amp is a sensation. Frankly, this system gets it so right, you’d be forgiven for wondering what the makers of vastly pricier kit have been playing at. Possibly phoning in their designs from the beach?

Make no mistake, this is one of the very best *Beautiful Systems* to date, which makes it astounding value. A personal favourite. **HFC**

David Vivian



Award winning musical sound  
Lifetime warranty  
Sexy design



## The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

The new reference integrated amplifier from Densen is perhaps the most advanced integrated amp on the market. It is filled with advanced solutions, which all share the goal of giving you even more musicality and flexibility. The B-150 is basically a scaled down version of the B-250 and B-350 (Densen's reference pre/power combo) in one box with all the high end ingredients such as relay driven volume control, zero feedback technology, custom-made components and much more.

However, there is much more to a perfect product than just superior sound quality. It is our intention to make complete products. Not just products that are sonically superior, but complete like a perfect circle. As you learn about Densen, you'll discover that we go the extra mile in every aspect: design, user-friendliness, quality, warranty, upgradeability, production methods and of course sound quality. But you really won't have a clue about it all until you get to hear and see what we're talking about in real life. Then you will know what we mean when we say Air-Guitar factor (say what? check our website). There is one Air-Guitar / Air-Baton included with every Densen product.

Discover why we say:

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



Best Integrated Amp  
Portugal 2006

### Authorised dealers:

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Densen Audio Technologies - Phone: (+45) 75 18 12 14 - E-mail: mail@densen.dk

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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

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 well-civilised players for this money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC** Jason Kennedy

**VERDICT**

**SOUND** → 83%

**FEATURES** → 85%

**BUILD** → 85%

**VALUE** → 85%

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



# Naim and address

*A big integrated amp was an obvious gap in Naim's portfolio. The SuperNait addresses that beautifully*

**PRODUCT** Naim SuperNait

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £2,350

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.2x8.7x31.4cm

• Weight: 14.8kg • Inputs: six analogue, five digital, power supply input, MP3 player mini-jack, headphone minijack, power amp inputs • Outputs: two tape, loudspeaker terminals, preamp outputs • Power output: 80 watts per channel • On-board DAC

**CONTACT** ☎ 01722 426600 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

If you happen to be an aspiring Naim owner but don't relish the thought of accommodating a multitude of boxes and the attendant wiring, the SuperNait might just represent your ideal choice of amplifier. This new top-end integrated model combines all the typical attributes of the company's electronics – both the distinctive sonic performance and the upgradeability and versatility – with the convenience of being a

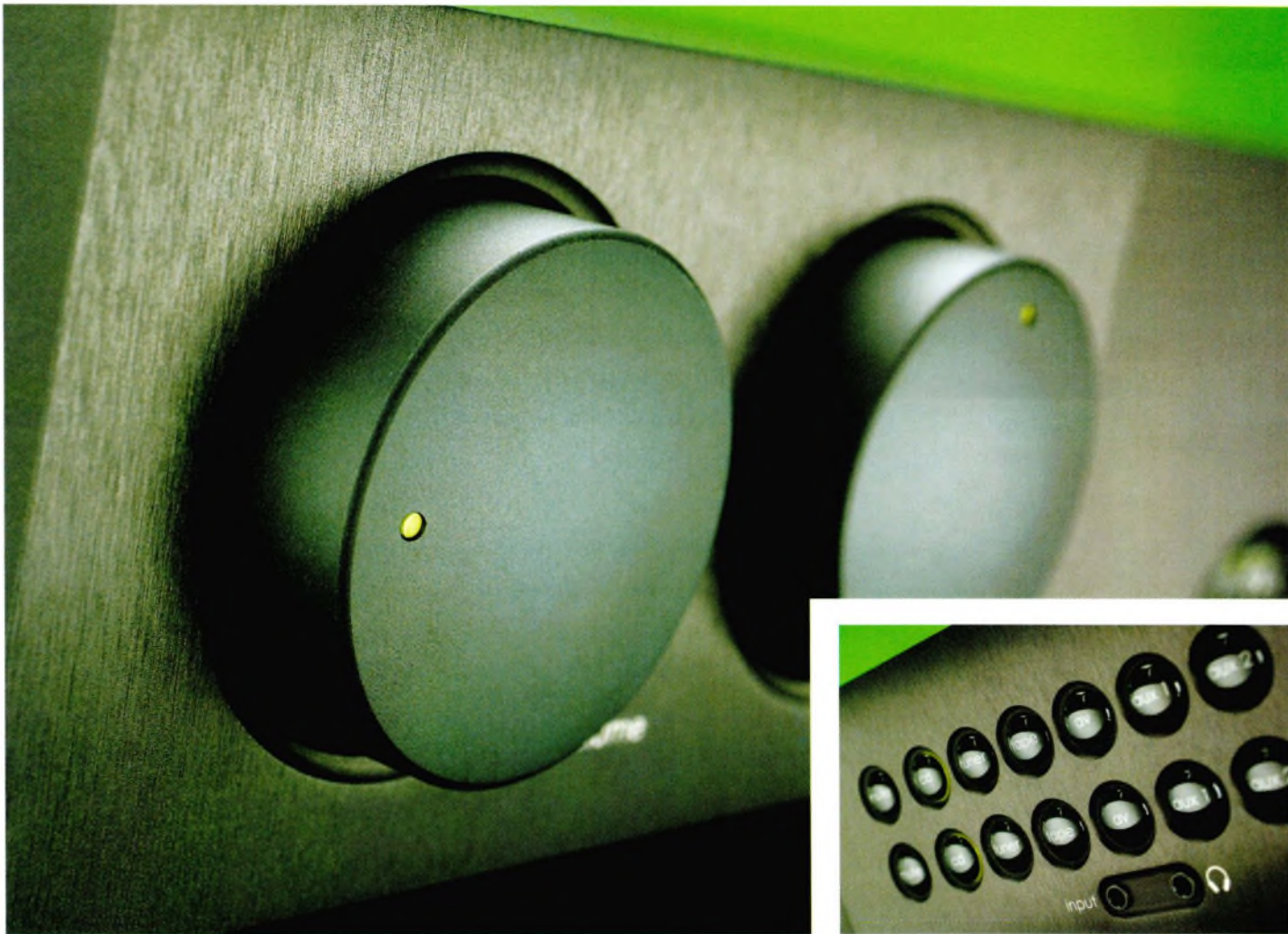
neat, single-box design that would be easily incorporated into any home.

A quick read of its specifications will convince you that it has all the up-to-date technology that one might reasonably require nowadays. There are integral digital inputs and re-clocking conversion, an iPod socket, a headphone jack, further socketry to enable it to act either as a preamplifier or a power amplifier in a bi-amplified system, remote control and 'intelligent home' connectivity, while its sound should easily convince all but the most musically illiterate of its worth.

The latter point is something to which we will return in detail later, but for the moment we will say that the SuperNait's musical performance is utterly amazing. In hi-fi terms, it is exemplary, but in musical terms, the way in which it reproduces recordings is beyond the wildest imaginings of someone (like me) who has been using Naim's top-of-the-range pre and power amplifiers for more than two decades.

The SuperNait, it should be understood, slots into Naim's range at the 'reference' end of the spectrum. It is not a 5-series component. Not that there's anything wrong with the 5-series, but the all-in-one nature and facilities of the SuperNait might make some people regard it as some sort of 'Naim-lite' product, despite its £2,350 price tag. Believe us, it most definitely is not watered down in any respect. As Naim's sales manager, Doug Graham said: "This is a serious addition to the Naim range; one that will connect you with the music and the (increasingly important) boy's toys." Listening to it in my own system has utterly convinced me that he meant what he said.

First, let's get the boring mechanical details out of the way: the SuperNait offers 80 watts per channel and 400VA output for transients thanks to the expected, over-engineered, dedicated power supplies that Naim always puts into its designs. Note that this is not a switching power supply, but a 'proper',



meat-eating, bourbon-drinking, toroidal transformer with seven discrete windings. Inputs include six of the analogue variety and five digital (two coaxial and three optical, including a combination mini-jack/mini-Toslink connector with auto-switching on the front panel). The digital board powers down when an analogue input is selected, to clean up the electrical environment and to eliminate any audiophile paranoia.

Those not wishing to stick with single-box elegance can add external power supplies to the unit – Flat-Cap, Hi-Cap or Super-Cap – or can even combine the SuperNait with a secondary power amplifier to bi-amplify suitable speakers.

The preamplifier section, which was derived from the high-end NAC 282 design, offers separate record and listen selectors on the front panel, and around at the back, an RS232 port for custom installation applications and a subwoofer output, which, given my experiences using the SuperNait, would seem a tad superfluous.

Before describing how the SuperNait sounds, it's worth mentioning that the amplifier is built into Naim's usual, bomb-proof, triptych aluminium casework as used in the Reference series models and uses multi-layer PCBs. As

**“Note that this is not a switching power supply, but a ‘proper’ meat-eating, bourbon-drinking toroidal transformer.”**

usual, the inputs are the preferred DIN types but these are duplicated with RCA phono connections for the benefit of those who have yet to see the light, as well as those who enjoy playing with trick cables.

Because of the tight deadlines involved in this article, Naim rushed one of the first SuperNaits that it finished round to us on the same day that Neat delivered a pair of the Motive 1 loudspeakers. You might imagine that two new products (new to me, at least) would not be a wise pairing but we decided to hook them both up for a listen, and to give them both a thorough, simultaneous warm-up. Much to our surprise and delight, this turned out to be a marriage made in heaven. Each product gelled with the other to form what proved to be an intensely satisfying and dynamic musical joint venture. We used a variety of analogue and digital sources with this combination including CD players from Saxon and Roksan, a Cambridge Audio Azur

640H music server, an Apple Mac Pro laptop, and, as the final arbiter, my own Naim CDS CD player. Cables were a mix of Naim, Chord Company and various manufacturers' logo-free interconnects, and Chord Company Signature loudspeaker cables.

#### SOUND QUALITY

We mentioned the SuperNait's musical performance a little earlier in this review and it is in this respect that the design truly stands way above most other integrated amplifiers we have heard – and a great many pre/power combinations, too. It does all the hi-fi stuff very well, of course, but it's the way it puts music together that really makes it shine. This is a concept that seems lost on many listeners, not to mention some reviewers, but which, for me, has always been Naim equipment's greatest strength. It's a hard concept to explain but I'll do my best: we sat listening to a selection of CDs recorded by Telecaster ▶

## Q&A

We spoke to Doug Graham, Naim Audio's sales manager, about the SuperNait, and precisely where it fits in the Naim pantheon



**HFC** This new integrated seems a radical departure from its predecessors. Is it?

**DG** The earlier Nait's (shorthand for Naim Audio integrated) were meant as entry-level introductions to our brand. The new amplifier reflects how an increasing number of people now live and their connectivity requirements. The ability to re-clock and convert digital info streams from various sources properly is indeed radical for a Nait.

**The SuperNait seemed discriminating about sources. Is that a good thing?**

Our starting point for this project was obtaining great performance out of a single box. The analogue stuff came first, which meant a lot of work and know-how went into the preamp section. It had to let you know what was being fed into it and had to be of sufficient quality to respond to the power supply upgrade options that we provide.

**Did implementing the on-board DAC involve a great deal of work?**

We knew the DAC chipset well from our work on our DVD5, so we were confident that, used in this application with our own de-jitter circuit, it would yield great performance. Managing the power supply to the DAC was very important as was the software implementation. DACs are much more complicated to make perform well than most people (including other manufacturers) think.

**Can you connect a turntable to the SuperNait?**

It has an 'Aux 2' socket that can power a Stageline or a Prefix phono stage.

**What speakers, other than your own, does the SuperNait work successfully with?**

We've just returned from a show where one of our dealers was using the new Kudos brand: the C10 and C20 seemed to be a very good match. Other than that, Neat speakers have shown some impressive synergy. The SuperNait is very capable with difficult speaker loads: you might be surprised by what it ends up driving.



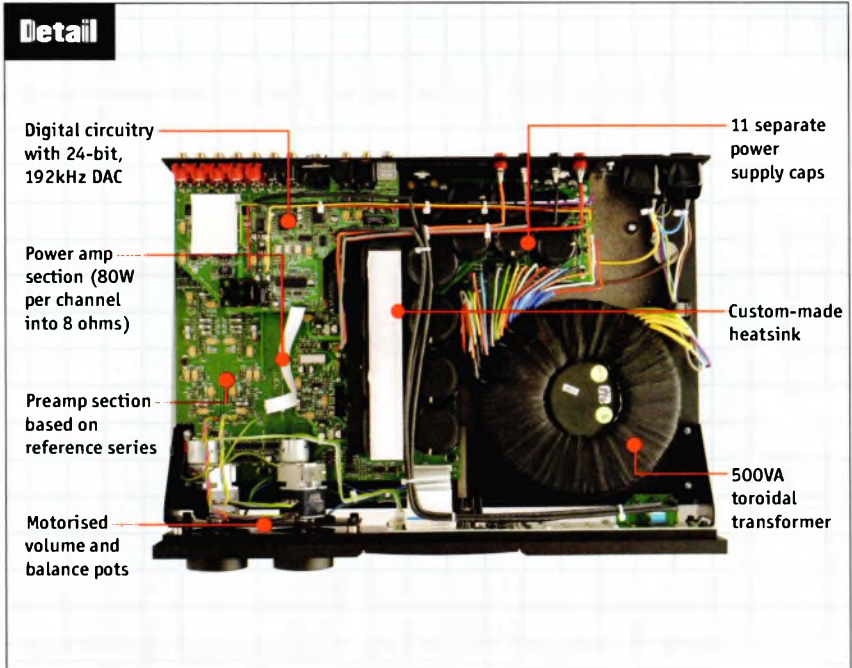
maestro, Steve Cropper and blues ace, Robert Ward. Neither of these guys is an outwardly impressive player – certainly not in terms of today's million-notes-a-minute shredder guitarists, yet the SuperNait easily revealed that it was their phrasing, tone, and the choice of notes they played as well as those they left out that marked them out as being a cut above journeyman players.

This wasn't just the usual Pace, Rhythm and Timing thing: certainly all the temporal clues were present and correct but the SuperNait and the Neats seemed able to dig deeper still into the music and get to those telling, often quite deeply submerged, nuances with immeasurable dexterity. For example, several times we found ourselves involuntarily

smiling as Vernon Reid ripped through *We People Who Are Darker Than Blue* from the Curtis Mayfield tribute album *People Get Ready*, awe-struck by his harmonic sensitivity and the subtle detuning he uses to great effect on the track.

It's not that other hi-fi amplifiers and speakers don't render such information but simply that the SuperNait portrays it in such a way that one can't easily ignore it, or its influence on the music as a whole. The SuperNait and Neat Motives are an ideal coupling for anyone who wants to transcribe songs to write guitar or bass tablature, for example. Was that a quarter-note bend or a half note? The SuperNait will provide the answer with clarity and gusto.





**“It is a wonderfully cohesive-sounding amplifier and it has no problems knitting together diverse musical strands.”**

In a recent conversation with one of the UK's most influential loudspeaker designers and semi-pro jazz players, I was told that few systems truly recreate bass with any real semblance of pitch. He had obviously not heard this system, which seemed uncannily able to convey low frequencies with vivid realism and conviction. We don't mean make-you-soil-your-underwear, AV subwoofer style bass, but really powerful lows replete with note-shape, intonation, tone and attack/delay envelopes by the truckload. The Motive 1s clearly played a valuable role in this instance, but they could only do what the amplifier was instructing them to do and the SuperNait was gripping them in a vice-like fashion. And this was at levels varying from a mere whisper to a full-on ear-bleeding assault. The amplifier's exemplary timing ensured that despite the metronomic regularity and precision of low frequencies, the idiosyncrasies of whoever was playing were still allowed through to full effect.

Earlier we touched on the subject of cables, with which the SuperNait, with its copious connections, lends itself to experimentation. And experiment we did, with both sources and cables. The amplifier proved to be especially open and revealing of sources. The Naim CDS quickly established itself as the source of choice. The Hi-Line cable then proved why it costs as much as it does by vaingloriously trouncing a selection of other high-end and more lowly interconnects. Again, this wasn't an 'Oh, the treble sounds sweeter' type of hi-fi

decision. It was far more relevant than that: while Aimee Mann sounded pleasant but nothing special as a vocalist on her *Whatever* CD through regular cables, her voice sounded quite magical through the Hi-Line; similarly, Lightning Hopkins' guitar work took on an even more meaningful and expressive demeanour through the better cable. We've tried this comparison through many systems and never before heard results so clearly night-and-day. The same was true when swapping a supplied component digital cable with the Chord Company's Optichord Toslink lead. The differences in the performance and presentation were truly dramatic. And we had the benefit of a very experienced listener – and equally cynical friend – providing a reality-check as we switched leads.

Comparing the SuperNait with a NAC 122X and NAP 200 combination was equally enlightening, with the integrated model more than holding its own against the pre/power set-up. We dare suggest that anyone who was set on having one box instead of more in their living room would scarcely determine any musical difference between the presentation of the two systems. One listener preferred the SuperNait, feeling its view of music sounded more clearly etched and decisive. And, on several tracks, we felt inclined to agree with him. Certainly it is a wonderfully cohesive sounding amplifier and has no problems knitting together diverse musical strands: no better did it display this facility than with tracks from Tower Of Power's *Soul Vaccination*

CD, where the steamroller bass thundered along relentlessly, with outstanding fluidity and clearly defined pitch. All the while, the staccato horns and muted guitar chops punctuated its flow with their relevant, but delightfully incisive and coherent interjections.

And that appears to be the Naim SuperNait's forte: pair it with a good source, capable loudspeakers, and don't scrimp on the cables, and it will nail a surprising smile to your face permanently, irrespective of your musical inclinations. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 93%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Musically riveting. High-end Naim quality meets the plug-and-play generation. Not simply a BigNait, this one takes on Naim's own pre/power combos in a fair fight... and the result's a draw.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 90%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Its openness doesn't always favour lesser quality source components, and even interconnect cables.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 90%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 92%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A superb high-end introduction to the Naim sound that might just satisfy you for a life-time. The SuperNait combines a truly engrossing musical performance with single-box simplicity and forward-thinking connectivity. We love it!	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 92%</b>	

# Hype-free hi-fi

*This latest incarnation of Quad's timeless electrostatic is dramatically beefed up*

**PRODUCT** Quad ESL 2805

**TYPE** Floorstanding electrostatic loudspeaker

**PRICE** £4,500 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD) 70x107x39cm

• Weight 35kg • Four electrostatic panels, forming a

single planar diaphragm • Plinth incorporates

electronics and substantial mass-loading • Tensioned

rear strut enhances overall mechanical integrity

• Single wired with mains socket for panel energiser

electronics • Sensitivity equivalent to 84dB • Nominal

impedance eight ohms

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 447700 🌐 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

This is the fiftieth anniversary of a hi-fi legend. It was 1957 when Quad stunned the hi-fi world by introducing the first full-range speaker based on an electrostatic (as distinct from the usual electro-dynamic) principle of operation.

That original Electrostatic (for that was its formal name) stayed in production for more than two decades. Its successor, codenamed the ESL-63 (because work started in 1963), didn't actually appear until late 1981, and

remained perpetually back-ordered until the mid-1990s, when it became impossible to build within modern safety standards.

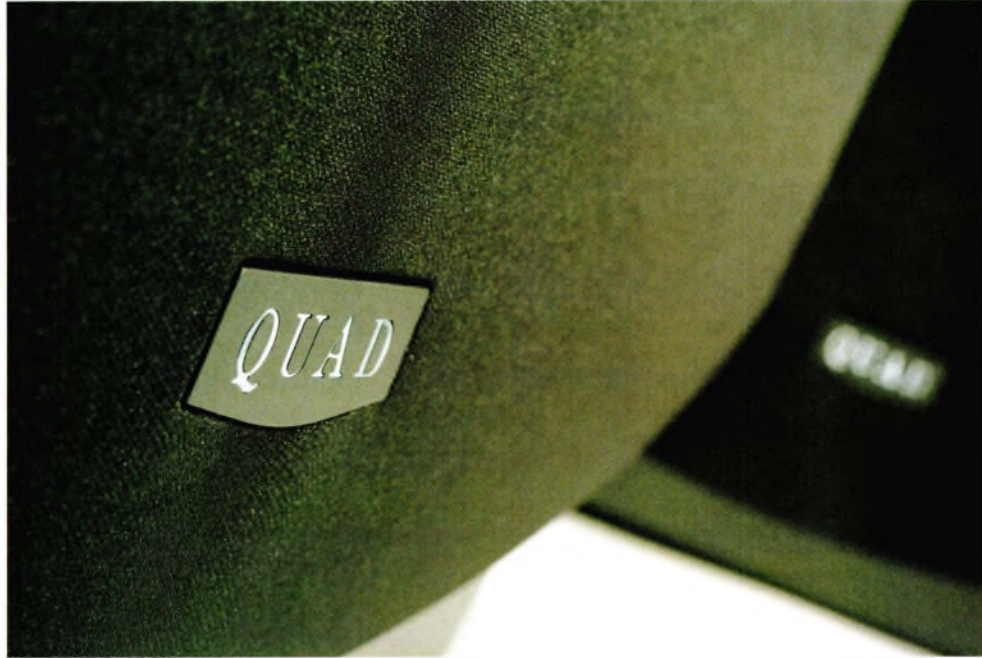
Come the millennium, with the brand stabilised under IAG control, the electrostatic speakers had gone back into production, with two models rather than one. The ESL-988 and ESL-989 were based closely on the ESL-63, while incorporating a number of changes, partly to satisfy safety legislation, and to strengthen the speaker mechanically.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine







Further development work since then has served up two new versions – the ESL 2805, plus its bigger '2905 brother. Both models now have substantial steel and alloy frames, extended fabricated steel bases fitted with 8kg mass-loading billets, and a hefty strut that braces the top of the frame against the back of the base, and there are further improvements to the baffle plates and their mountings.

While it's exceptionally slim when viewed from the side, like any panel speaker it's also very bulky from the front, standing just over a metre tall and more than two thirds of a metre wide. Apart from the silver alloy extrusions that form the sides, and a curved gloss-black top, most of this is black grille, creating a sombre monolithic effect, but a gilt edge/brown grille classic version is also available. Decoration is limited to an illuminated Quad logo near the base on the front, which can be turned off.

Electrostatics operate on a totally different principle from conventional moving-coil drivers, generating their sound output from a series of large panels of ultra-light plastic film – six in the 2905, four here – stretched between high voltage charged plates and all working as one big panel. This distinct approach has numerous consequences, the most significant being that the panel radiates sound equally forwards and backwards, but the radiation of each is out of phase with the other, so where they mix (at the sides), they cancel each other out.

It's known as dipole or doublet operation. This front-to-back cancellation also means that the absolute bass extension is actually determined by the width of the panel. Dipole operation results in a figure-eight sound radiation pattern, rather than the substantially spherical pattern created by a conventional box loudspeaker, and this has several implications. The sound is delivered forward and back, but much less goes up, down or to the sides,

**“Because the diaphragm is large, and therefore makes only tiny movements, linearity is high and distortion very low.”**

resulting in a high direct-to-reflected sound ratio. It also allows the speakers to be placed close to side walls.

This latest ESL features improved materials for greater mechanical integrity and sonic transparency, but at its heart is still Quad's extremely clever 'delay line' approach, originally introduced in the ESL-63. The problem with any large-area diaphragm is that it will radiate higher frequencies in an increasingly narrow beam, whereas the ideal would be to maintain constant directivity at all frequencies. This is a major reason why most speaker systems have two or more drive units, the addition of a tweeter providing wide directivity at high frequencies. The Quad design is different: it may sport two outer panels flanking a pair of smaller central panels, but these elements are fed the same frequencies and there are no 'treble' and 'bass' units... and no need for a crossover.

All Quad electrostatics (from the ESL-63 onwards) have eight concentric rings in the two centre stators, connected via delay lines that progressively delay the feed to the larger, outer rings. This allows a flat diaphragm to mimic a point source one-third of a metre behind the speaker itself, with the highest frequencies generated from the innermost circle outward. In other words, the speaker attempts to recreate a notionally 'perfect' transducer.

