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See page 28



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MonoPulse 32S • Revel F12 • Yamaha Soavo 2

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The ultimate hi-fi buyer's guide: all of our favourite gear in one great directory





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CLASSE



Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE AUGUST 2007 ISSUE 296

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



I write having just joined around 65,000 music lovers at the new Wembley Stadium to see George Michael make musical history. While it wasn't my first choice of artist, it was more about being there for the special opening gig, and the results were worth the trek. Stadium events certainly have their own magic, and I'd recommend keeping an eye on Wembley's forthcoming concerts...

You may well have noticed a slight change this issue: there's a new Editor on board. But don't worry – *Hi-Fi Choice* will still bring you your favourite mix of the best hi-fi and the hottest exclusives from the companies that count. More importantly, we want to make it your magazine and we welcome your opinions and comments, so do get in touch if you want to share your views; you can email me any time at dan.george@futurenet.co.uk.

Speaking of hot exclusives, this month we're delighted to be the first magazine to reveal Sugden's new A21aL Series 2 integrated amplifier – a classic reborn – plus Wharfedale's incredible high-end Airedale Neo loudspeaker, which until now was only available in Japan. It makes a welcome splash on these shores on p42.

Finally, we'd all like to say a fond farewell to our former editor Tim Bown, who has left the UK's finest hi-fi magazine in magnificent shape. We're all immensely grateful for your hard work over the years. Bon voyage...

Dan

Dan George 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

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

PAUL MESSENGER A former <i>HFC</i> 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.	JIMMY HUGHES With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the country's best known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of system matching, hi-fi tweaking and record collecting is unmatched in the industry.	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 <i>HFC</i> .	MALCOLM STEWARD Former editor of <i>Hi-Fi Review</i> magazine, Malcolm was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible <i>The British Audio Journal</i> .	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 <i>HFC</i> , 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.	DAVID VIVIAN An award-winning journalist, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for <i>HFC</i> . He also writes about cars, but who needs the latest Lotus when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive.

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.



50

60



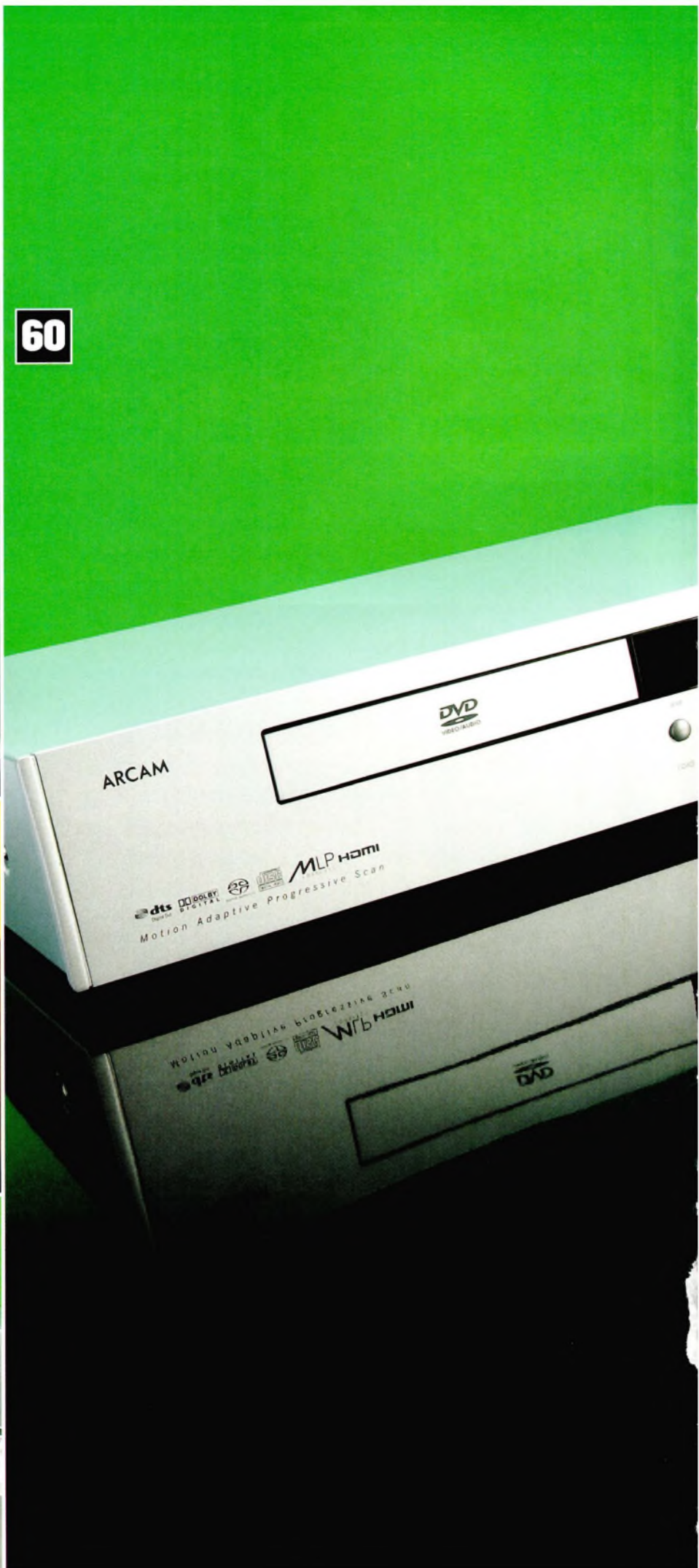
52



63



56



Contents

NEWS AND FEATURES

7 PRODUCT NEWS

The juiciest new fruit from the hi-fi tree

12 HAPPENINGS

Hot news from Munich's High End show

16 DISPATCHES

Audio-related opinion and comment

23 SYSTEM FILE

One reader's system laid bare

24 INDUSTRY PROFILE

Marantz audio legend Ken Ishiwata

28 COMPETITION

Win Vincent's SV-236 integrated amplifier, worth £1,000!

30 CHOICE CUTS

New music – rated by our experts

33 CHOICE MAIL

A selection of your letters and emails

36 BEAUTIFUL SYSTEMS

A high-end system of sonic beauty: this month, an all-Leema Acoustics system

EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH PRODUCT TESTS

42 Wharfedale Airedale Neo loudspeaker

46 Sugden A21aL Series 2 integrated amplifier

50 Marantz DV7001 universal disc player

52 Moon SuperNova RS CD player

56 Pioneer A-A9 integrated amplifier

59 Onkyo DV-SP504E universal disc player

60 Arcam DiVA DV135 universal disc player

63 Tivoli Audio Music System one-box system

64 Goldring 2100 moving-magnet phono cartridge

64 Profigold PGC82546 loudspeaker cable

65 Cambridge Audio Azur Reference interconnect cable

65 Sennheiser HD 485 headphones

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

LOUDSPEAKERS £800-£1,200

68 DALI Mentor 1

69 Dynaudio Focus 140

71 Epos M16

73 MonoPulse 32S

75 Revel Concerta F12

77 Yamaha Soavo 2

BUYER'S BIBLE

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

Your shortlist starts here...

SOURCE COMPONENTS

88 CD players

90 DVD players

92 Vinyl

95 Radio tuners

97 Digital recorders

AMPLIFIERS

100 Stereo amps

102 AV amps

LOUDSPEAKERS

108 Stereo speakers

112 AV speaker packages

ANCILLARIES

115 Headphones

117 Cables

119 Stands and supports

READER SERVICES

Our regular information service, including our official accessories store and latest subscription offer

80 Choice Bits accessories shop

82 How to subscribe

84 Back issues

121 Glossary

122 Dealer Guide

128 Dealer Directory

130 What's in next month's *Hi-Fi Choice*



FREE MINI-MAG!

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

2 2nd-hand shootout – this issue, the finest turntables £1,000 can buy

3 Trading pages

7 Readers' classifieds



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

Electra 1000 Be : mastering our own innovations

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FOCAL
the Spirit of Sound



EDGAR TP105VR INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

▶ An amplifier called 'Edgar'. What's next – Timmy the turntable? But, Edgar is new to these shores and when you get over the anthropomorphic name – as well as the distinctive cherry-wood front panel – you find this is a sweet little integrated amplifier that uses valves to their best effect. Amid a plethora of Chinese-built products, this one is rare in being both designed and built in the European Union – Slovakia to be exact. The stereo line-level amp sports just three wooden knobs (and a huge glowing logo) on the front panel, but behind that fascia is an amplifier that features 12 valves, in the preamp and power amp stages. The latter runs in ultralinear

(pentode) mode to deliver 40 watts per channel. With a CD player, two integrated amps, a headphone amp and a phono stage in the range – all of them swathed in glorious wood – we hope to be hearing a lot from Edgar. But will the Slovakian valves win us over? Find out next month.

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

PRODUCT Edgar TP105VR
TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE £1,450
KEY FEATURES Valve design ▶ Five line inputs ▶ 40 watts per channel ▶ Weight: 19kg
CONTACT ☎ 01435 867438 🌐 www.edgar.sk

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"Excellent build quality, protection circuits, a fully adaptive filtration circuit and stunning performance make the Sigmas a true bargain." HI-FI NEWS, BEST ACCESSORY 2006



"IsoTek is the UK's biggest name in filtration...this year we hail a new product, the Sigmas." HI-FI CHOICE, BEST MAINS CONDITIONER/CABLE 2006



IsoTek is committed to the creation of truly cutting edge designs through the development of unique proprietary technologies. Every product is designed and developed in the England and hand assembled in their factory in Hampshire.

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PRO-JECT DEBUT PHONO USB TURNTABLE AND PHONO STAGE

▶ If you wanted to archive your record collection, in the past you used a CD recorder. Now you can rip your hot wax straight to PC with this clever offering from Pro-Ject. Based on the hugely successful Debut III turntable, the Debut Phono USB, as the name suggests, has a built-in phono stage with both line-level and USB outputs, making it ideal for computer connections.

Supplied with the widely specified Ortofon OM5E moving-magnet cartridge and the Pro-Ject 8.6 tonearm, the Debut III is already the darling of the entry-level vinyl market. And now it can be connected straight into a line-only integrated amplifier or a PC's USB

input. With hard disk storage cheaper than ever, there's never been a better time to digitise your LP collection, and the Debut Phono USB might just be the best way of uploading your vinyl.

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

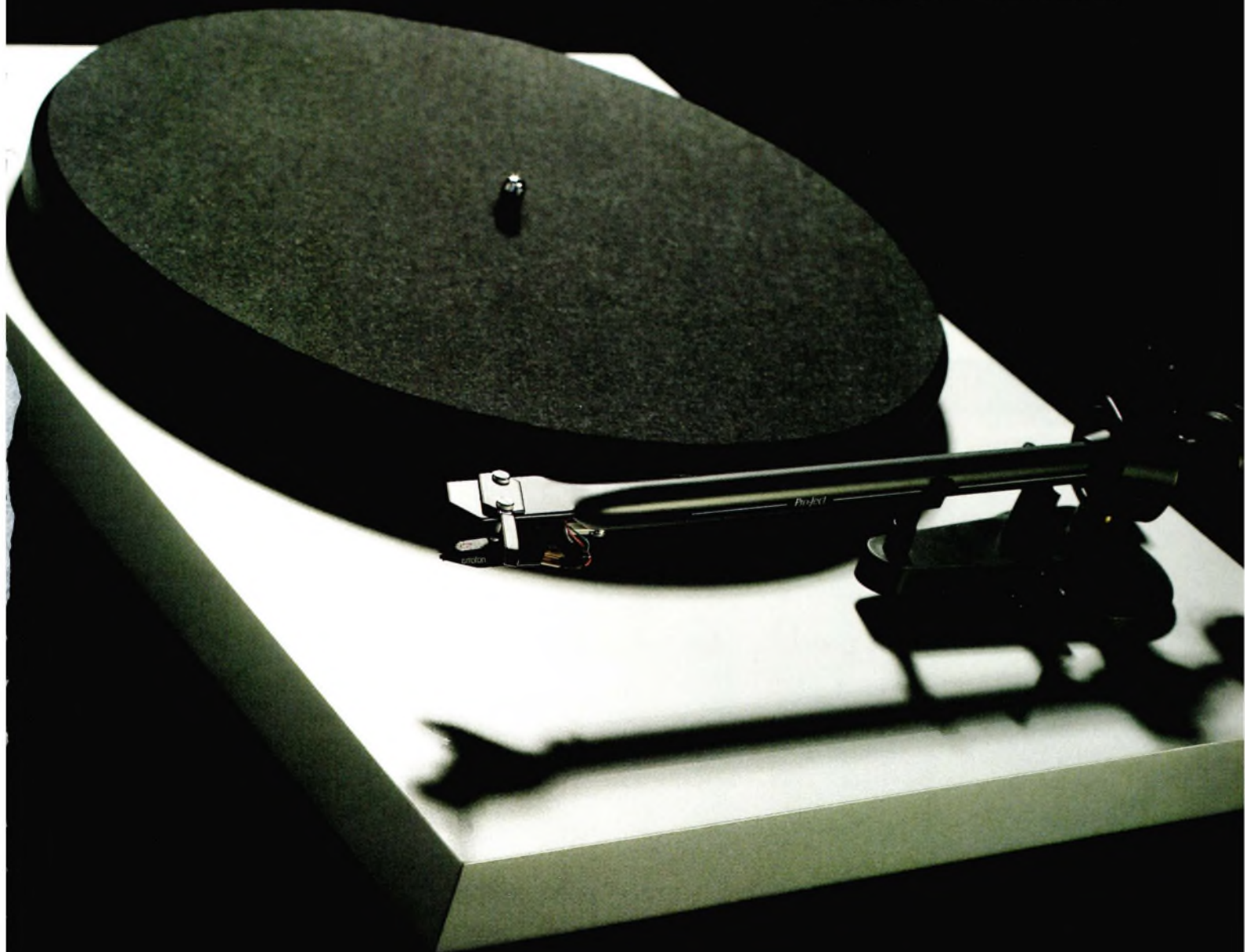
PRODUCT Pro-Ject Debut Phono USB

TYPE Turntable and phono stage

PRICE £210

KEY FEATURES Supplied with Ortofon OM5E cartridge ▶ 33/45rpm ▶ USB and line-level outputs ▶ Pro-Ject 8.6 tonearm

CONTACT ▶ 01235 511166
⌘ www.project-audio.com



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



CHORD ELECTRONICS RED REFERENCE

Chord Electronics has just upped the upsampling ante with its new £13,345 Red Reference CD player. This one-box player, with its distinctive angled disc-loading silo and solenoid-powered interlock door, features an 80-bit-upsampling, 64-bit-digital-to-analogue converter. The Red Reference supplants the Blu transport/DAC64 converter combination as Chord's top digital-replay system. It also provides the framework for the new £7,425 Red Standard CD player. The Standard shares 95 per cent of its metalwork with the Reference player and also uses the same 64-bit conversion system. It omits the 80-bit sampling option.

Chord has also launched a new preamp and a new power amp. The fully balanced CPA3000 preamp (£5,480) features elements filtered down from the company's flagship CPA5000. These include the high-frequency switch-mode power supply and Chord's own ultra-low-noise circuitry. The 150-watt, £3,990 SPM1050 power amp also features the company's custom-made 2kW switch-mode power supply, in addition to Chord's lateral-structure dual-die MOSFET output devices. These are said to help the SPM1050 drive difficult loudspeakers "with clarity and precision".

Price from £3,990 **Due** now ☎ 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

MORDAUNT-SHORT MEZZO RANGE

Mezzo is a new loudspeaker line from Mordaunt-Short, featuring many of the innovations seen in the company's outstanding Performance speaker, but without the high-end price tag. The Mezzo models feature an adaptation of the unique 25mm Aspirated Tweeter Technology first seen in the Performance 6, and use the same 200mm continuous-profile-cone aluminium bass drivers. Placing Performance technology in a wooden cabinet has meant careful selection of composite materials and very careful curve-forming and bonding. Combined with cross-bracing, this helps keep internal standing waves at bay.

The range currently comprises a Mezzo 2 standmount (featuring one 200mm bass drive unit) and a Mezzo 6 floorstander (which has two), but a complete hi-fi and home cinema line-up is scheduled to follow soon.

Price c£400 (Mezzo 2); c£800 (Mezzo 6) **Due** September
☎ 01753 680868
🌐 www.mordauntshort.com



MUSICAL FIDELITY 550K SUPERCHARGER

The latest hi-fi product from Musical Fidelity really lives up to its dramatic name. The Supercharger takes the regular output of an amplifier and 'supercharges' it, potentially turning 50 watts into 550. Installed between amp and speaker, it uses the same power-amp circuit as the company's flagship 550kW integrated amp, and is claimed to deliver up to a 10dB increase in dynamic range. It works with any existing amplifier and merely requires an additional (short) set of loudspeaker cables to connect it into the system. The post-amp power amplifier delivers a suggested 550 watts and 250-amp (peak-to-peak) current swings from each of the tall, cylindrical power tubes. Whether it's better to upgrade your ageing amp in its entirety or give it a boost from a Supercharger remains to be seen.

Price £1,499 (per channel) **Due** August

☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com



T+A E-SERIES

Unveiled at the Munich High End show, T+A's new three-strong E-Series of components is its first to feature a disc player that supports a wide range of computer-music sources. The Music Player is an innovative design that combines a high-end CD player, an FM (with optional DAB) tuner and an internet music client in a single box. Supporting a wide range of streaming client sources and server protocols, the Music Player also bristles with connections for computer sources, including iPod, USB, UPnP, LAN and WLAN.

For those who aren't interested in adding a computer-music component to their listening, the E-Series CD Player features components you might expect in a BMW – stainless-steel pushrods, a laminated metal/ABS drawer set in an all-metal housing, a critically damped sub-chassis – but also sports the same Burr-Brown, 24-bit/352.8kHz oversampling DAC found in the Music Player and the popular 1250 R SACD player. The two sources are joined by a 125-watt integrated amplifier called the Power Plant.

Price tbc **Due** September ☎ 01623 517000
🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de

GOLDMUND REFERENCE II

The Rolls-Royce of turntables in the 1980s was the ultra-high-end Goldmund Reference. To celebrate its 25th anniversary, Goldmund has released a radically revised Reference II. For the price of a two-bedroom house in Derby, 25 lucky people will discover what 350kg of precision-engineered turntable – featuring a brushless, no-radiation DC motor and a super-high-inertia brass/methacrylate-sandwich platter – can really sound like.

Price c£130,000 **Due** now

☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.goldmund.com



ZINGALI TWENTY RANGE

Created to celebrate Giuseppe Zingali's two decades in the loudspeaker business, the Twenty series is a new quartet of floorstanders.



The speakers boast Zingali's patented Omniday horn-loaded compression-driver tweeter, as well as a wooden 'acoustic lens', said to better integrate the bass with the higher frequencies.

Models range from the Twenty 2.06, with its two 170mm bass units, to the Twenty 2.12, which uses two 310mm units. All four are finished in 'soft feel' black with contrasting cherry-wood, and all apparently boast extremely high sensitivity, from 92dB up to 100dB for the Twenty 2.12.

Price from £3,600 to £10,250 per pair **Due** now ☎ 0141 333 9700 🌐 www.zingali.it

ONKYO T-4555

Onkyo's T-4555 DAB/AM/FM tuner is unique in offering upgradeability on its DAB platform. Onkyo has designed the tuner with a drop-in module that can be replaced if DAB technology changes. With DAB+ potentially a force in digital radio replay, this modularity makes the T-4555 the first fully future-proof digital tuner.

Irrespective of the upgradeability options, today's T-4555 is a 40-preset design with extensive DAB and RDS capability. The tuner is also designed to slot into a custom-install system, as it features an RS-232 and mini-jack remote-control sockets. It sports audiophile-grade components in key areas and features a special dynamic range control for late-night listening.

Price £350 **Due** now ☎ 01494 681515

🌐 www.onkyo.co.uk



B&W 600 SERIES

It's major makeover time at B&W. The company has recently launched a sassy new website and is calling itself Bowers & Wilkins once again. Perhaps more importantly, the loudspeaker giant has also totally revised its ever-popular 600 Series speaker range. Designed to appeal to the traditional hi-fi and home cinema buyer and newcomer alike, the new 600 Series uses a distinctive side-mounted logo doubling as a baffle for the tube-loaded tweeter, a fixed-suspension Kevlar midrange cone (these were previously only used in the flagship 800 range) and aluminium-skinned paper/Kevlar-composite bass drivers throughout.

The range includes two two-way standmount speakers – the 686 and 685 – plus the two-and-a-half-way 684 and three-way 683 floorstanders. Home cinema enthusiasts will be pleased to hear that there are also two centre-channel speakers, three subwoofers and a surround speaker.

Price from £279 to £899 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bowers-wilkins.com



Soundbites

QUANTUM PRODUCTS' Symphony mains conditioner is now being distributed by Russ Andrews. The Californian conditioner uses 'Quantum Resonance Technology', which is claimed to alter the conductive properties of electrical materials by subjecting them to a small electromagnetic field. Expect to pay £279.

☎ 0845 345 1550



DYNAUDIO'S Audience 42 SAT speaker is a true multi-purpose design, suitable for use in hi-fi, home cinema and custom-install settings. The flexible on-wall model has a price tag of £250 per speaker and mounts to the wall with just a single screw. A matching 250 MC subwoofer is also available.

☎ 01908 487557

SONOS has bundled together its Controller 100 handset, ZonePlayer 100 client amplifier and ZonePlayer 80 client source component. This enables the computer-wielding audiophile to connect to their hi-fi system and a second zone elsewhere in the house. Called the Bundle 130, the £699 package represents a £178 saving on the price of the individual components.

☎ 0808 234 6596

BLACK RHODIUM'S new Coda interconnect cable has two cores of silver-plated copper insulated in silicone rubber and twisted together to help reduce radio-frequency interference and hum. The insulation is post-cured, which is said to remove impurities inherent to the manufacturing process, and the end result is terminated with high-quality Eichmann bullet plugs. Prices start at £130 for a 0.5m pair.

☎ 01332 342233

LYRA'S new Skala is the first model in the company's fifth generation of moving-coil cartridges. The white plastic body features a distinctive vertical blade structure, which contains both the cantilever, magnets and output pins of the cartridge and damps the cartridge against the tonearm. The Skala replaces the popular Helikon and costs £1,850.

☎ 01727 865488



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

JIM THIEL

Job title: Co-founder, CEO and head of product design
Company: Thiel Audio



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

Well, the CS3.7 speaker is a really exciting product that we are still working on, in the sense of getting all the little bugs out of the manufacturing process. I've been involved with that for more than two years.

Do you think 'Generation iPod' can be turned on to hi-fi?

Yes – by demonstrating to them just how good the sound can be! They are obviously already interested in music, but they are people who have never heard truly high performance audio before. They aren't interested in it until they know what it is!

What's a great piece of music you've heard recently?

One that I heard recently was Murray Perahia doing Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto*. That was fabulous – and it's a good recording as well, I think.

Are audio servers the future?

I have to say I probably don't have the most informed opinion about that, because it doesn't really relate directly to loudspeakers and loudspeaker design. A loudspeaker, of course, doesn't really care where the signal comes from – it doesn't care whether it's from an iPod or from a disc. So I've not really put an awful lot of thought into that.

Hi-Fi Diary

SEPTEMBER

- 2 **Audiojumble 2007**
Angel Leisure Centre, Tonbridge, Kent
www.audiojumble.co.uk
Second hand hi-fi galore
- 21-23 **The London Sound and Vision show '07**
Park Inn, Heathrow
www.chestergroup.org
London's finest hi-fi show
- 29 **Musicmania**
Olympia Two, London
www.vip-24.com
One of the UK's largest CD, DVD and vinyl fairs

SHOW REPORT

Munich High End 2007

The High End show goes from strength to strength and certainly lives up to its name as **Jason Kennedy** reports

Munich's High End show has become the biggest and best hi-fi gathering in Europe. It's the place to go if you want to see the full range of exotic audiophilia from around the globe. We found some nice surprises too...

Creek amazed everyone with its first turntable, which has a £2,000 price tag and the working name WyndSOR. It features an acrylic platter and plinth, a separate power supply and opposing magnets in the bearing, and it looks stunning. Creek also resurrected its OB11 entry-level headphone amp, at just £120.

Revolver went back to its roots with its own deck, the Replay. Expected to go on sale in the autumn for £1,500, it has a marble plinth, a composite platter with a felt mat and an OEM Japanese tonearm.

Being a German high-end show, there were lots of turntables, but the most extreme was Herr Baasner's home-made beast, which has a floating parallel-tracking tonearm, with a syringe to adjust VTA, shields to deflect air movement and nylon-thread drive via a maze of pulleys. Mass production seems unlikely.

The big news, though, was B&W's completely revamped 600 Series. Priced from only £279, they



A pairing with the RB-1072 100-watt Class D power amp (£595) looks to offer great value.

Denon unveiled the AVP-A1HD and POA-A1HD (£10,000), its first processor-and-multichannel-power-amp combo for a decade. The AVP-A1HD does everything, and in HD too – so it has balanced connections, HDMI 1.3a and even internet radio. The power amp promises 10x150 watts or 5x500

“There were lots of turntables, but the most extreme was Herr Baasner's home-made beast.”

have all-new drive units, including a bass unit made of paper, Kevlar and aluminium, plus an FST midrange unit on the floorstanding 683 (£899), which is virtually an 804 in affordable cabinetwork.

Mordaunt-Short upped the ante with its first Mezzo models, the floorstanding Mezzo 6 (£800) and standmount Mezzo 2 (£400). Both feature Aspirated Tweeters and 6.5-inch CPC mid/bass drivers with plenty of trickle-down from the Performance 6.

Wilson Benesch brought along the Trinity, a £4,500 standmount that uses Murata's 'ultrasonic generator' for treble extension up to 100kHz. The Tactic mid/bass unit has a revised magnet structure and all three drivers are clamped from behind for maximum rigidity.

Following up on last year's S-1EX bargain high-end speaker, Pioneer delivered the slightly smaller S-3EX (£3,400). This has a coaxial mid/treble driver using a ceramic tweeter in a magnesium cone. The baffle is 5cm thick in the middle and 10cm at the end, and has a concave curve in order to time-align the drivers.

Rotel had a slew of new components, among them the RC-1082 preamp (£645), which has nine inputs, including an MM/MC phono stage and a mini-jack.

watts (into four ohms) for total control.

Ultra-high-enders dCS showed the Scarlatti system (£33,000), its most ambitious SACD/CD offering yet, comprising Transport, DAC and Master Clock components. The DAC component features the latest dCS Ring DAC, a new-generation digital-processing engine and an all-new chassis, while the transport is based on an Esoteric Audio VRDS-NEO drive unit.

Cyrus touted its new Discmaster 8.0 (£800), an audiophile DVD player with up to 1080p resolution. It also showed the AV Master 8.0 processor/preamp (£800), which has three channels of amplification on board, uses a 7.1-channel Crystal DSP chip and has a 2x upsampling feature. It packs 70 watts for the centre channel and 2x35 watts for front left/right or rear surround channels.

Finally, Marantz's Ken Ishiwata (see *Industry Profile* on p24) wanted a big speaker system for his new SA-7S1/SC-7S2/MA-9S2 (£19,995) SACD player, preamp and monoblocks. As partner Mordaunt-Short's Performance 6 wasn't big enough, he used two pairs, one above the other. It worked incredibly well, but don't try this one at home folks! **HFC**

New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



CARBON/SILICON

Title: TBC

Release date: autumn

Following an EP, Bill Price is producing the first full-length CD album from the new band formed by The Clash's Mick Jones and Tony James (Generation X/Sigue Sigue Sputnik). Tracks will include *War On Culture* and *The Gangs Of England*. The former is said to be about the Pete Doherty/Kate Moss tabloid frenzy; the latter is described as "a caustic take on the contemporary music scene".

EMINEM

Title: TBC

Release date: TBC

Despite suggestions that he was thinking of retiring, Eminem is apparently recording a new album. The news comes from close friend and fellow rapper 50 Cent. "I've heard a few songs, and it's hot," he reports. "He won't tell nobody he's working on a new album, but I'll tell you: he's working on new music and it's gonna come out."

KANYE WEST

Title: *Graduation*

Release date: September

American hip-hop guru West has been in the studio with Coldplay's Chris Martin – and he likes the results so much that their collaboration, *Homecoming*, is tipped to be the first single from his third solo album. The follow-up to 2005's *Late Registration* also features the track *Can't Tell Me Nothing*, a clip of which has already been leaked online.

THE FEELING

Title: TBC

Release date: TBC

Fresh from picking up the Songwriters of the Year trophy at the Ivor Novello Awards, melodic British soft-rockers The Feeling have already started laying down tracks for their follow-up album, frontman/guitarist Dan Gillespie Sells reveals. However, with their double-platinum 2006 debut *Twelve*



Stops And Home still selling strongly, the dictates of commerce suggest we'll have to wait a while yet before it hits the stores.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

Title: *Hey Venus!*

Release date: 27 August

Everybody's favourite psychedelic Welsh band are currently finishing off their eighth studio album, and it sounds like it's a bit of a concept. "A lot of the songs have the same central theme – following a young woman called Venus moving from a small town to a big metropolis," says the band's Gruff Rhys. They'll be previewing the new material at Glastonbury.

