

HI-FI CHOICE

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Audio Aero Prima • Cyrus Pre vs2/8 Power/PSX-R • Exposure 3010S • Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1 • Sudgen A21aL Series 2 • Unison Research Unico Secondo

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Second-hand hi-fi mini-mag with free classifieds



▶ BUYER'S BIBLE

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





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Islington
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Phase 3 Hi-Fi
Worthing
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CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE SEPTEMBER 2007 ISSUE 297

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



The really big news this month is our cover star, the incredible Marantz SA-7S1 CD/SACD player. Following its first outing to an excited press at the Munich High End show (see last month's issue for the full story, *HFC* 296) we managed to get our hands on it first. Now, after weeks of exhaustive testing, we're delighted to reveal just how special this new player is – turn to p40 for the full review.

When a product of this calibre comes along and begins to set new standards for CD replay, audiophile chins start wagging and word quickly spreads. But how much does Marantz's flagship player cost – £10k? More like £5k. Yes, it's still expensive, but compared to the high end marques, it would appear good value.

The real reason to get excited, though, is the 'trickle-down' effect. The technology in ground-breaking products such as the SA-7S1 eventually filters down into the real-world hi-fi that the majority of us can afford. This passing down of hi-fi know-how is superbly demonstrated with B&W's 863 floorstander, from the new 600 Series. In another scoop for *Hi-Fi Choice*, we proudly bring you on p44 the first review from what is arguably B&W's most important speaker range.

So, even if your budget can't stretch to some of the incredible products featured in *Hi-Fi Choice* each month, read on, because you might just get a taste of the high-end down the line...

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

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

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

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



Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

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



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



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



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 *HFC*.



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



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



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



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



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

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



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

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FREE MINI-MAG!

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

- 2 2nd-hand shootout – this issue, the best CD players £2,500 can buy
- 3 Trading pages
- 7 Readers classifieds



Chorus 800 V: the affordable luxury

Can we be uncompromising on sound quality, and at the same time sensitive to the aesthetics of a loudspeaker? Chorus 800 V proves that it is possible, with original solutions and choices at previously unseen prices. Acrylic (organic glass) of exceptional lustre, non-parallel walls of ultra-rigid 25 mm MDF, and the double-vented Powerflow® system for a deeper and more dynamic bass are major, high-end innovations that integrate with exclusive Focal technologies (Polyglass membrane, Aluminium/Magnesium inverted dome tweeter, DPC crossover). With Chorus 800 V, luxury finally becomes affordable. Now available in Moka and Ebony finishes, www.focal-fr.com





PATHOS DIGIT CD PLAYER

▶ Pathos could only be from Italy. That unique blend of design awareness and performance is something that could be applied equally to anything from a Ferrari sports car to a pair of Ferragamo shoes. But, even among such iconic brands, Pathos stands out as the coolest of the cool. The company's stunning TT amplifier and Cinema X both look far more elegant than any good hi-fi deserves. Then there's the Endorphin CD player, which looks like it has blasted in from a galaxy far, far away...

The new Digit CD player follows the Endorphin's sci-fi lines, only sleeker. The slimline new player is a top-loading beauty sporting the latest 24-bit/192kHz dual

differential delta-sigma DAC. It has a pair of valves in the output stage and has both analogue and digital audio outputs. It's styled to match the elegant Classic One integrated, but does the Digit live up to its looks? Look in next issue for the answer.

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

PRODUCT Pathos Digit

TYPE CD player

PRICE £1,995

KEY FEATURES Dual differential 24-bit/192kHz DAC ▶ Valve output stage ▶ Coaxial digital output ▶ Balanced and single-ended analogue outputs

CONTACT ▶ 01753 652669

▶ www.pathosacoustics.com

Isotek®

www.isoteksystems.com

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"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

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

Accessories
IsoPlug, DeMag CD, etc...

Multi-Ways
Available in 4, 6 or 8 sockets

Solus

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

GII Mini Sub & Vision

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

Orion & Gemini
Two levels of high quality filters

BEST ACCESSORY WINNER 2006
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2006
★★★★★

Sigmas

Nova

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★

Product of the year 2005

Titan

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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KEF REFERENCE 201/2 LOUDSPEAKER

▶ It's not every day that KEF revises its top Reference range. The new Reference 201/2 is the only standmount speaker making it the least expensive model in the range. But, don't equate 'least expensive' with 'compromised'... this is KEF's ultimate Reference class monitor for those who lack the space for a floorstanding model like the 203/2.

It's a full-range loudspeaker designed as a three-way bass reflex model and features a Uni-Q driver array, with a 25mm tweeter in the acoustic centre of a 165mm midrange driver, with yet another 165mm driver below. KEF has developed its advanced Uni-Balance system to allow the user to tailor the output of the speaker to the room itself; thus

helping to make the speaker less room-dependent than most other designs. With a frequency range suggested from 56Hz up to a whopping 60kHz, the speaker is perfect for both high resolution formats as well as good old CD and vinyl. Read the first UK test of KEF's Reference range in HFC next month.

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

PRODUCT KEF Reference 201/2

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £3,500 per pair

KEY FEATURES Three-way bass reflex design

◉ Sensitivity: 86dB ◉ 25mm dome tweeter in a Uni-Q array, inside a 165mm midrange driver

◉ 165mm bass driver ◉ Uni-Balance bass control system ◉ Tri-wiring speaker terminals

CONTACT ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 840E/840W

Building on the strengths of Cambridge Audio's ground-breaking Class XD amplifier, the company has moved up a gear with its new 840E preamplifier and 840W power amplifier. These two products form the company's new top-of-the-line range and form a logical extension of the developments first seen in the award-winning 840A integrated amplifier.

The 840E line preamp is the first to feature the company's new Terrapin amplifier modules. These are essentially custom-made, ten-pin amplifier modules to replace off-the-shelf op-amp chips. It features both balanced and single-ended inputs and outputs, adjustable input gain, a fully configurable front panel and easy integration with custom install systems thanks to both RS-232 connectivity and Cambridge Audio's own Incognito multiroom system.

It is joined by the 840W, a 200 watt stereo power amplifier that can deliver up to 500 watts in bridged mono mode. Employing a new generation of Class XD and a freshly designed output stage, it also supports both balanced and single-ended inputs.

Price £750 (840E); £1,000 (840W) **Due** autumn
 ☎ 0845 090 2288 # www.cambridge-audio.com

BOULDER 865

Colorado-based high-ender Boulder has announced its first-ever integrated amplifier, the 865. The 150 watt heavyweight features extensive customisable functions for use in home cinema and multiroom settings (including Boulder's own Boulderlink system), and features a discrete-resistor step volume control as seen on the 2010 preamp for 0.5dB level adjustment. The fully balanced amplifier is unique in that it only supports XLR connections in all its four line level inputs. Boulder claims the new amp has a frequency response that reaches as low as 0.015Hz, and up to an impressive 150kHz.

Price £7,750 **Due** now ☎ 01435 867438 # www.boulderamp.com



HECO CELAN SERIES

Pure Sound, the designer of the Bewitch valve amplifier, has announced that its Heco Celan range of speakers is now available in the UK. The range spans across three floorstanders, a standmount, a centre speaker and two subwoofers with either a 300mm or 375mm bass unit.

All the Celan speakers feature traditional Kraft paper cone bass units, made from long-fibre pulp and wool, while the soft dome tweeters sport carbon nano particles that are claimed to extend the high frequency output up to 40Hz. Available in beech, cherry and rosewood, as well as a silver lacquer finish, the asymmetric Celan cabinets have aluminum-cast reflex ports and include a two decibel HF boost at the flick of a switch, if needed.

Price from £570 to £1,400 per pair **Due** now
 ☎ 01822 612449 # www.heco-audio.de



IMERGE MEDIA SERVER MS5000

Imerge has moved its music server concept up a gear. The Media Server MS5000 is a full video and five-source audio server that can distribute enormous amounts of data around the house. Two models have been announced, the only difference being the size of the RAID array storage inside the elegant case. With full 1080p HDTV video quality and 24-bit Wolfson DACs built in, the largest model (with its seven 500GB hard drives!) can store up to 840 hours of video, or more than 4,600 CDs in full 16-bit PCM audio quality.

Price £6,999 (1.5TB), £8,999 (3TB) **Due** now
 ☎ 01954 783600 # www.imerge.co.uk



PRO-JECT PRE BOX/AMP BOX

Pro-Ject made audiophile turntables affordable, and now it's doing the same thing to amplification. Its new Box series is a no-nonsense range of small, power amplifier modules and matching preamplifiers based around Class D 'digital' amplifier concepts that deliver 30 watts per channel for the stereo power amp and 40 watts per channel for a pair of monoblocks. The Pre Box is a simple two-input device with remote operation that shares the same size box as the Phono Box II. Expect an exclusive review next issue.

Price £150 each **Due** now

☎ 01235 511166 # www.project-audio.com



THIEL POWERPOINT

Hot on the heels of the new CS3.7 loudspeaker (*Audiophile*, HFC 295), Thiel has announced a surface-mount (wall or ceiling) speaker that brings high-end performance to those after discreet audio. Using the same driver arrangement used in the company's top CS7.2 speaker, the 25mm tweeter in the acoustic centre of a 165mm woofer creates a perfectly time-coherent design. The PowerPoint uses a uniquely angled cabinet that gives optimum sound in a variety of wall and ceiling settings.

Price from £995 per speaker **Due** now

☎ 01727 865488 # www.thielaudio.com



TEAC CR-H2571

Micro system expert TEAC has announced a component mini-system that adds an iPod dock to the ever-popular CD receiver package. Sporting a CD player that supports CD, CD-R/RW and MP3 files (on disc) and a DAB/FM tuner, the 25 watt unit features a universal iPod dock that can handle both music and video (with composite and S-Video output). The TEAC remote offers full control over any iPod in the dock, down to the menu level, but it also supports other MP3 players through a front mini-jack connection.

Price from £280 **Due** now ☎ 0845 130 2511

www.teac.co.uk



NAD C315BEE AND C425

First seen at CEDIA UK, the new C315BEE amplifier is the latest in a long line of top-quality budget amplifiers, dating right back to the original 3020 amplifier. The new amp is a 40 watt integrated design and has been designed to retain the performance of the hugely successful C325BEE, but at a considerably lower price and without sacrificing functionality. This can be done thanks to NAD's PowerDrive circuit, which was first seen on the company's Masters Series products and has trickled down to the C315BEE. It's six-input, remote controllable amplifier that even features a media player mini-jack front-mounted input for iPods. This is joined by a new AM/FM tuner, the C425. With 30 presets and RDS capability, the new tuner shows not everyone needs DAB. Thanks to full RS-232 compatibility and IR inputs, it's also ideal for incorporation within a multiroom setting.

Price £180 (C315BEE); £200 (C425) **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111

www.nadelectronics.com



Soundbites

NORDOST'S new Odin interconnects and speaker cables are among the best in the world. The cables both sport 24 oxygen-free copper micro-mono-filament cables, each shielded from interference by chain-mail (dubbed 'Total Signal Control' by Nordost) and wrapped in a Teflon-like material known as FEP. The elegant ribbons don't come cheap though: a metre pair of the interconnect costs £10,000 and the same length of speaker cable costs £12,500. Cor!

☎ 01635 291357



AUDIO PRO'S new £250

Porto portable music system is designed to turn personal audio players communal. With a rechargeable battery system, a dock for both iPod music and video, and 3.5mm inputs for other MP3 players, the red leather or black AM/FM receiver with integrated speakers, is ideal for picnics during what we laughingly call summer.

☎ 01422 372110



ECLIPSE has revamped its elegant TD307 speaker for smaller systems. Perhaps unsurprisingly called the TD307II, the small single-driver unit comes with a distinctive multi-angle integrated foot for desk, wall or ceiling mounting. The speakers are also available as a system (the TD307PAII), complete with a matching 12 watt conical amplifier for £400.

☎ 020 7328 4499



AUDIO TECHNICA'S new

lightweight ES3 headphones are ideal for iPod Nano users, because the earpieces come in Apple-chummy shades of vivid blue, green and pink. The collapsible headphones are closed-back designs, which means you will not upset your fellow commuters on the train. The headphones are claimed to deliver hi-fi quality sound and cost £40.

☎ 0113 277 1441



ATLAS CABLES' new

Silver-line interconnect, costs a cool £1,000 and features Ohno Continuous Cast silver stranded conductors in a dielectric of Teflon on a bed of cotton yarn, wrapped in PVC and sheathed in cotton.

☎ 01563 572666



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

MATT NIMMONS
Job title: Operations Director
Company: CEDIA



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

Our autumn education programme for building specifiers, designers and installers. We are offering Installer Level 1 and Designer Level 1 training at our St Neots facility.

What album have you most enjoyed of late?

That's a good question! I think it must be *Memory Almost Full* by Paul McCartney.

Can generation iPod be turned on to hi-fi?

They are already switched on... they are buying custom install at the moment!

CD or vinyl, and why?

Not really bothered to be honest. Most people nowadays are downloading stuff and putting it all on a server.

Are audio servers the future then?

Not just audio servers, media servers too. And they aren't the future; they are here already. I think there's going to be a continual growth in the download market, and more video too, coming on stream.

Obviously people are already switched on to audio and I see this change to video files as well as audio from my own point of view. I've been downloading more and more video onto my own iPod in recent months. I can only see that growing, especially as hard drive capacity increases and prices drop.

Hi-Fi Diary

SEPTEMBER

- 4-9 CEDIA Expo 2007
 Colorado Convention Center, Denver, CO
www.cedia.net
Custom installation goes pan-global
- 21-23 London Sound and Vision Show 2007
 Park Inn, Heathrow
www.chestergroup.org
London's biggest and best hi-fi show
- 29 Musicmania
 Kensington Olympia Two, London
www.vip-24.com
UK's largest CD, DVD and vinyl fair

SHOW REPORT

CEDIA UK Expo 2007



London's Docklands discovers hidden hi-fi as CEDIA shows off the latest in custom installation tech. *Alan Sircom reports*

CEDIA, the Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association, has grown fast. Little more than an off-shoot of hi-fi and home cinema a dozen years ago, CEDIA is now eclipsing its more traditional forefathers and the CEDIA Expo, held every June in the ExCeL centre in London's Docklands, shows just how big this industry has become.

Dozens of stands filled the space with the latest in distributed audio and video and lighting systems, and a wide array of training sessions were on offer. This may not be a place for the non-specialist, and audiophiles may find little to take comfort in, but scratch the surface, and the hi-fi roots begin to show.

There are a lot of famous names from the hi-fi industry (such as KEF, Meridian and Monitor Audio), but the products on show have little bearing on the products you see in the hi-fi shops or reviewed in the magazines. Take Naim Audio for example. The company's NaimNET NS03 Music Server (£4,250) is not the sort of product you will find sitting next to Naim's regular CD players or amps, but this DigilinX-compatible, six stream music server acts



(filtered down from NAD's top amps) to keep costs low, but in all other ways this amp represents the spiritual heir to the classic 3020. Onkyo and NAD also both showed a brace of new AV receivers with HDMI 1.3 compatibility, but NAD upped the ante by offering a unique way of keeping abreast of changes to DAB. The company has made the DAB tuner on its upcoming receivers an external optional

“It's filled with the sort of goodies that were considered sci-fi a year or two ago.”

as a perfect interface between audio system and computer-based sound files. It also stores its own ripped music on a 400GB hard-drive built into the server. The servers are merely the front end of a system that includes four-way tuners, preamps, room amps and video switching.

Media servers are fast becoming standard issue in custom install, regardless of whether they store their own sound files, or fall back on attached storage. Of the brace of audio and video servers, LivingControl's Studio6 Media Server is perhaps unique because it can simultaneously drive two Full HD video outputs and can be controlled by a Nokia N800 internet tablet. At around £7,000, it's not cheap, but it's the state of the art... for today, at least.

There were small outposts of traditional hi-fi at the show. Onkyo showed the new DX7355 24-bit/192kHz CD player (£180) with matching A9155 stereo integrated amplifier (£200) with discrete output stages (rare at this price today). NAD also broke the sub-£200 price barrier with its new £180 entry-level C315NEE stereo amplifier. The six-input, 40 watt design uses a new power amplifier stage

module, so no need to throw away your receiver if or when DAB+ arrives. The DB-1 module is expected to cost about £100.

NAD's distributor, Armour HE, is a key player in the custom install game. Armour's latest find is SoundCast, a Wi-Fi-enabled iPod dock and speaker system that allows you to have your iPod charging in one room and playing in another. Better still, the deliciously named add-on, OutCast, is a tall, rechargeable and water-resistant outdoor Wi-Fi omnidirectional speaker system with a built-in 100 watt amplifier, for £500.

Moving on to loudspeakers, U-vola is a hanging loudspeaker concept from an Italian company back in the UK. Its speakers can be painted in all manner of funky colours and are said to be full-range devices. Expect to pay around £2,000 per pair.

Given most of the rest of the show was dedicated to high-end projection systems, lighting solutions and companies selling cable crimping devices, it's little wonder CEDIA is a trade show. However, it's still filled with the sort of goodies that were considered sci-fi a year or two ago, and will be springing up in regular hi-fi systems before long. **HFC**

➤ New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



ROBERT WYATT

Title: *Comicopera*
Release date: October

The ambitious follow-up to 2003's Mercury Prize short-listed *Cuckooland* from jazz-rock pioneer Wyatt is divided into three acts – *Lost In Noise*, *The Here And The Now* and *Away With The Fairies*. Within them are 16 new songs, all but four of them written by Wyatt himself. Heavyweight assistance comes from Brian Eno, Paul Weller and Phil Manzanera among others.



DEBORAH HARRY

Title: *Necessary Evil*
Due: September

After the successful Blondie reunion comes Harry's first solo in 14 years. "The comfort level with the band is great, but in most cases, the audience wants to hear the old music from us rather than the future, and that's death for an artist. You have to keep moving forward," she says. Song titles include *Two Times Blue*, *If I Had You* and *Charm Alarm*.

songs are set to roll out over a busy summer that finds her playing more than a dozen European festivals.

THE HIVES

Title: *tbc*
Due: autumn

You could never accuse Swedish garage rockers The Hives of false modesty – remember their 2001 international debut was called *Your New Favourite Band?* Rumour has it that the new one is to be titled *The World's First Perfect Album*. According to frontman Howlin' Pelle Almqvist, collaborators on the album include Pharrell Williams and producer Jackknife Lee, who is also currently working on the forthcoming REM album.

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Spyro Gyra *Good To Go-Go* (Jul), Paul Bley *Solo In Mondsee* (Jul); **Anna Netrebko** *Marriage of Figaro* (Jul); **Vladimir Ashkenazy** *Beethoven: Diabelli Variations* (Jul)

SACD/ DVD-A

Various Artists *Best Of The Chesky New York Sessions*, (SACD, Jul); **BBC Nat Orch Wales (Hickox)** *Elgar Symphony 1 Organ Sonata* (SACD, Jul); **Cincinnati Pops (Kunzel)** *Masters And Commanders* (SACD, Jul); **All-American Rejects** *Tornado*, (DVD-A, Jul); **James Carney Group** *Green-Wood* (SACD, Aug)

THE CULT

Title: *tbc*
Due: September

Fresh from his spell filling Jim Morrison's shoes in the Surrogate Doors, Ian Astbury has reunited with Billy Duffy to revive 1980s rock heroes The Cult. The band's first studio album since 2001 is currently being recorded in London with producer Youth (Verve/Primal Scream) and the new material is currently being previewed on tour supporting The Who.

KATIE MELUA

Title: *tbc*
Due: tbc

The 22-year-old Melua has now overtaken Dido as the best-selling British-based female singer of recent years with more than seven million sales of her two albums to date. The final touches are just being put to her third release and several of the new

- Living Control Studio6 Media Server
- NAD's new C315BEE entry-level integrated amp
- NAD's DB-1 DAB module
- Naim Audio's NaimNET NS 03 Music Server
- Niko makes lightswitches sexy, perhaps?
- Onkyo DX7355 CD player with A9155 amplifier
- SoundCast OutCast external WiFi speaker system
- Philips cool new TSU9600 Pronto remote
- SoundCast AudioCast WiFi iPod dock and SpeakerCast speaker system
- Systemline's iPort IW5 in-wall iPod Dock
- U-vola hanging loudspeaker system



Sign o' the times

you're on iPod, Krell ain't a bad place to be

It's a sign of the times that Krell has made an iPod dock. Okay, it's no ordinary iPod dock – it costs \$1,200 and is the size of a decent DAC – but 'The Kid' (as the prototype dock is nicknamed) is indicative of just how important internet audio is today.

Along with anyone not working for Krell, or lucky enough to spend a mid-May weekend in New York at the Home Entertainment Show 2007, I haven't heard this and know nothing about its specs. But I know I want one and probably can't have one. And that's because it's cool – like most Krell kit. Except that this bit of Krell cool might stay frosty for the under-35s – unlike most Krell gear.

Here's the thing. There is a generational divide, possibly greater and more confusing than anything since the original Rise of the Teenager in the late 1950s. Those of us over 20 might have iPods and camera phones and

“Those of us over 20 might have iPods and camera phones and PDAs, but these products are not really second-nature to us.”

PDAs, but we don't really live in a world where these products are second nature to us. Those under 20 totally understand a digital world where music is never on disc and you can watch your favourite TV programs on an iPod screen. Even those of us who keep up with the technology cannot compete with the people who actually live in the *zeitgeist*, rather than just commute there.

Krell's dock is important because it recognises that divide, up to a point. It is products like this – and not another CD player – that will increase Krell's market position, because it appeals to a user who thinks of music on disc as legacy material. Or at least it will, when that generation of products can afford high-end audio.

Krell's iPod dock got me thinking about what tomorrow's high-end audio will be like. What will audiophiles be playing ten years from now, and what will they be playing it on? The results, when you think this through, are depressing.

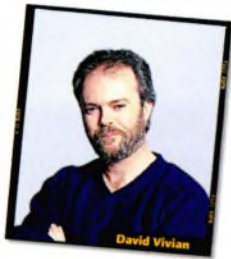
Yes, there will still be people collecting discs, probably even LPs. But, by and large, the collectors will be an aging community, because those who will be turning 30 in 2017 aren't coming from a generation that collects things.

I suspect that even the idea of even retaining a collection of music on your own computer or storage device may seem antiquated a decade from now. As such, the source component for future audiophiles will be a music-on-demand client, connected permanently to huge servers on the internet. There are already models for this, such as Rhapsody in the US. You won't keep any music, you'll simply call songs up and rent the track for as long as it takes to play.

The change in source need not necessitate a change in amp tech, but it's changing anyway. The ICE power amp technology demonstrates this; the latest products from Bel Canto, NuForce and Flying Mole all use this high-speed, and very green, switching amp design (or something very similar) to great effect. Energy efficient designs are going to be a lot easier to sell.

As to speakers, who knows? The market changes rapidly and speakers are most subject to change from innovations in materials science. I suspect the on-wall speaker will become even more significant than it is today.

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



The magic number

Whether watts or horsepower, it's 500

There seems to be a growing correlation, in the rarefied air of the automotive and audio high-end, between horsepower and watts per channel. And what crops up time and again is 500. To build a big-league car, 500bhp is the price of entry these days. Likewise, serious kick-ass amps seem to need 500 watts a side to strut their stuff.

Coincidence? Probably. But still intriguing. Both sides will tell you it boils down to much the same thing: effortless grunt, and always having something in reserve. And that's undoubtedly true. With excessive power comes excessive fun.

And with cars, in my experience at least, the drug is acceleration. As a road tester for a car magazine during the 1980s, the notion of 'extreme acceleration' carried the most kudos.

In 1985, I was spat from 0-60mph in 2.5sec by John Welch's 550bhp, Zakspeed-engined, X-trac rallycross Escort. It was the suddenness of the acceleration – 8000 revs, all four wheels spinning, 0-30mph in 0.9sec – that made me forget to breathe. For a few seconds we were accelerating at over a G; it was a relentlessly violent and unsettling sensation, but fun too. After four runs I started to feel strange and let someone else sit next to Welch, but the physical memory of the event stays with me to this day. Once the shock had worn off, I wanted to do it again and again.

With amps, I suppose the equivalent thrill is dynamic realism: the capacity, in a couple of heartbeats, to hit a thunderous peak without distortion or compression and then capture the quietest moment. The visceral impact of controlled deep bass that can only be generated by monster amps with massive power bandwidth capabilities isn't so different to the working over your internal organs receive at the hands of an 8-litre V10.

The amp I listen to most? Musical Fidelity's kW500. That's the other thing. When you're hooked on power, it's hard to go back.

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

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

ROKSAN
HOTCAKES



From its inception, Roksan was always one of the more serious-minded sources of hi-fi equipment.

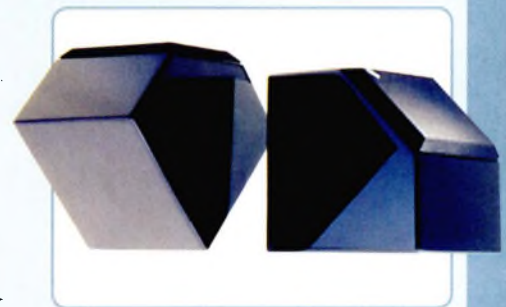
Their first project was a direct competitor to the revered Linn Sondek LP12, the Xerxes, which was followed by an even more serious turntable, the TMS, then the Artaxerxes arm, the Attesa CD player, and some truly serious speakers such as the Darius. Very rarely has Roksan let its corporate hair down, though it has done so with the excellent (and nearly affordable) Radius turntable and matching Nema unipivot arm not so long ago.

But that isn't today's story, not least because these remain current models and serious products in every meaningful sense. However, there was one truly frivolous product that did come from Roksan – the oddly named Hotcakes speaker, which was introduced in 1989, flourished for a few short years, and is now discontinued. It has no current successor, but it nevertheless left its mark, anticipating some important products from competing producers, such as Bose.

Why Hotcakes? Well if memory serves me right, the expectation was that it would sell in quantities suggested by its product name. It was also one of the most affordable products ever to wear a Roksan badge, with the obvious exception of the Corus moving magnet cartridge, though recorded history no longer tells what that cost was. £150 a pair, anyone?

Roksan's own literature records that the Hotcakes were versatile, and designed to be used anywhere in the home. The unusual enclosure, with its 45-degree inclined baffle, was intended to allow the speaker to be used in any available nook or cranny, particularly on shelves or in room corners. Somewhat fancifully, it was even suggested that the Hotcakes could be used as the main speaker in a Xerxes-based system, or extension speakers in a system including Darius loudspeakers. The Hotcakes used a single driver, with a nominal 100mm diameter. There was no tweeter, the bass was loaded by the tiny sealed enclosure, which measured 19x19x14cm, and it was finished in a striking and undeniably high-quality black-gloss-lacquered MDF box.

I don't know for sure that anyone ever used

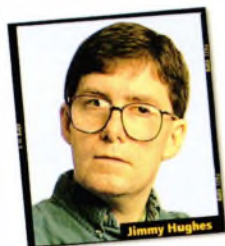


“Almost everyone who heard them fell for them, and quite a lot ended up buying a pair.”

the Hotcakes in Roksan's rather ambitious system context. It was marketed however at the start of the home cinema boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and fulfilled the kind of role that Bose was later able to plug with their miniature singing matchboxes. The Hotcakes may not have given Bose many sleepless nights, as it lacked output in the treble, and also at the low frequency end of the range. But the single speaker design's essential simplicity, and lack of a crossover meant that although somewhat coloured and raw, it had a certain integrity that enabled it to perform in systems that should have required larger and more ambitious speakers. The driver was a SEAS unit with a foam surround and a paper cone, and I believe it had a whizzer cone which extended the response to around 20kHz, although such a large cone radiating area, and the discontinuity at the edge of the whizzer cone, meant the range above 6kHz was uneven and more than a little axially dependent.

It was a wide dispersion speaker, though not omnidirectional as has been suggested, and it worked hand in glove with corner positioning. Almost everyone who heard them fell for them, and quite a lot ended up buying a pair, perhaps as rear effects speakers, and extension speakers for use with a quality host system in a nearby kitchen, bedroom or office. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



Comparisons...

Recordings can vary as much as hi-fi gear

For those of us with too much time on our hands and more money than sense, making comparisons was, is, and perhaps always will be, hi-fi's most interesting activity. It's a broad church – from comparisons of complete systems, and individual components, to go-faster tweaks and accessories. But most interesting of all is comparing different issues of the same recording.

A real enthusiast has more than one copy of the same album – the standard issue when the disc was first released, and the subsequent improved, remixed, restored and re-mastered audiophile version. If you buy additional copies because the cover was perhaps changed, have a couple of extra brownie points – for being a deeply sad git. I should know...

All good clean fun. But, is it my imagination, or are the record companies cutting back on this sort of thing? In classical music, CD reissues (especially those taken from analogue tape

“Who’s interested in hearing music in 24-bit/96kHz resolution when you can hear it hung, drawn and quartered on your iPod?”

sources) were nearly always meticulously remastered. Often, the litany of equipment and engineers involved in the reissue seemed to be greater in number than those involved with making the original recording.

The record companies' aim was simple. They promised you better sound in order to get you to buy again what you already had. How many of us have two or three copies of Miles Davis' classic album *Kind of Blue*? I must have it on LP three or four times, and on CD at least twice. When the liner notes tell you that a previously unknown version of the master tape has been found, who can resist? I certainly can't...

Being a sucker for that sort of thing, I've bought stacks of albums I already had because the original tapes had been lovingly remastered by Vestal Virgins. But, does the promise of better sound still shifts units? If not, what's the point of taking so much trouble? Perhaps as a result, quite a few recent reissues are exactly the same as the originals. Technological advances made in the last 20 years are not being exploited.

Contrast this with the wacky world of DVD. A friend was moaning the other day about how many DVDs he'd bought at top-price and never opened. A year or two down the line they're now on sale for half or even a quarter

of what he originally paid. He was angry with himself for having spent well over the odds for something he'd never actually watched and could now buy much cheaper.

Yet in the next breath, he started to say how the advent of Blu-ray and HD DVD meant he now had to buy everything all over again! Never mind that he hadn't made time to view what he already had. Never mind that he wasn't the least bit dissatisfied with the results he was getting from ordinary DVD – the siren call of the new beckoned. Everything needed replacing again. Attaboy!

Alas, hi-fi seems to have gone beyond all that. In days of yore we upgraded relentlessly – mono to stereo, analogue to digital, and LP to CD. With each breakthrough, new recordings were needed to exploit advances in technology. Then, suddenly, all that stopped. We started going backwards. Worse became the new better. I mean, who's interested in hearing music in multichannel SACD and 24-bit/96kHz resolution when you can hear it compressed, and hung, drawn and quartered on your iPod? No comparison – right?