#### SOUND QUALITY

Because the electrostatic 2805 operates on an entirely different principle from regular dynamic speaker systems, all the rules are changed, and

a totally different set of compromises emerges. In some respects, the 2805 sets a performance benchmark that even the most costly regular speakers can only dream of approaching; in other respects it has obvious and exasperatingly recalcitrant limitations.

Providing your choice of music and listening levels suit its strengths – and for many that will be the case – the 2805 is one of serious hi-fi's greatest bargains. It's unquestionably best at reproducing acoustic instruments (including voices), but has its limitations in both loudness capability (partly due to very low sensitivity) and deep bass reproduction (as a consequence of dipole operation).

Because there's no box, there's no boxiness. And because the actual weight of the Mylar film diaphragm is less than one hundredth the weight of even a light driver cone, and is effectively evenly driven across its entire surface, it is exceptionally responsive to even the tiniest signals. Furthermore, because the diaphragm is large, and therefore makes only tiny movements, linearity is high and distortion very low.

Changing over from a conventional speaker to the 2805 can be a little disorienting, because the differences in presentation are dramatic. This speaker has the most stunningly gorgeous midband you're ever likely to hear, combining remarkable neutrality with great expression and delicacy. There's also an inherent sweetness here that results from a splendid freedom from any exaggeration or hype.

The 'Quad' sound has wonderful coherence and unusual phase-accuracy, bringing ▶



**POSITIONING**

Placing the Quad for best results can be tricky. Because it radiates sound in a figure-eight pattern, with the rearward output out of phase with the front, it's vital to get the speaker as far away from a rearward wall as practically feasible. Conversely, the output towards the sides is effectively nulled, so the speakers can be placed quite close to side walls without messing up the imaging.

The highest frequencies do show some beaming, so for best results the speakers should be directed precisely towards the most favoured listening seat.

Although the considerable total weight with its plinth mass-loading will create practical difficulties, the enthusiastic might well try raising the speaker clear of the floor. This might well help counter any tendency towards 'lumpy' bass. Note, however, that if the speaker is raised higher, the vertical tilt will need to be adjusted to compensate.

**SYSTEM MATCHING**

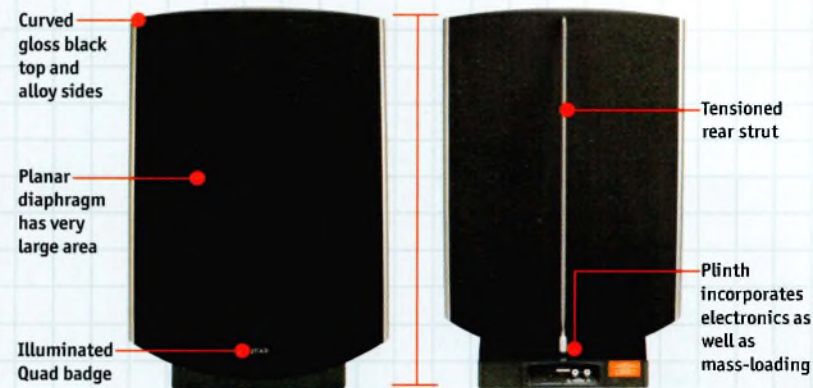
The 2805 is not an unduly difficult amplifier load, inasmuch as the impedance stays above 3.5 ohms throughout, averaging around eight ohms. The low sensitivity (c84dB) does mean that the partnering amplifier will need to provide a healthy voltage swing to achieve full loudness capability, though that is constrained by ultimate power handling. Amplifiers with power ratings in the 50W-100W per channel range would seem the most suitable.

The 2805 is exceptionally sensitive to the components further up the hi-fi chain. Its innate midband sweetness proved well suited to valve amplification, and it's also worth spending some time experimenting with different sources and speaker cables.

It's tempting to add a subwoofer or two, but it's very difficult to achieve a good match. That's partly because the Quad is a velocity transducer and nearly all subwoofers are pressure devices, but also because few subwoofers have filtering only between 20Hz and 40Hz



**Detail**



remarkable realism to human voices, and creating exceptionally precise stereo images. Piano and woodwind reproduction also stands out as startlingly realistic, though brass can get a little edgy. However, these observations could well relate as much to the sources, amplification and ancillaries being used as the speakers themselves, as the 2805s proved exceptionally sensitive to components further up the chain.

Contributing to the pin-point imaging is the fact that dipole speakers have a much higher direct-to-reflected sound ratio than monopole box loudspeakers. In other words, you hear more of the actual recording, and less of your listening room. The pinpoint imaging is most impressive, but there's still some beaming of the very highest frequencies here, so best results are obtained when the listener is seated directly on the forward axis – and there's really only one 'best seat in the house'.

While much of this speaker's sound is deeply impressive, there are some limitations. The bass extension is defined by the width of the speaker here, and limited to around 50Hz, so the bottom octave is not on the agenda. It might be possible to supply the extra bass octave with some form of subwoofery, but this is far from straightforward, as the Quads are

velocity transducers, whereas most subwoofers are pressure devices. Attempts to use two of REL's new T-series subwoofers did not prove successful. Despite the limited extension, the bass reproduction of the Quads alone is qualitatively good – crisp and clean, with no overhang, though it could be more even, and one wonders whether some

means of lifting the whole speaker 10-20cm or so off the ground, leaving free air underneath, might be advantageous.

The 2805 has both low sensitivity (around 84dB) and relatively modest power handling (though sophisticated electronic protection ensures that accidental overload won't cause any damage). This is not therefore the ideal speaker for those who like their rock music loud and dirty, but in contrast its low level performance is utterly entrancing. One day the BBC in its wisdom chose to broadcast Verdi's exceptionally dynamic *Requiem* after 2am, when serious levels are totally impractical. But the 2805 performs masterfully even at whisper quiet levels, and the rich texture and detail came through beautifully. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*



**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 94%**



**PRO**

Magnificent midband with great coherence, fine neutrality and exceptional low-level detailing. Can sound eerily realistic and delivers pin-point stereo imaging.

**EASE OF DRIVE >> 80%**



**BUILD >> 89%**



**CON**

Limited bass weight and loudness capability is less well suited to rock. Can be system fussy, and needs to be well clear of rearward wall.

**VALUE >> 88%**



**CONCLUSION**

Within acknowledged loudness and bass limitations, this genuine 'high-end' reproducer sets the standard for natural realism of voices and acoustic instruments. Not a great rocker, but imaging, coherence and low-level detailing are exceptional.

**HI-FI CHOICE** >>> **91%**  
**OVERALL SCORE**

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A Meridian F80 hi-fi system is shown inside a red Ferrari helmet. The helmet's interior is black with a textured surface. The hi-fi system is black and features a control panel at the top with several buttons and a small display. The Meridian logo, a prancing horse, is visible on the front of the system. The helmet's exterior is a vibrant red. The background is a solid purple color.

BBC Radio 3

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



# Life in the fast lane

*Meridian joins forces with Ferrari to make the world's best portable hi-fi system*

**PRODUCT** Meridian F80

**TYPE** Tabletop hi-fi system

**PRICE** £1,495

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD) 40.8x23x18.5cm

• Weight: 6.5kg • DVD/CD player, DAB/AM/FM tuner • Integral 2.1-channel speaker system • 80 watts per channel • Inputs: 2x aerial, 1x 3.5mm analogue, 1x 3.5mm digital, mini-DIN for iPod dock • Outputs: composite video, S-Video, 3.5mm digital/headphone • Available in Ferrari red, yellow, black, silver and white

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 445678 # www.thef80.com

**W**hen you think about it, Meridian Audio and Ferrari are made for one another. Both make luxury products mere mortals aspire to and both produce high technology design classics among the best you can own in their respective fields. So, putting the two together in one cool product is logical, and the result is a masterpiece.

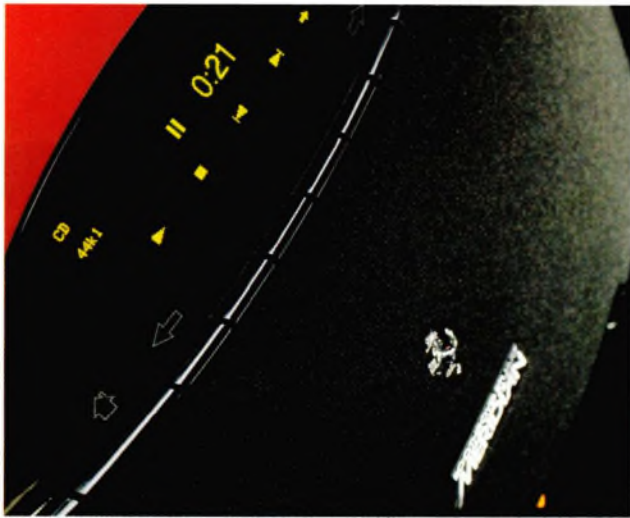
The F80 is a one-box, tabletop system – two speakers in the front, a subwoofer in the back

and 80 watts of grunt and a lot of DSP in-between. Well, underneath – the electronics sit in a floorpan, save for a dashboard at the top of the arch. Everything else, from the slot-loading DVD/CD player, to the toroidal transformer for the power supply and the array of connections, stands a couple of centimetres from the player's feet. This electronics housing is known as the 'engine' and the body is the 'chassis'. The Ferrari connection, you know.

Ferrari engineers took the basic 'engine' concept and designed the shape, and sourced the materials for the admirably stiff and acoustically dead body. The five Ferrari-colours (Ferrari red... oh yes!) cover a mineral-loaded composite arch. This has a squidgy plastic volume knob to one side; below the top of the arch is the control panel for the DVD/CD player, DAB/AM/FM tuner and 2.1-channel amplifier stage with optional inputs. This uses smart buttons that change function depending on what section of the F80 you are using at

the time. Fortunately, the display panel is just as smart as the buttons and little yellow on black words help define what button does what. There's even a S-Video-sized mini-DIN socket designed for an iPod dock. At the back of the arch is a grab handle – although the F80 is not battery powered, it is transportable. It's also surprisingly heavy.

The F80 all about as simple to use as they come (most people would be hard-pressed to ever reach for the manual and once you have set the clock, the F80 is more or less good to go), but 'simple' isn't 'unsophisticated'. There are neat touches, like the twin aerial inputs, with an internal aerial for AM. And, given the likelihood of this system going in the open-plan kitchens of the rich and famous, the small remote control doubles up as a fridge magnet and has splashproof buttons. Both the remote and main unit have the Ferrari prancing horse logo on them, which causes surprising amounts of excitement.



**“Impressive, too, is the effect it has upon non-audiophile ‘muggles’. It’s like cat-nip for hi-fi widows; they love it.”**

Despite Meridian's DVD-Audio connection, the F80 skips over this format, going for CD and DVD-Video, plus WMA/MP3 coded CD-Rs. Video nuts may find the lack of an HDMI output to be limiting in this day and age (there's just composite and S-Video), but this is missing the point – the F80 isn't a replacement for a full-size hi-fi or home cinema set-up, but as a funky and convenient tabletop system it's a whole lot more sophisticated than your average portable stereo!

This is a bold departure for Meridian, although Ferrari – with its collaboration with Girard-Perregaux watches, Montegrappa pens, Acer laptops – is getting used to brand building exercises like this. Meridian Audio has always been considered 'the Ferrari of hi-fi'... now it gets to live up to that claim.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Okay, so it doesn't sound like a V12 on song. But neither does it sound like the table radio you might expect it to sound like, given its stature. There seems to be some serious misunderstanding about the F80 – some people think it's an expensive toy with a Ferrari badge, but in fact it's entry-level Meridian Audio kit, with all the high-end, hi-tech that entails. Remember that as a full Meridian system, this is extremely cheap!

What the F80 does remarkably well is fill a room with sound. Surprisingly big rooms, too. We had it fill a large office reception with



opera and swamped an entire house with the sound of baa-lambs when playing *The Archers* on DAB. Under any setting, this is impressive stuff – it has the dynamic range and sheer energy to make that integrated 2.1 system sound like it's a pair of big floorstanding loudspeakers hooked to a meaty amp. But it doesn't seem like this big sound is made at the expense of any clarity; there's no mid-bass suck-out (a common failing of many similar systems) or overt honking sounds... it just sounds big and powerful.

That Ferrari chassis does make a lot of sense, forming an inert enclosure and protecting the internals from vibration. This is of particular value with an integrated system like this, where the electronics are not physically separated from the speakers by several metres of air and cable. It means no stray buzzes, no feedback and no resonance, even at high volumes.

Each source performs similarly well, although the S-Video output does automatically limit the performance of the DVD-Video picture. Meridian has a long-standing reputation for high-quality CD replay, and the F80 doesn't let the side down. The sound is detailed, gently extended (but not aggressive) in the treble, solid and architectural in the bass and

articulate in the midrange. DAB gets admirably close to the CD performance, although it seems to be fractionally curtailed in the treble (perhaps to keep the worst excesses of DAB at bay), while FM is brisk and clean and even AM is listenable.

Put it up against high-quality separates and the limitations begin to show. Stereo separation is in low gear and the overall sound, though rich and warm and powerful, isn't the most subtle around. The upper bass can sound overblown in smaller rooms, too. But, the point is, the F80 only loses out under close scrutiny – immensely impressive for an all-in-one, tabletop system.

Impressive, too, is the effect it has upon non-audiophile 'muggles'. It's like cat-nip for hi-fi widows; they love it and start asking you awkward questions about your 'proper' system. Reviewer's wives are not immune, either. "Aww, where did the arch-y thing go, I liked that" was the response when I boxed up the F80 that I was testing at home. Perhaps it's the sheer 'cool' this thing oozes that wins us all over. It looks the part, it sounds the part and you get to say "I own a Ferrari" – and mean it! **HFC**

Alan Sircom



**VERDICT**

<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 85%</b>	<b>PRO</b> It's got the Scudena prancing horse on the front and it sounds fantastic. It fills surprisingly big rooms with extremely competent sound. What more do you need?
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 93%</b>	<b>CON</b> Your other half will be asking awkward questions about why you need your bulky separates system... though the compact format has its sonic limits.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 92%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 90%</b>	

**CONCLUSION**  
Even without the Maranello connection, the F80 is small enough to replace a table radio, powerful enough to challenge your main hi-fi system and entertaining enough to leave you smiling. With the Ferrari touches... rev up that credit card!

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%**



# The Air bare bunch

*Pioneer returns to two-channel hi-fi with a purist player and amp, both with Air-studios tuning*

**PRODUCT** Pioneer PD-D6 and A-A6

**TYPE** CD/SACD player and integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £300 each

**KEY FEATURES** (PD-D6) Size (WxHxD): 42x10x34cm

• Weight: 4.5kg • Outputs: analogue (RCA phono), digital (electrical and optical) • Compatibility: CD (inc. CD-RW), SACD, MP3, WMA • (A-A6) Size (WxHxD): 42x10x36cm • Weight: 10kg • Inputs: 4 line, 1 phono (MM) • Outputs: Record, speaker (one set), headphone

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 600 1539 🌐 [www.pioneer.co.uk](http://www.pioneer.co.uk)

**R**emember Pioneer? The company was once a major player in the affordable hi-fi separates league, but in recent years it has focused its efforts more towards the AV and multimedia side of things – plasma TVs and the like. But someone at the firm clearly felt nostalgic for products like the A-400 (the amp that re-established the credibility of Japan in the affordable 'quality' hi-fi world) and so it's

back with a modest but purposeful line-up of two amps and a CD/SACD player. It's the '6' twins – the PD-D6 player and entry-point A-A6 integrated amp – that are tested here.

Pioneer is at pains to point out that final 'voicing' was carried out after listening tests at London's Air Studios, run by George Martin. The company's publicity also regales us with a list of design features built into the units, some (dual-mono construction, mechanical vibration control) more impressive than others (four times oversampling, Class AB output stage).

The PD-D6's construction is lightweight, though that's not necessarily a bad thing, as it's much easier to damp vibrations in thin metal. The transport is an open-frame affair and the main audio electronics board features a pair of high performance DSD/PCM DAC chips to handle the SACD and CD datastreams in their respective native formats. Upsampling is courtesy of Pioneer's 'Legato Link Pro', which is

just a slow-roll-off filter, though you can switch it off and have conventional sharp filtering instead. Power is sourced from a frame-type transformer and both units sport a distinctive aluminium front panel with an interesting shape to it, which we'll let the photo reveal to you.

The A-A6 amp is not quite as minimalist as it looks, with tone and balance controls accessed via the remote. Aside from that it's simple enough, with just four line-level inputs and a phono stage (MM only), one recording output and single speaker terminals. It's a heavy lump, thanks to the twin frame-type transformers, which feed separate capacitor banks for each channel via high-speed rectifiers. Each channel has its own generous heatsink, on which is mounted a single pair of bipolar output transistors. The main amp circuits use discrete transistors, while the input/preamp board sports a couple of op-amps and a multipurpose selector/volume/tone control chip.



**“Working as a pair, they fed us some good, clean sounds with a wide variety of source material and bounced along with the music.”**

Nice as these units look, they share an LCD logic that is slow to respond and so one may think commands have not been accepted when, in fact, they have. This is made far worse by the lack of next/previous track buttons on the PD-D6; from the front panel, one can only load discs, start and stop. On the A-A6, the volume knob is stiff to turn but wobbly on its shaft, while the selector is not very positive either. Oh, and the PD-D6 makes a lot of mechanical noise when playing, too.

**SOUND QUALITY**

All that said, there's plenty going for both the A-A6 and the PD-D6 sonically. Working as a pair, they fed us some good, clean sounds with a wide variety of source material and generally showed an aptitude to bounce along with the music. There's a well-rounded tonal balance with plenty of extension at both extremes and a fair-to-impressive helping of detail too, and the amp's low notional power rating didn't seem to be a serious hindrance.

The sound of the PD-D6 depends noticeably on whether Legato Link is turned on or off and we definitely preferred it 'off'. Despite the claims made for it, it merely allows more distortion through to the outputs, colouring the sound and reducing precision. 'Pure Audio', on the other hand, we found completely indistinguishable from the normal



setting (nor could we measure any effect due to it). The player has an even tonality, which extends with confidence into the bass, the treble being restricted in the way it flows. Detail is better than the amp's and in fact could pass without undue comment among considerably dearer players, while imaging is very clear laterally and has good depth, too.

SACD replay is particularly interesting as this is one of the least costly dedicated audio players available for the format. Here the PD-D6 really scores, sounding impressively close to £1,000-plus machines we've heard. Again, the treble may be less open and relaxed than some, but it's not far off and this is one of the best 'affordable' introductions to SACD we can think of just now.

The A-A6 amp makes a good, but perhaps not astonishing, impression. Its strong suit is probably its rhythmic energy, which makes for fun times with lively music, but its powers of analysis are probably about par for the course. If you want to be able to hear the finest details of what's happening in the middle of a mix, you'll have to spend a little more. Also, perhaps not surprisingly, the spatial resolution is some way behind what one expects these days from, say, a good £500 amp. A few £300-ish models can better the A-A6 there too, but you might have to put up with less bass drive.

Bass control is not half bad either, again not

exactly high-end but admirable for a budget amp. This is perhaps most welcome in quieter music, where subtle bass lines are clearly audible without unduly dominating. The high treble is clear and unforced, though it lacks a little air and can on occasion seem dry. The phono stage, similar in design to those in most competing amps, sounds similar to them, too. It's decent on a get-you-going basis but short on insight and a candidate for rapid upgrading if you expect to play a lot of LPs.

The pair mark a welcome return to hi-fi for Pioneer, but those expecting audio legends are asking too much. That said, they offer a good starting point for two-channel SACD replay, with particularly creditable bass. **HFC**

*Richard Black*



**VERDICT - PD-D6**

**SOUND >> 80%**



**FEATURES >> 80%**



**BUILD >> 76%**



**VALUE >> 86%**



**CONCLUSION**

Bass is admirable and treble never less than decent, with CD or SACD, and value is high, but we dislike the ergonomics and mechanical noise.

**HI-FI CHOICE >> 83%**

**VERDICT - A-A6**

**SOUND >> 76%**



**FEATURES >> 82%**



**BUILD >> 78%**



**VALUE >> 83%**



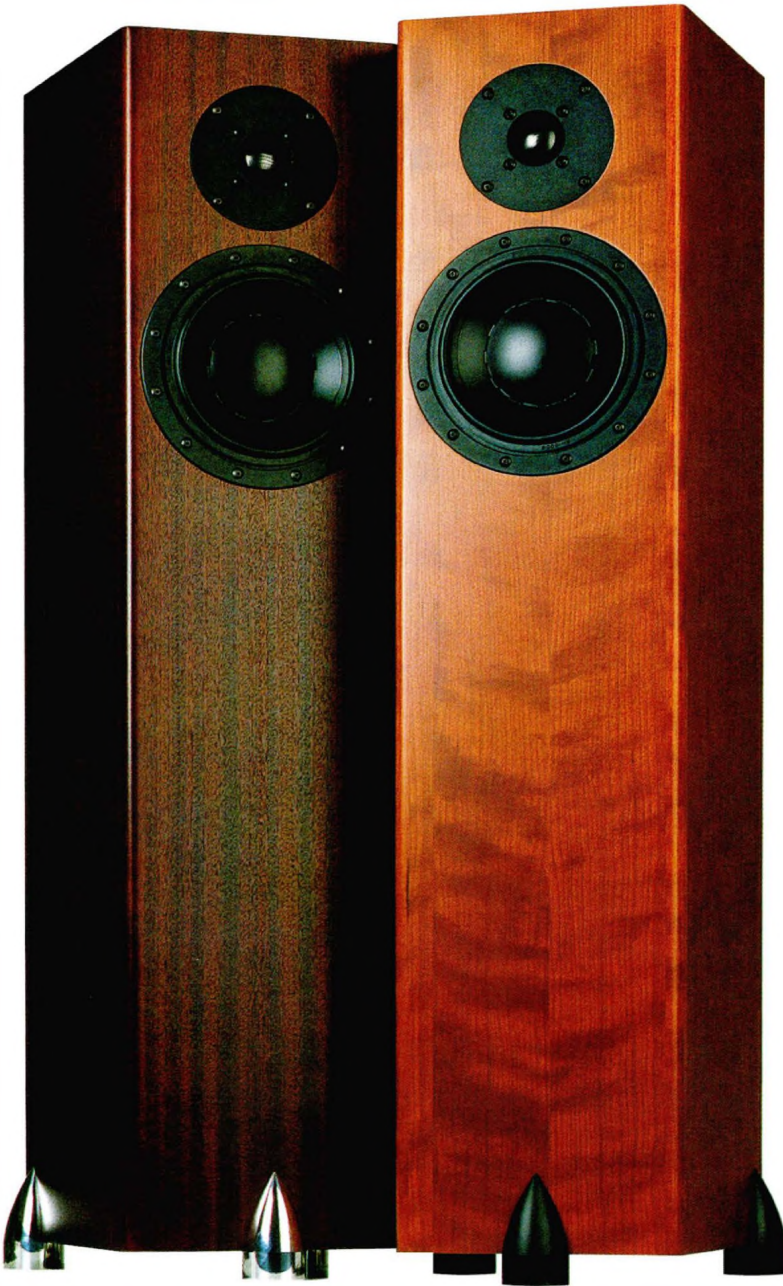
**CONCLUSION**

Despite some veiling, this is a lively and enjoyable amp. Treble is less assured than the bass, and imaging could be more generous.

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

# Forest

Totem has spared no expense in making the Forest one of the best speakers available at any price... It's a two-way floor standing model that is surprisingly affordable, considering that it is a true super-speaker. The woofer and its aluminium dome tweeter, allow it to cover the full auditory range. Those aren't mere paper specs, either! The response is down only 6 dB at 28 Hz, a frequency most speakers can't reach. Its lock-mitred monocoque chassis, its slanted rear baffle, and its fine hand-crafted construction place it above lesser speakers of its size and price. Much of this is invisible, though by no means inaudible. As usual with Totem speakers, the fine wood veneer is also placed inside the cabinet, to equalise forces on the two sides of the walls. Why it's called the Forest? Well, where would you expect to find a totem? Well, a forest would be a good place to begin your search. However, a forest also imbues mystery, quietness and unpredictable, unexplainable power. In a real forest you are surrounded with sound, which can suddenly appear, surprise and then disappear. It can happen anywhere around you. Let the Totem Forest surprise you in the same way...



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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE  
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# Six of one...