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

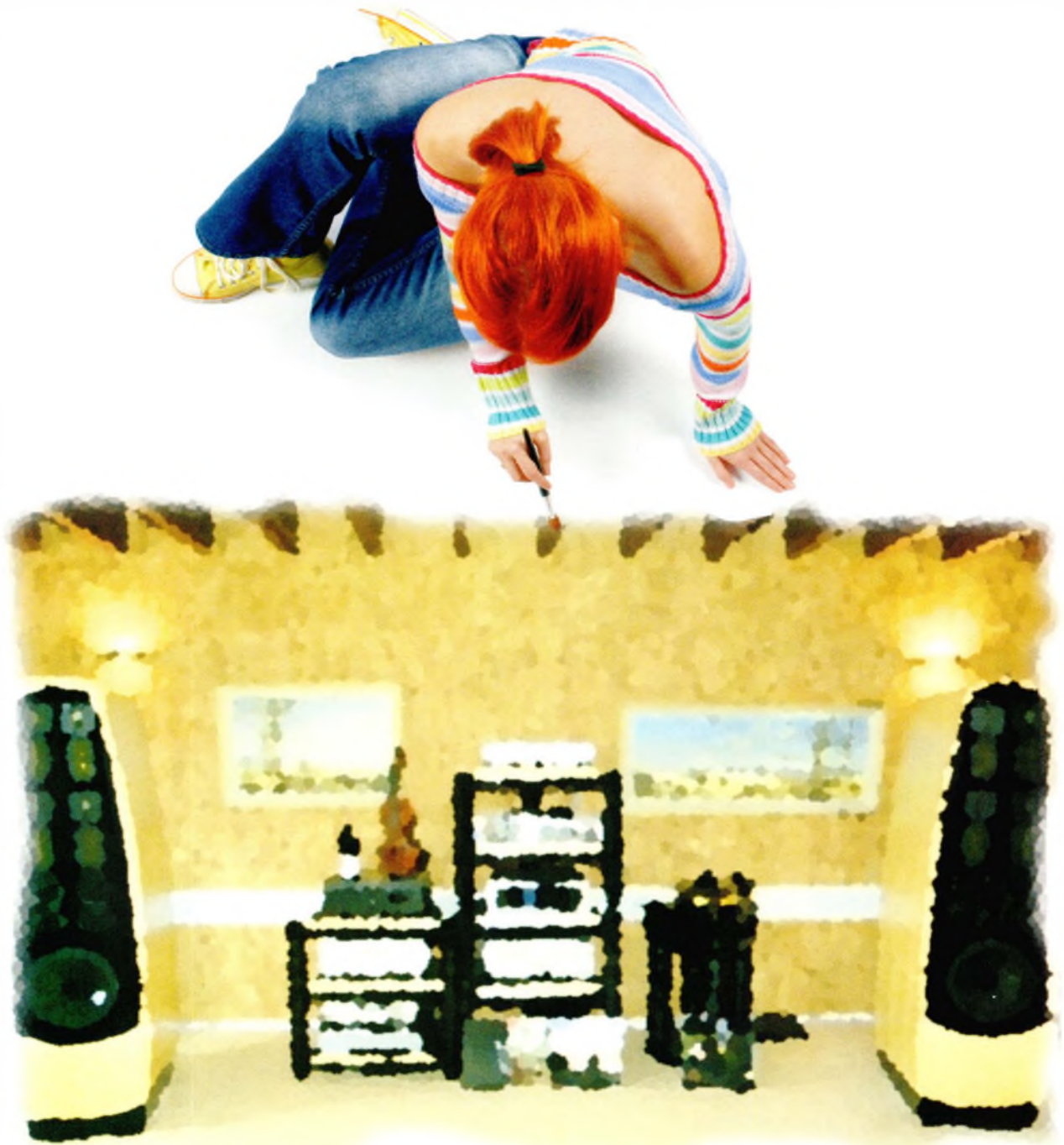
Kunzel/ Cincinnati Pops American Jubilee: Popular & Patriotic Works (Jul); **Gloria Cheng-Cochran** Piano Music Of John Adams & Terry Riley (Jul); **Ella Fitzgerald** Love Letters From Ella (Jul); **Harry Connick Jr** Chanson Du Vieux Carré (Jul)

SACD

Boston SO (Münch) Berlioz: Harold in Italy (SACD, Jun); **Netherlands PO (Kreizberg)** Dvorak: Symphony No 8 and The Wild Dove (SACD, Jun); **Milt Jackson Sextet** Invitation (SACD, Jun); **Chicago SO (Reiner)** Mahler: The Song Of The Earth, (SACD, Jun); **Michael Brecker** Pilgrimage (SACD, Jun)



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2. Pioneer S-3EX
3. Rotel RC-108Z
4. Cyrus Discmaster/AV Master
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Dominic Todd

Vinyl demand

Is it time to feed your LPs to the PCs?

In the middle of the 1990s, I bought my first CD-R machine and made a decision. "Now that I've got a CD-R and a high-quality CD player," I said to myself, "I really don't need my record collection at all." I felt that the best thing to do would be to record my entire vinyl collection onto CD and then, hopefully, sell the records to cover the cost of the discs – around a fiver each back then.

As it turned out, by the time I'd got to 'Altan' I was already both bored and frustrated. The boredom came from having to be in attendance of every recording and, worse still, pressing a marker button for every change of track. I soon decided that while this might be okay for the occasional album, life was too short to dedicate hundreds of hours to recording hundreds of records. Frustratingly, I also found my albums

"I remember thinking that when 700-900GB of storage became affordable, I could be tempted to commit everything to hard disk."

weren't paying for the blank discs – and yes, that even included Altan's *Horse With A Heart!*

More than a decade on, I'm glad I halted proceedings and stuck with the black stuff. Since then I've actually bought more vinyl and even upgraded my turntable. It seems I'm happy with the status quo – so why do I find myself thinking similar thoughts now? These days it's not CD-R, of course, but the lure of the hard drive. I remember thinking a couple of years ago that when prices came down enough to make 700-900GB of storage affordable, I could be tempted to commit everything to hard disk. The benefits are obvious: easy access to all my music from various systems around the house, no deterioration in sound quality through repeated playback and, best of all, the freeing up of about half the space in my sitting room.

Of course, now I can afford to do it, I'm not going to. Some of the reasons why are familiar. Recording all that vinyl would still be horribly time-consuming – even though CDs can be ripped and 'identified' in seconds these days. Then there's the issue of what would happen

if the hard disk broke. If I hadn't made back-ups I'd be stuffed. Yet if I did make back-ups, then unless I compressed the music files, the amount of space saved by the whole exercise would be greatly reduced. Blu-ray and HD DVD discs have opened up the possibility of storing up to 50GB of uncompressed music on one disc, but then the hardware is still expensive.

Thinking ahead, we can't be too far from a point where a music collection, of any media, is considered something of a novelty. We're already seeing the first download-music 'price wars', and it can only be a matter of time before downloads are so fast and cheap that we don't bother storing them at all – at least not beyond a short-term buffer memory. It may seem an alien concept, but don't forget that the idea of pay-per-view films has been with us for a while now; why not pay per listen? As for me, though, well, I think I'll just stick to my records. After all, they're now part of the furniture. Literally.

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



School of rock

Who needs classical to judge hi-fi properly?

Many years ago, when I first became professionally involved with hi-fi, argument raged over which type of music was most appropriate for assessing the equipment. I, being of the 'blues and rock' school, was regularly told that classical music was the only 'true' source that could be relied upon to differentiate the good from the bad.

I thought then, as now, that this contention was based more on snobbery than any musical fact. Part of the case in support of the 'classical is superior' argument was that the music was inherently more 'natural' and 'true to the original' than the 'processed and manipulated', 'electronic' performances that made up the majority of the contemporary repertoire.

Then I attended a few classical recording sessions and quickly realised those 'true-to-life' classical recordings weren't as seamless and unadulterated as we were led to believe. I once sat in a control room and watched as take after take of the same few bars was dropped in, because the bass players couldn't hear their contributions above the rest of the strings, then the woodwind players took umbrage because the brass was drowning them; then the percussionist had his twopenn'orth because his levels seemed wrong – to him, at least. And so the process dragged on until every part of the orchestra was more or less satisfied. This was followed by numerous wrong notes being replaced in many passages: as the producer explained, orchestras can get away with the odd duff note in performance, but in a recording, which might be listened to many times and scrutinised, there's no room for 'fluffs'.

Another classical recording I observed from close quarters was equally enlightening. I asked the engineer why he chose to use the monitors he did. After his lengthy answer I asked him whether he thought that having the bass drivers submerged inside the flight cases he used to transport the speakers to the venue might have any influence on their performance. His reply suggested he thought I wasn't being serious.

If you've fallen into the trap of believing that classical recordings are the only sort worth ▶

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

PIONEER DV-747A
UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER



It's difficult to convey this far forward in time just how exciting this player was when it was first released back in 2002. The folks at Pioneer had by then long since concluded that the future of audio and video would be optical, and they bet the farm on it. Luckily for them and their shareholders, they got it exactly right at a time when it was anything but certain that they had read the runes correctly.

The DV-747A was the first ever universal disc player, and it hit the market running not long after high-resolution audio had gone on sale. It had huge appeal to the video-users market, of course, as it didn't cost a fortune (it started life at around £900 as I recall, but the price was progressively pared away during its lifetime) and it was well equipped for DVD-Video replay. But the player was also of huge interest to the audio community, as it could also cope with DVD-Audio and SACD discs, both stereo and multichannel. Remember that it was the first: no earlier player could cope with this range of discs, and this means that no player up to that point was better adapted for multi-purpose systems, those with a full range of video and audio capabilities – stereo and multichannel DVD-Audio and SACD, as well as CD audio and DVD-Video.

The spec was surprisingly comprehensive. At the time it was able to play a wider range of disc types than almost any other player; it handled CD-R and -RW discs and DVD-R and -RW, including DVD-RW discs recorded in VR format. The '+ ' formats hadn't arrived at this point. It was also okay with MP3 compilations on CD, which were just becoming common. Dolby and DTS decoders were included, but then as now, it was invariably a better idea to use the partnering amplifier, as long as it had its own surround decoder. The Pioneer had a wide range of outputs, including composite, S-Video and component video with NTSC-only progressive scan – most of these were doubled up. Twin Scarts with RGB pass-through and optical/coaxial digital outs were also on board.

The internal hardware included three twin-channel CS4392 24-bit/192kHz DACs and a range of internal picture adjustments, some



“It was the first universal disc player and hit the market not long after high-resolution audio itself.”

concerned with MPEG parameters, such as Block Noise, Mosquito Noise and Y/C timing, plus more general settings such as gamma correction and mid/high-frequency sharpness. With a little bit of care and attention, it was possible to achieve a really good set-up with this player – one that would even put some contemporary players to shame. The audio subsection included switchable Legato Link PRO digital filtering (a kind of slow-acting but audibly benign low-pass filter), a dual-layer chassis and an anti-vibration isolated loading tray. It would take another year and a model increment to the DV-757 before iLink and the ability to stream DSD and high-resolution PCM data across the digital interface arrived. HDMI was yet another generation and a year or so further in the future.

Of course, in the fullness of time we learned that universal players were bound to suffer from some performance shortcomings compared to single-purpose players, but they weren't severe – and with casual use, you may not have noticed any problems at all. SACD quality wasn't as good as with recent dedicated players, especially some of those at much higher prices, but it was a revelation at the time, and DVD-Audio was arguably even better, or at least closer in balance to compact disc, which was also more than presentable. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

Using to assess hi-fi, think again. I believe, from these and other experiences, that they're far less honest and revealing than those of the three- or four-piece blues bands that I prefer.

What's equally important, blues musicians aren't as precious and self-obsessed as their classical counterparts seem to be. Listen to any early blues recording for proof of this: as the late recording engineer Bob Shad said of Lightnin' Hopkins, "He didn't want to know about doing a tune over. He didn't know the lyrics from one song to another, but made them up as he went along. But he had a wonderful feeling..." And, naturally, Hopkins didn't do drop-ins or multi-track recordings, because most of his recordings pre-dated the required technology.

He never played wrong notes, because there are simply no such things in the blues. Instead of 'wrong' notes, blues players have 'passing' tones, which they use as stepping stones on their way to the 'right' note. Far more elegant!

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



“I recently reviewed these compact but expensive (£2,000) speakers, and, sure enough, they look and feel like a guitar.”

This approach to cabinet design runs counter to the normal desire to create a cabinet that adds as little as possible to the output of the drivers. After all, if the box resonates as well as the drivers, the chances of getting a neutral, uncoloured sound are going to be undermined. Perhaps Onkyo thought that as most speaker cabinets have a tendency to resonate at one frequency or another, it should try and use this quality in a positive way. This is rather like the way some martial arts use the energy of an opponent against them – for example, pulling a punching fist in the direction it's travelling in order to throw the opponent off balance. The drawback with a loudspeaker is that music isn't aikido, and everything you play will be coloured by the character of the box's resonance. This might be fine if you only want to play acoustic-guitar records, or perhaps even violin music, but it's unlikely to give the true character of a piano or saxophone.

I guess you could make a piano-oriented speaker out of dense hardwood (as it happens, Bösendorfer does something just like that and more than gets away with it). Or you could use a metal box for fans of saxophones, trumpets and the like. It could be a little inconvenient having to change speakers according to the

music you want to play, but a brass speaker might look pretty cool.

In practice, the D-TK10 is rather more limited by its size and sensitivity than by its cabinet; it's an 80dB (at four ohms) design, and thus technically incapable of playing at high levels without distress. Which is a pity, because in other respects it's a highly entertaining and engaging loudspeaker that makes up for what it lacks in precision with rare timbral energy and sweetness of treble. The latter is due to the use of a ring radiator tweeter that's claimed to have a response up to 100kHz, and even if you can't hear above 16kHz, it does bring a naturalness to the mid and treble that's entirely tangible.

Regardless of the end result, you have to applaud Onkyo for making such a distinctive and essentially niche product. It's the sort of thing that makes this hobby interesting, and in truth is no more a diversion from the path of high fidelity than many glass powered amplifiers. Maybe they should add strings to the next model so you can tune it!

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



Jason Kennedy

Soundbox speaker

Onkyo's speaker thinks it's a guitar

Last year (in HFC 288, to be exact), I wrote a *Happenings* story about a new approach to loudspeaker-cabinet design that Onkyo had taken with its Takamine D-TK10 model. This seemingly middle-of-the-road hi-fi company had been working with Japanese acoustic-guitar-maker Takamine to produce a loudspeaker cabinet that had the character of an acoustic instrument. Perhaps unsurprisingly, that character was essentially that of a small guitar.

I recently had the opportunity to review these compact but rather expensive (£2,000) speakers, and, sure enough, they look and feel a lot like a guitar, thanks to their very thin mahogany side walls and a thin ply central section. Without their rosewood plinths, they must weigh a couple of pounds at most. Not surprisingly, they sound pretty damn resonant, and this enhances the harmonics and timbre of everything that's reproduced through them.



Wire not?

What price speaker cable?

When I first got into hi-fi, around 1970, 30p-per-yard bell wire from Woolies was the normal recommendation. By the mid-1970s I'd moved on to 30-amp cooker cable, which was quite effective if rather rigid, but the idea of using special audio cables was just starting to emerge, initially from Japan.

People starting listening to cables and finding clear sound-quality differences. The floodgates opened, and all sorts of 'audiophile' cables began appearing. Many were sincere attempts at improving sound quality, but some offered little actual benefit. Nowadays it's not unusual to find speaker cables costing hundreds – or thousands – of pounds a metre, though whether such prices can be justified remains debatable.

I discovered one of the risks of 'audiophile' cables very early on. I tried something called Cobra cable from the US, which had a cunning woven construction that effectively cancelled the usual inductance of the cable. My Naim amp immediately went into self-destruct mode; happily, I managed to switch it off before any damage occurred. It turns out Naim amps rely on a degree of cable inductance to maintain high-frequency stability. Thus I learned to exercise caution when testing fancy cables.

Naim quickly developed its own speaker cable – a simple, inexpensive spaced pair with a healthy cross section of multi-strand copper called NACA4. A few years later, a similar-looking but mechanically much stiffer NACA5 using a superior insulating sheath replaced this.

Since then, Naim has established itself as the UK's leading manufacturer of amps and CD players, and in 2002 its amps underwent a major change. The current models have a much sweeter overall sound, and to my ears, this is at odds with the character of the venerable NACA5, still Naim's speaker cable of choice.

I still like NACA5 a lot: I admire its lack of bullshit, fine dynamic integrity and immediacy. At £11 per metre (plus termination) it's also superb value for money, but that price seems out of kilter with that of Naim's top NAP 500 power amp (£13,360). I've therefore started looking for alternatives that offer a sweeter and more sophisticated sonic presentation.

One such is Chord's Signature, which I've used on and off for some months now. It has fine



By 1959, Miles Davis, pretty much the biggest name in jazz at that point, had already recorded two albums with self-taught

Canadian arranger Gil Evans. *Miles Ahead* put Miles at the front of a big-band jazz setting, while the pair's interpretation of Gershwin's 'jazz opera' *Porgy And Bess* had already challenged preconceptions of what jazz should be about.

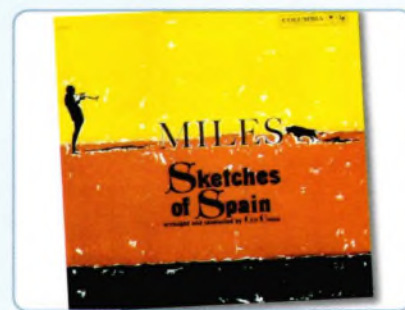
But their next project marked a further step in exploring the possibilities of jazz, and indeed, music. The idea was to reinterpret Spanish classical music, and its flamenco roots, in a jazz style, but without subsuming one into the other.

Miles had already experimented with Spanish rhythms and intonation on *Kind Of Blue's Flamenco Sketches* and *Blues For Pablo* from *Miles Ahead*, but this time he planned to take it further. The pair worked on the score for over two months, trading ideas and interpretations, and although it's a 'jazz' album, Evans scored nearly everything that can be heard, except for Miles's solos, and created some famously tricky passages. Indeed, classical composer Hall Overton visited the recording sessions in New York and declared the score "the toughest notation I've ever seen in a jazz arrangement".

The starting point for the record, and its centrepiece, is a reading of *Concierto De Aranjuez*, the almost unbearably mournful lament originally scored for guitar and orchestra by contemporary Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo. The stark beauty of Rodrigo's theme receives sympathetic treatment from Evans's re-imagining of the score for big band, using brass, woodwind and percussion, plus a jazz rhythm section including Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb and Elvin Jones – 26 musicians in all.

Beginning with a light flurry of castanets and harp, the piece gradually builds, with Evans's subtly intelligent arrangements providing an ever-shifting backdrop to Davis's solos, for which he forsook his usual trumpet for flugelhorn.

While unmistakably Miles (he has one of the most recognisable tonal signatures in jazz), Davis's playing is markedly different from his stylings on other records. Though he was never a 'light' player, there's a broodingly dark tone to the more sombre passages that he plays in



“There’s a broodingly dark tone to the more sombre passages that Davis plays in the lower register.”

the lower register to startling emotional effect, and that's offset by a sharply piercing tone that carries echoes of the *afillá* (hoarse, earthy flamenco voice) – a heart-rending cry of pain that seems half a world away from the swagger of bop or the defiant sorrow of the blues.

Among the supporting pieces for the album is *Will O' The Wisp*, a treatment of a tune from Manuel de Falla's 1915 ballet score *El Amor Brujo* (The Love Wizard), whose sinuous horn arrangements weave a magically enchanting spell. Another standout is *Saeta*, a flamenco 'arrow of song', traditionally performed by solo voice during Seville's Holy Week procession, and which surely must contain one of Miles's most starkly emotional pieces of playing, his piercing trumpet slicing across Evans's aural evocation of the procession using martial percussion and a brass band.

The album caused some controversy when it was first released in 1960. Jazz aficionados took issue with the limited space for improvisation, while classical fans considered the 'jazzification' of Rodrigo's most famous work a travesty – Rodrigo himself famously hated it.

Each to their own. Certainly, it's not really jazz, and not really classical, but a beautiful hybrid that might have frustrated purists of both camps, but continues to delight music lovers decades later. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

MILES DAVIS

SKETCHES OF SPAIN

dynamic expression and bass drive with a sweetness beyond that of NACA5, and brings a fine holistic quality to its music-making, so the whole experience is both highly informative yet also relaxing. The downside is that at £125 per metre (terminated), it's pretty costly.

A more affordable contender that has only recently come to my attention is Phonosophie LS-2, costing £30 per metre (plus termination). Phonosophie is a German brand with some links to Naim – proprietor Ingo Hansen used to distribute Naim in Germany – and LS-2 looks rather like NACA5, though it's claimed to use higher-purity copper conductors, and certainly sounds both sweeter and brighter at the top end, with a slightly dry overall character. In some systems it could well be preferred to Chord Signature, and it certainly represents a very interesting option for Naim-amp users.

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



“It’s useful to break up the ceiling as well, but this introduces an ugly studio-like element to the room decor.”

right amount of the right stuff is needed. Soft furnishings are touted as the audiophile’s saving grace, but too much can squash the life out of the sound. A good compromise is to make the speaker end of the room fairly free of absorbent, squidgy things such as sofas, and the listener end fairly free of reflective bright things such as mirrors. It’s also useful to break up the point of first reflection along the side walls and floor (and the ceiling too, but this introduces an ugly studio-like element to the room decor). You can find the first-reflection point by sitting in the listening position and having someone walk a mirror along the sides of the room. The point where you can see the reflection of the tweeter is the first reflection, and if you put something to diffuse the sound in this spot (a bookcase or CD store, say), you’ll significantly improve the performance of any system. A coffee table full of things to break up the reflection (piles of back issues of *HFC*, for example) between you and the speakers at roughly the same point will help too.

Before you can define a first-reflection point, you need to work out where the listening position will be. There’s a magic number that works here, used by the professional recording industry – sit precisely 38 per cent into the length of the room. This point should give the flattest low-frequency response in the room, but try pushing the chair back and forth until the sound is at its most comfortable. This is the best position for the speakers as well, with their centre point 38 per cent into the length of the other end of the room, but this is a

trade-off between what’s right for acoustics and what’s right for the specific speaker.

Naturally, those who routinely listen in the ideal environment are both fortunate and small in number. But if you try to make your room fit this standard as best as possible, your hi-fi will sound better than you could ever imagine.

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



Room-tuning

The key to superb sound is the environment

The room is an often overlooked – yet fundamentally important – aspect of audio replay. The construction, size and treatment of the room, and how both the listener and the system are positioned within it, can make or break the sound of any system.

The ideal listening room, according to the IEC standards committee, is one that’s around 10ft high, 16ft wide and 24ft long (in new money, that’s about 3m high, 4.9m wide and 7.3m long). That’s a pretty big living room by British standards, but the proportions (roughly 1:1.6:2.5) are more important than the physical sizes. Some suggest making the walls non-parallel or sloping the ceiling, but the amount of slope or non-parallelism needed to make a difference is so great that this introduces more problematic parameters than it does away with. In the same vein, alcoves, fireplaces and bay windows also cause their own difficulties and aren’t ideal for the audiophile’s uber-room.

Now we have the best location, what do we do with it? An empty room is a reverberant room, so it needs filling with stuff. But the



Vox pop

Another valve classic resurrected by IAG

Recently I had the privilege of visiting the IAG factory in Shenzhen, a trip that turned out to be full of surprises and chance discoveries. IAG, if you weren’t aware, is the holding company for Wharfedale (see the Airedale Neo review on p42) and others including Quad, Mission, Audiolab, Castle Acoustics and some companies I’d never heard of concerned with stage lighting and control.

What really startled me while touring the sprawling IAG factory was stumbling upon a pile of Vox AC30s – the legendary 30-watt amplifier/speaker that propelled the British rock invasion from the late 1950s. The Korg Corporation of Japan – which has owned the Vox name since 1992 – outsourced the building of the AC30CC to the IAG factory in 2003, but neither Vox nor Korg is part of the ever-growing IAG family.

I'm not going to be so stupid as to even attempt to explain the nuts and bolts of the AC30, though there was one variant on the theme that I hadn't heard of before seeing it, the AC40. This was distinguished by its 'soul' control – surely one step up from volume control that goes up to 11!

Of course the AC30 had nothing to do with high fidelity. Precisely the opposite. It was a byword for a very specific type of distortion and resolutely non-linear responsiveness, and led directly (it says here) to the development of the fuzzbox. The Beatles, Queen, the Rolling Stones and U2 are just some of the more prominent acts that used AC30s to help define their sound. Simplifying like crazy, the AC30 is a 30-watt not-quite-Class A tube guitar amplifier using EL84 output valves, whose characteristic sound is determined in large part by the total lack of negative feedback, cathode biasing of the output stage and copious amounts of hum, noise and distortion. The use of a pair of Celestion 'Blue' 12-inch (300mm), 15-watt speakers, "often overdriven to the brink of their power-handling capability" (says Wikipedia), is another key element.

I've now started reading some of the vast quantity of material that's available online about the AC30. I can't claim to have any personal experience; I never owned one, and what little I do know is limited to what I've heard over the decades from bands such as those named above who used or in some cases still use one. All I know is that the AC30 is rightly regarded as a classic for all kinds of reasons, any one of which on its own would utterly disqualify it from the world of high fidelity. Second-hand examples can fetch a lot of money, as well as attracting the interest of a thriving aftermarket in modifications and additions. Oh, and there's a musician employed in the factory just to play riffs through new AC30s as part of their quality control.

But for yours truly, on that day, it was the sheer incongruity of finding them piled up in a sun-bleached concrete apron in a factory in southern China devoted mainly to classic hi-fi brands such as Quad, Mission and Wharfedale that startled me to the quick. And now at least you know where AC30s come from.

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

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TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

HOW MUCH BASS DO YOU NEED?



In the *Techno* column six issues ago, I made a passing mention to the apparent paradox that limiting bass response can improve a system's perceived bass. Though at first sight rather bizarre, this claim nevertheless holds true for reasons largely down to the real-world behaviour of loudspeakers and, to a limited extent, amplifiers.

We can hear down to something like 20Hz, though our hearing response curve (the famous 'Fletcher-Munson curve') is such that our sensitivity to very low frequencies is pretty limited. Frequencies even lower than that can be detected by the body as vibration and/or a physical shock, though again the level needs to be reasonably high. Given the way bass response rolls off in most real loudspeakers, a typical hi-fi system effectively conveys next to no information to our sensory system below about 30Hz at best – the speaker just can't shift enough air below that to make an impact on us. King-size speakers with vast radiating area and huge amps driving them can indeed produce real sound at 20Hz, and very impressive it is too, but they necessarily cost an arm and a leg, and few of us will ever own a pair.

On the contrary, your typical modern CD player boasts response down to a couple of hertz or even lower, while many amps also comfortably better 5Hz. That's great, except that most loudspeakers actually react rather badly to even very modest amounts of subsonic input. Reflex loudspeakers in particular have very soft suspension at low frequencies, and so the cone tends to move a large distance in response to any subsonics.

That in turn causes problems with distortion and response flatness in the audible part of the spectrum, because drive units typically don't have an ideally linear relationship between input voltage and sound output – the two are only accurately proportional as long as the driver doesn't move very far. Off-centring it by applying subsonic input is one of the best ways of worsening its response.

Okay, but how is subsonic information going to arise in the first place? There are two main sources. One is actual subsonic information



“Most speakers actually react rather badly to even very modest amounts of subsonic input.”

in the original recording. Microphones have varying amounts of bass response, but plenty of them will pick up subsonics to very low frequencies indeed, including room resonances, wind noise and other extraneous diversions. One disc in my collection has so much data at the subsonic level that the cones on most speakers move several millimetres, at typical volume settings, in response.

Another source is distortion in the record or replay equipment. On the record side, many compressors put subsonic 'thumps' into the signal that can easily pass unnoticed, while some amps (especially single-ended triode models) can produce asymmetric distortion that includes ultra-low frequencies.

Cutting out frequencies below about 25Hz is a practical and subjectively beneficial 'tweak', but it must be done with care. In the 'bad old days', much equipment had bass response limited to about that figure due to limited capacitor size, but if you add several stages like that together (through record and replay chains) you get not only audible amplitude roll-off, but also disturbing phase anomalies within the audio band. Modern digital filtering, on the other hand, can be arranged to pass, pretty much perfectly, signals above 25Hz and remove, ditto, those below. I've tried it and it works. It's a funny old thing, audio! **HFC**

Richard Black

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Gold Award, HiFi Choice, October 2006



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SYSTEM FILE

Graham Cross used the same kit for nearly 20 years... until recently

THE SYSTEM

- Turntable:** Pro-Ject Xpression
- CD player:** Musical Fidelity A3.5
- Tuner:** Pure DRX-701ES
- Amplifier:** Rotel RA-01
- Loudspeakers:** Rogers LS7t
- Accessories:** Kudos stands, Sennheiser headphones, Sony MD player

Graham Cross's hi-fi is an ideal example of the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' ethos. Until recently, his system hadn't changed in almost 20 years. However, a cascade of calamity wrote off his Sony CD player and Audiolab 8000A integrated amp and 8000P power amp in quick succession.

The turmoil didn't last very long. Graham's a discerning man who knows exactly what he wants from his hi-fi. He quickly went through a selection of the best sub-£1,000 players on the market, in search of one that sounds just right. In and out went the Arcam CD73, the Marantz SA7001 and the Rega Apollo, but the Musical Fidelity A3.5 CD player passed the test. The Audiolab combo was easier to replace, as a Rotel RA-01 from his second system was drafted into use and he found it a good match.

CLASSICAL COLLECTOR

Graham has a huge collection of classical recordings on CD, but also takes advantage of great deals on classical LPs. These days, he listens to music on his Sennheiser HD 600 headphones, because late-evening listening and loudspeakers – even refined speakers such as the Rogers LS7t – don't mix.

He's tried fancy cables, equipment tables and the rest. Speaker stands aside (the jump from wobbly Target frames to solid Kudos S100s made a big difference, he suggests), none made an improvement that would justify their inclusion. So he uses standard 79-strand wire and entry-level interconnects.

The unforced, effortless sound is perfectly pitched toward the late 19th/early 20th century composers he favours. The speakers could soon follow the CD and amplifier, but Graham is content with headphone sound.

If Graham doesn't stand out as a typical hi-fi enthusiast, it's because his audio kit is merely handmaiden to the music. Which is, of course, exactly how it should be. **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 (please include your name and address). If we pick you, you'll get a visit from one of our reviewers, plus two fabulous free gifts – an IsoTek System Enhancer CD and fabulous Russ Andrews' *Sound Solutions* book... so get writing!



The world according to...

Ken Ishiwata

This month, *Hi-Fi Choice* talks to **Ken Ishiwata**, brand ambassador for Marantz and the most flamboyant dresser in hi-fi. Interview: Malcolm Steward

While attending Munich's annual High End show this May, we managed to lure Marantz's brand ambassador Ken Ishiwata away from his demonstrations to question him about the state of the hi-fi nation. We met in the privacy of the show's press room, where we hoped we might be spared the constant interruption of his 'fan club', who wish to photograph him, be photographed with him, or have him autograph something (*a KI Signature?—Ed*) at every opportunity. Ishiwata-san is certainly the closest thing that the hi-fi industry has to an A-lister. And he's considerably brighter than Paris Hilton!

HFC How do you see the state of the general hi-fi market at the moment?

KI I'm very happy to see how two-channel hi-fi is faring right now. It's doing much better than

it has been, especially over the past couple of years. And much of this, surprisingly, is due to the iPod, which triggered the interest and made young people, in particular, think that two-channel is really cool.

HFC Have you seen any evidence that 'Generation iPod' has begun moving towards proper hi-fi?

KI Some of them have done, but it's a matter of education. If we can teach those people that better sound exists, then there's a real chance that they will want it. If our industry can do a proper job, then it has the opportunity of capturing the interest of those people.

HFC What exactly do you mean by "a proper job" – presumably, not just sticking an extra input on their amplifiers and labelling it 'iPod' as many seem to have done?

KI No. For example, when you're dealing with

MP3, you need to consider different codecs [compression and decompression or encoding and decoding algorithms] carefully. Every codec delivers a different performance. I hate talking about 'compression'; I much prefer talking about bit-rate reduction. Bit-rate reduction doesn't mean that you necessarily lose quality. For example, consider the DVD-Audio format: every second you have 192,000 samples at 24-bit. If you encode the music at this rate, 90 per cent of it is wasted, because music is dynamic and constantly changing – you don't need 24 bits all the time. In other words, it depends on how you do it – including when you use MP3, which is compression of the data, but the fact that it's compression doesn't mean that we necessarily have to sacrifice quality so much.

You need to apply your compression or data reduction correctly – for example, human hearing is very insensitive to some aspects of sound, such as absolute phase. Can you hear a quantitative difference between a sound that is meant to be positive and one that is meant to be negative? And can you detect a subtle change in a low-level sound immediately after – and while your hearing is 'recovering from' – a loud transient? This masking effect is critical, for instance, in digital filters.

HFC My recent experiences with music servers have taught me that it seems inordinately dangerous to leave computers and algorithms to decide which bits of musical information it's safe to throw away.

KI What I did when initially testing those codecs was to compare the original file with the DCC version [Digital Compact Cassette, a short-lived rival to MiniDisc] and then the MiniDisc recording. By summing the encoded files, you can effectively listen to the differences between them and the original. In a good system, you should only hear noise, but with ATRAC [the MD compression system] I could still hear the music envelope. Provided you use a suitable codec and bit rate, you can get quality that is really quite good, but, as I said

"It's a matter of education. If we can teach 'Generation iPod' that better sound exists, then there's a real chance they will want it."