Jimmy Hughes is one of the country's best-known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of tweaking and his record collection know no bounds



The real world

Why does hi-fi not bother with real music?

Writing *Hi-Fi Choice's* interviews with industry figures is not nearly as intimidating a task as being, say, a war correspondent, but there are times when it can feel almost as threatening – usually at the point when the interviewee invites you to have a listen to their system...

That's where things can start to get a little sticky, because what I enjoy and look for in a hi-fi, isn't always the same as the person who is proudly playing it. To satisfy me, and before it does anything else, a system must play music. Now that sounds a fairly obvious statement but, as I've discovered over the years, different people can have very different interpretations of what playing music entails.

Stereo imagery is a prime example of this: I regard it as something that is all well and good as a bonus, but I don't consider it a vital constituent of a musical performance. Fundamental elements such as tunes and timing are far more of a concern to me than the minutiae of where the musicians are placed on the imaginary sound stage.

It's rewarding, then, when I get to meet an interviewee who thinks along the same lines and plays me a system that pushes all the right buttons. This happened most recently when I visited Russ Andrews, who is probably Britain's foremost supplier of hi-fi accessories. Despite owning a truly phenomenal collection of quality hi-fi equipment, which includes four pairs of Quad electrostatics – two pairs of 57s and two pairs of 63s, along with more electronics than most stores have in their stock room – Russ' system is virtually entirely home-brewed: and those components that he didn't make himself, he has modified and tweaked extensively. That was sufficient to set the alarm bells ringing – unnecessarily, as I was subsequently pleased to discover.

The goal of his endeavours, he told me, has always been to get closer to the music rather than the hi-fi attributes. And that proved true – even of his copiously modified AV system, which did the near impossible and kept me rooted to my subwoofer-enhanced seat until the not-so-early-hours of the following morning as we listened to hard-disk recordings of *Later with Jools Holland* and DVDs by



Years before he created the comics that would be filmed as *V For Vendetta* and *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*,

Alan Moore wrote about rock for *Sounds* music weekly. After watching the 1972 incarnation of counter-culture doyens Hawkwind, he would marvel, "Joss sticks were passed out... Hepatitis sufferers in greatcoats were passed out. The day-glo Hawkwind insignia blazed in the ultra-violet light, bouncing semaphore flashes off the retina. Christ, I had one hell of a time..."

The live experience he was describing was the *Space Ritual*, an ambitious, multimedia conceptual "space opera" that, over 28 dates, depicted the dreams of sleeping astronauts via speeding, diesel-driven trance rock. As well as a seven-piece band, the show boasted a four-man lighting crew, stage banners painted by design visionary Barney Bubbles, heavy strobes and three exotic female dancers.

It matters not that the memories exist only in the ruined psyches of hippy veterans; the music, which must have absorbed some of the sensory overload of its surroundings when it was recorded live at Liverpool Stadium and Brixton Sundown in December 1972, will do just as well.

Far from the hippy zenith of 1967, here were west London freaks dreaming and medicating themselves into the outer reaches of space and time, more attuned to the coming of punk than the prog norms of its own day. Over four sides (on the original vinyl) and an hour and a half of music, strange visions emerged through fogs of primitive synthesizer and feedback, coalescing into firestorms of repetitive drumming, the relentless basslines of Lemmy (yes, that one), acid guitar, electronic improvisations and Nik Turner's free jazz sax. The results, songs like *Born To Go* and *Time We Left This World Today*, are a grimy British variant on the Krautrock that was still convulsing Germany.

Lyrical concerns are never less than far-out. When the ultra-pummelling *Master Of The Universe* proclaims, "The wind of time is blowing through me," you can almost see The Master from *Doctor Who* grinning as he plots cosmic doom.



"Space Ritual depicted the dreams of sleeping astronauts via speeding, diesel-driven trance rock."

"We were pretty much playing psychedelic music, and at that time there was a lot of people taking LSD," chief Hawk Dave Brock would later say. "There was a big rave culture at the time. We also had a good light show, with a lot of strobes at really dangerous levels, and we utilised a lot of different sound frequencies. Therefore a lot of people would be falling over, or if they were drunk, they used to be sick!"

It's not all spewing and collapsing though. There are several spoken word interludes by vocalist Robert Calvert to make acid-fried onlookers panic more subtly. Calvert's actorly recitation of *The Black Corridor* by author Michael Moorcock declares, "Space is a remorseless, senseless, impersonal fact!", while the haunting *Ten Seconds Of Forever* harks back to life on faraway earth.

With regular changes of line-up, Hawkwind survive to this day. Over the years, the band have acquired some interesting celebrity admirers, including John Lydon, Jarvis Cocker, and the Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra. It's a safe bet that all of these would cite *Space Ritual* as where everything this unique group were about combined into a single, glorious trip into infinity.

Space Ritual Collector's Edition – two remastered, expanded CDs and an audio DVD (DTS 96/24, Dolby Digital surround sound, 24-bit stereo), is out now on EMI **HFC**

Ian Harrison

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

HAWKWIND
SPACE RITUAL

■ Roy Orbison and Bruce Springsteen.

And therein lays a crucial point. Not once during the entire evening did he subject me to the usual tedious suspects in terms of demo material. We started by listening to Bob Marley and then moved on through Chet Baker, Van Morrison, Ali Farka Toure and a myriad of other artists until we wound up with Frank Zappa. Not one of the usual 'audiophile pressing' candidates. I never once had to grimace politely through a Dire Straits album, or think about dental surgery to cheer me up while Phil Collins played.

There's a lesson for all of us here. If your hi-fi only sounds good playing a few selected audiophile recordings, it's probably time to replace it with one that truly plays music. Can you honestly enjoy a system that's dictatorial about what you're allowed to listen to? I know that I never could.

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



Anorakopedia

Jon is down with all the latest audio terms

With new and revised words entering the English language all the time as well as appearing in dictionaries ('ming' and 'minger', for example, made it into the Oxford English dictionary way back in 2002), I thought it was time to look at some of the revised meanings of terms we see used in hi-fi specifications.

TIM: some people would have you believe that this is still an acronym for Transient Intermodulation Distortion. Although TIM does not appear in the manufacturer's specs for all hi-fi equipment of pedigree, this is only because he's extremely busy, glued to the screen of his spectrum analyser, slaving away over one hot amp after another. He does, however, emerge from his sealed laboratory whenever there's a hi-fi show. He resembles Bamber Gascoigne – as he might have looked if he'd served 20 years in Alcatraz for unpaid parking tickets, sitting in solitary confinement, deprived of Beaujolais and truffles. TIM can be recognised by his tartan tank top,



“It has since become better known as Pimp My Power Output, and represents the ultimate in ‘creative’ specifications.”

pale complexion and slightly bulging eyes.

PMPO: among those at the bleeding edge of marketing lo-fi gear, PMPO is a key weapon in the arsenal of pushing new product. So wildly inaccurate and misleading were the PMPO figures of hundreds of watts attributed to PC speakers using 30p drivers loosely glued into plastic boxes the size of a Rubik's cube, the term garnered an enviable notoriety in its first incarnation (Peak Music Power Output). It has since become better known as Pimp My Power Output, and represents the ultimate in 'creative' specifications.

Wow and Flutter: as a description of speed instability, this term remains largely true to its roots. However, where once it was applied to the rotation of a turntable's platter, these days it has more of a medical feel to it. Now, it's frequently used to describe the change in the cardiac rhythm of an audiophile upon learning of the price tag attached to that turntable with a platter the size of a tractor tyre, which was lovingly machined at altitude to reduce oxidation of the metal during its shaping thanks to the lower oxygen content of the rarefied air in the workshops of an Andean industrial estate.

Cross Talk: as a measure of the signal from one channel leaking into another channel, cross talk does a great job of describing why it's almost impossible to work out how the demo model at a hi-fi show actually sounds. Especially true if you're trying to listen to a recording of a lute recital next door to an AV demo running *Independence Day* at 500dB.

Impulse Response: classically used in a number of areas of hi-fi design, such as that of loudspeaker cones, where it aided the creation of stiffer, lighter cones. Hi-fi widows are all too familiar with the impulse response – make the mistake of walking past a dealer's window with an audio anorak, and his IR will consist of a couple of seconds of rubber-necking followed by 20 minutes inside yacking to a salesman about the choice of materials in the jackets of digital interconnects.

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



Powered by music

Musicians help drive the hi-fi business

I got a press release from Geoff Meads, the brand manager at Arcam, the other day. Nothing remarkable there: except that the release was not about some exciting new product from Arcam, but rather Geoff's own

project, *Joined at the Heart*, which is a musical based on the story of Frankenstein that he's co-written. It's showing in Cambridge from 1 to 4 August and Edinburgh from 12 to 18 August as part of the Festival Fringe. Full details are at www.joinedattheheartmusical.com

I'll try to get along: I like Geoff, I like musicals and I like Cambridge. But what this reminded me of, yet again, was how many people in this industry of ours really do love their music, and more than that, get involved in it. It's common for manufacturers to spout about their love of music and one can easily get cynical, but a large number of individuals really do have solid musical credentials. Geoff is obviously one of them – writing a musical, while holding down a full-time job, is no mean feat.

Probably the best-known audio personality and musician is Antony Michaelson of Musical Fidelity who, publicity-shy character that he isn't, has been photographed with his clarinet in various magazines and has made several recordings playing it – you even get one when on hold to his company's switchboard. But I often find out that some manufacturer, PR representative or humble employee has or had a sideline playing or singing in some context.

Why does this matter? I just find it very heartening that, in these days of private equity funds, asset stripping and all-round outsourcing, we are surrounded by so many genuine enthusiasts, who were attracted to the whole shenanigans for the best possible reason. Sure, they've had to adapt to business practice and maybe sacrifice some idealism along the way. But they were motivated by a desire to do something to further their enjoyment of music – and yours and mine. The arts are a funny thing, after all: artists create from an inner urge and to that extent it's a selfish activity, but it's also one of the most sharing aspects of humanity we can all share in and benefit from.

Indeed, the entire hi-fi business grew out of enthusiasts building equipment for themselves, then for friends who heard it, then for friends of friends... eventually for a world market. Even firms like Sony and Marantz can trace their origins back to such beginnings. Do you think the industries making toilet seats, or street lamps, or any other of the multitude of useful things in everyday life, had such an exciting and honourable birth? Yeah, right.

And that's why I am persistently optimistic for the health of hi-fi. As long as musicians and music-lovers continue to populate it, the future surely can't be too bad. So support your local live musicians, folks, and go and cheer on Geoff!

Richard Black is a professional musician, recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst. He writes about hi-fi exclusively for HFC

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

WHAT'S IN A POT?



The manufacturer of one of the amps in this month's Ultimate Group Test (p64) claims to employ a volume control that is "invisible to the signal". Is that possible? How do volume controls work, anyway?

The basic idea of a volume control is to cut the signal being fed to, or through, an amplifier so that it comes out at the right level. It's easier to do this at the input than at the output, simply because in the latter case you have to deal with big voltages and currents, hence serious wasted power – not to mention various problems with controlling loudspeakers – whereas at the input, it's really only voltage one has to think about.

With a traditional mechanical volume control, one has a circular resistive element with full signal at one end and ground at the other, and depending on where you touch that element you can 'tap off' a proportion of the signal, from full to zero. A metal wiper attached to the control shaft does that and Bob's your uncle. This is the classic attenuator.

An alternative approach, also possible with a traditional rotary control, is to vary the gain of an amplifier stage. Most such stages have gain defined by two or more resistors and if one of them is variable – using exactly the same sort of component as just described, though you only need to use one end of the 'track' and the wiper – you can change the gain as you wish, within certain limits. This has one big advantage over the conventional arrangement. With an attenuator, as you reduce the signal, you worsen the signal-to-noise ratio which is defined by the signal level you're working with and the noise at the amplifier's input. With a true gain control you reduce the amp's noise (if you've done it correctly!) as you reduce the signal. Surprisingly, perhaps, this approach is very rare in audio, probably simply because it's possible to make amp stages quiet enough that the noise problem is academic.

But plenty of modern amplifiers use an



“Mechanical and electronic controls both have their pros and cons. There's no single ideal solution.”

'electronic volume control'. There are several ways of doing this, the commonest being to use electronic switches (transistors, in fact) to switch individual resistors in and out of circuit so that the attenuation changes as required. All the transistors and resistors are integrated on a little bit of silicon in an integrated circuit and it's easily possible to have over 100 discrete steps, giving very fine resolution. If you're a purist, though, you may wince at the thought of the signal having to go through all those extra components. This is where the 'invisible to the signal' thing appeals, but it's not really possible to make a control that is not, in a very real sense, in the signal path. The amp in question uses a part that combines attenuator and gain control functions and is most certainly in the signal path.

Mechanical and electronic controls both have their pros and cons. Mechanical parts can be noisy, they're often ill-balanced at low levels (due to mechanical misalignment between the two components required for stereo) and they wear out, but tolerate overload well. Electronic parts often have limited headroom but give great channel matching and step accuracy, and in practice very low distortion. As so often, there's no single ideal solution. **HFC**

Richard Black



KRELLS ANGELS

THE EVOLUTION CHAPTER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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EVOLUTION 402



EVOLUTION 505



EVOLUTION 222

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SYSTEM FILE

Richard Franklin knows how to rock 'n' roll, even with a humble system

THE SYSTEM

Turntable: Pro-Ject Debut II
CD player: NAD C542
Tuner: Denon TU-260LI
Amplifier: Marantz PM7200
Loudspeakers: Mission M71 i
Accessories: Soundstyle table, Cable Talk/
 Cambridge Audio cables and interconnects

Richard Franklin's system is not the stuff of dreams. It's a humble system made up of decent, yet far from exotic, electronics and speakers. But it works, and works well.

He's been buying hi-fi for the past dozen years or so. Nothing too expensive at any time and each component gets years of use before being donated to friends' systems or sold on eBay, or even stored in a cupboard somewhere. It's a pragmatic system; the equipment is all kept in perfect running order, but isn't obsessively left powered-on all the time. The choice of cables is well-considered too, yet the speakers sit on very queer unbranded stands.

Most of Richard's system was bought about four years ago and has worked dutifully ever since. Well, almost... Richard admits to having a penchant for trashing cartridges, but that's more a sign of how often the record deck is played than clumsiness on his part. Because this system gets played a lot.

SKILLS

Richard's a keen guitarist in his spare time and his collection teams with plenty of guitar greats from Rory Gallagher to Jimmy Page, and many other heroes of the axe, both past and present.

It's a system that sounds well-used in all the good ways and everything clicks together like a well-drilled army parade. It's perfectly suited toward Richard's love of guitar music and there's certainly none of the bloodless 'accuracy-is-all' mindset at work here. This is a system with a beating heart that's all about entertainment.

Of course, it could be improved. I dare say Richard's tastes put him firmly in the Naim Audio camp, and the addition of some Naim components would turn a rockin' system into one that really grooves. However, that might be an expense too far. Truth be told, Richard probably gets more enjoyment out of his hi-fi than some audiophiles with mains leads that cost more than his entire system do. **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...

Russ Andrews

This month, Hi-Fi Choice talks to the audiophile archduke, the Kimber Kable King, the tweakmeister general himself... Russ Andrews. Interview: Malcolm Steward

Russ Andrews holds near legendary status in the hi-fi community. The ultimate committed tweeker, eager to extract as much performance – by any means possible, and usually without any form of compromise – from any hi-fi system, he spends much of his day at work in his R&D facility.

That building, at the rear of his farmyard home, could easily double as The National Hi-Fi Museum, containing, as it does, a truly vast and wonderful collection of components from hi-fi's early days to the present; test and pro equipment; and a similarly comprehensive library of hi-fi magazines. Setting aside my inherent (and entirely justified) loathing of public transport, I endured a five-hour train journey to the Lake District to chat with him and to hear his system. Neither experience disappointed in any way.

HFC: Let's begin with the obvious question, how did you get started in hi-fi?

RA: I first got interested when, as a schoolboy, my pal took me home to show me his dad's newly built system – a Collaro auto-changer record deck, a Mullard valve amplifier and a Wharfedale 10-inch (250mm) driver screwed to a plywood baffle leaning in the corner of the room. I heard it and thought instantly that it was the sound that I wanted. I went home and immediately started to upgrade my record player: the first thing I did was to swap the horrible rubber mat it had for a felt one. It was interesting when, years later, I first met Ivor Tiefenbrun and he told me how even the felt mat on Linn's then new Sondek LP12 was crucial to the sound. I thought: "I know. I've already been there and done that!" I became thoroughly tired of the education system, left

school and went into TV and radio servicing before joining the then huge GEC Telecommunications as a test engineer. I found I could do my quota of work in just over an hour each day and I soon got very bored of doing crosswords and trying to look as though I was working for the other seven hours. Then I met the lady who was to become my wife and she said she wouldn't marry me until I was doing a job that I enjoyed: that was an alien concept to a lad from the Midlands brought up with the idea of simply taking the job that paid the most money.

That led me to going to Edinburgh as a mature student to study chiropody. (My wife is a physiotherapist and we planned to set up a joint practice.) I had to work part-time to supplement my grant and did a host of worthless jobs before becoming a service engineer in a hi-fi shop, Audio Aids, where I worked in the evenings and at weekends. Eventually, the owner asked me to go into partnership with him. That, and another partnership, subsequently led to me setting up my own retail business, Russ Andrews Hi Fidelity, which carried on, even after I sold my shares in it, right up until last year.

Ultimately, though, I tired of retail. I found it very frustrating that manufacturers weren't interested in my suggestions as to how they could improve their products. I can't think why [Laughs uproariously]. I saw the job of the retailer as being someone who put together systems that played music rather than just selling a collection of five-star products. I think it's a measure of my success in taking that approach that many of my customers today were initially customers of the shops I worked in all those years ago.

HFC: When did you leave retail and start Russ Andrews Turntable Accessories?

RA: That was in the 1980s when I moved here, to Cumbria, and we took over the distribution of Grace and Supex from Linn. That became too constricting a title, so we abandoned the

"I found it frustrating that manufacturers weren't interested in my suggestions as to how they could improve their products."



Russ Andrews in his hi-fi grotto, his audio elves hard at work

'turntable' part of the name. Now we're simply 'Russ Andrews', because it helps to be that bit more general.

HFC: Can we discuss the Russ Andrews' approach to accessories?

RA: It's not so much an approach to accessories as an approach to enjoying music from a hi-fi system. Going back to my days in retail, I thought then that the dealer's task was to put together systems, balancing the strengths and weaknesses of the components so that they worked together and produced a coherent musical result. I'm not so sure that all retailers do that nowadays. And going back to the late 1970s when I, quite by accident, discovered cable directionality and I read about the influence capacitors had on sound, it switched on a light bulb about a whole new area of system improvement that hadn't been thought of before. I found that by getting cables running in the right direction, I could make improvements to a system that I hadn't been able to make any other way... because the sound of a cable running in the wrong direction has quite a distinctive 'footprint'. It changes the music in ways that are unmistakable and consistent. That led me to look for other ways to improve the system I had. As I worked on getting more music out of that system I discovered that the improvements weren't specific to that particular system: they worked on all systems.

HFC: Surely it's easy to get led down the wrong path by using your own system to develop generic fixes?

RA: It is, and I have. At one stage I found that a slab of slate under my turntable improved its sound so I had some made and began selling them. I then discovered that I hadn't come up with a general solution but one that was particular to my system: I had a fault in my tone-arm and when I fixed that the problem went away and the slab sounded worse. But that experience led me to Torlyte: it caused me to investigate why adding mass under the turntable made it sound worse. So there was a positive outcome from that embarrassing mistake! It taught me, though, to make sure that what I sell and recommend are truly generic solutions that work with anything.

In the early 1980s, while in America, I was introduced to mains spike filtering, which I'd not heard before. That led me into looking at the mains supply far more, even though I'd been aware of the importance of the mains since the mid-1970s. Hi-fi would sound different on different days and at different times of the day: and everybody said that it was down to "the way that you felt." I ▶





“I understand my customers’ problems because I’m a customer myself. I’m also an enthusiast and I’m driven by musicality.”

I didn't know what the cause was, but I was sure it wasn't psychological. And then, while repairing an amplifier, I noticed that slight variations in the mains input voltage resulted in dramatic variations in the amplifier's output power and an increase in its distortion. So I measured my domestic mains and found that it swung between 250V and 209V, and, no surprise, the lower the voltage the worse the system sounded. It always seemed best late at night when the voltage was highest and when the Electricity Board was bringing the frequency back into line to catch up with its legal obligations over each 24-hour period. Over the years, I found many problematic mains effects that I've been able to cure with filters and devices, better mains cables and suchlike, but we're still at the mercy of the Electricity Board. I can't, for example, deal with DC on the mains but I think I've sorted out pretty much everything else.

HFC: Is DC on the mains still much of a problem?

RA: Yes. In fact we have even more to deal with these days with things like microwave ovens and hairdriers with their cheap half-wave rectifiers. People say this doesn't matter because their hi-fi is isolated by its mains transformers, but DC can effectively pass through a transformer because it causes the magnetic field to collapse. The only way round

that problem, as far as I can see, is to regenerate the mains. There are such devices that will work with low-demand equipment but it's hard to build one that will supply the requirements of even a modest power amplifier.

HFC: Can we discuss the way in which your 'accessories' are driven by the search for a more musical performance rather than a more 'hi-fi' performance?

RA: I have to credit Ivor Tiefenbrun for switching me on to the concepts of rhythm and timing. I'd heard them and recognised them long before I ever put a name to them. I knew what was good and what wasn't but I didn't fully know why, and I knew what I preferred but I couldn't describe it. Ivor then described it as 'rhythm and timing' and I thought "Of course it is. Why didn't I think of that?" That was a great moment because I then had a name for this phenomenon and a concept that I could follow. I found that if I listened to performances I'd prefer the one with the better rhythm and timing. The music was consistently

better. If you put a system together with equipment that did rhythm and timing well, that system always sounded better. And if you used cables that also handled rhythm and timing well, it became a virtuous circle. If you do the right things in the right order, then you hear more and more.

HFC: What exactly is the right order?

RA: Doing things in the correct order, I think, is important because you end up getting better value for money with every penny you spend. I've just demonstrated a system to you where I upgraded the mains cables, then the interconnects, and finally added Oak support cones under the equipment. Lots of people would say that the Oak cones were the most noticeable improvement but that's only because I demonstrated them after doing all the other upgrades, which solved the bigger problems first. If I'd demonstrated the cones first, you wouldn't have noticed the large improvement, because the bigger problems with the system would not have been solved. One has to solve the bigger problems first because that gives you the best payback. That gives you a bigger 'magnifying glass' on the small problems, which then appear bigger. When you then solve those problems you get the same big payback and another big step forward in system performance. And so it goes on... I don't see any end to it. As I find more

and more problems to solve, that magnification factor gets bigger and bigger. And the pleasure gets bigger, too, because the music keeps getting better with it.

HFC: We spent a long while listening to your system last night and I must say that I didn't hear too many problems with it. How do you come across them – do your customers tell you about them?

RA: Mostly, I'm dealing with them for myself. I understand my customers' problems because I'm a customer myself. I'm also an enthusiast and I'm driven by musicality – the rhythm and timing – and by trying to improve the way a system reproduces those elements, you can't go wrong. I want my system to deliver more and more music, so, effectively, that system is my test bed.

I have worked at design level with components themselves, right down to building cartridges with Goldring, and that has enabled me to detect more differences. I also designed the ARC loudspeakers. When you're listening for rhythm and timing at every level, it guides you along the right path and forces you make the right choices. So that is how I ended up with my own electronics and the loudspeakers that you heard last night, because I'm interested in getting more music out of every component in the chain.

When you start selling things to people and then listening to what those customers say you find that they're experiencing problems that I haven't come across. That makes you wonder how you can solve that problem, and ultimately that solution leads to a better product or advice that you can pass on to others. Gradually, with more feedback from customers, I've found that I've been solving more and more problems.

HFC: Do you find that you have to do a certain amount of re-education with customers who perhaps haven't yet latched on to the concepts of rhythm and timing?

RA: I try not to do it that way. I prefer to ignore all the hi-fi talk because it doesn't get anyone anywhere. We're not trying to 'sweeten people's treble' or get rid of their 'flabby bass', for instance.

If you do the right things to improve the system, the treble, bass and 'hi-fi' problems will automatically sort themselves out.

On that note, I ended what I felt had been an enlightening interview, in which I'd encountered a true hi-fi enthusiast who, for once, wasn't hung up on what I believe to be irrelevant considerations but who recognised that it's the music that matters. His approach may be very different to mine, but the results were strangely, strikingly similar. How wonderfully refreshing. **HFC**

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The Soavo 2 typifies this return to form. It's a two-way standmount loudspeaker with non-parallel sides to break up any internal standing waves. The speaker features an exotic 160mm bass driver featuring a talc-loaded mica substrate, sitting in a spider designed by audio expert Kurt Müller. We were so impressed with the speaker when we tested it in *HFC 295* that we immediately submitted it for an *Ultimate Group Test* in the very next issue. Both times it achieved a Best Buy rating and both times it was praised for its beautiful sense of balance and expressive sound. And now, you can get in with the Yamaha action, too. For your chance to win a pair, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.



CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winner, Mr K Kyriacou of Harrow, Middlesex, who wins a stunning NAD T585 universal disc player worth £800!



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: **Yamaha Competition, 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 part of the Soavo 2 did Kurt Müller design?

- A: The Cricket
- B: The Aphid
- C: The Spider

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The closing date for entries is 22 August 2007. No purchase necessary. Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and Yamaha Electronics (UK) Ltd, 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 system accessories such as mains filters, tables and cables?

Would you ever buy a valve amplifier?

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

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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

SIMON & GARFUNKEL

The Graduate OST

Columbia/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl



Music: Many of the tunes on *The Graduate* soundtrack were written by Dave Grusin specifically for Mike Nichols' film, but the songs you remember;

Scarborough Fair/Canticle, *Sounds of Silence* and *Mrs Robinson* were taken from Simon and Garfunkel albums already, or simultaneously released. *Mrs Robinson* crops up twice in bite-size fragments – neither is longer than 1'15" though. The Grusin tracks make a dramatic contrast, being big-band extravaganzas that imitate the music of the 1950s to good effect. Don't buy this for the S&G originals, get it for the weird edits and lounge music. ★★★
Sound: About average for its vintage, the big-band material is pretty plush but not slick while the folk tunes show their age a little. Label Speakers Corner has done an excellent job. ★★★ JK

BOOKER LITTLE

Candid/Pure Pleasure

180g vinyl



Music: Trumpeter Booker Little's four-album career was cut short by his death in the same year that this recording was made. He played on John Coltrane's

Africa/Brass and alongside Max Roach and Eric Dolphy during the late 1950s. Despite his short career, Little managed to establish his own sound, one that marked the transition between bop and the freer world expanded upon by Coltrane and Miles Davis in the 1960s. He placed an emphasis on emotion rather than technique, but was highly skilled as these seven tracks show. He's joined here by drummer Roach and 'free' saxophonist Eric Dolphy among others and reveals just why his loss was so tragic. ★★★
Sound: Candid's engineer Bob d'Orleans creates a consistently tight and revealing sound with good use of stereo that has been painstakingly re-mastered by Graeme Durham for Pure Pleasure. ★★★ JK

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

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



VARIOUS

Real Life, Permanent Dreams

Castle CD

Music: To celebrate 40 years since the first Summer of Love, nostalgia vampires Castle have put together this mammoth, four CD, 99-track 'freak-beat' compilation. It actually covers much of the period between late 1965 and early 1969, but manages to do so without resorting to the obvious. Thus the Kinks, Small Faces, Julie Driscoll and Marc Bolan are all here, although not doing their usual Top 20 hits, while relative unknowns like The Fleur-De-Lys, Floribunda Rose and The Frame get a rare chance to strut their mod-goes-regency stuff. The ideal set for anyone interested in the roots of psychedelia, prog rock or Britpop. ★★★★★
Sound: Most of these cuts haven't sounded so good in decades – a loving audio restoration. ★★★★★ PS



THE THRILLS

Teenager

Virgin

Music: After selling a million copies of their first two California-recorded albums, the Dublin five-piece deliberately chose the scuzziest part of Vancouver to make their third. But there's little sound of their muse taking on a darker hue, since they've gone and made another album of joyously catchy and direct soft-rock that makes you feel good. Life's just grand in their sunlit pop-heaven as all but one of the dozen songs clock in jauntily at well under four minutes. Sure, it's undemanding and not particularly ambitious, but that's exactly why they've sold so many records. ★★★★★
Sound: The keyboard-dominated *Nothing Changes Round Here* sounds like their bid for the Coldplay vote, but elsewhere, it's the jangling mandolins and ringing guitars that define their appeal. ★★★ NW



K'NAAN

The Dusty Foot On The Road

Wrasse

Music: The Somalian rapper has a tale to tell of guns and gangs while growing up on Mogadishu's war-torn streets that, as he observes on *What's Hardcore*, makes "Fifty Cent look like Limp Bizkit". Most of these tracks appeared on his studio debut, *The Dusty Foot Philosopher*, but when played live the charismatic blend of thought-provoking rhymes, hip-hop routines and African rhythms is more compelling than ever. There's no posturing and nothing bombastic about K'naan's hip-hop; this is the all-too-rare sound of a rapper with dignity. ★★★★★
Sound: Authentically live with a real band rather than DJs, they've eschewed cleaning up the tapes in the studio to place the emphasis on the symbiotic energy generated between performer and audience. ★★ NW



AMIINA

Kuur

Ever Records

Music: This all-woman instrumental four-piece from Iceland originally started out as a classically trained string quartet, but soon expanded their repertoire to incorporate pretty much anything that came to hand, whether it be guitars and keyboards, or harp, harmonium, wine glasses, celeste, saw and computer. The result isn't a million miles away from moody fellow countrymen Sigur Ros (as well it might be, since they tour as their string section), but less strident, more contemplative and subtle, with an ever-present sense of wide-eyed wonder, tinged with just a smidgeon of melancholy. ★★★★★
Sound: Any good ambient record should have a sense of space, and this one has loads. Despite the surfeit of instruments mentioned on the sleeve notes, none appears to be overused and the results are like a barely glimpsed dreamscape gently intruding on your consciousness. ★★★★★ DO