*Pro-Ject's range revamp grows apace with refinements to the RPM 6 turntable*

**PRODUCT** Pro-Ject RPM 6.1

**TYPE** Turntable and tonearm

**PRICE** £550

**CONTACT** ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.project-audio.com

**T**he Czech Republic must be analogue heaven. How else can you explain the plethora of designs in Pro-Ject's portfolio? By looking at the markets to the West might be the more rational answer, not least the UK, where our remarkable sense of taste has kept vinyl in a rather more buoyant state than most other countries.

Pro-Ject has been revamping its range recently... and now it's time for a new version of the distinctive RPM 6. The changes are small, though. The overall style and build remains as before with a massive MDF platter sitting atop an acrylic subplatter, which is supported by an inverted ceramic bearing. The change here is that the platter now has peripheral mass damping: steel shot has been added to enhance inertia and to aid the dissipation of heat from the bearing in the process. The platter surface is actually vinyl, the idea being that by using the same material as the software you can drain the resonances within it more easily (a scheme used successfully by Funk Firm's Achromat and Achroplat), and a heavy unthreaded clamp is supplied to aid the process.

Drive is courtesy of a suspended motor with electronic speed switching via a box under the chassis. The on/off switch is hidden under

there as well, and we really do mean hidden, but it's not hard to find with practice.

Refinements have also been made to the chunky 9c carbon fibre tonearm, which has thicker walls than its predecessor and uses ball rather than gimbal bearings. As ever with Pro-Ject tonearms, the arm lead is interchangeable and you can adjust most everything including arm height and azimuth. Height cannot be reduced that much, however, and not enough for many cartridges to be set up with correct VTA.

Isolation is provided by Sorbothane-damped metal cone feet that can be used to adjust for level, but are better left tight with the support being properly levelled first.

## SOUND QUALITY

You seem to need three hands to fit a cartridge to the 9c, because the arm clamp is not very firm. You also need to push the arm lift all the way down before you return to your chair, otherwise the needle will hover over the vinyl indefinitely. Once it's in the groove, however, things are rather more gratifying. The RPM 6.1 delivers an open and expansive sound with good treble extension and plenty of energy. We found this was especially noticeable when we compared it to a Rega P3, a less expensive albeit capable design. On the other hand, next to the similarly priced Funk Firm turntable with a Rega RB250 arm, the Czech design is not quite as vibrant-sounding, but it's better at coping with energy in the support furniture.

We like the way it can dig down into the bass, stopping and starting at that end of the

spectrum with apparent ease. Felix Laband and Leftfield both provided a tuneful result in its care, the former even throwing out some out-of-phase detail that put the sound well into the room. It also has a good grasp of image depth, when given a cartridge that can do this well. It dug up almost hidden layers on Taj Mahal's *Sweet Home Chicago*, allowing us to clearly differentiate the Pointer Sisters on backing vocals from Taj and his guitar up front, singin' the blues.

Musical tension is also well served thanks to the way it gets a handle on micro-dynamics and tracks the fine details. All in all, this is a capable and attractive turntable that is clearly keeping pace with the times. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 85%**



**FEATURES >> 85%**



**BUILD >> 85%**



**VALUE >> 91%**



**PRO**

Dynamic, well timed and with decent imaging, this is a consistent-sounding turntable that's easy to upgrade, with plenty of arm cable and cartridge choices.



**CON**

Arm height cannot be reduced enough for shallow cartridges and the vinyl platter surface needs to be kept clean, yet there is no dust cover.

## CONCLUSION

The upgrades that Pro-Ject has lavished on the RPM 6.1 have clearly been positive as this is a steady and revealing design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge. It also looks the part with its minimal chassis and huge platter!

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE

**>> 88%**



# Totally NAD for it!

*It's hardly in 'classic NAD' budget territory, but this new universal player offers terrific value for money*

**PRODUCT** NAD T585

**TYPE** Universal disc player

**PRICE** £800

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.5x10x30cm

• Weight: 8.63kg • Audio outputs: 2ch analogue (RCA phono), 5.1ch analogue (RCA phono), optical digital (Toslink), coaxial digital (RCA phono) • Video outputs: composite video (RCA phono), S-Video (mini-DIN), component video (RCA phono trio) • AV outputs: Scart socket, HDMI 1.1 output • Custom Install connections: RS-232 port, 12V trigger mini-jack

**CONTACT** ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

This new 'universal' disc player from classic 'budget specialist' NAD is a serious solution to a serious set of requirements, and consequently it costs proper, serious money. £800 is several times the price of a typical budget universal player, though it is still well short of the price of esoteric high-end models.

What you get here starts life as a slightly simplified, bargain-price variant of the NAD Masters Series M55 universal player. This is broadly in Arcam DV137 territory for quality, flexibility and price – they both cost around £1,300. In common with virtually all universal players, the T585 starts life as a DVD-Video

player, which can also play CD (of course), DVD-Audio and SACD. It is also compatible with almost all types of recordable and recorded disc-based media, including WMA, but as usual excluding DVD-RAM.

The T585 includes a wide range of interfaces. On the audio side, the player has separate 5.1 channel and two-channel stereo/downmix analogue audio outputs – the 5.1 output can be fed from an integral Dolby Digital decoder – and the usual optical and coaxial outputs handle digital multichannel codecs in digitally wrapped form, to be decoded by an external processor or amplifier.

The NAD is unusual (though not unique) in that it processes SACD in its native DSD form. At the very high end of the market there is at least an argument that can be marshalled in favour of converting DSD to PCM for decoding. However, at this price level, it is NAD's contention at least that there is no such case to be made, and the NAD does process DSD natively – up to a point. The limit is set by the HDMI output (the only output deemed sufficiently protected – by HDCP – to stream the digital data off disc). The version of HDMI used here (1.1) has no passthrough for DSD.

Video connectivity is equally well catered for. The familiar analogue options are present and correct: composite, S-Video and component, plus Scart and (unusually) a VGA output of the kind normally limited to some projectors. There's also the aforementioned HDCP-encoded HDMI output, for digital video connection. This is an upsampling video player, and the component, S-Video and HDMI outputs are capable of streaming up to 1080i video.

The T585 is well equipped with the kind of bells and whistles you might expect from this kind of player, including an unusually attractive, simple to use on-screen menu system. This incorporates a comprehensive bass management facility that works independently for each major disc group – SACD, DVD-Audio, DVD-Video – and more sound and (in particular) picture tweaking options than are normally available. The unit has an onboard Dolby Digital decoder and SRS Tru Surround, which gives a surround-like effect from a single pair of speakers... allegedly. Other codecs (DTS for example) are handled by off-player processing, via a digital output in the usual way.

The rather button-bound remote control handset is fully dedicated to the player: it has



**“SACD has a clean, energetic quality, with plenty of fine detail, which is reproduced in a natural-sounding acoustic space.”**

no punch through options for the system TV or amplifier, and there's no button illumination, but the control layout is clear and easy to learn. Video processing is performed by Faroudja's DCDi system, rather than the more exotic solutions used by some.

The disc mechanism comes from Sony (one of the few options available for SACD) and the video decoder from ESS. Hybrid 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs are from the Burr-Brown stable. AMX/Crestron system controllers can be accommodated, and the unit offers infra-red and 12v triggers, plus an RS-232 interface.

**SOUND QUALITY**

This is an altogether better player than NAD has produced in its classic 'mainstream' series before. CD performance is firm and bold, with a well-extended and tuneful, if noticeably warm bass. Many mid-price systems that end up with this player will probably work rather well with this bass. The other end of the band also has the same characteristic smoothness, and the midband has depth and weight, with good agility. It works well with electronic music if it has been well recorded, but it really thrives with acoustic material, such as vocal, instrumental, orchestral... the usual suspects, if you like.

Often with less costly universal players, SACD ends up being soft edged and disappointing, where DVD-Audio tends to ape the sound of

CD. This gives DVD-Audio an edge, with comparatively strong presence and detail, especially on a multichannel stage. DVD-Audio performance here can be categorised in just this way. This player is one of the few that had no problems with early Dual Discs, which have caused real difficulties in the past.

The SACD chain is palpably superior to the usual run of the mill. It doesn't have the slightly lazy quality of some of its ilk, but has a clean, energetic quality, with plenty of fine detail, which is reproduced without grain and in a natural-sounding acoustic space – given a suitable-quality recording as source material. Again the bass has real weight and gravitas, but it does not go over the top. It is also tuneful and it times well.

**VIDEO PERFORMANCE**

Good as the audio performance is, picture quality is in some respects even more impressive. There is a solidity about DVD video replay that places the NAD on a par with more costly players. Video upsampling does not improve the inherent resolution of the picture, of course, but using the NAD's video scaling will result in a much more stable picture, with deep, saturated colours and good black levels (black level tracking and other parameters can be adjusted in the set up menu), while motion artefacts are well

suppressed – better so than with many other implementations of Faroudja DCDi video scaling and processing.

For those unacquainted with NAD's more exotic and capable Masters Series, this model is a more solid piece of equipment than one might expect from the brand. Although the exterior styling has been compromised in the process of reducing the selling price, it is a palpably better engineered player than older classic models, and you will see and hear the difference. Impressive stuff! **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



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 >> 88%**  
 SUB RATINGS: CD 85% SACD 90% DVD-A 88%

**VISION >> 91%**

**FEATURES >> 92%**

**VALUE >> 91%**

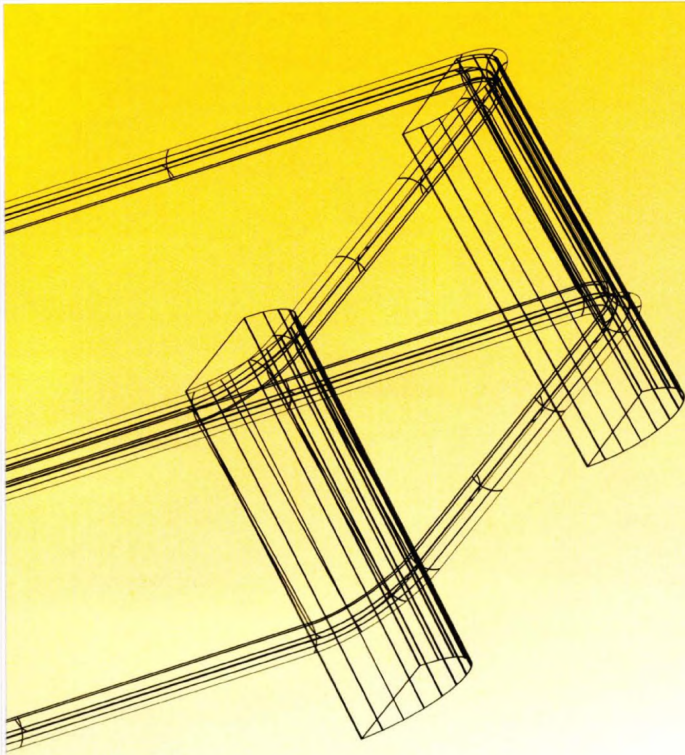
**PRO**  
 An impressively well thought through design. Well built, with exceptional video quality, powerful and authoritative CD/DVD-Audio sound and well above average SACD performance.

**CON**  
 NAD livery arguably looks a bit tired. Remote handset lacks backlighting and punch-through controls.

**CONCLUSION**  
 This player takes NAD's excellent, top-end Masters Series platform and drags it down into a more affordable, classically styled frame. Both audio and video are delivered with splendid depth and solidity, making an impressive mid-price all-rounder.

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%**





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THE ACOUSTIC PERFORMANCE OF THE TRANSFORMERS THEMSELVES HAS ALSO BEEN CAREFULLY CONSIDERED WITH A BESPOKE DESIGN FOR VERTEX AQ. THE USE OF THESE TRANSFORMERS KEEPS THE ACOUSTIC NOISE FLOOR OF THE ELBRUS LOW UNDER LOAD.

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HFC/YAQ/0607

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Audio Analogue	Roksan
Audio Research	Shanling
Copland	SME
Crystal Cable	Sonus Faber
Dream Vision	Stands Unique
Focal Jmlab	Stax
Grado	Sterling Broadcast
Hyperion	Stratton Furniture
Isophon	Sugden
Isotek	Sunfire
Jadis	Theta
Koetsu	Townshend Audio
Krell	Transparent
Lavardin	Unison Research
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# Mix master

Cambridge Audio stirs up a heady brew of its entry-level and flagship amp designs in one £500 box

**PRODUCT** Cambridge Audio Azur 740A

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £500

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 900 1000

≡ www.cambridgeaudio.com

Cambridge Audio must have seen the £500 price point as a hole that needed filling. Hence the Azur 740 series, which comprises a CD player (tested last issue) and this 740A integrated amplifier. The amp is superficially closer to the more expensive 840A, but lacks the unique 'Class XD' technology, which makes it more similar electronically to the 640A v2, its existing and less costly brother.

In concept, there is nothing too surprising going on here. 100 watts is, these days, not outrageously powerful for such an amp and six line inputs (no phono option) are par for the course today. The two record outputs, preamp output and headphone socket are hardly uncommon and neither are the twin (switchable) speaker terminals. These allow for either bi-wiring or two-room operation. Remote control connections are more sophisticated, though, thanks to the inclusion of Cambridge's own 'Incognito' multiroom system.

There's also more control sophistication than most amps, thanks to the adoption of the 840A's display. This gives a numerical readout of volume setting and allows inputs to be named to suit circumstances. You can adjust balance, too, as the volume control is electronic, and indeed bass and treble should

you feel the need. Unlike the 840A, this is all achieved without the rattle of relays.

A heavy and well-filled box, the 740A has a large toroidal mains transformer, half surrounded by a profiled heatsink for two pairs of output transistors per channel. Separate rectifiers and fairly generous capacitor banks feed each channel, and there's extensive buffering of signals. As with other Azur models, clipping protection simply turns down the volume. This is a lot of amplifier for the money.

## SOUND QUALITY

It's also a lot of sound. Common sense and history both suggest that features and sound can be a trade-off at this price. But with plenty of recent experience in £500 amplifiers in mind, we found no reason to question the balance achieved here.

That experience suggests that we should be looking, as a minimum, for competence in all areas, excellence in at least some and, crucially, some of the little extras that point the way towards the high end. We couldn't accuse any area of failing in competence. Perhaps the bass is less assured than some (the 840A, for a start), especially in terms of definition at low levels. Still, it is certainly extended and the generous reserves of power do no harm at all in assuring its kick and dynamism. Excellence? We could happily use the term in connection with the treble, which is as clear as a bell and breathes with uncommon ease. The imaging is not far short either, with superb width and lateral resolution, and fine depth too.

And the little extras... probably what most appeals, overall, about this amp's performance is its sense of inviting the listener into the music, something more than just listening comfort or technical competence. We've heard this in other amps at the price (the Creek Evo springs to mind) but it's not something one can take for granted, and it does indeed give a flavour of what esoteric kit is all about.

We could use more detail than the 740A offers (its bigger brother sets a high standard of detail that justifies the extra expense). We have heard better bass at its price, too. But, all things considered, the 740A is a very worthy amp, one we're happy to recommend. **HFC**

Richard Black

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 84%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**FEATURES >> 88%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**BUILD >> 86%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**VALUE >> 92%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### PRO

Excellent treble, very good imaging and a real sense of musical involvement are all well above the class average.

### CON

It is possible to find more refined and assured bass, and detail is not quite the best around. It will always live in the shadow of its bigger brother, too. You will like or loathe the display!

### CONCLUSION

Considering the sum of features and sound, this is one of the most attractive mid-price amps we know. It's outperformed by the range-topping 840A in terms of detail and refinement, but at just two-thirds the price it comes impressively close.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE

>> **88%**

# Atlas Ascent 2.0

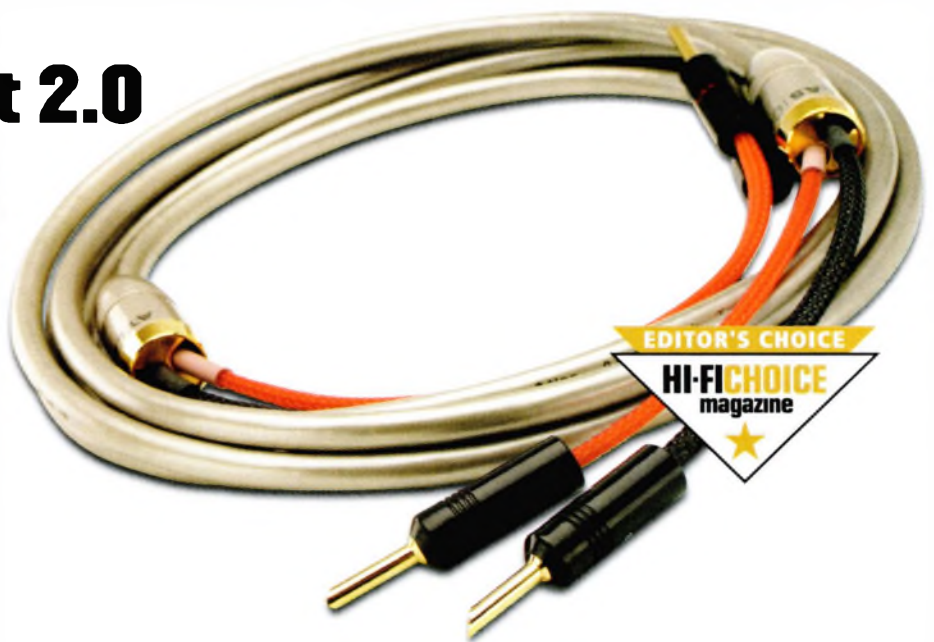
**TYPE** Loudspeaker cable

**PRICE** £55 per mono metre (unterminated)

**CONTACT** ☎ 0800 731 1140 # www.atlascables.co.uk

There are, of course, speaker cables that cost a good deal more than Ascent 2.0, but £460 for a terminated 3m set of speaker wires is definitely not mass-market stuff. In fact, it represents the top of the Atlas range. It's possible to buy this cable unterminated and arguably that's better value, but those metal terminators do make for a very neat job and add to the cable's high-end look. Fear not, though: there are no electrical networks in there!


Atlas uses high purity conductors of 'Ohno Continuous Cast' copper, with insulation materials including PTFE and cotton yarn, and the overall construction is flexible for an 8mm cable. The 2.0 in the name refers to the copper cross-sectional area in square mm. Although the fitted plugs don't look as fancy as some terminators, they do give very good contact in sockets. Atlas supplies this cable with a complimentary 'burn-in and demagnetising' CD, which is a nice touch and allows sceptics the chance to try it without admitting anything.



We were at first a little taken aback with the sound, which seemed to be bass-light compared with the sort of performance one expects at this price. After a little while, though, we came to realise that the bass is in fact exceptionally well-controlled and as a result highly detailed, precise and, yes, extended at the instants when it needs to be. This may not be to everyone's taste – you may prefer a richer overall balance – but it's well worth sampling.

What's more, midrange and treble are very open and detailed, and imaging is first-rate and exceptionally stable. Not your average cable, but welcome for just that reason. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board.	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> >> <b>90%</b>

# IsoTek IEC connector

**TYPE** Mains connector

**PRICE** £50

**CONTACT** ☎ 01635 291357 # www.isoteksystems.co.uk


We're a little shy of reviewing any kind of mains DIY components as mains electricity isn't exactly something one wants to mess with. Still, just putting a plug on a cable is hardly rocket science and one of several reasons why this connector appealed to us is that it is very easy to fit without those embarrassing slip-ups that lead to blue flashes and awkward explanations. All mains cables thicker than 6A flex are a pain to work with, but IsoTek has provided both ample space for any amount of wire and a cable inlet that will accommodate wires as much as 14mm thick.

In fact, cables with up to 20 square mm of copper could comfortably fit in the high-pressure clamps (locked down using a sensible-size screw head), and the overall cable clamp will securely grip anything down to bell wire, making this an IEC for all cables. It uses gold-plated copper and the body is made of tough polycarbonate plastic, which resisted cracking despite our best impression of a ham-fisted electrician in a hurry.

And is it worth the trouble? The answer does rather depend on the cable you're trying to terminate. If it's bog-standard 3A flex than, frankly, no, you'll be hard-pushed to know the difference. If it's super-thick tweaky audiophile wire, you'll not be able to do a comparison with a standard IEC because the latter simply won't fit. But we did manage to find a mid-size specialist mains cable to try, which was enough to convince us that IsoTek's pricey connector (in fairness, the top Wattgate costs more) offers a subtle but worthwhile effect in tightening up the sound, particularly the stereo image. Sceptics may scoff, but the proof, as they say, is in the listening! **HFC**

*Richard Black*



<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> IsoTek's connector offers real sonic benefits over standard IECs – a great gift for the hi-fi that has everything!	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> >> <b>98%</b>

# Clearer Audio Mains Hub

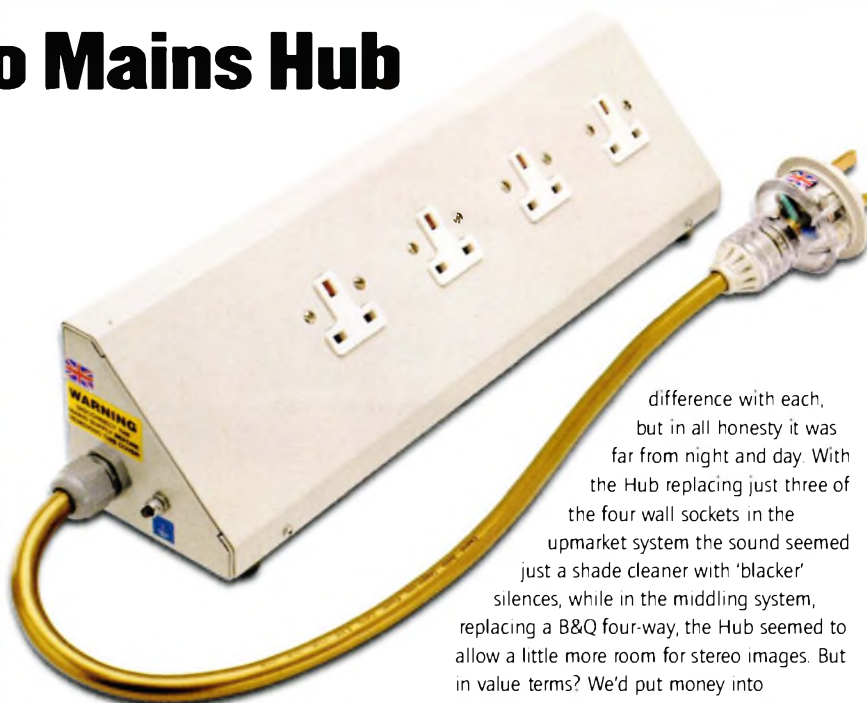
**TYPE** Mains distribution block

**PRICE** £240 (four-way block with 0.5m inlet cable)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01702 543981 # www.cleareraudio.co.uk

So it's just a four-way mains board, yes? Maybe not 'just'... Clearer Audio manages to produce five pages of description and specifications, which go at least some way towards justifying the price. For a start, it is made of quite thick steel, robustly screwed together and fitted with good-quality unswitched sockets. It is fitted with a thick, short cable terminated with a very funky plug (also used on Clearer's mains cables, a handful of which were supplied to us to use with the Hub). The one downside is that the cable is sufficiently stiff that it can be hard to rotate it to fit into a socket.

Inside the Hub, the extra-thick wire theme is continued with star connection of each socket to a seriously chunky terminal block, and some very simple filtering is provided in the shape of a ferrite sleeve over all the cores of the main cable just as it enters the housing. There is also a little group of spike suppressors. In terms of filtered versus unfiltered mains boards, though, this is in the 'un' category: it is basically all



about good-quality copper, connections and construction rather than mains cleaning.

We used it to feed a couple of systems, one distinctly upmarket and one quite middling: the former system already had slightly tweaky mains cables in use, fed from multiple wall sockets. Perhaps surprisingly, we heard a

difference with each, but in all honesty it was far from night and day. With the Hub replacing just three of the four wall sockets in the upmarket system the sound seemed just a shade cleaner with 'blackier' silences, while in the middling system, replacing a B&Q four-way, the Hub seemed to allow a little more room for stereo images. But in value terms? We'd put money into interconnects or speaker wires first. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

**CONCLUSION**  
Using 'quality' components but little in the way of filtering, this is a good rather than spectacular upgrade.



# Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo

**TYPE** Analogue interconnect cable

**PRICE** £260 (1m pair)

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8971 3909

# www.crystalcable.com

Crystal Cable, based in the Netherlands, is the brand famously developed by the ex-concert pianist Gabi van der Kley, whose husband operates another prominent high-end cable brand, Siltech – although the two brands operate entirely autonomously, by the way. The range of Crystal cables is growing exponentially, but this unusual interconnect design is perhaps the most obvious exemplar of the cable company's craft.

Piccolo's elegant appearance may give some cause for concern. The gold/silver alloy conductor is just 0.3mm in diameter, rising to 1.3mm in overall diameter including insulation, and the cable barely looks thick or strong enough to sustain manhandling. The solid, stable terminations also appear vulnerable, too. But this is more perception than reality. The strain relief built into the design is more up to the job than you might suppose. With extensive use in many systems over a period of some months, which is enough to cause many cables to fall to bits, the Piccolo has never

given us the slightest cause for concern.

Indeed, we were initially predisposed in its favour as it is reminiscent of some seminal experiences with the original DNM Solid Core. It doesn't really sound like DNM, but it does have some of the same positive qualities. For a start, there's no lack or excess of bass. Where it moves out of DNM territory is in focus and articulation, which you get in spade-loads. The instrumental timbre is lean, but fully formed, with a diamond like precision. Tactile textures, such as the finger noise on acoustic guitar fretboard or strings, or the genuinely dynamic sound from piano, at both *ppp* (very soft) and *fff* (very



loud) ends of the scale, are beautifully rendered. Most movingly of all, however, is the purity of a well-recorded human voice through Piccolo. It's rare to find a cable that packs a real punch, class-leading resolution and some very real musical expressiveness without the physical intrusiveness of alternative solutions. Which is why Piccolo is something special. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

## VERDICT

**CONCLUSION**  
Thin cables often offer improved handling and higher resolution, as this one ably shows. A modern classic.



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

# LOUDSPEAKERS

The latest sub-£400 speakers prove there are still bargains to be had in Hi-Fi Land

Although even cheaper speaker systems do exist, this month's *Ultimate Group Test* covers the least costly collection of models that *Hi-Fi Choice* has reviewed in recent memory, with an average price per pair of just £280. As such, it's perhaps all the more surprising that the majority – four of the six – are floorstanders, requiring no further outlay on stands. Furthermore, three of those four have gone a worthwhile step beyond merely equipping the base of the speakers with spike sockets: both the Acoustic Energy and Q Acoustics models come supplied with separate mass-loadable plinths, while the Mordaunt-Short uses moulded outrigger feet to improve stability.

Floor coupling aside, you won't find much in the way of luxury touches at these prices. Vinyl woodprint finish is the rule here, with no exceptions, and while it's true that the art of imitating wood has improved considerably over the years, best practice doesn't seem to have percolated down to the budget sector yet. The best of today's vinyl woodprint can certainly fool the eyes, if

not the fingertips, but that's not true of the rather unconvincing examples found here, where ambition would have been better avoided and anonymity provides the best option.

While acknowledging that most hi-fi speakers at the cheaper end of the market are now actually manufactured in the Far East, our group tests have become increasingly cosmopolitan in recent years, with French, Danish and German designs joining established British names. This group, however, is nearly all home-grown in design terms, only the little French Focal interrupting a clean sweep by British brands.

Naturally, the two standmounts are two-way designs, but so too are the Q Acoustics and Mordaunt-Short floorstanders. The full volume of a two-way floorstander's enclosure would be too large for a single main driver, so only the top part of the enclosure is acoustically active; the lower section is effectively an integral stand, with the option to add damping or mass-loading material like dry ('silver') sand. This can do wonders for the bass.

The Acoustic Energy and Tannoy models both have extra drivers. But, where the Tannoy doubles up its bass/mid driver in d'Appolito configuration, the AE is a true two-and-half-way. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

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

## MUSIC USED

- Ⓢ Arcade Fire *Neon Bible*
- Ⓢ Be Good Tanyas *Hello Love*
- Ⓢ Bob Dylan *Modern Times*
- Ⓢ Lowell George *Thanks, I'll Eat it Here*
- Ⓢ Nitin Sawhney *Beyond Skin*
- Ⓢ BPO Karajan *Wagner Tannhauser Overture*
- Ⓢ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test

## ON TEST



Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3  
£370



Focal Chorus 705V  
£289



Monitor Audio BR2  
£200



Mordaunt-Short 904i  
£270



Q Acoustics 1030  
£230



Tannoy Mercury F4  
£350



## 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.

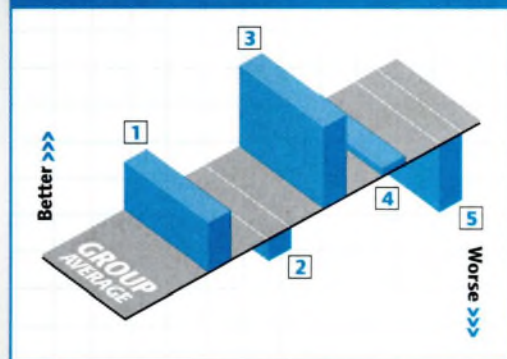
**2] Bass extension:** A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

**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



# Chord Epic



- Two proven designs combined to make a fabulous new speaker cable
- 12 gauge twisted pair silver-plated conductors
  - Teflon insulation
  - Dual layer high frequency shielding
  - Reveals the subtlest dynamic shifts
- Brings a new level of realism to any hi-fi system
- Available in Twin and Super Twin configuration

Chord Epic is the result of combining two of the Chord Company's award winning cables

Taking the shielding system from Chord Signature and applying it to Chord Odyssey has brought huge improvements to the overall performance

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## ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS NEO 3

Neo is for neodymium, a powerful and costly magnetic material

**A**coustic Energy came to prominence in the 1980s with the tiny Pro-look AE1, which brought considerable credibility both to tiny speakers and the use of metal diaphragms. Since then, the company has grown, been bought by Malaysian interests, and expanded its ranges considerably, while continuing to maintain its identity through using metal cone drivers with characteristic pointy central dust covers.

The vinyl-finished, budget-price Aegis series originally began in the late 1990s, evolved into Evo versions in 2002, and has now taken a further evolutionary step by introducing the Neo range. In this context, 'Neo' stands for the rare earth element neodymium, which (combined with other elements) is one of the more recently developed permanent magnet alloys. Weight-for-weight, neodymium magnets are much more powerful than regular ferrite ones, allowing for a much less bulky motor.

They're also costly, which is why they have hitherto been largely restricted to tweeter use.

The important feature of AE's new Neos is that the bass and bass/mid drivers also use neodymium magnets, which are claimed to improve linearity and reduce distortion compared to ferrite designs.

Like its Evo predecessor, the Aegis Neo 3 is a compact 'two-and-a-half-way' floorstander, though unlike the Evo it uses nominally identical 130mm drivers for both bass-only and bass/mid duties. Both these drivers have 100mm diameter metal cones and operate in their own rear-ported sub-enclosures. The tweeter is one of those classy annular 'ring radiator' types, 25mm in diameter.

Our samples arrived with the lowest box cavity mass-loaded, though this is not a standard feature now, and must be added by the end user. It's also supplied with a plinth and decent 8mm spikes, to improve the stability and enhance the appearance. Twin terminal pairs provide a bi-wire option.

### SOUND QUALITY

Even when placed well clear of walls, the Neo 3 delivers more than ample bass output, so free-space siting is clearly mandatory with this model. However, if the bass proves too heavy in the specific room and/or chosen location, it might be worth experimenting with blocking one or other (or both) of the two rear ports – these have differential tuning (see lab report), and the trick is to try and avoid exciting the room's own natural standing wave modes, which of course vary from room to room.

This floorstanding Neo sounds clean, crisp and open, with good overall neutrality, fine control and plenty of detail. Imaging was particularly good, showing precise focus with decent depth and superior stability. The sound does lack some dynamic tension and expression, though the dynamic range is rather good, and there's also more authority and weight here than one normally encounters among low cost speakers.

Despite that weight and gravitas, the overall character is a little on the cool side of strict neutrality, and some extra warmth through the upper bass and lower midband might have been welcome. Coloration is generally low and the voice band is essentially clean, despite a touch of audible nasality and hardness. That unusual tweeter certainly contributes to an impressively high level of detail, but the sound can get a little harsh and edgy when some material is played at high levels. **HFC**

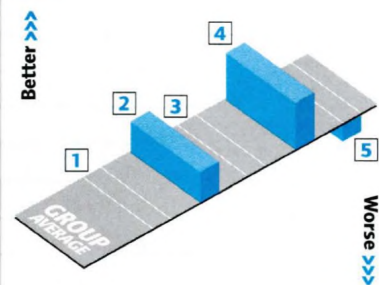


### LAB REPORT

Although the spec claims 90dB sensitivity, our far-field measurement registers a figure of 88dB, though this shouldn't pose any practical difficulties in partnering the speakers with an integrated amplifier in reality. The pair-match shows just a mild damping discrepancy at low frequencies, and the bass extension, which remains full to below 30Hz, is impressive. The load looks a little complex, but stays around or above 6 ohms across most of the band, just falling below at low frequencies.

The two ports are differently tuned, the lower one giving maximum output around 37Hz, the upper one at around 48Hz, broadening the net output and offering some scope for tuning. The overall frequency balance holds within decent overall limits but does show some unevenness: output is a little strong at 30-60Hz, a little weak through the upper bass (60-500Hz) and restrained in the presence zone (2-3.5kHz), with a slight peak at 4.5kHz.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> +20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/~ ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	35Hz	24Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 80%**

PRETTY floorstander with separate plinth and classy tweeter. Bass is deep and powerful, with some tuning flexibility, imaging is better than most, and it shows fine neutrality and openness, with a wide dynamic range.

**PRACTICALITY >> 82%**

**BUILD >> 83%**

**VALUE >> 92%**

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

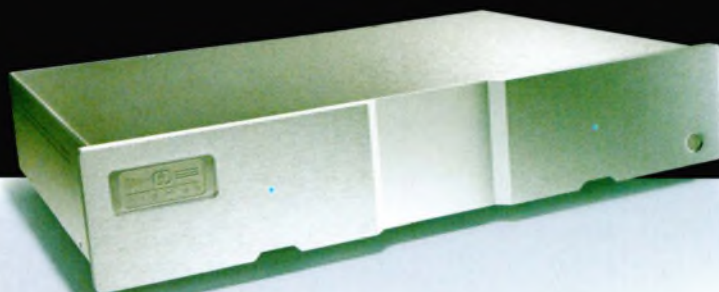


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## FOCAL CHORUS 705V

*Small but unusually formed, with a notably classy tweeter*

**F**ocal is France's leading hi-fi speaker manufacturer, and if the name isn't immediately familiar, that's because its complete loudspeaker systems were called JMLab up until 2004. Since then it has gone back to using the company's original name of Focal, which used to be reserved for its raw drive unit sales.

2006 saw the introduction of no fewer than ten new stereo pairs in its 'budget price' Chorus ranges – we use the plural here because they fall into two distinct groups: the simpler, less costly and more traditional looking 700Vs (the replacements to the original Choral range) and the more stylish, expensive and more substantial 800Vs (which effectively replace the earlier Cobalts).

This £289 per pair Chorus 705V is the smallest and least expensive of the group of ten. It's also the smallest, but by no means the cheapest, in this test group. But it does incorporate a number of premium features by way of compensation.

Focal is first and foremost a drive unit specialist, and makes the point that all the drivers it uses are made in its French factory. Also, the distinctive styling has tapering side panels, so the internal faces are not parallel and therefore avoid creating focused (frequency specific) standing waves. All the panels, finished in Amati vinyl woodprint, are a substantial 20-25mm thick.

The small cone driver used here has a 135mm cast alloy frame and a 100mm diameter paper cone coated with 'Polyglass' glass 'micro-spheres'. The inverted dome tweeter is a familiar Focal feature, the example

used here having an aluminium/magnesium alloy diaphragm, mounted in a rigid L-shaped cast chassis at the top edge of the enclosure, unobstructed by the visually rather striking V-shaped grille. A small front port provides bass loading, signal is applied to a single terminal pair, and a rear panel mounting lug is fitted to hang the speaker on a wall.

### SOUND QUALITY

That rear panel mounting lug implies that the speaker is suited to close-to-wall siting, and that was amply confirmed by both in-room measurement and listening tests.

Even with wall assistance, there's not a lot of bass weight or authority here, but the alignment is good, delivering a smooth bottom end with some agility and a welcome freedom from boom or thickening. The website suggests that the 705V is best suited to smallish rooms of 15 square metres or less – significantly smaller the 24 square metres of our listening room. A smaller room will tend to increase the mid-bass output, which will probably be beneficial here.

Provided there are no inquisitive probing fingers around that might cause damage, it's sonically well worth removing the little magnetically-held metal mesh covers protecting the tweeter diaphragms. The tweeter is the star act in this speaker, and removing those obstructive covers does seem to add significantly to the overall delicacy, sweetness and transparency of the sound.

Wall proximity usually involves some increase in midband coloration, but the 705V seemed less susceptible than most to this unwanted side-effect. A smooth and polished performer, this is a very polite-sounding speaker that

delivers plenty of sweet detail with little to disturb its overall equanimity and neutrality.

The down side, however, is rather weak and feckless dynamic expression, softening the impact and drama of the music, and somewhat reducing the facility of communication. While the recommendation for smaller room use makes good sense and will positively influence the overall balance of this speaker, it won't improve the

lack of subjective dynamic vigour. **HFC**

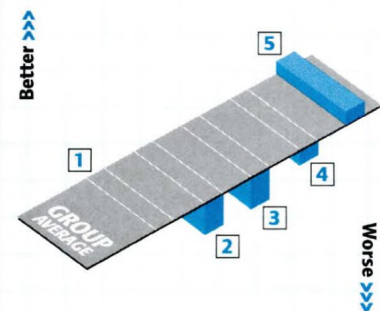


### LAB REPORT

Focal's claim of 91dB sensitivity seems decidedly optimistic for such a small loudspeaker, and even our 88dB rating was a little generous. Furthermore, the impedance falls to around 4 ohms in the lower midband (200-300Hz), so this isn't the easiest speaker to drive. The pair match was reasonably close, with just a mild discrepancy in the fundamental resonances of the two main drivers, while the port is tuned to around 48Hz.

In free space, output falls away steadily below 250Hz, but the effect of close-to-wall siting is entirely positive, extending the bass down to an impressively useful 40Hz, and delivering an overall balance that is unusually even and reasonably smooth. One might point to mild excess 50-70Hz and again 800Hz-1.2kHz, and slight leanness through the upper bass (80-170Hz), but these criticisms are minor.

### HOW IT COMPARES



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

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/3 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	57Hz	40Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 75%**

Unusual miniature has non-parallel sides to reduce boxiness. Works well close to a wall, and has a superior quality tweeter. Delivers a smooth and unruffled sound, but with limited bass weight and dynamic tension.

**PRACTICALITY >> 85%**

**BUILD >> 84%**

**VALUE >> 84%**

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



Following the magnificent Grand Concert and Concerto, Triangle and UKD are proud to announce the arrival of two new models in the Magellan Series - the Quatuor (£7,500 - pictured) and the Cello (£5,500). These have all the quality, finish and technology of their larger brothers. They're luxurious, emotionally involving speakers that will satisfy the most discerning music lovers. As Alvin Gold (Hi Fi Choice/Feb.2007) wrote of the Concerto "it looks fantastic. ..with a wonderfully passionate style of music-making. . ."



## PATHOS

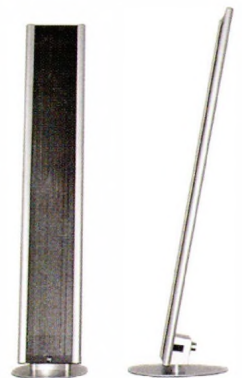
Everything that comes from the Pathos factory at **Vicenza, Italy** has real class about it. A big hit already with audiophiles worldwide, the Endorphin (£4,500) is a fine example of the Pathos commitment to excellence. Other players may have good looks or performance, but none deliver both to the standard of this wonderful player. The Endorphin is a musical treasure, to admire and enjoy. If you're looking for a CD player that delivers the highest performance combined with superlative design and build, look no further.



Unison's goal is simple: beautiful, fine sounding valve amplifiers made for a lifetime of musical enjoyment. The new Preludio keeps faith with this tradition. This £1,795 integrated sets the standard for high-quality, affordable valve amplifiers. As What Hi-Fi noted in the latest issue: "There might be cheaper valve amplifiers but none we've heard come close to this Italian integrated when it comes to all-round talent." Arrange an audition and discover this for yourself!



The latest model in the Final range of high definition flat panels is the 300i. This elegant, slimline floorstander \* offers all the insight and detail of the best electrostatic designs, and at a very attractive price. A stereo pair with matching subwoofer costs under £1,500 - astonishing value for a top quality electrostatic loudspeaker. The 300i is unique - whether used for 2-channel stereo or in a home theatre system. Call your nearest UKD dealer to arrange an audition.



\* 300i can also be wall mounted



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## MONITOR AUDIO BR2

*This compact standmount features a refined, good-size main driver*

**W**ith an illustrious history that goes way back to the 1970s, Monitor Audio is probably best known for upmarket speakers in top-quality, real-wood veneers, and as a pioneer in the use of metal diaphragms drivers. However, a change in ownership in the late 1990s brought a change in direction, with the (initial) creation of three distinct ranges, logically labelled Bronze (budget, vinyl), Silver (mid-price, real wood) and Gold (upmarket, luxury veneer).

This BR2 model is one of four stereo pairs in the latest (third) generation of Bronze models, known as Bronze Rs. The larger of two standmounts, it carries a £200 per pair price tag, which is just £20 more than the cost of the original Bronze 2, which received a Best Buy in a review way back in 2000.

The front panel has classic Monitor Audio styling cues, including the familiar gold-anodised tweeter dome. Vinyl finish is inevitable at this price, but the woodprint used here – black, walnut or cherry – does look prettier than that of its predecessors. Although the overall package looks very similar generally, the press release cites all manner of detail improvements, to crossover components, enclosure bracing, main driver motor linearity and tweeter operating bandwidth, to mention just a few.

The shielded main driver has a 165mm frame and a 120mm MMP (metal matrix polymer) cone – basically, polypropylene loaded with shiny metal particles – and is neatly rebated

into the thick front panel. The tweeter has a mesh-protected 25mm anodised alloy dome; its rear-loading chamber has been re-engineered to lower the fundamental resonance and enable the crossover to be simplified. Twin terminals on the rear permit bi-wiring connection, while a port on the front augments the bass.

### SOUND QUALITY

Like its predecessors, the BR2 works best when placed quite close to a wall. This helps to fill out the mid-bass octave nicely, though on the other hand, it also creates some unevenness further up in the midband.

As a result, the BR2 doesn't have the smoothest sound around, but it is both coherent and dynamic, and also has the characteristic agility and clean bottom end of a standmount. Indeed, it's when you go to a well aligned standmount after trying a series of floorstanders that you realise what an obvious advantage a quality standmount like this Monitor Audio has when it comes to delivering a crisp, clear, lively and informative bottom end. The BR2 gives little if anything away in terms of weight and scale, yet it punches out the bottom end with a real sense of purpose and drive, especially for the size.

The BR2 is by no means smooth or free from coloration. Irrespective of wall proximity, there's an upper midband peak here that certainly adds a slightly 'cupped hands' character to voices and especially speech, with a tendency to over-project and hype the detail here. But it's easily forgiven because of the seamlessness of the transition from main driver to tweeter.

Perhaps as a consequence of the now simplified crossover arrangements, the integration between the two drivers is quite superb, so that one is scarcely aware that more than one source is producing the sound, and certainly not conscious of the 'separate' tweeter. The net result is a thoroughly engaging and entertaining

low-cost speaker, as well as one that works well when tucked back against the wall. **HFC**

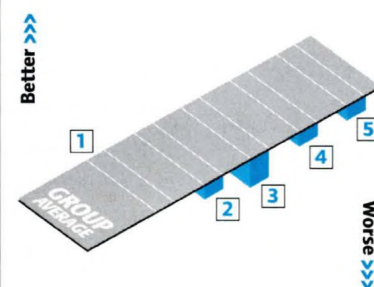


### LAB REPORT

Although one or two response peaks reach the specified 90dB sensitivity, a more representative overall figure is 88dB, which is respectable enough in view of the decent bass extension (-6dB at 30 Hz under in-room, wall-mount conditions). That said, the impedance is a fairly demanding 4 ohms across much of the low and mid portions of the band. Pair matching is par for the course, and a minor resonance was detectable at around 230Hz.

Though decidedly unpromising when measured in free space, the BR2s flattened out very nicely when sited close to a wall, aided by 45Hz port tuning. The net result is a relatively flat response across most of the band. This comes with a little extra mid-bass weight below 120Hz, and a rather obvious 3dB peak centred on 850Hz, but with a remarkably smooth and even output either side.

### HOW IT COMPARES



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

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/- ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	30Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 82%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**PRACTICALITY >> 85%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**BUILD >> 83%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**VALUE >> 97%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Inexpensive standmount is suited to close-to-wall placement, with a muscular sound with good dynamics and superior overall coherence. Some coloration, but superior mid-to-treble integration is a strength.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE **90%**



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



*Superb Hi-Fi .....*

*Just a little more desirable than the norm*



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## MORDAUNT-SHORT AVANT 904i

*A very pretty and very compact floorstander at a very nice price*

**M**ordaunt-Short, alongside brands like Cambridge Audio, has been part of Audio Partnership (AP) for a number of years. M-S products are now sold around the world, with Marantz handling UK distribution.

Early on, AP realised the potential of combining UK design talent with low Chinese manufacturing costs. First introduced at the beginning of the century, the original 900-series evolved into Avant 900 and now into Avant 900i. The overall configurations and sharp styling have remained consistent, while core ingredients have been steadily refined.

This £270 per pair Avant 904i follows earlier *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews of the larger and more complex 906i and 908i models (HFC 281 and 284), and is the direct descendant of the Avant 904 we reviewed back in 2004 (HFC 255). It's a simple two-way design, using the same driver line-up as the standmount 902i, but housing them in a floorstanding enclosure.

Although the part of the enclosure that loads the bass/mid driver is larger than the 902i, it doesn't use the whole of the space

inside this floorstander. Instead, it leaves a blanked-off section near the base to add mass loading/damping material.

An aluminium 'skin' covers the upper section of the front where the drivers are mounted, and this matches the aluminium alloy used for the drive unit diaphragms. An elliptical 'dished' section around the tweeter recalls an earlier Mordaunt-Short era, and probably acts as a wave-guide. The drivers are actually mounted from behind, giving a super-clean look with hidden mounting hardware. An elegantly embossed name completes the look.

The main driver incorporates magnetic shielding and has a small 100mm diameter dish-shaped diaphragm, described as a CPC (Continuous Profile Cone), further reinforced by small radial ribs just in from the edge. The tweeter has a mesh-protected 25mm metal dome. Stylish bi-wire terminal pairs are mounted low down on the back panel, and moulded 'outrigger' feet improve the mechanical stability. The sharp-edged, slim enclosure is available in either black, maple or a rich 'calvados' woodprint.

### SOUND QUALITY

In-room measurements indicated and listening tests confirmed that in spite of its small main driver, this speaker was best kept well clear of walls, whereupon it delivered a very respectable bass performance. Naturally there's no great scale or authority here, but what bass there is sounds quite smooth and clean, with more weight than one might expect.

On a high-quality system, this speaker has a lovely open quality that brings good clarity to voices, and makes it very easy to understand speech and lyrics. Stereo imaging is precise and well focused, and well detached from the boxes. However, the sound can get insistent when played loud, and the overall balance might prove bright with some cheaper and less capable electronics.

Although speech does reveal a degree of nasal coloration, the overall neutrality and smoothness of this speaker is perhaps its greatest strength. It has a lightness of touch, and is a good basic communicator. However, overall dynamics are rather muted, and a greater sense of drive and purpose would have been welcome.