At next year's Munich High End show – ceiling height permitting – Ken may attempt the triple

earlier, we need to make people aware of this and educate them about it.

HFC *How about high-definition audio?*

KI DVD-Audio didn't have enough software from day one. SACD has reached 4,500 titles and they're still coming. We know it won't be the 'final' format, but at least certain people appreciate the quality of SACD. And the DSD technology on which SACD is founded offers tremendous potential for archiving music – especially old analogue recordings. It's a great technology for preserving those recordings from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s that are currently stored on magnetic tape and quietly rotting away. PCM is not the way to do it, but DSD means that we can effectively remaster those recordings.

HFC *That strikes me as an important consideration given the current state of the music business. There's nobody these days in the same league, for example, as Hendrix, whose popularity and influence haven't wavered in 40 years.*

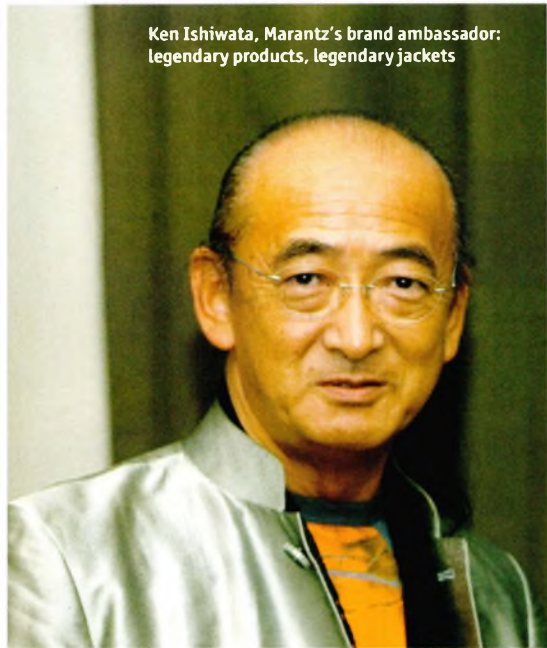
KI Think about classical music: what is that if not pop music from several hundred years ago? Music has always changed in accordance with people's way of life. Look at how we live now: doesn't today's music match the way people live their lives nowadays? You and I have lived through a period of transition, and we were very lucky that the time coincided with the emergence of hi-fi. We saw the days of the mono LP, then the stereo LP, and then CD. We were very lucky to have also enjoyed some wonderful musicians exploiting those technologies and making some fantastic recordings – when the potential exists for making high-quality recordings, the musicians seem to put more of their skill and passion into their work.

HFC *Why have you called the new Marantz series 'Legendary'?*

KI That's not the range's official title: it's just the way our PR people have been referring to it. The numbers 7 and 9 used in the new model designations are perhaps legendary, though, because the original Model 7 was the preamplifier that we introduced in 1958 and the Model 9 was the monoblock power amplifier that we introduced later. Those single-digit models (from Model 1 to Model 9) were original Saul B Marantz products, which could rightly be called legendary. The new ones are in no way backwards-looking or trying to hark back to a golden era, but they attempt to maintain our traditions, heritage and identity. For instance, they have meters similar to those on the early designs that help to make it easy for people to recognise ☐



Ken Ishiwata, Marantz's brand ambassador: legendary products, legendary jackets



“We have to ensure we’re not editing what the musicians have produced: it’s our duty to get all that information to the listener.”

the brand. That avoids the situation that you find with old Japanese cars – take the badges off most of them and you’ll have no idea who made them. They have no features that make them instantly recognisable. We’re simply trying to do the same as BMW and Mercedes, which are instantly recognisable, and reinforce the maker’s identity.

HFC Will there be KI versions of these products, or have you already tweaked them?

KI No. They are more traditional high-end products, although I had an influence on their development and sound quality. In truth, though, I much prefer working in the budget arena. That has a much wider audience. This new range is wonderful, but there’s only a small number of people who can afford it. The budget products are more affordable to a greater number of people and they’re also more challenging to develop. My goal has always been to reach that much wider audience and give them the highest-possible-quality sound: how much you can enjoy your music shouldn’t be governed by how much money you have to spend.

HFC The ‘legendary’ system you’re demonstrating here is certainly outstanding and has become the talk of the show, not least because of the ‘stacked’ Mordaunt-Short Performance loudspeakers.

KI We had to come up with a demonstration

package to show off the new electronics. Speakers were a problem, because we’ve been using the Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 for the last four years and there wasn’t a suitable model to replace them, so I decided to do something very different with them – create a sort of line source with two pairs of them that would give me really wide dispersion, a very wide and precise stereo image, and handle the huge power from the amplifiers. I wanted to create a similar impression to the sound you hear in a concert hall.

The system has been very well received and many people have asked me how much it would cost. I’ve told them that first they’d have to buy two pairs of speakers and then the special frame that I designed to accommodate them. One stand – and naturally you’ll need two of them – might cost £475 to £550.

HFC When we spoke yesterday about that system, you were keen to point out how solid its stereo imagery was. I have to agree that it images extraordinarily well – while at the

same time thinking that’s not really relevant to the music. Don’t you think that imagery is just an artefact, something that’s perhaps nice to have as a bonus, but not entirely necessary to communicate music’s message?

KI I would disagree. Musicians and recording engineers put so much effort into what they put onto disc, and it’s our job to reproduce that music exactly as they intended it to be heard. Imagery is a part of that process.

HFC But modern music is, for the most part, just panned mono, and I’ve never been to a classical concert and heard so-called pinpoint imagery – I hear nothing more than a vague impression of where the instruments are located along with a bit of ambient/spatial information.

KI If you listen to a rock band like Peter Gabriel you’ll hear how he takes imagery seriously – as do several other British bands. Even Phil Collins knows how to scale an image. I think it’s our job to present that information exactly as it was put onto the disc. That’s the only reason I’m doing this.

HFC A cynic might say that such material is so bereft of worthwhile content that it needs something else – even if it’s only some sort of soundstage – in order to encourage people to buy it.

KI [Laughs] Everyone has the right to his own opinion, but as we are a hardware company

providing the link between the software and the listener, we have to ensure we’re not editing what the software creators have produced: it’s our duty to get all that information to the listener. It’s true that with most rock concerts there is no real stereo image, but listen to Pink Floyd’s studio recordings and try to imagine them without the three-dimensional, theatrical effects the band created.

HFC Where do you predict audio being in, say, five years’ time?

KI I don’t think we’ll see any big changes in five years, because it’s a relatively short time span. Ask me about where we’ll be in 10 or 20 years and the answer might be different. Once a technology becomes a consumer standard it tends to last a very long time: look how long we’ve had LP and CD. If we’re talking about sources, I can’t see any dramatic changes in the short term – the majority of people today are still very happy with the quality of CD.

HFC But you told me several years ago that Japan Incorporated needs constant and frequent change (at least every ten years, but seemingly increasingly less) to maintain its product churn.

KI Japan was too late with DVD. Once DVD came and the Chinese began producing it, it killed it, because it’s now a real commodity. Japan desperately needs the new HD formats, such as Blu-ray and HD DVD.

HFC But where does it go after that? Surely in a few years it’ll need Super Blu-ray and Hyper HD DVD, and then something else.

KI Today’s HD is only 1080p, when real high-resolution pictures demand much more. 1080 compared to what we have today is certainly an advance... until you look at the resolution of 35mm film. That level of resolution probably needs 24 megapixels – and then how many frames per second of that do you need? Video still has a very long way to go!

HFC Is the same true for music formats?

KI Music is a different story: video is limited by lo-fi broadcast media, and there’s a very long way for movie performance to go. 1080p should keep Japan Inc happy for the next ten years or so, but in truth I don’t see video versus music as a fair comparison. Everyone is able to see the improvement in picture quality that HD can bring over what we have now, whereas most people are quite happy with CD-quality music. Why should they change that?

On that salient and pragmatic point, we ended the interview, thereby allowing the queue of patiently waiting people – eager to photograph Ken or have him sign something – to indulge themselves. And we tried our best to get our heads round the fact that we were in the presence of industry professionals rather than awestruck customers. **HFC**

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The Vincent name is the perfect example of the merits of East-West cooperation. Designed in Germany and built in China, the SV-236 is a fully featured hybrid integrated amplifier. The preamp section uses sweet-sounding valves to serve up what we thought was a truly "sparkling" and "charming" performance, while the power amps kick out a hefty 100 watts per channel, which we found meant it could drive "pretty much anything thrown at it". It's all built into a chassis so solid that it could almost put the Ark Royal to shame. With six line-level inputs and a full set of tone controls, it's also one of the most flexible integrated amps you can own. Add to this the glowing 12AX7 triode tube on display in the centre of the front panel and the Vincent SV-236 is clearly deserving of the Best Buy badge awarded to it last issue (*HFC* 295). For your chance to win one, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.



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: I love Vincent, *Hi-Fi Choice* magazine, 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:

What is almost put to shame by the Vincent's chassis?

- a) The Ark of the Covenant
- b) The Ark Royal
- c) The Royal Tandoori, London W11

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The closing date for entries is 26 July 2007. No purchase necessary. Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and Ruark, 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 all winners will be notified by telephone within ten working 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 accepted, but multiple entries will be disallowed. 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?

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

Do you like reading about aspirational high-end equipment?

Do you still listen to vinyl?

Up to how much are you willing to spend on a single item of hi-fi?

YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

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HI FI PLUS / ISSUE 44 / ROY GREGORY / SUMMIT

"THE VANTAGE IS SOMETHING OF A GIFT AND ONE THAT KEEPS ON GIVING"

HFC THE COLLECTION / 06 / ALVIN GOLD / VANTAGE

Through their sheer beauty – both aural and visual – MartinLogan speakers have established hybrid **electrostatic technology** as the obvious choice for those who want state-of-the-art sound without **suffering** a profusion of ugly boxes. The company's name is now a byword for elegance in **audio**.

Every MartinLogan speaker, from entry level and home theatre to state of the art, is immediately recognisable as a MartinLogan product: the **peerless, off-imitated, room-friendly** appearance, the **captivating see-through panels** and furniture grade finish. Best of all, the sound is as **clear** as the panels themselves.

MartinLogan has raised the bar even higher with the sublime Summit, a speaker that possess all of the virtues of the brand in a **disarmingly compact** form. To make its virtues available to a wider **audience**, the Summit has been followed by the smaller Vantage, and – for those with space or budget restrictions – the passive-woofer Vista. We have no doubt that they are the most **satisfying MartinLogan** speakers ever, **magical blends** of electrostatic openness and the kind of bass only available from a **dynamic woofer**. They can **charm** and excite in equal measure, dealing with **everything** from delicate, 'unplugged' music to massive orchestras, from funk to fusion.

To augment the Summit and its sisters, especially for home cinema applications, a new baby has been added to the range of MartinLogan subwoofers. The Abyss, coming **above** the very successful Dynamo but below the Grotto, features a 12in woofer, and it provides a new form of **convenience** for true flexibility: the Abyss, driven by its internal 300W amp, can be installed with either front- or **downward-firing** positions. It uses inverse mathematical equalisation, for sound to suit the environment.

New, too, for home theatre and environmental situations, are the Stage hybrid centre channel speaker and the Ticket, a compact and affordable in-wall model. The Stage fits into an enclosure only 34.6in wide, **ideal** for the new **generation** of wall-mounted plasma and LCD displays. Better still, a pair of flush-mounted Tickets will complement an in-wall monitor so unobtrusively that they're ideal for studies, bedrooms and anywhere else a secondary system is used.

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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

GERRY MULLIGAN QUARTET Annie Ross Sings A Song With Mulligan!

World Pacific/Pure Pleasure



180g vinyl

Music: English-born singer Annie Ross teamed up with Gerry Mulligan on baritone sax for this 1958 recording. The

sleeve notes describe her as singing with "a strong swing, peppery bite, archness and potent feeling". In modern terms, this description translates into 'sassy' almost perfectly. She certainly puts a lot of colour and verve into the standards on offer here and this, combined with a high standard of playing, makes this a most enjoyable album. ★★★★★

Sound: This is quite an early stereo recording, so you find that the musicians are kept to single channels, with only the voice given the full stereo treatment. However, the quality of the pressing is excellent and brings out all the subtleties and finesse of the recording. ★★★★★ JK

THE BYRDS

Sweetheart Of The Rodeo

Columbia/Sundazed



120g vinyl

Music: After their folk rock debut with *Mr Tambourine Man* and subsequent 'space rock' phase, 1968 marked a significant change

of direction for the Byrds. This was due in great part to their recruitment of Gram Parsons. He joined Roger McGuinn, Chris Hillman and Kevin Kelly (plus eight session musicians) to create a rich and vibrant backdrop to these 11 country rock tunes. It was a pivotal album for country music too, bringing the form to the attention of a generation that had turned its back on Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline. Most of all, it's an upbeat and entertaining slice of country at its most groovy. ★★★★★

Sound: The sound that engineers Roy Halee and Charlie Bragg get is lightweight by today's standards but not thin, and manages to cram in a throng of musicians without sounding messy. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure and Sundazed
www.purepleasurerecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



LEE MOSES

Time And Place

Castle CD

Music: Lee Moses never had a hit in his 1967-1972 heyday, which is a pity since his rawly sincere voice (and the neo-psychedelic soul style he embodied) deserved better recognition. Jimi Hendrix played on a few of these cuts, and Johnny Brantley produced many more yet Moses, a guitarist himself, never got much radio play and had to do studio sessions to stay solvent during his own lifetime. The bluesy, horn-led *Never In My Life* and the superb, effortlessly funky title track are but two of a dozen gems on this 23-track set. Includes the whole of his 1971 *Time & Place* album. ★★★★★

Sound: A journey through time – from early takes that sound pleasingly ancient to more polished post-Dolby productions, Moses' king-sized vocals cut through each track. ★★★★★ PS



THIN LIZZY

Thin Lizzy/Shades Of A Blue Orphanage

Universal/Decca

Music: Phil Lynott formed a number of bands in Dublin before encountering guitarist Eric Bell and drummer Brian Downey to form Thin Lizzy – a metal/rock trio mindful of Hendrix and Zeppelin but infused with Irish lyricism. If *Thin Lizzy* (recorded in five days) mixes melancholy with balls-out no-nonsense hard rock, 1972's *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* goes further to add folk and classical influences of which the beautiful *Sarah* and the impressionistic title track are true Irish rock milestones. ★★★★★

Sound: To really hear the difference afforded by these two remasters, check out the sting of Downey's cymbal breaks and the scorching sizzle of Bell's Gibson on the classic *Whiskey In The Jar* single, included among the abundant bonus tracks. ★★★★★ MP



JOHN BARRY

Themependium

Sony BMG

Music: Composer John Barry's name is synonymous with the James Bond theme. But he's an extremely prolific writer of film scores (for which he's won five Oscars) and is still working occasionally today (his last score was for *Enigma* in 2001 and his CV includes *Born Free*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Dances With Wolves*, *Out Of Africa*... the list really does go on and on). His lushly romantic melodic themes, intelligent arrangements and ear for interesting detail make him one of a handful of film composers whose body of work stands comparison with the classical canon. ★★★★★

Sound: This four CD box set is said to be the first to include all original recordings of Barry's scores, rather than sampling from the many reinterpretations, and it's all the better for it. ★★★★★ DO



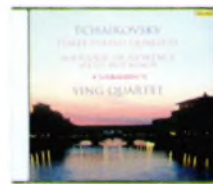
CROWDED HOUSE

Time On Earth

Parlophone

Music: Nobody bar McCartney writes tunes with quite the same effortless melodic facility as Crowded House frontman Neil Finn and *Time On Earth* – the band's first album of new studio material since 1993's *Together Alone* – marks one of the most eagerly anticipated reunions in years. With expectations so high, perhaps an initial feeling of being underwhelmed was inevitable. Certainly there's nothing here as instantly memorable as *Weather With You* or *Don't Dream It's Over*. Yet persevere and repeated play unveils the mature subtlety and nuance of songs such as *Nobody Wants To*, the bossa-tinged *Sat That Again* and *Even A Child*, which for once finds Finn sounding more like George Harrison than Macca. ★★★★★

Sound: The over-polished surface gloss means the songs take their time to show through; if they really are the Kiwi Beatles, they could do with a little of Lennon's grit for contrast. ★★★★★ NW



TCHAIKOVSKY

Three String Quartets

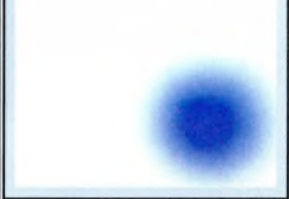
Ying Quartet

Telarc 2CD 80685

Music: Tchaikovsky's orchestral compositions can sound overcooked, but his chamber music seems to wear better. As the disc notes point out, the music bears a debt to German traditions in its indebtedness to Brahms. These works are varied, interesting and dynamic, all the more so from being played by the wonderful Ying Quartet, which consists of four siblings whose playing almost seems to involve a touch of telepathy in its unanimity. ★★★★★

Sound: Telarc's engineers have wrung a touch of magic dust from these recordings, as they so often do with their finest recordings. The sound is bold and three dimensional, and gives relatively high replay levels in a good system. ★★★★★ AG

POINT by CORNELIUS



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Elements of prog alongside poppy riffs"

THE CORNELIUS Point Matador

Music: For 2002's breakthrough *Point*, Japanese DJ Cornelius used real instruments and put down an eclectic but focused selection of excellent tunes. Influences include everything from the Beatles to Metallica and there is rarely a dull moment. Even predictable moments are scarce, the music twisting and turning in all sorts of unexpected directions. It has elements of prog alongside almost poppy riffs and sounds that glisten thanks to a palette of field

recordings, which includes the jungle and the ocean. It could so easily descend into introspective noodling, but instead maintains a maturity so often lacking in this genre. **Sound:** The recording is not the last word in finesse, but its bright edge brings definition to the speed of playing that is often indulged. This precision also gives the bass its shape and power. It should make any system that can cope with its energy sound fast. **JK**



MINA AGOSSI
Who Wants Love?

Candid

Music: African-born, Paris-based Mina Agossi may be a jazz singer, but her sound is far from the light, wispy and almost easy-listening definition usually associated with the modern incarnation of that phrase. Normally accompanied by just bass and drums, she uses her formidable voice very much as an instrument, bending and stretching familiar tunes far out of shape and back again. Time signatures and rhythms too can fit in a heartbeat from straight-ahead to free, courtesy of Eric Jacot on bass and Ichiro Onoe on drums, through a repertoire that ranges through originals, jazz standards and unusual covers like Hendrix's *Spanish Castle Magic*. This, her third album on Candid, was recorded live in New York and goes a long way to capturing her free-wheeling, 'anything goes' improvisational vibe. **Sound:** This is a superb, open and spacious live recording in a medium-sized venue that takes over the listening space thanks to the reach of the format. A fine example of what SACD can do at its best. **JK**



DVD-AUDIO & SACD

JERRY GRANELLI V16

The Sonic Temple Monday and Tuesday

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD) plus stereo CD)

Songlines

Music: Jerry Granelli is a septuagenarian drummer whose CV includes backing Vince Guaraldi on *Charlie Brown's Christmas* in 1965, in 2006 he played the Atlantic Jazz Festival with his guitar-rich combo V16. The band consists of guitarists David Tronzo and Christian Kogel with Granelli's son Anthony on the bass. The music is reminiscent of open spaces and is often extremely spare with only a slide guitar to fill an expansive soundstage. Granelli may be a drummer and percussionist, but he keeps a suitably modest profile for the most part, letting the twin guitars create cinematic vistas that feel like Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* but at the same time don't sound anything like Ry Cooder. This is jazz with space for contemplation, a rare commodity. **Sound:** This is a superb, open and spacious live recording in a medium-sized venue that takes over the listening space thanks to the reach of the format. A fine example of what SACD can do at its best. **JK**



BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7, Triple Concerto

LSO, Bernard Haitink (cond)

LSO Live 000078

Music: Haitink's reading of Beethoven's seventh, with its ebullient outer movements, and passionate 2nd movement, is alert, brisk but not rushed in its tempi, rhythmically measured yet impassioned. This is simply one of the finest sevenths committed to disc. The Triple Concerto is not as well known, but elicits a beautifully measured performance, with great concord from the orchestra and soloists. **Sound:** This is an excellent live recording, made at the LSO's Barbican home. The sound is very clearly articulated, with a firm sense of weight and with clarity maintained among the solo parts of the concerto. The disc is also available as a multichannel hybrid SACD. **AG**



GOGOL BORDELLO

Super Taranta!

Sideonedummy Records

Music: Eugene Hütz, the Ukraine-born frontman of New York's crazed gypsy punks is far happier playing rock festivals than Womad – but he will settle for 'conquer the world music' as a description of his band's manic fusion of traditional East European and Balkan influences and high-octane rock riffs. Guitar patterns that might have wandered in from a Clash record sit merrily alongside gypsy violins, wheezing accordions and oom-pah-pah brass while Hütz chants his Roma-rebel lyrics in a voice that stays just the right side of a Borat pastiche. **Sound:** Brilliantly produced by Victor Van Vugt (Nick Cave/PJ Harvey), who makes a connection between the complementary energies of punk and the band's gypsy fling. **NW**

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Les Illuminations (Op 18), etc

Clio Gould (directed from the violin), Toby Spence (tenor), Martin Owen (horn)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD) plus stereo CD)

Linn Records CKD 226

Music: The Scottish Ensemble is a 12-strong chamber group. Its playing has a lean and pungent quality – try the opening of the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* for a masterclass in making twelve musicians sound like fifty – along with impressive unison. The musicians work well in these three early works, apart from some occasionally suspect intonation from the horn, for example in the opening Prelude of the *Serenade For Tenor, Horn & Strings*, though elsewhere the horn playing is fresh, energetic and exciting. In any case, this does little to spoil what are undeniably masterpieces in each case from a fledgling Benjamin Britten. **Sound:** This is a full multichannel hybrid recording, recorded at Caird Hall, Dundee, which from this recording, appears to lend itself wonderfully to the massive range of dynamics and colours produced by the instrumental and vocal forces at work here. **AG**



DAVID RUSSELL

Art Of The Guitar

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD) plus stereo CD)

Telarc

Music: This Glasgow-born, Spanish-based guitarist has won all sorts of prizes for his playing, including the Julian Bream Guitar prize (twice) and Spain's prestigious Francisco Terregga Competition. But he's not just an empty technician, and brings a beautifully delicate touch to his classical guitar renderings both of standard guitar compositions and reinterpretations of other classical works. This album features selections from the traditional Spanish classical repertoire as well as popular classics from Debussy and Greg, and a pacier than usual rendering of Stanley Myers' *Cavatina*, the tune made famous in the movie *The Deer Hunter*. **Sound:** The solo classical guitar offers great scope for SACD's broad tonal range and there's a marvellous feeling of space and air around this solo recording. Proof you don't need big orchestral sounds to showcase SACD. **DO**



Listen Up...



WHAT HI-FI?
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SPEAKER PACKAGES
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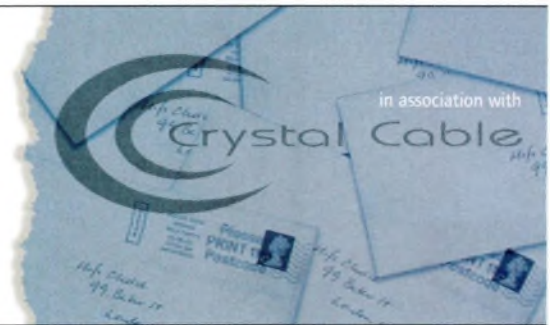
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The pick of this month's best letters

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



Above:
DALI Ikon 7

DON'T DILLY-DALI

Due to very favourable press and reviews (and a very detailed sound) I purchased DALI Ikon 7 speakers about six months ago. Unfortunately, although the speakers sound very good with vocals and acoustic music, they aren't good all-rounders. Their sound is bright and annoying when listening to rock music with lots of drums, cymbals and bass.

Therefore I would like to ask you what would be the best way to either tone down the treble or boost the bass: would it be an equaliser, a subwoofer, an amp with tone controls, or some service that DALI can provide? I positioned the speakers just next to the wall, with no toe-in, and it doesn't help – there just isn't enough bass to neutralise the over-exposed treble. My system consists of a Marantz CD7300 CD player and a Primare A10 amp.

I would be very grateful if you could give me some advice, since I wouldn't like to change them after such a short period of time.

Zoran Dolar via email

HFC There's a curious saying (which also formed the basis for a minor punk hit for Tenpole Tudor): 'Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.' You stand a fighting chance of ruining the good sound you get from the system in trying to get a better sound for rock. You have the building blocks

"The DALI's sound is bright and annoying when I'm listening to rock music."

of a very fine system, although the Ikon 7 can be bright in the wrong room – so change the room! Repositioning yourself in the room, adding soft furnishings and diffusing standing waves with lots of bookshelves and CD racks behind the system and your ears can do wonders. If this doesn't work, a change in speakers may be better than trying to shift the balance of the sound.

LET THEM EAT STATIC

Can you help solve a problem my friend is having with his budget – CD player? It seems to be suffering from static. We have tried sprays to both sides of the discs, anti-static Statmats... but nothing seems to work. He has changed the machine twice, but the problem is still occurring. It normally happens towards the end of a disc – suddenly the sound goes all mushy and crackly. Once the machine is stopped or a track is forwarded the sound is okay again. Is it static or a design fault?

Adrian Williams Kent ☐

Letter of the month

PUT THE SQUEEZE ON US

I've totally given up on 'conventional' radio, except for when I'm in the car. Nowadays, I get my radio stations through my internet connection, sent from my PC to a Squeezebox wireless streamer and then into my Naim Nait 5i. I've downloaded the *AlienBBC* plugin, too, which allows me to use the Beeb's Listen Again service and more. And the audio quality is way better than DAB. So, given how great it is, why haven't you reviewed the Squeezebox yet?

Greg Sammon via email

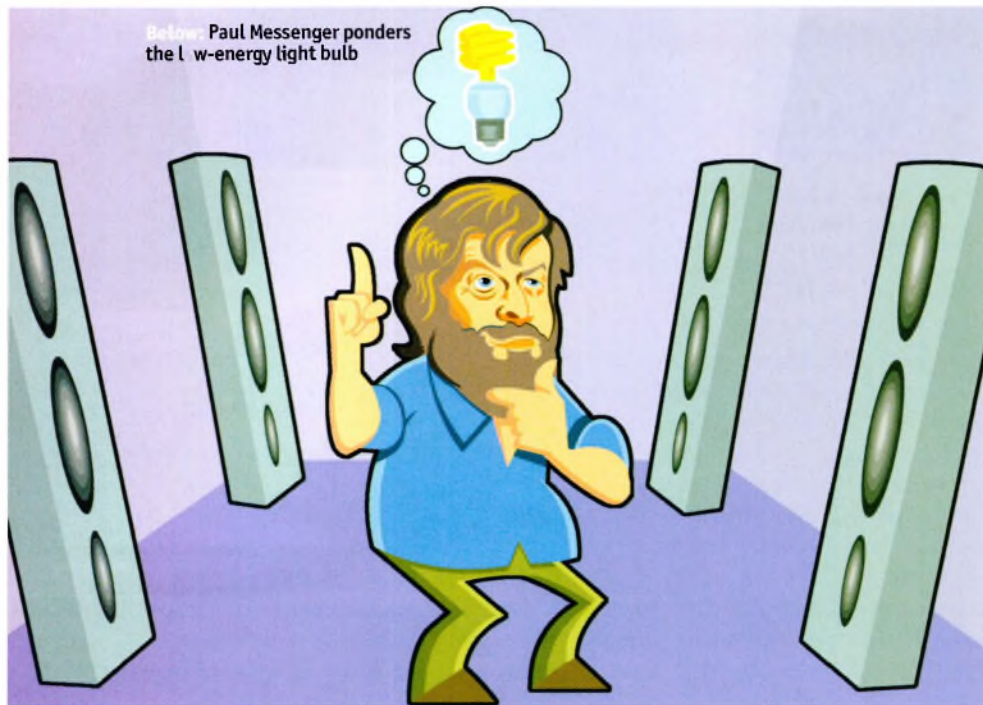
HFC It's a very good point, and an increasing number of our readers (both online and magazine readers) are using a Squeezebox, its audiophile bigger brother the Transporter, or a Sonos system, a Roku SoundBridge or similar, to port some or all their musical content. Some have taken the next step and downloaded all their music to a file server, using the Squeezebox as a 'front end'. While such products aren't yet core to many of our readers, this doesn't mean they should be overlooked. We hope to be investigating these fascinating technologies soon.



WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!
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The author of our letter of the month receives a one-metre pair of Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo interconnects worth £260, featuring a silver/gold conductor with Kapton insulation, plus a transparent Teflon jacket. So get writing! (150 words max please...)

Below: Paul Messenger ponders the low-energy light bulb



“What really gets to me is the way these ‘green’ lights are being pushed at us.”

of a cable. Many don't care and are simply convinced that cables make a big difference to the sound of a system (their absence certainly does!). That's the beauty of hi-fi, in a way. It's a broad church, and nothing's heretical. Well, almost nothing...

GREEN GOBBLING

I read Paul Messenger's rant about light bulbs (HFC 293) with great interest. I hate these new 'green' lights too, but because of the quality of light they cast. What really gets to me is the way these things are being pushed at us, gobbling up the better designs of old because they aren't PC enough. And now they want to take our standby switches away! My Naim kit has only been switched off three times in the last two years, and every time it took weeks to sound good again. Once again the little guy suffers!

Jim Tanner via email

HFC A plastic disc spinning at a fair lick can build up static, but it's unlikely to cause this level of trouble. It sounds like the player is at fault, unless of course you tend to shuffle round your thickly carpeted living room in tennis shoes and have a penchant for putting on nylon sweaters before loading a disc. If you tend to get static problems around the home, earth yourself by touching something like a metal equipment stand immediately before loading up a disc.

WIFE SWAPPING

I did some tests recently: I compared the sound of expensive interconnect cables and the sort given away with cheap CD players. When I switched the cables over myself, I could hear

big differences every time, but when my wife did the swapping and I simply sat and listened to the changes, I couldn't hear any difference whatsoever. Does this mean cables make no real difference?

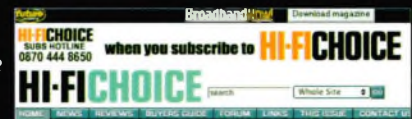
Ben Crawford via email

HFC A cable used in domestic audio is in the main, electronically defined by its resistance, capacitance and inductance. Many people think – with some justification – that a cable's audio performance is similarly defined by those parameters and nothing else. Others believe – with different justification, obviously – that there are further parameters (perhaps even intangible ones) that also influence the performance

HFC We suspect the standby-killing Euro directives are aimed at big sellers such as flat-screen TV sets and satellite decoders. Leaving them switched on during the night plays havoc with your fuel bills, and if millions of us are doing it, that's a lot of power being consumed for no useful reason. As many of these directives don't apply to low-volume, high-value items such as specialist hi-fi products, future Naim gear will not be compromised. Hopefully.

Onlineforum

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



I'm setting up a second hi-fi in the kitchen. I need to get a pair of small wall-mounted speakers, preferably without a subwoofer. They will likely be wall-mounted, but ceiling-mount is also a possibility. The budget for these would be up to approx £200.