DAVID AXELROD/ ELECTRIC PRUNES

The Warner/ Reprise Sessions

Warner/Rhino

Music: After years of dodgy re-issues the final phase in psychedelic also-rans The Electric Prunes story is given the Rolls-Royce treatment. The *Mass In F Minor*, composed and produced by David Axelrod, is a bizarre folly that still reeks of incense, though *Kyrie Eleison* (used in the *Easy Rider* acid sequence) is the last truly original Prunes' song here. *Release Of An Oath* (1968) was actually the work of Axelrod and session musicians and *Pride* (1970) rounds up his other Warner productions. All three albums are on Disc 1, while Disc 2 comes laden with rare out-takes. ★★★★★
Sound: This CD set's overall brightness favours the later recordings rather than the classic *Mass*, which still sounds better on vinyl. ★★★ MP



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Laid-back, dubbed-out speaker shaker"

BURNT FRIEDMAN & JAKI LIEBEZEIT Secret Rhythms Nonplace

Music: Germany's don of the electronica/dub reggae crossover has produced a number of albums with different musicians and on *Secret Rhythms* he joins forces with Jaki Liebezeit, drummer with Krautrock pioneers Can. Liebezeit specialises in hypnotic, laid-back beats that are joined here by Friedman's structurally challenging bass, Josef Suchy's guitar and Morten Cronvad's vibes. They make a chilled-out, but dynamic sound that slowly twists and turns with the

power of the waves, assisted by the sparkle of sunlight provided by guitar and vibes. One to get to know the neighbours with... ★★★★★

Sound: Jamaican dub never sounded this good unless you were under the influence of heavy narcotics. But here the heaviness is in the sound's girth that warrants as much power as you can throw at it. That and a some substantial loudspeakers. ★★★★★ JK



RICHARD HAWLEY

Lady's Bridge

Mute

Music: "Call the police, Richard Hawley's been robbed," quipped Arctic Monkeys singer Alex Turner big-heartedly when the group won this year's Best Album category at the Brit Awards. Similar accusations could be levelled if the

former Pulp sideman's second album doesn't receive its due. It's more of the same really, but what a glorious same that is – gorgeous melodies describing the kind of hurt that makes you imagine that unrequited love is just brilliant, all set in a Leeds that seems both very real, and also a product of Hawley's nostalgic imagination. ★★★★★

Sound: There's a bit more of the Roy-Orbison-style crooners than the Scott Walker epics this time round, but the sound is lush and warm, as befits an album that invites you to wallow in its bitter-sweet charms. ★★★★★ DO



BENJAMIN BRITTEN

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Richard Hickox (cond), City of

category London Sinfonia

Virgin Classics 0946 3 81832 2 8

Music: Of all Britten's operas, this is arguably the least intimidating, and a sheer delight from the opening spine-tingling glissandi. The recording is sensuous, and the excellent engineering lays plain the simplicity and transparency of the production. The libretto is in English, and the notes include a full synopsis, so there is really no excuse not to follow what's going on. ★★★★★

Sound: This excellent recording was produced by Andrew Keener in Abbey Road's celebrated Studio 1. If extra help is needed, the unusually fine use of stereo, and the expensive tempi chosen by Hickox, help lay things out in explicit fashion, even though it is not a multichannel recording. ★★★★★ AG



MARTHA ARGERICH AND FRIENDS

Live From The Lugano

Festival 2006

EMI 0946 3 89241 2 8

Music: The latest compilation from the Lugano Festival covers a wide range of material, from Schumann's *Piano Trio Op63* and *Quartet Op47* to Gulda's extrovert *Cello Concerto*. As usual with pianist Argerich, there is nothing superficial or routine about her performances. Debussy's *Fêtes* for example is breathtaking and makes other performances sound pedestrian, such is the intelligence and sure-footed skill that Argerich brings to the task. ★★★★★

Sound: Unobtrusively natural and transparent engineering makes the whole set very easy on the ears. A *tour de force*, and for piano lovers, not to be missed. ★★★★★ AG

SACD

HELGE SUNDE NORSKE STORE ORKESTER

Denada

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

ACT

Music: This Norwegian composer and multi-instrumentalist revitalises the big-band sound in a highly distinctive fashion. Sunde plays trombone, trumpet, tuba and French horn alongside 11 compatriots on brass, piano, double bass and clarinet and while the sound they make varies a lot it's intrinsically energetic and manages to sound musical without venturing into overly familiar ground. Duke Ellington it's not, but it has plenty of originality and if not swing then definitely groove. Sunde pushes his instruments in directions that few others have done on record and makes music that is impressive and thoroughly enjoyable. ★★★★★

Sound: The music would not be as gripping were it not for a good recording, but there's still a lot going on and some superb textures and subtleties alongside the solid energy. ★★★★★ JK



RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: On Wenlock Edge etc

James Gilchrist (tenor), Fitzwilliam String Quartet

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Linn Records CKD296

Music: Here are some eclectic settings of English poetry from AE Housman, Yeats and Cecil Day Lewis. The disc is accompanied by extensive notes, which informs us that "Houseman was not keen on having his poetry set to music after he heard *Lake Isle Of Innisfree* – a poem voicing a solitary man's desire for greater solitude – sung by a thousand Boy Scouts", and that Vaughan Williams had an altercation with Housman, after he cut two verses from *A Shropshire Lad*. RVW was unrepentant, noting that "a poet should be grateful to anyone who fails to perpetuate such lines as *'The goal stands up, the keeper/stands up to keep the goal'*". Unanswerable... ★★★★★

Sound: These are winning, measured performances, with sensitively phrased accompaniments from the Fitzwilliam String Quartet and soloists. The disc is served by excellent engineering in both stereo and multichannel mixes. Like other Linn issues, it can be downloaded at up to CD quality. ★★★★★ AG



PIXIES

Surfer Rosa

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab

Music: Indie revitalises the Pixies' breakthrough album from 1988 may not seem like an obvious contender for the SACD treatment, but it's a welcome addition to the canon nonetheless. The roaring guitars, thunderous basslines and pounding drums were already a path well trodden by this time, but the harmonic possibilities of black Francis and Kim Deal's vocals (his rough and shrieking, hers sweet and oddly vulnerable), along with an unusually adept melodic sense (not to mention crazed lyrics about pop culture, superheroes and outside male appendages) put them right at the top of the indie guitar tree, eclipsed only by Nirvana's uncompromising new grunge wave. ★★★★★

Sound: Always something of a murky record, MFSL's hi-res approach deftly manages the trick of bringing out the detail in the trees without losing the overall effect of the wood. ★★★★★ DO



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Gold Award, HiFi Choice, October 2005



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



VALVE POWER

I recently purchased a Musical Fidelity X-T100 amp, which I am very, very happy with. But, being a curious type of guy, I can't help wonder what trying a few different types of valve might do to the sound, or even if its possible to deviate from the type fitted in the amp. The valves are 6922 types, of which there seems to be many brands that range in cost from about £8 up to £100 or so. What are your thoughts on the matter?

While I am at the keyboard, any chance you may, in the future, do a proper group test – or even a special edition – devoted to mains supply conditioners, filters etc. These things are not cheap and it would be nice if some

wonderful mag were to take up the challenge and give us all the truth, about how much of a difference they make to budget, mid and high-end gear in various UK locations.

Matt Lynch Edinburgh

HFC The 6922 valve can be replaced with other 6922 valves, as well as those marked 6DJ8 or ECC88. All three designs are essentially identical and interchangeable, but we don't advise any other substitutions without reworking the circuit. Even those with the same nine-pin valve seat can make very different demands on the amplifier. If you were lucky, you might only blow up the amplifier. And, when it comes to which

valves sound best, opinions vary, but most think that while the quality of new valves just keeps on improving, old valves have the edge, even though their prices can be hyper-inflated by the collector market.

Sadly, though the likelihood of an *Ultimate Group*

Test or a special edition devoted to mains products is at best remote. Although there is strong demand for tests of such products


“I can't help wonder what trying a few different types of valve might do...”

from a sub-set of hi-fi enthusiasts, mains conditioners and their ilk are fundamentally niche products. But, we never say never. Watch this space...

INFERIORITY COMPLEX

I would like to purchase a CD/SACD player. I was thinking of buying a Marantz SA7001, but considering my poor DVD player, I might instead buy a Marantz DV7600 universal player. Do you think that in terms of music, the universal player is inferior to the CD player? After all, it could be that the £200 price difference allows the extra formats with no sonic compromise...

Asher Uziel via email

HFC The quality of good universal players has improved considerably in recent years. We tested the Marantz DV7001 (the DV7600's replacement) universal player last month (*HFC 296*) and found it to be good with all formats. If you could go with 



Above:
Musical
Fidelity X-T100
amplifier

Letter of the month

GENERATION EX

If you want to ruin the sound of a hi-fi system, get a divorce. Although my wife and I have parted relatively amicably, it's strange how suddenly she developed audiophile tendencies when the hi-fi system started going back into its boxes. Worse, we were fighting over every CD that had been bought over the last five years or so. Eventually, our son came up with the perfect solution... he got both of us an iPod filled with the same CD collection, and I feel like I've joined the younger generation.

Thomas Rockwell via email

HFC Smart kid! That sounds like a perfect solution, certainly better than the Solomon-esque conclusion reached by many estranged families. Two iPods full of music are a lot better than hundreds of CDs broken in two. Of course, now you'll be needing two iPod docks, two pairs of decent headphones and more.

As to joining the younger generation of listeners, go for it! Although iPods and their ilk have not appeared in *Hi-Fi Choice*, as music lovers foremost, we appreciate how entertaining they can be when on the go.



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: Eastern Electric MiniMax BBA



the more modern DV7001 over the DV7600, you will get better performance.

In theory, a dedicated CD player will always outperform a universal model, by virtue of having no video signal chain to potentially undermine the audio performance. Of course, nothing's as simple as it seems and there are universal players at the sharp end of many a high-enders' luxury system. But, as you want a CD/SACD player and plan to improve your DVD player, it would seem pointless to split these components up into separate entities. A universal player is the best way to go, here.

BI-MONTHLY BIBLE

I would just like to say how much I like your magazine. It has a good mix of reviews and information. However, why do you have your *Buyer's Bible* in every month? Could this not appear every three or four months with more music, system or solo reviews instead? Yes it

would put the price up, but it would also make your magazine so much better.

Also, I was hoping that you could tell me if Mana Acoustics are still trading and if so do you have a contact number? I have been trying for months.

Craig Wyllie
via email

HFC Our *Buyer's Bible* is a popular look-up table of the products we rate as the best you can own. It acts as a

useful reference point for readers – both regular and occasional – to judge the performance of products. If it was to be published irregularly, then the occasional and new readers of the magazine would find the lack of *Buyer's Bible* galling in the extreme. From a quick peek at the comments we get our mailbag, it seems you are in a small minority; many more would like to see the *Buyer's Bible* extended every month! It really is an essential buyer's guide.

As for Mana Acoustics, although the company's website and forum are still active, the company ceased trading several years ago and – despite occasional rumours to the contrary – shows no signs of resurfacing.

TOP MARKS

Has all hi-fi really become that good in recent times? I have noticed a trend in *Hi-Fi Choice* to award products either high percentage marks or Best Buy tags with surprising regularity. Alvin Gold's review of the Eastern Electric buffer stage (*HFC* 295) has left me stumped.

“The review score was 60 per cent, which ranks as pretty good...”

The review is highly critical of the product, not only in its overall performance but questioning whether the volume control was degrading sound even further. Yet the review score was 60 per cent, which ranks as pretty good in anyone's books.

A misleading review, fear of being honest or a desire to suck up to manufacturers who submit products for review? Misleading for readers, certainly – and that is not what a reputable publication should be about.

Andy Hanson via email

HFC Yes, hi-fi standards are improving all the time. Especially at the bottom and middle ends of the market. More stringent safety legislation means there are no more products that could kill at 30 paces, but it also means properly designed products at all levels. Although the occasional lemon still gets through the process, and scores of 50 per cent and below are reserved for those rare products that should come with a health warning or melt one CD in three.

Viewed in that light, the 60 per cent score of the Minimax buffer stage seems wholly appropriate. This means we do not think it adds anything positive to a system, but as they say on the interweb, 'YMMV' – Your Mileage May Vary – and you may find it beneficial in context. And, as no one was maimed or killed in the reviewing process, it makes the cut.

Onlineforum

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



Do I go for a new player or do I dig through the vagaries of eBay and find something like a Tri-Vista, a Wadia 8 or dCS, which would normally be out of the price range...

Filterlab

...If buying new I'd go for the Opus 21.

Papa Lazarou

...New, try the Resolution Audio Opus 21 and the Leema Antila. Second-hand, Wadia 860 maybe, but 861's are still £3,500 second hand. A Mark Levinson 390 might be worth a try, too.

Duvel

...I would also give a cautious recommendation

for the Opus 21. I had one for a short while and it didn't suit my system, but it did sound nice. The McIntosh is slightly over your budget. You might also consider a Micromega Aria. It's a stonking player, but it is a top loader, so may not suit. Comes in at a shade over £2,000.

Umberto Vanni

I've recently been given a Tara Labs Spectrum 1a cable that has three conducting cores. It's for a balanced termination, but my equipment doesn't have balanced inputs. I'd really like to try this cable. Could anyone tell me how to terminate this cable with RCA plugs?

patknk939

...Tara Labs 1a uses three solid-core conductors. Use the white core as signal conductor soldered to the centre pin of the RCA connector. Then strap the blue wires together and use this as the ground/return at both ends of the cable, as solid cores have no screening.

Effem

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

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

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

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



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



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ISOL - 8

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





CAIRN FOG 3 CD PLAYER | CAIRN 4810 INTEGRATED AMP | PIEGA TC 10X LOUDSPEAKER | £9,740

The odd couple

This may look like a normal hi-fi system. However, look closer. All is not quite as it seems. And it's better than you think...

Feeling comfortable? Good. Then let's begin with a spot of word association, audiophile style. I'll start, Switzerland... hi-fi. Uncanny. All right, France... hi-fi. Hang on, I know this is *Beautiful Systems*, but what happened to Gitanes, Citröen 2CVs, Raymond Blanc and berets? Or Toblerones, ventilated cheese and cuckoo clocks come to that. Trying to build in some national flavours, here.

Let's try again. Switzerland... hi-fi, expensive, precision engineered wrist watches. Perfect, stop right there. It doesn't necessarily follow, of course, that if the Swiss were to build a high-end standmount loudspeaker, it would be expensive and exquisitely engineered. And, no, you can't wear the Piega TC 10X on your wrist. But, if you could, no one could accuse you of lacking good taste or, indeed, a willingness to pay for it. I'll explain why it costs £5,750 in a moment.

And France... hi-fi (yes), quirkiness, Gallic flair. That'll do. Quirky? Allow me to introduce a CD player called FOG 3 that looks, for the most part, perfectly run-of-the-mill and yet is anything but. And an integrated amp called 4810 (yeah, just 4810) that definitely takes the road less travelled when it comes to ergonomics and engineering. Both are manufactured by Cairn and if you haven't heard of that company, either, don't worry: Piega and Cairn are new to the UK. An odd couple? If you like, but just as a large area of Switzerland speaks French, so you get the feeling these components understand each other.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Piega came to hi-fi in 1986 with a box of fresh initiatives and materials. Its Big Idea was a new type of ribbon tweeter, called the Linear Drive Ribbon, that over

the next 14 years evolved first into a treble/midrange ribbon system and then into what Piega claimed was, "The world's first coaxial ribbon system". The practical upshot, especially in a compact two-way hybrid design like the TC 10X, is that Piega's large ribbon panel reaches down far lower than conventional ribbon tweeters, allowing much easier integration with the single dynamic driver, which can be freed to do what it does best (bass and lower mid-range). What seems particularly Swiss, however, is the hours of intricate, painstaking labour that's poured into making every ribbon. The work is so precise and exacting, it can only be carried out in a room with carefully maintained climatic conditions at Piega's factory in Horgen.

Maybe just as well, then, that most of the employees' eyes fall on a tranquil lake when they look out of the window. Both the factory and a second studio building have lakeside locations. The management believes that this is how it should be, where staff can feel at their best, where creativity is encouraged and where the view across the water has a calming effect, even when things get hectic. I think the context might be relative, here.

Piega's other USP is that it makes its speaker enclosures entirely out of either extruded or sand-cast aluminium. It's almost impossible to appreciate how good this looks and feels without cradling a TC 10X out of its carton, though this was Swiss designer Hannes Wettstein's intention – a feast for all the senses, not just the ears. Cool to the touch, the gently rounded contours of the cabinet are seamless and wonderfully tactile. In the case of the TC series, of which the 10X is the smallest member, the plan view of all the models in the range is C-shaped. The two other model ranges have trapezoidal and semi-elliptical



Cairn FOG 3 CD player
£1,995

This idiosyncratic French disc spinner quirky ergonomics, adjustable filters and a menu-driven display. Sound quality is top drawer and it's very nicely put together, too. Bags of built-in flexibility for those who want it.



Cairn 4810 integrated amp
£1,995

The "Arcam with a French accent" description is apt because it offers huge amounts of flexibility. Sonic performance will please the purists, especially the first 10 watts of the 100 available, which are pure Class A quality.



Piega TC 10X loudspeaker
£5,750

If you're looking for a baby monitor built with a master Swiss watchmaker's care, innovation and eye for detail, this is probably as close as you're going to get. Best of all, it sounds as beautiful as it looks.

"An odd couple? If you like, but just as a large area of Switzerland speaks French, so you get the feeling these components understand each other."



▣ cabinets of varying sizes and depths, the claim being that each offers individual acoustic properties and "interesting volume responses", but absolute consistency in resisting resonance and fine frequency linearity.

FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK...

Cairn, the younger of the companies by some eight years, says its aim is to build hi-fi electronics based on the best technology with a "high-end presentation" but real-world prices. Think Arcam with a French accent and attitude. And think Chord too, thanks to those top plate mesh grilles that look like the trumpets of a carburettor array. However, the circular, menu-driven displays with tiny, confusing graphics seem to belong to Cairn alone. Especially the buttons that sometimes seem to do nothing at all. If you've ever driven an old Citroën, you'll know the score. And you'll either love it or loathe it. But don't go getting the idea that any of this is fragile or flaky.

Take the FOG 3 CD player. Whatever else it may be, there's no denying that it's chunky and well made, with a 2mm thick steel chassis and 12mm thick aluminum fascia that looks as flawless as you would expect given the five different machining and surface treatments it has

received. Technically, it punches its weight at the price with an up-to-date DAC spec, Class A analogue stages, filtering regimes designed to minimise phase distortion and low noise circuitry.

And few rivals offer the same level of versatility. Beyond being a simple CD player, the FOG 3 can perform as a DAC and digital preamp as well, with switchable digital inputs and adjustable digital filters. Features can be configured to personal taste, even to the extent of having function keys that are defined by the user. Firmware updates can be downloaded from the Cairn website.

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

The 4810 is a notably flexible design too. A true dual-mono integrated amplifier, it can be bought with optional modules that allow a similar degree of customisation to the FOG 3. Although rated at 100 watts per channel into eight ohms, it operates in Class A up to 10 watts, which is a neat compromise if you don't intend listening at party levels most of the time and something of a godsend when you do.

There's a school of thought that suggests loudspeakers and amps should play to the strengths and disguise the inherent shortcomings of CD players: smooth off any tendencies towards

sharpness, counteract a bright balance and generally warm things up to give the effect of a pleasant wash of euphony. It's a natural variant of the traditional 'source first' system, where the amount of money spent on the speakers relative to the rest of the system forced limitations on the speakers automatically. Once upon a time this might have been a reasonable ambition, but things have changed. Today's best CD players, far from setting your teeth on edge, are often stunningly capable performers and, therefore, it's the speakers' job to give them every opportunity to shine.

The baby Piegas have clearly been designed to be outstandingly open, transparent and revealing, qualities that should be increasingly apparent as the quality of the the accompanying electronics increases. Their musical skills should span the whole spectrum from get-up-and-dance verve and energy to draw-you-right-in emotional power and subtlety. Great bass performance is a key element, too.

METTLE GURU

With the Cairn CD and amp doing their bidding, the TC 10Xs quickly show their mettle, delivering a mix of clarity, exuberance and power that belies their





“The truthful nature of this combo doesn’t do iffy productions any favours at all. It isn’t as ruthlessly revealing as some combos we’ve had in these pages, but it tells it like it is, warts and all.”

slender stature, and which transcends the conventional understanding of what a compact standmount can do. In fact, a good standmount is theoretically capable of better sound than almost any larger speaker, because it’s freed from the tyranny of the big box and its potential to introduce plenty of coloration into the sound of the system. Small boxes have their own limitations (especially in the bass), but Pega does build upon neutral foundations.

Plain from the start is a beguiling sense of air and openness with images tightly focused and spread well beyond the boundaries of the cabinets in all planes. The presentation lacks the hyped ‘presence’ of some of its rivals, but sounds true and natural, detail meshing effortlessly into the larger sonic picture rather than being pushed into the spotlight. Ambience is especially well conveyed and never better appreciated than with Dave Gilmour’s almost mesmerically atmospheric *On An Island*. This system doesn’t smudge edges or

blur textures; it presents the solid and the spacious as a coherent whole with the full spectrum of tonal colours and beautifully resolved instrumental timbres. As for the integration between the ribbon and dynamic drivers, it’s every bit as seamless as claimed. True, bass is hardly thunderous but it has energy, timing, good pitch and plenty of rhythmic drive.

WHAT A LOAD OF BOTOX

On the other hand, the truthful nature of this combo doesn’t do iffy productions any favours at all. Over-zealous recordings – and it’s hard to think of any more gratuitously OTT than George Benson’s *Irreplaceable* – sound vaguely ridiculous flat, while colourless efforts certainly won’t receive the sun bed and botox makeover. It isn’t as ruthlessly revealing as some combos we’ve had in these pages, but it tells it like it is, warts and all, nonetheless.

‘Warts and all’ is an oft-used term in hi-fi journalism. It’s usually appended to

products that have an eviscerating effect on the music played. That’s not the case here, but the system still retains that ‘warts and all’ character. It sounds like an oxymoron, but this is an open-sounding combination that isn’t so open that it lets the music fall out while saving the detail. Saying that, without the repetition, the system has all the trappings of true studio monitoring – plenty of detail, accuracy and insight into the recording – but not making the sound appear so analytical, you cannot listen comfortably to music. To these ears, that’s a good compromise.

Out of the box, this isn’t the most obviously thrilling hi-fi system you will ever hear. It isn’t because it’s chronically laid back. Easy going is certainly part of its repertoire, but that repertoire is wide and, as with all the very best systems, informed by the quality of the recording rather than the collective character of the hardware. And, in the long run, that’s where the heart of real satisfaction resides. **HFC**

David Vivian



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REVIEWS

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



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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

Our overall conclusion

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION
This is a highly entertaining and colourful player at a competitive price. The build quality is spot on and the feature list strong. It's not the most subtle CD player but if you're looking for a player to inspire you it could prove a bargain.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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



super audio cd player SA-7S1

Point of reference

Marantz's all-new SA-7S1 sets new standards for high-end CD/SACD players

PRODUCT Marantz SA-7S1

TYPE CD/SACD player

PRICE £5,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 45.9x13.6x42.6cm
• Weight: 22.3kg • Compatible with: CD, SACD, CDR-R/RW discs • Can use external clock up to 176kHz • Switchable filters

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

In the escalating product race between Denon and Marantz, both companies have introduced a range of high-grade disc players and amplifiers that have helped

to push the boundaries of what's commonly referred to as 'state-of-the-art' in the world of hi-fi. The Marantz SA-7S1 is an excellent example of this. It's a stereo-only model and is Marantz' best CD/SACD player to date, from a range so far known as the Legendary Series.

It's not a rehash of anything that came before either (see our interview with Ken Ishiwata, p42), and that includes its spiritual predecessor, the mighty SA1, which sold for around the same price, until it was discontinued in 2002, leaving a top-end gap.

The external casework and general presentation owes much to the more recent

CD-7, but with subtle changes. It has many of the same trademark features, including a copper-plated chassis and an unusually solid, low-resonance dual-layer base. The mechanism is a new in-house design based on a disc tray fabricated from 10mm thick solid aluminium to reduce resonant behaviour and to inhibit internal noise radiation. Where other players use opto-couplers to provide ground plane separation between different functional areas of the circuit, the SA-7S1 uses digital isolators using Giant Magneto Resistive materials from Swiss company IsoLoop. A key piece of the internal digital clockwork is the PEC777f2,



which performs multiple roles, acting as a digital filter, DC filter, noise shaper and eight times oversampler.

Features include selectable absolute phase inversion performed in the digital domain, which should (and to our ears, does) mean no unwanted side effects, and an input for an external high-precision clock. The latter parallels a similar facility found on some other players, from Teac Esoteric and dCS, for example, and makes the SA-7S1 capable of locking onto clock signals of 44.1, 88.2 and 176.4kHz presented to a rear panel BNC. There is no Marantz-branded clock available, however, even in Japan, and we didn't have any third-party clock to try. Our prior experience with such devices is that some players – for



“Difficult combinations of sounds, subtle layering of instruments and voices just seem to float out of the speakers.”

example Esoteric – tend to benefit, but in other cases the result is merely a difference, which is difficult to describe as better or worse. The obvious *quid pro quo* is the additional cost of the clock, which is likely to be of the same order as the player itself.

The power supply is described as having a choke input. This is nothing to do with

choke regulation, Musical Fidelity style, which some suggest make amplifiers sound as though their bass and treble run independently, like having two amplifiers in one box – an odd, and slightly disconcerting sensation. We discovered during conversation with Ken that he has had a similar experience. The configuration used here is optimised for

consistency across the frequency spectrum, and for overall dynamic range, which in his words is “difficult to do”. The display is said to be a low noise design, though it looks like a conventional enough fluorescent design. Standard optical and coaxial digital outputs are available from CD only, but they can be switched off when not required. And like virtually all self-respecting high-end players these days, the analogue audio output is available in balanced and single-ended form. The SACD section delivers text readouts from text-enabled SA discs, but this sadly doesn't extend to CD Text, which would have ▶

Q&A

To shed some light on the background to this important project, Hi-Fi Choice comered Marantz's brand ambassador, and legendary sharp dresser, Ken Ishiwata to discuss the SA-751.



HFC Where exactly does the SA-751 sit within the Marantz hierarchy?

KI The SA-751 fills the void in our flagship Reference range that has existed since the SA-1 was discontinued in 2002. That player used technology from the beginning of the SACD era that has now been far exceeded by what is available to us now.

What is your assessment of the status of SACD as a format? Is it not just yesterday's news?

We knew that most would use the SA7 primarily as a CD player, but there is still a significant market for SACD, and new companies are introducing SACDs all the time. Many SACDs come from CD 44.1 kHz (digital) masters, and don't make the transition well when examined under the SACD microscope, but acoustic material, recordings mastered in DSD and analogue records are a different matter, which is great if you happen to be into classical or jazz. Overall though, people are listening to music rather than formats, so we felt the onus was on us to bring CD replay performance as close to the capabilities of SACD as possible.

What are the key features that distinguish the SA-751 from its predecessors?

The most important technology is the new digital filter, which we have been working on continuously since 1986. For the CD7 the best we could deliver was four times oversampling, but the new design is a dual differential, eight times oversampling filter. We're also using a new D/A converter from NPC, the SMS866A, in dual differential form, which is more accurate than the usual favoured Burr Brown hybrid DAC, and which we believe is currently the finest of its type in the world – and is likely to remain so. We have found NPC are very responsive, and understand exactly what we need.



been good. So would a smoother scrolling text display, but that's just being pedantic.

The SA-751 also has user-selectable output filters – similar to those available on the SA11-S1 – which involves three filters for CD, which also have an influence on the SACD output, see later. The SACD settings include the nuclear option of no active filtering at all. There is also a DC filter (a high-pass network whose roll-off is set at 1.7Hz) plus a noise-shaping option that can be selected. The digital outputs can also be deselected, which is worth doing. It goes without saying that everything Marantz knows has gone into reducing jitter. The player includes a fully shielded Super Ring (sic) transformer, and fully balanced internal signal architecture.

As usual, Marantz specifies a discrete HDAM output buffer, known as the HDAM-SA2, which offers a short, direct signal path and fully balanced topology; a more refined circuit than in previous versions. The player looks wonderful, and handles discs well, with faster disc identification speeds than many SACD players, and rapid track access times, too. The remote control will also handle the basic functions of Marantz amplifiers, and is generally well-designed, though we've seen better.

PARTNERING THE SA-751

The SA-751 is not the only newcomer in the flagship line-up. Alongside the SA-751, Marantz has launched the SC-752 preamplifier, a comprehensively reworked and re-voiced iteration on the SC-751 theme, and the MA-952 high-power, current feedback monoblocks, which do a similar number on the MA-951. The preamp has the wide operating bandwidth (150kHz) necessary to make the best of SACD, and a floating control bus to control other preamplifiers for multichannel SACD replay. The power amp is rated at 300 watts into 8 Ohms (600 Watts/4 Ohms), and a 150 amp current capability. Alas, it was not possible to hear the amplifier in the time available, but we expect to be able to test the combination soon. If Marantz is right, there is clear synergy between the player and amplifier, and they work well in each other's company.

SOUND QUALITY

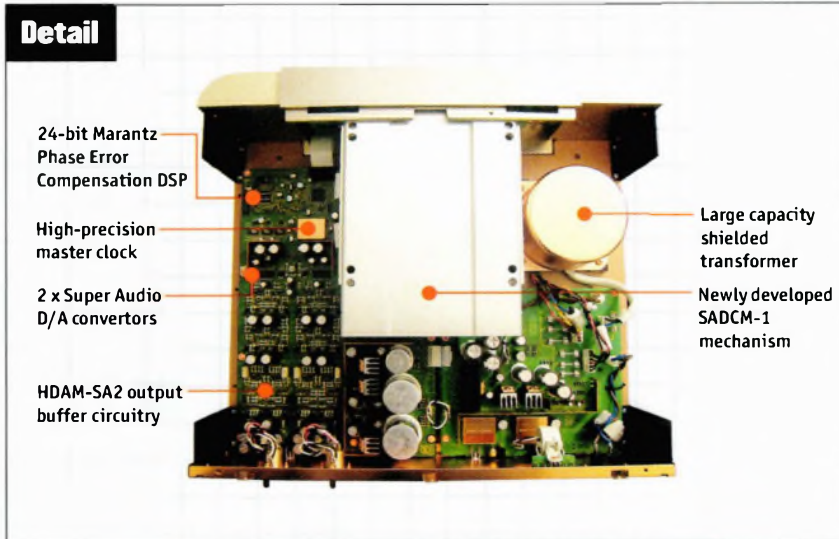
Building an appropriate system around the player was clearly going to be a key to assessing its performance, but luckily with *The Collection* getting under way at around the same time, this was not too much of a problem. The matching Marantz amp wasn't available, but I did have access to a Pass Labs pre/power combination, the X1/X150.5, which were used in balanced mode using



Nordost Valhalla balanced interconnects (the new high-end Odin cables were not ready in time for this test). I did, however, have an EMM Labs CDSA player, which was introduced towards the end of the test as a kind of yardstick. The main speaker was the Mordaunt-Short Performance 6, which is relatively inexpensive for a high-end model, but functions as a high-end design in every way that counts. Better still, the combination of player, amplifier, speakers and cable fortuitously turned out to be particularly well balanced; the slight leanness of the Mordaunt-Short and Nordost was offset by the warmth of the player and amplifier.