The 904i would also benefit from a little more warmth and harmonic richness through the 'cello band. Voices sound a touch thin, while male speech lacks some of its resonant character, but it's a capable design all the same. **HFC**

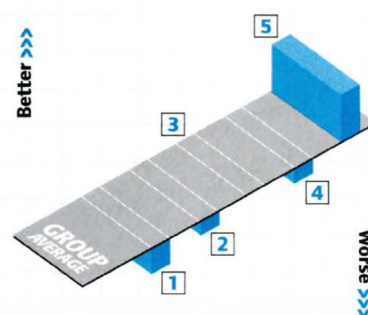


### LAB REPORT

On our measurement, sensitivity was between 86dB and 87dB, the latter being the benefit of the doubt, yet still 2dB shy of the figure claimed by the manufacturer. Although our figure is on the low side, it's consistent enough with the small main driver and an easy-to-drive impedance characteristic, which is 6 ohms or better throughout, and also shows very good pair matching. Like all speakers in this test, it should pose no problems for partnering amps.

Tuned to 50Hz (which coincides with a major mode in our listening room), the 904i delivered quite strong mid-bass output, and was remarkably flat across the rest of the band, staying within +/-3dB from 65Hz all the way up to 20kHz – though in truth, absolute flatness to the highest frequencies under far-field conditions is probably not ideal, and some treble rolloff is both desirable and the norm.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	50Hz	40Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 78%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**PRACTICALITY >> 85%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**BUILD >> 83%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**VALUE >> 92%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Slimline floorstander has sharp and attractive styling. Balance is unusually flat, smooth and neutral, and the speaker has decent bass output, fine openness and a bright overall character, alongside modest dynamics.

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

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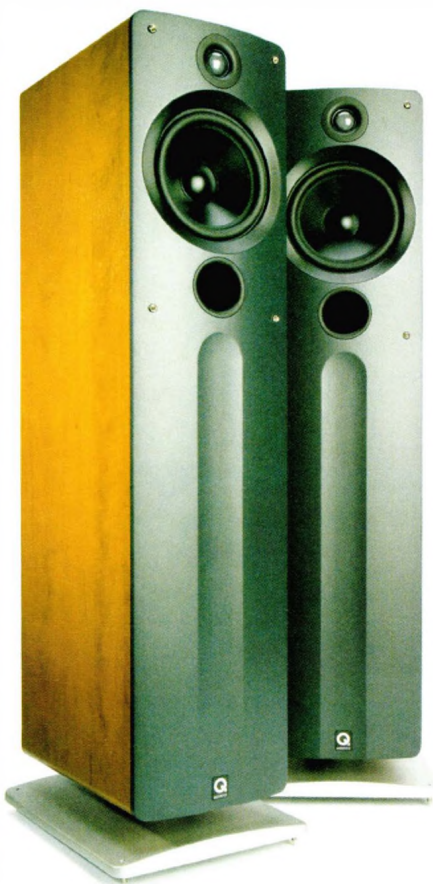
## Q ACOUSTICS 1030

*A beefy floorstander with a proper plinth at a very low price*

**A** relatively new brand, Q Acoustics was invented by Armour Home Electronics, itself a recent operation that brings together and distributes a number of well-known British names like Alphason, Myryad and QED. Armour is particularly strong in the budget sector of the market, and wanted a speaker brand to go with its electronics and accessories, so decided to create one, using a combination of its own staff, outside engineering consultants and Chinese factories.

*Hi-Fi Choice* has already reviewed the 1050 floorstander (HFC 284) and 1010 standmount (HFC 286), both of which received Best Buy ratings. This time around it's the turn of one in the middle, the 1030 floorstander, which sells for a very modest £230 per pair. It looks very like a 1050, but is a little shorter, uses just one bass/mid driver instead of the 1050's pair, and costs £100 less.

Inevitably, the finish is mostly vinyl, in a choice of cherry or beech woodprint, or graphite black, though a thick and attractively sculpted front panel is (on our cherry samples) painted dark grey. The whole thing feels very



solid, as confirmed by its total net weight of 15.5kg – ours actually arrived with mass/damping material already loading the separate lower chamber, though. One very impressive feature, especially in view of the very modest price, is an alloy plinth that lifts the speaker a few centimetres off the floor, extends the stability footprint, and generally tidies up the appearance. It has top-adjustable spikes, but no lock-nut provision.

This is a two-way design, based around a 165mm bass/mid driver with 115mm doped paper cone, mounted below a 25mm woven polyester fabric dome tweeter. The enclosure and main driver is loaded by a front port, while the rear houses twin zig-zag terminal pairs integrated with a cable-tidy; a fabric-covered perforated metal grille is also supplied.

### SOUND QUALITY

Both our in-room measurements and our hands-on listening tests indicate that this speaker is best kept clear of walls, to avoid excessive mid-bass output. If domestic circumstances dictate wall proximity, it would be worth considering blocking the ports (rolled up socks work well).

Despite its modest pretensions and price, this is an impressively engaging loudspeaker, due in part to its innate simplicity, yet also in part to the fundamentally good sound quality of that 165mm main driver, which delivers the broad midband with fine coherence and even a measure of transparency and delicacy.

That said, there are also obvious limitations, especially outside the midband and towards the top and bottom ends of the audio band. The bass is weak on weight and authority, and while it seems agile enough, it doesn't have a great deal of grip or drive, and also suffers from thickening of textures.

The presence is rather restrained, even 'shut in', which takes a little off the 'edge' off voices. This is not always a bad thing, given the vagaries of modern recording practice, but it does make it a little harder to make out speech and lyrics, especially when playing the system at very low levels.

The treble proper doesn't sound particularly sweet, which is maybe why it too is a little more restrained than the norm. This all makes good sense, as a strong treble coupled with a weak bass would sound unbalanced. Instead the 1030 plays to its strength, which is that impressively coherent midband. This too might have been smoother, but does a fine job of communicating the musical messages. **HFC**

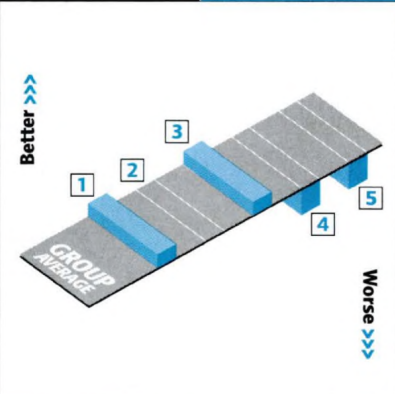


### LAB REPORT

It's nice to find one speaker in the group that isn't wantonly exaggerating its sensitivity claim: although we give the 1030 89dB, we won't quibble with the manufacturer's 90dB. The 43Hz-tuned port makes enough of a contribution to ensure decent bass extension, but also makes free space positioning mandatory, even though this leaves the bass end a little 'dry'. Pair matching might have been tighter, and a minor resonance is seen at 180Hz, but the load stays above 5 ohms throughout, so should be easy enough to drive.

The frequency balance is very well ordered from 90Hz up to 1kHz, but then dips several dB into a suckout at 1.4kHz before making a partial recovery. The treble proper is nicely ordered too, but 3-4dB down on the level set through the broad midband.

### HOW IT COMPARES



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

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/3.6 ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	48Hz	25Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 76%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**PRACTICALITY >> 84%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**BUILD >> 84%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**VALUE >> 91%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Two-way floorstander with an alloy plinth is great material value for money. It has a fine expressive midband but the bass lacks some authority and crispness while the presence and top is a little too restrained.

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

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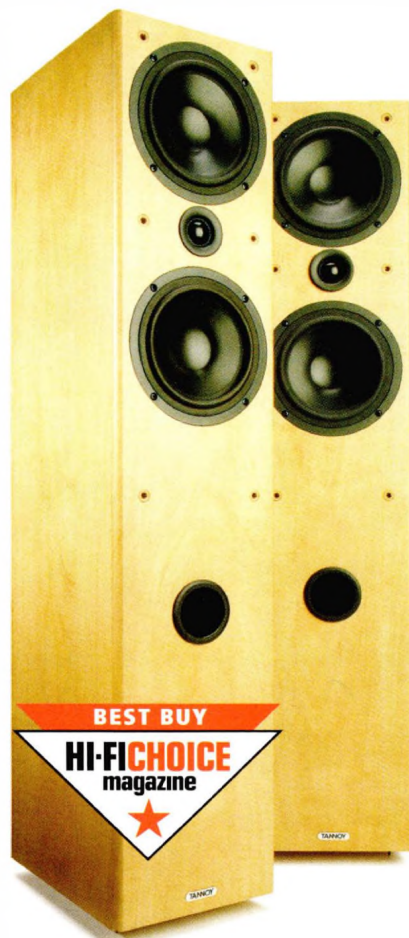
# TANNOY MERCURY F4

*Twin d'Appolito main drivers pack more punch at the price*

**A**lthough Tannoy is now owned by a Danish ProAudio company, it has always operated successfully across all loudspeaker sectors, from the smallest AV satellites right through to exceedingly loud ship's foghorns. The Mercury name has long been given to its mainstream budget domestic hi-fi models, and this latest Mercury F-series, which includes four stereo pairs plus AV-oriented extras, can trace its ancestry back several years.

This £350 per pair Mercury F4 has much in common with a Fusion 4, which received a Best Buy some three years ago (HFC 255). Both share a similar two-way configuration that uses twin bass/mid drivers placed above and below a solitary tweeter – the so-called d'Appolito arrangement.

Finished in a decent enough vinyl woodprint (apple or dark oak are the options here), the generous port-loaded enclosure provides an internal volume of 40 litres. Most is built from 15mm MDF, but the front panel is in heavier 19mm stock, with nicely rounded edges, and



internal braces reinforce the whole carcass. Looking rather monolithic and regrettably lacking any form of plinth, fixing for the 6mm spikes proved satisfactory, and stability seems respectable enough.

The main drivers have 170mm frames and 120mm diameter doped paper cones, giving a generous total diaphragm area that is further augmented by a front port. Interestingly, as delivered the port was filled by an open-cell foam bung, which doesn't block it completely but does resistively damp its output.

The drivers are magnetically shielded, the tweeter has a 27mm soft dome and neodymium magnets, and twin terminals are fitted to allow bi-wiring. The grille mounting lugs are coloured to match the enclosure here, which is a nice touch, while the grille itself is an attractively neutral purplish-brown.

## SOUND QUALITY

At first sight one would tend to assume that a large speaker such as this, with two main drivers and port loading, would need to be kept well clear of walls. Surprisingly that proved not to be the case.

In fact, the bass alignment is quite dry, even with the bungs removed, so the speakers work best when quite close to a wall. Whether one chooses to use the bungs or remove them is really a matter of taste – a question of whether one prefers bass that's a little 'dry' (with bungs), or slightly 'fruity' (without bungs).

The double main drive arrangement has several obvious sonic consequences. The most positive of these is a degree of dynamic grip and expression that is rarely encountered below £400, and unequalled in this particular group of speakers. Unlike the two-driver systems, which tend to have a slightly cool overall character, the Mercury F4 sounds if anything a little too warm and rich through the upper bass and lower midband, while at the same time the broad presence band is just a little restrained.

The stereo image focuses very well – provided you sit down, so that your ears are within a slightly restricted vertical window bounded by the drive units. The Tannoy's colorations are modest, with few signs of box coloration as such, but speech has a slightly pinched character. Criticisms are therefore minor, and the net result is a sound that is both comfortable and easy on the ears, yet is also very effective at communicating the vigour and dynamics of the musical performance – very impressive at the price. **HFC**



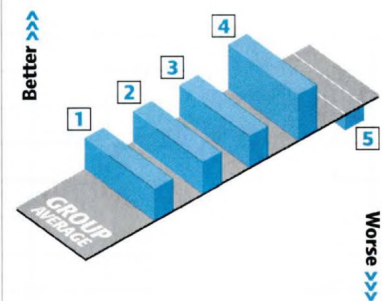
## LAB REPORT

Our generous 90dB sensitivity rating is close enough to the manufacturer's claim of 91dB not to quibble over the difference. One reason is that the Mercury F4 has a bass alignment suited to close-to-wall positioning.

The port is tuned to 40Hz, and the resistive bungs reduce the output (below 100Hz or so) by around 2dB. The speaker should be easy to drive though, the load staying above 6 ohms across most of the band, dipping down to 4.5 ohms above 4kHz.

The tonal balance holds within reasonable limits, but shows some obvious trends. With close-to-wall reinforcement, the bungs are likely to be a matter of taste: open ports give the flattest overall response above 80Hz, but a little too much output 40-80Hz. There's a modest peak around 900Hz, and a slightly depressed broad presence zone from 1.3kHz to 4kHz.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	7/4.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	24Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 83%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**PRACTICALITY >> 87%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**BUILD >> 83%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

**VALUE >> 96%**

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Twin d'Appolito two-way is handsome enough. It works well close to a wall, with port damping. It delivers an engrossing and entertaining sound with good dynamic expression and a warm, restrained balance.

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 90%**

# CONCLUSIONS

The latest crop of sub-£400 speakers delivers tremendous value for money

This group of speakers is significantly less expensive than those normally covered in our *Ultimate Group Tests*, and that means unusually tight constraints on manufacturing costs.

Vinyl woodprint finish is one way of saving costs, of course, and that is universal here. There are doubtless economies in the crossover network components, too. But the designer still has to pack two or more drive units into an enclosure, and the variations we have encountered are remarkable.

In truth, all these speakers are very competently designed, and capable of surprisingly good results within performance envelopes that are necessarily somewhat limited. Picking Best Buys is therefore an invidious task, as all six represent fine value for money in an overall speaker market context, and each offers its own particular and unique styling and performance solutions.

There's no arguing with the fine value for money of the £230 Q Acoustics 1030 or, for that matter, Mordaunt-Short's £270 Avant

904i. But, as Goldilocks might have pointed out, the former sounds a little dull and the latter a bit bright.

Focal's £289 Chorus 705V is a genuine miniature, and a very well mannered one too, though really best suited to smaller rooms where space is at a premium. Monitor Audio's £200 BR2 is a fine example of the classic medium size standmount, cleverly adapted to make good use of close-to-wall location, while its compact cabinet and 165mm main driver ensures a fine 'power-to-weight' ratio.

Both the £350 Tannoy Mercury F4 and £370 Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3 add extra drivers to good effect. The wall-loving, two-way Tannoy delivers vigorous dynamics and engaging musicality, while the free-space, two-and-a-half-way AE has superior imaging and a well controlled sound.

Each of these speakers makes different choices and has different strengths and weaknesses. The challenge, as always, is to figure out which best suits your particular preferences and requirements. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### CD PLAYERS

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640C** £250  
Basic no-frills CD player delivers musical information with fine coherence and flow.

### REGA APOLLO

**REGA APOLLO** £498  
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### AMPLIFIERS

**DENON PMA-700AE** £250  
A budget amp with decent timing and analysis and good loudness capabilities.

### CREEK EVO

**CREEK EVO** £500  
Could be more accurate, but its lively musical presentation is very persuasive.

## 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 Aegis Neo 3	Focal Chorus 705V	Monitor Audio BR2	Mordaunt-Short Avant 904i	Q Acoustics 1030	Tannoy Mercury F4
PRICE	£370	£289	£200	£270	£230	£350
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Pretty compact floorstander has fine neutrality and openness, wide dynamic range and good bass weight.	Unusual shape reduces boxiness, giving a smooth sound with good detail but limited weight and dynamics	Good looking standmount delivers a muscular and vigorous sound with good dynamics and coherence.	Compact floorstander sounds smooth and neutral with decent bass and fine openness but modest dynamics.	Generous floorstander with an expressive midband, but also limited bass authority and restrained presence.	Close-to-wall floorstander delivers an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm overall balance.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
SIZE (WxHxD)	20x90.5x24cm	19x31.5x25cm	18.5x35x25cm	16.5x80x26.5cm	29.5x90x19.5cm	20.5x97x29cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2.5-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	2x130mm	1x130mm	1x165mm	1x130mm	2x165mm	2x170mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Floor	Stand	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Vinyl	Vinyl	Vinyl	Vinyl	Vinyl	Vinyl
BI-WIRE?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	88dB <b>A</b>	88dB <b>A</b>	88dB <b>A</b>	87dB <b>P</b>	89dB <b>G</b>	90dB <b>G</b>
EST. BASS EXTENSION	24Hz <b>G</b>	40Hz <b>P</b>	30Hz <b>A</b>	30Hz <b>A</b>	25Hz <b>G</b>	24Hz <b>G</b>
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	6/4 ohms <b>A</b>	6/4 ohms <b>A</b>	6/4 ohms <b>A</b>	8/6 ohms <b>G</b>	7/5 ohms <b>A</b>	7/5 ohms <b>A</b>
OVERALL PREQ. BALANCE	+30% <b>G</b>	-10% <b>P</b>	10% <b>A</b>	-10% <b>A</b>	-20% <b>P</b>	+30% <b>A</b>
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	-10% <b>A</b>	+10% <b>A</b>	10% <b>A</b>	+30% <b>G</b>	-20% <b>P</b>	-10% <b>A</b>

# DEFINITIVE AUDIO



KSL Kondo Nero Line Integrated Valve Amplifier £24,000



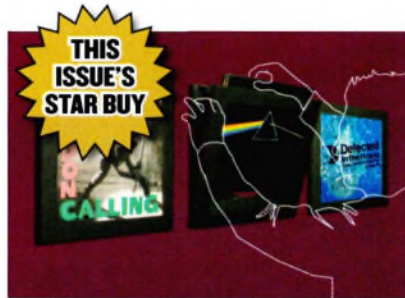
**L to R:** 1. Kuzma Stabi XL £10,000 2. Art Audio Concerto Stereo Amplifier (GE) £4400 3. Living Voice IBX R2 (Burr Oak) £4400 4. SME 10 / SME V £4115  
5. Living Voice OBX RW (Santos) £7200 6. KSL Kondo Ongaku Integrated Amplifier £49,000 7. Magnum Dynalab 106T Valve Tuner £3600  
8. KSL Kondo Gakuoh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

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

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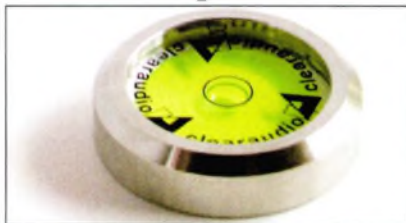
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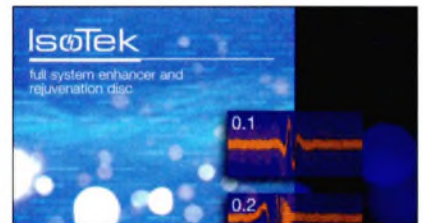
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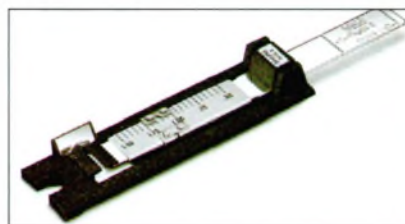
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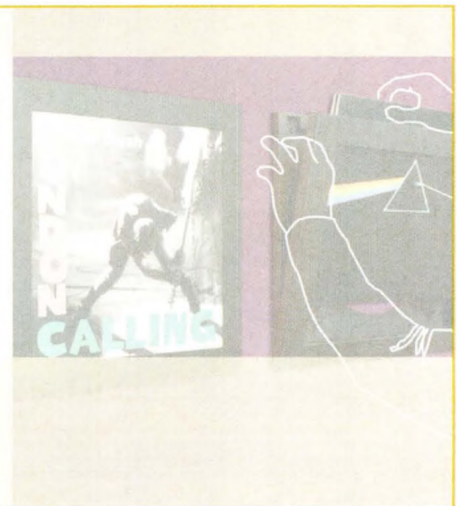
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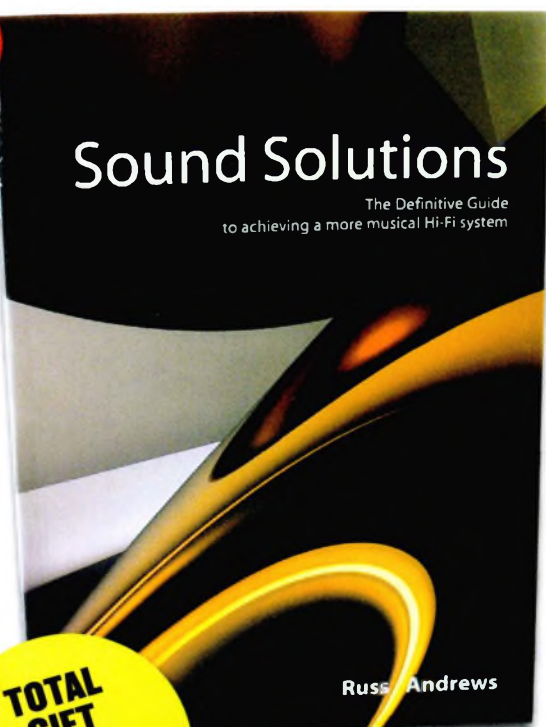


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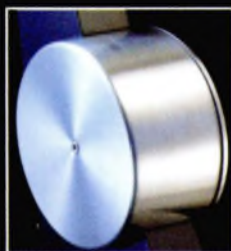
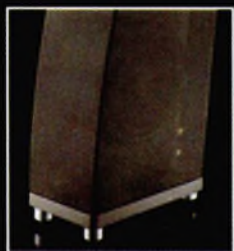
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# *nonconformist*

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



# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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

## Reviews you can trust

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

## How to use this guide

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

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

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# CD PLAYERS

*Audio disc players for music only*



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

## SUPER AUDIO CD



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

## Q&A

### WHAT'S A DAC?

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

### WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

### DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

### WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion.

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

### CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

### CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

## TOP BUYS



### Rega Apollo £498

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



### Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

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



## Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# CD PLAYERS

### Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player								285
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative								293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully undemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing; enhanced by flexibility as a DAC								291
	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift, otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value								285
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)								270
	Denon DCD-700AE	250	Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay								284
	Marantz SA7001	430	Easy, relaxed sound arguably lacks true grit, but is extremely listenable from CD and SACD								281
	Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system								288
	Naim CD5i	825	Bass has great extension but lacks control, slightly. Tonal neutrality higher up is excellent, however								291
	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation: smaller-scale works can lack focus								291
	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer								285
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance								276
	Vincent CD-S6 MkII	999	With its tube output stage, a beguiling midrange, sweet highs and attractively figured lows plus fine dynamics								287
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality: 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!								280
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Audio Research Ref CD7	8,000	Top of the CD playing tree, with a sound as open and musically accomplished as you'll ever find from the format								279
	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender								281
	Classe CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced								286
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Classe CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs								284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too								280
	Cyrus CD XV/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion								279
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output								289
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best								291
	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm								283
	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.								284
	Meridian G06	1,695	Great combination of all-round attainment with superb looks and build quality, plus superb remote control								281
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance								280
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via onboard XPS supply								238
	Rega Saturn	1,300	Attractive simple player does the basics superbly, delivering performance with great poise, precision and range								286
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source								244
	Sugden CD21 SE	1,395	Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers								271
	T+A CD1230R	1,500	Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering								280
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits								253

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



**Copland CDA823** £1,750

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



**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 multifunction 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?

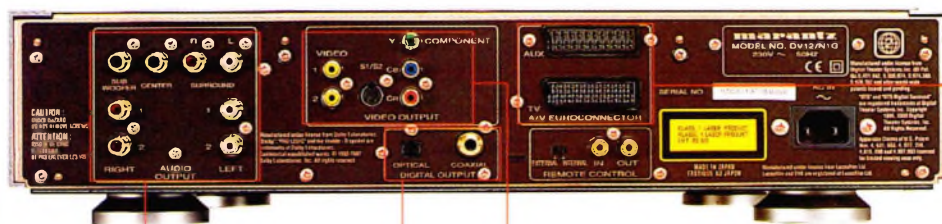
Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

### 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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC. DIG. OUTPUT	OPT. DIG. OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	SOURCE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem						276
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation						274
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video						275
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing						287
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD						266
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi						259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BB</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	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 (5.3mm) 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.