Baz

...You can buy the B&W M-1s separately, for about £125 each. But as with all small satellites, they're not going to produce a lot of bass, so if you want the full spectrum of sound, then a sub is a must.

Paul Mac

I'm currently considering an amp upgrade. I like the

way that Jadis amps sound, and am therefore considering the Jadis DA88 (integrated) or the JA30 monoblocks with a matching preamp. Another option would be the Cary CAD 211 monoblocks and SLP 05 preamp. I'd welcome any comments or suggestions.

ycekin

...I have listened to both Accuphase and Spectral amps with some Peak Consults (mighty fine midrange!), and have found they work very well indeed. I would suggest that an Accuphase would be more to your taste and would be more of a sound purchase than a Jadis, if you can get over the fact

that they're solid-state...

Napoleon

...If you like the sound of the Jadis Orchestra, then you're going to seriously love the DA88. The midband is so sweet you might need insulin treatment afterwards.

**Welarbia
Munkeyzunkel**

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

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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





LEEMA ACOUSTICS ANTILA CD PLAYER | LEEMA TUCANA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER | LEEMA XONE LOUDSPEAKERS | £7,485

LA story

Leema Acoustics started out with one desperately impressive miniature speaker. Guess what? The system's even better

As fellow serious audiophiles, we ask you this. Would you trust a CD player that bids you farewell when you power it down? We guess it depends on the wording. "So long, farewell, *auf wiedersehen*, goodbye" might appeal to a specific section of the target market. "Bugger off, then, and hurry back", while suitably tongue-in-cheek, would, alas, undoubtedly offend many. "Later's" – the superbly succinct sign-off invented by adolescents to minimise the energy required to speak – probably fails to generate the appropriate gravitas, given the likely clientele for something costing £2,495 that merely plays CDs (and doesn't download MP3s).

At least, though, they leave you with the expectation of reacquaintance sometime in the not-too-distant future. But "Bye-bye"? *Bye-bye?* That's it, then. One listen to the Leema Acoustics Antila and it's adios. *Lame, lame, Leema.* What were you thinking? Apart from anything else, it's so '1980s Pontiac Ponderous dashboard LED message-centre display'. So unworthy of a CD player that can hold its own with the world's best. So... um, the only damn thing we can think of to criticise. The only thing there is to criticise. You know something? We get the feeling this is going to be a good system.

For a start, there's the 'dream team' backstory. Leema Acoustics might be relative new boys on the Brit-fi block, but they're hardly wet behind the ears; the credentials of company founders Mallory Nicholls and Lee Taylor – both of them ex-BBC engineers – are right out of the top drawer. Before they got into the hi-fi business, Nicholls's name was synonymous with the world's best multichannel monitoring electronics for recording studios and mastering houses, while Taylor has a Bafta and a Palme d'Or on his mantelpiece recognising his

recording and mixing skills for the film, television and music industries.

The two pooled their arsenal of talents as well as their Christian names (Lee-Ma, you see) to create Leema Acoustics in 1998, their initial aim, at least, being to produce a miniature speaker that was "capable of outperforming a system many times its size". Its development required some real outside-of-the-box thinking (the mathematical models and software tools available to them at the time simply weren't good enough, according to Mallory, so they went and wrote their own), and the result four years later, the Xen, lived up to the claims precisely as predicted. The first wave of acclaim came from the professional sector – for whom the speaker was principally designed – quickly followed by a thudding rubber stamp of approval from the clued-up two-channel audiophile community and more discerning home cinema enthusiasts. This in turn prompted Leema to develop the SPLX subwoofer, which in turn led to sales in unexpected areas, most notably to the owners of CD and DVD mastering suites, who loved the Xen/SPLX package's performance-to-size ratio.

SPACED OUT

It's easy to see how one thing leads to another. It certainly did for the boys at Leema. If the Xen looked tasty, the electronics that followed were clearly the fruit of a 'you ain't seen nothing yet' brief. The names of the five stunningly styled and exquisitely built components – the Antila CD player, Cygnus phono stage, Tucana integrated amp, Hydra power amp and Corvus centre-channel amp – should give a clue as to their manufacturer's aspirations. If we're to take Leema at its word, stellar. They're all named after constellations (although we're pretty sure it should be ☞

"The names of Leema's stunningly styled and exquisitely built components should give a clue as to their manufacturer's aspirations: stellar."



Leema Antila
CD player

£2,495

Two-and-a-half grand may seem a lot for a CD player, but the truth is you'd have to spend an awful lot more to buy one that sounded any better than this. The Antila is wonderfully transparent and unerringly musical.



Leema Tucana
integrated amplifier

£2,995

The Tucana is a truly world-class integrated amp that makes a formidable team with the Antila. It's fast and revealing, but also superbly muscular with exceptional bass grip and definition. And, like the Antila, it's brilliantly well built.



Leema Xone
loudspeaker

£1,995 per pair

Again, it's a lot of money for a small speaker, but when you fire it up it needs no excuses, with scale, power and dynamics that completely belie its diminutive size.



Antlia, not Antila!). Indeed, the whole ensemble is called the Constellation series. And if that conveys the notion of grouping, it's no accident. All Leema systems, whether stereo or multichannel, benefit from the Leema Intelligent Protocol System (or LIPS), which enables any number of Leema components to operate with the simplicity of an all-in-one stereo. In this case, the Antila CD player can be either a 'slave' – remotely controlled by the Tucana amp – or a 'master' for input selection and volume adjustment, showing the settings on its own display. It all smacks of an unusual level of user-friendliness for a high-end stereo system, which is undeniably a Good Thing. But it's still no excuse for the display flashing up "Bye-bye" when you thumb the standby button.

XONE ALONE

Along with the surge in electronic hardware offerings, the speaker range has also expanded to include the Xone floorstander you see before you, which boasts a dainty footprint similar to that of the Xen, but in a beautifully svelte and, it has to be said, desperately cute floorstanding cabinet. This baby manages to possess both the X factor and the Wife Acceptance Factor – a *Beautiful Systems* natural if ever there was.



So, down to the nitty-gritty. The most intriguing and ambitious component, by a breezy margin, is the Antila CD player. We've already reviewed it by itself (HFC 291) and reported warm, fuzzy feelings of sonic satisfaction. As the front-end of an all-Leema combo, though, it has the potential to shine more brightly still. The Antila is a heady mix of tactile and technical for all the right reasons. One, for the unfussy elegance of its design, which melds hewn-from-solid chunkiness with tasteful brand-themed aesthetic flourishes (the "A" logo-shaped ventilation holes in the top plate, for instance) and nicely judged detailing – though the amp-style heat sinks running along either side of the casework are arguably a finishing touch too far. Two, for its slick operation and sublime user-friendliness (cutesy shutdown message notwithstanding). And three, for its genuinely novel approach to digital-to-analogue conversion.

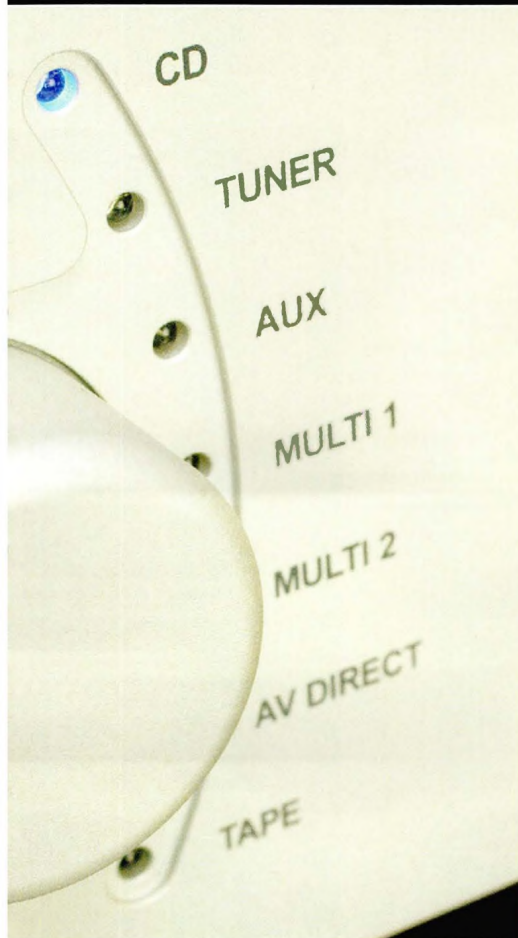
The Antila has 20 DACs, which is 19 more than the vast majority of CD players and 18 more than some. There can be only one response to this. Why? Well, to put it bluntly, it's a job-sharing scheme. Each phase of each channel is converted by five 24-bit/192kHz delta-sigma chips. Nicholls claims that this so far unique approach, which Leema

has named MD2 Active Differential Multi-DAC technology, irons out any slight differences between them. In effect, they form a homogeneous single DAC where any individual device or timing error is averaged out. Each DAC contributes a small part to the final result. Prior to conversion, the bitstream is buffered in Leema's data pipeline, which reduces jitter in the incoming signal.

CD SHOOT-OUT

One final thing. If you're of a nervous disposition, the speed at which the CD drawer shoots out when you hit the 'open' button might be a little alarming. The good news is it's a Philips VAM transport, one of the only audio-specific mechanisms still in production.

You wouldn't call the matching Tucana amp under-endowed, either – not to its face, anyway. It's just that when you stand the Tucana next to something as gobsmackingly new as a CD player with an icosDAC converter, it makes it look sort of ordinary, in much the same way Keira Knightley looks sort of ordinary compared to Heidi Klum. Of course, this amp is pretty damn far from ordinary. It's a dual mono design using three heavy-duty toroidal power transformers and has a refined bipolar output stage. Using six output devices, each channel



“The Xones are very surprising speakers. That so much scale, air, perspective and palpable, room-filling presence can be generated by such slim and tiddly towers is something of a jaw-dropper.”

is rated at 148 watts into eight ohms and is said to be capable of delivering over 45 amps of current, thereby exerting a vice-like grip on just about any speaker you care to put in its path.

Not that the Xone requires a heavy hand by any means. A two-and-a-half-way design with a rear-firing port, it shares quite a lot of its DNA with the standmount Xen. Its bass and midbass drivers, developed in collaboration with SEAS, use massive, magnetically screened magnet assemblies mounted onto SEAS's latest open-basket design with a new fibreglass composite coil former. The screened, high-flux, neodymium-magnet, ferrofluid-damped 'Tymphany' fabric tweeter, which is used in the rest of the Leema range, is claimed to have an upper response extending well beyond 30kHz.

GRIPPING STUFF

Nordost Micro Mono-Filament wiring is used internally, and the Xone's Linkwitz-Riley second-order crossovers feature

'Clarity Cap' capacitors and air- and iron-dust-cored inductors. Two pairs of gold-plated binding posts allow individual access to the split crossover, which has been specifically designed to gain the maximum benefit from bi-wiring.

The Xones, it must be said, are very surprising speakers. That so much scale, air, perspective and palpable, room-filling presence can be generated by such slim and, frankly, tiddly towers is something of a jaw-dropper. Low bass, understandably, is off the agenda, but the low registers are so taut, tuneful and well timed you'll quickly forgive the absence of the bottom octave. It's a grip, control and composure thing – and you can sense the whole system pulling in the same direction on this. The overall presentation is beguilingly natural and coherent, with a spacious soundstage and stunning image solidity and depth.

As we find time and time again with our *Beautiful Systems*, it's the ability to present fine detail in a musically uninhibited manner that distinguishes

the great from the merely good – and this Leema system is definitely in the former category. Its deft touch with timing – it's wonderfully fast yet can stop on a pinhead – is matched by fine clarity and focus. When called upon, the system sounds vivid, dynamic and muscular. When Amy Winehouse sings *F**k Me Pumps*, she sounds aerobically charged with real, in-the-room presence. This is a compelling combo, marrying as it does clarity, grip and dynamics with great musical insight. It brings emotional depth to CDs you'd have sworn were as icy as a polar bear's nose. And with well-recorded material, it can sound simply sublime.

Considering all this – and its aesthetic excellence – the £7,485 price doesn't seem all that high. The rewards, however, are very special indeed. In fact, this system plays music so well, you may even forgive the CD player's *sayonara* signature sign-off. After all, even the best of us have our quirks. **HFC**

David Vivian



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→ the essence of musical luxury, defined by Cyrus

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYERS
CYRUS CD6s

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
CD PLAYER
BEST CD PLAYER £1000 - £1500
CYRUS CD6x

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
STEREO AMPLIFIERS
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £750 - £1250
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REVIEWS

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



EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 42** Wharfedale Airedale Neo loudspeaker
- 46** Sugden A21aL Series 2 integrated amplifier
- 50** Marantz DV7001 universal disc player
- 52** Moon SuperNova RS CD player
- 56** Pioneer A-A9 integrated amplifier
- 59** Onkyo DV-SP504E universal disc player
- 60** Arcam DiVA DV135 universal disc player
- 63** Tivoli Audio one-box system



- 64** Goldring 2100 moving-magnet cartridge
- 64** Profigold PGC82546 loudspeaker cable
- 65** Cambridge Audio Azur Reference interconnect cable
- 65** Sennheiser HD 485 headphones

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

LOUDSPEAKERS £800-£1,200

- 68** DALI Mentor 1
- 69** Dynaudio Focus 140
- 71** Epos M16
- 73** MonoPulse 32S
- 75** Revel Concerta F12
- 77** Yamaha Soavo 2



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

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

The things we like most about the product

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

OVERALL SCORE >> **84%**

PRO Great build and fully featured, with a snappy, open and dynamic sound.

CON Unfortunately it's a CD player – no real thing in itself, but it's better than it looks!

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 overall conclusion

The Siemens equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing than es with dense material with remarkable science and ease. It even seems to be

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
★



Back to the future

Not usually associated with the high end, Wharfedale's Airedale Neo is a blast from the past

PRODUCT Wharfedale Airedale Neo

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £9,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 51.7x115x45cm

Weight: 90kg • 25mm soft-dome Alnico tweeter

75mm soft-dome Alnico midrange driver • 300mm

Alnico bass driver • Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance:

8 ohms (nominal)

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

If you happen to live in Yorkshire, you'll know that Wharfedale is one of the incredibly beautiful Yorkshire Dales. The rest of us will recognise 'Wharfedale' purely as the name of one of the first British specialist loudspeaker manufacturers. The famous proselytiser for great sound, instinctive engineer and professional Yorkshireman Gilbert Briggs founded the company way back in 1932. Wharfedale (along with the likes of Celestion and Tannoy) was there for the birth of high fidelity.

The firm was eventually acquired by a Far Eastern company, and moved lock, stock and barrel to Shenzhen in southern China. But although it has a fairly low profile in the UK right now, it's very much alive and kicking. It manufactures 600 different drive units to support current and discontinued models. There's very little buying in of components or enclosures, which is how many supposedly all-British companies operate. Wood, steel and reels of wire go in at one end of the factory, and finished loudspeakers emerge from the other.

Now here's a trick question. What image do you have of Wharfedale (the company, not the landscape)? The sheer numbers of Diamonds, Lintons and Dentons it sold in the 1970s and 1980s mean that most people think of it as a producer of cheap and cheerful – if good-value – loudspeakers. But that's only part of the story, and the manufacturer has a long tradition of building upmarket audiophile products – a tradition that continues today.

The Airedale Neo is the second-largest model in the Wharfedale range (after the Airedale Heritage). It's an ambitious design, in part an attempt to underline that Wharfedale is every bit the modern manufacturer, but also a celebration of Wharfedale's past, being named after one of its seminal early models. The biggest market for the Airedale range is Japan, and it was voiced in part for consumers there.

The design is retro down to the soles of its feet. There's something reassuringly artless

about the way this speaker has been put together, apparently with few of the hi-tech accoutrements one might expect – the hi-tech diaphragms and enclosures of the latest diamond-tipped flagship B&Ws, for example. It's a three-way bass-reflex design, housed in a huge box, like a gently sloping wardrobe.

a hard aluminium former, and boasts very low distortion over its operating range (a typical rating of less than one per cent at 100dB at 1m is claimed). The midrange driver is partially horn-loaded by the profiled die-cast mounting plate to help match directivity with the tweeter at the handover point between

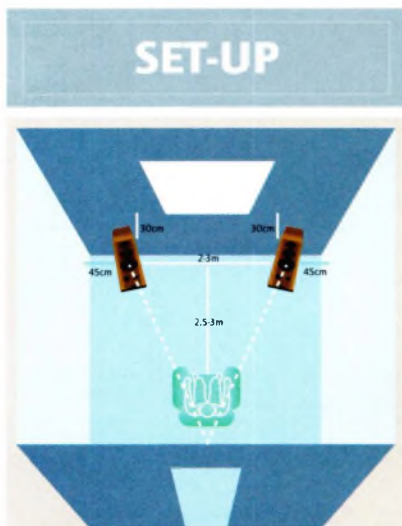
“There's something reassuringly artless about the way this speaker has been put together, with few hi-tech accoutrements.”

The flagship Airedale Heritage is bigger still.

The enclosure is centred around a large (75mm) soft-dome midrange driver. This has

the two. Wharfedale (along with ATC and Dynaudio) is something of a specialist when it comes to dome midrange units: this one, unique to the Neo, has a soft textile dome and a bandwidth of 800Hz-3.7kHz. This is virtually the whole of the frequency range covered by the human voice, which is where the hearing 📺





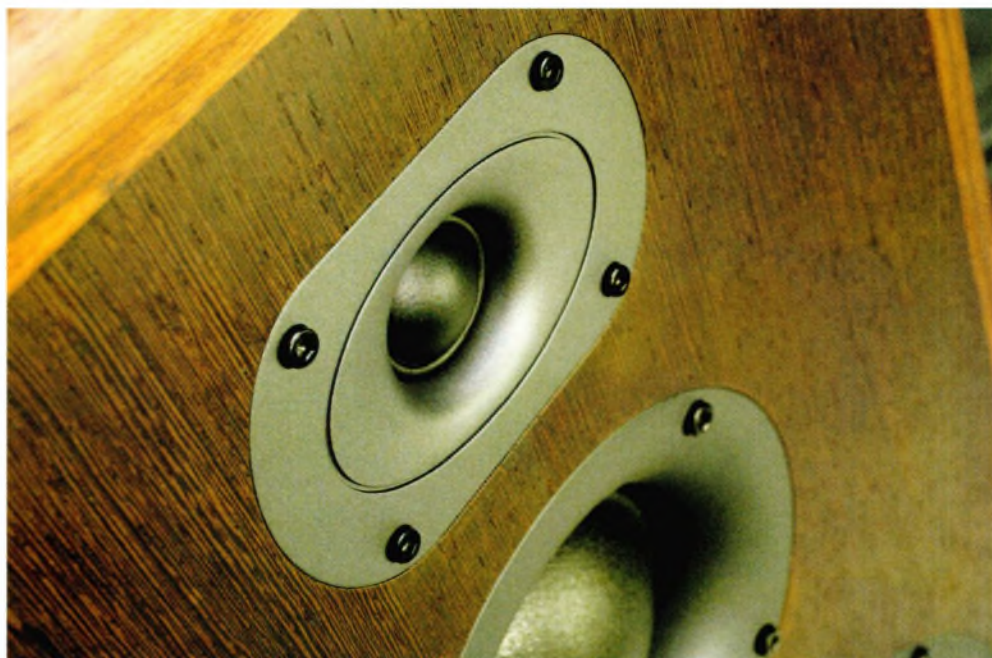
POSITIONING

Wharfedale makes explicit recommendations for positioning, specifying a three-metre listening range and a 97cm ear height, which is directly on the midrange unit's central axis. Although the listening range is specified, it's safe to reduce this by a half-metre or so without ill effects. Wharfedale additionally recommends that you sit at one apex of an equilateral triangle whose baseline is the two speakers, with the back of each speaker 10-30cm from the back wall and at least 45cm from either corner, with an appropriate toe-in.

The question of toeing in is one that you'll have to settle on a case-by-case basis. The output of the Airedale Neo is surprisingly axially dependent. Move more than a foot or so off the tweeter line and the treble presence recedes, and the whole system becomes rather dull. There are some positive side effects to this, though. There's little if any noticeable 'splash' from the side walls, and therefore no need to install sound damping at the first reflection points (which can normally be determined by having a partner temporarily hold mirrors on the side walls). Wharfedale suggests that imagery is more non-directional than we found, the broad baffle helping to widen the apparent image source. Also experiment with the rear wall distance, which you may prefer to be larger than the recommendation.

SYSTEM MATCHING

Our first priority when the review started in earnest was the issue of building a test system around the Airedale, and with such an unfamiliar product, there was always the possibility that this could prove troublesome, or at least produce an unpredictable outcome. In fact, as far as could be judged within the timescale of the review, the Airedale isn't especially fussy about what it's used with. For the record, our main test system involved the Moon SuperNova CD player (see p52 in this issue) and i-7 amplifier, and cables from Nordost and Moving Air's Abbey Road range. But the Wharfedale is less fussy than we expected, and certainly less fussy than most comparable large, high-end speakers.



process is at its most discriminating. Normal speakers split the voice across two units, one of which has an intrinsically heavy and slow-responding diaphragm/voice coil.

The area above 3.7kHz is handled by another soft dome ("A better choice than metallic-based domes that seem to add their own character to the treble," suggests Wharfedale), and again low distortion is claimed, along with wide dispersion. In common with the other drive units, the magnet structure uses Alnico (an extremely expensive alloy of aluminium, nickel and cobalt), which has fallen into disuse elsewhere since the development of ceramic magnets after WWII. The tweeter bandwidth is said to extend to 45kHz.

The bass driver is a 300mm cone unit whose Alnico motor system is supplemented by a flux-stabilisation ring and a structure behind the cone that's as open as possible to reduce noises that would otherwise be reflected back through the cone. The compact Alnico

magnet helps in this respect. The voice-coil former bears on a robust and well-damped dual-spider arrangement. The cone itself is a three-layer sandwich (reminiscent of the high-end designs of Focal and B&W), consisting of glass-fibre outer layers encasing a carbon-fibre core, with extra stiffening around the rim. A similar tri-laminate is used for the dust cap.

The Neo is a reflex-loaded design, with two large front-facing ports to reduce air velocity well below Thiele-Small recommendations, and wind noise is consequently low. The enclosure is styled similarly to the Airedale of the 1960s, with period touches and a classic, luxurious oiled-walnut-veneer finish with matching grilles and trims. Corners and edges are radiused, using solid walnut fillets to control edge diffraction, and the enclosure is constructed from extensively braced and damped 25mm MDF panels. The front and side panels are tilted inwards to discourage internal reflections, and the system has a massive internal volume of 125 litres. Internal wiring is Monster XP, and the bi-wired crossover is hard-wired.

SOUND QUALITY

The Neo features very middle-of-the-road sensitivity and power handling. The bass isn't massively extended given the enclosed air volume (a specified -3dB at 25Hz). Usefully for those who don't live in massive homes, the balance has been optimised for perceived Japanese-market tastes, which means a well-damped, almost polite bass in listening rooms that aren't excessively large.

The speaker is on sale through a bare handful of dealers in the UK, where it goes up against such designs as the Tannoy Westminster and the JBL K2. All three models are distinctly retro in appeal – sonically as well as visually. The Neo has an easy, relaxed and fairly neutral





tonal presentation, and a very 'broad' quality when dealing with dynamic, wide-bandwidth material. It stops just short of being 'lush'. It's all but impossible to put the Neo under any apparent strain; it never sounds hard or edgy, and there's no hint of aggression in the sound. It's almost (note the qualification) too relaxed, though the Airedale is unusually axis-dependent, so it can be tuned to deliver the balance you prefer simply by changing the orientation (see Positioning).

The soft-dome mid and tweeter also bring something interesting and distinctive to the party. As Wharfedale suggests, there's nothing metallic about the way midband and high frequencies are produced, and the bass is well (but not extravagantly) extended. Overall, the speaker breathes in a very natural, open way. The Neo is notable for its consistency across a broad frequency and dynamic range: it's very 'together' and even-handed in its voicing, although there is a low level of residual coloration, identified in listening notes as a kind of 'big box' feel. This contrasts with the harder-edged, more highly tuned quality of some contemporary high-end designs. The Neo is the very opposite of 'in your face', and if anything the midband sounds recessed, and the bass warm. To misuse a motoring metaphor, it has more of the quality of a big, relaxed American V8 than that of a highly tuned, small-bore Italian powerplant. It's not that one kind is intrinsically more capable than the other. If you like, it's a question of personality.

Those personality differences have some very tangible outcomes. The Airedale Neo's forte is large, expressive performance with equally large instrumental groups – bands or orchestras, for example – whose sound is reproduced with a scale that's unusual from a hi-fi speaker. There's also a hint of warmth that stops short of being overhung. At the opposite extreme,

“It’s all but impossible to put the Neo under any apparent strain; it never sounds hard or edgy, and there’s no hint of aggression.”

very small-scale material – solo speech, for example (try listening to a Radio 4 news broadcast) – can sound heavy-handed. These effects appear to be only distantly related to the active part of the design, and more to do with the enclosure. The cabinet has a 'hollow' feel when subjected to the 'knuckle rap' test. The Neo isn't as tightly constructed or as inert in feel as the best large enclosures from other sources, and the result is a large loudspeaker that sounds large, almost irrespective of the type of music being played. The paradigm of a small, fast-responding loudspeaker isn't part of the Airedale Neo's DNA.

The preceding comments aren't intended as criticism. No loudspeaker to our knowledge handles all types of music-making equally, and in this respect the Wharfedale is no exception. It's just that its personality traits are a little unusual, albeit not entirely at odds with the Tannoy and JBL models mentioned earlier, and users of horn-loaded speakers will certainly be used to larger departures from absolute, literal accuracy than the Neo delivers. In any such comparison, the Wharfedale is almost certain to be more transparent and accurate.

We greatly enjoyed our all-too-brief spell with the Airedale Neo, but there are distinctive features about its sound which necessarily require some acclimatisation. In particular, if you're used to the small-speaker feel of a highly tuned modern speaker – one that can respond at lightning speed to changes in musical dynamics, tonality and focus – then you'll definitely find the Airedale Neo hard

work at first. But we quickly grew accustomed to the sense of image scale, the intrinsically very musical quality and above all the unusually coherent, fluid midband. All of which make this Wharfedale time machine worth setting your clocks back for **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 89% [Progress bar]	PRO Great build and finish, easy, relaxed sound, great image scale (though not specificity) and good but not exceptional detail retrieval.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 80% [Progress bar]	CON Expensive, and not exactly a fast, maximum-information design: some low-level enclosure resonances and the large baffle dimensions are probably responsible.
BUILD >> 91% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 80% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
Wharfedale's latest is a big, V8 of a loudspeaker, offering tremendous image scale and a very fluid, consistent musical style. Once you've experienced it, the Airedale Neo's sound will probably have you hooked.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%



Extreme makeover

Sugden's evergreen A21a gets a serious revamp, but does it still have charm?

PRODUCT Sugden A21aL Series 2

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £1,299

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x9.2x3.5cm • Weight: 11kg • Inputs: 5x line level • Pre-outputs: fixed and variable • Finishes: titanium, graphite • Output power: 21 watts per channel (8 ohms), 20 watts per channel (4 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01924 404088 🌐 www.sugdenaudio.com

The Sugden A21a is something of a living legend, a Class A integrated amplifier that has been in production for over 20 years, but whose earlier incarnations date back as far as the sixties. It has maintained its appeal thanks to a sound that can charm the pants off the most hardbitten of reviewers and inspires genuine affection among its many

users. However, time would seem to have caught up with it in many respects, and Sugden Audio felt the moment had come to bring it up to date, albeit while attempting to retain the characteristics which have won it so much admiration.

The brand new A21a is not particularly well differentiated on paper; the name has been extended by the letter L in upper (line level) or lower (phono) case and the words Series 2. Marketing was clearly not at the forefront when this revision was conceived – in fact, judging from the stealthy approach that Sugden takes to all forms of promotion, we suspect it's a dirty word in that part of Yorkshire.

However, there have been significant changes both internally and externally to this solid integrated amplifier. As you can see, the front panel is no longer made of bent steel but

10mm-thick aluminium with chunky machined control knobs to match. It's a faceplate style that'll be very familiar to anyone who has seen the A21SE or any of Sugden's Masterclass series, and one that's a dramatic improvement on its predecessor. It's not just a facelift, though – the chassis is 50 per cent thicker and made out of a single piece for increased rigidity. Possibly this was a necessity brought about by the introduction of a beefier power supply, one that means the A21a's output is no longer compromised by speakers with a four-ohm load.

The preamplifier section has also been completely reconfigured and sited behind the fascia in order to reduce the length of the signal path. The overall circuit has been straightened by removing the tape-monitor and mono-switching options of the previous



“This is still a proper ‘hair shirt’ product. There are no input markings on the front panel – you have to find your source blind.”

model, facilities which some people will no doubt miss, especially given the scarcity of mono switches on contemporary amplifiers. But if the result is worth the candle, so to speak, then it'll have been a worthwhile sacrifice. Another victim of the straight lining process is balance control, again something that has become a bit of a minority interest these days, and something we only ever use to check for a fault.

Sugden describes these various changes as evolutionary, but the removal of three functions strikes us as being closer to radical, more so even than the cosmetic revamp. However, the model still retains the horizontal cooling fins along its flanks, and there's the option of adding an MM/MC phono stage for a very reasonable £100, though this does take up one of the five line inputs. Another radical change is the introduction of remote volume control, something, which in our view, more than makes up for the features lost. Remote input selection would also have been nice, but this is still a proper 'hair shirt' product. So much so, in fact,

that there are no input markings on the front panel – you have to find your source blind, though the radial nature of the inputs means that you soon learn where they are.

As previously mentioned, although the power output remains at 21 watts per channel, the increase in power-supply stiffness means higher current is available, which makes for greater control over the loudspeaker load. It's still hardly a bone-cruncher in power terms, but its Class A operation means that when it runs out of steam it does so in a far smoother style than Class AB amps, which is why low-powered valve amps get away with so much. Nonetheless, speakers that have higher sensitivity are always a good idea with most Class A designs.

SOUND QUALITY

One practical advantage of Class A is that the amp warms up very quickly, and within half an hour is too hot to leave your hand on. This isn't exactly economical, but Sugden does suggest you turn it off when not in use, which means

it probably has a similar carbon footprint to an AB design that's permanently left on.

Having said that, an easy load would be best for the A21a. Given a spin with the mighty B&W 802Ds in our listening room, it doesn't seem phased by the task, so long as the volume is kept to a sensible level. The pairing enables the amplifier to show off its delicate touch through the midband, one which brings forward subtleties of the music that aren't usually apparent with more powerful amps. It produces a big-boned, bold piano sound with good low-level resolve and a smoother top end than that of the Pioneer A-A9 we tested shortly afterwards (which is less than half the price).

Moving on to a more natural loudspeaker partner in the form of Living Voice's Avatar OBX-R, with its higher sensitivity and easier load, it becomes apparent that the new A21a isn't quite as romantic as its predecessor. It's still very sweet, but it's also more even in balance and extended at the bandwidth extremes; the bass has a bit more weight to it and the highs don't seem as smoothed off. Which is a step forward in terms of fidelity and one we applaud, but it does bring this amp a bit closer to the norm. However, the Class A factor saves it from being just another integrated model, while the midrange is glorious and voices have so much depth and

[Review] Sugden A21aL Series 2 integrated amplifier

Q&A

We spoke to Patrick Miller, the director at Sugden Audio, to find out more about the revamped A21aL Series 2



HFC Why change such a popular design?