Given the reputation that the Performance 6 has, the bass from the combination was superbly realised and remarkably well developed, to the extent that the use of the matching subwoofer was simply not deemed worthwhile pursuing, even though one was available. Partly, however, this was down to timing – or rather the lack thereof. All the equipment was very thoroughly run in, with hundreds of hours on the clock in the case of the EMM Labs and Pass Labs equipment, while the Nordost cables and Mordaunt-Short speakers have been in almost daily use for a very long time.

We've taken some pains over specifying the test context to underline our confidence in the findings. In the final analysis, there was no difficulty in nailing down the character of the SA-7S1. Fundamentally, this is a unusually musical player, one that works brilliantly with CD, and even better with SACD given discs of a suitable calibre – which are not always easy to find. As on previous such tests, some of the very finest sounds came from discs on the M&A label, including (but not limited to) their remarkable sampler. In any case it was easy to hear what the Marantz was doing from almost the first bar of the first disc tried (*Gitano*, from *Ilama* by Silvia Perez Cruz & Ravid Goldschmidt), which has a soft, yet incredibly tactile sound – a very difficult trick to pull off, and one that requires remarkable sensitivity. In a way this sums up the SA-7S1. We have considerable experience with such players, and this has



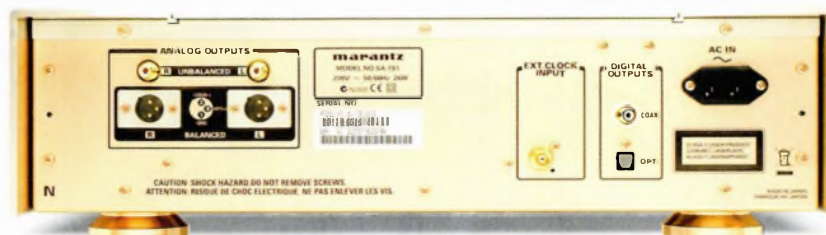
involved listening to quite a few high-end CD and SACD players over the years. We cannot recall another player that makes music-making sound so easy, so unstressed, so facile.

It's not that there's any lack of detail here, nor of dynamics. On the contrary, it all happens a bit like a conjuring trick. There's no hint of strain, and difficult combinations of sounds, subtle layering of instruments and voices, for example, just seem to float out of the speakers. No other player in our experience can beat the Marantz in the way it manages the difficult technical trick of sounding like music. It's easy going yet well disciplined, and in the end we had an impression of a box that does its job without sounding in the least bit mechanical, or processed. For most discs, the default (first) filters delivers the best, most natural sound by

a narrow margin, but it's essentially a matter of taste and worth experimenting with.

It is almost as good with CD as it with SACD. The difference is often just the inherent difference in the quality of the recording rather than the format, but there are exceptions, such as the M&A recordings already highlighted, and some others from Pentatone for example.

It's a remarkable *tour de force* and we're being cautious when we pronounce this as arguably the finest player available. It's also far from expensive for a machine with such ambitions. If you want a disc player that will do the very finest musical job possible with your CDs and SACDs – the only really serious remaining audio disc formats – the Marantz SA-7S1 can even be considered a bargain at £5,000! **HFC**
Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 96% >> SUB RATINGS CD 95% SACD 97%	PRO Not just state of the art, but also remarkably easy on the ear, making high-class disc replay sound almost too easy. The finest player we have heard in a long while.
BUILD >> 98%	CON Costs an arm and a leg, but other brands offering similar packages generally charge more. Other than this, there are no further complaints.
FEATURES >> 88%	CONCLUSION Stunning player aimed at the serious audiophile community, that offers remarkably transparent sound in the very specific sense that it is virtually impossible to hear it working. CD replay often approaches the quality of SACD.
VALUE >> 90%	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 93%



BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

Eight and six

B&W's astonishing new 600 Series is finally here, and the 683 has been worth the wait

PRODUCT B&W 683

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £899

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 19.8x98.5x34cm

Weight: 26kg • Sensitivity: 90dB/w at 8ohms
Impedance: 8 ohms (nom) • 150mm FST midrange driver • 2x165mm aluminium/kevlar bass drivers

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 # www.bowers-wilkins.com

The 683 is the top model in B&W's most recent incarnation of the entry-level 600 Series. It's not a speaker range to be taken lightly, especially given that B&W is one of the largest dedicated loudspeaker makers in the world and thus one of the biggest players in the audiophile market.

The new 600 Series is smaller than previously, and there are just two stand mounts, the 686 and 685, and two floorstanding stereo models, the 684 and 683. There are also three subwoofers: ASW 608, 610 and 610XP (the '8' and '10' refer to the driver size in inches, and XP essentially just means bigger and better). There are also two centre speakers and a surround speaker (detailed in the box-out).

While the stand mounts are very similar, except for the size of main driver and box, the two floorstanders are distinctly different. The 684 (£699) is a two-and-a-half-way with two matching Kevlar cones (one dedicated to bass, the other to bass and mid), while the more expensive and taller 683 takes an FST midrange unit from the 800 series and augments it with two new bass drivers. All the 600 series models have the same aluminium tweeter set in its distinctively offset face plate.

The FST midrange driver makes the 683 the most interesting speaker in the new range. This is the same midrange technology that you will see on all of the three-way 800 Series models, including the mighty 800D. And given that the least expensive of those – the 804S – costs £2,700 and yet has a similar driver array, this newcomer would seem to be a bargain. Okay, it doesn't have the fancy 800 Series cabinet work, nor the Matrix internal bracing, and its tweeter is not on top in a separate enclosure. However, there is a Nautilus tube behind the 683's tweeter and the bass drivers look even more 'bling' thanks to their metal cones.

The aluminium dome tweeter has been heavily revised for this series, its neodymium magnet giving it increased

sensitivity while copper plating of the pole-piece extends the frequency response. Meanwhile, mass has been lowered thanks to an edge-wound voice coil, and the resonant frequency of the system has been reduced with a new surround material.

“The 683 is a remarkably revealing speaker for its price. You can clearly hear into the mix, with fine details easily picked out.”

The FST midrange is distinguished by its very thin foam surround, which is a termination rather than a suspension as such (FST stands for Fixed Suspension Transducer). The driver can work this way because it is limited to the midband and does not have a great deal of

travel. B&W says that to bring the price of this drive unit down to the point where it could be used in the 600 it just simplified the mounting method to a conventional bolt-on approach, rather than the suspended, single point fixing used in the 800 Series. There is

also another major factor that we will return to.

The bass drivers here are aluminium cones with a paper/Kevlar skin on the back – the combination giving stiffness and damping and ending up with the same mass as the carbon fibre/Rohacell-sandwich cones on the 804S.

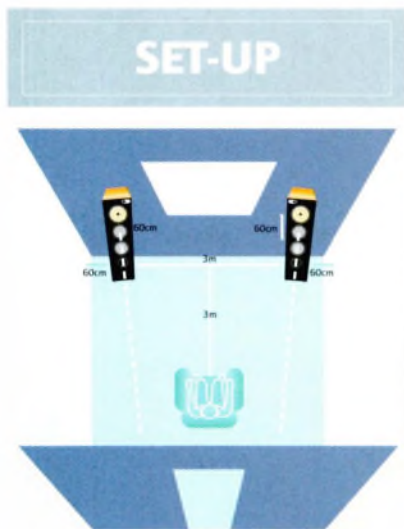
The 683 is a lot of loudspeaker for the money, its weighs in at 28kg and looks great in its Wengé vinyl skin, rubberised front panel and high quality bi-wire terminals. You may even wonder how it can be produced for the price? The answer is that B&W set up its own facility in China, moving the old 600 production line from its Worthing factory. This is the first range that the company has built overseas in its own facility and helps to explain how it can offer so much value for money. But as we know, there's more to the dark art of speaker building.

PERFORMANCE

The results are pretty damn impressive, if perhaps a little darker or more subdued than one might expect of a 600 Series speaker. Having run them in for 24 hours things did change – the balance becoming more lively and up-front. They did this to the extent that we went from an on-axis set-up with the speakers pointed at the listening chair to a straight down the room, parallel axis arrangement. Something to bear in mind should you be auditioning a brand new pair.

We would be very impressed if any other companies could compete with the bandwidth and resolution on offer from the 683, which is a remarkably revealing speaker for its price. You can clearly hear right into the mix, the fine details that are often masked being easily picked out. This applied equally to differences between voices in a choir and to the little extras that accompany the vocal in a densely mixed piece of hip-hop. This is partly because of the speaker's wide dynamic range. ▣



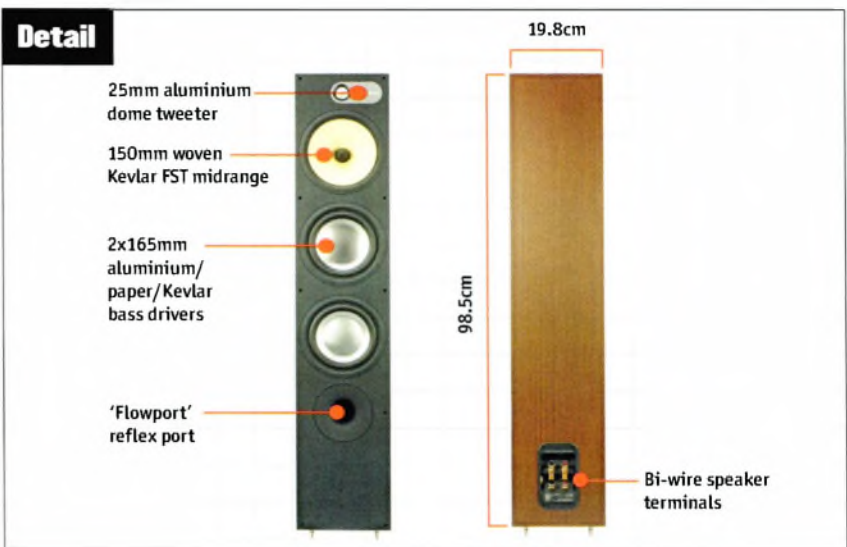


POSITIONING

With its impressive bass extension you might expect the 683 to need plenty of space to avoid the bass getting too strong with respect to the midband. However, thanks to the front firing port it works surprisingly well close to a rear wall; we tried a 30cm gap between the rear baffle and the wall and this didn't seem to upset its equilibrium. If you can give it 60cm, the balance is a bit more upbeat and lively, which may be more to taste. You can also tweak the balance by the amount of toe-in you apply. With the speakers firing directly at the listening position you get the most mid and treble energy – too much for our tastes to be frank – but fire them parallel to the walls and things are more relaxed. As rooms vary a lot it pays to experiment, but 60cm to rear walls, a bit more if possible to sidewalls and a flat back, non toed-in orientation is the place to start.

SYSTEM MATCHING

The 683 is usefully sensitive at 90db for a nominal eight ohm load so you won't need a monster amp to get decent level, but the impedance drops to three ohms for a while, so even though the spec suggests power ratings from 25 to 200 watts we'd recommend you avoid much less than 50 watts from a solid-state amp at least. This is also a pretty revealing speaker, so avoid anything aggressive or edgy unless you are into an edge-of-the-seat balance. The most economical amplifiers that will give this speaker a chance to strut its stuff would include the Cambridge Azur 840A, Naim Nait 5i and Arcam DiVA A70. As far as sources go both the Naim and Cambridge amps have partners that more than make the grade, while you need to pay a little more for an Arcam FMJ CD36. Just remember that the source is still king when it comes to it.



TAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

If you plan to build a multichannel system around the 683, B&W encourages you to choose its 683 theatre set-up: this adds the HTM61 (£399) centre speaker, DS3 (£549) surround and an ASW610XP (£699) subwoofer. The nice thing about the HTM61 is that it has the same FST midrange driver as the 683, so you are assured of the same level of resolution across the critical front speakers. However, it has a Kevlar driver rather than metal bass driver, (albeit in the same size chassis) as the bass units on the 683. This presumably, because home cinema systems hand the lowest bass duties to the subwoofer. If you are putting together a multichannel system primarily for music, however, a third DS3 and no sub would, perhaps, be the best course. The DS3 is a selectable dipole or monopole surround speaker, its switchability ensuring even sound dispersion even if placement is restricted.

its sensitivity to the smallest notes even when there are far louder ones threatening to hide them. It also comes down to excellent separation of instruments and voices, it's easy to pick out the little bits because there seems to be more space between them and the centre of the musical action.

The 683's bass extension and power adds genuine gravitas to piano and orchestra, and for that matter the less cultivated productions of Dr Dre, Tool and Mr Oizo where the floor literally starts to resonate at specific frequencies. Something that one does not really expect of speakers at this price, especially ones that also deliver tunefulness and control at low frequencies. Helge Sunde's brass extravaganza positively bounces with zip in the B&W's hands, with the instruments taking a solid physical form in the room. We found little to criticise in

this speaker given its price. It inevitably doesn't have the slam of something like an 804S, nor does it deliver the depth of image of more expensive designs. But when it comes to sheer resolution and lack of colouration from a speaker that also does proper bass, it is in a class of its own. By getting its FST driver into a sub-£1,000 speaker B&W has without doubt raised the stakes for the market as a whole. You may be able to get real veneers on smaller speakers but you will struggle to find the combination of resolution, timing and energy in this competitive sector. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%

EASE OF DRIVE >> 88%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 95%

PRO
 Remarkably revealing and a wide dynamic range combine with impressive bass extension and a lovely rubberised front baffle.

CON
 Vinyl finish won't be to all tastes. They will also reveal any limitations in partnering ancillaries and could damage your neighbourly relations!

CONCLUSION
 By taking the fundamentals of the 804S and putting them in a solid box, B&W has laid down the gauntlet at this price point. We have not come across this level of transparency in a sub-£1,000 speaker before – the killer bass is the icing on the cake.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%

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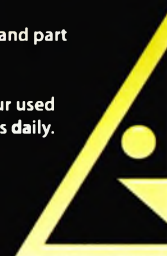
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Legendary
Marantz launch new reference series



Out of the woods

Slovakia's finest hi-fi manufacturer gives us wood

PRODUCT Edgar TP105VR

TYPE Integrated valve amplifier

PRICE £1,750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.5x16x35cm
● Weight: 19kg ● Line inputs: 5 ● Finish: real cherry and 'black tin' ● Rated power output: 40 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01435 867438 🌐 www.edgar.sk

Although Eastern European brands are growing in number, to the best of our knowledge, Edgar is the only hi-fi company that designs and builds its products in Slovakia. Edgar produces a small but distinctive range of valve-powered components. These include an all-valve phono stage with Lundahl step-up transformers for moving coil cartridges, a CD player (seen in *Beautiful Systems*, HFC 294) and an open-chassis integrated amplifier with a higher (50 watt) output power than the TP105VR here, but without the remote volume control.

Being an all-tube design, the glowing cherry exterior of the TP105VR is neatly complimented

by the warm tones produced inside. The amp runs pretty hot, thanks to full valve rectification and four EL34 pentode output tubes operating in ultralinear (push-pull) mode. Valve purists won't need any other source of heat in the listening room while this is running!

The Edgar's classic configuration reminds us of the Audio Innovations Series 500 from the late 1980s, even though its roots go back a generation further – to the 1950s, when the pentode came to pre-eminence as the output device that offered the most power and least distortion of its time.

In the Edgar, the input signal is sent to the volume control and then to the first gain-stage, a 12AX7 triode. The second stage is an ECC81 valve, which inverts phase before the final and most powerful gain stage; a pair of EL34s in push-pull configuration. Between here and the output taps is an output transformer that reduces the high output impedance of the valves to something that can drive loudspeakers.

In the realm of reasonably priced integrated valve amps, full thermionic power supply rectification is quite a rarity. This is because the

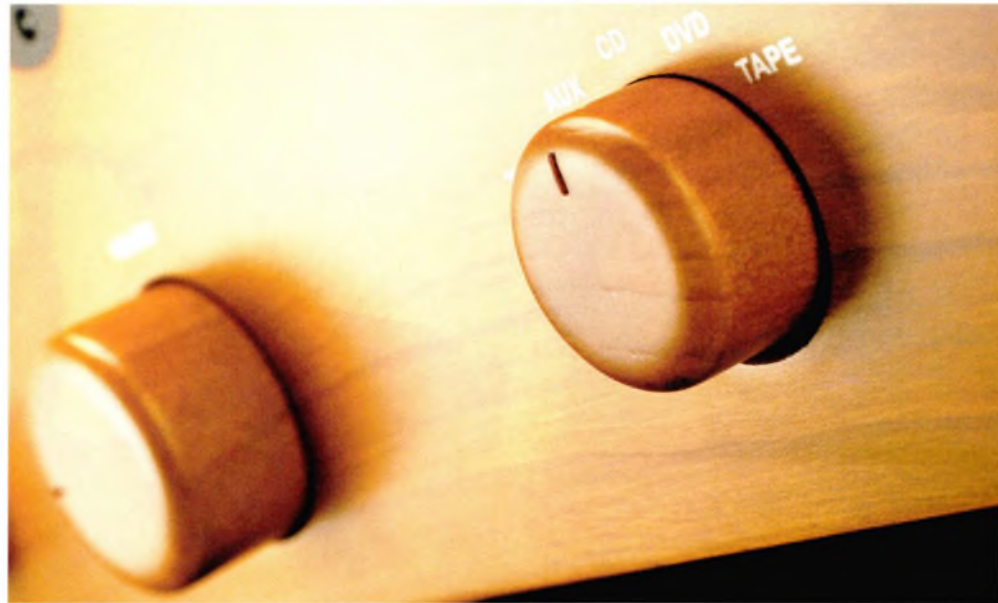
job can be done rather more economically with solid-state devices. For the purist, however, this approach is the only true way.

The TP105VR comes equipped with a remote control that also incorporates cherry wood and is more attractive than the usual mass-produced plastic variety, although its appeal lessened when it stopped working shortly after delivery!

The speaker terminals come in four and eight ohm versions, which represent alternative tapings from the output transformer. As speakers rarely have a fixed impedance it's best to experiment with these to see which gives the highest output level. We didn't find a big difference between the two when using the Living Voice OBX-R speaker, but this isn't always the case. Inputs include five line-level phono pairs, plus a tape output.

SOUND QUALITY

Having failed to fix the remote handset, we went back to basics and got off the couch to use the TP105VR, which seemed entirely appropriate given that the product is based on 1950s technology. The first speaker we gave



“As warm as its cherry veneer suggests, however this doesn’t stop it from delivering a highly engaging and superbly timed result.”

the amp to drive was a slightly unusual one: the Piega TC70X. It’s unusual in part because it costs a lot more than the amplifier (£8,500), but in the main because it has a coaxial ribbon tweeter and midrange driver. The Piega is specified as being 92dB at four ohms, however, and thus not too bad a load. In fact, the Edgar seems quite at home with the Piega, delivering an appealingly quiet background against which it painted some highly articulate sounds. It seems a little rolled off at high frequencies – or perhaps it’s just soft – but this doesn’t stop it recreating the full body of a piano or the power of a singer’s voice. This is a familiar characteristic of good valve amps and something that you simply don’t get in the same way with solid-state. Here, the people and instruments take up a definite place in the listening room and you sense a genuine presence.

The amplifier doesn’t have particularly sharp imaging – probably as a result of that smoothed top end – but the solidity of sound is just as effective and just as true a version of stereo as something that is sharply etched, but lacking depth.

It also delivers extremely natural sounding tonality. Voices have harmonics aplenty and the resolve of a note’s decay is wonderful. This could be because valve amps distort in a harmonic fashion, but nonetheless,

it sounds very convincing and perhaps adds in an extra element that the recording and mastering

process cuts out. It does this more clearly than Class A transistor designs, such as the Sugden A21SE, which has more definition on leading edges (and thus greater speed), but does not offer the fullness of tubes – even when they are tubes operating in Class AB.

The only area where the Edgar is found wanting is that old Achilles heel of valve amplification when there isn’t a high sensitivity loudspeaker to drive: bass. It’s all but impossible to beat solid-state when it comes to the lower registers. The ultralinear approach does come a lot closer than many, however, and what it lacks in crunch, it makes up for in timbral shading and fullness. Just don’t expect those Prodigy albums to deliver their full weight.

With a more valve-friendly speaker in the form of Living Voice’s OBX-R, the Edgar can deliver more than enough energy to enliven Ornette Coleman’s saxophone on *Change of the Century*, a job it does without making the instrument sound too abrasive. Something that will appeal to some more than others, but which suits these ageing ears rather well. The pairing also gets into the musical groove brilliantly, letting the interplay between musicians and their superb sense of timing come through loud and clear, despite what is intrinsically, a laid-back balance from the amplifier and the speaker.

A pair of ATC SCM19s were

also used, in an attempt to find a better tonal partner. Now, at 85dB, this is not a sensible partner

for a 40 watt amplifier on paper, but in practice its benign impedance curve is sufficient to allow playback at medium levels with ease. The pairing also keeps time extremely well, which is always a good sign. The speaker’s relatively analytical balance also helps even things out, bringing edge definition into sharper relief. We imagine that something from Triangle’s catalogue of high-sensitivity, fast-sounding speakers would be an even better partner for the Edgar, but it gets on with the ATC remarkably well.

The Edgar is as warm-sounding as the cherry veneer on its front panel suggests, however, this doesn’t stop it from delivering a highly engaging and superbly timed result. Pick your ancillaries with care, handle the remote with even greater care and it will deliver many hours of cosy musical fun. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 85%



PRO
Extremely natural and well timed, with distinctive styling and good power levels for a valve design, making it easy to find matching speakers.

CON
Runs very hot (like valve amps generally). Our remote control failed during the review, but hopefully this is a one-off. The sound could be too cosy for some.

CONCLUSION

A very appealing amplifier that combines a great sense of timing with a timbral richness that transistors can’t emulate. Careful speaker selection is essential to get sufficient level out of its 40 watts and to produce an even tonal balance though.

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





Flight deck

Thorens is back in the UK and ready for take-off with this stripped-down turntable

PRODUCT Thorens TD850

TYPE Turntable

PRICE £1,395 (including TP300 arm, cartridge extra)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x16.5x34cm
• Weight: 21kg • Speeds: 33rpm, 45rpm • Speed change: electronic • Audio output: phono sockets

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.thorens.com

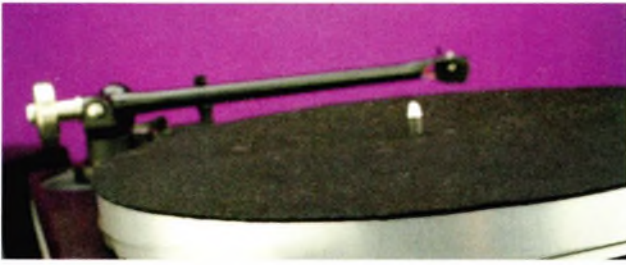
The resurgence of interest in vinyl has seen the emergence of some wacky LP-spinners, and thrown a welcome lifeline to a number of formerly endangered turntable manufacturers. Thorens falls perfectly into this category, having had a near-death experience in 2000, but now finding itself in rude health. The Swiss/German company has been making mechanical music devices since before the dawn of sound recording and, while there has been some diversification of late into audio electronics, turntables still feature prominently in the company's catalogue.

Indeed, the TD850 is just one model among eleven in the current line-up, with prices varying from a hundred to several thousand pounds. All are once again available in the UK thanks, this time round, to UKD. Features and appearance vary quite widely across the range, with the 800 series models being pretty much the 'bare bones' players in most ways. They share basic construction, though this one is, at 21kg, the heaviest of the series and a substantial bit of machinery.

Most of that weight is accounted for by the thick plate of steel at the heart of the main chassis member. It is sandwiched between two pieces of MDF, which are bonded to it with elastic glue. This is known as 'constrained layer damping' and is a remarkably effective way of reducing resonance. Thorens suggests that in this case resonance is completely banished, though to be pedantic we'd have

to disagree as there's still a little in evidence if one taps the chassis with a knuckle.

There's quite a lot of resonance in the platter, too. It's a thick aluminium affair that weighs over 4kg, and the felt mat does little to damp it. On the other hand its sheer weight will do a fair bit to minimise any speed variations. It's driven by a square section belt, which is not quite as good in principle as a high quality flat belt, but surely preferable to round section types which love to 'wander' up and down drive pulleys and surfaces. The belt is, in turn, propelled by an AC motor mounted at the rear. As is near-invariable practice these days, the supply to that motor is not pure mains but a freshly generated sinewave produced in an outboard box. This is powered by yet another box, which at least ensures hum fields can be kept remote. Speed selection is just a matter of flicking a switch to change the sinewave frequency, but we were slightly surprised to



“We found a lot to like about this turntable. It produces a very immediate, upfront sound, good rhythmic drive and clear articulation.”

find that the reference source is not a crystal oscillator but an ‘RC’ circuit that is considerably less stable. On the other hand, it is trimmable should you choose to take the lid off the case.

Because turntables ‘read’ vibration in the stylus, they are unavoidably sensitive to vibrations in the structure – hence the fuss about resonance. So, isolation from the outside world is critical. Thorens has addressed this by fitting polymer-damped spiked feet to the TD850: the weight is enough to make these leave a mark in a wooden shelf, but matching cups are also supplied. With or without cups, though, the feet offer relatively little isolation and some kind of suspended isolating platform would seem to be an obvious upgrade for this particular model.

The arm fitted to our sample was a Thorens TP300, a badge-engineered version of the Rega RB300. This old favourite, certainly one of hi-fi’s most famous products and an all-time reference for budget arms, is a straightforward and reliable design. It features simple, yet very accurate adjustment of the

downforce, supplied by spring rather than gravity, which greatly improves tracking of warped discs. This is a standard fitment, though the cheaper TP250 and dearer SME309 are also available. A cartridge is not supplied with the deck, though our review sample came with a Goldring Elite (pictured) which we were happy enough to use for most of the time. Strangely, there’s no lid available – we strongly recommend buying a universal one or arranging some sort of protection. Dust and LPs are sworn enemies!

SOUND QUALITY

We found a lot to like about this turntable’s performance. Most of all, we like it because it produces a very immediate, upfront sound with good rhythmic drive and clear articulation. It also has some limitations though, particularly with the way it handles detail, but we’ll come back to that in a minute.

It’s often said that one can tell a fair amount about a turntable just from the noise the run-in groove makes. We wouldn’t like to put too much faith in that theory, but we definitely got a strong impression of the TD850 from the

first few bars of music we heard from it. In a fit of analogue nostalgia, the first disc to grace its platter was Pink Floyd’s *The Wall*, an album that starts with a short whimper followed by a very pronounced bang. The former may not tell anyone very much about anything, but the latter, well played, has the ability to make one jump after any number of hearings, and on the TD850 it certainly did that.

One aspect of the deck’s performance that seems remarkably consistent is the impact and sheer scale. Even changing cartridges leaves these aspects untouched: Goldring’s Elite is always generally lively, but even when replaced by a super-laid-back Shure moving-magnet cartridge, the sound remains energetic. This would make the deck a natural, one might think, for rockers, but plenty of musical styles benefit from that natural exuberance, not least opera and large symphonic works. Shostakovich, for instance: a man never afraid to use plenty of brass percussion, his music came up in full mock-martial brilliance with all the thrills, spills and terrors of Stalin’s Russia easy to imagine.

In a sense, that sums up probably the most admirable and attractive musical virtue of this turntable: its evocative way with music. Indeed, it’s more evocative than most CD (and indeed DVD-A/SACD) players and, while it’s utterly pedantic, this may be due in some part to imperfections rather than any arcane secret to higher fidelity. We’re inclined to say that ▶

Q&A

To gain some extra information on the TD850, we spoke to Heinz Rohrer, CEO at Thorens.



HFC The TD850 uses an AC motor but some models have a DC motor. Why?

HR DC motors are only used on the entry-level products (from the TD158 to TD240). The upper end products, from the TD800 to the TD20303 and the suspended sub-chassis TD350, all use a separate speed controller which calls for AC power. They all use heavier platters and an AC motor can get the platter moving quickly. After a short period, the speed settles at either 33 or 45rpm as selected. Wow and flutter measurements are better from AC power

The TD850's massive construction is a far cry from the classic suspended-subchassis designs that made Thorens' name. What are the advantages of this approach?

We still follow the classic Thorens philosophy of sub-chassis design with the TD350, but we also looked at the trend for creating turntables with more mass. We offer all types of turntable design, including stylish high quality acrylic models and the elegant 800 Series. Incidentally, we have the new TD160 HD suspended sub-chassis model arriving in the next few weeks. This is a high quality redesign of the very popular and classic TD160. We are the only manufacturer that concentrates on different styles and theories of turntable design – from entry level to high-end – at the highest possible level.

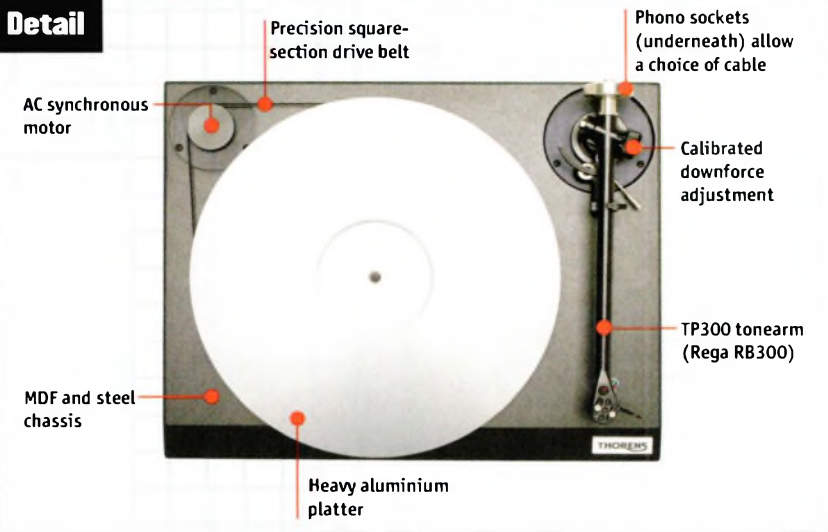
What kind of support is recommended for the TD850, for best performance?