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

Arcam DV78 DVD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(750.00)	£399.00
Arcam AVR250 A/V Receiver E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1025.00)	£629.00
Arcam FMJ DV29A DVD-A Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1600.00)	£895.00
Linn Klassik Music System Sil E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1250.00)	£749.00
Linn Klout Power Amp S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(2400.00)	£895.00
Naim XPS2 Power Supply E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(660.00)	£395.00
Naim SuperCap Power Supply E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1475.00)	£1075.00
Naim N-Sats Speakers (Maple) (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(750.00)	£525.00
Naim N-Sub Active Sub E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1525.00)	£1075.00
ProAc Studio 130 Speakers E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1099.00)	£769.00
Quad 12L Speakers Piano Black E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(399.00)	£249.00

# 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



**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.

for use with line-only amps.

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

### 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	
<span>BB</span>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	268
<span>EC</span>	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45		●	●	271
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
<span>BB</span>	Michell Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
<span>BB</span>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●	●		239
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<span>BB</span>	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●	●		248
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	195
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
<span>EC</span>	SME 20/12A	11,133	Brings a calmness and precision to vinyl replay that we have rarely encountered, build quality is second to none	33/45/78	●	●	●	293
<span>EC</span>	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●	●		259

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE PHONO CARTRIDGES

### MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around		●		285
<span>BB</span>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<span>EC</span>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
<span>BB</span>	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound		●		290
<span>BB</span>	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound		●		270
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		●		265
<span>EC</span>	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●		253

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE PHONO STAGES

### Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUQ GAIN	AUQ IMPEDANCE	
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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.

**CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY** **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown. **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

# SME

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Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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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

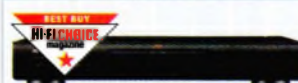
area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

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](http://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

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# TUNERS

## FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

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

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

Some decisions are just so simple

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
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# DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

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### 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	SPECIFICATIONS:				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>CD-R/RW RECORDERS</b>								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1				218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1				233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2				243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2				233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1				205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1				243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1				218
<b>MD RECORDERS</b>								
	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
<b>HDD RECORDERS</b>								
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160			276
	Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160			280
	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
	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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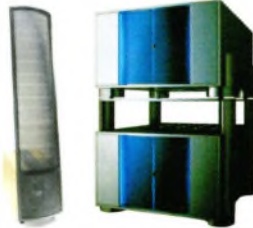
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# STEREO AMPLIFIERS

*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.

## HOME CINEMA STEREO

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

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

## Q&A

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

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

### WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-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.

## TOP BUYS



### Marantz PM7001 £350

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



### Cambridge Audio Azur 840A £750

Like the matching 840C CD player, this is a technically innovative product with a sound so refined it belies its price point – just check out that fantastic midrange!



### Primare 130 £1,500

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



### Copland CTA405 £2,498

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

# Our favourite EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO AMPLIFIERS

### Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DIVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM			60	289
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt			90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A V2	300	Nasty-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	750	Excellent value - powerful and capable with useful features and clear, dynamic sound	8				120	293
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt			85	283
	Cyrus 6 vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7				40	293
	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
	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence - an authentic classic	5				25	224
	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM			50	293
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7				100	266
	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8				100	280
	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6				100	275
	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6				130	281
	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt			85	255
	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM			50	286
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6				100	286
	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt			60	292
	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6				180	275
	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5				200	247
	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4				200	289
	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5				75	271
	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5				150	288
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7				180	285
	Primare i30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4				40	268
	Unison Research Unico 200	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5				200	269
	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 EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO AMPLIFIERS

### Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>										
	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
	Croft Precession VPolestar 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
	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2				266
	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6			125	270
	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated			6			75	264
	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt		50	287
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling			5			136	256
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value			5			70	285

**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 STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

continued

## Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>								
	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
EB	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/All+	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
EC	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too	●	●	6	opt	400 293
	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
	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)	SCALE NUMBER
<b>MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS</b>								
	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
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640R	600	Simple and elegant receiver. Attributes that reflect in good sound quality without the distracting toys you'll find elsewhere	●	7	●	100	292
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	●	10	●	140	267
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	●	3	●	160	255
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo! Cultured sound, too		5	●	110	270
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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	●	7	●	100	273
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price	●	6	●	100	287
<b>MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS</b>								
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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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## MONITOR AUDIO

### RS6 SPEAKERS

- Floorstanding design
- Metal cone technology
- Finish options available

*"They walk the fine line between total revelation and class entertainment"*



## PRIMARE

With class-leading build quality, and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, Primare build elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.



## ROTEL 06 SERIES

Rotel's 06 Series will give you years of enjoyment and offers excellent value for money. This range of separates creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.

## SPENDOR S5e SPEAKERS

- Hand-made 'e' generation bass-midrange drive units reward with a uniquely clear and musical sound.
- Natural wood cabinets available in a choice of finishes



## KEF

### iQ5 SPEAKERS

- Uni-Q design
- Finish options
- Floorstanding
- Award-winning

*"The iQ5s are little stars, providing stunning scale and authority from discreetly sized towers"*



## 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 CD5001OSE CD players, the SA7001 SACD player and the PM4001 amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.





## Any song. Any room. Anywhere. **SONOS** Wireless Music System

Sonos is the first wireless, multi-room digital music system that lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house – and control them from the palm of your hand. With a wireless Sonos Controller in hand, you'll have instant access to all your digital music, plus Internet radio, subscriptions to online audio services and even music from your favourite CD or MP3 player. With Sonos ZonePlayers in the rooms of your choice, you can play the same song in different rooms, or different songs in different rooms. To start listening, just grab the colour controller, pick a room, pick a song and simply hit play.

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Sevenoaks has 34 years' experience in the hi-fi market - and nobody knows more about getting the most from music. With the major brands in stock, Sevenoaks can help you choose individual components or design a complete system from scratch. Just tell our in-store experts what you listen to, when and where.

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SOUND & VISION

The Experts in Home Entertainment



### ONKYO CS-515DAB

This award-winning micro delivers exceptional performance and is superb value for money.

"A truly musical micro system"



### MONITOR AUDIO

#### i-DECK PLUS

Get amazing results from your MP3 collection with the i-deck plus. This upgraded model now includes an AM/FM tuner and new infrared remote control allowing access to all your iPod's menus.



### YAMAHA CRX-M170

- Compact system
- Comprises CD player, amplifier and DAB/FM tuner
- What Hi-Fi? recommended



### ARCAM

#### SOLO MUSIC SYSTEM

- Amazing sound from an integrated system
- Exceptional quality CD, FM and DAB radio
- Integrated iPod connection
- From Arcam, a great British company



### DIVA SERIES

Arcam believes that superb sound quality is vital to the real enjoyment of music. The Diva range reproduces music at a level that is remarkably true to life.

## Don't Forget! Accessories make the difference

The quality of sound and vision a system produces is determined as much by its accessories as its main components. At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought - our staff can demonstrate the difference the right accessories can make to your home entertainment experience.



Revive  
your record  
collection



### PROJECT DEBUT III

- Two speed, belt drive turntable complete with cartridge
- What Hi-Fi? award-winner



NEW

### CYRUS

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price. **NEW DAB 8.0 TUNER**



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## A vision for every home

Create your dreams with the latest home entertainment technology. Whether it be home cinema, quality hi-fi or multi-room, Sevenoaks will transform your home and increase your viewing and listening pleasure.

Sevenoaks Design and Custom Install provides a solution that meets your exact needs and budget.

At Sevenoaks, we create bespoke home entertainment systems of the highest quality that complement your home and lifestyle.

With 49 stores and over 30 years of experience, Sevenoaks creates systems that will transform your life.

## Multi-room systems

A multi-room system puts all your home cinema and/or hi-fi equipment in one place and gives you control at the touch of a button. Put screens and speakers in as many rooms as you want and control what you listen to or watch from one central hub. With hard-disk technology, you can store your entire DVD and CD collections in one place and play different films or music tracks in different rooms at the same time.

Sevenoaks staff are experienced at installing both simple and complex multi-room systems, and ensuring they integrate with the look and feel of your home as well as being fully functional and easy to operate.

## How it works

The Sevenoaks custom install service takes in everything from initial site visits to designing and planning your system, through to project management and installation to ensure you get the most from your home entertainment system.

**Sevenoaks consults with you at every stage and, if required, will liaise with builders and architects.**



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## SEVENOAKS GUIDE

Pick-up our 2007 Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Guide at your local store. Alternatively, it can be ordered via our Website and posted to you (UK mainland addresses only) FREE OF CHARGE



## Choose the best in the business

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is the UK's largest specialist retailer of high-quality home entertainment solutions. With 49 stores nationwide and a proud history of satisfying customers, Sevenoaks has a hard-earned reputation as the most comprehensive provider of home cinema, hi-fi and multi-room audio systems, offering excellence in customer service and a unique design and custom install option.

## Ahead of the field

- **LEADER for quality brands.** Sevenoaks 100 per cent independent status means it can bring together the finest components and systems under one roof.
- **LEADER for quality staff.** Sevenoaks employees are home cinema and hi-fi enthusiasts with a passion for the products and satisfying customers.
- **LEADER for quality service.** At Sevenoaks, customers are treated as individuals and solutions are designed for individual needs.
- **LEADER for custom install.** Few retailers have more experience of designing, installing and optimising bespoke systems in homes.



### SIM2 DOMINO D35 DLP PROJECTOR

SIM2 is synonymous with the finest quality home cinema projectors and the new D35 model adds to that enviable reputation.

### INFOCUS IN76 DLP PROJECTOR

Fill your screen with bright, vivid, crisp and detailed images with this award-winning, 720p resolution, DLP projector.



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- LATEST TECHNOLOGY
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The Experts in Home Entertainment



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- stock leading brands to offer a range of quality products
- offer impartial and personal service
- have home cinema and hi-fi demonstration rooms

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# STEREO SPEAKERS

*Speaker pairs for stereo sound*



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

## Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

## Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



## Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

## Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

## POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

## Q&A

### IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

### DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

## TOP BUYS



**Q Acoustics**  
1050 £330

This range-topping floorstander from newcomer Q Acoustics produces an engaging sound with fine dynamics and impressive transparency.



**DALI**  
Ikon 6 £899

Complete with a ribbon super-tweeter, this is an exceptionally capable floorstander for the money, delivering a highly detailed and thoroughly engaging sound.



**B&W**  
805S £1,600

A superbly well-engineered stand mount 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	ISFE NUMBER	
	<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
	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	
■	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39	●	A	22	●		292	
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,295,255	A-	45	●			283	
■	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	
■	ATC SCM11	849	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with good, natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much	21,38,25	A-	55	●			293	
■	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65	●			260	
■	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23	●		●	226	
■	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25	●			234	
■	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	165,28,28	A-	40	●			279	
■	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35	●			253	
■	Castle Richmond 7i	900	Does all the musically important stuff flawlessly. A fine communicator that delivers reassuringly credible bass	18,92,5,26	●	A+	47	●		286	
■	Castle Compact Column	550	Compact, not so much that you need a sub to back up the bass, an elegant and engaging speaker for its size	14,87,5,16	●	A-	50	●		280	
■	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●		271	
■	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	●	A+	22	●		275	
■	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24	A	40	●			215	
■	Dynaudio Focus 110	850	Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness	17,30,28	A-	38	●			279	
■	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	●	A-	28	●		273	
■	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A	60	●			241	
■	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40	●		●	269	
■	Epos M12 2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40	●			265	
■	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	●	A-	25	●		275	
■	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,000	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37.5	●	A+	20	●		288	
■	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	●	A	25	●		275	
■	KEF iQ3	280	Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33	A+	40	●			284	
■	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	●	A	25	●		273	
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●		271	
■	Monitor Audio BR5	400	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold sounding, good value and an easy electrical load	17,85,25	●	A-	36	●		293	
■	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27	A-	40	●			284	
■	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	●	A	33	●	●	276	
■	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	165,85,29.5	●	A	40	●		281	
■	Naim n-SATS	695	Very discreet and informative, if a bit lean and forward. Just add an n-SUB for excellent all round results	20,29,21	A	50	●			268	

**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 (s) **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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"CAPABLE OF A THRILLING SOUND"  
WHAT HI-FI AWARDS ISSUE, 2006



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- Superb build quality and performance
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- Birch finish

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SAVE: £180

£149.95

AELITE 2

- Black, cherry or birch

WAS: £449.95  
SAVE: £200

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AELITE 15.1 SYSTEM

- 2 pairs Aelite 1, Aelite Centre and Aelite Sub
- Compact design, beautiful finish, stunning performance
- Birch finish

WAS: £1529.95  
SAVE: £730

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AWARDS 2006



### TURNTABLE PRO-JECT RPM6.1SB

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### AMPLIFIER NAD C352CT

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- Remote control
- Titanium finish

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AWARDS 2004



### PORTABLE DAB RADIO PURE POCKETDAB 1000



- All aluminium case and fascia
- 18 hour battery life from DAB
- B Grade: fully guaranteed for 1 year

WAS: £169.95  
SAVE: £120

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- SD Card Reader and MP3 playback with USB file transfer
- B Grade: fully guaranteed for 1 year

WAS: £199.95  
SAVE: £100

£99.95

### AV SYSTEM DENON S301

WAS: £1399.95  
SAVE: £400

£999.95

- Multi-region DVD Playback and multi-format compatible
- HDMI output with HD video upscaling up to 1080i
- 2x70 watts stereo and 140 watt subwoofer

WHAT HI-FI  
AWARDS 2006



### MINI SYSTEM DENON DF103HR

- CD/WMA/MP3 player
- Hard disk capacity for up to 900 uncompressed albums
- Internet radio, USB in for external media playback
- DAB/FM/AM tuner

WAS: £749.95  
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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 DOME	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BEST BUY</span>	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 TC10	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
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26	A-	30		292
	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>								
	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	22,44,31,5	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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	28,104,37,5	A	45		287
	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28,115,38	A	28		290
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	A+	30		255
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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
	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

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Our favourite  BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

# STEREO SPEAKERS

*continued*

## Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (W/H/D, CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (W/D)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
	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	33,5,57,5,10	●	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
	PMC EB1	5,950	The best argument for large speakers that we've heard in a long time	29,120,46,5	●	A-	19	●	292
	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
	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
	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	30	●	265
	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	20,100,25	●	A	22	●	290
	Ruark Tailsman 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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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 BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

### Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE-OF-DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SIZE NUMBER
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●		224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A+	5	53	●		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A+	6	20	●		251
	Focal-JMlab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20	●		268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29	●		269

**SPECS KEY:** **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.

**NUMBER OF SPEAKERS** The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

**FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## SUBWOOFERS

### Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	SIZE NUMBER
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">BT</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	45x33x45	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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**Yamaha**

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**5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE**  
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PRO 50 MKII

**£ CALL FOR PRICE**

**£ CALL FOR PRICE**

**£ CALL FOR PRICE**

**CHECK ONLINE FOR PRICE**



BUY NOW PAY  
**2008**

**MISSION**

**INFORMATION**

Mission's Stunning M-Cube consists of an active 250W subwoofer with 2x200mm (8") bass driver, magnetically shielded centre and satellite speakers and 5 Wall brackets.



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**2008**

**DALL**

**INFORMATION**

The Award winning IKON 6 utilises the already famed and celebrated Hybrid Tweeter Module and features 2 x 6.5" paper/wood fibre cone IKON drivers. This speaker combines a beautifully crafted exterior with such an impressive sound quality that it will bring a smile to your face.



**Quad**

**INFORMATION**

This 5.1 speaker system is capable of delivering outstanding performance featuring four satellite speakers, a dedicated centre channel and a 300W rms 10" powered subwoofer.



**MJ Acoustics**

**INFORMATION**

The PRO 50 MKII is an awesome addition to complement the most discerning cinema and music system featuring twin crossovers, 120watts of power, new designed 10" driver and Speaker and Line Level inputs with Gain Control Range 80 and 60dB.

**CHECK ONLINE FOR MORE PRODUCTS & PRICES**

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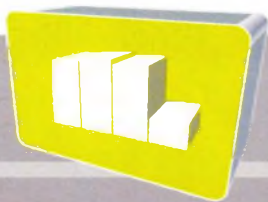
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The Destiny integrated amplifier produces world beating audio performance with its use of discrete analogue MOS-FET, its new mains transformer which produces up to 100 Watts into 8 Ohm operation and its 3Hz - 80KHz Frequency Response

Destiny Series  
Creek



**STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER**

The 8000P is a classic two channel power amplifier, delivering over 100W per channel and featuring a frequency response of 0.1 Hz - 75 kHz.

8000P  
Audiolab



**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER**

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2010s  
Exposure



**STEREO RECEIVER**

The NAD C720BEE combines the award winning C320BEE amplifier with an RDS AM/FM tuner, it includes a Multi-source Zone facility and features 100W, 150W, 180W. IHF Dynamic power into 8, 4 and 2 ohms, respectively.

C720BEE  
NAD

**Monitor Audio**



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**MULTI AWARD WINNING SPEAKER PACKAGE**

**SPEAKER PACKAGE BRONZE REFERENCE**

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This Bronze Reference system features a blend of high performance driver technology, exceptional build quality and gorgeous finishes.

These components are also available individually in a variety of finishes.

**Infocus**

**CHECK ONLINE**

HOME CINEMA PROJECTOR IN76



**INFORMATION**

The HDTV-ready IN76 features 1280 x 720 resolution, 1000 lumens and 3000:1 contrast ratio, uses Pixelworks™ DNX™, and 1 x HDMI, 1 x M1-DA/DVI (HDCP), 1 x 3-RCA component port and more making the IN76 fully compatible with DVD players, gaming consoles, cable boxes and satellite.

**Sonos**

**£ CALL FOR PRICE**

MAKE YOUR MUSIC WIRELESS ZP80 INTRODUCTORY PACK



**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 every room you choose directly from your PC.

**Onkyo**

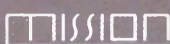
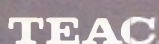
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DAB/CD MINI SYSTEM CS-515UK



**INFORMATION**

The award winning CS-515UK CD receiver system features 50 Watts (RMS) power output, DAB Radio, MP3-CD / CD-R/ RW playback, Bass Boost and the audio quality is promoted with the inclusion of a Wolfson® 192 kHz/24-bit DAC.



Finance options available through V12 Finance

Full terms and conditions of the sale are available at [www.hifibitz.co.uk/terms-conditions](http://www.hifibitz.co.uk/terms-conditions). The terms of sale do not affect your statutory rights. Finance options are available on all items priced over £400 e.g. Buy Now Pay September 2007. All calls are recorded for training purposes.

# BLUE MURDER

6'0"

5'6"

5'0"

4'6"

4'0"

3'6"

3'0"

2'6"

2'0"

1'6"

1'0"

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## The Unilet Suspects

(They're not hard, they're pussy-cats really!)

**The Line-up** of top end hi-fi and home cinema at criminally-low prices is staggering. No wonder the crowds line up each year to grab bargains on the type of equipment real audiophiles would kill for.

**The Victims** are ex-demonstrators, previously-owned, factory specials and many virginal examples from some of the best families around. All will be offered at cut-throat prices.

**The Modus Operandi** for the greatest sale of the year is simple. All year, the gang at Unilet demonstrate the very latest and best in pure two-channel audio and home cinema. But a year is a long time and every Spring they decide to have a good cleanout to make way for even more models.

**The Crime** would be if you were to miss out. For the early-bird specials you'll need to get along at the crack of dawn. But there are so many great opportunities to save a fortune that whenever you arrive you're sure to find a real bargain.

**CrimeWatch** You can get all the details of what's on offer, directions to the crime scene and print off the Blue List Bargains by going to our website [www.unilet.net](http://www.unilet.net)

**Reward** yourself and get along to the Blue Murder Sale at Unilet. You'll be able to pick out the usual suspects and pick up some great bargains.

## Sale ends Saturday 2nd June



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**July 14th**  
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The hidden hi-fi store where you'll find all the best brands including: Acoustic Energy (AE), Anthony Gallo, Apollo, Arcam, Arcam FMJ, Atacama, Audio Lab, Audiovector, Beyer, Bosendorfer, Boston, Bryston, B&W, Celestion, Chord Electronics, Chord Cables, Denon, Denon Gold, Dynavector, Ecosse, Future Glass, Heed Audio, Insert Audio, IsoTek, IXOS, JAMO, JBL, KEF, KEF Reference, Koetsu, LAT, Lexicon, Marantz, Marantz Premium, Meridian, Merin Cables, Morduant Short (MS), Michell Engineering, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, Nordost, Optimum, Ortofon, Panasonic, Parasound, Pioneer, Plinius, PMC, Primare, ProAc, Project, Pure, Q Acoustics, QED, Quad, Quad Electrostatics, Quadraspire, REL, Roksan, Roksan Turntables, Rotel, Sennheiser, Shure, Siltech Cables, SME, SONOS, Sonus Systems, Soundstyle, Spendor, Stands Unique, Stax, Supra, Talk Electronics, Tannoy, Target, Teac, Townshend Audio, VDH, VPI, WBT, Wharfedale, Wilson Benesch, Yamaha.

# 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	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190	219
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	194
	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	219
	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution						35	290
	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270	266
	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience						260	252
	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20	285
	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280	268
	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						295	205

**SPECS KEY** **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



After 5 years in production, the Dino is still one of the most popular phono stages around. Highly versatile with accessible switches on the baseplate to facilitate a wide range cartridges.

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Visit our website to learn more about this exciting product and the high performance Diablo phono stage.

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**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.

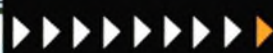
Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.  
Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,  
Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.  
Specialist set up services: **ISF Display Callibration**.

**Nobody else** in the area offers you a "One Stop Solution" to all of your home entertainment requirements, as we are also Custom Installation experts. Discuss your requirements with us and we can survey, design, install, commission, and maintain full Sound and Audio-Visual distribution, and automated lighting around your home.

**Visit us first** and you won't need to go anywhere else.

We have superb demonstration rooms for both Hifi and Home Cinema, and we will deliver and install.

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**".....it's hifi for fun's sake....."**

# 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	P	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>								
	Black Rhodium Harmony	60	Clear and well defined sound with good bass and admirable articulation					290
	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit					293
	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 Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass					259
	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!					279
	Ixos Ixtica X1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail					283
	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed					248
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too					281
	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere					284
	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral					278
	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble					281
	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging					280
	Supra Sword-ISL	379	Unusual inductance-free design, beautifully built, with bold, finely detailed and outgoing sound quality and excellent discipline					292
	TCI Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass					285
	Townshend DCT300	300	DCT wire with hum-busting ferrite sleeves. Packed with enough detail to make rivals sound flat					234
	Vanden Hul MC Silver IT MkII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price					289
	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price					273
	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
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>								
	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
	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble					E 278
	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price					E 260
	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price					E 265
	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O 234
	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
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>								
	Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	A high degree of musical communication: detail is not perfect but one is seldom aware of the shortfall					290
	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
	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
	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board					227
	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
	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, high res and suitable for exacting systems					278
	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging – a budget bargain					276
	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems					234
	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical					287
	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round					241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times					291
	Wireworld Luna 16/4	5	Budget b/wire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail					292
	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.

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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
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
	Clearlight AudioAspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless	65	60,42		4	Glass	293
	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot	75	45,36		5	Glass	261
	Quadraspire O4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

## Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50	20,17			1	293
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16,5,18			1	281
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16,3			4	283
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20			1	220
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4	232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15			5	261
	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22			6	287
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280

**EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY** HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

**SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY** HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.

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# Brilliant Blu-ray

Want to count the hairs on Leonardo DiCaprio's chin in *Blood Diamond* or watch individual ice crystals gleam in *March Of The Penguins*? Then Blu-ray is the format for you. You've heard the hype now learn more about what it can do...



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### ▶▶ Picture perfect

Without dedicated high-definition content, the only time an HD Ready TV will have shown you a high-definition picture is in the shop.

That is until now - Step forward Blu-ray, a high-definition disc format that will show you your favourite movies with up to 6 times the picture quality of standard DVD.

### ▶▶ Crystal-clear sounds

For those of you looking to recreate your own home cinema experience Blu-ray has one other great advantage over standard DVD: its superb sound quality. By using the extra capacity of the Blu-ray disc, you can enjoy the same sound quality as the original studio master (and that means it's actually better than the cinema).

### ▶▶ More memory

Forget the extras you've grown to love on DVDs. Blu-ray discs will give you much, much more. A dual-layer Blu-ray disc can hold up to nine hours of high-definition video, offering you simply masses of entertainment and information. It really is the future of home entertainment.