PM The original A21a was introduced 20 years ago and has received very little attention from us apart from minor component/cosmetic changes. The commercial reasons for change were to upgrade a rather utilitarian case design and address the lack of a remote control, which many people were demanding. Instead of just taking the easy option of a 'cosmetic' makeover, we decided to totally redesign the A21a to improve the technical and sonic performance.

Do you still do all the metalwork in-house?

We operate a specialist custom-engineering shop that does all the fine finishing and most of the machined case components. We prefer to keep things in-house and under control as far as possible. The same goes for all the circuit-board assembly

Does the new power supply mean the amp delivers more current than its predecessor? If so, how much?

The amount of available current has increased substantially – equating it to power output into four ohms, the result is a 60 per cent increase. This is due to better regulation and loading on a redesigned power transformer.

What is the output into four ohms?

The power output has increased from 12 watts to 20 watts, but we're talking Class A watts here, with the ability to grab a loudspeaker firmly by the voice coils and go down that extra octave.

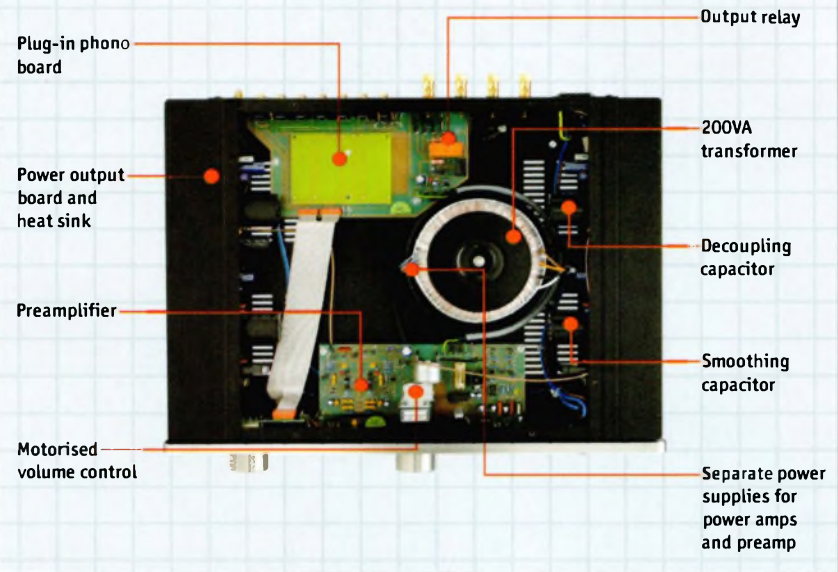
The cooling fins are oriented horizontally rather than the more popular vertical style – is this for practicality-of-build reasons, or do they work equally well like this?

With horizontal fins the heat sinks are 25 per cent less efficient. We use our own unique custom heat sink with an additional rib formation to improve efficiency. The design is very finger-friendly.

What were the main benefits of removing the mono and balance controls?

When we reworked the preamp stage the idea was to reduce the signal-path lengths by as much as possible. As the mono, balance and tape-monitor controls were in circuit, we knew removing them would improve separation and low-level detail.

Detail



timbral colour that when they belong to the likes of Diana Krall they take on a new allure.

What the changes seem to have brought to the party is a greater fleetness of foot – this Sugden has a great sense of timing and draws you into the groove before all else. That's something we don't remember being so clear with its predecessor.

It also retains the sense of life in the music, the energy that makes Class A so appealing. Instruments sound dynamic and real and take on a three-dimensional solidity in the room – an effect reinforced by the high level of detail that the Sugden is able to deliver and underpinned by a bottom end that has something approaching grip when the load isn't too challenging. But stick on something more weighty, such as the beats of Missy Elliott, and you can hear the limitations of those 20 watts. If you want to bomb the bass, then there's no substitute for power. This is demonstrated quite ably by Russ Andrews' HP-1/PA-1 pre/power amplifier, which offers 55 watts and delivers the fourth dimension – bass – in relatively arse-kicking fashion, albeit in the context of a two-box system with only two inputs and no remote. The A21a presents a more upbeat and effusive sound that's more lyrical and arguably more enjoyable, even if you don't feel it so strongly in the sternum. It's extremely communicative, and given that music

is a language of sorts, this is a key strength.

Giving the Sugden a final crack with Tannoy's pretty efficient Glenair 10 speakers (reviewed last month) reveals that they make a great pairing. The amp's strong dynamics play to the speaker's strength, and its smooth highs offset the slightly exposed nature of the speaker's treble. More importantly, they both pull in the same musical direction to produce a totally engaging experience with a superb sense of presence.

The Sugden A21a has, we're glad to say, managed to up its game without losing its magic touch in the communication department. It may not be as romantic as its forebear, but it's still pretty sweet by most standards. This, combined with the wholesale improvement in looks and build, means that it remains as potent a force for musical good as ever. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



FEATURES >> 82%



BUILD >> 30%



VALUE >> 88%



PRO

Resolute and charming in equal measure, with greatly improved build and the couch potato's favourite feature, remote control.

CON

Gets hotter than the nanny state is likely to tolerate for too much longer and has limited power output, thus requiring you to select your speakers carefully.

CONCLUSION

The A21a remains the finest solid-state Class A amp to come out of Yorkshire, if not the country, and now it looks the part too. It may have lost the mono and balance controls, but the added remote control is a bonus for what is a beguiling little beauty.

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

Minimalist masterpieces!



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FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Any disc will do

A high-performance alternative to the budget DV6001, boasting some serious audio prowess

PRODUCT Marantz DV7001

TYPE Universal disc player

PRICE £600

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x12.8x11.9cm
• Weight: 7.3kg • Audio outputs: 5.1-channel phono, stereo phono • Digital outputs: coaxial phono, Toslink optical • Video outputs: 2x composite, 2x S-Video, 2x component, 2x Scart • HDMI v1.1

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 • www.marantz.com

The DV7001 is a medium-priced high-spec straight DVD player – but note the word 'straight', which in this case applies specifically to the video subsection. Marantz (and its partner Denon in the D&M group) has yet to commit irrevocably to either of the high-def formats, Blu-ray and HD DVD. At least until the dust settles on the two protagonists, it's sticking with 'normal' DVD, but with enough clever processing under the lid to go some way to bridging the gap between it and the new formats. Given the limitations of Blu-ray and HD DVD as they stand right now, this isn't a completely unrealistic strategy.

In addition, both major partners in the D&M group have made most of their players into high-quality audio players, paying particular attention to the quality of CD replay, as well as including DVD-Audio and SACD. It may be that high-res audio is more appealing to some than high-def video. Indeed, a look at the lists of available titles shows around 4,000 SACDs, and a bare handful of high-def films worth owning, unless your tastes run to the worst kind of low-rent dross. Things will change, of course, but it won't happen overnight.

So here is another well-equipped player from the Marantz stable, based loosely on the high-end DV9600, but simplified and at a lower price. You could also look at it as an enhanced DV6001, with a slightly improved feature set and higher-quality video and audio components such as better passive components in the audio section, better DACs and enhanced rear-panel connections. There are also extra features, such as an internal DTS decoder. The video spec includes HDCP-enabled HDMI version 1.1, which will stream DVD-Video and DVD-Audio digital multichannel sound, as

well as Dolby Digital and DTS codecs from DVD, which can be passed on in raw digital form to any amp or processor with an HDMI input or in digital (undecoded) form via the straight optical and electrical digital outputs. The DV7001 can also decode these signals internally, presenting them from analogue outputs on the back panel in the traditional fashion. SACD can only be played from the model using the analogue outputs.

The Marantz is equipped with six Analog Devices NSV (noise-shaping) video filters. Standard 480 or 576p video can be upscaled to 720p or 1080i, or all the way to 1080p assuming the video-display device can cope, using the on-board 12-bit/216MHz ADV7320 video D/A, from Analog Devices. 1080p is the same resolution as full HD, but there's no direct comparability between video upscaled to 1080p and true 1080p from a 1080p source, despite what has been written in some quarters. The former uses interpolated data, whose efficacy depends on complex algorithms which involve examining each source pixel and predicting how surrounding pixels should be



“There’s no doubt it’s a significant advance on the budget model, and that the main differences are in the area of sound quality.”

displayed in real time. Video processing includes a Faroudja DCDi chip for progressive scan signals, while audio is handled by 24-bit DACs on each of the six output channels, with discrete HDAM output buffers (a Marantz speciality). Also included is variable delay to ensure accurate synchronisation of sound and picture, increasingly an issue with some panel displays.

The player is well built, with a solid extruded fascia and a twin-layer base, a legacy of the DV9600. The set-up menu lacks visual flair, but is neatly executed and comprehensive, with a good range of bass-management and video settings – black levels, for example. More-than-adequate spacing is provided between output sockets to allow the use of thick, exotic cables. A dual-mode (segmented) power supply includes a switch-mode section for the video and a linear analogue design for the audio. An RS-232 connector is used for integrated system control, typically via a touchscreen controller, but the player can also be operated with the Marantz handset, by using a proprietary wired D-Bus link or via a direct infrared input receiver.

SOUND QUALITY

If you’re in the habit of choosing a DVD player off the page, you’ll probably go for the DV6001 (reviewed in HFC 293), which will save you quite a bit of money while having much the same set of headline features. But it is obvious where the extra cash has gone.

It might be helpful to read this review in conjunction with

the DV6001 review, bearing in mind the points made earlier and the price difference (around £300). There’s no doubt that this player is a significant advance on the budget model, and that the main differences are in the area of sound quality. This is nowhere more obvious than with CD format, especially when the video output is switched off. The DV7001 is bolder and more muscular-sounding, bringing more grip and gravitas to the task, and a greater sense of detail too. It’s simply a more vivid, informative and open-sounding player.

This isn’t the only area where the player scores over its cheaper sibling. The Marantz can play high-res audio, and it does it supremely well for a model that costs less than many mainstream CD-only players. There’s little to be said about DVD-Audio, as the format is dying on its feet, but the Marantz is a more than respectable SACD player, with a sharper, more focused sound than that of the DV6001, which fails to show the full benefits the format can bring to the party, and generally fails to deliver better sound quality from the SACD layer of a hybrid disc than from the Red Book CD layer.

The DV7001 is also a decent Dolby and DTS decoder. Film soundtracks generally sound well focused yet airy, with a slightly lightweight feel, which to an extent is characteristic of the player as a whole. Dialogue is reproduced with clarity and conviction, but as usual, it’s better

to pipe the raw digital audio to the system amplifier, using HDMI if it’s available, which

should provide more detailed bass-management settings and greater audio transparency.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

The picture quality also appears better than that of the DV6001, though we weren’t able to make a side-by-side comparison. What is clear, however, is that the differences are fairly small, limited to smoother picture gradations, slightly better-defined contrast between adjacent picture areas and more realistic handling of the near-blacks. There’s little visible difference in the processing of moving images. For situations where HDMI isn’t available, the DV7001 has a high-performance component video output.

This Marantz, then, builds on the qualities of the DV6001, but its audio side has had an injection of steroids. Thus it’s a perfectly good CD player as well as being an impressive DVD performer, and it’s reasonably priced too. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
<p>SOUND >> 85%</p> <p>Uses technology from the DV9600 to make a player with features similar to those of the DV6001, but offering better all-round performance, with the key improvements in the area of audio quality.</p> <p>VISION >> 88%</p> <p>FEATURES >> 91%</p> <p>VALUE >> 85%</p>	<p>PRO</p> <p>Uses technology from the DV9600 to make a player with features similar to those of the DV6001, but offering better all-round performance, with the key improvements in the area of audio quality.</p> <p>CON</p> <p>Film soundtracks can sometimes sound a little lightweight, which reflects on the player as a whole.</p>
<p>CONCLUSION</p> <p>An excellent and affordable disc player that will cope with almost anything round, silver and digitally encoded, this latest Marantz model places a welcome emphasis on the sound quality of CD and SACD.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 87%</p>	

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Reach for the Moon

A state-of-the-art Red Book player with an input for an external digital source

PRODUCT Moon SuperNova RS

TYPE CD player

PRICE £4,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 47.6x14x41.9cm • Weight: 18kg • Analogue inputs: phono, XLR • Digital outputs: phono, XLR (AES/EBU) • Digital input: phono

CONTACT ☎ 0131 555 3922 🌐 www.simaudio.com

Not many issues ago (in *HFC* 288), we looked at the Moon i-7, an integrated amplifier from Simaudio, a high-class Canadian manufacturer of considerable repute. This turned out to be one of the highlights of the recent reviewing calendar. Here we move on to one of a number of CD players from the same source, the SuperNova. Unusually at this end of the market, it doesn't double as an SACD player, and there's no DVD-Audio (or video) provision either. In most respects it's a straight no-frills CD player – with some refinements we'll come to shortly – but it's undeniably meticulously specified and engineered.

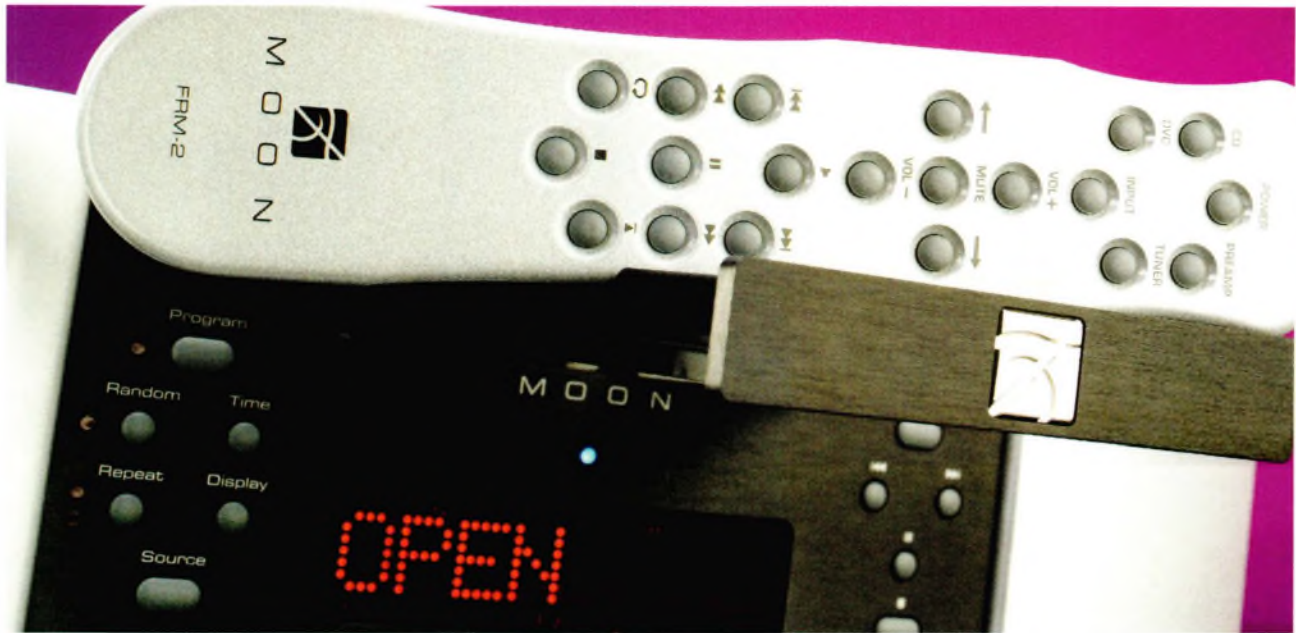
There are obvious parallels between the way this player is built and designs from Wadia,

Krell and Mark Levinson, notably the use of fabricated side, front and rear panels, locked together with pillars at the four corners. The resulting assembly is extremely heavy and solid, more nearly comparable to a high-power integrated or power amp than to the average CD player. The Simaudio player isn't just heavy, though; it's built with supreme integrity – all of the internal and external detailing points in the same direction. The player is supplied with four pointed cones that can be screwed into the bottom surface, though we placed coins below each one to avoid marking the surface of our equipment rack. A mechanically better arrangement (though arguably cosmetically inferior) would have been to fit three spikes rather than four, which on some surfaces would have been more stable.

The SuperNova is equipped with a number of inputs and outputs, including S/PDIF single-ended and AES/EBU balanced digital inputs, single-ended and balanced analogue outputs using similar connectors, a bidirectional RS-232 socket for use with external controllers, SimLink ins and outs, and an IR input. Note

the absence of optical ins and outs. A mains switch is fitted next to the IEC mains input, but its relative inaccessibility hints at the fact that the maker intends the model to remain permanently powered.

The player uses differential-mode conversion and has a fully balanced audio path internally, but although an output is available on XLR-balanced connectors, standard unbalanced electrical outputs are also fitted. The internals are based on a Philips mechanism, with digital data sampled at 24-bit, and oversampled to 352.8kHz prior to being processed using a 24-bit Burr-Brown PCM1798 D/A converter. The player has separate toroidal transformers and power supplies for the analogue and digital circuits, the power supplies using an unusual and elaborate scheme involving independent inductive DC filtering for each active circuit block, 20 such inductive stages being used in total. The signal path eschews the use of coupling capacitors, and instead is DC-coupled for stability. Other highlights include a digital clocking circuit accurate to 25ppm (which doesn't mean the player as a whole operates



“This model is a true heavyweight, easily comparable to the best of its high-end rivals, but with a few individual twists.”

at jitter levels that low) and a proprietary 6dB/octave analogue filter used prior to the main differential output. The PCBs are four-layer designs, and very short signal-path lengths are employed to minimise noise build-up.

One unusual provision is a digital input: a single S/PDIF phono socket enables the player to be used as an outboard D/A for another digital source and is compatible with inputs clocked at up to 96kHz. This is undeniably useful, but for many will come as a clear second best to an external analogue input and volume control of the kind you'll find on some Mark Levinson players – the 390S being one example. If there were also an on-board volume control, which the Levinson for one has, then the player could be used at the heart of a high-quality, twin-source system without the need for a dedicated preamplifier.

Various cosmetic options are available at the point of purchase, including silver or black corner pillars and a silver or black fascia. There are even cosmetic options for the spikes and Moon logos – chrome, gold or pewter! This range of choices is described by Simaudio, for reasons unknown, as 'C4 Aesthetics', and there

are 24 combinations of colours and finishes in total. The red-LED dot-matrix display is massive, designed to be read clearly from the far side of the room, and can be set to one of three brightness levels or switched off.

The remote control is large, heavy and made from die-cast metal, and provides rudimentary access to the main functions of most of Simaudio's components, including its amplifiers and CD players, but it doesn't include random-track access or programming – not that these features will be missed by the majority of users. In any case, programmed play is available using the front-panel controls.

SOUND QUALITY

It's tempting to partner the SuperNova with the Moon i-7 integrated amplifier. They're an aesthetic match, they come from the same design house – perhaps even the same design team – and they have similar sonic priorities. In addition, the i-7 has a balanced input, which one would expect to be an ideal match for the player's output – and this is indeed the case.

A note of warning, though: like the i-7, the SuperNova needs to be run-in for an extended

period. Quite why this player, or the matching amplifier, should need so much running-in (see also the i-7 review) is something of a mystery, but the effect is real enough, and we were able to run the player in repeat mode for more than a week before any further improvement became inaudible. Simaudio recommends leaving it constantly powered, and fits a suitably optimised standby facility for the purpose, though the model runs cool, which implies that – even taking the massive heat sinks into account – the design has a low current drain. When fired up from cold, it sounds lacking in precision and even a touch opaque, but after a while under power the sound becomes more fluid and transparent, even though the player becomes only slightly warmer to the touch.

By Red-Book-CD-player standards, this model is a true heavyweight, easily comparable to the best of its high-end rivals, but with a few individual twists. Above all else, the SuperNova is bold and muscular. It has a strong bass, a palpable sense of dynamics and musculature when reproducing instruments, and treble that's detailed, if not quite to the extent experienced with some machinery from, say, Ayre or Esoteric, or the best SACD players.

The SuperNova is also a player that times well, or at least doesn't mess up on timing cues. There's little or no opacity, and none of the sometimes very subtle harshness that gives away digital sources for what they are. It all happens very organically and naturally. ▶

Q&A

For more info on the SuperNova, we spoke to Simaudio's Dominique Poupart (chief of engineering) and John Poulin (CEO)



HFC Why do you oversample to 352.8kHz?

DP The main reason is that we can avoid rounding errors when upconverting from 44.1 kHz. The benefit is more accurate timbre.

Can you explain the benefits of your complex power-supply design?

There are two transformers – one for the analogue circuits, the other for the digital and control circuits and the drive motors. The outputs are subdivided and mutually isolated for their various tasks, and another stage of separation is added, consisting of 20 independent inductive DC filters, one in front of each powered circuit block. This gives an effect very similar to a battery power supply: a very smooth DC low-ripple waveform. The benefit is a lack of artefacts, and from this we can achieve a smoother, more natural sound.

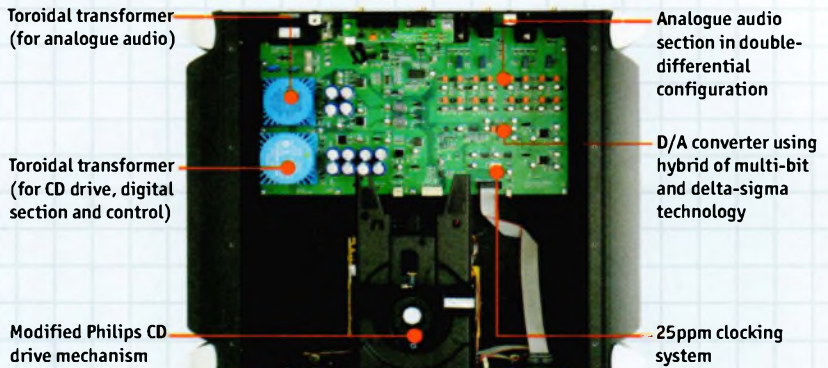
What other design highlights can you pinpoint?

Our choice of DAC was carefully considered, and we opted not for a hybrid or delta-sigma DAC, but one that has a very low noise floor in the audio band, and which allows a very simple second-order output filter, which with special op amps helps produce a more natural musical waveform. We use current instead of voltage feedback, with a very wide bandwidth, and output filtering designed to reduce the influence of cables and the amplifier input. A four-layer PCB is used to shorten the signal path, and helps create an extraordinarily low jitter performance – of the order of 100ps for the player as a whole.

Why is the SuperNova exclusively for CD replay, and not SACD?

(JP) It's harder to design an SACD mechanism that also performs well with CD, and we don't know if the Philips SACD mechanisms will be available long-term. Given that SACD hasn't been anything like as successful as CD, we decided to concentrate our efforts where the benefits would be maximised. We are currently designing our own CD mechanism for future models. In the meantime, the quality of key CD components, op amps, DACs and so on has been improving significantly over recent years. We do have a universal player, the Orbiter, which is sold mostly in America, but there are clear trade-offs for CD replay.

Detail



though it would be too much to suggest that the SuperNova is particularly sweet-voiced. It's too strong-willed for that. Instrumental textures are bold and well formed, which goes against the grain for a player that sounds this sweet. In addition, it has a strong sense of flow, of musical momentum, and this contributes to the sense of propulsion that it brings to the proceedings with the right musical material. But there's nothing synthetic about the way the player brings these qualities to life.

Stereo imagery tends to be tightly focused in the lateral plane, and with good depth differentiation, often forward of the plane of the speakers, giving well-recorded CDs an unusually three-dimensional quality. There's even the perception of greater image height than with other comparable players, but this is probably a consequence of the player's unusually bold voicing.

There is a difference between the single-ended and the balanced outputs, the player favouring the latter by a small but useful margin. The difference is mainly one of image scale, the balanced output sounding larger and slightly more firmly focused in space, and more forward of the plane of the speakers and with a hint of improved dynamics. The comparison was made as fair as possible using parallel single-ended and balanced XLR Nordost Valhalla interconnects. The digital input was also assessed, but in this case using a relatively inexpensive universal player via the digital stereo output, namely the Marantz DV7001

also reviewed this month. Sound quality went a long way to matching the SuperNova's native performance, but this kind of combination makes no sense with a multichannel player, still less one that's so ill-matched in cost terms.

This is a superb CD player that will cast your CD collection in a glorious light. At this price, however, we would like to see SACD included, and we know from experience that its provision needn't compromise CD-playing ability to any great extent (though DVD-Audio is a different matter). SACD done right provides greater refinement, detail and presence, and a better sense of being there. That said, if you're not a big fan of classical or acoustic music, which is well represented on SACD, then the lack of the format might not be such an issue; note too that at more affordable price levels, SACD or universal players may even be sonically inferior to Red Book CD models. A beautiful, accomplished CD player, which would be made even more attractive with SACD added. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	PRO Boasts superb build and finish, well-thought-out ergonomic features and bold, effortlessly dynamic yet refined sound quality.
FEATURES >> 85% [Progress bar]	CON Only performs at its best when warm, would be bettered with SACD ability, digital input may be less useful for most than analogue input and volume control.
BUILD >> 92% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 86% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION A statement-quality CD player at a price that's surprisingly reasonable for a model of such all-round classiness, the SuperNova avoids the synthetic overtones of many players, even some of those at the high end.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%	



How the new 550K Supercharger from Musical Fidelity turns most hi-fi systems into 550w dynamic power houses.

The new 550K Supercharger is a low gain power amp that is connected to the system just before the loudspeakers.

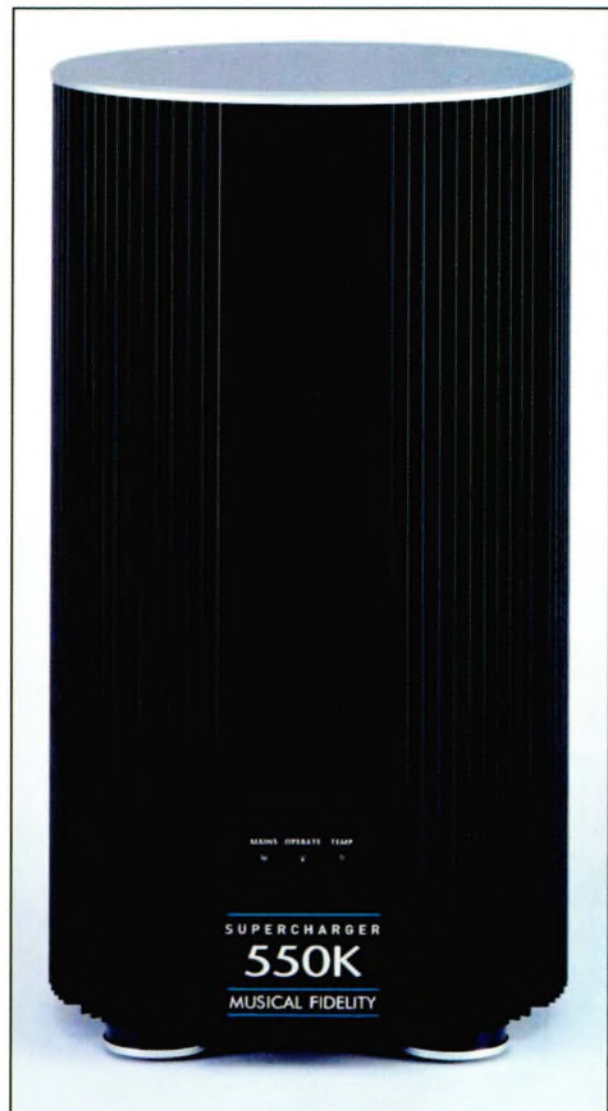
Used in a system with an amp rated between 50 and 200 watts, it will increase its power to 550 watts, and improve the system almost beyond recognition.

It dramatically increases dynamic range and enables the amplifier already in the system to function perfectly.

The 550K turns even a modest integrated amp into a state-of-the-art amplification system.

It works with any make of amp, and it works with valve amps, transistor amps and hybrids.

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magazine



Pioneer

POWER



STANDBY



OFF ON



PHONES



AIR apparent

Pioneer's latest amp – with AIR Studios tuning – is a worthy successor to the trailblazing A400

PRODUCT Pioneer A-A9

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £600

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x11x37cm

● Weight: 11.5kg ● Power output: 55 watts per channel (8 ohms) ● Inputs: 4x line, phono MM/MC, USB type B

● Outputs: tape, pre-out, headphone

CONTACT ☎ 01753 789789 ● www.pioneer.co.uk

It has been a while since Pioneer last made serious two-channel audio components, and it's perhaps a reflection of how crowded things have got in the AV market that it has decided to have another stab at it now. Unlike some of its rivals, Pioneer does have some pedigree in the two-channel arena; it made some decent CD players and integrated amps in the nineties and a very fine turntable in the seventies. Among the amps was a giant-slayer, the legendary A400, and it's this model that's said to have inspired the new the A-A9.

The A400 was particularly popular with reviewers, because despite being an entry-level amplifier, it worked rather well in higher-end systems too, and the rave reviews produced big sales figures for Pioneer. For the A-A9 and its more affordable sibling, the A-A6 (reviewed in *HFC* 294), the company got hold of an

A400 to use as a point of reference at the tuning stage. This was done at AIR Studios, George Martin's recording facility in Hampstead. Pioneer used this facility for its VSA-AX10 AV behemoth a few years back, and must have a sponsorship arrangement with the place, given how often its engineers seem to visit.

The A-A9 differs quite considerably from the A-A6. The output power is higher for starters – albeit only by 10 watts – and, more importantly, it has toroidal rather than standard mains transformers, aluminium side and front panels, a motorised volume control, MC as well as MM phono input and a USB input (on a B-type socket) for PCs and MP3 players. There's also a Sound Retriever function designed to improve the sound of such compressed audio sources, and "professional, big, gold-plated, screw-type" speaker terminals (this is perhaps overselling them, but they are rather better than those on the smaller amp). The volume control is a proper motorised Alps potentiometer rather than the continual-rotation type found on the A6, but it only has a small indent to indicate the level. The display shows this numerically, but the amp's 'direct' setting means that the backlight is normally off. In other words, you can't see how loud it will play at a glance.

The sculpted front fascia is attractive and has the minimum of controls, most facilities being

accessible via the remote: a very slim affair with the volume buttons a little too close to the off button. The display, a backlit LCD type, can be dimmed and stays on in standard mode, but in the 'direct' mode, which bypasses the tone and balance controls, it only illuminates when you change level or input, so you can't tell which input is selected without pressing a button.

SOUND QUALITY

The A-A9 partners well with Tannoy's Glenair 10 loudspeaker (reviewed last month), a model whose openness and dynamics make the most of the amp's precise and subtle sound. In some respects the Pioneer is a bit too tonally lean for the Tannoy, but it does a fine job of revealing its speed and definition. That said, we tried it after experiencing the smooth Sugden A21aL Series 2, clearly a more relaxed-sounding amp that doesn't have the bold muscularity the Pioneer can produce due to its higher power. Further listening reveals that the A-A9 is more than able to extract high levels of detail in a transparent and three-dimensional fashion.

A slightly more appropriate comparison is with Cambridge's popular Azur 840A, which costs £150 more and offers another 30 watts. In the studio this translates to significantly greater bass extension and power, we were quite surprised at how much extra grip the



“In some respects the A-A9 seems easier to listen to and a bit more musical than the popular Azur 840A, which costs £150 more.”