Heavy, stable and vibration-free is best for Thorens. We are working on developing something very interesting, support-wise, soon. Watch this space!

Do Thorens turntables mainly sell to upgrade customers, or are new vinyl lovers buying in too?

Both. Most new converts start with an entry-level product. Often these customers will upgrade once they start to realise the potential sound quality the further up the ladder you go. We may not be the cheapest at the entry-level point, but we offer exceptional value for money with these products – all have automatic speed change, for example, and are supplied with a quality pick-up.

Detail



something that feels as good as this surely can't be all bad.

Not quite everything about the TD850 has us in such admiring mood, though. We have to admit to niggling doubts about whether in the end it's all it might be. The sound gets your attention – great. It doesn't seem to have much trouble holding your attention for long spans – even better. But we found that attempts to analyse exactly what in the music is grabbing our attention were obstructed by vagueness at a level somewhere below the bright and clearly etched surface. This makes it hard to hear deep into the music and work out what's going on.

You might think that only a musician trying to nick a riff, or a musicologist researching orchestration, would want delve that far into the music: but in a way we all do it to some extent, subconsciously, on repeated hearings of a piece. First time through the overall shape and sound make an impression, but on second and subsequent hearings the brain looks for more detail to enhance the novelty, since the outline is now familiar, and this is where we felt some disappointment. In a way there's just a little too much of the TD850's own sound in evidence.

There's definitely mileage in good isolation, and our custom-made turntable support of

many years' standing (40kg of concrete and lead on an air bellows) reduced the effect, but it didn't eliminate it. Indeed, it couldn't, because acoustic feedback is only part of the problem. Playing LPs is all about mechanical action and reaction, and the small (but not vanishing) residual amount of resonance in the turntable's structure is inevitably excited by the process and just slightly muddies the sound, masking the finest detail. It's a shame because in many ways this is a very right-sounding product. It's good-looking and practical (even with a missing lid!) but in the end we find ourselves thinking that it's a good turntable but not, perhaps, a great one. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%



FEATURES >> 82%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 80%



PRO
Upfront, immediate sound that really brings the music alive, especially at climaxes. Excellent speed stability. Operation is simple and user-friendly.

CON
Detail is frustratingly masked by persistent low-level hash and resonance. Repeated listenings are less captivating than the first time.

CONCLUSION
This is certainly a well-made and practical turntable that does a lot right, but at this sort of price we'd really like the deck to provide more insight into our cherished vinyl, along with the impact and rhythmic assurance. A good product, however.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 81%

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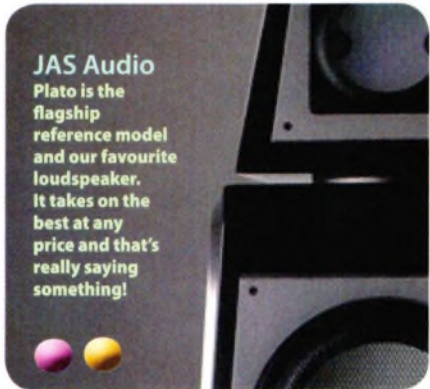


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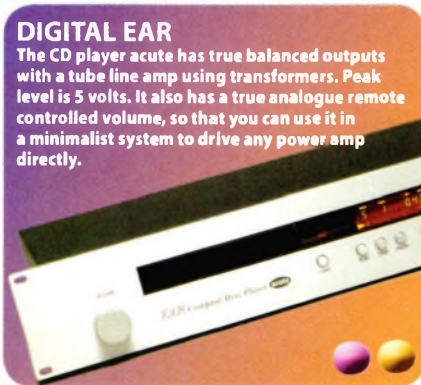
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Quad almighty

The Brit-fi legend returns, with a re-engineered replacement for the gorgeous 22L floorstander

PRODUCT Quad 22L2

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £900 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20.5x85x27.8cm

⊙ Weight: 38.1 kg ⊙ 25mm fabric dome tweeter ⊙

2x 165mm mid/bass drivers ⊙ Sensitivity: 89dB

⊙ Impedance: 6 ohms (nom)

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

Founded in 1936, Quad is one of British hi-fi's biggest names, though these days it's part of the Chinese IAG group. It's probably best known for its amplifiers, and for creating the world's first full-range electrostatic loudspeaker, but in recent years it has also achieved great success with more conventional moving-coil loudspeakers, which combine exceptionally attractive piano-lacquered veneers with very competitive prices.

Succeeding the L series, Quad's new L2 series consists of five stereo pairs all told. Here we're looking at the top £900 22L2 floorstander, which replaces the 22L we reviewed three years ago (*HFC* 257). The two models have much in common, on the surface at least, but the new version includes several engineering changes, providing some justification for the higher price.

A beautifully finished and relatively compact enclosure is a key feature of both this model and its predecessor. You can choose from a wide range of colours and wood veneers – plain black for our samples, with silver, bird's-eye maple, cherry and rosewood the other options. All are finished in a deep, multi-layer, high-gloss lacquer. Beneath the surface, the wood composite is apparently eucalyptus-based, which is said to confer good self-damping properties.

A criticism of the 22L was that it lacked a decent-sized plinth, but the new model has an attractively shaped plinth that usefully extends the lateral footprint and, in the case of our samples, matches the enclosure. One small niggle remains, however – the way the spikes are mounted. They're held by thumbwheel nuts above and below, but the threaded insert through the plinth remains free to rotate, so it's impossible to lock the spike firmly in place.

The speaker is a two-and-a-half-way design, with the lower of the two 165mm main drivers only used through the bass region (alongside the port, to reinforce the bottom end) and the upper main driver and tweeter operating as a regular two-way. Both the main drivers have cast frames, 115mm woven Kevlar matrix cones and quite stiff rubber surrounds, though the lower bass driver has a different dust-cover arrangement and presumably the four-layer voice coil and extra mass loading used in the 22L. The all-new tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome and powerful neodymium magnets, and its faceplate is partly cut away, enabling it to be positioned closer to the bass/mid unit.

Fed from twin terminal pairs, the crossover unit has a glass-fibre circuit board with large, non-interlacing tracks. Components (mounted



“The flat and even midband is an obvious strength, but this speaker also has a brightness that’s rather less welcome.”

to avoid magnetic inter-modulation) include air-cored inductors and metalised polypropylene low-loss capacitors, and the internal wiring uses heavy-gauge oxygen-free copper.

SOUND QUALITY

It’s interesting to compare the performance of the 22L2 with that of its predecessor, as it’s clear that one of our major criticisms with the earlier model has been eliminated. Whereas the 22L showed a quite alarming dip in its frequency response at around 600Hz, reflected in a minor perturbation in its impedance trace, this dip is entirely absent from the 22L2, and the impedance ‘wiggle’ is greatly reduced.

The frequency response with this speaker (sited well clear of walls) is much flatter and smoother across the broad midband and treble indeed, it holds within tight +/-2dB limits all the way from 150Hz up to 16kHz, with the only real perturbation a mild dip at around 1.4kHz, under notoriously difficult far-field in-room averaged conditions. Whether the in-room balance ought to remain flat right through into the high treble under these conditions is more debatable, however, as it does mean the 22L2 will have a sonic character that’s subjectively significantly brighter than average.

Interestingly, no sensitivity rating is given in the specification – maybe because the midband sensitivity is a surprisingly low 86db (2-3dB lower

than that of the 22L), which contributes to the relatively bright top end. This should be seen in the context of an impedance that stays above 4.5 ohms throughout, which isn’t an unduly difficult load.

Although the bass shows a bit more damping than before, with a rather indeterminate port-tuning frequency of around 35Hz, its output level is barely changed, so another result of the reduced midrange sensitivity is that the average bass level is relatively stronger. The pair match is somewhat disappointing, with a significant discrepancy in the lower treble, 2-5kHz.

The frequency balance has a direct bearing on the 22L2’s sound quality. That flat and even midband is an obvious strength, ensuring superior neutrality, fine perspectives and a low level of boxy coloration. Voices sound pleasingly open and clear, even at low volume levels.

At the same time, though, there’s no denying this speaker also has a brightness that’s rather less welcome. Expensive models with advanced tweeters and costly crossover components often get away with this, but the 22L2 isn’t one of these, and while the treble provides plenty of fine detail, it also sounds rather insistent.

The bottom end is also a shade too warm and rich. This may be good for handling film effects, as it ensures a good sense of weight, scale

and power, but it also adds a certain chestiness to male speech, and bass instruments tend to sound too heavy and thickened.

Stereo images are well formed, with good lateral and depth perspectives, and respectable focus, though dynamics could be more vigorous and exciting, and micro-dynamic information seems a little weak.

While that beautifully smooth, even midband remains a major strength, the tendency to emphasise both the top and bottom ends of the audio band introduces a touch of ‘loudness contour’ character.

This means the 22L2 is at its best at fairly low listening levels, sounding beautifully open and detailed, but it can become a little wearing when the volume is turned up high. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 80% [Progress bar]	PRO Deep lacquered finish over a range of coloured or wood surfaces, plus a proper plinth. Has an exceptionally smooth and neutral midband, with fine, open voice reproduction.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 80% [Progress bar]	CON The spikes can't be properly locked. Sounds best at low volume levels; turning it up makes the mild bass and treble excess a little too obvious.
BUILD >> 86% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 80% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION With its predecessor's gorgeous cabinetwork plus a number of engineering improvements, this is a tasty compact floorstander with a lovely midband. On the downside, it has a tendency to emphasise both the top and the bottom of the audio band.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 81%	



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Ion in the soul

No existential crisis as Heed Audio revives an integrated classic

PRODUCT Heed Obelisk Si
TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE £850
CONTACT ☎ 01803 226104 @ www.heedaudio.com

Back in the 1980s and 1990s an electronics engineer called Richard Hay designed a number of amplifiers under the Nytech and Ion Systems brand names that gained an almost cult following. Unfortunately, despite Hay's enthusiasm, both Nytech and Ion failed, and with them, the popular Obelisk amp design disappeared from the market. Gone, but not forgotten: the Ion Obelisk still has its followers, especially within the Hungarian hi-fi fraternity at Heed Audio, makers of various electronics components including pre/mono amplifiers, headphone and phono amps and even turntable power supplies.

Heed's Zsolt Huszti decided to rebuild the Obelisk, basing its power amplifier on Richard Hay's design, albeit with heavy revision and the addition of his own preamp section. The Obelisk Si (Super integrated) is the first example of what Heed intends to be a small range of amplifiers that will include an entry-level model and a power supply (X-2) that forms a dual-mono supply for the power amp section of the amp. To this end, the Obelisk Si comes with a blank connector to bridge the power supply input, the presumption being that the external supply will be added at a later date. This is similar to the upgrade routes offered by Naim and Cyrus.

The Obelisk features one pre-output and five

line inputs, one of which can have an internal card added to turn it into either a phono stage, or a digital to analogue converter (DAC). At the time of writing, neither were available.

Power is specified as 40 watts a side. Heed is at pains to point out that the Obelisk is not DC coupled, something which Zsolt has very little time for, although this hardly picks him out from the crowd. He also describes the power amp as a "valve amp built with transistors", the inference being that it clips in the smooth style of a valve amp.

SOUND QUALITY

The Obelisk does indeed display some valve-like traits, most notably a good grasp of dynamics that injects music with a liveliness and energy that is easy to enjoy. It doesn't, however, have a smoothed-off top end, but instead, seems to stretch further than one might expect of a compact 40 watt design. Our reference speaker for an amp of this price is the ATC SCM19, which gives low sensitivity but offers a benign load, so much so that the 40 watt Edgar valve amp (tested on p48) could deliver reasonable levels through it. The same applies here, but the sound is distinctly different. The top end is more open and extended and there is clearly more attack to notes. Strangely, this extra edge does not seem to help the Obelisk when it comes to timing: in fact, it lags behind the Edgar in this respect. Further investigation by us pinpointed the bass as the slowing factor. This could have something to do with the Obelisk having more bass extension as a result of its solid-state nature, although it's no heavyweight by any means.

An alternative reference point in the form of Cambridge Audio's 840A showed the Obelisk a thing or two when it came to power. It delivered more body and weight, as well as extra headroom thanks to its 100 watts. However, the Obelisk does deliver a crispness and attack that is convincing. It makes metal instruments sound more real and allows good contrast between loud and soft notes. It suits acoustic material very nicely, if the speaker is evenly balanced. It is also very musical, which is what Heed claims to be aiming for and seems to have succeeded in delivering.

Despite facing some strong competition at its price point, the Heed Obelisk warrants your attention. It really does make that solid-state valve-sound dream a little closer to reality. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 82%



PRO

Valve style clipping in a solid state package makes for an engaging sound. Can also be upgraded with onboard DAC or phono stage, and onboard PSU. Pearly controls feel great.

CON

A lot of money for the power and features on offer. Plus, the bass doesn't do justice to heavier material and edges at the frequency extremes.

CONCLUSION

Heed has produced an updated Obelisk with valve-like characteristics in an amp that's a lot 'greener' than its glass-powered alternatives. Its low power requires sensitive speakers for the best results, but its musicality will engender it to many.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **82%**

Seconda base

This elegant Italian floorstander opts for sealed-box bass loading

PRODUCT Opera Seconda

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,295 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD):

24x102.5x31.5cm • Weight: 25kg

• 25mm fabric dome tweeter • 2 x 125mm

aluminium cone bass units • Enclosure is

finished in a combination of leather and

real wood veneer • Sensitivity: 89dB

• Impedance: 4 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669

🌐 www.operaloudspeakers.com

Opera loudspeakers is part of a sizeable hi-fi manufacturing operation based just outside Treviso, in the north-east corner of Italy. Opera itself is a specialist speaker brand, but shares premises, ownership and distribution with the Unison operation, which makes both solid-state and valve-equipped electronics components. The factory isn't far from the HQ of that other UKD stablemate Pathos, whose Digit CD player is tested next month.

The Seconda might be positioned a bit above the budget price mainstream, but at the very least the extra outlay buys you an attractive finish and an interesting shape. Available in cherry, mahogany or piano black, the curved sides of the Seconda expand immediately behind the front baffle, and then taper to a slightly narrower back. This is pleasing to the eye, and also helps to avoid focusing internal horizontal standing waves. The front and rear panels, as well as the top, are all covered in leather that looks and feels good, while adding a modicum of damping.

If the finish and presentation of these speakers is unusual, so too is the bass-loading technique. This is a sealed-box speaker, a type that has an illustrious history, but is rarely seen these days, as the overwhelming majority of today's speakers are reflex loaded, (or its close relation, the transmission line). Port-loading has the apparent advantage of producing more bass output 'for free', through the tuned resonance of the reflex port augmenting the output of



the speaker system. However, one has to wonder whether a two-and-a-half-way design, which already has an additional drive unit to supply extra bass, has any real need for ports

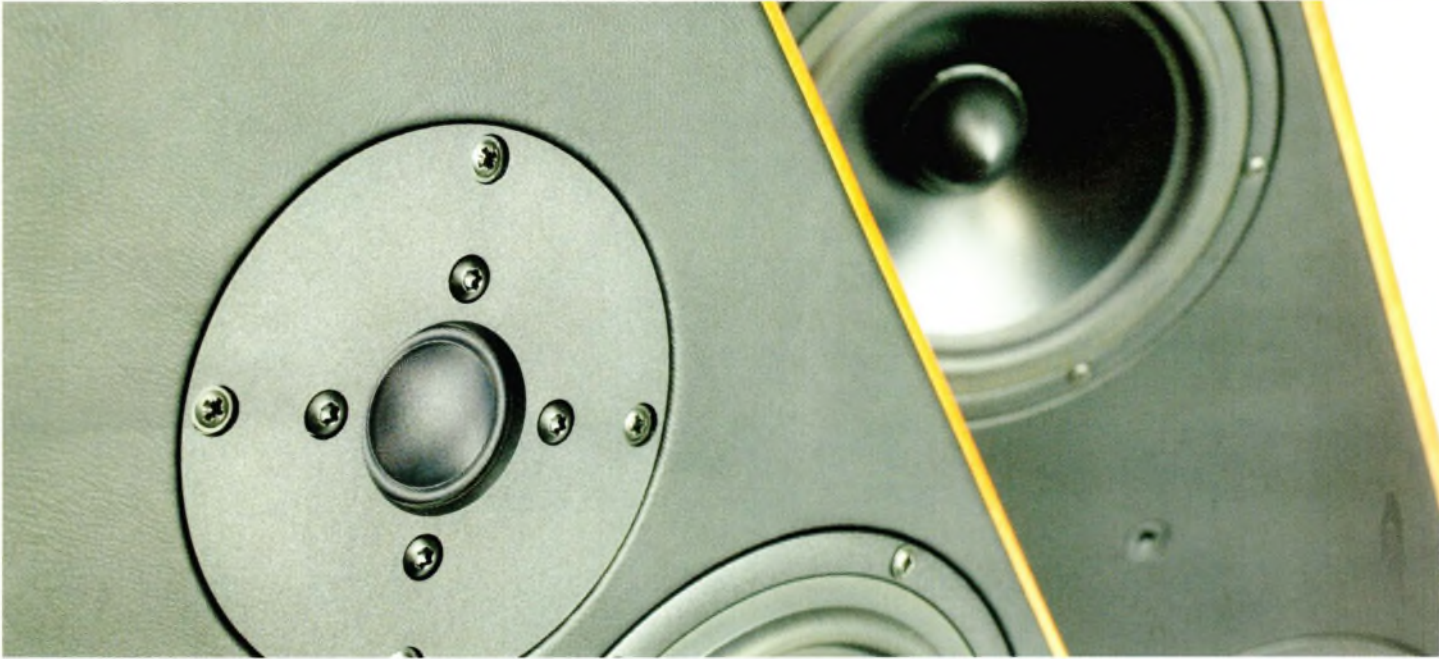
that do the same job rather less effectively. The port output might be a freebie, but it comes with some unwanted baggage, such as the one-note tendency of any tuned port versions, a scrambling of phase relationships, and a steeper (12dB/octave) ultimate roll-off rather than the 6dB/octave that applies when the enclosure is a sealed box. The enclosure here is divided in half, so that each cone driver operates in its own sub-enclosure, and the sides have some extra stiffening.

Sourced from Norwegian specialist SEAS, the two main drivers here look identical, both having 180mm cast alloy frames and 125mm aluminium alloy cones. The tweeter is also a SEAS unit, using a 25mm fabric dome diaphragm. Floor coupling is unusual yet effective, with a very hefty pair of 10mm spikes just 9.5cm apart supporting the front, while a much wider 28cm steel bar with brass-headed and threaded spikes ensuring good lateral stability. Twin terminal pairs provide optional bi-wiring and feed a fairly complex crossover network, with 12dB/octave upper roll-off to the midrange, and 24dB/octave high pass feeding the tweeter.

SOUND QUALITY

It was no real surprise to find that these speakers work best when placed clear of walls. The consequences of sealed-box loading are clearly evident and mostly positive. Measured under far-field in-room conditions, the overall

frequency balance is remarkably well ordered, from the deepest bass (-3dB at 20Hz



“The Seconda delivers an impressively high standard of neutrality, underpinned by a bass that is dry but smooth and well extended.”

in-room) right up to the top limit of audibility. Most of the audio range is reproduced within tight ± 3 dB limits, apart from a -5 dB suckout at 70Hz. There's the merest hint of forwardness in the upper midband, 700Hz-1.5kHz, which will sharpen detail projection a little, plus a mild, shallow dip in the presence zone (around 2.5-3kHz), which should help the speaker avoid any aggressive tendencies. Above that point the treble makes a mild recovery, delivering a smooth and extended ultimate output.

The net result is an impressively high standard of neutrality, underpinned by a bass that is dry but smooth and well extended. Despite its 52Hz fundamental bass resonance falling very close to a major reinforcement mode in our test room, the bottom end remained unusually free from any thickening or 'one-note' emphasis.

The impedance stays above 4.5 ohms throughout, so the load is not unduly difficult to drive. However, our in-room, far-field measurement gives a below average sensitivity rating of 86-87dB (somewhat lower than the specified 89dB), so a reasonably powerful amplifier will be helpful to those who like their music loud. Pair matching is excellent, right across the frequency band, which speaks volumes about the quality control of both drive units and crossover components.

The impressive measured frequency response is directly reflected in a fine overall sound quality. Primarily auditioned via Naim amplification (NAC 552/NAP 500), Chord Signature cables, driven from a Rega/Linn

hybrid vinyl source, Naim CDS3/PS555 CD player, and Magnum Dynalab MD103T FM tuner, the Seconda might not have the most exciting sound dynamically speaking, but it is supremely well balanced overall.

The bass end has plenty of weight and power, driving the music along with a crispness rarely found in ported enclosures, without a trace of thickening, overhang or heaviness to obscure the detail further up the band. Few speakers are as effective at conveying the contrasting tonal characters of upright acoustic or electric basses, or are able to handle a walking bass line with similar smoothness and consistency.

The midband neatly judges the line between emphasising detail and becoming aggressive. It's essentially neutral and smoother than average, with just a hint of forwardness to project voices well and maintain good intelligibility at low levels.

Criticisms are minor. This is a speaker that does a good job of going about its business without drawing attention to itself. One might perhaps find the top end obvious in the way it makes itself heard, and it could be sweeter and more transparent, but in every other respect this is an impressively discreet design that simply does the job without fuss.

Dynamics could be a little livelier and more invigorating, and subtle instrumental textures are not particularly forthcoming or obvious, as some of the finer micro-detail doesn't come across all that well. Stereo images are well formed, free from any obvious boxiness and with respectable, if unexceptional, focus and

depth, though transparency and dynamic tension are both a little weak.

This is a speaker that succeeds as much through what it doesn't do as what it does: while it may not deliver the most exciting sounds around, it's very careful not to put a foot wrong either. The beautiful and original presentation goes a long way towards justifying this speaker's price, while the sonic performance provides fine vindication for the use of sealed-box loading in a two-and-a-half-way context. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 85% [Progress bar]	PRO Attractively shaped and unusually finished cabinets with well-judged overall neutrality. Bass is crisp, clean and deep, while the midband is open and informative.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 82% [Progress bar]	CON Could have more dynamic expression, and image could be more transparent. Modest sensitivity might limit ultimate loudness capability.
BUILD >> 87% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 82% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION The pleasing shape and high quality finish combines well with the neutral presentation of these speakers. They could have more dynamic expression and transparency, but the bass is crisp, clean and deep with a fine midband that's very open.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%	

exposure



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The vinyl frontier

Pro-Ject is helping vinyl make its move into uncharted territory – MP3

PRODUCT Pro-Ject Debut III USB

TYPE USB turntable

PRICE £210 (including arm and cartridge)

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

There is something faintly sacrilegious about transferring vinyl to a compressed music format. The concept is nothing new of course; people used to do it all the time with cassette, and both CD-R and MiniDisc still have their followers on this front. However, if it's ease of access you want, then hard disc storage really is an impressive option.

Getting vinyl onto a computer has always been surprisingly complicated. The traditional method has been to record the original to CD and then rip this to hard disk. The USB turntable – by virtue of an onboard phono stage and analogue to USB converter – simplifies the process by sending the signal from a vinyl LP straight into a PC or Mac. You need software to record it with of course, but you can find excellent packages online, often for free. Pro-Ject recommends Audacity, a multi-track audio editor for Linux, Mac and PC.

The Debut III USB is based heavily on Pro-Ject's entry-level model, which in standard form sells for £160 and features the Ortofon OM-5E moving magnet cartridge and gimbal bearing tonearm, as well as an onboard phono stage found here. The platter is pressed steel with a felt mat to reduce ringing, while the motor is suspended on rubber to stop it from

causing the plinth to resonate. The latter is available in black or silver paint finishes and has a moulded plastic lid. Power is courtesy of a plug-top transformer and on/off switching hidden under the plinth, which keeps the top looking clean.

The arm cable is a separate interconnect and thus easily upgraded. In this instance, it comes with a phono to mini-jack adaptor, so that you can plug it into a wider range of components.

SOUND QUALITY

Inevitably, the Debut is not the most refined of turntables, yet manages to avoid sounding thin or abrasive by virtue of a rolled-off and soft balance that is easy to live with, if lacking in dynamics or genuine high frequencies. Pro-Ject's Expression II at £250, which features the Ortofon OM-10 – the next needle up in the range – sounds a lot more dynamic and open when passed through the phono stage of a Pioneer A-A9 integrated amplifier. This leads one to suspect that the Debut's built-in phono stage is also a limiting factor.

The Debut can nonetheless deliver the essence of vinyl magic. It is relaxed and revealing enough to let you know that the format has plenty to offer and is more than worthy of digital competition at the price.

The Audacity software took a bit of mastering, but once the knack had been acquired, we were able to record LPs with relative ease. You can vary factors like oversampling and bit rate, although higher bit rates really eat into your hard disc space.

The end result inevitably depends on your computer's sound card, but with an Apple MacBook using the headphone output, the result was pretty close to the original when recording at 24-bit/48kHz.

The alternative to this approach is to use an outboard analogue to USB converter, or a soundcard with an analogue input after the phono stage. We did something similar with the Terratec iVinyl (reviewed on p62) and got a better result using the Expression II source.

The Debut USB is a neat solution for those wanting a decent turntable to upload their vinyl. Plus, it's also an attractive option for vinyl virgins thanks to the onboard phono stage. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 70%



FEATURES >> 88%



BUILD >> 78%



VALUE >> 85%



PRO

Very convenient way to get your vinyl onto the computer with decent sound to boot. Upgradeable cartridge and arm lead, ideal for beginners.

CON

Not the most dynamic of turntables – especially at high frequencies and bandwidth is restricted. Its upgradability is also somewhat limited by the onboard phono stage.

CONCLUSION

An upgrade on the plastic competition that makes easy work of transferring your vinyl to a computer. If you already have a decent turntable, then there are better sounding options, but if you need an affordable transcriber, it's your best option.

HI-FI CHOICE >>> **81%**
OVERALL SCORE

Atacama Equinox XL Pro SE

TYPE Equipment support

PRICE £350 (as reviewed)

CONTACT ☎ 01455 283251 # www.atacama-audio.co.uk

A tacama has been in the equipment supports game for a very long time, and the experience has clearly come in useful when designing the Equinox XL Pro SE. This model neatly marries 'old-time' virtues of rigidity and tubular-welded construction with modern curves and 'designer' looks. The Equinox range includes several versions of the stand, and this one is aimed at particularly wide equipment. Its four-leg design (the 'Hi-Fi' model has only three) aids balance and load-carrying, although it's intrinsically trickier to set up and level.

The base unit supports two shelves, with add-on units supplied separately. The base rests on spikes, and individual levels connect to one another using spikes too, making the stand easily to dismantle, but also secure and steady. The toughened glass shelves rest on ball-bearings, sandwiched between plastic locating cups to prevent the shelves from sliding too readily. If you really value point-contact support you could leave out

the upper cups, but having glass on ball bearings means it is a bit inclined to skid every time you press a button!

Not surprisingly, the assembly is on the resonant side and this has a noticeable effect on the system. It's not too severe, though, and the slight degree of presence enhancement it gives can sound downright pleasant with some systems. The size is generous enough to support a variety of outsize kit (not extra-deep Krell amps though!), plus it looks dead smart. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

A tough and versatile stand that adds a slight presence bloom to the sound, well suited to large and heavy kit

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 83%

Audioquest Sidewinder

TYPE Analogue interconnect cable

PRICE £45 (1m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01242 539100 # www.audioquest.com

You might need a long memory to recall Audioquest: the company's cables have been seen before on these shores, but over the last couple of years there has been no UK distributor for the US-based brand. Happily that has now changed and we can welcome the extensive range back again.

The Multi-Room Company sent us a handful of cables to look at and we're starting here with a modestly-priced interconnect that is a popular model in the United States. Looking rather like the mains lead on a old smoothing iron with its braided fibre exterior, Sidewinder is a simple enough pseudo-balanced cable with 'Long Grain Copper' stranded conductors and PVC insulation, the whole amounting to a 7mm-diameter cable that's flexible enough to manage tight corners. Good quality, albeit basic, phono plugs are also fitted.

Expectations of what a £50-ish interconnect should achieve are high these days, and Sidewinder did not disappoint. It has a very nearly neutral tonal balance with, we felt, just

a slight lift in the upper bass, which is pleasant enough unless you have speakers that are already keen on that region. Deep bass is well controlled but certainly not constricted, while treble is a shade shy in the very highest reaches, slightly reducing the ambience on good acoustic recordings. Stereo imaging is broad and has pretty good depth. Best of all, though, is a real sense of rhythmic 'snap', which we suspect will help this cable sell quickly in shop demonstrations! **HFC**

Richard Black



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
 magazine



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

A lively and detailed cable with generally enjoyable tonality and excellent rhythmic qualities. Adds slight upper-bass warmth.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 86%

Audioquest VDM-3

TYPE Digital interconnect cable

PRICE £70 (1m terminated)

CONTACT ☎ 01242 539100 # www.audioquest.com

A digital cable seems like the simplest thing in the world – the requirements are just the same as a TV aerial cable (priced about 15p per metre last time we looked) and digits are digits. Except, of course, for jitter, induced noise modulation and all sorts of other side effects that, between them, make the job of a digital interconnect at least as demanding as that of an analogue one.

Audioquest make a startling array of cables to suit each and every purpose and the VDM-3 falls somewhere in the middle of its digital connector range. Beautifully finished in braid, with phono plugs wrapped in a fetching shade of dark red, it certainly looks the part. And this beauty, Audioquest assures us, goes more than skin-deep, with construction suited to high-end ambitions. Each cable features a thickly silver-plated copper core, polythene foam insulation and silver-plated copper braid and conductive plastic screen. The phono plugs are silver-plated, too, which all goes to make up

a high-spec digital coaxial cable.

The very best DACs are considerably less critical of digital interconnect quality than not so exalted models, and this cable made little, if any, difference when feeding a dCS Elgar. With more realistically-priced DACs we tried, though, it had one of the most pronounced effects of any sensibly-priced digital cable we can recall, cleaning up the overall sound and seeming to reduce grain markedly. While there's no tonal change in the sound, the reduction in grain makes subtle treble clearer and sweeter, while the bass also seems to gain some extension. In short, this fine cable is well worth the expense. **HFC**

Richard Black



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Upgrading your DAC cables can be highly cost effective. This one is excellent value with gains that are clearly audible.