### ▶▶ Greater interactivity

With Blu-ray, you'll no longer be limited to simply scanning chapters or need to exit a film to look up information. The Java software on Blu-ray discs lets you bookmark your favourite scenes and bring up menus, quizzes and even games while the film is still running. So, when you're desperately trying to remember which film you last saw the psychotic cop killer in, you'll be able to call up his biographical material at the push of a button.



**Offering pictures so sharp you'll want to reach out and touch them, Blu-ray will soon be the format of choice for all serious film buffs.**

But if you still need some convincing, check out our Blu-ray guide in the next issue.

We'll be answering all your Blu-ray queries, and explaining just what makes it special. We'll also take a look at high-definition gaming, plus give you a sneak preview of just some of the great Blu-ray films being released in the coming months. And because we know you'll be itching to get your hands on some of these Blu-ray discs, we've selected some of the best kit on offer to help get you started.



  
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Guide.  
Next  
issue!**

**The Blu-ray guide. All you need to know.**

# 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.

**CLASS A** The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

**CLASS AB** Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

**CLIPPING** An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

**CLOCK** Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

**CROSSOVER** A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

**DAB** (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

**DAC** or **Digital-to-Analogue Converter**. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

**DOLBY DIGITAL** A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used

**DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL** Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

**DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER** A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

**DSD** (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

**DSP** (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

**DTS** or **Digital Theatre Sound**. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

**DVD-AUDIO** High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

**ELECTRICAL DIGITAL** Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

**FILTERS** Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE** The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

**IMPEDANCE** With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

**JITTER** An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

**KBPS** (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

**LINE LEVEL** Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

**LOSSLESS COMPRESSION** A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

**LOSSY COMPRESSION** Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

**MIDRANGE** The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

**MP3** (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

**OUTPUT IMPEDANCE** A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

**PCM** (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

**PRESENCE BAND** Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

**QUANTISATION NOISE** A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

**SACD** (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

**SAMPLE RATE** The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.0227msec. 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.

**TDSLINK** The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

**TRANSISTOR/MDSFET** 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.

**JUCY** Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

**LOW-LEVEL DETAIL** The quietest sounds in a recording.

**MUSICAL** or **musicality**. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

**NATURALNESS** Realism.

**OPAQUE** Unclear, lacking transparency.

**OPEN** Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

**PACE** Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

**PRESENCE** A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

**PRESENCE RANGE** The upper midrange.

**SEISMIC** Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

**SIBILANCE** An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

**SNAP** A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

**SPEED** A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

**STURDY** Solid, powerful, robust sound.

**THICK** A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

**THIN** Bass light.

**TIMBRE** The tonal character of an instrument.

**TIMING** A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

**TRANSIENT** The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

**TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT** A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

**TWEAK** To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

**TWEAKER** Someone who enjoys this process.

**VEILED** Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

**WARM** A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

**WEIGHT** A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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Available: May 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.

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(JAS-Audio Orsa, hi-fi+, issue 43).

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Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi Choice Dec 06

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- Jake B

“ P.S. your service is world beating and I have told no end of people, cheers... ”

- Darren J

“ Thanks for good advice, accurate descriptions, and fast and seamless delivery. Ordering equipment unseen and unheard over the internet always relies on honest and wise advisors - Shadow Audio are the best I have come across. ”

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“ Please thank everyone at Shadow Audio for their courtesy, help and patience in dealing with me and many thanks for the use of the KW SACD whilst my Opus was on order. I will be in contact with regard to a new amplifier in the near future! ”

- John O

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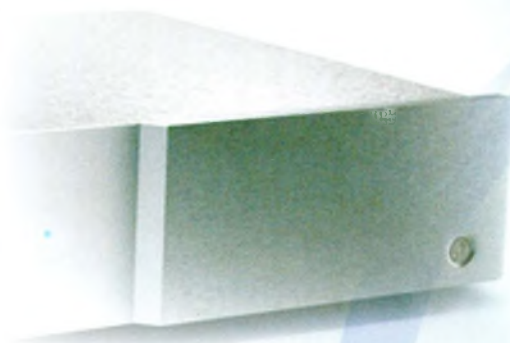
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What Hi-Fi

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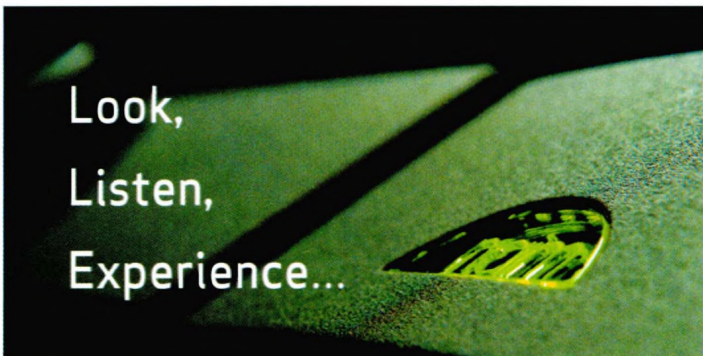
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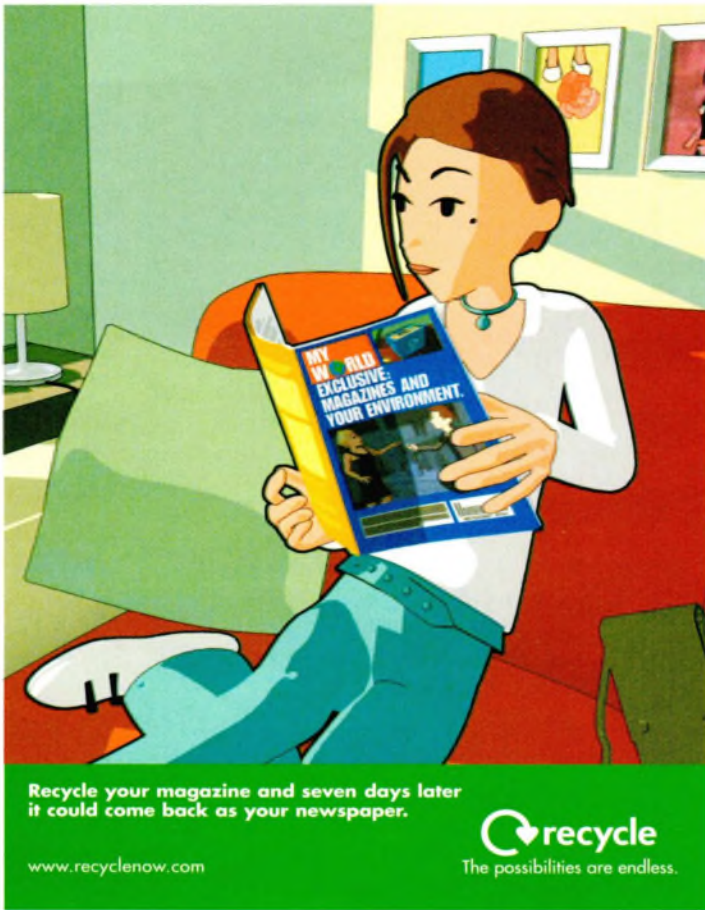
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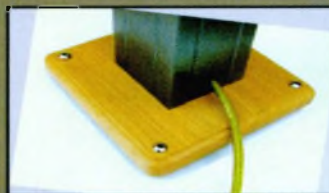
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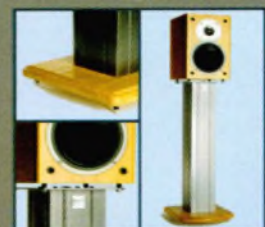
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## In-depth reviews of the most vital new kit, including...

- ▶ Musical Fidelity A1008 integrated amplifier
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- ▶ Clearaudio Performance turntable
- ▶ Heed Obelisk Si amplifier
- ▶ Yamaha Soavo-2 loudspeaker
- ▶ Russ Andrews HP-1 preamplifier and HP-2 power amplifier



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JUNE 2007 ISSUE 294

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# 2ND HAND HI-FI & 3 HOME CINEMA BUYER

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DIGITAL TUNER

# 2nd-hand shootout

*£500 can get you a sensational pair of loudspeakers, if you know what to look for*

**W**ith so few moving parts, speakers are among the safest second-hand purchases in hi-fi. With the average life expectancy of a loudspeaker pushing the 20 year mark, you can afford to be a little adventurous.

It's with this spirit of adventure in mind, that we look at our first £500 second-hand choice. Although only discontinued in 2002, the Naim SBL ('Separate Box Loudspeaker') was very much a product of the late 1980s. That wide cabinet may not convey a holographic soundstage, but for dynamic clout and rhythm, the SBL still impresses today. Cabinets are no longer available, but both drive units are, although a bass driver will set you back a hefty £185 or so. It's worth buying as late a model as possible, as they had improved woofers and cabinets. Look for a moulded woofer chassis as opposed to the earlier pressed steel one, made by Mordaunt-Short. Later cabinets are fully veneered and all the better for it.

One crucial check is that the twin-arm metal backbone the SBL is built upon neatly separates the three individual cabinet units. There should be no rocking before the mastic seal is applied and the aluminium pads must not be over penetrated. There's no doubt that the SBL is not a user-friendly speaker to set up. Many in the business recommend a long-serving Naim dealer to set up and install the speaker for you, as getting it wrong can ruin the sound.

Nevertheless, once set up correctly the SBL can be an enthralling listen and one that's well within our budget.

If you like the idea of a large loudspeaker, but are put off by the SBL's complexity, then the Epos ES30 is well worth considering. Produced at a time when Epos was in financial difficulties, the ES30 was a grand range-topper and signed in at nearly £2,500 towards the end of the last decade. Since 1999, Creek has owned Epos and, as it never actually produced the ES30, spares are scarce. Having said that, it will always do its best to support the model, and can even supply alternative drive units. When retrofitting drive units, though, it's always advisable to change in pairs. Although not the easiest speaker to get parts for, the ES30 has plenty going for it. The first is that most models will only just be ten years old and, as they were extremely well built, should have years of useful life left in them. Secondly, these under-rated speakers are still ridiculously cheap on the second-hand market. We've seen pairs for £500 before, and even the most expensive fetch little more than £650. At this sort of money, a well looked-after pair are a no-brainer.

If space or taste dictates a smaller speaker, then £500 still provides a wide range of options. In some respects the Sonus Faber Concerto is the polar opposite of the floorstanders here. This exquisite walnut and leather mini has limited volume



Above: Naim Audio SBL loudspeakers

knowledge of wooden furniture! In extreme conditions, the leather covered baffle can become unstuck, but a quality glue will soon sort that out. Although over £1,000 new, these delightful speakers can now be had for as little as £400. For our budget, you should be able to find a mint pair, perhaps even with the matching stands.

Our final choice of speaker would once have been a direct rival for the Concerto, yet has a very different sound. If it's neutrality you crave then they don't come much better than the B&W 805. Although around the same price as the Concerto new, they tend to hold their value better. Our budget would buy a good model from the mid 1990s, but

**“They were extremely well built and should have years of life left in them.”**

potential, but a beguiling midrange. During the mid-late 1990s, this speaker was regularly used as a reference for other 'exotic' miniature designs, and it certainly marked a turning point for Sonus Faber: until the Concerto came along most Brits' had never heard of the Italian company. Absolute Sounds distribute the Sonus Faber range within the UK, and keep spares for the Concerto. Not that you should need such spares. Being solid wood the cabinet is as tough as they come. Better still, if it does pick up scuffs and scratches, these can easily be sorted out by anyone with some

probably not the later Nautilus-inspired model that came along in 1998. The key issue with this speaker is avoiding examples that have been thrashed in a studio. Being so resilient and neutral sounding, they've always been a popular pro choice. Yet, they're not unburstable, and it should be remembered that a pair of tweeters will set you back over £130 before fitting. Buy a good pair, though, and you'll be rewarded with what is still one of the most balanced sounding speakers out there. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month – £750 tonearms



Above: Epos ES30 floorstanding loudspeakers

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## Used Product Listing

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### DIGITAL

Wadia 302, silver, exc cond, fully boxed, manual and R/C. Be quick! (£4000)	£1995
Musical Fidelity A3 S CD, immac cond, few months old, fully boxed (£995)	£595
Micromega Ana, black, ex HiFi Choice review model (£2150)	£1395
AudioNet Art V2, silver / blue display, immac cond, boxed, remote (£2400)	£1595
GamuT CD-1, mint condition, only 18 months old, fully boxed (£2995)	£1995
Micromega CD132, ex-dem, black finish, as new condition, boxed (£849)	£595
Audio Research CD3 MK1, excellent condition, black faceplate (£5000)	£2295
Linn Klassik, CD+ Amp+Tuner, All in one system, only 6mths old, black (£995)	£749
Arcam Diva 93t, silver, exc cond, boxed, manual, r/c, 1 yr old, (£1000)	£595
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, only 1 month old (£4000)	£3395
AVI Lab Series CD, current spec, boxed, unmarked condition (£1499)	£1195
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive, ex-dem, immaculate cond (£4000)	£2995
Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, black/silver (£2950)	£2295
AVI S2000 DAC, excellent cond, only 1 owner from new, fully boxed (£995)	£249
AVI Series 21 MC4 CD player, excellent cond, only 1 owner from new (£995)	£249
Marantz SA-11S1, mint, 2mths old, silver finish, boxed (£1995)	£1695
Marantz SA15 S1, silver finish, unmarked condition, high end SACD! (£1100)	£795
Krell Standard S2 SACD, silver, mint, few months of use, original box (£4200)	£2995
Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, only 3mths old, latest ver (£1250)	£895

### AMPLIFIERS

Exposure 23 Pre Amp, mint, boxed, remote (£1400)	£795
Exposure 28 Power Amp, mint, boxed (£1400)	£795
Krell 280p Pre Amp, silver, immac, only a few months use, fully boxed (£3000)	£1995
Cairn 4810 Integrated, silver, immaculate cond, just over a year old (£2700)	£1795
Bryston 4B-SST Power Amp, 2 months old, like new, 300wpc (£2750)	£2249
EAR Yoshino 834T Hybrid Int, mint, boxed, 8 months old! Bargain! (£2800)	£1995
Qinpu A1 Ox, ex What HiFi review model, boxed in immac cond (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295)	£795
Musical Fidelity A5 Int, 250wpc, 6 months old, boxed, as new (£1499)	£995
Musical Fidelity A5 Pre, mint, only a few months old, fully boxed (£1499)	£995
Bryston B-100 SST Int amp + DAC, unmarked condition, boxed (£3750)	£2995
McIntosh C220 Pre, only 2 months old, boxed, mint. Simply stunning! (£3300)	£2795
Jadis DA30 valve integrated, mint, 2yrs old, fully boxed, 30wpc (£4000)	£1995
Bel Canto Evo 2i Integrated, boxed, mint cond (£2800)	£1595
Linn Kairn Pre, immaculate condition, fully boxed with manual and remote	£699
Musical Fidelity KW550 Integrated, only a few months old, mint (£5000)	£3995
AVI Lab Series integrated, immac cond, only a few months old! (£1599)	£1095
AVI Lab Series Power Amp, immac, less than 1yr old, boxed (£1650)	£995
Linn LK280 Power Amp, 2 available, both in excellent condition (price of each)	£299
Pathos Logos, brand new sealed box! canc order, great opportunity (£2700)	£2295
Eastern Electric M520 Int, What Hi-Fi 5 star review, 4 mths old (£1539)	£1095
McIntosh MA2275, immaculate condition, only 1 year old! (£5700)	£3995
McIntosh MCS01 Monoblocks, mint condition - as new (£8050)	£5995
Minimax Power Amp, 1 year old, 1 owner, immaculate condition (£995)	£649
Manley Labs Neo Classic 300b Monoblocks, 25wpc, mint! Sensational! (£5895)	£3495
Marantz PM15-S1 Integrated, silver, unmarked condition (£1100)	£795
Cyrus Pre X VS, immac cond, only 5 mths old! one prev owner (£1000)	£749
Nagra PSA Power Amp, very rare, only 6 months old!, immac, stunning	£3395
AVI S2000 Pre Amp, excellent condition, only 1 owner from new (£995)	£249
Bel Canto S300i Integrated, mint condition, only 2 months old (£1799)	£1495
Lyngdorf (Tact) TDA2200, digital int, full room correction, excellent (£2395)	£1495
Pass Labs X1 Pre Amp, mint, less than 1yr old!, sep power supply (£4700)	£3495

### LOUDSPEAKERS

Hyperion 938, gloss black finish, immac cond, very low hours (£3750)	£2895
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic, ex-display, never been played, fully boxed (£845)	£650
Wilson Benesch Arc, silver stands and side cheeks, immac cond (£2600)	£1795
B&W CM4 speakers, in Rosenut, 5 years old, boxed	£449
Sonus Faber Cremona, natural maple finish, 5 mths old, boxed Superb (£5k)	£3795
Thiel CS 0.5, Natural Cherry finish, immaculate condition (£1200)	£749
Ref 3a De Capo-, redwood finish, superb cond, boxed (£2500)	£1695
Wilson Benesch Discovery, mint, silver stands, silver side cheeks (£5700)	£3995
JM Lab Diva Utopia BE, exc cond, boxed, tweeter covers and spikes (£7500)	£3995
PMC FB1+, cherry, boxed, immac cond, few mths old! (£1695)	£1295
PMC OB1, in oak, boxed as new, 6 mths old, simply stunning! (£2700)	£1995
JAS Orior, birds eye maple finish, mint, 10 months old!, fully boxed (£2300)	£1495
JAS Audio Orsa, ex HiFi Plus review model, poplar tumor (£1399)	£1149
Zingali Overture 3S, cherry, exc cond, orig packaging, 1 year old (£4250)	£2250
ATC SCM10A-2 Active's, 2 months old, mint, all original packaging (£1995)	£1649
PropAc Studio 140, mahogany finish, brand new - never used but box opened, recent 5 stars What Hi-Fi, evenly balanced sound with high quality finish!	£1195
JAS Audio Supertweeters, Review pair, sound awesome! (£649)	£495

### ANALOGUE

SME 20/2A, immac, inc factory silver tonearm wire upgrade!, less than a year old (£6300)	£4495
Trichord Dino Phonostage, black, excellent condition, 1yr old (£325)	£225
Trichord Dino+ PSU, silver, excellent condition, 1yr old, boxe (£249)	£175
Clearaudio Emotion, immaculate condition, only a few months old! (£690)	£575
Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, exc cond, inc Ply Cartridge (£2100)	£1495
Musical Fidelity Kw Phono, immac, fully boxed, ex Hi-Fi News review model, yes, the price is correct, not to be missed!!! (£2400)	£1250
Audio Research PH5 Phonostage, MM/MC, mint, only 6 months old! (£1800)	£1395
PI Scout inc JMW-9 tonearm, immaculate condition, boxed (£1650)	£1195

### MISC

Nordost Blue Heaven Speaker Cable, ex-dem, 4m pair, bi-wire (£489)	£349
Isotek Gill Minisub, silver front, current spec, immac cond (£545)	£395
Naim Hi Cap power supply, good condition, serial no. 304xx, superb upgrade	£349
Isotek Nova, only 5 months old!, immac, fully boxed, great opportunity (£1700)	£1295
Hovland Reference Speaker Cable, exdem, boxed, 8ft pair, single wired (£1200)	£795
Townshend Supertweeters, titanium finish, boxed as new, exd (£800)	£649
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

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<b>Canary</b> 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 mths old - boxed £3250 £6500		
<b>Canary</b> 608 Integrated amplifier - with LV upgrade VGC - serviced. nice £1700		
<b>Unison Research</b> Smart 300B class A power amp - 1 year old £2500 £4500		
<b>Art Audio</b> PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo £2500 £4500		
<b>Beard</b> integrated amp - beefy boy - needs some help £350		
<b>Border Patrol</b> 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - charmer £2500 £5000		
<b>Mactone</b> MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - 30 hours use £2500 £6500		
<b>Nottingham Analogue</b> Spocedeckwith Rega RB300 tonearm, Reson Recca cartridge and Living Voice mat. £900 £1633		
<b>Tube Technology</b> Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use £1250 £2500		
<b>Clearaudio</b> Goldfinger cartridge. Brand new, still in sealed box £3500 £5640		
<b>Sugden</b> Bijou mm/mc phono stage - 100 ohms - virtually new £300 £650		
<b>Transfiguration</b> Esprit - 10 hours use - perfect ex-review bargain £600		
<b>Micell</b> Iso / Hero phono stage £200		
<b>Border Patrol</b> Control unit - line preamplifier current spec £1750 £3000		
<b>Mactone</b> XX330 line pre-amp - 10 hours use £2500 £8000		
<b>Placette</b> passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 mths old £700 £1600		
<b>Conrad Johnson</b> PV-14L pre amplifier £1400		
<b>Living Voice</b> Avatar, lBX-R2 / OBX-R2 / Auditorium ex-dem', part-ex, and seconds, from very young to very old		
	<b>please call</b>	
<b>Sonus Faber</b> Electa - Walnut - no stands £900		
<b>B &amp; W</b> 704 Cherry, vgc. Less than a year old. Original packaging. £900		
<b>Horning</b> Agathons Silver - VGC - Oak finish. £1500 £4000		
<b>Audio Note (UK)</b> Ltd ANE loudspeaker £500		
<b>Ruark</b> Crusader loudspeaker £600		
<b>Revel</b> M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood -with stands £850 £2000		
<b>Avalon</b> Arcus loudspeaker - Maple £3500 £7000		
<b>Shahinian</b> Arc loudspeakers - oak. Good condition. £1400		
<b>Nairn</b> SBL loudspeakers - latest specification £1000		
<b>Rega</b> Jupiter CD player - professionally clocked + rebuilt with Black Gates £600		
<b>Mark Levinson</b> ML-39 CD player £1600		
<b>Pink Triangle</b> Dacapo II CD player £900		
<b>Townshend</b> Audio Seismik Sink - 3DHD - 100 kilos, 48 x 37 cms £300		
<b>Townshend</b> Audio Seismik Sink - 3DSS - 12 kilos, 48 x 37 cms £250		
<b>Micell</b> Orbe SE with Techno arm. VGC. 2.5 yrs old. £1600		
<b>Ortofon</b> Kontrapunkt B cartridge 150 hours £450		
<b>Art Audio</b> Argento amplifier. Black with chrome. Excellent condition. Only 9 months use. £6000		

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# Heatherdale

audio limited

202 Findon Road Worthing, West Sussex BN14 0EJ

Web: www.hifi-stereo.com

E-mail: heatherdale@hifi-stereo.com

Telephone: 01903 872288

Mobile: 07860 660001 Fax: 01903 872234

### Speakers:

B & W 801 Mark 1 speakers	£695
B & W 802 Mark 1 speakers	£650
Kef Concord speakers	£150
Dynaudio Audience 7 speakers & stands	£395
Hales Transcendence 5 Loudspeakers	£2900
Quad 2905 electrostats. BRAND NEW FACTORY SEALED	£5750

### Pre-amps:

Naim Nac 92 with Nap 90/3 amp	£595
Proceed PAV pre-amp	£995
Mark Levinson ML28 with phono stage	£995
Mark Levinson ML380S pre amp	£3495
Mark Levinson ML383 integrated amp	£2750
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	£1595
Kora Triode 100SB	£3500
Lumley Stereo 70 Amp with passive pre-amp	£1595
Pair Trilogy 958 monoblocks withTrilogy 902 pre-amp	£1995
Nakamichi Amp 1 with Cassette Deck 2 and CD Player 3	£795
Mark Levinson 432 Power Amp	£4495
Exposure 15 integrated amp	£295
Audionote Kegan mono amps, mint (£28,000)	£11995
Audionote Gaku-Ons (Kondo) mono amps (£150,000)	£30,000
Pathos "Twin Towers" integrated amp	£1695

### CD Players, Transports and DACs:

Denon DCD 590 CD player	£60
Sony CDP M41 CD player	£60
Sonic Frontiers SFD1 DAC	£795
Theta Data Basic 2 CD transport	£395
Theta Chroma DAC with HDCD	£195
Esoteric X03 SE CD/SACD player (ex demo)	£POA