840A managed to deliver. The A-A9, however, matches it for scale and dynamic thrill power, if not sheer transparency. In some respects it also seems easier to listen to – albeit less emphatic, and a bit more musical, which is interesting.

With ATC's SCM19 loudspeaker, the Pioneer shows it has enough power to do the job even with a less efficient design; the pairing works really well so long as you don't try to play at silly levels. Ornette Coleman's *Change of the Century* was delivered in upbeat, timely fashion with the double bass putting in a particularly sprightly performance. Coleman's sax-playing was as lyrical as ever, and when he and Don Cherry played the chorus, the system just let the life in the music flow. The more contemporary

tunesmithing of EST allowed the amp to show it has plenty of bass weight and can deliver a piano with solidity and drive. The midband could possibly have been a hint smoother, and piano notes got a little hard when the volume was pushed, but it's more than likely we were expecting too much in the SPL department – this is still an 85dB-efficient speaker, after all. That said, the listening continued to be highly entertaining thanks to the A-A9's dynamic capabilities and the way it can place instruments in space with precision.

Bringing in a Rega Mira 3 at the same price produces a relatively pared-down sound, the Pioneer filling in the gaps around the notes rather better thanks to higher detail resolution.

The Rega is attractively clean-sounding, but you get the impression it's leaving something out.

We also connected up a MacBook and tried the Sound Retriever function, which seems to increase perceived volume by filling out the sound. It doesn't appear exactly neutral, but if your MP3s are a little thin it would help, though we'd rather make lossless or higher-bit-rate files. While the subject of alternative sources, hooking up a Funk V turntable with a van den Hul DDT moving-coil cartridge to the A-A9's phono stage reveals some limitations. Though it delivers a fine sound, it struggles a little with the low output and can't match the dynamics of a standalone stage, and we'd suggest its use be limited to MM cartridges.

Niggles aside, though, the A-A9 constitutes a welcome return to form from Pioneer, offering a good balance of musicality and resolution. It may not have quite as much charm as the A400, but it's a lot more revealing and better-built, with inputs for sources old and new. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



BLAST FROM THE PAST

Along with the A-A9, Pioneer also supplied us with an example of its spiritual predecessor, the A400, which made for an interesting comparison. On its own terms, the A400 puts in an appealing performance, while a little bit richer and smoother than the newbie, it delivers the music in highly engaging fashion. It inevitably lacks the snap and precision of the A-A9, and this means its sense of timing is more easy-going, which probably has something to do with the age of its components. It also seems a little less able in terms of power; it has a similar power rating to the A-A9, but not the heavy-duty power supply. Progress has clearly been made, but the A400 remains a very enjoyable amp for its second-hand value of around £100.

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



PRO

A well-equipped model with good looks, high resolve and decent power levels for the money. USB and phono inputs mean it's ready for almost any source.

FEATURES >> 89%



CON

In its better-sounding direct mode, the display can't be left on, so detecting the input and likely volume level requires a prod at the remote.

BUILD >> 78%



VALUE >> 90%



CONCLUSION

The A-A9 takes on the mantle of the classic A400 with ease. It isn't quite as cuddly, but it's very resolute and revealing for the price. If there's any justice, it'll put Pioneer back on the bargain-audiophile map in the same place the A400 was last sighted.

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

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REL

FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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



All or nothing

Onkyo's latest universal model marks a renewed focus on stereo values

PRODUCT Onkyo DV-SP504E
TYPE Universal disc player
PRICE £300
CONTACT ☎ 01494 681515 🌐 www.onkyo.co.uk

Onkyo's hi-fi releases are very like buses: nothing for ages, then several come along at once. After a flurry of digital amps, not much was heard from the firm – and now both the unusual D-TK10 speaker (see *Dispatches* p18) and this universal DVD/SACD player show up. Companies such as Onkyo and Pioneer are joining Denon and Yamaha in returning to audio from the AV badlands, but what has a DVD player got to do with stereo?

Well, the DV-SP504E is an SACD, CD and DVD-Audio player as well, and a healthy slice of the budget has been spent on the critical audio components in the circuit. So it has Nichicon capacitors, low-switching-noise diodes and a 'well-regulated power supply' rather than all the latest video-processing gizmos.

It has some of the latter, of course, and at just £300 it is good to see a HDMI output with its upscaling to 1080i and progressive scan. This means pictures will look better than average if you have a compatible screen. The interesting thing is the emphasis Onkyo claims to place on minimising noise in the audio signal path, because this is what screws most DVD players when it comes to sound quality.

The DV-SP504E has a good selection of inputs and outputs, including the slightly confusing Front or D.Mix stereo outputs – you have to

use the latter pair if you want a regular stereo feed, even if the machine is set up to play only two-channel audio. Alongside are 5.1-channel audio outputs for adventures in multichannel, component, composite and S-Video analogue video outs, a Scart connector and a digital audio output that can be switched to downsample to 48kHz or not, as required.

Build is pretty good for the price. The Onkyo has a metal front plate and, unusually, an IEC mains inlet so you can upgrade the cable if you fancy. Finish lives up to the usual lofty standards of large Japanese companies, even though manufacture is in Malaysia.

SOUND QUALITY

The sound produced by this player is clean and revealing, considering how many formats it plays and its price point. As a CD player, it lags behind dedicated machines such as Cambridge Audio's 540C (£200), which extracts greater resolution through the mid and more bass weight. However, it doesn't make things sound hard or particularly lightweight, and isn't easily phased by dense material. It just lacks the degree of definition of a dedicated machine – not surprising given all the licence fees Onkyo has to pay for the logos adorning its fascia.

Give it an SACD, however, and it'll outplay a budget player that only accesses the CD layer. Barb Jung's SACD disc on Linn Records, for example, reveals more of its subtlety in the Onkyo's hands. Pioneer's PD-D6 SACD player (£400) delivers a more exciting sound, but doesn't of course do video replay. Switching to DVD-Audio, the Onkyo clearly reveals more

low-level detail than with CD, making an orchestra sound significantly more natural.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

On screen, the DV-SP504E has good colour saturation and decent detail levels, but is prone to a degree of digitisation on fast-moving edges – there's a slight loss of solidity of image. On the whole it's bright and crisp and delivers a picture that's about average for the price.

This is a tough call. The DV-SP504E has stiff competition from Denon's DVD-1930 (£250), with Pioneer's similarly priced DV-LX50 due in the autumn. It's a nice one-box player with a sound that'll never fatigue, but not the best buy if you primarily want great CD sound. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 76%
 >>> SUB RATINGS
 CD 75% DVD-A 78% SACD 77%

VISION >>> 75%

FEATURES >>> 84%

VALUE >>> 82%

CONCLUSION
 Onkyo has paid a lot of attention to the sonic aspects of this video product; however, unless you own lots of hi-res discs, its value in audio will be limited. As a complete source solution, though, it is very tempting, especially if your TV has HDMI input.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 79%

FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

ARCAM

DVD
VIDEO/AUDIO

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Great universal

Arcam's latest universal player sets a new standard, offering consistently fine performance

PRODUCT Arcam DiVA DV135

TYPE Universal disc player

PRICE £900

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x8.5x3.5cm • Weight: 5.2kg • Audio outputs: stereo phono • Digital outputs: coaxial phono, Toslink optical • Video outputs: composite, S-Video, component, Scart • HDMI v1.1 • RS-232 port, trigger and remote mini-jacks

CONTACT ☎ 01223 203200 • www.arcam.co.uk

It's a funny thing about universal players. They were all the rage a couple of years ago, but now the importance of SACD and particularly DVD-Audio seems to be waning fast. Which, according to Arcam, makes this the perfect time to release a trio of universal players, the DV135 being the cheapest.

In fairness, there is some logic to the decision when you dig a little. SACD and DVD-Audio represent the high-water mark of music replay on disc, and although Blu-ray and HD DVD high definition video players and discs are in the stores, it's still very early days for those formats. So the DV135 takes the things we've already got in great numbers – DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, CD and SACD – and runs with them as best it can. These days, that means

stereo replay in analogue, with digital audio outputs for PCM audio from CD or DVD. Hi-res audio signals from SACD or DVD-Audio are locked within the player. HDMI is deployed very conservatively, with Arcam sticking to version 1.1 here. This means nothing if you use the connector to wire your player to a screen, and it allows PCM stereo and Dolby Digital multichannel to pass, but it won't support discrete digital multichannel systems. In short, there's no digital SACD multichannel output.

This is a transition product, reflecting the state of flux in the AV industry. On the audio side, we still retain the Toslink optical and coaxial digital outputs and twinned pairs of gold-plated phono sockets. However, things get twisty with the video inputs – there are composite, S-Video, component video and Scart sockets for analogue outputs and HDMI for digital output. Also, to suit an increasingly connected world, the DV135 has trigger and remote jacks and an RS-232 port.

True to form for Arcam, there have been no changes to this player's external appearance or its long, thin remote. It's part of the DiVA range, and shares a lot of technology with its bigger DiVA DV137 and FMJ DV139 brothers. It retains the Wolfson 8740 24-bit, 192kHz

DACs, jitter-reducing high-precision clock and toroidal transformer of the DV137 and features the same Zoran Vaddis 888 video processing as the FMJ player.

So, what's missing? The DV135 skips on the interestingly named technologies that go into higher-end Arcam kit: 'Mask of Silence', 'Stealth Mat' and the 'Acousteel' chassis. This might make it a fraction more prone to the ill effects of vibration and electromagnetic interference, but unless you watch DVDs beneath a radio mast in an earthquake zone, we doubt you'll notice. In addition, on the video side, where the more upmarket players have a dedicated scaler and even de-interlacer, the DV135 assigns these tasks to the Zoran video chip. It'll still zap up the picture to 1080i-grade performance, but the magic 1080p figure eludes it.

The video menu suffers from no omissions, being complete and highly configurable. The booklet comes with a little blue filter you place over your eyes when running through the installation routines, which enables you to drill deep into unexplored video territories.

SOUND QUALITY

It's a four-way love-fest inside the DV135. No matter which format you choose to play, it



“When playing CDs, far from delivering a claustrophobic soundstage, it’s adept at throwing right-sized shapes into the room.”

turns in a remarkably consistent performance. The days of ‘great DVD, shame about the CD’ appear long gone if this player is anything to go by. At least, that’s the initial impression.

As you delve deeper into the back catalogue of SACD, so you find the format lags behind the other three ever so slightly. The best SACD recordings can sound magnificent in structure and tonally full without seeming rich, but here some of the gloss is rubbed away and the sound appears thickset. These are observations, not shortcomings, though, and in fact, many will love the SACD performance in its own right.

The warmth of the sound shines through on all four formats, and while it’s least comfortable on CD, this is a distinct advantage for CD replay. Typically, CD replay on universal players is either so soft that Megadeth sounds like easy listening, or so harsh that Mendelssohn sounds like Chas ‘n’ Dave. The Arcam manages to fall between the two extremes, with the warmth of the player giving it a nod toward naturalness. Similarly, imaging: the assurance with which a player throws out a soundstage, is often inversely proportional to the number of formats the player handles. Yet far from delivering the claustrophobic soundstage you

might expect from a universal, the DV135 is adept at throwing right-sized shapes into the room. It’s only when the sound gets really complex that the limits begin to show. But Beethoven’s *Ninth* is a tough call for any CD player, and this one fails by blurring the image instead of collapsing it down.

In many ways, what Arcam has done here is take the performance of its well-respected CD players and insert it into a universal without sacrificing the sound. From experience with other products, this isn’t as easy as it seems.

DVD-Audio replay is similarly positive, more so than the outlook for said format. Naturally, the quality of the sound in two-channel will depend on the quality of the downmix made at the time the surround was encoded, and – anecdotally at least – the downmixes of DVD-Audio seem inferior to those of SACD. Regardless, the Arcam makes good, giving the sound a spacious, deep image and a pace that’s often kept in check on many players.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

It’s a shame, but some people will reject this player purely because it lacks a 1080p upscaling facility. Well, let them go – the rest of us can

bask in a picture quality so fine that we just want to play disc after disc. If you run through the picture settings and stay down in the 720p/768p region (depending on your set), you get a picture vibrant enough to cope with shiny Technicolor and precise enough to handle all those myriad white fast-moving contrails against a black *Battlestar Galactica* sky.

It’s not just about the picture quality or the performance of a specific music format; it’s the covers-all-bases nature of the DV135 that’s so alluring and hard to better for this sort of money. Perhaps it’s no wonder Arcam has done without the silly-named technologies, and perhaps it’s a good thing the product designers worked on the inside of the player and not the outside. Because this feels like four very good players rolled up into one. And that’s almost a perfect definition of a universal player. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 89% SACD 86% DVD-A 88%

VISION >> 89%

FEATURES >> 88%

VALUE >> 88%

PRO

A true universal in that it does everything universally well. Excellent musical replay plus a stunningly vibrant picture makes this all things to all people. Good value, too.

CON

Spec-heads will turn away at the lack of 1080p support, and multichannel SACD and DVD-A support (in-player or via HDMI) would be useful.

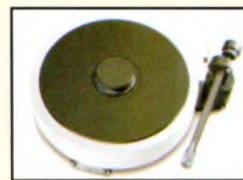
CONCLUSION

It might look just like every other Arcam player of recent times, but this universal disc-spinner has plenty of aces up its sleeve. With its tidy sound (through all sources) and vibrant picture, the DV135 is the ideal all-rounder.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **88%**
OVERALL SCORE



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



Combi contender

Can this Tivoli all-in-one system cut it in the hi-fi stakes?

PRODUCT Tivoli Audio Music System

TYPE One-box hi-fi system

PRICE £650

CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 # www.tivoliaudio.com

Tivoli's original Model One pretty much reinvented the table-top radio. Various additions to the range have included portable models and CD players, but this new unit neatly combines all functions in one, with a CD transport that also plays MP3 and WMA files, FM and AM radio reception, auxiliary input and stereo speakers – as well as bedside functions such as an alarm with 'snooze'.

The first thing that strikes you about the unit is its superb finish. Our sample is veneered in dark walnut with a high-gloss polish; black and white are other options. Closer inspection reveals that the familiar analogue tuning dial has been replaced by a digital tuning system. This has some advantages, but we did like the old version. You get IRDS on this unit, though, and of course station presets are now available.

Tivoli isn't slow to point out that there are many applications for the system: ultra-fancy alarm clock, kitchen-table radio... even second

'real' hi-fi. The most obvious comparison is with the well-established and rather cheaper Wave Music System from Bose. So has Tivoli upped the ante in audio convenience systems?

SOUND QUALITY

Well, under some circumstances, with some music, the Music System can make decent enough noises... but in the end we could never convince ourselves that we were listening to anything more than a glorified tranny – and that wasn't the case with the Model One. Here the sound seems seriously constrained by the small speakers; it's strangled and struggling, and there's no happy medium between 'too quiet' and 'overloaded', even though the actual volume coming out is quite high.

Mercifully, the system does have several redeeming features. First, it's very, very good with speech. Voices are clear and highly intelligible and have little or no tendency to 'spit'. In addition, sound is unusually good at background listening levels.

Although the built-in speakers are less than a foot apart, the 'Stereo Wide' setting succeeds in producing convincing-sounding images, at least from CD. With FM radio you'll need very good reception to enjoy that advantage, as

the setting also boosts reception nasties; we found ourselves listening in mono quite a lot.

By default, 'EQ' ('loudness', essentially) is switched on, and it's worth having a listen with this off – we preferred it that way. Although, we have to conclude that this not a true hi-fi system, it remains a very good bedside solution and a fairly reasonable kitchen radio, too. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 65%



FEATURES >> 85%



BUILD >> 88%



VALUE >> 60%



PRO
Pretty much the ultimate in audio convenience, this beautifully finished unit offers very good performance with speech and also does a fine job in background-audio applications.

CON
Judged by hi-fi standards, the sound fails to hit the mark, with a debilitating lack of real scale and impact.

CONCLUSION

It looks great, but it hisses and hums more than real hi-fi and fails to produce sound of real scale – and for £650, you can buy some decent audio separates. It works well enough as a kitchen or bedroom system, though, albeit an expensive one.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **74%**
OVERALL SCORE

Goldring 2100

TYPE Moving-magnet cartridge

PRICE £70

CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 # www.goldring.co.uk

Goldring points out with justifiable pride that its background in home audio goes back a full century, to the days before electronic amplification. To the cynical observer, it might seem that the company's phono-cartridge designs date back very nearly as far (of course, 'if it ain't broke...' and all that). But what's this? An all-new phono-cartridge range for the 21st century?

There are five models, of which this is the cheapest, varying in both the stylus type and the generator specifications. Basically, of course, the specifications are the same as those of most other moving-magnet cartridges, and the mass, size, mounting holes, electrical connections and output level will suit the vast majority of LP players, arms and (phono) amplifiers in the world today. Goldring has sensibly included threaded holes in the cartridge, making mounting simpler and safer than with bolts and nuts.

We'll be interested to try the dearer models in due course, as while this one doesn't entirely

blow us away, its performance still bodes well for the rest of the range. The sound is a touch coarse and 'heavy', with a slight lack of get-up-and-go, but then again, it doesn't suffer from the spit and persistent annoying brightness you get with some budget cartridges. What's more, it has a very good bass and, in fact, a nicely neutral midrange too, and there's no question that it's a good first upgrade if your current LP-spinner features something of the 'giveaway' persuasion. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Decent but not outstanding sonically, with less insight than we might have wished for, but nothing shameful at this price.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 81%

Profigold PGC82546

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £18 per metre

CONTACT ☎ 01923 205605 # www.profigold.com

Historically, Bandridge hasn't really been a name to conjure with in audiophile circles, bringing with it connotations of ultra-cheap accessories. However, under its Profigold brand, the company has been making some interesting stuff of late, and this cable looks absolutely the part.

A rather bulky bi-wire design, some 5x20mm in cross section, it consists of four conductors of silver-plated copper wire insulated in foamed polythene with an overall sheath of PVC. It's sold off the reel and is nice and easy to strip and connect up, and because it's possible to 'unzip' the individual conductors, cheapskates could easily use it in single-wire mode at an effective £9 per metre. We used it with some nice Profigold clamp-on banana plugs at £15 per set of four.

The one area where we have reservations about this cable is the bass, which seems dry and lacking the bloom that makes it obvious whether, for instance, one is listening to a quiet pitched note or a gentle tap on a bass

drum. There's plenty of extension, but bass 'tunefulness' falls short.

Apart from that gripe, though, there's much to enjoy in this cable's sound, including particularly clear treble with good extension but no hint of excessive brightness. Stereo imaging is very fine too, depth extending well behind the speakers with good definition. There are plenty of decent cables to choose from at this price, of course, but this one holds its head up among its peers. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Very good in the midrange and treble, with plenty of kick, this is only (slightly) let down by a touch of dryness in the bass.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 85%

Cambridge Azur Reference

TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £50 (0.75m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

It's hardly surprising that Cambridge Audio would bring out an interconnect cable to partner the successful Azur range of separates. Nor is it much of a surprise that the material value for money looks very good – a big fat (8mm-diameter) interconnect of silver-plated copper with twin screens and low loss insulation for £50 seems decent to us. It's reasonably flexible and, if you need to, it's easy enough to unzip the two channels for use with two mono amps, for instance. The phono plugs are nice grippy affairs with split centre pins.

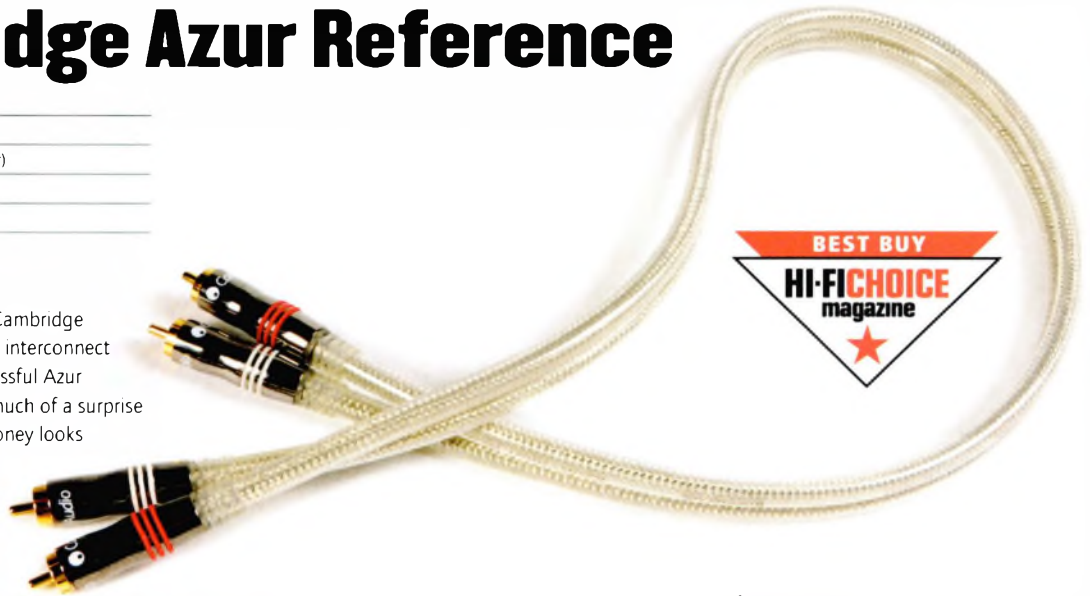
The cable itself may be bulky, but what's most striking about the sound is its airy agility. Bass is in fact very good, but the treble really stands out as exceptional among sub-£100 cables we've heard, with extension that seems

limitless and superb definition of acoustic decay and physical placement of instruments. All those delicate little percussion sounds that so easily get submerged – bell tree, triangle and those small metallic things only percussionists know the correct names for – are crystal-clear and very well defined in space. High melody instruments also have an unusually natural timbre and voices are unforced and lifelike.

We thought there might be just a hint of lightness in the upper bass/low midrange, but

low bass is full and very well controlled, and across most of the midrange the balance seems exemplary, while rhythmic impact is good but not exaggerated. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION
The performance wouldn't shame a cable twice as dear especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness.

HI-FI CHOICE
>>> **88%**

Sennheiser HD 485

TYPE Headphones

PRICE £65

CONTACT ☎ 01494 551551 🌐 www.sennheiser.co.uk

Sennheiser's range of headphones covers every base imaginable, but it seems to have been a while since we looked at any of its cheaper hi-fi models. Do these HD 485 phones offer a bargain approximation of the performance of the rather wonderful HD 650s?

Appearance-wise, at least, they're not very similar to the 650s, but they're certainly smart and modern, with an ingenious nod to the famous Sennheisers of yore in the spoked ear-cup. At first sight, the cups look too small to fit over most ears, but in reality they fit snugly. This both keeps them on your head when you turn round and ensures the sound is well coupled into the listener's shell-likes. Comfort is pretty good – some may find the clamping force on the head a little too much, but sweat doesn't seem a major problem.

Most importantly, what we like about these headphones is the sound. Clearly they've benefited from some 'trickle-down' technology. In a side-by-side comparison with the HD 650s, they're easily distinguishable by their

relative lack of transparency and slightly sibilant character, but that's hardly surprising. After all, we're taking as a reference a product that offers fine value at five times the price. In terms of what one expects for well under a ton, the 485s are an astoundingly fine example of the headphones art. Their levels of transparency and resolution are on a par with what one expects from speakers costing a king's ransom, and the extended bass and treble are fabulous too. The sibilance will only bother the most picky. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Great all round headphones for the occasional (or frankly even heavy) user, refined in sound and comfortable in use.

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

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

Today's mid-level speakers offer widely differing approaches to audio excellence

This month's group test covers the mid-price sector of the speaker market, with an average retail price of £990 per pair. Half the models are standmounts and half floorstanders, and the six cover an extensive range of sizes, from the tiny DALI miniature to the enormous Revel.

With so many speaker brands choosing to outsource all or at least part of their manufacturing processes to China, it's becoming increasingly hard to specify a country of manufacturing origin these days. In terms of the brand origins, however, there are two models from Britain, two from Denmark, one from the US and – unusually but interestingly – one from Japan.

The first four mentioned are from the usual suspects – brands which have appeared regularly enough in our speaker group tests over the years. The last two are newcomers, to our group tests at least, although both are major players on the global stage. Revel might be a relatively new brand on the scene, but it's part of the giant Harman group, and is therefore backed by the same resources as JBL and Infinity. Yamaha needs little

introduction, either to hi-fi enthusiasts, musicians or motorcyclists.

Perhaps predictably, the smallest model, from DALI, has the prettiest veneer, while the largest, from Revel, is the only model with vinyl wood-print surfaces. It's pretty clear, however, that in loudspeaker land the relationship between size and price is complex. The big Revel with its generous enclosure and formidable driver array clearly offers superior material value for money to that of the simpler standmounts.

But the relationship between size and performance is also complex. Large multi-way speakers may be necessary to reproduce deep bass with authority and conviction, but all that additional cabinetwork and crossover complexity has its disadvantages too, so unless price is absolutely no object, allowing massive over-engineering to be used, the smaller, simpler speaker may well have the overall advantage through superior agility and reduced box coloration.

And those observations don't even take into account the aesthetics of the comparison, which may well be one of the most important considerations for

the potential purchaser. Although the Revel might be good value, and offer the sort of bass welly beloved of movie fans, its sheer bulk does seem rather better suited to large US living spaces than small British lounges. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS 3/555 PS CD player
- ⊕ Burmester 001 CD player
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ⊕ Rega RB1000 arm
- ⊕ Rega Apheta cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner
- ⊕ Naim NAC 552 preamplifier
- ⊕ Naim NAP 500 power amplifier
- ⊕ Cables from Vertex AQ, The Chord Company, Phonosophie, Russ Andrews and Naim Audio

MUSIC USED

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

ON TEST



DALI Mentor 1
£1,000



Dynaudio Focus 140
£1,150



Epos M16
£800



MonoPulse 32S
£895



Revel Concerta F12
£900



Yamaha Soavo 2
£1,200

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 will extract more current and therefore power from an amp than higher-impedance ones.

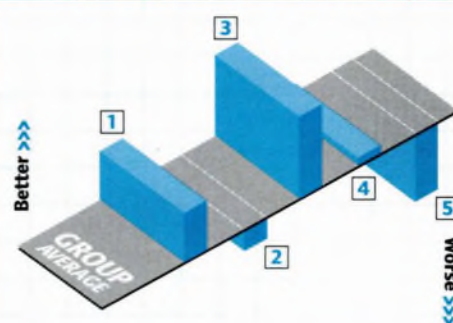
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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



£1,000 per pair ☎ 0845 644 3537 🌐 www.dali.dk

DALI MENTOR 1

DALI's new Mentor 1 is a genuine luxury miniature in every sense

DALI is short for Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries, and the company makes a large number of different speaker ranges designed to appeal to a broad customer base. Hitherto there was quite a large price gap between the near-budget Ikons and the considerably dearer Helicon and Euphonia ranges, and it's this gap that the recently introduced Mentors are intended to fill.

There are just three Mentor models so far: the standmount Mentors 1 and 2, plus the much larger floorstanding Mentor 6, which was reviewed in *HFC* 290. All three use variations on DALI's proprietary dome/ribbon treble-module theme, above different-sized enclosures and bass/mid drivers.

The Mentor 1 is the smallest model in the range, and is a genuine miniature. With a price tag of £1,000 per pair, it's a relatively expensive example of the type, but it does feature top-quality ingredients throughout, combining a small 130mm bass/mid driver with a 95mm dish-shaped doped-paper diaphragm, loaded by a rear-ported enclosure of around seven litres, alongside the '1.5-way' tweeter array. This treble module combines a 28mm soft dome and a 17x45mm ribbon on a single chassis. The ribbon operates above 10kHz, partly to extend the bandwidth, and partly to ensure consistent and wide lateral distribution.

The very solid little enclosure is beautifully finished in a smooth and well-figured real-wood veneer, and has slightly convex front and back panels, presumably in order to reduce standing-wave focusing. The drivers

themselves are mounted on an extra silver-grey flat baffle panel. Wall-mount bracket-mounting lugs are fitted to the rear, but would seem best avoided in view of the lab findings. High-ish stands are needed to get the ribbon up close to seated ear height and stay within its vertical 'window' – the 60cm stands in our testing room were just tall enough. A single pair of terminals is integrated with a moulded port.

SOUND QUALITY

It's tempting to assume that this little speaker should be placed close to a wall, especially in view of the little bracket-mounting lugs fitted on the rear, but in practice it seems better kept out in free space on proper stands, to avoid the midbass becoming too strong.

The net result is inevitably somewhat bass-light, but not to the extent that it spoils one's enjoyment of most types of music. Although one might have wished for a bit more bottom-end welly and warmth, especially with heavier rock and dance tracks, the fine openness, evenness and good detail projection further up the band make the shortcomings through the lower octaves very easy to forgive.

One could argue that the DALI's upper midband is slightly hyped, as the in-room measurements suggest, and perhaps that should be taken as a criticism in strict high-fidelity terms. However, it's also one of the factors that makes listening to this little speaker a whole lot of fun, with its crisp coherence, fine communication skills and superior stereo imaging.

It might be small and a little lacking in weight and warmth, but this is nevertheless a thoroughly entertaining speaker, with a

notably clean and well integrated top end. So much so, in fact, that one soon forgets its limitations and appreciates the clarity and expression that it brings to human voices, as well as the essential sweetness that it brings to everything. **HFC**

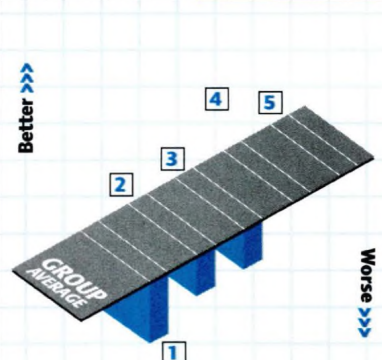


LAB REPORT

Many tiny 'miniature' speakers are intended for sitting close to a wall, to take advantage of the extra midbass output this generates. One might assume this is the case here, not only because of the small size, but also the provision of mounting lugs for attaching to a wall bracket on the rear. However, the Mentor 1's port is tuned to 48Hz, so under our in-room far-field conditions it's best kept out in free space, on high-ish stands to keep the ribbon tweeter close to seated ear height.

Since the bass output is generous for the size, and the load only drops momentarily below six ohms, the sensitivity is correspondingly below average, our measurement agreeing with the manufacturer's claimed 86dB. The tonal balance appears to be well judged overall, if somewhat lean through the upper bass and lower midband, while there's some peaking in the upper mid, around 750Hz – 1kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m, 2.83V	86dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6 – ohms	8.6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (1GdB)	45Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 86%

PRACTICALITY >>> 84%

BUILD >>> 87%

VALUE >>> 85%

This beautiful miniature uses DALI's advanced drive units, including the hybrid dome/ribbon tweeter array. There's more bass than you'd expect, and while the sound is a tad lean, it's splendidly coherent with fine voice expression.