HI-FI CHOICE

>> **88%**

Terratec PhonoPreamp iVinyl

TYPE USB phono stage

PRICE £99

CONTACT ☎ 01327 844880 # www.terratec.co.uk

The iVinyl is a simple solution for those looking to record and save their LP (or cassette) collection onto a digital format. It features a phono stage with a line-level option, the output of which then transfers along USB 2.0. So, the iVinyl sits between a turntable and computer with USB input. It draws power from the computer itself and does not need a separate soundcard to record (although a soundcard is needed to hear what you record, of course).

The iVinyl has curious selectors for 'capacity', denoted simply as '100', '250' and '430'. In fact, these refer to the cartridge's capacitance and traditionally carry the suffix 'pF' for picofarads. There are also three 'input level' settings marked 'line', 'max' and 'min'. These are not referred to in the literature, but would seem to indicate gain. However, this is a moving magnet-only device, with the 'line' setting reserved for cassette decks or other analogue sources.

The iVinyl comes with two software discs,

Algorithmix Sound Rescue for PCs and Roxio Spin Doctor for Macs, for both burning and vinyl de-clicking. But, you can use any software you wish. We struggled to keep Spin Doctor up and working on a Mac and reverted to using Audacity to make vinyl recordings. We then attempted to use the Spin Doctor noise reduction system to de-click what seemed like emphasised noise from classical vinyl. Unfortunately, it wouldn't play ball. However, results in general were pretty good, and certainly better than the Pro-Ject Debut USB (reviewed on p61). That said, the improvement here was in part because we were using a better turntable and cartridge, rather than



iVinyl being a better phono stage.

If you already have a turntable we would venture that you also have some kind of phono stage, be it standalone or in an amplifier. Taking a line out from this into a good soundcard will, we strongly suspect, give rather better results than either. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

An easy way to get vinyl onto your PC, but one that is bettered by a decent soundcard and your existing phono stage.

HI-FI CHOICE

>> **75%**

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

AMPLIFIERS

The best amplification options at the one-to-two-grand level are seriously diverse

ON TEST



Audio Aero Prima
£1,595



Cyrus Pre vs2/8 Power/PSX-R
£1,700



Exposure 3010S
£1,000



Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1
£1,198



Sugden A21aL Series 2
£1,299



Unison Research Unico Secondo
£1,250

In assembling a group of amplifiers within the £1,000-£2,000 range (in the end the dearest came in at £1,700) we faced an interesting choice: restrict ourselves to one-box integrated amplifiers or look further to pre/power combinations? This, after all, is broadly where the crossover happens. Yes, you can get one or two pre/power combos for under a grand and a handful of integrated amps for well over £2,000, but on the whole that statement is true.

Having duly assembled our group, listened to the models and dissected them all, we're definitely glad that we decided to go for the mixed bunch. For one thing, when you're listening to a piece of music, who cares whether it's going through one amp box or two? The end result is what matters – and that's what we assessed. That at least makes comparisons easy enough. Now, of course, one can upgrade pre- and power amps more easily than integrated models; however, these days most integrations have 'preamp' outputs, so they can be upgraded too, either by replacing the power section or by adding to it (bi-amping).

Furthermore, given the engineering trade-offs, it's debatable whether one box or two is the better option. Back in the old days, when LP was the main source, separate preamps meant lower hum from the phono stage (radiated from the amp's mains transformer), but with the move to all-line-level sources hum ceased to be a major issue, and integrated amps, with their greater convenience, became the obvious choice for many hi-fi consumers. Then people

found that a dedicated power supply improved the performance of line stages no end, and the two-box amp suddenly rediscovered its *raison d'être*. Yes, it's possible to look after the power supplies individually in one box, but the resultant increases in complexity and size make doing this about as expensive as building an external preamp.

The differences in approach in this area and others made for a particularly varied group, and one with which we had a lot of fun. We hope that after reading the following few pages you'll want to join in. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Pioneer PDR-609 CD recorder
- ⊕ dCS Elgar D/A converter
- ⊕ Chord DAC64
- ⊕ Wireworld, AudioQuest, Kimber and Bespoke Audio cables

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ⊕ John Joubert *Songs For Voice And Recorder*
- ⊕ Igor Raykhelson *Jazz Suite*
- ⊕ Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*

EARS USED

Yet again, we're immensely grateful to the kind souls from within the industry who gladly came and lent us their highly trained ears, tempted by nothing more than the prospect of cake and coffee. Our deepest thanks to:

- ⊕ Adam Shaw-Cotterill (Audio Partnership)
- ⊕ Geoff Meads (Arcam)
- ⊕ Steve Reichert (Armour Home Electronics)

3010 Integrated Amplifier

SUGDEN

A21a

VOLUME

Selector

Volume

Prima Amplifier

CD **UNBALANCED** **CED**

LISTENING TESTS

In classic *HFC* fashion, the centrepiece of the listening was a 'blind' presentation of each amp to a panel of expert listeners, in an attempt to remain free of prejudices and preconceptions. Listening levels were accurately matched and the same programme of music was played through each amp with minimal distractions. In addition, each amp was auditioned on its own more informally, to get the fullest picture of its character.

LAB TESTS

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

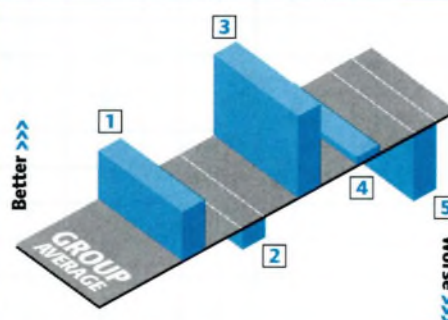
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average: a higher percentage means a better performance (e.g. lower distortion, lower noise, flatter response). In this test, the parameters are:

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





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CYRUS PRE VS2/8 P/PSX-R

This combo from Cyrus offers lots of scope for expansion

Cyrus calls the 8 Power an 'upgradeable' amplifier. No kidding! The number of possible upgrades is mind-boggling. We've taken a fairly simple two-box set-up and added a single PSX-R, but one could go crazy and end up with an active-crossover system featuring six power amps and seven PSX-Rs...

The unifying feature of all Cyrus electronics products is, of course, the case, but sometimes other links become apparent. The Pre vs2, for instance, evidently uses a circuit board designed for an integrated amplifier, with only the positions designated for input selector, volume control, headphone amp, power supply and housekeeping actually filled. Selection and volume control are done electronically, with a cramped back panel enabling up to seven sources to be connected. The power supply is generous for a preamp, with a large transformer that can still be supplemented by a PSX-R.

Thankfully, the 8 Power doesn't use the same circuit board; it has a dedicated board mostly utilising discrete transistors and ending in a single pair of bipolar transistors per channel. It has slightly more features than some power amps, in that it's also upgradeable with a PSX-R and it can be switched to mono (bridged) to deliver up to nearly 200W, short-term.

And then there's the PSX-R itself. Essentially a big transformer in a smart box, it also includes supply regulation and enough intelligence to interface effortlessly with the unit it partners. Connecting it to a preamp, power amp or CD player supplements but doesn't replace the original power supply.

SOUND QUALITY

Our panel heard the system with the PSX-R connected to the preamp, which Cyrus says is the commonest configuration. On the whole, it went down well, but again, it didn't quite blow our listeners away. Their first impression was that there's something a bit odd about the bass. We began with Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, and while one listener thought the bass heavy,

another found it rhythmic but lacking real extension, and the third simply commented 'thin'.

While that might appear contrary, it does seem that there's a degree of unevenness in the handling of very low frequencies, which strikes different listeners in different ways. Higher frequencies are more consistent, though, and a track with practically no bass whatsoever (female voice and recorder) made a much better impression, with good vocal intelligibility too.

The system scored well on detail, making a good job of separating instrumental lines. But the sound seemed to harden when the music got loud, the amps straining a little. And once again there was a big question mark over the imaging, which everyone felt lacked both scale and, particularly, depth. Sounds seemed to come predominantly from the speakers themselves rather than giving the impression of a real body of performers.

Later, we tried the PSX-R driving the power amp instead of the pre. We felt this removed most of the sense of strain, but on the other hand reduced the detail a little. Imaging wasn't much affected, and we suspect that the choice largely hinges on musical taste – chamber music lovers will partner the PSX-R with the pre; rockers will team it with the power. **HFC**

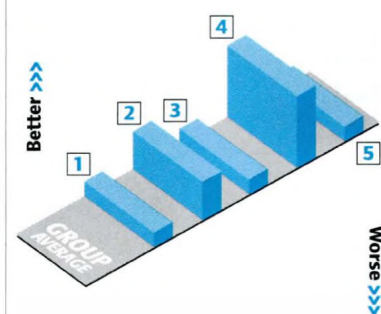


LAB REPORT

No insane powerhouse by any means, the diminutive 8 Power still manages to generate a fair bit of oomph, with momentary peaks of over 100W. What we didn't expect, though, is that maximum output is very slightly less with the PSX-R connected. We doubt you'd notice, though – it's a difference of less than 1dB, and with or without it, output current is quite generous, so we don't anticipate problems with any normal loudspeaker load.

Frequency response is very wide indeed from the preamp, and it's nicely judged too, rolling off by only -1dB at 40kHz. In what we've found to be the typical Cyrus manner, distortion is on the low side of average, around 0.01% in the midband at high power (it's somewhat higher, around 0.04%, at high frequencies), but dropping off to complete insignificance below an output of a few watts. Noise is also good, and hum in particular is kept extremely low.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >> +30%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +10%
- 4] Distortion >> +50%
- 5] Output impedance >> +10%

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%

FEATURES >> 82%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 80%

The Cyrus combo is a smart and readily upgradeable system, but the sound seems unable to balance effortless power delivery with subtlety and detail at lower levels. In addition, the bass is a little inconsistent.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 81%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	60W	72W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.002%	0.006%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.25dB	±0.5dB

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EXPOSURE 3010S

This upgraded beast offers exciting, engaging performance

The basic look and indeed internal design of Exposure's 3010 Series components is familiar bordering on 'elder statesman', but the addition of an 'S' to the model number denotes a few recent changes. Chief among these is a power-supply upgrade to increase the amp's rating and make it more confident with lower impedances. Much remains the same, though, including the basic line-only spec with the option to add a phono stage if desired.

Internally, this is a completely traditional amp with through-hole-mounted components (mostly discrete transistors doing the amplifying, just a couple of ICs being visible) assembled on a single-sided circuit board – or actually two boards, stacked vertically. Two pairs of bipolar transistors per channel look after the output, while the mains transformer is indeed a monstrous affair good for several hundred watts. It's assisted by slightly more reservoir capacitance than usual, and with the large heat sink, it's obvious that this amp expects to be driven hard now and then. The volume control and selector switch are both mechanical types, motorised for remote-control purposes.

The case is made entirely of aluminium and has some very nice phono sockets on its rear, along with twin pairs of speaker terminals (hardwired together). There's also a twinned preamp output, offering easy upgrading to bi- and tri-amp configurations.

SOUND QUALITY

In our blind listening tests, the 3010S followed a couple of slightly disappointing contenders, and so was greeted all the more warmly when it suddenly seemed to add a new level of involvement and excitement. All the same, things weren't unequivocally positive, with our listeners highlighting the slightly sibilant way it handled female vocals, and also noting a certain harshness, especially in the context of naturally bright sounds such as saxophone.

Opinions varied over the amp's tonality, the bass seeming now heavy, now well balanced.



We concluded that the bass is extended, but lacks a little control compared with the efforts of one or two other contenders in the group. As a result the quality varies depending on what the amp is being asked to do – sustained bass notes sound very well extended, but 'bass transients' can seem a little over-rich.

That didn't stop the amp putting on a good rhythmical performance, though, and in the upper-bass/low-midrange region it's energetic and punchy. The higher midrange going into the treble is perhaps a shade bright, and it was probably that rather than distortion as such that led to the odd complaint of harshness. Detail is mostly good, though perhaps not stunning. In the Michael Jackson track, voice and backing were clearly defined both on their own and in relation to each other. The instrumental lines in Raykhelson's *Jazz Suite* were easy to follow, while the individual timbre of singers was made more obvious than with most models.

In addition, the 3010S turned in one of the best performances of the day imaging-wise, with lateral position clearly and stably defined and some good depth too. And in the end, what really counted in its favour was the way it managed to make the music suddenly more enjoyable and engaging for the listeners. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 85%	This Exposure model delivers a good rhythmic performance with good, if perhaps not outstanding, detail, offset by a touch of treble harshness and some lack of bass control. It's generally involving and exciting, though.
FEATURES >>> 80%	
BUILD >>> 85%	
VALUE >>> 83%	

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE 83%

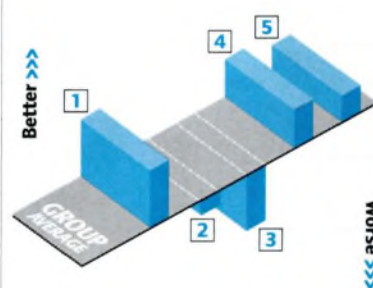


LAB REPORT

Definitely the powerhouse of the group, the 3010S exceeded its rating with a sustained output of 128W and peaks reaching nearly 160W. Into four ohms we obtained outputs of some 240W. Exposure does tend to favour gently restricted bandwidth, and in this case the treble rolled off by 1dB at 21kHz, just enough to be subtly audible in direct comparison with completely flat amplifiers, though nowhere near muffled. Bass, too, is a little less extended than with most models, but again, 1dB at 10Hz is a perfectly acceptable figure. Output impedance is low at all frequencies.

Distortion is a little higher than average for the class, hovering around the 0.02% level at high and medium power before vanishing around 0.5W. There's also a trace of crossover distortion, perhaps just enough to account for the slight brightness in the amp's character. Noise is higher than average too, but still acceptable.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >>> +40%
- 2] Frequency response >>> -10%
- 3] Dynamic range >>> -40%
- 4] Distortion >>> +30%
- 5] Output impedance >>> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	110W	128W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.03%	0.015%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±0.9dB

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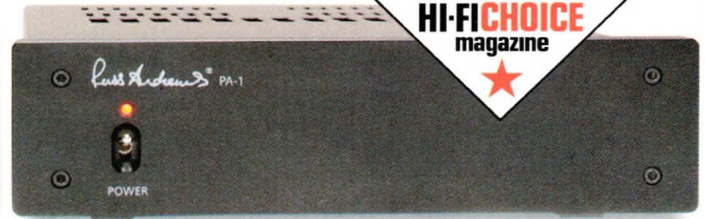
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RUSS ANDREWS HP-1/PA-1

RA's shoebox-sized dynamic duo punch above their weight

We looked at this intriguing little combo in HFC 295, but here's a summary of what's on offer. Built for Russ Andrews by Stello of Korea, the HP-1 is first and foremost a headphone amp, but doubles as a minimalist preamp by dint of offering two inputs and a line output. The PA-1, meanwhile, is as simple as a power amp can be – input, output, mains switch. Similar in area to a sheet of A4, the pair are designed for 'real' hi-fi and desktop systems alike, at a very realistic price too.

Actually, the HP-1 has two further features: a gain switch (the high gain setting doesn't seem that useful, but some portable audio devices may benefit) and a 'filter' switch, which cuts the treble; the settings are 'flat' (A) and 'gently rolled off' (B). Again, that may prove more useful with mobile or computer audio than with real hi-fi sources. As for the two inputs, well, plenty of serious systems only use two sources on anything like a regular basis.

The build is solid, and the components have clearly been carefully selected. The HP-1 has a reasonably generous power supply, while that in the PA-1 naturally has a lower-capacity transformer than most of the amps here, though it's bigger than one might expect, and there's no compromise in the provision of reservoir capacitors. The heat sink is internal (and cleverly aligned with ventilation holes) and carries one pair of bipolar power transistors per channel.

SOUND QUALITY

It must count for something that this combo was the only contender in the group to be met with universal enthusiasm at the outset. Good imaging, strong 'out of the box' sound, a high degree of vocal communication and good bass weight were all detected with the opening track. Female vocals were also well liked, though one sharp-eared individual thought there may have been a slight top-end cut (see Lab Report).

In general, though, the combo was felt to have a very neutral and well-balanced tonal character. It was also among the best of the



group at handling detail, with fine identification of instruments. A passage in the jazz number features saxophone and viola, a combination that's quite hard to separate clearly – yet the amps managed it confidently. They were no less adept at separating instruments spatially, presenting images with precision across the lateral spread and with plenty of depth too.

Criticisms were restricted to the occasional comment regarding a slight lack of grand scale and dynamic swing – but that didn't seem to reduce the pair's rhythmic drive. And overall the amps were praised by all for delivering a really involving performance; for making music rather than just sounds. There's plenty of analysis there, and in the busy mix of the jazz piece, for instance, it was unusually clear just how each instrument was being played and where its line was leading – and moreover, the pair succeeded in mixing these lines without blurring or homogenising them. Whether the combo can meet your needs with its two inputs is your call. But at the very least, it could form the heart of an exceptionally capable second or even office system. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 88%

FEATURES >>> 75%

BUILD >>> 86%

VALUE >>> 85%

If the lack of inputs doesn't put you off, this is a highly enjoyable and surprisingly powerful combo that offers fine levels of detail, good rhythm and stable, precise imaging – along with great headphone-driving ability!

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 86%

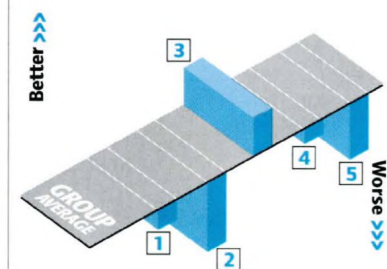


LAB REPORT

We mention the treble-cutting option of the HP-1 in the main text, but the PA-1 power amp also distinctly tailors the sound, and this isn't switchable. With a response that's 3dB down by 17kHz, it's likely to sound audibly 'sweetened' in comparison with most of its peers, although the effect is still modest enough to be a question of taste for most folks. Bass, however, is flat to well below 20Hz in the case of both units.

The power output of the PA-1 is just minutely shy of its advertised figure, but receives an unusually high-impedance source from the HP-1, which will further colour the frequency response, by up to a decibel or so, depending on loudspeaker impedance characteristics. The noise floor is fine, while distortion is a little on the high side. Perhaps more importantly for subjective character, it's relatively high at low output levels (around 1W), only vanishing into noise as output drops to 0.2W or so.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >>> -15%
- 2] Frequency response >>> -50%
- 3] Dynamic range >>> +30%
- 4] Distortion >>> -10%
- 5] Output impedance >>> -40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	50W	48W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.02%	0.15%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+1dB	±3.5dB

Some decisions are just so simple

WHAT HI-FI?
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SUGDEN A21A SERIES 2

Sugden's class Class A contender is the Marmite of amps

If Exposure's 3010 has been around for a while, the A21 is positively geological in its antiquity. The model dates back to the era of The Beatles, and over 40 years has, says Sugden, been subjected to "continuous improvement". The look is modern enough and you get a remote control (for the volume only), and most of the components are types introduced long after 1965, but the Class A circuit isn't a million miles from the original.

The point of Class A is that it totally avoids the bugbear of push-pull circuits, crossover distortion. Transistors work pretty well while they're conducting, but if one has to switch off completely, all sorts of odd things happen that can seriously degrade reproduction of low-level audio signals. With Class A, conditions are arranged so that all the output transistors conduct continuously, but the downside is that a lot of current passes through them at all times, most of it just generating heat. This isn't very green, and tends to result in amps that put out rather modest amounts of power – the A21a is rated at 20W, which, by 2007 standards, isn't much. Mind you, our listening panels have never yet asked for more than 20W (peak) to be delivered to the notoriously insensitive ATC speakers in our 220sq ft listening room.

Largely dual mono in internal design, the A21a includes separate circuit boards for each channel, mounted directly against the heat sinks which form the side panels. These are mounted the 'wrong' way for optimum heat dissipation, and in hot climes it might make sense to slope the amplifier from front to back to improve air circulation. Connections include five line inputs, one upgradeable to phono.

SOUND QUALITY

This probably isn't an amp to suit everyone. Never mind the power limitations; what some listeners will miss is the lack of punch. This isn't due to the amp running out of steam (it didn't in our blind test at least, where the maximum level was carefully checked and found to be



within its comfort zone); rather, it's the flip side of its relaxed, laid-back character. One listener used the term 'valve sound', and while we'd be the first to raise all sorts of objections to that, we probably all know what's intended, and it's certainly something to bear in mind.

Detail is good – on that all agreed. There's plenty of information on offer with regard to who's playing what, where they are and so forth. Tonality is rather more of a subjective matter. Female voices seemed a little fuller, slightly rounded out and as a result subtly changed in character – but it was still very easy to follow the meaning of the words. By contrast, the jazz track was a little uncomfortable; the bright sounds of many of the instruments sat awkwardly with the amp's tendency to warmth, and the result had a touch of hardness to it that didn't entirely please our listeners.

With a full symphony orchestra, the A21a generated a surprising amount of scale, proving it's happy enough to deliver full power (the orchestral track reached the highest peak level of all our selections), but it somehow failed to excite, again drawing comments to the effect that punch and attack fall short of expectations. There's no denying this is a warm, mellow and smooth amp – and your fondness of it will rely largely on your musical tastes. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 82% 	The Sugden's sound is generally warm and mellow, but it struggles somewhat when required to be incisive. It's not the punchiest amp around, but some will simply 'get it' despite its limited power output.
FEATURES >> 82% 	
BUILD >> 83% 	
VALUE >> 81% 	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 82%	

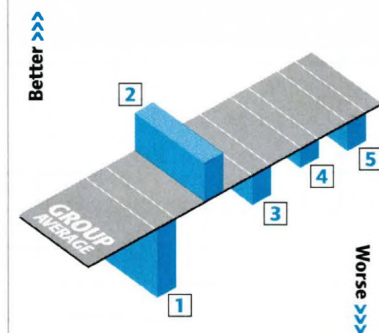


LAB REPORT

Even Sugden's modest 20W rating proved optimistic by about ten per cent, but perhaps more important is the rather strange behaviour of signals as, and after, the amp is driven into mild overload. Clipping is asymmetric and varies depending on the precise amount of overload and its duration, and funnily enough, this appears to have a beneficial effect with suitable music, adding some 'kick' and apparent extra power. Typically for a Class A amp, though, you certainly don't get extra power into low impedances, with a measly 15W available into four ohms.

Output impedance is moderate and frequency response typical of good-quality amps, down by 1dB at 6Hz and 40kHz. Noise is moderate and distortion is on the high side at high levels, but it does fade away – as it should with Class A – lower down. Mind you, that's also the case with several Class AB contenders in the group. The power consumption speaks for itself – turn it off at night!

HOW IT COMPARES



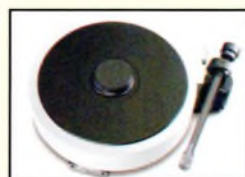
- 1] Dynamic power >> -50%
- 2] Frequency response >> +30%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -20%
- 4] Distortion >> -15%
- 5] Output impedance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	25W	23W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	-	0.16%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±0.5dB



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



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UNISON UNICO SECONDO

This Italian beauty is a real hidden gem

Hi-fi companies are a funny lot. As the Unico Secondo's maker demonstrates, they can produce a nice new amp... and forget to put it on their website, surely most people's first port of call for information these days. Luckily, Unison Research's UK distributor is more alert, and from it we learn that this is the "second generation" of the Unico, a well-established valve/transistor hybrid design from Italy. Not for the first time, we find ourselves wondering just how much 'valve character' one really gets from one double triode small-signal valve per channel, but, well, we've had good results from Unico models in the past...

It's a big amp and a well-filled case. The mains transformer actually looks quite small at first, but only because it's dwarfed by the case itself and the heat sink next to (and cunningly profiled around) it. Moving across the case to the left, one finds a large rectifier and the usual reservoir capacitors, plus two pairs of MOSFET output devices per channel. Most of the audio amplification is done on a large board which carries the audio circuits (the valves and some ICs, a couple with their numbers intriguingly scratched off). A daughterboard at the rear bears the selector switch, a mechanical type not accessible via the remote control, plus the input circuit for the single balanced input. The remaining five inputs are line-level unbalanced – one is upgradeable to phono operation.

Twin speaker terminals are fitted, plus phono outputs marked 'Monitor' (aka tape out) and 'Subwoofer' (pre out). We were particularly taken with the look of this model, with its extra-thick front panel – very aspirational!

SOUND QUALITY

It's a bit horses for courses, as ever, but this was clearly one of the hits of the day. One listener never quite found the levels of excitement he got from the Russ Andrews amps, for instance, but the others had little but good to say about it. Most of all, they found in it the punch and immediacy thought lacking with some other



contenders. Obviously, the Michael Jackson track benefited from this considerably, but it wasn't the only one to enjoy new-found life.

Some interesting direct comparisons were made with the RA combo (remember our panel were listening blind), the consensus being that this was probably the more neutral of the two contenders, but perhaps (as a consequence?) less upfront. The Unico seemed to have more 'boogie factor' and perhaps slightly more impression of depth – and even, one listener suggested, height – in stereo images. It also seemed to have the best 'blackness' between notes of any of the group, and some of the best dynamics too, not just in terms of swing from maximum to minimum, but also in the naturalness with which that was achieved.

Occasionally such qualities are achieved at the expense of analysis – not here. In fact, the Unico was one of the most detailed amps in the group, making clear the varied tones and directions of the instruments within the whole, but never separating them unnaturally. If anything, sounds became more solid and real as they got more complex, with highly stable image placement and some very good depth too. And tonality? Well, given that not one listener mentioned the subject with any of the tracks, there can't be much wrong there! **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 89%	Unison may not be shouting about it, but this amp is very good at retrieval of details and also at placing them in their appropriate context. Tonality is natural, imaging precise and deep, and dynamics wide and enforced.
FEATURES >> 82%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 88%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 87%	

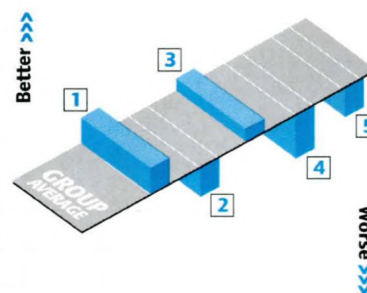


LAB REPORT

Unison Research's claim of 110W is right on the money, and the meaty output stage and power supply barely flinch as more current is demanded of them, putting out around 200W into four ohms. Peaks into eight ohms reach around 160W. Output impedance is quite low and loudspeaker-dependent response changes will be small.

However, the frequency response isn't entirely flat. With the volume set to maximum or very low, the amp reaches 45kHz for a loss of 1dB, but with a -6dB setting, it's -3dB at only 13kHz, which is certainly audible. At the setting used in our tests, the -3dB point is around 35kHz – just enough to sweeten things. We're not sure this variability is a good thing. We also wonder whether addressing the slightly above-average distortion would improve or worsen the sound; we're talking 0.3% at high power, and still nearly 0.1% at 1W output. Noise is good and low, though, while power consumption is on the high side.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +20%
- 2] Frequency response >> -20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +10%
- 4] Distortion >> -30%
- 5] Output impedance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	110W	112W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.1%	0.25%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±1dB

CONCLUSIONS

Spending more money is no guarantee of better musical performance

In concluding this test, we admit to being slightly disappointed. When summing up other recent amplifier groups, we've often found ranking the models hard, as there was so much to like about so many. Here it was much easier, and there were some we'd happily pass on without shedding a tear. Was this because our expectations were too high, the top models were superb, or because the weaker ones were just so very weak?

Although our panel didn't know the specific amp or combo they were

listening to, they did know which models were in the group and the rough price range. What's more, at least two of them were familiar with our basic test system, and had sat in on tests of cheaper amplifiers recently, so our panel were well placed to judge these products in absolute, as well as relative, terms.

We've long suspected that – on audio purity grounds alone – there's not much difference these days between the best in the £500-£1,000 class and average amps costing twice as much. This test

has confirmed that suspicion.

Not that there's much wrong with the low-scoring products here. Audio Aero, Cyrus and Sugden all make a decent amp. It's just that, given the standards achieved by the best £500-odd models, none of the three really leaps out. That said, in terms of pride of ownership, fit and finish, and (in the case of the Cyrus) upgradeability, they still have something to offer.

The Exposure 3010S scored very slightly higher than these three, and as the cheapest unit here, with

a generous power output, it does have its own niche carved out. But musical fulfilment came most readily from the Unison Research and Russ Andrews models. With similar price and scores, but precious little in common physically, these two amps (technically three: one integrated, one preamp and one power amp) get to the heart of the music in a way the others couldn't quite match. For most purchasers, the difference in specs between the two will determine which is most suitable. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

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

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

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

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

AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Audio Aero Prima	Cyrus Pre vs2/ 8 Power/ PSX-R	Exposure 3010S	Russ Andrews HP1/ PA1	Sugden A21a	Unison Research Unico Secondo
PRICE	£1,595	£1,700	£1,000	£1,198	£1,250	£1,200
SOUND						
FEATURES						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Performs best with loud, high-energy music. With subtler sounds it seems oddly lacking in definition and stereo image detail.	Sound seems unable to balance power delivery with subtlety and detail at lower levels: bass is inconsistent.	A good rhythmic performance and good detail, but some treble harshness and lack of bass control.	A highly enjoyable little combination with fine levels of detail, good rhythm, stable and precise imaging.	Sound is generally warm, but struggles when required to be incisive. Not the punchiest amp around, and lacks power.	Very good detail and coherence. Tonality is natural, imaging precise and deep, and dynamics wide and unforced.
KEY FEATURES						
LINE INPUTS	4	7	6	2	5	6
TAPE OUTPUTS	1	1	1	0	1	1
PHONO INPUT	No	No	Optional	No	Optional	Optional
SIZE (WXHXD)	43.5x11.2x33cm	21.5x7.3x36cm (each)	44x11.5x30cm	21.2x5.5x29cm (each)	43x9.2x35cm	43.5x12x36cm
WEIGHT	12kg	3.7/4.6/6kg	11kg	3.5/4.5kg	11kg	14kg
REMOTE CONTROLS	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
BALANCED INPUT	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
CLIP POINT	24V A	24V A	32V G	19.5V A	13.5V P	30V G
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	±0.7dB A	±0.5dB G	±0.9dB A	±3.5dB P	±0.5dB G	±1dB A
DYNAMIC RANGE	107dB E	103dB G	96dB A	106dB E	100dB G	103dB G
OUTPUT IMPEDANCE	0.02 ohm E	0.05 ohm G	0.04 ohm E	0.3 ohm A	0.16 ohm A	0.16 ohm A
POWER CONSUMPTION	42W/25W	30W/14W	15W/-	20W/-	110W/-	48W/-

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L to R: 1. Kuzma Stabi XL £10,000 2. Art Audio Concerto Stereo Amplifier (GE) £4400 3. Living Voice IBX R2 (Burr Oak) £4400 4. SME 10 / SME V £4115
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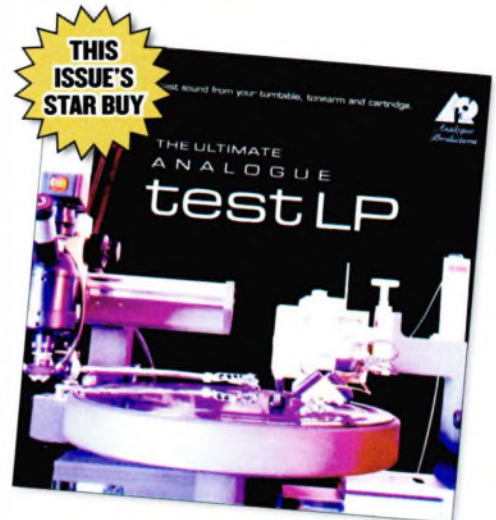
Most of the test records in the past have been made to test a variety of equipment. This test record avoids cannon shots, typewriters, voices on one channel and other useless fluff. Instead, it's designed to provide the basic test signals necessary to calibrate a turntable or cutting lathe as simply as possible.