### Miscellaneous:

Hitachi FT5500 Mk1 1 tuner	£125
Sony ST-SE570 tuner	£60
Nakamichi 682 Cassette Deck	£395
Technics ST-GT550 tuner	£65
Winds stylus gauge	£425
JPS 'The Power Plus' 2m power cable	£195
Sony FM/AM ST-SE370 Tuner	£75
Kimber KS1020 mtr' interconnect	£195
Transparent "The Wave" 5.5 mtr' speaker cable	£195
Van den Hul "The Cleartrack" 5.5 mtr' speaker cable	£55

### Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer	£2495
My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new)	£2750
Blue Pearl turntable with Graham Phantom arm	£POA

### Main Dealer for:

**Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villetti speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Micell.**

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### Analogue

- Alphason Xenon, excellent 249
- Anston RD80, wood finish ex condition 149
- Anston RD80, black finish ex condition 149
- Ariston RD115 c/w Infinity Back Widow, excellent 249
- Clearaudio Ref. TQI arm, Accurate cart. (new £8880) 3999
- Clearaudio Solution AMG Black/Satisfy Carbon direct wired 999
- Clearaudio Solution/Satisfy Carbon direct wired (£1650) 849
- Clearaudio Start Smart Emotion, inc smartphone & cover 650
- Clearaudio Exact Stylus gauge 79
- Clearaudio Smartphon, as new 179
- Clearaudio Champion Level 1 Satisfy Carbon arm, ex boxed 999
- Heybrook TT2 c/w Linn Basik LVX 249
- JBE SlateSeries 3Mission774 rare as.. 349
- LFD MM0 Phono stage 179
- Linn LP12, OL DC Kit 399
- Linn LP12, Valhalla, no arm 349
- Linn Ittok 12", VERY VERY RARE ITEM. REDUCED 899
- Linn LP12, LVX arm, good order 399
- Linn LP12 superb order in maple, c/w upgraded rega etc 649
- Michell Orbe SE, NC power, RB300, unused 1749
- Michell Focus One, Rega arm, excellent for year 249
- Michell Transcendents Reference Hydraulic/Fluid arm, NOW 599
- Michell Gyro SE, DC motor, ex boxed 649
- Micro Sew/DX1000, matching arm, offboard p/s, lovely! 999
- Mission 774originalarm 149
- MFM Source, c/w large p/s, REDUCED 449
- Musical Fidelity XLPV3 as new boxed 199
- Musical Fidelity XLP5, excellent boxed 129
- Ongin Live Ultra deck with off board p/s, SME cut. NOW 179
- Pink Triangle LP1/RB250, the best I've seen 379
- Project Experience Ltd edition Xpack, vgc with Ronco red Project PhonoBox SE 379
- Rega PS/RB700, as new, thankfully in black 499
- Rega Planar 3, OL advanced DC kit, RB300, excellent 399
- Rega Planar 3, RB300, vgc boxed 179
- Roksan Radius 5 in maple, c/w Minna arm, ex dem 479
- Roksan Xenos, Taboz 2, XPS3.5/DSU excellent 549
- SME IV, excellent 799
- SME V excellent boxed 1099
- SME V turntable, ex boxed (no arm) 1799
- SME 3009, excellent boxed 249
- SME 3009, excellent 179
- Systemdek II X900 99
- Systemdek II (biscuit tin), ADC arm, vgc 249
- Technics SL1210mk2 light domestic use only, excellent boxed 249
- Technics SL10, good working order 199
- Thorens ID124, SME 3009, plinthed etc v nice indeed Call
- Thorens TD124, exserviced 323
- Thorens TD125/SME3009 229
- Thorens TD160u/Mayward vgc 229
- Tom Evans Microgroove, ex dem 299
- VPI 16 S Cleaning Machine, call for details 379
- Zeta, famous heavyweight arm, excellent 549

### Digital

- Arcam DV79 REDUCED AGAIN 599
- Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 ex dem Call
- Audomeca Mephisto Transport, ex boxed remote 779
- AVI 2000 Reference CD player 399
- AVI Lab Series, mint boxed ex dem 849
- Bow Technologies Z28, beautiful, vgc boxed 1999
- Cairn Fog 2, as new boxed 799
- Consonance Droplet, ex dem bargain - WOW! 1499
- Cyrus Quattr, c/w tuner, UNDER HALF PRICE! 499
- Cyrus CD7, ex c/w remote 379
- Cyrus PSXR in silver excellent boxed 349
- DCS Edgar DAC/Pre, a taste of the high life! 2999
- DCS Purcell Upsampler, bargain upgrade 1249
- Electrocompaniet ECOM1-UP, superb monster unit, ex boxed 1749
- TEAC/Esoltec P70/D70, vgc stunning high end combo, rare as! Call
- Esoltec DV50S, very close to the X03 Call
- Esoltec UX1 - the ultimate player? COMPLETE BARGAIN!!! 2249
- Exposure 3010, as new boxed 599
- Heart Audio CD6000, valve output, superb boxed 449
- Linn Naimex DAC, ex boxed 299
- Meridian 200 Transport, excellent boxed 299
- Meridian 203 DAC, excellent boxed 179
- Meridian 508, ex boxed, due in Call
- Micromega Stage 3, excellent 299
- Nu Tjoebe CD4000 valve output with upsampling board, boxed 549
- NVA Transparent Statement, ex crate 1499
- Primare CD30 2, ex boxed c/w remote 749
- Proceed PDT2, nr mint boxed 599
- Roksan Caspan M Series, ex dem, mint boxed 799
- Shanling CDT80 as new 499
- Shanling CD1300UK Omega Drive, as new 2899
- Sugden Bhuu CD Master, vgc boxed 599
- TEAC/Esoltec P70/D70, vgc stunning high end combo, rare as! 499
- TEAC VRDS9, excellent, remote Call
- Trichord Pulsar DAC, as new boxed 299

### Radio and Recorders

- AVI S2000 Tuner vgc boxed 249
- Cambridge Audio DAB AVR640T as new boxed in black 119
- Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/FM New 199
- Musical Fidelity FM Tuner 79
- Musical Fidelity ES500 c/w remote 149
- Quad66FM 299
- Pure 701ES, new 149
- Ringo Radio 129
- Sorry 777ES DAB Tuner REDUCED 249
- Videologic 601 DAB in BLACK 99

### Amplifiers

- AC Magnum MF125 Monoblocks, excellent monos in vgc 399
- Arcam A32, ex silver c/w remote 749
- Arcam Alpha 10, excellent boxed just serviced 399
- Audotab 8000/8000X7, as new processor/7 channel amp 1249
- Audio Research LS7 Preamp 699
- Audio Research D130 Power, ex 999
- Audio Research D70 Power, ex 899
- Audio Research SP12 Pre, ex 599
- Audio Valve Eclipse Preamp, ex boxed 1249
- Audio Valve Balour 200 Monoblocks - incredible (£10k new) 4499
- AVI Lab Series ex dem, superb little brute Call
- AVI S2000Pre, superb little preamp 449
- Cairn Meq Monoblocks, ex in silver 50k Class A, fabulous 749
- Cairn Ion T2 Monoblocks, mint in back 499
- Chord SPM1200B, boxed as new in track 1499
- Consonance Signature 10, v lovely 2A3 valve integrated 999
- Consonance Ref 8.8, c/w remote, uses 6550s to great effect 1199
- Denon 4400A monoblocks far 429
- Exposure 6 pre with two 7 power supplies, boxed 299
- Exposure 3010, as new boxed with £200 mm phono stage 649
- ITL MA80/MA100/MA100 Pre/Power x2 lovely combo NOW 299
- Krelli KSA100S, excellent boxed just serviced, in use at home!!! Call
- Linn Klou power, ex from 749
- Linn Naim Pro, late S05 version ex boxed 449
- Marantz PM7200, ex boxed 199
- Meridian 556, superb power amp, reduced 599
- Musical Fidelity E200 excellent 249
- Musical Fidelity A5 power, excellent boxed Call
- Musical Fidelity A3.2 pre/power, excellent boxed 999
- Musical Fidelity XP100 and XAS100 pre/power ex boxed 799
- Musical Fidelity The Preamp original mint thing 119
- NAIM 112/150x remote pre/power combo, ex boxed 899
- NAIM 92/90 pre/power combo, ex boxed 379
- NAIM NAP140 Olive, boxed 379
- Parasound JCI1 Monoblocks, nr mint boxed, FANTASTIC 2899
- Pathos Classic One Mk2, ex dem Call
- Pathos Logos, excellent boxed c/w remote, save £1000 1799
- Quad 909 Power, excellent boxed 699
- Quad 66 Preamp, c/w full remote 399
- Quad 44 Preamp, 405 and 405/2 Power amps NOW from 199
- Quad 33/303, vgc for year fully serviced 299
- Quad 99 Preamp, as new, buy with 99 Poweramp save £100 549
- Quad 99 Poweramp, as new boxed 399
- Quad II, monos and pre, factory serviced 2006 799
- Radford STA25 Renaissance and SC25 Pre/Power, excellent 1249
- Roksan Caspan M series pre/power 999
- Rotel RA1062, excellent boxed 349
- Sonic Frontiers Anthem Pre IL & Power 1, Reduced to only, mint 799
- TACTiLyngdorf Audio SD42175, great press, as new 1999
- Trestam DR3 & PSI1, min 2 box pre, phono, cute boxed 199
- Trio L 05M monoblocks, v nice indeed 499
- Tube Technology Prophet and matching p/s vgc boxed 699
- Usher Audio R1.5, Monster Class A poweramp 949

### Speakers

- Acoustic Energy AE2, ex black 699
- Acoustic Energy Aelle 3, ex dem award winners, in chery 499
- Audovector M3 Sig, active crossovers, new £4k+, amazing 1699
- AVI Duo, ex dem minor marking, reduced 849
- B&W 801S3, vgc super monitor, due in Call
- Castle Richmond 3, excellent boxed 149
- Castle Kendal, malmgany, excellent little floorstander 199
- Coleston S16S, excellent example of seminal standmount 349
- Dynaudio 40, in chery, boxed 179
- Dynaudio Focus 110, in maple, boxed c/w stands, fair Call
- JMLab Micro Utopia Be, c/w stands amazing monitor Call
- JMLab 1027Be, award winning floorstander, call for details 1999
- Living Voice Auditorium 2, excellent boxed 1749
- Martin Logan Aeon I, as new boxed 1199
- Martin Logan Aeon I, boxed bargain! 949
- Monitor Audio Radius 270 excellent 349
- Monitor Audio, mint boxed GS20 in Piano Black 1199
- Monitor Audio, mint boxed RSW12 Subwoofer 449
- Monsoon Audio FFF1000 excellent, ribbon/woolers NOW 479
- NAIM Credo in chery, vgc boxed 599
- Naim NKS Standmount well reviewed, great with NAIM 399
- Neat Acoustics Ultimatum MFS in Piano Black, £4k new, ONLY 1499
- Neat Acoustics Petite 3 SE c/w Ultimatum bass drivers NOW 530
- Pega F4XL mk2, stunning floorstander, ex dem save £1000! 1499
- PMC TB2 in chery 449
- Proac Response 1SC, Dreadnoughts & 20m Proac cable superb 999
- Revel M20, scruffy with stands Offers
- Revolver R33 ex dem, well reviewed bargain 249
- Rogers LS35a, need we say more 299
- Ruarx Taisman 2, excellent 299
- Ruarx Sabre, vgc, nice mid sized standmount 199
- Sonus Faber Concerto c/w SF Stands 699
- Tandberg Studio Monitor Large! 399
- Usher Audio R737, ex dem 1199
- WAD KLS9 kit, professional CNC cabs 179

### Accessories/Systems

- Cairn Fog v2 Cd player and 4808 integrated amp, ex dem Call
- Chord Odyssey, cut pair 448
- H Kardon AVR635 - was 1999 448
- Linn Classik K with onboard tuner, as new boxed 599
- Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3 excellent 179
- Musical Fidelity X-Can v3 excellent 179
- Primare CD110, one box system, ex dem 899
- Tara Labs Ref 8 Spkr cable Call
- TEAC R3 FM/DAB near portable radio in white, limited quantity 75
- TEAC DV20D DVD player and AG7D6.1 amp w/d save £150 329

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## FOR SALE

### A WHOLE LOTTA VINYL

complete collection for sale, over 2,000 records must go. Terry 07908 750494 (Kent)

### ARCAM ALPHA 10/ DAVE

digital amps, mint, boxed, (£2,500) offers. Ixos custom

coaxial interconnect, 6m, WBT locking RCA plugs, mint, (£85) offers. 01772 745553 (Lancs)

### ARCAM DIVA DV137 DVD

player, boxed with remote and manual. Excellent condition, almost new, £875. 0118 947 6254 (Reading).

### ARISTON RD11 series 80SL

turntable, walnut plinth, Rega tonearm with MP30, £150 07757 162478 (Yorks)

### AUDIO RESEARCH VS55

amplifier, £1,300. B&W Nautilus 805 speakers, £950. B&W FSN805 speaker stands, £200.

Linn Kann speaker stands, £50. 07940 507215 (London).

### AUDIOZONE AMP-1 integrated

amplifier, outboard power supply, superb sound, mint, £800. 07765 808374 (Lancs).

### B&W DM601 S3 speakers,

unmarked, as new condition in sorrento. Boxed etc, £180.

Apollo Olympus 50cm stands, mint work very well with B&Ws, £35. May deliver, readvertised due to time waster. Chris 01766 781211 (Harlech)

### B&W 604 S3 black, four

months old, boxed, mint condition, (£800) £600. Thomas 07835 056237 (Notts)

### B&W 704 in rich American

Walnut. 18 months old, perfect condition and boxed, £800. Naim Flat-cap x2, 10 months old, only powered CD player, perfect condition, boxed, £400 delivered in UK. 07729 458836 (Northern Ireland)

### CABASSE 100-watt monoblocks.

Lector two-box CD player, valve preamp, Naim 03 tuner Shahinian Hawk gold speakers. Phone for prices. 020 8524 2181 (Essex).

### CYRUS 8 integrated amp (black),

three years old, mint condition, boxed, remote and standard accessories £450ono. 01604 643531 (Northampton).

### 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](mailto: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)

### KAILIN KN-7 valve preamp.

Rotel RB-03 power amp, both mint less than a year old, £425 the pair. 01252 659058 (Surrey).

### KIMBER KABLE KS 1021 RCA

1m terminated with WBT 0108, incredible sound improvement with this top Kimber cable, original box, £275.

0039-02-215093 or email [fedepenzo@hotmail.com](mailto:fedepenzo@hotmail.com) (Italy).

### KIMBER SELECT 1011

interconnects 0.5m pair, next gen WBT plugs, (£328) £175.

Shun Mook Mpingo disc, (£50)

£30 inc. postage. Ortofon

Rohman cart (200hrs), (£1,050)

£400. Trichord Diablo with NC

power supply, (£1,500), 11

months old, £750. Stuart 01384

394441 (West Mids)

### KIMBER SILVER STREAK

interconnect 1m, (£250) £125.

Russ Andrews Mega Clamp Ultra,

(£250) £150. Both as new, will

accept £225 if bought together.

Stuart 01384 394441 (West

Mids).

### LIZARD WIZARD PMC amplifier

(Serial Number 0003), six months

old, hard transport box. 60W into

8ohms. Needs no warm up!

(£2,350) £1,500ono. 07900


248604 (Gloucester).

### LUXMAN D322 CD player with

variable output, boxed, in as new

condition with manual and

remote, £150ono. John 07855

121587 (W.Yorks) 

## WANTED

### AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100

tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts)

### BRYSTON 3BST power amp or

larger Briston power amp(s).

01803 523553 (Devon)

### LINN OR NAIM speakers. 01793

728103 (Wilts).

### NAIM CDI in good condition, with

box, manual and leads. Cash

waiting, for the right player in the

right condition. 020 7042 4522

(London).

### 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, Naim Nait amp. Inca

Tech Claymore. Sonneteer

Campion amp. 07810 103908

(West Yorkshire).

### REL / MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer

with remote. Possible part ex for

my Quad L-Series sub.

023 8073 8935 (Hants)

### STAX OMEGA electrostatic

earspeakers up to £1,000 for mint

condition example. 01333 311247

(Scotland)

### WHARFEDALE 708 speakers

023 8073 8935 (Essex).

## BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

**FOR SALE**

■ **MARANTZ PM6010 OSE** amp with remote and instructions, exc. condition, £85. Will deliver in Midlands area. 01543 251848 (Lichfield).

**MARANTZ CD17 MKII** CD player. Unmarked black model, with remote, interconnects, and original packaging. Build quality unmatched, £325. 01924 871782 or email stevehi-fi@tiscali.co.uk (Wakefield)

**MARANTZ PM6010 OSE** amp, CD6000 OSE CD player, Cambridge Audio DAB500 tuner, all black. Alphason five-tier glass rack with chrome legs. All as new £400ono. Chris 01202 828383 (Dorset)

**MERIDIAN G08** CD player, eight months old £1,700. Roksan Caspian tuner £300. Talk 3 preamp £300, all black. 01803 523553 (Devon).

**MERIDIAN 508** 24-bit CD, 504 FM tuner, 551 integrated amplifier, AVI Neutron III monitor speakers, Atacama three leg stands, hi-fi cabinet as new, £2,750. 01427 717134 (Lincoln).

**MONITOR AUDIO GR20** floorstanding speakers, cherry

wood finish. Excellent condition, (£1,500) £650ono. 07802 936750 (Hampshire).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY E100** integrated amp, fully serviced, vgc £100. Yamaha TX950 tuner, £100, Marantz CD5400, (£150) £95 01491 614325 (Oxfordshire).

**NAIM 80** power amps x3, £500 each. Hi Cap power supply, £400. 102 preamp, £500. Possibly TAG McLaren CD20R, DAC20 (offers). Mr Harrison 01323 486933. (East Sussex).

**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 1960s-1990s, some classic, call for information. 01224 646473 (Aberdeen)

**NEAT PETITE MKI** speakers (8"x12") matt black with removable grilles, (£525) £200. 020 7328 5001 (London)

**NORDOST RED DAWN REV** 3m pair, 2 to 4 biwire config, £250. Phone Ian on 01789 261585 or 07941 424322 or email ian.brunt@zen.co.uk (Warwickshire).

**NORDOST SOLARWIND** interco 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. 0794 655 3071 or email kesterbantini@hotmail.com (London).

**QUAD 22** Control Unit and Quad II power amplifiers, classic valve system, recently serviced, £650. 0113 275 1628 (Leeds)

**REGA 7** turntable, Exact cartridge. Rega phono stage as new, £950. Sony MiniDisc JA3DES plus discs, £175. 07736 773830 (Yorks).

**REVOX B750** amp and B760 tuner. Both excellent condition with manuals, £350ono. 01384 390067 (West Mids)

**RUARK SABRE III** speakers, rich walnut, one year old, boxed mint condition, £600. 01970 615386 (Aberystwyth).

**SENNHEISER HD600** headphones, mint, boxed cost £250, sell, £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. Daniel 01954 715266 (Cambridge).

**STELLO CDT 200** CD transport, silver, two years old, boxed, excellent condition, (£900) £450. David 01926 315981 (Warwickshire)

**TANNOY REVOLUTION 3** speakers in cherry finish, excellent condition, boxed and supplied with 4x2m runs of DNM Reson speaker cable to give a fantastic sound, £245. Chris 07894 683 392 or chris@riddle1403.fsbusiness.co.uk. (Ayrshire).

**TOWNSHEND** universal disc player – modified Pioneer DV-747A. three years old, power supply upgraded to never connected design. Litz link cable. Sounds fabulous as all the reviews say, £1,500 ono. 07900 248604 (Gloucester)

**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 38kilos, (£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, £40. Linn K20 speaker 2x 5m, £35. Chord Odyssey bi-wire 2x 1.5m, £25. Mission 771E rosewood speakers, £45. 01384 894284 (Stourbridge).

**YAMAHA CDX 493** CD player, ex condition in black, remote, instructions, original box, c/w Chord Cobra 3 gold plated interconnect phono to DIN, £110, will split. 01656 782523 (Porthcawl).



Above: Primare CDI10 one-box hi-fi system

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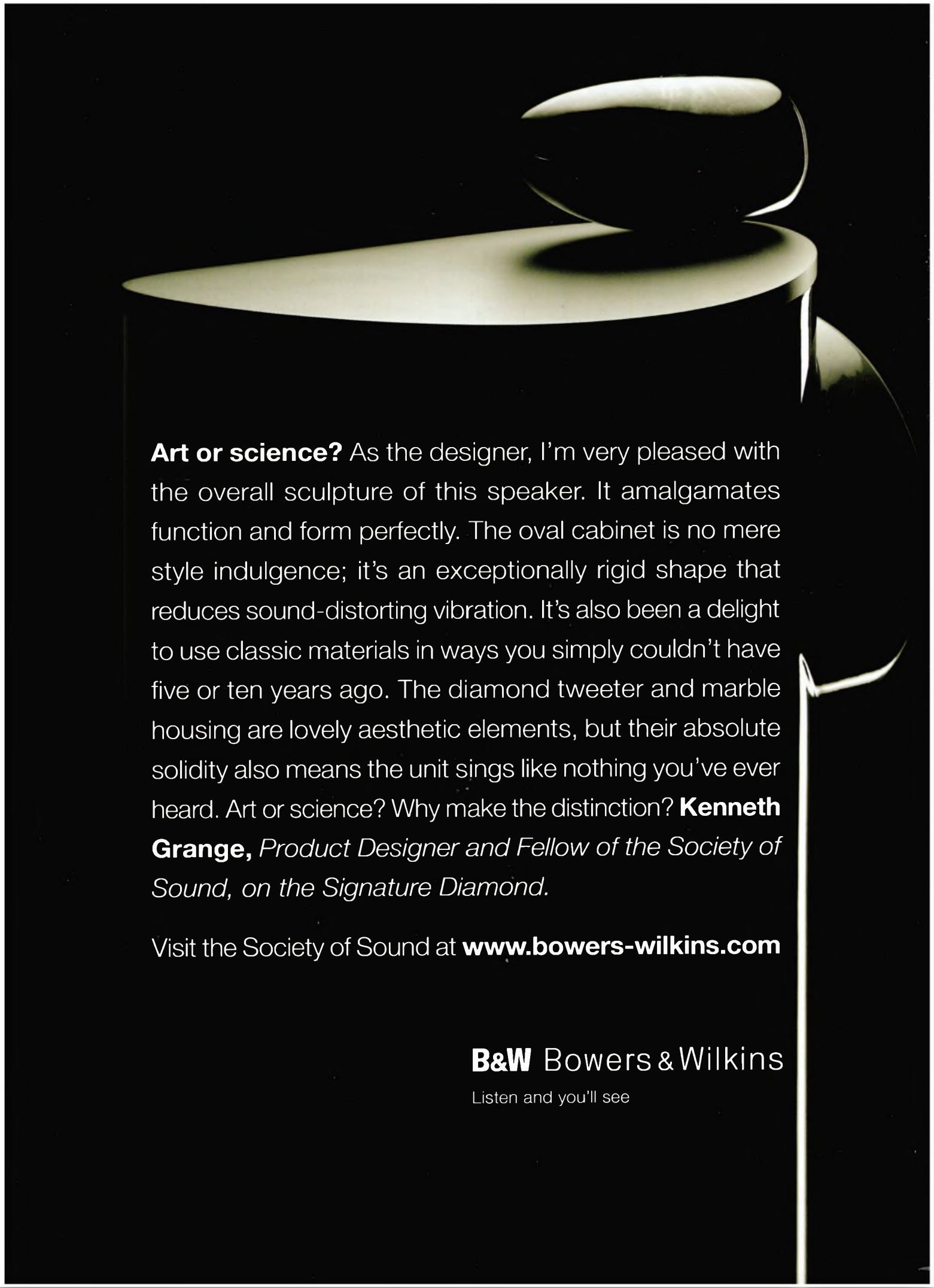
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**Art or science?** As the designer, I'm very pleased with the overall sculpture of this speaker. It amalgamates function and form perfectly. The oval cabinet is no mere style indulgence; it's an exceptionally rigid shape that reduces sound-distorting vibration. It's also been a delight to use classic materials in ways you simply couldn't have five or ten years ago. The diamond tweeter and marble housing are lovely aesthetic elements, but their absolute solidity also means the unit sings like nothing you've ever heard. Art or science? Why make the distinction? **Kenneth Grange**, *Product Designer and Fellow of the Society of Sound, on the Signature Diamond.*

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