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



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magazine



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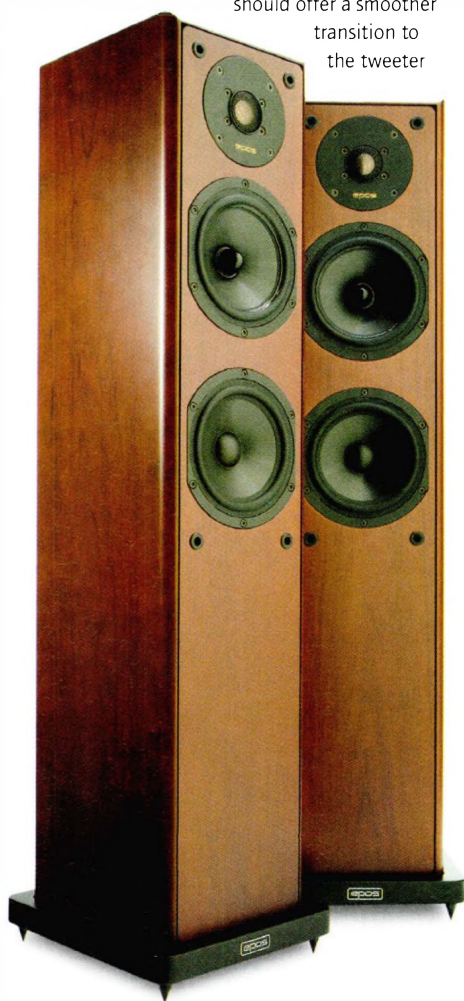
EPOS M16

A seductively pretty little floorstander at a competitive price

Epos has long had a reputation for producing attractively compact speakers with genuine audiophile appeal, and has managed to maintain this status through several changes in ownership. The company is now owned and operated by Mike Creek, and the speakers make natural partners with its high-quality affordable electronic components.

The £800-per-pair M16 is the latest addition to the range, and if the recipe looks quite familiar alongside the company's three other floorstanders, there are differences in the details that make it a logical addition to the roster. In a sense it's an upmarket variation on the ELS 303 configuration, at roughly double the price, but including some very pretty real-wood veneered cabinetwork and more advanced drivers based on those used in the M5 miniature.

The adoption of two 135mm-frame drivers in a two-and-a-half-way configuration makes plenty of sense, over and above facilitating an attractively slim loudspeaker. The upper driver – fitted here with a bullet phase plug – should offer a smoother transition to the tweeter



than a larger 165mm driver, while the lower driver, which has a conventional dust dome, is just used to double the effective cone area and add worthwhile bass reinforcement below 150Hz. In this case the bass-only driver is loaded by the bulk of the enclosure and a rear port, while the bass/mid unit operates in its own sealed sub-enclosure. Both cone drivers have 95mm moulded plastic cones, while the tweeter has a 25mm metal dome diaphragm.

The very compact enclosure is beautifully finished in a very smooth, dark red stained-wood veneer, with elegantly radiused edges around the front and back panels. (Light cherry and black ash are alternatives to our dark cherry pair.) The whole enclosure sits within a black-painted plinth, which extends the spike footprint to ensure good physical stability. Three terminal pairs give full bi-/tri-wire/amp flexibility, which is nice, and the internal cable is DNM solid-core.

SOUND QUALITY

The M16 is unquestionably nice to listen to, but while the broad midband is clear, even and well projected, it does rather dominate proceedings, and the sound quality is somewhat less impressive towards the upper and lower ends of the frequency band.

As with a number of models in this test group, the 45Hz port tuning frequency results in a less-than-ideal bass alignment, with slight 'one-note' tendencies along with a certain lack of harmonic richness. That said, this floorstander does have a slight advantage over the typical standmount in terms of bass weight and power, and drives the music along with some enthusiasm and gusto, even though serious authority is beyond its capabilities.

Epos has established something of a tradition for models with a degree of restraint in the presence band, enabling the system to be played quite loud without becoming aggressive, but has the disadvantage that voices tend to sound a little 'shut in'. The M16 takes this rather further than most of its stablemates, resulting an overall sound that's essentially warm in character, albeit with some loss of vocal-band expression and some nasality, even though the treble proper supplies much of the necessary fine detail.

This speaker is something of a paradox, as it sounds unflinching polite and is therefore very pleasant and easy on the ears, but its essentially laid-back character doesn't really grab and hold the listener's attention as much as one might like. **HFC**

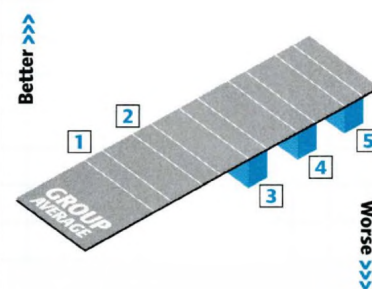


LAB REPORT

The speaker comfortably meets the specified sensitivity of 88dB under our conditions, and the associated four-ohms impedance only applies at low frequencies, where the bass-only and bass/mid drivers are operating in tandem. The configuration is interesting, in that the bass-only driver is loaded by the main enclosure and a port tuned to 45Hz, while the bass/mid unit's separate sealed-box resonance is up at 90Hz.

The far-field in-room response traces are a little disappointing due to two reasons. Under our conditions the speaker needs to be clear of walls, but even here the 50Hz output proves rather strong, while the octave 60-120Hz is somewhat lacking. The broad midband (120Hz-2kHz) is pretty well ordered, but there's then a quite obvious suckout in the crossover zone, 2-4kHz. Though some loss here is not unusual, in this case it does seem rather extreme.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4/- ohms	5/3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	48Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%



PRACTICALITY >> 83%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 84%



A very pretty real-wood floorstander at a very realistic price, the M16 has a fine, broad midband with good coherence and projection, but bass alignment proved tricky for us and the presence band is a little too laid-back.

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

Award winning musical sound
Lifetime warranty
Sexy design



The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

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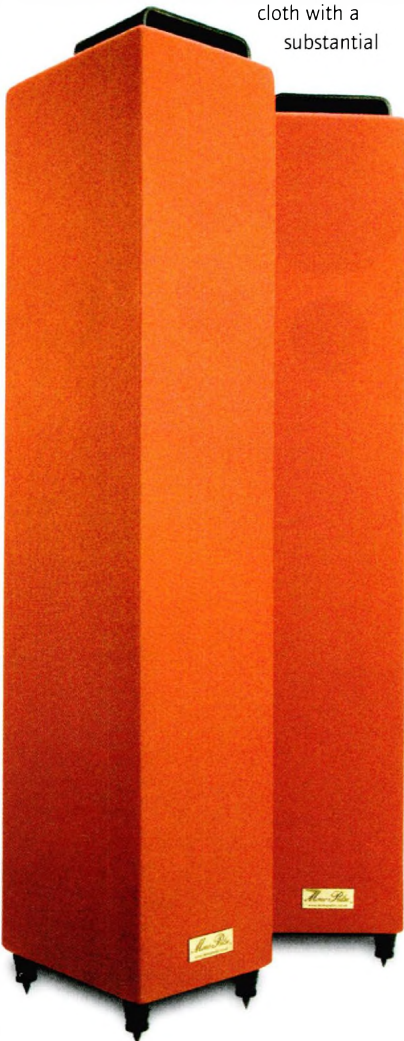
MONOPULSE 32S

MonoPulse's new baby features its unusual crossover and styling

Relatively young as hi-fi companies go, MonoPulse was founded by one Allan Hendry, who spent much of his life in electronics working on pulsed, phased-array radar systems, and then decided to apply the knowledge he'd gained to his lifelong passion for hi-fi and loudspeakers.

The relevance of radar to loudspeaker design might not be immediately apparent, but Allan is particularly conscious of the need to maintain the correct phase relationships between bass/mid driver and tweeter through the crossover region, in order to reproduce the leading edge of an impulse accurately, and that's reflected in both the crossover network design and in the unusual way the drivers are positioned and spaced.

The MonoPulse stereo models come in 'S' and 'A' types. All eschew the usual real or imitation wood finish: the S models are clad all over in cloth, with ten different colour options available, from the sober to the mildly outrageous, while the A versions combine cloth with a substantial



contrasting steel hoop. Our S type came in Cranberry – a sort of pastel magenta – which is certainly unusual, but rather attractive.

Curiously, this £895-per-pair 32S seems to have little in common with the original 32 (now 32A) that we reviewed back in 2003 (HFC 245). The different styling was to be expected, of course, but the 32S has a 130mm (rather than 165mm) frame, aerogel-cone main driver, and is also equipped with a top-mounted, time-aligned piezoelectric super-tweeter. The main tweeter is a 31mm soft dome device, mounted quite low down, below the bass/mid driver.

A reflex port is fitted into the base of this enclosure, firing downwards and held an appropriate distance off the floor by little feet with spikes. The small main driver enables the enclosure to be very slim, but this raises questions over its physical stability, which is frankly rather inadequate and needs some attention. Connection is made via twin terminal pairs, set rather high off the ground.

SOUND QUALITY

MonoPulse places its main emphasis on maintaining integrity and phase coherence through the crossover region, and it's true that the 32S is largely successful in this respect. Voices – both speech and singing – sound impressively vivid, coherent and expressive, highlighting the accents and tonalities of different individuals in a most persuasive way. However, it's not without an element of coloration, which adds a slightly 'shouty' quality, especially with close-miked voices, with some pinched and nasal effects too.

The real problem here is that either the upper mid and treble are over-projected, or there's too little contribution through the bass and lower midband. The consequence is a rather cool and clinical overall character, emphasising detail, but very much at the expense of the warmth and 'body' of the instruments, so long-term listening can get a little fatiguing.

There's some bass output, for sure, but this seems mostly due to the port contribution, giving some weight to bass guitars, but leaving their harmonic contribution weak. Cellos and male voices both sound rather weedy, and grand pianos too 'honky-tonk'. Close-to-wall siting was tried, but didn't really seem to offer any advantage, and a free-space location was preferred. Despite its undoubted strengths in the upper registers, the 32S's overall balance is a significant weakness. **HFC**

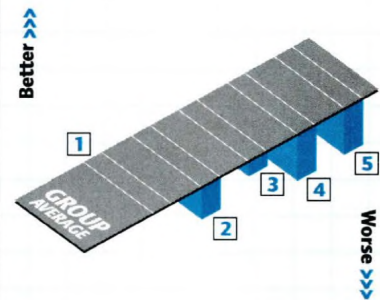


LAB REPORT

The measured frequency balance under in-room far-field conditions is a complete contrast to the norm, emphasising the upper part of the frequency band at the expense of the low-frequency half. The 50Hz-tuned port gives plenty of output, as does a pronounced resonance at 220Hz (seen in the impedance trace), but apart from those isolated peaks, the average output below 400Hz is several dB lighter than that recorded 400Hz-6kHz. Most serious is the significant relative lack of output at 60-200Hz – the 'warmth' band. The crossover zone seems well enough judged in average-level terms – there are resonances at 4.2kHz and 6kHz.

Although the claim for 88dB sensitivity seems reasonably accurate, and the impedance stays comfortably around seven ohms or higher over most of the band, it drops dramatically to around four ohms above 6kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/6.5 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	32Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%



PRACTICALITY >> 79%



BUILD >> 84%



VALUE >> 82%



MonoPulse's baby has great coherence in the presence band, but the sound lacks overall balance, as the lower half of the audio band isn't strong enough to balance the top half. Physical stability is also an issue.

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

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REVEL CONCERTA F12

It might not be pretty, but the F12 undeniably looks purposeful

Revel is a US loudspeaker specialist that started out in the mid-1990s. It's part of the giant Harman conglomerate, alongside the rather better-known and longer-established JBL brand, giving it access to Harman's impressive research facility in Northridge, California, even though the company itself is based on the East Coast. Indeed, despite some obvious differences, there's a clear family resemblance between this Concerta F12 and the JBL Studio L880 we reviewed early in 2006 (HFC 275).

Revel's budget Concerta range is essentially a multichannel package, but it also involves several options, and includes two stereo pairs – a compact M12 standmount and this large £900-per-pair F12 floorstander. It's not exactly what one would call a pretty loudspeaker, as it's far larger than all the other speakers gathered for this group test, but with a generous and hefty well-braced enclosure and four drive units giving a total weight of 28.4kg, it's clearly impressive material value for money.

The F12 is a full three-way design, with two good-sized 150mm cone, cast-frame bass drivers operating in the main enclosure volume and port-loaded at the rear. A separately enclosed 135mm cast-frame driver with a 95mm cone handles

midrange duties before handing over to a 25mm dome tweeter loaded by a short horn flare and protected by a phase compensator. All these drivers use what Revel calls Organic Ceramic Composite (OCC) diaphragm material: it's actually deep-anodised aluminium, which creates a stiffening oxide surface skin – a technique similar to Harman stablemate Infinity's CMMD, and about as inorganic as it's possible to be.

All are neatly mounted on a black-painted front panel, while the rest of the speaker is covered in a quite convincing vinyl wood print, in cherry, maple or black, though the picture-frame front edge is punctuated by unsightly grille-mounting lugs if the grille isn't used. The speaker comes fitted with substantial rubber feet, into which carpet-penetrating spikes could be fitted if desired, although tightening any locknuts might prove difficult. High-slope crossover filters are used, at 575Hz and 3kHz, fed from two pairs of terminals.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the ingredients, it's no great surprise to find that this speaker has more than ample bass output and should be kept well clear of walls. That said, there's still a tendency towards bass excess even in our relatively large listening room, so small rooms are probably not ideal.

Happily, the bass, though strong, is pretty well controlled, apart from a mild thickening of textures, so the overall effect is of a genuinely authoritative heavyweight, able to supply plenty of weight and scale to any material – movie fans will love it!

This speaker has two other notable strengths. It's exceptionally even-handed, and no part of the spectrum seems unduly exaggerated. The presence might be a little too strong for some tastes, and brass can therefore sound a little fierce, but timbre and tonality are generally impressively neutral. It also has the sort of headroom and freedom from strain that only large loudspeakers can really create: even when playing quite loudly, it remains essentially unflappable and seems to have plenty in reserve.

Although the F12 does the big things very well, it's rather less convincing when it comes to the delicate subtleties, which somehow seem a little smoothed over, leaving vocal expression a little muted. And for all its neutrality and authority, the soundstage does lack transparency, depth and air. **HFC**



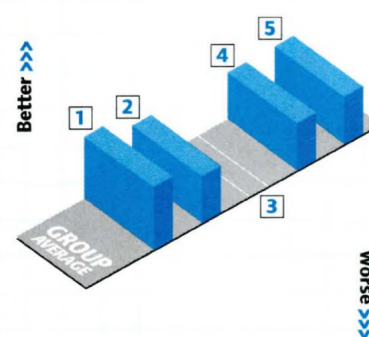
LAB REPORT

Specified at a high sensitivity of 90.5dB, the F12 at least manages 90dB under our conditions. On the debit side, the load is quite demanding, staying below six ohms through much of the midband, and dipping to a rather awkward minimum of around 3.3 ohms right on the mid-to-treble crossover at 2.7kHz.

Helped by a port tuned to a lowish 32Hz, the bass extends down to a generous 22Hz (-6dB), and actually proves a little too strong at 25-60Hz in our room and under far-field averaged conditions, even with the speakers located well clear of walls. Indeed, relatively strong output is maintained right up through the bass and lower midrange to 200Hz.

Above that point, the speaker delivers an extraordinarily smooth and flat response, with just a hint of a crossover wrinkle around 2.8kHz; whether this is entirely desirable is debatable, but it's an impressive achievement nonetheless.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +40%
- 2] Bass extension >> +30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90.5dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/- ohms	5/3.3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	40Hz	22Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

BUILD >> 80%

VALUE >> 89%

This massive multi-way may look a bit of a brute, but its clever engineering gives it fine headroom and freedom from strain, along with an impressive neutrality with ample low bass. A winner for film lovers, too.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 86%



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YAMAHA SOAVO 2

Can the Soavos put Yamaha back on the serious-speaker map?

The only Yamaha loudspeaker review lurking on our hard drives is of an active subwoofer way back in 1994, and a good-value example of the type too. Yamaha is a broad-based multinational, as well known for its motorcycles and pianos as for its hi-fi equipment, and its recent hi-fi activities have been strongly oriented towards multichannel sound.

However, the firm's history in loudspeakers includes some notable successes, from the legendary NS1000 models of the 1970s to the highly successful NS10M near-field studio monitor of the 1980s and 1990s, so there's plenty of precedent for the new Soavos.

While the complete Soavo range is clearly oriented towards supplying an upmarket multichannel sound system, the Soavo 1 and 2 models are floorstanding and standmount stereo pairs respectively, this smaller model carrying a £1,200-per-pair price tag.

It's a good-sized example of the type, based around an advanced 165mm bass/mid driver loaded by a rear-ported enclosure that probably has a capacity of around 14 litres. The precise volume is difficult to ascertain here, because a key feature of this speaker is its beautifully asymmetric enclosure, probably inspired by origami: the eight non-parallel faces should ensure well-dispersed internal reflections and standing waves. The enclosure comes in various finishes, is built using triple-mitred joints and attractive birch-veneered MDF, and feels very solid and substantial.

The main driver has a 115mm cone in an interesting proprietary material called A-PMDF (advanced polymer-injected mica diaphragm),

which is claimed to combine very low mass with high stiffness and good self-damping characteristics. The 25mm aluminium dome tweeter is surrounded by a short horn flare, protected by an open-mesh cover and mounted on a substantial die-cast aluminium plate to provide a measure of isolation from cabinet vibrations. Twin terminal pairs (with wire links) feed a hard-wired crossover with metallised polypropylene capacitors and air-cored inductors, and port-blocking foam bungs are also supplied.

SOUND QUALITY

Those bungs could be useful if circumstances demand that the speaker be placed close to a wall, but in truth this is really a free-space design, and an extremely impressive example of the type too.

You won't get an abundance of deep bass from a compact standmount, but they have the potential advantage of being lighter on their feet than floorstanders, helped by the fact that there's space for the sound to disperse below as well as all round the speaker, rather than being trapped by the floor.

It's that lightness of touch and the sheer delicacy and subtlety of midband expression that sets this speaker comfortably ahead of the pack. The complex cabinetwork has clearly resulted in an impressive freedom from boxiness, while that fancy main-driver diaphragm seems to have the agility of lightweight paper without its occasional tendency towards 'edginess'.

The tonal balance could perhaps be a little more even, but is very well judged overall; imaging is excellent, and dynamics are quite expressive, because the background hash is so well suppressed that instrumental texture

and low-level detail come through well. In the final analysis, one might wish for a little more absolute grunt – which makes its much larger brother an enticing prospect. In the meantime, this little standmount well justifies the name 'Soavo' – derived from the Italian words for 'gentle' and 'voice'. **HFC**

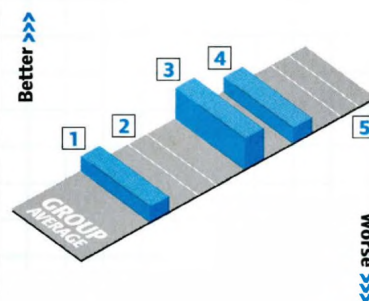


LAB REPORT

The Soavo 2 is rated at 88dB sensitivity, which is actually quite conservative, as we wouldn't have quibbled with 89dB. The quoted six ohms impedance is also closer to a minimum than a nominal figure, while the bass extension is respectable enough in context, though there is some disparity at low frequencies between the two samples of the pair.

The model's overall in-room far-field averaged frequency balance is not all that smooth, but it does hold within reasonable overall limits. The 45Hz port tuning isn't ideal in our testing room, emphasising our 55Hz room mode and leaving the mid-bass octave (60-120Hz) rather on the lean side, but having said that, the overall bass energy is pretty well judged. There's a shallow depression through the presence/crossover zone, though again it's gentle and appears well judged.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/~ ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	28Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



PRACTICALITY >> 84%



BUILD >> 88%



VALUE >> 87%



Clever cabinetwork ensures that no panels are parallel, minimising standing-wave focus. It might not have the smoothest balance around, but it's beautifully balanced overall, with a delightfully delicate, expressive sound.

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



CONCLUSIONS

Our top three all excel in different areas – while port tuning is an issue across the group

The curious thing about this group of speakers is just how many of them – five out of the six – have their reflex ports tuned in the narrow band of 45-50Hz. This may well suit some room conditions, but it's an unfortunate choice for our listening room, in part because it has a room mode close by at 50-55Hz, but also because the effect of close-to-wall siting is to boost output significantly in the 50-100Hz octave.

Putting those various factors together, it was clear that all these

models needed to be kept well clear of walls, and that all five, to a greater or lesser extent, suffered from rather too much 50Hz output. Two (the Dynaudio and Yamaha) supplied port-blocking bungs, but completely blocking the port tends to be a bit too drastic a measure.

Some alternative strategies would have been useful. Tannoy (which, incidentally, usually tunes its ports to a much lower and less harmful frequency) supplies open-cell bungs which merely damp rather than completely remove the port

output. B&W's clever solution with its little CM1 is a 'hollow bung', the insertion of which retunes the port output half an octave lower. Other manufacturers could adopt similarly useful flexibilities.

Our six review models show that there's little relationship between size and the price tag, the three Best Buys running the gamut from the diminutive but delicious DALI Mentor 1 with its splendid coherence, via the subtly voiced and cleverly asymmetric Yamaha Soavo 2, to the monstrously

massive and studiously neutral Revel Concerta F12.

Diversity is the rule rather than the exception here, and the same applies to the other three models in the test group. The Dynaudio fared less well than its baby brother because its bass alignment worked less well under our conditions, but one must still respect its exceptional neutrality. The Epos and MonoPulse represent opposite sides of the tonal-balance coin, the former a little too laid-back, the latter rather too upfront. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

» Floor-coupling spikes should have tight locknuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads
 » Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is extremely 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 midbass.
 » 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	DALI Mentor 1	Dynaudio Focus 140	Epos M16	MonoPulse 325	Revel Concerta F12	Yamaha Soavo 2
PRICE	£1,000	£1,150	£800	£895	£900	£1,200
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Exceptionally pretty miniature; it sounds a little lean, but offers splendid coherence and vocal detail.	Classy standmount that sounds smooth with impressively neutral balance, but is somewhat lacking in excitement.	Handsome-looking floorstander that's sharply priced but might be a bit too laid-back for some tastes.	Unusual floorstander with splendid upfront voice coherence, but lacks warmth, body and richness lower down.	Massive multi-driver floorstander; not pretty, but has great headroom, bass weight and impressive neutrality.	Well-crafted standmount with a beautifully judged balance that always sounds lively, open and involving.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	16.2x31.8x24.1cm	20x35x29.5cm	17.4x8.7x21cm	15.5x9.1x22cm	25x108x36cm	22x38x35cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2.5-way	2-way	2.5-way	2.5-way	3-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x130mm	1x165mm	2x130mm	1x130mm	1x130mm + 2x200mm	1x165mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Wood veneer	Wood veneer	Wood veneer	Cloth	Vinyl	Wood veneer
BI-WIRE?	No	No	Yes/ tri	Yes	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	86dB P	87dB P	88dB A	88dB A	90dB G	88dB A
EST. BASS EXTENSION	40Hz P	26Hz A	28Hz A	40Hz P	22Hz G	28Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/6 ohms G	6/4.5 ohms A	5/3.3 ohms P	6/4 ohms A	5/3.3 ohms P	8/6 ohms G
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	0% A	+30% G	-20% P	-30% P	+30% G	+10% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	0% A	+30% G	-20% P	-30% P	+30% G	0% A

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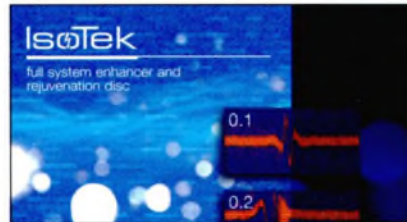
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The piracy issue

Are you fed up with the sub-standard pirate discs that seem to be everywhere? We are. We speak to the key players in the industry to find out what's being done to protect HD-DVD and Blu-ray content and how the industry is fighting back. Plus, an HD downloader exclusively confesses his wicked ways



PLUS:

We've put both a Blu-ray and an illegal pirate version of *Pirates of the Caribbean* through their paces in the Tech Lab to see if it's really worthwhile breaking the law in order to save a few quid

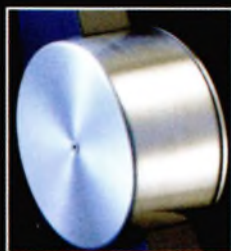
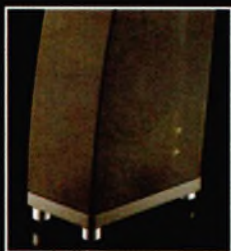


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nonconformist

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.

SOURCE COMPONENTS

- 88 CD PLAYERS
- 90 DVD PLAYERS
- 92 VINYL
- 95 RADIO TUNERS
- 97 DIGITAL RECORDERS

AMPLIFIERS

- 100 STEREO AMPS
- 102 MULTICHANNEL AV AMPS

LOUDSPEAKERS

- 108 STEREO SPEAKERS
- 112 MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGES

ANCILLARIES

- 115 HEADPHONES
- 117 CABLES
- 119 STANDS AND SUPPORTS
- 121 GLOSSARY

DEALER CLASSIFIED

- 122 DEALER GUIDE
- 128 DEALER DIRECTORY

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	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET
UP TO £1,000										
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player							285
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative							293
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully under demonstrative, 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-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality							295
	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
BB	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
ABOVE £1,000										
	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality: 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!							280
EC	Audio Research Ref CD7	8,000	Top of the CD playing tree, with a sound as open and musically accomplished as you'll ever find from the format							279
	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender							281
	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced							286
EC	Classé CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs							284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too							280
	Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R	1,400	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer too							295
	Cyrus CD Xt/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion							279
EC	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat							285
EC	Gamut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music							289
EC	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output							289
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best							291
BB	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm							283
	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.							284
	Meridian G06	1,695	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands							295
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY v8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system							288
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance							280
EC	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply							238
	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character							295
	T+A CD1230R	1,500	Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering							280
	Unison Research Unico CD	1,495	Strong timing and rhythm, this player is well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution							295

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



Copland CDA823 £1,750

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



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

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

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



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

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



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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

DVD-AUDIO

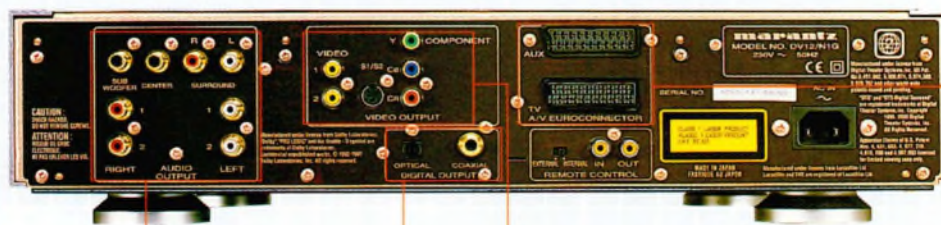
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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

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



CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ESD# NUMBER	
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		
UP TO £1,000										
	Arcam DIVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money							254
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem							276
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation							274
	NAD T585	800	Easy to live with universal player that shows clear signs of rejuvenation of the Classic range							294
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer-based implementation, which performs well with audio and video							275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star							274
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts							274
	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs							280
ABOVE £1,000										
	Arcam DIVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing							285
	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing							287
	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD							266
	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi							259
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat							280
	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too							265
	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio							263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity							279
	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD							270

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

TOP BUYS



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



NAD T585 £800
This universal player borrows from NAD's Masters Series to make a cracking all-rounder.



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



Meridian G98AH £3,625
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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



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

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

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

There are two types of phono



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.

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

TOP BUYS



Pro-Ject RPM 5 £400

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



The Funk Firm Funk V £760

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



Clearaudio Champion £1,475

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



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

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

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
MB	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45				247
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45				229
MB	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45				268
MB	Clearaudio Performance	1,670	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncolored performance. Good arm and cartridge	33/45				295
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45				271
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78			opt	276
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45				266
MB	Micell Tecnodoc	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45				268
MB	Micell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45				239
EC	Micell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45				235
MB	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
MB	Pro-Ject 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
MB	Pro-Ject RPM 6.1	550	With its minimal chassis and huge platter this is a steady design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge	33/45/78				294
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45				228
MB	Roksan Radius 5/Nirma	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45				248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45				195
EC	SME 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
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalbur arm)	33/45				259

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
MB	Cartridge Man MM II	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
MB	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around				285
MB	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss				235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality				215
MB	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound				290
MB	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo II	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				270
MB	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light				235
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for				265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money				253

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUJ GAIN	AUJ IMPEDANCE	
MB	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
MB	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound					268
MB	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
MB	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!					234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP					201
MB	Trichord Dina/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility					234

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

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

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

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

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

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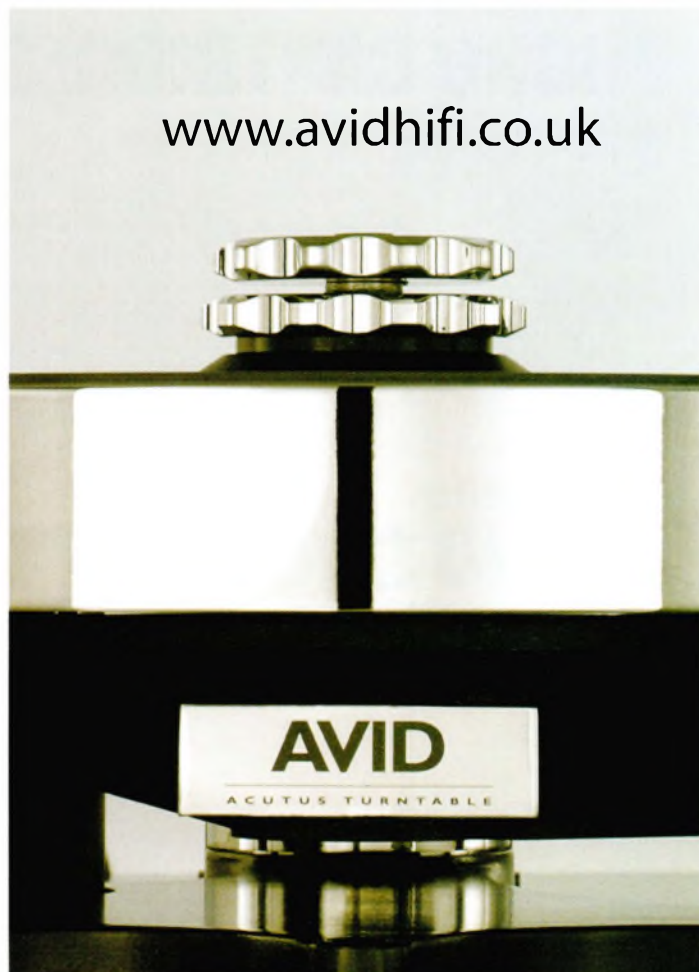
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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates

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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon TU-1800DAB £250

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



Creek T50 £550

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



T+A T1210R £1,000

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



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

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

Our favourite TUNERS

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

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

SPECS: **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.

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 people show

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Q man
 people show

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DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

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

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

Recordable CD

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

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

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

Hard drive

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

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

TOP BUYS



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
Hifidelio Pro £850
160GB hard disk and CD-R/RW drive in a box – as music servers go, this is a cracker.



Imerge
S3000 £2,800
A flexible audio server that's well designed, easy to use and sounds great too!

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

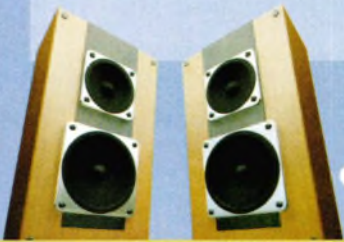
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	SITE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1				218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1				233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2				243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2				233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1				205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1				243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1				218
HDD RECORDERS								
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducingyer that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1				205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1				233
HDD RECORDERS								
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160			276
	Hermstedt Hifidelio Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160			280
	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 HDD 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.