Most of the signals have specific implications, but it is certainly possible to use them in any number of novel ways. The ten tracks on side one take the LP enthusiast from setting a baseline measurement of sound quality, offset angle and channel balance, through to azimuth, high and low frequency adjustment and precise VTA alignment. These are not only

useful for setting up a turntable, but also ideal for precisely matching a cartridge to an adjustable phono stage. The last track on side one is a standard wow and flutter test that is designed to determine the accuracy of your turntable's speed control.

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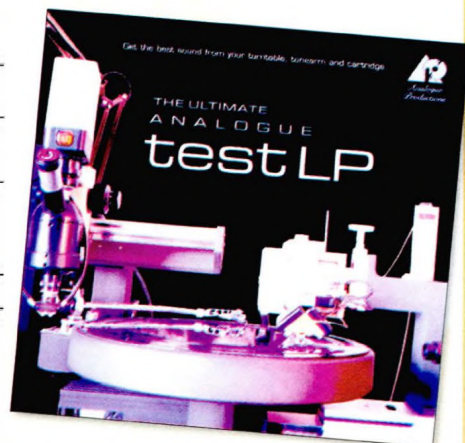
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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

Reviews you can trust

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

How to use this guide

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

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

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD

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



Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



Rega Apollo £498

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



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

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

Our favourite CD PLAYERS

BEST BUY
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG. OUTPUT	OPT. DIG. OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL. ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	
UP TO £1,000												
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player									285
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative									293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully undemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing, enhanced by flexibility as a DAC									291
	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift; otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value									285
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)									270
	Denon DCD-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
	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
	Classe CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced									286
EC	Classe CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs									284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too									280
	Cyrus 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 XI/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion									279
EC	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat									285
EC	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 Antlia	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best									291
	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm									283
	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.									284
	Meridian G06	1,695	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands									295
EC	Moon Supernova	4,500	Refined, high-performance player offers tremendous transparency and includes coaxial digital input									296
	Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer, £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system									288
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance									280
	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

SPECIAL BUY **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

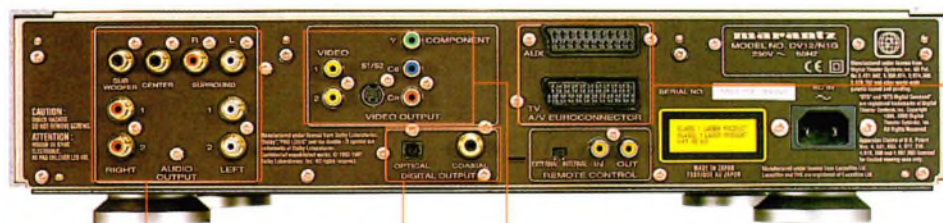
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	SPKE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV135	900	Unchanged looks and stereo-only DVD-A/SACD, but the overall performance is great across all formats. Stunning picture, too						296
	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 DV7001	600	Enhanced model based on DV6001, but with various improvements, including superior CD replay capabilities						296
	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
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD						266
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 DV135 £900
Stereo-only SACD and DVD-A, but excellent performance with audio and video.



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

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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



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

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

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

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 BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition
	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended
	Clearaudio Performance	1,670	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance. Good arm and cartridge
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution
	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
	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
	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality
	Michell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed
	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor
	Pro-Ject Expression II	250	A smooth and engaging turntable with the ability to revel in the glory of vinyl, with upgradable arm cable
	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
EC	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
	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
	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat
	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm
	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm
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
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)

SPECIFICATIONS				
SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
33/45				247
33/45				229
33/45				268
33/45				295
33/45				271
33/45/78		opt		276
33/45			opt	279
33/45			opt opt	284
33/45				266
33/45				268
33/45				239
33/45				235
33/45				289
33/45				279
33/45/78				294
33/45				268
33/45			opt	257
33/45			opt	257
33/45				228
33/45				248
33/45				195
33/45/78				293
33/45				259

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm
	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around
	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality
	Ortofon Saisa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound
	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound
	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
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for
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

SPECIFICATIONS			
MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
			266
			285
			235
			215
			290
			270
			235
			265
			253

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	Tested with the almost-as-good £40 540P, this remarkable phono stage brings refinement and bass weight to budget vinyl
	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound
	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
	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!
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
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility

SPECIFICATIONS			
MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUX GAIN	ISSUE NUMBER
			277
			268
			245
			234
			201
			234

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

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

SME

The way to play vinyl...

Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series M2



Series 300



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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



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



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



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



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

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE? PRODUCT £ COMMENTS

FM TUNERS

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, the generally decent performance on both bands makes this an great dual-band choice
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST7CC1	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free
<input type="checkbox"/>	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too

DAB TUNERS

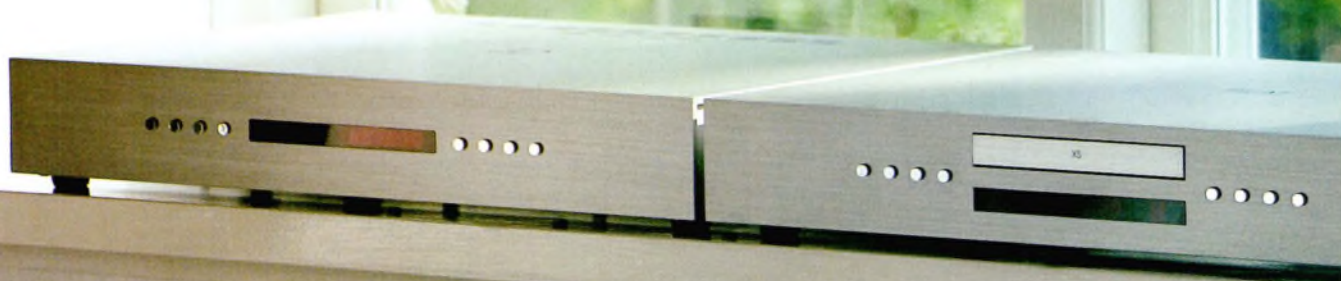
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge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

SPECIFICATIONS

WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	SCALE NUMBER
FM, M, L	128					251
FM	7					283
FM, M, L	100					281
DAB, FM, M	200					283
FM	opt	opt				257
200						283
FM, M	30					250
FM	30					230
DAB, FM, M	99					283
FM, M	20					283
FM, M	30					242
FM	100					283

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

Award winning musical sound
Lifetime warranty
Sexy design



The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

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

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

Discover why we say:

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w w w . d e n s e n . c o m

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

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

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

Recordable CD

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

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

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

Hard drive

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

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

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
CDR-HD1500 £599
Combining hard disk with CD-R adds flexibility to digital audio recording.



Cambridge Audio
Azur 640H £600
Rip and store CD tracks on hard disk, create playlists, connect to a PC and more.



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



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)	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS						
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		218
MD RECORDERS						
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducingly that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1		205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		233
HDD RECORDERS						
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160	276
	Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160	280
	Imerge S3000	2,800	Thought-out solution to the problem of storing, sorting and accessing a music collection. Sound wouldn't shame a good midrange CD player	1	160	291
	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250	278

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

monday - friday
9.30 - 5.30

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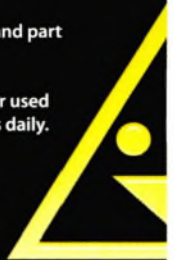
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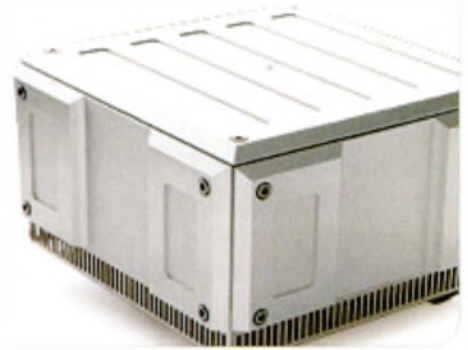
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6B02 POWER AMPLIFIER

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Qinpu A8000 MK II

Hi-Fi World guessed the price of this integrated amplifier to be around £3k... imagine their surprise when we told them it sells for under £1500!



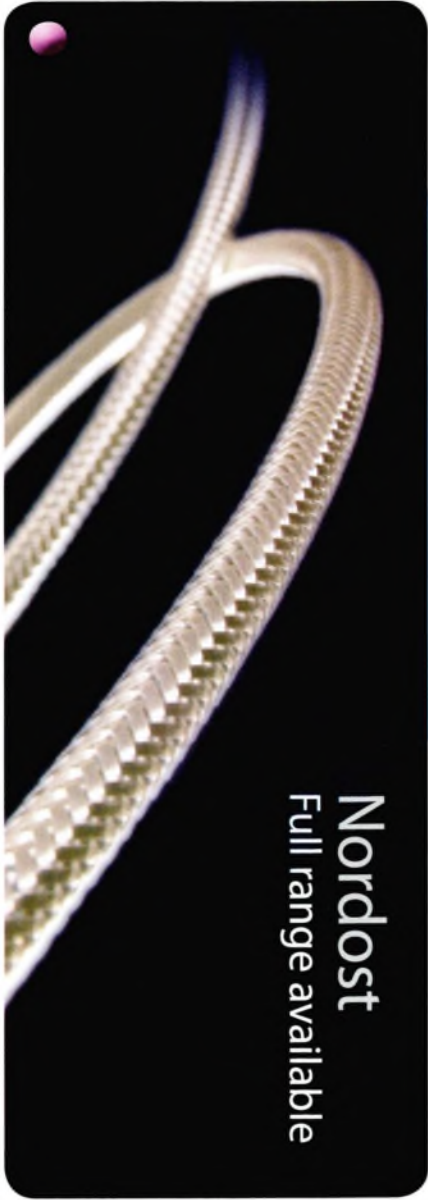
Balls of steel

The Duevel Planets have real balls - literally! At £800 (pair), this omni-directional loudspeaker is an absolute steal!



MiniMax CD

We think that when you combine digital and valve technology, you create something truly special. It seems that the press and customers also agree having heard the MiniMax!



Nordost
Full range available



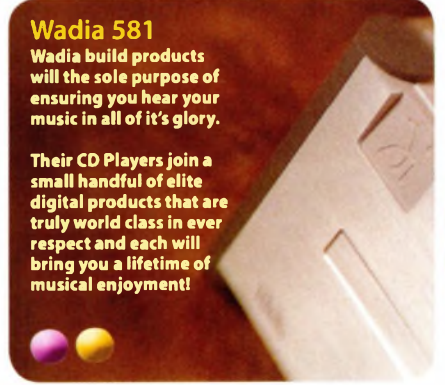
Shanling MC-30

The performance from this beautifully compact all-in-one system is first class. You should hear them with ATC or JAS-Audio speakers!



ATC SCM 7, 11, 19 and 40

At their respective price points, we don't think any other loudspeaker can tell you more about your music than the ATC range can. They offer exceptional value for money. We like the new and improved styling too!



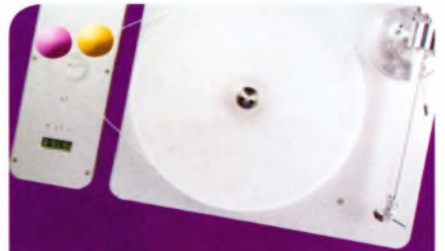
Wadia 581

Wadia build products will the sole purpose of ensuring you hear your music in all of it's glory.

Their CD Players join a small handful of elite digital products that are truly world class in ever respect and each will bring you a lifetime of musical enjoyment!



Hyperion
Full range available



Emotion

Clearaudio has a turntable in it's range to suit every budget. The Emotion model is one of the most popular, offering many of the Clearaudio technical innovations at an affordable price.

Bryston B100 SST

The B100 SST from Bryston is only their second integrated amplifier in 32 years. Not only will this 100wpc Amplifier bring your speakers to life but your CD Player and any other digital sources as well with its stunning optional onboard D/A Converter (4 inputs). Was it worth the wait? You bet!



Specialist items at great prices with

Atacama

£ CALL NOW



2 SHELF HI-FI BASE
MODULE
Equinox

INFORMATION

Combining high performance with practicality and good looks, the Equinox Series offers a flexible approach to Hi-Fi equipment rack design. Check online for the full range of Atacama AV and HiFi products.

Pro-ject

CHECK ONLINE



TURNTABLE WITH
ORTOFON 510 MKII
CARTRIDGE AND
CORK MAT
RPM5

INFORMATION

This Award-Winning Turntable will give any CD Player a run for its money. Includes an Ortofon 510 cartridge and a host of impressive features.

BUY
NOW PAY
2008

TEAC

£ CALL NOW



Reference
300DABMK3 System
REF300DABMK3

INFORMATION

This unique reference system combines the A-H300MK3 Remote Amplifier, the T-H300DAB MK3 300 DAB Digital Tuner and the PD-H300 MK3 32-Track Music Memory CD Player to create a sensational arrangement.

> **Products, technology and irresistible prices**

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PRE-AMPLIFIER WITH POWER AMPLIFIER

The PRE30 employs a Class A coupled, discrete fully balanced circuit topology utilised for the best possible signal-to-noise ratio and audio fidelity. This combined with the A30.2 Dual Mono Power Amplifier produces music and movie sound as vibrantly as at the moment it was recorded.

PRE30/A30.2



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7.1-CHANNEL HOME THEATER RECEIVER
AV receiver built to embrace high-definition media featuring DTS-HD Master Audio, Dolby TrueHD (Dolby Licensing), Hdmi (v. 1.3a), HDMI and Component Video Upconversion and Bi-Amping Capability for Enhanced Musicality and Power.

TX-SR605

Onkyo

Primare

5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
M-Cube 5.1

IKON AV SPEAKER PACKAGE
Ikon AV Speaker Package

HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
ELS1 5.1

ACTIVE SUB BASS SYSTEM
PRO 50 MK2

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE

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CHECK ONLINE FOR PRICE



BUY
NOW PAY
2008

MISSION

INFORMATION

Mission's Stunning M-Cube consists of an active 250W subwoofer with 2x200mm (8") bass driver, magnetically shielded centre and satellite speakers and 5 Wall brackets.



DALI

INFORMATION

This five star what hifi award winning speaker package comprises of 2 Ikon 6 floor standing speakers, 1 Ikon Vokal 2 centre, 2 on wall rear speakers and the Dali Ikon subwoofer. All of which are also available individually with free OED speaker cable.



epos

INFORMATION

This speaker package integrates two pairs of ELS3 speakers, one ELS 3C centre channel and the powerful new ELS subwoofer in order to create this fantastic new system. These full range of high end, high quality Epos speakers are available either individually or as part of this 5.1 package.



MJ Acoustics

INFORMATION

The PRO 50 MkII is an awesome addition to complement the most discerning cinema and music system featuring twin crossovers, 120watts of power, new designed 10" driver and Speaker and Line Level inputs with Gain Control Range 80 and 60dB.

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AUDIO LIMITED

MONITOR AUDIO

polkaudio
the speaker specialists

Wharfedale

audio pro

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INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The Destiny integrated amplifier produces world beating audio performance with its use of discrete analogue MOS-FET, its new mains transformer which produces up to 100 Watts into 8 Ohm operation and its 3Hz - 80KHz Frequency Response.

Destiny Series
Creek



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

The 8000P is a classic two channel power amplifier, delivering over 100W per channel and featuring a frequency response of 0.1 Hz - 75 kHz.

8000P
Audiolab



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Integrated Amplifier with 75 watts per channel into 8 ohms, 200VA custom-made toroidal power transformer, power supply capacitors and separate pre-amp output with class A buffer stage.

2010s
Exposure



CONDITIONING UNIT

The GII Mini Sub & Vision was designed to be a very rewarding single box 'plug-n-play' solution for a complete audio or home theatre system. It features 'Polaris X' technology - dedicated earth post and 6 high quality individually filtered sockets which utilise filter circuits and cryogenic technology.

GII MiniSub
IsoTek

Monitor Audio



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MULTI AWARD WINNING SPEAKER PACKAGE

SPEAKER PACKAGE BRONZE REFERENCE

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This Bronze Reference system features a blend of high performance driver technology, exceptional build quality and gorgeous finishes.

These components are also available individually in a variety of finishes.

Sennheiser

CHECK ONLINE

HIGH-END TRAVEL HEADPHONE SET PXC-450



INFORMATION

The PXC-450 is a circumaural high-end travel headphone set with NoiseGuard™ 2.0 technology, patented Duofol diaphragms and TalkThrough function for the best possible attenuation of ambient noise (as featured in the Bristol Show 2007).

Sonos

£ CALL FOR PRICE

MAKE YOUR MUSIC WIRELESS ZP80 INTRODUCTORY PACK



INFORMATION

Make your favorite audio devices part of a wireless, multi-room digital music system with the Sonos™ ZP80s or ZP100. Together with the Sonos™ Controller, this popular set up will give you music in any room you choose directly from your PC.

Onkyo

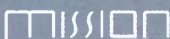
CHECK ONLINE

DAB/CD MINI SYSTEM CS-515UK



INFORMATION

The award winning CS-515UK CD receiver system features 50 Watts (RMS) power output, DAB Radio, MP3-CD / CD-R/ RW playback, Bass Boost and the audio quality is promoted with the inclusion of a Wolfson® 192 kHz/24-bit DAC.



Finance options available through V12 Finance

Full terms and conditions of the sale are available at www.hifibitz.co.uk/terms.asp. The terms of sale do not affect your statutory rights. Finance options are available on all items priced over £400 a.p. Buy Now Pay September 2007. All calls are recorded for training purposes.

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, tunelessly extended bass and excellent stereo imaging are among the highlights.



Primare
I30 £1,500

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



Copland
CTA405 £2,498

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £1,000								
	Arcam DVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM		60	289
	Arcam DVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt		90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6			75	279
	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
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	750	Excellent value - powerful and capable with useful features and clear, dynamic sound	8			120	293
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt		85	283
	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7			40	293
	Denon PMA-1500AE	500	Well set up to make the most of big-scale music, with copious power and drive, though slightly bright	5			70	278
	Denon PMA-700AE	250	One of a growing number of new low cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels	4	MM		50	284
	Flying Mole CA-S10	1,000	The Mole makes a mountain of detailed sound from its digital circuitry, if you choose your speakers well it's a short-cut to hi-fi nirvana	3			100	291
	Marantz PM7001K1	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM		70	289
	Musical Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3			70	288
	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5			80	278
	Pioneer A-A9	600	Takes on the mantle of the legendary A400. Not as cuddly, but very resolute and revealing for the money. Has USB input	4			80	296
	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM		50	293
	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								
	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8			100	280
	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6			100	275
	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6			130	281
	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM		50	286
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6			100	286
	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt		60	292
	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt	100	277
	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6			180	275
	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4			200	289
	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft centred and it understands dynamics	5			75	271
	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5			150	288
	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
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7			180	285
	Naim SuperNait	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6			80	294
	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			100	267
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt		21	296
	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4			40	268
	Unison Research Unico 200i	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5			200	269
	Unison Research Perform	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5			40	287

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £2,000									
	Croft Precession V/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer			6		25	290
	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical					50	290
	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2			266
	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated			6		75	264
	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt	50	287
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling			5		136	256
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value			5		70	285
	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 PRICE COMMENTS

ABOVE £2,000

<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too
<input type="checkbox"/>	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D200 MK3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer

SPECIFICATIONS						
PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
					5 opt	273
					5 opt	277
					6 opt	100 278
					6	300 249
					5	120 269
					6 opt	400 293
					8 opt	80 276
						180 253
					5 opt	265
						200 247
					9 opt	125 250
						700 234
					4	238
						140 208
					6	233
					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	PRICE	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5 CHANNEL POWER (W)	SCALE 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		
EC	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o	11	140	273		
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously	11	170	266		
EC	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	10	140	267		
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmicky	3	160	255		
EC	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo. Cultured sound, too	5	110	270		
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements	10	150	260		
	Sony STR-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 superb purist 5.1	8	90	250		
	Arcam AWP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	8	135	275		
EC	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound	7	180	235		
EC	Classé SSP-600/CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces	11	200	278		
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art	5	125	236		
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier	4	260			
EC	Linn Exotik + DA	3,245	Good analogue preamplifier with multichannel in/out up to 7.1 and a home cinema processor of quality combine to make a tempting package	8		291		
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6		230		
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering	5	50	238		
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen	11	250	243		
	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world	5	120	238		

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



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.

'Never Connected' power supply technology virtually removes all incoming mains noise allowing only the music to be heard.

Visit our website to learn more about this exciting product and the high performance Diablo phono stage.

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SEVENOAKS



WHY CHOOSE SEVENOAKS

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is the UK's largest specialist retailer of high-quality home entertainment solutions. With stores nationwide and a proud history of satisfied customers, Sevenoaks has a hard-earned reputation as the most comprehensive provider of home cinema, hi-fi and multi-room audio systems, offering excellence in customer service with a unique design and custom installation option available at many of its stores.

All Sevenoaks Stores:

- are staffed by experts in home cinema and hi-fi
- stock leading brands to offer a range of high quality products
- offer impartial and personal service
- have home cinema and hi-fi demonstration rooms

Come and visit us

HOME CINEMA PLASMA AND LCD TV



Pioneer G8 Series PDP-428XD
42" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

Featuring Pioneer's new ultra black panel technology and an amazing contrast ratio of 16000:1, this 8th generation 42" plasma screen produces ever deeper blacks than before. Visit your local store and see the difference.



Samsung PS50Q97HDX • 50" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

This HD ready 50" model features all the latest technology and is guaranteed to deliver an outstanding home cinema experience into your home. Key features include a built-in digital tuner for access to Freeview channels, picture-in-picture and virtual surround sound.

"This 50" screen is simply a brilliant all-round performer"



Sony Bravia KDL-40W2000
40" LCD TV • FULL HD READY • FREEVIEW

With a super wide viewing angle giving you a great picture from almost anywhere and a fast response time to ensure smoother sports and action sequences, this award-winning LCD TV includes a built-in Freeview tuner, 1920 x 1080 resolution and two HDMI inputs.

Panasonic Viera TH-37PX70
37" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

Panasonic's Viera screens come with a choice of mounting options including a pedestal stand or a dedicated cabinet. This 37" model is finished in a classy gloss black finish that will blend into any living space. With a built-in Freeview tuner and excellent connectivity, this screen effortlessly handles motion and produces vibrant, natural colours.



Loewe Individual 32s
32" LCD TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

There can be no more excuses that the TV doesn't match your decor. Loewe's Individual Selection screens come in a choice of five different front colours which can be matched with interchangeable side panels in nine different colours. A choice of floor and table-top stand options are available or you can even suspend the TV on a floor-to-ceiling pole.

FIVE YEAR WARRANTY

WITH ALL PLASMA & LCD TELEVISIONS WHEN PURCHASED AT OUR NORMAL SELLING PRICE (SRP)*

SAMSUNG • PIONEER • LOEWE • PANASONIC • SHARP • SONY

WITH A 26 INCH SCREEN OR LARGER

*SRP (Suggested Retail Price)
Not in conjunction with any other offer or promotion. E&OE



Sharp Aquos LC-37XD1E
37" LCD TV • FULL HD READY • FREEVIEW

This TV offers unbeatable picture quality. Its beautiful slim, graceful appearance makes this model a design classic for the future. This is not just a TV, it is a piece of art for your home.





Getting the most from your home cinema

Home cinema has evolved from a simple projector-and-screen set-up to a state-of-the-art way of enjoying TV, DVD and multimedia. Sevenoaks knows the ins and outs of every component and will tailor a system to suit your exact requirements. Whether you're replacing an individual component or taking a first step into home cinema, expert advice is available.

PROJECTION



Sim2 DOMINO D35

Sim2 Multimedia is a world-leading manufacturer at the forefront of home cinema technology and a name synonymous with high-end home cinema projection.

"This is a fine projector that's also a pleasure to use. One of the best at the money without a doubt."



CLAIM £200 towards the projection screen of your choice.

HOME CINEMA SYSTEM

Arcam SOLO MOVIE 5.1 SYSTEM

This new home cinema system from Arcam combines one-box simplicity with superb-quality sound and vision. Simply add a screen and speaker package for an amazing home entertainment system.

- Combined DVD/CD transport chosen for its performance resulting in world class picture and sound quality
- DAB/FM/AM - The clarity of reception will bring radio lovers hours of enjoyment
- Integrate music and pictures from your iPod using either Arcam's rDock or rLead



"Matches one-box simplicity with superb-quality sound and vision"

HOME CINEMA SEPARATES AND SPEAKERS



Denon DVD2930 DVD PLAYER AVR2807 AV RECEIVER

Featuring 1080p upscaling, this award-winning DVD player provides first-class picture and sound quality and is compatible with all popular disc formats including SACD and DVD-Audio. The 6.1 channel AVR2807 receiver features two HDMI inputs, one HDMI output and is supplied with a new 'Glo-key' remote control.



Arcam DIVA DV137 DVD PLAYER AVR280 AV RECEIVER

Delivering 80w across all of its 7 channels, Arcam's new AVR280 produces terrific sound with both movies and music. It is an ideal partner for Arcam's DV137 universal disc player. Compatible with DVD-Audio and SACD discs along with standard DVDs, the '137 impresses with its crisp, vivid images.



Sony RDR-HDX1065 DVD RECORDER STR-DA5200ES AV RECEIVER

Building on the abilities of Sony's award-winning 'HXD860, this new DVD recorder features twin tuners, an HDMI output, 250GB hard disk plus a USB input. When partnered with the STR-DA5200ES 7.1 channel receiver the combination promises excellent sound and vision performance.



Yamaha DVD-S1700 DVD PLAYER RX-V1700 AV RECEIVER

Designed for top-notch sound quality, the award-winning Yamaha RX-V1700 delivers a thunderous 130 watts across all seven of its channels. A host of impressive features hides behind its fascia. The multi-format DVD-S1700 disc player is an ideal partner, complementing the 'V1700 with both its looks and performance.

KEF KHT3005 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

Winner of the 2006/07 EISA award for best Home Cinema speaker system, the KEF KHT3005's impressive looks are backed-up with superb surround-sound, powerful enough to fill even the largest of rooms.



REL R Series SUBWOOFERS

The R-Series is designed to augment the performance of "full range" speaker systems and to provide linear response down to below 20Hz. The R-Series comprises the 205, 305 and 505. All models feature class D amplification and are available in a piano black lacquer finish.



B&W Mini Theatre MT-30 • 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

The Mini Theatre MT-30 delivers excellent performance and is ideal for both home cinema and hi-fi applications.

Don't forget! Accessories make the difference

The quality of sound and vision a system produces is determined as much by its accessories as its main components. At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought - our staff can demonstrate the difference the right accessories can make to your home entertainment experience.

CLAIM FREE ACCESSORIES WORTH UP TO £300

when you purchase selected hi-fi, A/V separates and speakers at our normal selling price (RRP). Choose from QED, Soundstyle, Grado and more.

Ask in-store for details.



PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please confirm before travelling. Any published prices were correct at time of going to press. Special or added value offers are not available in conjunction with any other offer or promotion (NICWAOD). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 23/08/2007, E&OE.

MORE COMPETITIVE THAN YOU THINK

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to the store manager's attention.

FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS*

Spread the cost of buying.

Flexible finance options* are available on the majority of products we stock.

* Written details on request.

Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.



Getting the most from your hi-fi system

Sevenoaks has 34 years' experience in the hi-fi market - and nobody knows more about getting the most from music. With the major brands in stock, Sevenoaks can help you choose individual components or design a complete system from scratch. Just tell our in-store experts what you listen to, when and where.

HI-FI SEPARATES AND SYSTEMS



Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price.

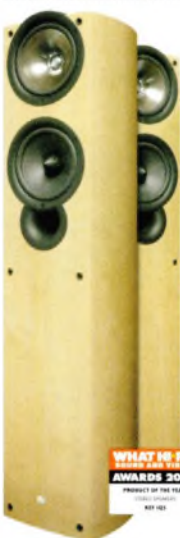
- High-definition audio and video performance
- Wide choice of both hi-fi and A/V components
- Uniquely broad upgrade options
- Luxuriously high quality of manufacturer



Arcam SOLO MUSIC SYSTEM Monitor Audio RS1 SPEAKERS

A great package coupling Arcam's award-winning all-in-one hi-fi system with the excellent RS1 speakers.

Ask in-store about our recommended cables and stands.



KEF iQ Series

From the second you spot the soft sheen of titanium on the main driver cones, you know you're in for something special. And you won't be disappointed.

Utilising KEF's trademark Uni-Q technology, the iQ series delivers consistently detailed imaging and unrivalled off-axis response so everyone in the room gets the full benefit, wherever they sit.



Spendor S Series

Each Spendor 'S' series speaker delivers a balanced energy output to guarantee a consistent sound and a seamless sound stage in a diversity of living environments. Each model features:-

- Hand-made 'e' generation bass-midrange drive units
- Dynamically damped cabinets which reduce energy re-radiation to inaudible levels.



Monitor Audio

Across a speaker range rich in its choice of style, shape and application, Monitor Audio's thirty year heritage of technical expertise guarantees great sound with tonal accuracy that is shared by every speaker. From on-wall, in-wall, ceiling and floor, Monitor Audio gives you the freedom to enjoy high-quality sound in every room of your home.



Ranges include Bronze Reference, Silver RS, Gold Signature and Radius



Primare

With class-leading build quality, and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, Primare build elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.