However *you enjoy your* music...

“ Isn't it easy to buy a new system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price, you order the system, get a friend who knows his onions to install it – and live happily ever after. ”

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. It's likely that the system will help you lose interest in music pretty rapidly. The problem is that there are more myths about hi-fi than Aesop's Fables. CD gives you perfect sound. All CD players sound the same. A £50 CD player plays high fidelity music. All magazine reviewers are experts. Big speakers are always better than small ones. More watts per channel is everything. MP3 format gives you high quality. A collection of 'Best Buy' components will be a great system. And so on and so on.... ALL MYTHS.



...get the best Hi-Fi

Music - the real aim

Our aim must be to buy a hi-fi system that will prove musically satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money. If the system doesn't excite you musically you've wasted your money. What is even worse is that you may not even realise you've bought a bad egg – you'll just switch the TV on instead and your desire to listen to music will gradually diminish. Have you ever been in a pub or club where you realise it's very difficult to conduct a conversation, even to the extent of being really tiring? A poor quality system continuously distorts but I don't mean it necessarily reaches the point of audibly breaking up. With a top quality system you can play music very loudly and still hold a conversation because it's free of distortion. A poor system is tiring to listen to even when it's played at low volume. If you want proof, go into a shoe or clothes shop where they play background 'music' and try to enjoy listening. It's odds on you'll fail.

What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. So where do you start? Here's an important tip... don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE. There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. Again, just myths. Most specialist hi-fi dealers are running their business because, above all, they love music. They spend a large portion of their time listening to music and comparing systems to get the best possible result. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. But they all also know the system must suit you.



STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★	☆	★	★	★
SERVICE	★	☆	★	★	★
FACILITIES	☆	★	★	☆	★
VERDICT	★	★	★	★	★

Buying or being sold to?

Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met...and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problem you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by commendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.



Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about more than just a good price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system for your money!

Ask our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

Listed below are **20 OF THE BEST HI-FI SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY**. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

LONDON

N1
GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
020 7226 5500

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2043

SOUTH
Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
01233 624441

Brighton
THE POWERPLANT
40 Church Road, Hove.
01273 775542

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street.
01245 265245

Colchester
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.
01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road.
01702 435255

Southampton
PHASE 3 HI-FI
37 Bedford Place.
023 8022 8434

Worthing
PHASE 3 HI-FI
213-217 Iarring Road.
01903 245577

SOUTH WEST

Bath
AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
01225 333310

MIDLANDS

Banbury
OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
01295 272158

Birmingham
SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich.
01922 493499

Birmingham
MUSIC MATTERS
363 Hagley Road, Edgbaston.
0121 429 2811

Coventry
FRANK HARVEY
163 Spon Street.
024 7652 5200

Leicester
CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel Street.
0116 262 3754

Nottingham
CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
0115 9584404

Stafford
ACOUSTICA
114 Wolverhampton Road.
01785 258216

NORTH
Cheadle
THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road.
0161 428 7887

Chester
ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road.
01244 344227

Sheffield
MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St.
0114 275 6048

York
SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate.
01904 627108

Gateshead
LINTONE AUDIO
7-11 Park Lane, Gateshead.
0191 477 4167

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh
LOUD & CLEAR
Bonnington Mill,
72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

Glasgow
LOUD & CLEAR
520 St Vincent St, Finnieston.
0141 221 0221

N. IRELAND

Belfast
LYRIC HI-FI
429-431 Lisburn Rd.
028 90 381296



STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



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

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

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

How to choose an amp

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



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

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

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

HOME CINEMA STEREO

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

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

Q&A

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

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

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

TOP BUYS



Marantz PM7001 £350

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



Cyrus 6vs2 £600

The latest 'singing shoebox' from Cyrus is an absolute peach! Strong rhythmic flow, tunefully extended bass and excellent stereo imaging are among the highlights.



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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVAA70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM	●	●	60	289
BB	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt	●	●	90	286
EC	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		●	●	75	279
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	500	Ticks all the boxes for bass, clarity, imaging etc. and invites the listener into the music with uncommon grace	6		●	●	100	294
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	750	Excellent value - powerful and capable with useful features and clear, dynamic sound	8		●	●	120	293
EC	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	●	●	85	283
MB	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7			●	40	293
MB	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
MB	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
BB	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
BB	Marantz PM7001K1	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM	●	●	70	289
MB	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
BB	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
MB	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5	●	●	●	80	278
MB	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM	●		50	293
MB	Vincent SV-236	999	Valve hybrid whose sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling, short on neutrality but high on sparkle	6		●		100	295
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8		●		100	280
EC	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6	●	●	●	100	275
EC	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6		●		130	281
BB	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM	●		50	286
BB	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		●	●	100	286
MB	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt	●		60	292
EC	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
EC	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6		●		180	275
EC	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
EC	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4		●		200	289
EC	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5	●	●		75	271
EC	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
EC	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4	●	●		250	295
MB	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7		●		180	285
EC	Naim SuperNait	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6		●	●	80	294
BB	Primare i30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6		●	●	100	267
EC	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4		●		40	268
BB	Unison Research Unico 200	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5		●		200	269
EC	Unison Research Perform	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5		●		40	287

Our favourite BB 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)
UP TO £2,000									
BB	Croft Precession I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer	●	●	6		25	290
EC	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
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2			266
EC	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured	●	●	6		125	270
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	136	256
BB	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value	●	●	5	●	70	285
EC	Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1	1,198	Shoe-box-sized duo with a superb headphone-amp-cum-preamp: power amp lacks some subtlety and insight	●	●	2		50	295

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
ABOVE £2,000									
BB	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●	●	5	opt	●	273
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	opt	●	277
EC	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	●	100 278
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6	●	●	300 249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5	●	●	120 269
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●	●	●	●	200 247
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	●	125 250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●	●	●	●	700 234
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
BB	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)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited		7		100	284
	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
	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A11XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o		11		140	273
	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inlegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously				170	266
	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
	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
	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
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1		8		90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power		8		135	275
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen		11		250	243
	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5		120	238

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



After 5 years in production, the Dino is still one of the most popular phono stages around. Highly versatile with accessible switches on the baseplate to facilitate a wide range cartridges.

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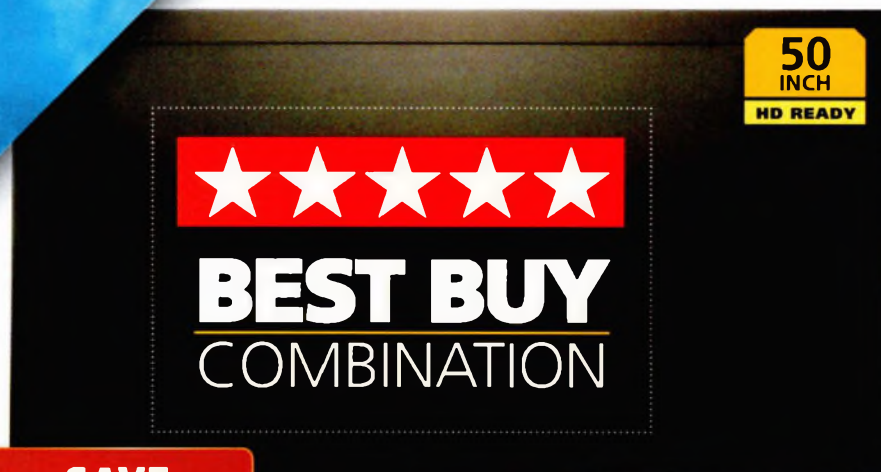
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 magazine

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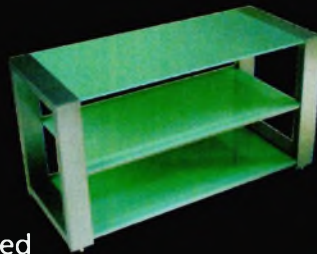
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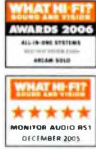
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28/07/2007, E&OE.

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



Tannoy
Mercury F4 £350

Tannoy's Mercury speakers have a long history of 'quality' sound at low prices, and the latest range is no exception – this floorstander is thoroughly engaging.



DALI
Ikon 6 £899

Complete with a ribbon super-tweeter, this is an exceptionally capable floorstander for the money, delivering a highly detailed and truly engrossing sound.



B&W
805S £1,600

A superbly well-engineered standmount that's capable of delivering magnificent musical communication, alongside superior subtlety and delicacy.



Mordaunt-Short
Performance 6 £3,500

This extraordinary speaker stands at the pinnacle of Mordaunt-Short's current range. State of the art resolution and imaging are among its many attributes.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	UP TO £1,000									
	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 Aegis Neo 3	370	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	A	24				294
	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	18,29,5,25,5	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	24,53,7,31,5	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	16,5,28,28	A-	40				279
	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35				253
	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
	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 BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30				294
	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!	16,5,85,29,5	A	40				281

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 amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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NEW Glenair 10



"This is an elegant but generously sized loudspeaker, more efficient than average and thus easier to drive."

"The Tannoy has an uncanny ability to delve deep into the mix and deliver seemingly every last nuance of the recording."

"It requires refined ancillaries but not necessarily expensive ones and can be heartily recommended for combining great looks with a highly engaging and revealing sound."

Jason Kennedy, Hi-Fi Choice
 July 07 Issue, Awarded 89%

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Focal 1037 Speakers

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM 40Hz	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24		A	50	●	261
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21.5,19.5		A	48	●	286
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26		A-	30	●	292
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20.5,97,29		A+	24	●	294
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40	●	265
ABOVE £1,000									
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53		A+	30	●	255
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31		A-	46	●	245
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38.5		A-	45	●	294

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM Hz?	FREE SPACE	
	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
	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 Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
	Sonus Faber Concerto D.	1,799	The Concerto Domus performs significantly above its price level, especially with acoustic material	21,99,31	●	A	35	●	270
	Sonus Faber Cremona A.	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32	●	A	48	●	246
	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 Glenair 10	2,999	With a 250mm dual concentric driver this is a generously proportioned, highly engaging speaker for a good price	36,100,35	●	A+	38	●	295
	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 Celiux 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
	Yamaha Soavo-2	1,200	Good overall balance, and a welcome return to the audiophile loudspeaker industry after a long gap for Yamaha	22,38,35	●	A-	45	●	295

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SIZE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●		224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
	Focal-J/MIab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●		241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38	●		262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,800	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25	●		210
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20	●		268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29	●		269

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s) **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WIDTH (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	SIZE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	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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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being

best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not

quite as straightforward as it should be.

Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190	219
BB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro orientec design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
EC	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
BB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
BB	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
BB	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	194
EC	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
EC	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
BB	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
BB	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270	266
EC	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience						260	252
	Shure SE420	240	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears with real refinement						15	295
	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20	285
	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280	268
EC	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						205	295

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules **WEIGHT** In grams **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc

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B&W 602.5 Speakers - Sorrento E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£265.00
Epos M15.2 Speakers - Dark Cherry Ex/D (2Yr G/tee)	£495.00
Goldring GR2 Turntable Ex/D (2Yr G/tee)	£195.00
KEF iQ5 Speakers (Var Colours) E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£295.00
KEF iQ7 Speakers - Dark Apple E/D (2Yr G/tee)	£475.00
Sugden CD Master Bijou CD Player E/D (1Yr G/tee)	£859.00
Sugden Powermaster P/Amp inc stand E/D (1Yr G/tee)	£869.00

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Arcam AVR300 Reciever NEW boxed	(Was 1300.00)	Now - £679.00
Arcam AV700 Processor E/D	(Was 1399.00)	Now - £895.00
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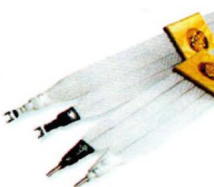
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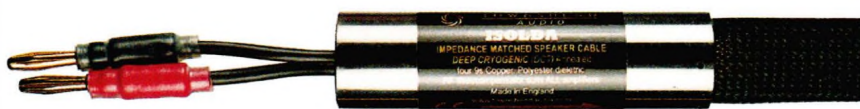
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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
	Atlas Questor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine	●	●			295
	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 Copper-Line Alpha	50	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too	●	●			295
	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!	●	●			279
	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generically - notably resolution, focus and articulation	●	●	●		294
	Ikos Isotica IX1	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
	Van den Hul MC Silver IT MkII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price	●	●	●		289
	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
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
	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
	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●	●			E 279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
	Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	A high degree of musical communication: detail is not perfect but one is seldom aware of the shortfall	●	●			290
	Atlas Ascent 2.0	55	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board	●	●			294
	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
	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, hi-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 biwire 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.

Do you want to choose your hifi or home cinema system, in a comfortable and relaxing environment...?

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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.

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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** ,

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless
	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack
	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)
	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
80	66,46		5	Glass	247
81	50,50		4	Glass	217
82	43		4	MDF	193
87.5	48		5	MDF	193
75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
75	56,37		4	Glass	286
65	60,42		4	Glass	293
75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
74	48,40		4	Metal	247
62	49,44		4	Metal	271
75	45,36		5	Glass	261
51.5	49,39,5		4	MDF	217
68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
92	50,40		5	Glass	217
76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!
	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
50	20,17			1	293
56	16,5,18			1	281
61	18,16,3			4	283
63	17,20			1	220
62	18,15			4	232
61	17,15			5	261
53	31,22			6	287
60,50	15,21			3	280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.

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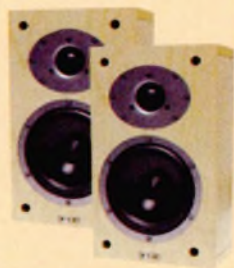
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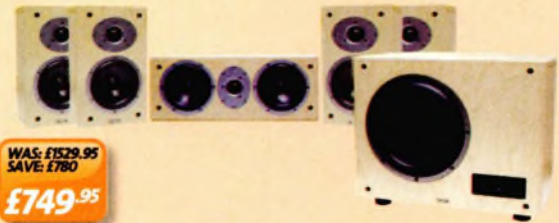
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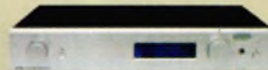


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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp). Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire). Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

STURDY See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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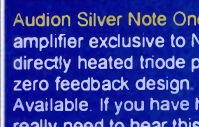


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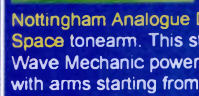
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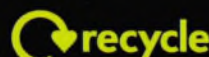
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2nd-hand shootout

A grand will buy you a whole lot of turntable, if you go for one of our four favourites

Kicking off our fabulous foursome is a choice that's perhaps unexpected. The Clearaudio Solution with Satisfy tonearm is one of those products that's often overlooked – probably because it's not British. No matter, for this German-built deck has a level of finish that would shame many a UK rival, with sound quality to match. The separate motor guarantees freedom from vibration, while, intriguingly, the three-point base will hold up to three tonearms.

With such fine build quality and a fairly recent introduction (1999), there's little to worry about when buying second-hand. What you do need to be aware of, however, is the bewildering array of options. There are five different finishes, with the top one costing £630 more (new) than the basic. They're more than just cosmetic differences, too. Worth searching out is the AMG wood finish, using high-gloss plywood sandwiched between aluminium plates. This material is so rigid that it works wonders for the sound quality – and is reckoned to be bulletproof!

The equally well-made Satisfy tonearm also comes with a variety of extras. The standard price new is £400, but this can easily be increased 50 per cent by choosing a Directwire connection and an ebony arm tube. Yep, a wooden arm tube is an optional extra! Our choice would be to stick with the aluminium, but go for the direct wiring. Combine this with a Solution in AMG wood and, for around £1,000, you'll have a top-flight deck that's only a few years old and

costs about £2,200 new. Clearaudio may not be as prestigious as the other brands here, but it's a great choice value-for-money-wise.

Those seeking a more conventional deck could do a lot worse than Linn's evergreen LP12. £1,000 is a key price point for these decks, as that's where the Lingo-equipped models kick in. This separately housed power supply adds speed and texture to the bass response and appreciably 'sharpens up' the sound. Mechanically, it's worth trying to get a model with the Cirkus (from serial number

“Those seeking a more conventional deck could do a lot worse than Linn's LP12.”

90,582) modifications. Failing that, look for a serial number later than 70,000 – at least giving you the suspension upgrades of 1987.

Our advice is to get as late a model as possible, even if it means buying one with a 'starter' arm or none at all. Most arms will get you going with the LP12, and you can always upgrade later. Reliability is excellent and the product has an army of experts behind it. Set-up, however, is crucial. Even an incorrectly positioned mains lead can spoil the sound, so if you're not buying from a dealer, a two-hour Linn specialist service may be the best upgrade you'll ever buy...

Few turntables make a greater visual statement than the Michell GyroDec (the full-on Perspex-swathed 'Dec, not the naked Gyro SE – it just isn't the same). Launched in 1982, the GyroDec used a floating chassis with a balanced arm board and stabilised suspension. On our budget, you should be able to afford one of the post-2001 models that comes with a DC, rather than AC, motor. While the sound-quality improvements may be slight, a DC version is worth it for the easier upgrading potential alone. AC units can be upgraded to DC, but the £600 cost

makes it rather uneconomical; far better to start with a DC model and then consider the Orbe enhancements, including the impressively engineered platter and bearing.

Second-hand, the GyroDec is an especially good bet, as it's the Gyro SE, or Spider Edition, that's the more fashionable. This means that while the 'Dec costs £1,239 to the SE's £987 new, by the time they're a few years old, their values are about the same. Find a model with the 'never connected' HR power supply and excellent TecnoArm and

you'll have a turntable that not only looks iconic, but performs as well as many more modern competitors, the Gyro SE included.

To finish off with we have the Roksan Xerxes 10. Built to mark the Xerxes's tenth anniversary in 1996, this deck improved upon the already impressive sound quality of the original. If it's pace, insight and staging you're into, then this is for you. From a second-hand perspective, the best thing about the Xerxes 10 was its much improved build quality. It wasn't so much that the original was poorly built, but it did have problems with sagging plinths. Drawing on experience learned from the flagship TMS model, the Xerxes 10 continued to use a version of the isolated plinth, but this time it was constructed in a more robust manner.

The single-point bearing is hard-wearing, but can suffer if neglected. As with any turntable, it's worth listening for bearing noise. Matching arms are most likely to be Roksan's Tabriz or Artemiz. Both are decent, though not as well made as some. Be aware that the oldest Artemiz arms are over 20 years old and could need serious attention. Fortunately, our budget should be enough for a well-looked-after, relatively recent deck. Look for a model that's about five years old, comes with the DSU power supply and has a Tabriz ZI tonearm of a similar vintage.

Four super turntables, then, and each one guaranteed not just to sound impressive, but also to offer a decent upgrade path. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month – £2,000 CD players



Above: Michell GyroDec turntable

Right: Clearaudio Solution turntable with Satisfy Carbon Directwire tonearm

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Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace turntable with LV Mystic Mat - SME cut	£1500	£2200
Martin Logan SL3 speakers	£1500	£2500
Ortofon Kontrapunkt cartridge - 150 hours use	£450	
Living Voice loudspeakers - various ex-dem, part-ex, seconds, from very young to very old		Please Call
Canary 601 line pre (110v) - very smart, very good	£2000	£3000
Canary 303 monos - Living Voice upgrade - saucy	£750	£7500
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - Maple	£3500	£7000
Mactone XMIII 6550 p.p. integrated - retro joy - virtual new	£3000	£6000
Audio Aero Capitole CD24/192	£1700	£4000
Canary 608 integrated amp with LV upgrade - vgc - serviced - nice!	£1700	
Mactone XX 330 line pre-amp - retro, quirky - new	£2500	£8000
Mactone MA 300B stereo power amp - more quirky - waffle maker style	£2500	£6500
Sonus Faber Electro - Walnut - no stands	£900	£1700
Border Patrol 300B SE - Maple - 6 months old	£1900	£4850
Border Patrol 300B SE - Mahogany - 2 years old	£1700	£4850
Border Patrol 300B SE - Mahogany - 3 years old	£1500	£4850
Tascam 122 MkIII tape deck - very nice if you need one	£500	
Sugden A21a - 3 to choose - from	£500	£950
Tube Technology Prophet two box pre-amp - 10 hours use - bargain	£1000	£2250
SME M2-9 tonearms - NEW	£350	£650
Placete passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control	£700	£1600
Horning Agalton Silver - vgc - oak finish	£1000	£4000
Audio Note (UK) AN-E loudspeaker	£500	
Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood - with stands	£850	£2000

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- Pure 701ES, new 129
- Rega Radio 99
- Sony 777ES DAB Tuner REDUCED 199
- Videologic 601 DAB in BLACK 79

Amplifiers

- AC Magnum MF125 Monoblocks, excellent monos in vgc 299
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- Arcam Alpha 10, excellent boxed just serviced 349
- Arcam AVR200, ex boxed 399
- ATC SIA2 150, excellent boxed 999
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- Audio Innovations Series 200 preamp 279
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- Audio Research LST Preamp 679
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Accessories/Systems

- Cairn Fog v2 Cd player and 4808 integrated amp, ex dem 1549
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- Linn Classik K with onboard tuner, as new boxed 579
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- Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3 excellent 199
- Primare CD110, one box system, ex demo 879
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FOR SALE

ACCUPHASE T108 tuner for sale. Absolutely perfect, boxed, £700. 01332 843758 (Derbyshire).

ARCAM A85/ P85 amplifiers, silver, pristine. Original packaging, remotes, lead etc, £650ono. Can split. 07766 078281 (London).

ARCAM DV79 DVD player in black, as new. HDMI compatible, boxed with manual and remote. (£1,000) offers. 01772 745553 (Lancs)

ARCAM FMJ A32 integrated amplifier, boxed, mint, (£1,200), sell for £650. 01491 614325 (Oxon).

ART EMOTION loudspeakers, piano black gloss with integral stands, one year old, (£5,000), £2,450. 01628 524869 (South Bucks)

AUDIO PHYSIC LUNA 2 subwoofer, cherrywood veneer, mint condition, boxed, (£1,650) £850. 07776 143890 (Southampton).

ARISTON RD11 series 80SL turntable, walnut plinth, Rega tonearm with MP30, £150 07757 162478 (Yorks).

B&W DM601 S3 speakers, unmarked, as new in sorrento. Boxed etc, £180. Apollo Olympus 50cm stands, mint work well with B&Ws, £35. May deliver. Chris 01766 781211 (Harlech)

BRINKMANN FEIN phono amp, 2006, mint, MC/MM, granite base, great finish in black, (£1,500) £750 07968 189647 (Herts)

EPOS 12.2 standmount mahogany speakers, (£450) plus Epos black speaker stands, (£120). As new condition, boxed, will demo, £395 for both. Adam 07815 046623 (Surrey).

EPOS M15.2 speakers, light cherry, mint condition, £225ono. Partington Superdreadnought speaker stands, graphite, mint condition, £75 ono. Philip 0208 923 9757 (London)

JEFF ROWLAND Coherence One preamp and two Model 3 mono power amps with manuals, £3,650. Genesis 400 loudspeakers, rosewood, as new £1,900. 01255 421589 (Essex)

JM-LAB 936 speakers in cherry finish, boxed with manuals, four years old and in good condition, £1,500ono. Buyer collects 01494 521937 or email martin.skipi@btinternet.com (Bucks).

KEF 105/ 3 REFERENCE speakers in rosewood. Four-way, six-driver design. Rich, open with superb soundstaging, excellent condition with original boxes/ packaging. (£2,400), £780ono. 07973 220663 (Leicestershire).

KEF Q7 floorstanders, black, excellent, boxed and still under warranty, (£800) £375ono. 01926 402824 or email pcs9@hotmail.co.uk (Warwick).

KEF RDM2 standmount monitors, black with thick high gloss solid cherry side cheeks. Excellent sound and looks (£700), £200. 0116 284 9087 (Leicester).

KRELL FPB300CX power amp, immaculate, new, boxed, £7,000ono. Email ewadv@hotmail.com (Israel).

LINN AKURATE 212 standmount speakers in rosenut, fabulous sound, cabinets unmarked, boxed, (£3,600) £1,950. Naim NAC552 preamplifier, Naim's flagship, immaculate condition and boxed, (£13,600) £8,495. 01285 862539 (Cirencester)

LINN GENKI CD player, silver 17 months old, boxed, (£1,100) £650. Linn LK85 power amp, (same), £350. Linn Kollector preamp, £300. Arcam P75+ power amp, boxed, (£380) £220. 0115 960 3934 (Notts)

LOWTHER AUDITORIUM speakers x4 PM6AS. Been rebuilt, mahogany cabs, superb condition, £850 (or swap for Quad 57s or Quad ESL-63 electrostatic loudspeakers). 01722 334694 (Salisbury).

MANTICORE MANTRA turntable with Rega 250 arm, Audio Technica coil cart. Original box, lubes etc, as new, unmarked, black plinth, £150. Linn Helix bi-wire speakers, black ash, almost perfect, boxes, with Linn stands, £85. 07813 666686 (Bucks).

MARANTZ DV6001 universal multi-region, (£350) £250.

Target Hi-Fi/TV stand 5-shelf black ash, £75. SENTEC phono preamp, sota, MM/MC, £75. 020 8951 3178 (London)

MEADOWLARK SHEARWATER Hot Rod speakers, excellent condition with boxes and accessories, (£2,200) bargain at just £850ono. 07737 135414 (Bath) ☑

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AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts)

BRYSTON 3BST power amp or larger Briston power amp(s). 01803 523553 (Devon).

NAIM CDI in good condition, with box, manual and leads. Cash waiting, for the right player in the right condition. 020 7042 4522 (London).

ORTOFON T-5 step-up moving coil transformers. Will pay £25. 01323 723292 (E. Sussex)

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx AO21, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire)

REL / MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer with remote. Possible part ex for my Quad L-Series sub.

023 8073 8935 (Hants)

STAX OMEGA electrostatic earspeakers up to £1,000 for mint condition example. 01333 311247 (Scotland)

WIREWORLD OASIS 5 or Atlantis interconnect in mint condition. Fair price please as currently unemployed. 01323 487640 (Sussex)

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

◀ **MIRAGE BPS-400** powered subwoofer. Piano finish top. Excellent condition, £800. 01252 614055 (Hampshire).

MISSION 771E speakers, £60. Award-winning speakers in rosewood. Good condition. Wharfedale 8.1 speakers, £60. Half price, boxed, in pristine condition. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).

MONITOR AUDIO RS6 loudspeakers, 10 months old, dark wood finish, slight scratches to top, hence price. Otherwise excellent condition, superb sound, bargain, £300. 07983 096202 (Kent).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 pre/power amps, Cyrus CD8x, all brand new. Boxed, unopened, (£3,300). KEF 95 floorstanding speakers, black ash, (£150). 07896 708572 (West Yorkshire).

NAIM 180 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 CD51 CD player, under guarantee, new, upgraded remote control, as new, boxed, hardly used, £500. Call Chris 01395 513529 (East Devon).

NAIM INTRO speakers, black ash, with new grills, £200. Buyer collects. Karl 07743 483571 (Manchester).

NAIM NAC 62 preamp (1992), NAP 90 power amp plus Hi-Cap, leads, plug ins and manual, all in good condition, can demonstrate, £725 (+£10 UK delivery) 01656 782523 (Porthcawl).

NAIM NAP250/ 2 two years old, £1,600. Linn Akurate 212 speakers without stands, rosenut finish, £1,700. Project Ground-it deluxe isolation platform, £140. All mint and boxed. 01285 862539 (Gloucestershire).

NORDOST SOLAR WIND speaker cable 2x6m pair, one pair bi-wired speaker end, (£350) £85 per pair. Russ Andrews Crystal-Ag 0.5m interconnect, (£322) £160. QED Qunex Silver Spiral interconnect cables, 2x0.5m, 1x0.75m, (£85) £25 per pair. Call John 01932 580394 (day) 01202 516289 (eves) (Bournemouth).

OPTIMUM hi-fi/AV stand OTP5500 featuring five 6mm glass shelves, 610x520x63mm (WxDxH), with gold legs, as new (£349) £160ono. 07817 379 508 or email ejgrovevood@ukonline.co.uk (Stafford).

PIONEER A88X amplifier, £250. Mordaunt-Short A5000 amplifier, £195. Rogers Ravenbourne amplifier, £95. Tannoy P10 speakers (cherry), £210.

Wharfedale 708 speakers (black), £195. Goodmans IC100 speakers, £120. Graham 07837 188670 (Ilford).

PIONEER VSX-D2011 Audio/Video multichannel receiver, £395. Crane CSS1 Oceana home theatre speaker set, inc QED cable, £250. 07970 826145 (Dorset).

PMC OB1 speakers, 300 watts (£2,700) £1,700ono. Nordost Silver Shadow lead, 0.6m, (transport to DAC) (£360) £200ono. Musicworks six-way block (£230) £95. Gary 0117 9629725 (Bristol).

PROAC SC1 standmount speakers, four months old, mint condition in cherry wood finish, £1,000ono. 01476 404574 (Lincs).

PROAC TABLETTE 2000 loudspeakers, mint condition, boxed, £350. Soundstyle ST122 silver speaker stands, Soundbyte loaded, vgc, £65. 01329 667809 (Hampshire).

QUAD 99 bus leads (long), £30. Quad 99 remote, £25. QED Silver

Spiral interconnects, 1.0m, £35. Rothwell attenuators, £25. Russ Andrews Yello four-way power block, £25. Yello mains leads, £15. Call for more info 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

QUAD 99 and 909 pre/power amplifiers, boxed with manuals, Quadlink and remote control, £900ono. Quad ESL 2905 loudspeakers, new, sealed cartons. Why wait three months? Warranty, £5,750. Steve 07905 762363 or email sappleby@powelltuck.co.uk (Sussex).

REGA PLANET CD player plus Rega phono leads with gold plugs, £100. Rega Mira 2000 amp, £185. Both boxed with manuals and remotes, perfect condition. 07733 261077 (Berkshire).

REGA PLANET CD player, Rotel THX multichannel power amp (RB-985), Rotel (RSP-976) surround processor, Quad 12L2 speakers, Marantz DV6200 HDCD DVD, Loewe Vitros 32" TV and stand, £1,500ono. 07914 590086 (Oxford).

ROGERS LS55 floorstanding loudspeakers, rosewood. Immaculate condition, boxed, owned from new in 2000. Manual, £120 or offers, buyer collects. 01584 831443 (Shropshire).

ROKSAN CASPIAN power amps x2. M Series silver, boxed, £350 each or £650 the pair. 07805 731653 (Surrey).

ROKSAN M SERIES I control amp, Roksan M Series stereo power amps x2, black, boxed, mint, (£3,000), £1,500. 07891 533084 (Swansea)

ROTEL RT 950BX tuner, (£300) £80. Marantz CD65DX, £80. Arcam Alpha One CD, £100. Sony STS8920 QS AM/FM, £90. Meridian 596DVD, upgraded, (£3,199) £1,299. Quad 99 + remote, £560. ESL63s (£3,800) £1,699. P/X a possibility 01206 510392/07880 983630 (Colchester).

TRICHORD NC PSU for Diablo, (£500) £300ono. High performance power lead, (£140) £70. Kimber Select 1011 0.5mtr, (£328) £150, and Silver Streaks 1mtr (£225) £125. Call 01384 394441 (West Midlands).



Above: Arcam FMJ A32 integrated amplifier

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