Marantz

Marantz products range from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and A/V receivers. Its hi-fi range includes the CD5000 and CD5001OSE CD players and the PM4001OSE amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.



Rotel O6 Series

Rotel's O6 Series will give you years of enjoyment and offers excellent value for money. This range of separates creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.



Pro-ject

Revive your record collection with Pro-ject turntables. The range includes the award-winning Debut III (pictured above). This belt drive, two speed player comes complete with Ortofon cartridge.

WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

Sonos

Sonos is the first wireless, multi-room digital music system that lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house - and control them from the palm of your hand. You can play the same song in different rooms, or different songs in different rooms. To start listening, just grab the colour controller, pick a room, pick a song and simply hit play.

- Built-in wireless system
- Multi-room synchronous playback
- Expandable design, up to 32 rooms
- Familiar, simple user interface



SUMMER OFFERS

just a small selection of our amazing summer offers

Please note these offers are not available in conjunction with any other or promotion (NICWA00)

CLAIM
UP TO **£300**

Claim free accessories worth up to £300

when you purchase selected hi-fi and AV separates or speakers at our normal selling price (RRP).

Choose from QED, Soundstyle, Grado and more.

Ask in-store for details (NICWA00)

PURCHASE VALUE
(AT RRP)

CLAIM ACCESSORIES WORTH (AT RRP)

£250 - £499	£50	FREE
£500 - £999	£100	FREE
£1000-£1499	£200	FREE
£1500-£1999	£300	FREE

SAVE
15%

Create your own system and SAVE 15% with our HI-FI system builder

CHOOSE CD + Amplifier + Speakers
ADD their selling prices (RRP) together
DEDUCT 15% from the total

Includes most, but not all, brands. Contact your local store for details (NICWA00)

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Create your own system and SAVE 15% with our A/V system builder

CHOOSE Screen + DVD + AV Amplifier + Speakers
ADD their selling prices (RRP) together
DEDUCT 15% from the total

Includes most, but not all, brands. Contact your local store for details (NICWA00)

SAVE
25%

25% off original RRP on all end-of-line* hi-fi and A/V amps, receivers, CD and DVD players

*Some are ex-display but all are sold with full warranty. (NICWA00)

SAVE
35%

35% off original RRP on all end-of-line* hi-fi and A/V speakers

*Some are ex-display but all are sold with full warranty. (NICWA00)

ONLY
£999

Spend £1500 on home cinema separates at RRP and buy the amazing Pioneer PDP427XD TV for only £999*

INCLUDES 1 YEAR WARRANTY

*Offer price available when you spend at least £1500 on home cinema separates (DVD players, A/V amps or receivers and A/V speaker packages) from the brands available in-store. All components must be purchased at RRP and in one transaction. (NICWA00)

CLAIM
£200

Claim £200 towards the projection screen of your choice with selected Sim2 and InFocus projectors

Ask in-store for details (NICWA00)

CLAIM
5 YEAR

Claim a five year warranty on all plasma and LCD TVs when purchased at our normal selling price (SRP)*

Includes Samsung, Pioneer, Loewe, Panasonic, Sharp and Sony with a 26 inch screen or larger. *SRP (Suggested Retail Price). (NICWA00)



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*Written details on request.

Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

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 □ BEST BUY ■ EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxDxH) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 Aeilite 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	24,5,37,31,5	A	26				288
□	ATC SCM11	849	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with good, natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much	21,38,25	A-	55				293
□	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65				260
□	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23				226
□	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25				234
□	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	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
■	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
■	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24	A	40				296
□	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 CS10	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 in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

The new Reference 3 with CDT II™ Tweeter Technology

Anthony Gallo isn't one to follow the crowd, a characteristic he shares with the people who buy his loudspeakers.

His latest speaker design, the Reference 3, is rewriting the price versus performance equation. So much so in fact that influential U.S. publication *The Absolute Sound* have bestowed on it their ultimate honour - product of the year.



"Gallo's Reference 3's are rewriting the book on value in high-end loudspeakers, making accessible a level of performance that might previously have been far beyond the reach of most of us."
The Absolute Sound

For further information or to locate your nearest dealer, please visit our website

www.anthonygallo.co.uk

tel. 0870 350 1348

nonconformist

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

Our favourite ☐ BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	BASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	Q. OFF TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER	
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24		A	50			261	
☐	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line stand-mount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30		A	28			275	
☐	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23		A+	40			267	
☐	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19,5		A	48			286	
☐	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,9,7,5,30		A+	28			284	
☐	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26		A-	30			292	
☐	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24		A	50			269	
☐	Rega R3	448	Discreet, pretty and fine value. A little lightweight but impressively open, it delivers music with great agility	20,76,28		A	40			265	
☐	Revel Concerta F12	900	Massive multi-driver floorstander is not pretty, but has great headroom, bass weight and impressive neutrality	25,108,36		A	22			296	
☐	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	
☐	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,9,7,29		A+	24			294	
☐	Totem Rainmaker	795	Standmount has a big sound, with a smooth midband and bright top. Could have more punch and warmth	17,35,5,23		A	25			291	
☐	Triangle Antal Esw	995	Smoother than its predecessors, with a beautifully balanced bass and midband, though the top end is uneven	20,108,34		A	20			288	
☐	Triangle Titus ES	370	Not pretty but busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	18,37,30		A-	40			269	
☐	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40			265	
ABOVE £1,000											
☐	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26		A+	40			281	
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,900	Luxury miniature has a laid back but bouncy sound, fine dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25		A-	30			281	
☐	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,200	Slim, laid back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range	17,99,26		A	28			275	
☐	ATC SCM19	1,499	Super linear motor system, heavy weight construction and fabulous veneer that makes the ATC a pro favourite	22,44,31,5		A-	54			285	
☐	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22		A+	27			271	
☐	AVI Duo	1,299	Sophisticated floorstander, a natural partner for AVI's electronics. Unusually clean and honest musical presentation	19,77,28		A	50			280	
EC	B&W 802D	8,000	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication. Makes sweet music	37,115,56		A	<20			267	
☐	B&W 805S	1,600	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back but otherwise a real delight	24,39,33		A	25			271	
☐	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36		A-	20			260	
EC	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46		A	20			264	
☐	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5		A-	<20			281	
EC	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26		A	45			277	
☐	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,104,37,5		A	45			287	
☐	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28,115,38		A	28			290	
EC	Focal Beta 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	
EC	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53		A+	30			255	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	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	
EC	Krell Resolution 2	6,497	Large but good looking, with Sonus Faber type elasticated front. Musically a great full bandwidth all-rounder	122,29,61		B	28			273	
☐	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31		A-	46			245	
☐	Meridian M3100	1,850	Attractive and capable active (125w) with great imaging and strong bass. High neutrality and good power handling	19,39,25		ACT	45	opt		280	
EC	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38,5		A-	45			294	

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	BASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	Q. OFF TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
16,29,24		A	50			261
20,40,30		A	28			275
15,27,23		A+	40			267
15,21,5,19,5		A	48			286
19,5,9,7,5,30		A+	28			284
19,34,26		A-	30			292
15,32,24		A	50			269
20,76,28		A	40			265
25,108,36		A	22			296
20,33,5,27		A-	50			289
20,5,9,7,29		A+	24			294
17,35,5,23		A	25			291
20,108,34		A	20			288
18,37,30		A-	40			269
20,42,34		A	40			265

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOOR/MOUNT	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SCALE NUMBER
	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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 Water 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	335,57.5,10		A+	45			285
	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30		A	20			260
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39		A	30			265
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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 Celius Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34		A	22			277
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	Wharfedale Airedale Neo	9,000	Expansive yet relaxed sounding, the Neo is a coloured but surprisingly musical and enjoyable speaker	52,115,45		A-	25			296
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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	Cunningly crafted stand-mount with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving	22,38,35		A	28			296

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



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

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

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

Music vs movies

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

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMlab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A price among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement

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)

SPECIFICATIONS					
EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SCALE NUMBER
A-	6	12		opt	255
A	6	27			241
A	5	22			224
A	5	28			224
A-	5	53			241
A-	6	20			251
A	5	50			232
A-	6	18			253
A	5	30			232
A	6	28			241
A-	6	38			262
A	5	25			210
A	6	20			268
A	6	29			269

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
<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
<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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging
<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

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.

SPECIFICATIONS					
SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SCALE NUMBER
29,34,35	500	20			259
53,56,52	1,000	18			246
52,47,50	500	40			287
32,32,34	120	27			225
32,36,34	300	25			284
28,40,29	100	18			257
36,40,420	300	25			291
32,46,33	150	18			257
42,62,33	150	18			225
34,52,37	200	15			267
59,56,39	200	16			217
26,27,33	1,000	28			286
45,33,45	1,000	10			290

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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
□	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
EC	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
EC	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
□	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
□	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	194
EC	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
EC	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
□	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	219
	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution						35	290
□	Sennheiser HD485	65	A great all-round headphone for occasional or even heavy use, refined in sound and comfortable, too						220	296
□	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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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 [EC] EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	P	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
[EC]	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise	●	●	●		270
□	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price: especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness	●	●	●		296
□	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
[EC]	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
□	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail	●	●	●		283
□	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
[EC]	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
[EC]	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
[EC]	Vanden Hul MC Silver IT MkIII	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
[EC]	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●	●		E	278
[EC]	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price		●	●	E	260
[EC]	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price			●	E	265
[EC]	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	40	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
[EC]	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
[EC]	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical	●		●		287
[EC]	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 bwire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail	●		●		292
□	Wyrewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.		●	●		267

SPECS KEY STRANDED Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. SOLID CORE Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. COPPER Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. SILVER Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. DIGITAL CABLE TYPE E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design SD404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
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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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 LR, 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.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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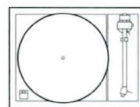
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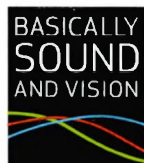


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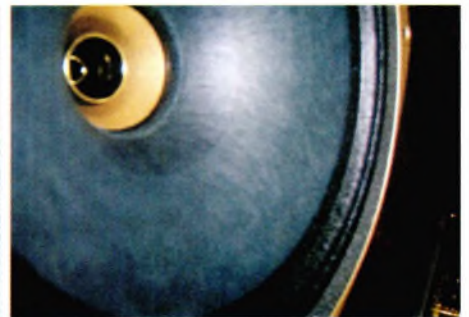
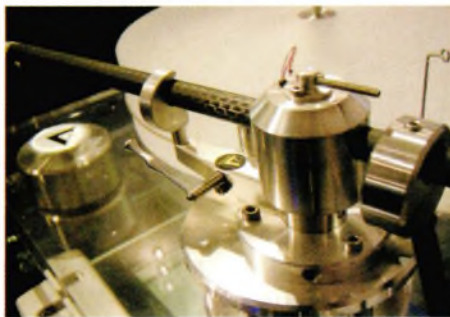
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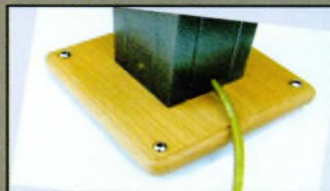
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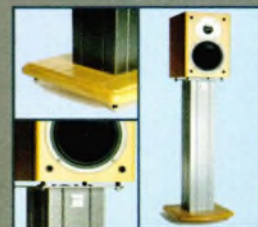
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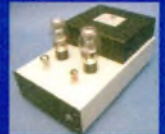
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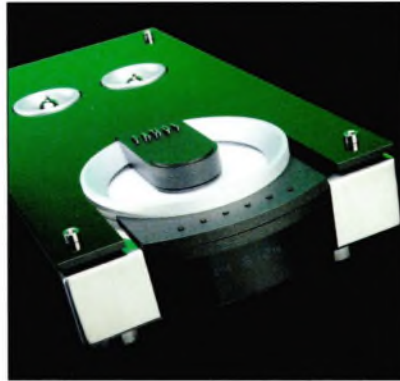
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HI-FI CHOICE

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DIGITAL TUNER

2nd-hand shootout

The best CD players can be yours if you are prepared to pay a bit more

Spending £2,000-£2,500 on a second-hand CD player guarantees you reference grade sound and a diversity of choice. The four here variously offer separate power supplies, valve outputs, SACD and even DVD-A compatibility. They also offer the widest range of hi-fi styling you're ever likely to come across.

Starting with the sober choice, we have the Naim CDS2 with XPS. What's most important when buying this CD player second-hand, is to realise that the CDS2 on its own is useless. To make it work you need an XPS power supply, so don't fall into the trap of thinking you've got yourself a bargain CDS2 – it probably won't have any power supply! Launched in 1998 and priced at around £5,500 for the pair, this was certainly a statement CD player of its time. Sound quality is classic Naim, with exceptional timing and rhythmic integrity. Some suggest that it sounds at its best in a Naim system, but this is an excellent CD player that will suit a wide range of systems.

Naim equipment usually holds its value well, and the CDS2/XPS is no exception. Despite the earliest versions being eight years old now, you'll still need at least £2,000 to pick one up. For a newer model with the superior remote control and a dealer warranty, you're looking at more like £2,500. But even at this price, it makes a good buy. Naim supply a full service back up for this player and the only issue that usually arises is the laser pick-up wearing out. Replacing this Philips device can cost over £100 but, in the context of a player of this quality, it's well worth it for the extra 7-10 years of life it brings.

Rather less conventional, is the Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista CD player. Like its Nu-Vista predecessor, the Tri-Vista was built in limited numbers (800), owing to the fact the Musical Fidelity could only source so

many valves. Built from 2003 and sold until around 2005, a Tri-Vista is still recent in reference CD player terms. Costing £4,000 new, a decent model should easily be available for the lower end of our budget. In addition to using military-spec 5703 triode tubes, the Tri-Vista features SACD playback and a choke-regulated power supply – as adopted by many Musical Fidelity designs. The good news when buying second-hand is that the Tri-Vista has proved to be extremely reliable. Sets of valves are available for £95 but, according to MF, the only ones sold so far have been for spares and not direct replacements. As with all lasers, the Philips-based pick-up will wear out, but it's comparatively cheap and simple to replace. On a cosmetic front, the satin finish can mark easily, so be careful. If you like your music lush and expansive, then this is the choice for you.

The next CD player isn't a CD player, it's a very fine universal disc player. The Esoteric DV50s proves so compelling with CD and

“All of these players provide an exceptional listening experience.”

SACD that it more than justifies its place with conventional models. Technologically speaking, this is one of the most advanced disc players you're likely to come across. Using a combination of trick filters, the DV50s can upsample conventional CD up to a heady 1.4GHz, which rather makes 192kHz upsampling look a little weedy. There is also a dedicated DAC for audio, plus countless high-end components. The upshot of this is that the top TEAC Esoteric is a remarkably transparent and spacious sounding player. It's also an enormously tweakable machine. Despite Esoteric already having modified the player two years ago, thus giving it the 's' suffix, there are a myriad of aftermarket kits available.

Some of these are hugely expensive, so we'd tread carefully here. Although the 's' version was only launched in 2005, second-hand models have already shed half their new value of



Above: Shanling's striking CDT300

£4,500 and are easily available within our budget. This is fantastic value for a player that may not be the product of the moment now, but is built well enough to survive many more years of use.

If none of the above appeal, and you feel the need for something more visually arousing, then take a look at the Shanling CDT300. Coming complete with a valve output, separate power supply and eerily glowing blue 'legs', the CDT300 has always divided opinion. Yet, if you like the styling, the general consensus is that the sound

quality is even better. Only 300 CDT300 will be made and it costs £4,000 new. But, because it lacks the prestigious image of Linn, Naim or Quad, it tends to suffer heavy early depreciation. Consequently, we've seen a couple of nearly new versions going for as little as £2,200 and £2,500.

Considering that this player uses top quality components, such as the Philips CDM-4 transport and no fewer than eight Burr Brown PCM1704K DACs, there should be little trouble with reliability or servicing. That said, there is always some uncertainty with a recently introduced brand. A point to watch, though, is to ensure the version you buy has the correct 240V/50Hz UK power supply. Getting hold of the supply on its own could prove troublesome.

All of these players provide an exceptional listening experience, and with the price now around half the original, it's an experience that's all the sweeter. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month – £500 recorders

Below: Naim Audio's CDS2





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LFD MMO Phono stage
Linn LP12, OL DC Kl
Linn LP12, Valhalla, no arm
Linn Itok 12", VERY VERY RARE ITEM, REDUCED
Linn Linto Anniversary edition
Linn Linto, excellent
Linn LP12, Valhalla, Akko, in rosenut plinth v nice, inced
Michell Orbe SE, NC power, ex dem
Michell Focus One, Rega arm, excellent for year
Michell Transcriptors Reference Hydraulic/Fluid arm, NOW
Michell Gyro SE, AC motor, Rega arm, ex boxed
Michell Gyro SE, DC motor, ex boxed
Msson 774 original arm
MRM Source, c/w large p/s, REDUCED
Musical Fidelity XLP3v3 as new boxed
Musical Fidelity S
NAIM Arco as new boxed
Orign Live Ultra dock with off board p/s, SME cut NOW
Pmk Triangle LPT8250, the best I've seen
Rega PS/PB700, as new, blank/film in black
Rega Planar 3, RB300, vgc
Roksan Radius 5 in acrylic, c/w Nima arm.
Roksan Xeres 20, XPS7, Artemiz - Absolute steal
SME V excellent boxed
SME 3, lovely
SME 3009, excellent
Systemdek IIX900
Systemdek II (piscuit kn), ADC arm, vgc
Technics SL1210mk2 light domestic use only, excellent boxed
Technics SL10, good working order
Technics SL110, good working order with lid SME cut
Thorens TD124, motor unit only
Thorens TD125/SME3009,
Thorens TD160b/Mayware vgc,
Tom Evans Microgroove, ex dem
VPI 16.5 Clearing Machine, call for details
Whesl Audio PS 20/MSU 20 phono stage, ex demo
Zeta, famous heavy weight arm, excellent

Digital

Arcam CD72, vgc remote
Arcam DV89, bargain
Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 ex dem
AVI 2000 Reference CD player
AVI Lab Series, mint boxed ex dem
B&W Technologies Z26, beautiful, vgc boxed
Carm Fog 2, as new boxed
Chord DAC64 as new in black, buy both get free rack
Chord Blu Transport as new in black, buy both get free rack
Consonance Droplet, ex dem bargain - WOW!
Cyrus Quadra, c/w tuner , UNDER HALF PRICE!
Cyrus CD7, ex c/w remote
Cyrus dAD 3 Q24 excellent boxed
DCS Elgar DAC/Pre, a taste of the high life!
DCS Purcell Upsampler, bargain upgrade
TEAC Esoteric D70, vgc slunning DAC
Esoteric UX1 - the ultimate player? COMPLETE BARGAIN!!!
Heart Audio CD6000, valve output, superb boxed
Lector CDP05T, ex valve output stage
Linn Numenik, v late version
Marantz CD12 Transport and DAC combo, boxed and fab
Meridian 200 Transport, excellent boxed
Meridian 203 DAC, excellent boxed
Micromega Stage 1, excellent
Musical Fidelity KWDM25 two box, ex
Musical Fidelity XDACv3, excellent boxed
Musical Fidelity 3.2, excellent
Nu Tjeb CD4000 valve output with Upsampling board, boxed
NVA Transparent Statement, ex created
Primare CD30 2, ex boxed c/w remote
Quad 99CDP, as new boxed
Roksan Atessa, c/w Dac and power supply
Sugden CD21SE, ex dem
Sugden Masterclass CD
TEAC WHDS9, excellent, remote
TEAC T1 D1 combo, excellent, remote

Radio and recorders

AVI S2000 Tuner vgc boxed
Cambridge Audio DAB Azur 640T as new boxed in black
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/FM New
Musical Fidelity E500 c/w remote
NAIM NAT 05, ex
Pure 701ES, new
Rega Radio
Sony 777ES DAB Tuner REDUCED
Vedeologic 601 DAB in BLACK

Amplifiers

AC Magnum MF125 Monoblocks, excellent monos in vgc 299
Arcam Alpha 7SE 149
Arcam Alpha 10, excellent boxed just serviced 349
Arcam AVR200, ex boxed 399
Audio Analogue Maestro Reference 150w monster integrated 1179
Audio Innovations Series 200 preamp 279
Audiolab 8000/8000X7, as new processor/7 channel amp 1149
Audio Research LS7 Preamp 679
Audio Research D130 Power, ex 949
Audio Research D70 Power, ex 879
AVI S2000Pre, superb little preamp 249
Carrn Mea Monoblocks, ex in silver 50w Class A, fabulous 699
Carrn Ion T2 Monoblocks, mint in black 479
Chord SPM1200B, boxed as new in black 1449
Consonance Signature 10, v lovely 2A3 valve integrated 949
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Musical Fidelity A1000, monster integrated with ps 649
Musical Fidelity A5 Integrated, just serviced, boxed 679
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NAIM Falcap 3, current style 339
NAIM NAC112, current style preamp 386
NAIM NAP180, Olive, boxed, excellent 499
NAIM NAP140 Olive, boxed 299
Nuforce Reference 95E Monoblocks, ex dem in silver 1999
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Speakers

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Monitor Audio, mint boxed GS20 in Piano Black 329
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Yamaha NS1000M, full working order, fair cosmetics 599

Accessories/Systems

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Chord Signature 1m interconnect 279
H Kardon AVR635 - was 1999 399
Linn Klassik K with onboard tuner, as new boxed 579
Linn Klassik original, as new boxed 379
Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3 excellent 159
Primare CD110, one box system, ex demo 879
Tara Labs Ref 8 Spkr cable 119
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Musical Fidelity 3A pre-amp £95
Proceed PAV pre-amp £995
Audionote M8 pre-amp with phono stage (£19,500) £9995
Audionote Zero remote control pre-amp (new) £695

Amplifiers:

ASR Emitter 1 Exclusive amplifier Boxed/Mint £5995
Audionote Neiro mono-blocks £5495
Classe CA201 amp £1595
Harman Kardon PA2200 power amp £195
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Pathos "Twin Towers" integrated amp £1695

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Denon DCD 590 CD player £60
Esoteric X-01 Limited CD/SACD player (MINT) £5495
Marantz CD873 CD player £65
Meridian 507 24 bit CD Player (MINT) £595
Musical Fidelity Digilog DAC £95
Sony CDP M41 CD player £60
Sonic Frontiers SFD1 DAC £795

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Sony ST-SE570 tuner £60
Nakamichi CR-2E cassette deck £125
Nakamichi 682 Cassette Deck £395
Winds stylus gauge £425
Sony FM/AM ST-SE370 Tuner £75
Transparent "The Wave" 5.5 mtr¹ speaker cable £195
Transparent Music Link Plus 1 mtr. Interconnect £125
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Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace and LV Mat - only been used for mono LPs	£1500	£2200
Lyra Helicon cartridge - mono - only very light use	£600	£1200
Otofank Kontrapunkt cartridge - 150 hours of use	£450	
Kuzma Airline tonearm with Kondo internal/external wire - lovely	£4000	£7500
Kuzma Stagi 'S' unipivot tonearm	£350	£650
SME M2-9 tonearm (NEW)	£350	£650
Nottingham Analogue/SME 345 arm	£1250	
Townsend Seismic Sink 100 kilos - 48cm x 37cm	£250	
Rogue Audio Zeus Stereo - power amp - very heavy!	£3000	£7500
NAIM NAC 72 and NAP 140	£TBC	
Mactone MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - as new - 2 months old	£3250	£6500
Mactone XX330 line pre amp - as new - 2 months old	£2500	£8000
Sugden A21 Integrated amplifier	£550	
Art Audio PX25 5 watts - single ended stereo	£2500	£4500
Unison Research Smart 300B class A Power amp - 1 year old	£2500	£4500
Lavardin PE Reference Line pre amplifier	£1500	£2400
Lavardin AP power amplifier	£2100	£3400
Exposure 3010 CD player - as new - boxed - 100 hours max use	£850	£1400
Audio Aero Capitol CD24/192	£1700	£4000
Meridian CD 207 - 2 box player	£TBC	
Rega Jupiter CD player - professionally clocked and rebuilt with blackgates	£600	
Esoteric X03 CD player - perfect - boxed - 200 hours max	£4000	£5000
Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 months old	£700	£1600
Audion Sterling Plus power amplifier	£TBC	
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - charmer	£2500	£5000
Canary 601 Line pre amplifier - very smart	£2000	£3000
Canary 903 4 box pre amp - 3 months old - boxed	£3250	£6500
Canary 303 monos PP 22 watts 300B with Living Voice upgrade	£3500	£7500
Canary 608LV integrated amp - 25 watts with Living Voice upgrade	£1000	£3000
Martin Logan SL3 speakers - very tall and slim	£1500	£2500
Horning Agathon Silver Oak - big daddy - vgc	£1500	£4000
Living Voice Avator/IBX/OBX/Auditorium - ex dem and part ex	£Please Call	
Ravel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood - with stands	£850	£2000
Rega Jura Jura floorstanders - cherry	£450	
Sonus Faber Electro - walnut - stand mount	£3000	£7000
Ruark Crusader - rosewood	£600	
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - maple	£3000	£7000
Tube Technology Prophet pre amp - 30 hours use	£1000	£2500
Tube Technology Unisis Signature integrated - 30 hours use.	£1000	£2500
JPS Superconductor 2 Interconnects 1m pair x3.		
Rogue Audio Metis pre, Atlas power. Ex demo - less than 20 hours use	£1000	£2250
Nordost Blue Heaven speaker cable - 4m set Rev 2 - boxed	£400	

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FOR SALE

ACCPHASE T108 tuner, £600. Musical Fidelity X-PRE v3 preamp and X-P200 power amp, £1,000. All items mint, boxed 01332 843758 (Derbyshire).

ACOUSTIC ENERGY LINEAR 1 speakers, mint, boxed, £80. Two pairs of Rothwell Attenuators, boxed, £18 per pair. 07941 174804 (Berks).

ARCAM A85/P85 amplifiers, silver, pristine. Original packaging, remotes, lead etc, £650ono. Can split. 07766 078281 (London).

ARCAM CD82 CD player, silver finish, excellent condition, £250. 01482 503011 (Yorks).

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)

AUDIO RESEARCH LS5 preamp, excellent condition, hardly used, (£5,290) £1,000. ATC 20TASL, (£4,800) £2,000. Part exchange welcome on any hi-fi product 020 8504 1638 or 07812 465326 (Essex).

B&W 804 speakers, cherrywood, bought in February this year, absolutely mint, very little use, boxed, manuals, cleaning cloths, (£2,700) £2,200. Tel 01786 834796 (Kent).

BOSE QUIETCOMFORT 2 headphones, boxed, mint, (£295) £100ono 07891 533084 (Swansea).

BRINKMANN FEIN phono amp, 2006, mint, MC/MM, granite base, great finish in black, (£1,500) £750 07968 189647 (Herts).

CHAPTER AUDIO PREFACE Plus preamp, Couplet power £4,750. Apogee Stages £500. Kimber 8TC, (5m), £350. Philosophy speaker cable (5m), £500. Buyer must collect 01843 600722 after 6pm (Kent).

CHORD COMPANY CHORUS 1m pair RCA to RCA, £90. Chord Chorus 0.5m pair RCA to RCA, £65. Naim NAC A5 seaker cable 3.5m pair, Naim termination, £50. 02893 369169 (N Ireland)

CLASSIC MERIDIAN M3 active compact monitors, cables, stands, £295. Celestion A1 speakers, matching stands, excellent, boxed, (£1,200) £450. Roksan Kandy integrated, one year old, boxed £325 01243 863371 (W. Sussex).

DENON 2900 DVD player. Gold finish, boxed, manual, excellent condition multi-region, £350 ono. Call James 07977 135995 or 01442 234062 (Herts).

DENON TU1800 DAB/FM tuner with remote, boxed, one month old, (£250) £100. 01274 598818 (Bradford)

DYNAUDIO CONFIDENCE 5 speakers, black ash, perfect condition, £2,950 ono, 0151 727 3763 (Liverpool).

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. 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). ▣

WANTED

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts)

ARCAM DELTA 100 cassette deck. Must be in very good condition. 0208 509 0238 or 07900 076096 (London)

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 A021, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Campion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

REL / MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer with remote. Possible part ex for my Quad L-Series sub 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

STAX OMEGA 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

█ **LINN NINKA** speakers, cherry, stands, manual, boxes, excellent condition, £700 ono. Norman 07957 650274 or email normanlevy@waitrose.com (London).

LOWTHER AUDITORIUM speakers x4 PM6AS, rebuilt, mahogany cabs, superb, £850 (or swap for Quad 57s or Quad ESL-63 electrostatic loudspeakers). 01722 334694 (Salisbury).

MEADOWLARK SHEARWATER Hot Rod speakers, excellent condition with boxes and accessories, (£2,200) £850ono. 07737 135414 (Bath)

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 700 PMC bookshelf speakers, bi-wire capable, £120. Energy Take 5.2 satellite speakers including stands (1 pair) and Energy centre speaker, excellent condition, £100. 01689 608925 or 07941 107141 (Kent)

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 A1000 amp, £350. Two pairs QED Silver Spiral interconnects, £20 per pair. 07941 174804 (Berks)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR pre and power x2, (£6,600) £3,200ono. Townshend DCT 300

x3, (£300) £150. DCT speaker cable, (3m), two pairs, (£300) £150. Kimber KCAG, (£300) £150. MIT Z Cord 2 + IPS GPA2 with Wattgate, offers. Monster interconnects, £15. Six tier equipment rack, £210. All mint. 0115 912 6424 (Nottingham).

NAIM T12 preamp and 150 power amp, four months old, perfect condition, boxed, remote control, instruction manuals, £950. Can be posted if required. 01794 513003 (Hants).

NAIM CDS1 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).

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).

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)

ROGERS LS55 floorstanding loudspeakers, rosewood. Immaculate condition, boxed, owned from new in 2000. Manual, £120 or offers, buyer collects. 01584 831443 (Shropshire).

ROTEL RT 950BX tuner, (£300) £80. Marantz CD65DX, £80. Arcam Alpha One CD, £100. Sony STS920 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).

RUARK SABRE III speakers, walnut veneer, HFC and WHF Best Buy, lively and detailed, demos on request. Mint and boxed, £600. 01970 615386 (Wales).

SOUNDSTYLE X105 hi-fi rack, four tiers, piano black, excellent condition, £85. 07946 553071 (London).

SYSTEMDEK IIX/ 900 turntable (no arm), RB300 armboard, good condition, new belt, £50. 01484 421426 (W. Yorks)

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: Ruark Sabre III loudspeaker

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